
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON II : ISRAEL'S FAILURE TO LOVINGLY OBEY THE LORD (1:1-31)

THE BIBLE VERSIONS — several versions will be used in these studies: the **KJV** because of its time-honored acceptance and familiarity, the **NIV** as a well-accepted updated version, and **Young's Literal Translation** for a more literal “wooden” translation. Different translations help make the text clearer, with each version having its own positives and negatives to add to the reading. The reader is also encouraged to note how the newer versions retain the poetic form when translating poetic passages, of which there are many within the book of Isaiah.

THE GENERAL EXPOSITORY APPROACH — I agree with those expositors who believe scripture might have multiple meanings, meaning a given passage might be understood historically, prophetically, and spiritually, with there being perhaps many applications. But I also think it an error to take a passage spiritually (making the spiritual application) without first understanding the historical emphasis, therefore I will attempt to keep the comments directed towards what Isaiah was writing about 2700 years ago before making application. I believe that also helps keep our observations in context and prevent mis-application.

Isaiah 1:1-31

Chapters 1-5 form a distinct preface to the book of Isaiah, apparent from at least four things:

- The dating of chapter 6 contrasts with chapters 1-5's undated oracles. Something must have prompted them to be sure; but Isaiah did not find reason to state them.
- Chapter 6, “the prophet's call”, could all too easily been the beginning of the book
- Apart from the Philistines in 2:6, there's no foreign nations are named in chapters 1-5, not even while describing the conqueror in 5:25-30. The sense is the first five chapters form a general backdrop for the entire book.
- There's a progressive, coherently structured message between chapters 1-5, with natural divisions between chapters 1, 2-4, and chap 5.

“The first chapter is an introduction to the entire book, containing the basic themes of Isaiah's ministry, namely, the sinfulness of Judah and Jerusalem (v3-8), the tender appeals of the Lord (v16-19), the certainty of the coming judgement (v24,25,29-31), and the blessedness of the salvation to come (v26,27).” [Young, *Isaiah*] General chapter outline (from Young's *Isaiah*):

- I. Judah's Sinful Condition (1:1-9)
 - A. The Prologue (1:1-3)
 - B. The Condition of the Nation (1:4-9)
- II. God's Judgement upon Judah (1:10-31)
 - A. Judah's Hypocritical Worship (1:10-17)
 - B. An Appeal to Repentance (1:18-23)
 - C. The Announcement of Coming Judgement (1:24-31)

I. Judah's Sinful Condition (1:1-9)

A. The Prologue (1:1-3)

The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." (NIV)

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. 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. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. (KJV)

The Visions of Isaiah son of Amoz, that he hath seen concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, For Jehovah hath spoken: Sons I have nourished and brought up, And they — they transgressed against Me. An ox hath known its owner, And an ass the crib of its master, Israel hath not known, My people hath not understood. (YLT)

The kings and biography of Isaiah was covered in last week's introduction. Isaiah's *vision* is not a reference to inward sight or perception, nor metaphorical for Isaiah's own perceptive powers. Rather it signifies the "sight" God had placed in the prophet's mind or had revealed to him. ***Thus what is given in his book is heavenly in origin, not human opinion or reasonings but a special revelation of God to Isaiah which in some sense inexplicable to us was "seen" by him.*** [Young, *Isaiah*]

THE HEAVENS AND EARTH TESTIFY — At Israel's beginning, Moses stated they would turn from the Lord and called upon the heavens and earth to testify against them: *"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.... Assemble before me all the elders of your tribes and all your officials, so that I can speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to testify against them.... Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth..."* (Deut 30:19,20; 31:28; 32:1) "Inasmuch as men are 'bereft of their senses' (Calvin), the prophet invokes elements of the creation which are without feeling, namely, heaven and earth. ***When insensate objects are commanded to witness a condemnation of sensible creatures, the guilt of the latter must truly be great.***" [Young, *Isaiah*] Thus it may be stated even unfeeling inanimate elements are regarded more faithful than Israel.

