

Israel Indicted
YAHWEH Presents The Evidence To Indict Israel and Judah
A Settlement Offer for Judah
Isaiah 1:1 – 20

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Right from the beginning of the book we see that Isaiah wastes no time. In one verse he lets us know who it is that is the author. With the very next verse, he begins presenting the legal case that YAHWEH has against Israel and Judah.

Isaiah presents the formal indictment of YAHWEH regarding the why for those changes and events which are about to take place. History is being explained in advance and that history will be in the near future for both kingdoms, and we will also learn that history will also be in the far future as well. Some of it we are waiting on today.

Again, remember that during the lifespan of Isaiah, Israel and Judah will go from being militarily and economically prosperous, to one nation, Israel, ceasing to exist and the other, Judah, being eviscerated to the point that all that is left is Jerusalem. Everything is about to change, as promised by YAHWEH through Moses back in Deuteronomy.

The amazing thing I find is the similarities to some aspects of what we are seeing in our own nation, the United States.

Isaiah 1:1–3

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. Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the LORD speaks, “Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me. An ox knows its owner, And a donkey its master’s manger, But Israel does not know, My people do not understand.” (NASB95)

Picking up in verse 2 we see the beginning of the indictment of YAHWEH against His people.

For us to understand the gravity of the situation, Isaiah uses the same terms that Moses used in Deuteronomy 32:1 in the beginning of that heavy hit, the Song of Moses.

Deuteronomy 32:1

“Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; And let the earth hear the words of my mouth.” (NASB95)

As with all tunes, there is a back story for why it has been written. Deuteronomy 32:1 is no different. Looking at the back story in Deuteronomy 31 we see the following, Moses is speaking.

Deuteronomy 31:26–30

“Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you. For I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the LORD; how much more, then, after my death? Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call the heavens and the earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death

you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands." Then Moses spoke in the hearing of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song, until they were complete:" (NASB95)

Isaiah starts off using the same style, and intentionally brings the Song of Moses, also known as the heavy hit "Give ear," into the mix.

This song is a compendious outline or draft, and also the common key to all prophecy, and bears the same fundamental relation to it as the Decalogue to all other laws, and the Lord's Prayer to all other prayers. The lawgiver summed up the whole of the prophetic contents of his last words (ch. 27–28, 29–30), and threw them into the form of a song, that they might be perpetuated in the memories and mouths of the people. This song sets before the nation its entire history to the end of time. That history divides itself into four great periods: the creation and rise of Israel; the ingratitude and apostasy of Israel; the consequent surrender of Israel to the power of the heathen; and finally, the restoration of Israel, sifted, but not destroyed, and the unanimity of all nations in the praise of Jehovah, who reveals Himself both in judgment and in mercy. (Keil and Delitzsch 1996, 49-50)

Isaiah is pointing directly to this song and he is intentionally comparing the current state of Israel, as well as Judah, to what is in the song and what it stated very clearly would be the outcome of rebellion. Why are these words important, the "Give ear" or the "Listen?"

In both cases, Deuteronomy as well as Isaiah, it is God who is talking and the people, as stubborn as they are, need to listen and understand what is being said to them by the Lord. Listening is not just important to the nation then, but it is important to us today to listen as well. The Holy Spirit speaks today to each of us what God has for us and we need to listen.

Why heaven and earth, they are cosmic witnesses, they were present then when Moses spoke to the people and they are present now as Isaiah is presenting the indictment. Note who was appealed to as witnesses by Moses.

Deuteronomy 4:25–29

"When you become the father of children and children's children and have remained long in the land, and act corruptly, and make an idol in the form of anything, and do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD your God so as to provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will surely perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to possess it. You shall not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD drives you. There you will serve gods, the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul." (NASB95)

Deuteronomy 30:19–20

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them." (NASB95)

In both cases, Moses appealed to the same cosmic witnesses that Isaiah appeals to. Moses said, that based on his experience with the nation, he knew the people were rebellious and stubborn. They have not changed as note the first point YAHWEH makes.

