

## Isaiah 2:1 – 22

<sup>2:1</sup> The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> Now it will come about that in the last days  
The mountain of the house of the LORD  
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,

And will be raised above the hills;  
And all the nations will stream to it.

<sup>3</sup> And many peoples will come and say,  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
To the house of the God of Jacob;  
That He may teach us concerning His ways  
And that we may walk in His paths.'

For the law will go forth from Zion  
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup> And He will judge between the nations,  
And will render decisions for many peoples;  
And they will hammer their swords into plowshares  
And their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,  
And never again will they learn war.

<sup>5</sup> Come, house of Jacob,  
And let us walk in the light of the LORD.

<sup>6</sup> For You have abandoned Your people, the house of Jacob,  
Because they are filled with influences from the east,  
And they are soothsayers like the Philistines,  
And they strike bargains with the children of foreigners.

<sup>7</sup> Their land has also been filled with silver and gold  
And there is no end to their treasures;  
Their land has also been filled with horses  
And there is no end to their chariots.

<sup>8</sup> Their land has also been filled with idols;  
They worship the work of their hands,  
That which their fingers have made.

<sup>9</sup> So the common man has been humbled  
And the man of importance has been abased,  
But do not forgive them.

<sup>10</sup> Enter the rock and hide in the dust  
From the terror of the LORD  
And from the splendor of His majesty.

<sup>11</sup> The proud look of man will be abased  
And the loftiness of man will be humbled,  
And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.

<sup>12</sup> For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning  
Against everyone who is proud and lofty  
And against everyone who is lifted up,  
That he may be abased.

<sup>13</sup> And it will be against all the cedars of Lebanon that are lofty and lifted up,  
Against all the oaks of Bashan,

<sup>14</sup> Against all the lofty mountains,  
Against all the hills that are lifted up,

<sup>15</sup> Against every high tower,  
Against every fortified wall,

<sup>16</sup> Against all the ships of Tarshish  
And against all the beautiful craft.

<sup>17</sup> The pride of man will be humbled

*Jerusalem:* The capital city of the once united Israel, and later just the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem was built on and around Mount Zion (Isaiah 1:8; 2:3), so Zion became a synonym for the city and the holy temple in which God dwelt. Sacrifices were offered there so God could symbolically cleanse the people and the land.

The temple in Jerusalem was a partial restoration of Eden. God appeared as a pillar of light and fire, and stood at the threshold of heaven and earth, between the cherubim (Exodus 25:18 – 22). This reminds us of the flaming sword between the cherubim guarding the way back to the tree of life in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24).

*The Threat from the East:* Assyria took the Northern Kingdom of Israel captive in 721 BC. Isaiah had seen the devastation left (Isaiah 1:7, 9), and maybe the actual Assyrian army itself. Jerusalem stood alone (1:8). And Babylon was a rising threat to the region (Isaiah 13 – 14; 39). Babylon will take the Southern Kingdom of Judah captive in 586 BC.

And the loftiness of men will be abased;  
And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day,  
<sup>18</sup> But the idols will completely vanish.  
<sup>19</sup> Men will go into caves of the rocks  
And into holes of the ground  
Before the terror of the LORD  
And the splendor of His majesty,  
When He arises to make the earth tremble.  
<sup>20</sup> In that day men will cast away to the moles and the bats  
Their idols of silver and their idols of gold,  
Which they made for themselves to worship,  
<sup>21</sup> In order to go into the caverns of the rocks  
And the clefts of the cliffs  
Before the terror of the LORD  
And the splendor of His majesty,  
When He arises to make the earth tremble.  
<sup>22</sup> Stop regarding man,  
Whose breath of life is in his nostrils;  
For why should he be esteemed?

