

## Dr. Marv Wilson, Prophets, Session 29, Isaiah, Select Themes

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This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is session number 29, Isaiah, Select Themes.

All right, I am ready to begin.

So let's have a word of prayer, please. For this day, we thank you, our Father. We recognize every day, indeed, as a gift from you, life itself. We can't explain ourselves without you. You're not only our creator, but our sustainer. We acknowledge that.

We thank you for the joy of living. Here at Gordon, we thank you for the community of faith in which we live, that we might encourage each other, provoke each other to good works, to a higher quality of living, to a vision of what this world might be through servants dedicated to you who go out into the world to live Christ. Pray that the prophets will undergird our thinking as we construct our Christian Weltanschauung, our world, and life views.

Give us the ability to sort out the true from the false, the genuine from the spurious, and the real from the fake. We know this is not easy. We thank you that your word has an important part to play as we make decisions, as we think through our faith. So, guide us to that end, I pray, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Alright, we're studying a number of different themes in Isaiah.

Today I want to pick things up on a little bit about what Isaiah has to say about the society women of Jerusalem. As you're working through chapters 1-27, getting ready for the English Bible exam, one might think at first sight that Isaiah was a misogynist. He was somebody that hates women.

He is pretty critical of the Jerusalem women, but again, we have to put this in the context of the Bible as a whole. In 3:16 he talks about the daughters of Zion who walk around with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, and they have a habit of making noises as they trip along with their ornaments that bedeck their ankles. And for Isaiah, who again has this passion to reveal before God the heart of the woman of Jerusalem, as we saw in chapter 1, not just the external outward signs of religion or piety or trying to impress people.

The thing I think in this section that Isaiah wants to impress his readers with the most is that God desires a sincere and godly heart above anything else, particularly it trumps self-centeredness, a kind of flaunting with the external, saying, come look at

me, and the prophet is saying there is something deeper. Don't devote yourself just to the latest fads in hairstyle, in jewelry, in clothing. Self-adornment has its place, but like anything, the modesty theme and the balance theme are very important because self-attraction is not the key thing for people of God.

Now, when you scan these verses, you might think you were going through Neiman Marcus or Gucci's or Macy's or some other place where the latest styles are out there because these women, the implication is by Isaiah, were dressing as it were like the goddesses of the ancient world. In fact, some of the language here is very analogous to how female deities in the Mesopotamian world were perceived. And so, with the poor of Jerusalem, a major concern of prophetic passion and interest, these women are brazenly setting forth the outward appearance.

A little bit of this in Amos 4, where it says with the women who in their luxury and in their greed shouted to their husbands, bring that we may drink like the cows of Bashan. They were passive, and they were indulgent. And so, now a southern kingdom prophet comes back on this theme.

One might wonder why all these ornaments here are mentioned in great detail. And again, it's because of the outward, the finery of the anklets, the headbands, the crescents, the pendants, the bracelets, the scarves, the headdresses, the armlets, the scarves, the sashes, the perfume boxes, the amulets, the signet rings, the nose rings, the festival robes, the mantles, the cloaks, the handbags, linen garments, turbans, veils. It's sort of a catalog of finery.

And these things are very important. They were exceedingly expensive. Isaiah is not condemning beauty and attractiveness per se, or the articles per se, but he's saying these are simply an external symptom or sign of a systemic problem.

And that problem is corruption of the heart. It's kind of an inner pride that manifests itself with a kind of haughty sophistication. A kind of pride and arrogance and elitism in the midst of a very hurting and a poor corruption of the heart.

And so, Isaiah, what he had to say, was built on of course by Peter in 1 Peter 3. 1 Peter draws the same point, 1 Peter 3:3 and 4, referring to women. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment such as braided hair and the wearing of gold, jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight.

For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. So, what does Peter do then? Peter draws again on that inward dimension of spirituality. Not to impress people with their outward flashiness and costliness because these women were not modest.

The problem then here basically was not one of dress but it was one of the heart. It was inwardly. They had, as verse 16 puts it, become haughty.

