

The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah

Text

Isaiah 56:9-57:21

Topic

The Jews in Judah are portrayed as perfumed prostitutes who prefer
Gentile kings

Title

"Judah, Don't Take Your Love To Crowns"

President Donald Trump is not the first to use derogatory names for political opponents; it has a long history.

Publisher James Callender called our second POTUS, John Adams, a "hideous hermaphroditical character which has neither the force and firmness of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman."

I was surprised to find that sort of thing in Isaiah.

The leaders of Judah are called "blind watchmen," "ignorant," "dumb dogs," and "greedy dogs." The LORD outs them as functional alcoholics.

That's just His opening salvo! He goes on to say they are "sons of the sorceress... offspring of the adulterer and the harlot."

Before you cut loose on Sacramento, however, be reminded that First Timothy 2:1-3 & First Peter 3 direct **us** to speak truth to power without vulgarity.

There was a righteous remnant of Jews in Judah:

1. "The righteous perishes, And no man takes it to heart; Merciful men are taken away" (57:1).
2. The last phrase of the same verse is, "While no one considers That the righteous is taken away from evil."

You noticed it. **Twice** we read that the righteous will be "taken away." We will take a look at these 'take-aways' as they relate to 7th century Judah. We will apply to our lives what we can without blurring the biblical distinction between Israel, who remains the Apple of God's Eye, and the Church.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 When You See The Righteous Perishing, The End Is Near**, and **#2 When You See The Righteous Removed, The End Is Here**.

#1 - When You See The Righteous Perishing, The End Is Near (56:9-57:13)

We pick-up our commentary in 56:9.

Isa 56:9 "All you beasts of the field, come to devour, All you beasts in the forest.

Isa 56:10 His watchmen are blind, They are all ignorant; They are all dumb dogs, They cannot bark; Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.

Isa 56:11 Yes, they are greedy dogs Which never have enough. And they are shepherds Who cannot understand; They all look to their own way, Every one for his own gain, From his own territory.

Isa 56:12 'Come,' one says, 'I will bring wine, And we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink; Tomorrow will be as today, And much more abundant.' "

This is a herding metaphor. The "watchmen" are sheep-herding dogs. A blind, alter-barked dog who sleeps all the time isn't ideal. When Ralph Wolf comes, you need Sam Sheepdog.

There were three hyena's in the animated *Lion King*. Ed was clearly disabled. These men are like that.

Gentile nations are the "beasts" who are set upon Judah to discipline them:

- Assyria destroyed the 10 tribes in the north.
- Babylon would conquer the 2 southern tribes that comprised Judah.

Isa 57:1 The righteous perishes, And no man takes *it* to heart; Merciful men *are* taken away, While no one considers That the righteous is taken away from evil.

Isa 57:2 He shall enter into peace; They shall rest in their beds, *Each one* walking in his uprightness.

The "righteous," i.e., *believers*, are described as being "taken away" by the LORD to protect them from the growing evil. It is described as "peace" & "rest." In other words, *they were dying*.

Have you ever said something like, "I'm glad Grandpa didn't live to see this?" Isaiah wrote 150yrs before the series of Babylonian invasions that would leave the Temple sacked, and Jerusalem abandoned. It would break the hearts of the righteous to see it.

Isa 57:3 "But come here, You sons of the sorceress, You offspring of the adulterer and the harlot!

Isa 57:4 Whom do you ridicule? Against whom do you make a wide mouth *And* stick out the tongue?

I gave up sticking out my tongue at a very young age. One of my brothers (I can't remember which on account that my traumatic memory represses it) hit me under the chin while I was sticking out my tongue at him. Effective.

Isa 57:4 ... *Are* you not children of transgression, Offspring of falsehood,

The Jews disowned the LORD. They took on the characteristics of their new 'parents.' We see three such traits in verses 5, 6 & 7.

Isa 57:5 Inflaming yourselves with gods under every green tree [This is sexual perversion. The pagan religious rituals were fertility based They involved all manner of perverse sexual behavior. Anything you could imagine that you should not imagine]. Slaying the children in the valleys, Under the clefts of the rocks? [This is exactly what it says - child sacrifice].

Isa 57:6 Among the smooth stones of the stream Is your portion; They, they, are your lot! Even to them you have poured a drink offering, You have offered a grain offering. Should I receive comfort in these?

Isa 57:7 "On a lofty and high mountain You have set your bed; Even there you went up To offer sacrifice [This is idolatry].

Isa 57:8 Also behind the doors and their posts You have set up your remembrance;
For you have uncovered yourself to those other than Me, And have gone up to them;
You have enlarged your bed And made a covenant with them; You have loved their
bed, Where you saw their nudity.

Their homes were supposed to be centers of learning about the LORD, but the people had made them places of idol worship and adultery. Instead of teaching the children the LORD's *statutes*, they were laying them on burning-hot idol *statues*.

Isa 57:9 You went to the king with ointment, And increased your perfumes; You sent your messengers far off, And *even* descended to Sheol.
Judah was an adulterous queen who decorated and perfumed herself to court other nations.

They went as far as "Sheol." Wait, *what?* Sheol is the place of the dead. They didn't physically enter Sheol. We are reminded that there are real supernatural forces behind the chaos of this world, always seeking to devour us.

Isaiah 57:10 in the CEV reads, "Though you tired yourself out by running after idols, you refused to stop. Your desires were so strong that they kept you going."

Unbelievers baffle me with their resistance to Jesus. Just when I think they are about to open to Jesus' knocking, they bar the door with false optimism that they can handle life without God's help. Even as they lose the things they believed would satisfy them.

Isa 57:11 "And of whom have you been afraid, or feared, That you have lied And not remembered Me, Nor taken *it* to your heart? Is it not because I have held My peace from of old That you do not fear Me?"

Isa 57:12 I will declare your righteousness And your works, For they will not profit you.

Isa 57:13 When you cry out, Let your collection of *idols* deliver you. But the wind will carry them all away, A breath will take *them*. But he who puts his trust in Me shall possess the land, And shall inherit My holy mountain."

They did not fear the LORD because in mercy He delayed discipline. If the Lord did not delay discipline, *there wouldn't be a church*. Ananias & Sapphira were struck dead for lying to God the Holy Spirit. Are we without sin?

God will one day “declare” the self-righteousness of the unsaved. It will prove insufficient to save them.

Unbelievers may feel secure, but even a wind as weak as a breath can topple them.

“Let your collection of idols deliver you” is a terrifying epitaph that could be engraved on the majority of headstones in cemeteries.

“But he who puts his trust in Me shall possess the land, And shall inherit My holy mountain.” God, by His providence, always preserves a godly remnant in Israel. In the future, “all Israel” **will** be saved at the Lord’s return. What about us, as a nation?

⇒ Child sacrifice? Check that box. According to the CDC, in 2021 there was one abortion for every five newborn children in the US.

⇒ Sexual perversion? It seems the latest rage among celebs and the powerful is sex-trafficking of human beings, including and especially children.

⇒ Idolatry? Sure - it is everywhere you look.

There are no statistics on the accelerated perishing of the righteous. I think we must concede, however, that *righteousness* has been on its way out for quite some time in our country. We call evil good, and good, evil.

Is the End near? We think so. But we also agree with something A.W. Tozer wrote. “When He returns is not as important as the fact that we are ready for Him when He does return.”

#2 - When You See The Righteous Removed, The End Is Here (v14-21)

In verse one we read, “While no one considers That the righteous is taken away from evil.”

As a general principle God will not destroy the righteous with the wicked.

Examples might be better than arguments. Lot, the nephew of Abraham, was living in Sodom when the angels came to destroy it. Abraham bargained with the LORD, saying, “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” (Genesis 18:23). The LORD said He wouldn’t. The angels got Lot away before the fire & brimstone.

There are other examples, e.g., Rahab who converted & was saved when Joshua fit the Battle of Jericho.

The early church historian Eusebius tells of a prophetic oracle given to the Jerusalem church that caused Christians to flee before its destruction in AD70.¹ Did every believer get out of Jerusalem in time? Maybe!

God does not destroy at all. He saves. Any destruction is deserved, and the LORD is willing to save any who simply believe Him.

Isa 57:14 And one shall say, "Heap it up! Heap it up! Prepare the way, Take the stumbling block out of the way of My people."

"Heap" means *build*. It describes getting the road(s) ready for the righteous to travel. He's describing a return to Jerusalem. One such return would happen after the 70yr Babylonian captivity. Another would happen in 1948 and continues to this very day.

Ultimately, this is describing pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Millennial Kingdom.

"Stumbling-block" is a name of Jesus.²

The Jews 'stumbled' over Jesus in His First Coming, but will receive Him as King at His return.

Isa 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy *place*, With him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

"Contrite" means *that which is broken, crushed, beaten small, trodden down*. Heart attack survivors often describe feeling like an elephant is sitting on their chest. The real 'elephant in the room,' so to speak, is sin crushing your soul. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up. You'll be able to breathe as God the Holy Spirit takes residence in you.

Isa 57:16 For I will not contend forever, Nor will I always be angry; For the spirit would fail before Me, And the souls *which* I have made.

¹ Eusebius, 'Church History' 3.5.3

² Matthew 21:44

Don't read this as if the LORD was fed-up with them. He's saying that if He didn't intervene, the human race would "fail."

It is similar to what Jesus said to those Jews who would find themselves in the future Time of Jacob's Trouble. "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22).

This is the incredible longsuffering of God. He will wait as long as He possibly can in order that the greatest number of people will be saved.

Isa 57:17 For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid and was angry, And he went on backsliding in the way of his heart.

Isa 57:18 I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will also lead him, And restore comforts to him And to his mourners.

Isa 57:19 "I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace to *him who is far off* and to *him who is near*," Says the LORD, "And I will heal him."

The "him" the LORD is talking about is the nation of Israel. God disciplined "him," then waited, but Israel went on backsliding.

Still, after all that, the LORD would "lead" Israel back, "restore," give him "peace" to sing about. Twice the LORD simply said "I will heal him."

Israel remains the chosen nation of God, the Apple of His Eye. "Has God cast away His people? Certainly not! God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew" (Romans 11:1-2).

Isa 57:20 But the wicked *are* like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest, Whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

Isa 57:21 "*There is no peace*," Says my God, "for the wicked."

If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, you may not call it peace, but that is what your heart is always seeking. It's why you're never truly satisfied. You don't have peace *with* God, and therefore you can't know the peace *of* God.

All the while, the Lord is seeking you, drawing you, loving you.

Jesus came in the first century and made a genuine offer to establish the Kingdom. His offer was officially rejected. He was crucified, buried, then rose from the dead. As

He ascended, the promise of the Kingdom was renewed. The disciples were told Jesus would return, and He will.

His Return is preceded by a 7yr time of great tribulation. It is called the Time of Jacob's Trouble because it is a time set for God to bring Israel to salvation.

We are not Israel. We are the Church. Jesus promised the Church, "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the Earth" (Revelation 3:10).

We will be kept "from" the Tribulation by being taken away.

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (First Thessalonians 4:16-17).

When the Church is resurrected & raptured, and the righteous are "taken away," **the end is here.** The four horsemen ride out of Heaven's stables and the Time of Jacob's Trouble follows the course set down in chapters 6-20 of the Revelation.

Again quoting Tozer, "Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. **He is our hope** - our Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him."

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!