

**ADULT**

*Lesson Commentary*

**Spring Quarter, 2017**

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## About the Writers

Recognized for their knowledge, wisdom and understanding of the Holy Scriptures, the writers of the *Adult Lesson Commentary* are faithful pastors, teachers and spiritual leaders among the Lord's churches. The following are biographical notes about these men.



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# *The Vision God Gave to Isaiah*

**Isaiah 1:1-31; 2 Kings 17:1-41**

## **Introduction**

The book of Isaiah was written by the prophet bearing the same name. The name Isaiah means the Lord Jehovah has saved. The prophet Isaiah lived in the city of Jerusalem, which he consistently refers to as the city of Zion or the daughters of Zion. He lived in the eighth century BC and was the son of Amoz. During his childhood, Jeroboam II was king of Israel, to the north, and Uzziah was king of Judah. With the exception of refusing to have the high places of pagan worship dismantled, Uzziah was faithful to the Lord and led the nation of Judah back to the exclusive worship of Jehovah and to conformity to the Law of Moses. Isaiah's prophetic ministry began during the latter stages of the reign of King Uzziah, who had previously elevated his son, Jotham, to be co-regent with him. According to the text of 2 Chronicles 26, Uzziah had disobeyed the Law of the Lord and attempted to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah, the priest, along with eighty valiant men of the tribe of Levi, tried to stop him but Uzziah rebuked them and grew angry. Before he could complete his disobedient task, the Lord afflicted him with leprosy and he was thrust out of the Temple. As a result of his disobedience and arrogant presumption, King Uzziah lived a shortened life in his leprous condition.

Isaiah lived between 765 and 695 BC and prophesied during the reigns of four kings of Judah, namely, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Legend has it that his father, Amoz, was the brother of King Uzziah, but there is no biblical evidence to support this other than the fact that Isaiah seems to have had access to the throne. Any familial ties to the king are sheer conjecture. The prophecy of Isaiah is one of the most well attested books of the entire Bible. The Masoretic Text of the ninth to the twelfth centuries AD was later compared to the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaiahb) found in the Qumran caves in 1947, which has been dated to be around 250 BC, is virtually identical to the Masoretic Text; an amazing feat largely due to the care and discipline of the copyists of the Old Testament text. The canonicity of the book was recognized before the time of Christ and has attestation in the book of 2 Chronicles as a true prophecy from the Lord to the nation of Judah.

## God Confronts His People

Isaiah 1:1-9

The prophetic ministry of Isaiah likely began during the latter part of the reign of King Uzziah, probably around 740 BC and continued through to the later years of the reign of King Hezekiah which ended in 686 BC. Based on the vision Isaiah received over the course of several years and during the reigns of four of Judah's kings, the prophet had the opportunity to anticipate through his prophetic vision the comparison between the anticipated rule of the perfect King, the Lord Jesus Christ, to those men who were less than ideal. Their imperfections, contrasted with the messianic King, must have given the prophet all the more reason to long for the kingdom era and the righteous rule of the Messiah. The initial portion of Isaiah's vision was the lengthy oracle he received from the Lord describing Jehovah's indictment of His own people.

Verses 2 and 3 begin the indictment of the Lord against His people. Initially, the message invited the heavens and the earth to stand as witnesses concerning the charges in the indictment of the Lord against His own people. Then, it describes the familial relationship which the Lord had for His own, that of a Father and His son. The word translated "nourished" is the Hebrew word *gadal* which refers to the fact that the nation of Israel had its origin and covenant relationship as a result of God's initiation. The word translated "brought up" is the word *rum* which refers to the idea that Jehovah raised His special people to an exalted place wherein they were the Lord's uniquely blessed people. The indictment, therefore, revolved around the breach of that covenant by the wayward sons of the Lord, the nation of Israel, overall, which included the nation of Judah.

