

**Presentations for Sermon Seminar 2015**  
**Preaching on First Isaiah**  
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**Lecture One**

- I. Introduction: My topic is preaching on First Isaiah, but before we get to the preaching part there are some introductory matters that have to be discussed.
  - A. First of all, what do we mean by First Isaiah? It is customary to designate chapters 1-39 of the book of Isaiah as First Isaiah, but of those chapters only chapters 1-23, 28-33, and perhaps chapters 36-39 contain genuine prophecies of the late eighth and early seventh century BC prophet, Isaiah of Jerusalem, the son of Amoz.
    1. Chapters 36-39, which are found in an almost identical form in 2 Kgs 18:13-20:19, contain mostly stories about Isaiah, with only a couple of actual oracles.
    2. Chapters 24-27 are usually referred to as the Little Isaiah Apocalypse and are normally dated at least 80 years after the death of Isaiah of Jerusalem.
    3. Chapters 34-35 are also normally dated much later than the time of Isaiah of Jerusalem, since they have close stylistic and content connections to Second Isaiah.
  - B. We have fairly accurate knowledge of the time period of Isaiah of Jerusalem's prophetic ministry, because of the number of historical notices contained in chapters 1-23, 28-33, and 36-39. Some of the clearest are at 1:1; 6:1; 7:1-6; 8:1-3; 14:28; and 20:1.
    1. According to 1:1, Isaiah prophesied during the days of the Judean kings Uzziah (also called Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.
    2. According to 6:1, Isaiah received his prophetic call in the year that king Uzziah died. For a number of reasons I date that to the year 738 BC, other scholars date his death a few years earlier in the late 740s.
    3. The oracle in 14:28 is dated to the year of Ahaz's death, which was probably 715 BC., and Isa 20:1, which refers to the three year period before the fall of Ashdod, probably dates to 712 or early in 711 BC.
    4. From the oracles in chapters 28-33 and the stories in chapters 36-39, it is clear that Isaiah lived through Sennacherib's campaign against Judah and Jerusalem in 701 BC.
    5. How much beyond 700 BC Isaiah lived is debated, but he may have lived to see Sennacherib's total destruction of Babylon in 691-689 BC, and perhaps even the death of Hezekiah in around 686 BC. There is a late legend that Isaiah was martyred by Hezekiah's successor Manasseh by being sawn in two.
    6. At the barest minimum, Isaiah's prophetic ministry lasted at least thirty-eight years.
  - C. The long length of Isaiah of Jerusalem's prophetic ministry has important implications for how one reads, exegetes, and preaches from his material.

1. As one reads through the collection of Isaiah's oracles, one often encounters inconsistencies in seemingly connected material from one verse to another. If one looks at the commentaries, the inconsistencies are normally explained as later interpolations or glosses by a late scribe who did not understand the text or wanted to give it a different slant. But is that the only alternative?
2. Let me see the hands of all of you who have preached regularly for 10 years or more?
  - a) Now when you had one of those weeks when everything seemed to go wrong, people died inconveniently or had marital problems, or you had unexpected visitors, or maybe the sermon you were working on all week just fell apart on you Saturday night--did you ever pull out an old sermon, hopefully one that you had not preached at that church before?
  - b) If you have, and did not thoroughly revise the old sermon, you may have discovered, when preaching it, that some things in the old sermon did not fit the new situation. Once on a Sunday night, using the mss of an old sermon I had not carefully edited, I said, "This morning we are going to...."
  - c) Even you purists who have never reused an old sermon will surely recognize that you often come back to the same themes that interested you years ago, and I would bet that much of your earlier language reappears in your later sermons
  - d) My point is, I think Isaiah himself reused old oracles, not always thoroughly revised, to address later situations in his ministry, when the historical situation he was now addressing, while in some ways analogous, involved different players in different configurations.
  - e) A good example of that is found in Isaiah 28:1-6. Years ago William Holladay recognized that these verses were originally an oracle against Israel from the time of the Syro-Ephraimitic War of 735-732 BC, but some twenty-seven years later Isaiah reuses this old material as an introduction to vss. 8-15, in what Holladay called a "self-extended" oracle to condemn the Judean political and religious leadership at the time of Hezekiah's revolt against Assyria in 705 BC. In my opinion, this phenomenon of the reuse of old material in new contexts is widespread in Isaiah's oracles.
- D. It is also important for us to recognize the shaping influence of the religious traditions in which the prophet Isaiah grew up. Those of you who grew up in traditional churches of Christ, unless you have deliberately thrown off your roots, have a different theological language to speak about the Christian faith than Lutherans, Reformed, Baptists, or Methodists, and each of them has their own terminology. For someone in the know, it is easy enough to distinguish even between a Dutch Calvinist and a Scotch Presbyterian just by listening to their theological terminology.
- II. The primary theological influence on Isaiah's prophetic message was the royal theology that had been created in the period of David's imperial expansion and cultivated in the Davidic court and the royal temple in Jerusalem ever since.

- A. This theological construct that I designate as the Zion Tradition consists of three main points.
1. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the creator of the whole world, the imperial divine ruler over all gods and all nations, who rules with divine justice and equity.
  2. Yahweh has chosen Jerusalem, also called Zion, where his temple is, as his royal abode on earth, and his imperial capital.
    - a) Because Yahweh lives in Zion, it will be like the garden of Eden, the garden of God.
    - b) He will protect it from its enemies, the powers of chaos and particularly those vassal kings that rebel against Yahweh's imperial rule.
    - c) The foreign nations, as vassals, will come up to Zion to pay tribute and have their disputes with one another settled by the imperial God and his Davidic regent
    - d) Since God lives in Zion, the human inhabitants of Zion must be righteous in order to live in the presence of God
  3. Yahweh has chosen David and his dynastic line as his human king to sit on God's throne, carry out God's justice, and act as the agent of God's imperial rule.
  4. Isaiah shows clear signs of being steeped in this tradition
    - a) He sees Yahweh as the great king—Isaiah 6
    - b) He sees the Davidic king as Yahweh's chosen, who participates in Yahweh's rule as Yahweh's child and agent—Isaiah 7; 9:1-7; 11:1-10; 32:1-8
    - c) He sees Jerusalem as Yahweh's city on Mt. Zion, where Yahweh lives (8:18), and as the city that Yahweh founded (14:32). It is built on a high mountain (2:2), protected from its enemies (17:12-14).
- B. In some of this earliest oracles from the time of the Syro-Ephraimitic War in 735-732 BC, Isaiah makes a straight forward appeal to this royal theology. Soon after Ahaz came to the Davidic throne of Judah in 735 BC, the Aramaean Rezin of Damascus, the leader of an anti-Assyrian coalition, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, supported by the Philistines and the Phoenicians, made a surprise attack on Jerusalem, the Judean capital that was close to the northern boundary of Judah.<sup>1</sup>
1. They attempted to breach the city wall of Jerusalem and remove Ahaz from the throne of David before Judean troops stationed south and west of Jerusalem could come to the city's relief (Isa 7:1-6; 10:28d-34).
  2. The coalition intended to replace Ahaz with the non-Davidic son of Ittobaal of Tyre in a direct challenge to the promises of the Zion Tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed treatment of this incident, see my "The Context, Text, and Logic of Isaiah 7.7-9," in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honour of Herbert B. Huffmon*, ed. By John Kaltner and Louis Stulman (JSOTS 378; London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2004) 161-170.

