***THE PROPHET’S WIFE***

**Part Three: *In The Courtyard, End of A Kingdom***

This time Isaiah found his wife in the garden, seemingly waiting for him to return from his usual time with his growing number of disciples. He knew that she favored this time of the day when they had quiet time to themselves before their children returned from their instructions.

“It seems your prophecy has begun to be fulfilled,” Miriam said to her husband, Isaiah, as he walked through the entrance to the garden. He took a seat next to her.

“So, you have heard the news?” Isaiah asked.

“The Kingdom of Jeroboam II has been reduced by the Lion of Assyria!” Miriam said.

“This is the beginning of the end if the Northern Kingdom does not submit to the Lord,” Isaiah could see the path they have already chosen. “Tracks of territory on the coastal plain in Galilee, and east and north-east of Galilee were annexed by Assyria. Now the Kingdom of Ephraim is reduced to the time before their king Jehu.”

“I have also heard, my husband, that their King Hoshea, who was doing so well until Tiglath-pileser died,” his wife added. “And now he has now joined Assyria’s enemies in a bid to overthrow their rule.”

“What!” Isaiah was astonished at the news. “The fools, they will bring down the wrath of the Assyrians to our door steps.”

“Our sons will discern the meaning of their names,” Miriam said

“They are old enough now,” Isaiah said. “At least Shear-Jashub wants to join the other students rather than the fools.”

“His command of the language is growing,” Miriam said with pride. “He wants so much to be like you.”

“Soon we will change his name,” Isaiah hinted. “I am only waiting for a sign.”

“Well, I met a young man today,” Miriam stated, “Not to change the subject, but he is a refugee sent by his father from the Northern Kingdom.”

“Oh?” Isaiah said interested. “What is his name?”

“He said his name was Ammi,” Miriam said, and then paused as she recalled his father’s name. “…Ammi ben Hosea.”

“Is he from the tribe of Levi?” Isaiah asks.

“Yes, that he did mention,” she answered. “By his accent he is definitely not from Judah but probably from Northern Israel near the territory of Syria.”

“That explains why his father sent him south,” Isaiah said. “They are right in the path of the advancing Assyrians.”

“I asked him if he needed a place to stay,” Miriam said.

“My wife,” Isaiah said with love, “What a blessing you are to me and to the people of God.” And then Isaiah added, “Maybe a blessing of information about what is happening in the north, and from a Levite! At least some are listening to their priests.”

Probably Isaiah had been a **teacher** of some sort. That there were schools in Jerusalem at this time cannot be doubted. A key concept of this school literature appears to have been that human wisdom or counsel is fallible, but the “counsel of Yahweh stands firm.” It is precisely this point that Isaiah brings against his contemporaries. The king and his counselors, he says, are giving advice without consulting Yahweh or paying attention to what his counsel might be.

Had Isaiah been a teacher in such schools this would also help to explain his **literary versatility**. Note especially the superbly crafted allegory of the vineyard, in 5:1-7, and his transparently pedagogical approach in a passage like 28:23-29. This too would explain why he alone of the prophets took the unusual step of binding and sealing his teachings in the memories of a certain group of students or disciples. Isaiah’s messages are generally regarded as the theological high-water mark of prophetic literature and lend themselves, as such, especially well to thematic treatment.

The second event in the background of Isaiah’s mission was **Assyria’s response** to this rebellion on its western flank. In that same year, 734, Assyria launched a sweeping invasion of this region during which Damascus-Syria was roundly defeated and large tracks of territory belonging to Israel on the coastal plain in Galilee and east and northeast of Galilee, the Trans-Jordan area, were annexed as Assyrian provinces.

Isaiah came to believe that a **devastating invasion** was about to sweep through **Judah**, one that would lay waste its countryside and towns. Although, it was not explicitly stated that Assyria is to be the perpetrator of this invasion, this clearly is what Isaiah had in mind. However, Assyria’s rise to power, as Isaiah came to understand it, was more than an accident of history. Behind this event was the One whom his eyes had seen enthroned over the universe: the King, Yahweh Sabaoth. Assyria was but an instrument of divine action.

Why is Yahweh doing this? Because we are told in 1:10-17, the people of this city are endlessly involved in worshiping Yahweh through an extravagance of animal sacrifices which the Lord hates, **while neglecting** what he really wants of them: ceasing to do evil, learning to do good, searching for justice, disciplining the violent, and caring for orphan and widow.

Why then, in summary, is Yahweh bringing the Assyrians to decimate Judah before being crushed itself? It was to humble Judah’s proud elite, to purge a remnant in Jerusalem of its sins, to demonstrate that Yahweh is indeed God, and to prepare the way for the advent of a new, more just, more upright leadership and community among those who survive these ordeals.

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SUGGESTED READINGS:

Allegory of Vineyard, Is 28:23-29

Why is Yahweh doing this? Is 1:10-17