

A Sick Society; A Worthless Worship  
Isaiah 1:5-15

May 10, 2009

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B. Jeremiah 17:9

C. Galatians 6:7

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E. Revelation 11:8

F. Hebrews 11:6

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—{1}. **Isaiah 1:5-15 . . . . . 'A Sick Society; A Worthless Worship'**

A. Introduction

1. In what kind of society do we live?

a. this chart is based on figures from Statistics Canada

- (A) it shows that in the 35 years from 1970 to 2004 there were some 3.2 million abortions in Canada
- (B) a loss of life which has affected our school system, our health care system, our retirement system, and many other facets in our life
- (C) if this is the number in Canada, I dread to think of the corresponding figure for the United States

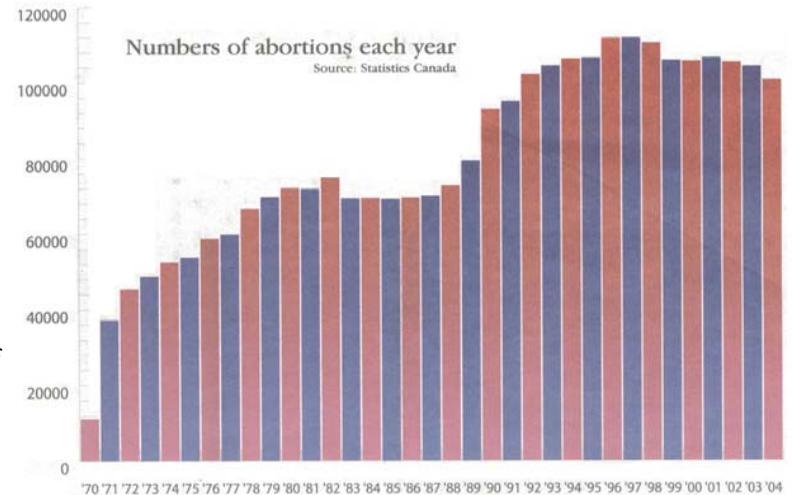
b. to speak out against this practice is not tolerated

- (A) politicians fear to do so lest they be labelled extreme
- (B) here is an news article from Washington, DC <sup>—{2}</sup>. — **The Department of Homeland Security has released a document warning about a possible rise in 'right-wing extremists,' which it defines as 'groups or individuals that are dedicated to a single issue, such as opposition to abortion or immigration.' The department admits that there is no evidence that such groups or individuals are 'planning acts of violence.'** Lawyer Richard Moore of the Thomas More Law Centre said the Homeland Security document is a 'prelude' to 'hate speech laws targeting Christian church and others who oppose abortion.' The law centre filed a lawsuit against Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and her department.

(C) and the courts and universities have further censored the expression against this practice

c. churches are not immune from following society

- (A) the episcopal church in the US has declared the Bible to be anti-Semitic
- (B) — a strange decision given that every human writer of it, with the possible exception of Luke, was Jewish —
- (C) but, by doing so it can reject its authority in matters such as the moral wrong of homosexual practice, living together out of marriage, and abortion



- (D) it is small wonder that even Christians get trapped into thinking that these are the norms of society and faith
- d. but there are some positive signs – you may have noticed this article in the Auroran<sup>{3}</sup>.
  - (A) Aurora Council endorses prayer breakfast initiative
  - (B) Last week, Aurora Council formally recognized and endorsed *this* initiative
  - (C) As described by Bob Callow, who appeared at council with two other representatives of the committee, the non-partisan group represents 14 churches in the area that are planning to host a Christian Celebration of Prayer for the community leaders serving Aurora and the surrounding municipalities.
  - (D) Similar events held in Markham, Whitchurch-Stouffville and Richmond Hill have brought together hundreds of citizens to honour, recognize and pray for all community leaders, from elected politicians of all levels of government, to representatives of police and fire departments, and local schools. ...
  - (E) Mr. Callow confirmed the event would be open to everyone who wished to attend, no matter what their religious beliefs.
  - (F) we have been involved with the planning committee along with such churches as Cornerstone Ministries, Community Bible, and the Gathering Place, as we seek to fulfill our mandate as Christians to pray for 'all that are in authority' (1 Timothy 2:2).
  - (G) but even in something this worthwhile, the concern is that this may be only Christian nominalism.
- e. for, you see, we live in a sick society
  - (A) and even the best in our society
  - (B) even our churches
  - (C) have been tainted by the world in which we live
  - (D) but, this is far from being a new phenomenon

