

ISAIAH 1¹

*Yahweh's Indictment against Israel*²

Israel's Rebellion and Its Consequences

1 The vision (וִיזוֹן)³ of Isaiah⁴ the son of Amoz,⁵ which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem⁶ in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.⁷

2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth,⁸ for Yahweh has spoken:⁹

¹ Is 1-5 is the backdrop of the whole book, and Is 1 serves as the introduction of the introduction. Probably Is 1-5 follows Is 6 chronologically. These chapters are placed before Is 6 as a literary introduction.

² This chapter is like a courtroom drama and has been called “The Grand Arraignment.”

³ As Yahweh’s prophet, Isaiah receives insight/perception into Israel’s spiritual condition. **2 Ch 32:32** 32 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and his good deeds, behold, they are written in the vision (וִיזוֹן) of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. See *The Prophets* and *Special Revelation*.

⁴ Isaiah means “Yahweh saves.” No other author is ascribed in the entire book, arguing for the unity of *Isaiah*.

⁵ Jewish tradition suggests Amoz was the uncle of Uzziah, making Isaiah of royal blood. However, the name Amoz appears on an ancient seal found in Jerusalem, where he is identified as a scribe (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:82).

⁶ Isaiah prophesied in Judah, but his prophecies extend to Israel and the nations.

⁷ This introductory formula follows the pattern of all prophetic books except Ezekiel, Jonah, Haggai, and Zechariah: “The word of Yahweh/oracle/vision which came to the prophet/the prophet saw at such and such a time” (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:81).

⁸ Isaiah is a prosecuting attorney for Yahweh, and he calls all creation to witness Yahweh’s case against Israel. All creation impliedly agrees that what Yahweh contends is right and just. **Dt 4:26** 26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it but will be utterly destroyed. **Dt 30:19** 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your seed may live. **Dt 32:1** 1 Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. **Ps 50:4** 4 [Yahweh] calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people [Israel]. **Mic 1:2** 2 Hear, you peoples, all of you. Pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it, and let Lord Yahweh be a witness against you, Yahweh from his holy temple. **Mic 6:2** 2 Hear, you mountains, the indictment of Yahweh, and you enduring foundations of the earth, for Yahweh has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel.

⁹ We are dealing with a God who speaks. He is not silent.

Children¹⁰ have I reared and brought up,¹¹ but they have broken away (פִּשְׁעוּ)¹² from me. 3 The ox knows (יָדַע)¹³ its owner, and the donkey¹⁴ its master's crib, but Israel¹⁵ does not know, my people do not understand (בִּינָה).¹⁶

4 Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, seed (זֶרַע) of evildoers,¹⁷ children who deal corruptly! They have abandoned (עָזַב) Yahweh. They have despised (נִאֲצָה) the Holy One of Israel.¹⁸ They are utterly estranged.¹⁹

5 Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel?²⁰ The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. 6 From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no health (מָחַם) in it, but bruises, sores, and raw wounds.²¹ They are not pressed out, bound up, or softened with oil.²² 7 Your country lies desolate. Your cities are burned with fire. In your very presence, foreigners devour your land. It is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners.²³ 8 And the

¹⁰ **Hos 11:1** 1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

¹¹ Yahweh has not failed to keep his responsibilities under the Mosaic covenant.

¹² **Dt 32:6** 6 Do you thus repay Yahweh, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?

¹³ **Jer 8:7** 7 Even the stork in the heavens knows her times, and the turtledove, swallow, and crane keep the time of their coming, but my people know not the rules of Yahweh. See *Knowledge*.

¹⁴ In Bible times a donkey was known for its stupidity (J. Martin, *BKC*, 1:1034).

¹⁵ See *Israel*.

¹⁶ Israel's failure to understand God and his plan is a theme of Isaiah, Jesus, and Paul. See *Understanding*.

¹⁷ **Ge 3:15** 15 I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. **Mt 3:7** 7 When [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

¹⁸ This is Isaiah's special name for Yahweh. We will see it many times.

¹⁹ Sin loads us down, makes us do evil, makes us deal corruptly with one another, and estranges us from God. See *Sin*.

²⁰ It is senseless to keep sinning, yet we do it anyway. We are caught in a downward spiral of destruction.

