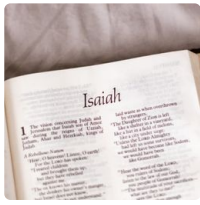


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Isaiah 3 - 6



Isaiah - Steve Gregg

Isaiah 3-6 is a denunciation against the sins of Judah, particularly their repeated sin of arrogance. The chapter predicts the oppression of the people and the judgment of the elders and princes. It also includes a reference to the Holy One of Israel, a repetition common in Hebrew poetry. The speaker refers to possible interpretations of the "us" plural in Isaiah 6 as a literary device or a reference to the Trinity.

Transcript

We're picking up now at Isaiah chapter 3. Remember in chapter 2, the denunciation was against many sins of Judah, but particularly repeated often was the sin of arrogance. The leaders were arrogant. I don't know if this was just a general arrogance, such as afflicts people when they are in high positions, or if it was specifically referring to their arrogance and thinking that they could get along without God.

Especially in a time of national crisis, when there were enemies that were quite capable of destroying them, they should have been on their faces crying out to God for mercy and help, but they were not. They were thinking they could settle problems themselves, or at least with the help, such help as they could recruit from Egypt or from other places. They were, in other words, not concerned about their own inadequacies to handle situations that really were quite larger than they could be expected to handle.

They arrogantly saw themselves as indestructible and quite capable of solving everything. So they didn't have any reason to turn to God, as people ought to in a case like that. We see a continuation of that concern in chapter 3. It says, Now, it's not entirely clear how God is saying He's taking these away from Jerusalem and Judah, because Jerusalem actually, as it turned out, did not succumb on this occasion, although it did later.

So one could think that God is referring to the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem in Old Testament times when the Babylonians came. That was over 100 years after Isaiah's time, but it nonetheless did happen. And as I said in our previous lecture, it's also possible that He's saying that this is essentially what's going to happen to Jerusalem now

at the hands of the Assyrians, but with the implied condition, of course, unless there's repentance.

This is what God is threatening to do. This is what God is intending to do if there is no repentance. He's going to take everything away from Jerusalem, the food and the population.

Now, this is similar to what He says a few verses later in verse 12. He says, Now, giving children and women to be their rulers was considered to be, of course, to their embarrassment, to their shame. And it's not clear whether it is talking about literal children and women or whether He's saying the men that are ruling are no better than women and children.

They're effeminate. They're weak. They're inexperienced.

They're not the kind of rulers, the kind of manly rulers that a nation needs. They're more like children and women. Now, it could be literal, of course, because shortly before this time, there had been a number of rulers that could qualify as women and children.

Athaliah, for example, was a woman and she forced herself into the role of queen by killing all of her grandchildren who were the heirs to her dead son's throne. And she took the throne. She herself was eventually killed.

But she was a woman and she did rule over Judah. So, I mean, God could be referring to that fact. And also, some of the kings had become rulers at very young ages.

When Athaliah was killed, Joash, her grandson, became the king and he was seven years old. That's a child by any description. The next king, Amaziah, was 25 years old and Uzziah was 16.

So, they'd had a series of rulers who were quite young, a seven-year-old, a 16-year-old, and a woman. So, this statement that in verse 12, that women rule over them, and in verse 4, I give you children to be their princes and babes rule over them, could be literal. But some commentators would think it's rather an insult to the male rulers there that they're like children and like women rather than like men.

Verse 5, The people will be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbor. The child will be insolent toward the elder, and the base toward the honorable. When a man takes hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, You have clothing, you be our ruler, and let these ruins be under your hand.

In that day, he will protest, saying, I cannot cure your ills, for in my house is neither food nor clothing. Do not make me a ruler of the people. This is talking about a time when the economy is totally destroyed.

The store of food has been taken away, described in the first verse of this chapter, and everyone's poor. And at the best of times, most people didn't have more than one suit of clothes. We can hardly imagine such a situation where we only had one suit of clothes.

But the average person was a peasant, and clothing was expensive, and most people just had one suit of clothes. Not one change of clothes, just one suit of clothes. A person was somewhat more affluent than the average if he had two.

So owning clothing was in a sense one of the signs of one's affluence. If they had more than one set of clothes, the ones they're wearing, then they were somewhat more affluent than the average. And he says, people will be desperately looking for someone to take charge of the mess, and take responsibility, and lead Judah out of their problems, to cure their ills.

That is to cure the sickness of the nation. And they'll be grabbing anyone who looks like they have some advantage that might set them apart, make them a little more regal. You've got some clothes, presumably means clothes besides the ones you're wearing.

So you're about better off than most people. Why don't you take charge and be our ruler? And the guy's going to say, in my house there's not food or clothing. Now he's wearing clothing, but he's denying that he has any changes of clothes at home.

And doesn't have food either. He says, I'm in no position to be in charge. And the disaster is so great, no one wants to be responsible for it, is what's being said here.

For Jerusalem stumbled, and Judah is fallen, because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of His glory, to look on their countenance, the look on their countenance, witnesses against them. And they declare their sin as Sodom. They do not hide it.

Woe to their soul, for they have brought evil upon themselves. So this is a second comparison with Sodom. In chapter 1, verse 9, they were like Sodom in the sense that they were, well they were almost like Sodom.

Sodom was completely wiped out by God's judgment. Judah had almost been wiped out, only a remnant remained. And had that remnant not been spared, they would have been completely like Sodom.

