



The first five chapters of Isaiah give us a general description of the problems of Israel in the days of the prophet. It unfolds as follows:

- I. Introducing the Days of Isaiah¹
 - A. Devastation brought by sin²
 - B. Destiny, destiny lost, destiny regained³
 - 1. Destiny⁴
 - 2. Destiny lost⁵
 - 3. Destiny regained⁶
 - C. Fruitlessness⁷

- 1:1-5:30
- 1:1-31
- 2:1-4:6
- 2:1-5
- 2:6-4:1
- 4:2-6
- 5:1-30

• Israel is like a badly injured man persisting in the thing that caused his injury

1. Sin ruins nations

• God is judge and accuser

Isaiah chapter 1 describes the condition of Israel in Isaiah's times. The nation was like a man, badly injured because of some piece of stupidity and yet persisting in the very thing that is causing his injury.

1. Sin ruins nations. The description in 1:2–31 is like something that might happen in a court of law when a criminal is being accused of some terrible crime. The whole universe is called upon to take notice of what happens in this court. The court is called to attention.

²*Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth!
For it is Yahweh himself who has spoken.*

God himself is both the judge and the accuser. He presents his charges against the people of Israel.

• Sin makes men and women unresponsive to God

Sin makes men and women to be unresponsive to God.

*'Sons have I reared and brought them up,
but they of all people have rebelled against me.
³The ox knows his master,
the donkey his owner's manger,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.'*

• Israel is unresponsive to God

Animals have an instinctive knowledge of the ones who feed them. God has done so much for Israel and yet they are totally unresponsive to him. Men and women are meant to be brought to a position higher than the angels but they can in some respects become lower than unreasoning animals.

• Sin despises the many privileges God gives us

Sin despises the many privileges God gives us. God had made the people of Israel to be his sons and daughters but it was 'they of all people' who rebelled against him. Their sin was sin against Yahweh, the one who redeemed the nation by the blood of the lamb.

⁴*Ah, sinning nation,
a people heavy with iniquity, a family-line of evildoers, sons given to corruption!*

• Instead of passing faith through each generation, they had passed wicked ways

They were meant to be the 'seed of Abraham', a family which in each generation were called to have the same faith that Abraham had. But they became a 'family-line' who passed on wicked ways from one generation to the next.

*They have forsaken Yahweh;
they have treated the Holy One of Israel with scorn
and have gone backwards so as to become strangers to him.*

• Sin makes us strangely blind

Sin makes us strangely blind. It ruins whole countries. Again and again Israel were falling into terrible sufferings because of their own wicked ways but they were amazingly optimistic that somehow it did not matter and all would be well. But Isaiah protests.

• Isaiah protests

⁵*Why, seeing that you will be beaten again,
do you persist in rebellion?
Your whole head is injured,
your whole heart afflicted.*
⁶*From the sole of your foot to the top of
your head
there is no soundness –
only wounds and welts
and open sores,
not cleansed or bandaged
or soothed with oil.*
⁷*Your country is desolate,
your cities burned with fire;
your fields are being stripped by foreigners
right before you,
laid waste as when overthrown by foreigners*

• Idolatry the root cause of attack by enemies

These words from Isaiah's ministry obviously come from a time when the nation was being savagely attacked by foreign enemies. But the deepest cause of the ruination of the land was the nation's idolatry.

• Sin has a tendency to bring extermination and ruination

Sin has a tendency to bring extermination and ruination. He that does the will of God abides for ever, but sin brings an end to all that is good. During Isaiah's days, Israel was almost destroyed; it was only God's gracious mercy that kept a small part of the nation in existence. God does not allow his people to be entirely exterminated like Sodom and Gomorrah. Isaiah knows that God will bring his people through despite the heaviest judgements that fall upon them.

• Isaiah knows that God will save His people despite their sin

⁸*The Daughter of Zion is left
like a shelter in a vineyard,
like a hut in a field of melons,
like a city under siege.*
⁹*Unless Yahweh Almighty
had left us some survivors,
we would have become like Sodom,
we would have been like Gomorrah.*

2. Religious routines do not inevitably help us if the heart is not right

2. Religious routines do not inevitably help us if the heart is not right. One might think that the spiritual disciplines given by God to the nation would solve their problems. But religious routines are of no value in themselves. If they do not lead into ways of godliness, they are worthless. During Isaiah's time the people were actually highly religious! But God was displeased with their religion.

¹⁰*Hear the word of Yahweh,
you rulers of Sodom;
listen to the law of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!*
¹¹*The multitude of your sacrifices —
what are they to me?' Yahweh keeps saying.
'I have more than enough of burnt-offerings,
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;
I have no pleasure
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.'*

• Animal sacrifices and holy days – entirely useless

The people were almost as bad as Sodom and Gomorrah, the two cities famous for their wickedness. The people loved offering animal sacrifices and the keeping of holy days. Yet this kind of religion was entirely useless.

¹²*When you come to appear before me, who has sought this from you, this trampling of my courts?*

*¹³Stop bringing a gift that is nothing!
Your incense is detestable to me.
New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations –
I cannot bear your iniquity and obligatory assembly.
¹⁴Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts
I hate with all my heart.
They have become a burden to me;
I am weary of bearing them.
¹⁵When you spread out your hands in prayer,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even if you offer many prayers,
I will not listen.
Your hands are full of shed blood.'*

3. The only hope for the nation was a changed way of life altogether

3. The only hope for the nation was a changed way of life altogether.

*¹⁶Wash and make yourselves clean.
Take the evil of your deeds
out of my sight!
Stop doing wrong,
¹⁷learn to do right!
Seek justice,
reform the oppressor.
Defend the cause of the fatherless,
plead the case of the widow.'*

• God offers a chance to turn to Him – will they take it?

God offers them the chance to turn to him. All is not completely lost. God is still willing to receive them back if they will change their ways. The alternative is yet greater calamity for their land. They have a choice. Will they be willing and obedient? Or will they resist and rebel?