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God's Complaint



Isaiah: A Topical Look At Isaiah - Steve Gregg

In "God's Complaint", Steve Gregg draws parallels between the sins of Israel and Judah and the current state of the United States. He highlights how America, like Israel, has rejected the knowledge of God and spurned Him, even going as far as committing wicked sins. Gregg emphasizes the importance of understanding that true worship is not about religious ritual but instead involves a worshipful heart, meeting the needs of the poor, and not resorting to idols or syncretism. Ultimately, Gregg reminds listeners of the importance of staying true to God's standards and not becoming complacent in their faith.

Transcript

Well, today, I'd like for us to talk in this session about some of the specific sins of Israel and Judah that the prophet Isaiah complained of. And it wasn't just that Isaiah had something in his craw, he had the burden of the Lord. And the burden of the Lord means he felt what God feels about things.

He was burdened with the things that burdened God. And God described himself as being burdened by these people. He says they were a burden to him because of their wickedness.

And one of the advantages of studying this is seeing that God is angry at a nation, especially a nation that knows him or has access to the knowledge of him, but who resorts to these things that Israel and Judah did. And obviously we cannot help when we read these things but think of our own society and how it has followed in the same way. Certainly I do not equate, in terms of significance, the United States with Israel.

But there are some parallels in history insofar as the United States, more than most countries in the past, did have a high degree of knowledge of God and has gone the same way that Israel has in terms of rejection of the knowledge of God and spurning God, even going into some of the most wicked sins that any nation has ever been into as if we never knew God. And that is how both Israel and Judah were. And if we were to catalog the sins of those nations that Isaiah brings up, it makes a very long list.

I'd like to, in fact, make that list and look at the scriptures about it. It is helpful for us to remind ourselves of the kinds of things that God finds abominable. We are, as many people have pointed out, to some extent like a frog in a kettle.

If the kettle is not too hot when the frog is put in, it can be raised gradually to a boiling point. The frog will die without ever realizing that the temperature has risen to mortal levels. Of course, if you put a frog into a boiling pot, it'll jump out if it can.

But if you just leave it in a pot that's gradually getting hotter, it will stay there, apparently. I've never tried this, but there's many people who've said this is true. And it's not a very original observation to say that our society or Christians in this society are in danger of being like the frog in the kettle because, by stages, the assumptions of our culture just kind of intrude.

I mean, we're initially shocked at certain things when we first see them, and then we're less shocked and just a little disgusted. Eventually, we realize it's not really politically correct even to be disgusted. We just disagree with certain things.

And after a while, we're not so sure we ought to disagree. I mean, no one else seems to disagree anymore. And maybe we're just being too old-fashioned.

Maybe we ought to lighten up a little bit. And then we begin to be tolerant of things. And, obviously, the next step in that continuum is indulgence.

And this is the tendency. And that's where the Word of God really needs to be consulted continually. And our minds need to be bathed in it because it never lets us get very far down that path before confronting things that we now... I mean, all the things we'll list here, we would call them sin.

But to a certain extent, these things are practiced in our society without us being overly shocked, and possibly even among ourselves to a degree, creeping in. The first sin of Israel and Judah is one that a pagan nation could never commit. And that is forsaking God.

And this is something God complains about right at the beginning. In Isaiah chapter 1 in verse 4, he says, Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corruptors, they have forsaken the Lord. They have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel.

They have turned away backward. Now, as I say, not all nations could be accused of this because most nations have never been close to God. I suppose the nations of Western Europe have been nominally Christian for many centuries.

You know, I didn't realize this until a few years ago, but America, which many Christians in America think of America as a Christian nation, and we truly did have in many

respects Christian beginnings, America is less officially a Christian nation than most of the nations in Europe were because most of the national charters of those nations actually named Jesus Christ as Lord of their nation. If you go back far enough, Germany and France and Italy and England, all of them in their original national charters, they named Jesus Christ as the Lord, Lord of lords and King of kings, where none of our national founding documents mention Jesus Christ. They mention a creator, and there's obviously theism there, but this nation never ever did acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord in its official documents.

Now, of course, for all that's worth, I mean, look at the European nations now. Their documents say it, but they're about as far from God as anyone could be. In most cases, and so are we getting that way.

So I'm not sure it matters a great deal what the national documents say. It has more to do with what the national spirit is, and I would say that possibly in terms of real Christianity, real knowledge of God, America probably in its beginnings and through most of its history was closer to God than most of the countries in Europe ever were, even though they were Lutheran countries and Catholic countries and things like that. Most of those countries did not define being a Christian in terms of conversion.

They defined Christian in terms of being part of an institutional church, and in that sense probably never really knew God very much at all, except for the minority of them, whereas one difference in America has been that we never have defined being a Christian in terms of being an American. And although there are certainly those denominations in this country that have defined Christianity as just being a member of their denomination, there's been a much stronger evangelical movement in this part of the world than in Western Europe. And in that sense, we are more culpable.

We have known God probably better than most of the European nations have, and besides the European and American and Australian nations, most nations have not known God at all. I think that America stands most guilty of any modern nation, with the possible exception of Israel itself, the modern state of Israel. Certainly Israel had more opportunities than any nation, even than us.

After all, they were God's chosen people, and still the majority of Jews today are atheists. They are not believers in God, and the ones who do believe in God, the vast majority, don't believe in Jesus. And so I would say Israel, if there's any nation more culpable than America, it would be modern Israel.

But I'd say both are pretty much on a similar level. Now, forsaking God, as I say, is something that can only happen to a nation that once knew God. And while I do not claim that America was a Christian country in the strictest sense of that word, it certainly was, in modern times, the nation most affected by Christianity, it would seem, say a century or two ago.

Now, the complaint God had against Israel and Judah is that they forsook God, and this makes them more guilty than a nation that never knew God and never forsook Him. Jesus said, in I think the 13th chapter or the 12th chapter of Luke, He said, That servant who knew his master's will and did not prepare himself or do his master's will, will be beaten with many stripes. But that servant who did not know his master's will, but did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few stripes.

In other words, the servant who, two servants, both do the same thing, worthy of stripes, but one knew better and one didn't. The one who knew better will be beaten with more stripes than the other. They're more guilty in the sight of God.

Jesus said that the judgment will be more lenient for Sodom in the day of judgment than for Capernaum. Why? Well, because Capernaum saw all the miracles of Jesus and didn't repent. Sodom didn't repent either, but they never saw those miracles.

Now, Leonard Ravenhill had a book called Sodom Had No Bible. I've never read it, but I presume what he's pointing out is we do, and we live like Sodom, and therefore we're more guilty than Sodom. Sodom didn't have a Bible.

Sodom didn't have the light we have. And yet, Sodom was judged, and we are guilty of many of the same sins, and therefore we should be. Now, forsaking God is something God complains about a great deal of Israel and Judah.

In chapter 5, verse 24, it says, Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom will ascend like dust, because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Again, a pagan nation can never be accused of this. They've never had the law of God in order to reject it, but Israel had rejected it.

They had known and rejected it. Now, I believe that the wrath of God burns hot against those who know and reject, and burns cool against those who never knew and did not reject. In fact, you know, the Bible says in Romans 1.18, that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness.

It says in 2 Thessalonians, that those who did not receive the love of the truth, God sends them strong delusion, so that they might believe a lie and be condemned. Jesus said in John chapter 3, This is the condemnation of the world, that light was in the world, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Now, this is what really condemns people before God, is that light was there, but they loved the darkness.

Now, people who never had much light, they're still condemned because they have some. Everybody has some light. If they don't know the Bible, they at least have a

conscience that they violate.

Everybody has some moral insight, and everybody violates the light they have. But violation of little light is not as criminal as the violation of a great deal of light. And it's the rejection of what one is entitled to know, or is enabled to know from God, that is so offensive.