The idiom of walking with an outstretched neck is just an example of a Hebraic idiom. There are a lot of these idioms that are very concrete in their description. To stretch out the neck in the ancient Near East, including in Hebraic culture, was an expression of pride and haughtiness.

Their eyes are flirtatious, it says in verse 16, desiring to cause attention. They were not haughty. They were not modest.

They were beautiful. You'll notice how the prophet here says, alright, the Lord's going to punish this kind of arrogance where a scab will be in the place of beauty. What does that mean? Well, the hair is a place of beauty, a person's glory.

In fact, it's going to fall out. If you go down to verse 24, where you have the contrast between the high-end dressers, the flip side of that is that you get rottenness instead of a beautiful sash around your waist. You're going to get a rope, which could imply being taken off into exile because we actually have reliefs of people of Bible times being led away with ropes around their waists.

I've mentioned the fish hooks, so that could be an allusion to exile. Instead of well-set hair, baldness. Instead of beauty, shame.

Instead of a rich robe, simply sackcloth, which is a symbol of mourning or disaster or catastrophe. So, God, as it were, says he's going to reverse the tables in judgment. And those who delight in this kind of outward exposure put it on your back, will be punished with a very painful blunt statement in verse 17, laying bare their secret parts.

Immodest exposure. Could that refer to rape? Could that refer to adultery, the devastation of war? He only hints. Many of the items in verses 18 to 23 are objects that were worn by Ishtar.

I mention capital I-S-H-T-A-R because Ishtar is the word from which our English word Easter derives. Now, there are some Christians who have some real problems with the word Easter because of its pagan origin. Ishtar was the Babylonian Venus or Aphrodite, the goddess of sex, fertility, love, Ishtar.

What do you have in Easter? You have Easter eggs, you have the rebirth of life and nature as it comes alive, and so forth. I actually have a few friends who would never be found with the word Easter on their lips. It's Resurrection Day, it's the Sunday after the celebration of Good Friday.

They just won't say the word. That's the way they are. Well, we can't be totally consistent on that.

Indeed, when we go through the days of the week, we're calling out the names of many gods that are up there in the region of Northern Europe for which we have our days sometimes. We cannot thoroughly purge ourselves. When we say January, we could be referring to the god that opens the year, Janus, in the Roman world.

So, to clean up the English language from pagan influences, as President Bush would put it, not going to do it. Not going to do it. It just doesn't work.

However, the list of these things was attached to this goddess of fertility, Ishtar, fertility. So, there was a pagan connotation. In the ancient world, this was very critical to come out from the culture around you, which may, of course, be the reason why Jewish people did not boil baby goats in the mother's milk because that was a pagan Canaanite custom.

Do not see the kid in its mother's milk. Three times reported in the Torah. And as the rabbis further developed that, they said, don't mix dairy products and meat products together.

Keep them separate. So, if you observe the biblical dietary laws, the origin of all of that may have come out of that pagan world where to manipulate a Canaanite deity, you did take a baby goat and boil it in its mother's milk in order to gain the attention of the deity to receive gifts and benefits from that deity. So, there is a disassociation from those kinds of connotations that might accompany something like that.

And as we know, in this world of ideophoric ethics, if you go ahead and eat meat offered to an idol, you could cause somebody else around you to stumble. That could be a problem because of the pagan connotations of that meat. Now, to you, meat may be meat, but what was done with that meat and the context out of which it comes can create certain problems.

And so, this is something, particularly in the ancient world, that people were very, very conscious about, particularly connotations of idolatry. In fact, for hundreds and hundreds of years, Jewish people had lots of problems even talking about Jesus because he represented idolatry. Those Christians have gone and made a god out of a man.

And there is something, if not explicitly idolatrous, about that, implicitly there is. There is a whole tractate in the Talmud entitled, Serving of Idols and Forbidding These Kinds of Things. So, here is Ishtar with her bangles, with her headbands, with her crescent necklace. The crescent necklace is in verse 18, probably by using the word crescent; what does the crescent imply? The moon, yes.