That is, they'd had such drastic loss of population at the hands of God's judgment, that in that way they were a lot like Sodom. But they're a lot like Sodom in another way too, and that is that they're shameless about their sins. They declare their sins publicly, not in the form of a humble confession made to, you know, in repentance.

But they just declare it as something they're proud of. And so in that respect, they bear another resemblance to Sodom. Verse 10, say to the righteous that it shall be well with

them.

There's always a remnant that God's going to be looking out for. For they shall eat the fruit of their doings, but woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him. For the reward of his hands shall be given him.

As for my people, children are their oppressors, women rule over them. Oh, my people, those who lead you cause you to err and destroy the way of your path. So it's the leaders, the national leaders that are the problem.

At least they lead the nation to err in the wrong direction. Now the Lord stands up to plead and stands to judge the people. 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 God of hosts. So these are obviously very oppressive rulers taking probably more of a tax burden, laying more of a tax burden on people than they should, so that people have to surrender their vineyards, have to surrender their houses.

They feel plundered by their government. It's as if they're crushing the people and grinding their faces and the people they're taking advantage of are the poor. This is just outrageous, this is offensive to God.

And he raises that objection here again, as he had done earlier in chapter 2 when he talked about oppressing the widow and the fatherless and so forth. That's another term for the poor. Now from verse 16 to the end of the chapter, we have the women of Judah are targeted for denunciation and they also are guilty of essentially the same thing that was the big sin in chapter 2, which was haughtiness, arrogance.

These Jewish people in Jerusalem at this time had no grounds for being confident or arrogant. Their land was devastated and it was going to get worse and here they are acting like nothing's going on and they're just proud and self-confident and the women were not any better than the men in that respect. Back in chapter 2 verse 11 and verse 17, we saw God talking about how he's going to bring down the lofty looks of man and the haughtiness of men should be bowed down.

Chapter 2 verse 11 and in verse 17, that refrain was repeated. Now, it's the lofty looks and the haughtiness of the women that is brought up and a lot of emphasis on how they dress and ornament themselves with jewelry and so forth. It says, because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks and wanton eyes, that'd be seductive eyes, and they walking and mincing as they go, that's a good King James word.

It means tripping or stumbling as they go. It's almost like an affected form of walking. I

can hardly picture what it would be.

I don't know what it looks like, but it's not like they're really falling down. It's more like it's an affected kind of way they're walking, holding their neck stretched out and casting alluring glances. And then they're wanton.

Wanton means sex crazed. And tripping along as they go. Somehow the way they were walking was an affectation that it's referring to, making a jingling with their feet.

Probably they had bells on their toes, on their shoes. Therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion and the Lord will uncover their secret parts. They're wearing fancy, stylish clothing to make themselves look good in the eyes of their neighbors and so forth and be admired.

He's going to take away their clothes. He's going to uncover their secret parts. This was often the way that captives were led away, especially by the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

When they would capture people and lead them off into captivity, they'd often strip them naked. Sometimes they'd put hooks in their noses and lead them that way, but they would strip them naked because it's so shameful. It's so embarrassing and humiliating.

And Isaiah himself in chapter 20, when he's predicting that Egypt is going to go away into captivity, he himself walks around naked in order to, yeah, chapter 20, in order to depict how it will be, how the captives will go off naked. He probably was not stark naked, but it does speak of his buttocks showing, or at least their buttocks showing, and he's a symbol of that. So he had to walk around for three years in a condition that was humiliating to him.

I mean, the prophet has to actually pay the price for being God's messenger. He's got to live his message. But these women are told that their clothing will be taken away.

He'll uncover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the finery, the jingling anklets and the scarves and the crescents, the pendants and the bracelets and the veils, the headdresses, the leg ornaments and the headbands, the perfume boxes and the charms, the rings, the nose jewels, the festal apparel and the mantles, the outer garments, the purses, the mirrors, the fine linen, the turbans and the robes. That's, you know, I guess some idea of the finery that they were wearing.

And so it shall be, instead of a sweet smell, there will be stench. The perfume boxes that are mentioned in verse 20 probably refer to some kind of a sachet or something that hangs down under the clothing, around the rib around the neck, under the clothes that gave them a smell. And he says, now that sweet smell is going to be gone.

It's going to take that away and you're going to stink instead. Instead of a sash, you'll

wear a rope because people led away into captivity would often have, you know, they'd be chained or roped together with other captives walking on a single file with a rope around their waist. So their nice sashes are going to be replaced by ropes.

Instead of well-set hair, baldness, probably due to actual self-inflicted baldness, which is done when people mourn, when people would mourn, they'd shave their heads, tear their clothes and things like that. Instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth and branding instead of beauty. Branding, of course, might refer to them going into slavery and being branded like cattle, or it could just be a reference to being burned in torture.

Your men shall fall by the sword and your mighty in war. Her gates shall lament, meaning Jerusalem's gates, shall lament and mourn. And she being desolate, she'll sit on the ground.

And in that day, chapter four, verse one says, seven women shall take hold of one man saying, we will eat our own food and wear our own apparel. Only let us be called by your name and take away our reproach. Now this is where the chapter should end.

As you can see, the chapter four began with that verse, but it's a shame because many people, if they read chapter four beginning in verse one, they don't know what to make of it. Looks like, I mean, what's it talking about? Seven women wanting to be wives of one man. Well, that's explained in the previous chapter.

