



Preaching Through The Bible, Michael Eaton

Isaiah

Part 9

Lost at Sea (5:18-30)

- Terrible consequences of sin

1. First there is attachment to sin and impatience with God

- The people of Israel drag a heavy burden

- Impatient with God

2. Then all spiritual and moral values are reversed

- Lifestyles condemned by a sensitive conscience become normal in a society that moves away from God

In Isaiah 5:18–30, the prophet is still describing the terrible consequences of fruitlessness. Isaiah outlines the sin ^{■1} and its consequences^{■2}. The sin has stages to it.

1. First there is attachment to sin and impatience with God.

¹⁸*Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of falsehood, and wickedness as with cart ropes,
 19to those who say, ‘Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it.
 Let it approach,
 let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it.’*

The picture is of a cart being pulled along. The ‘cart’ is wickedness. The ones pulling the cart are the people of Israel. The ropes are cords of deceit. They tell themselves lies, and drag along what is really a heavy burden. They are impatient with God. Their style of talk is: ‘If God is for us, let him do what we want – now!’

2. Then all spiritual and moral values are reversed.

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.*

Lifestyles that are condemned by a sensitive conscience become normal, even required, in a society that moves away from God. It fills the atmosphere (like light); it governs private decisions (like taste). Behind it all is a confidence in human cleverness.

²¹*Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and discerning in their own sight.*

But this ‘cleverness’ only produces heroes in wickedness.

²²*Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks,
 23who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent.*

3. The result is destruction

- Metaphors for the violence of God’s anger

- Extermination

■1 5:18-23
 ■2 5:24-30

3. The result is destruction. Isaiah pours out a string of pictures and metaphors, speaking of the violence of God’s anger when at last he can no longer tolerate human wickedness. Verse 24 speaks of extermination:

²⁴*Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust; for they have rejected the law of Yahweh Almighty and spurned the talk of the Holy One of Israel.*

Verse 25 talks of the intensity of God's anger:

²⁵Therefore Yahweh's anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down.

- The mountains shake when God approaches

The mountains which are famous for being steady and immovable shake when God approaches.

*The mountains shake,
and the dead bodies are like refuse in the
streets. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned
away, his hand is still stretched out.*

- Distant nations begin to invade God's people

Distant nations, like the Assyrians and Babylonians, begin to invade God's people.

*²⁶He lifts up a banner for the distant nations,
he whistles for those at the ends of the earth.
Here they come,
swiftly and speedily!*

*²⁷Not one of them grows tired or stumbles,
not one slumbers or sleeps;
not a belt is loosened at the waist,
not a sandal thong is broken.*

*²⁸His arrows are sharp,
all his bows are strung;
his horses' hoofs seem like flint,
his chariot wheels like a whirlwind.*

- Judgement is powerful – the people are helpless before it

The judgement is powerful; the people are helpless before it.

*²⁹His roar is like that of the lion,
he roars like a young lion;
he growls as he seizes his prey
and carries it off with no one to rescue.*

*³⁰In that day he will roar over it
like the roaring of the sea.*

3. Is there any hope at all?

4. The question is: is there any hope at all? The final lines of the section are a picture of hopelessness.

*And if one looks at the land,
he will see darkness and distress;
even the light will be darkened by the clouds.*

- The people are like sailors in a boat due to sink – no hope

The people are like sailors in a boat which is doomed to sink at any moment in the violence of a great storm. They look towards land to see if there is any hope but the land is not even visible because of the approaching night-time and the darkness of the storm-clouds. There seems to be no hope at all.

- Our wickedness is so serious that we drag our sins along with us and try to justify them

- We are helpless

It is generally the way of the Bible to be totally realistic concerning the human predicament, before it gives us any hope of rescue. Sooner or later, at one point or another, we have to be persuaded of the seriousness of our problem. So serious is our inborn wickedness that – despite all that God has done for us – we love our own sins and drag them along with us like a cartload of burdens to which we are attached by our own deceitfulness. Then we use every bit of ability we have to justify our own wickedness and we end up putting darkness in the place of light, and telling ourselves that our darkness is really quite bright! One calamity after another falls upon us and eventually we find ourselves as helpless as a man before a roaring lion, or a sailor lost at sea in a storm.

• The call of a prophet – the miracle-child

• We are lost in darkness but soon we shall see a great light

At Isaiah 5:30 we come to the end of the introduction to Isaiah's message. We should be grateful that the book does not end there. There is an answer after all. It begins with the call of a prophet. Before we can find a way out of our darkness a word must come to us that we know is from God himself. Then he will tell us of the miracle-child who is born of a virgin, one whose name is Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. At the end of Isaiah 5 we are a people lost in darkness, for we know our case is not so different from Israel's. But as we keep reading, soon we shall see a great light.

Dr Michael Eaton (1942-2017) was highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. Born in the UK, he lived for many years in Kenya where he became a citizen. He was one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship in Nairobi. His Preaching through the Bible books are highly popular worldwide, written in a clear and down-to-earth style but underpinned by rigorous scholarship. Some of these books have been reformatted as individual sheets for personal and group study and preaching. The New Testament volumes have been re-edited and combined in the Branch Commentary. The Old Testament, including previously unpublished material will follow. More details: www.slices.org.uk.