

If men and women will turn to God as their only refuge, despite all that they have done, then God 'will not accuse for ever, nor . . . always be angry'. Ritualistic religion will be of no value to them without social justice.

1. Sin ruins the whole of life

• No great blessing on the people in Isaiah's time – but the difficulty is not with God

1. **Sin ruins the whole of life.** In Isaiah's time the Assyrians were never very far away. At one point they destroyed the whole land of Judah and almost succeeded in destroying Jerusalem. God is willing to lift up the people, but sin is a hindrance to their exaltation. There is no great blessing upon the people at the time Isaiah writes. But the difficulty is not in God.

¹Look, the hand of Yahweh is not too short to save,
nor his ear too dull to hear.

²But your iniquities have separated
you and your God;
your sins have hidden his face from you,
so that he will not hear.

³For your hands are defiled with blood,
your fingers with iniquity.
Your lips have spoken lies,
and your tongue mutters wicked things.

⁴No one calls for righteousness;
no one pleads his case with integrity.
They rely on empty arguments and speak lies;
they conceive trouble and give birth to evil.

God has turned away from his own people because of their backsliding ways. Violence, deceit, injustice, carelessness and mischief-making of many kinds fill the nation. The problem of the nation is with them; there is no lack of power in God.

• Sins of violence, deceit, injustice, carelessness and mischief-making – the reason God has turned away

⁵They hatch the eggs of vipers
and spin a spider's web.
Whoever eats their eggs will die,
and when one is broken, an adder is hatched.

⁶Their cobwebs are useless for clothing;
they cannot cover themselves with their deeds.
Their deeds are trouble-making,
and acts of violence are in their hands.

⁷Their feet rush into evil;
they are swift to shed innocent blood.
Their thoughts are evil thoughts;
ruin and destruction mark their ways.

⁸The way of peace they do not know;
there is no judgement in their paths.
They have twisted their pathways to their own hurt;
no one who walks in them will know peace.

In picture-language Isaiah describes the nation in fuller detail^{□1} and then specifies the precise sins he has in mind^{□2}.

□1 59:5-6

□2 59:7-8

2. God will not rescue us while he is angry with us

• God did not lack power

2. **God will not rescue us while he is angry with us.** Although the nation was in such distress God would do nothing to help them. Yet it was not that he was lacking in power. The hand of Yahweh was not too short to save.

3. A change will come as we confess our sins

3. **A change will come as we confess our sins.** Isaiah puts into their mouths the confession of sin that is needed.

⁹Therefore justice is far from us,
and righteousness does not reach us.
We look for light, but all is darkness;
for a gleam of brightness, but we walk in deep shadows.

• *The people must acknowledge that they have brought their sorrows upon themselves through idolatry*

• *If we look for happiness outside of God's will, it will elude us*

• *The people must admit their need*

• *What is happening in their nation and their part in it*

• *Darkness around and blindness within*

• *Sorrow and distress*

• *We are iniquitous – our nature always leads us astray*

• *Guilty of betrayal*

• *If we admit our sins, God will no longer hide His face*

people must acknowledge that they have brought upon themselves their own sorrows. They had deceived themselves in looking for brightness from their idolatries. In turning to pagan gods nothing but gloom had come upon them. All this must now be confessed and acknowledged. The more we look for happiness outside of God's will, the more happiness will elude us. But the prophet asks us to expose our own heart before God, to admit that we are in darkness and gloom. If we have been seeking light in the wrong place and have found only darkness we had best admit it as soon as possible.

¹⁰ *Like the blind we grope along the wall,
feeling our way like people without eyes.
At midday we stumble as if it were twilight;
among the strong, we are like the dead.*
¹¹ *We all growl like bears;
we moan mournfully like doves.*

The people must admit their need. They must confess what is happening in their nation and how they are part of it¹⁰, the darkness around them¹¹, the blindness within¹², the sorrow and distress that is everywhere to be found¹³.

*We look for justice, but find none;
for salvation, but it is far away.*
¹² *For our rebellions are many in your sight,
and our sins testify against us, each one of them.
For our offences are ever with us,
and we know our iniquities:*
¹³ *rebellion and treachery against Yahweh,
and turning away from following after our God,
speaking oppression and revolt,
conceiving and murmuring from the heart
words of falsehood.*

Their prayers for rescue are unanswered¹⁴. Isaiah uses the entire range of the vocabulary of sin ('rebellions . . . sins . . . offences . . . iniquities . . . rebellion . . . treachery . . . turning away') to pinpoint what is happening. He asks us to admit it all. We have been like citizens rebelling against the authorities. We are iniquitous – people with a twisted nature that always leads us astray. We have been guilty of betrayal towards a God who has been generous towards us in giving us life and providing for us a Saviour.

The confession of sin has to be specific. They admit that justice is far from them. They must admit what they have done to others. They must get to grips with the seriousness of the self-centredness which despises the other person. It has brought them into blindness. It is God himself whom they have offended. They cannot throw off the influence that their sins have had upon the whole of their lives. The hand of Yahweh is not too short to save. He can rescue and heal and lift us up once again. But the sins that have made our ears dull, and have brought a barrier between us and God must be admitted. Then he will no longer hide his face but will turn towards us and lift us up to where he wants us to be.

10¹ 59:9a
11² 59:9b
12³ 59:10
13⁴ 59:11a

14¹ 59:11b



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