And this verse is really part of the previous chapter. Your men, verse 25, shall fall by the sword. And your mighty in the war is saying that you're going to lose so many men to the war that there'll be seven women for every man.

And since they'll be widows, they'll be desperately looking for somebody to be their husband. And in a society like that in ancient times, women would rather share a husband than have none at all. Our modern women, of course, are much more independent and don't need a husband as much.

You know how much fish need bicycles. And so women often don't feel the need for a man or to be married. But in those days, a woman was very vulnerable without a man.

For one thing, there was not much she could do to support herself, not much virtuous, anyway, that she could do to support herself. She could also be taken advantage of by other people in society, especially men. If she was a widow, she often didn't have the resources or the expertise to know how to defend her cause in court.

I mean, having a man to stand up for the family, having a man stand up for his wife, was considered to be essential, really, not just something that was a nice thing to have. So when a woman lost her husband, she was in a very, very desperate condition in society. And so they'd much rather share a husband with six other women than be without a husband.

Now, the number seven is certainly just a figure to indicate there's a massive shortage of men. So that, you know, it's like seven women for every man because of the population of men being so decimated by war. But then verse two begins really what should be the beginning of chapter four, and it'd be a short one at that because it's that passage we have looked at in our topical.

It's one of the Messianic passages. It's essentially the second one we come to here in Isaiah. And it says in that day, the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped.

And it shall come to pass that who is he who is left in Zion and he who remains in Jerusalem will be called holy. Everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem, when the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning, then the Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion and above her assemblies a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory, there will be a covering and there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat and from for a place of refuge and for a shelter from the storm and rain.

We don't have time to go into this again, and we don't need to. You'll remember our treatment of this passage earlier. There will be a tabernacle.

Which I believe has its fulfillment in the church, which is the tabernacle of God. God dwells among us. We're the house of God.

And yet there's many dwellings, not just one in every over every dwelling. In Mount Zion, there is that she kind of glory that the presence of God dwelling in everyone. Collectively, these dwellings are under the umbrella of the large tabernacle.

But each individual dwelling also is a private or separate, I should say, dwelling for God and the assemblies, too. So you've got individuals, you've got assemblies of individuals, then you've got the whole thing. And just like there isn't a church, you know, there's one church globally.

That's the house of God on the earth. God dwells among men in his people, his church. But the global church is broken down into local assemblies.

And the local assemblies are comprised of individuals. And God's glory and presence is in every individual, and in every assembly, and in the whole. So this is how it's being described.

And I called attention to the similarities here with John chapter 14, where Jesus said, in my Father's house are many dwelling places. The Father's house, of course, is the church. And the many dwelling places are us.

God dwells in each of us. And so also we have the dwelling places here in Zion. God dwelling in each one individually, as well as in the collective.

Now, that's a very short passage about God dwelling with his people. Perhaps it is called for because the descriptive passage prior to it of the destruction of Jerusalem may suggest that there's got to be a new tabernacle, a new dwelling of God, because Jerusalem housed the temple. And the temple was the house of God at that time.

And if it's destroyed, then where's God going to live? Well, he's going to live in his people. And that, of course, is true ever since A.D. 70 when the temple was burned down. Of course, in Isaiah's day, there was going to be a more near future destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. But there's an ultimate destruction of the temple that has resulted in this very condition of the church being the habitation of God in the world.

Now, Chapter 5 begins with the parable we considered previously about the vineyard. Now let me sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved regarding his vineyard. It's interesting that he would introduce it that way.

It's peculiar. But he is speaking of God as his beloved, which perhaps is making a distinction between himself and most of the people who didn't love God. Well, I still love God, whether you people do or not.

He's my well-beloved. He had a vineyard. My well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill.

He dug it up. I mean, it was a land of milk and honey he brought them to. A good, fruitful place, potentially.

He dug it up and cleared out its stones. He removed the obstacles for the vine to be able to grow safely and permanently. He planted it with the choicest vine.

He built a tower in its midst, which would be no doubt for a watchman to watch for invaders and so forth. So it's a protective measure. And he made a wine press in it.

And he expected it to bring forth good grapes. But it brought forth wild grapes. And now, oh, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, please, between me and my vineyard.

Now God is speaking. Initially, Isaiah is speaking about God as his beloved. But now God is speaking and says, what more could I have been? What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now please let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned, and break down its wall, and it shall be

trampled down. I will lay it waste, it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it, for the vineyard of the Lord, of hosts, is the house of Israel.

And the men of Judah are his pleasant plant. He looked for justice, and behold, oppression. For righteousness, but behold, weeping.

Now, again, we have looked at this passage and pointed out that Israel is figuratively called a vineyard and a vine. And what you plant a vineyard for is to get fruit. Now God says, you know, I looked for this, but I got that.

In verse 2 it says, he expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. And the question was asked the other night, you know, well, didn't God know? I mean, how did, how did, how was God surprised? Doesn't God know the future? How could he have expected one thing that was different than what actually materialized? And this is a passage that is sometimes used by those of the openness theology camp who say, well, actually God doesn't know what people are going to do in advance. That's a view growing in popularity in evangelical circles today.

And passages like this are used to encourage that view. Although in my own opinion, I believe God does know the future. And I believe that he is here simply speaking as a player in a story where he's the owner of a vineyard, like a human owner.

