

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET
ISAIAH

Introduction to Isaiah: Isaiah has been called the chief amongst the writing prophets. His prophecy is directed to the nation of Judah beginning about 760 B.C., or more than 160 years prior to the Babylonian captivity. Through Isaiah, God pointedly warned Judah of impending judgment if they did not turn from their sin. Sadly, Judah for the most part ignored God's warning.

The book of Isaiah is unique in that it has more of the testimony of Jehovah God than any of the writing prophets. Moreover, Isaiah is clearly the prophet of redemption. There is no other place in the Old Testament where the suffering Messiah is set forth as clearly as here. It is first of the major prophets, not because it was the first written, but rather because of the excellency of the matter contained therein. No one writes so fully and clearly of the person, offices, grace, and kingdom of Christ; of His incarnation and birth of a virgin; of His sufferings and death; and the glory that should follow, as does Isaiah.

John Gill has observed, "Our Lord preached His first sermon at Nazareth out of this book, (Luke 4:17-21) and it was in this the eunuch was reading when Philip came up to him, who from the same Scripture preached to him Christ, Acts 8:28-35. And there are more citations in the New Testament made out of this prophecy than any other book, excepting the book of Psalms." Some have advanced that Isaiah lived to the time of

Manasseh and that it is he who was sawn asunder by him as is referred to in Hebrews 11:37.

The book also includes pointed warning of coming judgment against neighboring nations of that day. However, the greater message is directed to Judah (Israel). Isaiah clearly warns of the impending Babylonian captivity as well as foretelling the return therefrom. The humiliation and suffering of the Messiah is set forth more clearly here than anywhere (with the possible exception of Psalm 22.) The book also presents a more comprehensive picture of Christ in His kingdom than any other book of the entire Bible. The book has essentially two divisions: (1) looking toward the captivities (chapters 1-39) and (2) looking beyond the captivities (chapters 40-66). This has prompted some liberal theologians to claim there were two authors of Isaiah. However, there is no evidence to support this claim.

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***Overview of Isaiah 1:** The book begins immediately and pointedly with God's charges against Judah. The focus then shifts to the first of many exhortations by God through the prophet to His backslidden people. Near the end of the chapter, God promises to turn away His wrath if Judah will turn from its sin. Yet, judgment is inevitable.*

1:1 The prophecy of Isaiah commences, noting the era in which it was presented. **The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.** The book thus begins with several introductory notes. (1) The book is noted as a *vision* which is used in the prophetic sense. Clearly implied is that the prophecy of Isaiah came from God. (2) Isaiah

briefly notes the name of his father Amoz. Little else is known of his personal background. (3) The focus of the prophecy is “concerning Judah and Jerusalem” and hence the southern kingdom. (4) The time of Isaiah’s writing ministry was “in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, *and* Hezekiah, kings of Judah.” That time span approximates eighty-five years. Some Jewish tradition holds that Isaiah lived into the reign of Manasseh and was “sawn asunder” by him.

1:2-3 Isaiah wastes no time in launching into the message from God to Judah. **Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken.** The source of the prophet’s message is clear: **the LORD hath spoken.** God’s message was **I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.** The children, of course, were the house of Judah and to a greater extent, Israel. God had nurtured them as a nation and blessed them in every conceivable way. Yet, they had turned their backs upon their God.

God through the prophet thus uses the following illustration. **3 The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.** Even a beast such as an ox or a donkey knows its own master. But Israel was willingly oblivious to their God, neither did they care. The indictment of God against His people is thus summarized.

1:4 The prophet therefore addresses his own people. **Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.** Isaiah uses three illustrations to describe his sinful nation. (1) They were a people carrying great iniquity. (2) They were a generation of evildoers. (3) They were corrupt. The prophet uses three more descrip-

tions to characterize his people. Worst of all, (1) they had forsaken Jehovah their God. (2) They accordingly had provoked God to anger. Noteworthy is the phrase, “the Holy One of Israel.” Apart from two references to this title in the Psalms, Isaiah is the primary source thereof. Of the thirty times it appears in Scripture, twenty-seven of them are found in Isaiah. (Jeremiah uses the phrase once.) Indeed, Jehovah God is the Holy One of Israel. He is holy altogether. Moreover, that holiness of God will be ultimately described in chapter 6. (3) Finally, the prophet indicted his own people for having “gone away backward.” They had backslidden from their God.

1:5-6 The prophet thus asks his people, **Why should ye be stricken any more?** God had already been chastening His people because of their sin. Judah had been defeated in a war with Israel. II Chronicles 28:19 notes that God had brought them low because of the sins of Ahaz their king. Nevertheless, Judah continued to rebel against her God. **Ye will revolt more and more.** Therefore, the prophet uses the analogy of physical sickness to describe his nation. **The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. 6 From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.** The nation was full of spiritual cancer from its head to its feet. They had long rebelled against their God.

1:7-8 Lest there be any question to the application of his analogy, Isaiah continued, **Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.** Judah was in deplorable condition and Isaiah makes it very clear it was because of God’s chastening against them for their sin.

With eloquent metaphor, the prophet continues, **8 And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.** Though the metaphor sounds quaint and rustic, that is not the intent. A “cottage in a vineyard” was a shack used for shelter to watch against animals and thieves coming to steal grapes. Likewise, a “lodge in a garden of cucumbers” was a hut in which the gardener could hide to guard against thieves. The final analogy is even more pungent. A “besieged city” was a city on the brink of starvation.

Though Jerusalem had as yet to face such dire circumstances, the hint is clearly made. Judah was already facing hard times because of God’s chastening and it would become vastly worse. The once mighty and proud nation of David and Solomon was now on the brink of poverty and would face the specter of invasion, seige, and eventual defeat. The warning of God was at hand.