However, the messages quickly turned to an allegorical comparison which showed how foolish the sons were in comparison to the more submissive types of animal. The ox is a beast of burden which, when trained in the yoke, is completely given over to the will and the whims of the master. In the same way, a donkey, a durable beast used as a means of agricultural labor, transportation, and many other tasks, instinctively knows where the feeding trough is located at the conclusion of its daily labor. As a result, that stubborn beast is given over to the will of its master, its provider. The parallelism points to the irrefutable fact that God's special covenant people became less aware of the source of their provisions than those two beasts of burden. Simply stated, those beasts manifested more sense than the sons of Israel in that they rebelled against the One who birthed them and provided for them in loving and special ways.

Throughout its history, Israel had numerous opportunities to evaluate just how special they were in the heart of God, but continually turned away from His provisions, as well as His presence. In their rebellious defiance of the Lord and His Law, the nation of Israel showed their utter contempt for the Lord their God and the prophet's message brought the stinging indictment of that contempt and rebellion.

In verse 4, the prophet used some of the most graphic words to describe the sins of the people and how that affected their covenant relationship with the Lord. The word "Ah" is from the word *hoiy* which can mean ah, woe, alas, and is an interjection which was often stated in a funeral procession in the

near Eastern culture. With the Lord's indictment concluded in verse 3, the prophet began to mourn over God's people as he anticipated the pending judgment which the nation of Judah was soon to experience. As a prophet, Isaiah was already mourning the demise of his own people, although he was also sent by the Lord to render further warning to the nation in order for them to potentially repent and turn back to the Lord. If they did not, their demise was inevitable.

The literary device Isaiah used in verse 4 is crystal clear in describing both the relationship the nation of Judah had with the Lord along with the sinful activity associated with their consistent breach of their covenant with the Lord. The word "sinful" is associated with "nation," the word "iniquity" with people, the word "evildoers" with seed, and the word "corrupters" with children. The prophet wanted the people of God to know that their waywardness was tied to their illicit rebellion in spite of their unique relationship as God's chosen people. In the latter part of the verse, the most striking aspect of Judah's sin was that it provoked the "Holy One of Israel unto anger." The prophet used that description twenty-five times in his prophecy, and it seems to be the most awe-inspiring description of Jehovah he personally experienced and penned. The phrase describes the true majesty of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. It also denotes that the Lord God has absolute authority over all His creation and, especially, His covenant people Israel. As such, the prophet wanted the rebellious people of Judah to clearly understand just who they were rejecting.

Reverting back to verse 3, it was revealed that they did not have the understanding of an ox or a donkey! Since Jehovah God is perfectly holy in His moral character, the sinful condition among His people was especially incomprehensible.

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### Animals That Know More Than Humans (Isaiah 1:3):

Even with all of God's blessings, the people of Judah rebelled and their animals acted with more sense than the people did. The word rebelled is from the Hebrew word *pasha* which means to transgress, revolt and to apostatize. The people did not "consider." This is from the Hebrew word *biyn* which means they did not think it through with proper regard. Judah was a sinful nation so corrupt that they provoked the Lord. The proverbial dumb ox and stubborn ass at least knew where their next meals were coming from and acknowledged their master. The people of Judah missed the way and missed the path of spiritual right and duty. They moved about spiritually blinded because they had forsaken their Master.

### Corrupters

#### Word Study #7843

**Isaiah 1:4.** A participle in Hebrew that conveys in this context the idea of causing immoral behavior and sinful acts resulting in the destruction and ruination of a life. The word is used in another context (Exodus 12:23) to describe the destroyer who would pass over the houses of the Jews who had blood on the doorposts. Clearly, the end result of death is the emphasis there. Here it seems to be more of an immoral process leading to destruction. (See also Genesis 6:12, 13, 17.)



The word “provoked” (verse 4) is translated from the word *na’ats* and means provoke, abhor, despise, treat with contempt. The sons of Jehovah turned themselves away as though they were strangers to Him. The word “backward” is translated from the Hebrew word *achor* and refers to the idea that they simply turned their backs against the Holy One of Israel.

