

ISAIAH 01 – INTRODUCTION

Let's Start to Paint^a
(Isaiah 1:1-26)

Isaiah 1

¹ The vision^b of Isaiah^c the son of Amoz^d, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzzi'ah^e, Jotham^f, Ahaz^g, and Hezeki'ah^h, kings of Judahⁱ.

The Wickedness of Judah

^{2j} Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;
for the LORD has spoken:

“Sons have I reared and brought up,
but they have rebelled against me.^k

³ The ox knows its owner,
and the ass its master's crib;
but Israel does not know,
my people does not understand.”^l

⁴ Ah, sinful nation,
a people laden with iniquity,
offspring of evildoers,
sons who deal corruptly!
They have forsaken the LORD,
they have despised the Holy One of Israel^m,
they are utterly estranged.ⁿ

⁵ Why will you still be smitten,
that you continue to rebel?
The whole head is sick,
and the whole heart faint.^o

⁶ From the sole of the foot even to the head,
there is no soundness in it,
but bruises and sores
and bleeding wounds;
they are not pressed out, or bound up,
or softened with oil.^p

⁷ Your country lies desolate,
your cities are burned with fire;
in your very presence
aliens devour your land;
it is desolate, as overthrown by aliens.^q

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.^r

⁹ If the LORD of hosts
had not left us a few survivors,
we should have been like Sodom,
and become like Gomor'rah.^s

Seek First Justice and Mercy

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD,
you rulers of Sodom!
Give ear to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomor'rah!^t

¹¹ "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the LORD;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of he-goats.^u

¹² "When you come to appear before me,
who requires of you
this trampling of my courts?^v

¹³ Bring no more vain offerings;
incense is an abomination to me.

New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies—
I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.^w

¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts
my soul hates;

they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.^x

¹⁵ When you spread forth your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.^y

¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,^z

¹⁷ learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
defend the fatherless,
plead for the widow.^{aa}

¹⁸ "Come now, let us reason together,
says the LORD:

though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.^{bb}

¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;^{cc}

²⁰ but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be devoured by the sword;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."^{dd}

The Degenerate City and the Faithful City

²¹ How the faithful city
has become a harlot,
she that was full of justice!
Righteousness lodged in her,

but now murderers.^{ee}

²² Your silver has become dross,
your wine mixed with water.^{ff}

²³ Your princes are rebels
and companions of thieves.

Every one loves a bribe
and runs after gifts.

They do not defend the fatherless,
and the widow's cause does not come to them.^{gg}

²⁴ Therefore the Lord says,
the LORD of hosts,
the Mighty One of Israel:

“Ah, I will vent my wrath on my enemies,
and avenge myself on my foes.^{hh}

²⁵ I will turn my hand against you
and will smelt away your dross as with lye
and remove all your alloy.ⁱⁱ

²⁶ And I will restore your judges as at the first,
and your counselors as at the beginning.

Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness,
the faithful city.”^{jj}

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

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^a The Titles of the lessons in this study are borrowed from those given by **Jhan Moskowitz** of Jews for Jesus to the chapter titles in his recorded study of Isaiah upon which much of this study is based. I owe a great debt to Jhan, my late friend and brother in the Lord, who was called Home before his time, not only for much of the work in this study, but also for giving me a whole new perspective on the Scriptures and the Jewish Messiah. Jhan's original recordings may be downloaded from the Jews for Jesus web site. <http://jewsforjesus.org/jhan-moskowitz>

^b The entire Book of Isaiah is identified as a “**vision**” meaning, in a broad sense, divine revelation, 2Ch 32:32, Ob 1, Nah 1:1, Am 1:1, Mi 1:1, Hab 1:1. The visions in Isaiah are not arranged chronologically. The first 5 chapters could have taken place during any, or all, of the time of Isaiah's ministry and are perhaps best understood as setting the scene, or painting a picture, of the

spiritual condition of Judah during Isaiah's ministry. Isaiah himself will not appear in the Book until Chapter 6 when the beginning of his ministry is described. While there is some debate among scholars regarding the date and authorship of the Book, this study will assume that Isaiah is the author, and that it is relatively contemporaneous with the times it describes. There is good reason to believe, however, that it may be a sort of "greatest hits" of Isaiah, with various writings of Isaiah throughout his ministry arranged in the final form to make a point about Judah, Jerusalem, the coming Jewish Messiah and the plan of salvation. In order to understand Isaiah, we need to ask how the sections of the Book are connected, and why they are arranged the way they are. So we need to see the Book of Isaiah as a collection of Isaiah's thoughts and writings, perhaps originally written or spoken in another context, which were arranged intentionally in the specific order we find them.