COURTROOM? — Some take the scene to be one of a courtroom (Motyer and Grogan, for example) implied by the legal overtones of these opening verses. Young and Grogan argues against this however: "The tone makes it clear that what follows will be not so much a legal presentation as a personal one. While the covenant is clearly in view here, it is in the background and remains there. ***Israel's offense is against common decency and common sense. Even animals know better.***" [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

GOD'S GOODNESS / ISRAEL'S REBELLION — Isaiah emphasizes the fact Israel was the “son” of God, not only in being adopted and created by Him but also in His watch care over them (v2b). The contrast however (note “children” and “they” are emphatic; see YLT) is after all the Lord’s done for them, they rebelled (“*I reared... they rebelled*”). “*Against Me...*” — ***all sin, whether the sinner realizes it or not, is against God*** (Ps 51:4). Israel’s rebellion is contrasted with the faithfulness of two of the dumbest animals, the ox and donkey, the ignorant beasts acting more wisely than Israel. From Motyer, *Isaiah: Sin (both Judah’s and our’s) is unnatural*, which can be seen by looking at common actions of beasts! *Why do we disobey? — the answer is our minds (know ... understand) or the heart of man; there is nothing external coercing our rebellion.*

B. The Condition of the Nation (1:4-9)

Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness — only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege. Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah. (NIV)

Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. (KJV)

Ah, sinning nation, a people heavy [with] iniquity, A seed of evil doers, sons — corrupters! They have forsaken Jehovah, They have despised the Holy One of Israel, They have gone away backward. Wherefore are ye stricken any more? Ye do add apostacy! Every head is become diseased, and every heart [is] sick. From the sole of the foot — unto the head, There is no soundness in it, Wound, and bruise, and fresh smiting! They have not been closed nor bound, Nor have they softened with ointment. Your land [is] a desolation, your cities burnt with fire, Your ground, before you strangers are consuming it, And a desolation as overthrown by strangers! And left hath been the daughter of Zion, As a booth in a vineyard, As a lodge in a place of cucumbers — as a city besieged. Unless Jehovah of Hosts had left to us a remnant, Shortly — as Sodom we had been, To Gomorrah we had been like! (YLT)

GRIEVANCE OVER SIN — Isaiah begins with “Ah”, a difficult word to translate according to Young. It could have the sense of “*alas!*” as *if including pain, pity, wonder and deep abhorrence*

at the unbelievable ingratitude of the nation. God is grieved by sin, and Isaiah, with the heart of a true evangelist, grieves with the Lord. “Words are not sufficient to express Isaiah’s feelings; he must break forth into an agonizing cry.” [Young, *Isaiah*]

PRIVILEGE GIVEN AND LOST — Isaiah lists four nouns of privilege to describe Israel: a unique *nation*, a redeemed *people*, the “*seed*” or *brood* (of Abraham), and the *children* of God. Combined with these four descriptions of privilege are four descriptions of lost ideals:

sinful — or “going on sinning”, missing God’s target

loaded with guilt — possibly “heavy with”, in the sense that ***the Lord who carried them felt the burden as well as they***; guilt = iniquity, sin as corruption of character and manner

evildoers — the chosen seed had become those who do evil

given to corruption — acting corrupted, spoiled, ruined

They have forsaken ... spurned ... turned their backs: all sin is essentially a sustained rejection of the Lord. They became what they were prior to redemption.

Note how Isaiah refers to the God they were rejecting: the *Holy One of Israel*, a title used frequently in Isaiah. ***The very height of Judah’s privilege, to know the Lord in the fullness of His holiness and holy nature, became the benchmark of the depth of their fall.***

THE INVASION — In v5,7 Isaiah describes Israel metaphorically, in v7,8 he replaces the metaphor with the actual conditions. The exact invasion Isaiah is referring to here is questioned, with each commentator stating it is not possible to know with any certainty. Possible choices include the Aram-Ephraim invasion of 735 BC (noted in 2 Kings 15:37-16:6; 2 Chron 28) or the Assyrian attack in 701 BC (Isa 36,37; 2 Chron 32). Grogan states the description in v7-9 of Jerusalem isolated and besieged harmonizes well with Sennacherib’s own description found in ancient documents. But which exact invasion referenced here is unimportant; the important thing is ***Isaiah views history as the “arena of divine moral judgement”.***

The enemy’s attacks have left the nation crippled (v5,6) from the top of their head to the bottom of their feet, inwardly (*heart*) and outwardly (*head ... foot*), and without remedy (*not cleansed, bandaged, nor soothed with oil*). In v8 Isaiah likened the situation in the land to the roughly made shelters of the farmer’s watchmen, standing desolate against the skyline once harvest was over. These were not only natural incidences but divine chastisement with more to follow if they persist in their rebellion. ***“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, *Isaiah*]

