

Scripture Summer School

# Jessie 3

Time





# “What Time is it?”

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The prophetic view of present, past and future



# The role of the future in prophecy

Foretelling – predicting the future

Forthtelling – looking deeply into the ‘now’

**Prophets see in the present the seeds of the future.**

- The most ‘successful’ prophetic predictions of disaster don’t come true!

Jonah: “Forty days and Ninevah will be destroyed!” ..... “God saw their efforts to renounce their evil behaviour. And God relented: he did not inflict on them the disaster which he had threatened. (Jonah 3:4, 10)

And some of the elders of the land arose and said to all the assembled people, <sup>18</sup> “Micah of Moresheth, who prophesied during the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, said to all the people of Judah: ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.’ Did King Hezekiah of Judah and all Judah actually put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and did not the LORD change his mind about the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster on ourselves!” (Jeremiah 26:17-19)



# The danger of seeing 'now' as 'forever'

- “The end of history” - an economic or political system that is considered to be the end-point of human socio-cultural evolution, which cannot be improved upon.
- Those who benefit from the status quo will always deny that things can change fundamentally. Things *cannot* (or *must not*) change.
- Prophets don't buy into this dominant vision.
- When prophets speak truth to power, they challenge the dominant consciousness - prophetic dismantling. Prophets offer an alternative vision of what the world can look like – prophetic energising.
  - E.g. Moses versus Pharaoh's Egypt. The vision of a just, egalitarian society in the law given at Sinai.
  - The prophets challenging the Israelite kings who had set themselves up as 'little pharaohs.'
- Prophets relativise 'now'. The present comes to life because of its relationship with the past and the future.



# The God of the prophets (Ex 3:13-15)



- I AM
  - I am who I am / I will be who I will be
  - God of freedom and of new possibilities
- “God of our ancestors”
  - The God of the covenant
  - Committed in solidarity to a partner who also has agency
  - A God who is known in and through the Tradition
- God and the world are not a closed system in which the everything can be explained without remainder in terms of what went before and in which the future can be confidently predicted by extrapolating from the present without reckoning with God’s freedom.



# God's people have broken the covenant ....

## ... THEREFORE

They know no limits in deeds of wickedness;  
they do not judge with justice  
the cause of the orphan, to make it prosper,  
and they do not defend the rights of the needy.  
Shall I not punish them for these things?  
says the LORD,  
and shall I not bring retribution  
on a nation such as this?

(Jer 5:28-29)

## ... NEVERTHELESS

Why do you cry out over your hurt?  
Your pain is incurable.  
Because your guilt is great,  
because your sins are so numerous,  
I have done these things to you.  
Therefore all who devour you shall be devoured,  
and all your foes, every one of them, shall go into  
captivity;  
those who plunder you shall be plundered,  
and all who prey on you I will make a prey.  
For I will restore health to you,  
and your wounds I will heal,  
says the LORD,  
because they have called you an outcast:  
"It is Zion; no one cares for her!"

(Jer 30:15-17)



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# Coming out of exile

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- The dislocation of the Exile has become the 'new normal'.
- The challenge for the prophets: to energise God's people to move forward into the new.



# Isaiah 43:14-21

Thus says the LORD,  
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:  
For your sake I will send to Babylon  
and break down all the bars,  
and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned  
to lamentation.

<sup>15</sup> I am the LORD, your Holy One,  
the Creator of Israel, your King.

<sup>16</sup> Thus says the LORD,  
who makes a way in the sea,  
a path in the mighty waters,

<sup>17</sup> who brings out chariot and horse,  
army and warrior;

they lie down, they cannot rise,  
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:

<sup>18</sup> Do not remember the former things,  
or consider the things of old.

<sup>19</sup> I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.

<sup>20</sup> The wild animals will honor me,  
the jackals and the ostriches;  
for I give water in the wilderness,  
rivers in the desert,

to give drink to my chosen people,

<sup>21</sup> the people whom I formed for myself  
so that they might declare my praise.



# Making sense of the present in light of the past AND the future

- Remember – God of our ancestors
- Forget – Don't be stuck in the past and demand that God work that way
  - Create space in your imagination and expectations to see what God is doing now.
- Remember – what you already know of God so that you can discern what God is doing in the present
- Be willing to step out with God into the new!



To think about ...

How does the past  
(memory) and the  
future (expectation)  
impact on our present  
experience?

What new thing might  
God be doing?

