

Let's turn to the prophet quoted more in the NT than any other. In fact, he's quoted more than *all* the other prophets *combined*. J.B. *defined* his ministry by his words. Jesus *began* His ministry preaching from his words. Of course, we're speaking of the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 1:1-31

"Come Now, And Let Us Reason Together"

Often, when we think of the "prophets of old", we think of men who "foretold" the *works* of God. But they were also men who "told forth" the *word* of God. They acted in many respects like a good doctor. They would diagnose the problem, prescribe the remedy & then warn of the ramifications of ignoring or not acting upon the prescription.

When a prophet would declare a vision of the future, it was to exhort/encourage people to obey God *today*. Peter put it this way, "*Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness*".¹ The idea being, "Since this is what *will be ultimately*, what kind of person ought you *to be presently*?"

Now, couple things you should know about the book of Isaiah. One, is that it wasn't written all in one sitting. As we'll see from Vs 1, his ministry spanned about 60 yrs in totality & encompassed the reign of several kings. Also, not everything is chronological so you might want to get that out of your mind from the very beginning...There are multiple sections to the book, but the 2 primary sections are Ch's 1-39 & Ch's 40-66.

Vs 1

I always debate w/in my mind how much time I want to spend in the opening study of a book upon historical/background content. But to keep it kind of concise, what we deduct from this Vs is the approximate time frame of Isaiah's ministry & from that we know what was happening historically.

Isaiah prophesied from approximately 750 B.C. (give or take a few yrs) to around 690 B.C. (again, give or take a few yrs on either side). The most Biblically significant event that happened in his lifetime was the carrying away into captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians. –

Israel was reigned entirely by 3 kings. King Saul, king David & king Solomon. But toward the end of Solomon's life, he began to backslide & build monuments & allow for the worship of various pagan gods. What that did was open the floodgates of idolatry for kings to come (& believe me when I tell you that the gates opened wide).

But after Solomon's reign, his son (Rehoboam) imposed a tax burden upon the people that caused them to say, "You know what, we're done w/you."

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [2 Pe 3:11]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& They officially seceded from Judah. Ultimately what happened was Judah & Benjamin remained in the south & the remaining 10 tribes made up Israel in the north.

The southern kings of Judah that followed were a mixture (some good/godly, some wicked). Of the kings in the north, not one was good, they were all wicked & rebellious toward God. But 25 yrs or so (again these are approximate dates) after Isaiah began his ministry. The northern kingdom was overwhelmed, overrun & carried off into captivity by Assyria. Assyria would then press in on Judah, coming all the way up to Jerusalem (in the days of Hezekiah). But God fought for them, killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night which devastated them & caused them to return home. Egypt then overcame Assyria, & Babylon conquered Egypt & it would be the Babylonians who would conquer & carry off Judah into captivity (a little over 100 yrs after the northern kingdom had been conquered). – Perhaps I’m guilty of over simplifying things, but that’s the basic gist.

If you want to read the Biblical passages Isaiah is prophesying into, read 2nd Kings 15-21 & 2nd Chronicles 26-33. **Of the kings listed here in Vs 1. Uzziah was classified as a good king (though he did wind up a leper because he intruded into the holy place, & even a king wasn’t to do that). His son, Jotham, was a good king. Ahaz (however) was a bad king & finally Hezekiah was a good king as well... But it was Hezekiah’s son (Manasseh) who was the single most wicked king in Judah’s history who is believed to have been the one to put Isaiah to death. Most believe (& strong tradition holds) it was by having him sawn in two. Many believe that the reference in Heb 11:37 to being sawn in two points back to Isaiah.**

The particular prophecy of this Ch probably took place during the 16 yr reign of the wicked king Ahaz.

Vs 2-4

The book of Isaiah opens in the form & fashion of a courtroom drama. God is calling heaven & earth as His “jury” to witness & hear what He has to say about & against His people. They’ve *resisted* Him, they’ve *rebelled* against Him & now He will state His case against them.

