

Dr. Marv Wilson, Prophets, Session 35, Isaiah, Key Texts

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This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is his final lecture, Lecture 35 on Key Texts from Isaiah.

I'm ready to start.

Let's have a word of prayer to begin. This day, we come before you, thanking you for your faithfulness. Each day is a gift. We get up each day. It's not automatic. You're the one that keeps our heart beating.

You're the one that keeps our mind fresh and alert. You're the one that's given us a reason for living today. We thank you for calling us unto yourself in a world of darkness.

We don't understand that, but we marvel at the grace of God and your calling on each of our lives. The same God who's brought us into the light of the gospel and giving us different places in the vineyard where he wants to deploy us. And some of these places are short-stopping points in life. And then there are new turning points. Help us to follow you faithfully. Thank you for the word of God that chronicles a faithful God with a people.

And though they had end runs and went into cul-de-sacs and many other challenging experiences, we thank you that you never left them. And we know that's true of our lives also. So help us to take heart as we read the prophets, knowing the one who began a good work with Israel and said he would continue it until the end is the same God that began a good work in us in the past and reminds us there's a future beyond Gordon. And for that we thank you through Christ our Lord. Amen.

All right, a couple things to remind you of.

Monday the 16th at 2.30 will be the final exam. Keep in mind we've said that several times. We've corrected the syllabus.

So, it will be Monday at 2.30. It will cover specifically all reading from April 8th through May 9th, as the syllabus indicates. And the lecture material it will cover will start with Isaiah 6 through today. In addition, I may give a course synthesis question on the final.

It's nothing you can specifically study for. But if I give that kind of a question, it would draw on various themes from the whole experience this semester. All right, do you

have any questions on that? At the very end of today's class, if you would do a course evaluation, I'd appreciate it.

And I want to get back to some of the selected favorite texts of Isaiah. We're looking at a variety that I want to make some comments on. Some of the comments are exegetical.

Some of them are textual. Some of them are practical. Some of them are homiletical.

Some of them are historical. I mentioned last time the Dead Sea Scrolls and how they have affected a few readings in Isaiah. They have reinforced the overall picture, namely that now we have a tradition textually that goes back more than a thousand years earlier than the full Hebrew Old Testament we had, which was 1010 A.D. Now this text has not suffered from enormous corruption, everything hand copied, but it affirms the essential purity of the text, the integrity of the text through the copying process.

So, the Bible we have today is the same Bible Jesus used. A word on hymnology, especially because it pertains to A.J. Gordon. A.J. Gordon wrote two hymns, and one of his less popular hymns is based on Isaiah 33:17. If you go to the hymnal in the chapel, it's called The King in His Beauty.

That expression is taken from 33:17. It says, Your eyes will see the king in his beauty, and view a land that stretches far. Now in this section, in the chapter which immediately preceded, for example, chapter 32.1 says, See, a king will reign in righteousness, and rulers will rule with justice. Here, he seems to be alluding to the Messianic age.

That's when you get the righteous king, and that's when justice and righteousness comes to this earth. So, my guess would be, contextually, the allusion here is, this king and his beauty is probably an allusion to the Messianic age. The text here says it will be a land, literally, of distances.

A land that stretches far, as the NIV puts it. Stretches in all directions. So, probably, it implies the universal rule of the Messiah.

Again, Zechariah 14:9 states that he will be, the Messiah, king over all of the earth. This idea of level land stretching for a distance is compared with the present condition of land occupied by an enemy. So, the glorious reign of the Messiah.

Another reference, some of these I just quickly want to allude to. In 35:3, the book of Hebrews in the New Testament draws extensively from the Hebrew Bible. Hebrews 12:12 quotes Isaiah 35:3, Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way.

It was a time for fear and trembling in Isaiah's day, with the enemy on the doorstep. Remember, it was during Isaiah's reign that Assyria did come down. Isaiah's reign stretches all the way down to about 680, and it was 701, 20 years earlier, when he cleaned up all of the southern kingdom, certainly Judah, and that was knocking on the door of Jerusalem.

