



ISAIAH

A PROPHET'S PROPHET

VOLUME 1

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ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-3901-9

Published by CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.

2373 W. 700 S., Springville, UT 84663

Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., www.cedarfort.com

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021947603

Cover design by Courtney Proby

Cover design © 2021 Cedar Fort, Inc.

Edited and typeset by Valene Wood

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed on acid-free paper

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ISAIAH CHAPTER 1

The Sin of Apostasy upon Ancient Israel



THIS CHAPTER HELPS US UNDERSTAND THE ATTITUDES OF THE PEOPLE OF Israel and Judah and how they felt about their God. It shows how poorly they followed the prophets of God and lived His commandments. Chapter one of Isaiah provides a glimpse into the conditions of his time and some of the great concerns that he had for the Lord's people. Have you ever wondered what caused ancient Israel to fall so far into apostasy? This chapter provides some of the reasons for their downfall.

The first chapter is like a court scene with Israel being the defendant and Jehovah acting as both the plaintiff and the judge. Isaiah is an observer who sometimes is taking part in the dialog of the court. As a result, this chapter is often called the "Great Arraignment," the defendant Isaiah, as an observer and occasional interlocutor, and heaven and earth as the witnesses. After a prologue (Isa. 1:1) comes the court scene, which can be outlined as follows:

The Accusation—The Lord charges Israel of being guilty of sin and spiritual sickness (vs. 2–6).

“Immediate judgments: Physical and spiritual consequences are coming upon Israel because the people have not obeyed the Lord” (vs. 7–15).

“Promise of pardon: Conditions of cleansing, repentance, and blessing are presented (vs. 16–20).

“Final sentencing: The Lord will purge the wicked and redeem the righteous through apostasy, restoration, and judgment” (vs. 21–31).
(Ludlow, 71)

UZZIAH THE KING

1:1 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.

Background of the Man Isaiah

Isaiah was born about 770 BC and was the son of Amoz which means “strong.” The name Isaiah (Heb. *hyevy*) means “Jehovah Saves” or “The Lord is Salvation.” According to the Jewish authority Kimchi, Amoz, not to be confused with the prophet Amos, was “the brother of Amaziah, the father of Uzziah, . . . which would make Isaiah of royal lineage and a cousin of Uzziah,” king of Judah. Isaiah lived under several kings of Judah. These were Uzziah (784–740 BC), Jotham (740–735 BC), Ahaz (735–715 BC), and Hezekiah (715–687 BC). Many scholars believe that Isaiah ministered between the years 740 and 700 BC (Parry, *Understanding Isaiah*, 8).

Isaiah was married and his wife was called (Heb. *haybn*) “The Prophetess.” They had two sons (see 7:3, 8:3, and 8:18). Their two sons were named Shearjashub (Heb. *bwvy rav*) “The remnant shall return” and Mahershalalhashbaz (Heb. *zb vx llv rhm*) “He hastens the prey.”

Tradition suggests that King Manasseh encased him in the trunk of a tree and sawed him in half (Josephus, *Antiquities* 10: 3 and Ginsberg, *Legends of*

the Jews 4: 279.). An eastern tradition reports that he lived to one hundred and twenty.

Isaiah was called as a prophet in the same year that Uzziah died from leprosy.

Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar. (2 Chronicles 26:19)

Elder James E. Talmage explained what happened to Uzziah in his book *The Articles of Faith*.

A striking instance of divine jealousy, which is righteous zeal, concerning priestly functions, is shown in the experience of Uzziah, king of Judah. He was placed upon the throne when but sixteen years old. As long as he sought the Lord he was greatly prospered, so that his name became a terror unto his enemies. But he allowed pride to grow in his heart, and indulged the delusion that in his kingship he was supreme. He entered the Temple and essayed to burn incense on the altar. Shocked at his blasphemous action, Azariah, the chief priest of the Temple, and fourscore priests with him, forbade the king, saying: "It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed." At this rebuke and condemnation from his subjects, though they were priests of the Lord, the king became angry; but immediately the scourge of leprosy fell upon him; the signs of the dread disease appeared in his forehead; and being now physically an unclean creature his presence tended the more to defile the holy place. So Azariah and his associate priests thrust the king out from the Temple; and he, a smitten thing, fled from the house of God never again to enter its sacred precincts. Concerning the rest of his punishment we read: "And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day

of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord” (Talmage, 185–186).

GOD’S CHILDREN REBELLED AGAINST HIM

1:2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

The beginning phrase of verse 2 echoes the words of Moses as he begins the great psalm that was his last mortal discourse: “Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth” (Deut. 32:1; compare Deut. 31:28). Moses’s last sermon deals with God’s greatness, His choice of Israel as His covenant people, Israel’s rebellion, and God’s final sovereignty over Israel and all nations. Isaiah expresses those same ideas and begins this chapter with a similar exhortation, indicating his familiarity with Moses’s sermon. These words also serve as a reminder to Israel of the solemn covenants their ancestors made with the Lord before they entered the promised land. As in the past, willful disobedience to this covenant is sure to result in utter destruction (See Deut. 4:25–26).