So, when he says, they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel, this is a far worse thing that can be said of them, than can be said of any pagan nation around them. In Isaiah 31, and verse 6, Isaiah says, Return to him against whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted. Their sins are not simply the sins like any other nation has sins.

They are a sign of revolt, of a revolution against God, against their king. And that, as I say, is one of the prevailing, recurring complaints in chapter 59 of Isaiah, in verses 1 and 2. He says, Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor is his ear heavy that it cannot hear, but your iniquities have separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. They have been connected to God before, but they have been separated from God by their sins.

A wall of alienation has been erected by their sins, and therefore they are guilty of turning from God, or of alienating themselves from God by the choices they've made. Now, what kind of choices? One of the things that God is most offended by is that while they have in fact forsaken God, they have not forsaken the appearance of religiosity. This is something that is common in probably any religion.

We know this is true in Islam, this is true in Christendom, and it's apparently always been true in Judaism too. I don't know about other religions, I suppose that human nature being what it is, probably all religions have this problem. That people are converted to them, in many cases sincerely, but eventually when carnality reigns, and they seek to find ways to justify their sins, their secret sins, and they can keep them secret, they still keep up the outward appearance of religiosity.

And this is either knowingly deceiving people, or else worse yet, they don't even know they're deceivers. They think that outward trappings in ritual religion is all that matters. This is certainly the case with many religious people in the world today.

A lot of people I know who are Roman Catholics seem to think that it doesn't really matter a great deal how they live their lives, so long as they stay current on their confession, and rosaries, and Hail Marys, and things like that. In other words, you do the ritual, and it buys you an indulgence, as it were. And of course, Protestants have their own alternate forms of that, and the Jews did too.

In the Jewish religion, it was the offering of sacrifices, the burning of incense, and this

was the ritual aspect of their religion. And of course, what Jesus pointed out in his teaching is that God never really was all that wild about ritual religion. What he wanted all the time is that people love their neighbors themselves.

And Hosea 6.6, which was quoted twice by Jesus in Matthew, says, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. In other words, what God desires people is to be merciful people, loving people, not so much that they offer animal sacrifices. Now, this doesn't mean he didn't approve of animal sacrifices, or was seeking to abolish them in Hosea's day.

It simply is saying this is where God's priorities are. And also that famous verse we all know in Micah 6.8 that says, He has showed the old man what is good, and what does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. That is preceded in the same passage, Micah 6, by the inquiry, what does God want? Shall I bring thousands of rams and sacrifice them to God? Shall I bring rivers of oil and pour them out before the Lord? Shall I sacrifice my firstborn for the Lord? I mean, using hyperbole, you know, how much sacrifice, how much ritual does God demand of me anyway? And the answer is, He has shown you what is good and what the Lord requires, but to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly.

Now, he's looking for good character. He's looking for integrity. He's looking for real righteousness, not religion, not external ceremonies.

And Judaism, in its law, had, of course, a lot of ceremony. And the reason it did was not because God was so taken with ceremonies and such a religious guy, but because He wanted to teach principles that would be fulfilled in Christ. The principles of substitutionary atonement and other things that are sort of abstract ideas, which were illustrated through the sacrificial system and all of that.

It was a tutorial, really. It was a means of getting them to understand certain concepts so that when Jesus would come, they'd understand the meaning of His death. And so God, of course, saw value in the sacrificial system in that it was a teaching tool.

But the law of Moses also had some basic instructions about what godliness is. You don't kill. You don't commit adultery.

You don't steal. You don't covet. You don't bear false witness.

You don't dishonor your parents. And what I guess many of the Jews never fully realized is that other set of laws, the moral laws, really were struck at the heart of what God wants from people. He wants them to be good people, righteous people in their private lives, in their relationships.

But the Jews mistakenly, like so many people by human nature, they become enamored with the religious ritual. Eventually, they think that that's all that matters is the religious ritual. That as long as I'm going to go to temple and offer my sacrifice, as long as I am

regular in the synagogue, I can live sinfully.

And this would apparently have been a very predominant thing in Jesus' time with the Pharisees. Now, we think of the Pharisees as very righteous people, very religious people externally, because they kept all these ceremonies. But there is indication that they were very immoral people.

There are many indications of this. When the woman taken in adultery was brought to Jesus, and Jesus said, He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her. Many translators say, whoever has not committed this sin, let him cast the first stone.

As if Jesus was implying, if you have never committed physical adultery, then you go ahead and cast stones, and no one could do it. Now, you wouldn't think of the Pharisees as people who actually committed adultery, but there are all kinds of loopholes in the ceremonial law, or in not the ceremonial law, but in the rabbinic traditional law, that allowed things. You know, if you read the Talmud today, there are so many immoral practices that are permitted.

There's all this hair splitting. You can't do this, but you can do that, and so forth. Even molesting of children under three years old was permitted by some rabbis, because they aren't people yet until they're three years old.

I mean, this is actually in some of the rabbinic writings, sexual molestation of infants. I mean, it blows your mind when you hear of it, because you just wouldn't think it true, and yet that is in the Talmudic tradition. So, you can imagine how corrupt some of the most religious people were in their private lives.

Isaiah indicates that while many people were offering sacrifices, they were going out murdering people. That seems a bit extreme, and I'm not sure in what sense. Maybe it was indirectly.

Maybe it was like in James, where the rich people were oppressing the poor, and essentially not paying them their wages, and so forth, so that the poor would die of starvation, and this was seen by extension as murder on their part. I don't know. But we see in chapter one of Isaiah, an extended passage right at the beginning, where God takes them to task for being regular in their ceremonial worship, but being immoral in their behavior, and he indicates he's disgusted.

He hates their religious ceremonialism. In verses 11 through 15 of chapter one, it says, To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me, says the Lord? I have had enough of burnt offerings from rams, and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

When you come to appear before me, who has required this from your hand to trample

my courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices. Incense is an abomination to me. The new moons, the Sabbath, and the calling of assemblies, I cannot endure.

Iniquity and the sacred meeting, your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hates. They are trouble to me. I am weary of bearing them.

When you spread out your hands, that is in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you, even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Well, why? What's the problem here? I mean, they're offering sacrifices. God told them to do that.

They're keeping new moons and Sabbaths. God told them to do that. What's wrong here? What's wrong with this picture? Why is it that he won't hear them? Why is he finding it such an abomination? Well, look at the last line in verse 15.

Your hands are full of blood. And so, he's basically saying, you go out and shed blood, and then you come and worship me. Now, what I think we should understand, the worship of God is not available only to people without sin.

That's what sacrifices are there for. Without the shedding of blood, there's no atonement. The blood was given for an atonement.

And therefore, we would expect that people who offer sacrifices have sinned. They're not perfect people. But what's wrong here is not so much that people who have sinned and now have repented are coming to bring a sacrifice, as they ought to do, but people who have sinned, they haven't repented.

Nor do they see any need to repent. Sin is their lifestyle. They're unrepentant sinners.

It's the pattern of their life. But they just think that going regularly and offering their sacrifices and burning the incense and doing all those things, that somehow covers, that somehow makes it all okay. And there are lots of people whose concept of religion today is that way as well.

We see this again in Isaiah 58. This time, the issue is the religious practice that they're doing is fasting. Now, God never commanded fasting in the law, except on the day of atonement, one day out of the year.

But the Jews had instituted a number of other kinds of fasts. In Jesus' day, the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist fasted two days a week. I don't know how frequently people were fasting in Isaiah's day, but it was clearly not something God had required them to do on the schedule they were doing it.

And yet, they thought that gave them bargaining power with God. Missing a few meals, somehow God is therefore obligated to do what they ask. Even though, in their private lives, they were oppressive of their servants and just plain old wicked, uncompassionate

people.

In Isaiah 58.1, it says, Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet, and tell my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. They seek me daily. That sounds good.

And delight to know my ways. That sounds good too. As a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God.

