

ISAIAH'S MESSAGE TO A BACKSLIDING PEOPLE

BIBLE TEXT : Isaiah 1:1-31.

LESSON 348 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Isaiah 1:1-31

¹ 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.

² 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.

³ The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: *but* Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant,

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I Vision of Isaiah

1. Isaiah saw a vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, Isaiah 1:1.

2. Israel was scathingly rebuked of God: although dumb beasts knew their masters, yet Israel did not know their Lord and Creator, Isaiah 1:2-4;

Jeremiah 8:7

⁷ Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD.

3. Israel was asked why they desired to be stricken more when they were already smitten from head to foot, Isaiah 1:5-9;

Jeremiah 2:30

³⁰ In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction: your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion.

Jeremiah 5:3

³ O LORD, *are* not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, *but* they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.

4. God refused to accept Israel's many sacrifices and religious ceremonies which insulted the true worship of God, Isaiah 1:10-15;

Malachi 1:6-14

⁶ A son honoureth *his* father, and a servant his master: if then I *be* a father, where *is* mine honour? and if I *be* a master, where *is* my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?

⁷ Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD *is* contemptible.

⁸ And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, *is it* not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, *is it* not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts.

⁹ And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the LORD of hosts.

¹⁰ Who *is there* even among you that would shut the doors *for nought*? neither do ye kindle *fire* on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.

¹¹ For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense *shall be* offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name *shall be* great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

¹² But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the LORD *is* polluted; and the fruit thereof, *even* his meat, *is* contemptible.

¹³ Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness *is it!* and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought *that which was* torn, and the lame, and the

we should have been as Sodom, *and* we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

¹¹ To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

¹² When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?

¹³ Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*.

¹⁵ And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

¹⁶ Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

¹⁷ Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

¹⁸ Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

¹⁹ If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

²⁰ But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD.

¹⁴ But cursed *be* the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I *am* a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name *is* dreadful among the heathen.

Matthew 15:7-9

⁷ Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,

⁸ This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.

⁹ But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.

5. Israel was commanded of God to cease from evil, and learn to do well, Isaiah 1:16, 17;

Hosea 6:6

⁶ For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Hosea 9:13

¹³ Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place: but Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer.

Jeremiah 4:14

¹⁴ O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?

James 4:8-10

⁸ Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.

Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double minded.

⁹ Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness.

¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

6. God desired to reason with Israel regarding their sins, Isaiah 1:18-20;

1 Samuel 12:7

⁷ Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers.

Micah 6:2

² Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD'S controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel.

Micah 6:3

³ O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.

7. God lamented over Jerusalem because of their idolatry and shameful turning away from Him, Isaiah 1:21-23;

Jeremiah 2:19-27

¹⁹ Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that *it is* an evil *thing* and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear *is* not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

²⁰ For of old time I have broken thy yoke, *and* burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot.

²¹ Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?

²² For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, *yet* thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord GOD.

²³ How canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done: *thou art* a swift dromedary traversing

²¹ How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

²² Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water:

²³ Thy princes *are* rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

²⁴ Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies:

²⁵ And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:

²⁶ And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.

²⁷ Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.

²⁸ And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners *shall be* together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed.

²⁹ For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen.

³⁰ For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water.

³¹ And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench *them*.

her ways;

²⁴ A wild ass used to the wilderness, *that* snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure; in her occasion who can turn her away? all they that seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they shall find her.

²⁵ Withhold thy foot from being unshod, and thy throat from thirst: but thou saidst, There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.

²⁶ As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets,

²⁷ Saying to a stock, Thou *art* my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned *their* back unto me, and not *their* face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us.

Ezekiel 22:24-29

²⁴ Son of man, say unto her, Thou *art* the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation.

²⁵ *There is* a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof.

²⁶ Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed *difference* between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

²⁷ Her princes in the midst thereof *are* like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, *and* to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain.

²⁸ And her prophets have daubed them with untempered *morter*, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken.

²⁹ The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully.

8. The purging fire of God is promised upon Israel until Zion is redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness, Isaiah 1:24-31;

Malachi 3:3-6

³ And he shall sit *as* a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

⁴ Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

⁵ And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in *his* wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger *from his right*, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

⁶ For I *am* the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Zechariah 13:9

⁹ And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD *is* my God.

Romans 11:24-27

²⁴ For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree?

²⁵ For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

²⁶ And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

²⁷ For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

Romans 9:26

²⁶ And it shall come to pass, *that* in the place where it was said unto them, Ye *are* not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

Romans 9:27

²⁷ Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved:

NOTES:

Messengers of God

Isaiah began his prophetic office when it seemed that all true religion in Israel was in great danger of being forsaken. Isaiah's messages were directed mainly to Judah and Jerusalem. The other ten tribes of Israel had so apostatised from the worship of the Lord that the judgment of God was coming upon them. That judgment came in the form of the Assyrians, a cruel and despotic people who ravaged most of the land and took into captivity the people. Judah and Benjamin carried on the worship of God in form, but in spirit and in truth they were rapidly becoming as reprobate as their brethren.

Despite the apostasy of Israel God raised up a series of men who fearlessly proclaimed the great truths of God to the people. Of these men Isaiah was one, and has been often called the "fifth evangelist" because of his incomparable prophecies and teachings of Jesus Christ. Isaiah preached the truth of God uncompromisingly through the administrations of four different kings. His fearless preaching against sin and wickedness finally cost him his life under the reign of the wicked king Manasseh. According to tradition, Isaiah is referred to in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews where mention is made of one who was sawn asunder.

Message of God

Isaiah's message to Israel, as we read it in the first chapter of Isaiah, was received in the form of a vision, which revealed to him the true condition of the people's souls before God. The vision covered the period of the reign of four different kings. It was a message Isaiah was to preach during the reign of those kings, proclaiming to the people the state of their sins before God.

God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; and yet men do persist in living in sin, despite all the warnings God sends to them. Israel did not leave the worship of God to turn again to the vile practices of heathen idols without full knowledge that God's Word was immutable, and that it could not be transgressed with impunity. The prophets whom God sent to Israel could be said to have been Israel's conscience, and they lamented Israel's sins before the people. The prophets of God expressed the mind of God. To hear them was to hear God; and to reject them was to reject God.

Paul told the saints at Thessalonica regarding the message he brought, "He therefore that despiseth not man, but God" (I Thessalonians 4:8). Likewise Jesus told His disciples: "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me" (Luke 10:16). Although the prophets came with the authority and the Spirit of God, they were seldom received with kindness; and more

often than not the tolerance of Israel was very much strained with their presence. They came nevertheless, sent of God, and warned Israel of the penalties that would soon follow their sin.

Truth of God

The description Israel received of the sin of Israel is one of the most detailed and vivid portraits of sin that the Bible gives. God does not minimise the horridness of sin; neither does He hesitate to inform men of the true state of their souls before Him. Men cannot and will not repent of their sins until they realise the terrible hideousness and vileness of sin. When men learn of the guilt of their sin, then, and only then, is there hope of their turning to God in repentance of it.

Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Part of the truth of God is conviction of individual sin. This was the purpose of God's revelation of Israel's sins. Isaiah having once learned the true state of the people's hearts would preach their sinfulness to them unsparingly, that they might know their sins were known of God, and so repent.

It is the kindness and mercy of God that reveals to men the sins of their heart that they might know their need of salvation. Men do not like to hear about the wrath of God against sin, about a devil's hell, the Judgment Day that will judge every unrepentant man for the evil deeds done, or that the wages of sin is death; but unless they know and believe the truth they cannot find salvation from sin.

God's love for the souls of men does not give men permission to indulge in sin. On the contrary, it is because God does love men that He has provided salvation through the Blood of the cross of Christ so that they can escape the penalty for sin, which they have already committed.

We see this process carried out exactly in Isaiah's vision and preaching. Israel is told in vivid and exacting detail the amount and awfulness of their sins, and then the Lord inquires of them why they desire to persist in them.

Death Chosen

God continually inquires of men why they endure the agonies of sin when it is not necessary. Isaiah had cried to the people, "Why should ye be stricken any more?" Israel had been compared by God to one who had been terribly stricken, until from the top of his head to the sole of his feet he was nothing but a mass of wounds, bruises, and sores. The obvious implication was that their sins had brought about such a condition, and it was nothing less than madness to aggravate it by further sinning against God.

Sin is enticing for a season, but it is not so enticing nor its pleasures so stupefying that the pain of a wounded conscience cannot be felt. Neither can the voice of God crying out against sin be shut out of the human heart. Sin is painful, and the way of the transgressor is hard. The word of the Lord is: "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:20, 21). It is such an astonishment that men will persist in sin despite the anguish that it brings, that even God marvels at their stubborn suffering, and asks, "Why should ye be stricken any more?"

Mercy, and not Sacrifice

On one occasion Jesus said: "Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13; Hosea 6:6). This same proposition was directed to Israel by Isaiah. Their religious ceremonies were without value to God even though he had instituted them, because the truth they were meant to illustrate was forgotten and rejected; that is, that sin

would not be tolerated by God, and that to worship Him was to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Equity and righteousness are not mere theological philosophies, but are the fruit that is brought forth from the heart of those who love the Lord. Everywhere in the Word of God — in the Old and New Testaments, in the teachings of the prophets, and in the teachings of Jesus — it is emphasised over and over that there can be no true worship of God without acknowledgement that holiness and purity are integral parts of the Gospel.

"Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." This was the message Isaiah brought to Israel, and it was the same that had been brought from the beginning, and is the same today: "Cease to do evil." The sin of Israel was not that they neglected religious matters, but their elaborate procedures were meaningless and hypocritical before God. The land was full of wickedness and unrighteousness to such a degree that the people were likened to the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, upon whom the fire of God fell.

Reasoning Together

A most remarkable statement is made in our lesson text: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Surely it is a revelation of God's character that He would be willing to reason with man over the folly of his sins. If man will but listen to God while he reasons with him, he will soon be convinced of his folly. His sins can be forgiven of God, and though they be as scarlet, God will make them white as snow. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land."

The alternative? "If ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." Israel did refuse to listen to God's reasoning with them. They did continue in their sins, until finally the full wrath of God came upon them after the death of Christ.

The final verses of our text inform us that through the mercy of God there will be a remnant left through the ages until Zion is once again restored to its former glory, and that Jesus Christ who was once rejected and slain shall be their acknowledged King.

QUESTIONS

1. How did Isaiah receive his message that he was to preach to Israel?
2. How long did Isaiah preach?
3. How did Isaiah finally die?
4. Why did God describe the condition of Israel so exactly?
5. Why must men be convinced that they are sinners before they repent of sin?
6. How do men become convinced that they are sinners?
7. Why was God not pleased with the religious worship of Israel?
8. How should we worship God?
9. Why did God wish to reason with Israel?