

The Spiritual, Mental and Physical State of the Israelites Isaiah 1:2-9

Facilitator: Louise P. McQueen

I. Historical Background & Biblical Context

Isaiah was a famous Old Testament prophet who predicted the coming Messiah (7:14; 9:6; 11:1; 53:12). Isaiah spent his early years as an official of King Uzziah. When the king died, Isaiah received his prophetic calling in a stirring vision of God in the temple (ch. 6). Isaiah's primary work was that of preaching judgment. Judah would ultimately experience devastation by the hands of the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Isaiah, a skillful writer, was steadfast in his devotion to the Lord.

Israel had been in the promised land for almost 700 years. Up until the time of Isaiah, the kingdom of Israel, the ten northern tribes, had some 18 kings, all of them bad and rebellious against the Lord. The Kingdom of Judah, the two southern tribes, had some 11 kings before Isaiah's ministry, some good and some bad. In the time of Isaiah, Israel was a little nation often caught in the middle of the wars between three superpowers: Egypt, Assyria and Babylon.

God brought a formal indictment against the nation. Isaiah preached that the nation deserved this catastrophe because of its sin. The audience of Isaiah was made up of true believers who walked with God, and some who were not walking with God; therefore, God's action for them would be disciplinary. As long as a faithful remnant existed, Isaiah saw hope for God's blessing on the nation.

II. The Spiritual, Mental and Physical State of the Israelites

1. vv. 2-4.

The book of Isaiah pictured the southern Kingdom of Judah as ungrateful children rebelling against their parents. They were like rebellious children who never appreciated all that their parents did for them. God called heaven and earth as witnesses against Judah. The leaders and people of Judah had resisted God's will, and God now stated His case against them. The prophet called them back to obedience to God, the Holy One of Israel.

The leaders and people of Judah were not like dumb animals, such as the ox or donkey. They were dumber than dumb animals. The ox at least knew its owner, but Judah did not know who owned them. The donkey knew who took care of it, but Judah did not know who took care of them. They were a people who did not consider the blessings God had bestowed upon them. God clearly and strongly exposed their sin or iniquity. They had provoked the Lord to anger. The sinful condition of the people was noted, and punishment had been planned for them.

God did not stop calling them His children but was disappointed in their rebellion towards Him. The only thing that will halt the judgment of God from falling upon them is repentance. Our nation could take a warning from this picture of disobedience. We need to repent as a nation for the rampant sin in this country. We belong to Christ who paid a price for us with His own precious blood!

2. vv. 5-9.

Despite their sin, God did not wish evil upon Judah. Instead, He longed for them to repent and make it easy on themselves. They would continue to be stricken as long as they rebelled. The Kingdom of Judah

was attacked and pillaged by Israel, Syria, Edom, the Philistines and Assyria. For all this, Judah would not repent. Their sin brought them great trouble, but they still preferred their sin, with all of its trouble, than submitting to God. It appeared that their minds were on evil things, and those who should have been leading them morally were caught up in that evil as well. Already in ruins because of rebellion against God, the nation behaved irrationally by continuing their rebellion.

Their sinful way of life had totally consumed them from their feet to their heads. Every part of the nation was sick. There was no one to help the nation recover from the attacks from other nations. There was nothing to help it. The country was barren, the cities burned, and foreigners were devouring their land. God's goal was to create a world in which He and His people could dwell. However, the land was becoming a desert, a wasteland. All the beauty of Judah and Jerusalem had almost completely faded away. The foreign armies left Judah like a shed in a vineyard, alone. Judah became nothing but a booth in a vineyard, a lodge in a field, a besieged city. Small huts were built in fields so that watchmen could guard the crops ready to be harvested. At the end of the harvest, these huts would be abandoned in a field stripped bare of its produce. So, Jerusalem here was portrayed as vacant and deserted with nothing left to protect.

The wounded untended and the land without defense pointed to the helplessness and hopelessness that forsaking the Lord brings. God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because their inhabitants were very wicked, Genesis 19. If God's people were left on their own to fulfill their natural and sinful desires, without divine intervention, their fate would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah. The few people among us who loved and obeyed God were called the remnant. They did that even when no one else loved and obeyed God. After exposing Israel's rebellion and the consequences of its sin, and

after God confronts us with the truth, we still will not admit our failures or shortcomings; nevertheless, Isaiah reminded us of God's mercy.

III. Conclusion

Israel was not spared total destruction because of their power, merit or wisdom, but solely because of the mercy of God. Their disobedience called for judgment. This was divine preservation. There came a point where the Lord of Justice and mercy stretches out His hand and says "No" to the consequences of sin. God's preserving grace overrules our stupid decisions and saved us from ourselves! For those of us who are the children of God, may we remember the mercy and love of our Lord who does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities (Ps. 103:10). As we turn to the Lord, confessing our sins, we will marvel at the mercy of God through Jesus Christ.