The inspiration of the Holy Spirit need not be limited to those men and women who actually wrote the text of Scripture. It can extend also to those who may have edited or copied the original text, those who compiled it, and those who decided which texts were to be included within the Canon.

As we begin our study of Isaiah we must approach it from the standpoint of humility, and recognize that we study from faith and not knowing all the answers. While there are parts that seem fairly clear, there are other parts that are debated. This study will attempt to identify where the scholarship is essentially in agreement, and where there are debated passages and meanings. Returning to Isaiah from time to time should bring new questions and new insights.

The central theme of Chapters 1-39 is the "**King**." Chapters 40-55 have to do with the "**Suffering Servant**." And Chapters 56-66 have to do with a restored Jerusalem, with the key playing in those chapters being the "**Conqueror**."

^c The name "**Isaiah**" means "Yahweh has saved" or "May Yahweh save."

^d There is a Talmudic tradition that when the name of a prophet's father is given, the father was also a prophet, so that **Amoz** would have been a prophet like his son. Though it is mentioned frequently as the patronymic title of Isaiah, the name Amoz appears nowhere else in the Bible. It is also traditional that Amoz was the brother of King Amaziah, of Judah. Amoz is clearly distinct from Amos, the minor prophet. Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, were Kings of Judah. The dates cited in the following footnotes is according to one common chronology. Other chronologies have slightly different dates, but the relative time periods are consistent.

^e **Uzziah** (Azariah, 783-742); 2Ch 26:1-23, 2Ki 14:21-22,15:1-7. Uzziah was a "good" King doing what was right in the sight of the Lord.

^f **Jotham** (742-735); 2Ch 27:1-9, 2Ki 32-38. Jotham was also a "good" King doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord as his father had done.

^g **Ahaz** (735-715); 2Ch 28:1-27, 2Ki 16:1-20. Ahaz did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He suffered defeat at the hands of the King of Syria and the King of Israel. Ahaz later asked for help from the King of Assyria against his closer enemies. But the King of Assyria, once having been invited, took plunder from Judah, and Judah became tributary to Assyria. During the days of Ahaz, the Assyrians defeated Israel and carried its people into exile ending the Northern Kingdom, 2Ki 17:6-41.

^h **Hezekiah** (715-687); 2Ch 29:1-32:33, 2Ki 18:1-20:21. Hezekiah did what was right in the sight of the Lord. During his time the Assyrians conquered all of Judah with the exception of Jerusalem itself, which was put under siege. The Lord then fought for Judah defeating the besieging army. Hezekiah also led a great revival among the people of Judah who re-established the celebration of the Passover which had apparently fallen into disuse.

ⁱ (1) Is 2:1,6:1; Hos 1:1; Mi 1:1. This verse identifies Isaiah, his ministry, the time he prophesized, and where he prophesized. It also shows, based on the dates of the various Kings, that his ministry lasted approximately 55 years. During that time there were three, or maybe four important powers in the region including Egypt, the declining power with whom Judah attempted to make an alliance, Syria, a less important power that allied with Israel (the Northern Kingdom) to defeat Judah during the rule of Ahaz, Assyria, the most powerful of the nations (goyim) at that time, and Babylon, an up and coming power that will make its appearance later.

^j Much of the Book is in the form of **Hebrew poetry**. While the translation into English causes a loss of many of the poetic elements, some of those that remain will be identified as we go along. One thing that is apparent is that poetry, in Hebrew and English, allows the use of images which can paint a powerful picture of what is going on without being a literal description. Isaiah will make liberal use of these images. Verse 2 starts the first song.

^k (2) Dt 32:1,6,10,15 (the Song of Moses) begins in the same way, calling up the created universe to be a witness to what Isaiah is saying. Moses is telling the Jews that they will not follow the Law, and will therefore be taken into exile. In a sense, God is putting Judah and Jerusalem on trial before the heavens and the earth. Mi 1:2,6:1-2; Jer 3:22,6:19; Dt 4:26. The people of Judah were **children** not just in the sense of being created by God, Gn 1:26-31, but also because they were God's first born to be a blessing to the Nations, Gn 12:1-3. God redeemed them out of Israel, Ex 4:22, Hos. 11:1. Yet they had **rebelled** against God and his Law, Dt. 32:6,18,20, and deserved death, Ex 21:15-17. In a sense God is saying that though he took care of his children, they

had abandoned God. The Hebrew word for “rebel” here has a connotation of willfully pushing God away. Verses 2-4 describe Judah’s deplorable spiritual condition during Isaiah’s ministry.

