

# Isaiah

## Week 4 - Humanity and Chapters 40-55

### ANTHROPOLOGY

Over many decades we have been taught to analyze behavior naturalistically.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, much of this has been useful in various ways but in leaving out biblical ways of evaluating human motivation inevitably leads to problems.<sup>2</sup>

Biblical anthropology concentrates on humans in relation to God rather than world.

Let's consider what Isaiah teaches about us, especially the effects of sin and faith.

From Isaiah we are told that people are:

- created beings<sup>3</sup> with
- spiritual<sup>4</sup> and physical features;
- that they have free will<sup>5</sup>;
- that they naturally incline toward rebellion<sup>6</sup> and
- that God will rescue some from the effects of rebellion.<sup>7</sup>

In spite of God's sovereign right to rule his own creation<sup>8</sup> and his desire for intimacy with people, they wish to be free of God - free to live how they want...This is intrinsic to human nature.

Rebellion is only possible when God distances himself from his creation,<sup>9</sup> because the rebellious are terrified of God,<sup>10</sup>

they know they are guilty.<sup>11</sup>

Isaiah elaborates on the way that rebellion works itself out from God's POV:

Rebellion<sup>12</sup> manifests itself in three kinds of urges:

- The desire to acquire (i.e. lust of the eyes) 5:8-10, 23 remember how much of the wickedness of the people was associated with land-grabbing & swindling.

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<sup>1</sup> Naturalism is the view that everything in the material world can be explained using natural explanations (at least theoretically). So, human behaviors are explicable by biology, psychology or sociology. These latter two explanations concern themselves with causes & effects without necessarily making connections to the brain but both these disciplines assume that causes produce changes in the brain that subsequently produce behavioral effects.

<sup>2</sup> See the Powlison article, *Sane Faith*

<sup>3</sup> 43:7; 44:21; 45:12; 49:14-16; 54:5-8

<sup>4</sup> The Bible and the OT, in particular, is fairly loose with its use of words translated as soul or spirit such that it is difficult to clearly define or distinguish them. *Nephesh* can mean life, person, desire, passion, appetite, emotion, self (15:4; 19:10; 26:9; 38:15, 17; 53:11; 61:10; 66:3). *Ruach* means breath, wind or spirit but is difficult to distinguish from *nephesh* (26:9; 38:16; 54:6; 57:15f; 61:3; 65:14; 66:2). In many of these passages the terms translated soul or spirit appear to refer to mental states (intellectual, emotional or volitional). Yet this is not adequate to explain God sending various spirits (19:14; 29:10; 37:7), necromancers conjuring spirits (29:4), it's apparent use as a literary device (4:4, 11:2; 19:3; 28:6) or God's Spirit (63:10, 11, 14; 44:3; 40:13; 32:15; 11:2) who has an independent role in God's works.

<sup>5</sup> If not, it would be absurd for God to urge Israel to change her mind or to argue issues out with Him 43:26.

<sup>6</sup> Note, for instance, that even in a perfect environment rebellion fomented (26:10).

<sup>7</sup> Some will be forgiven...55:1,3,7; 59:16,20,21, but not all...22:14 (c.f. 1Jn.4:16 5:16f; Heb. 6:4; 10:26; unpardonable sin); 26:14; 27:11b; 29:9-12; 45:15; 55:6; 65:13ff.

<sup>8</sup> His right and ability to rule can be seen with every use of Adoni and Yahweh; see also, 1:1:3; 40:15,17,23; 45:9, 11; 14:26-27; 37:6f; 40:12; 43:13b; 44:25; 45:6b-7, 9 23-24; 46:10b; 48:15; 49:22; 50:1-3; 51:13-16; 55:11

<sup>9</sup> 57:11 Of whom were you worried and fearful, When you lied, and did not remember Me, Nor give Me a thought? Was I not silent even for a long time so you do not fear me?

<sup>10</sup> 33:14 Sinners in Zion are terrified; Trembling has seized the godless. Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?; see also several places where the response of the godless to judgment is terror

<sup>11</sup> Isa 59:11-13 All of us growl like bears, And moan sadly like doves; ...For our transgressions are multiplied before Thee, And our sins testify against us; For our transgressions are with us, And we know our iniquities: transgressing and denying the LORD, And turning away from our God, Speaking oppression and revolt, Conceiving in and uttering from the heart lying words. And justice is turned back, And righteousness stands far away;

<sup>12</sup> Jer.2:13 offers a terrific picture of the nature of rebellion and the inability of our rebellion to meet needs.

- The desire to stimulate the senses (i.e. lust of the flesh) 5:11-12 (drinking – music), 20 (calling evil good), 22 (kings of mixology); 56:10-12 (sleeping, eating, drinking); 57:5 (sexual orgies).

- The desire to exalt oneself (i.e. boastful pride) 5:16-19, 21; 10:8-19; 13:11

People with 'control' issues or 'victim' issues are both expressing pride.

The former is expressing the belief that they can and should re-wire the world to their advantage (i.e. they express power & control).

