

# Isaiah: Chapter 1

**Isaiah has hardly begun his prophecy, when he issues from the Lord, one of those wonderful invitations (v18) – “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.”**

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” In John 7:37, Jesus cries out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”

Jesus spoke of a wedding banquet, where many guests were invited. A number offered their excuses and the invitation went to others instead. When the Lord God Almighty issues an invitation, we do well to heed it! The invitation comes to his people. Isaiah will demonstrate God’s concern about the nations but the nations will discover God’s character and person, through His people. The state of God’s people often seems ridiculous for those who have received so much and know so much but it remains true today. God’s people must repent and come back to Him, in response to His invitation.

God’s willingness to reach out to sinful mankind is amazing! We rebuff Him, we reject Him, we disobey Him and then seem oblivious to the seriousness of our actions. But, however badly we have behaved, God is willing to make the impossible possible. He is willing to forgive our sins. Scarlet is like a dye; in cloth it becomes so deeply ingrained that it makes a stain nothing can remove. However, whatever stain our rebellious proud hearts have created, it can be removed by the blood of Jesus. Our lives can be cleansed so that they are as white as snow. The sin is gone - no longer visible - no mark to show where it was. Praise the Lord!

Isaiah talks of those who have blood on their hands – ‘red as crimson’. Some, by their actions and thoughts have committed murder; they have taken life! Manslaughter, abortion, euthanasia, hatred, war... The blood of Jesus can cleanse even these actions. Our hard cruel hearts can be forgiven and be as soft as wool. Praise the Lord!

**Either side of these verses, Isaiah addresses some key issues:**

## **1. Religious Practices**

Isaiah diagnoses a very severe condition in the people. He says that the whole head is injured, the whole body is damaged and the heart is afflicted. He comments on their offerings, their special days and their prayers.

### **a) Offerings**

The people were still making the sacrifices. The blood of animals was being shed. Incense was being offered. The Lord, however, is unmoved. The outward manifestation of faith is there but the heart is not. The deeds and the actions are a sop. They are not indications of repentance but rather, tokens of trying to keep God at bay. God says, “I have no pleasure... this trampling of my courts... Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me.”

It’s good to examine what we are offering to God – our money, our gifts, our time, our service, our ministry. But, if our heart and allegiance are not absolute, then these too are detestable to God. This is very reminiscent of Jesus words, “I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Rev 3:16). He calls us to return to our first love.

### **b) Special Days**

Some special days, formerly rooted in paganism, have been redeemed to the glory of God. However, if the day has been left unchanged and is used to worship another god alongside the living God – that is an offence to Him. Some days have true spiritual significance – Passover, Feast of Tabernacles, Pentecost – but even these days can be shallow. People enjoy the food and drink, more than the meaning of the day. Some just want a party and make the feast day an excuse for revelry and selfishness. God says, “I cannot bear your evil assemblies... They have become a burden to me.”

We need to examine special events and all our traditions and ask questions. Has the event moved away from the purpose for which it was intended? Is the organisation of the event more important than the event itself? Do we do things because we have always done them or do we prayerfully reflect?

### **c) Prayers**

Isaiah comments that God hides his face when the people spread out their hands in prayer. Quantity of prayer does not bring praise but a rebuke, "I will not listen!" Jesus was later to condemn the Pharisees for praying long pious prayers, which were more aimed at others than God himself. Prayer at its best, is an incredible tool, a real weapon to bring in the will of God. Yet, when it consists only of empty words and well-worn phrases and becomes almost a competition as to who can be the most eloquent and spiritual, it has lost its way and becomes offensive to God.

**It's good to examine our prayer life. Most importantly we must engage with God. It's apprehending His presence that counts!**

## **2. Moral and Social Issues**

The challenge Isaiah presents is the attitude of God's people to corruption, bribery and dishonesty, as well as the fatherless (orphans) and the widow.

Unrighteousness, short-changing, bribes; all to make money greedily, are a source of great grief to our God. The orphan is defenceless and, instead of being taken advantage of, needs protection and care. The widow's plight needs to be considered and not neglected.