3. Judah at the time was independent, and Isaiah simply appealed to Ahaz in a series of oracles to just trust God's promises in the Zion Tradition, assuring him that God would protect Jerusalem and that Aram and Israel with their capitals at Damascus and Samaria soon perish, and the threat would be over. There was no need to seek salvation elsewhere.
    - a) The three oracles attached to the symbolic names of Isaiah's sons, Shear-jashub (Isa 7:3-9; cf. 10:20-24a--in v. 21 "a remnant will return" is "Shear-jashub" in Hebrew), Immanuel (7:10-17; cf. 8:5-10), and Maher-shalal-hosh-baz (8:1-4) were originally of this nature.
    - b) So also was the oracle against Damascus and Ephraim in Isa 17:1-14.
    - c) The oracle in 10:27d (read Samaria rather than Rimmon)-34 was originally a promise that the Aramaean surprise attack on Jerusalem would fail.
  4. During this crisis Isaiah also addressed some oracles to the northern kingdom Israel as his fictive audience, though the oracles were really intended for the Judeans, particularly Ahaz's Davidic court.
    - a) Isa 28:1-6 is a classic example of this stylistic device
    - b) But the important oracle about the future glorification of Jerusalem and world peace in Isa 2:1-22 also belongs here.<sup>2</sup> Note in particular the address to the "house of Jacob" in the NRSV translation of vv. 5-6. The text is criticizing the north for joining forces with the pagan Aramaeans and the Philistines against their own Judean kinsmen in the Syro-Ephraimitic War, particularly since Zion, the city of God, was also the political and religious capital of the north in the glory days of the Davidic and Solomonic empire.
- C. Obviously before we as Christian preachers can sensibly preach on any of these texts to a modern audience, we have to acknowledge the huge historical and theological gap that separates us from Isaiah and his time. For Isaiah's argument to convince Ahaz and the Judean court to trust God and not seek help from Assyria or another major power, one would have to believe that God was in control of the world and that he had made irrevocable promises to the Davidic dynasty and to his chosen city Jerusalem. Ahaz and his court should have taken these beliefs seriously, because it was their official royal theology. That is hardly true of modern Christians. We may still believe the God of Israel is the creator and ruler of the whole world, but the earthly Jerusalem has long been discarded in Christian thought for the heavenly Jerusalem, our future home (Gal 4:21-27), or as a symbol for the church as the bride of Christ. Nor are we any longer committed to a succession of Davidic kings as God's imperial rulers on earth--Jesus, the son of David, is God's king, but his kingdom is not of this earth.

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<sup>2</sup>. For details see my "The End of War in the Zion Tradition: The Imperialistic Background of an Old Testament Vision of Worldwide Peace," in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture*, ed. by M. Daniel Carroll R. & Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007) 119-128.

Before citing any of these passages to argue that western leaders should avoid defensive political alliances or engage in unilateral disarmament, therefore, one should note that God has not made any promise to always maintain the office of the President of the United States, nor has he made any commitment to preserve Washington D.C. as his abode on earth. To be relevant to a modern audience, one must seriously think through what we in our time are called to do, and the different motivations for doing it.

- D. After Ahaz and his court rejected Isaiah's advice, and in sheer terror sent a vassal's tribute to Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria to come and save them, Isaiah's message to Ahaz's court became far more nuanced, and far less promising.
1. This is well illustrated by his oracle in Isa 8:11-15. God warned Isaiah and his supporters not to call everything treason which this people called treason, nor to fear (*tir 'ēû*) what they feared, nor to be terrified (*ta 'ārîšû*) by what terrified them. Rather they were to sanctify (*taqdîšû*) Yahweh of Hosts and make him their object of fear (*môra 'ākem*) and their object of terror (*mā 'ārîškem*). If one acted out of a fear and terror of Yahweh, that is, out of genuine piety, then Yahweh would be a *miqdāš*, a place of sanctuary or refuge. If not, however, Yahweh would be a stone (*'eben*) and a rock (*šûr*). Both these words could be used to refer to God's protection. Samuel set up an *'eben* which he named Ebenezer to commemorate Yahweh's help in battle against the Philistines, and Isaiah speaks of the large stones that Yahweh uses as the foundation for his unshakable sanctuary in Zion (Isa 28:16), while *šûr* is widely used as an epithet for Yahweh as a place of refuge (Pss 18:2, 31, 46; 19:14; 27:5; 28:1; *passim*). Isaiah uses it that way in Isa 17:10 and 30:29.
  2. In Isa 8:14, however, both terms are given an opposite meaning by their modifiers. For those who act out of fear—not of Yahweh but of some human object of terror—Yahweh will become to them not a stone of help or a rock of refuge but a stone of toe stumping and a rock of stumbling, a snare and a trap; they will stumble and fall and be broken, and they will be snared and caught. Because Ahaz would not listen to Isaiah, Isaiah withdrew with his disciples and the children God had given him as signs and portents to wait and see what Yahweh of Hosts who lived on Mount Zion would do (Isa 8:16-18).
  3. Perhaps one should comment further on this idea of making God one's object of fear. Even many Christians seem uncomfortable with the idea of "fearing" God, as though somehow "fearing" God is in conflict with "loving" God, and only "loving" God is compatible with the superior ethic of Jesus. Such Marcionite ideas have little to do with Jesus or the New Testament. 1 Pet 3:14-15 actually quotes Isa 8:12-15 in preparing Christians to stand up to persecution: "But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence."
  4. Against his disciples' fear of persecution, Jesus himself said, "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will

- warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!” (Lk 12:4-5; see Matt 10:28).
5. When I was a young child growing up on a farm in west Texas, we had a windmill about 50 yards from our back door. One of my chores was to shut down the windmill in the early evening before supper, so that if a windstorm came up during the night, the windmill would not be damaged. Being a child, I occasionally forgot to do it. Then at supper, hearing the creaking of the windmill still running, my father would tell me to get up and go turn the windmill off. By that time it was dark outside, country dark, with none of the ambient light familiar in our modern cities. I was afraid of the dark and whatever unknown I might encounter in the dark. For a young child, 50 yards was a long way to go in the dark. Because of this fear of the unknown, I did not want to obey my father. On the other hand, I feared my father, who was not a permissive, modern dad. If I did not obey, the punishment would be certain, swift, and painful, and I would still have to go into the dark after the punishment. My fear of my father put my fear of the dark in perspective. In the same way, the fear of God puts all lesser fears into perspective and gives one the freedom to be obedient in scary and dangerous times.
  - E. When Ahaz died in 715 B.C. Isaiah apparently put great hope in Hezekiah, Ahaz’s Davidic successor. In fact, Isa 9:1-7 appears to have been composed by Isaiah as part of Hezekiah’s coronation ceremony.
  - F. **Whose Child Is This?** Text: Isa 9:1-7. Introduction: This passage raises a number of important questions for the reader. What was the former time? What is the dishonor the speaker is talking about? What is the later time to which the speaker is referring? Who is this speaker that uses the plural “us”? To answer these questions we need to get at both the historical and the cultural background of this passage.<sup>3</sup>
    1. Egyptian influence on Israelite royal theology.
      - a) When Israelite monarchy took shape under David, the last major imperial power in the region had been Egypt. Under David’s imperial expansion, Egyptian models appear to have been used for the administration of the empire. David had an Egyptian scribe.
      - b) Solomon, David’s successor, was married to the daughter of the Egyptian pharaoh, and thus appears to have had a treaty with Egypt.
    2. The Israelite coronation service appears to have been modeled on the Egyptian enthronement service.
      - a) The Egyptian king at the enthronement ceremony was acknowledged as the son of the deity. This was done both by the deity himself and by the whole assembly of the gods—one finds direct address and 3<sup>rd</sup> person address.
      - b) The king is given his five royal names
      - c) The sonship announcement only made at the coronation though back dated.

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<sup>3</sup>. For a fuller treatment of this passage see my “Whose Child Is This?” in my collected essays, originally published in *Harvard Theological Review* 90 (1997) 115-29.

3. The historical background to this text seems to be the aftermath of the Syro-Ephraimitic war and the resulting Assyrian domination of both the north and the south.
    - a) The war took place in 734-732, and led to the incorporation of the Sea coast near Dor, Galilee, and Gilead being turned into Assyrian provinces
    - b) In 722-720 even the Ephraimite heartland around Samaria was annexed by Assyria
    - c) In the meantime Judah under Ahaz was paying tribute to Assyria
    - d) But in 720, Babylon revolted from Assyria—Merodach-baladan
    - e) And in 715 a new king, Hezekiah, was crowned in the south. He had contacts with Merodach-baladan and he was interested in regaining the north.
  4. Isa 9:1-6 was probably originally composed as part of Hezekiah's coronation ceremony.
    - a) Former-later refers to Assyrian annexation of north and Hezekiah's intended deliverance of the area
    - b) Language of deliverance from Assyrian yoke
    - c) Language of enthronement—cf. Ps 2:7; 110:3?—cf. Isa 6; 40 for plural
    - d) Names like the throne names, with the last one omitted
  5. But, if this was originally composed for Hezekiah, how does it remain relevant for us?
    - a) The last royal name removed, probably so that the text could continue to function as an expression of hope for the future
    - b) The embodiment of a royal ideal—note our political ideals in our election campaigns
    - c) There is a sense in which in Christian theology it is transformed; the deliverance is not just a political deliverance, and certainly not from Assyria
    - d) There is a sense, however, in which the metaphorical language is taken far more literally—divine sonship not just a metaphor. God with us, etc.
- III. The second, less influential, theological influence on Isaiah's message was the Deuteronomistic Mosaic covenant theology, that appears to have been dominant in the northern kingdom, Israel, but was brought south toward the end of the northern kingdom, and helped spark Hezekiah's great religious reform in 715 BC.
- A. We will look continue to look at material for sermons on each point of the Zion Tradition, and for the Mosaic covenant theology as well.
  - B. As we do, we must continue to recognize both the continuity and the enormous historical and cultural gap between us and our audience, and Isaiah and his audience. As preachers we must both be able to understand the world of Isaiah, and to translate that in relevant ways to the quite different world of our modern audience

## Lecture Two

Before moving chronologically to other oracles, I want to turn to Isaiah's call narrative in **Isa 6**.<sup>4</sup> Isaiah probably saw this vision in 738 BC, the year of Uzziah's death, but it is not clear how long it was before he felt the need to relate this vision to other people.

Prophets normally relate the visions of their prophetic calls to justify their prophetic proclamations, when the public or government authorities challenge their right to say what they proclaim--Amos 7, Jeremiah 7, 26--so Isaiah may have related this oracle early on when challenged for criticizing the policy of Ahaz's court, but he may have repeated the oracle during Hezekiah's reign, when his right to criticize the policies of the crown was again criticized.

Introduction :

Will be following the text in detail.

- I. The year king Uzziah/Azariah died was probably 738 B.C. Year of Isaiah's call to be a prophet.
- II. High and lofty throne—see 1 Kgs 6:19-28 (8:6-7)
  - A. Yahweh enthroned upon the cherubim (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; Isas 37:16; Ps 80:2; 99:1; 1 Chron 13:6)
  - B. Called a chariot of kerubim 1 Chron 28:18
  - C. Called a throne—Ezek 1:26; 10:1
  - D. What is a cherub—look at picture
- III. Hem of his robe
  - A. Not train as in wedding dress—royal robes
    1. Skirts--shulaw--Jer 13:22, 26; Nah 3:5; Lam 1:9
    2. Could be pulled over one's head to expose nakedness
  - B. Imagery is that of great size
    1. Temple at PAIN Dara with footprints—1 meter
    2. And huge stride—10 meters and subsequent height of at least 20 meters
  - C. Compare huge Buddas of Far Eastern temples
- IV. Seraph—What is it?
  - A. Secondary literature very confusing
    1. Wildberger is confusing and unclear
    2. Jensen says it can't be serpents, since serpents do not have feet
    3. Other want to make them angels of fire
  - B. Must look at usage
    1. Two other occurrences in Isaiah—Isa 14:29; 30:6

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<sup>4</sup> For a fuller treatment of this passage, see my "The Theological Significance of the Visual Elements in Isaiah's Vision in Isaiah 6," in *From Babel to Babylon: Essays on Biblical History and Literature in Honour of Brian Peckam*, ed. by Joyce Rilett Wood, John E. Harvey, Mark Leuchter (LHBOTS 44; New York/London: T & T Clark International/Continuum, 2006) 197-213.