## Questions

1. Have everyone pick a verse to analyze the poetry. Remember that biblical poetry operates by rhyming ideas and concepts, not sounds primarily. The point often rests on how the idea develops from line A to line B. Example (explain this verse, because it sets the tone for the whole chapter):

<sup>5</sup> Come, house of Jacob,	[God's command]
And let us walk in the light of the LORD.	[Why God gave the command]
<sup>6</sup> For You have abandoned Your people, the house of Jacob,	[God has left / will leave the temple]
Because they are filled with influences from the east,	[Because they turned away]

2. What are 'the influences from the east' (2:6)? Hints from the whole passage:
  - a. Soothsayers (2:6)
  - b. Wealth that comes from war (2:7)
  - c. Idol worship, false gods (2:20)
  - d. Pride (2:11 – 12, 17)
3. If the Israelites welcomed 'the influences from the east' (2:6) – that is, from Babylon – then is it appropriate for God to allow the Babylonian army to invade Israel and take them there?
4. Application: If we welcome sin into our lives, then is it appropriate for God to allow us to sink?
5. How does the vision of Messiah's reign in 2:1 – 4 contrast with the sinful state of the people in 2:5 – 22?
  - a. The Lord vs. the pride of people
  - b. Zion vs. the influences from the east
  - c. House of the Lord vs. 'house of Jacob' which has sinned
  - d. Peace-making vs. war and profit from war
  - e. God is not content with letting the Israelites continue to sin. Nor is God content with letting the Babylonians sin, either! So His response is to extend His reign, teaching, presence.
6. Why is the phrase 'the splendor of His majesty' repeated in 2:10, 19, 21?
  - a. Is it the coming Babylonian army?
  - b. Or is it the spreading of His reign from Zion? ← This one!!
7. What strikes you about the spreading of the reign of the Lord?
  - a. A lot of people are afraid of it, or opposed to it, because they will be challenged and humbled.
  - b. It's meant to invite people from everywhere, not just Jewish people.
  - c. It's meant to spread over the whole earth!
  - d. It's meant to be a *process*. It's not instantaneous. This is what motivated the apostles and the first disciples. It's not that they expected Jesus to come back really, really soon. Although he might – it's unknown. It's that they knew God always wanted partners to spread his reign.
  - e. Illus: My friend Harriet went to Washington DC to see Barack Obama give his reelection speech. Every Inauguration draws massive numbers of people to Washington DC. But in the biblical story, people are not coming to be *spectators*. They are coming to be *students*. 'That He may teach us concerning His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.' In Old Testament times, all the way up to the time of Jesus, the Temple served as God's throne-room and God's classroom. God's presence there was supposed to be 'a house of prayer for all nations' (Isa.56:7; Lk.19:46). And it was there, when you stood near God's glory-cloud that rested behind the veil in the Holy of Holies, and heard the teaching from the Israelite priests about the wonder of God and the commandments of God, that you learned what is good and what the Lord expected of you. You learned who you really are. What was once true in Jerusalem would spread over the whole world.
  - f. In John's Gospel, when a group of Greek people in Jerusalem at the Feast of Passover ask to see Jesus, this triggers something for Jesus (Jn.12:20). Jesus says, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.' People were coming to Jesus to learn about God. They had heard about him, and recognized something of the presence of God in him. Jesus was greater than the Temple. And now that 'the nations' and 'many peoples' were coming to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, not to stand in the Temple building per se but to talk with Jesus, this vision from Isaiah was really being fulfilled.
8. Did the spread of Christian faith actually do this?
  - a. To the East, across the vast continent of Asia, Jesus' followers took his name, his kingdom, and his reign to Arabia, then India, where he challenged the Hindu caste system. All the way up to today, the state of Kerala, India, is home to many Thomas Christians who have high rights for

women, high literacy rates, low infant mortality, and low inequality between rich and poor – all United Nations metrics of healthy societies. Sociologists have no explanation for why Kerala is so different from the rest of India except for Christian faith. Christian tradition says that Christian faith planted itself in Japan as early as 70 AD; we find that the largest and oldest Buddhist temple in Kyoto was built on top of a Christian church building, going back to the 500's, complete with Christian artwork and fragments of the Gospel of Matthew. But a Buddhist king killed the Christians in Japan. Christian faith could have been a leading influence in China had not the Mongolian Emperor Tamerlane converted to Islam and almost wiped out the Christians starting in 1400 AD. We get a glimpse of that because of this stone pillar called the Nestorian Stone, from 638 AD, engraved with the words, 'Our bishop is Alopen, a Syrian Christian; there are millions of Christians here across all walks of life...' How history could have been different!