Isaiah 1:2

Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the LORD speaks, "Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me." (NASB95)

The word that we see translated as revolted in the Hebrew is as follows פָּשַׁע pas - "TO FALL AWAY, BREAK AWAY from any one...TO BREAK a covenant entered into with him...Specially to turn away from God...to sin, to transgress..." (Gesenius and Tregelles 2003, 695)

This is not a single point rebellion but is a characterization of a lifestyle. "The term is one of an active resistance. Israel has intentionally refused a relationship with Yahweh that is proper and indispensable to its very character." (Brueggemann 1998, 13)

Intentional rebellion is endemic to two groups; fallen man and fallen divine beings as well. But for God's chosen people, those who have been provided for by Him and given His word, wholly unacceptable.

God is stating for the court that His people have broken a contractual obligation they had previously made; they have turned away from God.

This is not an issue, obedience, that ended with the Old Testament, it goes on today. Jesus addressed it Luke 6:45-46 when He said "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (NASB95)

The life of a believer should be characterized by obedience but for many it simply is not. John, in 1 John 2:3-6, calls someone like that a liar. "Now by this we know that we have come to know God: if we keep his commandments. The one who says "I have come to know God" and yet does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in such a person. But whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has been perfected. By this we know that we are in him. The one who says he resides in God ought himself to walk just as Jesus walked." (NET)

For us today as believers there is the expectation that since we trust Him, we will follow Him as a true follower, a disciple and learn to do what He asks of us and live as He demonstrated for us. "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;" (Ephesians 5:1, NASB95)

He knows we will blow it which is why 1 John 1:9 exists. He wants fellowship with us just as He wanted fellowship with His people, Israel and Judah. For them, believing loyalty meant the same, doing what He asked.

This is a high calling that we have and one also that the nation had. "But they were in no state to fulfil their high calling. The LORD had been a father to them, but, like headstrong, ungrateful children, they had rebelled against him (the details will be given later), and already this rebellion had cost them dearly." (Webb 1996, 42)

Isaiah 1:3

"An ox knows its owner, And a donkey its master's manger, But Israel does not know, My people do not understand." (NASB95)

As a comparative to what level of rebellion, the Holy Spirit has Isaiah compare Israel to a couple of animals. The two animals chosen are deliberate. They are both totally and completely dependent upon their owner to take care of them.

The ox is referenced in the Torah and is a sacrificial animal. The ox is also used as an example for the worthiness of workers to receive what is due them. "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." (Deuteronomy 25:4, NASB95)

The example of an ox/bull and a donkey have multiple ideas connected to them that would arise in the mind of a Jew. The use of these two animals is deliberate intentionally bringing these ideas up. Let's look at the ox or bull first.

The bull as a symbol of physical strength and sexual potency, together with all the economic benefits arising from herding, has an ancient pedigree in the religions of the Ancient Near East. From at least the time of Neolithic Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia, images have been prominent in glyptic art, sculpture and reliefs, and the animal has been prominent in iconography and theology. (Wyatt 1999, 180-181)

The ox or bull also shows up later in the book of Ezekiel as one of the faces of the throne guardian cherubim. For the Jew who are also familiar with the story told by the stars, the bull also has specific meaning and at one time it was also the astronomical sign of spring.

The spring equinox fell in Taurus the Bull from 4300 B.C. to 2100 B.C. (Custer 2002, 23)

But eventually, the bull, in the image of a golden calf, also became an object of worship.

The Israelites, in making the golden calf, had borrowed the worship of the Egyptian bull god Apis. The golden calf was merely a physical representation of the astronomical deity of Taurus the Bull, just as the Egyptian worship of their god Ra was a worship of the sun. In later years the Israelites would extend their idolatry to worshipping Moloch and other astronomical gods, for which the Lord was to carry them away captive beyond Babylon (Acts 7:43). The worship of the golden calf was the beginning of the idolatrous worship of the whole host of heaven that the prophets so bitterly denounced (Ezek. 8:13–18). The Israelites even became sun worshipers like the Egyptians (Ezek. 8:16). (Custer 2002, 61)

Recall that Jeroboam had set up two golden calves for the northern kingdom, Israel, to worship. Commentators disagree as to whether this was a repeat of what happened under Moses. But God did have an opinion of this act as He kept referring to the sin of Jeroboam in the scriptures and then there is His view as communicated by Isaiah's contemporary, Hosea.