They ask of me the ordinances of justice. They take delight in approaching God. Why have we fasted, they say, and you have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls and you take no notice? Now, should be clarified, verse 2, the irony in it is like this.

Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness. And as if they did not forsake the ordinance of their God. The implication is they are not a righteous nation.

They have forsaken the ordinance of God, and yet they seek him through the ritual ceremonies on a regular basis. They fast and wonder why God hasn't jumped when they snap their fingers. Have they not obligated God to do what they ask by fasting? He says no.

He said in verse 3, In fact, the day of your fast you find pleasure and exploit all your laborers. You're an oppressive, exploitative employer. And he goes on later to show what else they do wrong.

But in verse 6 and 7 he says, Is this not the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bonds of wickedness? To undo the heavy burdens? To let the oppressed go free that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out? When you see the naked that you cover them, and you do not hide yourself from your own flesh, that is your own human brothers. Now, what God says is your religious fasting doesn't count for anything. As long as you're uncompassionate toward other people.

If you don't love your neighbors, you love yourself. Your religion is worthless. James put it this way, he said, If any of you seem to be religious, and don't bridle your tongue, your religion is vain.

It's empty. And then he said, Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world. That's James 1, 26 and 27.

James 1, 26 and 27, which was written to Jewish people. The 12 tribes that are scattered abroad are addressed in it. And it must have been common enough to seem to be religious.

But they don't bridle their tongue, they gossip, they bear false witness, they blaspheme. But that doesn't matter as long as they do their rituals. That was good enough for them.

So the Jews in Isaiah's day, they oppressed their servants, they showed no compassion to the poor, they were far from godly in their attitudes, and yet they would fast and expect God to do something for them because somehow they were meeting this religious obligation. By the way, it was a man-made obligation. God didn't even put it on them.

If you look over at chapter 65, we'll see how God feels about their hypocritical, empty surface religiosity when it doesn't correspond with what's in the heart. Isaiah 65, verse 5, says... He's describing here... I better read a little earlier here. Verse 5, by itself, I guess, gives an idea of what their attitude is like, their self-righteous, hypocritical religiousness.

He says, they say, Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am holier than you. This is where the expression holier than thou comes from. The King James says, holier than thou.

These are smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day. This is not just something that doesn't work well with God. He's not just saying, hey, your religion... When you're wicked and you do religious things, it just doesn't count for much.

You don't get any brownie points for that. He says, it's offensive to me. It's like smoke in my nostrils.

It makes my eyes burn. It offends me. It's an irritant to me.

I was looking for another verse here. Where is that? It's not in my notes, but there's another place here. Here it is, I think.

Yes. I don't know why this isn't in my notes, but it should be. It's Isaiah 66.

And verse 3 says, He who kills a bull is as if he killed a man. He who sacrifices a lamb is as if he breaks a dog's neck. He who offers grain offering is as if he offers swine's blood.

He who burns incense is as if he blesses an idol. Now, what he's describing there is how he's reacting to their sacrifices. They are offering, in fact, clean animals.

Oxen, lambs. They're bringing a grain offering. Just all those things that God commanded.

But because of their wickedness, it is no more acceptable to God than if they were killing a man or offering swine's blood or some other unclean thing. They might as well break a dog's neck and offer it as a sacrifice, which is an unclean animal, as the lamb. Now, what he's saying is that if your heart is unclean, then even a clean sacrifice becomes unclean.

Even doing the right religious thing becomes sin if it is offered through a sinful motivation or from a sinful life. A number of times, I think three times in the Proverbs, it says that the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to God. And I don't know.

I should have had that in my notes. I don't. Yes.

15.8 is one of them? Thank you very much. Okay, good. Yeah, Proverbs.

Okay, good. Yeah, that's one of the places. Proverbs 15.8. Thank you, John.

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. Even in Proverbs, that was known. Even Solomon knew that.

But sacrifices were good if they were offered as a true expression of a worshipful heart to God. But when they became a replacement for holy living, they were an abomination to God. And that is... Okay, so we have two of the sins of Israel and Judah that are complained about here.

Well, the first was they forsook God. The second is that they had maintained the external forms of religion but had nonetheless forsaken God and therefore their religion was hypocritical and God found that offensive like smoke in his nostrils. In chapter 29... Excuse me.

Pardon? Proverbs 21.27 is another of those places. Right. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination.

Isaiah 29.13 is basically the statement that summarizes the religious hypocrisy of the people and why God found it so offensive. Sort of a thumbnail sketch of the spiritual religious life of the Jews in Isaiah's day. Isaiah 29.13 says, Therefore, thus says the Lord, inasmuch as these people draw near to me with their mouths and honor me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear toward me... That means their worship forms.

The fear is sometimes sent in for worship. ...is taught by commandment of men. Therefore, behold, I will do again a marvelous work among the people, a marvelous work and a wonder... And he means he's going to judge them.

But notice, they draw near with their mouth. Externally, they talk and act as if they're religious. But their hearts are far from me.

Their religion is taught to them by men. It's not taught to them by their hearts. You see, the kind of religion that God likes is religious acts that come from a heart that wants to honor and worship God and glorify God and finds ways to do so through whatever means God has ordained.

But when people just teach you how to go through the motions, to jump through the

religious hoops, how to fit in to do the protocol of the religious system, but it's not in your heart, that's the religion that God hates. And by the way, I'm sure you recall that Jesus quoted this verse. Isaiah 29, 13.

He quoted it in Matthew 15, verses 7 through 9. Matthew 15, verses 7 through 9. He quotes from Isaiah, including this verse. And it's interesting, Jesus introduces it by saying, well, did Isaiah speak of this generation or of you? In other words, Jesus said that Isaiah spoke these things about Jesus' own generation. Now, that's 700 years after Isaiah's.

And in fact, Isaiah spoke it about his own generation. What Jesus is saying is that Isaiah's generation was in a situation parallel to that of Jesus' own generation. Isaiah's own life, in some respects, was a type of Christ.

And his generation was in a situation analogous to that in which Jesus lived. So, Jesus frequently quoted from Isaiah to rebuke his own generation because they were guilty of all the same things Isaiah's generation was. Well, another thing, another big complaint God has against them is their idolatry.

Now, God was always opposed to idols, no matter what nation had them. I mean, he rebukes Babylon for their idols and Egypt for their idols and so forth. But, again, Israel was more inexcusable for having idols because they were told not to make any graven image.

They were told to have no other gods in the presence of Jehovah. And God had made it clear that he was a real god. And the idols were just fake gods.

God had delivered them from Egypt through the Red Sea. He had judged the gods of Egypt by showing that he had power over the river Nile, over the sun, over Pharaoh, all of which were gods of the Egyptians. Through the plagues of Egypt, God had shown his superiority in his reality as opposed to the falseness of the fake gods.

No one had more reason to know better in the area of idolatry than the Jews did. However, the Jews perennially, it would appear, until the Babylonian captivity at least, resorted to idolatry. They usually did not forsake the worship of Jehovah.

They kept that going too. The temple was still going. Sacrifices were still being offered.

The religion of the temple was still happening. But they were also worshipping idols on the side. The mixing of more than one religious system into a culture or into a new religious mix, an amalgam of religious ideas from different sources is called syncretism.

That should be in your vocabulary. Syncretism. S-Y-N-C-R-E-T-I-S-M.

Syncretism. It means the mixing or the blending of more than one religion. This is

essentially what Israel was guilty of.

They never totally abandoned the worship at the temple of Jehovah. They always saw themselves as worshippers of Jehovah. But they also had Baal.

They also had images. They also mixed the teachings of God with the teachings of the pagans. There were times in Israel's history where they offered their infants as burnt offerings to Moloch.

But they still worshipped at the temple. They had the practices of paganism and the practices of Judaism at the same time. That is syncretism.

