

The Book of Isaiah
Chapters 1-5

Introduction: This section of Isaiah reveals both the diagnosis and prognosis of Judah's condition.

- A. One of the interesting issues that emerge in Isaiah is his call (not until chapter 6).
 - 1. So why is his call after these prophetic oracles in 1-5?
 - 2. Is this pre-call ministry?
 - 3. Is this evidence of later addition or editing?
 - 4. Most likely Isaiah is his own editor trying to paint a picture of the condition of Judah when he receives his call.
 - 5. These oracles are likely declared after his call, but placed here so the reader can understand the context well.

- B. Overview of this section
 - 1. Chapter one reviews three facets of the contemporary situation.
 - a. National calamity
 - b. Religious decline
 - c. Social collapse
 - 2. Chapters 2-4 reveal both the glorious future of Judah (Zion) over against the very real situation of the present day.
 - 3. Chapter 5, by way of metaphor, reveals the wickedness of God's people and the divine response.

I. God Denounces, Invites, and Provides Promises to His People (Chapter 1)

- A. God's denunciation of His people (1-9)
 - 1. The call of Isaiah (four kings extend from 790 BC-690 BC, but Isaiah's ministry began at the death of Uzziah which is in 740 BC-see Isaiah 6).
 - 2. Jewish tradition says that Isaiah was killed by Manasseh (Hezekiah's son) but not internally confirmed.
 - 3. Charges are rebellion (2), corruption (4).
 - 4. Led to desolation and unless God had been merciful they would not have survived at all (7-9).
 - 5. Verse 2 there is the calling of nature to witness to their sin (see also Deuteronomy 4:26).

6. This passage speaks to the issue of rebellion (pesa) a refusal to recognize boundaries set by the Holy One of Israel (see v.4).
7. What gives Him the right to set boundaries?
 - a. Only one Holy One of Israel
 - b. Creator (set up boundaries of earthy creation, does He not have the right?)
 - c. Covenant God
 - d. He is their Father (this is His right; they are His children, v.2).
8. Rebellion has consequences.
9. The issue for us today
 - a. When offended we want justice.
 - b. When we offend we want mercy.

(ILL) No one doubts that the natural laws have boundaries and consequences (jump off a 40' building and see what happens), yet we're offended to think we have spiritual boundaries that will not bring consequences.

10. Personal freedom has become the absolute good of society and we want no one to set boundaries for us...but God has and when we rebel there is a price to pay.
 11. Isaiah will regularly challenge the idea of relativity...The Holy One of Israel, God the Creator is in charge and if He is offended, we will experience judgment.
- B. God invites His people (10-20)-note two ways of dealing with Israel's alienation from God, a wrong way and a right way.
1. The wrong way is hypocritical ritual (10-15).
 - a. Note reference to Sodom and Gomorrah in verse 9 is continued in verse 10.
 - b. If they are no better and act no differently, even their covenant will not save them.
 - c. They think their ritual offerings of covenant will save them.
 - d. Their gifts are worthless and their worship an abomination.
 - e. Hands full of blood (15) both of sacrifice and corruption.
 2. The right way is cleansing, purity, justice to neighbor (16-17).
 - a. Can't love God (worship) and treat brother corruptly.
 - b. True evidence you know the Lord is to treat others right.
 3. Consider your options (18-20).

4. Religious practice was to reveal the heart condition not procure favor from a God one disobeys (we do this today...cry “Lord, Lord!)
 5. Faith without works is dead.
 6. Still trying to use religious behaviors to manipulate God.
- C. God makes a promise to His people (21-31).
1. Isaiah describes the present situation (21-24).
 - a. Contrasts between divine intention and reality.
 - b. Israel felt they were God’s favorites, His chosen.
 - c. Must have hurt to be called His adversaries/enemies (24).
 2. Judgment is not God’s final word...He wants to purify (25-31).
 - a. Exile will be painful but God will use it to purify His people.
 - b. Zion introduced as “lady Zion” (27) the bride to whom God betrothed Himself.
 - c. This theme will be throughout the prophets (even NT) but God will seek to restore His bride to Himself.
 - d. Even though a promise of restoration, persisting in rebellion will bring destruction, “don’t get too comfortable” is the message.
- D. Takeaways
1. God wants well-deserved judgment to have a redeeming work.
 2. Danger of false security.
 3. The Church will survive but we must be purified (we are marginalized today because we have failed to care for the world as we are called to)—(17).
 4. Let’s allow God to purify us and use us again.

II. Israel: From Now to Then (Chapters 2-4)

- A. The Destiny of Israel (2:1-5)
1. Promise of great restoration for Israel.
 - a. Note that worship of Yahweh was never intended to be a tribal religion.
 - b. It is universal.
 2. What does this mean?
 - a. Maybe not just a literal place but a universal recognition that what God taught them, the truth, was for all.

- b. Every knee shall bow.
 - 3. Danger of taking this too seriously-we try to force it now as some kind of utopian society.
 - 4. Danger of not taking it seriously enough-we do nothing and wait for the Millennium.
 - a. The church has hurt herself (World Wars, Colonialism, abuse of power).
 - b. But there is still just One God over the earth and it is Yahweh.
- B. The Forsakenness of Israel (2:6-4:1)-note the radical shift from hopefulness to reality
- 1. Underlying principle-human arrogance and the humiliation that arrogance brings.
 - a. Israel has been seduced by human power and glory and has abandoned their creator.
 - b. They are doomed to be humiliated.
 - 2. Statement of the principle (2:6-22)
 - a. Israel was called to walk in the way of the Lord.
 - b. Instead, filled with human wisdom (6), human wealth and power (7), human made idols (8).
 - c. Those who trust in such things will be humiliated (9-11)
 - d. God's lofty glory contrasted with everything that seeks to be lofty (12-18).
 - e. All that humanity has set up will come to nothing and be destroyed (19-22).
 - 3. Illustration of that arrogance bringing humiliation (3:1-15).
 - a. God will take away, not only the provisions of Judah but those in whom they have placed their trust—not just because it was wrong to trust them, but because they failed God's people in their responsibilities (3:1-3; 13-15).
 - b. God will allow the immature to lead and the result will be tragic (4,5).
 - c. Typical conditions after defeat and exile (mature leaders are taken away)-see 3:6, 7-doesn't take much to lead, just a few clothes, but even that person rejects the invite to lead-death of leadership.
 - d. This is a result of their own arrogance (8, 9).
 - e. God's judgment is not arbitrary but fair (10, 11—if righteous, need not worry).
 - f. God's judgment predicted, leaders carried into exile (12-15).

4. Strongest and most graphic illustration of the humiliation that comes from arrogance (3:16-4:1)—NOTE v.24.

NOTE: Applying this section is not hard

- Self-esteem culture
- Idolatry is a state of mind before it is a religious practice.
- It is built on the false premise that my security is primary.
- And that my security can be guaranteed by the powers of this world.
- Both wrong because they make creation primary.
- We often make a leader an idol, thinking they can achieve for us what will make us happy—we give them the position of God and they oppress.
 - a. True humility is not self-denigration but acknowledging that we do not belong in the place of God. It is to know that there is a God and you are not Him.
 - b. Leaders must be and should be seen as exemplary but never as infallible. They must be respected but never worshipped.
 - c. Leaders must not believe all the praise or all the criticism.

C. The Restoration of Israel (4:2-6)

1. A promise of restoration (certainly Messianic hope).
2. They have been purified and survived the fire of purification.
3. The people will be holy, belong to God alone, and experience the presence of God as a blessing, not a threat.
4. The imagery of the cloud and fire, God bringing His people into their inheritance.
5. Lessons we learn:
 - a. Judgment is not meant to be God's last word (even though there are certain inevitable consequences to our choices).
 - b. Speaks of the unchanging nature of God's plan/ He has always wanted to live among His people (but first guilt for sin must be dealt with/He can't live in a filthy temple AND God's character must somehow be replicated in us. "Two cannot walk together unless they be agreed" (Amos 3:3).
 - c. It is not a cruel God who brings adversity upon us or a rejecting God that has abandoned us. It is a loving God who knows there is no other way for Him to be with us than for Him to purify us through adversity.
 - d. His concern is not our happiness but our holiness.
 - e. Jesus the Branch must burn things out of us so that He can take us into His temple to abide with Him and His Father.

III. The Harvest of Judgment (Chapter 5)

A. The Vineyard (1-6)

1. Again a quick shift from hope to judgment because without radical change that would come through the divine fire.
2. Vineyards were everywhere in Israel because grapes are what grow best there. This illustration would have made sense to the reader.
3. Grape crop demands a great deal of care and preparation (land cleared of other plants and rocks).
 - a. Clearing ground takes an entire year.
 - b. During year two the rocks cleared are built into fences and border protection to keep out animals and thieves.
 - c. Year three the fruit of the labor is ready.
4. Imagine the frustration of a landowner who despite all his work gets only a small crop of bitter grapes.

B. The Vineyard Explained (7-24)

1. Isaiah is talking about them (7)-note Hebrew wordplays.
 - a. Looked for justice (mispat) got oppression or bloodshed (mispah).
 - b. Looked for righteousness (sadaqah) got cries (sadhah).
 - c. Contrast between expectation and what really occurred.
2. Bitter grapes are described in a series of 6 woes.
 - a. Greed (8-10)-bigger houses and more land, rich taking land of poor (Ahab and Naboth)-just as he dispossessed another's land, God will make sure that his land bears nothing.
 - b. Self-indulgence (11-17)-they have focused on pleasure and now God will see to it that they have none.
 - c. Cynicism (18-19)-attitude that dares God to take action.
 - d. Moral perversion (20,21)
 - e. Social injustice (22-24)

C. The Instruments of Judgment in the Hands of God (25-30)

1. The onslaught of Israel's enemies (Assyria and Babylon) will not be because of their greatness.
2. Rather, the anger and judgment of God.
3. They come at the raising of His banner, like a dog after his owner's whistle.

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D. The Power of Story

1. Nathan and David
2. Jesus and the story of the wicked tenants stirred the Jews
3. The five sins mentioned begin and end with how we treat others (Maybe the most important)-first 6 of 10 commandments the same.
4. Have to admit that there is someone other than ourselves who has the right to tell us how to use our resources. There is a God, the uniqueness of Yahweh.
5. Notice again that God is the Lord of History (He is not fighting with their gods, He is blowing His whistle and lifting His banner and they are coming).

Conclusion:

A Crisis of Worldview: Is there any meaning to life outside of myself and the meaning I give to it?
Secular world says “no!”

1. Once we lose the idea that there is a God to whom we owe our allegiance, we are on a spiral to decadence (America today).
2. Cheating, lying, stealing are acceptable (no consequences).
3. Must commit ourselves to the authority of God’s revelation (the inspired Scripture).
4. Must commit ourselves to submission (which includes sacrifice)-Romans 12:1.
 - a. Surrender our right to decide what is right and wrong for us.
 - b. Surrender our right to supply our own needs for ourselves (Adam and Eve failed on both accounts).
 - c. But Abraham and Joseph did surrender and God blessed them—here is the victory over greed, cynicism, and self-indulgence.
 - d. Results may take time.