

Isaiah 1-12 Overview

A Chapter 1
The Vision and Call to Repentance

B Chapters 2-4
Glorious Mt. Zion — Judgment — Righteous Branch

C Chapter 5
Vineyard Parable and Assyrian Threat

Chapters 6-9:7
Glory of Yahweh/3 Sons

C' Chapters 9:8-10:34
Extended Woes and Divine Judgment

B' Chapter 11
The Righteous Branch and Peaceful Kingdom

A' Chapter 12
Songs of Salvation and Praise

Isaiah 1:2-31 — Overview

Verses 2-9: Rebellious Children

- Israel has rebelled against God despite His care for them
- Their land is consumed like Sodom and Gomorrah

Verses 10-17: Empty Religion

- God rejects their sacrifices and festivals that lack true justice and righteousness

Verses 18-20: A Choice

- Obedience leads to blessing
- Rebellion leads to judgment

Verses 21-26: City of Faithfulness

- True justice and righteousness makes the city faithful

Verses 27-31: Fire of Justice

- Those who repent will be redeemed through justice and righteousness but those who don't...
- ...their land is consumed like Sodom and Gomorrah

Isaiah 1:2-9

Rebellious Children (2-4)

² **Hear**, O heavens, and **give ear**, O earth;
for the LORD has spoken:
“Children have I reared and brought up,
but they have rebelled against me.
³ The ox knows its owner,
and the donkey its master’s crib,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.”
⁴ Ah, **sinful** nation,
a people laden with iniquity,
offspring of evildoers,
children who deal corruptly!
They have **forsaken the LORD**,
they have despised the Holy One of Israel,
they are utterly estranged.

Totally Wounded (5-6)

⁵ (a) Why will you still be **struck down**?
(a’) Why will you continue **to rebel**?
The whole head is sick,
and the whole heart faint.
⁶ From the sole of the foot even to the head,
there is no soundness in it,
but bruises and sores
and raw wounds;
they are not pressed out or bound up
or softened with oil.

Desolate Land (7-9)

⁷ Your country lies desolate;
your cities are burned with fire;
in your very presence
foreigners devour your land;
it is desolate, as **overthrown** by foreigners.
⁸ And the daughter of Zion is left
like a booth in a vineyard,
like a lodge in a cucumber field,
like a besieged city.
⁹ If the LORD of hosts
had not left us a few survivors,
we should have been like **Sodom**,
and become like **Gomorrah**.

Cosmic Introduction

The summoning of the heavens and the earth to witness the LORD's case is a callback to the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. It was here where Israel was about to enter the promised land and Moses communicates all of the potential blessings and curses if they obey or disobey the LORD.

Isaiah is calling out that what is happening/about to happen to Israel is the fulfillment of his prophecy.

Deuteronomy 32:1

¹ "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak,
and let the earth hear the words of my mouth.

This isn't the only comparison between Deuteronomy 32 and Isaiah 1 either, Isaiah pulls a ton from that passage to prove this point further.

Deuteronomy 32	Isaiah 1	Notes
¹ "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth.	^{2a} Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken:	Cosmic Witnesses
⁵ They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation.	^{2b-4} "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me... they are utterly estranged."	Estranged Children
²² For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.	³¹ And the strong shall become tinder, and his work a spark, and both of them shall burn together, with none to quench them.	Consuming Fire
³² For their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah;	⁹⁻¹⁰ "we should have been like Sodom ... you rulers of Sodom! you people of Gomorrah!"	Sodom and Gomorrah
⁴¹ Behold, I will repay. Vengeance is mine, and recompense,	^{24b} "Ah, I will get relief from my enemies and avenge myself on my foes.	Vengeance on enemies

Sodom and Gomorrah

The whole of verses 7-9 set up for the punchline of verse 10. We can get hints that Isaiah is making the comparison to Sodom and Gomorrah through "burned with fire" and "overthrown". "Overthrown" is only ever used elsewhere in the Bible with reference to God overthrowing Sodom and Gomorrah.

If this is the case, what is that saying about Israel? What is that saying about the about the "foreigners"?

Isaiah 1:10-17

- ¹⁰ **Hear** the word of the LORD, you rulers of **Sodom** !
Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of **Gomorrah** !
- ¹¹ "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of well-fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats.
- ¹² When you come to appear before me,
who has required of you this trampling of my courts?
- ¹³ Bring no more vain offerings;
incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—
I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.
- ¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me;
I am weary of bearing them.
- ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not **listen** ;
your hands are full of blood.
- ¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
- ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek **justice** , correct oppression;
bring **justice to the fatherless** ,
plead the widow's cause .

Bad Sacrifices

The LORD is saying that he's burdened by their sacrifices and who even asked them to do so, when there's a decent bit of Scripture pointing to *Him* being the one who commanded it in the first place!

There's something more needed than just their sacrifices and it all culminates in verses 16-17. None of their sacrifices or festivals mean anything to the LORD if they are devoid of social justice.

Bloody Hands

Pretty cool poetry on line 15. The "hands full of blood" refers to prayerful hands that either could have:

- been covered in blood from all of the sacrifices they were making
- been covered in blood from murder (Gen. 4:10-11)

Justice	מִשְׁפָּט	<i>mish.pat</i>
Definition: God's right order in the world.		

People treated as equal before his eyes. The oppressed and poor are lifted up. The proud and murderers brought low.

So how are God's children supposed to clean themselves? Removing evil, doing good, seeking justice for orphans and widows

Isaiah 1:18-20

- ¹⁸ “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:
though your **sins** are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
- ¹⁹ If you are willing and **obedient**,
you shall eat the good of the land;
- ²⁰ but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be eaten by the sword;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Isaiah 1:21-26

- ²¹ How the faithful city has become a whore,
 A she who was full of **justice** !
Righteousness lodged in her,
 but now murderers.
- ²² Your silver has become **dross** ,
 B your best wine mixed with water.
- ²³ Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves.
 C Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts.
 (a) They do not bring **justice to the fatherless**,
 (a') and **the widow's cause** does not come to them.
- ²⁴ Therefore the Lord declares,
 C' the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel:
 "Ah, I will get relief from my enemies
 and avenge myself on my foes.
- ²⁵ I will turn my hand against you
 B' and will smelt away your **dross** as with lye
 and remove all your alloy.
- ²⁶ And I will restore your **judges** as at the first,
 A' and your counselors as at the beginning.
 Afterward you shall be called the city of **righteousness** ,
 the faithful city."

Righteousness

צְדָקָה

tse.da.qah

Definition: Right relationships with God and others

"The meaning of tsedeqah is an ethical standard of right relationship. Biblical scholar J. Alec Motyer defines its use as "right with God and therefore committed to putting right all other relationships in life," and "to do right by someone."

Tsedeqah is the standard of right relationship between all people. And mishpat is the action you take to create the standard of tsedeqah. Biblical righteousness is about right

relationships in day-to-day conduct in family, work, and community”

— Bible Project, *Justice Study Notes*, <https://bibleproject.com/videos/justice/>

Isaiah 1:27-31

- ²⁷ Zion shall be redeemed with **justice**,
A and her converts with **righteousness**.
²⁸ But rebels and **sinners** shall be broken together,
and those who **forsake the LORD** shall be consumed.
B ²⁹ For they shall be ashamed of the oaks that you desired;
and you shall blush for the gardens that you have chosen.
B' ³⁰ For you shall be like an oak whose leaf withers,
and like a garden without water.
³¹ And the strong shall become tinder,
A' and his work a spark,
and both of them shall burn together,
with none to quench them.