Hosea 8:4–7

They have set up kings, but not by Me; They have appointed princes, but I did not know it. With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves, That they might be cut off. He has rejected your calf, O Samaria, saying, "My anger burns against them!" How long will they be incapable of innocence? For from Israel is even this! A craftsman made it, so it is not God; Surely the calf of Samaria will be broken to pieces. For they sow the wind And they reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads; It yields no grain. Should it yield, strangers would swallow it up. (NASB95)

Like the ox, or bull, who had a place in the Torah and would bring different images to the mind of a Jew, the donkey also was a common beast of burden that appears in the Torah. They were a common means of transportation at the time.

Although Jewish folklore often considered the donkey (hamor) the epitome of foolish or stubborn behavior, ancient Jewish sources regarded the animal as a symbol of patience and understanding. Issachar, who chose the life of the modest farmer, is likened by Jacob to a "strong-boned donkey" who has "bent his shoulder to the burden and become a toiling serf" (Gen. 49:14–15). (Eisenberg 2004, 716)

The donkey was a symbol of royalty—Saul, David, Solomon, and Absalom are described as riding donkeys, as will the Messiah at the end of days. Based on the prophesy of Zechariah (9:9) that the Messiah will ride into Jerusalem "triumphant and victorious, [yet] lowly [humble], and riding on a donkey," the Talmud states, "if one sees a donkey in a dream, he may hope for salvation" (Ber. 56b). (Eisenberg 2004, 717)

There is also that issue from the Torah, Numbers 22:21-35, of a donkey keeping Balaam out of trouble.

Numbers 22:28–31

"And the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" Then Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now." The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I ever been

accustomed to do so to you?" And he said, "No." Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed all the way to the ground." (NASB95)

All of these ideas, with the exception of Zechariah's prophecy, would be present as Isaiah, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uses these two specific animals as examples.

The animal is completely dependent, and the owner is completely reliable. The animal unreservedly trusts the owner, trusts even though such animals are not excessively bright or discerning. It is first nature (not second nature) for a donkey or an ox to know instinctively that to survive depends upon trust of the master. (Brueggemann 1998, 13)

These two dumb animals, one sacrificial and the other royal, know better than God's own people who are dumber than both.

Isaiah, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has just stated that Israel is dumber than a donkey. Judah is not far behind.

In other words, there is ingratitude present for all that God has done for them. Potentially, the ingratitude for the sacrificial system which points to Messiah, and ingratitude for the royal line He would be coming from. The level of ingratitude is revealed in the next verse.

Isaiah 1:4

"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." (NASB95)

God goes from the general to the specific very quickly here.

He starts by summing up a people who are dumber than basic beasts of burden as being a sinful nation. Why are they sinful? Obviously because they are rebellious leading to explicit disobedience. God though brings specific charges before the cosmic court. He shows what they have chosen to become.

Their sinfulness is not a yesterday thing. It is active and current.

The active participle indicates constant and habitual sinning, and so presents a remarkable contrast between what Israel's destiny was intended to be and what the nation had actually become. (Young 1965, 44)

They are struggling under a load of sin.

Offspring of evildoers, literally the seed of evil. They are worse than the prior generation, not better. The generation is evil.

In fact, they are corrupt children.

They have not only abandoned God, the word used tells us that they have divorced Him. עָזְבוּ ozbu - to leave...abandoned woman...to abandon a wife, husband, divorce. (Koehler, et al. 1994-2000, 806)

They despise God. The word used means to spurn, to treat disrespectfully or contemptuously. He is the one who is Holy and who called them to be Holy. They have "better" ideas. They have turned to more modern thoughts and ideas, ones that play better in the culture of the world they operated in. After all, no one has just one god anymore, and surely not one who is so demanding of moral purity too. As a result, they have turned from Him. This is deliberate apostasy. A turning away from God.