And there never was a time, as near as I can tell, where the whole nation of Israel threw off the worship of Jehovah in favor of the worship of Baal or some other idols. It's just that they mixed it. They had both.

And Isaiah, like Elijah before him, challenged them on that. You remember how Elijah on Mount Carmel said to the prophets of Baal and to the nation, he said, listen, if Jehovah is God, serve Him. If Baal is God, serve Him.

But don't serve both. He said, how long will you halt between two opinions? How long will you be double-minded? God and Baal can't both be God. So, don't mix them.

And so, in Isaiah's day, also, it was a similar kind of thing. The Jews had their ceremonial worship of Jehovah, but they also had idols that they worshipped. And a lot is said in Isaiah of God's complaint about the mixing of idolatry with His own worship.

In Isaiah chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, he said, their land is also full of idols. They worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made. People bow down, and each man humbles himself, not in the proper sense, but in the sense of bowing down before an idol.

Therefore, do not forgive them. This prayer, it's either God saying that to Isaiah, don't forgive them, or Isaiah saying it to God, don't forgive them. The idea is that they're almost to the point of being so reprobate that forgiveness is not even a consideration, an option open to them.

Look at Isaiah 42. It is especially the case in the latter portion of Isaiah, the book of comfort, that the denunciation of idolatry is just thick, thick through there. And Isaiah gets very sarcastic sometimes in mocking the worshippers of idols.

In chapter 42, verse 8, God says, I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory I will not give to another, nor my praise to graven images. Now see, this is where syncretism is condemned. I am the Lord.

There's no other. Now, you can worship me, but if you do, you'll have to worship no

other. I'm not going to share my glory with graven images.

You can depart from me altogether and stop pretending to be worshiping me and worship all the idols you want, but you can't worship me and idols too. I won't share your heart with them. This is a denunciation of religious syncretism.

In chapter 43, verses 10 through 12, He says, You are my witnesses, says Jehovah, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me there is no God formed, nor shall there be after me. I, even I, am Jehovah, and besides me there is no Savior.

I have declared and saved. I have proclaimed and there is no foreign God among you. Therefore, you are my witnesses, says the Lord, that I am God.

Now, He says, I saved you. I declared what I would do, then I did it. And there was no foreign God among you.

That is, you can't give credit to any of your idols because you didn't have any idols in those days. Back when you were delivered out of Egypt, in fact, in all the times that I've ever delivered you, it was times when you didn't have any idols. And that should tell you something.

I'm the Savior. I'm the deliverer. Those idols can't deliver you, is what He's saying.

Chapter 44, we have an extended passage against idols beginning at verse 9, where He basically ridicules the practice of making idols and worshipping them. You can see, we'll just read the whole section. Isaiah 44, 9-20 Those who make a graven image, all of them are useless, and their precious things shall not profit.

They are their own witnesses. They neither see nor know that they may be ashamed. Who would form a god or cast a graven image that profits him nothing? Surely all his companions would be ashamed.

And the workmen, they are mere men. Let them all be gathered together. Let them stand up.

Yet they shall fear. They shall be ashamed together. The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals, fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms.

Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails. He drinks no water and is faint. What he's talking about is, it takes a lot of effort.

A guy wears himself out making an idol. It's all human effort. An idol has no strength of its own.

It even saps your strength. It makes you hungry and thirsty. It drains you of energy.

Much less can it give you any strength. The craftsman stretches out his rule. He marks one out with chalk.

He fashions it with a plane. He marks it out with a compass. This is the process by which they made idols, images.

And makes it like the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house. He hews down cedars for himself and takes the cypress and the oak and secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine and the rain nourishes it.

Then it shall be for a man to burn, for he shall take some of it and warm himself. Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread. Yet, indeed, he makes a god and worships it.

He makes it a carved image and falls down to it. He burns half of it in the fire and with this half he eats meat. He roasts a roast and is satisfied.

He even warms himself and says, Ah, I am warm. I have seen the fire. And the rest of it he makes into a god, his carved image.

He falls down before it and worships it, prays to it and says, Deliver me, for you are my god. They do not know nor understand, for he has shut their eyes that they cannot see and their hearts that they cannot understand. He burns half of it in the fire.

Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals. I have roasted meat and eaten it. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood? He feeds on ashes.

A deceived heart has turned him aside and he cannot deliver his soul nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? So, he basically says, These people are irrational. They are mindless. Their minds are darkened.

This is a judgment of God upon them that he has taken away their common sense. It never occurs to them to think, Why am I worshipping this piece of wood when the other half of it just burned up in the fire? It could not deliver itself. How can I hope that it will deliver me? But they don't, you know, idolatry is stupid.

It is not rational. Now, why were the Jews attracted to idols? Well, there may be two reasons. One is that the idols made no moral demands.

The idols made no moral requirements on people. God did. There is no such thing as a relationship with a God, an idol God.

If you are in a relationship with people, they have standards that they expect you to live

up to or else you are going to be an enemy rather than a friend. If there is a living God, he is going to have standards of conduct that he requires for friendship. Idols don't have those standards.

And associated with much of idolatry were sexual practices, temple prostitutes, feasting, drunkenness. I mean, the pagan religions just had a big orgy and party as part of their worship of idols. Now, no doubt this is a principal reason why the Jews were attracted to it.

Their carnal nature, just like any other human beings, are attracted to sex and drunkenness and all those kinds of things. And so the idol religions seem to be attractive to them. Another thing is, and may be a factor, is that we are so unaccustomed to relating to the invisible world.

We live in two dimensions as Christians. We have, of course, our physical life we have to maintain. We have to eat.

We have to sleep. We have to work. We have needs.

We need to clothe ourselves. And a lot of our time is spent relating to that physical world. We also live in the spiritual dimension.

But that's not taken in by our senses. And therefore, it doesn't impose itself on our consciousness as much as the material world around us does. And we have learned to think of the material world as the real world.

Because it's always impressing us with its reality. We always have to deal with it so much that it just seems more real. I can feel it.

I can touch it. I can photograph it. It's there.

It's really there. But talk about angels, demons, God, heaven, hell, I haven't seen any of those things. They're supposed to be all right here.

Presumably there could be demons in this room right now. There are angels according to Scripture and gods here, but I don't see them. And unless I remind myself of His presence, He may never really force me to be aware that He's there.

It takes conscious effort to relate to the invisible world. We have to remind ourselves of it. And to a certain degree, we wonder, am I just kidding myself? If I have to remind myself of all of them, am I just kind of psyching myself up to believe something that isn't really real? Now, I don't know how many Christians really want to confess that that comes to their mind.

And I'm not sure if it consciously comes to mind very often. It's just something that kind of gnaws at the back of your mind. I mean, is it really real? I mean, sure.

I mean, my religion tells me that there's a God there and that there's a heaven and a hell. I mean, I've never seen that. Is it really real? And while Christians, by faith, embrace these truths, some don't have an awful lot of faith.

And some secretly suspect that the material world is really the real world. Now, I know that they do. I know that they do, even though they don't tell me because of the way they live.

It is so obvious, by watching anybody's life, whether they think the spiritual world is the real world or the physical world is the real world. If people are living for pleasure, for self-gratification, for money, for possessions, it's clear what they think is important. You know, Bruce and I were talking yesterday about some people we knew who had fallen away from the Lord who were really, at one time, appeared to be on-fire Christians.

And we were talking about... I said, I realize God says in 1 Corinthians, if any man thinks he stands, let him take heed lest he fall. So, I don't want to boast of anything. Perhaps I could fall too.

But, to be quite honest with you, I've never been able to understand how people can fall away if they really knew God. I can understand how a man can be attracted to sin and even commit sin because I've committed sin myself as a Christian. And I can imagine doing that.

I mean, it's not hard to imagine a moment of rebellion or carnality or whatever, where you make a choice under temptation to do a wrong thing and you kick yourself afterwards and so forth and come running back to God. I can understand that. I've done that.

