



Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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New Translation

- I decided to go with a less literal and more readable (but still accurate) translation this time.
- So instead of using the ESV, I've used the NET Bible for all of the biblical texts that appear in my slides today.
- I'm hoping this will make the reading of the text more understandable and require less explanation on my part.
- For example in Isaiah 1:3:
 - ESV – *The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.*
 - NET - *An ox recognizes its owner, a donkey recognizes where its owner puts its food; but Israel does not recognize me, my people do not understand.*
- Feel free to follow along in your ESV and comment on any significant differences – either before or after class.

The Sinful Nation (Isaiah 1:2-9)

² Listen, O heavens, pay attention, O earth! For the LORD speaks: "I raised children, I brought them up, but they have rebelled against me!" ³ An ox recognizes its owner, a donkey recognizes where its owner puts its food; but Israel does not recognize me, my people do not understand." ⁴ Beware sinful nation, the people weighed down by evil deeds. They are offspring who do wrong, children who do wicked things. They have abandoned the LORD, and rejected the Holy One of Israel. They are alienated from him.

The Sinful Nation (Isaiah 1:2-9)

⁵ Why do you insist on being battered? Why do you continue to rebel? Your head has a massive wound, your whole heart is sick. ⁶ From the soles of your feet to your head, there is no spot that is unharmed. There are only bruises, cuts, and open wounds. They have not been cleansed or bandaged, nor have they been treated with olive oil. ⁷ Your land is devastated, your cities burned with fire. Right before your eyes your crops are being destroyed by foreign invaders. They leave behind devastation and destruction. ⁸ Daughter Zion is left isolated, like a hut in a vineyard, or a shelter in a cucumber field; she is a besieged city. ⁹ If the LORD who commands armies had not left us a few survivors, we would have quickly become like Sodom, we would have become like Gomorrah.

² ***Listen, O heavens, pay attention, O earth!*** For the LORD speaks: “I raised children, I brought them up, but they have rebelled against me!”

- In the opening words, the “*heavens*” and the “*earth*” are called as a ***witness*** to the charges that the Lord levels against the nation of Judah.
- The Lord is addressing the ***scandalous*** state of affairs that has come about in the nation.
- His tone makes it clear that what follows is not so much a ***legal*** presentation but a ***personal*** one.
- While God’s covenant with Israel is clearly in view here, it remains in the ***background*** – Judah’s offense is so ***brazen*** that it goes against ***common decency*** and ***common sense***. Even ***animals*** know better.

² *Listen, O heavens, pay attention, O earth! For the LORD speaks: "I raised children, I brought them up, but they have rebelled against me!"*

- The two words, "*heavens*" and "*earth*" call to mind Genesis 1:1, and point to the entire creation.
- Such appeal shows the importance and significance of the message, and shows that the Lord who speaks, namely, Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, was no mere local tribal deity, but the God who could command attention from all creation.
- He alone, the God of Israel, had the right to order all creation, for he himself had brought it into existence.

² ***Listen, O heavens, pay attention, O earth!*** For the LORD speaks: “I raised children, I brought them up, but they have rebelled against me!”

- This opening appeal is reminiscent of the book of Deuteronomy, where Moses called upon the “*heavens*” and the “*earth*” to witness the covenant of “*life and death, blessing and curse*” that he put before the Israelites:¹
 - ***Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.*** (Deut 32:1)
 - ***Today I invoke heaven and earth as a witness against you that I have set life and death, blessing and curse, before you. Therefore choose life so that you and your descendants may live!*** (Deut 30:19)
- These were witnesses that had been present throughout Israel’s history; to them the Lord appeals now that the corruption of the nation must be brought to light and her punishment meted out.²

¹ Oswalt, John N.. The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39 (The NIC on the OT) (pp. 85-86). Eerdmans.

² *The Book of Isaiah*; Edward J. Young; Eerdmans; p. 35

² Listen, O heavens, pay attention, O earth! For the LORD speaks: ***“I raised children, I brought them up, but they have rebelled against me!”***

- The relationship between Israel and God is described here in terms of ***child*** and ***parent***.
- This relationship has even ***greater*** urgency than that of Covenant God and Covenant People. God is their ***Father*** and they have ***“rebelled”*** against him!
- This view makes rebellion against God all the more scandalous.
- To refuse to submit to the one who ***brought you into existence*** is bad enough; to refuse to submit to the one who has ***cared for you*** is ***incomprehensible***.

³ *An ox recognizes its owner, a donkey recognizes where its owner puts its food; but Israel does not recognize me, my people do not understand.”*

- Isaiah declares that even *dumb animals* display more gratitude than Israel did.
- The contrast is striking: the dumb animal “*recognizes*” its owner, though it would not be expected to, *in contrast* to Israel who does *not* “*recognize*” its heavenly Father, though it *ought* to.
- God laments that Israel does not understand that *he* is the one who has cared for them all this time.
- The continual care of feeding domesticated animals forms a certain bond or attachment between the animals and their owners, whereas God’s constant care for Israel produced only *growing contempt*.