The latter expresses sadness that they cannot re-wire the world to their advantage (b/c of circumstances or lack of resources; complaining is just an admission of powerlessness).

Most of us weave wildly between these extremes depending on how successful we are at controlling.

⇒ Devaluing others is the sister of pride and is manifest:

- through exploitation 1:16-23; 3:15; 10:1-2; 24:16; 32:6-7; 39:8b; 56:10-12
- through mockery 28:22; 29:20; 57:4
- through affectations aimed at manipulation 3:16-4:1; 58:1-5

⇒ Proud religious people seek to manipulate the spiritual realm for their own advantage 1:11-15; 17:7-8; 28:15(18); 29:13-14; 46:6-7; 57:5-9; 58:1-5

⇒ Proud people are very confident in their ways and means of getting what they want 2:6-22; 22:5-11; 28:15(18); 29:13; 30:1-5; 30:12,16-17; 31:1; 47:9-15; 50:11; note the tendency to depend on or use others as a method (i.e. compare this with 51:7-8,12-16).

⇒ Proud people are radically committed to their rebellion 1:5-9; 23:17f ; 47:15b; 48:4-8; 57:10,17

⇒ When every personal device fails unrepentant pride results in hopelessness 22:12-13; 37:23

#### Rebelliousness leads to troubles and increasing spiritual stupidity

- See for example: 5:12-13; 6:9-10; 9:13; 28:7-15; 30:9-11; 42:18-25; 44:12-20; 45:20; 46:5-7; 47:7b; 56:10-12; 59:9-10
- The rebellious are restless and anxious 57:10, 20-21
- The rebellious are mindless of their own demise 28:15(18); 47:7,8
- The rebellious think they can avoid God 29:15-16; 47:10a
- The rebellious blame God for their own choices 63:17

#### Those who trust God:

- are satisfied 3:10; 7:9b; 25:9; 26:3; 30:15; 32:17; 42:16; 48:18f
- are used by God for good 26:12
- are persecuted by the rebellious 50:6-9; 59:15
- get insight and wisdom from him 48:17; 50:4,5,10
- have closeness with him 57:15; 66:2b

#### God has a plan to rescue people from their own rebellion:

- through atonement 1:18; 6:7 e.g. of Isaiah; 43:25; 44:22; 53:5ff; 55:7; 59:16 the functional centrality of the gospel
- through immortality 25:7f; 26:19 (c.f. ICor.15:21-55; Rom.6:14; 2Tim.1:10; Rev.1:17f; Heb.2:14; 1Th.4:14; Rev.21:4)
- through restructuring of the character 26:8f;
  - redemptive discipline 1:5-9, 25-27; 10:25-27; 19:23-25; 29:22-24; 48:10; 51:17-23; 57:16-19; 59:18f
  - instruction away from evil and toward good 2:3; 48:17 (c.f. Gal.5:16-25; Rom.6:12; Phil.4:8; Mt.26:4)
  - spiritual guidance 32:15; 51:16; 59:21

### **An Overview of Chapters 40-55**

- ◆ Major themes
  - ◇ Theology proper (i.e. the doctrine of God)
  - ◇ Soteriology (i.e. the doctrine of salvation)
- ◆ Selected textual notes
  - 40:1-48:22 Deliverance from Babylon
    - 40:1-11 Focus is on sin and eventual return not exile.
    - 40:12-31 God is wise and powerful.
    - 41:1-29 deliverance from Babylon is in the works.
    - 42:1-25 deliverance from sin is in the works.
    - 43:1-44:5 You will be redeemed from Babylon.
    - 44:6-23 God is superior to idols.
    - 44:24-45:25 You will be restored through Cyrus.
    - 46:1-47:15 Babylon and her gods will fall.
    - 48:1-22 released from punishment for rebellion.
  - 49:1-57:21 The Person and Work of the Servant
    - 49:1-26 The servant and the restoration of Israel
    - 50:1-11 The suffering of the servant
    - 51:1-16 A double meaning: God will restore his people
    - 51:17-52:12 Good news for Jerusalem
    - 52:13-53:12 Salvation through the atonement.
    - 54:1-17 Jerusalem will rejoice and prosper.
    - 55:1-13 Trust God!
    - 56:1-8 Nations will flock to Israel for God's sake.
    - 56:9-57:21 A synopsis of Israel's sins

### Homework Assignment

- ◆ Read and annotate chapters 56-66
- ◆ Memorize one of the following verses: 57:15, 64:4 and 66:2b
- ◆ The pattern of sin explicitly described in 1 John 2:16 is repeated in many places in the Bible (e.g. see Mt. 6). Isaiah illustrates that rejection of God's leadership in favor of self-rule leads to such practices. How are you currently pursuing materialistic desires, sensuality and dependence on yourself? How might you resist these tendencies?
- ◆ Prepare responses to the following questions:
  1. Read Isaiah 2:6-22. Notice references to arrogance, idolatry and trusting man. How are these human attitudes and behaviors related?
  2. List 5 features of God's nature that are described by Isaiah.