

ISAIAH_1

Judah's Spiritual Condition from A Holy God's Perspective

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The height of Israel's glory as a nation was gained over a period of 120 years. Saul reigned for 40 years, David for 40 years, and Solomon for 40 years. However, after the death of Solomon, the Kingdom was divided because of Solomon's idolatry: Ten tribes forming the Northern Kingdom, called **Israel**; with Judah and Benjamin forming the Southern Kingdom, called **Judah**.

The Northern Kingdom had 19 kings, none of which were considered righteous, and the Kingdom only lasted a little over 200 years, and was then destroyed by Assyria in 721 B.C.

The dividing of Solomon's Kingdom and the ultimate destruction of the Northern Kingdom was a punishment from God for the apostasy of the people, which was initiated by Solomon.

1 Kings 11:10-12 – “He had warned Solomon specifically about worshiping other gods, but Solomon did not listen to the Lord's command. So now the Lord said to him, ‘Since you have not kept my covenant and have disobeyed my decrees, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants. But for the sake of your father, David, I will not do this while you are still alive. I will take the kingdom away from your son.’” (NLT)

The destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was a definite object lesson to the Southern Kingdom of Judah that God is the sovereign LORD and judge of all the nations of the earth.

The Southern Kingdom had 20 kings, with only 5 being considered righteous by God; and it lasted a little over 300 years and was eventually destroyed by Babylon, about 600 B.C.

God's punishment would prove to the world that God not only speaks to the behavior of nations, He also watches over His Word and unless people repent, He fulfills His Word.

I. Isaiah the Prophet

Isaiah was raised up as a prophet, serving the LORD in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, at a time when the Northern Kingdom of Israel had already been destroyed by the Assyrians.

Isaiah 1:1 – “These are the visions that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. He saw these visions during the years when Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah.” (NLT)

Isaiah is called the Messianic Prophet because he embraced the perspective that the Jewish nation was to be a Messianic Nation to the world. Rabbinic tradition tells us that Isaiah's father, Amoz, was the brother of king Amaziah. This would make Isaiah the first cousin to king Uzziah, and the grandson of king Joash, and thus, a man of royal blood.

Isaiah is quoted at least 50 times in the New Testament, more than any other prophet, and is alluded to over 250 times. His preaching along with the preaching of the prophet Micah helped stimulate the partial revival led by the godly King Hezekiah.

The Talmud informs us of Isaiah's death. It tells us that Isaiah resisted Manasseh's idolatrous decrees, and was fastened between two planks, and “sawn asunder.” He may have been referenced in Hebrews 11:37.

By way of background, the Assyrian Empire continued its expansion and under the rule of Jehu, King of Israel, about 150 years before the days of Isaiah. And Assyria carried the Northern

Kingdom of Israel away into captivity. However, while Isaiah was still a young man, the Southern Kingdom of Judah had begun to pay tribute to Assyria.

Then, a few years later, the Assyrians came into Judah, destroyed 46 walled cities and carried away about 200,000 captives. Judah continued to be threatened by the Assyrian army until they were finally stopped by God at the walls of Jerusalem, when Isaiah was an old man.

The visions Isaiah “saw” came to him by way of revelation from God. Such a revelation may be a vision in the narrower sense, but it may also be more general, as described in Amos 1:1 and in Habakkuk 1:1. The vision was not something which Isaiah saw all at once in its entirety, but it came to him in a number of revelations.

II. God’s Indictment of Judah and Jerusalem

All creation, both heaven and earth are called upon to bear witness to the trial God, the Holy prosecutor and Judge, has convened against Judah. And this is not the first time God has called for His creation to bear witness.

Deut. 4:26 – “Today I call on heaven and earth as witnesses against you. If you break my covenant, you will quickly disappear from the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy. You will live there only a short time; then you will be utterly destroyed.” (NLT)

Deut. 30:19 – “Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!” (NLT)

Isaiah 1:2-3 – “Listen, O heavens! Pay attention, earth! This is what the Lord says: ‘The children I raised and cared for have rebelled against me. Even an ox knows its owner, and a donkey recognizes its master’s care— but Israel doesn’t know its master. My people don’t recognize my care for them.’” (NLT)

Here you have Adam, in the beginning, with the amazing intellectual understanding enough to name all of the animals and yet what a dumbing-down process must have taken place. Now, an ox and a donkey have a better knowledge of their master than God’s peculiar people have toward their Creator. Paul explains it in the New Testament.

