

The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah

Text

Isaiah 1:1-31

Topic

The LORD announces His judgment upon the southern kingdom of Judah while simultaneously making them a gracious offer of forgiveness

Title

“God Makes You an Offer You Can Refuse”

Billy Graham wrote these words in a 2012 article titled, *My Heart Aches for America*:

Some years ago, my wife, Ruth, was reading the draft of a book I was writing. When she finished a section describing the terrible downward spiral of our nation’s moral standards and the idolatry of worshiping false gods such as technology and sex, she startled me by exclaiming, “If God doesn’t punish America, He’ll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.”

I don’t see God apologizing anytime soon.

Our nation is in a moral free fall. Because we “did not like to retain God in *[our]* knowledge, God gave *[us]* over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting” (Romans 1:28). Is it too late to recover?

“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”

God announced His judgment, then offered Judah forgiveness, and a complete pardon. For their part, they needed only to repent and God would restore.

Was this principle exclusively for Israel? God applied this principle to every Gentile nation in the Book of Jeremiah when He said, "The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy *it*, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it" (18:7-8).

We need God to relent. I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 If You Repent, God Relents**, and **#2 When God Relents, You Are Restored**.

#1 - If You Repent, God Relents (v1-17)

I can't emphasize enough how simultaneously thrilling and intimidating it is to comment on Isaiah. Listen to the scope of this book in a quote from commentator Barry Webb:

*"The vision begins with Heaven and Earth being summoned to listen (1:2), and it ends with their being so affected by what they hear that they are transformed into new heavens and a new Earth (66:22). It is about renewal on a massive scale, the re-creation of the universe. Isaiah's vision begins with the historical Jerusalem of his own day, corrupt and under judgment (1:8), and finishes with the end-time city of God, the New Jerusalem, the joy and delight of the whole Earth (65:17-19). It reveals God's dealings with His people from the eighth century BC (1:1) right down to our own time and beyond, to the things that will bring history to a close and usher in eternity (66:22-24). Its sweep is huge. **In a very real sense the vision is as big as the mind of God himself.**"*

Isa 1:1 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.

The nation of Israel divided after King Solomon died. The north was called Israel, and the south, where Jerusalem was located, was called Judah.

I mentioned Billy Graham. He had the privilege of ministering to twelve sitting US presidents, from Truman to Obama. Isaiah ministered to four sitting kings of Judah.

Isa 1:2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O Earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I have nourished and brought up children, And they have rebelled against Me;

Isa 1:3 The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master's crib; *But* Israel does not know, My people do not consider."

Were the Jews dumb and dumber, like donkeys and oxen? No - *donkeys and oxen were smarter than they were*. The animals were smart enough to return home to their master, while the Jews were running further away from a loving Father.

Isa 1:4 Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward.

Isa 1:5 Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, And the whole heart faints.

Isa 1:6 From the sole of the foot even to the head, *There is* no soundness in it, *But* wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; They have not been closed or bound up, Or soothed with ointment.

In procedural cop shows, there is always that scene where they have to enter the abandoned, rat infested warehouse, inhabited by barely alive addicts, in order to find someone. If Isaiah was writing today, he might use that to illustrate the true condition of the Jews, having run away from God to idols.

When Jesus wrote to the church in Laodicea, in the Book of Revelation, He said, "You say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (3:17).

We need the Spirit of God to show us our true condition, personally *and* nationally.

Isa 1:7 Your country *is* desolate, Your cities *are* burned with fire; Strangers devour your land in your presence; And *it is* desolate, as overthrown by strangers.

Isa 1:8 So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, As a hut in a garden of cucumbers, As a besieged city.

"Booths" and "huts" were like today's pop-up tents. When invaders came, those working in the fields would find no protection in a pop-up. The enemy would overrun them, then destroy outlying cities, then besiege Jerusalem by surrounding it and waiting for the inhabitants to surrender or starve.