Desirable Trees

Only one other time in the whole Hebrew Bible does the word for "desire" (חָמַד – kha.mad) appear in reference to desiring trees. It is in Genesis 3:6 when Eve saw that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was desirable to make one wise.

Just like the root of all sin is a desire to ignore God's Words (not "shema" to Yahweh) and take our own wisdom for ourselves, so is Israel's sin here. As highlighted in prior sections, they're giving vain sacrifices that might seem good in their eyes, but they're missing the whole point – true worship requires justice and righteousness – right relationships between both God and others.

Conclusion

So if this is the state of Israel, what hope do they have? How can this Israel be redeemed as Isaiah says will happen in v27?

In Chapter 2, we get a picture of what the result of this redemption and judgement will look like.

THE SAUCE

Deep dives & rabbit holes

In v6, there is no "soundness" in Zion. The Hebrew word מְתוֹם me.tom has the same root for "unblemished" or "whole". This is the same word used of the spotless lamb sacrifice needed for their coverings. How could we compare the "blemished" nature of Israel in light of their "blemished" sacrifices?

In v13, just about every other time the word "convocations" is used in the Hebrew Bible, it has the word "holy" before it. Not these convocations! Could look into other usages in the Scriptures or even read more of the Levitical laws showing how they're supposed to be done.

There's a lot of "courtroom" language in this passage. It's almost as if Yahweh is pleading His case. He picks this theme back up in chapter 5 as well – "What more could I have done?"

We'll probably end up touching on this later in Isaiah, but the concept of a "city" is usually not thought of in the way we do today. The very first city mentioned in the Bible was built by Cain after his sin and exiling.



Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah 1-12 Overview

A Chapter 1
The Vision and Call to Repentance

B Chapters 2-4
Glorious Mt. Zion — Judgment — Righteous Branch

C Chapter 5
Vineyard Parable and Assyrian Threat

Chapters 6-9:7
Glory of Yahweh/3 Sons

C' Chapters 9:8-10:34
Extended Woes and Divine Judgment

B' Chapter 11
The Righteous Branch and Peaceful Kingdom

A' Chapter 12
Songs of Salvation and Praise

Chapters 2-4

The Word of
Isaiah (1)

The Mountain
of Yahweh (2-5)

Streaming Na-
tions

Swords to
Plowshares

Isaiah 2:1-5

The Word of Isaiah (1)

¹ The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

The Mountain of Yahweh (2-5)

² It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be lifted up above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,

³ and many peoples shall come, and say:
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴ He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore.

⁵ O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD.

Mountain of Yahweh

The mountain of Zion itself for sure isn't the tallest mountain in the Ancient Near East – it isn't even the tallest mountain in the range of mountains around it!

So what is Isaiah getting at with the mountain being the highest above the hills?

Mountains in the Ancient Near Eastern cultures signified a spot where heaven and earth met. Think about famous stories where there are "mountaintop" moments throughout the Bible.

One of the predominant examples is Moses on Mt. Sinai receiving the Law. It's almost as if this vision of Mt. Zion where the nations stream up to receive the instruction of Yahweh is a second Sinai of sorts. It's the ultimate "heaven and earth" spot.

Streaming Nations

The word for "flow" in verse 2 is the verb form of the noun "river". Here we have a reversal of Genesis 2 where instead of the river coming from an Eden-like mountain to water the nations, the nations themselves are now flowing **to** the Eden-like mountain.

"A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates." — Genesis 2:10-14

Here, in a seemingly abrupt passage in the Eden story, we see something vitally important for the purposes of understanding this section of Isaiah.

The river of Eden splits off into 4 parts that each water a different area extremely relevant to the biblical story:

- **Havilah** - Pishon (meaning: 'gusher') waters the area where Ishmael's descendants will settle (Gen. 25:18). Probably south and east of Canaan.
- **Cush** - Gihon (meaning: 'bursting forth') waters the land of Cush, where the Ethiopians and Egyptians would be.
- **Assyria** - Tigris flows and waters Assyria.
- **Babylon** - The Euphrates River doesn't even mention the name of where it flows, the readers would know.

So from this list we see all of the major players in the drama of Israel all experiencing the blessing flowing from the mountain of Eden.

In Isaiah 2, written to a people currently at odds or in hot water with most of the regions mentioned in Gen 2, we see a reversal where these nations are the ones now "rivering" back up to the mountain of the LORD to receive his instruction.

It's the redemption of a lost Eden!

Swords to Plowshares

Note how the weapons typically meant for war and destruction are turned into farming equipment used for production and growth.

All of this flows from the nations rivering up to the mountain of Yahweh to learn his instruction.

Contrary to the world's stereotypical view of the Old Testament, the output of learning God's Law and instructions should be a people transformed from using instruments of destruction of life to instruments of cultivation of life.

THE SAUCE

Deep dives & rabbit holes

This passage is almost copy/paste of Micah 4:1-5. Who wrote it first? Did the LORD reveal it to both individually or did the prophets know each other?

How does this passage relate to the Tower of Babel? Who's making the Highest Mountain to the heavens?

Isaiah 1:2-5:30 Overview

1:2-31 Problematic Zion

- **Judgment** on Israel
- Call to repentance

2:1-5 Future Glory

- Mountain of the LORD exalted
- Nations streaming to learn

2:6-22 Day of Yahweh

- **Judgment** on human pride
- All that is high brought low

3:1-4:1 Leadership Crisis

- **Judgment** on Judah
- Inversion of power structures

4:2-6 Future Glory

- Branch of the LORD beautiful
- Survivors holy and cleansed

5:1-30 Song of the Vineyard

- **Judgment** on Judah
- Wild grapes instead of good fruit

Isaiah 2:6-22 – The Day of the LORD

- ⁶ For you have rejected your people,
the house of Jacob,
because they are full of things from the east
and of fortune-tellers like the Philistines,
and they strike hands with the children of foreigners.
- ⁷ Their land is filled with silver and gold,
and there is no end to their treasures;
A their land is filled with horses,
and there is no end to their chariots.
idols,
rocks, ⁸ Their land is filled with **idols**;
and they **bow down** to the work of their hands,
terror to what their own fingers have made.
- ⁹ So man is humbled,
and each one is brought low—
do not forgive them!
- ¹⁰ **Enter into the rock**
and hide in the dust
from before the terror of the LORD
and from the splendor of his majesty .
- ¹¹ **The haughty looks of man shall be brought low,
and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled,
and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.**
- B**
- ¹² For the LORD of hosts has a day
against all that is proud and lofty,
against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low;
¹³ against all the cedars of Lebanon,
lofty and lifted up;
and against all the oaks of Bashan;
- C**
- ¹⁴ against all the lofty mountains,
and against all the lifted up hills;
¹⁵ against every high tower,
and against every fortified wall;
¹⁶ against all the ships of Tarshish,
and against all the beautiful craft.
- ¹⁷ **And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled,
and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low,
and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.**
- B**

¹⁸ And the **idols** shall utterly pass away.
¹⁹ And people shall **enter the caverns of the rocks**
 and the holes of the ground,
 from before the terror of the LORD
 and from the splendor of his majesty ,
 when he rises to terrify the earth.
A ²⁰ In that day mankind will cast away
idols, their **idols** of silver and their **idols** of gold,
rocks, which they made for themselves to **worship** ,
and to the moles and to the bats,
terror ²¹ to **enter the caverns of the rocks**
x2 and the clefts of the cliffs,
 from before the terror of the LORD
 and from the splendor of his majesty ,
 when he rises to terrify the earth.
²² Stop regarding man
 in whose nostrils is breath,
 for of what account is he?

