

“Trust Not in Deceptive (Tricky) Words”: The Prophets¹ and Worship



SABBATH—AUGUST 20

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Isaiah 1:11–15; Isaiah 6:1–8; Isaiah 44; Isaiah 58:1–10; Jeremiah 7:1–10; Micah 6:1–8.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Who is like me? Let him come forward and speak boldly. Let him tell me everything that has happened since I created my people long ago. And let him tell me what has not happened yet. Let him announce ahead of time what is going to take place’ ” (Isaiah 44:7, NIV).

RUSSIAN AUTHOR IVAN TURGENEV WROTE A STORY ENTITLED *FATHERS AND SONS*. He put these words in the mouth of a person in the story: “The life of each of us hangs by a thread. A large hole in the ground may open up and swallow us at any time. But what makes matters worse is that we make all kinds of trouble for ourselves. In this way, we mess up our lives.”—*Fathers and Sons* (New York: Signet Classics, 2005), page 131, adapted.

Of course, the Lord offers a better way to live. He offers us the opportunity (chance) to follow Him, to love Him, to worship Him. This way we can save ourselves from many of the problems that we might bring upon ourselves.

Just claiming to follow the Lord is not what the Christian life should be. This week we will take note of what a few prophets said about the people who thought that their “worship” of the true God on the true Sabbath day was all that was necessary. The people felt it did not matter how they lived the rest of the week. As the prophets show, this is a lie. Truly, this way of thinking is a good way to “make all kinds of trouble for ourselves.”

1. prophets—men or women who are spokespersons for God. God gives His prophets special messages to give to His people.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 21

A THOUSAND RAMS (MALE SHEEP)? (Micah 6:1–8)

Unlike every other religion, the religion of the Bible (both Testaments) teaches that salvation is by grace² alone. Nothing we do can ever make us good enough to be accepted by God. Our “good” works can never heal the separation (gap) that sin has caused between God and people. Suppose good works could save us. Suppose good works could forgive sin. Suppose good works could pay our debt before God. Suppose good works could reunite sinful people with God. Then Jesus never would have had to die for us. And the plan of salvation would be something very different from what it is.

The death of Jesus is credited to us by faith. Only the righteousness (right living) of Christ, which He did throughout His life, is given to all who truly accept it. Only these gifts can save the sinner. Sin is evil. It goes against God’s government. Nothing but the death of Christ could solve the sin problem.

The Bible is clear that what we say, do, and think is important. But these thoughts and actions show how real our experience is with God.

With the above in mind, what point is the prophet making in Micah 6:1–8 about the sacrifices as symbols (signs) of the plan of salvation? How can we make use

of these words today? Read also Deuteronomy 10:12, 13.

There are people who claim to be children of God but fail to show justice and mercy to their fellow men. They really are acting out the spirit of Satan no matter how religious they pretend to be. But those who walk humbly with their God will not fail to follow the principles (important rules) of justice and mercy. They will not disrespect the proper way to worship. God wants true worshipers who are willing to show their love for Him through obedient lives and humble hearts. All the right prayers, all the right styles of worship, and all the right Christian principles mean nothing if the person is nasty, unkind, unjust, and unmerciful to others.

What do you think is more important: correct religious principles or correct actions? Can you have correct principles but treat others in a poor manner?

MONDAY—AUGUST 22

THE CALL OF ISAIAH (Isaiah 6:1–8)

Hosea, Amos, and Micah warned the people of Israel of their great danger. Judah (the southern kingdom), on the other hand, seemed to be under the rule of several good kings. King Uzziah (whose other name was Azariah) was known and respected among the nations for his wise leadership

2. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us in order to take away our sins.

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and actions. (Read 2 Chronicles 26:1–15.) But as it often happens, Uzziah’s success became his downfall. At first he was humble and faithful. But later he became very proud and expected too much. (Read verses 16–21.)

The people of Judah appeared to be growing spiritually too. People attended temple services faithfully. But many of the same evils that had spread among the people of Israel were also spreading across the kingdom of Judah. At this time, the Lord called Isaiah to His special work.

According to Isaiah 6:1–8, why do you think Isaiah would act as he did (verse 5) after he had a vision of the Lord? What important Bible truth is given here?

