

A Tale Of Two Houses

This advent dialogue was written to explore the relationship and animosity between the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah as a lens through which to understand some of the modern day tensions of divided communities. It was written only a week or so after the 20th Anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and so the intercessions which followed this consisted of photographs of the Berlin Wall, the Belfast Peace Lines and the Israel West Bank Barrier built to separate Israeli and Palestinian communities, projected to U2's song, "Peace on Earth".

I am Israel,
the northern of the two kingdoms
in First Century Palestine.
Israel,
once land of the Canaanites,
the land which lies
between the Mediterranean Sea
and encompasses
the fertile Sea of Galilee
and the lush River Jordan.
My land encompasses
the important city of Samaria
and land of the Samaritans.

I am Judah,
the southern of the two kingdoms
in First Century Palestine.
Judah,
also once land of the Canaanites,
the land which runs along the Dead Sea.
My land encompasses
the important, bustling
city of Jerusalem.

In Israel,
our trades
are fishing
and agriculture,
the land is rich and fertile
and the climate is wetter.
We live
in numerous tiny villages
dotted all over the landscape.
Galilee alone
has 214 villages
surrounding it.
But politically,
things are difficult.
The ruling family
is fraught with squabbling
and in-fighting.
There have been
numerous wars and conflicts

and many refugees
have fled south to Judah
and swelled the city
of Jerusalem.
We are a bit jealous
of Judah
with its great city
and bright lights.

In Judah,
we have been very busy.
Jerusalem has grown
from market town
to a thriving metropolis.
We have been
undergoing building works
to enlarge the city walls
and to dig new wells
to provide water
for the expanding population.
We are the city
of the great temple
home of priests and scribes
and Pharisees
centre of Roman occupation
We too have had
our wars and conflicts
and haven't forgiven Israel
for the violence of the past.
We see Israel
as a bit backward,
a place of little significance
or merit.

In Israel,
we have become known
as the place
where Mary and Joseph
came from,
the place where Jesus grew up
Jesus,
Known as the Nazarene
Nazarene,
meaning branch
or descendent
a messianic title
descended from Jesse,
father of the great king
David,
A branch of David
The insignificant place itself
Not even mentioned

By the great historian
Josephus
Hardly even a village
Later known as Nazareth
the place where Jesus came from
the place where Jesus grew up
For out of Israel
Says the prophet Jeremiah
Shall spring a righteous branch
To bring justice
and righteousness
to the land.

How dare you claim
Jeremiah for yourself
For it was to me,
Judah,
that Jeremiah spoke
The promises of God
In those days a
righteous branch of David
shall spring up
and save Judah and Jerusalem
for it was in Bethlehem,
the city of David's birth
and coronation
in Bethlehem
called the house of bread
that Jesus was born
we are the royal city
it is preposterous to suggest
that the coming messiah
is from an insignificant backwater
somewhere north of Samaria
land of the Samaritans
Jeremiah
The great prophet
claimed salvation for Judah.

I don't know why
You place such store
on the words of Jeremiah
the prophet of doom and gloom
Jeremiah,
whom you arrested as a traitor
to Judah,
Jeremiah,
whom you threw into a pit
for warning you of the exile
that was coming
for telling you
of your forthcoming separation

from the land you love
Yes Jeremiah offers you
Your hope and consolation
A time of waiting
Until the Messiah
The righteous branch
Of Jessie
The Nazarene
Is raised up by God
Raised up
from the very
land of Israel itself
so we shall build a wall.
To keep you out
And to keep us safe.
We will call it a peace wall,
We will build it high
so no one can climb over
we will station guards
at check points and
ensure only our people
may cross
and we won't care
if we separate families
from their olive trees
or from their relatives or friends
we won't care
if we bulldoze your homes
and deprive you of food
and medical supplies
for we see you Israel as a threat
for you make grand claims
of self-rule
with your infighting
and your terrorists
and our wall
will keep you
firmly in your place
and keep us safe.

I can see that I,
Judah,
Am never going to agree
With you, Israel.
And we Judah
shall keep fighting
those who are different from us
who may have a different religion
who are from rural farms
and unknown villages
for we see you Israel as a threat
for you make grand claims

of self-rule
and historical importance
And so we will fight your wall
will fight your encroaching
into our place in history
and onto our land
we shall attempt to destroy it
and tunnel under it
and send suicide bombers
into your market places
and graffiti protest art
onto your monstrosity of a wall.

For the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

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