⁴ Beware *sinful nation*, the *people weighed down by evil deeds*. They are *offspring who do wrong, children who do wicked things*. They have abandoned the LORD, and rejected the Holy One of Israel. They are alienated from him.

- Having compared his people unfavorably to the *natural* world, which demonstrates their lack of wisdom and orderly obedience, the prophet *now* turns to a *direct* description of their condition using a series of terse, hard-hitting terms:¹
 - The “*nation*”, intended to be distinct in holiness, became the “*sinful nation*”²
 - The “*people*”, redeemed and unique, became “*weighed down by evil deeds*”²
 - “*offspring*” is the word used for *Abrahamic descent*, but *they’ve* now become the line of those who “*do wrong*”²
 - “*children*” describes the relationship of redeemed people to God and *should* have resulted in a *holy life*, but *instead* Israel was doing “*wicked things*”²

¹ Oswalt, John N.. The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39 (The NIC on the OT) (pp. 87-89). Eerdmans.

² Motyer, J. Alec. The Prophecy of Isaiah (pp. 43-44). InterVarsity Press.

⁴ *Beware sinful nation, the people weighed down by evil deeds. They are offspring who do wrong, children who do wicked things. **They have abandoned the LORD, and rejected the Holy One of Israel.** They are **alienated** from him.*

- Furthermore they have:
 - “*abandoned the LORD*”
 - and “*rejected the Holy One of Israel*”
- This is the first use of term “*The Holy One of Israel*”, a phrase that Isaiah uses over 20 times in the book.
- The phrase may well have been coined by Isaiah as a title for the Lord in response to the revelation he received in his inaugural vision (Isa 6:3) where he saw the Lord seated upon his heavenly throne.
- He was Israel’s “Holy One” and yet they treated him with scorn.
- In doing so, they had become “*alienated*” from the Lord.
- God’s *chosen* people had reverted to *alien* status.

⁵ *Why do you insist on **being battered**? Why do you **continue to rebel**? Your head has a massive wound, your whole heart is sick.* ⁶ *From the soles of your feet to your head, there is no spot that is unharmed. There are only bruises, cuts, and open wounds. They have not been cleansed or bandaged, nor have they been treated with olive oil.*

- With graphic imagery, God addresses Israel, his wayward children, who have been punished by “*being battered*” through famine, drought, war, and ultimately exile.¹
- Despite the variety of warning blows, they are unwilling to learn the lesson being taught, as they “*continue to rebel*”.²

¹ Isaiah An Introduction and Commentary - Paul D. Wegner - Tyndale OT Commentaries

² A Study Commentary on Isaiah Volume I: Chapters 1-39 – John L. Mackay p.47

⁵ *Why do you insist on being battered? Why do you continue to rebel? **Your head has a massive wound, your whole heart is sick.*** ⁶ *From the soles of your feet to your head, there is no spot that is unharmed. There are only bruises, cuts, and open wounds. They have not been cleansed or bandaged, nor have they been treated with olive oil.*

- As a result no part of the land had escaped suffering: the word “*head*” here points to **external** assaults, and “*heart*” to their **inner** anguish as a result of the blows that had come to their communities. ²
- The nation is personified as an individual whose body is so bruised and battered that there does not seem to be any spot on it where it is possible for more wounds to be inflicted: “*From the soles of your feet to your head, there is no spot that is unharmed.*” ²
- Yet the children **still** refuse to obey and **persist** in their rebellion. ¹

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- Israel is a pitiable sight, with “*bruises, cuts, and open wounds*” that have received no medical attention.
- These images are an apt description of the ravages suffered in a war-torn land.
- Even though God is *justified* in punishing his ungrateful, wicked nation, he is a *loving father* whose heart aches to see his children persist in their sin and reap judgment as the consequence.

⁷ *Your land is devastated, **your cities burned with fire**. Right before your eyes your crops are being **destroyed by foreign invaders**. They leave behind devastation and destruction.*

- Isaiah now moves away from figurative language about a battered and bruised body and begins describing what is happening to them in plain *straightforward language*.
- “*Foreign invaders*” have devastated Israel’s cities “*with fire*”, a description consistent with the Assyrian march against Judah in 701 BC when it destroyed forty-six “*fortified*” cities before God stepped in to deliver Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:1-19:35)

⁸ *Daughter Zion* is left isolated, like a **hut** in a vineyard, or a **shelter** in a cucumber field; she is a besieged city.

