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Table of contents

introduction 4

isaiah 1.¹⁶⁻²⁰— just scripture 6

isaiah 1.²¹⁻²³— just scripture 8

isaiah 1.²⁴⁻²⁶— just scripture 12

isaiah 1.²⁷⁻³¹— just scripture 13

isaiah 2.⁶⁻⁹— just scripture 14

isaiah 2.¹⁰⁻¹⁶— just scripture 16

isaiah 3.^{4-5, 12-15}— just scripture 18

isaiah 5.⁸⁻¹⁰— just scripture 20

isaiah 5.¹¹⁻¹⁷— just scripture 22

isaiah 10.¹⁻²— just scripture 25

isaiah 25.⁴— just scripture 26

isaiah 30.⁹⁻¹³— just scripture 27

isaiah 31.¹— just scripture 29

isaiah 32.¹⁻²— just scripture 30

isaiah 32.³⁻⁴— just scripture 31

isaiah 32.⁵⁻⁸— just scripture 32

isaiah 40.¹⁵⁻¹⁸— just scripture 34

isaiah 40.²⁹— just scripture 35

isaiah 56.¹⁰⁻¹²— just scripture 36

isaiah 58.⁶⁻⁷— just scripture 37

isaiah 58.⁹⁻¹¹— just scripture 38

isaiah 59.³⁻⁸— just scripture 40

isaiah 59.¹²⁻¹⁵— just scripture 42

jeremiah 2.²⁰⁻²²— just scripture 43

jeremiah 2.²³⁻²⁵— just scripture 46

jeremiah 2. ²⁶⁻³⁰ — just scripture.....	48
jeremiah 2. ³¹⁻³⁵ — just scripture.....	50
jeremiah 3. ^{22c-25} — just scripture	52
jeremiah 4. ³⁻⁴ — just scripture	54
jeremiah 5. ²⁶⁻²⁹ — just scripture.....	55
jeremiah 5. ³¹ — just scripture	57
jeremiah 6. ¹³ — just scripture	58
jeremiah 7. ⁵⁻⁷ — just scripture	59
jeremiah 8. ¹⁰ — just scripture	60
jeremiah 9. ³⁻⁶ — just scripture	61
jeremiah 9. ²³⁻²⁴ — just scripture.....	63
jeremiah 12. ¹⁻⁴ — just scripture	64
jeremiah 17. ¹¹ — just scripture	66
jeremiah 21. ¹¹⁻¹² — just scripture.....	67
jeremiah 22. ³⁻⁵ — just scripture	68
jeremiah 22. ¹³⁻¹⁴ — just scripture.....	69
jeremiah 22. ¹⁵⁻¹⁷ — just scripture.....	70
jeremiah 22. ²¹ — just scripture	71
jeremiah 23. ¹⁶⁻¹⁷ — just scripture.....	72
ezekiel 16. ⁴⁸⁻⁵⁰ — just scripture	73
ezekiel 22. ^{6-7, 12-14} — just scripture.....	75
ezekiel 32. ² — just scripture	76
ezekiel 34. ²⁻⁵ — just scripture	77
ezekiel 45. ⁹⁻¹⁰ — just scripture.....	78
hosea 8. ⁴ — just scripture	79
hosea 12. ⁷⁻⁸ — just scripture	80
amos 1. ^{3-2.} ³ — just scripture.....	81
amos 2. ⁴⁻⁵ — just scripture.....	84
amos 2. ⁶⁻⁸ — just scripture.....	86
amos 3. ⁹⁻¹⁰ — just scripture	89
amos 3. ¹¹⁻¹⁵ — just scripture	91
amos 4. ¹⁻³ — just scripture.....	93
amos 4. ⁴⁻⁵ — just scripture.....	94
amos 5. ⁴⁻⁶ — just scripture.....	96
amos 5. ⁷⁻⁹ — just scripture.....	97
amos 5. ¹⁰⁻¹³ — just scripture	98

amos 5. ¹⁴⁻¹⁵ — just scripture	100
amos 6. ¹⁻² — just scripture.....	101
amos 6. ³⁻⁶ — just scripture.....	103
amos 6. ¹²⁻¹⁴ — just scripture	104
amos 8. ⁴⁻⁶ — just scripture.....	105
micah 1. ²⁻⁵ — just scripture	107
micah 2. ¹⁻³ — just scripture	108
micah 3. ¹⁻³ — just scripture	110
micah 3. ⁹⁻¹¹ — just scripture.....	111
micah 6. ⁶⁻⁸ — just scripture	112
micah 6. ⁹⁻¹² — just scripture.....	114
micah 7. ²⁻³ — just scripture	116
micah 7. ⁴⁻⁵ — just scripture	117
habakkuk 1. ²⁻⁴ — just scripture	119
zachariah 7. ⁹⁻¹² — just scripture	120
malachi 2. ⁹⁻¹¹ — just scripture.....	121
malachi 3. ⁵ — just scripture	122

Introduction



The image of a small portion of Michelangelo's fresco, "Creation," found above serves as metaphor for this page's means and ends.

- ? How would you characterize God's arm in the fresco?
- ? How would you characterize Adam's arm?
- ? What is the message in Adam's limp wrist? In the fact that his arm rests on his knee?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we engage in scripture study and seek to understand scripture, scripture's divine author and our relationship to Him?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we seek God's enlivening, strengthening, and saving influence and presence in our daily lives?

Michelangelo reminds us of our desperate need for God's presence in our lives if we are to follow Him and be all that He hopes us to be. In relation to this page and its purposes, we are in need of God's help as we seek to understand and apply scripture.

The questions we posed and our brief commentary concerning the fresco represent an example of our approach to each scripture reading.

Scripture readings are accompanied by general and passage-specific questions to ponder along with brief comments. In addition to the passage-specific questions associated with each reading, the reader can apply the following **general questions** to most readings. These questions come from the purposes of scripture as identified in the introduction to our site, ponderthescriptures.com, found on the site's home page

- What does this reading reveal about the character of God?
- How and what does this reading testify of Christ?
- What wisdom and knowledge does this reading provide?
- How does this reading direct the way you think and act?
- Of what dangers does this reading warn? How does it help you avoid these dangers?
- How does this reading gladden your heart, encourage you, and give you hope?
- How does this reading expand your vision and increase your expectations of the possible?
- What does this reading discern or "read" about you?
- How will you apply this reading to your life, to how you relate with others, and to how you relate to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

It is not intended that the reader ponder every question. We introduce numerous and varied questions in hopes that readers will find a question or two that catches their imagination and interest, seems pertinent to their lives, and provides an opportunity for meaningful pondering and further spiritual insight. In addition, if the reader wishes, the many and varied ponder questions allow the reader to spend additional time to consider passages from various perspectives.

Finally, we suggest that during and after your reading and pondering experience you consider how you can incorporate your thoughts and feelings from the scripture reading into your personal prayer life. As

you pray, share with Heavenly Father what you thought and felt as you studied and pondered. In your prayer, seek further insight from a God who is anxious to reveal himself, his will, and his interest in our lives. Incorporating your reading and pondering into your prayers can, we think, enliven a prayer life that can all too easily become mundane, mechanical, and rote.

Isaiah 1.¹⁶⁻²⁰— just scripture

¹⁶Wash you,
make you clean;
put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes;
cease to do evil;

¹⁷Learn to do well;
seek judgment,
relieve the oppressed,
judge the fatherless,
plead for the widow.

¹⁸Come now, and let us reason together,
saith the LORD:

though your sins be as scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they be red like crimson,
they shall be as wool.

¹⁹If ye be willing and obedient,
ye shall eat the good of the land:

²⁰But if ye refuse and rebel,
ye shall be devoured with the sword:
for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

Questionary

We can consider Isaiah 1.^{2-2.5} as an introduction to the entire book of Isaiah. Today's reading is the fifth of nine exploring this introduction. In the first reading (2-4) Isaiah introduced his metaphor of Judah as a rebellious child. In the second (5-6), Isaiah continued the metaphor by exploring the harsh punishment Yahweh inflicted upon the rebellious child. In the third (7-9), Isaiah turned his attention from the metaphor of punishment to the historical reality of the nation's punishment—punishment that involved the attack and siege of Jerusalem. In the fourth reading (10-15), Isaiah, revealed Yahweh's distaste for the temple, suggesting that part of Judah's sin stemmed from the temple itself.

1. In today's well-known passage, Isaiah indirectly discusses other of Judah's sins and stipulates that only societal justice could clean Judah of its sins.
 - ? What is the nature of Judah's sins?
 - ? How would reading "seek justice" rather than "seek judgment" alter your reading and understanding of today's passage?
 - ? What do the orphans and widows have in common?
 - ? How are these vulnerable populations taken advantage of and oppressed?
2. This passage is often quoted in relation to the Atonement of Jesus Christ and our need to apply his Atonement. This is of questionable interpretation.

Isaiah does indeed directly discuss how Judah's sin of oppression against vulnerable populations can be forgiven. Judah believed that temple ordinances such as sacrifices could atone for sin. But in verses 10-16, Yahweh made it clear that Judah's temple ordinances were unacceptable.

- ? According to Isaiah, what will the nation need to do to find the cleansing that is so desirable?
- ? How do you feel about Judah's forgiveness being contingent on society conducting itself with justice, especially toward vulnerable populations?
- ? Why, do you think, would God base an individual's and a nation's forgiveness upon the justice they showed to vulnerable populations?
- ? Given that social justice is required for a nation to live in a healthy relationship with God, how healthy is your nation's relationship with God?

- ? King Benjamin makes a clear connection between “maintaining a remission of sins” and how one treats the vulnerable (Mosiah 4.²⁶) Isaiah makes a clear connection between the initial cleansing from sin and showing justice and protection to vulnerable individuals and populations. Based upon such connections, how “clean” is America?
- ? How “clean” are you?

Isaiah 1.²¹⁻²³— just scripture

²¹How is the faithful city
become an harlot!

it was full of judgment;
righteousness lodged in it;
but now murderers.

²²Thy silver is become dross,
thy wine mixed with water:

²³Thy princes are rebellious,
and companions of thieves:
every one loveth gifts,
and followeth after rewards:

they judge not the fatherless,
neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them (author's translation).

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

²¹How is the faithful city
become an harlot!

it was full of judgment;
righteousness lodged in it;
but now murderers.

²²Thy silver is become dross,
thy wine mixed with water:

²³Thy princes are rebellious,
and companions of thieves:
every one loveth gifts,
and followeth after rewards:

they judge not the fatherless,
neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

After Isaiah's superscription (1.¹), Isaiah 1.^{2-2.5} may be viewed as an introduction to the book of Isaiah. It forms a literary unit with a chiasmic structure. As is done in the course of Isaiah's entire book, the introduction looks honestly at Israel's current pathetic plight, brought on by her rebellion. But this real time reality does not cause Isaiah to lose sight of another, more potent reality—the reality of God's power and mercy and his desire and capacity to redeem Israel. Following is one way of structuring Isaiah's "introduction."

The
Present Disappointment
& Shattered Hopes

The
Future Hope

a 1.²⁻⁹ The Rebellious Child

b 1.¹⁰⁻¹⁵ Condemnation Of The Cult

c 1.¹⁶⁻²⁰ The Redemptive Effects Of Justice

d 1.²¹⁻²³ A Faithful City turned Harlot

d' 1.²⁴⁻²⁶ A City Faithful Once More

c' 1.²⁷⁻²⁸ The Redemptive Effects Of Justice

b' 1.²⁹⁻³¹ Removal Of The Cult

a' 2.¹⁻⁵ Walking in Yahweh's Light

The first half of the chiasm (vs. 1.¹⁻²³) describes the real and current situation as it existed in Isaiah's time. The second half (vs. 1.^{24-2.5}) describes a potential future situation. No matter how pessimistic Isaiah may be about the present, he never gives up on Yahweh's potential to repair, redeem, and emancipate.

After this introduction, Isaiah explores the two themes of the introduction—The present disappointments and shattered hopes/ The future hope—in detail as outlined here.

The Present Disappointment and Shattered Hopes (2.⁶-10.³⁴)

- The Delusion of Institutions is Revealed—2.⁶⁻²¹
- The Delusion of Prestige is Revealed—2.²²-3.¹⁵
- The Delusion of Materialism is Revealed—3.¹⁶-4.¹
- The nation's Humiliation is Revealed—4.²⁻⁶
- Shattered Hopes of God Revealed in a Sad Love Song—5.¹⁻⁷
- The Woes of the Wicked are Revealed—5.⁸⁻²⁵
 - First Woe—5.⁸⁻¹⁰
 - Second Woe—5.¹¹⁻¹⁷
 - Third Woe—5.¹⁸⁻¹⁹
 - Fourth Woe—5.²⁰
 - Fifth Woe—5.²¹
 - Sixth Woe—5.²²⁻²⁵
- God's Agent of Woe—5.²⁶⁻³⁰
- Isaiah's Call—6.¹⁻¹³
- The Failure of the Israel/Syrian Confederation—7.¹⁻⁹.⁷
 - The Sign of the Child, Immanuel—7.¹⁰⁻²⁵
 - The Sign of the Child, Maher-shalal-hash-baz—8.¹⁻²²
 - The Sign of the Child, Wonderful—9.¹⁻⁷
- Return to the Woes of the Wicked—9.⁸-10.⁴
 - Seventh Woe—10.¹⁻⁴
- God's Agent of Woe—10.⁵⁻³⁴

The Future Hope (11.¹-12.⁶)

- The Branch—11.¹⁻¹⁶
- A Hymn of Praise—12.¹⁻⁶

We can consider Isaiah 1.²-2.⁵ as an introduction to the entire book of Isaiah. Today's reading is the sixth of nine exploring this introduction. In the first reading (1.²⁻⁴) Isaiah introduced his metaphor of Judah as a rebellious child. In the second (1.⁵⁻⁶), Isaiah continued the metaphor by exploring the harsh punishment Yahweh inflicted upon the rebellious child. In the third (1.⁷⁻⁹), Isaiah turned his attention from the metaphor of punishment to the historical reality of the nation's punishment—punishment that involved the attack and siege of Jerusalem. In the fourth reading (1.¹⁰⁻¹⁵), Isaiah revealed Yahweh's distaste for the temple, suggesting that part of Judah's sin stemmed from the temple itself. In the fifth reading (1.¹⁶⁻²⁰) Isaiah reveals that it is moral and ethical lapses in regard to social justice outside the temple that make what goes on inside the temple such an abomination to Yahweh. He stipulates that only societal justice could clean Judah of its sins.

In today's reading, Isaiah goes into detail concerning the immoral and unethical behavior prevalent in Judah.

1. The Hebrew Bible often symbolically portray the nations of Israel and Judah as the wives of Yahweh.
 - ? In light of this, what do you think and feel when you contemplate that the nations, once living with Yahweh in complete fidelity, are not prostituting themselves
 - ? To whom are they prostituting themselves?
 - ? What is idolatry, and how is it like marital infidelity and, worse, prostitution?
2. Verse 22 contains this imagery,
 - “Your silver has become slag.
 - Your beer is diluted with water.”

Consider this metaphor from the literal perspective. Imagine a wine dealer. He sells you diluted wine, and “in making change” gives you impure silver.

- ? How do you feel about the wine dealer?
- ? What does such a business practice tell you about the dealer and his priorities?
- ? What does the existence of such business practices tell you about those responsible for overseeing and regulating economic practices?

Now consider this metaphor from the symbolic perspective.

- ? What does this metaphor say about Judah’s population, and especially about its leadership—political, economic, religious, etc.?
- ? How do governmental leaders offer things and allow business leaders to offer things that are not what they claim to be, and offer things and allow things to be bought and sold for more than they are worth?

We know from the prophet Amos, a contemporary of Isaiah, that such economic practices were common. Amos quotes a merchant as asking the following:

“When will the new moon be gone,
that we may sell corn?
and the sabbath,
that we may set forth wheat,
making the ephah small,
and the shekel great,
and falsifying the balances by deceit?” (Amos 8.⁵)

- ? How do you feel about such merchants?
- ? What does this tell you about their “worship” experiences and their true feelings about God?

3. In speaking of Israel’s political leaders, Isaiah declares,

“Thy princes are rebellious,
and companions of thieves:
every one loveth gifts,
and followeth after rewards:
they judge not the fatherless,
neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.”

- ? Who is it that has the resources to offer government officials bribes?
- ? According to the last two lines of verse 23, what is the net effect of government corruption?
- ? How would you feel about the contention that when one sees the vulnerable portions of society being taken advantage of, one can simply assume that some form of bribery is at work among government and economic leaders?

4. In relation to the collusion between the wealthy and government officials, Isaiah speaks of “murder” in verse 21.

- ? How should we think of “murder” in this context?
- ? Is murder only the active and physical taking of another life?

Let’s go back to our earlier scenario. The merchant provides diluted wine and corrupted wheat at inflated prices (due to his corruption of the monetary system). This means the poor are paying more for less. After a time, the children become malnourished. Perhaps one dies. Perhaps a parent dies.

- ? Are we justified in saying that the merchant has murdered the child or parent?
- ? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? How would you feel if we contended that the Bible would indeed call this murder?
- ? How would you feel if we went further, and contended that many businesses and industries

today (remember: the U.S. supreme court has designated corporations as “persons”), along with their managers are engaged in murderous economic practices?

- ? What can the individual citizen do so as not to be implicated in such murderous practices and come under the sort of condemnation leveled by Isaiah against ancient Judah?

Isaiah 1.²⁴⁻²⁶— just scripture

²⁴Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts,
the mighty One of Israel,
Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries,
and avenge me of mine enemies:
²⁵And I will turn my hand upon thee,
and purely purge away thy dross,
and take away all thy tin:
²⁶And I will restore thy judges as at the first,
and thy counsellors as at the beginning:
afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness,
the faithful city.

Q

uestionary

We can consider Isaiah 1.^{2-2.5} as an introduction to the entire book of Isaiah. Today's reading is the seventh of nine exploring this introduction. In the first reading (2-4) Isaiah introduced his metaphor of Judah as a rebellious child. In the second (5-6), Isaiah continued the metaphor by exploring the harsh punishment Yahweh inflicted upon the rebellious child. In the third (7-9), Isaiah turned his attention from the metaphor of punishment to the historical reality of the nation's punishment—punishment that involved the attack and siege of Jerusalem. In the fourth and fifth reading, Isaiah, discussed one of Judah's real and historical sins—heretofore only mentioned metaphorically. This sin involved a dedication to temple ritual (10-15) without moral and ethical behavior outside the temple (16-20). He stipulates that only societal justice could clean Judah of its sins. In the sixth reading (21-23), Isaiah identifies the nation's specific unethical oppression of vulnerable peoples.