Israel has become a nation, thanks to the initial leadership of Jeroboam. The continual sinful leadership of the northern kingdom has produced the practice of habitual sin. They prefer sin over holiness as evidenced by their deliberately consistent apostasy.

At the point that Isaiah is delivering this message, all is well, but soon it will not be. Judah is not out of the woods either.

Isaiah 1:5–7

“Where will you be stricken again, As you continue in your rebellion? The whole head is sick And the whole heart is faint. 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. 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.” (NASB95)

The picture being developed by God is that of someone who has been beaten so much, that there is not a single place left that has not been beaten.

Studying the history of the northern kingdom, despite prophets telling them to repent, despite Elijah and Elisha ministering there, despite all that God has done to get their attention, they will not repent and will not return to Him. God is about to uphold the contract he cut with the nation because the northern kingdom.

Judah is not far behind and Isaiah mixes them both into this message.

Outwardly (the head) and inwardly (the heart) the nation has been so smitten by God’s punishments that it is personified as a man whose head is sick and whose heart is faint. Procksch suggests that the nation is pictured as a slave beaten by its master, but this is not necessarily the case. It is true that Israel had been freed from bondage, but she is not now God’s slave. He regards her as a nation of sons and punishes her as a loving father in order that she may repent. (Young 1965, 50-51)

Isaiah’s contemporary, Hosea, is saying much the same.

Hosea 5:13–15

“When Ephraim saw his sickness, And Judah his wound, Then Ephraim went to Assyria And sent to King Jareb. But he is unable to heal you, Or to cure you of your wound. For I will be like a lion to Ephraim And like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away, I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver. I will go away and return to My place Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.” (NASB95)

The description we get in verse 6 is graphic. The beating has been very thorough. What is coming for the south

2 Kings 15:36–37

“The rest of the events of Jotham’s reign, including his accomplishments, are recorded in the scroll called the Annals of the Kings of Judah. In those days the LORD prompted King Rezin of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah to attack Judah.” (NET)

2 Chronicles 28:5

“The LORD his God handed him over to the king of Syria. The Syrians defeated him and deported many captives to Damascus. He was also handed over to the king of Israel, who thoroughly defeated him.” (NET)

In the north, it is worse

2 Kings 15:17–19

“In the thirty-ninth year of King Azariah’s reign over Judah, Menahem son of Gadi became king over Israel. He reigned for twelve years in Samaria. He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not repudiate

the sinful ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat who encouraged Israel to sin. During his reign, Pul king of Assyria invaded the land, and Menahem paid him a thousand talents of silver to gain his support and to solidify his control of the kingdom.” (NET)

2 Kings 15:27–29

“In the fifty-second year of King Azariah’s reign over Judah, Pekah son of Remaliah became king over Israel. He reigned in Samaria for twenty years. He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not repudiate the sinful ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat who encouraged Israel to sin. During Pekah’s reign over Israel, King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, including all the territory of Naphtali. He deported the people to Assyria.” (NET)

Isaiah 1:7

“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.” (NASB95)

None of Isaiah’s kings (1:1) was inept. They managed a sound economy and followed clever policies, yet the land was devastated (5c–7), fragile internally (8bc) and threatened externally (8d). The key to national well-being is righteousness, i.e. what is right with God (Prov. 14:34), and in this the prophet records dismal failure. (Motyer 1999, 51)

Proverbs 14:34

“Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to any people.” (NASB95)

Isaiah is providing data that shows this is true, but it is true of both the northern and southern kingdoms. What we are left with, after everything takes place, is the following picture of Judah.

Isaiah 1:8–9

“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. Unless the LORD of hosts Had left us a few survivors, We would be like Sodom, We would be like Gomorrah.” (NASB95)

There is still hope for the southern kingdom, there is still hope for Judah. A shelter in a vineyard is a very small structure in a field that can produce a living for the person living there. This is a picture of Jerusalem being left and if they repent, like a survivor and not like Sodom and Gomorrah who were destroyed.

With the first part of the indictment complete, God moves on to show that in Judah, there is reliance on religion and ceremony and not relationship.

Isaiah now calls the residents of Jerusalem into the courtroom and the terms used are intentional.