To me, this is a sobering reminder of the fact that God is on the throne & He is the One w/Whom humanity has to do. Perhaps you recall that scene in Luke Ch 4... There they were, taking Jesus to the edge of a cliff, they wanted to throw Him over & be done w/Him... They had it in their minds that because they didn’t like what He had to say, that they could just get rid of Him & not have to deal w/Him anymore...

Listen, that's not a whole lot different than what man has sought to do w/God today. The world thinks that because they don't like what God has to say, what He desires & demands of us, that they can just remove Him from His throne, strip Him of His authority, take Him to the edge of the proverbial cliff & just shove Him over... But those people were unsuccessful in trying to get rid of Jesus. Even so, God is still on the throne! He's not abdicated it; He's not abandoned it & He will still judge the world in righteousness!

Here, He's dealing w/His own people. But again, as Peter said, *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"*² We tend to think that God should begin w/the unbeliever, the ungodly. But God says, "No, when it comes to establishing righteousness, meting out justice, I'm starting w/My own house 1st."

Think about it. Who are *you* more concerned with? Someone else's children, or your own? God says, "I've nourished & brought up children, & they have rebelled against Me." As parents, we can appreciate the frustration/exasperation that God expresses w/this. We know how galling, how irritating & infuriating it can be for our children to disregard & disobey our direction. & You can have thoughts like, "After everything I've done for you. I've nurtured you, provided for you, gone above & beyond in seeking to be a blessing to you & this is how you respond?"

Yet so often, we treat God, disregard & disrespect God in an infinitely greater way. God says, "My people are treating Me like rebellious children who have no regard, no respect for all that I've done in delivering them, protecting them, providing for them. They've grown corrupt & rebellious *toward* Me, they've turned their backs *on* Me..." Look at the words that God uses to describe the state of the nation... "A sinful nation, laden w/iniquity." "Laden, meaning weighed down." Remember when Jesus said, *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*³ Your sin has worn you down, has worn you out. Jesus says, "Come to Me. I'll relieve you of that burden & give you rest. Rest for your soul." – But God calls them, "A brood of evil doers, children who are corrupters! (They're not just corrupted, they're corrupters!) They've forsaken the Lord; they've provoked Him to anger & turned away backward..." They're going the wrong way."

Historically, outwardly, Judah was prospering. But inwardly, they were falling deeper & deeper into despair, depravity & disrepute.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Pe 4:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 11:28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But family, this is the danger of abundance. When things are tough, we're praying, we're going to church, we're drawing near to God & seeking His word for hope, for help & direction. But when things are going good... Apathy, lethargy, we relax our disciplines in seeking the Lord, spending time in His word & before we know it, we've drifted into compromise... God had warned them of this in His word. It was an, "I'll bless you, but beware & be careful how you handle it" kind of word/warning. – We read in Deut 6.

*"...when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full—then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."*⁴

It's hard when things are tough. But beware when they're going good. That's when we can so easily forget about the Lord who brought us out of the house of bondage. You might think (in Vs 3) that God is saying that they're acting as dumb as an ox, stubborn as a mule. "That would be to insult the animals," God is saying. At least the ox knows it's owner, the donkey is smart enough to recognize where it's food comes from. But *My people* (God says), don't know. They don't consider the fact that God is the One who tends to & takes care of all their needs! He's blessed them, they've turned their backs on Him. What a word of warning for our generation today...

Vs 5-9

Years ago, former President Obama said, "Elections have consequences." & Hopefully people are waking up to that reality (many politicians have said that since). But here's the deal, so does every decision we make. The Bible is clear, *"They sow the wind, And reap the whirlwind."*⁵ & Again, *"For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption,"*⁶

From the outside, it seemed that the nation was prospering. But from God's perspective the nation was like someone beaten from head to toe & left on the side of the road to die. Bruises, open untended to putrefying sores, diseased & desolate... Much like the church in Rev 3, *"You say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—"*⁷

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Dt 6:10-12]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ho 8:7]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ga 6:8]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Re 3:17]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& God is compelling them to repent of their sin! He says in Vs 5, “Why should you be stricken again?” Why continue in a manner & down a path that leads to destruction, to discipline?

During the reign of Ahaz the kingdom of Judah was attacked & pillaged by various nations & God is telling them that the moral decline is the reason that their nation is beginning to be devoured, burned & left desolate. They’re going from prosperity to poverty. Why? Because of their moral decline & abandonment of God.

Of course, it’s hard to read this (sinful nation, laden w/iniquity, evildoers, corrupters, forsaken the Lord) w/out thinking of our own nation. Having the birth & beginning of a people who simply wanted the freedom to *worship* God, wanted to establish a nation under the *word* of God. The bible being the 1st book studied in the public schools. It was the textbook from which children learned to read. Fast forward 150 yrs or so & our nation has turned its back on God. **The whole head is sick, the heart faints. Wounds, bruises, putrefying sores. Our cities literally being burnt, our land being devoured... But rather than being shaken to sobriety, saying, “What have we done?” & turing back to the Lord. Like Israel sinking deeper into pagan practices, rather than repent, we’ve gone deeper into depravity. Since Roe v. Wade in 1973, we as a nation are guilty of over 64 million abortions.** The left as gone on a campaign to defunding police, violent crime is on the rise, people are encouraging children to reconsider their gender in grade school. Ungodly agenda driven programing is on every streaming platform. Wokeness is lulling our nation to sleep... Prospering outwardly, perishing inwardly but still stubbornly clinging to our sin.

But even in judgment, the Lord was merciful. The distinction between Sodom & Jerusalem wasn’t the behavior/attitude of the people, it was in the grace & mercy of God.

Vs 10-15

You see what’s happening here, right? The people were engaged in all these sinful, self-seeking, self-gratifying, worldly, pagan practices. Yet even in the midst of all their rebellion they *continued* in their religious rituals & “spiritual” ceremonies. They continued bringing sacrifices *to* the Lord, they continued to burn incense *before* the Lord, they continued in their sacred assemblies & God (quite frankly) was simply *sick* of it all!

It was as if they thought that their *religion* & their *rituals* somehow made up *for* & brought balance *to* their *rebellion*. & Listen, it’s not that God was sick of, or no longer wanting them to honor the sacrificial system that He’d established for them.

But the whole system *presupposes* that the person making the sacrifice has turned from their sin & *wants* to be right w/& pleasing to God! Empty actions mean nothing to God. It would be like God saying, “Why are you even coming to church? Why are you singing the worship songs? Why are you having the potlucks or putting money in the offering? I’m sick of it! You live like the world all week & then you come to church, *not* because you want to change, but to “balance the scales” & “do your religious duty”! You know you have no intention of honoring Me w/your life. You’re still going to be getting drunk, getting high, watching pornography... I’m fed up w/it!”

Listen, if you find yourself somehow rationalizing along the lines of, “Well, I know I shouldn’t be engaging in pornography. But I’m still going to church.” “I know it’s wrong to get drunk or get high, but I’m still tithing.” Fill in the blank. **If you’re in a place whereby you know you’re engaged in some of sinful course of action, yet you’re trying to make yourself feel better, or think that it’s somehow balanced out because you got to church or help at the homeless shelter or sing worship and place money in the offering... that’s exactly the kind of thing that God is referencing here. – Religious activity doesn’t make up for a rebellious heart.**

Let me put it this way. Approximately 70% of Americans claim to be Christian. 7 out of 10 people in America will tell you they’re a Christian. Does the culture of our country reflect that? When a person comes to church but has no desire to change, doesn’t really care or isn’t even willing to really listen. **God’s like, “Why even be there?” Going to church doesn’t make God happy if we really have no heart to honor Him... For outward ritual to take on meaning to God, it must be accompanied by inward righteousness. In other words, even doing what God has told us to do doesn’t matter when our heart isn’t in it.**

It becomes an abomination to Him. Like Paul wrote to Titus, **“They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.”**⁸ If your heart isn’t humbled, changed & surrendered before God, then “religious service” & church attendance means nothing to God. In fact, He abhors it.

