

## 02.01.2021 ISAIAH

The book of Isaiah is like a miniature Bible. The first 39 chapters (like the 39 books of the Old Testament) are filled with judgment against sin and sinners – Judah has sinned, the surrounding nations have sinned, the whole earth has sinned. Judgment must come because God is a just God. But the final 27 chapters (like the 27 books of the New Testament) give us a message of comfort and hope. The Messiah is coming as Saviour and King; He will bear a cross and wear a crown.

Isaiah had a long ministry extending from about 740 BC to 680 BC. His ministry was to the southern kingdom of Judah. He witnessed the last years of the northern kingdom of Israel destroyed in 722 BC by Assyria. The Assyrian king of the time was Tiglath-Pileser who was succeeded by Sennacherib. In Judah, Isaiah's ministry began during King Uzziah's (Azariah) reign, and continued through Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah's reign (Isaiah 1:1). Tradition has it that Isaiah was martyred by Hezekiah's son, Manasseh.

Isaiah means 'Yahweh is salvation'. Isaiah was from a distinguished Jewish family. His education is evident from the impressive vocabulary, style, the comprehensive scope and the beautifully communicated message. He is called the 'St. Paul of the Old Testament'. His clear Messianic prophecies and his detailed prophecy of the atonement of the Messiah found in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 have earned for him the title 'the Gospel Prophet'. He is also called the 'Shakespeare of the prophets' because of the beautiful language and his clear vision of the human condition.

### CRISIS OF IDENTITY: Isaiah Chapter 1

***'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD, 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool'. Isaiah 1:18***

In the very first chapter of Isaiah, judgment is proclaimed against Judah. Judah is undergoing a crisis of identity; she has forgotten her Maker and lives in rebellion against Him, though she continues to perform the outward rituals of worship.

'It was the perversity of his people that brought to the Lord's servant (Isaiah) the greatest perplexity and the deepest depression. By their apostasy and rebellion those who should have been standing as light bearers among the nations were inviting the judgments of God...the outlook was particularly discouraging as regards the social conditions of the people. In their desire for gain, men were adding house to house and field to field. See Isaiah 5:8. Justice was perverted, and no pity was shown the poor...Even the magistrates, whose duty it was to protect the helpless, turned a deaf ear to the cries of the poor and needy, the widows and the fatherless. See Isaiah 10:1, 2. With oppression and wealth came pride and love of display, gross drunkenness, and a spirit of revelry. See Isaiah 2:11, 12; 3:16, 18-23; Isaiah 5:22, 11, 12. And in Isaiah's day idolatry itself no longer provoked surprise. See Isaiah 2:8, 9. Iniquitous practices had become so prevalent among all classes that the few who remained true to God were often tempted to lose heart and to give way to discouragement and despair. It seemed as if God's purpose for Israel were about to fail and that the rebellious nation was to suffer a fate similar to that of Sodom and Gomorrah.' *Prophets and Kings p 306*

### Hear, O Heavens! Isaiah 1:1-9

The form that Isaiah employs is that of a court case. Yahweh, the sovereign LORD of Creation, speaking in the first person, pleads His case against Judah and asks the entire creation to serve as a witness. They have rebelled and brought sickness upon themselves and sorrow to the heart of God.

Here is the case against Judah:

1. They have persistently rebelled against God, their Father who has nourished them (Isaiah 1:2).
2. They refuse to know and understand God (1:3).
3. God, who is the Holy One of Israel, who raised Israel to be a holy nation, finds that they have turned away backward from Him. They have 'turned everyone to his own way' – the essence of iniquity. Their sinfulness, their iniquity and their corruption is the consequence of their rebellion. (1:4).

This rebellion was universal and despite suffering severe consequences spiritually as people and as a nation, Judah refused to repent:

*Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment. Isaiah 1:5, 6*

Here is the state of man since Adam fell and chose to live independently of God. God alone is the Source of righteousness and health, and all who know Him and yet choose to live in rebellion against Him are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1-5).

*Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Isaiah 1:7-8*

Despite their rebellion, their God is the merciful and compassionate God who does not consume them. In the rebellious nation was a very small faithful remnant of godly people who remained faithful to God. The role of the remnant is crucial in the affairs of God's people.

*Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah. Isaiah 1:9*

### **Rotten Ritualism: Isaiah 1:10-17**

God tells His people that they are no better than Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses had prophesied that when God's people rebelled against Him, *'their vine is of the vine of Sodom and of the fields of Gomorrah'* (Deuteronomy 32:32).

**'The first chapter of Isaiah is a description of a people professedly serving God, but walking in forbidden paths'** EGW. Manuscript 29, 1911

In verses 11-15, God gives a stinging indictment of their services, sacrifices and rituals. Bear in mind that these rituals were all part of the ceremonial law; of which the writer of Hebrews many centuries later said, *'It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience'* Hebrews 9:9. Sacrifices are always associated with sin. They could not cleanse the sincere worshipper with regard to sin and conscience, but the sincere worshipper offered them in faith, looking to the time when Christ, the perfect Sacrifice would be offered for sin.

In contrast, a rebellious people offering sacrifices for sin was an act of utter hypocrisy. Imagine a holy God's revulsion when He looked down and saw His rebellious, disobedient people coming as hypocrites to offer Him sacrifice.

God calls them to repent of their evil ways and return to Him.

### **The Argument of Forgiveness**

*"Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isaiah 1:18*

Mankind's only hope for the remission of sin and the gift of righteousness is found in Christ Jesus...*'They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'* Revelation 7:14.

*"I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you." Isaiah 44:22*

Once we are forgiven and reconciled to God, we will put away the evil of our doings and learn to do good, by the power of His Spirit. This is the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:8-12.

*"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow." Isaiah 1:16, 17*

### **Eat or Be Eaten: Isaiah 1:19-31**

This passage warns the people of Judah (and us, today) that their response to God's mercy will determine their destiny. They are an unfaithful people, full of spiritual adultery and wickedness. But if they turn to the Lord and take up His offer of forgiveness and righteousness they will be restored and escape condemnation. If they refuse God's offer, they will be destroyed.

*"If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword". For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Isaiah 1:19, 20*

### **The Love Song... 'What more could I have done? Isaiah 5:1-7**

*“And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah: Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?” Isaiah 5:3, 4*

In the Judgment, when the final destinies of men and women are finally sealed, God will say, ‘Judge me and see if my judgment is righteous. What more could I have done for My people? What more could I have done to persuade them that true fruitfulness lies in following Me and trusting in Me?’

*For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, weeping. Isaiah 5:7*

Isaiah was speaking to his people in his time. Today, God speaks to spiritual Israel, the church. He looks for the fruit of righteousness in His people.

*For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: “That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged.” Romans 3:3, 4*

*Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. Isaiah 55:6-8*

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