2. Otherwise in wilderness wandering story of snakes (Num 21:6, 8; Deut 8:15)
3. A seraph was what was put on the pole (Num 21:8)
- C. Figure is represented in Egyptian art and borrowed into Israel
  1. Note legs feet and arms
  2. Note position of winged cobra and position of wings
  3. Note similar position on Israelite seal impression
  4. Note number of wings
  5. Note different function in the call narrative
- D. Number of seraphs probably two because of association with thrones
- E. Association with seraph on pole or Nehushtan likely (2 Kgs 18:4)
- F. See representation of this on the bronze bowl from Nimrud—Tiglath-Pileser III
- G. Frightfulness of seraphs simply serves the majesty of Yahweh—when it ceases to do that, it must be removed from the cult
- V. Isaiah’s response has a certain ambiguity
  - A. Woe is me! suggests the tradition that no one can see God and live (Exod 33:20; no one ever does in the narrative!), and Isaiah has just seen God--*dmh* in the niphal “to perish”
  - B. But note that he stresses unclean lips, which are then purified so that his problem is cured—another *dmm*, biform of *dmh*, which means to be silenced!
- VI. Note that Isaiah’s cleansing comes from a burning coal from the altar
  - A. Seraph must hold it with tongs, which suggests that cleansing is painful
  - B. Burning is standard motif for Isaiah’s view of how God will purify his people
  - C. The fact that it comes from the altar shows that Isaiah is not in principle against the sacrificial cultus
- VII. Isaiah overhears deliberation in divine counsel and volunteers
  - A. Apparently he didn’t know what he was volunteering for.
  - B. Commission is very odd (vss 10-11)
  - C. Isaiah’s response to commission is odd. Not, “Why?” but “How long?”
  - D. The answer is dismal and vs. 13 doesn’t relieve the gloom
- VIII. How is one to understand this commission
  - A. A reading back into his earlier ministry his later disappointments?
  - B. An original message of unrelieved judgment just so the people will know why they are getting it in the neck
  - C. A desperate effort to get the peoples’ attention—cf. use of this passage in the later literature
    1. Ingroup use (Mark 4:10-12)
    2. Outgroup (Acts 28:25-29)

To pick up again on the chronological sequence, as soon as Hezekiah was crowned, from 715-712, Isaiah was again compelled to try to influence the Judean court. Judah was now a vassal of the Assyrians, and while Hezekiah’s court and Isaiah both wanted to be free of Assyria, they differed on how to accomplish that. Isaiah wanted Hezekiah to rely on God and his promises to David and Jerusalem. Judah’s Philistine neighbors to

the west, however, with the promised support of the new Nubian rulers of Egypt, suggested an anti-Assyrian alliance with major military assistance from Nubia.<sup>5</sup> The ruler of Ashdod sent letters to all the local rulers, including Hezekiah, who had apparently just replaced the dead Ahaz, inviting them to join the alliance. Assyria got wind of the plot, however, and an Assyrian detachment replaced the offending Azuri with his more compliant brother Ahimeti. As soon as the Assyrian troops left the area, however, the citizens of Ashdod drove Ahimeti out, and replaced him with a commoner named Yamani or Yadna, one of the names may be a nickname. And he resumed sending letters to the surrounding states. This would involve Hezekiah switching an Assyrian overlord for a Nubian one, but some members of Hezekiah's court supported the move, apparently thinking it would give Judah a better deal. Hezekiah was clearly tempted, but Isaiah railed against the plan in a series of oracles (Isa 14:28-32; 18; 20).

#### **Isa 14:28-32**

IV. This oracle is specifically dated to the year of Ahaz's death (v. 14).<sup>6</sup>

- A. According to 2 Kings 18:13 and Isa 36:1, Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem in the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign.
  1. Since we know that Sennacherib's campaign against Jerusalem took place in 701 BC, that means that Hezekiah came to the throne in 715 BC
  2. There is no reason to emend the text of Isa 14:28, as many scholars do
- B. The Philistines were happy to see Ahaz die, because he had been a loyal Assyrian vassal since the time of the Syro-Ephraimitic war, and while the author of Kings has nothing favorable to say about Ahaz, when Assyria crushed the Philistines in 734, and again in 720, Ahaz as a loyal vassal would have profited from this at the Philistines' expense
  1. Ahaz was the rod that struck the Philistines
  2. Hezekiah was the flying seraph that came from the root of the snake
    - a) Snake imagery is not ordinary imagery for Assyrian kings--lion, bull, etc.
    - b) It was common imagery for kingship in Judah at the time
- C. Smoke from the north in v. 31 refers to Assyria attacking Philistia

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<sup>5</sup>. For a detailed treatment of the Ashdod affair see my "Egypt, Assyria, Isaiah, and the Ashdod Affair: An Alternative Proposal," in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, ed. By Andrew G. Vaughn and Ann E. Killebrew (SBL Symposium Series 18; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 265-283; and my "Isaiah's Egyptian and Nubian Oracles," in *Israel's Prophets and Israel's Past: Essays on the Relationship of Prophetic Texts and Israelite History in Honor of John H. Hayes*, ed. by Brad E. Kelle and Megan Bishop Moore (LHBOTS 446; New York/London: T. & T. Clark, 2006) 201-209.

<sup>6</sup>. For a detailed exegetical treatment of this passage see my "The Rod that Smote Philistia: Isaiah 14:28-32," in *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature: Essays on the Ancient Near East in Honor of Peter B. Machinist*, ed. D. Vanderhooft and A. Winitzer (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013) 381-395.

