

The Artist Formerly Known as Isaiah
Isaiah Hits the Top 40
Isaiah 5:1–25

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I used to be heavily involved in music ministry. I carried a double major of Bible and Music Education and interned in several churches as the Minister of Music. I have seen music break down walls and bring people to Jesus. I have also seen it be nothing more than noise in the background provided for you, so you do not have to be alone with your thoughts. Music can usher us to the throne room where we are before the throne of the God of the universe praising His name and prepare us to hear a message empowered by the Holy Spirit. It can also be used to talk to us and provide tough messages to listen to. Music can be used to reach the most hardened of hearts.

Isaiah will now give a practical demonstration of that.

We have now arrived at chapter 5. A quick review of where we have been to this point.

Chapter one provided us the introduction and the reasons why. Chapter 2–4 showed the contrast between what was versus what could be and the ultimate end state Chapter 5 is designed to bring us back to the current reality that exists in both sections of the nation, north and south with a serious focus on Judah. We will also see today in chapter 5. The current state, which we had a glimpse of in the last 3 chapters, must be dealt with.

This is a parable crafted as a song. Jesus may have even referred to it.

Uzziah is still on the throne and conditions in the nation are the same as we have seen for the past 4 chapters. God knows the stubborn hearts that He is communicating with through Isaiah, and He also knows how to communicate in a way that will attract attention and be remembered...by a song.

This parable was put into a song that it might be the more moving and affecting, might be the more easily learned and exactly remembered, and the better transmitted to posterity; and it is an exposition of the song of Moses (Deu. 32), showing that what he then foretold was now fulfilled. (Henry 1994, 1085)

In this song, God will let it be known what He has done for His people. He will also show how they respond to His loving care.

In the Jewish culture of Isaiah, the use of similes and metaphors were quite common. Just like us, they liked a good story and they enjoyed music. Some of the common themes they were familiar with and they cause us some interpretive difficulties at times; but our joy is to continually search the scriptures when we see these to ferret out the true sense of what is being said.

Saying that, lets read through this song first before we dig in.

Isaiah 5:1–7

“Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. “My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it And also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it.” For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.” (NASB95)

To us in the 21st century, this looks like, on the surface, to be a song about an agricultural disaster put to music and then sung by Isaiah with some points of explanation at the end. In other words, a good country song. But stop for a moment and let's think like a Jew in 700ish BC.

First, we would have a strong familiarity with the guidebook on wedded love written by Solomon. That book is called the Song of Songs or the Song of Solomon. They would all know Solomon's pick-up line example for us. His pickup line can be found in Song of Solomon 4:1–2 *“You are beautiful, my darling, beautiful beyond words. Your eyes are like doves behind your veil. Your hair falls in waves, like a flock of goats winding down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are as white as sheep, recently shorn and freshly washed. Your smile is flawless, each tooth matched with its twin.” (NLT)*

For the Jew of Isaiah's day, the image of a vineyard is the image of one's bride. We see this in the Song of Solomon where the object of Solomon's love makes a reference to working in the vineyards and as a result was unable to take care of herself as she should.

Song of Solomon 1:6

“Don't stare at me because I am dark— the sun has darkened my skin. My brothers were angry with me; they forced me to care for their vineyards, so I couldn't care for myself—my own vineyard.” (NLT)

When Isaiah says he is going to sing a song for his friend and references his vineyard, the immediate thought would be that this a wedding song, it is a love song.

Song of Solomon 8:11–12

“Solomon has a vineyard at Baal-hamon, which he leases out to tenant farmers. Each of them pays a thousand pieces of silver for harvesting its fruit. But my vineyard is mine to give, and Solomon need not pay a thousand pieces of silver. But I will give two hundred pieces to those who care for its vines.” (NLT)

Isaiah has perked the interest of those who are around him with his introduction of this song.

This is clearly a love song and would be perceived as such by those listening based on the introduction provided by Isaiah. “If the song is a “love song” in the formal sense, one would expect the singer to be the bride or husband of the beloved, on whose behalf the song is sung. Yet the prophet is clearly the singer and Yahweh the beloved, and the song has more to do with the relationship between the “beloved” and his vineyard than between the prophet and God. The singer (prophet) is therefore better understood as the friend and advocate for his companion (God); he sings a song about the love of his companion for his vineyard. (Seitz 1993, 47)

But as Isaiah begins, that is not what the listeners would be thinking. Isaiah is singing about his friend's vineyard, or in other words, he is singing about his friend's bride. The picture provided shows all that his friend has done to take care of and provide for his bride. The hook that Isaiah throws into the song, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is the hook of a love gone wrong, using a picture they were familiar with.

