

INITIATION INTO ISAIAH

by

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FIRST DIVISION JUDGMENT (Poetry) Chapters 1-35

CHAPTER ONE

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America Needs A Declaration Of Dependence

Isaiah 1:1-18

THE TIMES OF ISAIAH

Isaiah lived in a time of tension. In many respects, it was a time of crisis in the history of the world. World-shaking events were transpiring. Catastrophic and cataclysmic judgments were taking place. There was upheaval in the social order.

A new nation had arisen in the North; it was moving to world domination. Assyria, the most brutal nation ever to put an army on the battlefield, was marching to world conquest. Already, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been taken into Assyrian captivity. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was in precarious position, and an Assyrian army, 185,000 strong, was just outside the walls of Jerusalem.

In this dire, desperate, and difficult day, Hezekiah entered the temple and turned to God in prayer. God sent His prophet with an encouraging word. He asserted that Assyria would never take Judah; the army of Assyria would never set foot in the streets of Jerusalem, and they would never cross the threshold of any gate of the city of the great King. But God was preparing another nation—Babylon, the head of gold, down by the banks of the river Euphrates, and this nation would eventually take Judah into captivity unless she turned to God.

God was giving Judah another chance. In order to establish the justice of His cause, God called her into court; He held her before His bar of justice. He gave her opportunity to answer the charge, to hear His verdict, and to throw herself on the mercy of His court.

A VISION OF GOD ON THE JUDGMENT THRONE IN THE GREAT ASSIZE

God invites us into the court to see if He is just. It is well for this day and generation to go into the court room, and to see God on the Throne of Judgment in this sensational scene.

In the thinking of the world, God has been removed from the Throne of Judgment. He has been divested of His authority; robbed of His regal prerogative; shorn of His locks as the moral ruler of His universe; He has been bowed to the edge of the world and pushed over as excess baggage.

Let me say, that is a blasphemous picture of God! He is still the moral ruler of His universe. He is still upon the Throne of Justice. He has not abdicated. He punishes sin.

There is an expression that keeps recurring in my thinking—it is back in the Song of Moses which the children of Israel sang as they crossed the Red Sea. The expression is, “**the Lord is a man of War.**” Yes, He is! And He will not compromise with sin. He will not accept the white flag of surrender. He is moving forward in undeviating, unhesitating, and uncompromising fury against it. There would be hope today for man, if he could say with Isaiah, “**I saw also the Lord sitting upon the Throne.**”

GOD’S GENERAL JUDGMENT AGAINST JUDAH

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (Isaiah 1:1).

First of all, let us keep the gun sights of our hermeneutics of geography accurate: this is a vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem and this is the proper interpretation. I am sure that we will not make the mistake of locating either one anywhere in the Western Hemisphere. There is, however, a marvelous application for America today, and one that we need to hear and heed.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me (Isaiah 1:2).

God does not do anything in a corner or in the dark. This language is strangely similar to the way Deuteronomy 32 begins: “**Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.**”

When God put them in the Land, having taken them out of the land of Egypt, He put down the conditions on which He was “homesteading” them in the Promised Land; He called the created intelligences of heaven and earth to witness to these conditions.

Five hundred years later, when He was ready to take them out of the Land to send them into Babylonian captivity. He called the created intelligences of heaven and earth to witness that He was just and right in His dealings. After almost three thousand years. He invites us to make a close inspection, and to see that even by our modern standards, He was right and just.

The general charge He made against them was rebellion. As His children, they had rebelled against the Mosaic Law in this connection.

Over in Deuteronomy 21:18, there is the law concerning a wayward son:

If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother! and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place: and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice, he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die; so: shalt thou put evil away from among you: and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

This was what the law did with a prodigal son. The crowd that heard Christ tell of the prodigal son was dumbfounded when He said; that the father told the servant to kill the fatted calf instead of killing the poor son. God is not only just, but merciful; but the rebellion of a son is a serious thing. Scripture has a great deal to say about it.

In order to emphasize this charge, God indulges in a bit of humor. I trust that you recognize humor in the Bible, for it will make you enjoy it a great deal more. God has a sense of humor. Verse three is a splendid piece of satire: **“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.”**

The two animals which he used as illustrations have not built up very much of a reputation for having a high I.Q. We still have an old bromide of being “dumb as an ox,” and the little long-eared animal, the donkey, does not wear a Phi Beta Kappa key—at least, very few of them do. Even these animals have intelligence enough to know who feeds them. On the contrary, a number of folk today have not intelligence enough to know that God provides for all of our needs. What a commentary on this sophisticated generation that no longer needs God.

Most people today are living as if God does not exist, but even an ox knows his owner, and a little donkey knows where he is being fed.

The story is told of a little boy reared in a Christian home, who was having his first visit away from home alone. Although it was only next door for the evening meal, he was thoroughly enjoying the experience. When it came time for all of them to sit down at the table, the little fellow, who was accustomed to hearing grace at the table, bowed his head and shut his eyes, but the home to which he had been invited, was not a Christian home, and they immediately began to pass the food. The little fellow was just a bit embarrassed, but not having any inhibitions, he raised the question: “Don’t you folks thank God for your food?” Then the host was a bit embarrassed, but confessed that they did not.

The little fellow was thoughtful for a moment and then blurted out, “You’re ‘zactly like my dog: he just starts in.”

God continues with His general charge in verse four:

Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

They are in a backslidden condition: they are a “**sinful nation, laden with iniquity.**” That expression sends us down the court-way of the centuries, and we hear the Man of Galilee saying to His people, “**Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**” Now we know that He meant—“**laden with iniquity.**” His invitation goes out today to those with burdens, and those bowed down with sin, to bring that burden and load to Him, and find rest. In this expression, we can hear God still calling America.

ISAIAH PRESENTS A PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Now God specifies His charges against His people. He is going to put His hand upon some definite thing and prove that in that particular point they were wrong. He put His finger down on the very BEST thing in Judah; not the worst, and He showed that that was exceedingly wrong.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats (Isaiah 1:11).

Now, they had a God-given religion; a God-appointed ritual, in a God-constructed Temple, but they were wrong in that which represented the best. They were bringing sacrifices and going through the ritual according to the letter of the Law, but their hearts were in rebellion against God, and their lives were lived in sin.

Isaiah presents to us a philosophy of human government. In the book of Judges, you see this cycle of history of human government working itself out in the nation. It goes down through time like a giant hoop rolling over and over in a very monotonous way. Three stages are given in the downfall of every nation:

First, there is religious apostasy, followed by moral awfulness and political anarchy. One follows the other as the night the day until disintegration, decay and destruction, have set in. You can put this pattern down on any period of history and find that it is true.

For instance: Gibbon in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* gives his penetrating insight in the five reasons why Rome fell:

- “(1) The rapid increase of divorce.
- (2) The craze for pleasure.
- (3) The building of gigantic armaments when the real enemy was within.
- (4) Decadence of the people.
- (5) The decay of religion.”

GOD'S CHARGE AGAINST AMERICA

If God should call America into court today and specify His charges against us, where would He begin? Would He begin with political anarchy? Certainly He could, for the press tells of the open scandal which exists today in high places. In spite of all the smoke, it is obvious to the average citizen that there is some fire. Why men, whose loyalty to our government is questioned, are held in positions of high authority is not understood by us simple citizens. "Are there traitors in our government?" is the question that Joe Doaks is asking today.

Atomic secrets have been sold by political and scientific Esaus. It looks now as if we betrayed China to the communists because of a weak, vacillating policy, if not open sympathy, on the part of some of our leaders. The same pattern is being followed as when the civilized nations stood aside and watched Mussolini take and attempt to brutalize Ethiopia and, later, Hitler took Austria and Czechoslovakia.

God could put His finger down on political anarchy which is at work in our beloved nation today, but I do not believe that is where He would begin.

MORAL AWFULNESS

Moral awfulness runs rampant in this fair land of ours. A consideration of some reliable statistics is enough to enforce this.

In one year, since the war, our nation spent for liquor, \$9,500,000,000; for tobacco, \$3,410,000,000; for cosmetics and beauty aids, \$2,321,000,000; for vacations, theaters, recreations, racetracks, etc., \$7,942,000,000; and by contrast, the total amount contributed to all social welfare and religious work, amounted to \$1,525,000,000.

The employers in the United States lose \$200,000,000 annually through employee dishonesty. Yet, it would seem that the majority of our employees are honest.

The F.B.I. gives us these alarming statistics as of 1952:

- Fifteen million sex magazines are read monthly by a third of the nation.
- Three times as many criminals as college students.
- One million girls infected with social disease.
- 100,000 girls enter white slavery each year.
- One million babes born in illegitimacy yearly.
- Two out of three marriages end in divorce.
- Forty-five suicides every day.
- One murder every forty minutes.
- One major crime every eighteen seconds.
- 100,000 unapprehended murderers walk the streets.
- Twenty-one year olds represent the largest criminal group.

Surely God could bring a charge of moral awfulness against our nation, but I do not believe He would begin here.

SPIRITUAL APOSTASY

Is there spiritual apostasy in this land of ours? Every informed Christian is aware that modernism has taken over most of the great denominations of America today, and in this dire day, modernism, by its own confession, has failed.

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the mouthpieces of liberalism, is quoted as saying that liberal Protestantism has been inclined to sacrifice every characteristic Christian insight if only it could thereby prove itself intellectually respectable, but that liberalism finds itself unable to cope with the tragic experiences of our day.

Pandora's "box of troubles" was opened for America back at the turn of the century when professing Christians deserted the mid-week service and then after the First World War deserted the Sunday night service, and before long, there was no difference between the deacon's language and that of the local bartender.

Dr. Walter F. Tunks of the University of Akron said: "In the last six thousand years, there have been twenty-one civilizations, and every one of them has gone on the rocks precisely at the point where they let God go."

It is indeed interesting to find in the staid Wall Street Journal, when the depression first began, a brief editorial that went something like this:

What America needs today is not Government controls, industrial expansion, or a bumper corn crop: America needs to return to the day when grandpa took the team out of the field in the early afternoon on Wednesday in order to hitch them to the old spring wagon into which grandma put all of the children after she washed their faces shining clean; and they drove off to prayer meeting in the little white church at the crossroads underneath the oak trees, where everyone believed the Bible, trusted Christ, and loved one another.

We stand half way in the century, but our trouble began fifty years ago, and it is spiritual, and here is where God would put His finger down and say we are wrong.

This is where He put His finger down with Judah. The Lord Jesus did not enter Jerusalem and cleanse Pilate's Judgment Hall, or Herod's palace. He did not attempt to deal with the moral awfulness of Jerusalem, although they may have been unspeakably bad, except to tell one poor unfortunate woman that her sins were forgiven her and to go and sin no more.

He did fight with the Pharisees, and it was bitter.

Listen to God as He continues His charge against Judah in verse thirteen:

Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies; I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

They were guilty of rebellion against Him. They were bringing the sacrifices, but they needed to remember Samuel's words to Saul, **"to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."**

I am wondering if the Lord Jesus came to our churches today, would He commend us? Would He compliment us for our faithfulness to Him? Would He tell us how much He appreciates our attendance upon the services and our giving to Him? I think not! The One who has **"feet as burnished brass,"** whose **"eyes are as a flame of fire,"** and from whose mouth there goes **"a sharp two-edged sword,"** would not commend us.

I think He would tell us that all of our outward form, all of our lovely testimonies, and loud professions were making Him sick. Would He not tell us that we need to repent and come in humility to Him? Surely, there is a warning to the churches of America. Our difficulty today is fundamentally spiritual, and until the professing church repents and has revival, there is no hope for America.

A STRANGE SENTENCE

Let us return to the vision of Isaiah. The prisoner is now in the box and has been found guilty. All of the charges preferred have been proven; the verdict of the jury is in, and we are ready to hear the sentence of the Judge. It is a strange sentence. In fact, we stand amazed and aghast at this Judge. Listen to Him, **"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."**

He is saying to Judah, settle your case out of court. Do not force me to render sentence.

"Agree with thine adversary quickly whilst thou art in the way with him."

He says that He has a secret formula, a divine alchemy, a potent prescription, a powerful potion, a heavenly elixir that will take out sin. It is not a secret formula like the atomic bomb, but it is more potent.

You will find it in Isaiah 53 as the One more marred, who suffered more, who died differently, who was wounded for our transgressions and because He paid the penalty the Judge is able now to extend mercy to us. Is not God calling America to settle its case out of court?

England and France, in the 18th century, were in a low state morally and spiritually. Both nations faced a crisis. France had a revolution: England had a revival led by John Wesley. England was delivered. Yes, God will save America if we but turn to Him. God will punish America unless we do turn to Him.

Did He not punish Judah by sending them into Babylonian captivity, and did He not send Israel into Assyrian captivity? God may even yet use Russia to humiliate us for we are a proud nation, depending upon our dollars to buy peace in the world while God says, “**there is no peace to the wicked.**”

There is a message here for each individual. There is no use for us to attempt to prove our innocence before this Judge. He says that “**all have sinned,**” and we find a very cogent question asked in Proverbs 20:9, “**Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?**” but again, the Judge says to us as individuals. “**Come now, let us reason together. . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.**”

Aaron Burr was a grandson of the great Jonathan Edwards, who, upon an occasion, conducted meetings at Princeton, where Aaron Burr was a student. There was a great spiritual movement in the school. One night when Jonathan Edwards preached on the subject, “The Mastery of Jesus,” Aaron Burr was deeply stirred, and he went to the room of one of his professors to talk to him about making a decision for Jesus. The professor urged him not to make a decision under any sort of an emotional appeal, but to wait until after the meetings were over. Aaron Burr postponed making a decision, and he went on to murder a great American and to betray his country. When he was an old man, a young man came to him and said, “Mr. Burr, I want you to meet a friend of mine.” Aaron Burr said, “Who is he?” The young man replied, “He is Jesus Christ, the Saviour of my soul.” A cold sweat broke out on the forehead of Aaron Burr, and he replied, “Sixty years ago I told God that if He would let me alone, I would let Him alone, and He has kept His word!”

There is a way out for America, and there is a way out for you and for me.

WHICH WAY OUT

Philosophy says: Think your way out.
Indulgence says: Drink your way out.
Politics says: Spend your way out.
The Fair Deal says: Legislate your way out.
Science says: Invent your way out.
Industry says: Work your way out.
Communism says: Strike your way out.
Fascism says: Bluff your way out.
Militarism says: Fight your way out.
The Bible says: Pray your way out.
But Jesus Christ says: “**I am the way** (out). . .”

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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