Eph. 4:18 – “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.” (NIV)

The implication is that knowledge comes from God alone, and when an individual or a nation is without God, the source of knowledge and truth, he has no knowledge but is in darkness and ignorance.

Now, Jerusalem was the capital city of the southern kingdom of Judah. Isaiah also calls it Ariel (an altar covered in blood) and the city of righteousness. The children and descendants of Israel had a covenant relationship with God. To deny and break that covenant was to cut themselves off from God’s care and protection and to make themselves vulnerable to the domination of their rebellious nature, which produces destructive consequences.

God is addressing His covenant people as His “children,” the people He adopted as His own when they were a small and insignificant people. He blessed and multiplied them and cared for them through thick and thin. Giving them holy Laws, statutes, and ordinances that set them apart from

all the nations of the earth. Thus, their rebellion and ingratitude stands out all the more when you realize they are not just a rebellious nation, but rebellious sons.

They were rebellious against the most wise and loving person in the universe. You may wonder how Israel could be the chosen people of God and yet be so inept when it comes to spiritual reality. The answer is summed up by the Apostle Paul, “their election is of grace, not of works.”

You see, our sin separates us from God, but His grace preserves us until His saving power can accomplish in us His divine purpose. Hallelujah!

Now, what does the sinfulness of Judah and Jerusalem really look like?

III. The Sinfulness of Judah and Jerusalem

Isaiah 1:4 – “Oh, what a sinful nation they are— loaded down with a burden of guilt. They are evil people, corrupt children who have rejected the Lord. They have despised the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.” (NLT)

The only way that can happen, where an up and coming generation can actually end up rejecting the Lord, is when they grow up in a religious home led by imperfect parents and then they turn and listen to and buy into the lies the world-system is propagating.

As a nation, we used to know what was right and good, but now we’re just loaded down with guilt and the world around us is screaming: “Don’t force your morals on me.”

Isaiah faced a rebellious and apostate nation. Ever since the time when the kingdom was divided under Jeroboam, calamity and defeat had befallen the people; but you see neither the calamity under Jeroboam nor the prosperity they experienced under Uzziah’s reign ever led to a true repentance. Rather the burden of guilt bears witness to their bondage and the reality is they can’t free themselves. They don’t have the strength – they are slaves to sin.

IV. The Consequences of Allowing Sin to Rule

How can iniquity rest heavily upon a person or a nation? Iniquity itself is something intangible, and thus cannot be a burden in a physical sense. But iniquity brings evil results with it.

Isaiah 1:5-9 – “Why do you continue to invite punishment? Must you rebel forever? Your head is injured, and your heart is sick. You are battered from head to foot— covered with bruises, welts, and infected wounds— without any soothing ointments or bandages. Your country lies in ruins, and your towns are burned. Foreigners plunder your fields before your eyes and destroy everything they see. Beautiful Jerusalem stands abandoned like a watchman’s shelter in a vineyard, like a lean-to in a cucumber field after the harvest, like a helpless city under siege. If the Lord of Heaven’s Armies had not spared a few of us, we would have been wiped out like Sodom, destroyed like Gomorrah.” (NLT)

It’s obvious that further punishment will not bring about a real repentance. Isaiah sees the nation as a body so wounded that there is no place remaining upon which it can be smitten. **Outwardly** (the head – the way we think) is sick and twisted; and **inwardly**, the heart (the spiritual resource of hope) is faint and weak to the point of passing out.

Then Isaiah moves beyond the condition of individuals to the condition of the nation – a land utterly desolate, devoured by strangers. Then he addresses the status of the city of Jerusalem. But for the mercies of the LORD, Jerusalem would have been wiped out like Sodom and

destroyed like Gomorrah. Only the grace of God has averted the complete destruction of the city and preserved alive the people for His good pleasure.