1. In today's reading, Isaiah describes the Lord's response and solution to Judah's out-of-control rebellion.
 - ? What does Yahweh plan to do to reverse Judah's rebellion?
 - ? What does it suggest to you that in dealing with the nation's rebellion, Yahweh intends to begin by removing corrupt leaders, and replacing them with moral leaders.
2. In today's reading Judah's leaders are likened to impure silver.
 - ? Why is this imagery appropriate to the leaders' unethical behavior?
3. In the previous reading from 21-23 and today's reading, Isaiah utilizes a metaphor. In the metaphor, the city, Jerusalem, was once a faithful wife, turned prostitute. With the removal of unethical leaders, Jerusalem becomes, once more, a faithful wife.
 - ? How do you feel about this intense and intimate metaphor?

Isaiah 1.²⁷⁻³¹— just scripture

²⁷Zion shall be redeemed with judgment,
and her converts with righteousness.

²⁸And the destruction of the transgressors
and of the sinners shall be together,
and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed.

²⁹For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired,
and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen.

³⁰For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth,
and as a garden that hath no water.

³¹And the strong shall be as tow,
and the maker of it [what he produces] as a spark,
and they shall both burn together,
and none shall quench them.

Questionary

We can consider Isaiah 1.^{2-2.5} as an introduction to the entire book of Isaiah. Today's reading is the eighth of nine exploring this introduction. In the first reading (2-4) Isaiah introduced his metaphor of Judah as a rebellious child. In the second (5-6), Isaiah continued the metaphor by exploring the harsh punishment Yahweh inflicted upon the rebellious child. In the third (7-9), Isaiah turned his attention from the metaphor of punishment to the historical reality of the nation's punishment—punishment that involved the attack and siege of Jerusalem. In the fourth and fifth readings, Isaiah, discussed one of Judah's real and historical sins—heretofore only mentioned metaphorically. This sin involved a dedication to temple ritual (10-15) without moral and ethical behavior outside the temple (16-20). He stipulates that only societal justice could clean Judah of its sins. In the sixth reading (21-23), Isaiah identified the nation's specific unethical oppression of vulnerable peoples. In the seventh reading, Isaiah described the Lord's response and solution to Judah's out-of-control rebellion.

1. In today's reading, Isaiah returns to two themes he has already addressed in the chapter.
 - ? Can you identify these two themes? What are they?
 - ? Where have we previously found Isaiah's contention that only societal justice can "redeem" Judah?
 - ? Isaiah alludes to Judah's idolatry in today's reading. Where has Isaiah previously alluded to idolatry?
 - ? How had the temple become a form of idolatry earlier in the chapter?
2. Isaiah 1 ends, as it began, with metaphor—two metaphors, in fact.
 - ? What are the two metaphors?
 - ? Take a moment to picture them. What do you see?
 - ? How do you feel about Isaiah likening social elites to something as insignificant and seemingly harmless as kindling?
 - ? How does what they produce (think of this in terms of societal norms and practices) cause a spark that sets them on fire?
 - ? What do you hear Isaiah saying to and about society's elite?

Isaiah 2.⁶⁻⁹— just scripture

⁶When you turned your people loose,
the House of Ya‘qob—
such that it was filled with those from the east
and hummed with those from the west,
foreigners everywhere;
⁷its land affluent in silver and gold,
with no end to its wealth;
its land abounding with horses,
with no end to its chariots;
⁸its land was, in fact, crammed with emptiness
while they worshiped the work of their own hands,
that which their fingers made—
⁹then man was devalued,
each person debased,
no value was credited to anyone.

Questionary

Today’s reading from Isaiah represents the author’s translation. These verses are universally acknowledged as corrupt. Here is the KJV translation for those who wish to compare.

⁶Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people
the house of Jacob,
because they be replenished from the east,
and are soothsayers like the Philistines,
and they please themselves in the children of strangers.
⁷Their land also is full of silver and gold,
neither is there any end of their treasures;
their land is also full of horses,
neither is there any end of their chariots:
⁸Their land also is full of idols;
they worship the work of their own hands,
that which their own fingers have made:
⁹And the mean man boweth down,
and the great man humbleth himself:
therefore forgive them not.

1. Yahweh has allowed Israel to act according to its desires. As a result, Israel is experiencing an economic boom. People from every corner of the Near East, are buying and selling in Israel. Money is flowing into government coffers such that there is sufficient to purchase expensive horses trained for warfare and chariots. But from Yahweh’s perspective, all the money, horses, and chariots are “nothing.” All Israel’s accumulations are idols.
? What are the materialistic idols in our society?
2. One of the evils that Israel’s materialism produces is the objectification of individuals. Monied interests view others only as tools to be used for further gain.
? In what ways do businesses and corporations today use, abuse, and dehumanize their employees, seeing them only for the profit they can bring to the company?
? What can individuals do to express their objection to such idolatrous objectification, and to bring an end to such immoral behavior?
? What can individuals do to avoid being guilty of such attitudes and behaviors?
- ? At what point does a focus on “good economy”—represented here by “silver and gold” and

“treasures”—become idolatrous?

- ? At what point does trust in and a sense of security from a national military complex—represented here by “horses” and “chariots”—become idolatrous?
- ? How idolatrous or none-idolatrous is America in regard to economic concerns and militarism?

Isaiah 2.¹⁰⁻¹⁶— just scripture

¹⁰Enter into the rock,
and hide thee in the dust,

for fear of the LORD,
and for the glory of his majesty.

¹¹The lofty looks of man shall be humbled,
and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down,
and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.

¹²For the day of the LORD of hosts
shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty,
and upon every one that is lifted up;
and he shall be brought low:

¹³And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up,
and upon all the oaks of Bashan,

¹⁴And upon all the high mountains,
and upon all the hills that are lifted up,

¹⁵And upon every high tower,
and upon every fenced wall,

¹⁶And upon all the ships of Tarshish,
and upon all pleasant pictures.

Questionary

In our previous reading from Isaiah 2 (verses 6-9) we heard Isaiah's criticism concerning the idolatry and accompanying dehumanization that was brought about because of an economic boom.

1. In today's reading, Isaiah predicts the negative personal and societal consequences that will flow from the idolatry and its attendant dehumanization.
 - ? In what ways do economic booms create and strengthen "haughtiness"?
 - ? How does a proper relationship with God keep such "haughtiness" from erupting in our lives?
2. Isaiah speaks of "cedars," "oaks," "high mountains," "hills," "high towers," "fenced walls," "ships of Tarshish," and "tall ships" (rather than "pleasant pictures?").
 - ? What is the symbolic meaning of these?
3. Cedars and oaks are the most expensive of building materials. Only the wealthy could afford such extravagances, which they used in building their palaces.
 - ? Do we have analogous building practices in our day?
 - ? How do they create "haughtiness" that God must then correct through chastisement?
4. "High towers" and "fenced walls" represent the military.
 - ? How can the military become an idol?
 - ? Are we in danger of placing our trust in our military rather than in God? How is this reflected in our day?
5. The "ships of Tarshish" and "tall ships" represent the international trade, or, in other words, "economic concerns."
 - ? How do economic concerns become an idol?
 - ? Are we in danger of placing our trust in a good economy rather than in God? How is this reflected in our day?
6. "High mountains" and "hills" represent places where religious structures are established. In fact, temples and other religious shrines can come to be thought of as "mountains." The mountain and hill, then, represents the "religious establishment."

- ? “How might “religion” actually turn into “idolatry”?
- ? How might the structures of our religion become a source of haughtiness and idolatry?
- ? Are there adjustments you need to make in your personal attitudes toward any of these potential sources of idolatry?
- ? Are there societal tendencies in these areas that lead to idolatry that you could influence in even small ways?

Isaiah 3.^{4-5, 12-15}— just scripture

⁴And I will give children to be their princes,
and babes shall rule over them.

⁵And the people shall be oppressed,
every one by another, and every one by his neighbour:
the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient,
and the base against the honourable.

¹²As for my people, children are their oppressors,
and women rule over them.

O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err,
and destroy the way of thy paths.

¹³The LORD standeth up to plead,
and standeth to judge the people.

¹⁴The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people,
and the princes thereof:

for ye have eaten up the vineyard;
the spoil of the poor is in your houses.

¹⁵What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces,
and grind the faces of the poor?
saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

Questionary

In our previous readings from Isaiah 2 and 3, we found that Israel was guilty of idolatry as they sought security through materialism, expansion of military/national security measures, and through prestigious societal leaders rather than in Yahweh. As a result, Yahweh, in hopes that the nation would return to him, exposed the deficiencies of all these institutions and individuals.

1. In today's reading, we see that with the demise of its normal leadership, Israel turns to a new class of leaders.
? What is the meaning and significance of Israel having children and women as their leaders?
What do the two groups have in common?

Children, obviously, are inexperienced, without leadership skills, and thus unqualified to lead a nation. While we know today that women can lead and govern as well as men, in ancient Israel's patriarchal and sexist world, women would never be given the opportunities to develop skills necessary to national leadership. Thus, sheltered and suppressed as they were, women would have been considered as poorly prepared for a national leadership role as children.

- ? Do we see, today, trends in which the normal classes of leaders are rejected by a frustrated society, only to be replaced by unqualified leaders who only make matters worse?
2. We have already seen that Israel's attitude toward its leaders was idolatrous. In today's reading Isaiah summarizes the fundamental evils in which that leadership was engaged.
? What are those evils?
? How do you feel about the extreme language to which Isaiah resorts to describe the principle sin of Israel's leadership?
 - They have "eaten up [devoured] the vineyard"
 - They have built themselves up and created their comforts by means of "the spoil of the poor."
 - They have "beat my people to pieces."
 - They "grind the faces of the poor?"
 - They devour, spoil, beat, grind.

- ? Are we who lead and live comfortable lifestyles today, doing so by the same means?
- ? How do these sins against the poor, and thus against God, relate to Isaiah's earlier charge that Israel's materialistic obsessions were leading it to objectify, dehumanize, and misuse others?
- ? In what ways does our society treat people as mere tools that can be used to enrich the more powerful and "skilled" classes of society?
- ? What can you do to be sure you are not guilty of such contemptible behavior and to stand against such behavior when you see it in society?

Isaiah 5:⁸⁻¹⁰— just scripture

⁸Be warned! You who merge homestead after homestead,
combine property after property
until there's nothing left
and you dwell by yourselves in the heart of the property.

⁹Into my ears, YHWH Š^ebā'ôṭ speaks:

“It is certain that many an estate will become wasteland.
Large and profitable ones will be uninhabited

¹⁰such that a ten-acre vineyard will yield but six gallons
and three bushels of seed will yield a quarter bushel” (author's translation).

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

⁸Woe unto them that join house to house,
that lay field to field,
till there be no place,
that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!

⁹In mine ears said the LORD of hosts,
Of a truth many houses shall be desolate,
even great and fair, without inhabitant.

¹⁰Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath,
and the seed of an homer shall yield an ephah.”

After singing a love song commemorating God's love for His vineyard and the disappointment He felt about the poor quality of its yield, and then interpreting the song so that its application to the relationship between God and Israel was clear, Isaiah launches into six blistering warnings. This reading is the first.

1. In the KJV, “houses” are being purchased and “joined.” In my translations, “homesteads” are being consolidated. .
 - ? What, in your mind is the difference between “house” and “homestead”?
 - ? What does the latter suggest that the former obscures?
 - ? How does the choice of “homestead” indicate that purchasers are engaged in more than simple real estate transactions, but are involved in activities that impact and alter individuals' lives?
 - ? How much regard do our modern real estate laws and investor practices have for individuals' need not only for shelter from the elements but for “homes” with the security they bring?
2. As a result of the buying frenzy, “there's nothing left.”
 - ? What is the mood of this prophetic observation?
3. As a result of the buying frenzy, purchasers “dwell by yourselves in the heart of the property.”
 - ? What does this mean and what does it look like to you?
 - ? How does this reflect not only physical distance, but personal and relational distance?
4. In the verse immediately before this warning, we read
 - “He hoped for justice. But, look! Violence!
He hoped for the rule of law. But, look! Shouts of distress!”
 - ? How do the real estate practices of verse 8 relate to the observation made in verse 7?
 - ? How are modern American real estate laws and property investors' behavior similar to the behavior Isaiah condemns?
 - ? How do they show respect for the value of property and possession, but show a lack of

respect for human beings and the value of the individual?

5. In verses 9 and 10, God informs Isaiah that there will be consequences for the avaricious behavior of the “property developers.”
 - ? What are those consequences?
 - ? How are they appropriate to the unjust nature of the behavior?
 - ? What comes to your mind if we suggest that the poor harvests represent a “negative tithe” to the investment?

Isaiah 5.¹¹⁻¹⁷— just scripture

¹¹Be warned! Those who rise early in the morning,
pursue drunkenness until nighttime,
wine inflaming them,
¹²lyre and harp, tambourine and flute,
and yet more wine being part of their carousing.
But they will not consider what YHWH does
and won't acknowledge what his power has accomplished.

¹³So then, my people are exiled
because of the lack of understanding.
Also, the nation's reputable go hungry;
its masses parched with thirst.

¹⁴So then, Še'ôl increases its appetite
and opens its mouth without limit
so the nation's honored and common descend,
as well as its raucous and festive, into it.

¹⁵People will be brought low.
and individuals humiliated,
and the confident bearing brought down.

¹⁶But YHWH Šebā' ôṭ is exalted because of His justice
and the incomparable God is seen to be preeminent because of His rectitude.

¹⁷Lambs will graze as if in pastures,
and foreigners will eat in the ruins of the well-fed (author's translation).

Questionary

Isaiah 5 began with a love song (5.¹⁻²) commemorating God's love for His vineyard (Israel, 5.⁷) and the disappointment He felt when it yielded poor quality grapes (social injustice, 5.⁷). Isaiah then describes the ravishing and destructive consequences that will come upon the vineyard as a result of its poor yield (5.³⁻⁶). Isaiah then interprets the song so that its application to the relationship between God and Israel is clear. In this interpretation, Isaiah makes clear that God's disappointment with Israel is centered on the social injustice that He finds in the nation (5.⁷). With this, Isaiah launches into six blistering warnings. Each warning describes some form of the social injustice lamented in 5.⁷ and found in Israel. The first warning with its social injustice and the consequences thereof is found in 5.⁸⁻¹⁰. This reading contains the second warning with its social injustice and the consequences thereof.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

¹¹Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning,
that they may follow strong drink;
that continue until night,
till wine inflame them!

¹²And the harp, and the viol,
the tabret, and pipe, and wine,
are in their feasts:
but they regard not the work of the LORD,
neither consider the operation of his hands.

¹³Therefore my people are gone into captivity,
because they have no knowledge:
and their honourable men are famished,
and their multitude dried up with thirst.

¹⁴Therefore hell hath enlarged herself,
and opened her mouth without measure:
and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp,
and he that rejoiceth,
shall descend into it.

¹⁵And the mean man shall be brought down,
and the mighty man shall be humbled,
and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled:

¹⁶But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment,
and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness.

¹⁷Then shall the lambs feed after their manner,
and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat.

1. Verses 11 and 12 describe the nature of the next sinful injustice found in Israel.

? What is the nature of Israel's sinful injustice?

? What is sinful and unjust about gluttony and leisure described in these verses?

? How does the following passage relate to and enhance your understanding of verses 11-12?

“Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me...” (Ezek. 16.⁴⁹⁻⁵⁰).

? How were the resources wasted in such easy living likely acquired?

? How does the mention of the treatment of the “poor and needy” assist in answering the previous question?

Isaiah's first warning was,

“Be warned! You who merge homestead after homestead,
combine property after property
until there's nothing left
and you dwell by yourselves in the heart of the property” (5.⁸).

? How likely is it that this behavior did not make the behavior of today's reading possible?
Why do you answer as you do?

? How is the behavior found in today's reading manifest in society today?

2. After describing the uncaring and gluttonous behavior, certainly made possible through taking advantage of others, Isaiah adds,

“But they will not consider what YHWH does
and won't acknowledge what his power has accomplished.”

? How does this disregard for God contribute to and even make possible the nation's injustices?

? What is found in the word of God, the scriptures, that might have checked the unjust behavior?

3. We have suggested many times that the consequences of bad behavior can add to our understanding of the bad behavior itself.

? How do the consequences found in verses 13-15, 17 add to your understanding of the behavior described in verses 11-12?

? If a consequence is going hungry, what does that tell you about the behavior?

? What would you think and feel if we suggested that this consequence suggests that not only was there gluttony on the part of the offenders, but that their gluttony caused hunger in others?

- ? What does the mention of Še'ôl (hell) having an appetite and consuming the revelers tell you about the revelers themselves and the consumption they practiced on others?
- ? How do unchecked appetites of all kinds cause abuse and injustice toward others both at the private level and at the societal level?

4. Isaiah ends his description of the consequences with this:

“Lambs will graze as if in pastures,
and foreigners will eat in the ruins of the well-fed.”

- ? What does this mean to you?
- ? What does it suggest if animals are grazing among ruins where there were previous dwellings in which people were well-fed?
- ? What do you see when you close your eyes and imagine this imagery?
- ? How does the mention of “ruins” and of “the well-fed” tie this warning to the previous warning in which the injustice was,

“Be warned! You who merge homestead after homestead,
combine property after property
until there's nothing left
and you dwell by yourselves in the heart of the property” (5.⁸).

And the consequence was?

“It is certain that many an estate will become wasteland.
Large and profitable ones will be uninhabited
¹⁰such that a ten-acre vineyard will yield but six gallons
and three bushels of seed will yield a quarter bushel” (9-10).

- ? After reading these first two warnings (8-10 and 11-17), what is your estimation of Israelite society in Isaiah's day?
- ? How would you compare it with society today?

Isaiah 10.¹⁻²— just scripture

¹Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees,
and that write grievousness which they have prescribed;
²To turn aside the needy from judgment,
and to take away the right from the poor of my people,
that widows may be their prey,
and that they may rob the fatherless!

Questionary

1. In today's reading, the prophet Isaiah criticizes the Jewish government of "unrighteous decrees" that he labels as "grievous."
 - ? What is the nature of these grievous and unrighteous decrees?
 - ? Who are their intended targets?
 - ? Why have governments throughout time treated their poor and vulnerable citizens unjustly?
 - ? Clearly, every government has had its "justifications" for treating the vulnerable unjustly. What do you imagine those justifications have been? Make a list.
 - ? How is our society treating our vulnerable citizens today?
 - ? Are there vulnerable classes today in addition to Isaiah's "poor," "widows," and "fatherless"?
 - ? What justifications do we use to unjustly withholding public assistance from vulnerable classes of citizens? How are these any different that those used by governments throughout time?
 - ? What can you do as an individual and as a citizen/voter to mediate for the vulnerable in society?

2. Of course, governments can pass laws that simply offer no help to the vulnerable. Worse still, they may pass laws that do active violence and harm.
 - ? How is the later reflected in Isaiah's criticism of the Jewish government of his day?
 - ? What are examples of modern laws that actively do violence and harm to vulnerable individuals and classes?

Isaiah 25.4— just scripture

For thou hast been a strength to the poor,
a strength to the needy in his distress,
a refuge from the storm,
a shadow from the heat,
when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.

