

GOD'S FIRST CHARGE: THE REBELLION OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM ISAIAH 01:01–10

Introduction

The scene is a courtroom trial. The presiding judge is the Lord Himself. The accused are the citizens of Judah and Jerusalem, the very people God had chosen to be His witnesses to the unbelieving nations of the earth. However, Isaiah's message in this passage is applicable to all who know the Lord, for all believers are called to be His witnesses. Thus as His professed followers, we are all standing before the bar of the Judge of the universe. We are on trial, defending ourselves against serious charges. And the Lord's case against us is as strong as it was against Judah and Jerusalem.

God's case is presented by the great prophet Isaiah, who makes a powerful, dramatic presentation of God's charges. But even as he pronounces the Lord's indictment, the love of God shines forth. With each charge, the Lord offers His people the hope of salvation. Even Isaiah's name offers hope, for it means *the Lord saves*.

Only the redeemed those who have been set free from sin and judgment — will live in the Holy City of God, the New Jerusalem. God will create New Jerusalem when Jesus Christ returns to set up God's kingdom on earth (see outline and notes, Rev. 21:9-23). Through Isaiah, God tells His people that if they will repent of their sins, He will forgive them. Furthermore, He assures them that they will live in this Holy City of righteousness where there will be no evil or injustice. This is, *The Lord's Indictment of His People*.

I. God's prophet Isaiah: he was a man given a very special vision (v. 1).

II. God's first charge: they were rebellious (vv. 2-10).

I. *Isaiah 01:01 Isaiah the Prophet*

Isaiah was one of God's great prophets, a man who received a very special vision from the Lord. The word *vision* means to see, to grasp and understand some truth or future event. It is not the same as an insight that comes from human reasoning or from the opinions of people. A vision is a *revelation* from God.

2 Pet 1:21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along [led along] by the Holy Spirit.

In a clear and dramatic way, God gave Isaiah a special revelation into events yet to come. Isaiah clearly saw...

- the future of Judah and Jerusalem (1:1-12:6)
 - the future judgment of God on the nations and His triumph over the world (13:1-27:13)
 - the future woe (condemnation) that would fall upon God's people because of their continued sin and refusal to repent (28:1-35:10)
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- the future shift of world power from Assyria to Babylon and the impact upon Judah and Jerusalem (36:1-39:8)
- the future captivity of the Jews in Babylon and their release by King Cyrus of Persia (40:1-48:22)
- the future coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (49:1 59:21)
- the future consummation of history: the glorious destiny of God's people and the terrifying fate of unbelievers (60:1-66:24)

In addition to learning that the Lord gave Isaiah very special visions, we glean two other significant facts from the opening verse of Isaiah:

1. Isaiah's ministry focused on Judah and Jerusalem, and he preached and proclaimed the prophecies given by God. But in truth, Isaiah ministry is to the whole world. As the above outline shows, God gave him visions that concerned the future of the nations and of world history itself. His visions included the coming of the Saviour, which lay some 700 years in the future. Furthermore, God revealed to Isaiah the glorious consummation of human history. Thus he is definitely a prophet to minister to the whole world. His prophecies and messages are to be heard and obeyed by all people of all times. They are the Word of God, God's clear warning to the world.
2. Isaiah's visions and ministry touched the reigns of four kings. He began his ministry in the year that King Uzziah died (6:1). Uzziah lived a righteous life that pleased the Lord, but later in life pride and self-exaltation caused him to slide into sin. As a result, God disciplined him by afflicting him with leprosy, a disease he had until the day he died. As a leper, he was forced to live in isolation and to put his son, the Crown Prince Jotham, in charge of the government (see notes, 2 Chr. 26:1-23).

King Jotham was also a godly king, and he ruled over Judah for 16 years. Apparently he and Isaiah had a close relationship, for the prophet seems to have had unrestricted access to the royal court and the freedom to preach without fear of persecution (see notes, 2 Chr. 27:1-9).

However, when Jotham's son Ahaz took the throne, the godly environment throughout the nation changed dramatically. Ahaz was a very wicked king, totally depraved. Throughout his 16 year rule, he promoted and led the people in false worship, even committing the detestable sin of human sacrifice. Shockingly, he sacrificed his own sons to false gods. It was during his reign that the famous Syro-Ephraimite War took place, a war that utterly devastated Judah. The nation lost 120,000 soldiers in battle and 200,000 women and children were taken captive. King Ahaz was also guilty of seeking an alliance with the evil and brutal Assyrians, looking to them as Judah's saviour. He sought the help of Assyria rather than the help of the Lord.

