

## TEXT

### Isaiah 1:2–9 (ESV) <sup>1</sup>

**2** Hear, **O heavens, and give ear, O earth**<sup>2</sup>;

for Yahweh has spoken:

“**Children** have I reared and **brought**<sup>3</sup> up,

but **they**<sup>4</sup> have rebelled against me.

**3** The ox knows its owner,

and the donkey its master’s crib<sup>5</sup>,

but Israel does not know,

my people do not understand.”

**4** Ah<sup>6</sup>, sinful nation,

a people laden with iniquity,

offspring of evildoers,

children who deal corruptly!

They have forsaken Yahweh,

they have despised the Holy One of Israel,

they are utterly estranged<sup>7</sup>.

**5** Why will you still be struck down?

Why will you continue to rebel?

The whole head is sick,

and the whole heart faint.

**6** From the sole of the foot even to the head,

there is no soundness in it,

but bruises and sores

and raw wounds;

they are not pressed out or bound up

or softened with oil.

**7** Your country lies desolate;

your cities are burned with fire;

in your very presence

foreigners devour your land<sup>8</sup>;

it is desolate, as overthrown<sup>9</sup> by foreigners.

**8** And the daughter of Zion is left

like a booth in a vineyard,

like a lodge in a cucumber field,

like a besieged city.

**9** If Yahweh Almighty

had not left us a few survivors,

we should have been like Sodom,

and become like Gomorrah.

## CONTEXT

Introduction (1:1-5:30)

Israel’s present condition summed up (1:2-31)

**One nation under judgment of God (1:2-9)**

With religious hypocrisy (1:10-20)

Oppression and injustice for all (1:21-31)

Contrasting Israel Present vs. Israel Future (2:1-4:6)

A Harvest of Wild Grapes (5:1-30)

Isaiah’s Call (6:1-13)

<sup>1</sup> In verses 2-3 God is speaking, and in 4-9 Isaiah is amplifying

<sup>2</sup> Calling heaven and earth to witness. They were the primary witnesses called during the giving of the law.

<sup>3</sup> “Exalted” (cf. 52:13) – Israel’s guilt is amplified by her privilege.

<sup>4</sup> Emphatic they – “they – even they!”

<sup>5</sup> “crib” – feeding trough

<sup>6</sup> Literally, “woe” – a funeral lament, “Alas!”

<sup>7</sup> Literally, “they have be-stranged themselves backwards”

<sup>8</sup> Specifically, farmland – “they eat up your crops”

<sup>9</sup> Every other use of this word in the OT is connected with Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. v9-10)

## DISCUSSION

### INTRODUCTION

Chapters 1-5 form an introduction to the whole book, and serve to present a picture of the state of Judah at the time Isaiah prophesied. Thematically and structurally, they also link pretty well with the rest of the book. As one commentator put it – “The folly of Israel’s present choices (1:2-17, 21-23; 2:6-4:1; 5:1-30) is placed against the shining backdrop of what she might, nay, will, be (1:18-20; 2:1-5; 4:2-6).”<sup>10</sup>

Isaiah 1 is an introduction to the introduction, and in many ways serves as a preview or introduction of the whole book. Many of the themes touched on in this chapter will be picked up and expanded throughout the rest of the book.

- (a) The sinfulness of Judah and Jerusalem (vv.3-8)
- (b) Appeals for repentance (vv.16-19)
- (c) The coming of judgment (vv. 24, 25, 29-31)
- (d) The blessings of salvation to come (vv. 26-27)<sup>11</sup>

There are at least 3 distinct sections in Chapter 1 that give every indication of being distinct prophetic oracles, joined together by linking words. e.g.

- “Sodom” in v9-10
- “Hands are full of blood” in v.15
- “orphans and fatherless” and “justice” in the later verses

Together they present a coherent picture of the precarious situation faced by Judah. Verses 2-9 stand out in that their perspective is speaking of a nation who has undergone judgment and is teetering on the edge of survival, whereas the rest of chapters 1-5 speak as to a nation whose judgment is looming over their heads.

v.2-9 are like a movie whose opening scene is in the beginning of the climactic moment of the story, setting the stage of where the story will be going as it develops. Here we see the situation Judah faces at the height of Sennacherib’s invasion in 701 B.C., when the whole country has been ransacked and Jerusalem is now surrounded by the Assyrian army.

The transition in v.10 and going forward is like starting back at the beginning. How did we get here?

### V.2-3 THE COURTROOM SCENE

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for Yahweh has spoken: “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”

YHWH’s charge against his people is that they have transgressed his covenant.