THE REMNANT — literally “survivors”. In v9 Isaiah directs our attention is now directed to the part the Lord has played: ***if not for the Lord keeping the remnant in existence, they would have been totally destroyed.*** The world is left without hope but for the Lord’s people, there’s another factor. ***Merit says one thing, mercy says another.*** As far as Judah deserved, the Lord would either judge Judah or apologize to Sodom. But He is the Lord Almighty (lit. the LORD of [who is] hosts), indicating that in Himself He is and has every potentiality and power. He is therefore sovereign to act in whatever way accords with His nature. The same Lord who judges (v2) also acts in grace (v9) ***as it pleases Him!*** ***“In Sodom and Gomorrah there had been no remnant; therefore the***

destruction which came upon them had been complete. A remnant has been preserved from Israel and hence Israel's destruction will not be complete. For the sake of the righteous remnant, itself not deserving to be spared, the nation is spared a full overthrow. Consequently, the attitude of the nation toward the righteous should ever be one of deep gratitude. Instead, the righteous are hated by the world, even though for the sake of the righteous the destruction of the wicked is postponed." [Young, *Isaiah*]

II. God's Judgement Upon Judah (1:10-31)

A. Judah's Hypocritical Worship (1:10-17)

Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! "The multitude of your sacrifices — what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations — I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. (NIV)

Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. 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. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? 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. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. (KJV)

Hear the word of Jehovah, ye rulers of Sodom, Give ear to the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah, Why to Me the abundance of your sacrifices? saith Jehovah, I have been satiated [with] burnt-offerings of rams, And fat of fatlings; And blood of bullocks, and lambs, And he-goats I have not desired. When ye come in to appear before Me, Who hath required this of your hand, To trample My courts? Add not to bring in a vain present, Incense — an abomination it [is] to Me, New moon, and sabbath, calling of convocation! Rendure not iniquity — and a restraint! Your new moons and your set seasons hath My soul hated, They have been upon me for a burden, I have been weary of bearing. And in your spreading forth your hands, I hide mine eyes from you, Also when ye increase prayer, I do not hear, Your hands of blood have been full. Wash ye, make ye pure, Turn aside the evil of your doings, from before Mine eyes, Cease to do evil, learn to do good. Seek judgment, make happy the oppressed, Judge the fatherless, strive [for] the widow. (YLT)

Although a new section of the chapter begins, the reference to Sodom and Gomorrah connect this with the preceding. “A remnant has been spared, and consequently the fate of Judah was not that of Sodom; nevertheless, in respect to iniquity, Jerusalem has become a spiritual Sodom, and her inhabitants a people of Gomorrah.” [Young, *Isaiah*]

EMPTY RELIGION — What was Isaiah’s condemnation? Not that they did not practice their religion (*sacrifices ... offerings ... appear before Me ... trampling God’s court [temple attendance] ... Sabbaths ... assemblies*) but that their religion was merely an outward formality without inward spiritual morality (*your hands are full of blood ... evil deeds ... stop doing wrong ... seek justice ... help the orphan and widow*). ***“Hypocrites abound in outward religious observances just in proportion to their neglect of the spiritual requirements of God’s word.”*** [Barnes; quoted in Young, *Isaiah*]

MAKE GOD AN IDOL? THEN HE WILL ACT AS AN IDOL — ***“The nation ... had become guilty of idolatry, seeking to worship him as though approaching an idol. He would therefore be to Judah as an idol. The idol could not open its eyes, so he would not open his eyes. The idol could not hear, so he would not hear the multiplied prayer. People who thus sin deserve only an idol. But there was a difference. In reality God was not acting as an idol. He closed his eyes and ears, it is true, but in so doing rejected the worship and prepared to bring judgment upon the worshiper.”*** [Young, *Isaiah*]

LOVING OBEDIENCE — ***What does the Lord require of us? What does the Lord require from all His beings, including angels? – loving obedience!*** Israel’s problem is not that they didn’t “obey” the Lord; they did bring the sacrifices and observe the sabbaths. But the Lord saw the hearts and the insincerity, the ritualistic attitudes, the outward form but inward emptiness, and it revolted Him! LOVING OBEDIENCE is the proper balance. Without love and our affections set upon the Lord, any “obedience” (if there can be such a thing without proper devotion) is merely a legalistic empty formality. We become Pharisees who outwardly “obeyed” while inwardly unconverted and self-righteous. Our churches are filled with those who mouth the words of Christ without meaning, attending church regularly without loving the Lord, attending church on Sunday and living like the devil the rest of the week. Or those who obey outwardly, in a true legalistic fashion, while inwardly their hearts are far from the Lord, living a life of self-enforced slavery, rigidly making sure every “I” is dotted and every “T” is crossed correctly, not of their own desires but because they believe that’s what the Lord demands: pure servile non-thinking obedience.