And he's just saying, of course, he plants a vineyard hoping to get good grapes. And he's disappointed to find what he gets. This is not telling us everything that God does or does not know about the future.

It's simply putting him in the role of a human being in a, in a story about a vineyard. And of course, making it sound like he expected something good, but he didn't. Now, he does say that the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is Israel and Judah is his plant.

And so they should have produced fruit. What is the fruit? He wants justice. He wants righteousness.

Verse seven says, that's the fruit he wants, but he didn't get good fruit. He heard what he saw in Israel was oppression and weeping. That is victimization of the poor and of the helpless.

And therefore, instead of justice, there was injustice and oppression and victimization, as much as people could get away with, of their poor. This is the opposite of what he wanted. Now, God had given them the law.

He had given them the land of Canaan. He had driven out Canaanites ahead of them. And he protected them from invaders when they were being obedient.

And he had given them every advantage that they could be an alternative society in the midst of the earth, living by the laws of God, living righteously and justly as his laws would have dictated. What more could he have done to assure himself a just and a righteous people in the midst of the earth, but give them an isolated land, free from wicked people, that is free from pagans. And informed by the law and given good rulers.

God gave those things. Each of the judges was a pretty good ruler. And David was a good ruler.

So God gave them all the advantages that should have made them a good country. But they weren't. Now, this is all poetry and there's some word plays here.

When he says, he looked for justice and behold oppression. Justice is in Hebrew, Mizpat. And oppression is Mizpah.

So it's the word sound almost alike. They just have a different ending sound. And righteousness in Hebrew is Sadaka.

And weeping is Sa'aka. And so these words sound a lot to just one letter difference between them. So he's chosen his words for poetic use and for the similarity of their sounds.

But things that are quite different from each other in reality that sound similar when you speak them. Now, chapter 5, verse 8 through 23 is a poem that has six stanzas. And each stanza begins with woe.

So there's like six woes on here. And it's talking about, of course, the things that were going on in the society that God objected to. And upon which we're bringing judgment upon them.

The first in verses 8 through 10. Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field till there's no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land. In my hearing, the Lord of hosts said, truly many houses shall be desolate, great and beautiful ones without inhabitants.

For 10 acres of vineyard shall yield only one bath and a homer of seed shall yield one ephah. A bath is about six gallons and an ephah is about six gallons also. So, you know, 10 acres of vineyard producing only six gallons of wine when it's all brought in.

Now, when it says a homer of seed, most scholars say a homer is 10 ephahs. The scripture says a homer is a tenth part of an ephah or an omer is. I'm not sure if we got a different word there.

Probably so. But I guess a homer is 10 ephahs. So the idea is you're harvesting one tenth as much as you're sowing.

So we're talking about crop failure in a big way here. This is really a situation where there's agricultural disaster and houses left desolate. It sounds like our present economy, but it's not talking about that.

All these empty homes. It's talking about land grabbers, people who are seizing the inheritance of their neighbors through some kind of crooked deals, no doubt, and depriving them of their homes. God had given each family a tribal inheritance of land in the days of Joshua, and it was not supposed to change hands permanently, but unscrupulous people in power found ways to seize land that was not theirs and to expand, have their property include one house and one field after another adjacent to each other, and leave nowhere for the poor people to live because now they had taken control of all these fields.

And so this is condemned, and a woe is pronounced upon them. Verses 11 through 17 is a second woe. Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may follow intoxicating drink, who continue until night, till wine inflames them.

The harp and the strings, the tambourine and the flute, the wine are in their feasts, but they do not regard the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of his hands. And so these people are just partying all the time and drinking all the time. From the time they wake up till they go to bed, they're drinking.

They're not. They're self-medicated so that the disasters God's bringing upon them is not felt by them. They're distracting themselves with music and parties and drinking so that what God's doing, the work of the Lord, is not being considered as they should be considering it.

When you see God beginning to judge around the corners of your nation, you should wake up and smell the coffee and say, wait a minute, maybe we better get God off our back by doing what's right. And when God's actually devastating all the cities around you, it's like there's a very loud warning shot. You should be waking up.

But the more it's going on, the more they ignore it. They don't consider the works of the Lord because they drink and party and just ignore it. They distract themselves.

Therefore, my people have gone into captivity because they have no knowledge. Their honorable men are famished and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore, Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure.

Their glory and their multitude and their pomp and he who is jubilant shall descend into it. Sheol would be translated hell in the King James Version, but it's not really what we think of as hell. Sheol is the Hebrew word that means just where dead people go.

Often it's translated as the grave. So it's obviously just sort of a figurative way of talking about the state of being dead. When you go to Sheol, you're dead.

That's where the dead are. And this would be true no matter whether they're righteous or unrighteous dead. When people were dead, they were conceived as being in Sheol.

Verse 15, people should be brought down. Each man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled, and the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God who is holy shall be hallowed in righteousness. Then the lambs shall feed in their pasture, and in the waste places of the fat ones strangers shall eat.

So I'm not sure that lambs feeding in a pasture is supposed to be a negative, although most of what's going on here is considered negative, but maybe it's after God's cleaned house, then it'll be peaceable again. The armies will be gone, the lambs will be out in the pasture again. Then verse 18 and 19, Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity and sin as if with a cart rope, that say, Let him make speed and hasten his work, that we may see it, and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it.

