

AUGUST 20, 1995

FAIR WARNING

I find it amazing that people will do things that put themselves at great risk when they do not have to do so. We could list many activities that people know to be dangerous and yet they will continue to do those things in spite of the danger. Just knowing what is bad for us is **not** enough to avoid doing the wrong thing. In this time of an explosion of information and knowledge, most people have little excuse to not know what is safe, healthy, and good. We also have little excuse to not know what is unsafe, unhealthy, and bad.

We could identify categories of things and we could name specifics of good and bad behavior for each category. Drugs and chemical substances are examples of things that all of us need and can be used in helpful ways, but we can also abuse them. Even the foods we eat can be helpful or harmful. Researchers have carried out many studies and they can cite evidence to guide a wise person to avoid diets that have large amounts of foods that can be harmful. Use of tobacco products has been the subject of warnings for decades. Some respond to the warnings and others ignore them. Other activities such as speeding while driving, not wearing a seat belt, and driving while sleepy are all known to be dangerous and many of us have been guilty of such dangerous practices. The list of harmful activities could include pornography, gambling, lying, stealing, gossiping, envy, and greed.

You could give the average person any one of those topics and they could write a paragraph about why anyone should avoid participating in those activities. Yet, the average person will engage in many of those items. Though specialize knowledge about harmful effects of certain practices has increased significantly in the past 50 years, knowledge of the dangers of harmful practices has been around for thousands of years. The Bible has much to say about the destructive power of evil in a person's life. Much of the writing of Moses and the prophets focus on these consequences.

ISAIAH 5:8-10 In the days before Israel was ruined and scattered and before Judah was conquered and carried into Babylonian captivity, many of the prophets spoke out against the greed of the rich and powerful. Materialism is still a powerful driver among many in our present-day society. This "malady" is not limited to the rich, but it also infects those who have little. In Isaiah's time, the rich could buy influence in the courts because of dishonest judges and other officials. They would acquire the land of those who did not have such connections. In an agrarian society those who controlled the land controlled the economy and the wealth. The wealthy would take advantage of the poor and gain control of their land. Instead of family farms there were large estates with the stately mansion of the wealthy land owner. The poor people who lost their land would live in hovels and barely get by.

Isaiah's message to those who lived sumptuously was that God had spoken judgement upon them. All their greedy grabbing would not be of profit to them. The fine houses would be left and no one would live in them. Vineyards and grain fields would be so neglected that the amount of produce would not be worth the effort. It would be so bad that the harvest of grain would be only a tenth of what was planted.

It is likely that the timing for this judgement would be when Babylon conquered Judah and carried away the most capable people to Babylon. They and their descendants lived there in exile for 70 years in that captivity.

ISAIAH 5:11-12 "Hedonistic" is a good descriptor of the society in which we live. We are "into" pleasure seeking. The theme of the day is "If it feels good, do it." Before the fall of Judah, this same abandonment of morals and sense of responsibility to do what was right characterized the

Jews. It was “party time” every day and apparently all day long. When a person is caught up in such behavior, it can become an obsession from which escaping is difficult. Many young people are caught up in the hard rock and hard liquor scene and these ruin their lives.

The great tragedy for Israel was that they had traded hedonism for the work of the Lord. This nation was called out from all the nations of the earth to be God’s special people and they chose to go the way of destruction rather than the way of life. They had chosen arrogance over humility, they had chosen excess over moderation, and they had chosen to exalt themselves rather than to exalt God. The consequences of these choices were that they would go into exile where their excessive drinking would be replaced by thirst and their arrogance would be replaced with humiliation. Their exalted ones would be brought down to nothingness.

ISAIAH 5:18-19 The people of Isaiah’s time looked for ways to engage in ever more evil. They had no remorse and showed no fear of God. They literally mocked God and dared Him to do something. The warnings of the prophets had been around for decades before anything happened. God was fair in giving them every opportunity to repent; however, they misjudged his kindness as a lack of resolve to punish them for their evil. In their arrogance, they challenged God to punish them as His prophets had been warning.

I can see strong parallels of this type behavior among the people of the world today. People take great delight in ridiculing God and blaspheming the name of Jesus. They defy God to do anything about their behavior and since nothing happens to them immediately, they assume that nothing ever will.

ISAIAH 5:20 Sometimes I hear people in influential positions advocating immoral behavior and I have difficulty believing what is being said. We have a court system that protects those who kill unborn babies and puts people who protests such barbaric behavior in jail. We have the Surgeon General of the United State advocating giving needles away to drug addicts and passing out free condoms to high school students. We have school officials who deny Christians the right to read their Bible on school property and yet allow perverse literature to occupy shelf space in their libraries. This confusion in moral values will lead to moral decay and collapse of our society just as it did in Isaiah’s time.

ISAIAH 5:21 The essence of humanism was present in Isaiah’s time just as it is today. We have glorified self-sufficiency and pride to the point that if we speak against it, then people think we must be from some other planet.

ISAIAH 5:22-23 In our day we have glorified public figures who have no moral values and made heroes of people who are child molesters. Great sports figures can literally commit murder and much of the population refuse to believe it happened. Just as they could buy judges in Isaiah’s day, the super rich can buy the silence of their victims and bribe their way out of prosecution or maybe obtain a lighter sentence for their crimes. God warned Judah that judgement would come and we can also know that judgement will prevail in our day.

God warned Israel and they ignored the warning. God warned Judah and they ignored the warning. God’s judgement came upon them in history. We can and should learn from their example and thereby escape judgement by being obedient to what God requires.