2. Isaiah, too, lived in the midst of a sick society

- a. for the past 3 weeks we have been looking at that society
  - (A) at the events of his world and surrounding nations
  - (B) at the character of the 4 kings of Judah of his day
  - (C) at the message of the contemporary prophets

- b. in these message from Isaiah
  - (A) we are going to read the entire chapter each week
  - (B) or even a couple of weeks in a row
  - (C) so that even if the sermon has little to commend it
  - (D) you will have had the benefit of hearing God's word as written by Isaiah, the Evangelical Prophet

3. « Read Isaiah 1 in entirety » – keep your Bibles open, if you will

4. The book of Isaiah

- a. shows evidence of having been arranged in a certain order
- b. just as Jeremiah and Daniel are not in strict time order
- c. but rather arranged by the prophet into themes
- d. and this first chapter has been chosen by Isaiah
  - (A) through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,
  - (B) to introduce the entire book
  - (C) coming as it does before chapter 6 which records his calling as a prophet
- e. this chapter is in miniature what the book is as a whole
- f. the story of God working in history
  - (A) to accomplish His eternal purposes
  - (B) to bring salvation to mankind
  - (C) through the people He chose for that purpose
  - (D) by His chosen One, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ
- g. just as the first three chapters of Romans
  - (A) show the necessity of salvation explained in the rest
  - (B) so the first part of this chapter
  - (C) shows the necessity of salvation – the sickness of society – which the rest of the chapter and the rest of the book will proclaim in greater and greater detail

B. The Sick Society

1. the Portrait in Figure

- a. the sickness of sin 1:5
- (A) *Where will you be stricken again, As you continue in your rebellion? The whole head is sick And the whole heart is faint.*
  - (B) this verse begins the portrayal of the land of Judah
    - (1) and, particularly, the city of Jerusalem
    - (2) comprising the kingdom promised eternally to David and his heirs forever
    - (3) as a physical body, a sick body
  - (C) and the sickness, the plague that has marked that body
  - (D) is sin
  - (E) God questions the people through Isaiah in this verse, which is perhaps best understood if it is expanded and asked in this fashion: *'Why, or what point, is there in chastising you any further, seeing that your response is but to add further to your rebellion?'*
  - (F) like Pharaoh, whose response to the plagues was to harden his heart, so the people of Judah responded to the chastening mercy of God by increased sinfulness
  - (G) and the result was that the sickness of sin
    - (1) had infected them from head to heart
    - (2) Jeremiah (17:9) had the same thing to say a century later of this people: *'The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?'*
    - (3) their heart was infected; so was their thinking
    - (4) which becomes apparent from their ...
- b. the insensitivity to discipline 1:6
- (A) *From the sole of the foot even to the head There is nothing sound in it, Only bruises, welts and raw wounds, Not pressed out or bandaged, Nor softened with oil.*
  - (B) they had been disciplined from head to toe
    - (1) you can take this geographically – from capital city of Jerusalem to the remotest hamlet
    - (2) you can take this socially – from the highest in the land – king or priest – to the most humble
    - (3) you can take it as a deliberate judgement meted out by God or the inevitable consequence of sin: *'Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.'* (Galatians 6: 7-8) – both have the same result

- (C) the verse describes 3 different marks of the discipline to which they had been subjected
  - (1) the cuts or wounds as from a sword in a war
  - (2) the contusions, bruises or breaks from beatings
  - (3) the sores as the body loses its healing capacity
- (D) and in each case, these are ignored, neglected
  - (1) the cuts are not pressed or sewn together
  - (2) the contusions are not poulticed or bound
  - (3) the sores are not medicated
- (E) there is not concern on the part of this body for its sad state; a sick society unconcerned with its sickness

