

ISAIAH'S MESSAGE TO A BACKSLIDING PEOPLE

BIBLE TEXT : Isaiah 1:1-31.

LESSON 348 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "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" (Isaiah 1:18).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Isaiah 1:1-31

¹ 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.

² 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.

³ The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: *but* Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant,

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

The Lord's Message

The Prophet Isaiah opened his writing with these words: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken." Isaiah came to Israel with the message from the Lord.

Isaiah lived through the reign of four kings of Judah, both good and bad. He enjoyed the blessings of God during the times when Judah was worshiping God; and he suffered over the sins of the nation when the people worshiped idols. But always he spoke the words that God gave him. His faith never failed, although the ruler of the land and all his subjects turned from the Lord. God had given him a message to tell, and he told it whether people wanted to listen or not.

The good kings, Uzziah and Hezekiah, would ask Isaiah what God had said. They wanted to know the will of God, and Isaiah helped them to reform the people and teach them to worship God. Then God would bless the land, and everyone would be happy serving the Lord.

No Gratitude

There were times when, as at the beginning of Uzziah's reign, the people were very wicked. God had brought them up carefully, wanting them to love Him. He had tried not only to guide them as a nation, but He as a father had tenderly cared for them. How it grieved the heart of God when they turned against Him! Even the dumb beasts appreciate more their master's care than did the Israelites the devotion of God. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: *but* Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." They did not even realise that the blessings they enjoyed came from God. They never said Thank You to Him.

Their ungratefulness was not all that was wrong with the Israelites. If people have no regard for God and His laws, they have very little regards for any other laws. They became so wicked that God said there was no soundness in them. It was as if they were full of wounds and running sores, which had not been bandaged. It would have been bad enough if they had had literal sores, but it was their hearts that were corrupt. Because of their sins, God had let some of them be carried into captivity.

God had told the Israelites many years before that if they did not obey Him He would make them the tail and the other nations the head. Think of it! God's chosen people, whom He wanted to be the head, and who would have been if they had obeyed God, were not but the tail, while heathen nations prospered at the head.

Judgment Stayed

If there had not been a few godly people, such as Isaiah, scattered throughout the nation, God would have destroyed them all as He did Sodom and Gomorrah. Fire and brimstone had rained on those wicked cities because of their extreme wickedness.

It is only the presence of a few godly people in the world today that holds back the fury of the wrath of God. Wicked people do not deserve any of the blessings of God. They disobey

we should have been as Sodom, *and* we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

¹¹ 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.

¹² When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

¹⁷ Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

²⁰ But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

²¹ How is the faithful city become

Him, blaspheme Him, and make fun of His laws. Yet many think they will go to Heaven in that condition. They think that if they go through a form of religion, God will accept them, regardless of how they live.

God definitely told the Israelites what He thought of religious form when the heart was not right with Him. He asked: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? . . . I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; . . . 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 going to take more than going to church on Sunday, singing hymns, piously talking about Jesus, or making long prayers, to be accepted by Him. He said, "When ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood."

That does not mean that He will not hear a sinner pray. If anyone repents and asks forgiveness, God will answer. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." But man must turn from his evil-doings in order to be saved.

The Holy City Polluted

There had been a time when the city of Jerusalem had been holy. David once wrote: "Out of Zion [Jerusalem], the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." That was God's desire for His Holy City. The perfection that the city enjoyed at that time was comparative, for the time will come during the Millennium when it will be the Holy City indeed. Then "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 65:25).

But think of the condition of Jerusalem at the time that Isaiah wrote! "How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers." Think of it! In God's Holy City, where He wanted only righteousness and good things, there was much wickedness. "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after reward: they judge not the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come unto them." The people who were in high positions so that they could have helped the poor and the widows were easily bribed. They loved gifts, and worked for their own benefit rather than helping those who needed help.

God saw all that. God sees the oppressors today. He has said that there is coming a day of reckoning. The wicked will be brought into judgment for their evil deeds.

The prophecy that Isaiah made about the city of Jerusalem concerns the time of the Millennium. Jerusalem will then be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. There will be no more corrupt judges; and counsellors will be as they were when David said, "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined" (Psalm 50:2).

Doing Good

God was faithful to backslidden Israel and told them how to find favour with God. Isaiah told them: "Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

It is not enough to cease to do evil. A person might turn from all his evil deeds, and sit and fold his hands, rejoicing in the fact that he is not as the wicked people. That will bring him no reward. One must also learn to do well. We must prove to the world by our works that God has made a changed in our heart.

Not all those works consist of preaching, praying, singing hymns, and talking about Jesus. Again and again the Lord brings up the subject of having mercy upon the poor and helpless. The Psalmist wrote: "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble" (Psalm 41:1).

A Reasoning God

an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

²² Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water:

²³ 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.

²⁴ 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:

²⁵ And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.

²⁸ And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners *shall be* together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed.

²⁹ For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen.

³⁰ For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water.

³¹ 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*.

One of the greatest verses in Scripture is found in this first chapter of Isaiah: "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." Think how kind and considerate God is! He does not have to show mercy. Man has sinned against God and deserves to die because of his sins. But God in mercy opens wide His arms and calls, "Come." Come **now**. Do not put off salvation until some other time. Tomorrow may be too late. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2).

"Let us reason together." We have no excuse to offer God for our being sinners. Jesus died for our sins, and His Blood will wash us whither than the snow the moment we forsake our sins and ask for forgiveness. We have nothing but ourselves to give; He gives everything. Yet, He says he will reason with us. What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus my Lord!

At another time the Lord asked about Israel: "What could have been done more. . . , that I have not done?" (Isaiah 5:4). Jesus gave everything to save us from sin, including His very life. Should we not come to Him running, calling for mercy, pleading for forgiveness? How can people turn aside the love of God?

Not only does God wash away the sins, but, He gives a blessing to those who worship Him. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." Surely God's people are blessed!

Judgment on the Rebellious

One would think that everybody would want to be saved and enjoy the blessings of God. But many people do not. They rebel against God, and want to have their own way. This is what God says to them: "If ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword." And he made it sound very final when he added, "For the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." When God says a thing it will come to pass.

The immediate judgment that was to follow the words of Isaiah was that the Israelites would be taken captive by heathen nations. But judgment will come to every sinner — if not in this life, then in the world to come. After death comes the judgment.

Today Jesus is still saying: "Come now, and let us reason together." "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

QUESTIONS

1. Who gave Isaiah the message to Israel?
2. What kind of kings were Uzziah and Hezekiah?
3. How had God "brought up" Israel?
4. How did God compare Israel with the animals?
5. Why did God not want the sacrifices the Israelites were making?
6. In what condition was Jerusalem when Isaiah wrote?
7. After God had told Israel their sins, what did He ask the people to do?
8. What would happen to them if they refused Him?
9. What has God promised to the good and obedient?
10. What has He promised to those who consider the poor?