A LOYAL ANIMAL TRUSTS ITS OWNER

1:3 The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

Consider (Heb. *bîyn*)—understand, to see to the heart of a matter or discern.

Crib—the stall where animals are fed.

Animals do not have the intelligence of man, but a loyal animal trusts its owner and knows where its food and lodging come from. If an ox or an ass

knows where its home is and who its master is, then according to Isaiah this makes Israel dumber than both the ox and ass. Israel does not know Jesus Christ their master and will not obey His commandments, even though they have been rescued from bondage in Egypt by their Lord. They are unable to see to the heart of the matter.

ISRAEL IS A SINFUL NATION

In verse 4, the Lord “. . . elaborates upon Israel’s corruption in a fourfold denouncement that describes four types of wickedness (sin, iniquity, evildoing, and depravity or corruption) among four groups (nation, people, brood or seed, and children). The description of the last group (depraved or corrupt children) demonstrates the seriousness of Israel’s wickedness, for even her children are being taught to do evil” (Ludlow, 73).

1:4 Ah a 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.

Ah (Heb. *hoy*)—can be rendered simply as “ah!” although a more complete derivative would be “shame” or “alas.”

“gone . . . backward”—literally, “estranged” (see Ps. 58:3).

Why are the nations of Israel and Judah so sinful? Isaiah tries to paint a general picture of their problems, and he will discuss each of them in more detail in his writings. They are a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, and their children are just like their parents. Why have they gone away backward? Isaiah tries to help us see that they are corrupters and have forsaken the Lord to the degree that they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger.

What does it mean to go “away backward?” This is done by individuals who make a covenant(s) with God and then choose to walk away from Him and the

covenant that was made. A covenant binds you closer to God. Walking away from a covenant takes you away from God and you go “backward” in your relationship and spiritual progression. Those who may say that they are “stepping away” from the gospel for a while, or who indicate that they are “taking a break” from the Church are those who are “gone away backward.”

SIN OVERPOWERS GOOD THINKING AND SOUND JUDGMENT OF THE HEART

1:5 Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

In asking them the question, “why should ye be stricken any more?” God is asking them if it does any good for any of God’s children to sin or to rebel. Isaiah paints a picture of a people who have no interest in God and living His commandments have no desire to change.

What is meant by the phrase, “the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint?” This does not just mean the king and government leaders are corrupt, the sickness goes through every grade of the society. John Taylor addressing this same issue said:

Our systems, our policy, our legislation, our education, and philosophy, are all wrong, neither can we be particularly blamed, for these evils have been the growth of ages. Our fathers have left God, his guidance, control, and support, and we have been left to ourselves; and our present position is manifest proof of our incompetency to govern; and our past failures make it evident, that any future effort, with the same means, would be as useless. The world is diseased, and it requires a world’s remedy. (Taylor, *The Government of God*)

What is the true heart of any nation? It is the family. It is the family that provides the core strength to society in general. It is the family that

teaches, nurtures and develops the individuals that make up society. If the heart or family is faint, the family is not teaching spiritual truths that will make families strong. For a family to be strong in our day, parents must teach their children to “love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God, to follow the living prophets and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live” (Proclamation on the Family). (Miller, 10)

SORES REPRESENT UNCHECKED OPEN REBELLION

Isaiah desiring to show how deep Israel’s revolt from their God has gone, says,

1:6 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

Mollified (Heb. *rakak*)—softened.

Ointment (Heb. *shemen*)—olive oil. This oil is used in the temple in Isaiah’s day.

Mollified with ointment—The use of this medicine consists chiefly in external applications.

Nothing is taken internally.

The “sole of the foot,” symbolizes the most common person in Israel while the “head” symbolizes the highest leaders in Jewish society. From the lower-class citizens to their dignified leaders, Israel had no resolve in themselves to develop any change of behavior unto that godly sorrow that leads to repentance.

Anciently, a wound was purified by “pouring in oil and wine” on the wound (see Luke 10:34). After the washing out and cleaning of the wound had taken place, a clean bandage was applied to the wound. Israel was not being compared to a person who had given attention to their wounds, but they were being referred to as not caring for them. Spiritually, their open wound become infected, discolored, and pussy. What is the spiritual meaning of all this? Why would anyone not take care of his putrefying sores which had been left

undressed and ignored, neither bound up, nor mollified with ointment? Such action results in the wound becoming increasingly sore, pussy, and inflamed.