The other extreme is just as erroneous: we cannot have merely “love” either (as before, it might be asked if one can truly love the Lord without obedience), living on our emotions while living a life of self-will. This too compares with a wide movement in America, where “serving the Lord” means attending church, rocking-out to the latest praise music, hearing tidbits from the Word of God, then departing to live according to our pleasures after getting our “emotional fix” for the week. After all, “we live under grace and God understands”. “We’re not like those legalists who puts demands upon our lives. That’s not grace.” To those caught up in this movement, any constraints are met with the rebuke of “legalism”; for example, myself and a friend who were visiting a professing Christian were called legalists for stating her living in an adulterous affair was not pleasing to the Lord and the cause of some of the difficulties in her life. ***To say she could not live with a man unmarried is legalism? The attitude of some in America today is “grace allows me to live a life anyway I please as long as I mouth a profession in Christ – the Lord understands and ignores my shortcomings.” But there is a scriptural term which likewise describes that attitude: anti-***

nominianism, or literally “no-law”, in the sense that “grace means living without demands of obedience.”

Isaiah chapter one refutes both of these unbalances. Jesus put it like this in John 4:24, “we must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” *God demands whole-hearted, spiritual, inward devotion which is aligned with obedience and truth. There is a balance and both is required; one without the other is an extreme and an error.* Israel lived a life of sin as a nation while continuing the outward ceremonies of their religion, and it earned the rebuke of the Lord.

B. An Appeal to Repentance (1:18-23)

“Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her — but now murderers! Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow’s case does not come before them. (NIV)

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. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. (KJV)

Come, I pray you, and we reason, saith Jehovah, If your sins are as scarlet, as snow they shall be white, If they are red as crimson, as wool they shall be! If ye are willing, and have hearkened, The good of the land ye consume, and if ye refuse, and have rebelled, [By] the sword ye are consumed, For the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken. How hath a faithful city become a harlot? I have filled it [with] judgment, Righteousness lodgeth in it — now murderers. Thy silver hath become dross, Thy drink polluted with water. Thy princes [are] apostates, and companions of thieves, Every one loving a bribe, and pursuing rewards, The fatherless they judge not, And the plea of the widow cometh not to them. (YLT)

COME NOW... — This is not merely a request but a command; “*come now*” is in the imperative, for it is God speaking and He demands repentance! *“This is a command which cannot be evaded; it must be obeyed. God alone can lay down the conditions which must be followed. It is not a meeting of equals, but of God with His sinful people.”* [Young, *Isaiah*] Young continues however to note the Hebrew verbal form of the word “*now*”, stating it softens the command and takes the form of a loving, gracious invitation.

LET US REASON TOGETHER — The idea of mutual exchange of policy to the advantage of both parties is involved within the form of the verb. This must not be misunderstood however that Israel could negotiate their sinful status before the Lord (nor that we as sinners could do the same) but rather that He is “open to discuss” the accusation made against them by the Lord. “*‘This verse*

contains an invitation to discuss the question whether God was willing or unwilling to show mercy, implying that reason as well as justice was on His side, and asserting His power and His willingness to pardon the most aggravated sins.’ Inasmuch as God is thus willing to reason with the nation, the blame for its destruction falls back on itself.” [Young, *Isaiah*; quote comes from Alexander]

SINS FORGIVEN ... IF YOU REPENT — The Lord offers forgiveness to Israel, but not without condition. The Lord goes direct from “you may be forgiven freely” (v18) to “if you repent” (v19,20). “After the announcement that there may be forgiveness of sins, the Lord still places before the nation the choice between blessing and curse, a choice which had been set before it under Moses (Deut 28)”. [Young, *Isaiah*]

LAMENT — v21-23 presents a sub-division, lamenting the condition of Jerusalem in both a complaint and amazement. In v21 Jerusalem is likened to an adulterous woman, in v22 as items pure which have been adulterated and contaminated. **Silver:** not that there’s a speck of contamination here and there but rather the silver as a whole has turned to dross (waste product taken off molten metal during smelting). **Wine:** the Hebrew word here denotes fine wine, weakened and destroyed by water. “Jerusalem once possessed something desirable, represented by silver and choice wine. A great change, however, has come over the city; the silver and choice wine are gone, and in their place are dross and wine mixed with water.” [Young, *Isaiah*]