When David committed adultery w/Bathsheba, then he murdered her husband, he realized God wasn’t looking for him to just offer another sacrifice. To just make up for it by going to church. He said, **“For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.”**⁹

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Tt 1:16]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 51:16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Running to a religious routine & not truly repenting doesn't impress God at all. He says, "You can spread out your hands & make your prayers to Me all you want. I'll hide My eyes & stop My ears. Your hands are full of blood." In other words, all the praying, tithing, going to church, won't cause God to turn His attention to you if you're harboring sin in your life. Write it down, read it later, Ps 66:18.

Vs 16-20

Earlier God compared Jerusalem to Sodom & Gomorrah. We tend to think they were judged for homosexuality. (& Certainly those are sins for which they had to give account.) But in the book of Ezekiel (16:49) we're told that they heaped luxury upon themselves & had no compassion for the poor & needy.

Even so, here the Lord says that their corruption is showing up in how they're treating other people. He says, "Wash yourselves, put away the evil of your doings, cease to do evil, learn to do good. I.E. Seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow!"

This is what J.B. would refer to as the "fruit of repentance". Listen, it's the same message we see all throughout scripture. Repent of your sin, bring forth the fruit of righteousness. If you've turned from your sin, if you've truly surrendered to God, there'll be evidence of that in your life!

God wants to do that for you. "Come now, let us *reason* together, says the Lord." "Hey, let's settle this thing out of court!" If they would turn from their sin, God would wipe the record clean. He had every reason to punish them, but He offers to *pardon* them! He's not saying we should quit coming to church, He's saying that we should turn from our sin & let Him cleanse us & make us new!

"Cease to do evil." Don't just talk about it, be about it. Do something about the sin patterns in your life. Learn to do right. Put in the work. Show that you're serious about turning from your sin & leading a life pleasing to God. Give God His way in your heart/life.

He says, "Let's reason this thing out & let's do it (notice) now." It's madness to reject & resist a God of infinite wisdom, infinite love, infinite grace, and infinite power. Reason will lead you to humble yourself & surrender your life unconditionally to J.C.

& We love the fact that Isaiah likened our sin to scarlet & crimson. Not because of the color but because it was the harshest, most secure dye known at the time. The idea is that there's *no way* you can cleanse yourself. (Be it through good works, noble intentions, some self-inflicted suffering, time can't make it go away... not even death can remove the stain of sin.)

But God can remove the stain, the shame & the power of sin in your life. & He does it through the shed blood of J.C. – So come “now” He says. Today is the day of salvation. Don’t put it off, don’t delay or wait till another time. There’s no guarantee of another time. Don’t continue down that destructive path even for another minute...

But you have to be “willing”. If you’re “willing” which will be shown in “obedience”, then God will do the work. But if you refuse & rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword. Think about which phrase best describes your life, “Willing & obedient” “Refusal & rebellion”.

Vs 21-23

Vs 22. Sin pollutes the otherwise pure, it waters down what’s right. “Everyone loves bribes, follows after rewards.” They’d compromise for the right price.

Vs 24-31 Close

The references to the terebinth trees & gardens were places of idolatry. God is saying that He’s going to deal w/His enemies & take away His adversaries. But the goal wasn’t to ruin them, it was to redeem, restore & to reconcile them.

When we’re under the heavy hand of God’s discipline, His goal isn’t simply to “punish” us. It’s to purify us, to purge us of sin/unrighteousness that we might look *to* Him & walk *w/Him* & be faithful once again.

I love that He says, “They shall be ashamed... & be embarrassed.” It’s good to be ashamed of our sin, to be embarrassed of sin. Today, people aren’t ashamed of sin. They flaunt their sin & seek to impose it upon others so they can feel better about themselves... Our nation is sick, but God can save us... God help us to turn *to* Him, not away *from* Him. Let’s set our hearts before Him in prayer...

Prayer Points:

God, may we be a people quick to respond to the conviction of Your Spirit. We don’t want to be going through empty motions in our service to You. We want to honor You from the heart. Teach us as we make our way through the book of Isaiah & strengthen us in these days to which You’ve called us.

Come now let us reason together. God wants to cleanse you of sin & make you brand new... If you’re willing. He won’t force the issue. If you’re ready to turn from your sin & trust in J.C. then today is the day of salvation.