

Isaiah 1:1-9
November 12, 2017

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Why do people file lawsuits? [They believe they have been wronged; breach of contract; they want a judge, an objective listener, to render a fair judgment.]

Q: After both sides present their case, the jury weighs the evidence presented and then determines if the defendant is guilty or not. If the defendant is found guilty, then what happens? [The consequences are implemented]

Transition: We're kicking off a new study in the book of Isaiah. "Isaiah" means "the salvation of Jehovah," and the word salvation is repeated many times in the book. Isaiah apparently was from a leading family, since he had access to several of the Jewish kings. He was married (8:3) and the father of at least two sons. Isaiah becomes God's prophet who focuses on **Judah and Jerusalem**. The main theme of the first section of this book is God's chastening of Judah for their sins. In fact, the first chapter reads like a lawsuit that has been filed. God is the "plaintiff" and Isaiah is the attorney who communicates God's grievances to Judah, who becomes the "defendant." Chapter one is a capsulized message of the entire book. We are getting ready to get the big picture for the whole book of Isaiah.

Let's read the Lord's lawsuit against Judah and listen for the ACCUSATIONS the Lord has against his people. And then we'll look for what the Lord desires. It is my prayer that all of us can please God by obeying his COMMANDS. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.1:

- The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

V.2:

- Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.

V.3:

- The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."

V.4:

- Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.

V.5:

- Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted.

V.6:

- From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness— only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.

V.7:

- Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.

V.8:

- The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege.

V.9:

- Unless the Lord Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.

Process Observations/Questions:

Background V.1: We know from the kings listed in v.1 that the timeframe is around 758 B.C. Read footnote in NIV Study Bible. So Isaiah's prophetic ministry spans the reigns of four kings of Judah, which will cover at least (40) forty years.

Q V.2: Why do you think God called the heavens and earth to witness his complaint against his covenant people? [It was a way of informing the nation that all creation would agree with what God was about to say.]

Q V.2: What is the Lord's case against Judah? [They rebelled against Him.]

Q: Did any of you rebel against your parents growing up? If yes, in what ways? [Privileges? Curfew? Car? Dates?]

Q: So what do you think "rebellion" looked like back in Isaiah's day? [General turning away from God; engaging in evil acts, marrying foreigners when God said not to, etc.]

Q V.3: Isaiah compares Judah to animals. What is he trying to emphasize? [These animals, the ox and donkey, were more aware of their owners and the source of their provisions from their owners than were God's people. He's saying that Israel didn't know God or realize that He was her Provider. By being rebellious the nation failed to carry out God's commands, which proved they did not really "understand" God.

Q V.4: The lawsuit continues. What is the Lord's next accusation? [Judah is a sinful nation.]

Q: How does he breakdown the "sinful nation?"

- A people loaded with guilt
- A brood of evildoers,
- Children given to corruption (X-REF Rom 3:10-18)
- They have forsaken the Lord
- They have spurned the Holy One of Israel (a deliberate defiant attitude)
- They have turned their backs on Him.

Q V.5-6: When the covenant people turned their backs on God, they incurred certain consequences for their sins. What do you see?

- It's like someone who is beaten who is bruised all over his body.
- Their whole head is injured.
- Their whole heart is afflicted.
- From head to toe there is no soundness – only uncleansed, un-bandaged open wounds, welts and sores.

Observation: This is heavy material. I find this hard to read, yet we need to be reminded of the ugliness of sin and the consequences it has upon our own spiritual condition if it's left unconfessed. Sin deeply matters to the Lord, so we need to make sure it deeply matters to us!

Q V.7: Another consequence of sin is regarding their territory. What do you see?

- Their country is desolate
- Their cities burned with fire
- Their fields were being stripped by foreigners right before them
- Their fields laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.

Observation: So not only does sin infect us from head to toe and injure our minds and afflict our hearts, but sin also can spill over to cities and countries as a whole. As a point of interest, some theologians believe Isaiah was also speaking of her condition militarily. They were beset on all sides by hostile forces and were losing some of their territory to foreign nations (v. 7). They should have realized that these terrible problems had come because of their spiritual condition. Whether Isaiah was describing the soon-coming situation in the Northern Kingdom to be brought about by the Assyrian invasion (in 722 B.C.) or whether he was speaking prophetically of the coming destruction of Judah (586 B.C.) is open to conjecture though it more likely refers to Judah. His words **desolate ... burned**, and **stripped** were written as if the devastation had already happened. Thus he emphasized its certainty.

Q V.8-9: Isaiah now pictures Jerusalem's inhabitants. What do you see?

- Jerusalem is left like a shelter in a vineyard or a hut in a melon field.
- Like a city under seige

Q: Has anyone ever seen a hut in a melon field?! If not, here's the description: They were temporary structures built to shade from the sun persons who guarded the crops against thieves and animals. Such huts were usually "alone" and easily attacked.

Q V.9: How else does Isaiah picture Jerusalem's inhabitants? [Like Sodom and Gomorrah]

Q: Judah would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah, totally devastated, if not for what? [God's grace in leaving some survivors.]