Isaiah 1:10

“Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah.” (NASB95)

Yes, Isaiah has first compared them, after the Assyrian army passes through, to being survivors unlike Sodom and Gomorrah who were fully destroyed. But then Isaiah, once he gets Jerusalem into the courtroom, compares them with those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah.

The sarcastic address reflects the Lord’s perspective and emphasizes how sinful the nation was in his sight. (Chisholm Jr. 2002, 16)

Genesis 13:13

“(Now the people of Sodom were extremely wicked rebels against the LORD.)” (NET)

This has nothing to do with anything other than the people of Judah had become just like the men of Sodom, “extremely wicked rebels against the Lord.” But they were religious? Yep. They were God’s

people. Yep. They had allowed the culture of surrounding nations (Israel) to influence them and draw them away.

Satan loves it when we are religious.

Again, the grace of God is reflected as the city is likened to Sodom and to Gomorrah, but they have not been destroyed yet. There is still a chance if they repent and return to YAHWEH.

They needed to “give ear to the instruction of the Lord.” They needed to get back into Torah, their Bible, and obey what it is that is in it. The response though is...look at our ceremonies.

The problem that the nation is experiencing is the same problem we tend to fall into as well, going through the motions.

Isaiah 1:11–15

“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. When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? 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. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. “So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.” (NASB95)

God wants relationship, not ceremony. God wants a right heart, not ten hail Mary prayers and a couple of novenas. He does not want empty religion.

They forgot that God intended their ceremonies to be symbolic of their attitude toward Him. Their attitude to Him was more important than their flawless performance of worship rituals. (Constable 2003, Is 1:11)

The most pompous and costly devotions of wicked people, without a thorough reformation of the heart and life, are so far from being acceptable to God that really they are an abomination to him. (Henry 1994, 1077)

The answer is not being religious. Jesus talked about religious folks discussing with Him, at the Great White Throne judgement, how they had done all kinds of things for Him, but never really repented and never really had a relationship with Him (Luke 13:24-30, Matthew 7:15-23.) Jesus went on to say that His response to those who were into performance and not into relationship was summed up in one sentence. “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”

There is blood on Judah’s hands.

Some background about Judah

What Blood Is On Judah’s Hands?

Where are their hearts?

1. King Ahaz practiced child sacrifice, and the people followed. (2 Kings 16:1-5)
2. Israel and Syria attacked Jerusalem killing over 100,000 and took 200,000 captive (2 Chronicles 28:5-10)
3. King Ahaz bribed the Assyrians to deal with Israel and Syria (2 Kings 16:7 – 9)
4. Syria and Israel have been attacked, destroyed and the survivors have been taken off into exile by the Assyrians.
5. Non-Jews have been forcibly resettled into the north of the land.

6. As part of the deal, Ahaz became a vassal to the Assyrian empire and instituted worship of their gods in the Temple as well.
7. King Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria and God delivered Jerusalem alone through a miracle, but the rest of Judah was taken.

So with that background, we come back to the reality of where the people of Judah are. Many are only following YAHWEH because of politics. Under Hezekiah there is revival and a return to the Lord, but even with that, there were many who still did not have their hearts in it, including the Priests. (More to come on that)

James 1:22–24

“But be sure you live out the message and do not merely listen to it and so deceive yourselves. For if someone merely listens to the message and does not live it out, he is like someone who gazes at his own face in a mirror. For he gazes at himself and then goes out and immediately forgets what sort of person he was.” (NET)

Because of where they are spiritually, God outlines what is a problem and He also provides the reason why in verse 15.

Isaiah 1:15

“So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.” (NASB95)

So again, whose blood

1. Innocent babies who were sacrificed to Moloch
2. All of those who were killed through the duplicity of King Ahaz

False worshipers pace themselves through a dead ritual in two ways. One is the movement of their hands, the other the multiplication of their prayers. They spread out their hands before God as if sincerely seeking Him, but deny the gesture by their real disloyalties. (Rosscup 2008, 1082)

So God is condemning their prayer, due to blood on their hands, but also due to the dead ritual about their prayer which means nothing. They were spreading out their hands, lifting up their arms in prayer and worship, except they thought by doing that action, they would be heard.

