

God's Case & Cure

Isaiah 1:1-31

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What do we know about Isaiah?

This is the book of the prophesies of Isaiah who ministered from about 740 to 680 B.C.. For about 20 years, he spoke to both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. After Israel's fall to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., Isaiah continued to prophesy to Judah.

- This period of Israel's history is told in 2 Kings 15 through 21 and 2 Chronicles 26 through 33.
- Isaiah was a contemporary of the prophets Hosea and Micah.
- By the time of Isaiah, the prophets Elijah, Elisha, Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, and Amos had already completed their ministry.

By this time, Israel had been in the Promised Land for almost 700 years.

- The first 400 years in Canaan, Israel was ruled by judges, spiritual, military, and political leaders God raised up as the occasion demanded.
- Then, for about 120 years, three kings reigned over all Israel: Saul, David, and Solomon.
- But in 917 B.C. Israel had a civil war, and remained divided into two nations, Israel (to the north) and Judah (to the south) up until the time of Isaiah.

Up until the time of Isaiah, the northern nation of Israel had 18 kings - all of them bad, and rebellious against the LORD. The southern nation of Judah had 11 kings before Isaiah's ministry, some good and some bad.

- In the time of Isaiah, Israel was a little nation often caught in the middle of the wars between three superpowers: Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon.

As Isaiah's ministry began, there was a national crisis in the northern nation of Israel. The superpower of Assyria was about to engulf the nation of Israel.

- During the span of his ministry as a prophet, the southern nation of Judah was faced with repeated threats from the larger surrounding nations.

Many modern scholars think that there was more than one author to the book of Isaiah.

- The New Testament quotes Isaiah by name more than all the other writing prophets combined.

- But... in John 12:37-41, John quotes from both the "first" and the "second" part of Isaiah - the parts supposedly written by two or more different Isaiahs - and specifically says it is the same Isaiah.

Isaiah 1:1-20 – God states His case and offers a cure

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.*

² *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: "I have nourished and brought up children, And they have rebelled against Me;*

³ *The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master's crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider."*

⁴ *Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward.*

⁵ *Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, And the whole heart faints. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.*

¹⁰ *Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah:*

¹¹ *"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the Lord. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats.*

¹² *"When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?*

¹³ *Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.*

¹⁴ *Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.* ¹⁵ *When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.* ¹⁶ *“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil,* ¹⁷ *Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.* ¹⁸ *“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.* ¹⁹ *If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land;* ²⁰ *But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword”; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*

v1 – Who’s vision is recorded here?

Isaiah, son of Amoz: The name Isaiah means Salvation is of the LORD. There are at least seven men by the name of Isaiah in the Bible, but only one is Isaiah, the son of Amoz.

- Some thought that Amoz and the prophet Amos were the same person, but this seems unlikely. Some ancient Jewish traditions say that Amoz was a brother of king Amaziah, but there is no biblical way to prove this.
- We know more about Isaiah than most of the other prophets. Isaiah was married and was the father of at least two sons (Isaiah 7:3 and 8:3). He lived in Jerusalem (Isaiah 7:3, 22:1, 37:2, 38:5, and 39:3).
- There is a strong tradition that Isaiah outlived Hezekiah and was sawn in two by his successor Manasseh after the prophet had hidden himself in a hollow tree. Hebrews 11:37 mentions martyrs that were sawn in two as a likely reference Isaiah.

Isaiah was a great man of God with the courage of a Daniel, the sensitivity of a Jeremiah, the pathos of a Hosea, and the raging anger of an Amos; and he leaves them all far behind in the unique art of holy mockery.

- The prophecy of this chapter probably took place in the time of Ahaz, king of Judah (2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28). Ahaz was an evil king who was invaded many times by surrounding nations.

v2 – What is the Lord’s complaint against Judah?

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! God is calling heaven and earth as witnesses against Judah. The leaders and people of Judah have resisted His will, and God will state His case against them.

- We might think of heaven and earth as a "jury" God will present the case before.

