

Dr. Marv Wilson, Prophets, Session 27, Isaiah, Select Passages, Part 2

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This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is session 27, Isaiah Select Passages, Part 2.

Okay, let's begin with a word of prayer, please. You've been with us through this week.

We thank you for that our Father, that each day we can celebrate the fact that you've brought us through the night and have given us this day to live for you. Thank you that you've given us a holistic understanding of faith, that our faith is not a switch we turn off and on, but it's an all-encompassing walk with you each day as we are mindful of you and at all times and all places seeking to put you first, draw upon you and your power in our lives in every situation. Thank you that you're the God of all of life.

You claim all areas of life, all domains which you ask us to include you in. We pray that that will be our experience. Thank you for the prophet Isaiah.

There are so many difficulties that the prophets of Israel had with their generation, yet we can see a God at work in very, very difficult times. So, we can take hope and encouragement in that. Help us to understand what we study today, I pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Alright, I suggested a three-point broad outline for Isaiah's commission. Simply, the first four verses, he sees the Lord.

In verses 5-8, he becomes introspective and sees himself. Then, in verses 9-13, he is going to have a commissioning and then see the world.

And so that encounter with the Lord leads to reflection within himself and his own condition, his lack of qualification, which is precisely what the Lord needs. And then he's able to be commissioned, cleansed. Actually, when you look at this second section that we just completed, verses 5-8 in our previous lecture, looking at himself, he has this conviction: woe is me, I'm undone.

He has this confession: I'm a man of unclean lips. He experiences God's cleansing. He says, my sin is purged.

And then he is consecrated. Here I am, send me that sending of me, which is introduced with this interesting Hebrew word, hine.

Hini is sort of an attention-getting expression. We read it several times in Abraham's great Akedah chapter, 22nd chapter of Genesis. Here I am, or it's me, or behold, I'm listening.

It's an expression, a very idiomatic expression, that carries with it the idea, I'm ready, I'm prepared, I'm listening, give me my next instruction. I'm ready to move. And so this passage gives us the reason why people serve God.

When they deal with their own humanity and sinfulness, they're then in a position to realize ministry cannot be done in human power. And all the more so, the prophets are an example of this, as God's spokespeople. As we look at the third main section, which starts with 9 through 13, he gets his words: go and tell this person.

And so, the purpose of his ministry now is going to be revealed, and it's pretty much in negative terms. Basically, his labors are going to be fruitless. This wouldn't go over very big in a high school or college graduation.

You're going out into the world to be failures. God bless you. Notice the language here.

He says to the prophet, go and tell this people. This people is to be contrasted with many places in this prophecy, also Ezekiel and Jeremiah, where the word ami, my people, is used. That's a term of loving affection.

This is my people. This is go tell this people. It's kind of a big stick approach.

We know from chapter 1, which I'll be going on to momentarily here, that they were people who needed correction. So, it is expressing here this pleasure and contempt for his fellow countrymen. Now, what follows is one of the interesting chiasms of scripture.

Remember, a chiasm, an A-B-B-A structure, where the first and the last elements are similar, and the second and third are similar. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

Tradition is not the dead faith of the living, it is the living faith of the dead. A-B-B-A. Now, here you have a chiasm with actually six elements, not four, which is more common in scripture.

I mentioned this in a recent previous lecture when we said a little bit about poetical style. And in this particular passage, verses 9 and 10, he says, Be ever hearing, but never understanding. Be ever seeing, but never perceiving.

Make the heart of this people calloused. Make their ears dull, and close their eyes, otherwise they may see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts. So, the language here speaks to us of this paradoxical kind of thing the prophet is going to be involved with, where he is going to set forth a message and primarily have a very negative response.

Now, given the whole tenor of scripture theologically speaking, I think we have to say that this is going to be the result of Isaiah's words. He would not see people come to know God. And his proclamation to the people would result in their hardness of heart and the rejection of truth.

In short, they would be even further confirmed in their obstinacy. The purpose of Isaiah's preaching was not to produce this. This rather is what results in people's hearts becoming further blinded.

Isaiah's preaching did not create the hardness of heart. Like the parables of Jesus, it only exposed it. The parables of Jesus and the task of Isaiah were very similar.

To those who are unwilling to receive Isaiah's message, to them, this truth is inaccessible. They were not going to find it or respond to it. And Isaiah here is simply laying forth the truth, the prediction that they will not understand this thing and they would not be perceiving.

Their hearts would be calloused, and their eyes would be dull. And so, this response is seen by God. And the evil or lack of response or stubbornness or blindness, while a paradox, does come from the heart of men.

Certainly, we cannot charge God with evil intent. Again, our job, like the prophets of Israel, is to declare God's good news. How that word is responded to has a lot to do with the human heart.

The prophet, of course, would not be encouraged to hear such a word that his ministry would not be a popular ministry. And so, he cries out with a question in verse 11. How long is this blindness, obstinacy, callousness, dullness of hearing? How long is it going to continue? And the answer seems to be in the verses that follow until the people are going to be driven out of Judah, driven out of Jerusalem.

Notice what follows. Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitants. The houses were left deserted, and the fields were ruined and ravaged.

Until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. And while the language here is, perhaps to some degree, hyperbolic, because if it's 586 that he has in mind, it may very well be the overthrow of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar.

Certainly, there were some people who would be left in the land to tend the vineyards, as we know, as scripture puts it, the Yam Haaretz, the people of the land.

But the language says everyone will be removed far away, except, then he qualifies it, a tenth remains. And here, he introduces the remnant theme. There would be a surviving remnant.

No matter how frequently the people may seem to be destroyed, whether in 701, in Isaiah's lifetime, Sennacherib would come knocking on the door of Jerusalem and clean up 46 walled cities of Judah, or other attacks, and especially in mine, Nebuchadnezzar's attack, yet God was going to preserve a saving remnant, a surviving remnant that would be left in Judah. The way he talks about this is that the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land. In other words, there will be just a few faithful people.

The stump has life in it, and after cutting off the branches, God can yet bring life out of that again. We'll come back to that horticultural metaphor when we talk about that shoot that comes out of the stump of Jesse, which is part of Isaiah's prophecy, or the righteous branch that Jeremiah talks about. And it has messianic implications.

So, this describes the circumstances of the remnant, perhaps after the return from captivity. The nation would go through a reviving process. It was not totally dead.

It would consist of a remnant. And so, the name of Isaiah's own child, which comes up in the very next chapter, Shear-jashub, a remnant, will return. This theme of God working through a righteous remnant is a major theme of Scripture.

I'd like now to go to the opening chapter of the prophecy, which is a picture, really, of God's scathing indictment of His people. In particular, the people of Judah. And while the language in chapter 1, in some ways, is unqualified as prophetic language is, sometimes extreme and hyperbolic in its description, it is a picture about how God feels.

And as you're reading Heschel, and know something of the pathos of God, how intensely and personally He cares, and how moved He is by the condition of His people. And this nation, who has been rebellious, is, throughout this whole first chapter, described and analyzed in its sinful condition. The book opens with that expression, the vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

Vision is not always used in that sense of prophetic visions, as we saw it in Amos, the five visions, or Ezekiel's picture, vision of the dry bones. But here it seems to be used of revelation in general. One of our most misunderstood proverbs is Proverbs 29:18, hatzon, the word for vision, where there is no vision, the people perish.

That means prophetic revelation. It's followed by the line where the Torah is ignored, and people run wild. In other words, when people ignore the revelation that God gives, which is a restraining force in society, they do so, and it brings anarchy in its wake.

So, revelation is important, and I think it's used in that general sense here rather than in precise pictorial kinds of visions, which are described in the way in which we saw that in Amos. What other prophet are you reminded of as the book opens? Here, O heavens, listen, O earth, and the Lord begins His indictment of His people. What does that remind you of? Like Micah, exactly.

God is about to arraign Judah. The language is very similar, like we saw in Micah 6, with the Reve, the covenant lawsuit, the dispute, and the controversy that God has with His people. And so, in this arraignment, very similar to Micah 6, in that broad sense of the word, where God's chosen people are put in the dock.

And God is the judge, or the plaintiff in this particular case, and He's arraigning Judah, who is the defendant. We saw in Micah the hills that stood as jury and witnesses of Yahweh's indictment. And here we have a parallel thing where the heavens and the earth, as it were, all creation is there, ready to listen to the Almighty, who is going to speak.

