

Book of Isaiah



Chapter 1

Theme: God's charge against the nation Israel

**Michael Fronczak
564 Schaeffer Dr.
Coldwater, Michigan 49036**

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Isaiah 1:1 (KJV)

¹The 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.

Jerusalem is called by more than 30 different names.

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

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 Judeo-Christian tradition that holds that Isaiah also outlived Hezekiah and was sawn asunder by his successor Manasseh with a wooden saw after the prophet had hidden himself in a hollow tree from the angry king. (Bultema) Many think Hebrews 11:37 (they were sawn in two) is a reference to the martyrdom of Isaiah.

Isaiah's prophecies focus on Judah and Jerusalem. His book is called a vision, which suggests that the prophet "saw" (cf. 2:1) mentally and spiritually as well as heard what God communicated to him. This word "vision" also introduces the prophecies of Obadiah, Micah, and Nahum.

Isaiah was familiar with the city of Jerusalem and its temple and royal court. By this time the Northern Kingdom (Israel) was in its final years. The Northern Kingdom fell in 722 B.C. to the Assyrians who were seeking to conquer the entire Syro-Palestine area. Isaiah wrote specifically for the Southern Kingdom (Judah), which would fall to the Babylonian Empire a little more than 100 years later in 586 B.C.¹

First of all, note that this is a vision "concerning Judah and Jerusalem." I am sure that we will not make the mistake of locating either one anywhere in the Western Hemisphere. There is, however, a marvelous application for America today -- one that we need to hear and heed.

"In the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah." Uzziah, the tenth king of Judah, became a leper because he intruded into the holy place, which even a king was not permitted to do. However, Uzziah is classed as a good king. Jotham, his son who followed him, was also a good king. But Ahaz, the grandson of Uzziah, was a bad king. Finally, Hezekiah, the last king mentioned, was a good king. He was the king who asked that his life be prolonged, and God granted his desire. Asking this was probably a mistake on Hezekiah's part, because many bad things took place during his last years that actually were the undoing of the kingdom.²

The book claims Isaiah as its author. His name ("The LORD Saves") summarizes the revelation of the book, namely, that it is Yahweh who saves. Obadiah was the only other writing prophet who described his book as a vision. This unusual title stresses that what Isaiah wrote reflects reality accurately; he saw it. The kings of Judah mentioned ruled from 792-686 B.C.³

¹Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 1:2). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

³Notes on Isaiah, Dr. Thomas L. Constable; <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

These verses are in the form of a covenant lawsuit against Judah. In effect, it is a microcosm of chapters 1-39. The Lord, through His messenger Isaiah, indicted His covenant nation for her breach of the Mosaic Covenant, and offered His complete forgiveness to those who would repent but judgment to those who continued to rebel. In 6:9-13 God pointed out to Isaiah that most of the nation, however, would not repent.⁴

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.

Through v. 23: the chastening (re: Deut 28-29) has been visited upon the land and the time of expulsion is near. The renewal of the Palestinian Covenant of future restoration is included (Isa 1:26-27; 2:1-4).⁵

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.

God begins this prophecy in a majestic manner. This is God's general judgment against Judah. He is calling the world, if you please, to come into the courtroom and listen to the proceedings as He tries His people. God does not do anything in a corner or in the dark. This language is strangely similar to the way Deuteronomy 32 begins: "Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth." When God put the nation Israel in the land, having taken them out of the land of Egypt, He put down the conditions on which He was "homesteading" them in the Promised Land. He called the created intelligences of heaven and earth to witness these conditions.

Now, after five hundred years, God says, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." He is ready to take them out of the land and send them into Babylonian captivity. He calls the created intelligences of heaven and earth to witness that He is just and right in His dealings. His charge against them is rebellion. The condition upon which they were allowed to dwell in the land was obedience. They were disobedient; and, according to the Mosaic Law, when a man had a rebellious son, that son was to be stoned to death. God's charge against them is a serious one. As His children, they had rebelled against the Mosaic Law in this connection. In the Book of Deuteronomy note the law concerning an incorrigible son: "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear" (Deut. 21:18-21).

This was what the Law did with a prodigal son. The crowd that heard Christ tell of the Prodigal Son was dumbfounded when He said that the father told the servant to kill the fatted calf instead of killing the son! When the Prodigal Son got home, he asked his father for

⁴Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 1:2). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵ Notes on Isaiah, Chuck Missler, Koinia House

forgiveness, and even before he finished his confession, his father had thrown his arms around the boy, kissed him, and forgiven him. Instead of stripes, the son was given a wonderful feast. God is not only just, but also merciful; but the rebellion of a son is a serious thing. Scripture has a great deal to say about it.