1:9-10 The prophet now shifts to an even more pungent metaphor. He proclaimed, **Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.** The Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom had yet to take place. Yet, with prophetic prescience, Isaiah warned that unless “the LORD of hosts” left them a very small remnant, Israel would be like Sodom and Gomorrah. The very small remnant foretold is none other than Judah after the northern ten tribes were deported by the Assyrians. Judah (and Benjamin) would be a remnant of what once had been the mighty nation of Israel. Moreover, it was only by the mercy of God that they did not wind up as Sodom and Gomorrah. The metaphor is not by coincidence. The prophet clear implied that spiritual conditions in Judah were not greatly different than they had been in those two infamous cities of yore.

Therefore, the prophet thundered, **10 Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.** Isaiah was referring to the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem. He likened them to the rulers of Sodom and Gomorrah of antiquity. He thus directed the backslidden leadership of Judah to hear the spoken word of the Lord through the prophets and pay heed to the written Word of God which they already possessed.

1:11-12 The spoken word of the Lord through the prophet was, **To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.** Though Judah still nominally worshiped Jehovah God, it was not from their heart. They ignored the weightier matters of the Law. They only went through the motions of prescribed Levitical sacrifice. And, it was a mockery. God therefore let it be known that He was tired of their empty sacrifices. He was weary with all their hypocritical animal sacrifices. Their heart was far from him. As the prophet would cry out in Isaiah 29:13, **Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.**

The Lord therefore asked, **12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?** The question is rhetorical. God had required it in the Law of Moses. Yet, Judah made a mockery thereof by their hypocritical observance and heartless ritual.

1:13-15 God continued through the prophet, **Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I**

cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

Because of the hypocrisy of Judah, God ordered them to stop their pretense of worship. Moreover, Judah was openly indulging in idolatry in the hinterlands of the nation. During the reign of Ahaz, the king had even set up pagan altars in the very courts of the Temple. See II Kings 16:10-18. Yet, the nation still hypocritically continued to go through the motions of worship of Jehovah. He was sick of it.

In that same vein, God cried out, **14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.** Because idolatry permeated the entire nation, God was disgusted with the national convocations when Judah came to hypocritically give lip-service to their true God.

Furthermore, He warned, **15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.** When Judah finally would try to pray to God, He announced that He would not pay any attention to them. Judah had tolerated the murder of Zechariah by Joash (II Chronicles 24:20-22). They had participated in the abomination of Molech with their small children (II Kings 16:3). They had tolerated bloodshed in their land. God had had enough. He warned, He would no longer listen to their prayer if and when they prayed.

1:16-17 With that dark backdrop, Jehovah God thus pled with His people. **Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil.** God implored Judah to get right with Him. He begged them to cleanse themselves from their sin. He was not interested in ceremonial cleansing. Rather, he besought them to turn from their sin in fact.

Furthermore, God begged them to **17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless,**

plead for the widow. He pled with His people to return to righteousness. That included doing good, doing justly, helping those in need, and watching over those in distress. Clearly implied is that all of the above had evaporated from Judah.

1:18-20 With unsurpassed eloquence, Jehovah God bade His people, **Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.** God invited His people to sit down and consider His gracious offer. Though their sin was as scarlet, indicating the depth and perversity thereof, He was willing to cleanse and pardon them. Moreover, when God cleanses our sin, though it be red like crimson, He makes us as whiter than snow. See Revelation 1:18. (The mention of wool is a metaphor for whiteness.) There is no white more dazzling than newly-fallen, fresh snow. It is a white which makes any other white seem dull and yellow by comparison. God thus offered that utter cleansing to Judah if they would repent and allow His gracious cleansing. That cleansing today comes from the precious blood of Christ. See also I John 1:7 and Revelation 1:5.

However, God presented to Judah the clear condition for such cleansing then. **19 If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.** The principle was of a *willing* heart. That bespeaks a repentant heart. From a repentant heart flows obedience to God. The greater thought is that as Judah was *willing* to return to her God in repentance and become obedient to His Word, He therefore promised that He would again bless them in their land. The big word is found in *if*. If they would be willing to return to their God in complete obedience, He would bless them.

However, He warned, **20 if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.** If Judah refused to return to her God and continued

to rebel, harsh judgment was coming. The day was at hand when first the Assyrians would invade their land and then the Babylonians would utterly defeat them and carry them away captive for their sin. God had given them clear options. Repent, return, obey and be blessed. Or, refuse, rebel, and disobey and be devoured. God signed his offer with the oath of His own word, **for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.**

1:21-23 The Lord through the prophet now shifts to a plaintive lament of the spiritual condition of Jerusalem. **How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.** God uses the analogy of marriage and a faithful wife eventually becoming an adulteress. Jerusalem had done that to her God. Whereas once Jerusalem and Judah had been a haven for justice and righteousness, it now was a city of murderers. Jesus, seven-hundred years later, would indict Jerusalem for her murder of the prophets. See Matthew 23:37.

Accordingly, God lamented, **22 Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water.** The glory of Jerusalem had been transformed into corruption. The analogy of silver becoming dross refers to the slag of the refining process. They had substituted the slag of sin for the silvery glory of righteousness. Their fine Jewish (non-alcoholic) wine had become watery. The analogy was how Judah had substituted that which was of great value for that which was worthless.

Moreover, **23 Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.** The corruption and crookedness of the leadership of Judah is condemned. They not only were dishonest, but they willingly received bribes. They were hard-hearted towards those in need and had no concern for them.