Isa 1:9 Unless the LORD of hosts Had left to us a very small remnant, We would have become like Sodom, We would have been made like Gomorrah.

Isa 1:10 Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah:

Judah had become a spiritual Sodom and Gomorrah. It was evident by their sexual sin. Ezekiel chapter sixteen¹ and Leviticus 18:22 agree with what Jude wrote in his New Testament letter, "Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, [have] given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh" (v7).

The apostle Paul described a nation in a downward spiral, saying, "For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due" (Romans 1:26-27).

Just when you think sexual immorality can't get any *immoral-er*, a new sinful behavior is accepted, legalized, and pushed upon believers.

Sexual sin, especially when called good and legitimized, is a strong indicator that God has withdrawn from a nation.

Gotta love that word, "remnant." A remnant is a left-over amount from a larger portion or piece. No matter how bleak the outlook, God, by His amazing providence, always has believers to keep history moving towards the promised consummation.

Herman Melville, in his 1850 novel *White-Jacket*, wrote, "We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people - the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world."

America is a great Gentile nation, *but we do not replace Israel in prophecy*. We will want to be careful in making applications from Isaiah.

Isa 1:11 "To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats.

Isa 1:12 "When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?"

¹ The Hebrew word translated "detestable" refers to something that is morally disgusting and is the exact same word used in Leviticus 18:22 that refers to homosexuality as an "abomination."

Isa 1:13 Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies - I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.

Isa 1:14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing *them*.

Isa 1:15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

The elaborate yet beautiful rules and rituals that God set for Israel in the Law of Moses in order to worship Him were not meant to take the place of a personal relationship with God through faith. It was doing Judah no good to go to the Temple, outwardly professing love for the Lord, while inwardly rebelling, and desiring to get their sacrifice over with in order to rush to the places of their idolatrous worship.

Isa 1:16 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil,

Isa 1:17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.

The exhortation is to believe God, to be saved, and then they would be able to embody the virtues that God intends a nation to promote - "Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow."

Jonah was sent by God to Nineveh. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. The king said, "Who can tell *if* God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?" Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it."

When judgment is announced, grace intervenes.

#2 - When God Relents, You Are Restored (v18-31)

When you say "God relents," even though that is how the Bible reads, it hits a theological nerve in some believers concerning the sovereignty of God. If mankind can do something that moves God, some people think that the fabric of the universe will somehow be destroyed.

God's sovereignty *includes* Him "relenting" in response to repentance. We see it in Jonah, in Jeremiah, and in Isaiah. It's an offer we *can* refuse.

Isa 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool."

"Reason together" is in a tense that means, *listen to reason*. You are in need of forgiveness and a complete pardon. Listen to reason and receive God's offer.

Where can you find forgiveness and complete pardon from your sin? Only at Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, where the Savior died on the Cross, lifted up to draw all men to Himself.

God has made an incredible offer to individuals, and to nations. Let's listen to reason, repent, and be restored

Isa 1:19 If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land;
Isa 1:20 But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

God made both *unconditional* and *conditional* promises to Israel:

- His gift of the Promised Land was unconditional.
- Blessing them in the land was conditioned upon their obedience.

We need to be careful and not think that outward blessing equates to godliness, especially in the Church Age when weakness and suffering have high value as currency in Heaven.

Isa 1:21 How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; Righteousness lodged in it, But now murderers.

An idol-worshipping Jew left the Temple after sacrificing his lamb, and sacrificed his infant son to Molech.

Isa 1:22 Your silver has become dross, Your wine mixed with water.

Economic collapse and shortages of essentials is no fun. It's no joke that the phrase, "Have you checked your 401K lately?" has become a cultural catch-phrase. It reminds

us of a few more things Jesus said to the Laodiceans: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see" (3:18).

I touched upon it a moment ago - Heaven has its own currency, valued much higher than the world's.

Isa 1:23 Your princes are rebellious, And companions of thieves; Everyone loves bribes, And follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, Nor does the cause of the widow come before them.