- D. The point of the whole oracle, however, is to convince Hezekiah how to answer the Philistine and Nubian messengers trying to get him to join their coalition
  - 1. The correct answer is to rely on God's promises to Zion, which he founded
  - 2. Refuge is to be found there, not in foreign alliances
- V. In applying this passage in our own time, we would have to think of God's promises to the Christian community, or the church, however we want to see the modern equivalent of the ancient promises to Jerusalem, so that we, in our own situation can live faithfully, trusting in God, and not compromising our faith by faithless political or social alliances in order to avoid trouble or persecution or other unpleasantnesses.

## **Isa 20**

- I. The oracle in Isaiah 20:1-6 is dated to the year that Sargon's commander-in-chief took Ashdod (v. 1)
  - A. Ashdod fell in 711 BC, but this notice gives the final outcome of a much longer process as the following vv. indicate.
    - 1. Isaiah demonstrated publicly against joining Philistia's Nubian sponsored rebellion against Assyria for a three-year period (vv. 2-3)
    - 2. Since the prophet removed his sackcloth, which one wore against the skin as a sign of repentance or mourning, as well as his sandals, it appears that he appeared in public in the nude, which would have been shocking in his society
      - a) Modern scholars are so offended by this notion, that they try to put some clothes on the prophet
      - b) They have even suggested that the climate in Palestine is too cold for the prophet to have remain undressed that way for three years
      - c) But this ignores the fact that Isaiah was doing this as public theater--he only needed to undress this way when there were foreign messengers and a public audience in the area of the royal palace--at night he could go home and sleep in a warm bed
    - 3. Such radical political theater was sure to have everyone in Jerusalem talking, and any Assyrian agent in town would soon hear about what was going on near the palace, and there was no shortage of Assyrian agents around.
    - 4. Isaiah certainly did not carry out this symbolic action for three years before explaining his action, since without an explanation it would have no point--there has probably been a copyist's error of a vertical displacement of the expression "for three years" from v. 2 to v. 3. The explanation in v. 3 would have come from the beginning of this action.
    - 5. By the early spring of 711, when the Assyrian army marched on Ashdod, Yamani fled the city to take refuge in Nubian territory before the Assyrians even reached Ashdod, and after Yamani's flight, no one would have been tempted to join the Philistine revolt
    - 6. The 3 year period, then, must have been from 715 to late in 712, when a successful Nubian sponsored revolt might still have been a possibility

- B. Isaiah threatens the Nubians (Ethiopia) and their Egyptian allies with utter defeat, but his real intended audience is Hezekiah's court
  - 1. His portrayal of the Nubian-Egyptian defeat mirrors the earlier events of 720 BC, when a Nubian-Egyptian relief army was defeated in the field as it attempted to come to the relief of the Gaza area. At its defeat, and the ignominious retreat of its shredded remnants, the defenders on the city walls of the threatened cities, knew they were doomed
  - 2. Isaiah threatens a similar disaster on any Nubian-Egyptian relief force coming to the aid of Ashdod, quoting those defenders on the walls of Ashdod, as repeating those same hopeless words that characterized the trapped defenders in 720.
  - 3. The prophecy was not literally fulfilled, since no Nubian-Egyptian relief force appeared in 711, but the fate of the inhabitants of Ashdod and their allied cities was no better than that of the Gaza area in 720
- C. Isaiah achieved his real purpose, however, which was to prevent Hezekiah from joining the doomed revolt. It made him enemies for life, however, with those members of the court who had supported joining the revolt. In the future, they swore to keep any such deliberations totally secret from the prophet, since they regarded him as a major security risk for leaking information to Assyrian spies.
- II. Again, any sermon on this text would have to translate the concerns into our own context. Basing our security on God's promises to us, rather than seeking security in very human and compromising arrangements.

The final period of Isaiah's activity was during Hezekiah's revolt against Assyria in 705 and following. Sargon was killed in battle in 705, and his body not recovered, and event celebrated in Isaiah's gloating oracle in 14:3-21. In response to Sargon's death, Hezekiah joined Merodach-baladan of Babylon and the Nubian rulers of Egypt anti-Assyrian coalition and refused tribute to Sennacherib. After first defeating Babylon, Sennacherib then marched against Phoenicia, Philistia, and Judah in 701. He slowly conquered Judah's fortresses that protected the access to Jerusalem, and eventually blockaded Jerusalem. During this period Isaiah railed against the policies of the Judean court, and took up the theme of God's strange work or plan in Judah.

### **Isa 28:20-21; 31:1-5**

- I. One of the major motifs in the first half of the book of Isaiah is the motif of God's plan, or work, or deed.
  - A. It is contrasted with the plans of others
    - 1. Syria and Ephraim 7:5; 8:10
    - 2. Assyria 10:12; 14:25-27
    - 3. Egypt 19:3, 12, 17
    - 4. Tyre 23:8-9
    - 5. Judah 30:1
  - B. Their plans will fail 7:5; 8:10, but God's plan will be carried out 14:25-27
  - C. God's people should be aware of what God is doing—5:12

- D. But God's work is strange—look at 28:20-21
- II. After 705, Hezekiah and his court put their trust, not in God, but in the Nubian rulers of Egypt to deliver them from the Assyrians
- III. Because of this inappropriate refusal to trust God's promises in the Zion Tradition, Isaiah threatened Hezekiah's court with God's strange plan
- IV. This can be illustrated from two passages
- A. Isa 31:1-5
1. The imagery in vs 4-5 is confusing because the images clash with one another.
    - a) The lion imagery in Isaiah has a negative connotation. It suggests that God is fighting against Jerusalem. In Isa 5:29 very similar lion imagery is used of the Assyrian enemy of Jerusalem
    - b) On the other hand the bird imagery is clearly positive. Like flying birds, God protects Jerusalem and saves it. The imagery is similar to that of Ex 19:4 and Deut 32:11
  2. In other words, we have a mixed metaphor, or at least two clashing metaphors. Is God a devouring lion, or is he a protecting bird? Scholars hate that kind of ambiguity, so if you look at the commentaries, you will find that some turn both metaphors into negative metaphors—lions and vultures, while others turn both into positive metaphors—a saving lion and a protecting bird. But either move does violence to the text.
  3. Before resorting to such textual violence, one should look at other passages in Isaiah where the same ambiguity occurs.
- B. In Isa 29:1-8, instead of protecting his city as one would expect from the royal theology, God first besieges Jerusalem and then delivers it. It is though God was playing both the part of the wild Indians and the rescuing cavalry.
1. God uses whatever tools or at hand, including the evil Assyrians (Isa 10:5ff) to purge and purify his own people,
  2. Before he turns and saves the purified remnant (Isa 1:21-28).
- V. But what does all of this have to do with us 20<sup>th</sup> century Christians? It tells us something very fundamental about the nature of the God we worship.
- A. God expects us to have some insight into what he is doing in the world. Isa 5:11-13
- B. God's actual way of working in the world often seem strange even to God's people who tend to interpret God's promises in Scripture in an overly simplistic way.
1. God's people, Christians, the church, are not always protected from evil. There are few of you here who have not lost a mate, or a child, or a loved one—sometimes before their time and sometimes in tragic circumstances. Experientially all of us know that things do not always turn out as we would like, no matter how hard we have tried to please God.
  2. God may initiate action against his people to purge them of evil; God may even use the truly wicked or terribly evil to discipline the reasonably righteous.
  3. When God does that, the righteous suffer along with the wicked. In Isaiah's day there were rich landowners who by hook or by crook stole the property of the poor. Yet when the Assyrians rampaged through Judah in 701 B.C. as God's punishment on the people, it was not just the unrighteous land grabbers who suffered. Innocent babies,

