

## Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 2

### Isaiah 1-2:4

#### C. The Structure of the Book of Isaiah

##### 1. Isaiah 1-6 Judgment and Blessing

We looked at A., “Isaiah the Prophet;” B., “The Historical Settings of the Book;” and C. “The Structure of the Book” in the last hour. We’re going to pick up now within that structure with this section, chapters 1-6, which I mentioned were rather general, but they were characterized by this breakdown with three sections beginning with judgment, ending with the brief section of coming blessing. That was 1:1-2:5 with the section of blessing being 2:1-4; and then 2:6-4:6 with the section of blessing being 4:2-6; and finally, 5:1-6:13 with the blessing being 6:1-13. Now, in looking at chapters 1-6, I want to focus our attention on the short section of blessing rather than on the whole section itself. I’ll make a few comments on the first section 1:1-31, the section of judgment before we get to 2:1-4. I want to spend most of our time today on 2:1-4.

#### Isaiah 1:1-2 – Indictment & Deuteronomy

In that first section of chapters 1-6, after that introductory verse in 1:1, you notice the way Isaiah begins. It’s very interesting terminology. He says in verse 2, “Hear O heavens, listen O earth for the Lord has spoken.” “Hear O heavens, listen O earth.” What does that remind you of? Where have you seen a previous occurrence of that kind of terminology?

It goes back to Deuteronomy where Moses calls as witness the heavens and the earth to hear or see if Israel is going to be faithful to the covenant. So, Isaiah calls as witness the heavens and the earth; that’s strongly reminiscent of covenantal terminology. Look at Deuteronomy 4:26 for example. Deuteronomy 4:26, “I call heaven and earth as witness against you this day, that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. The Lord will scatter you among the peoples.” That is, if you turn away from the Lord. Or look at Deuteronomy 30, verse 19: “This day I call

heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life that you and your children may live, and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, hold fast to him.” Deuteronomy 32:1, there’s another reference. So, see right here in the first words of Isaiah you again have evidence of what we talked about last quarter with the book of Amos. But even though these prophets may not use the Hebrew term *berit*, covenant, that doesn’t mean they weren’t familiar with the covenant idea. That critical idea that the covenant was a late idea and that the early prophets didn’t know anything about it because they didn’t talk and use the term really is not a valid way to assess their familiarity with covenant, because they use covenantal terminology constantly that is rooted in that covenant relationship and the covenant material was found tied to the worldview and message.

Notice where Isaiah goes from there, he says, “Hear O heavens, listen O earth, for the Lord has spoken. I have reared up children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.” The Hebrew term there, rebelled, is *pasha*. ‘*Pasha*’ is a term that originally belonged to the political sphere. It signified breaking a legal relationship. So, they have rebelled. They had entered into a covenant. They had entered into this legal relationship, but now they’ve broken it. They’ve turned away from the Lord.

E. J. Young says the heinousness of the ingratitude lies not merely in the fact that the nation rejects God, but that a nation of sons casts aside a loving father. Notice, “I have reared up children.” They are sons. God was their father. “They have rebelled against me.” Then Young adds this comment, “Those who think Israel had a genius for religion will do well to remember this verse.” In other words, often that attempt to explain the development of these great religious concepts among the Jewish people stems from something that is considered internal to the Jewish corporate personality or something. And it really doesn’t do justice to the accomplishments in that area at all. God had intervened in the history of this people, giving his word as law. Israel tends to turn away from that. So, “I have reared up children, brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its master, and the donkey its owner’s manger, but Israel does not know. My people do not understand.” Remember we talked about the covenantal

implications of the term “know,” *yada*, that recognizes Yahweh as suzerain and the treaty stipulations as binding. It also is a term loaded with covenantal significance.

#### Isaiah 1:4-18

So, he goes on: “Ah, a sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt.” And most of the rest of the chapter contains an indictment. Remember we talked about that covenant policy, where the prophet is a messenger who comes to the people to bring the Lord’s indictment. I have entered into a covenant with you, you have turned away from me. As you go down through the chapter, you see that’s what the central heart of chapter 1 is. Look at verse 4, “Ah sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord, they have spurned the Holy One of Israel, turned their backs on him,” and so forth.