**If the invitation to reason and seek forgiveness is ignored, then shame and disgrace comes upon God's people. We will be like oak trees without leaves; gardens without water – much potential but no life and vitality. Ultimately, the works of the rebellious will be easily ignited and consumed. Therefore repent and seek forgiveness.**

### **Points to reflect on:**

- 1. God's invitations. We must respond.**
- 2. The nature of sin. A deep sickness, not a minor blemish.**
- 3. The radical power of the cross to cleanse and forgive.**
- 4. Offerings / special days and prayer. How can we keep these disciplines alive and full of faith? How can we avoid complacency and meaningless ritual?**
- 5. Honesty. Handling finances with integrity. What checks and balances can we build into church life, which helps us avoid worldly attitudes to money and wealth?**
- 6. The orphan and the widow. What are we doing to care for these people in the church? What are the principles behind our care?**
- 7. How can your church change in the light of this chapter? Are we detestable or a sweet savour to God?**

**God bless you.**

**Rev Richard Brunton**

# Isaiah chapter 7 and 9

The two chapters we are looking at are chapters with a clear view of the coming Messiah – Christ and are all the more remarkable when we reflect on the fact that these insights come over 400 years before Christ was born. We do not suggest that Isaiah knew the full implications of what he was saying but as a man of God waiting on God especially after his temple experience of chapter 6 he has significant things to say.

Chapter 7:14 and chapter 9 : 6-7.

The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

The chapter revolves around King Ahaz. This king is up against a coalition of Syria and Ephraim. He has a choice to trust God or adopt his own strategy. He chooses to form an alliance with the king of Assyria and has already sent some gold to the king.

The prophet encourages the king to be calm, quiet, careful and unafraid. The Lord invites him to ask for a sign. We know that Jesus was very angry with people wanting displays and shows of power for sensationalism. However the lord is willing to bolster our weak faith. Notice Gideon's fleece. Ahaz's reluctance is not piety but rather stubbornness and pride. He has solved his problem he thinks. He does not need the Lord! He is invited to ask for a sign of depth and height.

The Lord Himself will give you a sign. This disobedient king is to discover that God will act not through might and military power but through a child! This child will be born of a virgin. The Hebrew word *almah* (one mature and ready for marriage but still a virgin) is chosen not *bethulah* (a maiden living with parents and whose marriage is not pending) Immanuel means God with us. The Jews believed that a messiah would come and Jesus is that messiah. The conditions prevailing alongside Assyria would persist into Roman times when the Jews would have some jurisdiction and authority but ultimately rule came from Rome. Men like Ahaz would do everything to give some appearance of control. God's sign that a virgin will conceive Immanuel is of amazing depths God leaving heaven, coming to earth and becoming man. He rose to amazing heights. He would be exalted and His rule and reign would know no end. Milk and honey sounds good but it was in fact the food of desert wanderers. Jesus would become poor so that through his poverty we could become rich. He had nowhere to lay his head. No permanent home on earth. The time would come when judgement would fall. Ahaz was not of Abraham and all like him have every cause to fear. When a company of God's people depart from the Lord and His ways it is inevitable that barrenness, fruitlessness and futility ensue.

## Points to consider:

our faith in times of trial?

we try to build in alternatives to trusting God?

Are we guilty of hypocrisy pretending all is well when in fact we are full of doubt?

Keep the gospel simple. Remember Jesus who set the little child in the midst and commended child like qualities.

debated what Isaiah actually meant but the strongest vindication that unwittingly or otherwise He was foretelling the Messiah is that Matthew 1:22-23 & Luke 1: 31 – 35 describe what happened to Mary just what the prophet said. Praise the Lord.

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## Chapter 9: 6-7

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

Chapter 9 is one of the most well known Isaiah chapters with its amazing reference to the Messiah. The whole sense of passing from immediate judgement to God's people to a future rule and reign is extraordinary. Verse 2 refers to darkness and calamity with the promise of a great light shining is such a powerful picture of Jesus. The evidence of a people proud and arrogant, who despite judgement have remained unrepentant, is clear. Leaders have shown no leadership but have misguided God's people leading them astray. God's judgement brings the lofty low and strips away all pretence of show and life. But in the midst is the promise of the child, the son. He is a warrior king who will subdue all His enemies and bring a form of rule and government, which is incomparable. The child that is to be born and the son who will be given is for us. He is the very special gift that comes to us personally. He is coming with a purpose and the people of God are caught up in that purpose however undeserving we are. He is Jesus son of the living God. His names are predetermined. As so often seen in the Old Testament a name describes the character integrity and personality of the one who bears it.

This is not fatalism but a divine work.

wonderful and counsellor together. In Hebrew both words are nouns indicating separate titles. Jesus is simply **Wonderful**, He is in terms of Judges 13:1 is beyond understanding. What a contrast to the ugly grim

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description of sin in the world.

**Counsellor.** The messiah will make wise plans and will have strategy and vision beyond human comprehension. Eye has not seen nor ear heard what God has prepared for those who love him. **Mighty** all powerful immensely strong, able to deliver that wise counsel so it remains far more than an ideal or good idea. **God**, one Hebrew name for God is **EI** and **Immanuel** born of the virgin is God. Deut 10:17 describes him as God of Gods Lord of Lords, mighty and awesome.

**Everlasting Father.** He is the father of eternity, He inhabits and owns eternity. He is loving, gentle, full of compassion, a trainer, a wise instructor, one who disciplines and provides for his children. He is a protector of those that are His own. His fatherliness knows no curtailment and is always consistent.

**Prince of Peace.** He is then wonderful, wise, full of good plans, Mighty God of Gods, everlasting Father and as the Prince of peace he will subdue and destroy ultimately every enemy that would try to withstand him and the purposes he has for his people. No rebellion can upset His reign. Death, Hell the devil himself and all his angels have to bow at the name of Jesus and one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess He is LORD. He shall reign forever. Praise God that though kingdoms come and go it is absolutely true Christ's reign is permanent and He will never be replaced.

#### **Preaching points**

Compare life described by Isaiah to our day. What is similar?

Take each name mentioned and illustrate its relevance to us today.

How important is it to speak of an eternal God? Stress the importance of living with eternity in view.

Illustrate Christ's victory & show how even in such a troubled world He is the prince of Peace.

Talk about his eternal rule and reign and what life is like under the government of our God.

## **Isaiah: Chapter 52:13–53:12**

**Of the 'Servant' passages, this is probably the most powerful and memorable. This is the fourth and final 'Servant Song'. As poetry, it is wonderfully put together but, in terms of its meaning, it describes horrendous suffering. The invitation to see the wisdom and exaltation of God's servant, is the most compelling of all scripture. Deliverance from captivity in Babylon is one thing but the Messiah will achieve a deliverance from sin and hell, which is final and lasting. Hallelujah!**

This passage is quoted in Acts 8:30-35 and 1 Peter 2:22-25. The 'Servant' is not Isaiah but the Messiah (Jesus), who comes to deliver his people. The majesty of Jesus in suffering for us is not diminished by the awful pain he endured on our behalf. We can be confident in his resurrection from the dead and his glorious ascension to heaven. The graphic description of a beating, which would have made Jesus' face almost unrecognisable, is remarkable when we read the gospel records of what Jesus suffered before being hung on the cross. His whole body was scourged and, so, his form was considerably disfigured. Psalm 22:17 talks, remarkably, about none of his bones being broken. His suffering startles the nations. Kings and rulers, at some time, will have to concede who Jesus is and that what they have done is to God himself, in Christ.

### **No one expected the Messiah to be treated like this!**

Isaiah's revelation was unusual, when so many thought that a conquering king would annihilate and destroy his enemies. The concept of victory through suffering was unknown.

Christ's birth and childhood was so pleasant to see and the grace of God was upon him (Luke 2:40). Israel, however, was dry ground and therefore unfruitful. As Jesus emerged in his public ministry and was put on trial to face death, the attitude of Israel changed radically. He was despised (mentioned twice), rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Someone given no esteem and totally dishonoured. Hated, they regarded him as nothing. The word 'grief' some commentators say, is a reference to sickness and disease. Jesus experiences the effects of the sins and sorrows of those around him. It can also be said that Jesus is uniquely capable of acquaintance with various forms of illness. Isaiah's insights are so very moving. Jesus is the sin-bearer - the nature of sin; the workings of sin; the consequences of sin - are all borne by Him. Hallelujah!

Jesus truly identifies with the despised and the outcast. He is able to fully sympathise with all of our pains and sicknesses. The stirring reality is, that the suffering described is not a consequence of any action or mistake on the part of the Servant but, rather, ALL the suffering is because of our sin. Yet those who observed this suffering, wondered what had he done to deserve such a punishment!

### **There was an assumption that he was guilty in some way - but verse 5 reveals the real truth!**

He was wounded/pierced for our transgressions.

He was bruised/crushed for our iniquities.

Upon him was the chastisement/punishment that brought us peace.

Our law-breaking, falling short, evil deeds and thoughts were borne in his body on the cross. We deserved punishment but he takes it for us. He carries the can. He pays the price. We have peace because he fights the war and suffers in our place. Hallelujah! Peace is not just a state of mind, it is a condition for our whole being. The extent of his suffering is beyond words but he does this for us.

### **By his wounds we are healed**

The Servant has suffered because of God's purpose and plan. We can discover wholeness and forgiveness from God because of that work. It makes sense that, if Jesus has dealt with sin and that sickness results from sin, then sickness too is dealt with by his sufferings. Healing was very much part of the ministry of Jesus - physical healing as well as spiritual. Let us conclude then, that healing in the body of Christ is available because of his mercy, his love and his wounds, received for us.

When people are not healed, let us be careful not to judge but to put the matter into God's hands. Of course, ultimately, there is no sickness or sin in heaven.

### **All of us, like sheep, have wandered astray**

The record states that we have chosen our own wilful way, rather than choose God's way. God could have left us to our own devices but, instead, chose to send in Jesus, a substitute Lamb who took the consequences of our disobedience upon himself. Jesus took our sin and its consequences and was deeply oppressed for us. He offered no defence or argument and was silent before his accusers. This is not fatalism but obedience to his Father's will.

This is the passage that the Ethiopian is reading when Philip joins his chariot. Philip explains that this is none other than Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. He is cut off, not just from physical life but from his Father. The cry of separation recorded by the gospels is harrowing, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

### **Death came to Jesus, as it comes to all men - but God was still in charge!**

The expectation was that Jesus would be buried in a common grave, with little ceremony, but the prophet talks about the grave of a rich man. This is an amazing reference to the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea, who would offer his tomb as a resting-place for the body of Christ.

The prophet declares that Jesus had no violence and that there was no deceit in him. Most crucified people were probably guilty of both! The prophet has been dealing with immense suffering and a totally misplaced world view of the one who suffers. Now he declares, "It was the will of the LORD to let this happen." JEHOVAH, covenant God, is sovereign in all this. Though his life is an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring – those who will be rescued - those of true faith and calling in Jesus.

### **He shall prolong his days and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand**

Jesus will rise and be alive for evermore. He shall see the light of life, after the suffering of his soul, and be satisfied. As God's righteous Servant, Jesus shall cause many to be justified and he will bring many sons to glory. The Lord will give him the mighty for his portion - all foes will have to bow at the feet of Jesus!