REBELLIOUS LEADERS — The rulers rebelled against the Lord, not necessarily by relying on Assyria but rather in a general rebellion of heart and life against God. What begins in the heart however affects our outward being, with the rulers becoming companions of thieves. “Throughout his entire prophecy Isaiah sets forth the Lord as the only hope of man. Only through being willing and hearkening will a reversal of the present condition come about. *The fallacy of that modern phenomenon, sometimes known as the ‘social gospel’, is found in its low estimate of the nature of sin. A mere program of amelioration [improvement] will not suffice for the heart that is rebellious against God. What is needed is a new heart, and only from the Lord Himself may such a heart be obtained.*” [Young, *Isaiah*]

C. The Announcement of Coming Judgement (1:24-31)

Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: “Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.” Zion will be redeemed with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness. But rebels

Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: and I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. And the destruction of the transgressors

Therefore — the affirmation of the Lord — Jehovah of Hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: Ah, I am eased of Mine adversaries, And I am avenged of Mine enemies, And I turn back My hand upon thee, And I refine as purity thy dross, And I turn aside all thy tin, And I give back thy judges as at the first, And thy counsellors as in the beginning, After this thou art called, A city of righteousness — a faithful city. Zion in judgment is redeemed, And her captivity in righteousness. And

<i>and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the LORD will perish. "You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen. You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water. The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire."</i> (NIV)	<i>and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed. For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen. For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water. And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them.</i> (KJV)	<i>the destruction of transgressors and sinners [is] together, And those forsaking Jehovah are consumed. For [men] are ashamed because of the oaks That ye have desired, And ye are confounded because of the gardens That ye have chosen. For ye are as an oak whose leaf is fading, And as a garden that hath no water. And the strong hath been for tow, And his work for a spark, And burned have both of them together, And there is none quenching!</i> (YLT)
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JUDGEMENT WILL COME — The Lord's description of the nation's condition is true; there is no justice in the land and therefore the Lord will act. Isaiah reminds us of the statement in v14 (*"they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them"*) by stating He will avenge Himself upon His enemies.

THE ENEMIES OF GOD — These foes of the Lord are not the foreigners but the Israelites themselves. *"It is clearly taught that the one who persists in his sin is an enemy and adversary of God (cp Ez 5:13), and God must be rid of him. God is truly the master, and when He decides to punish sinners, He is fully able to do so. The sinner, and not merely the sin, is like a wearisome burden to God, a burden from which He will seek easement."* [Young, *Isaiah*]

THE HAND OF GOD — "My hand turned against you" either has the connotation of inflicting punishment (as Amos 1:8; Jer 6:9; Ez 38:12; Ps 81:15) or in bringing blessing (Zech 13:7). It is used in the latter sense here. *The judgement to come is not for the purpose of complete destruction but of purification.*

THE RESTORATION OF HIS PEOPLE — v25-27 speaks of the Lord returning Israel to the days when they were righteous and followed the Lord. The immediate context gives this the sense of after the judgement of the Lord, the people will be called faithful and return to the ways of the Lord. But the fullest sense of these verses is yet future, during the reign of the Messiah. Note the double reference, an important principle in the study of bible prophecy.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WICKED — While the Lord will restore His remnant, He will also visit destruction upon those who oppose Him. Perish: *"shall be consumed, shall come to an end"*. The reference is of total destruction, complete extinction.

ASHAMED OF THEIR TREES — The intention here is uncertain; perhaps the Lord was making reference to their pride in the best of the land, or in mere luxuries. Therefore the sense would be even the best gifts of God may be misused. Another possibility is the *trees* are a reference to the deities thought to dwell within, the groves being places of idolatry. *Garden* according to Young supports this concept, stating the reference is definitely an unlawful place of worship. "Sacred trees played an important part in the Canaanite fertility cult (cf. Deut 12:23; 2

Kings 16:4; Hos 4:13), for deciduous trees like the oak or terebinth may well have symbolized the death and rebirth of the god. The ‘gardens’ (v. 29) may be groves of these trees, or, alternatively, (esp. in the light of v. 30) places of sacred springs or wells.” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

PUNISHED WITH THE FRUIT OF THEIR OWN SIN — The people under judgement may be taught by their symbols of apostasy as the folly of turning from God (v29,30), and their actual destruction may come from the very thing our sin has brought into being (v31).

“Come now, let us reason together,”
says the LORD.

“Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool.

— *Isaiah 1:18 NIV*