Questionary

In characterizing the life of the “poor” and “needy,” the Lord speaks of “distress,” “storms,” “heat,” and “blasts.”

- ? How is this consistent or inconsistent with your own perspective concerning the life of the “poor” and “needy”?
- ? Who might be “the terrible ones” that rage as a storm against the “poor” and “needy”?

Isaiah 30.⁹⁻¹³— just scripture

⁹That this is a rebellious people, lying children,
children that will not hear the law of the LORD:

¹⁰Which say to the seers,
“See not;

and to the prophets,

Prophesy not unto us right things,
speak unto us smooth things,
prophesy deceits:

¹¹Get you out of the way,
turn aside out of the path,
cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.”

¹²Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel,
Because ye despise this word,
and trust in oppression and perverseness,
and stay thereon:

¹³Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall,
swelling out in a high wall,
whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant.

Questionary

1. Isaiah quotes the population’s desire that prophets “speak unto us smooth things.” We know from the poetic parallelism that the “smooth things” are not “right things” but “deceptive.”
 - ? But apart from bring wrong and deceitful, what is the nature of “smooth” prophesy?
 - ? How does the prophesying of “smooth” things relate to one of Paul’s famous statements:
“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4.³⁻⁴).
 - ? Why would people prefer to hear what they want to hear rather than what is actual and true even though they know they are being told lies or “fables”?
 - ? How do “lusts” lead one to wish to hear lies rather than truth?
 - ? How do people ask their “prophets” or religious/political leaders to tell them what they want to hear, though they know what they are hearing is a lie?
 - ? How are today’s “prophets” or religious/political leaders lying today?
 - ? What “smooth” things are today’s “prophets” or religious/political leaders “prophesying” today?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you read that this desire to be lied to is the same as requesting, demanding even that the “Holy One of Israel... cease from before us”?
2. Isaiah charges that Judah’s citizenry “trust in oppression and perverseness [deceit], and stay thereon.”
 - ? What is the relationship between wanting to be told fables and oppressing and deceiving others?
3. Isaiah warns that as a consequence of Judah’s demand for self-serving lies and dependance upon oppression and deceit for their own advancement over others
“this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall,
swelling out in a high wall,
whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant.”
 - ? What do you see when you picture this imagery?

? Does the following translation altar or clarify the image you have in your mind? If so, how?

“This sin will become for you
like a high wall, cracked and bulging,
that collapses suddenly, in an instant” (NIV).

Isaiah 31.¹— just scripture

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help;
and stay on horses,
and trust in chariots, because they are many;
and in horsemen, because they are very strong;
but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel,
neither seek the LORD!

Questionary

- ? What is the Lord's concern with his peoples' reliance on armament agreements with other nations for national security?
- ? What is the balance between preparing a nation strategically in its foreign affairs and putting one's trust in God?
- ? How do you feel about the balance or imbalance of your nation's attitudes in matters surrounding militaristic resources?

Isaiah 32.¹⁻²— just scripture

¹Know this: a king should reign by acting rightly,
and rulers by ruling justly—
²he should be one who acts as a hiding place from the wind;
as a shelter from a torrential rain;
as a watersource in a parched landscape;
as the shade of an immense rock overhang (Author's translation).

Questionary

We will devote several days to Isaiah 32.¹⁻⁸. Today, we will focus on verses 1 and 2. However, the reader may want to review the entire text, all of which can be found below. For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

¹Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness,
and princes shall rule in judgment.
²And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind,
and a covert from the tempest;
as rivers of water in a dry place,
as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

1. As explained in endnote 'b,' I understand the Hebrew imperfect verb to indicate “mood” rather than “tense” (future) as it has traditionally been understood. Under traditional readings, the passage has been seen as “Messianic,” addressing the nature of Messiah’s future politically just administration. I, on the other hand, read the passage as speaking common political wisdom and encouragement applicable to every age, nation, and form of government.
 - ? What thoughts and feelings do you have as you consider the difference between the two translations found above?
 - ? As you consider the role prophets play in your life, what role do they play in foretelling the future as opposed to addressing current life, behaviors, and feelings and how to improve them?
2. Isaiah stipulates that a civic leader is to be a “hiding place” (from wind), a “shelter” (from torrential rains), a watersource (in a parched landscape), and shade (presumably from a hot and blazing sun).
 - ? What kind of people and sort of life do these metaphors suggest that Isaiah had in mind when he spoke of the protective responsibilities of a ruler?

We will see in future verses that these physical dangers are representative of the challenges faced by vulnerable populations: “harried,” “cautious,” “hungry,” “thirsty,” “poor,” and “needy.”

- ? How do you feel about the role civic leaders are to play in the life of vulnerable populations?
- ? How well are your local, state, and national leaders doing in fulfilling their protective role in the life of vulnerable populations?
- ? How well would vulnerable populations say they are doing in their protective role?
- ? More specifically, how well is the current U.S. president doing as a protective influence in the life of vulnerable populations—national and international?
- ? What civic responsibilities do you have to encourage your civic leaders to play this role in the lives of vulnerable populations—national and international?

Isaiah 32.³⁻⁴—just scripture

³Would not the eyes of those who see such a thing lock onto it;
the ears of those who hear such a thing perk up?

⁴The heart also of the harried, would be intent on experiencing it,
and the tongue that spoke cautiously would speak with fluent exuberance (Author's translation).

Questionary

We are devoting several days to Isaiah 32.¹⁻⁸. In our first reading (verses 1-2) we found that kings and princes—all government and civic leaders, in fact—are under a divine injunction to provide care, comfort, shelter, and protection to vulnerable populations.

In today's reading, we focus on verses 3-4. However, as with the first reading, it seems helpful to provide the entire passage in order to firmly establish context for each verse. For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

³And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim,
and the ears of them that hear shall hearken.

⁴The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge,
and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly.

1. Verses 3 and 4 describe the excited and enthusiastic response of vulnerable populations when they ear and witness the just and nourishing rule of government (civic) leaders.
 - ? Use your imagination. Close your eyes and picture the look on the faces of the vulnerable and that of their children, about whom the vulnerable have been so anxious, when they realize that those who have power over them seek to shelter rather than oppress them. How does it make you feel to sense the relief, joy and enthusiasm of these vulnerable people because of a just and protective government?
 - ? How do you feel when you contemplate the insecure, fearful, and stressful life these same people experience when government does not seek their welfare, but, in fact, institutes public policy that is oppressive?
 - ? What do you think and how do you feel when you contemplate the vulnerable's newfound freedom to honestly speak their minds and to enthusiastically share the hope they feel at a government that shelters rather than attacks them?
 - ? How do your government and civic leaders—local, state, national—treat the vulnerable? Do they shelter and protect or deny and oppress?
 - ? How would the vulnerable answer this question?
 - ? What are you doing privately, publicly, and politically to assure that government is a protective and nourishing influence in the lives of vulnerable populations rather than a distressing and oppressive one?

Isaiah 32.⁵⁻⁸— just scripture

⁵The social deviant would never again be spoken of positively.

Nor would the scoundrel be thought respectable.

⁶For the deviant can only utter perversions;

his intent is to do harm;

to create impiety;

and to speak falsely of YHWH

in order to void the hopes of the hungry

and deprive the thirsty of drink.

⁷Such a scoundrel uses wicked means.

He advises foul plans

that will destroy the poor through deception

and deny the just claims of the needy,

⁸while the noble counsels generosity

and thrives through liberality (Author's translation).

Qquestionary

We have devoted several days to Isaiah 32.¹⁻⁸. In our first reading (verses 1-2) we found that kings and princes—all government and civic leaders, in fact—are under a divine injunction to provide care, comfort, shelter, and protection to vulnerable populations. In our second reading (3-4), we read of the joy, hope, and anticipation the vulnerable feel when civic leaders are unexpectedly and unusually just in their rule, and act as protectors and supports rather than oppressors and detractors.

In today's reading, we focus on verses 5-8. For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

⁵The vile person shall be no more called liberal,
nor the churl said to be bountiful.

⁶For the vile person will speak villany,
and his heart will work iniquity,
to practise hypocrisy,

and to utter error against the LORD,
to make empty the soul of the hungry,
and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.

⁷The instruments also of the churl are evil:
he deviseth wicked devices

to destroy the poor with lying words,
even when the needy speaketh right.

⁸But the liberal deviseth liberal things;
and by liberal things shall he stand.

1. In verses 6, Isaiah speaks of “scoundrels” and “social deviants” and their goals and objectives
 - ? How often, say, in just the past year, has society or societal populations spoken well of, given good press to, or trusted in modern day civic “scoundrels”—those who purposefully deviate from social norms?
 - ? How do “scoundrels” and “social deviants” vainly invoke the name of God to falsely implicate him in their deeds?
 - ? How is such social deviancy reflected in the treatment of vulnerable people and populations?
 - ? What do you think and how do you feel about Isaiah assertion that the goals of civic “social deviants” is often to disappoint and oppress those vulnerable to their unjust exercise of power?

2. In verse 8, Isaiah contrasts the “social deviant” with the generous and noble.
 - ? What are the differences between these two groups?
 - ? In what world could America’s modern-day Caligula not be thought of as the kind of “scoundrel” and “social deviant” about which Isaiah speaks?
 - ? What generous or noble sentiments has America’s modern-day Caligula expressed or exhibited?
 - ? What generous or noble actions has he taken in his governance?
 - ? What will you do to help restore the nation to a generosity of spirit and a nobility of action?

Isaiah 40.¹⁵⁻¹⁸— just scripture

¹⁵Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket,
and are counted as the small dust of the balance:
behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.

¹⁶And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn,
nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.

¹⁷All nations before him are as nothing;
and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

¹⁸To whom then will ye liken God?
or what likeness will ye compare unto him?

Questionary

- ? What do you learn from today's reading about God and his thoughts and feelings about the earth's nations in all their varieties and with all their supposed power?
- ? How could Isaiah's observation serve to change the conduct of the earth's nation today if they were to hear, accept, take it to heart, and apply it?

Isaiah 40.²⁹— just scripture

He giveth power to the faint;
and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

Questionary

- ? When you read of those who “faint” and “have no might” what individuals or populations of people come to your mind?
- ? How do you feel when you read that God will strengthen the “faint” and they “that have no might”?

Isaiah 56.¹⁰⁻¹²— just scripture

¹⁰His watchmen are blind:

they are all ignorant,
they are all dumb dogs,
they cannot bark;
sleeping, lying down,
loving to slumber.

¹¹Yea, they are greedy dogs
which can never have enough,
and they are shepherds that cannot understand:
they all look to their own way,
every one for his gain, from his quarter.

¹²“Come ye,” say they, “I will fetch wine,
and we will fill ourselves with strong drink;
and to morrow shall be as this day,
and much more abundant.”

Questionary

1. In today’s reading, Isaiah describes Judah’s religious and political leaders using mixed metaphors.
 - ? To what does Isaiah liken Judah’s religious and political leaders?
 - ? What “obligation” do human “watchmen,” “shepherds,” and “sheep dogs” have in common?
 - ? How do Judah’s religious and political leaders fail to meet their obligation to their charges?
 - ? What comes to your mind as you consider how Judah’s religious and political leaders feed upon their charges rather than feed them?
 - ? Consider the implication and interpretation of each adjective and phrase that is used to describe the faithlessness of Judah’s religious and political leaders.
 - They are blind (what good is a “scout” who is blind?)
 - They are ignorant (what good is a “watcher” who doesn’t know what to watch for?)
 - They are silent, refusing to raise a warning concerning Judah’s evils and the harms that they will produce (what good is an alarm that doesn’t go off?)
 - They lazily sleep when they should be on guard (what good is a guard who falls asleep at their post?)
 - They are controlled by their insatiable appetite
 - They always put their own needs before those of their charges
 - They refuse to see a danger even when it is staring them in the face, in order to maintain their own prerogatives
 - They appeal to the gullible greediness of their charges to manipulate them
 - ? How do today’s religious and political leaders compare with Judah’s?
 - ? How are they remaining moot in the face of societal and political evils?
 - ? What does Isaiah teach you about the various causes of their deafening silence?
 - ? What are the sheep to do in the face of their leaders’ gross noncompliance in regard to their obligations to the society?
 - ? What are you, or should you do?
- ? Isaiah skillfully describes the plutocratic leaders of Israel. What is your impression of them?
- ? What are their attributes?
- ? How do they compare with modern day leaders?

Isaiah 58.⁶⁻⁷— just scripture

⁶Is not this the fast that I have chosen?
to loose the bands of wickedness,
to undo the heavy burdens,
and to let the oppressed go free,
and that ye break every yoke?

⁷Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry,
and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?
when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him;
and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Questionary

- ? Who is one's "own flesh"?
- ? How is America doing at this "fasting"?

Isaiah 58.⁹⁻¹¹— just scripture

⁹If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke,
the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

¹⁰And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry,
and satisfy the afflicted soul;

then shall thy light rise in obscurity,
and thy darkness be as the noonday:

¹¹And the LORD shall guide thee continually,
and satisfy thy soul in drought,
and make fat thy bones:

and thou shalt be like a watered garden,
and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

Questionary

- ? How do you feel about the very, very close correlation between one's treatment of vulnerable populations and one's wellbeing?

Isaiah 58.¹⁰⁻¹¹— just scripture

¹⁰And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry,
and satisfy the afflicted soul;
then shall thy light rise in obscurity,
and thy darkness be as the noonday:

¹¹And the LORD shall guide thee continually,
and satisfy thy soul in drought,
and make fat thy bones:
and thou shalt be like a watered garden,
and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

Questionary

- ? How do you feel about discovering that your treatment of vulnerable people shapes and conditions how God treats you?

Isaiah 59.³⁻⁸— just scripture

³For your hands are defiled with blood,
and your fingers with iniquity;
your lips have spoken lies,
your tongue hath muttered perverseness.

⁴None calleth for justice,
nor any pleadeth for truth:
they trust in vanity, and speak lies;
they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.

⁵They hatch cockatrice' eggs,
and weave the spider's web:
he that eateth of their eggs dieth,
and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper.

⁶Their webs shall not become garments,
neither shall they cover themselves with their works:
their works are works of iniquity,
and the act of violence is in their hands.

⁷Their feet run to evil,
and they make haste to shed innocent blood:
their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity;
wasting and destruction are in their paths.

⁸The way of peace they know not;
and there is no judgment in their goings:
they have made them crooked paths:
whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.

Questionary

- . Today's reading lists several sins in which ancient Israel was involved.
 - ? Make a "scripture list" of these evils by annotating your margin with '1,' '2,' '3,' etc. for each sin you identify.
 - ? What stands out to you as you consider this list of societal sins?
 - ? Do you relate this list to your own society? If so, how? Consider specific modern examples of these ancient societal evils.
2. The first two parallel lines of today's passage read,

"For your hands are defiled with blood,
and your fingers with iniquity..."

 - ? What modern day societal "iniquities" cause vulnerable populations to live less than dignified lives, experience poor health, and even early death?
3. Isaiah likens Israel to a "cockatrice," and their deeds to its eggs, or reproductive powers.
 - ? What is a "cockatrice"?
 - ? How do you feel about Yahweh likening Israel to a poisonous serpent?
 - ? Given Israelite society's evils, how is this an appropriate metaphor for Israel?
4. Verse six, made up of four lines of poetry, reads,

"Their webs shall not become garments,
neither shall they cover themselves with their works:
their works are works of iniquity,
and the act of violence is in their hands."

Forming a kind of chiasmic structure, the last line's "violence" refers back to the first line's "webs." The third line's "works of iniquity" enhances our understanding of the second line's simple "works." Together, we learn that their "works of iniquity involve "acts of violence."

- ? How does the warning that their "acts of violence" will not produce "clothing" inform your understanding of the motivation that lies behind the acts of violence?
- ? "Violence," or the "violation of others" is a common means used to gain economic advantage over others and accumulate unjust riches. What other passages of scripture refer to this common human enterprise?

5. Isaiah says,

Their feet run to evil,
and they make haste to shed innocent blood...

- ? What does it tell you about ancient Israelite society that they are quick to do evil; that in their desire to get ahead, their first and unquestioned instinct is to violate another's "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness"?
- ? How does all of this relate to modern society?

Isaiah 59.¹²⁻¹⁵— just scripture

¹²For our transgressions are multiplied before thee,
and our sins testify against us:

for our transgressions are with us;
and as for our iniquities, we know them;

¹³In transgressing and lying against the LORD,
and departing away from our God,
speaking oppression and revolt,
conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.

¹⁴And judgment is turned away backward,
and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street,
and equity cannot enter.

¹⁵Yea, truth faileth;
and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey:
and the LORD saw it,
and it displeased him that there was no judgment.

Questionary

- ? How is truth fairing in today's American political environment?
- ? What will you do to help in restoring it?

Jeremiah 2.²⁰⁻²²— just scripture

²⁰ Long ago you broke off your yoke¹
and tore off your bonds;
you said,

“I will not serve you!”

Indeed, on every high hill
and under every spreading tree
you lay down as a prostitute.

²¹ I had planted you like a choice vine
of sound and reliable stock.

How then did you turn against me
into a corrupt, wild vine?

²² Although you wash yourself with soap
and use an abundance of cleansing powder,
the stain of your guilt is still before me,”
declares the Sovereign LORD (NIV).

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

²⁰For of old time I have broken thy yoke,
and burst thy bands;
and thou saidst,

“I will not transgress;”

when upon every high hill
and under every green tree thou wanderest,
playing the harlot.

²¹Yet I had planted thee a noble vine,
wholly a right seed:
how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant
of a strange vine unto me?

²²For though thou wash thee with nitre,
and take thee much soap,
yet thine iniquity is marked before me,
saith the Lord GOD.

1. In our first reading from Jeremiah’s second chapter, we mentioned that one of Jeremiah’s techniques is to criticize Judah for its apostasy by quoting the words of Judah’s citizenry and using their own words against them.
 - ? What words in today’s reading represent those spoken by Judah’s citizenry?
 - ? How does Jeremiah show the lie behind Judah’s claim that “I will not transgress”?
2. Verse 20, as translated in the KJV, is a little misleading. Compare the NIV translation.
 - ? Based on the NIV translation, what is the nature of Judah’s sin as described in verse 20?
3. Jeremiah asserts that Judah worships idolatrous “fertility” gods “upon every high hill and under every green.”
 - ? What is the relationship between idolatry and “fertility”?
 - ? What is economic fertility?
 - ? How is the focus on personal and societal economic gain, materialism, and consumerism like prostitution?

? How do you feel about Jeremiah resorting to the somewhat offensive imagery of prostitution to describe Yahweh's feelings about Judah's apostasy?

4. In the early 6th century BC, Jeremiah uses the following imagery for Judah's idolatry.

"I had planted thee a noble vine,
wholly a right seed:
how then art thou turned
into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?"