Now they draw iniquity with cords of vanity and sin as with a cart rope. The imagery is, I'm not sure what it means, except to say that wherever they go, they drag sin along with them. They are accompanied by sin as continually, as if they drag it along with them.

They don't want to ever be away from their sins, and yet they say, Let God make speed to hasten his work, that we may see it. They seem to be mocking Isaiah, who's claiming there's going to be judgment, and they say, Well, let's see that. Yeah, I hear you talking.

I don't see it happening. And so they're counting on the fact that God has not yet judged, and they're basically mocking the messenger who says that he's going to, because it hasn't happened yet, which is very reminiscent, of course, of 2 Peter 3. In 2 Peter 3, beginning with verse 3, Peter said, Knowing this first, that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation. In other words, they're saying, Well, you talk about Jesus coming, but it's not happening.

You say we're supposed to be ready for Jesus to come and give up our sinful ways, but why? He hasn't come. The fathers, our fathers have been saying he was going to come, and he hasn't come yet. They're dead.

They've fallen asleep, and things are still the same. In other words, you Christians who are saying that we need to be ready for Jesus to come back, because he's going to come and judge the world, well, it looks like you're kind of crying wolf. Our ancestors were saying that too, and it didn't happen.

So, in other words, they're counting on the fact that the delay means it's never going to

happen. And Peter goes on to say, but this they're willingly ignorant of, that God has in fact judged the earth in the past. He gives the flood as the example.

And he says in verse 9, 2 Peter 3, 9, The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slack. These scoffers are accusing God of being slack. He promised he'd come, and he hasn't come.

Peter says, No, it's not that he's slack, it's that he's patient. He's long suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. If he came today, there's people who will repent tomorrow who would not have a chance.

He's waiting for more to repent, and so he delays. He's not slack, he's just patient. And that's Peter's answer to the people who have this kind of response.

In Isaiah's day, they're saying, Let God make speed and hasten his work, that we may see it. And let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it. So they're basically saying, God's making all these threats, I'll believe it when I see it.

Woe to those who say that. Verse 20, Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. You know, back when I was younger and read this verse, I thought, that doesn't seem like anyone would really do that.

I mean, there are people who choose evil, but they wouldn't call it good, certainly. I mean, I knew people who were not Christians, and they were doing bad things, but they never said it was good that they were doing it. They just, they knew they were doing bad things, because the general knowledge of the culture was somewhat informed by biblical ethics and morality, that isn't the case anymore.

Now people do refer to Christianity as an evil. They think we're the bad people, we're the hateful ones. You know, even though we're not doing anything different than Christians always did, and Christianity was always known as a benevolent and loving religion.

I mean, that's where hospitals and orphanages and mercy ministries originate, is with Christians. And yet, without changing our behavior at all, the mood of society has changed, so that what we're doing is bad. We're the hate-mongers, and we're the evil ones, and we're the ones who impede progress.

Whereas people who are doing things that have always been recognized as wicked, they're the heroes in the movies. Have you ever seen a movie in recent times, besides Chariots of Fire, where the heroes were actually morally upright people? The heroes in movies are always at least fornicators, at the very least. And sometimes murderers and liars and all kinds of other things.

Sometimes they're practicing sexual perversion. And these are the heroes, or at least the people you're supposed to be sympathetic toward, because our society is moving in the direction of calling those things are good. Those are the things the heroes do.

Those are the things good people do. But the things Christians do, those are bad people. And so there actually has come about the circumstance, and I guess it did in Isaiah's time too, when people had come about to refer to badness as goodness, and goodness as badness.

Exchanging darkness for light. It's amazing that people would choose blindness when light is available to them. But they do.

Verse 21, Verse 22, They're great warriors, but not in real life. They're just good at mixing their drinks, and that's their great accomplishment. All the great gold medals go to the people who drink the most, and not people who do anything of value or anything heroic.

The ones who are admired, in other words, are the drunkards, not the warriors or the people who actually benefit society in any way. Those who justify the wicked for a bribe and take away justice from the righteous man. 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.

Now the term the Holy One of Israel is found mostly in Isaiah. Outside of Isaiah, it's only found five times in the Old Testament. So you take all the other 38 books of the Old Testament together combined, you'll find five times the term the Holy One of Israel.

But in Isaiah, it's found like 25 or 26 times. A dozen of those times are in the first 39 chapters, and the remainder is in the last 27 chapters. And that's one of the things that seems to speak of the unity of the book of Isaiah, that both sections seem to be written by the same man, but it's definitely an Isaianic expression, the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah uses it, you know, 25, 26 times throughout the whole book, and it's not used much else in the Old Testament. Therefore, the anger of the Lord is aroused against his people. He has stretched out his hand against them and stricken them, and the hills trembled, and their carcasses were as refuse in the midst of the streets.

For all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. Now, this statement, for all this his anger is not turned away, his hand is stretched out still, is found as a refrain in a later prophecy, in chapters 9 and the beginning of 10, this refrain is found four times as the closing remarks of each stanza of a longer poem. The stretching out of his hand, we sometimes think of a person stretching out their hand to help somebody or to beckon somebody, you know, like Paul, when Paul preached, it says

he beckoned with his hand, he stretched out his hand when he preached.

It's sort of a gesture of welcome, sort of a gesture of offering, you know, assistance or, you know, come to me, you who labor and are heavy laden. We might think of it that way, but that's not what it means here. It's not talking about God stretching out his hand to invite them to come, come on, come home.