If Isaiah was singing this to us today, it would be a country song.

What started off as a wonderful song about budding love and a wedding being planned suddenly turns toxic and becomes love lost with a funeral dirge by the end of it.

For the listener of Isaiah, the song starts off on an excellent note, “But the love song veers off in a direction that’s unexpected and then shocking. The vineyard produces no fruit; in other words, the man’s courting gets him nowhere. He then turns from love to hate and destroys the vineyard. One might imagine other men listening to the singer-poet, sympathizing with him and with his action.” (Goldengay 2014, 20)

He did use a catch phrase that is in the Song of Songs, “*well-beloved*.” Clearly this is a love song. Isaiah has the hook and he is being listened to as a result. We do not know where he is performing, possibly the Temple, but we are not told.

Just as one would take care in establishing a vineyard, we see in the context of a love song, that the vineyard, the bride is well cared for, all in the context of a vineyard.

As Isaiah starts off, he has attracted listeners who are not totally clear about what they will be hearing, but the hook appears to be this is a love song of some kind. Indeed, it is, a love song of YAHWEH for His chosen people, His wife, and the care He has for His people.

We see the care though for the bride being given. Isaiah’s friend, his beloved, took great pains to prepare a place for the vineyard and ensure the success of wedded bliss with lots of children.

Isaiah 5:2

“He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it And also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones.” (NASB95)

The vineyard was protected. Anything that would cause issues with taking care of the vineyard were removed.

This picture of all the work that goes into preparing a proper vineyard to ensure fertility and lots of grapes would be clearly understood by those listening to Isaiah’s song as also a picture of those things that one would do for their bride by preparing a place for her.

Isaiah’s audience could no doubt identify with both the experience of a disappointing grape harvest and the disappointing experience of unreciprocated love, and thus they are progressively led into total sympathy with the friend against his “vineyard.” (Roberts 2015, 71)

In the world of that time, the wedding would be arranged. The bridegroom would, at the appropriate time and after formal announcement, return to his father’s house and begin adding on to the house for the bride to be. Since fertility is anticipated, this would be a large addition. The preparation is thorough and takes a while.

The bridegroom loves his bride to be and as he does the work, he is anticipating the days that they will be together.

Everything has been done to ensure a safe protected place for the “vineyard” to live in. One that would ensure the upmost in fertility. Everything was supplied for this relationship to be one that would last the distance and truly be long-term. But we see at the end of verse two, the shoe drops, and we have a love gone wrong.

Those who are listening can clearly identify the picture of a poor grape harvest being a picture of unrequited love. They are fully “in” on this song and the message being conveyed with the imagery being used by Isaiah. If they had ignored his message before, they are not now, they are fully in on what he has sung.

Isaiah 5:3–4

“And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?” (NASB95)

Suddenly Isaiah switches from third person to first person to ask a question of his listeners. His listeners would be shocked from the story of unrequited love. They would fully identify with the picture of a woman scorning the one who had spent so much effort and time to win her. By flipping to first person here in verse 3, Isaiah adds to the drama by appealing to those listening to fully identify with the story and become part of it.

I am sure that by this point there are those yelling out suggestions of things that could have been done to prevent the results seen in the song. Part of telling a story well in music is to bring the listener along with you and then into the story itself identifying as a participant, becoming emotionally invested into what is going on. The listeners are fully in now.

Isaiah is using the same technique that was used by Nathan when he told King David a story about a rich man and a poor man in 2 Samuel 12.

2 Samuel 12:1–7

So the LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to David, Nathan said, “There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing except for a little lamb he had acquired. He raised it, and it grew up alongside him and his children. It used to eat his food, drink from his cup, and sleep in his arms. It was just like a daughter to him. When a traveler arrived at the rich man’s home, he did not want to use one of his own sheep or cattle to feed the traveler who had come to visit him. Instead, he took the poor man’s lamb and cooked it for the man who had come to visit him.” Then David became very angry at this man. He said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! Because he committed this cold-hearted crime, he must pay for the lamb four times over!” Nathan said to David, “You are that man! This is what the LORD God of Israel says: ‘I chose you to be king over Israel and I rescued you from the hand of Saul.’” (NET)

The technique draws the listener along and gets them emotionally involved in the story where they are now identifying with the party who has been wronged.