^l (3) Jer 8:7,9:3-6. Even dumb animals recognize their masters, yet Judah does not.

^m **The Holy One of Israel** (K’dosh Yisrael). This title for God, especially frequent in the prophecy of Isaiah, serves to place the sins of Isaiah’s society in stark contrast to God’s moral perfection, Isa 30:11, and expresses God’s absolute separation from evil, Isa 17:7, 2 Ki 19:22, Ps 71:22, Jer. 50:29. This theme of the Holiness of God is one Isaiah will come back to again and again. Another theme which will appear over and over in Isaiah is that of **Mt. Zion**, or Jerusalem. Finally **faith** will be a repeated theme. This study will show how Isaiah will keep returning to these themes.

ⁿ (4) Is 14:20,5:19-24; Mt 3:7; Ezk 14:5; Dt 32:20; Neh 1:7. The verse starts with “Oy” which in Hebrew or Yiddish means “woe.” It’s use here clearly indicates that trouble is coming. The people of Judah are a nation, but yet a sinful nation. They were to be a people, but they are a people laden with guilt. They were to be a seed (offspring), yet not living out their promise to be a blessing to the nations, Gn 12:1-3. They were children, yet they are rebellious children against the Holy One of Israel because they have turned their back on (become strangers to) God.

^o (5) Is 31:6,33:6,33:24; Jer 5:3; Ezk 21:13,34:4-16. Sin has affected the whole being from head to toe. This could be interpreted as God having punished Judah for its sin, or simply that despite God’s warnings, Judah continued to sin and suffered the natural consequences of its actions, Rm1:24-26 “God gave them up . . . “

^p (6) Ps 38:3; Dt 28:35; Jb 2:7; Jer 8:22. The image here is of a man beaten head to foot who would not seek healing through washing, anointing and binding up. Moskowitz likened this to God asking Judah, “Why do you keep on rejecting me and suffering more punishment? There is nowhere else on your body for you to be punished!”

^q (7) Dt 28:51-52; Lev 26:33; Jer 44:6. During Isaiah’s time Judah suffered several invasions and defeats, at the hands of Syria, Israel, Edom, Philistia and Assyria. The Land, to which much of the Covenant and Promise to the Jews are tied, is described as desolate with strangers devouring it. What is being said here is that Judah broke the covenant, so these bad things will happen to the Land itself, c.f. Lev 18:24-30 where God says the Land itself will vomit out the people if they allow certain detestable practices to be carried on there, even by foreigners.

^r (8) Jb 27:18; Zec 2:10,9:9. Isaiah describes a temporary shelter that is hardly protection from the wind or sun. It is an image of extreme loneliness and desolation.

^s (9) Gn 6:7-8, 7:1,23, 19:24-25, 45:7; 1Ki 19:18; 2Ki 17:18, 18:13, 19:4; Is 37:4; Rm 9:29,11:5; Lm 3:22; Jude 7; Rv 12:17. The faithful remnant is a recurring theme in Scripture. Judah would be like Sodom and Gomorrah which were destroyed for their sin allowing only Lot and his family to escape.

^t (10) Dt 32:32; Is 28:14; Ezk 16:46-55; Hos 5:1; Mi 3:1,9; Rm 11:8; Rv 11:8. This verse starts a new song with “Hear the Word of the Lord . . .” It is tied to the first song by the repetition of the reference to Sodom and because it starts the same way. Now God is addressing particularly the rulers of Judah, and calling them out for their sinful lifestyle. Sodom, Gn 18:16-19:28, was a byword among the prophets for spectacular divine judgment on immoral conduct, Am 4:11; Jer 23:14, 49:18, 50:40; Ezk 16:46-56; Zep 2:9.

^u (11) 1Sm 15:22; Ps 40:6, 50:7-15; Pr 15:8, 21:27; Jer 8:20, 14:12; Mi 6:6-8; Mal 1:10; Am 5:21-24; Hos 6:6; Mt 6:7; Heb 11:6. Isaiah is not saying the sacrificial system is wrong, but that, because of Judah’s sin, God no longer is pleased by the sacrifices and holidays. This sacrificial system gave the Jews before the time of the Messiah a way to fellowship with God despite their sin. But it is premised on the relationship between God and the Jews which has now been broken by the people of Judah turning away from God. Those forms of worship, while good, cannot substitute for the relationship. Worship is meaningless without faith.

^v (12) Ex 23:16-17, 34:23.

^w (13) Nu 28:11-14; Ex 12:16; Ec 1:2 (“empty”); Is 66:3; Pr 6:16; Jer 7:9-10; 1Ch 23:31; Lev 23:36; Jl 2:15-17.