- Further comparisons are used to picture the state of the land.
- Though “*Daughter Zion*”, (the people of Zion or Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, and therefore representing the whole nation²) had been left unconquered, her situation remained precarious.¹
- A “*hut*” or “*shelter*” here refers to a makeshift structure constructed from the branches of trees.¹
- They were set up in fields to provide shelter to those watching over the ripening harvest, but once the crop was gathered, the shelters were left exposed to the elements.¹

¹ A Study Commentary on Isaiah Volume I: Chapters 1-39 – John L. Mackay p.47

² Alexander, Joseph A.. Commentary on Isaiah (p. 10). Ravenio Books

⁸ *Daughter Zion is left isolated, like a hut in a vineyard, or a shelter in a cucumber field; she is a besieged city.*

- In other words, Zion is *not* pictured here as a *glorious city*, but as a *forlorn abandoned building*.
- In 701 BC, the Assyrian ruler, Sennacherib, bragged that he had shut Hezekiah up “like a bird in a cage” – no one was going to or from Jerusalem because there was no money to attract traders and no goods to sell them.

⁹ *If the LORD who commands armies had not left us a few survivors, we would have quickly become like Sodom, we would have become like Gomorrah.*

- Attention is now directed to the part which the *Lord* has played.
- He kept a *remnant* in existence, otherwise *total destruction* would have resulted, and Christ would not have come.
- For it was through that remnant, in the fullness of time, that he purposed to bring the *Redeemer* into the world.
- The deliverance is thus seen to be due to God, and the doctrine of salvation by grace is for the first time introduced into the prophecy.

⁹ *If the LORD who commands armies had not left us a few survivors, we would have quickly become like Sodom, we would have become like Gomorrah.*

- It is “*the LORD who commands armies*” who preserved this remnant¹
- The term “*armies*” (literally “hosts”) was *sometimes* used to refer to the armies of *Israel* (cf. 1 Sam 17:45).²
- It could *also* refer to the *angels*, the heavenly messengers of the Lord (Isa 6:5; 31:4; 37:16), or to the *stars* as God’s “hosts” (Isa 40:26; 45:12; Ps 33:6; Neh 9:6).²

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² *The Book of Isaiah*; Edward J. Young; Eerdmans; p. 57

⁹ *If the LORD who commands armies had not left us a few survivors, we would have quickly become like Sodom, we would have become like Gomorrah.*

- But when it appears, as it does here, without *any* further qualification, it designates the Lord as God of *all* hosts, and is therefore equivalent to the expression “the all-powerful God.”²
- Israel here is pictured as a remnant (“*a few survivors*”) that has narrowly escaped total destruction – *unlike* the unfortunate cities of “*Sodom*” and “*Gomorrah*” (see Gen 19:24-25) with whom they are compared.¹

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⁹ *If the LORD who commands armies had not left us a few survivors, we would have quickly become like Sodom, we would have become like Gomorrah.*

- This verse is quoted by the Apostle Paul (Romans 9:27), and applied to those ***few*** Jewish people who ***embraced*** Christianity in his day, while the ***majority*** of the Jews ***rejected*** it – and it was through ***them*** that the promises made to the fathers were fulfilled.
- In the worst of times there is often a remnant preserved from iniquity and reserved for mercy, as Noah and his family during the flood, or Lot and his family in the destruction of Sodom.
- This remnant is often a very small one in comparison with the vast number of revolting ruined sinners.

⁹ *If the LORD who commands armies had not left us a few survivors, we would have quickly become like Sodom, we would have become like Gomorrah.*

- A large number of people is not the mark of the true church. Christ's is a "*little* flock" (Luke 12:32-34).
- It is God's work to sanctify and save *some*, while many others are left to perish in their sin.
- *This* is the work of his *power* as "*the LORD who commands armies*".

⁹ *If the LORD who commands armies had not left us a few survivors, we would have quickly become like Sodom, we would have become like Gomorrah.*

- It is good for a people that have been saved from utter ruin to look back and see how near they were to it, and to see how much they owe to a few good men that stood in the gap because of a good God, who raised them up.
- It is only because of the Lord's mercy that we are not *all* consumed.
- Isaiah began this first discourse by emphasizing The LORD as the sovereign *speaker*; he rounds it off with an identical emphasis on the Lord as sovereign in *mercy*.
- The Judge and Savior are one!

Next Time

I plan to cover **Isaiah 1:10-20** where God addresses Judah's corrupt worship.

Class Discussion Time



*Class Discussion Time

- Many theologians and Christians in our day tend to view the nation of Israel as parallel to the New Testament church. And, in the sense that the nation of Israel were the people of God in the Old Testament and the church makes up the people of God in the New Testament the parallel holds true.
- However, there is a significant shift from the Old to the New Covenant which is clearly evidenced in this passage: most of the nation of Israel, despite God's continual kindness and mercy towards them remained rebellious, unbelieving sinners. It was only the "remnant" who were saved.
- One of the distinctives of the *new* covenant is that *everyone* in the new covenant, "from the least important to the most important, will *know me*" says the LORD. "For I will *forgive their sin* and will no longer call to mind the wrong they have done." (Jer 31:34)

***Class Discussion Time**

- Can you see how using the rebellious nation of Israel as a model for how New Testament believers might be expected to behave could be a harmful way of looking at things?
- Might it be better to see the rebellious Israelites as models of what we were as unbelievers, and the remnant of Israel as the model of how we in the New Covenant are to conduct ourselves?