- poor widows, unfortunate orphans, and the victimized poor were also killed, raped, and carried off into slavery by the Assyrians.
4. A little reflection on this point should be a healthy antidote to self-righteous smugness when we see bad things happen to other people. It is no indication that they are wicked, and the fact that it did not happen to us is not a guarantee that we are righteous. Nor, when bad things happen to us, should we immediately assume that it is a divine response to some sin in our lives. God's actions are not so predictable or simple. We should be sensitive to our own sins and open to God's discipline, ready to hear correction, but aware that with God nothing is ever simplistic.

### Lecture Three

Today I want to look at three passages, four if we have time, that show Isaiah's concern for the ethical behavior of his countrymen. One of these passages is clearly rooted in the Zion Tradition, two are rooted in the Mosaic Covenant Tradition, and the other, the one we will take up first, is not so clearly uniquely rooted in either tradition.

- I. In **Isaiah 5:8-24** there are a series of some six oracles, each introduced by the Hebrew particle *hōy*.
  - A. This particle is very popular in the prophetic literature to introduce an oracle, whether grouped in a series, or simply to introduce a single oracle
    1. Isaiah uses it elsewhere some eleven times to introduce a single oracle (1:4; 10:1, 5; 17:12; 18:1; 28:1; 29:1; 29:15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1), and once in the middle of an oracle (1:24).
    2. The NRSV translation renders the particle as "Ah," but in other translations one may find such renderings as "Alas," "Woe to," or the like.
    3. The rendering "Woe to" is a mistake due to a confusion of this particle with the similar sounding *'ōy lē*, which does mean "Woe to."
    4. In my view, the particle is simply an interjection to get a person or persons' attention, before directly addressing that person, just like our colloquial English interjection, "Hey!"
      - a) The interjection is often followed by 2nd person forms, indicating that direct address is involved
      - b) Oracles introduced with this particle normally continue with a characterization of the person or peoples addressed
      - c) Since in the pre-exilic prophets the particle is normally used to introduce an oracle of judgment, the characterization of the audience in this material is normally negative--"Hey, you who lie, cheat, and steal....," but that negativity comes from the characterization, not from the simple exclamation. In Post-Exilic material the particle can introduce an oracle of salvation as in Isa 55:1 and Zech 2:10-11.
      - d) In direct address in Hebrew, there is a syntactical tendency to shift to the third person in relative clauses, though the direct address continues. Something similar happens in English in our direct address to God in prayer, when we begin describing God's actions, "Oh God, who created and sustains the world, and answers our prayers...." If such description is

extended, the speaker often simply shifts to the third person, forgetting that he or she is addressing God as a “you.” The same thing sometimes happens in Hebrew, though second person forms often reappear after a long series of third person forms, indicating that the writer was still aware of the direct address.

- B. In Isa 5:8, the addressees are characterized as those who join house to house and field to field until there is no more room left, and “*you* are left to dwell in the midst of the land by *yourselves*.” There are two explicit 2nd person forms in the vs. showing that direct address is involved.
1. In Isaiah’s time, particularly after the collapse of the north following the Syro-Ephraimitic War, there was a large influx of now property-less and impoverished refugees from the north, which created a surplus of cheap farm laborers.
  2. That made it economically profitable for the wealthy to acquire as much farmland as possible, and some of them were willing to do anything to accomplish this
    - a) Isaiah speaks of the powerful getting oppressive laws passed that made it easier for them to seize the property of the poor (10:1-2)
    - b) And both Isaiah and Micah record their seizure of the property of the poor (Micah 2:1-2, 8-9; Isa 3:14-15).
  3. God’s judgment on this sin of the rich is
    - a) One, to leave them alone in the land--with no servants to do their work (v. 8)
    - b) Two, to leave their magnificent houses as abandoned ruins (v. 9)
    - c) Because their crops will fail, yielding less than a 10th of what the rich invested in them (v. 10)
- C. In Isa 5:11, the addressees are characterized as those whose whole day until late in the evening is spent over indulging in beer and wine. In the Hebrew there is a clever play on words and the expectations for poetic parallelism that the prophet uses to shock the audience, but which very few English translations capture.
1. In the first line the prophet characterizes his addressees as “you who get up early in the morning that beer they may pursue--*yrdpw*”
  2. The parallel line is laid out in the same order until one gets to the last syllable of the last word, “those who stay late in the evening that wine....”
  3. One expects him to say, “that wine they may chase after--*ydlyqw*,” but instead of the expected 3rd plural verb form, he switches to a 3rd singular with a 3rd mpl suffix--*ydlyqm*, unexpectedly switching the subject and object, “that wine may chase them!”
  4. The change is so unexpected many scholars emend this brilliant poetic play, to get the prosaic and mundane text they expected, but that just shows how blind they are to Isaiah’s poetic genius!