Why do the heavens have an interest in the rebellion of Judah?

Romans 8:22 – *For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.* All creation is waiting for the deliverance that will come when the Messiah rules directly over the earth. When God's people disobey, we might say there is a sense in which they "delay" that resolution of all things.

- No doubt angels are getting weary of the spiritual warfare as well.

I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me: The leaders and people of Judah are like rebellious children, who never appreciate all that their parents have done for them.

Have you known and rebellious children? How can this help us identify with God’s frustration with Israel?

As parents, we can appreciate how frustrating and galling it is for our children to disregard and disobey us. It fills us with righteous indignation, and we think, "After all I have done for them, they treat me like this?"

- But we have treated God even worse than any child has treated their parents.

v3 – How was Judah dumber than dumb animals?

The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know: The ox and donkey are considered dumb animals. But the ox at least knows its owner, while Judah doesn't know who owns them. The donkey knows who takes care of him, but Judah doesn't know who takes care of them.

- No animal has ever offended, resisted, rejected or disobeyed God the way every human has. Any animal is a more faithful servant of God than the best human!

v4 – How did God react to the sin of Judah?

God clearly and strongly exposes their sin. They are laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, and they have provoked the LORD to anger.

v5 – What does God want Judah to do?

Repent! Despite their sin, God does not wish evil upon Judah. Instead, He longs for them to repent and make it easy on themselves: *Why should you be stricken again?* God has been chastising Judah, and they have not responded. They will continue to be stricken as long as they rebel.

v5-6 – What kind of condition was Judah in?

Sick ... the whole heart faints ... no soundness ... wounds and bruises and putrefying sores: Because of their rebellion against God, Judah was in a bad place.

- This is where their disobedience and lack of submission has brought them!

v7 – What revealed that Judah was already stricken?

Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence: During the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah, they were attacked and pillaged by Israel, Syria, Edom, the Philistines, and Assyria (2 Chronicles 28).

2 Chronicles 28:19 – For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had encouraged moral decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the Lord.

Why wouldn't Judah repent in response to their troubles?

While their sin brought them great trouble, they still preferred their sin, then submitting to the LORD God.

2 Chron 28:22 – Now in the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the LORD.

v8-9 – What kept God from totally destroying Israel?

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: If it wasn't for Israel's remnant, God would have destroyed the nation. But He has preserved them because of the remnant.

How important is the remnant to God today?

The remnant today is made up of people from all nations, the church, to be His representatives on earth.

Acts 15:14 – Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.

The only reason God has not poured out His wrath on the earth yet is because of those who will come to know Him...

2 Peter 3:9 – The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

v10 – Why is God referring to Judah as the rulers of Sodom and people of Gomorrah?

God is obviously trying to get the attention of the leaders and people of Judah, by associating them with two cities synonymous with sin and judgment.

v11-14 – How was Judah a land of hypocrites?

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices? Even in the midst of their rebellion, Judah continued its religious ceremony and ritual. They continued the sacrifices, the burnt offerings, the burning of incense, and their assemblies – God was sick of them all!

What application should there be here for us today?

We can offer God all kinds of religious rituals and ceremonies, all kinds of religious service, and He may hate it and consider it an abomination! (see 1 Sam 15:22)

- We can be regular church goers and givers but if our hearts aren't changed, and humbled, and surrendered to the LORD, it makes no difference.

V15 – What is referred to by spreading out hands?

This was the posture of prayer in that ancient culture. Instead of praying with heads bowed and hands folded, they would pray with the face turned towards heaven and the hands spread out to heaven.

- So, when they prayed, the LORD says, "I will hide my eyes from you ... I will not hear."

Why wouldn't God hear the prayers of Judah?

We may be certain, that in the midst of all this religious ceremony, there were many fine prayers offered. Many eloquent, stirring, and emotional prayers were said.

- But they were empty, hollow, useless prayers, because God looked at Judah and said, *"Your hands are full of blood."*

How were their hands full of blood?