It's rather saying that he has done this much damage and his hand is still stretched out to do more damage. The stretching out of his hand here is clearly to do harm, because in verse 25, in the middle of that verse, he has stretched out his hand against them and stricken them. And then at the end of that, his hand is stretched out still, as there's more striking to be done.

And we'll, like I said, see a later poem in Isaiah that uses that refrain four times. He will lift up a banner to the nations from afar. He will whistle to them from the end of the earth.

Surely they shall come with speed swiftly. No one will be weary or stumble among them. No one will slumber or sleep, nor will their belt of their loins be loosed, nor the strap of their sandals be broken, whose arrows are sharp and all their bows bent.

Their horses' hooves seem like flint. They never break, even when running on rock. And their wheels, like a whirlwind, their roaring will be like a lion, and they will roar like young lions.

Yes, they will roar and lay hold of the prey, which will be Jerusalem, and they will carry it away safely into captivity, into bondage, and no one will deliver. No doubt this is looking forward to the Babylonian exile. The armies, of course, are spoken of with hyperbolic terms.

It's not really the case that they never take off their armor. They move swift, as is suggested. I mean, basically the idea is these are irresistible troops.

This is an invading force that will not be able to be resisted, and so Judah, no matter how proud they are, are not going to be able to withstand this invasion. In that day they will roar against them like the roaring of the sea, and if one looks to the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened by the clouds. So the land will be overwhelmed as it were by a tidal wave, like the roaring of the sea.

If one looks to the land, it's not going to really be safe. It's going to be overwhelmed by darkness, sorrow, and judgment. Now, chapter 6 is that vision that is so famous that Isaiah had, where he basically seems to speak of his commission to be a prophet, or perhaps the commissioning of a new phase of his prophetic ministry, if he was already a prophet before this.

It says, In the year that King Isaiah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim, which means burning ones in Hebrew. Each one had six wings.

With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

And the posts of the door were shaken, that is the temple door apparently, by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke, as when it was first built, and the shekinah glory filled the temple with smoke. Then I said, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Now, there are several things here.

Isaiah is having a vision of course, and he may have actually physically been in the temple when this happened, and he saw God filling it, or he may have just had a visionary experience in any other location where the scene of the vision was in the temple. It was as if he was in the temple, and God was filling the temple. His voice shook the foundations, even the door posts of the house were shaken, and his royal robes seemed to just fill the temple.

It's hard to know exactly what this looked like, but then there's these seraphim, and it's interesting that he would talk about seraphim instead of cherubim, because the temple ornamentation was all about cherubim. There were cherubim embroidered on the veils, there were cherubim engraved in places, I mean the cherubim were, there were cherubim statues over the Holy of Holies on the mercy seat. Cherubim were the main creatures that are associated with the temple, and Ezekiel saw the cherubim and described them, and they didn't look like this.

These creatures have six wings, the cherubim only had four. These creatures don't appear to have four faces like the cherubim do. Each of the cherubim that Ezekiel saw had four faces.

This seemed to be a different kind of creature, and one would think that Ezekiel, if he was making this up, would simply include cherubim instead of seraphim, because people wouldn't actually expect that in the temple, the cherubim, but instead there's apparently some other species of angelic being that's involved here, and they are seraphs. We don't read about them really elsewhere much. I don't know if we read about them at all elsewhere.

They have six wings, and they somehow are servants of God attending him in the temple there, and when Isaiah sees this, he's suddenly aware of his own sinfulness and inadequacy, and he cries out, woe is me. He's been crying out woe to others quite a bit. In verse 8 of chapter 5, woe to those who join house to house.

In verse 11, woe to those who rise early and follow strong drink. In verse 18, woe to those who draw iniquity, etc. Now he says, woe is me.

Suddenly, although he probably did feel somewhat superior to the people he was denouncing in the earlier prophecies, because he is. He was a better man than they were. He wasn't apostate.

He was faithful to God. He was a lover of God. For him to stand above the others and denounce them was natural enough.

He was a better man than they were. He was perhaps, one could say, worthy to criticize. But when he compared himself with God, or actually saw God as he is, suddenly he realized that he was not that much better than anyone else.

He was a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips. That is, he's about like the rest. So, when you compare yourself with other people in terms of righteousness, you can actually start to feel there's a difference between you and them.

You're better than them. But when you compare everyone with God, we're all about, none of us are much better than the others. The standard is so high that we all fall short of it about equally.

And so that's how he feels. And, he says, for my eyes have seen the king. Now this reference to God as the king, for the first time in Isaiah, is in juxtaposition with the opening verse.

This is the year that King Uzziah died. Now, Uzziah might not have died previous to this vision, but he died that year, either before or after the vision in the same year. Uzziah died, the king.

But now, Isaiah is aware that Israel has, has not lost its king. Uzziah was the king, and actually first cousin, I think, or second cousin of Isaiah. They were, they were relatives.

And Uzziah had lived a long time. I think his king, I think his reign was like 52 years, quite long. And, and so, the nation had had a stable king for half a century.

And now that guy's gone. And he died of leprosy too, because God struck him with leprosy for intruding into the temple, as he should not have done. And so, Uzziah is struck down.

The nation is left, you know, in a transition. It seems they've lost their long-standing king, but Isaiah says, oops, nope, I guess we haven't. This is our king right here.