In order to emphasize His charge and break the tension of the courtroom, God indulges in a bit of humor. I trust that you recognize humor in the Bible -- it will make you enjoy it a great deal more. I think that when we get into eternity and get past the time of sin on earth and are finished with the program God is working out at this present time, we are going to have a good time. I think we are going to have many laughs and enjoy many hilarious situations. It does not hurt Christians to have the right kind of humor. God has put a lot of humor in the Bible. A lady, who was a member of a church I pastored, was upset every time I found humor in the Bible. She would make a trip down the aisle and tell me that I was being irreverent. She has been home with the Lord for a long time, and I do hope she has had a couple of good laughs, because she certainly never had them down here. The fact of the matter is, she acted like she had been weaned on a dill pickle. Unfortunately, she never found humor in this life, and she didn't seem to enjoy the Christian life as God has intended us to enjoy it.⁶

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

This verse is a splendid piece of satire. The two animals that are used for illustrations do not have a reputation for being very intelligent. Neither the ox nor the long-eared donkey has a very high I.Q. The expression "dumb as an ox" is still often used. The donkey does not wear a Phi Beta Kappa key. I should qualify that statement: I admit that I have met a few who do! However, even these animals have intelligence enough to know who feeds them.

A number of folk today do not have intelligence enough to know that God provides for all their needs. They don't know that God feeds them. They do not even recognize that He exists. What a commentary on this sophisticated generation that no longer needs God.⁷

God Himself charged the Israelites with their sin. He called the heavens and earth to witness His indictment against His people (cf. Deut. 30:19; 32:1). His people had not only violated His covenant but common decency and good sense. Isaiah's references to the Mosaic Covenant were less explicit than Jeremiah's were, though both men viewed the covenant as the basis of Israelite life.

It was unthinkable that children should revolt against a loving father who nurtured them. Even stupid oxen and donkeys know their master, but the Israelites did not realize who cared for them. The Israelites made animals look intelligent.⁸

In this type of lawsuit the accuser first established his own innocence in the matter. The LORD, like a parent, did this by noting that the people of Judah, His children (cf. v. 4), had rebelled (cf. "rebels" in v. 28) against Him, who was innocent in the matter. The Hebrew word rendered "rebelled" (pāša') was used in treaties to speak of a vassal state's disobedience to the

⁶ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁷ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁸ Notes on Isaiah, Dr. Thomas L. Constable; <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

covenant made with it by the suzerain nation. Pāša‘ also occurs in 66:24, the final verse in the book.

Even animals know their masters, but the nation Israel did not know and did not understand God, her Master. (Israel, though often referring to the Northern Kingdom, is sometimes, as here, used of the nation of 12 tribes as a whole, and thus includes Judah.) An ox is unusually submissive; in Bible times a donkey was known for its stupidity. Therefore to say Israel was less knowledgeable than these domestic animals was an amazingly strong affirmation of her stupidity. These animals were more aware of their owners and the source of sustenance (manger was a feeding trough for animals) from their owners than were God’s people. Israel did not know God or realize that He was her Provider. By being rebellious (1:2b) the nation failed to carry out God’s commands, which proved they did not really ”understand“ God.⁹

⁴ Ah 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.

We see God as the Judge of all the earth and of His own people Israel. It seems a strange thing to think of God as a judge, because in the thinking of the world today God has been removed from the throne of judgment. He has been divested of His authority. He has been robbed of His regal prerogatives and shorn of His locks as moral ruler of the universe. Israel is described as "a people laden with iniquity." This phrase throws a world of light upon the personal invitation that the Lord Jesus gave in the New Testament. He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Now we know what He meant -- "laden with iniquity." The people of Israel were laden with sin. Today His invitation goes out to those who are laden with sin to bring that burden and load to Him and find rest, the rest of redemption.

In this verse God spells out Israel's condition. They are backslidden, they have turned away from God, and they are a people laden with iniquity. Now He is going to spell out in detail the charge that He has made against them.

