

Dr. Marv Wilson, Prophets, Session 28, Isaiah, Select Passages 3

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This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is session 28, Isaiah Selected Passages, Part 3.

Alright, I'm going to pray and we'll get started.

We start this week in need of your help, our Father. We're all students, we're all seeking wisdom, we're all seeking knowledge of your will. We confess we suffer from theological indigestion most of the time. We know a lot more than we practice.

We've studied and learned more than we've activated in our own experience. Indeed, help us to draw out the practical implications of the things that we will hear today in all of our classes. Thank you that your word is a rock.

The imagery of scripture is that it's there when everything else fades. As our good prophet Isaiah reminds us, the flower withers and fades, but the word of God is forever. And so we pray that we will read scripture as if, indeed, our life depends upon it.

Thank you that you're the anchor of our life. When everything else around us falls apart, we can depend on you to be there. Might that verity sustain us today, I pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Alright, you should be working ahead in your study of Isaiah 1-27. Don't forget, 20 minutes in that a day, every day is worth a lot more than an all-nighter 13 days from now.

Does that make good sense? You can accumulate the same amount of time, but some of it will be lost. Studying for an English Bible exam is like learning a foreign language. Specialists say if you study multiple times in shorter intervals, you learn a lot more than if you cram everything into an extended period of time.

Repetition is the mother of learning. If you come back and hit things a number of times, that will be useful. I want to work our way through some selected passages.

We've begun doing that. Last time I was on chapter 1, we talked about this rebellious nation. Isaiah is a rebellious nation.

Isaiah main concern is with Judah, obviously. He's given his indictment, which I said was similar in many ways, to the Reeve. That is the dispute, the litigation, the case

that God had set forth in Micah chapter 6, with the hills being witnesses to the words of the prosecuting attorney, which is Yahweh through his vehicle, his spokesperson, Micah.

Last thing I talked about was again parallel to Micah 6. Micah 6 builds on the words of Isaiah. He builds to his crescendo and he raises the question what the Lord requires. His own people thought outward religiosity was the emphasis.

Very important you nail this down because this is the kind of stuff Jesus picks up on. Not wanting to add to rituals, ceremonies, and laws, but to cut to the inner attitude, to the true meaning of spirituality, which for Jesus starts on the inside and moves out. Not only does he teach this in a personal way, but also, it's obviously how we understand the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is in the midst of you, but my kingdom is not of this world. This kingdom Jesus had to offer was not a bombastic coup, throw out Rome, plant the Mogan David in Jerusalem, and we're going to throw all the other nations of the world out and establish our reign and rule. No, it was more about the Malkuth Hashemayim, the kingdom of God in the heart, in the heart submit to God's reign and rule, and it starts on the inward side of things.

What Jesus taught then is really what the prophets taught. Even though there's a scathing indictment here where Isaiah's own people are likened to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, verse 10, he then comes back to this ceremonial, sacrifice, ritual theme, and he says, what to me are your sacrifices, your burnt offerings, the blood of bulls and goats? Again, it appears to be contradictory to Scripture and contradictory to the priests. He says, stop bringing these vain offerings, verse 13.

Very often, you'll find in the NIV the rendering of the word vanity or vain comes in as meaningless. The word has this idea of emptiness. They're hollow.

They're not genuine. You may be going through the motions externally, but inwardly the reality is missing. Your incense is detestable.

He comes back to this theme, new moon, which we saw in which prophet? Remember it was Amos. He talked about the new moons. Remember once a month there's a new moon.

Treat it like a Sabbath. No work was done. So, actually, in ancient Israel, you had the weekly Shabbat, plus you had another holiday once every 28 days, roughly, on the calendar when you had a new moon.

Now if you look under the sky tonight, you will see a full moon. Why? What's tonight on the Jewish calendar? Passover. And Passover is on the 14th of the month Nisan.

Under a full moon. Two of the three required pilgrimage festivals of Israel, Passover, and then in the fall, Sukkot, tabernacles or booths, which also under a full moon. And there was a reason for that.

As pilgrims, many of them would come from great distances, and as the moon would get brighter and brighter, some of these people probably had to do part of their travel in the dark. The festival was held under the full moon. So here, he kind of captures all of these required festivals.

The Pesach, the Shavuot, the Sukkot. The new moons. He says, I hate these things.

They're a burden to me. You can be like Solomon at the dedication of the temple, 1 Kings 8, and pray before the Almighty with your hands raised toward heaven. We don't have too many places in the Bible where it talks about the posture of prayer, including the raising of hands.

We do have that in 1 Kings 8 at the dedication of the temple, and Isaiah picks that up again here. And when he's talking about spreading forth your hands, literally, it's your palms upward toward God. God is not impressed with mere outward piety but again wants inward moral integrity.

And then he puts the flip side on the hands. In verse 15, your hands are filled with blood. And, of course, he's using that for the unjust ways in which God's people had been treated.

And he's using that for the unjust ways in which God's people had been behaving. But he uses that then as a transition to nine imperatives which come up. See, that's how Paul sets up his whole book of Romans.

1 to 11 is highly theological. It talks about salvation, justification, glorification, and sin. It's really a catalog of Christian doctrines.

Then he launches into 40 imperatives. In Romans chapter 12, where he goes from the highly theological to the ethical, to the how do you live. And so Isaiah likewise here.

And these first four imperatives are admonitions in light of Israel's condition. They're all negatives and they are all there to show God's feelings toward evil. He says, first of all, wash yourselves.

Or wash and make yourselves clean. These are probably not so much ceremonial washings, but these are washings that perhaps the most Jewish epistle in the New

Testament talks about. That's written by the half-brother of Jesus in all likelihood, James.

And 4:8, what does James say? Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you men of double mind.

So, when James says cleanse your hands, he's using that as a metaphor. It's Hendiadys here, two for one. Literally hen, the neuter Greek pronoun meaning one.

Dia meaning through. Deuce meaning two. Hendiadys, our English word, where you take two words in the original language to convey one idea.

We saw that in Jonah, arise, go to Nineveh. We see it here. Wash and make clean.

And so he's talking about a first step of cleansing 1 John 1:7 or 1 John 1:9 to be more accurate. If you confess your sins, he is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. We're talking here about an inward spiritual cleansing.

And this is the language that scripture uses. It begins in the prophets. Then the third imperative after wash and make clean is remove evil.

Remove the evil of your doings. When people have engaged in genuine teshuva, genuine turning around, and repentance, then this results in ceasing from evil. The Hebrew word for repentance, teshuva, involves a two-fold action.

Metaphorically, it means to turn away from your sin. Do a 180. Reverse your direction.

Turn around. That's what teshuv means. And then it means after you forsake your sin or turn from your evil, it means to turn to the living God with a spirit in your heart that says, I'm sorry enough to quit.

So, he sees, again, giving the admonition to the people to cease evil. This is the true nature of repentance. Removing, ceasing to do evil, removing evil doings or actions.

And then he comes to five imperatives. These five are all positive. Deals with the negatives first.

These are what the prophet is looking for that display true godliness. These deal with righteous living. The first is found in verse 17, where he says, learn to do good.

Theologians, psychologists, and social workers, particularly within the Christian world, have debated to what degree doing good is innate or to what degree doing

good is good. And he says, learn to do good. To what degree is it something you have to teach? Well, I suspect in the end it's both.

If we believe Augustine, who stands on the shoulders of Paul, and others that followed that original sin is something that we are born with that causes us to have a predisposition for not doing good. And if we believe Romans 8, which uses the word Holy Spirit many, many times, where Paul speaks of the need of the Spirit to counteract that old sinful nature. The Sarkakos man, the fleshly man, is a man of the spirit of the Holy Spirit.

Then we know we need God's help to overcome. So, to learn to do good, God is the ultimate capital T teacher for learning to do good. That's why we have in scripture what we call ethics.

Ethics basically means how to live and how to conduct your relationships in a proper and godly way in relation to your fellow human beings. In part, our college education is learning how God's people have understood what is the good life and what scripture teaches on what it means as Jesus engages in the gospels that question what it means to be good. Now, in Paul's sense, to be clothed with the righteousness of another has a lot to say with what it means to do good rather than having the capability of presenting oneself before God in one's own sense of goodness and righteousness.

The second imperative is to seek judgment or justice and fairness. We'll come back to that theme in a moment. This, of course, squares very nicely with our Micah 6.8 ethical trinity, the practice of justice, hesed.

They're preferably translated kind or gracious dealings toward others and then walking before God with modesty, with humility, with carefulness. His third imperative is correct oppression, especially oppression of the have-nots of that society, the economically deprived or those who did not have the power in society, the powerless. And here we see how the prophets stand on the shoulders of Moses.

Moses is the one who primarily talks about the orphan, the widow, and the stranger. Those are the people who tended to be oppressed. And so, the prophet speaks about Israel having a concern for oppression.

This theme, which tonight on Passover we come to build on in this text, the exodus had been hundreds of years before Isaiah's day, but tyranny and oppression and the need for liberation and deliverance, the meaning of that word Yeshua, which God brings to Israel when they come out of Egypt. And so, this becomes a dominant theme: freedom. And, of course, it becomes a major emphasis in what we call today liberation theology.

When the rabbis talked about the seven commandments incumbent upon the sons of Noah, that is, for non-Jews by which they are to live, one of the seven Noah-kid laws was to establish courts of justice and speaks to this particular point. The next, defend the fatherless. And here, in verse 17, this takes us to the orphan.

In one of the words in the Greek New Testament, we get our English words orphan, orphan, orphan. From it. And the fatherless represented a very vulnerable group.

So much so, one of the fascinating epithets, terms by which the God of Israel is addressed in Psalm 68, verse 5, father of the fatherless. And then coming back in the next line, protector of widows. And so, what do you see in these final two imperatives, the fourth and fifth imperative? Defend the fatherless and plead for the widow.

So, who is the God of Israel? He is the father of the fatherless and the protector of widows. The implication here from Psalm 68, verse 5, as Israel in her hymnology would use this expression, was a reminder that on an everyday level, those who oppressed the orphans and the widows were, of course, doing this to the Almighty. There's a direct connection between the identity, the character, the attributes of the Almighty, as He is described in Scripture, and His people who are to display those concerns.

As He is holy, they are to be holy. As He is a God of justice, they are to be just. As He is merciful and compassionate, so His people are to be merciful and compassionate.

This pleading for the widow was one of the first test cases after the Christian church was established. You remember there were seven people chosen to wait on the table for the distribution of food for widows because there was a problem here between the Hellenists and the Hebraists, the two groups of Jews in the earliest church. And Stephen, of course, is one of those who is chosen among the seven to deal with a very practical need in this fledgling Jewish community of several thousand people born on the day of Pentecost.

And now they had to face a real practical problem, and it concerned widows. Christianity comes along and doesn't say, okay, what are we going to do now with widows? They already had a tradition that was there for 1,500 years, 1,400 years from Moses until this time. The widow was to obtain her legal rights, often denied by wealthy litigants.

In those days, if a woman lost her husband, it being a patriarchal kind of world, a woman could often lose her source of income. Property could sometimes be mortgaged to someone to whom, and the widow could be that particular family, particularly the husband, owed considerable debt. And even children sometimes could be sold into slavery for the discharge of debt.

And so, the pleading for the case of the widow is an important concept to grasp because it comes right into the New Testament. And the responsibility, I think, of emerging early Jewish Christianity, the concern for the economically vulnerable, very important we know where this concept comes from. So, the earliest church didn't have to get together and invent a tradition of concern.

It was already there. It was already in practice. And the earliest church is an extension of Israel, not the replacement of Israel.

And so, when Paul writes, particularly his pastoral epistles, concern for the widow is there. It was part of his tradition. Now we come to a frequently quoted verse in verse 18, which is then, in light of this indictment and then the call for reparation, for correction, it leads to this invitation.

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, though they are white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. This particular invitation we see here is one that's filled with some very rich figures.

