

July 31

Scriptures: Read Isaiah 1 & 2

Key Verse: “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” (Isaiah 1:18)

Overview

The first chapter of Isaiah graphically pictures the rebellious and sinful condition of the people of Judah (Southern Kingdom), who were under the chastisement of God. Isaiah rebuked them and warned them of greater judgments to come unless they repented and returned to the Lord, who was graciously ready to forgive and restore them.

The Lord called heaven and earth to be condemnatory witnesses against His covenant people. This displays the importance of His message and His longing for the people to return to Him. It would also serve to expose, shame, and embarrass them because of their many sins (1:29).

Like a good and caring father, God had nourished and raised His chosen children, but they were ungrateful and rebellious. As the Lord reveals, they were more ignorant than beasts, for oxen and donkeys know their masters and have enough sense and appreciation to follow them (1:3); but the children of Israel stubbornly “turned away backward” (1:4) in a deliberate choice to not follow their Covenant God. God calls them “corrupters”, for they corrupted the true and pure way of God by following after their own sinful desires, including idolatry (1:21) and syncretism (cf. Rom. 1:21-23).

Their brethren in the Northern Kingdom of Israel had done the same, so God had stricken them and made their cities desolate (1:5, 7). Now the people of Judah have provoked God, and His anger stirred against them. They are full of putrefying spiritual sickness for which they have not sought treatment — a treatment of healing that only God can give (1:6). With Israel destroyed, Jerusalem remains like “a booth in a vineyard” (1:8), which housed those who guarded and protected the fields from marauders. If the people of Judah did not return to serve God, they, like Israel, would meet with calamity.

Isaiah explains that if it had not been for the faithful remnant, Jerusalem would have been destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. The majority of people, including judges, leaders, and priests, were hypocrites whose sacrifices to the Lord at the Temple were abominations to Him, since they were not offered with a pure and repentant heart (1:11-13; cf. Prov. 15:8; 21:27; 1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 50:14, 51:16-17; Amos 5:21-24; Jer. 6:20; Mic. 6:6-7). They “trampled” the courts of the Lord like hostile enemies, for in their hearts they had joined the camp of the Lord’s enemy (1:12, 24). They were murderers, thieves, and oppressors who perverted justice (1:21-23); so the Lord would not heed them when they prayed and lifted up their hands stained with innocent blood (1:15).

Even with all their guilt and sin, the Lord was still willing to forgive them and grant them His salvation, as He still does for mankind today. God desired that they cleanse themselves from all evil, repent, seek Him, and walk in His ways (1:16-17; cf. Jer. 4:14); then He would graciously call them before Him and mercifully change their lives stained with sin into lives that are pure

and “as white as snow” (1:18). The proper response to God’s forgiving grace is to live in obedience to Him, for only then will one enjoy the continued blessings of God.

Destruction awaits those who rebel against God; they will be consumed in an unquenchable fire (1:19-20, 28-31). Isaiah prophesied that God will restore justice and purge Judah of sin, as a refiner’s fire removes dross from silver. Jerusalem will then be a city of righteousness (1:25-26) which Isaiah expands upon in chapter two as occurring “in the latter days” (2:2; cf. Mic. 4:1-5) when Jesus Christ will return to rule and reign as the victorious King of kings. He will establish the New Jerusalem which will be the focal point of worship for the world. In the latter days, as it is today, Gentiles will share in the blessings of the covenant. The Messiah Jesus will judge all nations and rule “with a rod of iron” (Rev. 2:27), and it will be a time of wonderful peace and knowledge. In light of this future glory, Isaiah exhorts the people to serve the Lord now and to “walk in the light of the Lord” (2:5; cf. Prov. 6:23; Ps. 119:105; Eph. 5:8), so they might not suffer the future judgment of God’s wrath which His perfect justice demands.

To be obedient to God in such a corrupt society would naturally entail persecution, for it would mean opposing the fashionable trends of the day, which were self-pride, self-glorification (2:11,17), materialism, idolatry, and a close association with the heathen (2:6-9). Isaiah warns that in order to escape the terrible judgment and fate that awaits the sinful and the proud, the true people of God must sever themselves from these wicked men while they are still prospering (2:22). The prosperity of the unrepentant, however, will not last for long. In the Day of the Lord, their judgment will be so severe that they will run and hide in the caves and holes in the rocks, which was what the Israelites used to do in times of severe persecution (2:10, 21).

Prayer

Lord Jesus, please give us ears to hear what You are saying, and may we be obedient to You. Bring someone across our path today to whom we may minister.