A little more than a century earlier, Isaiah had used the following imagery for the injustices committed in the nation

¹Now will I sing to my wellbeloved
a song of my beloved touching his vineyard.

My wellbeloved hath a vineyard
in a very fruitful hill:

²And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof,
and planted it with the choicest vine,
and built a tower in the midst of it,
and also made a winepress therein:
and he looked that it should bring forth grapes,
and it brought forth wild grapes...

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah his pleasant plant:

and he looked for judgment,
but behold oppression;

for righteousness,
but behold a cry." (Isaiah 5.^{1-2, 7}).

? What is the relationship between idolatry and injustice?

? How do idolatry—or, in this context, the inordinate focus on wealth, materialism, consumerism, etc.—and injustice relate to each other?

? How does idolatry as reflected in the inordinate focus on wealth, materialism, consumerism cause individuals to be "objectified" thus making it easier to justify societal injustices?

5. Jeremiah declares that even though Judah washes "with nitre" and "much soap," its societal iniquity is not removed.

? What would remove the societal sin?

A century or so earlier, Isaiah had spoken to Israel concerning how its societal sins might be removed.

"Wash you,
make you clean;
put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes;
cease to do evil;

Learn to do well;
seek judgment,
relieve the oppressed,
judge the fatherless,
plead for the widow.

Come now, and let us reason together,
saith the LORD:

though your sins be as scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they be red like crimson,
they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1.¹⁶⁻¹⁸).

- ? Do Isaiah's instructions alter your answer to how societal sin is removed? If so how?
- ? What role does justice and the rejection of idolatry play in societal health and survival?

Jeremiah 2.²³⁻²⁵— just scripture

²³“How can you say, ¹
‘I am not defiled;
I have not run after the Baals’?
See how you behaved in the valley;
consider what you have done.
You are a swift she-camel
running here and there,
²⁴a wild donkey accustomed to the desert,
sniffing the wind in her craving—
in her heat who can restrain her?
Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves;
at mating time they will find her.
²⁵Do not run until your feet are bare
and your throat is dry.
But you said,
‘It’s no use!
I love foreign gods,
and I must go after them’” (NIV).

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

²³How canst thou say,
“I am not polluted,
I have not gone after Baalim?”
See thy way in the valley,
know what thou hast done:
thou art a swift dromedary
traversing her ways;
²⁴A wild ass used to the wilderness,
that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure;
in her occasion who can turn her away?
all they that seek her will not weary themselves;
in her month they shall find her.
²⁵Withhold thy foot from being unshod,
and thy throat from thirst:
but thou saidst,
“There is no hope:
no; for I have loved strangers,
and after them will I go.”

1. We have seen that Jeremiah often uses the words of Judah’s citizenry against them in his case asserting their idolatry and apostasy. In 2.⁶ and 2.⁸, Jeremiah accuses Judah and its leaders of never asking, “Where is the LORD.” In 2.²⁰, he quotes their false contention, “I will not [or have not] transress[ed].”
? In today’s reading, Jeremiah twice quotes Judah. Identify these two quotes.
? What evidence does Jeremiah provide as evidence that Judah’s claim, “I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim” is a lie?
2. Jeremiah likens Judah’s worship of the fertility gods, such as Baal, to a camel and wild donkey in heat.

- ? How do you feel about Jeremiah's use of such an offensive metaphor?
- ? How is this analogy of an animal in heat appropriate to the inordinate drive for "fertility," or economic gain, materialism, and consumerism?
- 3. Jeremiah suggests that idolatry, this drive to accumulate profits and acquire materials leads to something analogous to running until one's feet are bleeding and one's throat is dry.
 - ? How is this analogy appropriate to the passions and efforts involved in accumulating and consuming?
- 4. Jeremiah quotes Judah's response to his call to abandon their false gods and return to Yahweh as follows:

"It's no use!
I love foreign gods,
and I must go after them."

- ? What does this response suggest to you about Judah's mind set in relation to worshipping Yahweh versus worshipping fertility gods?
- ? How do you feel about their feelings that there is simply no other option but to follow the fertility gods; that their worship is inevitable?
- ? What does it say to you about the "addictive" nature of materialism and consumerism?
- ? How does one arm oneself against and protect oneself from such a subtle addiction?

Jeremiah 2.²⁶⁻³⁰ — just scripture

²⁶As the thief is ashamed when he is found,
so is the house of Israel ashamed;

they, their kings, their princes,
and their priests, and their prophets,

²⁷Saying to a stock,

“Thou art my father;”

and to a stone,

“Thou hast brought me forth:”

for they have turned their back unto me,

and not their face:

but in the time of their trouble they will say,

“Arise, and save us.”

²⁸But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee?

Let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble:

for according to the number of thy cities

are thy gods, O Judah.

²⁹Wherefore will ye plead with me?

Ye all have transgressed against me,
saith the LORD.

³⁰In vain have I smitten your children;

they received no correction:

your own sword hath devoured your prophets,

like a destroying lion.

Questionary

We have seen that Jeremiah often uses the words of Judah’s citizenry against them in his case asserting their idolatry and apostasy. He first quotes faithful words never spoken by Judah’s citizenry and leaders: “Where is the LORD.” He also quotes their false assertions of innocence: “I will not [or have not] transgress[ed],” “I am not polluted,” and “I have not gone after Baalim.”

1. In today’s reading, Jeremiah quotes words spoken by Judah’s political and religious leaders in the course of their idolatrous worship.
 - ? What are those words?
 - ? What is the significance of a “stock” and a “stone”?
 - ? What is the significance of calling an idol “Father,” or “my progenitor”?
 - ? How might “fertility,” or financial achievements feel “generative”?
2. Jeremiah speaks of Israel, especially its religious and political leaders, being “ashamed” as a thief who is caught is “ashamed.”
 - ? How is a thief, caught in the act of stealing, “ashamed”?
 - ? What is meant by “shame”?

Just as a thief, discovered in his theft, does not realize his expectations of possessing the stolen items that he hoped to enjoy, think of Israel’s being “ashamed” as meaning that Israel was “disappointed,” “experienced failure,” “did not realize its expectations.”

- ? How does this understanding or “ashamed” shape your understanding of Jeremiah’s insight into idolatry?
- ? In what ways does materialism and consumerism fail to satisfy the expectations that we might have of it?
- ? How is unbridled materialism like theft?
- ? What and who are the victims of this theft?

3. While Judah usually goes along worshipping idols, finding security and pleasure in acquiring and consuming, during good times, Jeremiah accuses Judah's citizenry and leaders—both political and religious—of hypocritically calling upon Yahweh for deliverance during times of trouble.
 - ? What does this suggest about Judah's real understanding of the idols?
 - ? How do you feel about the fact that Judah's idolatry was actually "willful;" that they knew in their hearts that fertility gods were vain, devoid of real power, but choose to ignore that knowledge for the sake of the pleasures of profit and acquisition?
 - ? How does our society engage in this sort of self-deception?
4. In verse 30, Jeremiah speaks of Judah's hostility to prophets who step forward with a message of correction and repentance.
 - ? What is it about idolatry that is of such strength that it resists criticism and calls to forsake it?
 - ? What grip, if any, and how strong a grip does idolatry have on our society? Upon you, personally?

Jeremiah 2.³¹⁻³⁵— just scripture

³¹O generation, see ye the word of the LORD.

Have I been a wilderness unto Israel?

A land of darkness?

Wherefore say my people,

“We are lords;

we will come no more unto thee?”

³²Can a maid forget her ornaments,

or a bride her attire?

Yet my people have forgotten me

days without number.

³³Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?

Therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways.

³⁴Also in thy skirts is found

the blood of the souls of the poor innocents:

I have not found it by secret search,

but upon all these.

³⁵Yet thou sayest,

“Because I am innocent,

surely his anger shall turn from me.”

Behold, I will plead with thee,

because thou sayest,

“I have not sinned.”

Questionary

I am not sure any prophet, dead or alive, is any more pertinent to our day and what is happening in the U.S. than this fearless and creative prophet.

1. One of Jeremiah’s preaching techniques is to quote lies that he has heard Jews utter about themselves and their nation. In today’s reading he addresses three things he has heard them say.

“We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?”

“Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me.”

“I have not sinned.”

- ? How do you feel about these false assertions?
- ? Do you suppose they believed them?
- ? How do individuals and nations manage to be so self-unaware?
- ? Do you see similar self-deception among us and in our nation?
- ? What types of actions suggest that a nation thinks of itself as a “lord,” or “master”?
- ? Are such actions evident among the nations of the earth today?

2. After the most cursory of searches, Yahweh has made a terrible discovery about his people:

“Also in thy skirts is found

the blood of the souls of the poor innocents...”

Think about this imagery.

- ? How is it possible that the Lord found in his quick search what the Jews do not see as they put on and take off their garments day after day after day?
- ? Clearly, their blindness to their sins is willful. They simply could not have missed the blood day after day. How do you feel about this “willfulness”?
- ? Is there such “willfulness” in us and in our society today when it comes to the way we treat the poor among us?

- ? What forms of “justifications,” “philosophies,” “ideologies,” and “doctrines” does our society use to remain in our “willful ignorance”?
 - ? How is the “blood of the poor” being shed? Is society running them through with swords and knives?
 - ? Obviously, it is a metaphor for all types of violence. What types of “violence” does our society practice against the poor?
2. The following two lines of poetry are a bit difficult.
- “Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?
Therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways.”
- ? What do you make of them? What do you envision?
 - ? Does the following translation from the NIV help? What do you see now?
- “How skilled you are at pursuing love!
Even the worst of women can learn from your ways.”
- ? How is the violent treatment of the poor an act of adultery and infidelity toward God?

Jeremiah 3.^{22c-25}— just scripture

^{22c}“Behold, we come unto thee;
for thou art the LORD our God.
²³Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills,
and from the multitude of mountains:
truly in the LORD our God
is the salvation of Israel.
²⁴For shame hath devoured
the labour of our fathers from our youth;
their flocks and their herds,
their sons and their daughters.
²⁵We lie down in our shame,
and our confusion covereth us:
for we have sinned against the LORD our God,
we and our fathers,
from our youth even unto this day,
and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.”

Questionary

After utilizing the imagery of marital infidelity to discuss Israel’s and Judah’s idolatry and unfaithfulness toward God, Jeremiah extended Yahweh’s surprising and generous invitation to repent and return. Even with such hope in his mind, Yahweh can’t help but return to the tragic reality of the present in the form of a lament (verses 19-22b). Now, in verses 22c-25, we hear Israel’s reply, itself a lament over wasted past efforts.

1. In their lament, the people speak of “salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains.”
 - ? To what are they alluding, here?
 - ? What was the false hope, or the false “salvation” Israel sought through its idolatry?
 - ? How does “fertility” or the “promise of individual or societal economic/political advancement” become twisted into a kind of “salvation”?
 - ? How do you feel about such “mundane” desires as individual or national economic and political wellbeing (“salvation”) being thought of as “idolatrous”?
2. Jeremiah focuses on the irony that principles, practices, and attitudes intended to bring about economic “salvation” actually had the exact opposite effect. Their idolatry
“devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth;
their flocks and their herds,
their sons and their daughters.”
 - ? How do you feel about Jeremiah’s observation?
 - ? Can you explain the phenomenon in which the “worship” of individual and societal “temporal salvation” has the opposite effect as the one desired: the ushering in of economic/political collapse?
 - ? What, if any, application does such prophetic observations and societal critiques have to you and the society in which you live?
 - ? What attitudes and actions would an individual or nation need to adopt to avoid these same ironies in their own experiences?
3. In its lament, Israel confesses, “from our youth even unto this day, [we have] have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.”
 - ? As you review in your mind the history of Israel as found in the Old Testament what evidences do you find that confirm this sad confession?

? How do you feel about Israel's candid and honest confession, when you consider that Israel was God's "the chosen people"?

Jeremiah 4.³⁻⁴— just scripture

³For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem,
“Break up your fallow ground,
and sow not among thorns.

⁴Circumcise yourselves to the LORD,
and take away the foreskins of your heart,
ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem:
lest my fury come forth like fire,
and burn that none can quench it,
because of the evil of your doings.

Questionary

Today's is the second of eleven readings taken from the fourth chapter of Jeremiah. The chapter can be outlined as follows:

1-4	Yahweh speaks to Judah of repentance, promises blessings if they do, and warns of an unnamed disaster if they do not
5-18	Yahweh names the disaster utilizing a series of metaphors
19-22	A lamentation is heard, lamenting Judah's foolishness and the consequent disaster
23-26	Jeremiah has a disturbing vision
27-29	Jeremiah's vision is interpretation
30-31	Metaphor of two women representing Judah

In the first reading (1-2), Yahweh invited Judah to repent and abandon its idolatry, promising that in doing so they would fulfill their role as a blessing to the nations of the world.

1. In today's reading, Jeremiah warns of an unnamed looming disaster and utilizes two metaphors to represent Judah's needed repentance.

? What are those metaphors?

In the first, an agricultural, metaphor, citizens of Judah and its capital city have two choices about where they put their efforts in planting a crop.

? What are those two choices?

? What is the symbolic meaning of “fallow ground”?

? How do you feel about their decision to spend wasted effort planting in weedy, uncultivated soil rather than in prepared cultivated soil?

? What is the spiritual meaning of sowing among thorns, or in uncultivated soil?

? What is the relationship between Jeremiah's agricultural metaphor and Jesus' parable of the sower in which the word is planted among the thorns, representative of the waste that is found in “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches”—a care and deceitfulness that “choke the word,” and cause a citizen and a follower of Jesus to become “unfruitful” (Matt. 13.²²)?

? Keeping in mind that Jeremiah's criticism is directed against Judah's culture and citizenry rather than at any particular individual, how do you feel about an entire culture that sows among thorns, or gets lost in “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches”?

2. In his second metaphor, Jeremiah uses the imagery of circumcision.

? What would the “foreskins of your heart” represent?

3. The Lord warns of an anger that burns unquenchably.

? What is the result of such anger leveled against societies?

Jeremiah 5.²⁶⁻²⁹— just scripture

²⁶For there can be found among my people ungodly individuals.

They keep watch, like bird catchers watching a trap.

They place traps, they capture human beings.

²⁷Just as a bird cage is full of birds,
their houses are filled with deceit.

This is how they have become powerful and wealthy.

²⁸They have grown fat and plump,
having gone beyond, even, the wicked words they speak.

They will not hear a legal case—

such as that of an orphan— and yet they enjoy success.

Nor will they bring the cases of the impoverished to trial.

²⁹Should I not level a charge against these?—

an oracle of YHWH—

Should I not take vengeance on a nation such as this?

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translation, here is the KJV.

²⁶For among my people are found wicked men:

they lay wait, as he that setteth snares;

they set a trap, they catch men.

²⁷As a cage is full of birds,
so are their houses full of deceit:

therefore they are become great,
and waxen rich.

²⁸They are waxen fat, they shine:

yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked:

they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless,
yet they prosper;

and the right of the needy do they not judge.

²⁹Shall I not visit for these *things*?

Saith the LORD:

shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

These verses continue Yahweh's response to Jeremiah after the latter had surveyed Jerusalem in search of any who were faithful to Yahweh and had reported back to Yahweh that he could find none.

1. Jeremiah likens Judah's wealthy citizens to bird catchers who catch and cage birds. But these wealthy citizens catch and cage human beings.

? What do you see when you picture this imagery in your mind?

? What is the purpose of other human beings in the view of the wealthy?

? How do the wealthy use, objectify, and dehumanize others today?

2. Jeremiah can think of at least two means the wealthy use to acquire their wealth, power, and success.

? What are those two ways?

? How do you feel about Jeremiah attributing the accumulation of wealthy, power, and success to wickedness and injustice?

? To what examples can you point that are indicative that this is true in today's society?

Jeremiah's belief that injustice allows the wealthy to accumulate wealth represents a challenge to the common assertion that wealth is accumulated through "righteousness."

- ? How do you feel about this challenge?
3. The wealthy make sure that vulnerable segments of society such as orphans and the poor are denied justice in the legal system and in the legislative bodies. We might be tempted to think only in terms of the judicial system and of courtrooms—of the poor not getting justice in the legal system. While this undoubtedly is part of it, we must think beyond such terms. The Hebrew word often translated as “judgement” can be translated as “governance.”
 - ? How are the poor denied justice in these two settings—policy making and civil/ criminal courts?
 - ? How do governments and societies neglect to “legislate” the “cause” and “rights” of vulnerable classes of society?
 - ? How are your local, state, and national leaders doing in these areas of legislation?
 4. Consider the following images from today’s reading
 - Wealthy and governing classes of society “set “traps” to “capture human beings.”
 - As a “cage is full of birds,” the homes of the wealthy and governing are fully and beautifully furnished with resources accumulated through deceit.
 - The wealthy and governing classes “grown fat and plump.”
 - ? What do you picture in your mind as you consider these images?
 - ? What modern realities do these images reflect in the governance and lifestyle of the wealthy and governing classes?

The Lord’s statement that the wealthy have “grown fat and plump” is not meant as a criticism of their weight, but is indicative of their health made possible by a healthy diet, made possible by their wealth.

 - ? How do you feel about Jeremiah’s criticism that individual health is often tied to personal finances?
 - ? How is the true today?
 5. Because the wealthy and powerful will not allow the cases of vulnerable citizens to be heard, God will himself bring the wealthy and powerful to trial.
 - ? How do you feel about this?
 - ? How do you feel about the Lord looking to be avenged for all the injustice that the wealthy and powerful have perpetrated against the poor and powerless?

Jeremiah 5.³¹— just scripture

The prophets utter oracles out of an intent to deceive;
the priests rule through the exercise of personal power,
and my people prefer it this way.

What will be the future consequences? (Author's translation)

Questionary

- ? Why would a people prefer religious and political leaders who speak something other than the truth and lead by their personal influence?
- ? What is the answer to Jeremiah's final question: "What will be the consequences of such preferences?"

Jeremiah 6.¹³— just scripture

For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them
every one is given to covetousness;
and from the prophet even unto the priest
every one dealeth falsely.

Questionary

- ? With its use of poetic parallelism, adjacent Hebrew lines of poetry normally repeat or enhance each other. With this mind, consider the relationship between “covetousness” and “dealing falsely.” ? How do they play off each other?
- ? What is the likelihood of one being covetousness and not dealing falsely?
- ? Why, do you think, does covetousness lead to deception?

Jeremiah 7.⁵⁻⁷— just scripture

⁵For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; ⁶if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: ⁷then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.

Questionary

- ? How is it that how a society/nation treats vulnerable populations such as resident aliens, orphans, and widows is so determinative as to that societies security and longevity?

Jeremiah 8.¹⁰— just scripture

...For every one from the least even unto the greatest
is given to covetousness,
from the prophet even unto the priest
every one dealeth falsely.

Questionary

- ? In what ways do citizens of your nation “deal falsely” with one another?
- ? How does “covetousness” drive this false dealing?
- ? How do you feel and what do you think when you read that religious leaders are at the forefront of covetousness that leads to false dealings with others?

