

ISRAEL Teaching Letter

www.bridgesforpeace.com

Vol. # 770719 • July 2019



Renata Sedmakova'sutterstock.com

Prophets, Consequences, Widows and God

By Rev. Rebecca J. Brimmer, *International President and CEO*

Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection®

Isaiah



AS I READ THROUGH THE BIBLE THIS YEAR, I am seeking to better understand God and His character. What does He love? What does He hate? What is important to Him? How does He respond? As you read Isaiah, keep these questions in mind. Jesus (Yeshua) told us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength (Mark 12:30). It seems to me like my whole being is to love God.

Isaiah

Isaiah, son of Amoz, was a prophet of God during a very challenging period of biblical history. Rabbinic writings tell us that Isaiah was royalty. He was the son of Amoz, who was the brother of King Amaziah of Judah. This gave him a unique platform—the ability to speak directly to the kings of his time.

Isaiah served God, kings and the people of Israel for decades during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He saw the Assyrian Empire rise to power. He understood all about the northern kingdom being taken into captivity. He saw the dangers of the times, the sin and idolatry of the people and understood the consequences. God used him to shout out against iniquity, encourage righteousness and foretell of future glory. He was married, and two of his sons had prophetic names—Shear-Jashub, meaning “A Remnant Shall Return” (Isa. 7:3), and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, meaning, “Speed the Spoil, Hasten the Booty” (Isa. 8:3). Imagine, every time Mrs. Isaiah called the boys home for dinner, a prophetic proclamation went forth—and a hope for the future.

A Spiritual Encounter—and the Response

God gave Isaiah a vision of heaven. *“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim...And one cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!’ And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke”* (Isa. 6:1–4).

I am impressed by the fact that although Isaiah is recognized as the greatest prophet, entrusted with the words of God for the nation and given this amazing vision, there is nothing prideful in him. He doesn’t say, “Look at me! See how God trusts me.” He doesn’t proclaim his own greatness. Instead, he responds by saying, *“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts”* (Isa. 6:5). Isaiah, like other biblical characters who encountered God in a manifest fashion, is overwhelmed by the presence of God. The story continues with one of the seraphim flying to him with a coal from the altar in his hand. *“And he touched my mouth with it, and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged’”* (Isa. 6:7).

The Call

God called Isaiah to be His voice to the people of Judah at a critical time in their history. It must have been very overwhelming. Make no mistake, Isaiah’s job was extremely difficult. It was not glamorous, easy or pleasant. He was responsible to portray the heart of God, even as the words God gave him to speak were harsh and often related to coming judgment. God was revealing Himself as the Judge and the Redeemer. He was setting before the people—once again—the consequences of their actions. As we read in Deuteronomy 28, either blessing or cursing are available to God’s people, depending on their actions. Speaking the words of God, Isaiah exhorted the people to come back to Him, warning that they will suffer the consequences of their sinful actions. Yet even though the worst may befall them, God still gives hope as He promises future redemption.

In his article “Isaiah the Prophet,” Jacob Isaacs writes, “Isaiah brought to king and people the message of the holiness of G-d, the L-rd of hosts, at a time when idolatry seemed to be taking hold in the land of Judah. He preached justice and charity at a time when the morals of the people had reached a new low...Isaiah’s mission was not only to admonish the people to keep them on the right path. He also instilled fervent faith in G-d in the hearts of his flock, and he brought them courage and fortitude at a time when they were suffering mortal fear from the threat of the new Assyrian Empire. Isaiah also described in glowing terms the future glory of Zion, which inspires our people to the present day.”

Rebellion and the Cure

In the first chapter of Isaiah, God speaks through the prophet of His anger and disdain for the people of Judah and Jerusalem (v. 1), which He also refers to as Israel (v. 3). The words are scathing, harsh and must have caused great fear and consternation in the hearers.

The words of the prophet thunder, *“Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward”* (v. 4).

After 15 verses of accusation, the prophet speaks with clarity about what needs to happen. *“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease*



to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isa. 1:16–17). The phrase “*rebuke the oppressor*” may be better translated in the Tree of Life Version (TLV) as “*relieve the oppressed.*”

Then the Lord pleads with them, “*Come now, and 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 be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword’*” (vv. 18–20a).

In Isaiah 1:16, I see two major elements or two steps that need to be taken to receive God’s favor. The first is repentance, and the second is the fruits of repentance. Together they result in blessing. Ignoring them results in curses. In verses 18–20, we see the consequences. Obedience leads to blessing, and rebellion leads to the worst kind of negative results.

This reminds me of Deuteronomy 28, where the Lord gave the Children of Israel a choice. “*And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God...*” (v. 2). What follows is an extensive list of wonderful blessings. Then we have the curses—and they are terrible indeed. “*...If you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you...*” (v. 15).

When Isaiah proclaimed God’s words recorded in Isaiah 1, I am sure he was remembering the verses in Deuteronomy.

Repentance

Isaiah 1:16 starts with the words: “*Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil.*”

The word “clean” is *zaka* in Hebrew. It has the implications of being clean, pure, justified, translucent or innocent. As Christians, we have some of the same imagery. In the book of Hebrews we read, “*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*” (Heb. 10:22).

Certainly, our sins can be forgiven in an instant when we ask, but true repentance involves a change in our nature. It has been described as turning 180° and facing the opposite direction. We don't even look in the direction of temptation anymore. Instead, we choose to seek God first and in a continuing fashion. God hates sin, but He loves people. He invites us to seek His face (Ps. 27:8, Ps. 105:4, 2 Chron. 7:14). If we turn to face God, we are turning away from our sin. We don't concentrate on the sin; we put our focus on the God who loves us and forgives our sin. However, He also expects us to keep making that decision. Isaiah makes it very clear: "*Cease to do evil*" (Isa. 1:16).

In Christian theology there is a concept of sanctification received at the time of salvation, but also of a progressive sanctification, which results in Christian maturity over time. Scripture is clear that we have to make a conscious choice and an effort to "*depart from evil,*" "*do good,*" "*put off...the old man,*" and "*put on the new man*" (Ps. 34:14 and Eph. 4:22, 24). Our acceptance of the free gift of salvation makes it possible for us to make right choices, but we still have to make them. It isn't automatic. As David cried out in Psalms 38 and 39, we too must humble ourselves before the Lord, repent of our sins, then get up and make choices that show repentance—thus turning from our sins. This comes from a deep resolve in our hearts to be the people God has called us to be.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik says, "If *teshuvah* (repentance) is indeed a multistep process, involving sin recognition, remorse, and resolve, how can an individual possibly be considered righteous after only a moment's thought?"

Fruit of Repentance

Once we have turned away from our sin and turned to face God, we need to start acting in a Godly fashion. The prophet Isaiah describes what that means to God when he says, "*Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor [relieve the oppressed (TLV)]; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow*" (Isa. 1:17).

What a state of affairs when the prophet has to tell people to learn to do good! No wonder God was distressed. His people seemed to have forgotten the concept. God created mankind in

His image. We are meant to reflect Him. Yet sin can obscure the image of God in us.

John Wesley once said, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”

The apostle Paul encouraged the believers at Colossae by saying, “*For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in **every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God...*” (Col. 1:9–10, emphasis added).



I believe these three things are examples of learning to do good: seeking justice, reproofing the ruthless and taking care of widows and orphans.

Seek Justice

The Bible repeatedly links the concept of righteousness and justice. If we are really going to live righteously, then we must provide justice for all. As I searched through the Scriptures on this subject, I was a bit surprised to see how often justice is linked with the poor, the hungry, the widow, the orphan and the oppressed. It is so apparent that one of the things God identifies with “doing good” is taking care of those who are unable to take care of themselves. Justice is a process of righting what is wrong. It is wrong that people go hungry. It is wrong for women to be sold into the sex trade. It is wrong for people to be enslaved by others. It is wrong for children to be abused. It is wrong to take advantage of the poor and needy. It is the opposite of doing good. It is evil and despicable in the eyes of God.

When Jesus (Yeshua) was teaching His disciples in the Olivet Discourse, He talked about the judgment of the nations (Matt. 25). What will the nations be judged for? How they treated the oppressed, the poor, the hungry, the stranger, the thirsty, the prisoner, the sick or those without clothing.





In fact, the punishment for not caring for the above mentioned is harsh, *“Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels...these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”* (Matt. 25:41b, 46).

Let’s look at a few Scriptures on the subject.

“For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing” (Deut. 10:17–18).

“You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow’s garment as a pledge” (Deut. 24:17).

“Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow...” (Deut. 27:19a).

“He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice...He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor” (Ps. 72:2, 4).

“Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked” (Ps. 82:3–4).

“I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and justice for the poor” (Ps. 140:12).

Are you convinced yet? I certainly am! God hates injustice and loves to care for those in need.

At Bridges for Peace, we are committed to loving the things God loves and doing good in practical ways, especially to the oppressed, hungry, poor, needy, widows and orphans. That is why we give food to 22,000 people every month. Over 1,000 of them are widows with extremely limited support. If we had the funds, we could immediately begin to provide food and encouragement to an additional 7,000 widows. We help Holocaust survivors who were cruelly oppressed by the Nazis. We welcome and bless new immigrants who are strangers in their own land. Recently I was calling out to the Lord to provide additional income so we can reach out with love to more people. I heard His voice saying,





“Trust Me and do good.” Psalm 37:3 says, “*Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.*”

Today I am asking what God expects of me. How can I learn to do good? Will you search your heart as well? God wants us to be His blessing column!

Bibliography

Broydé, Isaac, Cheyne, Thomas Kelly, & Hirsch, Emil G. “Isaiah.” *JewishEncyclopedia.com*. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8235-isaiah>

Isaacs, Jacob. “Isaiah The Prophet.” *Chabad.org*. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/464019/jewish/Isaiah-The-Prophet.htm

“John Wesley Quotes.” *BrainyQuote*. https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/john_wesley_524889

Soloveitchik, Rabbi Joseph, B. *Before Hashem You Shall Be Purified*. New Jersey: Ohr Publishing, 1998.

Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.—Deut.)

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble... James 1:27

With 22% of Israelis living below the poverty level, there are many widows and orphans in the Land who need help. Help us shine the light of hope upon these precious people and show them the love of Christians around the world. Your generous gift to our Food Project allows us to be your hands and feet here in the Land as we minister to widows, orphans and others in need during their time of trouble.

Bridges for Peace—Offices

Australia: Tel: 07-5479-4229, Toll free: 1800-000-661, bfp.au@bridgesforpeace.com

Canada: Tel: 204-489-3697, Toll free: 855-489-3697, info@bfpcan.org

Japan: Tel: 03-5637-5333, bfp@bfpj.org

New Zealand: Tel: 09-430-2943, bfpnz@outlook.com

South Africa: Tel: 021-975-1941, info@bridgesforpeace.co.za

South Korea: Tel: 070-8772-2014, bfp@bfpkorea.com

Spanish: Tel: (1) 787-755-0327, bfpteri@gmail.com

Russia: Tel: (7) 903-309-1849, info.ru@bridgesforpeace.com

United Kingdom: Tel: 01656-739494, ukoffice@bridgesforpeace.com

United States: Tel: 800-566-1998, Product orders: 888-669-8800, postmaster@bfpusa.org



© COPYRIGHT POLICY:

Bridges for Peace holds the copyright on this material. We encourage pastors, Bible teachers, and lay people to use these articles for preaching and teaching, and we hereby grant permission for a limited number of copies for such educational purposes. However, any other reproduction or transmittal of this material in any form—including reprinting, republishing, recording or use with any information storage and retrieval system—requires written permission from BFP International.

Bridges for Peace: Christians supporting Israel and building relationships between Christians and Jews in Israel and around the world.

International Headquarters
 P.O. Box 1093, Jerusalem, Israel
 Tel: (972) 2-624-5004
intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com

www.bridgesforpeace.com