I've done it a lot in my years as a Christian. But what I can't understand is someone really knowing God being a Christian. Just saying, well, been there, done that, let's try something else.

You know? Yeah, I was a Christian once. I was in that movement. I tried that.

It had some gratification. But now I've moved on to something else. Now I'm homosexual.

Now I'm a bigamist. Now I'm, you know, whatever. And I know people like that.

I think, how could this be? And I realize the difference between them and me, and the reason I can't imagine myself ever just walking away from God and staying there is because God is real to me. And He must not be real to them or else they couldn't do that. If the unseen world was as real to them as it is to me, they couldn't live that way.

And if we take less extreme cases, not people who've ceased to be Christians and now

live in an open homosexuality, let's just take people who are still in the church, still professing to be Christians, but every waking moment or most waking moments are spent trying to, you know, improve their standard of living, you know, get new clothes, new cars, you know, new entertainment systems. What they want for their kids is to be worldly successes. They're into their kids being in sports.

They're into all these kinds of things. I think, well, how can anyone get excited about those things? See, I'm not opposed to my kid playing in sports. Though, I'd be very cautious about it.

If my kid got into sports, I'd really want to monitor very closely how important that got to him. If it got too important, I'd pull him right out. And I don't really want him to be in sports.

I just wouldn't forbid it. I'm not a legalist. But I will never encourage it because sports becomes an idol.

And music becomes an idol. And entertainment becomes an idol. And things become idols.

And people so quickly drift into idolatry. Even people who are professing Christians who worship and sing hymns and songs and spiritual songs every Sunday and maybe sometimes midweek too, but in their lives, they have idols. They don't think they have idols, but that's just the problem.

They're not thinking. The reason they don't think they have idols is because they don't think. They don't think the right way.

Their thinking does not take into account that the unseen world is more real than the physical. They might say they believe that because that's orthodoxy. I mean, if I said, what do you think is more real? The physical, tangible world or God? Well, anyone who holds Christian opinions, who holds Christian orthodox ideas, would have to say, well, obviously God is more real than the physical world because after all, he's eternal and the physical world's not going to be here forever, wasn't always here.

It's more contingent. The physical world is contingent. It's got a derived existence.

God is self-existent. He's not contingent. Obviously, he is more real than the real world.

Anyone who knows Christian orthodoxy would say that, but when you see what they live for, how the hours of their days are spent, what things they desire for their children, then you see what they really find more real. And human nature being what it is, it's not too surprising to find people resorting to idols. And of course, we don't make idols.

We don't make images. But we have idols, nonetheless. As I said, sports, money, all

kinds of things are idols in our culture.

They're just not graven images. And it's not even so much carnality. I mean, it is carnality.

It's worldliness. But I would say a lot of Christians who are in that, it's not so much that they're into self-gratification, like, say, the Jews who went into Moloch worship because they could have an orgy in it and get drunk while they worship their god. I mean, you can see what kind of sensual things attract a person to that.

No doubt sensuality is a part of this other thing, too, but it's more a matter of the tangible is simply more real to them. I mean, take this for example. Most Christians would not dream if they could afford to have health and life insurance.

They'd never dream of not having it. Never would occur to them to be without it. If they find out you don't have it and don't want it, they think you're a nut.

Why? It's not so much because of sensuality on their part. It's because of a need for security. Now, if you, when you go to bed at night, believe that you've got ten Doberman pinchers around your house, guarding you from burglars, you'll probably feel pretty secure.

And that's because if you could look out the window and see them out there, they're on duty, and you've got armed guards around the house, you feel secure. Because that's real. You can see that.

You know they're there. But if someone just told you the angel of the Lord encamps around the righteous, those who fear him, and delivers him, but you can't see him, are you as secure? Why not? Why shouldn't you be? If you can see that you've got a retirement agreement with your employer, and it's in writing, and you could take him to court if he didn't pay your bills after you retire, you'd feel secure. But what if God says, even to your old age, I will carry you.

I am he. When you were young, I carried you, and I will carry you even to your old age, he says in Isaiah. In a passage we'll later look at.

But does that make you feel as secure? If not, why not? Because something you can see and feel, and put in a safe deposit box, that's more real to you than God is real to you. And that is what idolatry is all about. There's two things that attract people to idolatry, religious people who should know better.

One is the unspoken conviction that what I can see, what I can put in a safe place, what I can hang on to and keep looking to see if it's still there, that's real. God, yeah, I say he's real, but he's not very real to me. That's the first stage to trusting in and revering in God's place something else for your security, for your joy, to dictate your patterns of

living, and so forth.

The other thing, of course, is just outright sensuality and sinfulness where idols just don't make any moral demands on you. So those are the things that attract even religious people who know God toward idolatry, and we need to watch out for. And we need to be very careful about syncretism in our own faith.

The Word of Faith movement is an example of mixing metaphysical, cultic ideas with Christianity. The modern Christian psychological movement, the Christian counseling movement, is full of syncretism, bringing in Freud's and Jung's and Maslow's and Rogers' ideas into Christianity, trying to mix the two. This is syncretism, taking two different religious systems and trying to blend them into one and say this is true Christianity.

That's what the Jews did. They take the pagan ideas, pagan religions, and blend them in. God warned them in Deuteronomy.

And I wish I knew the verse. I don't think I'll be able to find it because off the top of my head I don't know where it is. I think it's around chapter 8 of Deuteronomy.

I'm afraid I don't know. God, Moses said, well, let's see here. Somewhere around here.

I'm sorry I don't... I'll tell you what it says. He says, When you go in to the promised land, do not inquire. I think the word inquire is in the King James.

It might be ask. Do not inquire how did these religions worship their gods, that we may worship Jehovah that way. It's somewhere like between... I think it's between chapters 6 and 8 or 9 of Deuteronomy.

I'm not even sure it's confined to that range. But it's been a while. I don't know if I can find it.

Maybe Tom can find it there. He's got concordance. I think it's do not ask or do not inquire.

The idea... Do you find something there? For those listening by tape, we've got someone with a concordance open looking for this. Nothing there? Okay, well, maybe we won't find it. But I know it's there because once I was teaching through Deuteronomy in SBS for YWAM.

And it was a YWAM base that also had a school of biblical counseling at it. Well, YWAM School of Biblical Counseling is basically the school of psychological counseling. And the SBS, the School of Biblical Studies and the School of Biblical Counseling were on the same YWAM base.

And I was teaching for the SBS through Deuteronomy and it came to that verse. And I kind of went off on a tangent as I on rare occasions have been known to do. And talking

about syncretism and how God forbade the Jews to pick up any religious ideas or norms or practices from the pagans around them.

And then I went off about how in the church we've picked up a lot of psychological... Modern psychology is just another religion. It's just pagan religion. It addresses the same issues that religion does.

At least it has a philosophy of life. It has a model of man. It has recommended methods of change.

It has implied ethics and morality. It's just a religious system. It's not based on the Bible.

It comes out of atheistic leaders. So to mix psychology with Christianity is syncretism. Just like what the Jews were forbidden to do.

And so many people say, well, listen, we're serving God with this. We're helping people. We're making better Christians out of people with this.

But Moses said to the people, do not inquire how the pagans worship their gods and how they do their thing. I don't know if the word pagans is the word that's used. It could be.

I think it could be. But there's a lot of similar sounding things around. But there's a particular verse I went off on of that.

And he's basically just saying that syncretism is forbidden. It may be later in the book than what I'm thinking. But unfortunately, of course, I can't go looking for it now.

614 maybe? 1230 maybe? 614 says you should not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you. And 1230? Yeah, I think this is the passage I was thinking of. Yes.

Chapter 12, verse 30. See, I had you on a false set because I put an artificially small range to the search. Verse 29.

When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them after they are destroyed from before you and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise. You shall not worship Jehovah your God in that way. For every abomination to the Lord which he hates they have done to their gods.