LOOK:

Our response to God grows out of our relationship to Him. The charge is that God's covenant people have not been responsive to God. Even the animals know their master, but His people have not recognized their dependence on God. Devastation is the result of sin.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Is). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

I. Name

"Isaiah" means "the salvation of Jehovah," and the word salvation is repeated many times in the book. Isaiah apparently was from a leading family, since he had access to several of the Jewish kings. He was married (8:3) and the father of at least two sons (7:3 and 8:1-3). He began his ministry near the close of the reign of King Uzziah, or about 758 B.C. He preached until the turn of the century, and tradition tells us he was sawn asunder by wicked King Manasseh (Heb. 11:37).

II. Theme

The Book of Isaiah divides itself into two sections, chapters 1-39 and chapters 40-66. The first section warns the Jews about the impending Assyrian invasion of Judah, while the second section encourages the captives returning from the Babylonian captivity.

The main theme of the first section is God's chastening of Judah for their sins, while the main theme of the second section is God's consolation of the captives after their suffering. Isaiah experienced the events of the first thirty-nine chapters, but he prophesied the events of the last section of the book. In the first section, Assyria was the chief foe; in the last section, Babylon was the enemy.

III. Historical Setting

You will recall that the nation divided after the death of Solomon; ten tribes in the north were organized as Israel, and two tribes in the south as Judah. The capital of Israel was Samaria; the capital of Judah was Jerusalem. Isaiah ministered in Jerusalem, but his messages touched both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms. Isaiah lived to see Israel (the Northern Kingdom) decline and finally go into ruin under Assyria.

The political scene was threatening to Judah at that time. Assyria was the menacing power and the other nations wanted to form a coalition to fight her. However, King Ahaz of Judah would not join the league. So, Syria and Israel united to attack Judah to try to force Ahaz to cooperate. Instead of trusting the Lord for help, Ahaz turned to *Assyria* for assistance and made a secret pact. Assyria was only too glad to get her foot in the door; she defeated Israel in 721 B.C., but Judah became a vassal state to Assyria, the price Ahaz had to pay for his security. No sooner was Israel out of the way than Assyria decided to attack *Judah* and enslave the entire Jewish nation. Isaiah told the people to trust the Lord for help, but various groups told the king to turn to Egypt for aid. In chapters 36–39, Isaiah tells how God gave King Hezekiah victory over Assyria when the invading army was at the very walls of Jerusalem. However, Judah was so weakened from war, and her cities had been so overrun by the enemy, that the nation never really recovered. Assyria was defeated by the Egyptians; the Egyptians fell to the Babylonians; and in 606–587 B.C., the Babylonians took Judah into captivity. So, in the first half of his book, Isaiah counseled the nation concerning Assyria; in the last half, he comforted the remnant concerning their return from Babylon.

IV. Christ in Isaiah

Isaiah gives a rich prophetic picture of Jesus Christ. We see His birth (7:14 with Matt. 1:23; also Isa. 9:6); the ministry of John the Baptist (40:3–6 with Matt. 3:1ff); Christ anointed by the Spirit (61:1–2 with Luke 4:17–19); Christ the Servant (42:1–4 with Matt. 12:17–21); Israel’s rejection of Christ (6:9–11 with John 12:38ff, Matt. 13:10–15, and parallel references in the Gospels; also Acts 28:26–27 and Rom. 11:8); the Stone of Stumbling (8:14 and 28:16 with Rom. 9:32–33 and 10:11, 1 Peter 2:6); Christ’s ministry to the Gentiles (49:6 with Luke 2:32, Acts 13:47; see also 9:1–2 with Matt. 4:15–16); Christ’s suffering and death (52:13–53:12); His resurrection (55:3 with Acts 13:34; 45:23 with Phil. 2:10–11 and Rom. 14:11); and the Coming King (9:6–7, 11:1ff, 32:1–2; 59:20–21 with Rom. 11:26–27; 63:2–3 with Rev. 19:13–15).

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 1034–1035). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

1. THE HEADING FOR THE BOOK (1:1)

1:1. Isaiah’s prophecies focus on **Judah and Jerusalem**. His book is called a **vision**, which suggests that the prophet “saw” (cf. 2:1) mentally and spiritually as well as heard what God communicated to him. This word “vision” also introduces the prophecies of Obadiah, Micah, and Nahum.

Isaiah was familiar with the city of Jerusalem and its temple and royal court. By this time the Northern Kingdom (Israel) was in its final years. The Northern Kingdom fell in 722 B.C. to the Assyrians who were seeking to conquer the entire Syro-Palestine area. Isaiah wrote specifically for the Southern Kingdom (Judah), which would fall to the Babylonian Empire a little more than 100 years later in 586 B.C.

For comments on Isaiah **son of Amoz** and the time of Isaiah’s ministry (in **the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah**) see “Author and Date” in the *Introduction*.