Look at verse 11: “‘The multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me?’ says the Lord. ‘I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals. I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.’” Remember, this is one of those passages that was often cited by the older critics that say that the prophets were opposed to the cult, fundamentally opposed to rituals. Indeed this is very strong. He condemns the sacrificial rituals of the Jewish people.

Verse 12, “When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings.” Remember, as we discussed before, the issue is not so much ritual or sacrifice per se, which certainly was God’s will for his people. The reason for the condemnation is down in verse 15. “When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood.” There’s the reason: their hands were full of blood. They were living a life completely apart from the law of the Lord and thought, “If we just go through the rituals then everything is going to be alright.” But God doesn’t want that kind of service, just a ritual performance of some sacrifice. He wants a heart that is devoted to the Lord and that desires to obey the Lord. Everyone will fall short, but then there’s repentance and forgiveness to bring a sacrifice.

But that was not the people's attitude.

So, what's he saying in verse 16? "Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!" What's "learn to do right"? That's again covenantal. "Learn to do right" means to obey the covenant obligations.

Remember Samuel, when the kingship was established? Saul was presented before the people in the context of covenant renewal ceremony. He said, "I will not cease to pray for you. I will teach you to walk in the good and the right way" (1 Samuel 12:23). The good and the right way, the way of the covenant. Here Isaiah says, "Learn to do right." Deuteronomy 6:18, says, "Do what is right and good in the Lord's sight, so that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take over the good land." The main theme is, "Do what is good and right."

#### Isaiah 1:18-20 Appeal to Reason Together

Now, verses 18-20 are an appeal to reason together. Again you're in legal terminology. What that means is, in verse 18, "'Come now, let us reason together,' says the Lord." "Reason together" is to argue the case. You're in a legal context. "Let's argue the case." And what the Lord is saying here is: "Let's argue the case and it will be clear that Israel is exactly what God says she is. She's turned away from him. She's disobeyed the covenant. Her hands are full of blood." But, strikingly, God is willing to forgive and cleanse. You see, "'Let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.'" God is ready to forgive.

But then when you go on, lest you think that's some sort of pardon regardless of whether or not there's repentance, you notice in the next verse the Lord says, "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." There are the options. Forgiveness is available, but you have to be willing and obedient. See, you really have the same two options here in different terminology that Moses used in Deuteronomy generally: "Choose life or choose

death; choose blessings, choose curses. Love the Lord; serve him and there will be blessing. Turn away from the Lord, disobey him, there will be cursing.” It’s the same two options. If you are willing and obedient you will eat the best from the land. It’s the choice between blessing and curse. Back in Isaiah 1:19, “But if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” So he calls the nation to the need for repentance.

Now, I think I’m going to leave my comments with that on chapter 1, the section of judgment. So, you see how the first chapter begins with an indictment and it sets the issue clearly before Israel. “You’ve turned away from me; and if you don’t repent and turn to me, judgment is going to come.” Notice chapter 1 verse 25, before we move on, “I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross, remove all your impurities.”

#### Isaiah 2:1-5 Swords into Plowshares

Let’s go on to chapter 2, which is the section of blessing that’s to come after the predicted judgment of chapter 1. Let’s read the prophecy in 2:1-5. It’s a short passage, but it’s a very well-known one. “This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In the last days, the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains, it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations, and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.” The heart of the prophecy is really only three verses because the first verse is simply an introduction. “This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw.” And the last verse is a concluding exhortation. “Come O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.” So, it’s really verses 2, 3, and 4 that are the heart of the prophecy

here of coming blessing.

#### Micah 4:1-5 Parallel

Now, as you read just last quarter, this prophecy is almost identical to Micah 4:1-5. Although, if you turn to Micah, you will see that Micah, even though it's pretty much the same, contains an additional verse that further describes the time of peace that Isaiah speaks of in verse 4. Isaiah says in verse 4 that "swords will be beat into plowshares, nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." And if you look at Micah, you see right after that, in verse 3 of Micah 4, "Nation will not take up sword against nation, neither shall they train for war anymore." But notice verse 4 of Micah 4: "Every man will sit under his vine and under his own fig tree and no one shall make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken." Every man will sit under his own vine and fig tree there, and nothing can make people fear or be afraid in this time of peace. Then the final exhortation is similar to the Isaiah exhortation but is worded a bit differently. Verse 5 in Micah is: "For all nations may walk, everyone in the name of their gods. But we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever." Truly an exhortation for Israel to follow the Lord, the true God. He's the one that was able to bring all these people back. Other people may follow other deities, but we will walk after, follow after, the Lord our God for ever and ever.

I'll be commenting on both the Micah and Isaiah passage, but let's go back to the Isaiah passage. Seems to me, and I say this in a rather general way before looking more specifically at the prophecy, that we have a revelation of a time of peace and righteousness, or justice, that speaks of a time in which there will be external peace and safety here on the earth; yes, a time of external peace and safety. Notice in the Micah context, that Micah 4:1 really flows right on from the end of Micah chapter 3.

At the end of Micah chapter 3 you have a passage speaking of a coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Micah 3:10 says, "They build up Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price." Verse 12 then says, "Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed

like a field. Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.” This is a clear prediction of judgment on Jerusalem. It seems quite clear that that’s not figurative, symbolic prophecy; that’s very specific. The city of Jerusalem is going to be destroyed, and that was accomplished not long after the time of Micah and Isaiah in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians came and destroyed the city. It was literally fulfilled. But you see Micah 3 flows right on into 4.

Micah 4:1 provides a contrast when it says, “But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; people shall flow to it. And the nations shall come and say, ‘Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord. The law will go forth from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.’” So even though Jerusalem’s going to be destroyed, there’s going to come a time in the future when all nations are going to flow toward Jerusalem, and the people of the earth are going to come to worship, and the law’s going to go forth from Jerusalem. In the context, particularly in the Micah prophecy, it seems very clear that we’re speaking about Jerusalem here in a very literal sense, not a symbolic sense. But remember I said it seems to be describing a time of external peace and safety, a time when God will protect his people. It’s not a time when God will just protect his people from danger. It seems like it’s a time when there’s an absence of danger. Every man’s going to sit under his own vine and fig tree; and Micah says, “And there will be nothing to make men afraid.” So it’s not just protection in the midst of danger all around; it’s a time in which there is an absence of danger, a time when Jerusalem will be a center for the word of the Lord to go out, a time when justice will be established in the earth, and there will be peace among the nations. Swords will be beat into plowshares, and war will not continue to be fought.

### When Will This Take Place?

Now, those are just general comments. The question is: when will this take place? Here’s where you get a lot of difference pretty much related to the differences between eschatological systems. You have, of course, pre-millennial, post-millennial, and a-

millennial interpreters who have looked at this passage and interpret it somewhat differently. I want to get into that in a few minutes. But let's begin our discussion of it with the first phrase in Isaiah chapter 2, verse 2, and that is "In the last days," *aharit hayamim* in Hebrew.

### "In the Last Days"

Now, what's meant by that term in Hebrew "in the last days?" I think a lot of people immediately assume that when you come across that phrase, "in the last days", you're talking about eschatology, and that the term itself is a technical term, an eschatological term referring to the *eschaton*. You can't conclude that simply from the terminology itself. Look at Genesis 41:9, for example, this is the blessings of Jacob on the twelve tribes where he says, "Jacob called unto his sons. He says, 'Gather yourselves together that I may tell you that which will befall you *aharit hayamim*, in the last days.'" What follows are these prophecies about the various tribes that, for the most part, were fulfilled in the Old Testament period. That term there doesn't seem to be used in an eschatological sense; it's more like: I'm going to tell you about what's going to happen in the future, in the time to come. Deuteronomy 31:29 is very similar where we have the blessings of Moses. That's Deuteronomy 31:29: "For I know that after my death you will utterly corrupt yourselves and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you and evil will befall you *aharit hayamim*. Evil will befall you in the last days because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands." He's talking about when Israel turns away from the Lord which is under the covenant curses, and that's in the future. That's not eschatological. It's not referring to the end times. So the usage of the phrase itself is such that the context has to determine what degree of future times is indicated. The context must determine what specific future times are being indicated. You could translate this in a more general way as "in future days," as well as "the last days" giving the idea all the way at the end.

Now, there is a collection of citations, if you look on page 5, bottom of page 5. Notice what Harris says; he says there are two theological questions at issue. First, there's

*aharit hayamim*, “the end of the days,” referring to the general future, but more specifically to “the last days,” the final segment of time. The writer of this article states elsewhere that this phrase usually refers just to the general future. Later, that’s what Harris says at the top of page 6, that the interpretation depends on the context. It is possible to use this phrase both for the final *eschaton* and for the general future because obviously all eschatology is future, but not all future is referencing the *eschaton* or end times.

The above-cited article suggests that the corresponding New Testament phrase also often refers to the general future and not necessarily to the final segment of time. This brings into question the idea that the New Testament church thought of itself as living in the final days. The perilous times spoken of in 1 Timothy 4:1 give a series of warnings for the indefinite future.

Oswalt, at the bottom of page 6, makes an interesting statement, I think, as far as the way in which the Hebrew mind conceived of the future. He says regarding Isaiah 2, verse 2, “In future days,” that’s the way he translates the phrase. “In future days” translates the phrase which literally means, “in the afterward of these days.” See, *aharit hayammim* means “afterward of the days.” *aharit* is “after,” or “behind.” The Hebrews did not face the future as we do. Rather, they face the past and backed into the future, so that the past was before them and the future behind them. Well, he’s saying we look at the future as something out in front of us, but he says the Hebrew mind looked to the past. The future’s behind them. Israel’s orientation was to the past, to history, to what God had done for them. So they looked to the past. The past was in front of them; the future was behind them. At least that’s his suggestion about where this expression comes in. So he says the rest of this phrase is not a technical one.

I think that’s the main point. In the Old Testament this phrase is not necessarily referring to a millennial age or even a period beyond that. Evidence supporting his understanding of it can be found—see Genesis 49:1 and various other references. But he says this is not to deny that the phrase can be used in a more technical way and there are a number of other references where “in the last days” is in an eschatological context and

therefore indicates the *eschaton*. So top of page 7, What is important is to evaluate the context to see how the phrase is being used. On that basis, it cannot be said that this passage can only refer to the millennial age. In a more approximate sense it can relate to the church age.” That brings up this other discussion of the way the whole passage (Isaiah 2 and Micah 4) is interpreted, and I don’t think you can settle that solely on the basis of terminology here. You’ve got to settle it on the larger question of what the passage is talking about.

“Last Days” as a Technical Term – E.J. Young [Time between the Advents]--  
Amillennial

Now, the interesting thing is, there are those who take the term as a technical term. And let me illustrate that with E. J. Young. E. J. Young is an amillennialist. That is, E. J. Young does not believe in a millennial thousand year reign of Christ at the end of times—“amillennialist” means no millennium. E. J. Young does not believe that there is described in the Bible a future period in which Christ will rule here on earth and establish conditions of justice and peace. He feels that the “kingdom passages” that many have applied to that future period of time here on earth are to be taken in a more symbolical way and applied to the church. These passages are being fulfilled now in the spread of the gospel through the conditions that the gospel produces in the hearts and lives of people in a spiritual sense. Now, on page 7 of that collection of citations, at the bottom of the page, Young says, “The phrase, therefore, is eschatological. When the latter days appear, they will reveal the Messiah who is the fulfillment and goal toward which all previous history has been pointing. See Vos. Vos contends rightly, we believe.” So here’s Young’s view in agreement with Vos that “the phrase belongs strictly to the field of eschatology. It relates to the collective aspect of eschatology, that is both elastic in its extent and moveable as to its position. The New Testament teaches that this period, in the last parts of the days, began to run its course with the first advent of Christ. It is the consummation of the ages, and the end of ages. The last parts will come to a close when the Lord returns in glory.” But you see what Young says is you’re speaking here of a time between the

advents; the last days are the times between the first advent and the second advent of Christ. So the content of this prophecy will find its fulfillment in the period between the advents, and he takes it as a technical term for that period.

Let's go over to page 8, top of the page, the first three paragraphs. The first two of those three paragraphs come from page 98 where Young says, "There are two considerations which show that this phrase comes to have a technical eschatological significance. In the first place, it is thus often employed in the Old Testament of the time when the Messianic salvation will be accomplished. In the second place, the New Testament definitely and clearly applies the phrase in this eschatological sense to that period of time which began to run its course at the first advent of Jesus Christ."