²¹ Israel's rebellion has made her sick emotionally, intellectually, morally, psychologically, and relationally. **Hos 5:13** 13 When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound. See *The Depravity of Man*.

²² Israel refuses to come to her Healer, her Physician. **Is 53:5** 5 [The Servant] was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. See *God as Physician*.

²³ Divine discipline has come upon Israel, just as predicted in Deuteronomy. See *Cursing*, *Divine Discipline*, and *The Mosaic Covenant*.

daughter of Zion²⁴ is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field,²⁵ like a besieged city.²⁶ 9 If Yahweh of hosts had not left us a few survivors (פְּרִיִּי; refugees, escapees),²⁷ we should have been like Sodom²⁸ and become like Gomorrah.²⁹

From False Worship to True

10 Hear the word (דְּבַר) of Yahweh, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the law (תּוֹרָה)³⁰ of our God, you people of Gomorrah!³¹

11 What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says Yahweh. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats. 12 When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?³² 13 Bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to me. New moon, Sabbath, and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. 14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen.³³ Your hands are full of blood.³⁴

²⁴ **Mic 4:8** 8 You, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem. **Zech 9:9** 9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you. Righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

²⁵ Because time was precious during harvest, families built temporary lean-tos in the fields and camped there until harvest was over (Oswalt, *NICOT*, 91).

²⁶ Sin has made Israel pathetic. She has become a shadow of what she once was.

²⁷ See *The Remnant of Israel*.

²⁸ See *Sodom*.

²⁹ This is either a reference to the invasion of Syria and Israel in 735 bc or the invasion of Assyria in 701 bc. **Ro 9:29** 29 As Isaiah predicted, If the Lord of hosts had not left us seed, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.

³⁰ If Israel wants to return to God, she must first of all listen to his word.

³¹ What a sad thing for Jerusalem to be compared with Sodom. In Ge 14, the king of Salem is compared with the king of Sodom. Jerusalem was supposed to counter Sodom, not become Sodom 2.0.

³² Israel's religious ritual has become just "the noise of feet on the pavement."

³³ **Ps 66:18** 18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, Yahweh would not have listened.

³⁴ See *The Religious Sinner* (Ro 2:12-29) and *Worship*.

16 Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes.³⁵ Cease to do evil. 17 Learn (למד) to do good.³⁶ Seek justice (משפט). Correct oppression. Bring justice (שפט) to the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause.³⁷

Yahweh's Grace Argument

18 Come now, let us argue [as in a lawsuit] (יכה)³⁸ together, says Yahweh. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. 20 But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword, for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.

From Unfaithful Jerusalem to Faithful Jerusalem

21 How the faithful city³⁹ (קִרְיַת הַאֱמֻנָה) has become a whore,⁴⁰ she who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. 22 Your silver has become dross, your best wine mixed with water.⁴¹ 23 Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves.⁴² Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them.⁴³

24 Therefore Yahweh declares, Yahweh of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel:⁴⁴

³⁵ See *Confession and Repentance*. **Ac 13:24** 24 Before [Jesus'] coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of a change of mind to all the people of Israel. **Ac 2:38** 38 Peter said to [the Jews], Change your minds and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins....

³⁶ Israel has to relearn what it is to be and do good. **Ro 12:1-2** 1 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the desire of God, what is good, acceptable, and perfect. See *Teachability*.

³⁷ Three negative commands relate to the past and five positive ones to the future. See *Justice and Widows and Orphans*. **Mic 6:8** 8 He has told you, O man, what is good. And what does Yahweh require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? **Jas 1:27** 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

³⁸ This invitation is more than a call for negotiations between Israel and God. The word "reason" is a law term used of arguing, convincing, or deciding a case in court. The people were to be convinced by their argumentation with God that he was right and they were wrong about their condition (J. Martin, *BKC*, 1:1036). **Job 23:7** 7 There an upright man could argue (יכה) with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge.

³⁹ Jerusalem represents Judah and Israel as a whole. As Jerusalem goes, so goes the nation.

⁴⁰ See *Spiritual Adultery*. **Hos 3:1** 1 Yahweh said to me [Hosea], Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as Yahweh loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.

⁴¹ Jerusalem has gone from purity to pollution.

⁴² An ungodly people deserves ungodly leadership.

⁴³ When a people turns from God, injustice becomes common.