This may have been literal in some cases but the point is that their disobedience to God made them unclean before Him.

v16-17 – What cure does God give Judah to restore their relationship?

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean ... Learn to do good, seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow: The corruption of Judah's leaders and people was shown in their bad treatment of one another.

1 John 4:20 – If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

The leaders and people of Judah wanted to say they loved God by their religious ceremonies, but the LORD cared more about how they treated other people, especially the weak (the fatherless, the widow).

v18 – What is God invitation to Judah and to us?

Come now, let us reason together: The Lord GOD invites His people to come reason with Him. What He offers us isn't just offered because He is "bigger" than us and has the right to dictate whatever terms please Him. God's direction for us is reasonable. It is smart. It is the best way to live.

How is the salvation of God reasonable?

What madness it is reject and resist a God of infinite wisdom, infinite love, infinite grace, and infinite power!

True reason will drive any honest man to the humblest adoration and submission towards God.

- It is just plain reasonable to follow God. Have you ever once heard of an old Christian, on their deathbed, gathering their children and friends around, and saying: "Now friends, watch out for that Christianity! I've followed Jesus my whole life and I'm so sorry I did!" What nonsense! Quite the contrary, we find that Christians on their deathbed are trusting and loving God more than ever. It's just plain reasonable!
- Logic led Pascal to Christ... God is, or God is not. Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing

What provision does God offer Judah (and us)?

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool: The LORD offers a repentant, humbled Judah true and complete cleansing from sin. Their condition of sin can be transformed from deeply stained to completely white.

How would God cleanse our sins?

Isaiah says nothing here about how this cleansing comes. But we know that it comes because Jesus took upon Himself our stain of sin, and God judged sin perfectly and completely in Jesus, so we can be accounted white as snow and as white as wool.

Is there any alternative to God provision for our sins to be forgiven?

No. Our good works can't clean the stain. Our best intentions or promises can't clean the stain. Our suffering or pain can't clean the stain. Time can't clean the stain. Death can't clean the stain. Only the work of Jesus can make us white as snow!

- We really can have a break with the past, and a new beginning in Jesus Christ. The power of sin, the shame of sin, the guilt of sin, the domination of sin, and terror of sin, and the pain of sin can all be taken away in Jesus.

When should we reason with God?

Come now: When we consider the greatness of God's cleansing and pardon, it is all the more reason for us to respond in repentance immediately. God wants the separation between you and He to be gone now. He doesn't want you to continue in your destructive path another moment. He wants the best for us now!

v19-20 – How did God want Judah to respond as a result of their reasoning with Him?

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: Here God offers Judah a choice. They can find hope in the midst of their chastisement, relief from empty religious ritual, and cleansing from their sin. But they must surrender their heart before God, and not refuse and rebel. Instead, they must be willing and obedient.

What is the principle here that we should apply to our lives?

We should consider which phrase better describes our life...Is it willing and obedient or do we refuse and rebel? There is a consequence for either course: eat of the good of the land, or be devoured by the sword. No wonder the LORD said "Come now, let us reason together!"

Isaiah 1:21-31 – A promise of redemption with justice

²¹ *How the faithful city has become a harlot!*

It was full of justice; Righteousness lodged in it, But now murderers.

²² *Your silver has become dross, Your wine mixed with water.*

²³ *Your princes are rebellious, And companions of thieves; Everyone loves bribes, And follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, Nor does the cause of the widow come before them.*

²⁴ *Therefore the Lord says, The Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, "Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, And take vengeance on My enemies.*

²⁵ *I will turn My hand against you, And thoroughly purge away your dross,*

And take away all your alloy.

²⁶ *I will restore your judges as at the first, And your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city."*

²⁷ *Zion shall be redeemed with justice, And her penitents with righteousness.*

²⁸ *The destruction of transgressors and of sinners shall be together, And those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed.*

²⁹ *For they shall be ashamed of the terebinth trees Which you have desired; And you shall be embarrassed because of the gardens Which you have chosen.*

³⁰ *For you shall be as a terebinth whose leaf fades, And as a garden that has no water.*

³¹ *The strong shall be as tinder, And the work of it as a spark; Both will burn together, And no one shall quench them.*

v21-23 – How had Jerusalem become a harlot?