- The heavens and the earth are summoned in as witnesses to God’s courtroom. They were called as witnesses at the giving of the covenant and have now been brought in as Israel’s covenant breaking is being prosecuted. Consider:
  - **Deuteronomy 4:25–31 (ESV) — 25** “When you father children and children’s children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of Yahweh your God, so as to provoke him to anger, **26** I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the

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<sup>10</sup> Oswalt, 1986

<sup>11</sup> Green Book Bible Study Series, Isaiah Vol. I, 72

land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. **27** And Yahweh will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where Yahweh will drive you. **28** And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. **29** But from there you will seek Yahweh your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. **30** When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to Yahweh your God and obey his voice. **31** For Yahweh your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.

- **Deuteronomy 30:15–20 (ESV) — 15** “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. **16** If you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God that I command you today, by loving Yahweh your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. **17** But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, **18** I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. **19** I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, **20** loving Yahweh your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that Yahweh swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”
- **Deuteronomy 31:26–29 (ESV) — 26** “Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of Yahweh your God, that it may be there for a witness against you. **27** For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. Behold, even today while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against Yahweh. How much more after my death! **28** Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears and call heaven and earth to witness against them. **29** For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly and turn aside from the way that I have commanded you. And in the days to come evil will befall you, because you will do what is evil in the sight of Yahweh, provoking him to anger through the work of your hands.”
- YHWH is the attentive father who has reared his children Israel – this covers the whole historical period from the Exodus to Isaiah. The word “brought up” here is the “exalted” or “lifted up”, the idea being raised to a place of honor. Despite the great privilege, they have rebelled, bringing upon themselves great guilt. Compare with the detailed description in Ezek. 16:1-63.
- Even dumb animals recognize their owner and where their food comes from, but Israel doesn’t know Yahweh or acknowledge his provision. Ox and donkey were both considered unintelligent animals, but they were in better shape than Israel. How ironic that the pinnacle of God’s creation, made in his image, by sin have become lower than the beasts.

#### V.4 THE FUNERAL LAMENT

Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken Yahweh, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.

- In vv4-9, Isaiah amplifies the indictment brought in the initial two verses. He begins with a funeral lament - a cry of “woe! alas!” – in other words, this sinful nation is as good as dead.
- In these 5 verses Isaiah uses every Hebrew variant for sin.
- In this verse we see 4 contrasts – 4 words describing Israel’s privilege and 4 words for sin:

Privilege	Sin
Nation	Sinful (miss the mark; sin)
People	Laden with iniquity (corruption of character vs behavior)
Offspring (Seed)	Evildoers (do harm; be bad)
Children (Sons)	Deal corruptly (depraved, ruined)

- The great privilege compounds the guilt. And we ourselves are not immune from this. One commentator: “With all the advantages, liberties, and blessings of people in countries where the Gospel has been preached for centuries, it is nothing short of amazing to behold the unbelief, ingratitude, and despising of the Holy God.”
- So, in spite of being called out as a Nation and People devoted to the Lord, in spite of being the promised Offspring of Abraham, even to the point of being called sons of Yahweh, they have forsaken and despised (or spurned) him.
- Holy One of Israel – one of Isaiah’s favorite designations for the Lord (25 out of 31 occurrences are in Isaiah) – He is the completely set apart from his creation, and his absolute moral perfection is fundamental to that.
- The parallels here are insightful:
  - To sin is to despise the Lord and vice-versa
  - Oswalt: “What this points up is the intimate connection between the moral life and one’s relationship to God. Morality without submission to God from whom morality stems may be merely another form of human pride. On the other hand, sin and evil, guilt and corruption, cannot be avoided when the vital link with the personal Lord is removed.”
  - This is true for Christians as well – when you find yourself trapped in a pattern of sin, then the first thing to consider where you are in terms of relationship with the Lord. Likewise, if you find your spiritual life withering, it’s worth evaluating whether there is some sin you’re cherishing or whether your external morality is itself simply a manifestation of pride (i.e. self-righteousness).
- As we will see, idolatry was at the heart of Israel’s rebellion. The whole point of idolatry was “the achievement of security through the manipulation of personalized force.” (Oswalt) Ancient people weren’t so naïve as to think that the wooden idol was actually a god, but they believed it was a channel to interfacing with the forces of the world that they needed to control in order to find safety and security. The way of Yahweh was to abandon this illusion of control and rely on the grace of God for safety and security. Israel tried to keep both and it resulted in disaster. When idolatry is defined this way, can we see idols all around us?

#### V.5-6 BRUISED AND BATTERED

Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.

- The picture is of a bruised and bloody person who doesn’t stop and doesn’t pursue treatment but continues to subject himself to a beating. Imagine Rocky, torn open but no help in his corner, continuing to run in and take further beatings. Their wounds haven’t been bound up, cleansed, or treated. These words are descriptive of injuries received in battle.
- Isaiah’s question is simple - you have suffered under so much judgment already – why will you not repent and seek relief from the Lord?