“What more was there to do for my vineyard...” Perhaps there were those yelling out “nothing.” Perhaps there were suggestions of how to fix the situation. The audience though fully identifies with the futility and the severe emotional pain that would go along with love lost or even a crop denied. Isaiah, after allowing an appropriate time to pass for crowd participation, continues.

Isaiah 5:5–6

“So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it.” (NASB95)

It is possible “leave” was yelled out, but the way that Isaiah presents this, it is along the lines of going one more step beyond what was being yelled to him as possible solutions to the issue.

As Isaiah begins in verse 5, you can hear the crowd agreeing along with him, “yeah, do it.”

They would be agreeing along with everything he is saying until he gets to the last phrase which suddenly changes the entire picture. Only YAHWEH can do that. Wait a minute here.

Isaiah has them exactly where YAHWEH wants them, they now can see the situation from the perspective of YAHWEH, and they are fully in on this. So now drops the hammer.

Isaiah 5:7

“For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.” (NASB95)

Mic drop!

Indeed, this is a love song, but one of YAHWEH for Israel and Judah. Suddenly it hits the listeners...We are the vineyard; we are the ones who have turned the relationship into one of unrequited love for YAHWEH.

Isaiah now shocked his audience by identifying the characters in his parable by name. His well-beloved and the owner of the vineyard was Yahweh of hosts, not some unnamed friend; the vineyard was Israel, not his friend's wife (cf. 1:8; 3:14; Ps. 80:8–18; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 15:6–8; Hos. 10:1; Matt. 21:33–44); and the Judahites were the individual plants in this unresponsive vineyard. (Constable 2003, Is 5:7)

Unfortunately, we may also see some elements of our own lives in this as well. The picture is applicable to more than one historical period.

Jesus has done so much for us, his bride. How have we responded?

Do we take advantage of His grace? Are we ungrateful and unthankful? Or do we truly know what it is He achieved for us on the cross?

Luke 6:46

“Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (NASB95)

James 2:14–17

“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.” (NASB95)

The anticipated crop of good grapes symbolizes justice and righteousness; the sour grapes represent bloodshed and cries of distress. Isaiah used wordplay to draw attention to the contrast between the Lord's expectations and reality. The Lord looked for “justice” (Heb. mishpat), but got only “bloodshed” (Heb. mispakh); he looked for “righteousness” (Heb. tsedaqah), but got only “cries of distress” (Heb. tse'aqah) from the oppressed. (Chisholm Jr. 2002, 22)

Isaiah follows up the big reveal with a series of woe statements. He has sung the song, and the big reveal has taken place and immediately Isaiah follows it up with a litany of wrongs.

I envision him looking at different groups around him who were actively involved in each of the items being discussed. They have been sucked in, and as Nathan did with David when he told him he was the man, Isaiah is now doing the same with those who have been listening.

First, he looks, possibly pointing at those who were inappropriately obtaining property.

Isaiah 5:8–10

“Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, Until there is no more room, So that you have to live alone in the midst of the land! In my ears the LORD of hosts has sworn, “Surely, many houses shall become desolate, Even great and fine ones, without occupants. For ten acres of vineyard will yield only one bath of wine, And a homer of seed will yield but an ephah of grain.”” (NASB95)

The Torah provided for an equitable and continuing distribution of land. In Leviticus 25, in the description of the Jubilee year, permanent aggregation of large estates was not to take place in Israel.

Leviticus 25:13–18

“In this year of jubilee you must each return to your property. If you make a sale to your fellow citizen or buy from your fellow citizen, no one is to wrong his brother. You may buy it from your fellow citizen according to the number of years since the last jubilee; he may sell it to you according to the years of produce that are left. The more years there are, the more you may make its purchase price, and the fewer years there are, the less you must make its purchase price, because he is only selling to you a number of years of produce. No one is to oppress his fellow citizen, but you must fear your God, because I am the LORD your God. You must obey my statutes and my regulations; you must be sure to keep them so that you may live securely in the land.” (NET)

Property was to revert to the original owner every 50 years. The nation was not doing that. By his statement to those who were doing that action, the Lord, through Isaiah, is clearly signaling one of the many reasons why Israel and Judah can no longer remain in the land. The offer is still there, yes. But the litany of crimes committed against YAHWEH continues.

Those who engage in this estate building would wind up losing those estates and the agricultural production they anticipated would not take place.

They have no idea that the world is about to change and very soon, under King Ahaz, there will be no one who could even be tenants.

King Solomon had given this idea of doing what you want to rather than what YAHWEH wants you to do a try during his reign. He wrote a book about his findings, which were apparently being ignored.

Ecclesiastes 2:10–11

“All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.” (NASB95)

That did not stop the land speculators though. Micah, ministering during the same time period, also wrote about this problem.

Micah 2:2

“They confiscate the fields they desire, and seize the houses they want. They defraud people of their homes, and deprive people of the land they have inherited.” (NET)

This was not something new that had popped up under King Uzziah, it was going on at least a generation before. Amos writes the following in Amos 2:6-8 *“This is what the LORD says: “Because Israel has committed three covenant transgressions— make that four!—I will not revoke my decree of judgment. They sold the innocent for silver, the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the dirt-covered heads of the poor; they push the destitute away. A man and his father go to the same girl; in this way they show disrespect for my moral purity. They stretch out on clothing seized as collateral; they do so right beside every altar! They drink wine bought with the fines they have levied; they do so right in the temple of their God!” (NET)*

Isaiah 5:11–12

“Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink, Who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them! Their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; But they do not pay attention to the deeds of the LORD, Nor do they consider the work of His hands.” (NASB95)

This is the second woe that Isaiah records. He has shifted his gaze to another group standing around him. There are a group of drunks around him. This is a group that due to the sin they are committing, as related in the first woe, indulges in self-satisfaction by numbing their minds to what it is they have done.

They are drunks.

The Bible does not condemn wine, but it does condemn the abuse of it. The group Isaiah is addressing is one that works to maintain a mind numbness about them. They double down by then engaging in the latest entertainments that the culture has to offer. This keeps their mind off their sin and duplicity and keeps them having anything to do with the worship of YAHWEH.

This second woe has distinct impacts that can be measured, and Isaiah goes there. He follows up with a litany of the results of the party lifestyle he sees in those standing around him. Many of these were so called leaders of the people. YAHWEH sees the hearts though and has revealed that to Isaiah.

Isaiah 5:13–17

“Therefore My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge; And their honorable men are famished, And their multitude is parched with thirst. Therefore Sheol has enlarged its throat and opened its mouth without measure; And Jerusalem’s splendor, her multitude, her din of revelry and the jubilant within her, descend into it. So the common man will be humbled and the man of importance abased, The eyes of the proud also will be abased. But the LORD of hosts will be exalted in judgment, And the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness. Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture, And strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy.” (NASB95)

What are the high points of verses 13–15? The result, per the Lord, in the life of the leadership being too engaged in a partying lifestyle, and failing to pay attention to ruling the nation is as follows:

Exile (13)

Willing ignorance (13)

Starvation for lower leadership (13)

Everyone will thirst (13)

Sheol eats many in the lifestyle in Jerusalem (14)

Self-exalting partyers are humbled (15)

About the willing ignorance. How should the leadership be seeing the world? They should be examining those things which were taking place and comparing them with what God’s word said. The nation was about to be engaged in a series of really poorly thought out alliances, why? Possibly this is the reason in verses 11& 12. As A result, they are not interested in having any knowledge about the geopolitics of the day. “Because Judah’s leaders in their intoxication with pleasure have lost the ability to discern God’s work, because they can no longer creatively apply the insights of their religious tradition to the political and social problems of their day, Yahweh’s people will go into exile for lack of this knowledge.” (Roberts 2015, 81)

What is wrong with the partying and addicted to entertainment lifestyle? Simply put, it forgets about God.

Though they may claim to remember Him in some way, they do not regard the work of the LORD, nor consider the operation of His hands. (Guzik 2000, Is 5:11-17)

So who will be left when the party generation, those leaders who should know better, are recipients of what YAHWEH has for them?

Following the disappearance of the carousers, only sheep would be left to graze on the ruins of the wealthy. (Chisholm Jr., Structure, Style, and the Prophetic Message: An Analysis of Isaiah 5:8-30 1986, 52)

Isaiah 5:16–17

“But the LORD of hosts will be exalted in judgment, And the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness. Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture, And strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy.” (NASB95)

That is always a hard statement to deal with, “the Lord of hosts will be exalted in judgment.” This takes us to the statement made of the coming day of the Lord back in chapter 2. *“The pride of man will be humbled And the loftiness of men will be abased; And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day,”* (Isaiah 2:17, NASB95)

God will not share His glory with another.