So, this fear and trembling, when the hands sink, and the knees totter. And this encouragement to be strong, it's to be strong in the Lord, it's the same kind of encouragement, which we read in the very next verse, 35.4, Say to those with fearful hearts, be strong, do not fear, your God will come. Those were the same words spoken to Joshua in the first chapter of Joshua.

Do not be fearful, but strong. Be courageous. And this is how Scripture balances, we've seen in the prophets, the contrasts, and this is the human response to terror, the divine answer.

As a local rabbi told a group of Gordon students, again, the most frequently found command in the Bible, be not afraid. Probably most of us would not have chosen that one, but from the Hebrew Bible, he said that's the most frequently repeated command in the Bible, fear not. Here's another version of that in light of the potential Assyrian invasion.

In 38:19, just want to make a comment there, some of us are here today because of paradosis, to use the Greek word in the New Testament, or Masorah, to use the word from the Hebrew Bible. It's because of truth which got handed down door to door, generation to generation. And certainly, paradidomi in the New Testament, which means to deliver over, to hand down, to pass along, to transmit.

And so, the idea of tradition. The oral tradition was a very, very important part of our heritage. Keep in mind the first book didn't roll off the printing press until the 1450s.

That was the clumsy Gutenberg Bible in Latin. So, everything pretty much had to be handwritten. And so, you had to rely, because of the lack of books, just manuscripts, to the oral tradition.

And so Isaiah suggests here about the importance of generational communication of truth, the continuity of the promises of God. Fathers tell their children about your emet, about your faithfulness. And so faith is not something with just a forward look.

One of the reasons we have confidence today is because faith has a backward look to it. He has been emet. He has been faithful.

He has been faithful. And remember how the rabbis do a number on this emet, first and middle and last word of the Hebrew Bible. It's a very, very important word they flag.

Because the word means reliable and trustworthy, it's what you can depend on, emet. So, truth is what you rely on.

Emet is sometimes translated as truth. But that truth is door-la-door, generation to generation. And many of us are here today because we've had faithful grandparents and parents.

We pass that on. That's the genius of the best teaching possible, according to 1 Timothy 4:4, where Paul talks about four generations of teachers. He received it, and he passed it on to others who will be faithful witnesses also.

In chapter 40, verses 6 and 8, this passage is picked up and quoted in 1 Peter 1:24 and 25. Which contrasts the transient nature of man. You know, the only psalm in the Bible attributed to Moses is Psalm 90.

And it's a psalm that deals with the transient, sudden, quick, fleeting, passing nature of life. From everlasting to everlasting, you are God, but you turn men back to dust. God is everlasting, but men come back to dust.

You sweep men away in the sleep of death. The length of our days is 70 years or 80 if we have the strength. Psalm 90, verse 10.

And so, he kind of comes to his denouement on this point in verse 12. So, teach us to count or number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Heart of wisdom, a wise heart.

Very important to the writers of the Hebrew Bible. What's the contrast here? Isaiah 40 says all men are like grass. So just as this psalm attributed to Moses puts it, they are and they're glorious like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers, the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever. Chapter 40, verse 8. I think on a personal level, one of the things that propelled me into teaching scripture as part of my own personal journey of faith was the fact you're dealing with something that's beyond yourself. That is, that has an eternal value to it.

I found that very appealing. I look at short order cooks. I look at people that build houses which someday will be bulldozed.

I look at other kinds of professions that are very kind of short-lived in value. But when you're dealing with scripture, it is eternal. And here, man is not enduring, is not permanent compared with the word of God.

Man has a transitoriness and a weakness to him. One of your keywords of Ecclesiastes, Kohelet, is hevel. Chevel is your breath on a cold morning.

While the word vanity is sometimes used for it, it really means what is fleeting, what is passing, and what is quickly gone. And it's one of the words, by the way, our Jewish friends, whenever they have a burial, they repeat a number of times the word hevel as they carry the corpse into the cemetery. Life, humanly speaking, compared with we are like the flower, like the grass, but it quickly withers and dies.

But in contrast, the word of our Lord stands forever. And that gives me hope. It is the eternal word of God.