V. The Tender Appeal of the Lord

Isaiah 1:10-19 – “Listen to the Lord, you leaders of “Sodom.” Listen to the law of our God, people of “Gomorrah.” ‘What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?’ says the Lord. ‘I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened cattle. I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to worship me, who asked you to parade through my courts with all your ceremony? Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts; the incense of your offerings disgusts me! As for your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath and your special days for fasting— they are all sinful and false. I want no more of your pious meetings. I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals. They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them! When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not look. Though you offer many prayers, I will not listen, for **your hands are covered with the blood of innocent victims**. Wash yourselves and be clean! Get your sins out of my sight. **Give up** your evil ways. **Learn** to do good. Seek justice. **Help** the oppressed. **Defend** the cause of orphans. **Fight for** the rights of widows. **Come now**, let’s settle this, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, **I will make them** as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool. If you will only **obey me**, you will have plenty to eat.’” (NLT)

The appeal of a Sovereign Creator through His prophet is “listen to My Word.” “Listen to My Torah-instruction.” What is God really after?

Fervor and zeal in prayer are not substitutes for obedience. I believe God is really after character transformation, which only comes by the revelation of God through His Word made alive by the Holy Spirit.

Hosea 6:6-7 – “I want you to **show love**, not offer sacrifices. I want you to **know me** more than I want burnt offerings. But like Adam, you broke my covenant and betrayed my trust.” (NLT)

1 Sam. 15:22 – “But Samuel replied, ‘What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your **obedience to his voice**? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.’” (NLT)

VI. The Certainty of Judgment and the Promise of Salvation

Isaiah 1:20-31 – “But if you turn away and refuse to listen, you will be devoured by the sword of your enemies. I, the Lord, have spoken! See how Jerusalem, once so faithful, has become a prostitute. Once the home of justice and righteousness, she is now filled with murderers. Once like pure silver, you have become like worthless slag. Once so pure, you are now like watered-down wine. Your leaders are rebels, the **companions of thieves**. All of them **love bribes** and **demand payoffs**, but they refuse to defend the cause of orphans or fight for the **rights of widows**. Therefore, the Lord, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the Mighty One of Israel, says, ‘I will take revenge on my enemies and pay back my foes! I will raise my fist against you. I will melt you down and skim off your slag. I will remove all your impurities. Then I will give you good judges again and wise counselors like you used to have. Then Jerusalem will again be called the Home of Justice and the Faithful City.’” Zion will be restored by justice; those who repent will be revived by righteousness. But rebels and sinners will be completely destroyed, and those who desert the Lord will be consumed. You will be ashamed of your idol worship in **groves of sacred oaks**. You will blush because you worshiped in gardens dedicated to idols. You will be like a great tree with withered leaves, like a garden without water. The strongest among you will disappear like straw; their

evil deeds will be the spark that sets it on fire. They and their evil works will burn up together, and no one will be able to put out the fire.” (NLT)

The certainty of judgment is declared by the Lord and then He gives the various reasons: rebel leaders who have become companions of thieves; and leaders who have set their affections on riches and thus love bribes and demand payoffs for themselves, while the rights of widows are overlooked.

Jewish land was held in the family name of the man and when the man died or was killed in battle, the land often reverted to a brother or near relative. In this way the widow was often denied her right to the support of the land.

God had chosen Israel to be His people, but Israel had chosen gardens and groves of trees.

So, God is not going to stand by allowing this kind of behavior to continue unchecked. His righteous character and justice demands judgment. Every rebellious person and those who continually sin will be destroyed.

Paul describes it so clearly in his letter to the church at Rome.

Rom. 1:18-23 – “But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.” (NLT)

You see, forsaking the worship of the true and Living God, men have exalted the creation above God by establishing plots of land and groves of trees as sacred. Even today, people would rather spend time in a beautiful garden on a Sunday morning rather than be in church with others who are worshiping the God of saving grace and mercy, the God who is their only means of salvation.

Amazingly, birds, whales, and snakes are of more value to these people who have strayed from God than the life of a baby, which is what God values.

God’s Word to us is, “‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the LORD. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.’ For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” **Isaiah 1:18-20** (NIV)

God is calling us as individuals and as a nation to consider our ways. His desire is to save us, but the question is “Do we really want to be saved?” Will we as a nation truly repent or will we be destroyed?

2 Chronicles 7:14 – “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” (NIV)