And what was Terah, Abraham's father's religion down in Ur of the Chaldees, moon worship? What does Terah mean? Moon. The god seen.

And what is the moon? The crescent. The crescent is Nanar, the moon god. And maybe coming from that part of the Tigris-Euphrates area, again reflected even in the shape of some of these pieces of jewelry.

So, we have tried to make the point that for the prophet, the issue then was inner, not outer. Let the true beauty of people let them be attracted to your inner quality, to your character. The outer is fading, and the outer is only fleeting.

And so, again, the Bible comes back to that point. Don't point so much to yourself, that's deceiving, modesty. And true godliness is the most attractive thing, not what you wear.

I want to move on to the Song of the Vineyard, which is in chapter 5, the parable of the vineyard. Chapter 5, verses 1-7. Let me read this.

Has a striking similarity in a number of its places to Mark chapter 12, the parable of the tenants. Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

He dugged it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines. He built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it. And he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded only wild grapes.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray, between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard than that I have not done in it? And when I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge.

It will be devoured. I will break down its wall. It will be trampled down and I will make it a waste.

It will not be pruned or hoed and briars and thorns will grow up. I will also command the clouds that they may not rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting.

He looked for justice, behold bloodshed for righteousness, and behold the cry. There aren't many parables in the Old Testament per se. We have one in the life of David when Nathan nails him and says, Atah Ha'ish, you're the man.

A little parable of a lamb. And that came, of course, as Nathan was holding David accountable for the double sin of adultery and murder. But parables are quite rare in the Old Testament.

Here we have a parable of a vineyard to show that Judah, in keeping with the big theme now, big picture, Isaiah 1-29, judgment. 40-66, hope, redemption, a future. So, in this section, the first half of Isaiah is judgment.

And what you have here is a parable dealing with judgment because Judah has been unfaithful. Despite the fact that Yahweh had given them so much. The parable begins, I will sing for the one I love, or let me sing for my beloved, and I will sing a song concerning his vineyard.

So, the prophet here is singing a song to Yahweh, his beloved. And it's a song concerning his vineyard. Allow the parable to interpret the word vineyard in verse 7. It says the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah.

So, we're talking north and south, the whole nation. The parable concerns viticulture. And, of course, this was a main everyday activity of the Jews agricultural theme that Jesus drew on.

I am the vine, and you are the branches. And Yahweh here plants this vineyard on what is described as a very fertile hill. The site was very fruitful.

Grape vines like sandy or loose soil. They like plenty of sunshine, and it's always a great bonus at night if there can be a lot of dew. That's why the grapes down in Hebron were among the best.

Don't forget when Joshua and Caleb came back to the Promised Land and took the pole with an eshkol, a cluster of fruit they were carrying back on the poles. It included grapes. And they came into the Hebron area as part of the reconnoitering, the spy, spying out the land.

And that's what they brought back from Hebron. Hebron is the high point in the hill country. Hebron down here, 3300 feet above sea level, that's as high as the hill country of Judah gets.

And this is 25-27 miles south of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is 2700. And on Yom Kippur, tractate Yoma of the Talmud says, you cannot start the morning prayers for Yom Kippur until a lookout goes on the top of the walls of Jerusalem, looks south, and can see the hills of Hebron in the distance.

And when he can see the hills of Hebron in the distance, the morning sacrifices can begin. So that kind of stood out there. And if you were standing there in Jerusalem looking south, you would see a peak about 500 feet higher than Jerusalem.

So that was Hebron. It crowned the land in the south, much, in a much smaller way, but similar to how way up here, of course, Mount Hermon crowned the north. So, this was a great grape-growing country because at night, that moisture came on the grapes.

So, you had added moisture. Hebron's pretty far south, comparatively speaking, so it was drier and it was hotter. But that night moisture on the grapes really added to the production there, and it does to this day.

In verse 2, he took the site and gave loving care to it. It's the land of rock and scroll, as we've said many times, and so he had to deal with the rocks. And he cleared this area of stones in this parable.