Praying via a specific ritual format does not necessarily mean God hears.

Matthew 6:5–8

“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” (NASB95)

For Judah, who is in the courtroom and for who there is still a chance, what is required for them, so they do not wind up like the northern kingdom?

What does God want? We see that next and it can be summed up in one word.
Repentance.

God makes an invitation and He does so with a series of imperatives. As the nation pays attention to their sin individually, it will result in outward deeds reflecting the believing loyalty within.

Isaiah 1:16–17

“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.” (NASB95)

There are nine commands listed in these two verses that must be done.

1. Wash – A deliberate action based on a decision
2. Make - Avail yourself of the cleaning ordinances He has provided
3. Remove - Evil deeds are removed from God’s sight
4. Cease – Stop the way you have been living
5. Learn – Start learning how to live differently
6. Seek – Make living differently a priority
7. Reprove – Speak out against the culture
8. Defend – Let your life reflect the change in you
9. Plead – Actively stand for what is right

His grace is there, and His invitation follows.

Isaiah 1:18–20

“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. If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword.” Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (NASB95)

I really like the way the NET Bible has translated this section. He is in the courtroom and He is making a direct appeal to Judah. There is still a chance for them. Before He moves forward with the indictment against them, He makes an offer of settlement.

Isaiah 1:18–20

“Come, let’s consider your options,” says the LORD. “Though your sins have stained you like the color red, you can become white like snow; though they are as easy to see as the color scarlet, you can become white like wool. If you have a willing attitude and obey, then you will again eat the good crops of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” Know for certain that the LORD has spoken.” (NET)

God is saying to Judah, “Do not force Me to render sentence. Settle your case out of court.” (McGee 1997, 192)

Here is the offer of settlement to stop this court action. This is your one-time good deal. Let’s talk this over a bit.

Let me show the advantages of believing loyalty. The contract you agreed to was the right decision and you can come back to that place of initial agreement. There is a way out.

No matter how bad you have been and how far you have drifted, you can be like new white snow. By the way, the offers being made are in the imperfect.

The imperfects must be translated as modal (indicating capability or possibility) to bring out the conditional nature of the offer. This purification will only occur if the people repent and change their ways. (Biblical Studies Press 2005)

As with all potential settlements, the offer is conditional. There is the requirement for there to be skin in the game. Because of the offer and the ultimate backing up of the offer made by God in Isaiah 53, because He paid the price Himself, we can be made new. There is a secret sauce and He tells us about it. This is the same discussion He had with Nicodemus.

John 3:3–21

Jesus replied, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time, can he?" Jesus answered, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must all be born from above.' The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear the sound it makes, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus replied, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you don't understand these things? I tell you the solemn truth, we speak about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. If I have told you people about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him. The one who believes in him is not condemned. The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. Now this is the basis for judging: that the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed. But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done in God." (NET)

For the Jew, believing loyalty meant repenting and following YAHWEH. Yes, participation in the rituals, which were looking forward to their ultimate fulfilment in Messiah, was something to do. But notice what is not said. He does not say run down to the Temple and get this done. He says repent.

Again, there is a choice to be made.

Isaiah 1:19–20

"If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword." Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (NASB95)

Just say yes, and then follow through on that.

Romans 10:8–10

"But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." (NASB95)

The result of saying yes for Judah, peace. A restoration of the promises associated with believing loyalty in their lives. The blessing outlined by Moses in Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

But if they say no, there will be no other offer for settlement for now. He refers to one of the curses outlined in Deuteronomy 28:15 – 68.

Deuteronomy 28:25

"The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth." (NASB95)

The wordplay in the Hebrew draws attention to the options. The people can obey, in which case they will "eat" v. 19 (אָכַל [to'khelu], Qal active participle of אָכַל) God's blessing, or they can disobey, in which

case they will be devoured (Heb “eaten,” תֹּאכְלוּ, [té’ukkélú], Qal passive/Pual of אָכַל) by God’s judgment. (Biblical Studies Press 2005)

Eat or be eaten

We will return to the courtroom next week.

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