Jeremiah 9.³⁻⁶— just scripture

³And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies:
but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth;
for they proceed from evil to evil,
and they know not me,
saith the LORD.

⁴Take ye heed every one of his neighbour,
and trust ye not in any brother:
for every brother will utterly supplant,
and every neighbour will walk with slanders.

⁵And they will deceive every one his neighbour,
and will not speak the truth:
they have taught their tongue to speak lies,
and weary themselves to commit iniquity.

⁶Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit;
through deceit they refuse to know me,
saith the LORD.

Questionary

Tragically, today's reading seems all too apropos for the current circumstances taking place in the United States.

1. Jeremiah charges Judah's citizenry of "bend[ing] their tongues like their bow for lies."
 - ? We often think of lies only in terms of an individual's relationship, or lack of relationship to "truth" or "facts." But there is more to lying than that. Jeremiah resorts to the metaphor of bows and arrows to represent lies. What do you understand from Jeremiah's use of this metaphor?
 - ? We understand how lies harm those who are the object of the lies, but how do lies harm those who simply hear the lies?
 - ? What harms come to a society when lying becomes acceptable and common behavior?
2. Jeremiah charges that Judah's citizenry is "not valiant for the truth."
 - ? What would being "valiant for the truth" look like?
 - ? What do you do to be "valiant for the truth"?
 - ? Is there anything more that you could do?
3. In verse 3, Jeremiah has God saying that liars and those who support them "know not me." In verse 6, he has God saying that liars and those who support them "refuse to know me."
 - ? What do you think and feel as you consider these insights?
 - ? What is God's relationship with the truth?

Not "knowing" God is one thing. It might be the result of simple, unintended ignorance. But "refusing" to know God is quite another. It is the result of willful choices.

? How do you feel about thinking of liars as willful deniers and even haters of God?

Jeremiah says that Judah's citizenry "have taught their tongue to speak lies."

? What does this suggest to you?

? How does this compliment Jeremiah's charge that Judah's citizenry willfully "refuse" to know God?

? How do you feel about someone who "studies" to be a more effective liar?

4. Verses 3 and 6, with their association of liars as ignorantly and willfully rebellious, bracket verse 4 and 5.

- ? In their discussion of lying and liars, what is the emphasis of verses 4-5?
 - ? How is disloyalty to one's neighbors and fellow citizens disloyalty to God?
 - ? As you consider the pervasiveness of lying and liars, how would you characterize the welfare of the state?
5. I began by suggesting that today's reading "seems all too apropos for the current circumstances taking place in the United States."
- ? How do you feel about this assertion?
 - ? How would you feel if we changed the "seems" to "is"?
 - ? How is lying on the part of citizens and public officials impacting the welfare of the U.S.?
- ? When you read Jeremiah's extraordinary critical estimation of his culture and citizens of his country what do you see in your mind and feel in your heart?
 - ? How does it compare with your view of your own culture and its citizenry?

Jeremiah 9.²³⁻²⁴— just scripture

²³Thus saith the LORD,

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
neither let the mighty man glory in his might,
let not the rich man glory in his riches:

²⁴But let him that glorieth glory in this,
that he understandeth and knoweth me,
that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness,
judgment, and righteousness, in the earth:
for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

Questionary

- ? Wealth, power, prestige: these are the three Satanic temptations he used against Jesus during his forty days in the desert, and uses against all mankind. How are these three temptations manifest in your life?
- ? How are they a reflection of idolatry, replacing God with wealth, power, and prestige for happiness and a sense of being?
- ? How do nations fall prey to these three temptations?

Jeremiah 12.¹⁻⁴— just scripture

¹Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee:
yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments:
Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?
Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?
²Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root:
they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit:
thou art near in their mouth,
and far from their reins.
³But thou, O LORD, knowest me:
thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee:
pull them out like sheep for the slaughter,
and prepare them for the day of slaughter.
⁴How long shall the land mourn,
and the herbs of every field wither,
for the wickedness of them that dwell therein?
The beasts are consumed, and the birds;
because they said,
‘He shall not see our last end.’”

Questionary

The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, has always intrigued and inspired me. He reveals more of his personal life, and more of his feelings about his life and ministry than any other writing prophet of the Old Testament.

Today’s reading is the third of four passages that record the back and forth in one conversation between Yahweh and Jeremiah. The dialogue looks like this:

Jeremiah	11. ¹⁸⁻²⁰
Yahweh	11. ²¹⁻²³
Jeremiah	12. ¹⁻⁴
Yahweh	12. ⁵⁻⁶

In Jeremiah 11.¹⁸⁻²⁰, the prophet complained about plots planned by his enemies against his life, and asked Yahweh to avenge him for these wrongs. In 11.²¹⁻²³, God replied to Jeremiah and promised that he would, indeed, avenge him. In 12.¹⁻⁴, Jeremiah responds to God.

1. Having successfully complained and pleaded with God in regard to the wrongs committed against him, Jeremiah finds the courage to boldly query Yahweh about another matter that he has found perplexing and troubling.
? What issue was troubling Jeremiah?

In this query, Jeremiah finds reason to question Yahweh’s judgment and justice.

Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?
Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?

- ? How do you feel about Jeremiah’s question and his challenging God’s justice?
- ? What does it suggest to you about the relationship between Jeremiah and God?
- ? Have you had the confidence in God and the security in your relationship with him to make known to God your uncertainties, doubts, and even your doubts about the appropriateness of his actions?
- ? How is it that the “wicked” and “treacherous” do seem so often to “prosper” as to the things of this world?
- ? Why does God permit such “injustice,” especially when it so often comes at the expense of

- others, often innocent?
- ? Have you ever found yourself wondering about why things are as they are in this world?
 - ? How do we determine when our “complaint” about the injustice of economic inequality is just “envy,” or “sour grapes” on our part and when it is a legitimate and godly concern for the poor and the societal evils that the inequality produces?
2. Compare Jeremiah’s complaint about the apparent comfort of the wealthy with that of the Psalmist.
- “But as for me, my feet were almost gone;
my steps had well nigh slipped.
For I was envious at the foolish,
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
For there are no bands in their death:
but their strength is firm.
They are not in trouble as other men;
neither are they plagued like other men.
Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain;
violence covereth them as a garment.
Their eyes stand out with fatness:
they have more than heart could wish” (Psalm 73.²⁻⁷).
- ? What additional thoughts, feelings, impressions, and life-direction do you glean from this passage?
3. In verse four, Jeremiah indicates that the wicked behavior of the well-off is impacting nature, or, better, is impacting the economy.
- ? How does extreme wealth of some, always at the expense of others, negatively impact the economy?
 - ? How do you respond to the dangers that economic inequality present to society?

Jeremiah 17.¹¹— just scripture

As the partridge sitteth on eggs,
and hatcheth them not;
so he that getteth riches,
and not by right,
shall leave them in the midst of his days,
and at his end shall be a fool.

Questionary

- ? Think for a moment about a bird that sacrifices its own comfort day after day to sit on its eggs. Think upon that same bird as it abandons its unhatched eggs. Think of those eggs abandoned in the nest to rot and decay. Now consider the immense wealth that so many have accumulated by abusing and oppressing others.
- ? How do such wealthy—the majority of the wealthy—come off looking like “fools”?

Jeremiah 21.¹¹⁻¹²— just scripture

¹¹And touching the house of the king of Judah, say, “Hear ye the word of the LORD; O house of David, thus saith the LORD;

¹²Execute judgment in the morning,
and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor,
lest my fury go out like fire,
and burn that none can quench it,
because of the evil of your doings.

Questionary

1. Yahweh demands that political leaders—the king of Judah in this case—“deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor.”
 - ? What type of activities would you include under the rubric of “spoiling”?
 - ? “Oppressors” come in the form of both individuals and institutions. What examples of both individual and institutional oppression would you point to in your own society?
2. The fact that the Lord is addressing the political leader indicates that the “deliverance” that the Lord expects from him is less private and more public—it is a matter of public policy.
 - ? How can public policy protect the vulnerable from the more powerful—oppressor in God’s language?
 - ? How well do your society’s public policies “deliver” the “spoiled” from the individuals and institutions that oppress them?
 - ? How well do American public policies “deliver” the “spoiled” from the individuals and institutions that oppress them?
 - ? To what examples can you point in which U.S. public policy oppresses vulnerable people rather than proactively “delivering” them?
3. When political leaders do not legislate in a manner that delivers the vulnerable from being spoiled by oppressive individuals and institutions, they can expect God’s “fury” to “go out like fire.”
 - ? How do you feel about such a strong response from God due to unjust economic oppression and inequality?
 - ? What did Yahweh’s “fury” look like in the case of ancient Judah?
 - ? How safe from such “fury” of the Lord is your society? American society?

Jeremiah 22.³⁻⁵— just scripture

³Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. ⁴For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. ⁵But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation.

Questionary

? Who are today's "spoiled" that you as an individual and the nation as a public are obligated by covenant to "deliver"?

? Who are today's "oppressors" who are doing the spoiling? It isn't you is it? Your nation?

A just society is assured their a king will "enter in by the gates of this house." An unjust society is assured that their "house shall become desolate." In other words, a nation is assured of a continuation of government only if it is just.

? How do you feel knowing that social injustice will produce a collapse of government?

Jeremiah 22.¹³⁻¹⁴— just scripture

¹³Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness,
and his chambers by wrong;
that useth his neighbour's service without wages,
and giveth him not for his work;

¹⁴That saith,
'I will build me a wide house
and large chambers,'
And cutteth him out windows;
and it is cieled with cedar,
and painted with vermilion.

Questionary

In the same breath, as it were, Jeremiah speaks of the wealthy cheating working people of their ability to support themselves on a fair wage, and the wealthy building themselves homes of the nicest and most expensive materials.

- ? What is the relationship between these two selfish practices?
- ? How does our society and its wealthy business owners, slight workers for their service to companies?

Jeremiah 22.¹⁵⁻¹⁷— just scripture

¹⁵Shalt thou reign,
because thou closest thyself in cedar?

Did not thy father eat and drink,
and do judgment and justice,
and then it was well with him?

¹⁶He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well with him:

was not this to know me?
saith the LORD.

¹⁷But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for
thy covetousness,
and for to shed innocent blood,
and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.

Questionary

- ? What is the significance of and a modern analogy to closing oneself “in cedar”?
- ? How do you feel about the fact that economic covetousness and violence are nearly always linked in scripture?
- ? Why does covetousness inevitably lead to violence?
- ? Why is advocating for “the poor and needy” the same as knowing God?

Jeremiah 22.²¹— just scripture

I spake unto thee in thy prosperity;
but thou saidst,
‘I will not hear.’
This hath been thy manner from thy youth,
that thou obeyedst not my voice.

Questionary

- ? What thoughts come to your mind and what feelings do you have when you consider that this criticism is aimed at the culture and the citizenry at large rather than any individual?
- ? That said, what would be said of your faithfulness to God at those times when things are going well for you?
- ? What can you do as an individual to influence society at large and encourage it to avoid the evil Jeremiah describes?

Jeremiah 23.¹⁶⁻¹⁷— just scripture

Thus saith the LORD of hosts,
Hearken not unto the words of the prophets
that prophesy unto you:
they make you vain:
they speak a vision of their own heart,
and not out of the mouth of the LORD.
They say still unto them that despise me,
'The LORD hath said,
Ye shall have peace;'
And they say unto every one that walketh
after the imagination of his own heart,
'No evil shall come upon you.'

Questionary

- ? How are American “Christian” leaders playing the role of false prophets in their unstinting support of the current president, a.k.a., Caligula?
- ? How does Caligula demonstrate that he “despises” God? Perhaps more accurately, how does he NOT “despise” God?
- ? How does he speak and act “after the imagination of his own heart”?
- ? How do these same false prophets “speak a vision of their own heart”?

Upon hearing the political pundits on radio and TV, any ancient time traveler to today’s society would think of them as “prophets.”

- ? What have politicians and pundits on the political right said and done in the past two weeks in relation to the coronavirus that would earn them the same criticism as the prophets of Jeremiah’s time?

Ezekiel 16.⁴⁸⁻⁵⁰— just scripture

⁴⁸As I live, saith the Lord God, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. ⁴⁹Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. ⁵⁰And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.

Questionary

In today's reading Ezekiel identifies the sins of which Sodom—the archetypical example of extreme wickedness—is guilty.

? What sins do you identify?

? Is this what you think of when you think of Sodom-like sins?

2. Take a moment to characterize each of the following Sodomite sins or iniquities identified by Ezekiel.

Pride

Fulness of bread

Abundance of idleness

Neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy

They were haughty

They committed abomination

? Why do you think that Ezekiel identifies “fulness of bread” as an “iniquity”?

? How do you feel about this?

? How do you feel about it being an iniquity that brings destruction upon societies?

? How could “fulness of bread” contribute to societal collapse?

? What is the relationship between “fulness of bread” and “abundance of idleness”?

? How does the following passage contribute to the answer to the previous question?

“And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6.⁸⁻¹⁰).

3. Sodom is most often associated with homosexuality. I suppose that in Ezekiel's critique, one could assume this under his rubric, “abomination.” But Ezekiel's critique does not seem focused on this. “Abomination” is simply one of six iniquities mentioned.

? Why do you suppose that modern Christian readers focus on homosexuality to the exclusion of the other iniquities?

? Why wasn't Ezekiel more specific, if we wished abomination to be understood as homosexuality?

? How do you feel about Ezekiel seeming to give equal weight to “fulness of bread” and “abomination”—read “homosexuality if you must, but there are many types of “abomination.”

4. These “Sodomite” iniquities were causes for Sodom's ultimate destruction.

? How is it that the iniquity, “Neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy,” can be society ending?

? What does “strengthening the hand of the poor and needy” mean?

? Does it include more than simply “caring for”?

- ? In what ways is our current society “Sodom-like”?

- ? Are there “sodom-like” economic iniquities in which you are involved?
- ? What can you do to avoid and/or forsake them?
- ? What can you do to encourage society to avoid and/or forsake them?

Ezekiel 22.^{6-7,12-14}— just scripture

⁶See how each of the princes of Israel who are in you uses his power to shed blood. In you they have treated father and mother with contempt; ⁷in you they have oppressed the foreigner and mistreated the fatherless and the widow....

¹²In you are people who accept bribes to shed blood; you take interest and make a profit from the poor. You extort unjust gain from your neighbors. And you have forgotten me, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹³I will surely strike my hands together at the unjust gain you have made and at the blood you have shed in your midst. ¹⁴Will your courage endure or your hands be strong in the day I deal with you? (NIV)

Questionary

- ? How are the unethical economic, judicial, and governmental sins that Ezekiel mentions in today's reading an evidence that individual citizens, politicians, society's institutions, and society in general have "forgotten" God?
- ? What does it look like to "take interest and make a profit from the poor"?
- ? What does it look like to "extort unjust gain" from a "neighbor"? Who is your neighbor?

Ezekiel 32.²— just scripture

Son of man, take up a lament concerning Pharaoh king of Egypt and say to him:
“You are like a lion among the nations;
you are like a monster in the seas thrashing about in your streams,
churning the water with your feet
and muddying the streams” (NIV).

Questionary

- ? What do you see when you consider Ezekiel’s imagery?
- ? Egypt, one of the ancient world’s national “superpowers,” is like a lion
- ? Egypt, one of the ancient world’s national “superpowers,” is like a huge whale swimming up a small stream
- ? Egypt, one of the ancient world’s national “superpowers,” is guilty of muddying waters previously drinkable
- ? How do modern “superpowers” engage in the same threatening and defiling behaviors?

Ezekiel 34.²⁻⁵— just scripture

²Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ³You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ⁵So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals (NIV).

Questionary

1. Ezekiel utters a “woe” against the “shepherds of Israel”?
 - ? Who are those “shepherds”?
 - ? Who are the “shepherds” in today’s society?
2. Ezekiel charges that Israel’s shepherds “eat the curds, clothe [themselves] with wool and slaughter the choice animals.”
 - ? What does their diet and clothing tell you about societal leaders’ economic status?
 - ? What material advantages that today’s societal leaders possess might be listed as indicators of profligate privilege?
3. While societal leaders were themselves enjoying an extravagant lifestyle, they made no attempt to assist the vulnerable
 - ? How do today’s societal leaders show their contempt for the vulnerable?
 - ? How do you feel about Ezekiel’s conclusion that societal leaders’ contempt for the vulnerable is the result of their self-interestedness—an interest in enriching themselves materially and enhancing their social prestige?
4. Ezekiel charges that societal leaders’ actions were more than merely self-interested and profligate, they were “harsh” and “brutal.”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider harshness and the nature of brutality?
 - ? How should people feel about brutal leaders?
 - ? What should be the consequences of brutality?

Ezekiel 45.⁹⁻¹⁰— just scripture

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: You have gone far enough, princes of Israel! Give up your violence and oppression and do what is just and right. Stop dispossessing my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. You are to use accurate scales, an accurate ephah and an accurate bath (NIV).

Questionary

- ? How do the wealthy and the financial institutions that represent them manipulate money and access to money in today's society?
- ? How have financial institutions "dispossessed" individuals, particularly vulnerable individuals?
- ? How did the financial institutions "dispossess" individuals of their homes during the housing crisis of the late 2000s?

hosea 8.⁴— just scripture
...of their silver and their gold
have they made them idols...

Questionary

- ? How do you feel about materialism being identified as the worship of false gods?
- ? How established is materialism in your life?

hosea 12.⁷⁻⁸— just scripture

The merchant uses dishonest scales
and loves to defraud.

Ephraim boasts,

‘I am very rich; I have become wealthy.

With all my wealth they will not find in me
any iniquity or sin.’

Questionary

- ? How are the wealthy, so often having acquired their wealth through fraud, actually found, even today, “innocent” in legal disputes into which they enter?
- ? In what types of fraud are the wealthy involved today?

Amos 1.3-2.3— just scripture

³Thus saith the LORD;

For three transgressions of Damascus,
and for four,

I will not turn away the punishment thereof;
because they have threshed Gilead
with threshing instruments of iron:

⁴But I will send a fire into the house of Hazeel,
which shall devour the palaces of Benhadad.

⁵I will break also the bar of Damascus,
and cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven,
and him that holdeth the sceptre from the house of Eden:
and the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir,
saith the LORD.

⁶Thus saith the LORD;

For three transgressions of Gaza,
and for four,

I will not turn away the punishment thereof;
because they carried away captive the whole captivity,
to deliver them up to Edom:

⁷But I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza,
which shall devour the palaces thereof:

⁸And I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod,
and him that holdeth the sceptre from Ashkelon,
and I will turn mine hand against Ekron:
and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish,
saith the Lord GOD.

⁹Thus saith the LORD;

For three transgressions of Tyrus,
and for four,

I will not turn away the punishment thereof;
because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom,
and remembered not the brotherly covenant:

¹⁰But I will send a fire on the wall of Tyrus,
which shall devour the palaces thereof.