This is Yahweh preparing the soil for the planting. Not the planting of any vines, but he digs it, breaks up the soil, clears it of stones, and plants it with choice vines. The choicest of vines possible.

He also built a watchtower. Now, the reason you needed a watchtower, and this word, of course, comes into the New Testament. Jesus talks about how you don't build a tower unless you count the cost.

And it's quite like that kind of tower would be in the middle of a vineyard because you had to protect the vineyard from the marauders. There's a fascinating little expression in Song of Songs that talks about beware of the foxes that spoil the vines. Foxes could be one of the marauders.

Cattle that were not being restrained could come in and trample through a vineyard. Poachers could come through the end of August into September, which was the major harvest time of grapes. Same as it is here in the eastern part of the United States.

You go out to western New York State, it's usually September, which is the big month for the vintage people who pick the grapes. And so, it works basically that way. It was an early fall harvest in Israel.

So, the watchtower would be there. You would go out there and sleep there at night. It also gave you that during the day, if you were working on some of the vines, tying them up, propping them up, weeding, or whatever else was involved in caring for the vines, you had some shade in the center of the vineyard.

He talks about in the vineyard making a wine press. Just a little bit about wine presses and wine vats. We have a good number of these in Israel that we can visit from Bible times that are scattered throughout the land.

Usually, you have a wine press that was cut out of solid stone. Usually, it was cut in such a way that the wine would be drawn to, or it was made to slope into a little trough where it would run out of the press. I have in my living room a picture, one of the earliest pictures we have of wine presses, which is interesting.

There's a trellis. This comes from Egypt, 1400-1500 BC on a papyrus. I happen to have it.

But the people who are in the wine press, they're up there holding their hands above on the trellis. You step on a grape, and you can be pretty red in the process by the time you pick yourself up. So, they are using their bare feet, which was what you did in the wine press.

You tread out the grapes. And a number of people would have the grapes brought in by baskets. They were placed around the press, and then people and families would do the pressing.

The wine then would flow, stocks and all, into what was called the wine vat. And the wine would be kept in the vat contained the juice and then it was usually stored in big jugs. We call them an amphora.

Some of the interesting things we learn from Mediterranean shipwrecks is some of the ships in the bottom of these ships that rode the Mediterranean that carried the cargo of wine. There wasn't a lot of wine in Egypt, some wine in Egypt, but they imported a lot from Greece. But these jugs, many of these, were specially designed so they had a pointed base to them that fit into the floor of the ship.

So, if the ship was rocking out there in the Mediterranean, the wine would not go over. It had a stable base through that base, that hole, and a pointed amphora. There are other amphora, obviously, that had a flat base.

Also, people stored wine in what Mark II calls the wineskins. These were goatskins that were basically the canteens that people used in Bible times. And not just canteens, but the earliest evidence we have of armies crossing the Tigris and Euphrates is to use inflated goatskins.

Much like sailors today in basic training are taught how to inflate their pants. So, if the ship goes down, they have something that will hold them up in the water. So, we know great armies in Bible times crossed the Euphrates with these inflated goatskins.



That was their pontoon bridge to get them across. Jesus comments in Mark 11 that you don't put new wine in old wineskins. What's going on there? Well, a wineskin made of goatskin, possibly lambskin or sheepskin, if it's been out there a while, it's gone through the process of fermentation.

Now, it didn't take long for fermentation to begin. It's a rather widely populated myth when you hear people suggesting, as they want to do in certain circles that people drank grape juice and not wine in Bible times. Yeah, there was unfermented grape juice that could be drunk, but it was not fermented.

It was not within a few days of when the grapes were picked and squeezed. But fermentation set in rather rapidly. And that's Jesus' point when you take this freshly squeezed juice and put it in wineskins that have already been stretched out, patched, or mended like the Gibeonites' wineskins they had when they came to Joshua.

If you put new wine in those, they're going to burst. Why? Because when wine ferments, it's pop, pop, pop, pop as the gases expand, and Jesus says, no, you don't put new wine in old wineskins, else they're going to burst. They're going to break open, split open.