The one I'm seeing here in the temple with his train filling the temple, and all these seraphs crying, holy, holy, holy, is Lord God, almighty, the whole earth is full of joy. That's our king. I've seen the king.

Now, the Lord of hosts. So, the emphasis is on God as the king of Israel here. Now, holy, holy, holy.

Of course, we're familiar with that because of hymns, especially one particular hymn by that name, that is very famous. But, it almost becomes cliché to hear the thrice holy for us, because of the famous hymn, and because we have this repetition of holy, holy, holy in the singing of the inhabitants of heaven in Revelation. But, why is it three times holy? It was suggested to me when I was younger by some teacher that this was a reference or an allusion to the Trinity.

There's three persons, each one is holy. So, holy Father, holy Son, holy Spirit, God is holy, holy, holy. A more common view, I think, is that this reflects the Hebrew custom of how emphasis is made.

In our culture, if we want to emphasize something, we say it louder, or in a different tone of voice. Or, if we're writing, we might underline it, or put it in boldface type. That's how we emphasize something.

In the Hebrew culture, the way to emphasize something is to repeat it. That's why the main feature of Hebrew poetry is, in fact, repetition, usually couplets of lines that say the same thing different ways. But repetition was the way to emphasize something.

There are some psalms that repeat the same thing in three or four lines. They more than double it, because that's strong emphasis. In Jeremiah, I think it's 22 or 23, he says, Earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord.

And, again, three times. If you say it twice, it's for emphasis. If you say it three times, it's much more for emphasis.

And so, saying, holy, holy, holy, is emphatic about the holiness of God, obviously. I mean, you would deduce that it was being emphatic, but it's simply a Hebrew way of expressing emphasis. Like, this is like the main message that people need to know, that God is a holy God.

And that may be why Isaiah, more than any prophet, refers to him as the holy one of Israel. Other prophets don't use that term very much, but Isaiah uses it a great deal. Perhaps impressed upon him by this vision and the emphasis on the holiness of God that the seraphim were singing about.

Verse 6, Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal, which he did take from the tongs, which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. It's not known whether this is the incense altar or the altar of sacrifice, because we don't know what part of the temple Isaiah is seeing himself in. But it doesn't really much matter.

The idea is that the altar, the whole system of sacrifice and incense and so forth were

part of God's way of bringing man to himself, and of course, redeeming man and reconciling man to himself, the system. And so a coal from that is taken from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it and said, Behold, this has touched your lips.

Your iniquity is taken away and your sin is purged. So Isaiah had complained that his lips were unclean. Well, not now.

Whatever was unclean there has been burned off. This, of course, did not literally happen. The man would not be able to speak for several weeks, probably if he was literally had a hot coal put on his lips.

But this is all symbolic. It's a vision in which he is now being purged. Because he has confessed his sin.

He is like those among whom he lives in that he is a man of unclean lips. So are they. He lives among a people of unclean lips.

The difference is he admits it. The difference is he is ashamed of it. The difference is he says, Woe is me.

He's repentant. The rest are not. And so he's purged for they're not.

And I also heard a voice of the Lord saying, In whom shall I send who will go for us? This us plural is like the us in Genesis frequently. Let us make man in our image. Or let us go down and see this tower which they're building.

This us, this plurality of the pronoun that God uses in addressing himself, sometimes thought to be a reference to the Trinity, the members of the Trinity, but also very frequently suggested to be simply a literary device, a plural of majesty as some would call it. Then I said, Here am I, send me. God said, Who will he send? And Isaiah said, I guess I'm available.

Now that my lips are purged, I guess I can do it. Send me. And he said, Go and tell this people.

Keep on hearing but do not understand. Keep on seeing but do not perceive. Make the heart of the people dull and their ears heavy and shut their eyes.

Lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart. And I return and be healed. Now, this passage has bothered a lot of people because it sounds like God is the one forcing these people to have their eyes shut and their ears closed and to then not be healed.

Doesn't God want people to repent? Well, in general, of course he does. But there comes a time when he's ready to judge people because they have shown themselves obstinate. And so he simply hardens their condition.

That's what Pharaoh's situation was. God hardened Pharaoh's heart. He was already a wicked man.

The man had chosen to be a wicked man. That was his consistent pattern. And God said, Okay, I'm going to judge you by making you not able to be anything else.

These people have been shutting their eyes to the truth and stopping their ears to the prophets for centuries. And God said, Okay, I'm going to harden them in that position. And Isaiah, you're going to do it.

Now, how's that? You're going to preach to them what they don't want to hear. They'll stop their ears. They'll close their eyes.

They'll resist it. They'll turn from it. This is how, you know, by giving them light, people who don't want the light have to shut their eyes when the light is shined in their faces.

And so, in a sense, Isaiah will be causing them to shut their eyes. But that's their chosen reaction. They don't have to.

People can open their eyes and receive the light and hear the word of the Lord, not stop their ears. But by the very presentation of light and a message that they don't want, it is basically the catalyst that causes them to react by shutting their eyes and drawing back further. And so that they don't return, I would heal them.

It almost makes it sound like, you know, God forbid that they should be healed. I mean, they don't want to be healed. They want to.

They should. If they want to be healed, they could, but they don't want to. They shut their eyes and so forth.

And we have, of course, this verse or these verses quoted and alluded to a number of times in the New Testament. In Acts 7.51, Stephen alludes to them. Paul does in Romans 10.

