

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #3

Isaiah 1:2-9

Someone once said, "Some of the best news I ever received in my life was the news that said, 'you have cancer.'" One would logically think, how could that possibly be good news? "Because," the person said, "that news diagnosed my problem accurately, treated it effectively and cured it perpetually."

Some of the greatest news you can ever hear about yourself is that you have been convicted by God and are sinful and guilty before Him. In hearing this news, which is accurate, you can get proper treatment and ultimately be cured forever.

That is exactly what Israel needed to do here because God is the Divine Complainant and He is indicting Israel in His sovereign court. Drs. Keil and Delitzsch have observed that in O.T. truth that relates to Israel, her history divides itself into four great periods: 1) The beginning and rise of Israel; 2) The ingratitude and apostasy of Israel; 3) The judgment of God and consequent surrender of Israel to foreign powers; 4) The ultimate restoration of Israel (*Isaiah*, Vol. 7, p. 74).

When we come to this section of Isaiah, Judah's apostasy and God's pending judgment are the themes. Judah had two main blessings that even Israel did not have: 1) She always was ruled by a descendant of David (II Samuel 7); 2) She always had the temple worship in Jerusalem. For her to turn away from God with these two blessings is an act that would make her legally liable before God.

Alfred and John Martin said when you come to these verses in Isaiah; you come to a text in which God levels a lawsuit against His own people (*Isaiah*, p. 36). God indicts His own nation of being guilty and He tells them the sentence He is going to impose on them. Even though this is a threatening text, God still gives His people a chance to come to their senses. The message here is simple to see; it is loud and clear:

IF GOD'S PEOPLE DO NOT HEED HIS WARNINGS AND ABANDON THEIR COMMITMENT TO HIM AND HIS WORD, GOD WILL SEND SOME TERRIBLE NEGATIVE JUDGMENTS INTO HIS OWN PEOPLE'S LIVES; BUT IF THEY WILL HEED HIS WORD, HE WILL SEND HIS WONDERFUL BLESSINGS .

Now the first five chapters in Isaiah take place during the reign of Uzziah, until he dies in chapter 6. G. Campbell Morgan said this first message is an impeachment against the nation, which describes the necessity of His judgment (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, Vol. 1, p. 16).

God is revealing to His own people, in this text, that He has some very serious charges to make against them and He warns them that if they do not start dealing with things, He is going to seriously deal with them. He makes these charges to Judah at a time when things are good, things are flourishing and life appears to be so productive, prosperous and positive. It is actually amazing that people, who are described in this section as being so bad, are still given opportunities to become so righteous. But that is the grace of God.

In **verse 2**, God majestically calls the “heavens and earth” to listen to this charge or indictment against His own people. They are called as His witnesses. This language means it is serious business. **Moses used the calling of “heaven and earth” summons as meaning a charge that meant certain judgment (Deuteronomy 4:26-27).** All of His creation not only can hear this indictment, but will agree with it. Calvin said the weight is ever further established by the fact that He is calling things without sense to be witnesses against His own people, which means they have less sense than what He is calling as His witness (Calvin, p. 38). **Israel and Judah had been unfaithful to God in various geographical places and God can call all these places as a witness to that reality.**

Years ago my grandparents knew of a spot where a girl’s body was found and it was suspected that she had been killed there. Now suppose God called the earth to testify of this reality. Suppose He allowed the terrain to talk. Suppose He called upon the trees and the grass and the birds and the animals who saw it happen. He could say - did this man kill this girl here and the terrain would say as a uniformed jury, “Yes, he did.” This was the spot. So God calls all of His creation to testify of the rebellion of His people.

We may also observe from **verse 2** that this is the LORD speaking. Isaiah uses this sacred proper noun for God more than 300 times. This is YHWH speaking; this is Jehovah speaking; this is the self-existing I AM. Isaiah has a holy, reverent perspective of God.