If you look at those references he gives, I think you can find justification for understanding the term "in the last days" to refer to the period of time between the advents. The question is, is that the sense here? Young continues, "The article of totality should be noted, for some refer this passage to a millennium which would begin after the church age. But the blessings depicted here take place in the period of the latter days. If the millennium is regarded as a part of the eternal state it cannot then be considered a part of the last days. And hence his prophecy cannot refer to it." See, he says, "if the millennium is a part of the eternal state." That's the real question. Should we consider the millennium part of the eternal state? I wouldn't consider it part of the eternal state. I would consider it distinct from the eternal state. But, you see, he can exclude the possibility of understanding this passage as referring to the millennium because it's between the advents of Christ. A premillennial view would say Christ would return first and this would be after that. A post-millennial view might say the spread of the gospel's going to lead up to this, but we'll come back to that. But, next paragraph, "The period which is intended by the phrase 'the last days' is the age of the Christian Church which began its course with the first advent of Christ."

Now, go over to page 9 on your citation. Young says, "This passage is difficult to interpret. It teaches that the blessings described will take place within the latter days. And it is this fact, notice," he says, "which supports the post-millennial interpretation of

Boettner and others. See Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*. At the same time other passages speak of wars continuing until the end. Some, therefore, like Boettner (whose book is admirable) believe that the world will become relatively better, merely a foretaste of heaven. But the present passage does not speak of relative improvement, but of an absolute change. “It is necessary then,” and here’s where Young really comes pretty much to his own conclusion. He says, “It is necessary then to maintain that the prophecy will be absolutely fulfilled,” – but then he gives a qualification – “in principle during the latter days. When at the second advent sin is removed, we shall realize all the blessings which are promised.” You see that’s an interesting way to try to find fulfillment: absolutely fulfilled in principle, but not completely fulfilled in practice. It awaits the second advent, when sin is removed, when it will be completely fulfilled.

Notice his next comment, “This interpretation is difficult,” I think it does add difficulty. “But it’s all that one can do if he would be faithful to the language of the Bible. The post-millennial interpretation does not do adequate justice to those passages which emphasize the evil character of the present world, an evil that continues till the end.” I agree with Young in that. The post-millennial view that says the spread of the gospel is going to lead into this sort of situation in which peace and justice will be established. Such a view is very difficult to harmonize with other passages in scripture that say at the end times things are going to get worse, not better, and there are going to be wars and rumors of wars (vid. Matt. 24). So I think Young’s right in his critique of the post-millennial viewpoint.

His own viewpoint, however, also runs into difficulties because he’s locked himself in this box of saying that this passage is going to be fulfilled between the advents of Christ. If it’s going to be fulfilled between the advents of Christ, it’s being fulfilled right now. You may ask: “Where is it being fulfilled right now? Where do we see it?” He would reply, “It’s absolutely fulfilled right now, but in principle.” Only in principle. It’s complete fulfillment is yet future, at the second advent of Christ. Well then, is it being fulfilled between the advents of Christ or not? He says it has its difficulties, but that’s all we can do with it. I think there are other better options.

Notice just as far as we've gone, and this *aharit hayamim* has a great deal of implication on the interpretation of this passage from Isaiah 2:2. If you take it as a technical term, as Young does, for the time between the advents, then the premillennial interpretation is ruled out because it's beyond the second advent. So you see, just by taking that as a technical term, you may exclude a premillennial interpretation. If you're an amillennialist, you take it as that technical term for the period of time between the advents. Then you're forced to say the passage is fulfilled in principle, but not in actuality, which is, in essence, what Young does. The post-millennialist, if he takes it that way, which most of them do, that's hard to reconcile with passages that speak of wars continuing to the end such as Matthew 24:6. So you see, taking that as a technical term, for the time between the advents, has many implications.

Premillennialists are not inclined to take it as that technical term for the period, between the advents. But what I'm saying is, if you do take it in that way, you exclude premillennialism as an option because premillennialists will apply this to something that will happen subsequent to the second advent of Christ.

Alright, let's take a break and we'll come back and look at it a bit further.

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