But Jesus does when he's asked why he speaks in parables to the people. For example, in Matthew 13. In Matthew 13, the disciples came to him and said, why do you speak to the people in parables? And he said, well, because it's been given to you, that is you disciples, to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

But to them, that is the crowds, it has not been given. Only those who are committed to Jesus would be let in on his secrets, the mysteries of the kingdom. The others would be excluded from it.

And he says, for whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance. But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. What that means is when Jesus came to Israel, he found that some people had a spark of interest in

God and some personal knowledge of God.

They were the remnant, trying to seek and cultivate their relationship with God. They had something, and they're going to be getting more. But there were those who didn't have that.

There were those who were apostate, who couldn't care less about God. Well, what little they seemed to have is going to be taken from them. This is the time where the choices people have made in a small way are going to be sealed to them in, as it were, a permanent way.

And he says then in verse 13, therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says, hearing you will hear and shall not understand. Seeing you will see and not perceive.

This is something of a paraphrase of what we were reading in Isaiah 6. For the heart of this people has grown dull, their ears are hard of hearing, their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn so that I should heal them. This is the passage in Isaiah we're reading, although it's obviously in slightly different wording. It's cast in a little different way, but it is a reference to Isaiah 6. And obviously Jesus is saying that he's doing the same thing in his day, that Isaiah was doing in his day.

By bringing light to them, he's almost forcing their eyes shut, because they don't want the light. How do you avoid light if it's given to you and you don't want it? You have to shut your eyes. It is also the case that this verse is quoted in John 12, verse 40.

And John 12, John is talking about the rejection of Jesus by the people, although they'd seen many signs. It says in John 12, 37, but although he had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in him, that the word of Isaiah, the prophet, might be fulfilled which he spoke. Now he first quotes from Isaiah 53, 1. Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? But then he quotes from Isaiah 6. Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, he has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and they should turn and I should heal them.

These things Isaiah said when he saw his, that is Christ's glory and spoke of him. He's talking about chapter 6 here of Isaiah. Now what's interesting is the way that John quotes the verse, it's God doing the blinding and the hardening of the heart so that they wouldn't see, and so they could not believe.

But the way Jesus quotes it in Matthew 13, it says, their heart of this people has grown dull, their ears are hard of hearing, their eyes they have closed, lest they should see. So

there's a sense in which they are the ones reacting this way, on purpose. But God is the one making it happen, because he's not leaving them in the dark, he's bringing light, so that they either have to see it, or shut their eyes.

And knowing their character, they don't want to see the light, so that he in a sense is forcing their eyes shut, by bringing the truth in front of them. And that's what Isaiah's ministry was to do. He's told basically, they're not going to listen to you.

Now Isaiah did have a few disciples that followed him, as we will read about in chapter 8, he had some disciples. So there were a few in the remnant who followed him. Jeremiah had it much worse.

Jeremiah, as far as you know, only had two converts. One was his scribe Baruch, and the other was an Ethiopian eunuch, named Ebed-Melech. But apart from those two, I don't think anyone followed Jeremiah.

Isaiah had a few more than that, who were his disciples. But for the most part, the nation was going to not listen, and that's what God's telling them. You're going to preach, but they're not going to listen.

Well that's encouraging. You know, imagine if you're just, you're released from seminary, and you're getting your first assignment, and you're told before you go in, God tells you, no one here is going to listen to what you have to say. Well, you'd go in the pulpit Sunday after Sunday, and preach to people like that.

I mean, it'd be so hard to speak to them, knowing they're not going to listen. But this is simply part of God's judgment upon them, that they hear, they'll be responsible for having heard, and for having shut their eyes. So God is sending him, even though he's telling them, they're not going to listen.

Verse 11, Now notice, this is not the total destruction of the Babylonians, necessarily. This is probably a reference to when the villages of Judah were wiped out by the Assyrians. That is in fact when repentance came.

That is when Hezekiah, at least, did turn to the Lord and save the nation. But until then, they're going to be hardened, and they're not going to turn. But yet a tenth will be in it, meaning a remnant, a tenth is not a literal statistic, but just a remnant.

It could be a tenth here, because that would be considered to be God's tithe. God has His small portion that's given to Him, the remnant of Israel, and will return and be for consuming. Consuming in a good way.

They're going to get eaten. But see, they're fruit. God's looking for fruit.

The idea is that they'll be edible. They'll be good fruit. God will be pleased with them, as

opposed to the rotten grapes He got out of the nation in general.

As a terebinth tree, or as an oak, whose stump remains in it when it is cut down, so the holy seed shall be its stump. Meaning that the nation, when destroyed, and only Jerusalem standing, Jerusalem would be like the stump of a tree. It used to be a big, broad, spreading tree.

Everything's dead now. It's been cut down to just this, the remnant that has survived is like the stump of a tree after it's been cut down. But there's some life in it still.

There's some fresh life that may come from it. Its seed is in it. Its holy seed is in the stump.

And therefore, although it doesn't state it, it implies there is the possibility that something yet may happen for this stump in a good way. There's some holy seed still in the stump. There's possibilities here.

And those possibilities, of course, will be discussed in some of the more hopeful passages about the remnant. So we come to the end of chapter 6, and when we come to chapter 7, we'll be talking about judgments on the northern kingdom. Isaiah's been focused on his own kingdom of Judah here.

We're going to take a break, and we'll come back, and we'll talk about chapter 7 and other chapters that follow there.