If the picture that stands out anticipates what hundreds of years later in the New Testament speaks about the power of God's forgiveness in very striking terms, it is this verse. The way in which I think, in part, we get to unpack verse 18 is to understand the dying industry in the ancient world. The tolu-worm that we already talked a little bit about in Jonah comes into play here.

He says, though your sins are like scarlet, they will be like the slopes of Mount Hermon that crown the land. Mount Hermon is about 3,000 feet higher than the highest mountain on the Appalachian Trail, Mount Washington. Now, I've been in Tuckerman's Ravine in Mount Washington the first week of July and had a snowball fight.

The snow up there, even though that's under 7,000 feet high. Mount Hermon crowns the land, which you can see up here, and Mount Hermon is mentioned in the Psalms. Mount Hermon probably was the mountain where Jesus had his temptation.

And while Catholics will tell you it's probably Mount Tabor, which is overlooking the Jezreel or Megiddo Valley. It does say in the Gospels it was a very high mountain. And that little word, very high, may have a reference to this mountain that has snow on it.

And it's called Mount Hermon. Every month of the year. I guess it was a little more than 10 years ago when meteorologists stopped counting when the snow up there was over 50 meters deep.

On the top. 50 meters deep. So that wonderful runoff becomes eventually the Upper Jordan.

The Upper Jordan is fed also by the springs at Banias. By the springs also in the Dan Nature Preserve. And that northern part of the land tended to be when the Seleucids were controlling the area.

They knew where they were going to do best in Israel for their nature worship. Because the northern part of the land had the water. And had that runoff year round.

And so, the beauty of the trees and that area as the water comes down and eventually into the Sea of Galilee. That could accommodate nature worship, particularly the god Pan. And the course that led, as I've said before, to the great battle in 198.

Now two centuries later, in Jesus' day, it was Caesarea Philippi. But that site known as Banias in many maps of Israel today retaining that word, that's where nature worship with the God Pan. And that the water off of Hermon and this whole region in Upper Galilee.

And so when the prophet here wants to make a comparison, could always look to Mount Hermon. A number of years ago on one of those days when all of the cloudiness and stuff in the air cleared out. We were on the top of Mount Tabor here.

And looking up to Mount Hermon, it was like you could reach out and touch it. It was so crystal clear, very early morning. And the beauty of the snow, even though we were over 40 miles away from here looking up here.

I said to myself, you understand now how Isaiah could make that comparison. And I said to myself, what was the connection between the heart of his fellow countrymen that was in need of cleansing? The word Phoenicia, of course, as we have up here for the cities of Sidon and Tyre, gets its name from the Greek phoenix, which means purple. And when the Greeks had to come up with a name for the land of Canaan along the coast, they called it Purple Land, which is the meaning of purple.

Probably here because of places like Dor, the name of the Dor out on the coast where archaeologists have uncovered considerable evidence of the dying industry, particularly the use of the Murex shell, which was taken. It was a shellfish caught in large quantities along the Phoenician coast from Tyre and southward. And hence, in ancient texts, we have this expression, Tyrian purple.

So famous for the little Murex shell, which was found to contain two ingredients. One was dark blue, and the other was brilliant red. And when you put the dark blue and the brilliant red together, the dying industry provided garments that were rather striking in color.

Hence, the idea of purple being the color of royalty or to be admitted to the order of purple is an expression we find in the ancient world. Some of these garments, and there are a bunch of dying vats into which the cloth would have been placed, sometimes up to ten times, to produce a scarlet color. Now, the word crimson is the word tola, which also relates to the dying industry, but this one again from the worm.

Remember we talked in Jonah about two meanings, tola in the Bible, as reference, first of all, to the worm itself, a parasitic kind of worm that lived on trees, which, as we'll see in a moment, was a parasitic kind of worm. Secondly, then gave rise to when this little worm was taken and crushed in water, it produced a colorfast dye, which the Bible, usually in English, translates as the word crimson. It being a colorfast substance, it could not be eradicated.

Therefore, it was the most highly sought-after organic substance for the dying industry because of its indelible quality. It could not be washed out. What the prophet is doing here in his figures of speech is drawing a contrast between sin, and I think there is a linkage here between these sins and our hands being stained with blood.

But yet, God's invitation is toward forgiveness, which comes through him, which gives a radical contrast through his forgiveness. So, Israel would be one of the most powerful nations quite as the snow-capped peaks of Hermon, or be like sheep washed in the Jordan River before shearing. They will be like wool.

I think then this figure is probably as powerful in anticipation by word picture, and that's how Hebrews taught so much of their theology by analogy. Most of the theology we have in the Hebrew Bible is analogous to everyday life. God is a father.

God is a shepherd. Sin is like an archer who misses the mark. There are many of these things that God uses then through figures of speech to convey these timeless truths.

The second thing I want to talk about today is this passage in chapter 2, which speaks to us of the triumph of God's kingdom. We've seen this passage before, and Micah and Isaiah, one may have borrowed from the other because the language is too close to say that each one on their own independently devised it. So, either one borrowed from the other or they both go back to another independent source which is now lost.

But they do reflect a teaching here about the eventual outworking of the kingdom of God. So, we have a parallel here to Micah 4, 1-3. Now, a few things I want to again stress.

It will come to pass in the last days. When did the last days begin? It began in the New Testament. Death, resurrection, ascension of Christ inaugurated the last days.

How do we know that? Well, there are a number of New Testament texts. One of the best that you can offer on that to show the last days have already begun is Hebrews, the opening couple verses. In many and various ways, God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets.

That's what we're studying. But in these last days, He has spoken to us through His Son. So, the New Testament announces that the last days began with the coming of Christ.

In this expression, last days or by Yom Ha'Hu and in that day, we've been seeing this prophetic formula. Often anticipates that the Messianic age was inaugurated with the first coming of Christ and to be culminated or consummated at the second coming of Christ. We talked about this with the Yom Yahweh concept of Joel.

So, this introduces, as it were, a Messianic period, which is typical of this formula. It will come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord, that is Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, is depicted here. The temple mount as the highest of the mountains.

To understand this in its context, you have to again understand something about ancient Near Eastern life how each culture had the belief that God and man communicated on a high place, on a mountain, on a high spot. God did not violate that kind of mindset that was present from early antiquity.

Consequently, he says, Moses, I've got 613 for you. We'll start you out with 10. We'll put those on two tablets and come up the mountain.

That's where you're going to receive them. Jesus does his teaching, the Sermon on the Mount, in that tradition. Mount Saphon is where Baal and El and Anat and the whole pantheon of Canaan reside.

It was thought to be in the north. Zeus lived on Mount Olympus in the Greek world. And the Ziggurats in the Mesopotamian world.

So, ancient people believed their gods dwelt on a high mountain. But the text here says this will be the highest of the mountains. So, something symbolic is going on here.

The chief of the highest of the mountains indicated that in the end, the God of Israel and those who come on to the teaching of the God of Israel are going to trump all other would-be revelations or encounters between deities. And this would be higher than any other mountain. A way of asserting that one day, the religion of Israel was the religion and that her God was the God.

So, this mountain, as it were, will be established as higher than any other hill. And Jerusalem being the geographical center for the fulfillment indicates here the triumph of God's kingdom. We know that the language here takes us into the Messianic Age because it says all the nations will flow to this mountain and many peoples will come.

This probably anticipates the conversion of the nations, the conversion of Gentiles in the latter days from Pentecost onward. And it talks about flowing, the word flowing to this mountain. It's a word typically used of rivers in the ancient world.

So, we have a stream of people who are coming for spiritual reasons. The house of the God of Jacob, the house of the God of Jacob. This was in the Torah the place where His name would dwell.

This is God's temple representing His presence. His presence as He was symbolically enthroned above the cherubim. And so, there is a theocentricity to this passage.

Come let us go up, verse three. Same verb by which the Hebrew Bible ends. That little expression leads to the noun aliyah, which means a going up, which means when you immigrate to Israel, you go up.

Spiritually speaking, you go up to Zion when you make a pilgrimage there. So, all these people, as it were, now are coming to the God of Jacob for what reason? For spiritual instruction that He may teach us His way to discover the will of God. And so, we have that we may walk in His paths.