Try to imagine how Isaiah felt when he saw the glory³ of God. Suddenly, he saw very clearly his own sins and the sins of his people in comparison with God’s holiness. No wonder Isaiah acted as he did! It is hard to imagine anyone doing differently.

Here we find before us a very important Bible truth about our sinful condition. When we see it in comparison with the holiness and glory of God, we learn how important it is for us to repent⁴ and admit our own sins and our need of grace as Isaiah did.

Think for a moment what our worship services would be like if they made us feel humble before our Holy God. His holy presence makes us

aware of our sinful condition and our need of His saving grace and cleansing power. Suppose that the singing, the prayer, and the preaching worked together to lead us to faith, to repentance, and to cleansing. And that worship helped us to cry out, “Here I am; send me.” That is what worship should be about.

Imagine yourself standing face-to-face with Jesus. What would you feel or do? What would you say? What about His promise to us in Matthew 28:20? What does that promise mean to us now?

TUESDAY—AUGUST 23

NO MORE USELESS SERVICES (Isaiah 1:11–15)

Many of the Old Testament prophets wrote warnings to God’s people and to the ones who were His “true church.” Most of these people claimed to follow the true God. They had a basic understanding of Bible truths (at least, much more than their heathen neighbors). They knew the right things to say and do in worship. But all this was nowhere near enough.

How are we to understand what the Lord, who started all these services, is saying to the people in Isaiah 1:11–15?

The answer is found in the few

3. glory—great beauty, power, and royal perfection.

4. repent—to feel sorry for your sins and to turn away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

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verses that follow (Isaiah 1:16–18). It is nearly the same as what we learned in Sunday’s study on Micah. No question, the church is for sinners. Suppose we had to wait until we were perfect before we could worship the Lord. Then none of us would ever be able to worship Him.



The church is for sinners.

But the good news is that God takes us as we are and forgives our sins. And Isaiah 1:16–18 teaches us that what God cares about most is how we treat others, especially those who are weak and helpless among us. God knows that helping people is more important than all kinds of religious services.

What is wrong with the fasting described in Isaiah 58:1–10? How does God say that the people should fast? What lesson can we learn from this for ourselves, whether or not we fast?

Fasting is one kind of self-denial⁵ about which Jesus had much to say. But some kinds of fasting are nothing but useless. They are a sign of hypocrisy (two-facedness). This means wanting to appear obedient while avoiding the responsibility of obeying God. A person who is inspired (filled) by love for God denies himself or herself so that he or she can help those in need. This is the kind of fasting (self-denial) that honors God. This is the kind of life that leads to the kind of worship that He likes. This is the worship that shows the sinner that he or she has been the receiver of God’s grace and love, but he or she must share grace and love with others too. That is the kind of self-denial that shows true faith (Luke 9:23). That is the kind of self-denial that is at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.



Some kinds of fasting are a sign of hypocrisy (two-facedness).

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 24

**PROFITABLE FOR NOTHING?
(Isaiah 44)**

South African writer Laurens van

5. self-denial—personal sacrifice; spending time or money (or other things) to help others in need.

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der Post once wrote about what he called “the burden [worry] of meaninglessness.” Some people seem to sense that their lives have no meaning even after they have said or done something they feel is important. They sense that sooner or later they will be dead. Anyone who knew them will be dead too. And before long all memory of them will be forever gone. In such an example, what do our lives mean? What can they mean? How easy it is to sense that so much of what we do has no real or important meaning.

With these thoughts in mind, write in your own words what the message of Isaiah 44 means to you. For example, how do these verses relate to the question of how and what people worship?

Isaiah was writing for his time, culture, and people. But notice how much these principles relate to us today. The Lord alone is the Creator. He alone is our Savior. He alone can save us. So He alone is worthy of our worship and our praise. Isaiah laughs at those who create idols with their own hands and then bow down and worship them. He says these idols are just things and are “profitable for nothing.”

Idol worship seems silly and foolish to us. But are we not in danger of doing something nearly the same? We dedicate ourselves, our lives, our time, and our energy to things that are “profitable for nothing.” They cannot answer the deepest need of our souls now. And they surely cannot buy us back from the grave

at the end of time. How important it is that we watch and pray, that, as Paul said, we examine ourselves to know whether or not we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). Sabbath worship, if done right, can remind us of why we should worship only the Lord. Worship should be a time that reminds us of what is important in life or what is “profitable for nothing.”

