

2. ISAIAH SERIES: Isaiah Looks Over His Shoulder

Isaiah 1:1-9

'The 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. 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. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. 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. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. 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. 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. 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. 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 (Isaiah 1:1-9).'

Isaiah begins his prophecy with a prologue or introduction to the whole of his book. It was probably at the end of his ministry that Isaiah in fact wrote chapter one. It is a 'look over his shoulder,' to that which he had experienced during his ministry as God's prophet to Judah. This point seems sure given the mention of the four kings in verse one.

Verse 1: The first verse explains to the reader just who it was that prophesied these words, to whom he ministered and the period in which he ministered.

This whole book then is a collection of prophecies or 'visions' that Isaiah revealed to Judah as God had revealed them to him. He was the prophet of God, and therefore he saw what God showed him (2 Pet 1:20,21). Therefore what we read in this book are more than just Isaiah's words, for these are also God's Words. We must therefore pay careful attention to what is being said in this book (2 Tim 3:16,17), for it is God's Word.

The prophecies concern Judah, and especially its capital Jerusalem. Many nations are mentioned throughout the Book of Isaiah, however these are only mentioned in as much as they stand in relation to Judah.

Isaiah ministered during the reign of four kings within Judah, beginning 'in the year that King Uzziah died (6:1),' and then through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

Verse 2: When the Lord had formed Israel into His own peculiar people, He had called heaven and earth to bear witness to the choice of life or death that He had given them, and the judgment that he would deliver when they rebelled (Deut 4:23-31,36; 30:11-20; 31:24-29; 32:1).

God now calls on heaven and earth to bear witness to His Word again. They had been there from the beginning and could bear faithful testimony to the truthfulness of God's Words. He has spoken and so it will surely now come to pass. God states Judah's condition and the judgment that has fallen upon her. God has brought down His verdict.

God had created a nation through Abraham (Gen 17:15,16; Deut 32:6,18) and He had cared for it as a Father (Ex 4:22,23; Deut 14:1; 32:20). He had done everything He could, even as a father cares for his own children (Is 5:1-7) and He had raised the nation up to greatness under David and Solomon. Yet in response to the Lord's gracious, Fatherly care and love, the people had turned against Him. They had rejected Him and rebelled, the original text giving the idea of a violent tearing away from Him. This then was Judah's current state.

QUESTION: The purpose of these questions within the study itself, is that you might meditate upon the relevance and application of the text to your own situation.

What encouragement do we have in verse two as regards the faithfulness of God's Word? Please explain your answer.

Verse 3: The prophet continues to show the foolishness of the people's rebellion against God. Both the oxen and the donkeys know whom it is that owns them, feeds them and cares for them. Knowing these things they continue to go to their owners for their food and care.

Whereas animals know those who care for them (Jer 8:7), this nation does not know who cares for them, who has prospered them or to whom they should turn. These people whom God had set apart to Himself as His, did not even think upon Him. They regarded all their prosperity as from their own industry.

Verse 4: Isaiah full of love and concern for his people cries out with great depth of feeling, 'alas.' Yet there is also the element of disgust at Judah's sin and stubborn refusal to submit to the Lord in Isaiah's cry. What a tragedy that this nation is now given over to sin in wicked abandon. It has forgotten God, and is continually engaged in sin. It is a nation that is weighed down with the burden of sin. Everywhere the people go their sin is on their back. Judah has become the slave of sin and is in bondage to it.

Israel was to be a holy nation (Ex 19:6) to the Lord, but instead it has become a brood of evildoers. They were supposed to be children of God, but instead they have become corrupters who have turned against the Lord in open rebellion. In their rebellion they have

aroused God (Lev 19:2) to anger. They are in fact turning their backs on God, wanting nothing more to do with Him.

Verse 5: Isaiah feels for these his own people according to the flesh (cf Rom 9:1-3), and cries out to them. ‘Why continue to suffer the judgments of God? Why continue to suffer these blows? If you turn it will be gone, yet you continue in your rebellion. Don’t you realise this will only bring more punishment?’

Isaiah presents the nation as a body, and says that both the head and heart are sick. This refers to the nation in general as the rest of the passage has highlighted. The whole book of Isaiah clearly shows that there is a remnant that has remained faithful to the Lord throughout. Yet the ravages of God’s general judgments upon Judah have affected the nation as a whole. There is not a place that has not been touched by the judgment of God.

Verse 6: Isaiah describes the nation by the analogy of a human body, as completely struck by God’s judgment (Deut 28:35). ‘From the sole of the foot, even to the head,’ all has been touched by God’s punishment. In other words, the nation as a whole has been struck, small and great, rich and poor.

There was much evidence of God’s judgments in the land. These were the wounds, bruises and putrefying sores that Isaiah mentions. Yet there had been no attempt to remedy the situation, for they had continued in their rebellion and they have been unable to bring about a solution to the various troubles that were plaguing them. Nothing seems to be able to be done to remedy the situation, for they continue to suffer fresh blows (1:5).

QUESTIONS: Discuss the relevance and implications of verses 5 and 6 in the area of God’s discipline of His people?

Is there any relevance or implications for the church today in these verses? Explain why you answered as you did.

Verse 7: The land of Judah has now gone from being a land flowing with milk and honey (Deut 6:3) to being a wasteland. The cities of the land had been pillaged and destroyed by invading armies, and the land was being gobbled up by their enemies (Deut 28:15-68; Is 9:12). It is a land ‘trashed’ by their enemies without concern.

The description of the nation given by the prophet here is similar to the threatenings given by the Lord early in Israel’s history (Lev 26; Deut 28,29), and this is not likely to be coincidental (1:2). Indeed, the punishments that Israel and Judah suffered for their unfaithfulness and rebellion are the result of the curse given in the Law for rebellion against God. God is proving Himself to be faithful to His Word.

Verse 8: All that remains now at the end of Isaiah’s ministry is Jerusalem. It stood alone

surrounded by rampaging cucumbers. It was like a shed surrounded with paddocks of cucumber vines. It was a besieged city, surrounded by its enemies. Jerusalem remains but as an old shed in a land full of invaders, in a very weakened condition.

Verse 9: But God is merciful, for just as the shed is about to be overrun by cucumbers the Sovereign Lord delivers it. He keeps Jerusalem and delivers it from the invading armies by His own Hand (Is 37:36-38). If God had not restrained the Assyrian army Jerusalem would have been destroyed as Sodom and Gomorrah, with none left alive. But He had been merciful and preserved a very small remnant, of which the prophet is a part.

QUESTION: Is there any relevance in verse nine to us? Explain your answer.

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

Individual Discovery questions give you the opportunity to do some 'digging' in God's Word for yourself and thereby experience the joy of discovery in the searching of the Scriptures. By doing these questions in the week before the study takes place, you will also be more able to enter into discussion within the group.

Why are the people of Judah likened to those of Sodom and Gomorrah in Isaiah 1:10? Is there any relevance in this designation to Australia today?

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