So, you put new wine in really new wineskins, so there can be elasticity. It won't break. They can expand naturally through the process of the giving off of that gas as the fermentation process.

So, the vat then was the place where wine was scooped up. Sometimes it was allowed to settle because there were skins, there were particles, there were stems, and you had to sort through all of that to help to purify the wine. Alright, so he talks about the wine vat being a part of this process.

The reason I took a little time on this is because I just wanted to take you back to the agricultural trio we've been talking about, the grain, the wine, the oil. And don't forget the cluster of raisins that was offered to Baal. We remember that in the beginning of Hosea.

So, this was a big part of the culture. The Canaanites had it, the Hebrews had it, and wine typically was diluted with water. That's something which would be unheard of in the early days in our modern culture, but it's the way you stretched wine was by adding water to it.

We know the ancient Romans even added salt water or sea water to stretch wine. So many parts wine to so many parts water, which simply meant if people were going to get drunk, they had to consume a lot more wine than it would be today, which is another thing to factor in why people drank in the ancient world, and were not always drunk. This was so much a part of the culture.

It was the dilution. And even Isaiah chapter 1 speaks about the dishonesty of the people of his day. If you read in 1:22, if you were a merchant who was supposed to be selling wine that was straight and undiluted, that would be a way of skimping, much like Amos talks about the merchants who adjust their scales and their weights, so you think you're getting so much wheat, and you're being cheated on the scales.

That little line in Isaiah 1:22 is really a line that deals with justice. He's reigning this unfaithful city. What does verse 21 say? It's a city that should be full of justice and righteousness, but now, what are you? You're a people whose wine is mixed with water.

You're diluted. And that's just one of the things from everyday life. Well, it likely misses our eye when we first see it, but everyone can cut corners in their profession.

It happens in business. The first home I built, I built, no, I would never build a home. The first home I ever lived in, we went to a realtor, and the realtor said, well, you know if you're going to live in this town, you have to be sure you get a home that's built by two neighbors.

And the realtor said, by two nail? I said, what do you mean by two nail? He said, well, we had two brothers. They were in the construction business. They got along fine until one of them started to skimp on the use of materials and tried to save money and cut costs, but was presenting his work as really good solid stuff, and customers were getting high-quality stuff when, in fact, it wasn't.

So, in the real estate business, after those brothers eventually had a quarrel over this kind of deception, one wanted to save money by using a lower-quality of material, and the other one wanted to be ethical in giving the customer what they thought they were paying for when they were building a new home and buying one. So, the realtor said, make sure you buy a home built by what she called two nail Farina, not one nail Farina. So, the reputation in town was one nail or two nails.

So, we said we're going to look for a two-nail home. We found one for \$13,800, and that was our first home. It's probably not enough to go through a semester in college—barely these days—but we did get a two-nail home.

It was good. It didn't fall apart while we were there. A few more things about the parable of the vineyard.

God as owner of the vineyard, verse 3, is going to pass a judgment on the vineyard, namely Judah and Jerusalem. And he's going to make a decision regarding his case. He's the judge.

He builds his case, you'll notice, much like Micah. Remember what Micah did? Micah laid out all of the wonderful mercies and advantages and acts of grace and kindness that Yahweh bestowed upon his people, the leaders he gave them, the redemption he brought them from Egypt, etc., etc. You notice the appeal is the same way here.

He had manifested overwhelming grace toward his people. No fault in Yahweh. There was nothing more that I could do for the vineyard.

I gave it a great start, great opportunity. But when I look for it to yield grapes, for it to be a great opportunity, fruitful, not necessarily Ephraim, which remember means doubly fruitful, but just fruitful. It actually yielded wild grapes, unusable grapes.

Or, as the NIV puts it, it yielded only bad fruit. So, he then comes to his conclusion. I tell you then what I will do with my vineyard.

I'm going to remove its hedge. Now, vineyards needed a hedge. Usually, the hedge was made of stones.

It was a wall to protect the vineyard. Sometimes it was a prickly plant. Sometimes it was a vine.

