

When I was in my early 20s, I watched the mini-series, “Cosmos: A Personal Voyage.”

At the beginning of every show Carl Sagan would narrate as the waves crashed on the screen,

“The cosmos is all that there is, or ever was, or ever will be.”

In 2006 the British evolutionary biologist wrote a book titled “The God Delusion.”

It was both a symptom and the ignition of a new worldwide commitment to an old ideology.

He insisted that science has demonstrated that we do not need God...

In fact, he maintains God has only been a delusion to help weak people in a confusing world.

Many have followed his lead, even if they do not understand what he is saying.

Our only hope is for the mercy of the Lord to humble us and heal us.

Because, for some 6,000 years people who God has created have needed the humbling.

I. The Folly of unbelief (and where it will take you)

Isaiah 57:11-13

These verses really continue the rebuke of God’s people that began in Isaiah 56:9.

It would help us to go back through the previous 14 verses and see just where these people are at with God.

Considering all that God has done, they ought to have learned, but apparently, they have not.

56:10-11 Those who ought to be looking out for the people are blind.

Their teachers, priests, prophets, kings, leaders know nothing helpful, are silent, are sleeping.

They ought to be watching over the sheep, but all they think of is personal gain.

There are signs of danger everywhere, but these people say nothing.

They are worried about what they can get and what people will think.

56:12 The people are drunk. Today it is not only alcohol, but drugs, porn, food, buying things

They are looking to addictions to pass the time and dull the pain of living.

Because they have no hope. They think that all will continue just as it has always been.

57:1-2 The righteous person perishes and dies, and no one cares. Everyone just goes on with their sinning.

57:3-7 The people mock God with their sorcery and idolatry.

They pride themselves in their God-denials and brag about their anti-God declarations.

They love lies and live in deceit, even justifying the slaughter of their own children! (vs. 5)

57:8 The people have hung a sign out to announce their sexual freedom.

They encourage people in their sexual exposure and misbehavior.

57:9-10 Even when their sinning wears them out and exposes their own futility, they keep going.

57:11 They made every effort to not fear God, and they interpreted His patience as absence.

This is a terrible error, but so common.

57:12 God does see their good deeds. People who hate God can do good things, kindness, show love.

But it does them no good because of their sin and rebellion against God.

57:13 A contrast: For these people when they are in trouble, and when they face God... who will help them?

Their “collection of idols?” actually, the language here is broader than this for “idols” are not mentioned.

The Hebrew reads simply, “your collection,” meaning all your idols and all your stuff.

We have a lot of stuff and many of us look to our stuff to make us happy. Beware collecting stuff.

They and their idols, and their stuff, will be blown away like dust in the wind.

But the one who trusts in the Lord, he will live forever in God’s land.

II. The Future of those who trust in the Holy One

Isaiah 57:14-19

These verses amount to an exposition on the latter half of verse 13.

This is the future of the one who takes refuge in the Lord.

Really, for the one who takes refuge in the Lord, this is their past, present, and future.

Verses 14-16 describe the character of God in dealing with sinners.

Verses 17-19 describe what God will do with sinners who take refuge in Him.

What is God like?

vs. 14 God has plans. God builds. God makes a way for us. God removes obstacles from our way.

God is one who makes a path for His people to follow. It is a great gift, a mercy.

There is nothing that says that the Lord must do this. Justice does not demand it.

It is only because He chooses to love you and me and so many others that He makes a way.

Satan destroys, deceives, leads astray. He is doing that all around us.

God creates and plans and makes a way. He is doing that in His son, Jesus Christ.

vs. 15 This verse describes God is such a way that brings together all of the Bible.

God is holy. He is completely other, different, perfect. We are not like that. We don't understand that.

God dwells in eternity. We do not understand that either. He is so far beyond us.

We cannot examine Him. We cannot approach Him. He is inaccessible.

It is no wonder that people do not believe in Him. The very attempt forces us to see our inability.

And yet, God is especially attentive to the humble, the downcast, the sorrowful, the repentant.

So, God is high and lofty, but He gets low and humble. He is holy, but He condescends.

“A bruised reed He will not break, a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish.” (Isaiah 42:3)

And yet who is really “contrite and lowly of spirit?” Only the Messiah can truly be like this.

And only Jesus the Messiah can make us truly like this.

vs. 16 God gets angry, but He will not stay angry forever.

He knows that if He is only angry we would faint and despair.

What does God do?

These are amazing verses. And make up the hinge on which the rest of Isaiah turns.

vs. 17 God sees the way of His people and He punishes them. He hides his face in anger.

God must punish sin and the sinner. His holiness and justice demand it.

What good would God be if he let people do whatever they wanted in His creation?

Thieves, rapists, abusive fathers, murderers, liars, the greedy, the gluttons, the arrogant, and me.

Still, they go on sinning. Their heart is committed to the destructive path.

vs. 18 God sees their path and He heals them. He leads them back and comforts them.

vs. 19 He makes them speak His words, “Shalom, shalom to those who are far and near.”

God makes peace with them and heals them.

This is the gospel that we preach, “Shalom through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36)

There is no explanation here of how this will happen, but we can look back on Isaiah 53 for clues.

The Servant Messiah will come and suffer God's wrath in our place. This is what Jesus did for us.

He bore our sorrows. (Isaiah 53:4)

By His wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

III. The Fear that we all need to have

Isaiah 57:20-21

In these last two verses we are reminded again of the direction of most of the world. What a picture!

They all toss and churn, dragging up all manner of filth and garbage.

“There is no peace (shalom) for the wicked.”

John Calvin writes about the people in this world who do not have Christ, “They are terrified and alarmed by conscience, which is the most agonizing of all torments and the most cruel of all executioners.”

It is a lie that in this world you can find peace within yourself.

People think that the fear of God is the enemy of peace. But, in truth, the fear of God leads to peace.

If you honestly look deep within yourself, you will not find shalom.

You will find desire, longing to be loved, both sadness and happiness, worry, lust, envy, greed, great potential, failures, both beauty and corruption, inconsistencies... like the sea in a storm, amazing and terrible.

It's not peaceful... unless Jesus comes in and calms the sea, takes your sin, and heals your heart.

When I became a Christian, I began to discover that I do not have to do what I want to do.

I get to do what God wants me to do. **Matthew 11:28-30**