5. The marvelous point made by the prophet's sudden shift is that one may so abuse alcohol, that the alcohol ends up controlling the drinker, rather than the other way around! Instead of chasing alcohol, the alcohol is chasing you!
  6. The continuation of the oracle in vv. 12ff shows that the wealthy were so involved with their feasting and drunkenness that they had lost all awareness of what God was doing in the world, and thus God's people were perishing for lack of knowledge
  7. The similar oracle against drunkenness in v. 22 shows how great a problem alcoholism was in Isaiah's time
- D. In the oracle in Isa 5:19, the prophet responds to his critics, who challenge him, saying, "If God has such a plan as you say, let him hurry it up so we can see what you are talking about...." That left Isaiah in a pickle, because he did not want God to hurry his "strange plan" for his people. To hurry it meant the destruction of the nation. On the other hand, for God to delay, meant that the credibility and perhaps the safety of the prophet was at stake--do you continue praying for the recalcitrant, or like Jeremiah, do you finally pray, "God, give them what they deserve!"
- E. In the oracles in vv. 20-21, and 23, the prophet attacks the injustice in his society masked by false terminology, by calling evil good, and good evil, darkness light, and light darkness, bitter sweet, and sweet bitter. Any evil can be made palatable in a society, if one redefines it with non-offensive, politically correct terminology that turns reality on its head. The big lie of reframing reality is alive and well in our own time!
- F. In preaching this text in the modern context, much of it needs little translation. The corrupt and lawless appropriation of other people's property because one can get away with it is still theft, whether it is done by powerful private citizens or by a too-powerful and unscrupulous government. Renaming it does not change the basic injustice, and God will not be mocked. Moreover, if one lives a life of self-indulgence, indifferent to what God is doing in the world, do not expect to escape the inevitable judgment.
- II. In **Isaiah 1:21-28** the prophet uses the ideal portrait of the righteous Jerusalem as a foil to critique the actual Jerusalem of his day
- A. The "faithful" ideal city of the Zion Tradition that was full of justice and inhabited by righteousness, has now become a whore, full of murderers (v. 21)
    1. Her silver has become dross, and her wine diluted with water (v. 22)
    2. Her royal officials are rebels and companions of thieves, and everyone loves a bribe,
    3. So the poor, the orphans and widows, who cannot afford to bribe officials and judges, have no chance for justice in court (v. 23)
  - B. God's response to this abomination is to threaten to take vengeance on his enemies in Jerusalem (v. 24)
    1. Addressing Jerusalem directly in the 2<sup>nd</sup> fsg, he threatens to turn his hand against you, purify your dross as in a furnace, and remove all your slag (v. 25)

2. Then he promises to restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning, and then, he says, you will once again be called the righteous city, the city of faithfulness.
  - a) At the beginning and at the first, refers to the period when David made Jerusalem his capital, since the city was not Israelite before then
  - b) The judges and counselors, do not refer to the period of the judges, but to the royal judges and counselors installed by David and Solomon in the “golden age” of the Davidic-Solomonic empire
  - c) Of course this is an idealized portrait of the Jerusalem of the golden age.
  - d) In actual fact, under David, there were complaints about justice that helped Absalom stir up his revolt against David
  - e) And under Solomon the northern tribes felt so oppressed that it eventually led to a breakup of the empire
- C. The summarizing statement in v. 27 then says that Zion will be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent by righteousness.
  1. There is a debate about the meaning of this statement--does *mišpaṭ* mean the people’s doing of justice, or God’s redemption of Zion through a fiery judgment
  2. Does “righteousness” mean God’s righteousness, or does it mean the repentant ones’ righteous behavior. On this last point, I think it is referring to the behavior of those in Zion who repent, which is supported by the next v.
  3. Since V. 28 contrasts those who repent and are saved by righteousness to the rebels and sinners, who desert God, who will totally perish.
- D. I think the most natural way to preach this text in our context is to see the ideal Jerusalem as a metaphor for the ideal church, rather than as a metaphor for any contemporary political structure, none of which have a religious undergirding comparable to that of Judah’s Zion Tradition
  1. In the Restoration Tradition, we have a tendency to idealize the first century church as the model for the church in every time and period, and this is perfectly fine if we realize we are setting up an idealized church as a foil to correct the current imperfections in the church
  2. We have to realize, however, that the real, flesh and blood churches of the first century had all the drawbacks and imperfections we are trying to correct, just as the imperial administration of justice in the golden age of David and Solomon was far less than perfect.
  3. When we look at an actual congregation of the first century, like that in Corinth, one sees the blemishes, warts, pimples, and all
  4. We obviously do not want to recreate the Corinthian church with its divisions, rampant sexual immorality, and the puffed up self-importance of the conflicting parties.
  5. It is the abstracted, ideal portrait of the early church that we want to use to structure our church life by
  6. The model for elders, deacons, and other church leaders in Timothy and Titus should be taken that way, as an idealized model.

7. If one actually looked closely at real elders and deacons on Crete or in the churches supervised by Timothy, it is likely that many of them would not actually live up to these idealized qualifications.
8. In fact, the idealized model has probably been formulated in part by past experience of leaders who failed. The admonition not to install a new convert in such a position most likely arose out of a bitter experience of having done just that, and that is probably true of many of the admonitions for choosing ideal leaders.

III. In **Isaiah 1:2-20** we have a covenant lawsuit based on the Deuteronomistic Mosaic covenant theology.

- A. In this theology, an international treaty form, used to regulate the relations between a powerful nation, or suzerain, and its vassal states, was adapted by Israel to express the religious relationship between Yahweh or God, the suzerain, and the people of Israel, his vassals.
  1. In such treaty forms, familial language is quite common, the suzerain in normally referred to as the father, and the vassal as his son
  2. Such treaties typically invoked the gods of both parties as witnesses of the treaty, and among these witnesses, particularly in the late second millennium Hittite treaties, there were multiple pairs of deified natural phenomena like heaven and earth, hills and valleys, rivers and streams, etc.
  3. When Israel adapted the form for their use, they could not include other gods as witnesses, since the covenant with God prohibited them from acknowledging other gods, just as a political treaty prohibited a vassal state from communicating with any great power other than to the suzerain with which it had entered into treaty. If one was a vassal of the Hittites, it was verboten and a breach of treaty to send an embassy to its rival Egypt
  4. But Israel was able to fudge the point by making heaven and earth, and other such natural pairs, substitute witnesses in place of the gods
  5. In a major breach of such a political suzerainty treaty, the guilty party would be exposed by the outcome of the war between the suzerain and vassal. The divine witnesses to the treaty would ensure that justice would be done by the outcome of the war, because there was no other tribunal of last resort to resolve the conflict
- B. In Israel's adaptation of this form then, when the covenant or treaty with God had been broken, God called upon the semi-divine witnesses to the treaty--heaven and earth--to hear his case against his people (v. 2).
  1. Some scholars pretend that the legal dispute in this passage was based, not on covenant law, but on simple everyday lawsuits in the village gates
  2. This is just wrong, however. In everyday lawsuits one did not call on heaven and earth as witnesses, one called upon people who had witnessed a contract, or had seen a murder, or had been present at a wedding, etc.
  3. The only reason to call on heaven and earth is because the everyday witnesses of ordinary lawsuits will not work