Bribes and outright theft in government are awful. I find it worse that it has become expected.

Have you ever had a surprise inspection? A nation had better be compassionately caring for its fatherless, widows, and all others who are disadvantaged when the LORD inspects.

Isa 1:24 Therefore the Lord says, The LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, "Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, And take vengeance on My enemies.

Isa 1:25 I will turn My hand against you, And thoroughly purge away your dross, And take away all your alloy.

For a time, the Incredible Hulk was the Champion of Sakaar, besting all those who faced him in arena combat. Could you imagine reading the fight card and seeing he was your opponent?

God considered the rebellious Jews His "enemies" and "adversaries." Our nation does not want God as their opponent.

Isa 1:26 I will restore your judges as at the first, And your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city."

Isa 1:27 Zion shall be redeemed with justice, And her penitents with righteousness.

This nugget is dropped in to give the remnant hope. God calls them "penitents," a word meaning *those who repent*. The remnant and any who may yet repent would see the restoration of Jerusalem.

This was not guaranteeing that each and every one of them would live to physically see Jerusalem restored. They saw it by faith. Like father Abraham, the promise was enough. "He waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God" (Hebrews 11:10). He never saw the city, but God's promises were as good as seeing it.

When you have God's promises, in His Word, you do not need to see them fulfilled. You can rest and find contentment knowing that God cannot lie.

Isa 1:28 The destruction of transgressors and of sinners *shall be* together, And those who forsake the LORD shall be consumed.

Isa 1:29 For they shall be ashamed of the terebinth trees Which you have desired; And you shall be embarrassed because of the gardens Which you have chosen.

Isa 1:30 For you shall be as a terebinth whose leaf fades, And as a garden that has no water.

Isa 1:31 The strong shall be as tinder, And the work of it as a spark; Both will burn together, And no one shall quench *them*.

The trees and gardens were the sites of idol worship. Those sites would be consumed, as would the idol worshippers. You've heard the expression, "Turn or Burn?" That's what Isaiah was predicting.

We need to be careful when we discuss idolatry, to not take cheap shots at people for having, let's say, a hobby they enjoy. Sure, a hobby *can* be an idol for someone. I am saying that idolatry is much more sinister, buried deeper in the heart.

The sources I consulted agree that the big three, little 'g,' 'gods' that the Israelites worshiped alongside YHWH were Baal, Asherah, and Molech:

- Baal comes to signify material prosperity.
- Asherah was worshipped with practices of sexual immorality.
- Molech was the idol upon whom babies were burned.

As a nation, *we are deep into those gods:*

- As far as I can tell, the so-called Prosperity Gospel is an American invention. It's adherents believe that, "Power is given to believers that binds and looses spiritual forces and turns the spoken word into reality. Faith is demonstrated in wealth and health. It could be measured both in the wallet - one's personal wealth - and in the

body - one's personal health - making material reality the measure of the success of immaterial faith."

- The US has legalized all manner of sexual immorality, while simultaneously nuking Biblical morality.
- We don't burn babies; we abort them. By the millions - 64m in these United States since the procedure was legalized. The techniques used are brutal and violent.

As a nation, we worship Baal, Asherah, and Molech.

A.W. Tozer wrote, "Have you noticed how much praying for revival has been going on of late, and how little revival has resulted? I believe the problem is that we have been trying to substitute *praying* for *obeying*, and it simply will not work."

Evangelist Charles Finney said something similar: "*A revival is nothing else than a new beginning of obedience to God.*"

Isaiah will have a new beginning of obedience to God when he has a vision of the Almighty and utters the famous phrase, "Here am I, send me" (6:8).

- If you are not a believer, you obey God by receiving His indescribable gift, Jesus Christ, as your Savior. You should say, "Here am I, save me."
- If you are a believer, you're going to want to spend time with Jesus, at the end of which you, too, say, "Here am I, send me."

 **When judgment is certain, grace intervenes**

 **If a nation repents, God relents**