Once the so-called leaders of the people, those who, as we saw earlier, oppressed them, are gone, who is left? The sheep are left, literally and figuratively.

“I will certainly gather all of you, O Jacob, I will certainly assemble those Israelites who remain. I will bring them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in the middle of a pasture; they will be so numerous that they will make a lot of noise.” (Micah 2:12, NET)

Jeremiah discussed the same leadership problem. *“The LORD says, “The leaders of my people are sure to be judged. They were supposed to watch over my people like shepherds watch over their sheep. But they are causing my people to be destroyed and scattered.”* (Jeremiah 23:1, NET)

Isaiah continues to shift his discussion through the group around him. Somewhere along the line, there are those who have been listening who have shifted into mocking him and mocking what he is saying. They are trolling him on Twitter and producing You Tube videos making fun of what it is he is teaching.

They are pulling the iniquity to themselves with ropes. They have not fallen into it. They are consciously choosing evil and exerting concerted effort to make that choice. (Oswalt 1986, 164)

Isaiah 5:18–19

“Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood, And sin as if with cart ropes; Who say, “Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; And let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near And come to pass, that we may know it!”” (NASB95)

The group that Isaiah is looking at now are the naysayers, the Twitter Trollers, the ones who are literally hauling their sin along with them. *“Woe to those who draw in the sins as with a long rope, and transgressions as with a strap of a heifer’s yoke,”* (Isaiah 5:18, LES2)

They are so heavy with sin, they literally need a truck to haul it around behind them.

I really like the comments of Bannister and Hemenway in their discussion of these men. “The truly muscular sinners, who put their pluck and power into the business of sin: so that they are like very stout pullers who draw the greatest cartloads with the strongest of ropes. Yet the cords that bind them to the huge loads of iniquity they carry are but cords of vanity, of infatuated folly.” (Bannister and Hemenway 1886, 42)

At the same time, because they do not believe Isaiah, these same people are daring God to go ahead and do it. They don’t believe He will. They are defiant to the message being communicated from YAHWEH by Isaiah.

Now I see Isaiah looking at a much broader group. This includes the naysayers, but the group is larger. I can see him pointing while making a circle and while doing so saying the next four verses. I also see him pointing to us today as well and pointing directly at most, if not all, the culture’s leadership. He is pointing at all aspects of our culture as he says the following:

Isaiah 5:20–23

“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes And clever in their own sight! Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine And valiant men in mixing strong drink, Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!” (NASB95)

As in Judah's culture, we too are experiencing a unique time. The Lord was about to move through Israel and Judah and sift them. Today, we are on the cusp of the return of Jesus Christ for His Church and all of the signs that Jesus told us about in Matthew 24 are clearly evident.

The love of many is indeed waxing cold as we see organizations who carry the name of Jesus Christ, but are dead, standing up in favor of those things and activities that God clearly is against.

Rather than living as a countercultural community that bears witness to the coming kingdom of God, many of us go with the cultural flow, thoughtlessly consuming the products, ideas, and aspirations streamed for us in an unending deluge of retweets and Facebook likes. (Kinnaman and Lyons 2016, 33)

We are exiles in, what David Kinnaman calls, "digital Babylon." Exiles in Babylon were being squeezed constantly to fit the mold of a good pagan Babylonian. Daniel and his friends rejected that outcome as should we as exiles in the world today. This is not our home.

...another group of religious Americans: those who say that the right to abortion is part of their religion. This group includes Jews, Muslims, and even Christians who believe their faith allows—and sometimes even requires—abortion under certain circumstances. They say the right to abortion is a constitutional one, protected not only by the right to privacy, but by the freedom to exercise religion.