For they burn even their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it. You shall not add to it nor take away from it.

A stronger statement against religious syncretism could hardly be hoped for. You don't add to what God said. You worship him the way he said to do it.

You don't say, Well, these religions have some good ideas, too. No, they have mostly really horrible ideas. They do every abomination that God forbids.

Don't look to them for any light and don't bring any of their darkness into the light that God has given. So, idolatry, obviously, is a major problem, offense to God. One other passage in Isaiah on this.

Isaiah 57, verses 3 and following. We see that another case where Isaiah points out that an offensive sin of Israel and Judah is their idolatry. Isaiah 57, 3 says, But come here, you sons of the sorceress, you offspring of the adulterer and the harlot.

Whom do you ridicule? Against whom do you make a wide mouth? That means smile and laugh. And stick out the finger. Are you not children of transgression, offspring of falsehood, inflaming yourself with gods under every green tree, slaying the children in the valleys, that is, sacrificing children to Molech, under the clefts of the rocks? Among the smooth stones of the stream is your portion.

They, they are your lot. Even to them you have poured a drink offering. You have offered a grain offering.

Should I receive comfort in these? On a lofty and high mountain you have set your bed. Now here he's talking about spiritual adultery. They are his wife.

They're in covenant with God. And yet they're worshipping other gods, which is like a woman going after and sleeping with another man other than her husband. On a lofty and high mountain you have set your bed.

Even there you went up to offer sacrifice. Also behind the doors and their posts you have set up your remembrance. For you have uncovered yourself to those other than me.

Like a wife burying herself for another man. So they have done by worshipping idols. In God's sight.

And have gone up to them. You have enlarged your bed and made a covenant with them. You have loved their bed where you saw their hand.

You went to the king with ointment and increased your perfumes. You sent your messengers far off and debased yourself even to Sheol. Now this is all figurative.

He's saying you're like a wife who when the husband's away or she thinks he's away she gets all dressed up puts on a lot of perfume and goes and seduces some other man. And this is how... Now by the way, any man who's had an adulterous wife or even a man who hasn't can possibly imagine how that would enrage the average husband. Now that kind of rage, that kind of jealousy is a righteous rage.

Although I do believe there's a place... Certainly a husband should be willing to forgive

and should never be violent or anything like that but to be incensed at the violation of covenant of his wife on that case or if the shoe's on the other foot when a man goes out and violates his marriage covenant. That is a thing that naturally enrages. It's an amazing thing how it does so.

There's something mystical about the marriage union that makes that offense one of the greatest offenses. Although technically, I mean, when you think about it, if a woman goes out and sleeps with a man other than her husband, she has not physically injured him. She has not taken any of his possessions from him.

He experiences no physical pain or loss. Technically she could still sleep with him just as much as if she has a pair or more on the side. So why is that so hard? Why is it so hard on marriages? Why is it so hard? Emotionally, it's one of the hardest things to endure.

And I think that's because there's something mystically, something spiritual that God has built into marriage because it is intended to be a picture of the relationship between God and His people and the very sense of betrayal, the sense of anger, and so forth that naturally arises in a situation like that between a husband and wife is there, I think, so that God could portray His outrage at people worshipping other gods. It's the same, not all people, but His people. He doesn't approve of anybody worshipping idols, but He's particularly upset when His wife goes out with other men.

I mean, I'm not happy that there's people in our town who go out and commit fornication. I'm not happy that there's people out in our town who commit adultery. But if my wife was doing it, I'd feel even worse about it.

You know? It strikes close to home. And likewise, that the pagans worshipped idols was bad enough, but that God's wife would go out and bear herself and enlarge her bed and sleep with, as it were, figuratively speaking, the other gods is something that is outrageous to God. And so He registers His outrage here.

Another aspect of their idolatry and one of the, sort of a separate sin, but related to their idolatry, was occultism. Now, Paul said, and he based this on something in Deuteronomy, but Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10.20 that the sacrifices that the pagans offer, they offer to demons and not to gods. In other words, the idols worshipped by the pagans actually have a demonic origin, perhaps a demonic presence about them.

And therefore, we could see that all idol worship is in itself occultic, in the sense that it involves demons. It's not just something that's done in a spiritual vacuum. Even though the idols are not real gods, in some cases, there's real spiritual dynamics involved.

And perhaps as an upshot or a corollary of their idolatrous practices, they also got into various forms of occultism. In chapter 2 of Isaiah, in verse 6, he says, For you have forsaken your people, this is Isaiah 2.6, For you have forsaken your people, the house of

Jacob, because they are filled with eastern ways. They are soothsayers like the Philistines.

They are pleased with the children of foreigners. you can see that, you know, God doesn't approve of his people becoming fortune tellers, practicing the occult ways of the east. What's interesting is, of course, Israel itself is, to our mind, an eastern, it's a Middle Eastern country.

It's an Asian country. It's not a Western nation. But from our perspective, we are a Western nation.

And when we talk about eastern religion and eastern practices, it speaks directly of this very same kind of thing, the occult. And the occult has invaded very much American culture and the church. You know, when I was a kid even, in the Baptist church, my sister, who was a Christian and a Baptist, brought a Ouija board home.

And she and some of her friends used the Ouija board. My parents didn't know anything about it. I mean, they knew it was a Ouija board.

They didn't know it was demonic. I didn't know. My sister didn't know it was demonic.

It was interesting. My sister actually went through a brief period of time in junior high. I think she was reading books about witchcraft.

She was kind of enamored with witchcraft. I believe she went to a seance or two also. She came out of all that and later realized, of course, that was demonic.

But we were Baptists in good standing. It never occurred to us that those things were inconsistent with Christianity. We didn't know that.

We knew nothing about the demonic realm. I mean, we lived in a religious system that was a matter of deduction merely. We deduced that there was a God.

We deduced the Bible was true. We believed its propositions. But we lived in something like a spiritual void.

And the idea that there were demons out there just didn't cross our minds. I read the Gospels, how Jesus cast out demons. But I remember at too late an age to be excusable, I must have been at least 12 or 13, the first time some missionaries at our Baptist church came home from a furlough and shared some of their encounters with demons.

They'd have a feel. I remember, it's like a light one. There's demons? I mean, I knew I'd read about demons, but it never occurred to me there might be demons still.

Where did I think they'd gone? You know, I never... It just never... It's like I lived in a total, you know, not a clue kind of condition that there was a spiritual realm. And that's

true in many religious people, of course. No, they didn't... Right.

Right, the demons must have gone the way of the gifts because the church I was in didn't believe in the gifts either. But they didn't discuss that they weren't around. They just didn't discuss them at all.

We lived in an obliviousness to their existence. Well, today, even in charismatic circles... See, I'll tell you, when I became a charismatic, when I got baptized in the Spirit, I became aware of the spiritual realm. I was aware of the occult.

I was aware of demons. I was aware of the need to cast out demons. I was... You know, spiritual awareness just kind of woke up in me at a time like that.

And I've lived in a spiritually charged environment ever since. But what's amazing is that even in the charismatic movement, occultic practices are current today. Not throughout, but to a very large degree.

Actually, name it and claim it. Occultism is very much an occultic... It's come directly into the church through the metaphysical religions, which are occultic, the mind science religions, the whole process of inner healing, which is a big thing in some charismatic circles, of visualization. And inner healing comes directly out of the occult, comes directly from Carl Jung, who was a practicing spiritist.

And he himself said that he got his procedures from his spirit guide, whom he called Philemon. He had a spirit guide called Philemon. He was a poltergeist guy.

He grew up in a home inhabited by poltergeists, and he was always in contact with them. He had his own spirit guide. And he's the one who originated the whole idea of visualizing an archetype, Jesus, if you will.

He comes into your imaginary world. You visualize him. He heals you from your past.