The faithful city has become a harlot! Jerusalem, once known for its faithfulness to the LORD had become a harlot spiritually by forsaking their "marriage" to the LORD. They had committed spiritual adultery with their idolatry.

How was the justice of Jerusalem in the past tense?

The days of justice and righteousness are long past in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was filled with murderers, political corruption (Your princes are rebellious), thieves, fraud (Your silver has become dross, your wine is mixed with water), bribes, and favoritism against the weak (They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them).

What does this tell us about what God expects of political and civil leaders?

God expects them to keep the peace (against murderers), have integrity (instead of being rebellious and the companion of thieves), and to defend the weak (the fatherless and widows).

- *Your wine mixed with water*: Jesus made water into wine; sinful abusers make wine into water.

Why did God allow Judah to have ungodly leaders?

Galatians 6:7 – *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*

They got the leaders they deserved. The corruption of the leaders of Judah was a symptom of the spiritual condition of the nation in general.

What does that tell us about why we have godless, corrupt, lawless leaders in the USA today?

We get the leaders we deserve. Our leaders simply reflect the spiritual condition of the nation in general.

What can we do about our national spiritual condition?

Pray that it would change (revival). Make sure we are not part of the problem, that we are solid in a biblical worldview and growing in the Lord. Do what we can to help everyone in our circle of influence to grow closer to the Lord.

v24 – What does the titles used here for God tell us about Him?

The LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: God now addresses Judah, introducing Himself with titles showing His power and majesty. He is the LORD of hosts, "hosts" referring to the armies of heaven. He is the Mighty One of Israel, whom it is futile to oppose. The title itself is a wake-up call.

- As Lord of hosts, He is a Warrior with angels as mighty soldiers at His disposal in the battle against the wicked.
- The use of God's battle name signifies little good when He uses it in reference to His people. It indicates that He is dealing with His people as His enemies.

What will God do about those who oppose Him?

I will rid Myself of My adversaries: The problem with the leaders and people of Judah was that they had set themselves as adversaries of the LORD. They were acting like His enemies. They were putting themselves in the path of judgment. They would find the hand of the Lord against them, instead of for them.

v25-26 – What would God thoroughly purge away?

And thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy: dross and alloy are impurities in metal. God promises to "turn up the heat" and refine Judah, taking away their impurities. His goal is not to destroy; instead, He says, *I will restore* (v26). God will purify Jerusalem, to the point where *afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city* (v26).

v27 – What will come with the redemption of Judah?

Zion shall be redeemed with justice: God's redemption and restoration are always done with justice and righteousness. He never saves or redeems at the expense of His justice and righteousness.

v28 – What will become of those who oppose God when He redeems Judah?

They will be destroyed and consumed. It is never a good idea to find yourself in opposition to your Creator and this is especially the case when Israel is redeemed.

v29 – Why would Judah be ashamed of the terebinth trees?

Terebinth trees were sites of pagan worship which idol-loving Judah kept among them. When Zion is redeemed, they will be ashamed of their former idolatries.

- God promised He would give Judah the gift of shame and embarrassment over sin again.
- Sacred trees were part in the Canaanite fertility cult ...deciduous trees like the terebinth may have symbolized the death and rebirth of the god.

What applications come to mind from our discussion today?

- Our religious rituals and ceremonies provoke God to anger against us if we're not fully surrendered to Him.
- God will not even hear our prayers if we are not obedient to Him.
- Our faith in God is a reasonable faith
- God gifted us with a capacity to reason, use it!
- There are blessings for being obedient to God and consequences for rebelling against Him
- Our bad leaders are a consequence for our spiritual condition... work to turn that around!
- Justice will be done and those who oppose God will be destroyed.