¹¹Thus saith the LORD;

For three transgressions of Edom,
and for four,

I will not turn away the punishment thereof;
because he did pursue his brother with the sword,
and did cast off all pity,
and his anger did tear perpetually,
and he kept his wrath for ever:

¹²But I will send a fire upon Teman,
which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah.

¹³Thus saith the LORD;

For three transgressions of the children of Ammon,
and for four,

I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof;
because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead,

that they might enlarge their border:
14But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah,
and it shall devour the palaces thereof,
with shouting in the day of battle,
with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind:
15And their king shall go into captivity,
he and his princes together,
saith the LORD.

21Thus saith the LORD;
For three transgressions of Moab,
and for four,
I will not turn away the punishment thereof;
because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime:
2But I will send a fire upon Moab,
and it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth:
and Moab shall die with tumult,
with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet:
3And I will cut off the judge from the midst thereof,
and will slay all the princes thereof with him,
saith the LORD.

Q

uestionary

The Book of Amos, written and inspired by an 8th century B.C. prophet (his name signifies “a burden,” or “load,” indicative of the book’s message) begins with a two verse introduction (1. 1-2), providing information concerning the time and place of the prophet’s ministry—during the reigns of Judah’s Uzziah and Israel’s Jeroboam, a period of economic and political resurgence, particularly in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Following this introduction are the “Oracles Against the Nations,” united by repeating literary patterns, devices, and themes, and comprising 1. 3-2. 16.

Today’s passage looks at the first six oracles spoken against nations surrounding the kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

1. While spending most of their time prophesying to and/or against the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel, the Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament do not ignore the surrounding countries. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all prophecy against surrounding countries. In Chapters 1 and 2, Amos does so also.
 - ? Take a moment to identify the six neighboring countries of Israel and Judah against whom Amos prophesied, and where they are on the map in relation to Israel and Judah.
2. In addressing each nation, Amos names them, identifies a national sin (rebellious behavior), and stipulates a consequence of the sin.
 - ? Identify the sin of each of the foreign nations: Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab.
 - ? What does it mean that Syria “threshed Gilead”?
 - ? Where is Gilead located? To which nation does it belong?
 - ? Does it refer to Syrian theft of grain? Or is it more serious, signifying brutality against the inhabitants of Gilead?

Gaza, one of the principle Philistine cities, “carried away captive the whole captivity [non-combatants as well as military personnel], to deliver [read, ‘sell’] them up to Edom.”

- ? What is the evil here?

Tyre was guilty of the same crime as Gaza, but, in addition did so against a “brotherly covenant.”

- ? What does this mean and what is the nature of the evil?
- ? What is the nature of Edom’s sin?

In order to extend their political power, the Ammonite military “ripped up the women with child of Gilead.”

- ? So, of what are they actually guilty?

Moab was guilty of burning “the bones of the king of Edom into lime.”

- ? What is the evil being described here?
- ? What do each of these individual nations’ sin have in common?
- ? How do these sins reflect a breach of the international order?
- ? What modern day examples of nations breaching the sovereignty of other nations and international law by acting rashly, overly aggressively, brutally, unjustly, and contrary to established treaties and accepted international laws?

It is always easy to see the errors of others. It is easy for nations to only see the insults and aggressions committed against them, without seeing the role that they themselves play.

- ? What examples are found in your national history when it has been guilty before God of acting rashly, overly aggressively, brutally, unjustly, and contrary to established treaties and accepted international laws?¹
- ? Do you make yourself aware of such actions? Do you have a responsibility to do so?
- ? What reasons would there be for not doing so?
- ? In our modern era of democracies, what role can and does the individual and the electorate play in demanding that their national leaders not overstep godly and just actions on the international stage, and in holding their national leaders accountable?

¹ To mention just three historical examples from American history, consider American military actions taken against the American Seminoles, atrocities committed during the Mexican-American War, or abuses against African-American slaves—all “institutional” deeds supported by a sizable portion of the American electorate.

Amos 2.⁴⁻⁵— just scripture

⁴Thus saith the LORD;

For three transgressions of Judah,
and for four,

I will not turn away the punishment thereof;
because they have despised the law of the LORD,
and have not kept his commandments,
and their lies caused them to err,
after the which their fathers have walked:

⁵But I will send a fire upon Judah,
and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.

Questionary

The Book of Amos, written and inspired by an 8th century B.C. prophet (his name signifies “a burden,” or “load, indicative of the book’s message) begins with a two verse introduction (1.¹⁻²), providing information concerning the time and place of the prophet’s ministry—during the reigns of Judah’s Uzziah and Israel’s Jeroboam, a period of economic and political resurgence, particularly in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Following this introduction are the “Oracles Against the Nations,” united by repeating literary patterns, devices, and themes, and comprising 1.³-2.¹⁶.

In our previous Read, Ponder, Pray passage from Amos (1.³-2.³), we found that the transgression, or rebellion of which the nations surrounding Judah and Israel are guilty involved international actions against other nations that were rash, overly aggressive, brutal, unjust, and contrary to established treaties and accepted international laws.

Today’s passage looks at the seventh oracle, this one spoken against Judah. It is a short reading, but one that is packed with meaning and application—both personal and institutional/national.

I suggest, too, that there is a kind of “looping feedback” that takes place between this oracle and those that preceded it. This oracle shines a light, and acts as a kind of commentary on the previous oracles; while the proceeding oracles shed light on and act as commentary on this one. We have a very, very thoughtful and perceptive man in this prophet named Amos.

1. Amos’ critique of the other nations involved their offences against each other and the international order.
 - ? Against whom is Judah guilty of transgressing?
 - ? How does transgressing against citizens of other countries compare with transgressing against citizens of one’s own country?
 - ? How does transgressing against one’s covenant (treaty) with God compare with transgressing against treaties made with other men and nations?
2. Amos charges that Judah’s “lies caused them to err.”
 - ? What is the nature of the “lies” that causes Judah to err?
 - ? What do you understand idolatry to be?
 - ? What do you do to be certain that traces of idolatry are kept out of your life?
3. In studying the sins of the surrounding nations in Amos 1.³-2.³, we did not say anything concerning the “punishment.” Go back and read the punishments. After doing so, read the punishment that is to come upon Judah.
 - ? What stands out to you about the punishments?
 - ? Is there a common element to these punishments?

In each instance, we read of the “devouring of the palaces.”

- ? What is it significant that it is “devour the palaces” rather than “devour the houses”?
- ? What do the “palaces” represent?

Because the palace represents the hub of government, “the devouring of the palaces” represents the collapse of the government. God has brought an end to nations any number of times in human history. He has promised to do so again. In fact, he has promised to bring an end to all the nations of the earth.

And verily I say unto you, the rest of my servants, go ye forth as your circumstances shall permit, in your several callings, unto the great and notable cities and villages, reproving the world in righteousness of all their unrighteous and ungodly deeds, setting forth clearly and understandingly the desolation of abomination in the last days. For, with you saith the Lord Almighty, I will rend their kingdoms; I will not only shake the earth, but the starry heavens shall tremble. For I, the Lord, have put forth my hand to exert the powers of heaven; ye cannot see it now, yet a little while and ye shall see it, and know that I am, and that I will come and reign with my people” (DC 84.¹¹⁷⁻¹¹⁹).

- ? How do you feel about the collapse of the world’s kingdoms?
- ? How likely is it that the demise of the world kingdoms in the latter-days will largely be the result of the same transgressions committed by the kingdoms of Amos’ day: breaching the sovereignty of other nations and international law by acting rashly, overly aggressively, brutally, unjustly, and contrary to established treaties and accepted international laws?
- ? What do you imagine the emotional, temporal, and spiritual impact of such governmental collapse would have on you and your family?

Amos 2.⁶⁻⁸—just scripture

⁶They sell out the innocent in order to turn a profit.

They sell out the impoverished in order to acquire a pair of sandals.

⁷They lust after the dirt

that is found in the hair of the poor,

and make the life of those already distressed even more precarious.

Father and son have sex with the same defenseless girl,

thereby bringing disrepute upon my reputation.

⁸Upon garments taken as collateral

they recline next to their altar,

while they drink wine, payment of those unjustly fined,

in the house of their God (Author's translation).

Questionary

The Book of Amos, written and inspired by an 8th century B.C. prophet (his name signifies “a burden,” or “load, indicative of the book’s message) begins with a two verse introduction (1.¹⁻²), providing information concerning the time and place of the prophet’s ministry—during the reigns of Judah’s Uzziah and Israel’s Jeroboam, a period of economic and political resurgence, particularly in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Following this introduction are the “Oracles Against the Nations,” united by repeating literary patterns, devices, and themes, and comprising 1.^{3-2.16}.

Amos 1.^{3-2.3} informs us of the transgressions, or rebellion of which the nations surrounding Judah and Israel were guilty. They all involved international relations with other nations that were rash, overly aggressive, brutal, unjust, and contrary to established treaties and accepted international laws.

Amos 2.⁴⁻⁵, informs us that Judah’s transgression, or rebellion, also involved a breach of covenant or treaty. However, Judah’s rebellion was against God Himself. Judah was guilty of idolatry or covetousness. Judah’s “lies,” or idols “caused them to err.” However, we are not informed of the exact nature of their errors.

As the prophet turns his attention to the northern kingdom of Israel, he will speak very specifically and exactly concerning the nature of Israel’s errors. Again, we should think in terms of “looping feedback” between the oracle against Judah and Israel. Judah’s specific errors, not mentioned in the oracle, were likely the same as those found in Israel. Israel’s specific errors, mentioned in the oracle, were indicative of a rebellion involving breach of covenant, or treaty with God and with fellow Israelites. Israel, like Judah, was guilty of—idolatry or covetousness. This can be seen in the nature of the errors.

Each of the three oracles—that against the neighboring nations, that against Judah, and that against Israel—are intended as commentary on the others, shedding light on the nature of human rebellion against God.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

⁶...because they sold the righteous for silver,

and the poor for a pair of shoes;

⁷That pant after the dust of the earth

on the head of the poor,

and turn aside the way of the meek:

and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid,

to profane my holy name:

⁸And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar,

and they drink the wine of the condemned
in the house of their god.

- ? As you look at the list of errors committed in Israel, do you see a common element?
- ? What elements of covetousness and abuse of power do you find in the immoral behaviors listed?

There are any number of ways that the wealthy “buy and sell” the poor. Consider the following passages.

Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy,
even to make the poor of the land to fail,
Saying, “When will the new moon be gone,
that we may sell corn?
and the sabbath,
that we may set forth wheat,
making the ephah small,
and the shekel great,
and falsifying the balances by deceit?
That we may buy the poor for silver,
and the needy for a pair of shoes;
yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?” (Amos 8.⁴⁻⁶)

“Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness,
and his chambers by wrong;
that useth his neighbour’s service without wages,
and giveth him not for his work;
That saith,
‘I will build me a wide house
and large chambers,’
And cutteth him out windows;
and it is cieled with cedar,
and painted with vermilion.
Shalt thou reign,
because thou closest thyself in cedar?
Did not thy father eat and drink,
and do judgment and justice,
and then it was well with him?
He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well with him:
was not this to know me?
saith the LORD.
But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for
thy covetousness,
and for to shed innocent blood,
and for oppression, and for violence, to do it” (Jeremiah 22.¹³⁻¹⁷)

- ? How are you, your community, and your nation doing in regard to just behavior and policies? Are your national laws such that they encourage ethical use of resources by the wealthy in order to protect and bless the poor?
- ? Is there something you can and should do or demand to bring about a more just society?
- ? How does the covetousness of Israelites warp and twist their view of others?
- ? To what examples can you point where covetousness causes individuals, corporations, or nations to “dehumanize,” or “objectify” others, seeing them only as tools for their own profit and gain, and thus subject to abuse?

- ? What responsibility do you have as an individual, as an employee, and as a citizen to try and check such covetousness, abuse, and objectification of others?
- ? The rebellion of the surrounding nations was against each other, that of Judah against God, and that of Israelites against fellow citizens. What is the significance of this observation? How do they relate? In what ways are they all really the same? Consider Matthew 25.³¹⁻⁴⁵.
- ? Having studied and pondered the oracle against the surrounding nations, the oracle against Judah, and the oracle against Israel, do you detect common transgressions and themes? Take some time to list them and ponder their significance.

Amos 3.⁹⁻¹⁰— just scripture

⁹Proclaim to the fortresses of Ashdod
and to the fortresses of Egypt:
“Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria;
see the great unrest within her
and the oppression among her people.”
¹⁰“They do not know how to do right,”
declares the LORD,
“who store up in their fortresses
what they have plundered and looted” (NIV).

Questionary

Having defended himself and his message of looming destruction (3.1-8), Amos aims his first full-throated execration against Israel.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

⁹Publish in the palaces at Ashdod,
and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say,
“Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria,
and behold the great tumults in the midst thereof,
and the oppressed in the midst thereof.”
¹⁰For they know not to do right,
saith the LORD,
who store up
violence and robbery in their palaces.

1. Ashdod is one of the Philistine’s principle political centers. Of course, Egypt we know.
? Why do you suppose the Lord called upon these specific nations to witness the oppressive evil that existed in Israel’s capitol city of Samaria?

As far as Israel was concerned, Egypt, Israel’s “original” and most personal “agent of oppression,” would certainly know oppression when it saw it. On the other hand, the Philistines were Israel’s principle enemy, repeatedly “oppressing” Israel. This makes Egypt and Philistia a kind of “expert witness.”

- ? What does it say about the state of oppression in Israel, that it would be witnessed against by known and “expert” oppressors such as Egypt and Philistia?
2. We have seen before the Old Testament prophetic belief that wealth is, more often than not, acquired, not through righteousness, but through wickedness. It is not acquired through doing good, but through knowing how to manipulate and oppress. We see it again in today’s passage.
“They do not know how to do right,”
declares the LORD,
“who store up in their fortresses
what they have plundered and looted.”
? How do you feel about this assertion?
? Can you see the truth of this from a historical and global perspective?
? What form does “plunder” and “looting” take today that make it possible for the rich to build their “fortresses” or “palaces/mansions”?
3. In the following passage from Moses, Cain, in that very first generation, articulates a basic principle for acquiring this world’s goods.

“And Cain said: Truly I am Mahan, the master of this great secret, that I may murder and get gain. Wherefore Cain was called Master Mahan, and he gloried in his wickedness” (Moses 5.³¹)

Murder is, of course, the ultimate exercise of “violence.” However, “gain” does not come only through the ultimate in violence—murder—but through all expressions of violence. This is the point.

? How does Cain’s discovery relate to Amos’ assertion concerning the accumulation of this world’s goods?

Amos 3.¹¹⁻¹⁵— just scripture

¹¹Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“An enemy will overrun your land,
pull down your strongholds
and plunder your fortresses.”

¹²This is what the LORD says:

“As a shepherd rescues from the lion’s mouth
only two leg bones or a piece of an ear,
so will the Israelites living in Samaria be rescued,
with only the head of a bed
and a piece of fabric from a couch.”

¹³“Hear this and testify against the descendants of Jacob,”
declares the Lord, the LORD God Almighty.

¹⁴“On the day I punish Israel for her sins,
I will destroy the altars of Bethel;
the horns of the altar will be cut off
and fall to the ground.

¹⁵I will tear down the winter house
along with the summer house;
the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed
and the mansions will be demolished,”
declares the LORD (NIV).

Q

In our previous reading from Amos (3.⁹⁻¹⁰), we read the beginning of Amos’ first full critique of Israelite society. There, two classic coercive and oppressive regimes—that of the Philistines and the Egyptians—were called to witness Israel’s coercive and oppressive practices whereby the wealthy were able to build and decorate their palaces. In today’s reading, Amos continues his first full critique of Israelite society.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

¹¹Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD;

An adversary there shall be even round about the land;
and he shall bring down thy strength from thee,
and thy palaces shall be spoiled.

¹²Thus saith the LORD;

As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion
two legs, or a piece of an ear;
so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria
in the corner of a bed,
and in Damascus in a couch.

¹³Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob,
saith the Lord GOD, the God of hosts,

¹⁴That in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him
I will also visit the altars of Bethel:
and the horns of the altar shall be cut off,
and fall to the ground.

¹⁵And I will smite the winter house
with the summer house;

the houses of ivory shall perish,
and the great houses shall have an end,
saith the LORD.

1. We have spoken before concerning “the law of restoration.” Among other things, this “law” stipulates that the “punishment fits the crime.” The classic Old Testament version of it is that those who “dig a pit for their neighbor” will, themselves, fall into the very pit they dug.

The punishment stipulated by Amos, tells us all we need to know about the crime.

? What is the punishment?

The Israelites are going to lose their “winter house,” their “summer house,” their “houses adorned with ivory,” and their “mansions.” Of all the wonderful possession in these homes, they will only be able to rescue a small portion of a piece of furniture and a little fabric from their bedspread.

? What does this “punishment” suggest concerning their “crime”?

? Do you see how the “law of restoration” works in this case?

We saw in our reading of Amos 3.⁹⁻¹⁰ that the wealthy acquired their wealth through plundering and looting the poor. This, of course, left the poor with very little. The poor were unable to protect themselves or their possession from the wealthy.

So it is that the wealthy are plundered and looted, unable to protect themselves or their possessions from the plunderer—in their case, the Assyrian army.

? On a minor note, what is the significance of ivory, and a home “adorned with ivory”?

2. The loss of mansions that the wealthy suffer, is presented in association with the destruction of one of Israel’s foremost sanctuaries, Bethel.

? What is the relationship between this “personal and secular” loss and the “public and sacred” loss?

We know that the private palaces were built and maintained through spoiling the poor.

? Is it possible that in Amos’ view, the temple, “Yahweh’s palace,” was also built and maintained on the backs of the poor?

It is one thing for a bunch of “hedonists” to live it up at the expense of the more vulnerable of society. It is another for the “religious” to do so. And it is yet another thing for the religious to “worship” by means of plundering the poor. Note, this passage from Amos, which we looked at in a previous Read, Ponder, Pray.

“And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge
by every altar,
and they drink the wine of the condemned
in the house of their god” (2.⁸)

? How are our modern religious institutions doing in this regard?

? Are they sometimes guilty of “plundering” the poor, not only for personal gain but for institutional gain?

? What can you do to resist, personally, this error?

? What can you do to assist religious institutes to see where they may be guilty of this error, and to see what actions they can take to correct the error?

Amos 4.¹⁻³— just scripture

¹Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan
that are in the mountain of Samaria,
which oppress the poor,
which crush the needy,
which say to their masters,
“Bring, and let us drink.

²The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness,
that, lo, the days shall come upon you,
that he will take you away with hooks,
and your posterity with fishhooks.

³And ye shall go out at the breaches,
every cow at that which is before her;
and ye shall cast them into the palace,
saith the LORD.

Questionary

1. In previous readings from Amos we have heard the prophet's complaints concerning Israelite society's treatment of the poor. In 2.⁶⁻⁷, we read

They sold the righteous for silver,
and the poor for a pair of shoes;
[they] pant after the dust of the earth
on the head of the poor...

Then, in 3.^{9-10 & 15}, we read how the wealthy spoil those vulnerable to their power, allowing them to build multiple palaces using the most expensive building materials (ivory is mentioned).

We might imagine that such injustices, pillage, and violence against the poor involve physical abuse practiced by aggressive males who dominate ancient societies. However in today's reading, Amos reminds us that oppression and violence takes on many activities that we might not think of as being violent or oppressive.

? Who is oppressing the poor and crushing the needy in today's reading?

? What is a “kine”?

? Why do you suppose Amos compares wealthy Israelite women to cows? (You will have to get past how totally politically incorrect this would be today)

? How are their demands of their husband to provide a continual supply of wine oppressive and crushing toward the poor? (Just a note for the LDS reader, this is not about the word of wisdom, but about being insatiable in ones desires and demands for more, more, more)

? When is enough, enough so that "the additional" can be devoted to the poor?

2. Amos says that these insatiable women will be lead captive out is the capital city with “fish hooks.”

? If you close your eyes, what do you see?

(Consider that almost certainly women in Amos' culture normally wore nose rings)

? How does the imagery make you feel?

“According to Assyrian reliefs (pictures engraved on stone), prisoners of war were led away with a rope fastened to a hook that pierced the nose or lower lip” (NIV Study Bible text note).

Amos 4.⁴⁻⁵— just scripture

⁴Come to Bethel, and transgress;
at Gilgal multiply transgression;
and bring your sacrifices every morning,
and your tithes after three years:
⁵And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven,
and proclaim and publish the free offerings:
for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel,
saith the Lord GOD.

Questionary

1. In today's reading from Amos, Yahweh, using the same four-letter word, makes two positive and one negative contrasting request.
? What is the four-letter word that is repeated in each request?
? What are the requests?
2. The question is who or what will Israel "seek"—they can seek Bethel," "enter into Gilgal," or "travel to Beersheba, or they can seek Yahweh." If you are unsure what Bethel and Gilgal are and what their significance is, take a moment to consider the following passages.

First, Gilgal

Joshua 4.¹⁹
Joshua 5.¹⁰
Joshua 5.²
1 Sam. 11.¹⁴⁻¹⁵

Now, for Beth-el

Genesis 12.⁸
Genesis 13.^{3, 28}
Gen 35

- ? What "firsts" took place in these two locations?

Both these locations were significant political centers and religious shrines throughout most of Israel's history. "And he [Samuel] went from year to year in circuit to Beth-el, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places" (1 Sam. 7.¹⁶). The prophet Hosea says of Gilgal,

"All their wickedness is in Gilgal:
for there I hated them" (9.¹⁵).
Later in his book, Amos will say,
"But seek not Beth-el,
nor enter into Gilgal,
and pass not to Beer-sheba:
for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity,
and Beth-el shall come to nought" (Amos 5.⁵).

3. Think about Amos' rapid transition from criticism of oppression of the poor to criticism of Israel's attitude toward its most sacred places and the rituals performed there. Apparently, Israel was most conscientious and self-righteous about their temple performance but quite lax in moral treatment of others.
? What is the relationship between false temple worship and oppression of the poor?
? How might one influence the other?
? How do you suppose temple going Israelites felt about this criticism?
? In what ways do we substitute "legalistic acts" for real moral treatment of the poor?

4. Beth-el was a political-religious center (“the king’s chapel”), while Gilgal had been a national and then regional political center from Israel’s earliest history.
 - ? How does trust in political institutions (often pseudo-religious as Roy Moore and his supporters demonstrate) stand in opposition to and reflect rebellion against God?
 - ? How would you feel if we admonished against seeking Washington, D.C., but encouraged seeking God instead?

Amos 5.4-6— just scripture

⁴For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel,

Seek ye me, and ye shall live:

⁵But seek not Bethel,

nor enter into Gilgal,

and pass not to Beersheba:

for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity,

and Bethel shall come to nought.

⁶Seek the LORD, and ye shall live;

lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph,

and devour it,

and there be none to quench it in Bethel.

Questionary

1. In today's reading from Amos, Yahweh, using the same four-letter word, makes two positive and one negative contrasting request.

? What is the four-letter word that is repeated in each request?

? What are the requests?

2. The question is who or what will Israel "seek"—they can seek Bethel," "enter into Gilgal," or "travel to Beersheba, or they can seek Yahweh."

? What is the significance of Beth-el in Israel?

(Consider 1 Kings 12.²⁸⁻³³; Amos 4.⁴⁻⁵; Amos 7.¹²⁻¹³)

? What is the significance of Gilgal in Israel's history?

(Consider Joshua 10.^{6-7, 15, 43}; 1 Samuel 11.¹⁴⁻¹⁵; Hosea 9.¹⁵; 12.¹¹)

3. Beth-el was a political-religious center ("the king's chapel"), while Gilgal had been a national and then regional political center from Israel's earliest history.

? How does trust in political institutions stand in opposition to and reflect rebellion against God?

? How would you feel if we admonished against seeking Washington, D.C., but encouraged seeking God instead?

Amos 5.7-9— just scripture

⁷Ye who turn judgment to wormwood,
and leave off righteousness in the earth,
⁸ Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion,
and turneth the shadow of death into the morning,
and maketh the day dark with night:
that calleth for the waters of the sea,
and poureth them out upon the face of the earth:
The LORD is his name:
⁹That strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong,
so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress.

Questionary

In our previous reading from Amos 5.⁴⁻⁶, Amos warns about “seeking” Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba. Each of these cities represented centers of political/religious power in Israel. Rather than putting our trust in political/religious individuals or institutions, we are to put our trust directly in God.

1. In verse 7, Amos provides his readers with one reason for being skeptical about their government institutions.
 - ? What is the principle governmental weakness that he mentions?
 - ? We will see in the next reading how governmental injustice is manifest. What would you identify as governmental injustices in today’s society?
 - ? How can the search for “justice” actually turn bitter and become an injustice?
2. Amos gives several examples of God’s power and sovereignty.
 - ? What are those examples?
 - ? What other evidences of God’s power and sovereignty would you add to Amos’?
3. The final evidence Amos provides of God’s power and sovereignty is found in his willingness and ability to bring an end to seemingly impressive and irresistible mortal sovereign powers.
 - ? How do you feel about the inclusion of this power?
 - ? Why did he include it?
 - ? What examples of God putting an end to mortal sovereign powers come to your mind?
 - ? Review in your mind how God liberated his people from the sovereign power of Egypt?
 - ? How do you feel about the Book of Revelation’s claim that God will put down all earthly sovereign power?

Amos 5.¹⁰⁻¹³— just scripture

- ¹⁰They hate those who call for justice in governance.
They abhor those who speak truthfully.
- ¹¹Therefore, because of your plundering of the vulnerable
by the grain taxes you extract from them,
you have built the most luxurious of homes,
but you will not live in them;
you have planted cherished vineyards
but you will not drink their wine.
- ¹²For I am well aware of the magnitude of your criminality,
and the vastness of your corruption:
oppressing the innocent, taking bribes,
and deny the impoverished a hearing.
- ¹³The one prospering in such times remains mute,
for such times are depraved.

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

- ¹⁰They hate him that rebuketh in the gate,
and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.
- ¹¹Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor,
and ye take from him burdens of wheat:
ye have built houses of hewn stone,
but ye shall not dwell in them;
ye have planted pleasant vineyards,
but ye shall not drink wine of them.
- ¹²For I know your manifold transgressions
and your mighty sins:
they afflict the just, they take a bribe,
and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right.
- ¹³Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time;
for it is an evil time.

1. In the KJV, verses 10 and 12 both speak of “the gate.”
 - ? What is the significance of the city gate in this culture?
 - ? How does my translation help you to understand the significance of “the gate”?
 - ? What do you read in today’s passage that evidences the injustices that are taking place in Israel’s law-making and court centers?
 - ? What is the motive of the ruling elite in denying criminal and economic justice?
2. Amos charges the wealthy ruling class of establishing taxes on wheat.
 - ? What is the significance and evil of taxing the poor for the wheat they purchase?
3. Through unjust rulings, both legal and economic, the ruling classes have “built houses of hewn stone.”
 - ? What is the significance of “hewn stone” in the construction of homes?
 - ? How does my translation help understand the significance of “hewn stone” in construction projects?
4. Today’s passage is another of many in which the prophet imagination understands that economic success of the ruling elites—symbolized in today’s reading by their luxurious homes and fine vineyards—is often the result of wickedness. Here, that wickedness is their manipulation of economic and legal laws and policies—symbolized by their taking of bribes from those with the

resources to bribe, and their making more expensive the necessities of life for the already impoverished.

- ? What are the necessities of life in today's world?
- ? How are our current governing, legal, and economic elites guilty of these same crimes against the vulnerable?
- ? What necessities are a challenge for the poorer classes to obtain due to the injustices of the monied and ruling classes?
- ? How do you feel about economic wealth and various forms of success and achievement being the result of wickedness rather than righteousness?
- ? Amos will mention several consequences of these injustices. What consequences does Amos mention in today's reading?

4. Finally, Amos ends with this lament:

“The one prospering in such times remains mute,
for such times are depraved.”

- ? What do you understand Amos to be saying here?
- ? How do you feel about those who remain silent and uncritical of the injustice that is taking place in their society because they, themselves are not being impacted by the injustice but are, in fact, prospering because of it?

amos 5.¹⁴⁻¹⁵— just scripture

¹⁴Seek good, and not evil,
that ye may live:
and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you,
as ye have spoken.

¹⁵Hate the evil, and love the good,
and establish judgment in the gate:
it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious
unto the remnant of Joseph.

Questionary

In our earlier readings from Amos 5, we noted the repeated admonitions to “seek.” In today’s reading, Amos returns to this admonition.

1. We have already noted Amos’ focus in chapter 5 on Israelite society’s criminal and economic injustices perpetrated against the poor, and the consequences of those injustices. Isaiah, a contemporary of Amos, had a similar message. Compare the following passage from Isaiah.

“Wash you,
make you clean;
put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes;
cease to do evil;
Learn to do well;
seek judgment,
relieve the oppressed,
judge the fatherless,
plead for the widow.
Come now, and let us reason together,
saith the LORD:
though your sins be as scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they be red like crimson,
they shall be as wool.
If ye be willing and obedient,
ye shall eat the good of the land...” (Isaiah 1.¹⁶⁻¹⁹)

- ? What similarities do you find between this passage and Amos message as found in previous readings and today’s reading?
 - ? With Amos as the context, what is the “good” that Israel is to “seek” and “love”?
 - ? Isaiah speaks of being cleansed. Amos speaks of receiving grace. How can Israel receive these two desirable benefits?
 - ? What application can you make to your own life and to your society?
2. We saw this in the previous reading, but it bears repeating. Amos admonishes Israel to “establish judgment [justice] in the gate.”
 - ? What is the significance and import of the “gate” in relation to justice?“Justice” is not only about what happens in the courtroom, but is also about what happens in the halls of legislatures as laws are written and passed.
 - ? How “just” are the halls of legislatures in your society?

Amos 6.¹⁻²— just scripture

¹Woe to them that are at ease in Zion,
and trust in the mountain of Samaria,
which are named chief of the nations,
to whom the house of Israel came!
²Pass ye unto Calneh, and see;
and from thence go ye to Hamath the great:
then go down to Gath of the Philistines:
be they better than these kingdoms?
or their border greater than your border?

Questionary

1. The first word in today's reading is "Woe."
? What do you think of when you consider this word?
2. Amos' "woe" is aimed at those who "trust" and find security in "Zion" and "the mountain of Samaria."
? What role do these two cities, Jerusalem and Samaria, play in the nations of Judah and Israel respectively?
? Why does trust in and security from these capital cities, and the government officials that reside there—government leaders who are thought of as world leaders—earn individuals a "woe"?
3. Consider the following passages, Psalm 118.⁸⁻⁹ and 146.³⁻⁴.
"It is better to trust in the LORD
than to put confidence in man.
It is better to trust in the LORD
than to put confidence in princes."
"Put not your trust in princes,
nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.
His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth;
in that very day his thoughts perish."
? How do these passages relate to Amos' warning?
4. Verse two is a bit difficult, but the main point seems clear. Citizens of Judah and Israel are encouraged to consider three other nations. After considering them, Amos questions Judeans' and Israelites' attitude of superiority and exceptionalism. Later in his book, Amos will repeat his skepticism concerning Israelite exceptionalism
"Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me,
O children of Israel?
saith the LORD.
Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt?
and the Philistines from Caphtor,
and the Syrians from Kir?"
? How do you feel about Amos' rejection of Israelite exceptionalism?
? How does it square with the common belief in Israel as a "chosen people"?
? How does this relate to yesterday's reading from Acts 17.²⁴⁻²⁹?
God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth,
dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though

he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring.' Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

- ? What are the dangers of nationalistic propaganda concerning "exceptionalism"?
- ? What modern-day application might you make of today's reading?

Amos 6.³⁻⁶— just scripture

- ³Ye that put far away the evil day,
and cause the seat of violence to come near;
⁴That lie upon beds of ivory,
and stretch themselves upon their couches,
and eat the lambs out of the flock,
and the calves out of the midst of the stall;
⁵That chant to the sound of the viol,
and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David;
⁶That drink wine in bowls,
and anoint themselves with the chief ointments:
but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

Questionary

1. Today's reading continues Amos' "woe" that began the chapter. The "woe" is targeted against governing and other influential citizens, principally those residing in the capital cities of Jerusalem and Samaria, who live lives of ease, do not anticipate personal reversals, but do not hesitate to practice violence against others in order to maintain their place in society. Amos mentions several evidences of this immoral life of ease. For example,

They "lie [to feast, not to sleep] upon beds of ivory."
They eat "calves out of the midst of the stall."

- ? What is the significance of an "ivory" inlaid piece of furniture?
- ? What is the significance of a stall-fed calf, and how does it compare to a pasture-fed calf?

2. Amos also speaks of "bowls of wine," musical instruments and performances, and expensive perfumes.

- ? What is the significance of having "bowls" or wine, rather than, say, goblets?
- ? Unlike today, musical resources and concerts are not available to everyone. Who is able to afford such luxury in Amos' day?
- ? What is the significance of their being able to afford the most expensive of perfumes?

3. Today's entire reading focuses on the excesses of the wealthy. These excesses will result in catastrophic collapse of society.

- ? If Amos were writing today and commenting on the excesses of the wealthy today, on what behaviors and acquisitions might he focus?
- ? What is the significance of Amos' final criticism of the comfortably wealthy, "They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph"?

Laying on the most expensive divans decorated with expensive ivory, they have the very best in gourmet food and drink while they listen to a live ensemble entertain them with the latest tune. And, how very nicely and expensively perfumed they are during their indulgences! Of course, the perfume is needed to cover the stench of the obscene profligacy.

Amos 6.¹²⁻¹⁴— just scripture

¹²Shall horses run upon the rock?
will one plow there with oxen?

for ye have turned judgment into gall,
and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock:

¹³Ye which rejoice in a thing of nought,
which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?

¹⁴But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel,
saith the LORD the God of hosts;

and they shall afflict you
from the entering in of Hemath unto the river of the wilderness.

Questionary

1. Today's reading begins with two absurd questions.
? Why do we call them "absurd"?
? What is the answer to this two questions?
2. Amos likens the absurdity of horses running across a bouldered surface or of attempting to plant crops in rock to the absurd evils prevalent in Israel's judicial system.
? Why is what Israel call's "justice" thought of by Yahweh as "poisonous oppression"?
? What comes to your mind when you read that the sweet fruit of treating others "right" has been turned into the bitterness of a poison berry?

Compare these words of the contemporary Isaiah.

"and he [God] looked for judgment,
but behold oppression;
for righteousness,
but behold a cry."

3. It is very common to translate verse thirteen something as follows
"You who rejoice in the conquest of Lo-Debar
and say, 'Did we not take Karnaim by our own strength.'"
However one reads it, the meaning seems clear. The political leaders of the nation have been guilty of hubris. They have boasted of their power and their military's prowess.
? Do you see such hubris in your nation's attitudes toward their military and its prowess?
? Upon finishing this series of readings from Amos 6, and identifying the economic, legislative, legal, and military evils found in Israelite and Judean society—evils that would bring an "end-of-days" to those societies—how similar or different is the society in which you live?
? What do you say or do to resist such evils in your society?

Amos 8.4-6— just scripture

⁴Hear this, those who weary the impoverished
to the end that they ruin the land's downtrodden—
⁵thinking: “when will the new moon sabbath be over
so that we can sell grain;
and the weekly sabbath
so that we can make our produce available,
while shrinking the size of the dry measure,
increasing the weight of šeqel,
and rigging fraudulent scales
⁶to buy the underprivileged with money
and the impoverished at the cost of a pair of sandals.
We will even sell worthless debris mixed in with the grain!” (author's translation)

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

⁴Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy,
even to make the poor of the land to fail,
⁵Saying, “When will the new moon be gone,
that we may sell corn?
and the sabbath,
that we may set forth wheat,
making the ephah small,
and the shekel great,
and falsifying the balances by deceit?
⁶That we may buy the poor for silver,
and the needy for a pair of shoes;
yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?”

1. In today's reading, Amos identifies several sins of which Israelite society, especially the business class, is guilty.
 - ? What are those sins?
 - ? How does Israelite society specifically target the poor and vulnerable?
2. Amos charges that Israelite merchants, while not conducting business on sabbath days, cannot stop thinking about their temporal needs even on days that are to be dedicated to God. They especially continue to consider how they can increase their profits.”
 - ? How is this a form of idolatry?
 - ? What does this say about their “relationship” with God, verses that with their material resources?
3. Amos informs us that individuals and society as a whole increase their profits by “shrinking the size of the dry measure,” “increasing the weight of šeqel,” and “rigging fraudulent scales”
 - ? What do you see when you visualize the business practices?
 - ? What does it suggest about society—its laws and governance?
 - ? Why, do you think, is no one regulating the use of weights, measures, and scales?
 - ? How do you feel about the poor getting less food of lower quality for more money?
 - ? To what modern examples can you point where companies provide inferior services or product at inflated prices?
 - ? Can Amos' criticism of ancient Israelite business practices be applied to today? If so, how? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What principles do you draw from Amos' example of unethical business practices that can be

applied today?

4. Amos charges individuals and society with buying “the poor for silver” and “the needy for a pair of shoes.”
 - ? What economic philosophies do you suppose individuals and society use to justify such injustice?
 - ? What attitudes about the nature of the needy do you suppose individuals and society propagate in order to justify such abuse of the poor.
 - ? What contemptuous attitudes does our society today hold and propagate about the poor?
 - ? What does society say about the poor in order to belittle and blame the poor for their status, thus justifying its own callousness toward the poor?

Micah 1.²⁻⁵—just scripture

²Hear, all ye people;
hearken, O earth, and all that therein is:
and let the Lord GOD be witness against you,
the Lord from his holy temple.

³For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place,
and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth.

⁴And the mountains shall be molten under him,
and the valleys shall be cleft,
as wax before the fire,
and as the waters that are poured down a steep place.

⁵For the transgression of Jacob is all this, [this, as a consequence of Jacob's transgression]
and for the sins of the house of Israel.

What is the transgression of Jacob?

is it not Samaria?

and what are the high places of Judah?

are they not Jerusalem?

Questionary

1. In today's reading, Micah warns that because of Israel's and Judah's sins (the northern and southern kingdoms respectively) God is about to act, allowing the consequences of their sins to have their sway. Israel's "transgression" is "Samaria." Judah's "idolatry" is "Jerusalem."
? What is the significance of "Samaria" and "Jerusalem"? What do they have in common?
? In what ways are these two centers of government a "transgression" and "idolatry"?
? How do political/governmental institutions and the attitudes toward them become a transgression and even a manifestation of idolatry—ascribing honor and power to them that belong solely to God?
? If Micah were around today, would he speak of Washington in a similar vein?
2. Micah calls Jerusalem a "high place" (Heb. *bāmâ*). Such places were universally thought of as illegitimate religious shrines.
? How do you feel about the prophet's attitude toward the Jerusalem temple—that it was an illegitimate and idolatrous institution?
? What kinds of ideologies and activities translate a legitimate temple into an idolatrous one?
3. In today's reading, Yahweh stands as a "hostile witness" against the capitol cities of Israel, Judah, and their sins. It is a comedic understatement to say that it is never a good thing to have God testify for the prosecution.
? If he were to stand today, and bear witness concerning you, what would he have to say?
? If he were to bear witness concerning the U.S., what would he say?

Micah 2.¹⁻³— just scripture

¹Warning! There are those who plot to abuse their power,
those who spend the night planning crimes.

Come daylight, they act upon their plans
because it is within their power.

²They covet tracts of farmland, and find a way to steal them.
They covet houses, and seize them.

Thus, they violently extort a property owner of their home,
and an individual of their property.

³On account of this, YHWH has warned:

“Understand that I am planning disaster for this people
such that you’ll not be able to remove it from around your necks
or be able to walk upright.

For it is a disastrous time” (Author’s translation).

Qquestionary

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

¹Woe to them that devise iniquity,
and work evil upon their beds!
when the morning is light, they practice it,
because it is in the power of their hand.

²And they covet fields, and take them by violence;
and houses, and take them away:
so they oppress a man and his house,
even a man and his heritage.

³Therefore thus saith the LORD;
Behold, against this family do I devise an evil,
from which ye shall not remove your necks;
neither shall ye go haughtily:
for this time *is* evil.

1. Today’s reading addresses the injustices that powerful Israelites perpetrated against vulnerable fellow citizens.
 - ? What is the nature of those injustices?
 - ? What does the fact that the powerful scheme and plan all night and then carry out their plans the next day tell you about the powerful and their commitment to acting unjustly?
 - ? How, do you suppose, did the powerful get away with their predatory injustices?
2. The predatory real estate practices that Micah describes and decries are the consequence of the wealthy’s covetousness. The word we have translated as “covet” is the same word used in the last of the Ten Commandments. “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Ex. 20.¹⁷). The Hebrew word translated as “covet” means “to want” or “desire.”
 - ? In your mind, what does it mean to “want” or “desire” what another possesses?
 - ? Does it mean wanting the very thing they possess or wanting the same types and amounts of the things they possess? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What do you do to check your desires so that you do not act unjustly in acquiring what you desire?
3. As the result of the injustice of the powerful, the entire nation is threatened with disaster.
 - ? Why do the entire nation come under condemnation for the injustice perpetrated by one class,

the wealthy and power?

- ? Individuals cannot commit such injustices on their own, without the aid of institutions—legislative, judicial, economic, etc. How are such institutions complicit in societal injustices?
- ? How does the following passage from Isaiah, a contemporary of Micah, relate to this question?

“Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees,
and that write grievousness which they have prescribed;
To turn aside the needy from judgment,
and to take away the right from the poor of my people,
that widows may be their prey,
and that they may rob the fatherless!” (10.¹⁻²)

It is, therefore, not enough to personally avoid committing such injustices. Nor is it enough to condemn individuals who commit such injustices. One must also advocate, agitate, and vote for individuals, and support institutions that uphold justice and legislate just laws.

- ? How do you oppose injustices in society?
- ? How do you advocate for just legislation?
- ? What can you do to strengthen your resistance to societal injustice and your advocacy for social justice?

There was in the late 2000s and is again in the early 2020s a housing crisis that removes the ability of regular working families to buy a home and of renters to afford to pay rent.

- ? To what extent is this the result of unethical and predatory real estate practices on the part of the wealthy and powerful?
- ? What does Micah lead us to think about our future if such practices are not condemned for the evil that they are and stopped through legislation and personal reform?

Micah 3.¹⁻³— just scripture

¹And I said,
Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob,
and ye princes of the house of Israel;
²Is it not for you to know judgment?
Who hate the good, and love the evil;
who pluck off their skin from off them,
and their flesh from off their bones;
³Who also eat the flesh of my people,
and flay their skin from off them;
and they break their bones,
and chop them in pieces, as for the pot,
and as flesh within the caldron.

Questionary

1. Micah directs his criticism at a specific class.
 - ? What class does he address?
 - ? What is the significance of addressing this class of citizen?

Consider the follow passage from the Book of Mormon.

“For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction! (Mosiah 29.¹⁷)

- ? How does this passage relate to today’s reading?
 - ? How does what Mosiah says about the deleterious effects of an immoral and unethical king upon the populous and their morals apply to any and all ruling elite in any and every form of government?
 - ? What kind of impact are today’s governing classes—business, government, religious, etc.—and their own personal morals and ethic having on the general populace? Why do you answer as you do? To what examples would you point?
2. In critiquing the ruling classes of his day, Micah resorts to the language of human cannibalism.
 - ? What language points in this direction?

Micah speaks of “plucking” and “flaying” off human skin,” “breaking” human bones, “chopping” human flesh into bit size pieces, and boiling the flesh in a pot.

- ? How do you feel about Micah resorting to such intense and extreme language?
 - ? What does this extreme, cannibalistic language suggest to you about the depth of immoral and unethical governance on the part of Israel’s ruling class
 - ? What does this extreme, cannibalistic language suggest to you about the depth of Micah’s own personal feelings toward the ruling class?
 - ? What does this language suggest to you about Yahweh’s feelings toward Israel’s ruling class?
 - ? What sorts of governance, legislating, and judging takes place today in our society that is akin to this metaphorical cannibalism?

Micah 3.⁹⁻¹¹— just scripture

⁹Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob,
and princes of the house of Israel,
that abhor judgment,
and pervert all equity.

¹⁰They build up Zion with blood,
and Jerusalem with iniquity.

¹¹The heads thereof judge for reward,
and the priests thereof teach for hire,
and the prophets thereof divine for money...

Questionary

- ? Of what sorts of societal and political injustices do Micah complain in today's reading?
- ? What are the possible meanings of "building up [a society] with blood?"
- ? How are the injustices that Micah mentions reflected in our modern society?
- ? What do you do to resist and combat such societal and political injustices?

Micah 6.⁶⁻⁸—just scripture

⁶How should I approach YHWH?

How should I bow to my exalted God?

Should I approach him with an offering to be fully burned?

How about with new-born calves?

⁷Will YHWH be satisfied with thousands of rams?

How about with countless channels of olive oil?

Should I offer my firstborn for my willful defiance?

How about my offspring for less serious private infractions?

⁸He has already told you, man, what is good.

What does YHWH want from you

but to do justice,

and love compassion,

and possess a readiness to live like your God (author's translation).

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

⁶Wherewith shall I come before the LORD,

and bow myself before the high God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,

with calves of a year old?

⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,

or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,

the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

⁸He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;

and what doth the LORD require of thee,

but to do justly, and to love mercy,

and to walk humbly with thy God?

This reading is one of our Just Scripture passages. In addition, it is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "Sanctification: Imitating and living Atonement." *

1. In verse 6, Micah asks a general question in two parallel lines
 - ? Rephrase his question in your own words?
 - ? How do you answer the question, "How does one approach God"?
 - ? For what reasons does one approach God?
 - ? How would you answer the question if we asked, "How do I approach God in such a way that he will respond to me"?
2. Micah then follows up his general question with six more questions in parallel lines of poetry (6c/d, 7a/b, and 7c/d). These questions ask about the effectiveness of various cultic activities in pleasing God and bringing a beneficial response from him.
 - ? What do you notice about each succeeding pair of questions?
 - ? How do each succeeding pair of questions suggest an every increasing depth of seriousness and dedication on the part of the worshiper/petitioner?

The questions posed about whether one should approach God in any of the suggested ways, seem rhetorical with the answer being, "No, this is not how one should approach God."

- ? Do you agree with this observation about the rhetorical nature of the questions with their negative answers? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? Do you agree with Micah's conclusion that these are not how God wishes to be approached

and are not the means to obtaining a beneficial response from him?

3. Reconsider Micah's last questions.

“Should I offer my firstborn for my willful defiance?

How about my offspring for less serious private infractions?”

? Why is the answer, “no”—hint, it has nothing to do with Yahweh's rejection of human sacrifice?

4. In verse 8, Micah describes the three parallel and most acceptable ways to please God when approaching him for help.

? What are those three ways?

? How are the doing of the first two, justice and compassion, manifest?

? How are they manifest in the way you personally treat others?

? How are they manifest in the way you expect and appeal to society and its leaders—secular and sacred—to treat others?

? How is society doing in relation to these two things, justice and compassion? Why do you answer as you do?

? Based on the doing of justice and the loving of compassion, how prepared is society to approach God with hope of a beneficial response?

5. In the KJV reading, the third of the three acceptable ways to approach God is to “walk humbly with your God.” There are a number of reasons to be cautious about this reading (you can see my discussion of these in the meditations devoted to the passage), not least of which is the modern muted and domesticated notions about what humility is.

? What do you think and feel when you contemplate my reading, “possess a readiness to live like your God.”

? How do justice and compassion encompass the divine character and the way God lives?

? How do justice, compassion, and living as God encompass the way Jesus lived during his earthly ministry?

? In your view, what events in the Savior's life exemplify each of these traits and attitudes in his earthly ministry?

? What is the relationship between acting with justice, giving preference to compassion, and living a life in imitation of God, Jesus, and Jesus' atonement—or his feelings of connectedness and unity with others?

? What is the relationship between arcane, often pointless, rituals performed in “sacred places” and real, meaningful, moral, and ethical actions conducted toward others in “profane spaces”?

? To which does God give the greater attention in determining the relationship he has with you on a daily basis?

6. Micah begins by discussing the ways that individuals feel they should approach God so as to please and appease Him. Common to all of these is the belief that God is pleased most with self-sacrifice, the greater the personal sacrifice the greater God's appreciation. However, Micah suggests that such manifestations of self-sacrifice, often legalistic in their nature, are, in fact, not what God asks. What he asks, instead, is just and compassionate relations and behavior one toward another.

? How do you feel about Micah's insight?

? What sorts of easy, often legalistic, expressions of self-sacrifice do we today sometimes focus on rather than the much more difficult human relationships based on justice and compassion?

The apostle Paul taught that, “the end of the commandment is charity...” (1 Tim. 1.5).

? How does this relate to Micah's teachings as found in today's reading?

Micah 6.⁹⁻¹²— just scripture

⁹YHWH's voice calls out to the city—
and it is wise to reverence his power;

pay heed to the warning of the one who issues it—

¹⁰“Are there still treasuries existing through falsehood in houses that exist through falsehood—
through diminished measures, which are condemned?”

¹¹Should I acquit any with false balances,
acquit any with a bag of fraudulent weights,

¹²acquit the city's wealthy who are full of violence,
acquit its citizens who utter deception,

their tongues flapping deceptively in their mouths?” (author's translation)

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

⁹The LORD'S voice crieth unto the city,
and the man of wisdom shall see thy name:
hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.

¹⁰Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked,
and the scant measure that is abominable?

¹¹Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances,
and with the bag of deceitful weights?

¹²For the rich men thereof are full of violence,
and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies,
and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.

1. Micah speaks of businessmen who grew their profit margins and grew wealthy by selling merchandise, especially food stuffs, at inflated prices by both shorting the buyer of the product and weighing purchasers' money so that it seems lighter than it is, thus allowing them to collect more money than is legitimate.
 - ? What was the goal of the seller?
 - ? Given that there was no shortage of wealthy businessmen, how effective were their unethical business strategies?
 - ? How do you feel about Micah's contention that wealthy had been accumulated through wicked and unethical means?
 - ? How do you feel about the contention that most wealth is acquired through wicked and unethical means?
 - ? If the businessman's achieved his goal of higher profit margins and personal wealthy through unethical business practices, what was the impact on the buyer?
 - ? What do their business practices tell you about the priority they gave to profit margins?
 - ? What do their business practices tell you about their attitude toward their fellow citizens?
 - ? What sorts of profit margin growing business practices are common, “legal,” viewed as “exemplary,” and so go unpunished in our society?
2. Micah charges that in their unethical business practices the wealthy are engaged in “violence.”
 - ? What types of behavior do you usually associate with “violence”?
 - ? How do you feel when you consider unethical business practices to be a form of “violence”?
 - ? How is the act of growing one's profit margins as much a violation of others and the robbing of a convenience store or robbing and assaulting someone on the street?
 - ? Are these different forms of violence treated in our society? Are they treated equally?
 - ? How diligently does our legal system seek to prevent and then punish these different forms of violence? Why do you answer as you do?

- ? What role do deception, fraud, perjury, etc. play in the acquisition of riches... historically, in today's business environment, in your life?
- ? What can you do to stand against such practices in your own life, in your public life, and in your role as a citizen?

Micah 7.²⁻³— just scripture

The good man is perished out of the earth:
and there is none upright among men:
they all lie in wait for blood;
they hunt every man his brother with a net.
that they may do evil with both hands earnestly,
the prince asketh,
and the judge asketh for a reward;
and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire:
so they wrap it up.

Questionary

- ? When you read that “they... “do evil with BOTH HANDS,” what do you see in your mind’s eye?
- ? How do you feel about such people/nations?
- ? How do the wealthy, the powerful, the prestigious use their advantages to execute their, often, unholy desires?
- ? How are legal officials “bribed” without the actual passing of money from the hand of one to another?

Micah 7.⁴⁻⁵— just scripture

⁴The best of them *is* as a brier:

the most upright *is sharper* than a thorn hedge:
the day of thy watchmen *and* thy visitation cometh;
now shall be their perplexity.

⁵Trust ye not in a friend,

put ye not confidence in a guide:

keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom.

Questionary

- ? Micah speaks of the poor moral state and extreme inability to trust others that are dominant in his society. How applicable is such criticism to your own day and society? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? What do you think and feel when you read Micah's criticism that individuals, even at their most upright, are still compared to a thorn that pokes and hurts and wounds?
- ? What do you think and feel about Micah's assertion that even those with whom one might be most intimate are not to be trusted?

Micah 7.⁴⁻⁵— just scripture

⁴The best of them is as a brier:

the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge:
the day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh;
now shall be their perplexity.

⁵Trust ye not in a friend,

put ye not confidence in a guide:
keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom.

Questionary

- ? Micah speaks of the poor moral state and extreme inability to trust others that are dominant in his society. How applicable is such criticism to your own day and society?
- ? How do you feel about individuals who are at their most upright, still being compared to a thorn that pokes and hurts and wounds?
- ? How do you feel about Micah's assertion that even those with whom you are intimate are not always to be trusted?

habakkuk 1.²⁻⁴— just scripture

How long, LORD, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, “Violence!”
but you do not save?
Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.
Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted (NIV).

Questionary

- ? How applicable are Habakkuk’s complaints about his society to our modern-day society?
- ? How and to what degree do you share Habakkuk’s feelings of frustration over the injustices of society?
- ? What are you doing to rectify the societal injustices so prevalent in today’s society?

Zachariah 7.⁹⁻¹²— just scripture

⁹Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, “Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: ¹⁰And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.”

¹¹But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. ¹²Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts (NIV).

Questionary

1. Yahweh admonishes his people to exercise justice, mercy, and compassion.
 - ? What is the relationship between these three virtues in the individual’s life?
 - ? What is the relationship between these three virtues in a nation’s legal system?
 - ? In a legal system, justice and mercy can be viewed as incompatible and in competition. If mercy is extended to the victimizer, the victim might be seen as having been denied justice. If the victim receives justice, the victimizer might be seen as having been denied mercy. Is it only a matter of erring on one side or the other, or is there a way to have both justice and mercy for both victim and victimizer? If so, how?
2. The admonition to exercise justice, mercy, and compassion is followed immediately by the command “oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor.”
 - ? How does understanding that the admonition to be just, merciful, and compassionate is in relation to how vulnerable populations are treated influence how you understand the relationship between justice, mercy, and compassion?
3. Yahweh laments that Israel “refused to hearken” to the command to be just, merciful, and compassionate toward society’s vulnerable populations, represented here by widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor.
 - ? In today’s society, what are other vulnerable populations?
 - ? How would you feel about adding African Americans or the uninsured? Are they vulnerable to being taken advantage of and oppressed?
 - ? How is our society doing at caring for the vulnerable members of our society?
 - ? What do you do as an individual and as a citizen to assist the vulnerable, and discourage society’s mistreatment of them?
 - ? Is there anything more that you could do?

Malachi 2.⁹⁻¹¹— just scripture

⁹Therefore have I also made you a contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law. ¹⁰Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? (NIV)

Questionary

1. In today's reading, Yahweh is speaking to priests, religious and legal leaders to a nation, concerning their sins and the consequences of those sins.
 - ? Of what sin or sins are the priests guilty?
 - ? What are the consequences?
 - ? How is public judicial injustice evidence of an individual's and a society's ignorance or rejection of the fatherhood of God?
 - ? How is public judicial injustice evidence of an individual's and a society's ignorance or rejection of the truth of humans' divine kinship?
 - ? How is public judicial injustice evidence of an individual's and a society's ignorance or rejection of the worth and dignity of each individual?
 - ? How do public judicial injustices lead to "despicableness"—a loss of personal reputation—and personal "humiliation"?
 - ? How do public judicial injustices lead to "despicableness"—a loss of national reputation—and national "humiliation"?
 - ? How is your nation and leaders doing in relation to exercising judicial justice?
 - ? What can you do to improve judicial justice in your community, state, nation?

Malachi 3.⁵— just scripture

And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

Questionary

- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that those who economically oppress vulnerable individuals are lumped together with sorcerers and adulterers?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that those who are unfaithful to a spouse are in the same boat in the eyes of God as those who are unfaithful to the vulnerable?