

## Isaiah 1

### God as holy judge

1. **Isaiah (meaning 'Yahweh is salvation') was a prophet who lived in Jerusalem** (Is. 7:1-3). He prophesied for about 40 years during the reigns of: Uzziah (791/790-740-439 BC); Jotham (740/739 – 732-731); Ahaz (735-716/715); and Hezekiah (716-715-687/686 BC).
2. **Historical context.** In the first half of the 8thC the northern kingdom of Israel, under Jeroboam II (c. 782-753 BC) and the southern kingdom of Judea under Uzziah, enjoyed much prosperity. This was due in large part to the weakness of the kingdom of Aram and to Assyria's lack of intervention in the west of its empire. Judea experienced its greatest prosperity since the division of the United Kingdom of Israel after Solomon's death. Isaiah's prophesying seems to mark the end of this prosperity.
3. **The situation for Israel and Judah changed** with the new Assyrian ruler Tiglath-pileser III, who began imposing his rule on countries in the West.
4. **During Isaiah's prophesying**, the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria, and many were taken into captivity (722 BC). 7. Isaiah tried to warn the southern kingdom Judea that it would face a similar fate if it did not change its ways and begin to serve God. Isaiah's warnings were not heeded and later in 587 it was conquered by Babylon and many were taken into exile. Isaiah's later prophecies give assurance that God would show mercy on them and bring them back from Exile.

### The Book of Isaiah

1. While some divide Isaiah into two sections chapter 1-39 and 40-66 there is strong evidence for the unity of the Book of Isaiah, with Isaiah as its main author. The main task for the prophet was to announce God's word to his people. They were sometimes given a prophetic word that also had a message for future generations. Some of these prophecies were seen in the NT as having their complete fulfilment in the person and ministry of Jesus.
2. **A central theme in Isaiah 40-48** (which predicts the fall of Judea) is that God demonstrates that He alone is God by announcing in advance, through the prophet, events that He as the Lord of history will bring about.
3. **Themes in Isaiah.** i. God is holy, majestic and powerful, He alone is God. ii. God is strongly opposed to human arrogance and disobedience. iii. God is trustworthy and the people of Judea should trust God in spite of their circumstances, rather than make useless political alliances. iv. The people's rebellion will be punished. v. God desires to forgive His people and give them real hope for a future with Him.
4. **Chapters 1-5 form an introduction to the book.** Isaiah spells out the corruption and disobedience of the people and the themes of hopelessness and hope. Hopelessness because sin must be judged and punished (v1:4) and hope because the Lord has a future for His people (see 4:2f.).

**Text 1:1-20. God announces the problem and provides a solution.**

1. **V. 1. The historical context of Isaiah's prophecies.**
2. **Vv. 2-9. God's charge against Judea.**
  - i. **Vv. 2-3. God opens the proceedings and makes the charge.** Heaven and Earth are summoned to listen as witnesses to Judea's rebellion against God (see Duet. 32:1; 30:19). The covenant has been broken and its curses fall on the people.
  - ii. **Vv. 4-9. The prophet amplifies the charge against Judea.** Isaiah's favourite term for God, 'The Holy One of Israel' ['Israel' is used to represent God's people]. Judea is persisting in her rebellion and facing the consequences (covenant judgment/curse – see Lev. 26; Duet. 28, 29).
  - iii. **Vv. 7-9. The foreign attacks** may refer to the resurgence of the Assyrian empire and its conquering of lands to the west including much of Judea, but not Jerusalem.
3. **Vv. 10-17. God's desire: justice, not hypocritical worship**
  - i. **Vv. 10-17. Note the summons to hear (10) – hear the word of the Lord. Note the reproof (11-15).** In strong language Judea is referred to as Sodom and Gomorrah (historic allusions to total corruption and disobedience). Their worship is unacceptable because they are acting unjustly (v. 12b). Procedure and form had taken over (the animal sacrifice could 'become' the sinner) rather than a representation of a repentant heart. The offerings are meaningless because they do not represent obedient lives and humble repentance. **Note the instruction to change (16-17)**, three negative – make yourself clean, stop doing evil, stop doing wrong, and five positive – learn to do right, seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the fatherless, plead the cause of the widows (see Duet. 10:12, 13; Mic. 6:8). The people must accept their responsibility to be recipients of God's grace.
4. **Vv. 18-20. The wisdom of Obedience.**
  - i. **Vv. 18. God wants to engage their minds and to correct their behaviour.** He wants to forgive their sins and to wash them clean (see v. 16).
  - ii. **V. 19. The people must set their minds ('be willing')** on allowing God to change them and their actions must show their obedience.
  - iii. **V. 20. If the people set their minds against God ('to resist')** and refuse to change their behaviour (to rebel) **God would punish them by the hand of their enemies.**

**Reflection/Response.** What does genuine public worship look like? How do we acknowledge our sin, God's holiness and His willingness to forgive us? And How do we engage our minds and order our lives to show our willingness to be changed by God and our desire to be obedient to Him?

BB.