No doubt, Isaiah faced a difficult time during the reign of Ahaz, for the king led the entire nation down the path of secular living and false worship. People who live wicked

lives and engage in false worship want nothing to do with the Lord and His claims of righteousness. Although Scripture says nothing about Isaiah facing the threat of persecution, he was most likely under constant pressure to stop preaching the coming judgment of God. As a prophet of God during the reign of an evil king, he most certainly faced ridicule, contempt and threats upon his life. (See notes, Chr. 28:1-27)

Whatever the case, when Ahaz's son Hezekiah took the throne, the situation throughout Judah again changed dramatically. Although Hezekiah had been reared in one of the most wicked environments imaginable, he somehow came to know the Lord in a very personal way, and he wholeheartedly committed his life to the Lord. Hezekiah's godly reign would not stop the tide of wickedness flowing through the Southern Kingdom, but it would stay the hand of God's judgment for a long time. Judah would not fall to Babylon until more than one hundred years had passed. Under Hezekiah's leadership, a spiritual reformation took place and revival broke out among the people (see notes, 2 Chr. 29:1-32:33). Apparently Isaiah had a close relationship with Hezekiah, for he devoted four complete chapters to him, covering his entire reign (see notes, Isa. 36:1-39:8).

Violence, immorality and the constant threat of war — these were the problems facing society in Isaiah's day. Assyria, the most powerful nation of that day, was determined to build a world empire, and the Assyrians were among the most brutal people to ever come upon the stage of world history. Seldom before or since have there been days so turbulent, so gripped by a spirit of lawlessness. These were the days in which Isaiah was called to minister and proclaim God's Word to the world.

Thought 1. People today desperately need a spiritual vision — a clear insight into spiritual matters — yet millions seem to be blinded to spiritual truth. They are complacent, disinterested and even closed-minded to the truth that only those who approach God through His Son Jesus Christ are acceptable to God. Down through history prophets have courageously proclaimed this truth. The vast majority of people reject prophetic visions of Christ and of God's warnings to the world. They want nothing to do with a message that proclaims the truth of righteousness and of the judgment to come.

But not Isaiah, the great prophet of God. He wanted clear insight into the future. He wanted to know what God's people faced. He undoubtedly sought the Lord often for clear insight into the future so he could face whatever was coming and do all he could to prepare God's people.

As believers, we should all seek clear insight as we study the prophecies in God's Word. Understanding what He says about the future strengthens our faith and better prepares us to face the terrible trials of life. Listen to what God's Holy Word says about spiritual vision and insight:

John 16:14-15 *"He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you."*

Luke 24:31 *"And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him [Christ]; and he disappeared from their sight."*

2 Cor 4:6 *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

Eph 1:18 *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.*

Heb 11:27 *By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered, because he saw him who is invisible.*

Gen 21:19 *And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.*

2 Kng 6:17 *And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes Lord, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha.*

Psa 18:28 *"You Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light."*

Psa 119:130 *The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.*

Isa 29:18 *And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.*

II. Isaiah 01:02–10 Israelites' Rebellion against God

God's first charge against His people was a strong one: they were rebellious children. God's relationship with His people is like that of a father with his children. God's Father-son relationship with Israel began when the Lord called Abraham to trust Him. From the time God chose him, Abraham and his descendants were to follow and obey the Lord just as children follow and obey their fathers. Down through the generations, God nurtured His people, caring for and looking after them. He always guided them, taught them and met their needs. And when they sinned, He disciplined them and did all He could to bring them back into fellowship with Him.

God chose the Israelites to be His special witnesses on earth, to proclaim that the Lord Himself (Jehovah, Yahweh) is the only true and living God (Gen. 12:1-3). He gave them two wonderful gifts: His Word, which they were to share with the world, and His Son, the Saviour, who was to rescue the world from the bondage of sin and death.

But down through the generations, the Israelites rebelled against the Lord. Like rebellious children, they rejected His love and His Word and broke all of His commandments. Forsaking the Lord, they lived wicked lives characterized by immorality, lawlessness and violence, and they corrupted the society and land God had so freely given them. Note God's first charge against His people, the charge of rebellion.