## 2. the Portrait in Fact

### a. the land of Judah

1:7

- (A) *Your land is desolate, Your cities are burned with fire, Your fields — strangers are devouring them in your presence; It is desolation, as overthrown by strangers.*
- (B) the way this verse is phrased is not as a prophetic forecast of something that will happen
- (C) but as a description of what the people of Judah and Jerusalem can look out and see to be the case
- (D) and it is all the more striking because there were in the life of Isaiah periods of great prosperity and growth under the various kings
- (E) but these merely masked what was really the case
- (F) for example
  - (1) Hezekiah was a good king and delivered by God
  - (2) but in his time, the army of Sennacherib went about capturing the cities of Judah (Isaiah 36: 1)
  - (3) and Sennacherib himself recorded concerning Hezekiah, *'Himself, I made a prisoner in Jerusalem ... like a bird in a cage.'*<sup>{4}</sup>.
- (G) devastation was never far away from this people
  - (1) they could look to the invasion and fall of the northern kingdom, with its capital, Samaria
  - (2) they could look within their own borders
  - (3) as raiders from the nations around them
  - (4) took advantage of their distressed condition

- (5) helping themselves to the produce of the land given to them, flowing with milk and honey
- b. the city of Jerusalem 1:8
- (A) *The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, Like a watchman's hut in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.*
- (B) as that tender term, 'daughter of Zion' conveys
- (C) is first described as a *succah* in a vineyard
- (1) you know that the feast of *succhoth* is where Jews live in very temporary shelters made of branches
  - (2) that is the word here – a temporary booth or tent
  - (3) that *succah* was only needed for a few days each year between the point where the grapes began to ripen and when the harvest was complete
  - (4) so that the rest of the year it is left to fall to pieces
  - (5) that is the first picture of Jerusalem, the great city
- (D) in the second, it is a hut in a cucumber patch
- (1) this is even less permanent
  - (2) it was the place where a watchman slept
  - (3) in fact, one translator rendered it a 'hammock'<sup>{5}</sup>.
- (E) that was Jerusalem – forlorn in the midst of desolation
- c. the remnant 1:9
- (A) *Unless the LORD of hosts Had left us a few survivors, We would be like Sodom, We would be like Gomorrah.*
- (B) God does deal with the other nations
- (1) in their history, Israel had watched God deal with Egypt and the various nations round about them
  - (2) Sodom and Gomorrah, along with the cities of the plain, were a reminder to the people of Judah of the total destruct of which God was capable
  - (3) in this period, Israel was taken into captivity and the land of the northern kingdom repopulated
- (C) but God, in His mercy, spared a few of Judah
- (1) and here is a theme of this book (as well as of the other prophets) – that theme is the remnant
  - (2) that God is preserving a few in the midst of many

- (3) in Elijah's day it was the 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Ba'al
- (4) nor, was this remnant spared because of their righteousness – but by election according to grace
- (5) that from this remnant there should come forth the one who would become Redeemer

3. every so often God uses events to discipline people

- a. make no mistake about it – God's chastisements are not limited to the people of Israel, or Christians
- b. because, remember, God's purpose is to bring rebellious mankind back to himself
- c. the Bible says, '[Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to any people.](#)' (Proverbs 14: 34)
- d. so God in his mercy sends warnings, allowing
  - (A) financial crises and market depressions
  - (B) plagues, epidemics and pandemics
  - (C) earthquakes and destructive storms
  - (D) acts of terrorism and bloody wars
  - (E) but a sick society pays no heed
- e. Judah's choice was the pagan choice; Judah treated the real God in the way the pagans considered their false and vain gods; and we see how God responded to their ...

C. The Worthless Worship

1. the People's Approach

- a. not pious but pagan 1:10
  - (A) [Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah.](#)
  - (B) they may have been spared, where the cities of the plain were not; but they are spiritually the same
  - (C) Revelation (11:8) warns '[And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.](#)'
  - (D) here is it both the rulers – the *kadi* or judges – and the people who are spiritually allied to Sodom
  - (E) Arab proverb, '[More unjust than a judge of Sodom](#)'
  - (F) to these rulers and peoples, Isaiah declares the word of the Lord and the law of the Lord – not

merely that as recorded by Moses – but the inner intent of God, even as did Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount

- (G) because, to appease this god of theirs who chastised them they were offering sacrifices ...
- b. a-plenty but unpleasing 1:11
  - (A) *'What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?' Says the LORD. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats.'*
  - (B) now Isaiah relates how Jehovah God feels about this
  - (C) God lists out the sacrifices
    - (1) they were numerous in their quantity
    - (2) but also in their diversity
  - (D) and in these sacrifices
  - (E) as they were offered only in form and not in faith
  - (F) God takes no pleasure, because, *'And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.'* (Hebrews 11:6)
  - (G) nor were these the only righteousness, righteous deeds, in which they engaged to seek to propitiate their god; for at the temple, they were ...
- c. present but profane 1:12
  - (A) *'When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?'*
  - (B) God gave to Israel for their good and for their joy
    - (1) the Sabbath that they should have rest
    - (2) the feasts that they should remember His works
  - (C) but these became but dutiful observances
  - (D) so, their marching into the courts of the temple
  - (E) in the celebration of Passover, Pentecost, Atonement, as well as the various feasts of new moons and so on
  - (F) by the word used, *'trampled'* is likened to that of a herd of cattle, which cattle they brought for sacrifice
  - (G) they came, contemptuously herded in as cattle, God held their profane entrance in like contempt; see ...

## 2. the Lord's Response

### a. cease and desist

1:13

(A) 'Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.'

(B) the Judge of the Earth issues the writ: Stop This!

(C) 'I have had enough' says the Lord, 'of empty worship'

(1) it's an abomination

(2) I cannot take it

(D) because worship is mixed with iniquity; hence it is ...

### b. hated and wearisome

1:14

(A) 'I hate your new moon *festivals* and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*.'

(B) in fact, if you want to know the truth about them

(C) your praise and worship are not only displeasing

(D) they are a wearisome burden; a loathsome annoyance

(E) you are trying to placate me so I will stop disciplining you, but because your prayers are ...

### c. hypocritical and unheard

1:15

(A) 'So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.'

(B) you go through all the motions of prayer

(C) and this is the problem of nominal Christianity as well

(D) you make a great display

(E) but the very hands that you lift up to me

(F) with your palms upturned that they may receive from me my blessings

(G) those same hands are filled with bloods – it is in the plural and denotes bloodshed – of violent injustice

d. I will hide mine eyes – the people, as we shall see in Isaiah 6, had ears but would not hear, had eyes, but not see – 'Well,' says Jehovah God, 'you are trying to get in good with me as the pagans do to their idols; then I will be to you as their idols are to them – unhearing, unseeing, unanswering – and I shall discipline you until you turn and learn; for whom I love, I discipline.'

## D. Conclusion

### 1. we live in a sick society

- a. a society that when it does think of God, think in terms of what He owes to them because of their good deeds
- b. and this distresses us
- c. but we are reminded of the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ, 'You are the salt of the earth; ... You are the light of the world ... Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.'
- d. our responsibility in this society is therefore clear
- e. the only cure for the sickness of sin that infects our society is the gospel of grace of salvation through faith in the finished work of salvation on the cross of Calvary

### 2. and we are distressed likewise when we see

- a. the sickness of society creeping in and becoming part of the church – just as in Isaiah's day it became part of the people of God of that time
- b. as the hymn-writer, Samuel John Stone<sup>-(6)</sup>, put it

Though with a scornful wonder

Men see her {that is, the church} sore opprest,

By schisms rent asunder,

By heresies distrest,

Yet saints their watch are keeping,

Their cry goes up, "How long?"

And soon the night of weeping

Shall be the morn of song

- c. and we, too, are left with that same glorious outlook
- d. in the meanwhile, let our prayer be that God will make us a blessing in the world society into which He has placed us

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Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, [www.holwick.com](http://www.holwick.com). Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick’s database are identified by “Kerux” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

In these studies in Isaiah, I commend, and have primarily used, these commentaries:

- a. K&D – Commentary on the Old Testament by Keil and Delitzsch, 1890; and specifically, the volumes on Isaiah by Franz Delitzsch. This has also been republished at various dates by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan
  - b. EJV – The Book of Isaiah by Edward J. Young; © 1965; Wm. B. Eerdmans
  - c. EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, particularly from Volume 6, Isaiah, Geoffrey W. Grogan, Principal, Bible Training Institute, Glasgow, Scotland; © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan
2. The Interim, Vol 27, No 3 for May, 2009; page 13; this issue also the source of the chart shown
  3. The Auroran, week of May 5, 2009; page 3
  4. Source ANET, quoted in EBC, *in loc*.
  5. Franz Delitzsch, K&D, *in loc*
  6. *The Church’s One Foundation*, by Samuel John Stone (1839-1900)