- David's cry of Psalm 38 could as well be the lament of the faithful remnant within Israel during Isaiah's time.
- Verses 5 and 6 function as imagery and metaphor for the description of Israel's circumstances in v.7-8.

#### V. 7-9 THE BESIEGED CITY

Your country lies desolate; your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence foreigners devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners. And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.

- This seems like a picture-perfect description of Sennacherib's siege in 701, the details of which we will cover in Chapters 36-38.



- All across the land, what we see is that which was promised for abandoning Yahweh and breaking the covenant.
- Right in front of you, invading foreigners are consuming your crops, your wealth.
- The use of overthrow in v.7 hints at Sodom and Gomorrah and that connection becomes explicit in v.9.
- Jerusalem stands alone after the flood of foreign enemies has washed right up to her doorstep. It is nearly complete, but for the preservation of Jerusalem itself. Two pictures and the reality given:
  - A shelter in a vineyard
  - A hut in a cucumber field
  - A city under siege
- Yet, despite this description of nearly complete wrath, there is a glimmer of hope. A remnant has been left, and what will their response be? Oswalt: "Isaiah believes there is hope for his people, even if he does not live to see it."

## PARALLELS WITH DEUTERONOMY 32

Chapter 1 has some striking parallels with the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. So much so, in fact, that there is a clear relationship between the two:

Isaiah 1	Deuteronomy 32
Isaiah 1:2 (ESV) — 2 <b>Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken...</b>	Deuteronomy 32:1 (ESV) — 1 <b>“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth.</b>
Isaiah 1:2 (ESV) — 2 ... <b>“Children</b> [‘sons’] have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.	Deuteronomy 32:20 (ESV) — 20 ... for they are a perverse generation, <b>children</b> [‘sons’] in whom is no faithfulness.
Isaiah 1:3 (ESV) — 3 The ox knows its <b>owner</b> [heb. <i>qā·nā(h)</i> ], and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”	Deuteronomy 32:6 (ESV) — 6 ... Is not he your father, <b>who created</b> [heb. <i>qā·nā(h)</i> ] you, who made you and established you?
Isaiah 1:4 (ESV) — 4 ... <b>children who deal corruptly...</b>	Deuteronomy 32:5 (ESV) — 5 They have <b>dealt corruptly</b> with him; they are no longer his <b>children...</b>
Isaiah 1:4 (ESV) — 4 ... <b>children</b> ...They have forsaken the LORD, they have <b>despised</b> [heb. <i>nā·’āš</i> ] the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.	Deuteronomy 32:19 (ESV) — 19 “The LORD saw it and <b>spurned</b> [heb. <i>nā·’āš</i> ] them, because of the provocation of his <b>sons and his daughters.</b>
Isaiah 1:9 (ESV) — 9 If the LORD of hosts <b>had not</b> [heb. <i>lû·lē(’)</i> ] left us a few survivors...	Deuteronomy 32:27 (ESV) — 27 [I would have wiped them from memory] ... <b>had I not</b> [heb. <i>lû·lē(’)</i> ] feared provocation by the enemy...
Isaiah 1:10 (ESV) — 10 <b>Hear</b> the word of the LORD, you rulers of <b>Sodom! Give ear</b> to the teaching of our God, you people of <b>Gomorrah!</b>	Deuteronomy 32:1 (ESV) — 1 <b>“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth.</b>  Deuteronomy 32:32 (ESV) — 32 For their vine comes from the vine of <b>Sodom</b> and from the fields of <b>Gomorrah...</b>
Isaiah 1:20 (ESV) — 20 but if you refuse and rebel, you shall <b>be eaten by the sword...</b>	Deuteronomy 32:42 (ESV) — 42 ...my <b>sword shall devour</b> flesh...’
Isaiah 1:21 (ESV) — 21 How the <b>faithful</b> city has become a whore, she who was full of <b>justice! Righteousness</b> lodged in her, but now murderers.  Isaiah 1:26 (ESV) — 26 ...Afterward you shall be called the city of <b>righteousness, the faithful</b> city.”	Deuteronomy 32:4 (ESV) — 4 “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are <b>justice.</b> A God of <b>faithfulness</b> and without iniquity, <b>just</b> and <b>upright</b> is he.
Isaiah 1:24 (ESV) — 24 ...“Ah, I will get relief from my <b>enemies</b> and <b>avenge</b> myself on my <b>foes.</b>	Deuteronomy 32:27 (ESV) — 27 had I not feared provocation by the <b>enemy, lest their adversaries</b> should misunderstand...  Deuteronomy 32:43 (ESV) — 43 ... for he <b>avenges</b> the blood of his children and takes <b>vengeance</b> on his <b>adversaries...</b>