This brings to mind the philosophy of human government upon which God operates. This system is presented to us in the Book of Judges, and you see this cycle of the history of human government working itself out in the nation. In the Book of Judges we saw Israel serving God, being blessed of God, and prospering. They began, in their prosperity, to turn away from God, and they finally turned to idolatry. They were in rebellion against God; in fact, they forgot Him. Then God delivered them into the hands of the enemy. In a short time they began to cry out to God for deliverance. When they turned to God, He delivered them from their enemies and put them back in the place of blessing. This picture follows all the way through Scripture, and history corroborates the fact that there are three steps in the downfall of any nation. There is religious apostasy, then moral awfulness, and finally political anarchy. Many people don't pay any attention to the cycle until the stage of political anarchy is reached, and then they cry out that the government should be changed and a new system adopted. Well, the problem is not in the government. The problem in Jerusalem was not in the palace, but the problem was within the temple. The trouble begins when there is spiritual apostasy.¹⁰

⁹Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 1:4). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁰ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

In His lawsuit God elaborated on the sinful condition of the nation. This idea that the nation was sinful (ḥāṭā') occurs a number of times in the book (e.g., cf. "sinned" in 42:24; 43:27 and "continued to sin" in 64:5).

Isaiah spoke of the "sins" (ḥāṭā'îm) of the people (1:18) and noted that the Suffering Servant came to remove "the sin (ḥēṭ') of many" in the nation (53:12). Because of their sin, the people stood guilty before God (cf. Rom. 3:9, 19, KJV). Because they were evildoers, they were corrupt (cf. Rom. 3:10-18 and the word "corrupt" in Gen. 6:12). Their deliberately defiant attitude against God is indicated by the words forsaken . . . spurned, and turned their backs.

As stated in the *Introduction*, the words the Holy One of Israel are used by Isaiah 25 times. This title appropriately contrasts the people's sin with God's holiness.

Though the people had turned their backs on God, in the future He will turn His back on Israel's sin by forgiving her. After Hezekiah was raised from his sickbed, he praised the Lord for placing his sins behind God's back (Isa. 38:17).¹¹

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

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.*

During the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah, they were attacked and pillaged by Israel, Syria, Edom, the Philistines, and Assyria (2 Chronicles 28). *It was written of this period, 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. (2 Chronicles 28:19)*¹²

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.*

Total destruction: Deut 29:22; Amos 9:11; Isa 13; Jer 50.

What God says in these verses is absolutely true. There is moral awfulness and political anarchy, but God is holding back. This still is not the charge that He is bringing against them.¹³

When the covenant people turned their backs on God (v. 4) certain consequences followed (cf. Deut. 28:15-68). Isaiah recounted what was happening to them to help them understand that their difficult times had come because of their disobedience. Isaiah first used the figure of a person who had been beaten and was bruised over his entire body (Isa. 1:5-6). Though these untreated wounds . . . welts, and open sores characterized the nation's spiritual condition, Isaiah was also speaking of her condition militarily. They were beset on all sides by hostile forces and were losing some of their territory to foreign nations (v. 7). They should have realized that these terrible problems had come because of their spiritual condition. Whether Isaiah was describing

¹¹Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 1:4). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹²<https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-1.html>

¹³ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

the soon-coming situation in the Northern Kingdom to be brought about by the Assyrian invasion (in 722 B.C.) or whether he was speaking prophetically of the coming destruction of Judah (586 B.C.) is open to conjecture though it more likely refers to Judah. His words desolate . . . burned, and stripped were written as if the devastation had already happened. Thus he emphasized its certainty.¹⁴

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.

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.

As bad as Judah's state was because of their sin, it could have been worse. It was only by the mercy of God that they survived at all. Sodom and Gomorrah were both totally destroyed, with not even a very small remnant to carry on. Even in the midst of judgment, God showed His mercy to Judah.

In other words, if there had not been a faithful remnant, God would have destroyed Israel as He did Sodom and Gomorrah. But there has always been a remnant of God's people. There is a remnant today: there are Christians scattered throughout the world.¹⁵

The prophet amplified God's charge and proved it by referring to Israel's condition. He lamented that Israel's state was the logical outcome of her behavior.

"The interjection 'ah' [v. 4] (the Hebrew word [*hoy*] is sometimes translated 'woe') was a cry of mourning heard at funerals (see 1 Kings 13:30; Jer. 22:18-19; Amos 5:16). When Isaiah's audience heard this word, images of death must have appeared in their minds."¹⁶

God's people had forsaken the Holy One of Israel, "the transcendent God, who is wholly separate from the frailty and finiteness of Creation (his majesty-holiness), and wholly separate from the sinfulness and defilement of man (his purity-holiness)."³⁷ Israel was consequently experiencing the destructive results of her sin in national disease and in political and social catastrophes (vv. 5-6; cf. 53:4-10; Deut. 27—30). It was customary in Isaiah's day for people to squeeze the puss out of a wound, to pull a cut together with a bandage, and to pour olive oil on sores to aid healing. Isaiah moved from describing Israel as a sick and injured body to a desolate, conquered land (vv. 7-9; cf. Lev. 26; Deut. 28—29). The description "daughter of Zion" (v. 8) emphasizes that God feels about His wayward people as a father feels about his daughter. He loves her, has committed himself to protecting her, and takes pains to guard her from all evil and danger.

