

## David Hrechuk - Messages Of Crisis

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Well, for my entire life and even my parents lives, entire lives before me, the Brethren had been looking for any sign that the breakdown of earth society, including North America, has begun. Why have the Brethren been so studiously looking for signs of collapse? Because Jesus taught that you cannot put a patch on an old garment because it will rip at that juncture and the garment will become useless.

So the kingdom of God cannot be grandfathered into the present evil world. Earth society as we know it must first be destroyed so that the new Earth can be established, and now we see just what we have been looking for since 1914.

The Worldwide Social breakdown by quarantines has joined with a worldwide political breakdown of treaties and trade partnerships, which is joined with a worldwide economic breakdown of too much government debt, which is joined with an ongoing religious breakdown of Christianity that offers no moral compass.

Together, these forces are beginning to collapse Earth society.

Undoubtedly, all of us are in various stages of recognition and resignation that life as we knew it in 2019 is not returning, and that is really quite a statement. We have somehow crossed the divide because this understanding is apparent to people everywhere, and we want to emphasize that this is just the beginning, a dividend, a crisis point. We are still fine.

We aren't expecting imminent disaster. But something has changed and we want to address this crisis in our personal lives. All of us have struggled in some way to adapt to these changing conditions, and we see more change on the horizon. All of us strive to be watchmen, set on a hill looking for what is coming, and we want to remember that the reason that we are watchmen is so that we can ensure that our hearts are in alignment with God's plan as early as possible.

And so the Lord has not left us without direction. When we turn to the Scriptures, we find many messages for those dealing with crises, both personal and collective. Today I would like to share with you my gleanings from reading the Book of Isaiah through the lens of our present day crisis. The Book of Isaiah deals with the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by Assyria, and with the siege of Jerusalem by Assyria that was stayed at the last moment, and with the regathering of a broken and hopeless nation of Judah in Babylonian exile, and with the despondent condition of those who returned to the land but were unable to realize the blessings promised. Each of these was a crisis that needed to be addressed.

Interspersed throughout is the glorious vision of the future kingdom, and with this vision comes the question that Isaiah presents to the thoughtful readers termed the servants.

Will you be part of the kingdom class, because how you react to each crisis will determine your destiny. When we turn to Isaiah, we find that the structure of the book is very complex and therefore difficult to follow. The first thing we notice is that the sections are not in chronological order. In fact, they constantly shift back and forth in time. As an example, the call to Isaiah to become a prophet is given in chapter six, after five chapters of his prophecies.

The second thing we notice is the multitude of pictures and metaphors that are used. There is very little context and almost no segues to alert the reader that a new section has begun.

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But the most difficult part of the structure of the book is that the perspective of the writer spans over 200 years.

Many of us read the Bible as if God is speaking directly to us, his words to our ears. But there can be great benefit in including the perspective of the middleman, the mouthpiece the Lord used. In this case the prophet Isaiah. We must remember that the prophets imparted their own individuality to their utterances. That is why each prophetic book has its own style and its own vocabulary.

Even if the messages themselves are directly from God, the prophets use the talents they had and their own life experiences, their perspective, to shape the delivery of the messages. Now, what do I mean by saying that the book of Isaiah's prophecy perspective spanned over 200 years, much longer than Isaiah was alive? First of all, we know that there are parts of Isaiah that are predictive. There are passages that predict Jesus's life on earth. There are passages that predict the millennial kingdom.

But that's not perspective. Perspective is the time frame from which the prophet is speaking to natural Israel. Isaiah speaks to an audience regarding two separate events that happened in his lifetime. During the reign of Ahaz, King of Judah, the nation of Israel and the nation of Syria, centered in Damascus, formed an alliance with the intention of rebelling from Assyrian control.

Because King Ahaz would not join their alliance, they attacked the nation of Judah where Isaiah lived. They did not succeed as they were invaded by Assyria. Isaiah spoke to his audience from the point of view of someone experiencing the that event. That was his first perspective. Decades later, the second event of Isaiah's natural life occurred when the Assyrian empire besieged Jerusalem.

This was during the reign of Hezekiah, King of Judah. Isaiah spoke to the audience of that day from the obvious point of view of someone experiencing that event. His prophecy explained why the judgment was coming to Judah, why it already came to Israel and other nations, how the Lord was using Assyria and then how the Lord was going to eventually destroy Assyria. So far, that's pretty straightforward.