You could build a wall of protection around the vineyard to keep out predators. But when the protection of the vineyard is removed, then cattle, foxes, anything can come in there and trample the vineyard. So, he says it will be devoured, the vineyard.

And when these foreign elements come in, they will affect the vineyard and the grape production. It will become a place of being trampled down. It will be made a place of waste.

He says not going to be pruned or hoed and what you're going to get is briars and thorns rather than a place for great viticulture. So, God is the owner of the vineyard and he alone can control the elements which affect the vineyard. Now, he builds to his climax and this is the best part because he's got another great point of paranomasia.

He's got another great point he comes to. He says the vineyard of the Lord of the Hosts is the house of Israel and Judah. He looked for mishpat, but what he got was mishpak.

He looked for zedakah, but behold he got ze'akah. I'll put the words up there so you can see the puns, the plays that he is making. This is one of the most powerful word plays we have in the prophets.

First of all, he looked for mishpat. He looked for tzedakah. He looked for mishpak.

He looked for mishpak. Mishpak occurs many, many times in the Hebrew Bible. It comes from a root shaphat meaning to judge and mishpat is justice or more properly judgment given by a judge.

A judge is a shophet. In the Hebrew Bible, what's the name for the book of Judges? Shophetim. And so, Yahweh looks for his people to act justly because mishpat is a mode of action, and as Heschel reminds us, it's a strict and exact way of giving another his due.

Mishpat refers to justice. It takes us to what is legal and what is right. It's a reminder of what the law states.

But as Heschel very nicely points out, justice in the Hebraic tradition is quite different from how people in the modern world understand justice. Justice for many in the modern world is what I'm entitled to. My entitlement, my legal right, my right but Heschel points out it's not what I have a legal claim to but it's also, it's really in the end a two-way street.

It's what the other person is entitled to also. That's justice from a biblical point of view. It denotes not simply what I may claim, my right, but what I am duty bound to acknowledge and to give and that is the right to someone else.

So, it cuts both ways. What I may claim as well as what is fair and just and what I am bound to ensure the other person receives as well. Again, many Christian attorneys would say when people enter litigation and come out of a court, when both parties go away unsatisfied, that's usually the best sign that justice has been done.

When you hear one party go out and say, man did we really take them and clean up on that one? Usually, justice has not been done. Okay, Mishpat, justice. It's a way of acting.

Instead of justice, he had mispak which was bloodshed. Striking contrast. He looked for a way to get justice for tzedakah.

Zedakah or as modern Israelis call it zedakah, often equating it with charity, but he looks for righteousness. Righteousness is often coupled with Mishpat. It goes beyond a Mishpat and extends to the quality of the person.

It implies that the person is not a philanthropic, generous, benevolent spirit to one when you are involved in righteousness. You have, as Heschel puts it, a burning compassion for the oppressed. That is righteousness.

So, it deals with the mode of the person, not simply what somebody else is entitled to. It speaks of what's in your heart as you're orientated toward community, toward other people with compassion and kindness. Instead of tzedakah, ze'akah, a cry is given.

It is the plea of the victim to receive aid in the face of some injustice. It's a term of deep feeling and pathos. You'll find this word used in Exodus 3:7 where Israel responds to the taskmasters of Egypt with tzedakah.

They cried out from their affliction. This being Passover week, we relive that history. Tzedakah, Exodus 3.7. Genesis 19.13, the outcry of the pain of those being oppressed.

I'll just read that verse. Exodus 19.13, it's Sodom and Gomorrah. And it says, The outcry to the Lord against His people is so great that He has sent us to destroy it.

The outcry. Many scholars believe the main sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was the insensitivity to the poor. Not a problem of sexuality.

And there's evidence certainly in the prophets to argue that way. This word, the outcry. Could it be there was oppression? Could it be people were being denied basic human rights? As part of the problem there at Sodom and Gomorrah.

The word is used for the cry of the oppressed. So then, the song of the vineyard. Again, what does the prophet call? Justice, righteousness.

Two very important terms that capture the concern of the prophet. It's not the outward, but it's the action that counts.

This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is session number 29, Isaiah, Select Themes.