Many Israelite families lived in villages but built little shelters in their fields and camped there during the harvest season. After the harvest these little shacks looked pitiful, abandoned, useless, and deteriorating. Unless the LORD of armies had preserved a few faithful in Judah, as

¹⁴Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 1:5). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁵Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

¹⁶Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 15.

He preserved Lot and his family, He would have destroyed the nation as He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 10; cf. Gen. 19; Rom. 9:29).

All the writing prophets except Ezekiel, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah used the title "LORD of Hosts" ("LORD Almighty") to stress that Yahweh has numberless assistants who are ready and able to carry out His bidding (cf. 2 Kings 6:15-18). This is also the first reference in Isaiah to the remnant, the faithful few in Israel who formed a distinct group within the apostate nation. This remnant (lit. "survivor[s]") constitutes a significant group and motif in the book.¹⁷

Quoted by Paul: Rom 9:29.

Mere outward religion condemned: most scathing indictment of religious formalism in Scripture. Cf. Hos 6:6; Amos 4:4; 5:21-25; Micah 6:6-8; Jer 7:4, 21; Ps 50:3-15.

Isaiah then pictured Jerusalem's inhabitants (the Daughter of Zion; cf. Jer. 4:31; Lam. 1:6; 2:13; Micah 1:13; 4:8; Zech. 9:9; and see comments on Lam. 2:1; Zech. 8:3) as being like a shelter in a vineyard or a hut in a melon field. Those were temporary structures built to shade from the sun persons who guarded the crops against thieves and animals. Such huts were usually "alone" and easily attacked. Judah would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah, totally devastated, if it had not been for God's grace in leaving some survivors. (Centuries later Paul quoted this verse in Rom. 9:29.) In fact Judah *was* like those two wicked cities in her sin. (Cf. the mention of both cities in Isa. 1:10, and of Sodom in 3:9; Ezek. 16:46, 48-49; 55-56.) Isaiah's reference to those two cities no doubt reminded some Judahites of the Lord's reference to them in Deuteronomy 29:23.¹⁸

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

Now God is spelling it out. The whole problem is spiritual apostasy.

The prophet laid out two alternatives for the people to choose between in relating to God in their pitiful condition. They could continue to rely on religious ritual (cult) to manipulate God (vv. 10-15), or they could change their ways and live morally and ethically pure lives (vv. 16-17). The choice was theirs (vv. 18-20).

Even though God had not yet destroyed Jerusalem as He had Sodom and Gomorrah, the city was like those corrupt towns in that the people and their rulers had turned from God's holy standard.

"Sodom' and 'Gomorrah' were regarded as the epitome of sinfulness; to say that Jerusalem had become like those cities was a scathing condemnation (Rev. 11:8)."¹⁹

The people needed to heed the instruction (Heb. *torah*) of their God.²⁰

"Sodom" = Jerusalem (Rev 11:18).

¹⁷ Notes on Isaiah, Dr. Thomas L. Constable; <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

¹⁸ Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 1:8). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁹ *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1113.

²⁰ Notes on Isaiah, Dr. Thomas L. Constable; <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

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.

God specifies His charges against His people. He has put His hand upon a definite thing, and He is going to prove that particular point in which they are wrong. He puts His finger on the best thing in Judah, not the worst. He shows them what is exceedingly wrong. Israel has a God-given religion and a God-appointed ritual in a God-constructed temple, but they are wrong in that which represented the best. They are bringing sacrifices and going through the ritual according to the letter of the Law, but their hearts are in rebellion against God. Their religion is not affecting their conduct. Frankly, that is a problem among believers today. A great many of us have reached the place where we have a form of godliness, but we deny the power thereof.²¹

What a sobering thought! 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! Perhaps, in the midst of all their calamity (described in Isaiah 1:5-9), Judah thought the answer was in religious ceremonies, in their ancient version of church attendance and a few dollars in the offering. But if their heart wasn't changed, and humbled, and surrendered to the Lord, it made no difference. Without the right heart, God hated their religious ceremony and service!²²

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

13 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

Even doing that which God has commanded becomes wrong when the heart is not in it and when it does not affect the believer's conduct.

If the Lord Jesus were to come into your church next Sunday, would He commend you? Would He compliment you for your faithfulness to Him? Would He tell you how much He appreciates your attendance at the services and your giving to Him? I think not! The One who has "feet as burnished brass," whose "eyes are as a flame of fire," and from whose mouth there goes "a sharp two-edged sword," would not commend us (cf. [Prov. 5:4](#); [Dan. 10:6](#); [Rev. 1:14-16](#)). I think He would tell most of us that all of our outward form, all of our lovely testimonies and loud professions, are making Him sick. Would he not tell us that we need to repent and come in humility to Him? Surely this is a warning to the churches of America. Fundamentally, our difficulty today is spiritual; and, until the professing church repents and has genuine revival, there is no hope for America.²³

²¹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

²² <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-1.html>

²³ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

“Abomination” = abominable image (Rev 13).

[18 - 31] Entreaty and warning. (The failure of the Church is *greater* than that of Jerusalem: she has had a greater light!)

14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*.

15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

The Israelites tended to fall into a pattern of thinking that religious ritual and their pagan neighbors' worship encouraged. They thought that going through the motions of worshipping God exactly as He specified satisfied Him. They forgot that God intended their ceremonies to be symbolic of their attitude toward Him. Their attitude to Him was more important than their flawless performance of worship rituals. Even their prayers would be ineffective if their attitude to God was not right (v. 15). We have the same problem today. This passage repeats descriptions of the Israelites' worship so often that the reader gets tired of them, just as God did. Hands full of bloodshed (v. 15) is a figure of guilt for abusing others.²⁴

When you spread out your 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.²⁵

The Lord rejected the people's appeal to several aspects of religious ritual-including animal sacrifices (v. 11), incense (v. 13a), festivals and feasts (vv. 12, 13b-14), and prayers (v. 15)-as compensation for their iniquity.

Some people have mistakenly said (from v. 11) that God had not established the sacrificial system. But this is wrong. Isaiah's point is that the people assumed that merely by offering sacrifices at the altar they would be made ceremonially clean before God. Even multiple sacrifices are meaningless (v. 13) and therefore do not please God when the "worshiper" does not bring his life into conformity with God's standards. Also the careful observance of monthly offerings (New Moons; cf. Num. 28:11-14) and Sabbaths (weekly as well as annual Sabbaths on the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles, Lev. 16:31; 23:34, 39) were meaningless to God when they were not done with the proper attitude. The same was true of their assemblies on the Sabbath (Lev. 23:3), and the festivals and feasts including the Passover (Lev. 23:4-7), the Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:15-21), the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24), the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-27), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34). Such observances God called evil because they were carried out hypocritically, with sinful hearts (cf. Isa. 1:4). Therefore those national gatherings, rather than pleasing God, were an obnoxious burden to Him (v. 14).

In addition, the people's many prayers were ineffective because of their guilt (v. 15). The words spread out your hands denoted asking for help (cf. 1 Kings 8:22; Lam. 1:17). Those hands, however, were full of blood (Isa. 1:15). By treating the needy unfairly (cf. vv. 16-17), the people were like a murderer spreading out his bloodstained hands to God in prayer. This spiritual

²⁴ Notes on Isaiah, Dr. Thomas L. Constable; <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.studyight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-1.html>

condition made Judah's religious ritual ludicrous. Obviously God would never listen to (i.e., answer) such prayers! (cf. Ps. 66:18) Inward righteousness must accompany outward ritual for that ritual to mean anything to God.²⁶

16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

Many centuries later, the apostle John would repeat Isaiah's message: 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? (1 John 4:20) 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).²⁷

17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

God says, "You are nothing in the world but a bunch of phonies. You come into My presence as if you are really genuine. You go through the sacrifices, but they have become absolutely meaningless to you." God has spelled out His charge against them. They are guilty of apostasy. It has led to moral awfulness and to political anarchy in the nation. God has called Israel into court and has proved His charge against them. Israel is like a prisoner standing at the bar waiting for the sentence of judgment. God can now move in to judge them.

But even at this late date God is willing to settle the case out of court. He says to Israel, "Don't go into court with Me, because you are going to lose." The Judge has something else to say, and we stand amazed and aghast at what He says next:²⁸

Having shown what God does not want, Isaiah now told the people what He does want (cf. 66:1-4, 17). His demands are short and simple in contrast to the elaborate rituals described above (cf. Deut. 10:12-13; Mic. 6:8). Three negative commands relate to the past and five positive ones to the future. Washing (v. 16) is symbolic of repenting (cf. Acts 2:38; 13:24; Titus 3:5).²⁹

"The passage clearly reveals a concern over the social injustices of the time. Such social injustices, however, could only be corrected by a change of heart upon the part of individuals."³⁰

18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Come now, no season can be better. If ye tardy till you're better, ye will never come at all. Come now; you may never have another warning; the heart may never be so tender as it is to-day.

²⁶Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 1:11). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²⁷<https://www.study-light.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-1.html>

²⁸Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

²⁹Notes on Isaiah, Dr. Thomas L. Constable; <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

³⁰Young, 1:74.

Come now; no other eyes may ever weep over you; no other heart may ever agonize for your salvation. Come now, now, now, for tomorrow you may never know in this world. Death may have sealed your fate, and the once filthy may remain filthy still. Come now; for to-morrow thy heart may become harder than stone, and God may give thee up. Come now; it is Gods time; to-morrow is the devils time. To-day if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, when your fathers tempted me and proved me in the wilderness and saw my works. Come now. Why delay to be happy? Would you put off your wedding-day? Will you postpone the hour when you are pardoned and delivered? Come now: the bowels of Jehovah yearn for you. The eye of your father sees you afar off, and he runs to meet you. Come now; the church is praying for you; these are revival times; ministers are more in earnest. (Spurgeon)

God is saying to Judah, "Do not force Me to render sentence. Settle your case out of court." In Matthew 5:25 the Lord Jesus said, "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him..." -- don't wait until he takes you to court. God says that He has a secret formula, a divine alchemy, a potent prescription, a powerful potion, a heavenly elixir that will take out sin. It is not a secret formula like the newest bomb, but it is more potent. You will find it in Isaiah 53 as the One who was more marred, who suffered more, who died differently, who was wounded for our transgressions. Because He paid the penalty, the Judge is able now to extend mercy to us. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, keeps on cleansing from all sin.

This is God's charge against His people, and this is the basis on which they may turn to Him. If they will turn to Him, He will preserve the nation -- He will give them almost one hundred years -- then if they don't turn to Him and change their ways, He will send them into captivity.

We see an application of this to our own country. In my beloved country I see political anarchy. It is obvious to most of us that men cannot solve the problems of this nation, and certainly not of the world.

The historian, Gibbon, gives five reasons for the decline of the Roman Empire in his book, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. As the first step towards decline, he lists the undermining of the dignity and the sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society. The second step includes higher and higher taxes and the spending of public money for free bread and circuses for the populace. The third was the mad craze for pleasure and sports becoming every year more exciting, more brutal, and more immoral. The fourth step was the building of great armaments when the real enemy was within: the decay of individual responsibility. The fifth was the decay of religion, fading into mere form, losing touch with life, and losing power to guide the people.

You see, a nation's decline begins with spiritual apostasy, which is followed by moral awfulness, and results in political anarchy.

Is there spiritual apostasy in this land of ours? Every informed Christian is aware that modernism has taken over most of the great denominations of America today; and, in this dire day, modernism, by its own confession, has failed. Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the mouthpieces of liberalism, is quoted as saying that liberal Protestantism has been inclined to sacrifice every characteristic Christian insight if only it could thereby prove itself intellectually respectable, but that liberalism finds itself unable to cope with the tragic experiences of our day.³¹

³¹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

“Reason together” = “reach an understanding.”
Grace includes full amnesty.

19 If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

20 But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

The government of God and the grace of God are two aspects emphasized in the Book of Isaiah. During the remainder of chapter 1 God is attempting to move Judah back to Himself. He is giving the people a warning.³²

The Lord now challenged Israel to a formal trial. In the light of Israel's condition (vv. 2-17), there was only one reasonable course of action. The Israelites could continue as they were and be destroyed, or submit to God's will and be blessed. If they were disposed to consent and obey, God would again bless them with fertility (cf. v. 3). If they decided to refuse and rebel, He would allow their enemies to defeat and destroy them. Behavioral change, the fruit of repentance, needed to demonstrate an attitude of repentance. It always does.³³

The Lord offered complete forgiveness to the repentant, but promised judgment on the rebels who continued to reject Him. The people had the mistaken idea that they could live any way they pleased so long as they made restitution in the sacrificial system. But instead of trusting in religious ritual (vv. 10-15) the people were to obey God and have the right attitudes toward Him and the right actions toward others.

The people needed to be clean inwardly (like a murderer washing his bloodstained hands). And they needed to replace their evil (cf. v. 13) deeds with right actions. As stipulated in the Mosaic Covenant they needed to evidence their trust in and obedience to the Lord by helping needy people—the oppressed . . . the fatherless, and the widow (cf. v. 23; 10:1-2; Deut. 24:17, 19-21; 26:12; 27:19).

God then invited the sinful people to come to their senses (Isa. 1:18) and admit they had been wrong in their attitudes and practices. The invitation Come now, let us reason together was more than a call for negotiations between the people and God. The word “reason” (yāqāḥ) is a law term used of arguing, convincing, or deciding a case in court. The people were to be convinced by their argumentation with God that He was right and they were wrong about their condition. (Other court terms in this chapter are justice . . . defend, and plead, v. 17.) If they acknowledged the depth of their sins—that their iniquities were like blood-colored stains on their souls (scarlet, a red dye made from a worm, and crimson, red-colored cloth)—then God in His grace would cleanse them, making them spiritually white like snow or wool. Acknowledgment of sin was to precede God's cleansing. And the same is true today.

The obedient (v. 19) would eat the best from the land, that is, they would have bountiful crops as promised in the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28:3-6, 11). By contrast, those who refused to

³² Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

³³ Notes on Isaiah, Dr. Thomas L. Constable; <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

turn to God (rebels; cf. Isa. 1:23, 28) would be defeated by enemies (devoured by the sword, v. 20; Deut. 28:45-57). This was certain for the . . . LORD has spoken (cf. Isa. 40:5; 58:14).³⁴

21 How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

While God's invitation to repent was genuine (vv. 16-20), the nation had so thoroughly departed from Him that repentance was not forthcoming and discipline was inevitable. The prophet bemoaned the depth of Israel's apostasy and announced that the Lord would have to purify His people in the furnace of affliction before they would become what He intended them to be. The structural form of verses 21-26 is palistrophic, with verses 23 and 24 forming the center and focal point of the chiasm.³⁵

“Harlot:” Ex 34:15; Hos 1:2; Isa 50:1; 54:1.

The contrast between the original condition of Jerusalem under David and the early years of Solomon's reign with the condition of the people in Isaiah's day is detailed. At one time Jerusalem was considered faithful like a devoted wife. Now, however, the city was a harlot. The imagery of prostitution is common in the prophetic books (esp. Jer. and Hosea). This figure is based on the fact that in marriage, as in the relationship between God and Israel, a covenant was made. When a person becomes a prostitute he or she mars the marriage covenant. In the same way when a person left the true God for idols he marred his covenant with the Lord.

Jerusalem had been known for executive justice and upholding righteousness. “Justice” refers to proper judicial procedures, and “righteousness” is the behavior of those who sought this standard. (Cf. these two in Prov. 8:20; Isa.

5:7; 28:17; Amos 5:7.) But now instead of righteousness “living,” “murderers were present. “Murderers” may refer to those who took advantage of the needy (cf. Isa. 1:23 and comments on v. 15).³⁶

22 Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water:

23 Thy princes *are* rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

Spiritual rot had penetrated even the capital of Israel, and what marked Jerusalem characterized the whole nation. The people, seen in the personification of their capital, who had formerly been devoted to the Lord, had become unfaithful to Him by pursuing other gods. Former glories were now tarnished, and what was once strong was now weak. The leaders of the nation, who formerly had been pure and valuable, were now adulterated and cheap. Rather than serving the

³⁴Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 1:16). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³⁵Notes on Isaiah, Dr. Thomas L. Constable; <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

³⁶Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 1:21). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

people, they served themselves. Idolatry had led to social injustice, as it always does unless checked.³⁷

Their silver and wine, which used to be valuable, had become worthless: dross metal and watered-down wine. Dross is the residue left in the smelting process after pure silver is removed. Like worthless dross, the nation would be "thrown away." The people would be exiled if they would not repent and turn to the Lord.

The rebellious rulers in the city were leading the people into ruin by theft, bribery, and injustice to the helpless (cf. comments on v. 17). The fatherless and widows could not even get hearings because they had no money for bribing the rulers. This situation was especially abhorrent to God because His covenant people were bound to Him and therefore to each other. But now they had no concern for each other's property and needs.³⁸

24 Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies:

God's lawsuit ended with His pronouncing judgment on the guilty nation. In this chapter God is pictured not only as one of the parties in the litigation but also as the Judge who will decide what will happen to the guilty party. Those who were obstinate, refusing to repent, would be judged, but the repentant would be redeemed.

25 And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:

26 And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.

Judah's destiny depends upon the people's response to God's offer of forgiving grace. If they are willing to turn from their sin and obey God, He will bestow His favor upon them materially and spiritually and protect them from their enemies.³⁹

Isaiah's unusual three-fold description of God as the sovereign (Lord) God of armies (hosts), who is the Mighty God of Israel, boded ill for Judah. Isaiah crowded together more names of God in verse 24 than he did anywhere else (cf. 3:1, 15; 10:6, 33; 19:4).

The specter of God arising to judge His people for their sins just mentioned is a fearful prospect (cf. Heb. 12:29). God judges sin wherever He finds it, among pagans and among His own people.

"Any facile statement that God always hates the sin but loves the sinner needs to be countered by Isaiah's insistence that those who transgress are *my foes and my enemies*."⁴⁰

³⁷ Notes on Isaiah, Dr. Thomas L. Constable; <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

³⁸ Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 1:22). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³⁹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁴⁰ Motyer, p. 49.

God would subject His people to fires of adversity, but only to purify them, not destroy them. Just rulers would emerge and the city would once again enjoy a reputation for righteousness and faithfulness to God. This is the first allusion in Isaiah to a coming Judge who will establish justice and create righteous conditions, about whom the prophet revealed much more later. The restoration described here will find fulfillment in the millennial reign of Christ.⁴¹

God's judging will bring Him relief from the displeasure caused by His foes (enemies within the covenant community). It will be like a purging agent, getting rid of the dross (v. 25; cf. v. 22), leaving only the pure silver. Vengeance was not for the purpose of "getting even" with unfaithful people. Its purpose was to turn the nation back to a proper relationship to God. The LORD will see that the right kind of judges are in office as in former times (David's and Solomon's empires), and Jerusalem will once again be called the City of Righteousness and the Faithful City (v. 26). References to "the faithful city" (vv. 21, 26) serve as a literary device called an *inclusio* to tie these two verses together.⁴²

27 Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.

28 And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners *shall be* together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed.

29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen.

It is good to be ashamed and embarrassed over sin. There is something wrong with us when we are shameless or beyond embarrassment. God promised He would give Judah the gift of shame and embarrassment over sin again.

This has to do with idolatry because the idols were placed under the oak trees, and a garden was planted around them.⁴³

30 For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water.

31 And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench *them*.

God has been misrepresented in the sense that He has been pictured as losing His temper and breaking forth in judgment. That is never a true picture of God. The fact is that our sin is like a wick, and when we play with the spark of sin, the fire will follow. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).⁴⁴

⁴¹ Notes on Isaiah, Dr. Thomas L. Constable; <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁴² Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 1:24). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴³ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁴⁴ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Even though Zion (a poetic synonym for Jerusalem) will experience redemption by God's justice and righteousness (vv. 25-26), the Lord will destroy individuals who continue in their sins and do not repent. This is the first occurrence of "redemption" as well as "Zion" in Isaiah, both of which received considerable attention from this prophet. The Israelites had turned to objects of idolatry ("oaks") and places of idolatry ("gardens," v. 29), and in doing so had forsaken the Lord. God had chosen Israel, but Israel had chosen a tree! It is impossible to turn from the Lord and not turn to an idol. God's people would feel betrayed because of their choice one day (cf. 29:3; 45:7; Ps. 34:5; 119:6). Those who consider themselves strong and self-sufficient, as oaks and gardens, but rely on the creation rather than the Creator to sustain them—will wither and dry up (v. 30). Both they and their works will inevitably burn in the fires of God's judgment, like felled trees.⁴⁵

The contrast between the fate of the remnant and the wicked is detailed in these verses. The remnant will dwell in the new redeemed city of Jerusalem (Zion; cf. v. 8) where God's justice will be present (cf. v. 26). Rebels (cf. vv. 20, 23) will perish, after being embarrassed that they were ever involved in idol worship near sacred oak trees (cf. 57:5) and in gardens (cf. 65:3; 66:17). Whereas they once enjoyed worshiping idols (probably including Baal), in those pleasant surroundings they would become like fading oak trees and a dry garden. Though once strong (like a mighty man) in defying God the unrighteous and his work . . . will burn. This unquenchable burning probably refers to the destruction by the Babylonian army *as well as* eternal judgment.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Notes on Isaiah, Dr. Thomas L. Constable; <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

⁴⁶ Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 1:27). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.