He protects you from past hurts and changes the past. And all of these strange things that are current in charismatic circles now came right from Jung, and he got it straight from his demon. But we can't be too hard on the Jews unless we're also hard on the church.

The Jews knew less about the spiritual world than we do, and that they played around a little bit with the occult is inexcusable, because God told them it was an abomination for them to do it, but he never told them why or what the dangers were. We know something now about the demonic aspects of those things and how a person stands to be inhabited by demons if they get involved in that kind of stuff, and we still find it in the church. In Isaiah 8, verses 19 and 20, Isaiah 8, 19 and 20, it says, When they say to you, Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter.

Should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony, if they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. That's a wonderful verse. It's saying, listen, when you're in trouble, a lot of the people in Israel or in Judah were going to say, let's go to a wizard, like Saul did.

Let's go to a medium. Let's try to get some insight from someone who's on the other side. And God says, why seek the dead on behalf of the living? As if they can help you.

They couldn't even save themselves. That's why they're dead. Shouldn't people seek God instead? He's saying.

Instead of going to the wizards and the mediums for counsel, why not go to the word, to the law, to God's counsel, to His testimony? If these people don't speak according to that word, it's because there's no light in them. And this is something, I quote this verse a lot, because there's so many people who are getting religious ideas, spiritual procedures, and so forth, from all over the place. But because they work, the church embraces them.

There's a spirit of pragmatism in Christianity. If it gets results, don't knock it. If it works, it must be okay.

It must be part of God's truth. Because all truth is God's truth. And therefore, if it gets the results we want, it must be part of God's truth.

Sure, it may be contrary to something the Bible said, but all truth is God's truth. This is what we hear from a lot of people who want to borrow from the occult, who want to borrow from psychology, and so forth. They say all truth is God's truth, and if it works, it's true, therefore it's God's.

But they forget that all lies are the devil's lies, too. And the devil lies about anything that's contrary to Scripture is a lie. Something gets results, doesn't make it truth.

When Nadab and Abihu burned incense with strange fire, it worked. The incense was consumed. The smell filled the room.

It worked the way the incense is supposed to work. But you know what? They were not acting in truth, and God consumed them. Because they violated His commands in the way they offered incense.

And the truth of God must conform to the word of God. And though many people say things and recommend things that sound like wisdom, sound like truth, if they don't speak according to this word, it's because there's no light in them. And so Isaiah says.

So he condemns occultism. Another trapping of both idolatry and occultism was the presence of false prophets. Now, the false prophets in Israel often would speak in the

name of Jehovah, but falsely.

Sometimes they wouldn't even speak in the name of Jehovah. They'd be prophets of Baal. Or they'd be prophets of some other god.

There were periods in Israel's history where there were actual, as you know, prophets of Baal. They didn't even profess to be prophets of Jehovah. And then there were others who professed to be prophets of Jehovah, but they were lying.

And they weren't. So said Jeremiah several times. You know, these prophets professed to speak for me, but I never sent them.

They're lying. So there's all kinds of false prophets in Israel. And this was something God opposed to.

He didn't say an awful lot about it in Isaiah. He said a lot more about it in other prophetic books. But in chapter 9, he does mention the presence of false prophets in the land.

In Isaiah chapter 9, in verse 15, well, it's 14 and 15, he says, Therefore the Lord will cut off the head and the tail from Israel, palm branch and bull rush, and one day, the elder and the honorable, he is the head, the prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail. Now, a false prophet isn't just somebody who makes false predictions. A false prophet is someone who professes to be communicating from God and is not really communicating from God.

And Jesus said that there will be many false prophets and false Christs, and we should be aware of them. First John 4, 1, says, Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. Christians have to be aware of false prophets, too.

There was a few years back, you know how the charismatic movement goes through its fads, the fad in the charismatic movement was called the new prophetic movement. It was centered in, well, I won't mention names and churches and so forth, but there were several leaders who were getting a lot of attention in the charismatic press and so forth, and everyone was talking about them, who were esteemed prophets. And one guy in particular had a credible claim.

He did have some remarkable prophetic abilities, and he was sort of the poster boy of the prophetic movement. And he was the one pointed to as the most advanced in the whole movement, and he was pretty impressive, but I believe he's made some false prophecies, but not very many. But there were a lot of little prophet wannabes.

In fact, it was determined, it became the doctrine of a certain group that what God was doing in the last days was restoring the five-fold ministry mentioned in Ephesians chapter 4, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. And some even

went so far as to radically oversimplify things and say, well, in the 70s, God was restoring the teachers. In the 80s, he was restoring the prophets, and in the 90s, he's going to be restoring the apostles.

And they saw themselves in the 80s and early 90s as experiencing the restoration of the prophetic movement. Well, when people have it as their doctrine, that what the Holy Spirit is doing today in the church is restoring the prophetic ministry, obviously that puts a lot of psychological pressure on churches to see if it's happening in their church or not. I mean, if this is the cutting edge of what God's doing in the world today, who wants to think that they've been left in the doldrums? If we're on the cutting edge of what God's doing, we need to find out what that is and find out if he's doing it here.

And when this kind of message went throughout the charismatic movement about four or five years ago, or even less, it was still happening less, I don't hear much about it anymore, unfortunately. You know, all the charismatic churches were affirming the prophetic ministry and looking for the prophets in their midst. Well, I don't deny that there are people with prophetic ministries, I agree with that.

But what this whole thing does, when you focus on any... Bruce said something to me yesterday that was really good. He said many profound things over the years to me that I can remember and quote. He says, you know, when you meet someone who focuses on Jesus, if they get into some of these side things, it's not so bad.

But when people focus on a side issue, it's just burdensome being around these people. He was talking about the people in the laughter movement now. He said he believed some of that laughter might be from God, but the focus there isn't on Jesus, it's on the laughter.

And that's what was happening in the prophetic movement. You know, if you're focused on Jesus, you can be open to prophets, you can be open to laughter, you can be open to a lot of different things if you're focused on Jesus. But when you focus on something other than Jesus, then it gets off.

Well, that's what the charismatic movement is constantly doing, is focusing on something other than Jesus. Jesus is always somewhere in the back of their mind, but there's always some new fad, deliverance, inner healing, prophetic movement, the laughter renewal, whatever, you name it. It comes up, it has its day, and while it's there, not all cares max, but the rank and file run like sheep after whatever the current thing is, because that's called the cutting edge.

They want to be on the cutting edge of what God's doing. And in the prophetic movement, what happened was an awful lot of churches didn't have any real prophets in them. Were under pressure to have prophets.

So they began to reduce the definition of a prophet to fit whatever they had. You know, if they didn't have a real prophet... Now, see, in my opinion, a prophet is 100% accurate. You make a false prophecy, you're a false prophet, the Bible says.

But they were saying, well, you know, when you're starting out in the prophetic ministry, you make some mistakes, and you grow in this ministry. And so they were talking about... Some people are baby prophets. And they were talking about how the top prophets in the movement were maybe upwards of 90% accurate, but some of the prophets in the movement were only 50% accurate, and there were some baby prophets who were only 10% accurate.

And you could count on about 10% of the time, the other 90% they were wrong, but they were still prophets, still had a prophetic ministry. In other words, what... I mean, I could be 10% accurate, I don't even claim to be a prophet. If I could stand here all day and make predictions, I'll bet 10% of them would come true.

Just by the law of averages, you know. And yet, you see, what this is, there's a pressure to say, well, prophets is what God wants us to have. We don't want to think we're subnormal.

We don't want to be below the standard. Therefore, we must have some prophets here somewhere. What's the closest thing to a prophet we've got around here? Hey, this guy prophesied about twice last month.

You know, we'll call him a prophet. Oh, he's not always accurate? Well, he's a baby prophet. You know, we can shift the definition of prophet to fit whatever it is we've got.

