

### God Denounces Rebellion and Hypocrisy

#### Isaiah 1:1-17

Isaiah 1:1-9 - *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.* <sup>2</sup> *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.* <sup>3</sup> *The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know. My people do not consider."* <sup>4</sup> *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.* <sup>5</sup> *Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints.* <sup>6</sup> *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.* <sup>7</sup> *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.* <sup>8</sup> *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.* <sup>9</sup> *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."*

#### Background Notes

The book of Isaiah is like a miniature Bible. There are 66 books in the Bible; there are 66 chapters in Isaiah. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. Isaiah is clearly divided into two major sections, with 39 chapters in the first part and 27 chapters in the second part.

The first 39 chapters, like the Old Testament, have a lot about the judgment of God because of sin. The second 27 chapters, like the New Testament, have a message of hope and consolation because of the coming Messiah.

Is this interesting structure part of the inspiration of the book of Isaiah? No, because the original text of the Bible was not divided into chapters and verses! Chapter divisions were made much later. So while this idea might help to remember the structure of Isaiah, the division of 66 chapters is not part of the inspiration of Isaiah.

Of all the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah is the most comprehensive in range. His themes reach back to the eternal councils of God and the creation of the universe (chapters 42 & 45), and they look forward to the time when God will create a new heavens and a new earth (chapters 65 & 66). Isaiah is universal in scope because all nations of the earth come into view in his prophecy.

The major theme of Isaiah is Israel's Messiah. Thus there is more about the Person and work of Christ in the book of Isaiah than in any of the other prophetic books of the Old Testament. As a result, Isaiah has been called the evangelical prophet, and his book has sometimes been called the "Gospel of Isaiah."

Isaiah had a long ministry - at least 50 years. Verse 1 tells us that his ministry spanned the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. During Isaiah's time the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrian Empire, in 722 BC. Isaiah's ministry was primarily directed to the southern kingdom of Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital city. His ministry also reached to all of the northern kingdom of Israel, especially before the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God denounces the rebellious actions of His people.

The first half of Isaiah 1 sounds like the Lord was bringing His people into court because He had a lawsuit against them. The people had broken the covenant that God had made with them. Heaven and earth were called on to be a witness of the Lord's just indictment of His people. He had brought them up as a good Father raises His sons, but they had rebelled against Him (v2). Even domesticated animals, like oxen or the stubborn and stupid donkey, showed more sense and obedience to their masters than God's people did to the Lord. *"The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know; My people do not consider"* (v3).

The people of Judah had not only sinned and acted corruptly, but they had actually despised the Holy One of Israel. *"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"* (v4).

This title of the Lord, *"The Holy One of Israel,"* is used 25 times in the book of Isaiah. It contrasts the people's sin with the holiness of God. There would be consequences for breaking God's covenant. The consequences were spelled out when the covenant was written down in Deuteronomy 28.

So verses 5-9 described how God's people would be disciplined for their continued rebellion and sin. God would allow their enemies to invade the land, and beat and bruise His people. They would be like a victim with untreated wounds. *"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"* (v6).

Their cities would be burned and their land would become desolate. *"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"* (v7).

Enemy forces would overrun their military defenses, and their situation would be as if they were sheltering in a little hut in a vineyard or cucumber field: *“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” (v8).*

In fact, it was only by God’s grace that a small remnant of survivors would be left, or they would have been completely destroyed, just like the utter destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: *“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” (v9).*

All of these predictions took place when the Assyrians overran the northern kingdom of Israel, and then when the Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom of Judah.

Just as God had to denounce the rebellious actions of the people in the Old Testament, so He denounces the rebellious actions of His people today. Listen to James 4:8, which is addressed to believers: *“Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”* Read the whole book of James in this connection. God denounces the rebellious actions of His people.

## **2. God despises the religious motions of His people.**

Isaiah 1:10-15 – *“Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah: <sup>11</sup> “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. <sup>12</sup> “When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. <sup>15</sup> 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.”*

Verse 10 reveals that the people of Judah had turned so far away from the Lord that they were actually likened to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah! And because their hearts were not right with the Lord, the sacrifices they made to Him were unacceptable.

These verses do not mean that the Lord was setting aside the Temple and the sacrificial system that He Himself had set up. No! He was telling the people that they were just going through traditional religious activity when they brought their sacrifices. They didn’t really care about the Lord at all! Their hearts were far from Him, and therefore He despised their sacrifices. Because they despised the Holy One of Israel (v4), their hypocritical sacrifices were unacceptable. *“I do not*

*delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats” (v11). And, “Bring no more futile sacrifices. Incense is an abomination to Me. I hate your new moons and your appointed feasts” (v13-14).*

**God hates hypocrisy** - then and today! When people just go through religious motions, like going to church to impress people, or because it's the “socially acceptable” thing to do, or in some cases even to cover up wrongdoing, God **hates** that. Remember what the Lord said to the Pharisees? *“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, and in vain they worship Me” (Mark 7:6-7).*

I trust you're not just going to church out of tradition, or thinking you're worshiping God when you're really only observing or doing religious activities. God despises the religious motions of His people.

## **Practical Application**

### **Make sure you are washed and clean!**

Isaiah 1:16-17 - *“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil. <sup>17</sup> Learn to do good. Seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.”*

This was the command from the Lord to all those who called themselves God's people - but their hearts were far from the Lord because of their rebellious actions and their charade of religious activities. Is that your condition today? Do you consider yourself to be one of God's people - but your heart is not right with the Lord?

Is it possible that you're not even a true believer, and you're just going through the motions of church or Christian activities? If so, you need the “bath” – you need the washing of salvation. Trust Christ as your personal Savior. He died on the cross to provide a way of salvation – to make you clean. Don't delay this decision. Make sure you are washed and clean (v16).

Maybe you're a believer, but you're far away from the Lord right now. Maybe there's a secret sin in your life that's keeping you from fellowship with the Lord. Read 1 John 1:9, and come to the Lord for cleansing and restoration.

**Make sure you are washed and clean!**