Money, Tanks, and Idols

In verses 7-8 we see, in a nice poetic form, what the land of Jacob is really filled with and what kinds of things they're placing their hope in – money (silver and gold), military prowess (horses and chariots), and idols.

It's a stark contrast to verse 4 where Israel is destroying their military tools into productive equipment for the communities benefit.

This is where the "real" Israel is at.

Don't Forgive Them?

So what's going on in verse 9 though? How will we be able to get to v1-5 if there's no forgiveness for the house of Jacob?

"...It seems to express the prophet's deep despair over his people's condition. He seems almost afraid that God might relent and, in violation of his own justice, forget their heinous sins. As such, this phrase exposes the problem of sin. It cannot be simply forgotten, it must be punished; otherwise, the whole chain of cause and effect upon which the world is built would be broken. But the punishment for playing god can be no less than banishment from God, a denial of God's purpose in creating human beings-fellowship with himself. What might the solution be? Chs. 1-39 never really answer the

question. Only in the second part of the book does the answer come (43:1-7; 44:21-22; 52:7; 53:12; 59:15-21; 53:1-6). But whatever the answer, it is not to be found in acting as if the sin had not been committed.”

— John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*

Forgive

נָשָׂא

na.sa

Definition: "to raise" or "to lift up"

The word "na.sa" is in direct contrast to the bowing down to the idols they're worshiping and the whole theme of this section of bringing low that which is high.

THE SAUCE

Deep dives & rabbit holes

Why is God against the trees? Is this a metaphor for the people? Is this because this is what they were worshiping back in chapter 1?

The "Ships of Tarshish" have a significant role in the Hebrew Bible. Yahewh "bringing them low" has a lot more significance than just "destroying ships"

There's probably more we could do with the Tower of Babel imagery here as well.

Isaiah 3:1-4:1 – Leadership Crisis

Isaiah 1:2-5:30 Overview

1:2-31 Problematic Zion

- **Judgment** on Israel
- Call to repentance

2:1-5 Future Glory

- Mountain of the LORD exalted
- Nations streaming to learn

2:6-22 Day of Yahweh

- **Judgment** on human pride
- All that is high brought low

3:1-4:1 Leadership Crisis

- **Judgment** on Judah
- Inversion of power structures

4:2-6 Future Glory

- Branch of the LORD beautiful
- Survivors holy and cleansed

5:1-30 Song of the Vineyard

- **Judgment** on Judah
- Wild grapes instead of good fruit

Isaiah 3:1-4:1 — Overview

Verses 1-7: God Taking Away (Men)

- All supports and leaders removed from Jerusalem and Judah
- Boys and infants will rule, causing social chaos
- Leadership crisis and refusal to lead

Verses 8-15: Why God is Taking Away (Men)

- Jerusalem stumbled because they defy God's glorious presence
- Leaders have oppressed the poor and devoured the vineyard
- Divine judgment pronounced against injustice

Verses 16-17: Why God is Taking Away (Women)

- Daughters of Zion are haughty and vain
- Their pride will be brought low through humiliation

Verses 18-4:1: God Taking Away (Women)

- Removal of all finery and luxury items
- Beauty replaced with shame and loss
- Desperation leads to reversing social norms

Isaiah 3:1-7

All Supports Removed (1-3)

- ¹ For behold, the Lord GOD of hosts
is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah
support and supply,
all support of bread,
and all support of water;
- ² the mighty man and the soldier,
the judge and the prophet,
the diviner and the elder,
- ³ the captain of fifty
and the man of rank,
the counselor and the skillful magician
and the expert in charms.

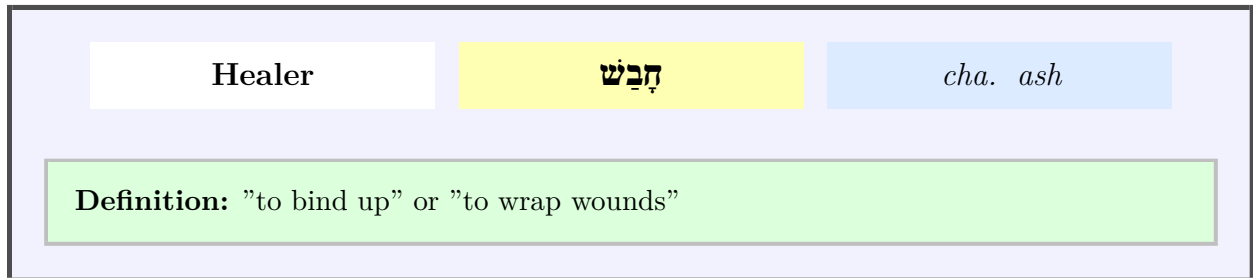
Children Will Rule (4-5)

- ⁴ And I will make boys their princes,
and infants shall rule over them.
- ⁵ And the people will oppress one another,
every one his fellow
and every one his neighbor;
the youth will be insolent to the elder,
and the despised to the honorable.

Leadership Crisis (6-7)

- ⁶ For a man will take hold of his brother
in the house of his father, saying:
"You have a cloak;
you shall be our leader,
and this heap of ruins
shall be under your rule."
- ⁷ In that day he will speak out, saying:
"I will not be a healer;
in my house there is neither bread nor cloak;
you shall not make me
leader of the people."

Leader -> Healer



In verses 6-7 we see a clear comparison between being the leader of Israel and being a "cha.vash". It's the same usage in 1:6 about there being sores abounding in Israel with no one to do this healing work.

It's not until 61:1 that the full picture of this healing leader that's needed comes in to view in the passage Jesus read from when kicking off his ministry.

*"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;"*

— Isaiah 61:1

Isaiah 3:8-15

Jerusalem's Defiance (8-9a)

⁸ For Jerusalem has stumbled,
and Judah has fallen,
because their speech and their deeds are against the LORD,
defying his glorious presence.

^{9a} For the look on their faces bears witness against them;
they proclaim their sin like Sodom;
they do not hide it.

Righteous vs Wicked (9b-12)

^{9b} Woe to them!
For they have brought **evil** on themselves.

¹⁰ Tell the righteous that it shall be **well** with them,
for they shall **eat the fruit** of their deeds.

¹¹ Woe to the wicked! It shall be **ill** with them,
for what their hands have dealt out shall be done to them.