⁴⁴ Isaiah's unusual three-fold description of God boded ill for Judah. Isaiah crowds more names of God in v. 24 than he does anywhere else. The specter of God arising to judge Israel for her sins is a fearful prospect (Constable, 30). **Heb 12:29** 29 For our God is a consuming fire.

Ah, I will get relief from my enemies and take revenge on my foes. 25 I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your [silver] dross as with potash/lye and remove all your slag.⁴⁵ 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 righteousness⁴⁶ (עִיר הַצְּדִיקָה), the faithful city (קִרְיַת הַאֱמֻנָה).⁴⁷

Destinies of the Righteous and the Wicked

27 Zion will be redeemed (פָּדָה)⁴⁸ by justice (מִצְדָּקָה), and those⁴⁹ in her who turn back (שׁוֹבִים),⁵⁰ by righteousness (צְדָקָה). 28 But rebels and sinners shall be broken together, and those who abandoned Yahweh shall be consumed.⁵¹ 29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks⁵² that you desired, and you shall blush for the gardens⁵³ that you have chosen. 30 For you shall be like an oak whose leaf withers and like a garden without water.⁵⁴ 31 And the strong (קָטָן)⁵⁵ shall

⁴⁵ God himself must act if Israel is to be restored to purity.

⁴⁶ See *Righteousness*.

⁴⁷ “Faithful city” in vv. 21 and 26 form an inclusio. The question is, how will the unfaithful city become faithful again, so that Yahweh may bless the nations through her? **Zech 8:3** 3 I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of Yahweh of hosts, the holy mountain.

⁴⁸ “To pay the ransom price.” **Ex 13:13** 13 Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. **Le 27:27** 27 And if it is an unclean animal, then he shall buy it back at the valuation, and add a fifth to it; or, if it is not redeemed, it shall be sold at the valuation. **Is 29:22** 22 Therefore thus says Yahweh, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale. **Is 35:10** 10 The ransomed of Yahweh shall return and come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. **Is 51:11** 11 The ransomed of Yahweh shall return and come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. See *Redemption*.

⁴⁹ Some will turn back. Others won't. It is up to each individual to decide.

⁵⁰ “A change of mind resulting in a new, Godward direction of life” (Motyer). See *Repentance*.

⁵¹ The righteous and the wicked have different destinies.

⁵² **Is 57:5** 5 ... You who burn with lust among the oaks, under every green tree.... **Hos 4:13** 13 They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your brides commit adultery.

⁵³ **Is 65:3** 3 ... A people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks.... **Is 66:17** 17 Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig's flesh, the abomination, and mice, shall come to an end together, declares Yahweh.

⁵⁴ **Dt 29:23** 23 ... The whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing, where no plant can sprout, an overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which Yahweh overthrew in his anger and wrath.... **Ps 1:3-4** 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. 4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. **Jer 17:8** 8 He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.

⁵⁵ **Am 2:9** 9 It was I who destroyed the Amorite before [Israel], whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong (קָטָן) as the oaks. I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath.

become tinder and his work a spark, and both of them shall burn together, with none to quench⁵⁶ them.

⁵⁶ **Is 66:24** 24 They shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

Biblical Worldview

- 1. Isaiah 1 sets the stage for the entire book of Isaiah.**
 - a. Is 1-5 identifies the problem (Israel is sinful yet called), and Is 6 shows the solution (the Holy One must act). The rest of Isaiah works out the implications.⁵⁷
 - b. See note 1.

- 2. The theological context of Is 1 is the Mosaic covenant between Yahweh and Israel.**
 - a. See *The Mosaic Covenant*.
 - b. In Is 1, Yahweh sends Isaiah to indict Israel for breaking the Mosaic covenant.

- 3. Because of the Abrahamic covenant, Israel's rebellion is bad news for the Gentiles.**
 - a. **Ge 12:3** 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.
 - b. See *The Abrahamic Covenant*.

- 4. As prophet, Isaiah functions as a prosecuting attorney on behalf of the Crown.**
 - a. Is 1:1.
 - b. See *The Prophets*.