This is why I think Christians need the Old Testament. I can give you many reasons, but this is such a foundational. It is the description of how we understand our faith.

Well, creeds and codes of conduct and doctrinal systems. And statements and dogmas are important in bringing people together and knowing what they believe and confessing what they believe. But the Old Testament describes this thing as a journey of faith.

As a walk of faith, and we need God's teachings, His mitzvot to keep us on the path of life, to keep us out of the cul-de-sacs and ditches. And so, the Torah Adonai, the teaching or guidance or direction of the Lord, was to be given to His people to instruct them in His ways.

So, the imagery then is a walk. We are on a journey. And I think nations, the nations of the earth that come under His Lordship and are seeking out His will, come under that imagery.

So that they may walk in His paths, and so, as Psalm 118 says, one speaks about walking. So, Noah walked with God.

So, Enoch walked with God. So, Abraham was on a journey of faith. So, when you come to Jesus' teaching in the Gospels, He draws on this.

There are two ways. A narrow way that leads to life, a broad way that leads to destruction. You pick it up in the book of Acts, the Hoddas.

And the early church came to know Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life. And that community of faith was the way in which people came under His instruction. And so, as this comes out in the Epistles, Paul, knowing this Hebraic passage, says, walk as children of the light.

Now, maybe Paul is sticking his dagger into the Essene community a little bit there. Because they were children of light and children of the darkness, and he is saying, you want to be one of the good guys.

Walk as children of the light. But the imagery of walking with the Lord is a very important image here. And the Gentiles are involved in this idea.

I've said it before, and I discussed this to some degree in Our Father Abraham. I think one of the ways the church went wrong was when it became too dogmatic and focused too much on a belief system rather than learning about living and the way in which God wants His people to live in relationship to others. We go to learn about the way in which God wants us to learn His ways so that we may walk in His paths.

For out of Zion goes forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Now, the end of all of this, the climax of it, is a lasting and permanent peace. So, I think the language here obviously takes us to the end of the church age, to the end of the messianic age, to the time of the second coming, where we have the culmination of God's kingdom.

Where the Lord Himself will impose His righteous rule on this earth with no international strife, and all countries will live in peace. Remember that little extra tidbit that Micah throws in.

Everyone will live under his vine and under his fig tree and none will make him afraid. It's the idea you can live outside your walled cities and security will not be based on who's got the best defensive system. Who can live in the fortress cities of Bible times and be guaranteed they will be survivors.

No. This whole thing comes about by divine intervention. This kingdom will be a warless society where even the very art of military warfare will be lost.

Not an armed peace, but a true God-sent peace. When the very implements of war are converted to agricultural implements, the nation will not learn war anymore.

So, we see the synecdoche that we talked about before. Where a figure speech in which part is used for a whole or a whole for a part. So, the abandonment of two weapons, swords and spears, refers to total disarmament.

The replacement of this picturesquely stands for total peace as it talks about plowshares, which were the little metal tips used for plowing the land. So, it refers to a different kind of life. So, to sum up, here is an external peace, a peace with total disarmament and without fear, a permanent peace.

Man-made peace is fragile and always, at some point, broken. Here, we have permanent peace because it is established by the Prince of Peace. He will judge among the nations.

His kingdom will involve the whole world and it will be built on righteousness, will be built on true spirituality. That will be the basis of that peace. It will be once again being reigned in by God's revelation.

So, peacekeeping is an important thing to pursue. Matthew 5.9, Blessed are the peacemakers. That's a good vocation.

At least you know it will be steady work. You won't have to collect unemployment if you are a peacemaker until everyone gets on the same page, realizing that the ultimate peace is divinely brokered, not purely brinksmanship, learning the skills of negotiation.

Those things are important, but we are talking here about the ultimate way in which God defines this. He has a lot to do with it. So, political science courses, let them come.

Peacemakers, let them be established. But they bring us only to a point until ultimately the spiritual or the religious side of this is brought into the equation. All right, that will be it for today.

This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is session 28, Isaiah Selected Passages, Part 3.