4. In a dispute between two nations, the dispute was ultimately settled by war, whose outcome was directed by the divine witnesses who had been offended by the breach of treaty
  5. When God complains that he had raised children, but they had rebelled against him, this is just the typical familial language of treaty relationships, and the language of “rebellion” underscores that
- C. The language of “knowing” in v. 3 is typical treaty language, but there is a certain ambiguity in the Hebrew text--What is it that Israel does not know, that my people do not understand. The LXX clarifies it by adding the word “me,” but the Hebrew is probably intentionally ambiguous allowing for several ideas, all of which are true--
1. Israel, unlike the dumb ox and ass, did not know where their blessings came from
  2. They did not know God
  3. And, as the following vv. indicate, they did not understand their terrible suffering was punishment for their rebellion
- D. In v. 4, the *hōy* particle introduces an expansion of this thought,
1. Isaiah’s audience is characterized as a sinful nation, a people loaded with sin, offspring who do evil, and corrupt children, who have abandoned Yahweh, spurned the Holy One of Israel, and turned their backs on him.
  2. In v. 5-6 then, God asks in puzzlement, “Why do you seek further beatings? Why do you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot to the head there is no sound place in the body, just bruises, welts, and festering sores that have not been pressed out, bandaged, or softened with oil.
  3. This troubling imagery of rigorous physical punishment, if carried out by a father against a child today, would be condemned as child abuse, but ancient Israel was far more open to the value of the use of the rod in disciplining children
  4. And, in any case, the image is only a metaphor for the actual punishment of rebellious Israel, which is spelled out in vv. 7-9.
    - a) The actual punishment is the desolation of Judah’s land and cities by foreigners, so that it is left desolate like the overthrow of Sodom
    - b) Even the sacred Zion remains like a solitary booth in a cucumber field
    - c) The reference appears to reflect Sennacherib’s campaign of 701, when all the major cities of Judah with the exception of Jerusalem, were captured by the Assyrians
    - d) Had not God left his small remnant (Sennacherib deported over 200,000 people from Judah, and that takes no account of the thousands he killed), we would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah
- E. The mention of Sodom and Gomorrah then causes the prophet to address the leaders of this devastated nation and their surviving people as the rulers of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah to indicate the depth of their rebellion (v. 10)

- F. The people are punctilious in their external religious duties of sacrifice (vv. 11-14), but God is fed up with this outward show of piety
  - 1. In v. 12-13 he commands them to quit trampling his courts
  - 2. Basically, he can no longer stand their worship, which has become too great a burden to bear vv. 14-15
  - 3. When they spread their hands in prayer, God will hide his eyes, and even when they make long prayers, he will not listen, because their hands are full of bloodshed
- G. If they want God to hear them, they must clean up their act, turn away from their evil deeds, cease to do evil and learn to do good, administer real justice and rescue the orphan and widow (vv. 16-17)
- H. God then calls them to negotiate with him to settle this broken covenant with him.
  - 1. Though their sins are as red as scarlet, they could be cleansed as white as snow, or as clean as white wool (v. 18),
  - 2. And, if they are willing, and listen (or obey), they will once again eat the good of the land (v. 19),
  - 3. But if they refuse and continue to rebel, they will be eaten by the sword, “for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken” (v. 20)--note how this ending of the lawsuit mirrors the beginning statement in v. 2, “for Yahweh has spoken”
- I. In preaching this text, one must certainly note that the covenant theology in the New Testament differs in a number of respects from the classical Mosaic covenant
  - 1. There is an emphasis on grace and the gift of God’s Spirit which enables the believer to obey God’s demands through the divine power God gives to his people
  - 2. Nonetheless, there remains much to learn from such texts
    - a) Jesus and the NT in general still speaks of the two ways, the narrow way of obedience that leads to life and the broad way of self-indulgence that leads to death (Mt 7:13-14)
    - b) And obedience to Jesus’ words, like obedience to God’s words in Isaiah 1, remains the criteria by which one is either saved or lost, lives or perishes (Mt 7:21-27).
    - c) The demand for genuine righteousness, expressed in the way one treats others, as more important than the punctilious observance of external rituals was also major part of Jesus’s teaching--I desire mercy and not sacrifice (Mt. 12:7)--and remains such among his NT followers, love in action by the way one treats others, not just in pious words without actions
    - d) Sometimes, the bad things that happen to a Christian individual or a Christian community may be wake-up call to the individual or community to repent and clean up their act, but not every bad thing that happens to a person or a community is because of that person’s or community’s sin.
    - e) When the disciples asked Jesus about the man born blind (Jn 9:2), whether it was because of the parents’ sin or the man’s own sin, Jesus said it was neither. Not every bad thing happens because of sin. In that

case, Jesus said that the man was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him (Jn 9:3).

- IV. The other covenant lawsuit is against the leaders of Jerusalem in Isaiah 3:1-15, where the cultural framework of the society is threatened with complete dissolution and social chaos
- A. Because Jerusalem and Judah has defied Yahweh, and proclaim their sin as brazenly as Sodom once did, both Jerusalem and Judah have stumbled and fallen (vv. 8-9)
  - B. A distinction is made between the innocent and the guilty, for both shall receive the fruits of their labor (vv. 10-11)
  - C. But the people as a whole will suffer primarily because of incompetent rulers--children and women (v. 12)--Isaiah was very much a conservative traditionalist from the wealthy class--certainly not a populist of any sort.
    - 1. The reference is probably to the court of Ahaz, who came to the throne at a young age, probably 16, and whose judgment may have been unduly influenced by the queen mother and other prominent women in the palace
    - 2. At any rate the misrule is so bad that Yahweh stands up like an angry judge to announce his judgment (v. 13)
  - D. Yahweh goes to court against the leaders of his people, because they have devoured the vineyard, filled their own houses with property taken from the poor, and oppressed the poor so severely that Isaiah can refer to it as grinding the face of the poor in the dirt
  - E. The continuation in vv. 16ff suggests that the wealthy women of these leaders also participated in the oppression of the poor and their arrogant, self-indulgent life style.
  - F. In preaching from this text, one should certainly emphasize the responsibility of true leaders to put the well-being of the community above their own immediate well being, though in the long run, the well-being of the leaders of a community is directly tied to the continued health, prosperity, and well-being of community as a whole. If the community collapses into chaos, so will the status of the now defunct leaders.