"There's a lot of folks who are pro-choice or support reproductive dignity and freedom because of their faith and not in spite of it," said Rev. Katey Zeh, an ordained Baptist minister and CEO of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. (Ettachfini 2020)

Sexual Confusion

In an uncompromising response, Mr. Hart said: "You can't abandon Christian teaching because some people don't like it. The faith once delivered to all the saints didn't emerge as a result of polling or focus groups. Neither will it emerge from following secular trends. The Bible's message is clear. Marriage can only ever be between one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others, for life." (Hart 2020)

The second kind of tolerance at play here could be called "epistemological tolerance," the idea that we should be tolerant of false/dangerous beliefs and worldviews. If people voice their opinion that Jesus did not exist as a historical figure, I am told by the New Age movement (and post-modernism in general) that I am to "respect their beliefs." Social tolerance is confused with epistemological tolerance such that worldviews, not people, are entitled to respect. The religious pluralism of the New Age movement is largely built upon the false idea that ideas have the same "rights" as humans to be tolerated and respected. In a postmodern world, worldviews should be exempt from criticism as abstract entities. (Bancarz and Peck 2018, Kindle Locations 4062-4067)

We have political leaders who lie continually. We have an entertainment industry that produces for public consumption those things which God in His word calls an abomination.

We are told that hating the sin but loving the person really means we hate the person, and nothing could be farther from the truth.

When Jesus died on the cross, He died for all mankind. The gift is free, but the offer must be accepted. When we give our life to Christ, He begins to change us and that is a participatory activity which is called justification. He will not leave us where we are in our sin, but He will conform us to Himself.

One reason is that we live in a time and a place characterized by rampant skepticism about Christianity and the Bible. Hyperrationalism and pop-culture atheism undercut belief. A majority of non-Christian youth and young adults are jaded to the appeal of following Jesus. They reject organized religion altogether, especially claims of an exclusive faith like Christianity. Many view the Bible as a book of oppression that is harmful to the minds of its devoted readers. In some influential places, young Christians encounter condescension or downright hostility from their peers, their instructors, and social elites. (Kinnaman and Matlock, Faith for Exiles 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon 2019, 27)

Romans 3:21–24

“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;” (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 6:9–11

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” (NASB95)

The message is simple per Paul, Jesus has changed us all. God has not winked, nor has He changed His mind about what is sin. We have. So did Judah and Israel.

Our culture today requires the same level of condemnation that the culture of Judah and Israel received at the hand of the Prophet Isaiah.

He has systematically laid bare the folly of his people from chapter 1 with the indictment through chapter 4 and the contrast between past present and future. Now he drops the hammer, the same as Nathan dropped for David.

To quote that sage philosopher, Pogo: We have met the enemy and he is us.

Our culture today, just as Judah, is enamored with everything that is evil. Our culture, just like Judah, then it turns around and calls it good. Jesus warned about this. It has been around since Pentecost.

John 16:2–4

“They will put you out of the synagogue, yet a time is coming when the one who kills you will think he is offering service to God. They will do these things because they have not known the Father or me. But I have told you these things so that when their time comes, you will remember that I told you about them. “I did not tell you these things from the beginning because I was with you.” (NET)

Romans 1:18–32

“But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles. So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies. They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved. Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. They know God’s justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.” (NLT)

Isaiah 5:20–23

“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes And clever in their own sight! Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine And valiant men in mixing strong drink, Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!” (NASB95)

The effect of these six woes is cumulative. The poetry presents a society that has lost its center, its reference, its focus, its purpose, and its chance for well-being. Thus the woes are followed by two abrupt, heavy, harsh prophetic “therefores” (vv. 24, 25), voicing Yahweh’s negative resolve. (Brueggeman 1998, 55)

Isaiah 5:24–25

“Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes stubble And dry grass collapses into the flame, So their root will become like rot and their blossom blow away as dust; For they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts And despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. On this account the anger of the LORD has burned against His people, And He has stretched out His hand against them and struck them down. And the mountains quaked, and their corpses lay like refuse in the middle of the streets. For all this His anger is not spent, But His hand is still stretched out.” (NASB95)

One – they have rejected the law of YAHWEH, the Torah. The rules that God provided to them for how to live life, how to govern and live as a society, all has been rejected. Isaiah points out not only rejected, but despised.

The Gentile nations can’t do this, they do not have YAHWEH’s law, but it was provided specifically to Israel so they would be a beacon to the world. They have failed to the degree that the specific light given to them by the Lord is itself being rejected. *“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:31, NASB95)*

Two – Because of that rejection by those who had been given great light, the *“anger of the Lord has burned against His people.”* YAHWEH will actively engage His own people. He will stretch out His hand against them.

This has not happened yet but is very close for the north and the south. So many will die that no one will be able to bury the dead. Even with that, there is more to come in judgment, and we will pick that up with verse 26 next week.

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