We all know the danger of making idols out of money, power, honor, glory, and so on. What about the danger of making idols out of things like church, the pastor, or even our own faithfulness or Christian lifestyle? Think this through and bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

THURSDAY—AUGUST 25

“THIS IS THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD, THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD” (Jeremiah 7:1–10)

The southern kingdom of Judah had its spiritual ups and downs. These were times of positive change and times of open backsliding (falling back into sin). But so often, even during the worst spiritual times, there was a show of false worship that was not acceptable to the Lord. How careful we need to be not to fall into the same trap of foolishness ourselves.

What theme do we find in Jeremiah 7:1–10 that we have read about all week? How can we take the principles here and use them in our modern lives today?

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We must be careful not to fall into the same trap of false worship that Israel fell into.

Notice verse 4. In one sense, the speakers were right. This was the “temple of the Lord.” This was the place where the Lord’s name was to be honored. This was the place where the sacrificial system⁶—which God Himself had started—took place. This was the place where the great truths of sacrifice, salvation, cleansing, and judgment were taught. After all, the people were God’s people. Their God was the true God. And they had more light and more truth than their pagan⁷ neighbors around them had. But the Lord clearly was not pleased with them or their worship. In fact, He called them liars. When they said, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord,” He said that they were deceiving themselves. The people were using deceptive (false) words because they believed that

6. sacrificial system—in the Jewish sanctuary (house of worship) service, animals were sacrificed (put to death) as a symbol to show that the people of Israel received forgiveness of sins. This service helped to point people to the future sacrifice (death) of Jesus Christ on the cross for their sins.

7. pagan—having to do with the worship of many gods or goddesses or the worship of the earth or nature.

simply by coming to the temple of the Lord and worshipping there meant that they were safe, they were saved, they were doing all that was necessary.

We have the light that God has given to us. But in what way might we as Seventh-day Adventists be in danger of making the same mistake that the Israelite people made? Think through possible comparisons between them and us. And think how, if we are not careful, we could fall into a foolishness that is much the same as theirs. What possible “deceptive words” might we be in danger of trusting in? They might appear to be true, yes. But how might they lead us into making the same kind of foolish errors?



Israel had more light and truth than the nations around them.

FRIDAY—AUGUST 26

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “The Call of Isaiah,” pages 303–310; “Hezekiah,” pages 331–339;

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“Deliverance [Setting Free] From Assyria,” pages 349–366; “Manasseh and Josiah,” pages 381–391; “Jeremiah,” pages 407–421, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“In Isaiah’s day the spiritual understanding of the people was dark through a wrong understanding of God. . . .

“The Israelites lost sight of the true character [who God is] of Jehovah [God]. But they were without excuse. Often God showed Himself to them as ‘God who is tender and kind. You are gracious [forgiving]. You are slow to get angry. You are faithful and full of love.’ Psalm 86:15, NlrV.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 311, 312.

“Isaiah was given a vision in the temple court [yard]. He had a clear view of the character of the God of Israel. ‘The One who is highly honored lives forever. His name is holy’ [Isaiah 57:15, NlrV]. He had appeared before Isaiah in great glory. But the prophet was made to understand that the Lord is merciful.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 314.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 In class, go over your answer to Wednesday’s final question. What are some “good” things that we can make into idols? How do we know when something has become an idol?
- 2 Think more deeply about the ideas discussed in Thursday’s study. Consider the things that the people were doing all the time when they came to “the temple of the Lord” to worship there (read Jeremiah 7:4). These things did not follow the principles of God’s Word. How can we learn to protect ourselves from falling into the same trap? Why is simple obedience to God’s Word very important in protecting us from all kinds of lies?
- 3 Think about the worship services in your local church. Do you come away with a sense of deep respect for God’s greatness in comparison with your own sinfulness and need of grace? If not, what could be changed in order to help the church as a group have the experience that Isaiah had (read Monday’s study)? Why is that so important?
- 4 How many things do you do in your life that are “profitable for nothing”? How much time do you spend wasting time or doing things that are useless and “profitable for nothing”? How can you learn to make better use of the limited time we all have here in this life?