

## Isaiah – Chapter 1

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Isaiah 1:2-3 – 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."

### Review

In our introduction parts 1 through 6, we covered Isaiah the man, his audience across eras, the direct hearers in Judah, key themes like judgment and restoration, the outline as a covenant lawsuit, special threads such as the Messianic hope and the Holy One of Israel, and linguistic features like parallelism and imagery. Remember, Isaiah writes in a mosaic pattern, building a full picture through pieces. The book opens as a legal indictment, calling heaven and earth as witnesses, just as Deuteronomy 30:19 instructed for covenant breaches.

Now we turn to chapter 1. This sets the tone for the whole book: Judah's rebellion, God's judgment, and a call to return. It's not a chronological start but a summary indictment, likely from early in Isaiah's ministry under Uzziah or Jotham, before the crises under Ahaz.

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Historical Context – Chapter 1 addresses Judah and Jerusalem during a time of outward prosperity but inner decay, around 750-730 BC. The Northern Kingdom of Israel is still standing but allied with Syria against Judah (foreshadowing the Syro-Ephraimite war in chapter 7). Idolatry thrives on high places, injustice oppresses the poor, and leaders trust alliances over God. Isaiah speaks as prosecutor in YHWH's lawsuit, citing covenant violations from the Deuteronomy 28 curses.

### Section 1:

#### The Indictment and Witnesses (1-9)

Isaiah opens with the vision's scope focused on Judah under four kings.

This anchors the book in a verifiable timeline, roughly 740 to 686 BC, and aligns with extra-biblical Assyrian records like Sennacherib's annals that mention Hezekiah. This grounds the prophecies as real events tied to Judah's kings, not abstract oracles.

This also defines the scope of Isaiah's ministry across four reigns, showing that his prophetic voice endured through prosperity under Uzziah, stability with Jotham, apostasy during Ahaz, and reform under Hezekiah. That span underscores the persistence of Judah's rebellion despite varying leadership quality. Uzziah and Hezekiah did right but faltered in pride, Jotham was decent but didn't remove high places, and Ahaz was outright idolatrous. The message isn't tied to one bad king: it's a national formal accusation.

Furthermore, this highlights the Davidic Covenant context. These are "kings of Judah," descendants of David, reminding the readers of God's promises in 2 Samuel 7:12-16 for

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an eternal throne. Yet the prophecies reveal breaches, setting up themes of judgment on the line while preserving a remnant and future Messiah from it.

Critically, this naming enhances authenticity—cross-references in 2 Kings and Chronicles match, like Isaiah's role in Hezekiah's crisis (2 Kings 19). It focuses the audience on Judah and Jerusalem, distinguishing from the northern kingdom's fall, and signals the book's structure: early chapters under Uzziah/Jotham, crises with Ahaz, deliverance under Hezekiah, then future-oriented visions.

Verses 2-3 call witnesses (heaven and earth), as in Deuteronomy 30:19, making this a formal covenant lawsuit. God speaks as a father betrayed by sons: they have been "reared and brought up" yet they have "revolted" is better understood as "rebellion." The animal imagery contrasts: even dumb beasts recognize their master, but Israel does not know YHWH. They do not *understand* – the word "בִּינָה (byn)" means to discern, see, and understand.

Throughout Israel's history, they have been given over to discipline. They would experience, famine, pestilence, invasion from enemies, etc. Judah was beginning to be pressed in from Syria and Israel. Judah should have recognized there was a problem, but they did not recognize the clear signs.

Verses 4-6 pile accusations: This is a poetic way of announcing that the nation is truly facing severe judgment.

"Offspring of evildoers" – zera mereim (zera for seed, mereim for those who do harm) – flips the "holy seed" motif we'll see later in 6:13, implying this generation inherits and perpetuates corruption rather than righteousness. "Sons who act corruptly" echoes the father-son relationship from verse 2, but now they're agents of ruin.

The triplet of actions, "abandoned the Lord," "despised the Holy One of Israel," and "turned away," builds a progression of rejection.

Then there is a rhetorical question: "Where will you be stricken again?" This assumes ongoing divine discipline, curses, for covenant breach, where persistent rebellion invites escalating plagues (Deuteronomy 28:58-61). "Continue in your rebellion" portrays sin as willful persistence. "Whole head is sick" targets leadership (kings, priests) as diseased, while "whole heart is faint" hits the core inner mind of the nation. All this shows corruption is not isolated and has permeated the nation.

Verse 6 inverts the body scan, "from the sole of the foot even to the head" for climactic emphasis, reversing verse 5's order to underscore totality. "Nothing sound in it" means there is nothing in the nation that is not corrupt. The wounds, "bruises, welts, raw wounds," evoke untreated battle injuries, not pressed (drained), bandaged, or oiled (soothed).

Deuteronomy 28:35 ("boils from sole to crown") for covenant curses. Psalm 38:3-7 (David's sin as festering wounds). This is metaphor but it previews societal breakdown –

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desolation in verse 7 – as self-inflicted under YHWH's judgment, with no healer because they've rejected the Holy One.

Verses 7-9 describe desolation: land overrun, cities burned, Zion isolated like a hut. This previews Assyrian invasions but fits the era's raids. The remnant hint ("few survivors") ties to themes: unless YHWH preserved a holy seed (as in 6:13), they'd be like Sodom and Gomorrah, utterly judged and in ruin.

### Section 2:

The Rejection of Empty Worship (vs. 10-15)

Isaiah addresses rulers as "Sodom" and people as "Gomorrah." This equates their sin to those cities' wickedness. This is a deliberate legal escalation, equating Judah's sin to the worst sin in the patriarchs' history (Ezekiel 16:46-49; Lamentations 4:6).

Verses 11-12 question the value of "multiplied sacrifices" and "trampling My courts," exposing hypocrisy and treating YHWH as one of the gods, not the Lord of creation, the Holy One of Israel. YHWH has "had enough" of rams, fat, and blood offerings. This echoes 1 Samuel 15:22 ("to obey is better than sacrifice") and Psalm 50:8-13 (God owns all animals, needs no food), emphasizing that rituals commanded in Leviticus become worthless when divorced from understanding what they mean. Historically, being under kings like Ahaz critiques blending pagan elements with prescribed Levitical forms, profaning the temple as a mere "appearance" before God.

Verse 13 labels incense, new moons, sabbaths, and assemblies an "abomination," and "iniquity with solemn assembly" shows even holy convocations do not matter when sin, lack of understanding, and disbelief reign. God's "weary" burden reveals strain, like a parent exhausted by a child's insincere gestures.

Verses 14-15 intensify with "hate" for feasts, and hidden eyes from spread hands (prayer posture) becomes futile. "Hands covered with blood" means that they are guilty of unjust bloodshed (Amos 5:21-24 - reject feasts without justice).

### Section 3:

The process for renewal (1:16-20)

This section provides a reprieve for judgment and gives hope to those who will heed the warnings of Isaiah.

Verses 16-17 form a command sequence in imperative parallelism, urging ethical renewal over ritual: "Wash yourselves" and "make yourselves clean" are not a ritual cleansing or sacrifices, but a command on how Judah was to fix the current state of rebellion.

- Remove the evil / Cease to do evil
- Learn to do good / Seek justice

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- Reprove the ruthless / Defend the orphan, plead for the widow

This is a list of the actions that the nation needed to take to be restored.

Verse 18, "Come now, and let us reason together," continues the lawsuit motif, inviting dialogue in YHWH's court, not negotiation, but a merciful offer amid indictment. If the nation does come and reason with the Lord, He is longsuffering and will restore them.

The antithetic parallelism in "though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool" uses color imagery for restoration: scarlet to white, symbolizes forgiveness, not through self-effort but divine cleansing.

Verses 19-20 present two potential outcomes. "If you consent and obey" leads to "eat the best of the land;" "but if you refuse and rebel" results in "devoured by the sword" (judgment curse). "Truly, the mouth of the Lord has spoken" seals it as irrevocable oracle, emphasizing the authority of YHWH spoken through Isaiah.

### Section 4:

#### The City's Fall and Future Purification (21-31)

Verses 21-23 use the harlot metaphor to contrast Jerusalem's past faithfulness with its current corruption, where the city is personified as an unfaithful wife chasing idols and injustice. "Faithful city" recalls its ideal as a place of justice and righteousness, but now it's a "harlot," implying spiritual adultery through alliances or idolatry, with "murderers" lurking, referring to oppressive rulers shedding innocent blood via unjust policies.

The economic debasement: "silver has become dross" symbolizes worthless leadership (pure metal turned slag), and "drink diluted with water" suggests corrupted justice or weakened covenants, evoking Proverbs 25:4-5, where removing dross purifies the king. Rulers as "rebels and companions of thieves" who "love a bribe and chase rewards" directly indicts bribery, leading to neglect of orphans and widows, vulnerable groups protected through God's Law. All this leads to curses on perverters of justice.

Verses 24-26 shift to YHWH's response: these verses signal judgment's inevitability, with titles "Lord God of hosts" (emphasizing war against Israel) and "Mighty One of Israel" which was supposed to be a protector of Israel (Genesis 49:22-25; Isaiah 60:16) but now turns against Israel and demands justice against His adversaries, avenging Himself on internal enemies (the corrupt within Judah). "Turn My hand against you" is about God's disciplinary hand; it is used to purify: "smelt away your dross." This is a consistent imagery in the Prophets to state that God will remove the evil from Israel, and then the remnant will thrive.

The promise: "restore your judges as at the first" harks back to ideal eras like David's or Solomon's early rule (2 Chronicles 19:5-7, Jehoshaphat's just judges), making Jerusalem "the city of righteousness, a faithful city" again, reversing verse the nations fall, tying to the city thread where Zion's restoration centers God's plan.

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Verses 27-28 contrast outcomes: "Zion will be redeemed with justice" promises deliverance for the city through mishpat (righteous verdict), focusing on "her repentant ones with righteousness," those who return (shuv, turn back, repentance is a bad term here), echoing the remnant theme from verse 9. But "transgressors and sinners will be crushed together with those who forsake the Lord will come to an end" this indicates no escape, for the dross that is in Israel, the wicked will be destroyed.

Verses 29-30 shame idolaters: "ashamed of the oaks which you have desired" targets sacred trees in pagan high places (2 Kings 17:10), and "embarrassed at the gardens" refers to cultic enclosures for fertility rites. The simile "like an oak whose leaf fades away or as a garden that has no water" inverts fertility symbols into symbols of drought judgment.

Verse 31 states that the "strong man will become tinder, his work also a spark" personifies the powerful and their idols as flammable, "both burn together with none to quench them." An unextinguishable fire, linking to judgment motifs throughout the Prophets.

Question: is verses 27-31 an eschatological reference? It is a promise to Judah and Israel for their entire history. But we know that this will only occur at the end. The restoration that is promised with the "returnees" being the Remnant in the end of the age. The final judgment for unbelieving and evil Israel will be judgement, death and an unquenchable fire.

### Conclusion

This wraps the chapter's indictment with hope for the faithful amid doom for the wicked, reinforcing that holiness demands separation from evil practices and active pursuance of justice.