

## Isaiah 1:1 – 31

<sup>1:1</sup> The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

<sup>2</sup> Listen, O heavens,

And hear, O earth; for the LORD speaks,

‘Sons I have reared and brought up,

But they have revolted against Me.

<sup>3</sup> ‘An ox knows its owner,

And a donkey its master’s manger,

But Israel does not know,

My people do not understand.’

<sup>4</sup> Alas, sinful nation,

People weighed down with iniquity,

Offspring of evildoers,

Sons who act corruptly!

They have abandoned the LORD,

They have despised the Holy One of Israel,

They have turned away from Him.

<sup>5</sup> Where will you be stricken again,

As you continue in your rebellion?

The whole head is sick

And the whole heart is faint.

<sup>6</sup> From the sole of the foot even to the head

There is nothing sound in it,

Only bruises, welts and raw wounds,

Not pressed out or bandaged, nor softened with oil.

<sup>7</sup> Your land is desolate,

Your cities are burned with fire,

Your fields--strangers are devouring them in your presence;

It is desolation, as overthrown by strangers.

<sup>8</sup> The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard,

Like a watchman’s hut in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.

<sup>9</sup> Unless the LORD of hosts

Had left us a few survivors,

We would be like Sodom,

We would be like Gomorrah.

<sup>10</sup> Hear the word of the LORD,

You rulers of Sodom;

Give ear to the instruction of our God,

You people of Gomorrah.

<sup>11</sup> ‘What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?’ says the LORD.

‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle;

And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats.

<sup>12</sup> When you come to appear before Me,

Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?

<sup>13</sup> ‘Bring your worthless offerings no longer,

Incense is an abomination to Me.

New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies--

I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.

<sup>14</sup> I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts,

They have become a burden to Me;

I am weary of bearing them.

<sup>15</sup> ‘So when you spread out your hands in prayer,

I will hide My eyes from you;

Yes, even though you multiply prayers,

*Isaiah:* A poetic preacher who lived in the 700’s BC and died after 687 BC, in the Southern Kingdom of Judah (after the nation Israel split into two kingdoms). Isaiah lived and taught during four kings’ reigns, so he saw some spiritual ups and downs, both of kings and people!

*The Threat:* Assyria took the Northern Kingdom of Israel captive in 721 BC. Isaiah had seen the devastation left (Isaiah 1:7, 9), and maybe the actual Assyrian army itself. Jerusalem stood alone (1:8). And Babylon was a rising threat to the region (Isaiah 13 – 14; 39). Babylon will take the Southern Kingdom of Judah captive in 586 BC.

*Jerusalem:* The capital city of the once united Israel, and later just the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem was built on and around Mount Zion (Isaiah 1:8), so Zion became a synonym for the city and the holy temple in which God dwelt. Sacrifices were offered there so God could symbolically cleanse the people and the land.

The temple in Jerusalem was a partial restoration of Eden. God appeared as a pillar of light and fire, and stood at the threshold of heaven and earth, between the cherubim (Exodus 25:18 – 22). This reminds us of the flaming sword between the cherubim guarding the way back to the tree of life in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24).

God placed the Israelites at the crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe, to be a light to them, and to represent the one true God. Israel’s leaders were NOT supposed to accumulate wealth and centralize power like every

I will not listen.  
 Your hands are covered with blood.  
 16 'Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;  
 Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight.  
 Cease to do evil,  
 17 Learn to do good;  
 Seek justice,  
 Reprove the ruthless,  
 Defend the orphan,  
 Plead for the widow.  
 18 'Come now, and let us reason together,'  
 Says the LORD,  
 'Though your sins are as scarlet,  
 They will be as white as snow;  
 Though they are red like crimson,  
 They will be like wool.  
 19 'If you consent and obey,  
 You will eat the best of the land;  
 20 'But if you refuse and rebel,  
 You will be devoured by the sword.'  
 Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.  
 21 How the faithful city has become a harlot,  
 She who was full of justice!  
 Righteousness once lodged in her,  
 But now murderers.  
 22 Your silver has become dross,  
 Your drink diluted with water.  
 23 Your rulers are rebels  
 And companions of thieves;  
 Everyone loves a bribe  
 And chases after rewards.  
 They do not defend the orphan,  
 Nor does the widow's plea come before them.  
 24 Therefore the Lord GOD of hosts,  
 The Mighty One of Israel, declares,  
 'Ah, I will be relieved of My adversaries  
 And avenge Myself on My foes.  
 25 'I will also turn My hand against you,  
 And will smelt away your dross as with lye  
 And will remove all your alloy.  
 26 'Then I will restore your judges as at the first,  
 And your counselors as at the beginning;  
 After that you will be called the city of righteousness,  
 A faithful city.'  
 27 Zion will be redeemed with justice  
 And her repentant ones with righteousness.  
 28 But transgressors and sinners will be crushed together,  
 And those who forsake the LORD will come to an end.  
 29 Surely you will be ashamed of the oaks which you have desired,  
 And you will be embarrassed at the gardens which you have chosen.  
 30 For you will be like an oak whose leaf fades away  
 Or as a garden that has no water.  
 31 The strong man will become tinder,  
 His work also a spark.  
 Thus they shall both burn together  
 And there will be none to quench them.

other kingdom or empire. Land was meant to be in the hands of families who cared for the poor and the foreigner (Leviticus 25). Kings were not supposed to build up horses, wives, or wealth, but simply be a 'model Israelite' (Deuteronomy 17:14 – 20). When leaders built up wealth and power in Jerusalem, they attracted attention from other foreign empires (Isaiah 39).