One thing we must see grammatically from **verse 2** is that God says these are His sons He has raised. Not only is He the creator of the heavens and the earth but of His sons. The point of these two Hebrew words “reared” and “brought up” indicates that God has provided everything for the development of His people. There was nothing lacking in their care. There was no deficiency in their upbringing. The Hebrew word “reared” is in the Piel stem and the Hebrew word “brought up” is in the rare Pilel stem. The Piel stem means that God specifically and eagerly was involved in the action of “rearing” Judah. He was actively involved in everything in her existence. The Pilel stem indicates God’s people were the recipients of His bringing up action and were involved in the great results of the action (Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, pp. 141-150). Judah could not blame her Divine Parent for her rebellion.

Children who come from godly homes, will not have a leg to stand on when they get before God and start making their excuses for pursuing a lifestyle of evil rebellion. God will hold them just as accountable as He held Israel and Judah. I have often believed that God truly empathizes with godly parents who have godless children. He knows what that is like and those children will answer to Him. There are two main parts to this section:

PART #1 – God makes indictment charges against His own people. **1:2-6**

Now before we look at the actual charges God brings, we must remember that these charges are being made against a very religious people who are living at a very prosperous time. These are people who regularly go to worship services and they regularly had their religious feasts and offered many sacrifices (i.e. Isaiah 1:11). So keep in mind that these charges are not being made against a group of heathens, but against a very religious Israel who are strutting around saying they are right with God. There are nine charges God makes against His own people:

Charge #1 - God's sons have revolted against Him. **1:2b**

There are two things to Isaiah that ought never to be in the same sentence - 1) You are sons of God; 2) You are in rebellion against God. God had homesteaded these people in this land and He had protected them and provided for them and they revolted against Him.

The actual Hebrew word "revolt" is one that refers to not obeying a legal treaty or agreement that was made with someone. Actually this word occurs again in the last verse of the book (66:24), where it is translated "transgress." **God is holding Israel legally responsible for revolting against Him and His Word.** They had violated and transgressed against His commandments. He is holding His own children responsible for their transgressing rebellion.

You certainly cannot blame the Divine Parent here for the rebellion of the child. God can relate to you parents who have watched this same kind of thing happen with your own children. God knows what it is like to give a child a good upbringing and then have that child turn out bad. He was not the problem; the child was the problem.

Sometimes when children go bad, counselors want to blame the parents. Sometimes perhaps it may be true, but usually it is not true. I have known of many children who have revolted against godly parents and a godly home. They came from a good home and a godly home. The problem is not with the parents; it is with the child. They are accountable for their revolt.

Charge #2 - God's people do not know Him. **1:3a**

There are three metaphors that God uses in these verses to describe Israel's condition:
1) Knowledgeable animals (**1:3**); 2) Sick body (**1:5-6**); 3) Agricultural hut (**1:8**).

The first metaphor is from the animal world. The ox and the donkey know their owners. Both are domesticated animals and they are dependent on their master for their needs. These animals know where and who their care and sustenance comes from. An animal such as an ox learns to recognize its owner. They know who their master is and they know their owner provides a place of food, water and shelter. Judah didn't know her own owner and master. She didn't know God.

God's people did not have as much devotion to God as an animal had to its own master. The comparative analogy of an ox and a donkey is very humiliating. To say that God's people had less knowledge than an ox or a donkey was not flattering to say the least. But this certainly prompts us to ask ourselves, to what level do we really know God? Is there a real hunger and thirst for God and His Word?

Charge #3 - God's people do not understand His Word or will. **1:3b**

Notice Isaiah mentions Israel here. Even though his prophecy is aimed primarily at Judah and Jerusalem, he has all of God's elect nation in view. Often the O.T. prophet's message would overlap between Judah and Israel and that is precisely what Isaiah is doing here. It wasn't just that Judah did not understand God's Word or will, Israel didn't either.

The word “understand” is one that describes knowledge at a skilled level; a knowledge level that has great insight. Israel, the nation, who should have known all the marvelous deep things of God, was very shallow in her relationship with God. By virtue of the fact that she did not really know His Word and did not carry out His will proved she had no real comprehension of God whatsoever. Imagine this, people going regularly to worship who do not know God.

Charge #4 - God’s people are very sinful. **1:4a** (42:24; 43:27; 64:5)

According to Exodus 19:6, Israel was to be a holy nation, but she was anything but that. In fact the adjective “sinful” in Hebrew is an active participle which means this nation was given to a lifestyle of continual and habitual sin.

Isaiah never waters down truth just so God’s people will all feel good about themselves and that is quickly seen here in his opening words. Isaiah calls it straight. Israel is a sinful nation; a sinful people:

- A. They are weighed down with iniquity. Don’t kid yourself; there is a crushing weight to sin.
- B. They are producing an evil offspring - should be seed of blessing but is evil seed producers.
- C. They are producing corrupt sons - both morally and doctrinally

The language here is not language that describes one who is just sunk deep in sin; this describes one who plunges himself into it and continually reproduces it. Isaiah says of God’s people, you are a totally degenerate bunch. You are weighed down with sin and guilt.

If you notice the various words used in **verse 4** to describe Israel’s condition - “sinful”; “iniquity”, “evildoers” and “corrupt”, the picture is not pretty. The word “sinful” means you are charged as missing the mark of the righteousness of God found in His law (Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, pp. 654-655). The word “iniquity” refers to willful choices of evil that bring cause guilt and punishment (B.D.B., *Hebrew Lexicon*, pp. 730-731). The word “evildoers” has to do with doing things that are morally wicked (Mounce, pp. 221-222), and the word “corrupt” refers to a moral corruption that is abominable and punishable (Ibid., p. 138).

By God using these words He is saying that His own people are a depraved group of moral perverts who have intentionally walked away from His righteous Word to pursue their corruption and for that they are about to get what they deserve and are about to receive His judgment.

The charge is not just against one or two people, but to generations of people who continued to pursue evil and sin from one generation to another. They were sold to iniquity. Again remember this is God’s assessment of His people who regularly went to the temple to worship services.

Charge #5 - God’s people have abandoned Jehovah. **1:4b**

The verb “abandon” in Hebrew is “azab,” which refers to forsaking or leaving and abandoning something (B.D.B., *Hebrew Lexicon*, pp. 736-737). God is charging His own people with abandoning, forsaking Him and leaving Him and His Word. It is very possible for a believer to abandon and forsake God and when that happens, God has every right to judge.

It isn’t that they are a nation struggling in their relationship with God; they have abandoned Him.

Charge #6 - God's people have despised the Holy One. **1:4c**

Whenever a believer pursues sin over God, he is acting in a way that despises God. This word "despise" means they treat with contempt, the Holy One of Israel. This Person "Holy One of Israel" becomes a critical Person of Isaiah's prophecies. This "Holy One" occurs some 14 times in chapters 1-39 and 14 times in chapters 40-66 (1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:17, 20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19, 23; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14, 15; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14). Now the obvious question is, "Who is this Holy One of Israel?" There cannot be much doubt when we read John 12:41, which says Isaiah spoke of Him, that this is a reference to Jesus Christ.

By virtue of the fact He is Holy, He is God and by virtue of the fact that He is a Person, He is human. What you have is a God/Person. Now notice Israel's reaction to Him - they despised Him. To this very day, she still does not honor Jesus Christ as the Holy One of God. But many N.T. believers are the same way. They act in ways that are despicable.

Charge #7 - God's people have turned away from Him. **1:4d**

This particular word is used to describe Israel as actually turning off the path of God and turning away to a path of moral and spiritual corruption. When God gave Israel His specific written directions as to how to govern themselves, they turned away from them and from Him. They decided to turn off the path of God.

Charge #8 - God's people are stricken in their rebellion. **1:5**

- A. They are sick in the head.
- B. They are sick in the heart.

There was nothing left to be affected by any other evil. Every part of them had been affected and stricken by their rebellion.

Charge #9 - God's people have nothing sound or soothing about them. **1:6**

At the time Isaiah wrote this prophecy, God did not see one healthy thing left in Israel. His people were completely wounded by sin.

There was not one solid, God-honoring thing about this entire nation. The nation is putrid all the way through. Nothing has been done to try and heal the problem. Nothing has been done to try and cure the evil.

These people were carrying the full weight for their own sin and they would receive the full brunt of God's judgment.

PART #2 – God warns and promises what He will do to His own people. **1:7-9**

Most people want a God of total toleration and mushy love. But that is not the God describe here. If God's people reach the level of depravity described here, God is outraged and His ferocious anger comes to life.

The picture given here presents Israel as a “ravaged battlefield.” This was a flourishing part of the world, when God made these warnings (II Chronicles 26:5-15). God’s judgments do not come quickly, but when they do come, they come ferociously and effectively.

Now Isaiah’s predictions here probably include the Assyrian invasion of Israel in 722 B.C. and also Judah’s destruction in 586 B.C. Many believe that most things described here refer to the destruction God brought against Judah during the reign of Ahaz.

However, these prophecies not only had historical application to Israel at the time Isaiah lived, but also this describes ultimately what will happen in the Tribulation on a grand scale. Before the Holy One comes to deliver her, the Antichrist will devastate her as a judgment of God. Now we may observe that when God decides it is time to punish, there is a downward spiral of a string of negatives that hit. These are no ordinary things of everyday life.

There are six main warnings given in these verses. I want you to observe the verb tenses are presented by Isaiah as if this truth is already done. There is literal certainty to Biblical prophecy. It is a done deal.

Warning #1 - God will permit her land to become desolate. **1:7a**

This was a land that should have been and eventually will be flowing with “milk and honey.” God was going to permit Israel’s Promised Land to be ravaged and that it has been. He has literally let this land be ravaged. Why did God permit the Edomites and the Philistines to invade Judah during the days of Ahaz (II Chronicles 28:17-18)? Why did God permit the Assyrians and the Babylonians and the Persians and Greece and Rome to dominate Israel? Why would God permit a final Antichrist to so ravage Israel so that Jews will flee as fast as they can? Because as a nation she despised the Holy One and would not come to terms with her sin.

Warning #2 - God will permit her cities to be burned. **1:7b**

There are some Assyrian sculptures that show a torch being applied to a city taken in war. In A.D. 70, Titus and the Roman military literally burned Jerusalem. Why did God permit this? Because of what is describe right here.

Warning #3 - God will permit her fields to be taken by strangers. **1:7c**

Foreigners, non-Israelis would deluge the land as a judgment of God. Do you think it is a coincidence that every inch of the Promised Land is an inch for which Israel must fight? From land to towns to ground, Israel is in a fight against strangers.

Warning #4 - God will permit Jerusalem to become a temporary shelter. **1:8a**

Others will temporarily hunker down in the land that belongs to her.

Warning #5 - God will permit Jerusalem to be besieged. **1:8b**

Today, acreage that at one time was totally dedicated to God during the days of Solomon, contains an Arab shrine - Dome of the Rock - dedicated to a false god and false system of worship.

Warning #6 - God will leave just a few survivors. **1:9**

God says if it were not for Me, you would be wiped off the face of the earth. What would happen to you, if it were not for God, would be what happened in Sodom and Gomorrah. According to Zechariah, during the Tribulation two thirds of Israel will be destroyed and only one third of all the Jews in the world will survive (Zechariah 13:8-9).

What a humiliating picture for God to compare His people with Sodom and Gomorrah. In Sodom and Gomorrah, all were destroyed. If it were not for God's grace, that would be the exact same thing that He would authorize against His own people and sacred city. However, He would preserve a remnant.

Do not miss the adverb in **verse 9**, "unless." Talk about Grace. God still desires to have a relationship with His people who have totally and completely walked away from Him. As we shall see in verse 16, He still gives His people time to get washed up and cleaned up.

The indictment that God makes against the nation Israel is also applicable to the individual. You may be a wretched sinner who has plunged deep into sin. If you will turn to the Holy One, "though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow."