

Chastening & Mercy

Isaiah 48

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**BIG BEND
BIBLE
FELLOWSHIP**

Isaiah 48:1-8 – The Lord sees the hard hearts (NIV)

“Listen to this, you descendants of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel and come from the line of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of the Lord and invoke the God of Israel— but not in truth or righteousness—² you who call yourselves citizens of the holy city and claim to rely on the God of Israel— the Lord Almighty is his name: ³ I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. ⁴ For I knew how stubborn you were; your neck muscles were iron, your forehead was bronze. ⁵ Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, ‘My images brought them about; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.’ ⁶ You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them? ‘From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you. ⁷ They are created now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today. So you cannot say, ‘Yes, I knew of them.’ ⁸ You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ears have not been open. Well do I know how treacherous you are; you were called a rebel from birth.

v1 – Why does God refer to Israel as the *House of Jacob*?

Judah should take notice of this opening statement. The name *Jacob* essentially meaning “*deceiver, cheater*” and thus they only have the name of Israel, not the character of *Israel*, which means “*governed by God.*”

What is significant about God reminding Judah of their tribal heritage?

The second statement of Isaiah 48 isn’t any more complimentary to the southern kingdom of Judah. God reminded them of their tribal ancestor, Judah, who was noted for his cruelty (Genesis 37:26-27) and immorality (Genesis 38).

v1-2 – How did God point out Judah’s hypocrisy?

Who swear by the name of the LORD...but not in truth or in righteousness: God exposed the sin of His people. They took His name, identified with the holy city (v2), and gave the appearance that they did lean on the God of Israel. Yet

it was only image, not reality, and God saw through the image to the reality.

Has hypocrisy been a problem in the church?

Jesus certainly pointed out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and those who made a public show of their piety.

- In Acts 5:1-10, two disciples are exposed for pretending to be more generous than they were.
- Peter is charged with leading a group of hypocrites in their treatment of Gentile believers (Galatians 2:13).

Therefore, hypocrites do exist among professing Christians. If even an apostle may be guilty of hypocrisy, there is no reason to believe “ordinary” Christians will be free from it.

- So, we need to be on our guard we are not tempted.

Who are the worst Christian hypocrites?

“Professing” Christians... not everyone who claims to be a Christian is truly a Christian.

- Those who truly belong to Christ will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
- Jesus’ parable of the seed and the soils in Matthew 13 shows that not all professions of faith are genuine.
- Many who profess to belong to Him will be stunned when He tells them, “*I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!*” (Matthew 7:23).

So, is the unbeliever’s accusation that all Christians are hypocrites true?

We all fall short of the glory of God so we are all hypocrites to some degree. But don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater...

- There are Christians who pretend to be more holy than they are, but this does not characterize all Christians.
- No Christian is perfectly Christ-like. However, many Christians genuinely seek to live the Christian life relying on the Holy Spirit to convict, change, and empower them.
- Making a mistake and failing to reach perfection in this life is not the same thing as being a hypocrite.
- All Christians are forgiven, even the sin of hypocrisy.

v3 – How did God reveal Himself to Judah through His prophets?

I have declared the former things from the beginning.... Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass: The LORD has shown Israel His power to declare the future in predictive prophecy. Only our Creator-God who is outside the confines of time can do that.

v4 – Why did God reveal Himself through prophecy?

He did this because *I knew that you were obstinate...* knowing Israel's love of compromising with the world in their idolatry, He gave them irrefutable evidence that He was not like the idols.

- Ultimately, the purpose of prophecy is to reveal Jesus Christ to the world...

Revelation 19:10 – *For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*

Why was Israel so stubborn in their rebellion?

It reflects the natural sin nature of people...

Jeremiah 17:9 – *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?*

“Stubborn as a mule” is a well-known idiom...

Psalm 32:9 – *Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle.*

With this in mind, we must learn to yield and be pliable in God's hands. It's not our wish for Him to use the bit and bridle on us.

What does God think of stubbornness?

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 – *If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them... Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you*

It is so serious a sin that it was punishable by death in the Law. Stubbornness and defiance of God and His ordained authority is a serious offense, one that can spread like poison throughout a community. The Mosaic Law against stubbornness was designed to stop that spread.

What is the ultimate consequence for persisting in stubbornness?

God will eventually judge the obstinate over to the hardness of their hearts and no longer plead with them.

Romans 2:5 – *Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.*

v5 – How did God's prophecies expose the powerlessness of their idol worship?

Lest you should say: Their idols couldn't do what God did. So, Judah was without excuse. They knew the greatness and power of God, yet they still lived with only a religious image, without a spiritual reality.

v6 – What revealed the irrationality of Judah?

You have heard; see all this. And will you not declare it? It was as if the LORD was amazed that His people had seen all of His great power and glory, yet they still stood in stubborn rebellion against Him.

v7 – How could Judah claim to know what God revealed before God revealed them?

Judah was dismissing God's prophecies as not being significant. That is how people treat God's prophetic Word today... it was all written after the fact, or was self-fulfilling prophecy or just Nostradamus-like prognostications... so general that it could apply to any outcome.

v8 – Did God expect Judah to be rebellious?

For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and were called a transgressor from the womb: Certainly, the LORD stated the reason why His people were so deeply sinful. They were sinners from the womb, so their sinfulness was deeply rooted.

What makes all people rebellious sinners?

We inherited a sin nature because we descend from Adam who generated a sin nature when he exercised his free will:

Romans 5:12 – *just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*

It isn't our individual acts of sin that make us sinners; it is our descent from Adam. Our individual acts of sin merely prove that each of us is a transgressor from the womb.

Isaiah 48:9-22 – The Lord's mercy to the undeserving

⁹ *For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to destroy you completely.* ¹⁰ *See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.* ¹¹ *For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.* ¹² *“Listen to me, Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last.* ¹³ *My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together.* ¹⁴ *“Come together, all of you, and listen: Which of the idols has foretold these things? The Lord's chosen ally will carry out his purpose against Babylon; his arm will be against the Babylonians.* ¹⁵ *I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him. I will bring him, and he will succeed in his mission.*

¹⁶ “Come near me and listen to this: “From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there.” And now the Sovereign Lord has sent me, endowed with his Spirit. ¹⁷ This is what the Lord says— your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. ¹⁸ If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your well-being like the waves of the sea. ¹⁹ Your descendants would have been like the sand, your children like its numberless grains; their name would never be blotted out nor destroyed from before me.” ²⁰ Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it out to the ends of the earth; say, “The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob.” ²¹ They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and water gushed out. ²² “There is no peace,” says the Lord, “for the wicked.”

v9 – Why would God defer His anger over Judah’s rebellion?

For My name’s sake I will defer My anger: It isn’t because Israel deserves mercy; indeed, mercy can never be deserved. God gives it to glorify Himself and to further His eternal purpose.

v10-11 – Why had a disobedient Israel felt refining fires from the Lord?

For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it: Again, it was for the sake and honor and glory of the LORD.

Does it bother us to know that God allows trials and His refining fires in our lives for His own sake?

We should remember that we are not at the center of the universe, but God is. Everything He does and allows furthers His eternal purpose.

v12 – What is the significance of God being the first and last?

God is first, the Creator. He is also the last, there will be a culmination to history when justice will be universally realized. The course of history and its resolution are for His glory and to further His praise.

v13 – What is the significance of God being the Creator?

He made everything so He owns it all. The sooner we realize that and embrace it, the better off we’ll be.

v14 – Who does the Lord love?

Those who have declared the great things God has done, praising Him. But God loves us even before we become His witnesses and praise Him...

Romans 5:8 – *God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Though the LORD is the God of all glory and power, He is not some kind of narcissist. God is motivated by love for His people.

What should motivate us to love and obey the Lord?

Out of gratitude for His love for us. Our love of God fulfills our purpose... We were designed to obey and praise our Creator.

How is God punishing Babylon linked to His love for Judah?

It is the love of the Lord for His people that results in His punishing this nation that set itself against His people. This is the same love that allows the refining fires to touch His people.

v15 – How will those who God has called prosper?

God will equip all who He calls to be successful in what He has called them to do. As God called Israel to be His people, this will eventually come to fruition during the Millennial Kingdom.

v16 – Who did the Lord God and His Spirit send?

This is the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah Himself speaking. The Messiah is pleading with His people.

While this is clearly the Son of God speaking here, who was generally speaking as God before?

It could have been any of the persons of the Godhead...

Deuteronomy 6:4 – *Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!*

Certainly, the Holy Spirit is generally the One who inspired at least the prophetic Word of God...

2 Peter 1:21 – *prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*

Jesus said the Holy Spirit would be the One to help us remember all He told us...

John 14:26 – *the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*

How is it the Lord has not spoken in secret?

God has revealed Himself through His prophets. His boldness in His revelations to us should leave no doubt about Him.

Amos 3:7 – *Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.*

v17 – What does the Son of God do for Judah?

He teaches them how to *profit* (NKJV), *what is best* for them (NIV) and *the way* they should go.

How is Jesus the way?

John 14:6 – *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

The only way to have eternal life in the presence of our Creator is to accept the sin-penalty payment Jesus made on the cross on our behalf. Who wouldn't accept this? Only those who in their pride have stubbornly held on to the salvation-by-works doctrine of demons.

v18 – What does God lament here?

Oh, that you had heeded My commandments: In light of His power and love for Israel, God laments their unfulfilled potential, unfulfilled because of their disobedience.

How could Judah's peace be like a river?

If they had only obeyed, then their peace would have been flowing, bountiful, and life-giving as a river.

How could their righteousness be like waves of the sea?

If they had obeyed God, their righteousness as certain, as unending, as reliable as the sea.

v19 – How could their descendants be like the sand?

If they had only obeyed, then their descendants would be as numerous and as dense in population as the sand.

But didn't God promise Abraham's that his descendants would be as the sand on the seashore?

Genesis 22:15-17 – *the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son— blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore*

That would be the case eventually, physically during the Millennial Kingdom and spiritually in eternity which would include the church. But when Israel was in rebellion, that was not the case.

Who is it whose name would never be blotted out nor destroyed from before Me?

Those who are obedient by embracing The Way God made for us to spend eternity with Him.

What is the principle in obedience to God that we can apply to our own lives?

It is sobering to think what unfulfilled potential we have, and what disobedience or unbelief keeps us from everything God has for us.

v20 – What could Judah look forward to?

Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing: Their deliverance from Babylonian captivity... Despite Israel's disobedience and unfulfilled potential, the LORD still loves them and will still free them from their captivity in Babylon.

What should Israel proclaim to the end of the earth?

That *the Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob*. The whole world should know how great and merciful God is.

v21 – What else should Israel tell the world about?

God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, leading them and supplying their needs.

v22 – What should Israel proclaim along with God's deliverance?

That there are consequences for not embracing God's way... *There is no peace,*” says the LORD, *“for the wicked.* Hand in hand with praise for the greatness of the LORD is a contrast — the destined misery for the wicked.

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- Hypocrisy is a temptation... resist!
- God reveals Himself through Bible prophecy... ignoring His prophetic Word results in an incomplete understanding of who He is.
- We have inherited natural rebelliousness... thank God He made a way for us to overcome it!
- Our purpose is to glorify God... so we should make it our practice every day.
- The more we obey God, the more of His blessings we will experience.

The broad section of Isaiah 40 through 48 focused on the promise of God's deliverance of His people from their captivity in Babylon, and the specific prediction of the Gentile king who would deliver them, Cyrus. Through the section, God shows that His desire to deliver His people proves His love, His ability to deliver His people proves His power, and His prophetic knowledge of the deliverer proves His uniqueness among all gods. Starting with Isaiah chapter 49, there is no longer a mention of Cyrus, now the focus is on the ultimate deliverer, the Messiah. Though there is still reference to the deliverance from Babylon's captivity, the real focus is on the ultimate deliverance the Messiah will bring.