**Jesus' willingness to die for us and to be labelled a sinner for us is overwhelming! He bore our sins and those of many others and now ever lives to intercede for us. Praise the Lord!**

### **Points to consider:**

- 1. Suffering in the will of God is serving God. Jesus can identify with every form of rejection.**
- 2. Jesus is described as a man of sorrows. No sorrow is a mystery to him and he understands our deepest feelings.**
- 3. Forgiveness and healing are available through the cross. Jesus is the Lamb of God, who brings salvation.**
- 4. The Father bestows many blessings on his Servant. Our salvation was planned by God, out of a Father's heart.**
- 5. Read Psalm 22 and consider its meaning in the light of this passage.**
- 6. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13). See also John 3:16 and Romans 5:8.**

**The prophet describes the events surrounding the Messiah's redemptive suffering but only God's Spirit can reveal the immense love that is behind it all. Let us respond to that love!**

**God bless you.**

**Rev Richard Brunton**

# **Isaiah: Chapter 54**

**After a break looking at Psalm 46 and Acts 9 - The Apostle Paul's walk in the Holy Spirit, we return to the book of Isaiah and chapter 54. Approaching this chapter, let us bear the following thoughts in mind:**

1. The relationship between Israel as a nation and their land is a crucial one, which the Bible addresses. Being in the land was a sign of God's blessing and favour. It was an indication of the people keeping their side of the covenant, made with God, to obey Him and have Him exclusively as their God. Out of the land, exiled, was a punishment that was meant to bring them to repentance. Rebellion, disobedience, arrogance and pride, all led to eviction from the land.

2. Isaiah 53 is an incredible revelation of the suffering servant, who becomes our sin-bearer. The judgement we fully deserve, has been taken by Jesus the spotless Lamb of God. The wrath of God, rightly displayed, is satisfied through Jesus' suffering on our behalf. This chapter - speaking of one who bears our sorrows, our sickness, our sins and our curse - precedes a change of tone as God speaks through Isaiah to his people.

**Isaiah uses three main pictures to indicate change for God's people:**

## **1. A Childless Woman**

She is promised children. Barrenness and misery are resolved by a merciful God. Isaiah proclaims hope instead of despair. Children and an inheritance instead of hopelessness and no future.

## **2. A Tent**

Isaiah proclaims a refreshing of the vision, which Abraham, Moses and then Joshua had been given. He says, instead of your area decreasing, prepare for increase.

Stretch your tent over the new place I am giving you (it would not be unusual to add pieces of canvas to make a tent bigger).

Lengthen your cords. Your tent must be fully utilised. Not floppy but well drawn-out. Longer cords must be added.

Get stronger stakes, so that the weight of the bigger structure is fully supported.

A new way of thinking must begin. During times of discipline and trial, we can have a mentality of just surviving. If our relationship with God is restored and, as humble penitents, we discover again His grace. So also, our faith to inherit and live in the good of all that God has promised, develops. Put your life in order! See again the promises and purposes of God! Put behind you, the days of serving your own fleshly, earthly desires! The redeemer, God's own lamb has been offered and has suffered, so that you can be free to move forward in God!

## **3. An Abandoned Wife**

God does not want us to feel deserted, distressed, rejected and abandoned but, rather, to enjoy His unfailing love and His peace.

The Lord wants to build through us, something beautiful, using turquoise, sapphires, rubies, sparkling jewels and precious stones. When we are far from God, it's like building with wood, hay and stubble. But, when our relationship with him is restored, we begin to see Him build that which is beautiful and precious. The restoration the prophet speaks of, is like the time after the flood when, having poured out His anger, the Lord speaks of a rainbow and a promise that seedtime and harvest will never cease.

Just as a blacksmith forges tools and weapons, which can be for good or destruction, the Lord speaks of the work of the enemy who is constantly seeking to find ways of destroying us and the work of God within us. Sometimes this is very obvious in difficult circumstances but, sometimes, it is

the malicious, backbiting accusations and destructive words that people say. However, the promise of God to those who keep clear of sin and walk humbly with Him, is that every scheme against them will be thwarted and every accusation refuted. So, rejoice and serve Him!

**Points to consider:**

- 1. God is for us, not against us. He disciplines us and He allows trials, but these are seasons.**
- 2. We must not wallow but learn the lessons He is teaching us.**
- 3. It is good to have godly vision, to believe for growth and extension and to prepare for that.**
- 4. Fruitfulness is not exceptional. We were made to bear fruit (see John 15).**
- 5. When we are in God's will, no demon or man can stop us. Be encouraged and serve the Lord!**

**God bless you.**

**Rev Richard Brunton**