*Uzziah* became king at age 16 and reigned for 52 years (783 – 742 BC). The first 24 years of his reign were shared with his father, Amaziah. He was regarded as a good king except he did not tear down certain altars to false gods (2 Kings 15:1 – 5), and in his pride he stepped into the role of the priests and offered incense at the altar (2 Chronicles 26:16 – 23).

*Jotham* became king at age 25 and reigned for 16 years (751 – 735 BC). He co-reigned with his father Uzziah for the first 11 years because Uzziah had become a leper. 'He did right in the sight of the Lord' (2 Chronicles 27:1 – 2).

*Ahaz* became king at age 20 and reigned for 16 years (744 – 728 BC). He co-reigned with his father Jotham for the first 9 years. Ahaz was an evil king (2 Kings 16:2; Isaiah 7:10 – 13) and was not buried with his forefathers because of his wickedness and disregard for the worship of God.

*Hezekiah* became king at age 25 and reigned for 29 years (715 – 687 BC). He co-reigned with his father Ahaz for some time before 715. He is regarded as having been very righteous.

## Questions

1. Have everyone pick a verse to analyze the poetry. Remember that biblical poetry operates by rhyming ideas and concepts, not sounds primarily. The point often rests on how the idea develops from line A to line B. Example (explain this verse, because it sets the tone for the whole chapter):

<sup>3</sup> 'An ox knows its owner,	[knows owner/master]
And a donkey its master's manger,	[knows who feeds and houses]
But Israel does not know,	[implied parallel: God as owner/master]
My people do not understand.'	[implied parallel: God feeds and houses]

2. How have the people sinned and been unfaithful to God?
  - a. If someone has picked a verse that speaks about this, ask them to share their insight
  - b. In v.4 – 6, Isaiah diagnoses sin like a disease affecting the whole human body
  - c. In v.7 – 10, Isaiah explains that the Assyrian invasion was the ravaging consequences of the sin of the Northern Kingdom
  - d. In v.11 – 15, God says that He detests the animal sacrifices that the people bring to him, because they are hypocritical gestures. They are not making any effort to curb their sin.
  - e. In v.16 – 20, God gives examples of how worshipping Him ought to be done: with justice in human affairs! Notice the themes of feeding and housing in v.19 – 20. The people will eat the best of the land in v.19 if they are faithful, but they will be eaten ('devoured') by the sword in v.20 if they are not.
  - f. In v.21 – 31, God warns Jerusalem.
3. Do you think God is harsh?
  - a. Do people just become 'disbelievers in God' but act ethically? Or do they start to oppress the vulnerable, cut corners, and build up wealth and power for themselves?
4. Application: How do leaders set the tone for others to follow? Notice that this poem eventually focuses on Jerusalem and the leadership there.
  - a. Who looks up to you? Even if you don't think they do!
  - b. Notice that God views good leadership as a gift: 'Then I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning' (v.26). But leaders can be corrupt, obviously (v.23).
  - c. We have to be content with our 'portion' (Lev.25; Ps.12:5; 16:5 – 6; 78:5; 105:11). We can't be greedy and dominate others. God defends the rights of the vulnerable. Renouncing wealth we have stolen from others, credit we have stolen, etc. is important!
  - d. So God takes away the platform and influence of bad leaders.
5. How does Isaiah use the motif of fire here?
  - a. In v.25, God is a purifying, refining fire like how a metal-worker melts down gold to get rid of the dross.
  - b. In v.31, there is some kind of fire, but what? The 'strong man' seems to be 'the powerful,' who are wicked and have done evil things. He and his work will burn together because some foreign power (Babylon) will come in to capture the city. It will burn down because the Jewish people will resist, and the enemy will crush the city.
  - c. Is there any difference between repenting and being refined by God? Fundamentally, it seems like they are the same thing. But when God has to take something away from us against our will, there is more shock. It's always better to repent willingly!
6. Application: Can you be nourished by God without trusting in Him, receiving His direction, and receiving His cleansing?
  - a. God told Israel they would eat the best of the land. They needed to trust Him for that. We eat spiritually, being nourished by Christ.
  - b. We have to be content with our 'portion' (Lev.25; Ps.12:5; 16:5 – 6; 78:5; 105:11). We can't be greedy and dominate others. God defends the rights of the vulnerable. Renouncing wealth we have stolen from others, credit we have stolen, etc. is important!
  - c. Remember the ox knows its master, and the donkey knows who feeds it. God is our master, and God is the one who feeds us. Trust Him!!