And they are there to support His complaint. And God's people are guilty on a number of counts, which He's about to charge them on. The first charge is in verse 2, where He uses the word rebellion.

They are a rebellious people. So, the word He uses here is pasha, and that word means to deliberately go against authority. And it's the breaking of a legal relationship, revolting, in this sense, against God, seeking to dethrone God.

And instead, one's own ego, one's own self, becomes now the authority. And so, this word, which sometimes in Scripture is translated as rebellion, and Israel not submitting to His will. Notice how He leads into this.

He says, I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled. Sort of the same theme again in Micah. Remember how he talked about bringing them up from Egypt and giving them as His sons all forms of grace?

Remember the names of the leaders of ancient Israel He gave to them, Moses and Aaron. And these were manifestations of His grace. And He adopted Israel as a nation of sons, but they rebelled against His authority.

They did not submit. Again, a reminder of this upside-down kingdom that we're introduced to when we come into Scripture. It's this battle of human will against divine will.

It is the kingdom of God that calls for submission to His authority. And the battle we have through Scripture in many ways, yeah, it is a battle of the gods, but it's also a battle of the wills. Who's going to sit on the throne of Israel's life? Not just the king in Jerusalem, but whose will will they submit to? Well, the Torah defined that will for daily living.

He then goes on to speak of the fact Israel is ignorant. An ox knows his master. My goodness.

A donkey knows who comes by the manger. Or crib or stall to give it food. Even these animals, notice He mentions the two you find in the Ten Commandments.

They got a Shabbat, so they were very close to the community. The ox and the ass, the John Deere, the Farmall of Bible times. These were very, very important animals.

And they have a spirit of gratitude. They know and appreciate their owners who clean their stalls, care for them, and feed them. But Israel does not know or acknowledge who this is.

So, He comes out then with this word: My people do not understand. The first of 23 places in the book of Isaiah where the term of affection, Ami, My people, is used. A third concern that he has is found in verse 4, where Israel has proven unfaithful in their relationship to God.

And in verse 4, he starts with Paranomasia. We earlier saw Paranomasia in one of the visions of Amos. The Kayitez and the Katez play on words.

Paranomasia. How does he start verse 4? He starts it with hoi goy. Hoi goy.

Hoi is one of the great expletives, terms of deep feeling and expression as part of Jewish or sometimes we would say Yiddish vocabulary. The word is difficult to translate in one word. Words that express emotion.

Alas, or woe, or something of that order. Goy means nation. So, hoi Goy. Alas, nation. It's what we call the boogie woogie construction in Hebrew. Hoi Goy.

Oi vey, you've heard before, right? Which is Yiddish for, oh, pain. So, you could translate this, oh, nation. So, Oi Gavalt.

Oh, powers. Gavalt being a Yiddish word coming in via the German. Yeah.

Yeah, I like your comment. While they were a nation, as we know from Genesis 12, God says to Abraham, I will make you a Goy Gadol, a great nation. So, nation early on in Israel's history is used.

Not just for foreign nations, but Goy is used. Now, in the modern world, Goy is definitely a pejorative. When it comes from a Jew's lips to a non-Jew, it means somebody who is insensitive, usually an anti-Semite.

It's a pejorative, a negative term. Somebody who is heartless. In this particular case, he is including everyone where he uses that word, nation.

He calls them sinful. This word sinful is our friend hata, which properly means they've missed the mark, they've gone astray, which parallels fairly closely Hamartano in the Greek New Testament, which, for instance, in Romans, speaks about the result of sin going one's own way. And so, the missing of God's goal in life, falling off the path, going astray, veering in the wrong direction, uses a participial form here, probably implying the idea of a continuous kind of action.

They are people who are loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption. He pulls out all the stops here. When he uses the word corruption, it's really the word twisted, bent.

And so, if righteousness is God's exactness and straightness and correctness, what we would call in the Greek world orthodox, straight or correct thinking, Israel is crooked and perverse and twisted. This root avon properly means to be bent from a standard, a straight standard. And so, Israel has, much like we saw the plumb line in Amos, has fallen away and is bent here on its own destruction.