¹² **My people**—infants are their oppressors,
and women rule over them.

O **my people**, your guides mislead you
and they have swallowed up the course of your paths.

Divine Judgment Against Leaders (13-15)

¹³ The LORD has taken his place to contend;
he stands to judge peoples.

¹⁴ The LORD will enter into judgment
with the elders of his people and its princes:
"It is you who have devoured the vineyard,
the spoil of the poor is in your houses.

¹⁵ What do you mean by crushing **my people**,
by grinding the face of the poor?"
declares the Lord GOD of hosts.

Echoes of Chapter 1

This passage strongly echoes themes from Isaiah 1, often using specific words that only show up in either chapter 1 or this chapter. This shows the continuing pattern of God's judgment on Jerusalem and Judah.

Isaiah 1	Isaiah 3	Notes
<p>⁶ From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.</p>	<p>⁷ In that day he will speak out, saying: "I will not be a healer";</p>	Need for Healing
<p>⁹ we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah. ¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom!</p>	<p>⁹ they proclaim their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it.</p>	Sodom Comparison
<p>¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; ²⁰ but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword</p>	<p>^{9b} Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves. ¹⁰ Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds. ¹¹ Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with them</p>	Good vs Evil Outcomes
<p>¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.</p>	<p>¹⁴⁻¹⁵ "It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?"</p>	Injustice Against the Poor
<p>³ The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.</p>	<p>¹² My people—infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, your guides mislead you and they have swallowed up the course of your paths.</p>	"My People" - Failed Understanding
<p>²⁰ but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.</p>	<p>²⁵ Your men shall fall by the sword and your mighty men in battle.</p>	Death by the Sword

Sin of Sodom

What is the "sin like Sodom" in this passage that's being fleshed out? How does Isaiah see what Israel's sin is like and why would he compare it to Sodom?

Most of the prophets when referring to the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah see something more than just sexual immorality – it was a neglect and care for the outsider.

*"Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom,
pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters,
neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.
And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me:
therefore I took them away as I saw good."*

— Ezekiel 16:49-50

Isaiah 3:16-17

Haughty Daughters of Zion

¹⁶ The LORD said:

Because the daughters of Zion are haughty
and walk with outstretched necks,
glancing wantonly with their eyes,
mincing along as they go,
tinkling with their feet,

¹⁷ therefore the Lord will strike with a scab
the heads of the daughters of Zion,
and the LORD will lay bare their secret parts.

Isaiah 3:18-4:1

Removal of 21 Items (18-23)

- ¹⁸ In that day the Lord will take away
the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents;
¹⁹ the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves;
²⁰ the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes,
the perfume boxes, and the amulets;
²¹ the signet rings and nose rings;
²² the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks,
and the handbags;
²³ the mirrors, the linen garments,
the turbans, and the veils.

Beauty Replaced with Shame (24-26)

- ²⁴ Instead of perfume there will be rottenness;
and instead of a belt, a rope;
and instead of well-set hair, baldness;
and instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth;
and branding instead of beauty.
²⁵ Your men shall fall by the sword
and your mighty men in battle.
²⁶ And her gates shall lament and mourn;
empty, she shall sit on the ground.

Desperation and Role Reversal (4:1)

- ¹ And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying,
"We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes,
only let us be called by your name;
take away our reproach."

Taking Away Reproach

Again we have hope in men which the end of chapter 2 specifically told us not to do!

Where else can Israel find hope for this? This, again, leads the reader to keep going when they reared in chapter 25:8 that there is some ultimate hope when it's Yahweh Himself who will be the one to take away reproach, not men.

*"He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken."*

— Isaiah 25:8

Isaiah 1:2-5:30 Overview

1:2-31 **Problematic Zion**

- **Judgment** on Israel
- Call to repentance

2:1-5 **Future Glory**

- Mountain of the LORD exalted
- Nations streaming to learn

2:6-22 **Day of Yahweh**

- **Judgment** on human pride
- All that is high brought low

3:1-4:1 **Leadership Crisis**

- **Judgment** on Judah
- Inversion of power structures

4:2-6 **Future Glory**

- Branch of the LORD beautiful
- Survivors holy and cleansed

5:1-30 **Song of the Vineyard**

- **Judgment** on Judah
- Wild grapes instead of good fruit

Isaiah 4:2-6

The Branch of the LORD (2-3)

- ² In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious,
and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor
of the survivors of Israel.
- ³ And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy,
everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem,

Divine Cleansing and Protection (4-6)

- ⁴ when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion
and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst
by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning.
- ⁵ Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion
and over her assemblies
a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night;
for over all the glory there will be a canopy.
- ⁶ There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat,
and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

Sprout of Yahweh

Sprout

צֶמַח

tse.mach

Definition: "branch", "shoot", or "growth"

tse.mach is the same word used in reference to the fruit trees that sprout in Eden (Gen 2:9). This imagery evokes the idea of new life and growth emerging from what seemed dead or cut off.

Elsewhere this term is used in the prophets as an explicit Messianic reference (Jer 33:15, Zec 6:12), but the immediate context leads some folks to see it as describing the glorious land and Eden-like abundance that the remnant will have.

Given that Isaiah picks up on a Messianic hope for Israel and uses similar terms for Him just a few chapters later (Isaiah 11:1,10), assuming this "sprout" is purely an abundance reference may be a bit flat.

Recorded for Life

Verse 3 isn't the first time we've seen in the Hebrew Bible about a scroll that Yahweh is keeping that tracks who's been recorded for life. In Exodus 32:32-33, Moses offers to have his name blotted out of the book that Yahweh has written if it would save the people.

*But now, if you will forgive their sin, please forgive it; but if not, please wipe me out of your book that you have written.
And the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book."*

— Exodus 32:32-33

This imagery likely stems from the Ancient Near East practice of keeping a record of the living and the dead, where the king would have a "census" scroll of his subjects. To be removed from this list likely meant either exile or death.

Yahweh Himself has his own scroll in which those who are the holy ones are written for life. Likely not just physical life, but a pure heart that will see the Glory of the LORD.

Washed away...by Fire?

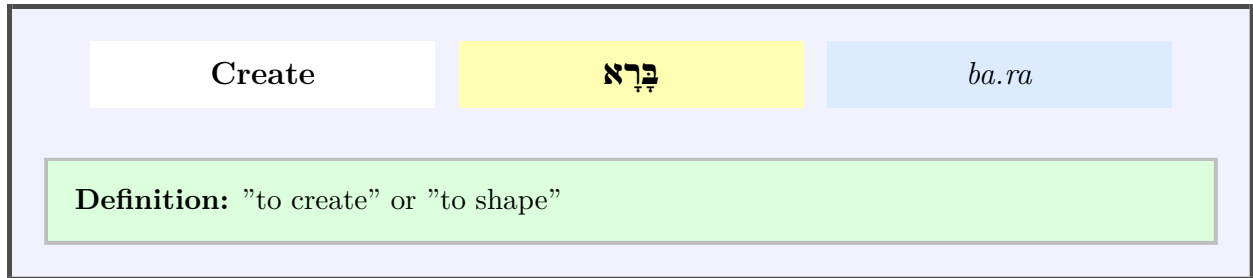
In Verse 4, after the fruitful, Eden-like land, we have another early Genesis image with a flood of judgement washing away the filth of the daughters of Zion.