But then we notice something very strange. All of a sudden. Isaiah's perspective jumps over a century into the future. It is as if he, the prophet, is living in exile in the Babylonian captivity. At the end of the Babylonian captivity, and as God's prophet, he is giving forth a message of comfort and encouragement to go back to the land because Babylon is about to be destroyed.

He even tells you who is going to do it. It will be the Median empire headed by Cyrus.

What is strange about this is that this is not written from the perspective of Isaiah predicting the future. He isn't telling the people alive in his day that in the distant future, Babylon will be coming against Judah and will destroy Jerusalem and the Temple and carry them off into exile, and that when they receive the word to return, they should return instead. Even though he himself was dead over a hundred years before any of this happens, he is speaking from the point of view of someone who is alive at the end of the period of captivity. Later on in the book of Isaiah, the perspective of the author changes yet again. This time, his point of view jumps decades ahead to someone who has returned from exile and has begun the rebuilding of a fully restored and blessed nation.

As God's prophet, he is giving forth a message of why they are still failing to be the true people of God and why they are not inheriting the promises of earthly blessings again. Isaiah is not predicting this state of affairs will take place. Instead, he is speaking to the audience of that day as someone

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who is experiencing those same events. Understanding these four changes of perspective helps us to understand what Isaiah is referring to in his various word pictures and metaphors. It helps us to make sense of his message to the people of the day, so that we can then draw the correct spiritual lesson for those of us living now.

We are experiencing crises that Isaiah could never have dreamed of, and yet God has embedded in Isaiah's prophecies encouragement and direction for his people throughout the ages. Knowledge of the odd structure of the book of Isaiah imparts deeper lessons than a mere surface reading will do. It is a complete work that is shifting in perspective, shifting in time, shifting in metaphors, but not shifting a message. Even though the context of some of the passages has been deliberately obscured, this helps us to remember that external events should not be our focus.

Instead, the Lord, through his mouthpiece, is holding up a mirror to his people, saying, here is your present condition in God's eyes. In the midst of your present upheaval, here is what you need to correct if you want to be part of the Kingdom class. Crises are opportunities for character to be revealed. We learn much about ourselves when we are in the fire of affliction.

So let us turn to some of the lessons from the Book of Isaiah that were and still are necessary to learn if one is to be part of the Kingdom class. The first lesson we need to learn if we want to be part of the Kingdom class is to put aside fear when a crisis looms. We learn from 2nd Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28 that the nation of Israel and the nation of Syria, Damascus formed an alliance to break away from the Assyrian empire.

Other nations joined with them, but the kingdom of Judah, led by King Ahaz was refused.

In a series of prophecies From Isaiah chapters 7 and 8, we can trace God's messages, his warnings, and his judgments to his people given over the space of years.

In Isaiah 7:1:9, the prophet Isaiah met King Ahaz to warn him to not worry or react to this alliance, even though they were trying to put another person on the throne.

Showing that Ahaz and the nation would reject this advice, Isaiah was told to bring his son, whose name meant only a remnant will return.

And that is exactly what Ahaz did. He rejected Isaiah's advice. Soon his army was being overrun, many officials were killed, including his son, and Jerusalem was about to be besieged. Ahaz decided to form his own alliance and call upon the empire of Assyria to help him. In the next prophecy found in chapter 7, verses 10 to 17 chapter 7:10-17 Isaiah once again approaches Ahaz.

He tells the king that despite the havoc being wrought in the land, God would give him a sign that he should not fear the nations of Israel and Syria because the Lord would deal with them. Ahaz, being a wicked idolatrous king, refused to ask for a sign. Isaiah said a sign would be given anyway a child would be born. We assume to Isaiah, whose name would be God is with us, the inference being not with Ahaz and the entire nation of Judah.

Ahaz's intention was still to appeal to to Assyria for help instead of God. So Isaiah told him, then Assyria will destroy you. In the next prophecy found in chapter 7, verses 18 to 25, Isaiah proclaims that Assyria will come against all and following the next prophecy in chapter 8, verses 1 to 7, chapter 8:1-7 God gives a warning to the entire nation of Judah.

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God told Isaiah that he should have another child and to legally prename the child, hurry, spoil and hasten pray.

God then says that before the Child will learn to say his first words, father or mother. Syria and Israel will become the prey of the Assyrian empire and be despoiled. Isaiah does as God commands.