- 5. Yahweh routinely calls creation to witness our sin and his righteous response.**
 - a. Is 1:2
 - b. See note 8.
 - c. If we live contrary to our nature, we will experience the destructive result of our behavior.
 - d. "The Lord's dealings with his people are designed to develop true spiritual instincts, a mind-set of attachment to the Lord as automatic and spontaneous as that seen in the animal creation."⁵⁸

- 6. Yahweh wants knowledge and understanding from us.**
 - a. Is 1:2-3.
 - b. See *Knowledge and Understanding*.

- 7. Sin makes us sick, brings on divine discipline, and makes us pathetic.**
 - a. Is 1:4-9.

- 8. God doesn't want the false worship of religious sinners.**
 - a. Is 1:10-15.
 - b. **Pr 21:27** 27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. How much more when he brings it with evil intent.
 - c. See *The Religious Sinner and Worship*.

⁵⁷ Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:21-22.

⁵⁸ Motyer, 43.

- d. God's law is about character, attitudes, and relationships. These may be symbolized by ceremonies, but they are not to be replaced by ceremonies. We must always distinguish between the symbol and that which is symbolized.
- e. Our faith is susceptible to the danger of defining reality in terms of its outward forms.⁵⁹
- f. "Even doing that which God has commanded becomes wrong when the heart is not in it and when it does not affect the believer's conduct."⁶⁰
- g. "Because religious ceremony tends to put God in the past, to become magical, to be man-centered and man-pleasing, to make God familiar, and to blur his moral demands, it is a positive threat to the kind of present relationship with God that Isaiah and the other prophets knew was possible."⁶¹

9. Three steps to true worship are confession, teachability, and the pursuit of justice.

- a. Is 1:16-17.
- b. To reorder our personal lives, we must stop (decisively abandon the old life), learn (develop a new mind), and seek (set new objectives and priorities conformed to God's stated desire).⁶²
- c. See *Confession*.
- d. See *Teachability*.
- e. See *Widows and Orphans*.
 - (1) **Jas 1:27** 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.
 - (2) **1 Jn 3:17** 17 If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

10. Justification by grace through faith makes true worship possible.

- a. Is 1:18.
- b. Faith in phase one and faith and works in phase two lead to blessing.
- c. Unbelief in phase one leads to judgment.

11. Spiritual adultery/idolatry leads to injustice, oppression, and societal breakdown.

- a. Is 1:21-23.
- b. Nations declines because of their spiritual condition. Sin destroys national well-being and security.
- c. How a nation treats its most vulnerable is a measure of its spiritual status.
- d. In the past fifty years, the West has turned against its most vulnerable (abortion, child pornography, the LGBTQ agenda among youth, euthanasia).

⁵⁹ Motyer, 45.

⁶⁰ J. Vernon McGee.

⁶¹ J. P. Hyatt, quoted in Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:99.

⁶² Motyer, 47.

12. God himself must purify and bring forth righteousness and justice, and he will.

- a. Is 1:24-26.
- b. Given our depravity, God himself must be the source of all righteousness and justice.
 - (1) **Is 33:5** 5 Yahweh is exalted, for he dwells on high. He will fill Zion with justice and righteousness.
 - (2) **Is 51:5** 5 My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples. The coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait.
 - (3) **Is 53:11** 11 By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.
- c. For Israel, discipline is inevitable, but restoration and return are equally inevitable.
- d. God's final purpose is not destruction but blessing achieved through purification.
- e. "God does not contend with us as though he wished to pursue our sins to the utmost."⁶³
- f. "There is hope, but in God's way, not ours."⁶⁴
- g. "The Lord does not destroy the forest of human pride to leave us a field of stumps (6:13). Rather, the destruction is in order that the true glory of humanity, that which it derives from its Lord, may appear (66:9, 13, 21, 22)."⁶⁵

13. The Messianic kingdom will happen. It is up to us whether we want to be a part of it.

- a. Is 1:27-30.
- b. God loves all human beings, but human beings can choose to remain his enemies.
- c. Continued arrogant rebellion against God will result in destruction.
- d. Is 1 ends just as the book of *Isaiah* ends, with unquenchable fire.
 - (1) **Is 66:24** 24 They shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.
- e. "A striking feature of the section is this interchange between judgment and hope. The prophet moves back and forth between these two themes and although he concludes the section on a note of impending doom, it is still clear that doom is not to be the final outcome."⁶⁶

⁶³ J. Calvin.

⁶⁴ Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:101.

⁶⁵ Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:111.

⁶⁶ Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:80.

Notes