- b. To the South, across Africa, Jesus' followers took the name of Jesus and the reign of Jesus up the Nile River, to confront the powers of Egypt. In Acts 8, we find the Ethiopian eunuch reading the scroll of Isaiah the prophet; he comes to faith through the explanation of Philip, and then apparently starts Ethiopian Christianity, reinforced maybe by the apostle Matthew, and then in the fourth century by the missionary named Frumentius. Later, Christian missionaries took the faith further south to the mighty Nubian Kingdoms, in present day Sudan, which became a Christian kingdom that lasted for centuries until Islam took it over in 1276 AD. The impact of Christian faith here is the Nubian kings were no longer considered divine, two major kingdoms of Nobatia and Makuria merged peacefully under the influence of Christian reconciliation, and there was a fantastic literary culture in Nubia.
  - c. To the North, Christian faith spread through the Germanic tribes, then to the Slavs through the missionaries Methodius and Cyril, who gave the Slavic peoples the Cyrillic alphabet, still used today. Then look at the people in the snowy regions of Norway, Sweden, and Finland. What were they famous for? Raiding. One of the achievements of Christian faith in northern and northwestern Europe prior to 1400 was the abolition of slavery: France (650's); Hungary (1000); England (1102); Iceland (1117); Netherlands (1300's); Scandinavian peoples (1330's). No one else in the world abolished slavery.
  - d. To the West, across Europe, Jesus' followers spread to Asia Minor, then Greece and Italy to the renowned cities of Athens and Corinth and Rome. Tradition has it that Paul made it to Spain. In France, we find Bathilde, a British slave who caught the eye of a young Clovis II. Clovis came to the throne of the Kingdom of the Franks, freed her, married her, and the two of them set about making the Kingdom of the Franks the first kingdom to abolish slavery. Here is Roger Williams, the founder of Providence, Rhode Island and the father of American religious liberty. He recognized that you need to have some religious liberty in the public square, because Christian faith cannot compel someone to believe. Roman Emperor Constantine recognized that in the 300's, so Roger Williams was standing in a long Christian tradition. His thought became part of the American First Amendment. Native American chief Seattle of the Suquamish tribe accepted Jesus as a man in his prime in the late 1840's, and made some insightful comments on ecology and the land. Queen Liliuokalani was the last reigning constitutional monarch of Hawaii. She accepted Jesus as a child. As an adult, the Dole Company and the U.S. usurped her place and annexed Hawaii. Rather than resist with violence, she advocated peace because of her commitment to Christ. Native Hawaiians were saddened but respect her greatly for avoiding bloodshed.
  - e. Because of the reign of Jesus over his human nature, Jesus' people beat their swords into plowshares. That is why we do everything possible, within our faith and integrity, to reconcile with others. Even during your roommate drama. Even in tough family situations. Jesus taught us to love our enemies, and even etched the love for those who hated him into his own heart, so that he could share his heart with us, and we might turn our spears into pruning hooks.
9. (optional) State: Judaism as we understand it was the first religion to believe in a happy ending story. They were the first to believe in a God who is 100% good. Therefore, that God will have to defeat evil in the world. Not just judge souls that are escaping from the world, but defeat evil in the world, healing and transforming it. He is the hero who will defeat the villain. That has huge implications. Historian Thomas Cahill writes, in his book, *The Gifts of the Jews*:

‘We can read the Bible (as do postmodernists) as a jumble of unrelated texts, given a false and superficial unity by redactors of the exilic period and later. But this is to ignore not only the powerful emotional and spiritual effect that much of the Bible has on readers, even on readers who would rather not be so moved, but also its cumulative impact on whole societies. The Bible’s great moments – the thunderous ‘lekh-lekha’ spoken to Avram, the secret Name of God revealed to cowering Moshe, Miryam’s song on the far shore, God’s Ten Words, David’s Good Shepherd, Isaiah’s Holy Mountain – are hard to brush aside as merely human expressions with no relationship to the deepest meanings of our own individual lives. Nor can we imagine the great liberation movements of modern history without reference to the Bible. Without the Bible we would never have known the abolitionist movement, the prison-reform movement, the antiwar movement, the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the movements of indigenous and dispossessed peoples for their human rights, the antiapartheid movement in South Africa, the Solidarity movement in Poland, the free-speech and pro-democracy movements in such Far Eastern countries as South Korea, the Philippines, and even China. These movements of modern times have all employed the language of the Bible; and it is even impossible to understand their great heroes and heroines – people like Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Mother Jones, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez, Helder Camara, Oscar Romero, Rigoberto Menchu, Corazon Aquino, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Charity Kaluki Ngilu, Harry Wu – without recourse to the Bible.

‘Beyond these movements...are other forces that have shaped our world, such as capitalism, communism, and democracy. Capitalism and communism are both bastard children of the Bible, for both are processive faiths, modeled on biblical faith and demanding of their adherents that they always hold in their hearts a belief in the future and keep before their eyes the vision of a better tomorrow, whether that tomorrow contains a larger gross domestic product or a workers’ paradise. Neither ideology could have risen in the cyclical East, in Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, or Shinto. But because capitalism and communism are processive faiths without God, each is a form of madness – a fantasy without a guarantee. Democracy, in contrast, grows directly out of the Israelite vision of individuals, subjects of value because they are images of God, each with a unique and personal destiny. There is no way that it could have ever been ‘self-evident that all men are created equal’ without the intervention of the Jews.’<sup>1</sup>

If you have a God who is 100% good, then He must be in the process of defeating evil in the world. God cannot be passive. He cannot be partly evil. He cannot be a puppet master, because of His love for human beings. Human beings are both heroes and villains, so God must be acting not just to defeat human beings, but to redeem the villains and defeat the evil in them. So the idea of a chosen people, called to be His voluntary partners in His plan, is necessary. It fits. And that chosen people must involved in what God is doing in the world to redeem it. High ethical monotheism with a good God must be connected to messianism. It’s just logical! That is why it’s important to ask whether Christian mission is any meaningful sense *Jewish*. The reality is yes, it is.

10. (optional) Illus: Let me read one of the most charming and succinct descriptions I’ve seen of Christian faith. It takes place in on a website called ‘Ask the Rabbi.’ One woman, named Karen, writes a letter that asks:

Dear Rabbi,

With the Pope visiting Israel and all the fanfare, it brings to mind a question I’ve often pondered: Why did Hashem allow Christianity to become such a major religion?

The rabbi responds:

Dear Karen,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (Thorndike, ME: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p.256 – 257

Jewish ideas such as “brotherhood of humanity,” “love your neighbor,” and “age of peace” are taken for granted today by much of mankind. But when Judaism first introduced these ideas to the world, they were revolutionary. These Jewish concepts have been spread largely by Christianity (and by Islam). Christianity came to a world in which people were slaughtering to Zeus, Apollo, and a host of other idols, and taught some basic ideas of Judaism, albeit in a distorted form.

Now I disagree with ‘distorted.’ But in essence, I like this and I agree with the rabbi’s point: Judaism is an historical anomaly to which we are all very indebted. And Christians have spread those ideas.

11. Application: Think again about verse 2:22. ‘Stop regarding man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils; for why should he be esteemed?’ Not in the sense that human life is suddenly worthless. But rather, stop fearing what other people think. The Lord reigns, and he calls us to spread his reign in ourselves and towards others. So what are you afraid of? Lay it down. Pray...