In the next prophecy found in chapter eight, verses eight to 10, Isaiah says, to those who fear the alliance of Israel and Syria, now Assyria will be coming upon all the land, even against those who God is with, and the coming of Assyria would bring not just fear but terror. In the next prophecy, our key prophecy found in chapter 8, verses 11 to 15. Chapter 8 11, 15 Isaiah himself is given a prophecy and we read and I'll be reading from the ESV for the Lord spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of the people, saying, do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts him you shall honor as holy.

Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. Notice just how difficult this can be by the fact that the Lord had to preface his remarks to Isaiah. He had to put his strong arm on him. I imagine it as steadying Isaiah so that he would be able to heed this warning because of its importance, and we have all seen and perhaps experience the debilitating effect of fear, fear for our flesh.

As we learn to wean ourselves away from this flesh and this earth, this natural debilitating fear is replaced with a spiritual, proper, comforting fear of displeasing our heavenly Father, and this removal of fear is also based on the intellectual understanding that the Lord of armies is the hand behind the crisis.

Our own perspective is our natural lifespan.

It takes effort to see the whole timeline of history of human history, which is but a slice of God's perspective. If we can continually force our mind to view the plan of the ages as our perspective, our fear melts away. We can then fully trust in the words of Isaiah, chapter 40, verses 15, 17 and 23 behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales. All the nations are as nothing before him, who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. The last warning given in this section is found in chapter 8, verses 16 to 23.

And here Isaiah speaks in the first person directly to his disciples. He assures them that the children he has been given are signs that the prophecies are true. Destruction is inevitable. But if you turn in fear to anything other than trusting in God, you will be hopeless. Brethren, we see momentous events taking place in the world before our very eyes.

We do not have an Isaiah to reveal the hand of the Lord as he deals with each upheaval of the present social order. Instead, we are given the spirit of the prophecy to have faith that it is indeed God's hand behind our present day crises. The next lesson to be learned if one is to be part of the kingdom class is to not trust in earthly solutions or stop gap measures. Excuse me, once again our lesson is to not trust in earthly solutions or stop gap measures when the crisis looms and we read In Isaiah chapter 30, verses 1 and 2 Isaiah 31 and 2 Ah, stubborn children, declares the Lord, who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin. Who set out to go down to Egypt without asking for my direction, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh, and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt.

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From a narrative section found in chapters 36-39 we understand that there was a faction in Israel pressuring King Hezekiah to enter into an alliance with a powerful country, Egypt. This was being done in order to forestall Assyria's invasion and the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem.

King Hezekiah resisted this pressure to turn to Egypt. When all seemed lost and he was given terms of surrender by the Assyrian general besieging Jerusalem, Hezekiah prostrated himself and spread the written terms of surrender before the Lord in the temple. The Lord then miraculously intervened and caused the Assyrian army to be struck by a plague and in disarray. They left Jerusalem, never to return.

However, after this great example of putting faith in God alone and not trusting to an earthly power, surprisingly we can even say, astonishingly, Hezekiah later stumbled on this very issue with a different world power.

When the king of Babylon, who was planning a rebellion against Assyria, sent envoys to Hezekiah, Hezekiah showed him all of his wealth, no doubt in an effort to boost his status as one worthy of an alliance with an up and coming power. Isaiah denounced this action, saying in chapter 39 and verse 8 Hear the word of the Lord of hosts. Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and that which your fathers have stored up till this day shall be carried to Babylon, and some of your own sons shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs and in the palace of the King of Babylon. Brethren, we can see from this example we all have natural fleshly prejudices. We tend to support one side and not the other.

Our natural temperaments, ethnicity and experiences shape our thinking and shape our reactions, and it takes great effort to live as if we had been transplanted into the kingdom.

This requires us to be observers of societal collapse and not to be lulled into thinking that any human effort will be worthy of the kingdom.

We often hear the phrase be on the right side of history, but from the perspective of the future kingdom to which we are training our perspective to be what is the right side?

If God is bringing about societal collapse, is he on the side of justice now?

Is he on the side of humanitarianism now? Is he on the side of people living happy, productive lives now we would have to say no.

Remember the prophetic utterance of Isaiah 28:21 for the Lord will rise up as on Mount Perazim, as in the valley of Gibeon. He will be roused to do his deed. Strange is his deed, and to work his work. Strange is his work.

In times past, the Lord arose in these places to bring victory to his people. Now he arises to bring about destruction.

As prospective members of this kingdom class, let us strive to have God's perspective in this strange work of collapse. Another lesson that must be learned if one is to be part of the Kingdom class is that you cannot trust in your own ability to survive a crisis, and this is shown in a passage mocking the manufacturer of idols in Isaiah 44.

What is noticeable about this passage is that it is connected with the return from Babylon. Its perspective is someone living at the end of captivity and needing God's encouragement and

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admonition to return, and that is why it captures our attention. Why talk against idols at this juncture of Israel's history?

We know that one of the main reasons the nation of Judah went into Babylonian captivity was because of their idol worship. But that great and terrible crisis had its intended effect. Those who returned had put aside idol worship to such an extent that it is never mentioned as an issue in Daniel or Zephaniah or Haggai, Malachi, Ezra, Nehemiah, or Esther. That particular propensity to sin was burned out of them.

So, reading carefully, we notice that this passage is not a denunciation of idol worship. Instead, it is a mockery of idol manufacturing. Let us read a few verses to catch the flavor of the passage, and we Read in Isaiah 44, verses 14 to 17 Isaiah 44:14 17 he plants a cedar, and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man.

He takes a part of it and warms himself. He kindles a fire and bakes bread.

Also he makes a God and worships it. He makes and he makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat, he roasts it and is satisfied also he warms himself and says, aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire, and the rest of it he makes it.

He makes into a God his idol and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, deliver me, for you are my God. The foolishness is in thinking that something you created can have greater power than the one who created it. So much power that it will deliver you, and as a foundation insight we know that we all have the tendency when facing a crisis to start creating solutions and putting up barricades and finding workarounds.

Brethren, in any crisis, but most especially in the crisis of collapse that lies ahead of society, there is no way out. There is no way of escape that we can rely on. Our only deliverance can come through our hope in being caught up together with our Lord. Brethren, nothing we create can have the power to stand against God's power which is being brought to bear against heaven and earth.

Another aspect of this lesson which we must learn if we want to be part of the Kingdom class, is found in the conclusion of this passage in chapter 44, verse 20, which says he feeds on ashes. A deluded heart has led him astray and he cannot deliver himself or say, is there not a lie in my right hand? Because idol worship and idols themselves are so far removed from Western modern thinking, we need to reframe this example so that we can relate to it. At its core, what is being described is a person in a very pitiful condition of heart. His self delusion has resulted in him creating and living in an illusion, one that he is convinced will be his security, his sure way to deliverance.

However, this illusion proves utterly futile. Everything turns to dust and ashes in his mouth. But his hard heartedness will not allow him to accept reality even as it pushes against his reason. Brethren, the self delusion or illusion that is most dangerous for us is thinking that we know how the Lord is dealing with us or leading us, that we think we know what the Lord has planned for us, that we think we know how the Lord wants us to develop. We then set about creating that environment and we tend to concentrate or focus on an aspect of our consecrated walk that we think is of primary importance.

We are so sure, we are so convinced that we are doing the Lord's will.

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Then we receive a blow, a humiliating blow that is designed to bring us up short and see our own inability to know the way forward. All humiliating and painful experiences we might term personal crises are God given opportunities to look deeply into our hearts and to assess if we are on the right path.

Mercifully, the Lord always provides opportunities to course correct if we are willing to acquiesce to his will. Another thought derived from this passage is that one of the reasons an idol is an abomination is that it defines God. It allows humans to think that they can fit God into a recognizable shape.

But our God cannot be defined by the human mind. As Isaiah 40:18 says, to whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with Him?

Our minds cannot encompass all that he is. When we first came to know God and were begotten by His Spirit, some of his attributes seen through his offer of salvation became apparent to us. But our knowledge of God was also mixed with misconceptions.

Learning of him comes through insightful study and comes through experience, both trials and blessings, and this will last our entire consecrated walk.

We can never fully understand his dealings with us or his dealings with the world. When we sense a feeling of confidence and security and how we are serving the Lord or in what the Lord is doing in the earth, it is time to remember that our humility and powerlessness is what the Lord wants of us. As we Read in Isaiah 5:21, Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and shrewd in their own sight. Another reason an idol is an abomination is that it leads to the concept that one can manipulate God. If I bow down to this idol and offer a sacrifice to it, I can obligate God to listen to my prayer.

Or if I perform this ritual and say this incantation, I can command God to appear and operate on my behalf. We too can subconsciously feel that we have obligated God to bless our endeavors or grant us opportunities, or preserve us in some fashion in the midst of crisis.

Perhaps we have obligated him through our work on behalf of his people, or through a sacrifice that we have made in his service.

This too is an illusion that we have created the people of Judah, we're told in Isaiah 1 verses 11, 12, and 15.

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices when you come to appear before me? Who has required of you this trampling of my courts?

When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Though the prohibition of idol making and the characteristic of the Levitical sacrifices were a hedge against this thought that one could manipulate Jehovah. We see that it is a part of human nature to want to bring things under our control. Brethren, at all times, but especially in times of crisis, when we see no way of escape, we must guard against this all too human trait of manipulation.

Instead, we must put our trust into the hands of the Creator of the universe and the controller of the crisis. The last lesson, what we'd like to examine that must be learned if one is to be part of the Kingdom class, is that we must serve God in spirit and not just in letter. At the very end of Isaiah,

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the perspective is of a nation in unexpected crisis. They have returned from captivity through the miraculous power of God. They have believed and acted upon the great promises of a fruitful, restored land where the worship of Jehovah brings other nations to its glory.

The construction of the temple and of the city had begun, and yet where was the fulfillment of the promises? All around them was poverty and despair and reproach. They lived in fear of enemies who actively worked against them. Why was not God blessing them?

They were obeying the law. They were keeping the Sabbath. They had even inaugurated fast days to remember their great punishment. What were they doing wrong? We read in Isaiah 58, beginning verse 3, why have we fasted?

And you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves and you take no knowledge of it?

God answered them, behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist.

Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. We see that this act of fasting had not elevated them to a spiritual understanding. In fact, it had not even elevated them on an earthly plane, as its effect was a negative one of making them merely hungry and irritable.

To bring them up to a higher level of understanding, God first asked them if even the proper earthly reaction to a fast was what he was looking for. He said, is such the fast that I choose a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast and a day acceptable to the Lord God then presented to them the higher spiritual level of what a fast should engender in the heart? He said, is not this the fast I choose to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house when you see the naked to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh. God was now reminding them of the reason these fasts were instituted. We read in Zechariah chapter 8 and verse 18, when the fasts were rescinded by the days of King Darius, that there were the fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of of the tenth, and from the books of Jeremiah and laments. Scholars have identified these dates with, firstly, the death of Zedekiah and the end of Davidic rule, secondly, the siege of Jerusalem marking the end of Judean independence, thirdly, the destruction of the capital city, and fourthly, the murder of Gedaliah, the Babylonian appointed governor. All four fasts are related to events connected with the demise of Judah with the designed effect to cause Israel to be insightful about God's leadings.

God was inquiring of returned Israel. Are you merely remembering the bitterness of the chastisement, or have you learned the lesson?

So? Did this remembrance instill in them a continued desire to loose the bonds of wickedness that had brought the chastisement upon them in the first place? Did this remembrance instill in them a desire to move forward from the punishment?

God had shown them mercy in ending their captivity? Were they then not merciful to those of their brethren who were oppressed in other ways? Israel thought that by having enough faith to return to the land, this would guarantee their status as faithful servants of the kingdom class. But this was not so. As always, God was looking for a change of heart.

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As we read in Zechariah 8:19, the true end of these fasts were to become seasons of joy and cheerful feasts if they would love truth and peace. If Israel could only catch the Spirit of the law, then God assures them in Isaiah 58, 8 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily.

Well, brethren, this is a fundamental lesson to be learned if we want to be part of the kingdom class.

Every service that we do for the Lord, the truth, or the brethren, every act of worship should have an enlarging effect on our heart, a deepening of communion with God. The service and the acts themselves are not needed by the Creator of the universe.

These acts and services are designed to demonstrate that we are in accordance with the Spirit of the Heavenly Father, and that we are bringing ourselves into harmony with his plan, not just for us, but for the whole world of mankind.

As crisis looms and as crisis deepens, there will be many opportunities to realize the condition of our hearts and to humbly bring ourselves back to a true worship of God in spirit and in truth.

Well, brethren, these messages from crisis are for our instruction to inform our behavior. But in addition, the book of Isaiah is filled with some of the most memorable images and beautiful passages in the whole of script which will encourage us and strengthen us in the midst of deepening crisis. From beginning to end, the glories of the future kingdom are constantly contrasted with the bleak present.

So, dear brethren, I encourage a careful reading and consideration of this book as it can bring to light many insights into the character necessary to be part of the Kingdom class. May it inspire you, and may the Lord overrule these words to our good.