The only thing though is this washing away and "cleansing" (another word for washing, always used in association with water), is done by a "spirit of judgment" and a "spirit of burning"?

Spirit	רוּחַ	ru.ach
Definition: "wind," "breath," or "spirit." It's the invisible life-energy that animates and sustains all living things.		

So this phrase of "spirit of burning" could also imply a fire wind of sorts that is "cleaning house" so to speak, leaving the holy remnant in Zion.

Tabernacle Glory



On to Verse 5! The use of the word "create" (בָּרָא – ba.ra) is a direct callback to main acts of "ba.ra" in Genesis 1. This new creation will be for not only Mount Zion itself, but also all of her (now) holy people.

Her people get a very similar showing of Yahweh's divine presence in the "cloud by day"/"fire by night" that is a direct hyperlink to the installation of the Tabernacle where Yahweh's glory that was leading them through the wilderness now was resting on the newly established tabernacle as His dwelling place.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

— Exodus 40:34-38

Now, in Isaiah's vision, this Tabernacle glory of Yahweh is available now to all of Zion and her people within it! God's dwelling place isn't just confined to a tabernacle or temple, it's now over all her assemblies in the form of a...wedding tent?

The word "canopy" is a wedding tent (only ever used elsewhere in Psalm 19:5 and Joel 2:6). Instead of a regional temple, the whole mountain is a wedding tent where the ultimate union with the branch and His holy ones will occur.

Safe from the Storm

In the final verse we see that the "wind of burning" and the "washing away" are still occurring in some way, except Zion's assemblies will all be safe from the storms around. It doesn't quite seem like the "final" image given in chapter 2 where there's no more war.

Just like in 1 Peter 1:5, God's people here are being guarded by His power for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

This should give every reader in Jesus a hope and assurance of the "already" and the "not yet".

Isaiah believed that the final encampment of God's people would be in the new Zion. There, at last, their journey would end. But notice the democratization of the ancient ideal which takes place here. In the final encampment the glory of the Lord's presence fills the whole camp, and the protecting cloud, like a vast canopy or pavilion (cf. Exod. 40:34), covers the entire site and all who are assembled there (5). There will no longer be any need for the tabernacle or temple, for the glory of the Lord will be directly accessible to all. And those with whom God is present in this way will be perfectly secure for ever (6). This is no out-of-date dream, but one which Jesus prayed to be realized (John 17:24), and which the apostle John sets before us again at the climax of the Bible as the vision of our own future in God which should still inspire us and draw us on (Rev. 21:22-27). We, too, are pilgrims.

— Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*

THE SAUCE

Deep dives & rabbit holes

Why is it ok for the fruit of the land to be the pride of the survivors of Israel? It's the exact same word used in Isaiah 13:11 – "I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pride of the ruthless."

The "booth" (Hebrew: *sukkah*) in verse 6 directly connects to the Feast of Booths (Sukkot), where Israel was commanded to dwell in booths made from their "threshing floors" and "winepresses" and all people (servants, orphans, widows, foreigners, etc.) were to be blessed and joyful for seven days (Deuteronomy 16:13-15).

Isaiah 1-12 Overview

A Chapter 1
The Vision and Call to Repentance

B Chapters 2-4
Glorious Mt. Zion — Judgment — Righteous Branch

C Chapter 5
Vineyard Parable and Assyrian Threat

Chapters 6-9:7
Glory of Yahweh/3 Sons

C' Chapters 9:8-10:34
Extended Woes and Divine Judgment

B' Chapter 11
The Righteous Branch and Peaceful Kingdom

A' Chapter 12
Songs of Salvation and Praise

Isaiah 5:1-30 — Overview

Verses 1-7: Judgment on the Vineyard (A)

- A beloved's vineyard that **planted** choice vines but **yielded wild grapes**
- God **looked for** **justice** but found **bloodshed and outcry**

Verses 8-14: Two Woes and Two Therefore (B)

- **Woe** to greedy land-grabbers and indulgent party-goers
- **Therefore** exile and death await the people

Verses 15-17: Divine Justice (C)

- Human pride humbled,
God exalted in **justice** and **righteousness**
- Desolation where the rich once lived

Verses 18-25: Four More Woes and Two Therefore (B')

- **Woe** to the provocative, morally confused, proud, and corrupt
- **Therefore** God's anger burns against His people

Verses 26-30: Judgment on the Land (A')

- God signals distant nations to come as His instrument of judgment
- **Darkness** and distress cover the land

Isaiah 5:1-7 (A)

The Song of the Vineyard (1-2)

¹ Let me sing for my beloved
my love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.

² He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and **planted** it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it,
and he **looked for it to yield grapes** ,
but it **yielded wild grapes** .

The Appeal to Judah (3-4)

³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem
and men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.
⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard,
that I have not done in it?
When I **looked for it to yield grapes** ,
why did it **yield wild grapes** ?

The Judgment (5-6)

⁵ And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will **remove its hedge** ,
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.
⁶ I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and briars and thorns shall grow up;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.

The Interpretation (7)

⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant **planting** ;
and he **looked for** **justice** ,
but **behold, bloodshed** ;
for **righteousness** ,
but **behold, an outcry** !

Jesus and the Vineyard Parable

This passage may sound familiar as it has the exact same intro to one of Jesus's parables about a vineyard as well in Matthew 21:33-46.

Both passages feature a carefully tended vineyard that fails to produce proper fruit for its owner.

Taking the context here from Isaiah into account, reading Christ's parable becomes quite a bit more straightforward knowing what He's referencing.

Given Isaiah is one of the most often quoted books of the Old Testament in the New, It re-emphasizes our need to know the whole of the revealed scriptures.

Expectation vs Reality

Wild Grapes	בְּאֲשִׁים	<i>be. .shim</i>
Definition: "stink fruit"		

In verses 2 and 4, we see at the end you have this expectation of what he looked for to yield grapes, but it instead yielded wild grapes or stink fruit. The next time you see this "he looked for" statement it's at the end of this little section in verse 7, when he is looking for justice and righteousness, but behold bloodshed and outcry. There's some wordplay going on here too:

Justice	מִשְׁפָּט	<i>mish.pa</i>
---------	-----------	----------------

Bloodshed	מִשְׁפָּח	<i>mis.pach</i>
-----------	-----------	-----------------

Righteousness	צִדְקָה	<i>se.da.qah</i>
---------------	---------	------------------

Outcry	צָעָקָה	<i>se.a.qah</i>
--------	---------	-----------------

Hebrew scholar Robert Alter in his translation of the Hebrew Bible gives the following to try and capture this:

*"He hoped for justice,
and, look, jaundice,
for righteousness,
and, look, wretchedness."*

— Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*

"What More Could God Do?"

The rhetorical question in verse 4 strikes at the heart of the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility and agency. God gives a rhetorical statement here, implying that there is nothing else that he could do for the people themselves.

Isaiah 5:8-14 (B)

First Woe: Greed (8-10)

- ⁸ **Woe** to those who join house to house,
who add field to field,
until there is no more room,
and you are made to dwell alone
in the midst of the land.
- A** ⁹ The LORD of hosts has sworn in my hearing:
“Surely many houses shall be desolate,
large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant.
¹⁰ For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath,
and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah.”

Second Woe: Indulgence (11-12)

- ¹¹ **Woe** to those who rise early in the morning,
that they may run after strong drink,
who tarry late into the evening
as wine inflames them!
- B** ¹² They have lyre and harp,
tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts,
but they do not regard the deeds of the LORD,
or **see the work of his hands**.

Two Therefore (13-14)

- ¹³ **Therefore** my people go into exile
for lack of knowledge;
B' their honored men go hungry,
and their multitude is parched with thirst.
- ¹⁴ **Therefore** Sheol has enlarged its appetite
A' and opened its mouth beyond measure,
and the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude will go down,
her revelers and he who exults in her.

Whose Land?!

Leviticus 25:23 says, "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me."

The land ultimately belongs to God! And yet they want to take more and more at the expense of the needy – and what does it give them? Loneliness and isolation – kind of an ironic natural consequence of taking all the land for yourself.

Ancient Measurements

- Acre: area a pair of oxen could plow in a day
- Bath: 6 gallons (22 liters)
- Homer: 6 bushels (220–230 liters)
- Ephah: 0.6 bushels (22–23 liters)

Why are they being Exiled?

Due to a "lack of knowledge" Judah is being Exiled. From earlier sections like 1:12-15, we see that just because God's people know the right actions to take, their lack of knowledge of the true holy nature of Yahweh is what led them to their destruction.

Isaiah 5:15-17 (C)

- ¹⁵ Man is humbled, and each one is brought low,
and the eyes of the haughty are brought low.
- ¹⁶ But the LORD of hosts is exalted in **justice** ,
and the Holy God shows himself holy in **righteousness** .
- ¹⁷ Then shall the lambs graze as in their pasture,
and nomads shall eat among the ruins of the rich.

Isaiah 5:18-25 (B')

Third Woe: Provocation (18-19)

¹⁸ **Woe** to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood,
who draw sin as with cart ropes,
¹⁹ who say: "Let him be quick,
let him **speed his work**
that we may see it ;
let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near,
and let it come, that we may know it!"

Fourth Woe: Moral Confusion (20)

²⁰ **Woe** to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put **darkness** for light
and light for **darkness** ,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter!

Fifth Woe: Pride (21)

²¹ **Woe** to those who are wise in their own eyes,
and shrewd in their own sight!

Sixth Woe: Corruption (22-23)

²² **Woe** to those who are heroes at drinking wine,
and valiant men in mixing strong drink,
²³ who acquit the guilty for a bribe,
and **deprive the innocent of his right** !

Two Therefores (24-25)

²⁴ **Therefore** , as the tongue of fire devours the stubble,
and as dry grass sinks down in the flame,
so their root will be as rottenness,
and their blossom go up like dust;
for they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts,
and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.
²⁵ **Therefore** the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people,
and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them,
and the mountains quaked;
and their corpses were as refuse
in the midst of the streets.
For all this his anger has not turned away,
and his hand is stretched out still.

Isaiah 5:23

Translation	Text
ESV	who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!
NASB	Who declare the wicked innocent for a bribe, And take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!
NIV	who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent.
KJV	Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!
NET	They pronounce the guilty innocent for a payoff, they ignore the just cause of the innocent.

Isaiah 5:26-30 (A')

- ²⁶ He will raise a signal for nations far away,
and whistle for them from the ends of the earth;
and behold, quickly, speedily they come!
- ²⁷ None is weary, none stumbles,
none slumbers or sleeps,
not a waistband is loose,
not a sandal strap broken;
- ²⁸ their arrows are sharp,
all their bows bent,
their horses' hoofs seem like flint,
and their wheels like the whirlwind.
- ²⁹ Their roaring is like a lion,
like young lions they roar;
they growl and seize their prey;
they carry it off, and none can rescue.
- ³⁰ They will growl over it on that day,
like the growling of the sea.
And if one looks to the land,
behold, **darkness** and distress;
and the light is **darkened** by its clouds.

Who's Really Destroying the Land?

When Yahweh "raises a signal" (something to watch for as we go), which is what causes the enemies to destroy the land.

While Israel may have often thought that Yahweh was absent in their terror and exile, He was not only there with them, but also the catalyst in the first place.

Yahweh is in control from start to finish.

Chaos abounds

Two of the main chaotic forces in the Hebrew Bible are the waters and the darkness. Genesis 1:2 starts off stating that these chaotic forces are what God overcomes in creating this world.

Here we see these chaotic forces at coming in for a prime de-creation. But if this is true, then what hope does Israel have to become the "Glorious Mountain" or the "Eden-like Wedding Tent"?

What can make them new again?

Isaiah 1-12

Isaiah 1-5

Judgment and Rebellion

Isaiah 6

*Isaiah's Call &
Commission*

Isaiah 7-12

Hope and Restoration

Isaiah 6 — Overview

Verses 1-5: Vision of the Holy King

- Isaiah sees the LORD on His throne with seraphim crying "Holy, holy, holy"

Verses 6-8: Cleansing and Commission

- A seraph cleanses Isaiah's lips with a coal from the altar
- Isaiah responds to God's call: "Here I am! Send me."

Verses 9-13: The Hard Message

- God gives Isaiah a difficult message of judgment
- The people will hear but not understand until the land is desolate

Isaiah 6:1-5

A

Seen ¹ In the year that **King** Uzziah died I saw the Lord **sitting** upon a throne, high
the and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.
King

B

Holy, ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his
Holy, face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called
Holy to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is
full of his glory!" ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of
him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

A'

Seen ⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I
the **dwelt** in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the **King**,
King the LORD of hosts!"

The Real King

King Uzziah had reigned for 52 years when he died, making him one of the longest-reigning kings of Judah. His death marked the end of an era of prosperity and stability. But in this moment of political uncertainty, Isaiah sees the true King - the LORD of hosts - seated on His eternal throne.

Right before King Uzziah died though, we read the following story in 2 Chronicles 26:16-21:

2 Chronicles 26:16-21

¹⁶ "But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. ¹⁷ But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the LORD who were men of valor. ¹⁸ And they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the LORD God." ¹⁹ Then Uzziah was angry, and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the LORD, by the altar of incense. ²⁰ And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead. And they rushed him out quickly, and he himself hurried to go out because the LORD had struck him. ²¹ And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death, and being a leper lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king's household, governing the people of the land.

One of the reasons Isaiah could be explicitly calling out that this occurred the day of King Uzziah's death could be contrasting what Isaiah himself is going through here in God's holy place vs how King Uzziah treated it.

It's also maybe "ironic" in a way that as a leper, you'd have "Unclean" come out of your lips in order to let others know to stay away. Here Isaiah says he has the same – the remedy isn't to "burn incense" for yourself, it's to have God's atoning mercy given to you.

Isaiah's Response to Holiness

Why does Isaiah say he's "lost" in response to what he's just witnessed? It's helpful to compare translations when doing a deeper study. If you see a big difference in wording in the translations, odds are the underlying Hebrew word has a bit more nuance than can easily be communicated with just a single word or two in English.

Isaiah 6:5a

Translation	Text
ESV	And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost;"
NASB	"Then I said, "Woe to me, for I am ruined!"
NIV	"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined!"
KJV	Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone;
NET	I said, "Woe to me! I am destroyed,"

Lost	דָּמָה	<i>da.mah</i>
Definition: Ceased, cut off, or destroyed. Crushed into nonexistence		

What does the holiness of God even mean? It's his "otherness" – He's set apart in that He's filled with such extreme goodness and purity. Kind of like the sun that can be incredibly powerful and dangerous, but is also the source of life.

This is why Isaiah is so terrified – how can he be able to live in the presence of a Holy God?

Isaiah and the "People"

After he spent just about all of chapters 1-5 roasting Israel and clearly painting their need for judgement, when confronted with the holiness of Yahweh directly, he doesn't just say "Woe is Israel", he identifies his individualistic role within the larger community.

Isaiah 6:6-8

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”
⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

Holiness Transfer

“Instead of the temple becoming contaminated by Isaiah’s impurity, the opposite happens: God’s holiness transfers to Isaiah and erases his sin and impurity.

This is unexpected to say the least! The implications of Isaiah’s vision are huge. Perhaps God doesn’t need to be protected by the impurity our sin, maybe it’s the other way around. Maybe it’s our sin that is endangered by God’s holiness.”

— Bible Project, *Holiness Study Guide*, <https://bibleproject.com/videos/holiness/>

Guarding the Thresholds

Genesis 3:22-24

²² “Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.”

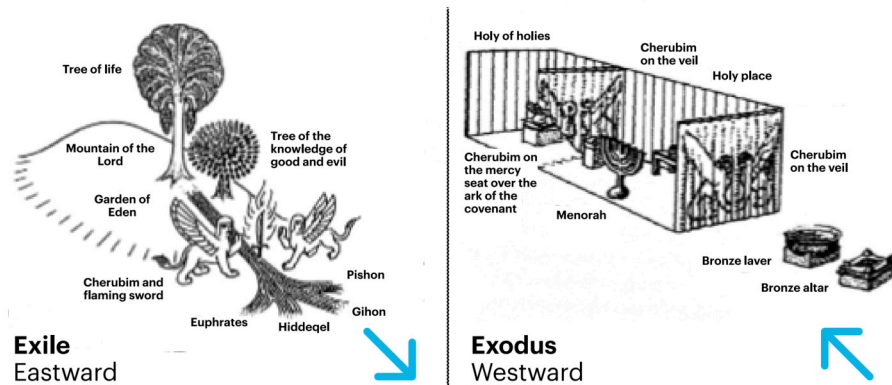


Image adapted from Morales, Michael L. (2015). *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*. IVP Academic.

Adapted from Morales, Michael L. (2015). *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*. IVP Academic. By BibleProject for Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

This isn't the first time we read about angelic beings who guard the sacred space of God. Here we have the guardians of the tree of life set up where Adam and Eve forfeited their right to have perfect communion with God Himself.

Now, Isaiah is "back in the garden" so to speak, by being directly before Yahweh. But he still needs to "pass through the cherubim" in order to be cleansed and begin his ministry.

These are guardians of the "entryway" or "threshold" which is probably why the foundations of the thresholds are specifically called out in v4.

Isaiah 6:9-13

The Hard Message (9-10)

⁹ And he said, “Go, and say to this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”

How Long? (11-13)

¹¹ Then I said, “How long, O Lord?” And he said: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste,

¹² and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

¹³ And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.” The holy seed is its stump.

Keep on Hearing

Verses 9-10 are picked up by Jesus in a few places in the Gospels:

Matthew 13:10-17

¹⁰ "Then the disciples came and said to him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?'
¹¹ And he answered them, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

'You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive.'
¹⁵ For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.'"

And in John, the same thing is present, except this time, John brings extra commentary to the surrounding passage in Isaiah 6:

John 12:36-43

³⁶ "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. ³⁷ Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, ³⁸ so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

"Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

³⁹ Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,

⁴⁰ "He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
lest they see with their eyes
and understand with their heart, and turn,
and I would heal them."

⁴¹ Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. ⁴² Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

The Holy Seed

In spite of this rejection and hardening, this glorious passage ends with a glorious promise, a holy seed (offspring) will remain from the chopped-down tree. Just like how the vision of Yahweh is 3x Holy, so the remnant after destruction will be.

Out of death and judgement comes the promise of a new life. A life that is holy and dedicated to the Lord!

"We come nearer to the heart of this chapter by noting that it is pervaded by the thought of death: the dying king (1), the prophet under sentence of death (5), the sacrificial animal dead on the altar (6) and the felled tree (13). Twice over, death seems to spell the end but is found not to be so. The king lies dead (1) but it turns out to be only the felling of a tree, and life remains in the root (13); the prophet lies dead, struck down by sin under divine holiness (5) but when the seraph approaches, apparently bearing the fire of judgment, it is to apply the efficacy of a sacrifice for sin and to speak the word 'atoned' (7). Death does not have the last word."

— Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*

THE SAUCE

Deep dives & rabbit holes

Seraph means "to burn" and this is the same word used in the fiery serpent on the pole that healed Israel from their snake bites in Numbers 21. There's maybe some interesting things here with the purifying nature of both of these stories – or even how Jesus uses this story in John 3:14-15.

How does Isaiah's call narrative relate to Moses's? Both have the fiery holiness of God, both have a servant who responds to God's commissioning of them to give a hard message. What other comparisons are there to meditate on?

What does the hardening of the hearers of this message mean for God's Sovereignty vs Human Responsibility? Why couldn't the message be like chapter 1:16 where they could turn and repent and be clean? Is this message to the same people?

Isaiah let's out the 7th "Woe" picking up from the 6 previous ones in chapter 5.

Isaiah 7:1-25 — Overview

Verses 1-6: Problem of Potential Future Judgment

- Syria and Israel alliance threatens Judah
- Ahaz and people tremble with fear

Verses 7-9: God will protect – have strong faith

- Yahweh through Isaiah speaks
- Faith requirement: "If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all"

Verses 10-17: Faith test – Immanuel / God is with us

- Yahweh through Isaiah speaks
- God gives the Immanuel sign

Verses 18-25: Problem of Sure Future Judgment

- In that day - repeated phrase marking divine intervention
- Assyrian invasion will devastate Judah

Isaiah 7:1-6

- A** ¹ In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, **Rezin the king of Syria** and **Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel** came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it.
- B** ^{2a} When the house of David was told, "**Syria** is in league with **Ephraim**,"
- C** ^{2b} the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.
- D** ³ And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field.
- C'** ⁴ And say to him, 'Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, because of the fierce anger of **Rezin** and **Syria** and **the son of Remaliah** .
- B'** ⁵ Because **Syria** , with **Ephraim** and **the son of Remaliah** , has devised evil against you, saying,
- A'** ⁶ "Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it,"

Isaiah 7:7-9

- A** ⁷ thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass.
- B** ^{8a} For the head of **Syria** is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is **Rezin** .
- C** ^{8b} And within sixty-five years **Ephraim** will be shattered from being a people.
- B'** ^{9a} And the head of **Ephraim** is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is **the son of Remaliah** .
- A'** ^{9b} If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all."

Isaiah 7:10-17

The Sign Offered (10-12)

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: ¹¹ "Ask a sign of the LORD **your God** ; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." ¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test."

The Sign Given (13-17)

¹³ And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary **my God** also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. ¹⁷ The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that **Ephraim** departed from Judah—the king of Assyria."

Virgin vs Young Woman

Virgin

עַלְמָה

al.mah

Definition: young woman of marriable age

In the Hebrew text, the word used for "virgin" in verse 14 is *almah*, which simply means "young woman of marriable age." However, when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (called the Septuagint), the translators chose to use the word *parthenos*, which specifically refers to someone who has never had sexual relations or borne children. This translation choice was significant for how later readers understood this prophecy.

Matthew references this very passage when describing the birth of Jesus:

"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)."

— Matthew 1:22-23

So why would Matthew quote this text with the word "virgin"? Or better yet, why would the Greek translators of the Hebrew Bible use "parthenos" instead of the other word for "young woman"? What is this all referring to and how does this text actually predict the coming Messiah at all?

The Virgin Birth Prophecy

There is a lot of comparisons in this and surrounding passages about Ahaz in Isaiah when compared to his son, Hezekiah in chapters 36-39.

Much of this insight comes from Bible Scholar Tim Mackie who also credits Jacob Stromberg. Here's a chart from them, in fact, comparing these two stories from the kings:

Ahaz in Isaiah 5-11	Hezekiah in Isaiah 36-39
Isa. 7:1 The Syrians and northern Israelites ally, so that a foreign king (מלך) goes up (עלה) against (על) the city of Jerusalem.	Isa. 36:1 The Assyrian army surrounds Jerusalem so that foreign king (מלך) goes up (עלה) against (על) the city of Jerusalem.
Isa. 7:6 The foreign king seeks to replace the legitimate Davidic king with someone else.	Isa. 36:14-17 The foreign king seeks to replace the legitimate Davidic king with someone else.
Isa. 7:3 Isaiah sends a message to King Ahaz “at the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the launderer’s field.	Isa. 36:2 “... at the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the launderer’s field.”
Isa. 7:4, 11 Isaiah says “don’t be afraid” (אל תירא) and offers a “sign” (אות) to confirm God’s promise.	Isa. 37:6, 30 Isaiah says “don’t be afraid” (אל תירא) and offers a sign (אות) to confirm God’s promise.
Isa. 7:14-15 The sign is a son to be born to a “young woman” (עלמה), who will “eat” (אכל) curds and honey until the city’s deliverance.	Isa. 37:30-32 The sign is that the remnant of Jerusalem will “eat” (אכל) plants that sprout “upward” (למעלה) and bear fruit when the city is delivered.
Despite the absence of a man “going into” the “young woman,” she will birth a son who will be a sign of the city’s deliverance and the survival of the son of David.	The king of Assyria will not be allowed to “go into” (בוא אל) Jerusalem, who is described as the “virgin daughter Zion” (בתולה בת ציון / παρθενος κηδεστὴς Σιών, Isa. 37:22).
Isaiah 37:30-35 ³⁰ “Then this shall be the sign for you: you will eat this year what grows of itself, in the second year what springs from the same, and in the third year sow-seed (זרע), reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit (פרי). ³¹ The surviving remnant of the house of Judah, it will again take root downward and bear fruit (פרי) upward. ³² For out of Jerusalem will go out a remnant , and survivors out of Mount Zion, The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” ³³ Therefore, thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, “He will not enter into (בוא + אל) this city or shoot an arrow there; and he will not come before it with a shield, or throw up a siege ramp against it. ³⁴ By the way that he came, by the same he will return,	
Ahaz and Hezekiah. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Rise of the Messiah (2024).	

In both of these stories, we have a King who's worried about a raging army about to go against it and "break it open" in order to install a puppet king.

God offers them both a sign of His promise of protection, even though Ahaz refuses.

This Immanuel sign is put on analogy to the surviving remnant in Isaiah 37:30-35. Even though the "Virgin daughter Zion" is not able to be entered, there will still be a fruitful "surviving remnant" coming forth from it as a sign of salvation.

This is exactly what the last few chapters of this whole book is about – a glorious surviving remnant worshipping Yahweh in a future glorious Zion! All of this, as we'll read later in Isaiah, is made possible by the coming Suffering Servant. The King of David. The Messiah.

Isaiah 7:18-25

¹⁸ **In that day** the LORD will whistle for the fly that is at the end of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. ¹⁹ And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the **thornbushes**, and on all the pastures.

²⁰ **In that day** the Lord will shave with a razor that is hired beyond the River—with the king of Assyria—the head and the hair of the feet, and it will sweep away the beard also.

²¹ **In that day** a man will keep alive a young cow and two **sheep**, ²² and because of the abundance of milk that they give, he will eat curds, for everyone who is left in the land will eat curds and honey.

²³ **In that day** every place where there used to be a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver, will become **briers and thorns**. ²⁴ With bow and arrows a man will come there, for all the land will be **briers and thorns**. ²⁵ And as for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe, you will not come there for fear of **briers and thorns**, but they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where **sheep** tread.

Untamable Land

Having land that used to be able to be worked ("hoed with a hoe"), but now they are full with briers and thorns is reminiscent of the fall as mentioned in Genesis 3:17-19:

"And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it," cursed is the ground

because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.’”

— Genesis 3:17-19

This also fits in with the rest of the imagery in v23-25 too between the initially abundant places that now are filled with violence and where the animals are not subdued (Gen 1:28).

Jerusalem’s flourishing can be spoken of like Eden and it’s destruction can be spoken of like the end of the world throughout the prophets. What God is doing through these people has worldwide implications for humanity’s quest to return to Eden.

Isaiah 8:1-4

¹ Then the LORD said to me, "Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters, 'Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz.'" ² And I will get reliable witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, to attest for me." ³ And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz; ⁴ for before the boy knows how to cry 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria."

Isaiah 8:5-8

⁵ The LORD spoke to me again: ⁶ "Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, ⁷ therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, ⁸ and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outstretched wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel."

Isaiah 8:9-10

⁹ Be broken, you peoples, and be shattered;
give ear, all you far countries;
equip yourselves and be shattered;
equip yourselves and be shattered.
¹⁰ Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing;
speak a word, but it will not stand,
for God is with us .

Isaiah 8:11-15

¹¹ For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying:

A ¹² "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread.

B ^{13a} But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as **holy**.

A' ^{13b} Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

¹⁴ And he will become a sanctuary, but for both houses of Israel he will become a stone of **stumbling** and a rock of offense, a trap and a **snare** to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁵ And many shall **stumble** on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be **snared** and taken."

Isaiah 8:16-9:1a

¹⁶ Bind up the **testimony**; seal the **teaching** among my disciples. ¹⁷ I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. ¹⁸ Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. ¹⁹ And when they say to you, "Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter," should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ To the **teaching** and to the **testimony**! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. ²¹ They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contumely against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. ²² And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.

^{9:1a} But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish.