

One Clear Message

[Isaiah]

'He's more a politician than a prophet !' Hamor turned to face his friend who stood thoughtfully watching Isaiah as he hurried from the Temple courtyard. He was making for the royal palace where the king was unwell. Distantly related, the king and the prophet had been friends for many years, and now in failing health Uzziah looked to Isaiah for spiritual strength.

'He's a noble man,' Shimon spoke slowly. 'And wise. He speaks the word from God, that's clear, and God doesn't separate religion from politics.'

'But is it God's word ?' Hamor asked. Shimon's glance did not hide his dismay that anyone could question Isaiah's prophetic authority even though he knew there were those who did. Hamor saw his friend's reaction and tried to justify himself.

'I mean, when he says there's trouble brewing and this time of prosperity won't last, is that divine inspiration or his own assessment of events? Everybody says 'good times come to an end', but that's just because they have in the past. It could be different this time.'

Hamor looked around him as he spoke. They had come to the market now where money flowed freely. The city had certainly seen some of its most affluent years during king Uzziah's reign.'

'Come on, Hamor,' Shimon stopped a moment to feel the quality of a length of Egyptian fine-spun cloth. 'It's obvious our people are caught up in the age-old progress of affluence. You can't be blind to the growing corruption and greed. The more people have the more selfish and lawless they become. That's a fact of life.'

They walked on. 'It's more than that,' Shimon continued. 'You heard Isaiah. He moves in political circles and he keeps his ear to the ground. He's says Assyria is rising again and Tiglath-pileser's armies are on the move, plundering westward again.'

'But our armies are strong to defend us.' Hamor spoke with the pride of an old soldier. 'We have friends among the nations and Israel will stand with us.' Shimon shook his head.

'Hamor, you've missed the point. That's just what Isaiah said. We've become so settled and confident in our wealth and our military strength, we've come to think that's everything. But where is the Lord in all this? More and more our people pay lip service to the Temple. We're forgetting that we are his people and we live and survive by his strength. You heard Isaiah say that what saves a nation isn't its wealth, its military might or even its religion, but it's obedience to God and its faithfulness to his laws. You're too well off, he said, and yet so poor because you leave God out.

Shimon, paused and then with laughter in his voice, said, 'Look at old Selma over there.' Hamor knew Selma well. Everybody did. His voice was loudest in the market whether selling his fruit, or heckling among the crowds.

Old Selma was listening to Isaiah the other day and asked him what he was doing about corruption in the markets. Isaiah came straight back at him. 'I'm working at being right with God' he said, 'and I'm trusting him for the rest - What about you?' It's the first time I've seen Selma without a reply!

'Good old fashioned preaching.' There was a hint of sarcasm in Hamor's voice. 'It's all too simple for me. Just repent and God forgives and makes everything work out right. The man who preaches that will be less popular today than ever.'

'That's true, agreed Shimon. 'But so is the message. Isaiah's still right, It takes a holy God and a holy people working together to make a world of justice and peace.



Six centuries later, God spoke that same message through the mouth of his Son, Jesus. He and his words were not popular either. He was put to death on a cross. But God raised him from death, and by that death and resurrection proved his love which will always restore repentant people and nations to himself. His message is for us today. The kingdom of peace, justice and truth will come in the world only through a holy people who are obedient to their holy God.