And now the same people who are doing that are doing the same thing with the term apostle. Everyone's supposed to have an apostle now, and so, since none of them have the signs of an apostle in their ministry, they have to reduce the definition of an apostle to fit whatever it is they have. But this movement spawned a ton of false prophecy and false prophets.

People calling themselves prophets and being called prophets. Who weren't prophets at all? And we need to be on the guard against that. Now, I only have a few minutes here, and there's several other things.

Let me just take some of the other major things that God had against Israel at this time. Injustice in the court systems, especially against the poor. Now, Isaiah, along with all the prophets, decried this as one of the principal things that God detested in Israel.

That poor people could hardly ever get justice because the political system and the legal system was corrupted. Corrupt people were judges, and corrupt judges obviously will take bribes. Therefore, if somebody wanted to steal the land from somebody who was a widow and didn't have a breadwinner at home and was not very wealthy, they could do

so and could win out in court against their victim because if they were rich they could pay off the judge and he'd rule in their favor.

And the widows and the orphans were the ones who were the most vulnerable because they had no breadwinner in the home and the rich often would exploit them. And the prophets frequently speak about this. And we see in chapter 1 of Isaiah, chapter 1, after he said he detests their sacrifices and so forth, he says in verse 16, Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean.

Put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good.

Seek justice. Reprove the oppressor. Defend the fatherless.

Plead for the widow. This is what they were not doing. They needed to stand up for the rights of the helpless, of the poor, the widow and the fatherless.

Notice over in verse 23 of the same chapter, chapter 1, 23, Your princes are rebellious and companions of thieves. Everyone loves bribes and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them.

This is a recurring complaint through the prophets, also in Isaiah, that justice is not being done, especially to the poor who are represented, especially in terms of widows and orphans. In chapter 3, verses 14 and 15, it says, The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders of his people and his princes. For you have eaten up the vineyard.

The plunder of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor, says the Lord of hosts? He says the plunder of the poor is in your house. It means through your power trips, through your legal maneuvers and so forth, by oppression, you have taken from the poor what was theirs, and now it spoils in your house.

That's an offense to God. In Isaiah chapter 10, verses 1 and 2, Isaiah 10, verses 1 and 2, It says, Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, which they have prescribed to rob the needy of justice, and to take what is right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless. Again, the same theme.

Over in Isaiah 58, that place where they were saying, Why have we fasted and you haven't heard us? Why is it that we've mourned and so forth and you haven't answered our prayers? When he gives his answer to them, he mentions some of the things they're involved in that are an offense to him. Isaiah 58, in verse 7, He says, The fast that I've approved is that you give up on violence and injustice, not food. He says, Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, that you may bring to your house the poor who are cast out? When you see the naked, that you cover him, and do not hide yourself from

your own flesh? And then in verse 10, If you extend your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in darkness, and the darkness shall be as the noon day.

He's saying, You've got to stand up for the poor. You've got to meet the needs of the poor. This is something that God always showed an interest in.

So did Jesus, of course. And even James said, This is what pure religion and undefiled before God is, to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction. That is, visit them with assistance, and to keep themselves unspotted from the world.

Now, we can list other things. We can't look them up because we're out of time here. Actually, the tape doesn't say we're out of time, but the clock does.

I think we'll go with the clock. Let me just say, there's a number of other sins of Israel and Judah, all of which cut close to home when we read of them, because they're also sins of our own society and of the modern church as well. Some of them, at least.

Among the other sins, I will just list them rather than look up the passages. Murder. There was murder going on.

Chapter 1, verse 21. And on the same subject, Chapter 59, verses 3 and 7. That's Chapter 1, verse 21. And Chapter 59, verses 3 and 7. Another thing that God decried, or that Isaiah decried in the society, was pride and arrogance.

Chapter 2, verses 11 through 17. Bring this up quite a bit. That's Isaiah 2, 11 through 17.

Also, Chapter 3, and verse 16. Another thing God held against them was that they were so affluent. Chapter 2, verse 7. He says, the land is full of gold and silver.

Of silver and gold. There's no end of their treasures. So they, no doubt, were trusting in their affluence.

That was something God had against them. Likewise, in Chapter 57, and verse 17. He says, for the iniquity of his covetousness, that's greed, I was angry and struck him.

His greediness. Another sin of the Jews that is spoken of several times is their trust in military, rather than the trust in God. Isaiah 2, verse 7 says, their land is also full of horses.

There's no end to their chariots. That is a reference to their military build-up. Likewise, on the same subject, Chapter 30, verses 1-7.

I'll just read some of these, not all of them. Chapter 30, verses 1-7. It says, woe to the rebellious children, says the Lord, who take counsel but not of me, who devise plans but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin, who walk to go down to Egypt and have

not asked my advice, to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh and to trust in the shadow of Egypt.

Therefore, the strength of Pharaoh shall be your shame and trust in the shadow of Egypt shall be your humiliation. For his princes were at Zohan and his ambassadors came to Hanes. They were all ashamed of a people who could not benefit them or help or benefit, but ashamed and also reproached.

The burden against the beasts of the south, these are the burdens carrying gifts down to Egypt to bribe them to help out, the land of trouble and anguish, from which came the lioness and the lion, the viper and the fire-flying serpent, they will carry their riches on their backs on young donkeys and their treasures on their humps of camels to a people that shall not benefit them. For the Egyptians shall help in vain and to no purpose. Therefore, I have called her Rahab Shabeth, or Rahab sits still.

Trusting in the military of Egypt is a sin. They are adding sin to sin by doing this, it says in verse 1. And one other place also on this, in chapter 31, verses 1-5. Chapter 31, 1-5 says, Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses who trust in chariots.

By the way, it says in Psalm 120, in verse 7. Psalm 120, verse 7 says, Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. Well, these people trusted in horses and in chariots, not in the Lord. Because there are many, and in horsemen, because they are very strong, but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel nor seek the Lord.

Yet He also is wise and will bring disaster. He cannot smart you. If He wants to judge you, you won't beat Him by military strength.

And will not call back His words, but will arise against the house of evildoers and against the help of those who work iniquity. Now the Egyptians are men and not God, and their horses are flesh and not spirit. When the Lord stretches out His hand, both he who helps will fall and he who is helped will fall down.

All they will perish together. For thus says the Lord, The Lord has spoken to me, As a lion roars and a young lion over his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is summoned against him, he will not be afraid of their voice nor be disturbed by their noise. So the Lord of hosts will come down to fight for Mount Zion and for its hill.

Like birds flying about, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem. Defending, He will also deliver it. Passing over, He will also preserve it.

So God will defend them, not the military. But woe to those who are trusting in the military, trusting in chariots and horses instead of in the Lord. Okay, well, the last thing, we won't look it up because of the shortage of time, but the last thing that he mentions

several times is drunkenness.

And I'm not sure why I don't have more references in my notes than I do, because I know there are more than what I have here. In chapter 5, verses 11 and 12, and in the same chapter, verse 22, so that's chapter 5, verses 11, 12, and 22, he speaks about their drunkenness as an offense to him. In chapter 28, verse 1, and in the same chapter, verses 7 through 8. So here's a partial catalog of the sins of Israel and Judah, most of which are every bit as prevalent in our own society.

Forsaking God, externalistic hypocritical religion, idolatry, occultism, false prophets, injustice to the poor, murder, pride, affluence, that is, greediness, trust in the military, and drunkenness. Now, these are the things that God says he's going to wipe them out for, and he dealt very severely with them for it. And yet, all of this is every bit as much in our society, and we become numb to it.

That's why it's so important to read the prophets, and to read God's word, because it reminds us how offended he is by these things. We cease to be offended when we become acclimated to a certain moral climate that's degenerate. But by exposing ourselves to the word of God, it calls us back to the standards.

It says, wait, these things are not okay. They're not even tolerable. These things are what destroys a nation, and brings it under God's judgment for destruction.

Well, we'll stop there because of our time running out, but we'll take another theme in Isaiah next time.