^x (14) Nu 28:11-29:39; Ps 5:5; Is 43:22-24.

^y (15) Ex 9:29; 1Ki 8:22, 8:38; Pr 1:28; Is 59:3; Lam 1:17; Mi 3:4; Jn 9:31. The phrase used to express the hands being filled with blood is also used, in other contexts, for being consecrated to the Lord, so the phrase has an ironic meaning here.

^z (16) Ps 26:6, 37:27; Is 55:7; Jer 2:22, 25:5; Ezk 18:23,31; Jl 2:12-13; 1Pt 3:11. There is, however, a remedy for having blood on your hands, to wash oneself clean by ceasing to do evil, and to seek justice. Note that the sin originated because of the turning

away from God, and that the remedy must come first by returning to God and then by improving one's actions. We cannot do this apart from faith.

^{aa} (17) Ps 34:14, 82:3; Jer 6:20-21, 7:1-15, 22:3; Am 5:15-24; Mi 6:6-8; Jas 1:27. Seeking justice means to reprove the ruthless (or perhaps encourage the oppressed), defend the orphan and plead for the widow, Ex 22:22; Dt 24:17-21, 27:19. The Hebrew word for the ruthless, or oppressors, is so close to the word for the oppressed that some translators have chosen one alternative and some the other.

^{bb} (18) Is 43:9, 43:26, 51:7; Jer 2:35, 44:22; Mi 6:2; Ps 51:7; Rm 4:5, 11:6; Rv 7:14. The language used here is legal language of adjudication. There is a hint here that after judgment, and repentance, comes grace. Wool is white, Ps 147:16; Dan 7:9.

^{cc} (19) Lev 25:18-19; Dt 28:1, 30:15-16.

^{dd} (20) Nu 23:19; Is 3:25; Mi 4:4; Titus 1.2.

^{ee} (21) Ex 34:15; Jer 2:20, 31:23; Hos. 4:13; Mt 23:37; Rv 21:2. The third song, beginning at v. 21, is about Jerusalem. Isaiah has a vision of the faithful city, which has now been corrupted, but in the end will be restored and become faithful again. That is a constant theme in the Bible, of that which has fallen into corruption and sin, being in the end restored to its original, sinless, condition. The beginning of the Bible is the Fall from the original created order. In Revelation there is a restoration of the original created order. The image of the Tree of Life in Revelation contrasts with the role of the Tree of Knowledge in Genesis.

David was the founder of Jerusalem. David, the Temple and Jerusalem are all connected, so the restoration of Jerusalem will, in some way, be connected to the restoration of David to the throne. Jerusalem has become a harlot which is fundamentally the breaking of a covenant, the consequences of which are moral decay, even murder. When faithfulness to God is abandoned, bad things will begin to happen.

This third song begins with faithful city in v. 21 also ends with faithful city at v. 26. This is a poetic device called an "inclusio." In Biblical studies, an **inclusio** is a literary device based on placing similar material at the beginning and end of a section. This similar material could consist of a word or a phrase, or greater amounts of text. The purpose of an inclusio may be structural - to alert the reader to a particularly important theme - or it may be serve to show how the material within the inclusio relates to the inclusio itself. An important case of this occurs in the Gospel of Mark's treatment of the "Cursing of the Fig Tree" and the "Cleansing of the Temple" (Chapter 11). By giving the first half of the story before the Cleansing of the Temple, and the conclusion after, Mark creates a "frame" that effectively highlights that he wants the Cleansing of the Temple to be seen in light of the Cursing of the Fig Tree - ie. Jesus' actions in the Temple are not just a reform measure, but a judgment against it.

^{ff} (22) Jer 6:30; Ezk 22:18. Once wine is mixed with water, they cannot be separated, and the wine is ruined. Once you leave God, you change fundamentally everything and only God can repair the damage.

^{gg} (23) Ex 22:22, 23:8; Jer 5:28; Ezk 22:7; Hos 5:10, 9:15; Am 5:10-12; Mi 3:9-11, 7:3; Zec 7:10.

^{hh} (24) Dt 28:63, 32:41; Ps 132:2; Is 35:4; Rm 5:10; 12:19. Judgement is coming. Judgement is a purge, to be followed by a restoration. God is making a future promise that Jerusalem will again be the Faithful City.

ⁱⁱ (25) Ps 81:14; Ezk 22:19-22; Am 1:8; Mal 3:2-3.

^{jj} (26) Jer 3:17, 33:7-11; Zec 8:3.