1. The picture is that of a court trial (v. 2). The great judge is the Lord Himself. He sits upon His sovereign throne of judgment, ready to indict the accused and to execute justice. The defendants are God's own people, the very ones He had chosen to be His special witnesses. In a deep, thunderous voice, the Lord calls upon heaven and earth to witness the charges against His people. Heaven and earth had witnessed not only the birth of Israel, but also its rebellion against the Lord. Therefore, all creation would agree with the charges God was now levelling against them. Choosing heaven and earth as witnesses showed just how solemn and serious the judgment of God's people would be.
2. The charge of rebellion revealed three facts about God's people (vv. 3-4):
 - a. It showed they had less knowledge and understanding than an ox or donkey. These animals know their owners. They know the person who feeds them and looks after them. They even know who holds them responsible to work. But not God's people, not the Israelites. Their rebellion proved they did not really know the Lord. They did not understand His love or why He had chosen them to be His people. They simply did not comprehend that they were to be His witnesses to the other peoples of the earth.
 - b. It showed they had sinful hearts. God's people had become loaded down with a heavy burden of guilt (v. 4). They were evil children, not only corrupt themselves, but corruptors who led others to imitate their evil behaviour.
 - c. It showed they had forsaken the Lord, despised the Holy One of Israel, and turned their backs on Him (v. 4). The title *The Holy One of Israel* is used about 25 times in the book of Isaiah, but only six times elsewhere in the Old Testament. The word *holy* emphasizes the character of God and contrasts His righteous acts with the sins of Israel. God's holiness stresses the necessity of their living pure and righteous lives. As *The Holy One of Israel*, God had a very special claim on the nation. But Israel totally rejected Him and His claims on their lives. They refused to be His witnesses to the unbelieving nations and peoples of the earth.
3. The rebellion of God's people was sheer folly, for it led to continued chastisement by God (vv. 5-9). Their rebellion down through the years had caused God to discipline the Israelites. Other nations had been allowed to attack, conquer and devastate them. In addition to war, the nation had suffered all of the consequences that sin brings upon a people: it had become an immoral, lawless and violent society. As long as Judah persisted in its rebellion, it would continue to feel the hand of God's discipline.

When Isaiah announced this prophecy, the nation was apparently still experiencing some prosperity. The judgment predicted here still lay in the future; therefore, the people still had time to repent of their rebellion and turn back to the Lord. Seeking to focus their attention on God's judgment, Isaiah asked two questions: Why would they choose to be stricken by God's judgment again? Why would they force Him to discipline them? Then he made three comparisons to show what the nation would be like when God's judgment fell:

- a. The nation would be like a wretched victim that had been attacked and beaten (vv. 5-6). No part of the nation's body would escape injury, and the wounds would be severe. The head, heart and entire body of the nation, from the sole of the foot to the top of the head, would be bruised and cut. Left untreated, the wounds would become infected and open sores allowed to fester and rot.
- b. The nation would be ravaged (vv. 7-8). Cities would be burned and the people's farms plundered and destroyed. Jerusalem, the daughter of Zion, would be besieged, destroyed and abandoned (v. 8). The capital would look like a crumbling hut that had been left to deteriorate in a field long after the melons had been harvested.
- c. The nation would suffer the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah: it would be decimated (v. 9). In His mercy, God would save some people, but they would be few — just a small remnant. Although the vast number of Israelites would continue to rebel against God, there would be a few genuine believers who would obey God's commandments and live righteously. God would spare those few so that His purpose for the Jewish people could be fulfilled. He would still give His Word to the world through the believers of Israel, and His Son, the promised Messiah, would come through the Jewish people. The promise of the *remnant* is one of the great promises of Holy Scripture (Isa. 1:9; 4:3; 6:13; 10:20-23; 11:11, 16; 46:3; Jer. 6:9; 23:3; 31:7; Mica. 2:12; Zec. 8:12; Rom. 9:27-29; 11:5).
4. Because of the people's sin, they had become just like Sodom and Gomorrah: totally depraved. Their only hope was to hear the Word of the Lord and to listen to His law (v. 10). *Hear* and *listen* mean to heed, give attention to and obey God's commandments. This was the only hope for the rebellious children of Jerusalem and Judah.

Thought 1. How many of us have rebelled against God, turning away from Him and His Holy Word? To rebel means to disobey God. People who refuse to keep God's commandments live as they please, doing their own thing. How many of us are living immoral and unrighteous lives, engaging in sex outside of marriage, oppressing the weak and cheating others? A person who rebels is defiant. How many of us are defiant toward parents, employers, teachers or any other person in authority? A person who rebels can cause divisiveness and sometimes rebellion. Think of the turmoil when athletes rebel against a coach, when students rebel against teachers, when employees rebel against employers, when children rebel against parents, and when people

rebel against governments. But as serious as rebellion is within society, the gravest offense is rebellion against God. When we rebel against Him, we contribute to the immorality, lawlessness and violence of society. And we doom ourselves to suffer the punishment of God's judgment. Listen to what God's Holy Word says about rebellion:

Rom 2:5 *But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.*

Eph 5:3-6 *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.*

2 Th 1:7-9 *And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.*

Heb 2:2-3 *For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.*

Heb 3:12-13 *See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

Jude 1:5-7 *Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home — these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*

Deut 11:28 *"The curse if you disobey the commandments of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known."*

1 Sam 12:15 *"But if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors."*

Prov 28:14 *Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.*

Prov 29:1 *A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed — without remedy.*

Isa 30:1 *“Woe to the obstinate children,” declares the Lord, “to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin.*

Isa 65:2 *“All the day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations.”*

Ezek 2:3 *He said: “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day.”*

Ezek 12:2 *“Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see, but do not see and they have ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people.” ■*