2. THE LORD’S LAWSUIT AGAINST THE NATION (1:2–31)

These verses are in the form of a covenant lawsuit against Judah. In effect, it is a microcosm of chapters 1–39. The Lord, through His messenger Isaiah, indicted His covenant nation for her breach of the Mosaic Covenant, and offered His complete forgiveness to those who would repent but judgment to those who continued to rebel. In 6:9–13 God pointed out to Isaiah that most of the nation, however, would not repent.

a. The Lord's accusation that His people broke the covenant (1:2–9)

1:2a. Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, invoked the **heavens** and the **earth** to **hear** the following accusation against the people. Calling on the heavens and the earth was a way of informing the nation that all creation would agree with what God was about to say.

1:2b–3. In this type of lawsuit the accuser first established his own innocence in the matter. **The LORD**, like a parent, did this by noting that the people of Judah, His **children** (cf. v. 4), had **rebelled** (cf. “rebels” in v. 28) **against** Him, who was innocent in the matter. The Hebrew word rendered “rebelled” (*pāša* ‘) was used in treaties to speak of a vassal state’s disobedience to the covenant made with it by the suzerain nation. *Pāša* ‘ also occurs in 66:24, the final verse in the book.

Even animals know their masters, but the nation Israel did **not know** and did **not understand** God, her **Master**. (Israel, though often referring to the Northern Kingdom, is sometimes, as here, used of the nation of 12 tribes as a whole, and thus includes Judah.) An **ox** is unusually submissive; in Bible times a **donkey** was known for its stupidity. Therefore to say Israel was less knowledgeable than these domestic animals was an amazingly strong affirmation of her stupidity. These animals were more aware of their owners and the source of sustenance (**manger** was a feeding trough for animals) from their owners than were God’s people. Israel did not know God or realize that He was her Provider. By being rebellious (1:2b) the nation failed to carry out God’s commands, which proved they did not really “understand” God.

1:4. In His lawsuit God elaborated on the **sinful** condition of the **nation**. This idea that the nation was sinful (*ḥāṭā* ‘) occurs a number of times in the book (e.g., cf. “sinned” in 42:24; 43:27 and “continued to sin” in 64:5).

Isaiah spoke of the “sins” (*ḥāṭā* ‘*im*) of the people (1:18) and noted that the Suffering Servant came to remove “the sin (*ḥēṭ* ‘) of many” in the nation (53:12). Because of their sin, the **people** stood guilty before God (cf. Rom. 3:9, 19). Because they were evildoers, they were corrupt (cf. Rom. 3:10–18 and the word “corrupt” in Gen. 6:12). Their deliberately defiant attitude against God is indicated by the words **forsaken ... spurned**, and **turned their backs**.

As stated in the *Introduction*, the words **the Holy One of Israel** are used by Isaiah 25 times. This title appropriately contrasts the people’s sin with God’s holiness.

Though the people had turned their backs on God, in the future He will turn His back on Israel’s sin by forgiving her. After Hezekiah was raised from his sickbed, he praised the Lord for placing his sins behind God’s back (Isa. 38:17).

1:5–7. When the covenant people turned their backs on God (v. 4) certain consequences followed (cf. Deut. 28:15–68). Isaiah recounted what was happening to them to help them understand that their difficult times had come because of their disobedience. Isaiah first used the figure of a person who had been **beaten** and was bruised over his entire body (Isa. 1:5–6). Though these untreated **wounds ... welts, and open sores** characterized the nation’s spiritual condition, Isaiah was also speaking of her condition militarily. They were beset on all sides by hostile forces and were losing some of their territory to foreign nations (v. 7). They should have realized that these terrible problems had come because of their spiritual condition. Whether

Isaiah was describing the soon-coming situation in the Northern Kingdom to be brought about by the Assyrian invasion (in 722 B.C.) or whether he was speaking prophetically of the coming destruction of Judah (586 B.C.) is open to conjecture though it more likely refers to Judah. His words **desolate ... burned**, and **stripped** were written as if the devastation had already happened. Thus he emphasized its certainty.

1:8–9. Isaiah then pictured Jerusalem's inhabitants (**the Daughter of Zion**; cf. Jer. 4:31; Lam. 1:6; 2:13; Micah 1:13; 4:8; Zech. 9:9; and see comments on Lam. 2:1; Zech. 8:3) as being **like a shelter in a vineyard** or **a hut in a melon field**. Those were temporary structures built to shade from the sun persons who guarded the crops against thieves and animals. Such huts were usually “alone” and easily attacked. Judah **would have** been **like Sodom** and **Gomorrah**, totally devastated, if it had not been for God's grace in leaving **some survivors**. (Centuries later Paul quoted this verse in Rom. 9:29.) In fact Judah *was* like those two wicked cities in her sin. (Cf. the mention of both cities in Isa. 1:10, and of Sodom in 3:9; Ezek. 16:46, 48–49; 55–56.) Isaiah's reference to those two cities no doubt reminded some Judahites of the Lord's reference to them in Deuteronomy 29:23.