Their exposed sores represent their open sin and rebellion against God. They didn't seem to care who saw and knew of their wickedness. Their willful sinning had been unchecked, symbolized with wounds not closed up by the healing power of Jesus Christ's Atonement. Neither were their sins bound with a broken heart and a contrite spirit of sorrow of the repentant soul. A change of heart had not taken place and they were not repentant. No wonder they would not hear the words of Isaiah and make a mighty change and bind up their spiritual wounds through repentance in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

Remember that the Balm of Gilead is symbolic of the power to soothe and to heal and to make the wound whole, in other words to heal the sin-sick soul (Recreational Songs, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1949, p. 130.) Yet Israel sought to "cure [their] guilt with self-justification, a quack medicine which only covers the symptoms; it will never cure the cause" (Packer, 10).

A PROMISE TO ISRAEL BECAUSE OF THEIR SIN

Isaiah prophesies what the result will be of Israel's rebellion. He writes:

1:7 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.

Why is the country of Israel to be desolate, with cities burned with fire and overthrown by strangers? History has born record that indeed, it was just as Isaiah taught: this great Assyrian army came upon them and gathered up all that could be moved and carried it off to Assyria and burned all the rest they could, leaving all cities in its path destroyed and desolate (see Isa. 37:36).

A ROTTING, DECAYING SOCIETY. CAN JERUSALEM STAND?

1:8 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.

Daughter—denotes the future, and in this context indicates that the future of Jerusalem will be one of decay.

The expression “cottage in the vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers” refers to what happens after the harvest season. At the start of a harvest season, workers would go from their homes in a city or village to the neighboring field or orchard. To maximize the time that they could spend harvesting the crop, temporary shelters would be made of branches and leaves in a vineyard, or a garden. After the harvest, these huts or cottages quickly fall into decay. Any new occupant will be quickly exposed to the elements. This is a forecast of what Jerusalem will become; he now refers to the city as a temporary shelter for its inhabitants. Temporary assistance will be given them when the Lord will kill one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrian soldiers at the siege of Sennacherib; but the house of Judah should remember that without repentance Jerusalem is just temporarily rescued, for the savior made the following prophecy in reference to Jerusalem, “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:3). (Miller, 13)

ONLY A REMNANT OF ISRAEL LEFT

1:9 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.

What happened to the great wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? They were totally destroyed and left without a sign of their existence. The Lord promises

here that a remnant of Zion would be saved even though they chose evil over good. The apostle Paul quoted Isaiah 1:9 and 10:22 (see Rom. 9:27, 29) to demonstrate that God would allow a remnant of Israel to remain on the earth.

Joseph Smith, in turn, provided an inspired commentary on these verses of Isaiah and Paul. Joseph concluded that “if it were not for the remnant which was left, then might men now be as Sodom and Gomorrah. (Parry, *Understanding Isaiah*, 13)

WILL YOU HEAR THE WORD OF GOD BETTER THAN THOSE OF THE PAST?

Verses 10–20 are arranged chiastically and emphasizes what the Lord requires. He invites us to cleanse ourselves through the Atonement of Christ and return to obedience.

A' The first summons: The Lord's displeasure (vs. 10–11)

a1 The flouting of the law (vs. 10)

a2 Ineffective religion (vs. 11)

B What the Lord has not asked: useless religion (vs. 12–15)

b1 No divine authorization (vs. 12)

b2 No divine acceptance (vs. 13–14)

b3 No divine response (vs. 15)

C What the Lord requires (vs. 16–17):

cl Towards God - cleansing (vs. 16abc)

c2 In personal life - reformation (vs. 16d–17b)

c3 In society - concern (vs. 17c–e)

A2 The second summons: The Lord's invitation (vs. 18–20)

a2 Effective cleansing (vs. 18)

a1 Return to obedience (vs. 19–20)

1:10 Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of

our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

In these last few verses, the Lord has compared the inhabitants of Jerusalem, its leaders, and its citizens, with the evil inhabitants of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The first nine verses of this chapter paint a picture of this wickedness and indicate the reasons for the great fall of Israel, which started long before the time of Isaiah. In verses 10–15 Isaiah condemns Israel's apostate temple practices. Because their sacrifices are a mockery before God, He will not hearken to their prayers.

SACRIFICES AND BURNT OFFERINGS

1:11 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.

Full (Heb. *saba*)—to satisfy, to be weary of.

In this passage Isaiah teaches that although a multitude of sacrifices are being offered, the hearts of the children of Israel are not given with their offerings, and thus their sacrifices are in vain and have no power to draw on the salvation of the Atonement. The emptiness of such offerings, offensive to God, results in condemnation (1 Sam. 15:22). We are under the same condemnation when we observe the forms of our religion without yielding our hearts. (Parry, *Understanding Isaiah*, 15)

1:12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?

Tread (Heb. *ramac*)—to tromp, or to tromp through something.

Courts (Heb. *châtsêr*)—areas in which the worshippers were; none but priests entered the temple itself.

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