And that's part of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5.18. The same point is made there, not just in 1 Peter. Another point I want to make in chapter 40, just to show you how punctuation can differ in Scripture. In chapter 40, which starts out, Nachamu, nachamu, ami, comfort ye, comfort me, comfort ye my people.

Parakeleo, in Greek, comes alongside in the sense of encouraging and comforting. And the announcement in verse 3, of course, in the New Testament, in three of the Gospels, a voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord. This is John the Baptist.

There is no hint of John the Baptist here; although John had a prophetic voice to him, he did exactly what the prophets of Israel have been doing all semester, calling people to repentance, teshuvah. What I'm interested in here is, in the poetry of the Hebrew in 40 verse 3, it's set up like this: a voice of one calling, calling, calling, in the desert, prepare the way of the Lord. Or the parallel passage, make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God, which implies probably an ancient Near Eastern monarch in the preparation.

You remove the rough spots, and you smooth it out. If the Pope were coming to make a pastoral call in Brooklyn, he wouldn't have to climb seven stairs of a tenement to pray for somebody. They'd find a way with an elevator.

They'd smooth it out as much as possible. What I find interesting here is the punctuation in John 1:23, Matthew 3:3 and Mark 1:3 is different. John says I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness.

That's where John in the wilderness of Judea, where he was located. And then the quote starts, prepare the way of the Lord. That's where the quote starts in the New Testament.

In Isaiah, it's different. And so, scholars sometimes argue over punctuation. But all I'm pointing out to you here is that there are different ways in which the writers of the New Testament make use of the Old Testament.

It was not mechanical. It was sometimes used in such a way in which they took Old Testament texts, and kind of adapted them for their own purposes. We saw that in the battle cry of the Reformation, the just will live by faith.

In Habakkuk's day the righteous man, the just man, lives out his life faithfully. Paul comes along in Romans 1.16 and 17 or wherever it is. My memory may fail me there.

But he's involved in a faith works controversy. He also talks about faith in Christ as the object of faith. Which certainly was in no way the immediate concern of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk's call was, look, Babylon's on your doorstep. Rely on God. Be faithful day by day.

That's how you should live. Reliance, firm, steadfast commitment to the Almighty God. Live by Emunah.

That's how you live. So, Paul comes along and has a different take on that. My point here is don't have preconceived or mechanical pre-thinking about how writers must quote.

It's not like you're writing a term paper today. Writers were looking for different kinds of things. Sometimes, they hint.

Sometimes they make nuances. Sometimes it's a verbatim quote. A whole variety of different kinds of uses they make of scripture.

John was calling people to get ready. The Messiah was here and he was doing a baptism of righteousness of the repentance of people's sins in preparation for the big event. So, he was calling people.

And so, the wilderness is not the important thing. Although he was in the wilderness of Judah, he had come up into the Jordan Valley. That's where he was doing his baptism.

Not in the wilderness. So, he's calling people to prepare. We're in the Jordan.

We don't know exactly. There are a number of possible places where he, the mikvah man of the Bible, did his immersing. We sometimes hear the expression drop in a bucket.

That comes from Isaiah. Isaiah has influenced some of the expressions we use in everyday life--chapter 40, verse 15.

The nations are like a drop in a bucket. Here's the estimate God places upon the nations. And he really doesn't need their counsel, nor man's.

It's interesting in presidential candidates when they include scripture in their addresses. In order to keep everyone happy, they usually dip into the Old Testament rather than the New. I remember Lyndon Baines Johnson came to the president.

He quoted from 1 Kings chapter 3 from Solomon. The prayer was a prayer for wisdom. The giving of a hearing heart, the Hebrew says.

I'm young. I don't know how to go out or come in. I need wisdom in judging this people.

I remember in 1972 when Nixon and McGovern had a presidential contest. Remember, in McGovern's conceding speech, he included Isaiah 40, verse 31. Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

They will soar in wings like the neshar, like the eagle. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

And here again, what is spirituality? Allah, the Hebrew Bible, it's life is walking with God. It's a journey. Run, walk, and God renews you for the journey.

Some of you have grandparents and a few of you have great-grandparents. You need to be encouraged in their latter years. Isaiah is a wonderful verse that you could take to the seniors in your family or if you go in a nursing home.

Isaiah 46, verse 4, even to your old age and gray hairs, I am He. I am He who will sustain you. I have made you, and I will carry you.

God does not ditch us during the journey, even when our physical and mental faculties are failing. And that's an encouraging word of hope for old age. All of us are interested in missions, and it's interesting how the book of Isaiah has influenced various people in different ways.

Take William Carey who went to what country? India. William Carey. Found in chapter 54, verse 2, the verse that was very meaningful to him.

He was a shoemaker in England. And this interesting verse, which, if you go back to the verse prior to this, Jerusalem is described or symbolized here as a woman living in a nomadic kind of tent, a nomad's tent. This chapter eventually talks about the future glory of Zion, but verse 2 here specifically says, enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back, lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.

Now, this general idea of enlargement sort of sounds like the prayer of Jabez, which has gotten a lot of mileage and a lot of money. Have you ever read the prayer of Jabez? Think big. Any part of the Bible that tells you to think big.

Here, Jerusalem is symbolized as a woman living in a tent; this may imply that offspring, spiritual offspring, are going to come from afar. Certainly, in the province of God, in the Messianic age, both Jews and Gentiles would be included in the make-up of God's people. And so, Judaism has always been a religion that has not just looked in; it has looked out.

Samuel Sandmel, who is one of the great Jewish scholars of the middle part of the last century, writing on Christianity, said the missionary impulse of early Christianity was founded on an earlier Jewish missionary impulse. And so, starting in Jerusalem, Samaria, and to the outermost parts of the world, or as Isaiah puts it, the coastlands await for your law, anticipating that it's not just Abraham in this particular covenant, but all nations will be blessed through you, Abraham, and through your seed. So, this expanded tent, and if we can look at God's people as part of a tent, and as the family grows, you add to the tent, a tent, you can sew on new parts to keep everyone under the tent.

Well, William Carey thought beyond his own limits, and as Jerusalem is urged to do, God, as verse 5 puts it, is called the God of all the earth, and he's anxious as the God of all the earth to reach all people. One of the beautiful ways that anticipates the gospel is found in 55:1. We all know the gospel is free, and grace is free, but some of the figures and pictures that are used in the Hebrew Bible anticipate this. 55:1 is the picture of the water cellar in the streets of Jerusalem in a semi-arid climate where people get dehydrated, particularly in the late spring and the summer months.

So, in Jerusalem, which was Isaiah's hometown, he imagines a scene here of the person who's the water vendor going through the streets. Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, except this water vendor is different. You who have no money, come, buy, even eat.

I got some other stuff here. In fact, I get some great stuff. Come, buy wine and halav, milk, without money and without cost.

Notice the emphasis here where he starts out in the figure of a familiar scene in the streets of Jerusalem and from the everyday life scene of the water seller. He then makes his point about slaking spiritual thirst. Why spend your money on what is not bread, your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen to me and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest affair.

So, he's talking about something spiritual here. We must buy without money. Why? Because, as Proverbs puts it, wisdom cannot be gotten for gold.

Romans 6.23, the gift of God is eternal life. And I think the picture here is the water seller is only going to satisfy you for 30 minutes, and then you're going to be thirsty again. And the spiritual thirst, or John's gospel, the living water, which Jesus offers the woman at the well, is of a different order.

So, the invitation to the thirsty here is to the water of life, and wine and milk symbolize abundance, etc. A couple others quickly I want to mention. 56.5, you've been to Jerusalem, you've been to the Holocaust Museum, the Yad Vashem, which in the last couple of years has moved into a beautiful new high-tech facility.

It gets its name from Isaiah 56:5, the words a memorial and a name. Yad is the Hebrew word for your hand. Yad.

What's a Yad look like? It looks like, shaped sort of like a rounded monument you might see in a cemetery. So, that's why it's translated a memorial, it's a monument memorial, and a name, Yad Vashem, to remember the people of the Holocaust. And the name was equal to people and their reputation.

In the same chapter, you go on two verses further, written over more synagogue doors in the world. Is this verse more than any other single verse? In fact, this verse is even quoted from in the New Testament, it's so important. My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, Isaiah 56:7, which means no one can ever keep you out of a synagogue.

It was to be a Bet Ha-Tefillah, a house of prayer. Remember, when you study the New Testament, you don't see this in the Old Testament tabernacle. When you look at Herod's Temple, there was a court for the Gentiles, which is just a reminder that people who were non-Jewish did come to the Temple.

It was to be a place of prayer for all people. When I have done so many of these trips with Gordon students to synagogues, I always point out that you're always welcome

at a synagogue to come to study, to pray, to visit. It is a house of prayer for all people.

All you need to do is bring out that verse and get your ticket punched with that verse. The only exception is during the high holidays when you need tickets because it's very, very crowded. Some of you have been to the synagogue with me, and there's only one place in the Bible that says every Shabbat, there should be an Onik Shabbat.

Oneg Shabbat, Oneg, O-N-E-G, means delight. And Onik Shabbat comes from one place in the Bible, and that's 58:13. It says that if you call the Sabbath a delight. And so typically, in every synagogue on a Friday evening, following the Torah reading service, there's an Onik Shabbat, which has reference to a fellowship hour, sharing refreshments, schmoozing with friends, and occasionally set speakers or programs.

I've taken at least 12 years, Gordon students, to put on programs at local synagogues for an Onik Shabbat. That's where the expression comes from, making the Sabbath a delight, not a drag. A few other things in that 58th chapter.

It's a great chapter on fasting, and what is the fasting God desires, to deal with injustice, oppression, care for the hungry, the homeless, the naked. I mean, this is the Old Testament version of Matthew 25. In the great and final roundup, where the sheep and the goats are separated, Matthew 25.31-46, the language here is virtually identical to the things people cared to do for others.

And here again, priestly religion, fasting, vis-a-vis prophetic religion, action. Again, it appears at times it's calling for either or, but of course it's both and in the Old Testament context. In hymnology, some of you are familiar with Beulah Land.

We've reached the land of corn and wine. Beulah Land. To be astute in the way you hear the words of hymnals in your generation, I think, misses out on something.

Our praise choruses are as good as they are and as repetitious as they are, which is Semitic, so I'll give credit that far to repeat things. The Hebrews did that. But the content, the biblical allusions to Israel's history, to Bible verses, and so forth.

Where's Beulah Land? Well, ba'al in Hebrew means to marry. And beulah means married. And when you look at 62:4 and 5, Zion is going to have a new name.

And God says, for Zion's sake, I'm not going to keep silent. For Jerusalem's sake, I will not remain quiet. And there was a time when Jerusalem was overrun by enemies.

In verse 4, it was deserted, it was desolate, but you're going to have a new name, Hepsibah. My mother threatened if she had a daughter, her Hepi or Hepsibah, which is a beautiful name. It's a feminine name.

Hepsibah means my delight, and my pleasure is in her. And your land will be called Beulah or married land. For the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married.

So, Zion is now God's holy bride as opposed to a spouse who was guilty of infidelity. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. And so, after 1 to 39 was far more judgment.

These last chapters of Isaiah are far more positive, encouraging chapters that bring hope. Even Paul's influence from this book, 64.8, we are the clay, you are the potter, we are the work of your hand. Even Paul uses that image from the prophets.

Clay in the potter's hand to make vessels, to mold and to shape. We are the clay, and you are the potter. I think that's a wonderful anthropomorphic.

God is making a work of art out of each of our lives, as Heschel puts it. Each work of art is going to be different. But the moldability, the flexibility, the pliability is key.

To me, this has been one of the great experiences about teaching at Gordon, having people who are open to learn. That's the peti learner of the book of Proverbs, the one literally who is open. We translate it literally simple, but it's the one who's teachable, educable, pliable, who can be indeed a learner.

And that's one of the best places to be for your whole life. Like clay, learn new things, and learning happens. It's a lifelong sentence.

You're at the intensive stage of things. But every day, like dogs, we learn new tricks. So, humans learn new things in the school of faith.

All right, that's my last word from my course in the prophets, and on Isaiah we end. Kevin's going to do a course evaluation quickly and we'll be all set and finish everything up.

This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is his final lecture, Lecture 35 on Key Texts from Isaiah.