We are introduced in verse 4 for the first time to this expression, Holy One of Israel. I mentioned earlier; this is often used for the argument by those who hold to the unity of the book that Isaiah, the son of Amos, wrote the entire prophecy because this unique expression is distributed equally between Isaiah 1-39, where it occurs 14 times and Isaiah 40-66. Let me rephrase that.

It's used 12 times in Isaiah 1-39 and 14 times in Isaiah 40-66. So, very evenly distributed. And certainly, where it's only used 5 times outside the prophecy of Isaiah, it's certainly one of his key terms.

Speaking of this one, we just saw in chapter 6, who is separate from his creation. And particularly this sinful creation where he obviously distances himself because they are called to be a holy people like their creator. But they have turned their backs on him.

Then, in verse 5, as he continues his indictment, he describes Israel as sort of like a prize fighter who's been pummeled and beaten on every part of their body. There are sores and bruises everywhere. Festers, festering sores.

And outwardly, Israel has been beaten. Her head is injured. And inwardly, the heart.

So, outward and inward. The head and the heart. You see that in a parallel fashion.

No more soundness in the body. We sometimes hear that idiom in English, from the top of your head to the bottom of your foot. Well, it comes right up here in Scripture.

From the crown of your head to the sole of your foot. So, he's saying the whole person is affected. Only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.

I suspect the most popular modern image of this is Mel Gibson's picture of Jesus experiencing the treatment of the Roman soldiers in the Passion of the Christ, where you look at a human body about as bloodied and bruised and beaten as you could visually conceive of that. Of course, Isaiah 53, verses 4 and 5, which became the inspiration for Mel Gibson's film, which opens with a quote from Isaiah. In Isaiah 54, referring to 53 Isaiah 53, verses 4 and 5, which were the inspiration for his film, surely He took up our infirmities, He was stricken by God, smitten by Him, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.

And the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds, we are healed. So, that suffering servant image in chapter 53. Now, there's another suffering servant.

Israel is Ebed-Yahweh. The language does not exclusively apply to Jesus. But in the prophecy of Isaiah, God's people themselves, who corporately are a suffering servant.

New Testament writers, of course, hone in on the image of the suffering servant and apply that specifically to one man. But Israel is called to be God's servant. And she's in a very sad condition.

Beaten, injured, welts, infirmities and wounds all over her body. The last line in verse 6 says, Israel has not had her wounds softened with oil. What are three or four of the main uses of oil in the Bible? Okay, it's used for ceremonial purposes.

You get the oil treatment. You have Samuel taking a horn of Shemin, olive oil. I say Shemin because when you hear the word Gethsemane, a place of the olive press, you hear the word Shemin, which is the Hebrew Bible word for oil.

And Garden of Gethsemane has those great, venerable, old olive trees. What else was oil used besides anointing? For what? Okay, that's how the menorah operated in the temple. Had to have oil for the seven-branched candelabrum.

Shemin. Any other places oil is used in Old Testament times? How did it come into the Good Samaritan story? Right, and that parallels what we have here, soothing wounds with oil. It was used for medicinal purposes.

Anointing wounds. Every home in ancient Israel used oil all night long. How and where? As a kid, did you ever have a nightlight in your room? Alright, there were usually oil lamps burning in the home all night long.

Starting with the four-spouter of Abraham's day. Certainly, in Isaiah's day. The one spouter, but the lamp was open.

It was more like a saucer, somewhat with rounded edges, pinched up somewhat on the edge, contained with a wick. So, the oil was used for the lamp. How did Mrs. Isaiah use oil every day? Cooking, yes.

That's right. She used what we would call butter today for various kinds of things. The oil was very important.

The olive tree. Preparing bodies? I don't think so. Sometimes bodies could be anointed with spices because of the odor of bodies particularly.

I don't think bodies were only for the wounds, but not once one was deceased. Now when you understand the olive industry of the Mediterranean world, Rome or Italy is the greatest olive producer of the biblical world. So, what does Paul do when he writes in Romans 11 about the metaphor of Israel being an olive tree? And he writes his letter to Rome, the biggest olive producing country in the Mediterranean world.

Greece and Spain also, by the way, are major producers of olives. Now there's obviously some of that in Israel, little of it in Egypt, but it was very important for the economy. Your country is desolate, verse 7, your cities burned with fire, your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.

This land of Judah is going to experience an invasion of foreigners and is going to be overrun. Then he addresses these people with this interesting term: daughter of Zion. This is obviously a synonym for Jerusalem, but daughter of Zion.

Cities were generally referred to in the feminine in Bible times. The word city itself, ear, is feminine. But this is Bat Zion, daughter of Zion.

Probably an expression of tenderness. Whether it's ben or bat, son of or daughter of, it often is used in relationship to belonging to a category or a group. So, it's a way of addressing the Jerusalemites, probably in a tender way, those belonging to this beautiful city.

And that's how it is categorized. And yet this city is going to be left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a temporary lean-to made of branches and leaves, or a hut in a field of melons or cucumbers, like a city under siege. Unless the Lord Almighty had left some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been like Gomorrah.

Again, we come back to the remnant theme. Sodom and Gomorrah become bywords in Scripture. So, in the community, the oral transmission of the faith of the people of Jerusalem now recalled all the way back to Abraham's time, which was more than a millennium.

And if we date Abraham somewhere around 1900, possibly a century or two later, scholars are not unanimous on that, but we're dating Isaiah in the 8th century. So, from the 18th century to the 8th century, it is a millennium. When these two cities were destroyed, Sodom and Gomorrah, overthrown with fire and brimstone, there had been no remnant.

In fact, to this day, the cities were so completely destroyed apparently that archaeologists have yet to decisively find wherever those cities are. Maybe great volcanic overthrow of these cities. We just don't know.

But it is the Lord who leaves the remnant. It's only through His grace that they didn't become like Sodom and Gomorrah. Again, a theme of Scripture is God is always more concerned with quality than quantity.

He works with a remnant. The ministry of Jesus would have been judged bad. 120 people after a three-year ministry by some modern standards.

Yet 11 of those 12 were willing to die by martyrdom. They believed as deeply as His followers in what He taught. So, God has always worked through a remnant idea.

It's interesting how, in Romans 9:29, this verse is picked up in this remnant theme that includes you and me, believe it or not. Not just a Jewish remnant, but Paul expands the meaning of this in terms of Gentile believers. So, Romans 9:29 It is just as Isaiah said previously, unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have become like Gomorrah.

In this righteous remnant, God's calling embraces both believing Jews and Gentiles. And the next verse says, What then shall we say? That the Gentiles who do not

pursue righteousness have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith. So, the remnant theme is those who live by faith.

The last point I want to make today is the meaninglessness of the phoniness of worship that is heartless. These people of Jerusalem, starting with verse 5, because they acted wickedly like Sodom and Gomorrah, had turned their backs on God's revelation. They were still outwardly going through religious acts. He talks here about burnt offerings of rams, the fat of fattened animals.

I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. It takes us back to Micah 6 again, right? Rejects ritual, rejects ceremonies. What do you think? I just want an intensification of the sacrificial system.

He says, when you come before me, what's all this trampling in my courts? Probably, people are coming, filling the holy precincts, but it's an insult to the deity. Because they're just bringing meaningless offerings, their heart is not in sync with the outward ceremony. And so, he says, stop bringing these meaningless offerings.

Again, Isaiah now takes a turn, which becomes a mega-theme, if not the dominant theme in Jesus' teaching. Jesus doesn't go for the external religion. Jesus usually talks about the sincerity of heart, the lack of forgiveness, the internal things, the lack of love, the lack of brotherliness, answering the question of loving God.

Jesus did not call for an intensification of rules or regulations, rituals, or ceremonies. And so Isaiah talks about new moons, Sabbaths, and holy convocations. God says, my soul hates these things.

They've become a burden to me. I'm weary with them. Even though you spread your hands out in prayer to me, I'm going to hide my eyes.

I will not really look at you favorably because your hands are full of blood. I have a friend who's written a book on the history of Christian-Jewish relations. And he used this term for the title of his book, Hands Are Full of Blood.

The violence, historically, that the church has inflicted on the Jewish people is another subject. But here, Israel's hands are full of blood. That is, they were guilty of wrong.

And so, there's going to be a call then to do something with those blood-stained hands. The call that we'll pick up in our next class will be toward cleansing of those hands. And that will be it for today.

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