

Putting Politics in Its Place: Israel / Prophets (Week 4)

Discussion Guide



You can use this discussion guide on your own, with your family, or with your discipleship community (virtually or in-person). To watch or listen to this week's sermon, visit bellevuechristian.church/sermons, subscribe to the Bellevue Christian Church podcast on your preferred provider, or watch our weekly service at youtube.com/bellevuechristian.

Introduction

We're in an 8-week series called *Putting Politics in its Place* that will take us all the way to week of the election. In a time where it feels like politics has forgotten its place, we want to be a church where we put politics back in its place. And, we believe that the best way to do that is by exploring political life in specific places throughout the Bible—places like Eden, Egypt, Israel, Babylon, Rome, & New Jerusalem.

This week we're exploring the political implications of life in Israel (Part 2)—specifically looking at what we can learn about being a church with a prophetic edge from the prophet Isaiah. In particular, we'll be thinking about what it looks like to consider the meaning of the moment, critique the church before the culture, and confronting injustice without becoming unjust.

Since political conversations tend to be particularly volatile in our cultural moment, we want to go over a few guidelines every single week that can shape we talk with one another:

1. **Seek to understand before you're understood.** This means that we're practicing active listening, not just thinking about how we'll respond. Before you counter what someone is saying, try your best to repeat back what the person is saying—to *their satisfaction* ("Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying").
2. **Hold the Bible tightly and your political opinions loosely.** Instead of trying to forcefit the Bible into our preconceived political opinions, we want to approach the Bible with humility that says, "God, I give you permission to reshape any of my opinions in light of your Word." If we're not careful, it's easy to let our political opinions shape how we read the Bible—instead of the other way around. This also means we want to keep our discussion centered around the text we're actually studying.
3. **Love the person even when you don't love their idea.** And, just because someone doesn't love your idea doesn't mean they don't love you. In the end, Jesus says that people will know we are his followers not by "the uniformity of our political opinions" but by our "love for one another" (Jn. 13:35).

Questions

It's okay if you don't get through all the questions. These questions are nothing more than a launching point for moving toward everyday life like Jesus. Feel free to add additional questions of your own.

- One of the best ways to break political polarization is getting to know people who hold different views than you—so every week we'll have a get-to-know-each-other-better question. **If you played for the Pittsburgh Pirates, what would you want to be your walk-out song and why?**
- This week's text is Isaiah 1:1-20. It's a word from Isaiah when the people are on edge of being exiled from their homeland by the Babylonian Empire. **Can someone read through the whole text?** As you listen, **what are some initial observations that stick out to you?**
- Whenever you're reading the Bible, you have to consider differences in context between where we are and where they were. Isaiah was speaking to the nation of Judah (the Southern Kingdom of Israel)—which was God's people, his chosen nation. **What are some differences between Isaiah's context and our own that we might need to consider?**
 - **What's the problem with over-identifying the nation of ancient Israel with America**—in other words, directly applying everything God said to Israel to America?
 - **What's the problem with under-identifying the nation of ancient Israel with America**—in other words, seeing no crossover between what God says to Israel and what God might say to America?
- On Sunday, Austin said that Isaiah is a model for what it looks to be the church with a prophetic edge in our own cultural moment—and that Isaiah gives us three marks of what that looks like.
 - **1) We consider the meaning of our moment.** In other words, we consider the possibility that there might be more going on than meets the eye during times of cultural upheaval (as we see in Isaiah 1:2-9).
 - **What's the danger of jumping too quickly to "God's judgment" when crisis strikes? What's the danger of never considering the possibility of "God's judgment" when crisis strikes?**
 - **How do moments of crisis like what we're experiencing in 2020, whether or not it's actually God's judgment, wake us up?**
 - **2) We critique the church before the culture.** In Is. 1:10-15, Isaiah critiques the "empty religiosity" of God's people—Israel then, the Church now.
 - **What might his critique sound like in modern language—if Isaiah were critiquing the church in our country?**
 - It's a common prophetic theme to address a disconnect between religious practices and how we treat the marginalized in our community. **What are some reasons why how we treat the marginalized in our community is a better indicator of our spiritual health than how many religious practices we do?**
 - **3) We confront injustice without becoming unjust**—in the process. In Isaiah 1:16-17, he encourages us to pursue justice.
 - **How would you define the word *justice*? How does what Isaiah says right after the phrase "seek justice" help us understand how Isaiah understands justice?**
 - In this text, Isaiah points out some of the marginalized and oppressed in Judah: the fatherless and the widow. In other places, prophets also list out immigrants

and the poor. These are meant to be a “prophetic window” that helps us see the marginalized in our own cultural moment. **Who might Isaiah point out if he was in our own cultural moment?**

- **What are some reasons why Christians sometimes avoid confronting injustice?**
 - **What keeps us from becoming unjust in the pursuit of justice?**
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- **What was your biggest takeaway from the sermon or discussion this week?**

If you have time, consider watching the Bible Project’s video on justice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A14THPoc4-4&vl=en>.

Prayer

Spend some time responding to this week’s discussion in prayer—especially for this political season. Ask the Lord to show us what it looks like to be the church with a prophetic edge in our cultural moment. Also, consider praying for our president’s health (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-4).