Beginning in verse 5, the prophet addressed the nation as a soldier who had been beaten, wounded, bruised time after time and battle after battle, only to prepare for a more devastating injury. As a result of continuing to rebel against the Lord and His precepts, followed by His response of chastisement, the people were left wounded and bruised, only to rebel again and receive judgment, yet again. The prophet asked rhetorical questions as if he were utterly flabbergasted as to how they could insist on continuing to rebel against the “Holy One of Israel,” thus receiving the same divine response of judgment, leaving them more wounded than before. Their repeated behavior seemed, to the prophet, to be utterly irrational. The more they rebelled, the more the Lord rebuked and chastened them. After only a few experiences of that repeated action and divine reaction one would think that they would finally realize their sin and repent to the Lord, but their hearts remained unmoved and, therefore, unchanged.

Isaiah noted that they were sick in their minds; no sane person would allow constant injury to themselves by willfully offending the One who could inflict such devastating injury on them. They were also faint or weak in their hearts. Their decision to rebel was based on a weakened spiritual condition which manifested itself in the lack of moral character and, especially, an inability to relate to the Lord their God at any level.

### Mollified

#### Word Study #7401

**Isaiah 1:6.** A passive verb form in Hebrew which means to be smoothed or to be made soft. It is in reference to the “wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores” Isaiah used to describe the awful spiritual condition of Israel about which nothing had been done.

Continuing the metaphor of a wounded soldier, the prophet spoke in verse 6 about the constant cycle of Judah’s rebellion and the Lord’s necessary response of the severe chastisement showed that their wounds were over the entire population, from head to toe and everywhere in between. It was as if the wounds were constantly new and fresh with no opportunity to heal or respond to treatment whether the wounds were cleansed, bandaged or had healing ointment applied to them. The entire population of Judah was involved

in the vicious cycle of the constant wounding associated with their rebellion toward Jehovah their God, followed by His consistent response to the rebellion of rebuke and chastisement.

In verses 7-9, the prophet Isaiah noted that the land of Judah had remained in a devastated condition which was probably the result from the ravages of war when the Syrians and, later, the armies of Israel laid siege on their country. Even though the sieges did not procure the overthrow of the nation of Judah nor its king, many of the prominent cities were left in such a condition of waste and destruction that the devastation served as a constant reminder of their



vulnerability. But it must be emphasized that the Lord allowed Judah's enemies to come against them; God's hedge of protection was partially removed as a means of chastising them for their wickedness and idolatry. But even at that, the chastisement did not secure their confession of sin and turning back to Jehovah their God. God, in His mercy, responded with further judgment, but not without His calling of the prophets to further warn the people to turn back to Him. Each successive warning, followed by the people's disdain of the prophet and the Lord God Himself, continued to serve notice that Judah would endure ever-increasing judgment from the Lord as they progressively turned further away from Him. The Lord also showed the nation that the earlier judgments of the Lord upon the sister country to the north, Israel, was to remind His people to the south that their plight would be the same if they did not turn back to the Lord and abandon their sinful direction. Even after the invasions of the Syrians and Israelites had ceased, those marauders destroyed the crops in the fields during the times of the various harvests leaving virtually nothing for Judah's agricultural needs.

In verse 8, the statement "daughter of Zion" clearly indicates who the prophet was describing. Even the city of Jerusalem became vulnerable and exposed to the potential of further devastation. The word "cottage" is translated from the Hebrew word *sukkah* and means covert, covering, booth and refers to the temporary shelter used by farmers during the time of harvest which were never intended to be permanent dwellings and were, typically, fairly rustic in its construction. The word "lodge" is translated from the word *melunah* and simply means hut. During the off season when those temporary dwellings became unattended, they were in such a state of disrepair that they were uninhabitable. The prophet used those descriptions to indicate the vulnerable nature of the actual permanent dwellings in Judah, including the city of Jerusalem.

According to verse 9, even though it was an obvious time of serious judgment upon Judah, reflecting God's disapproval and chastisement, the prophet noted that the nation was not utterly destroyed. He referred to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which had been completely ruined by God's judgment upon those cities after Lot's family left. While those cities were completely destroyed, Judah still continued to survive as a nation because of the faithful remnant who had

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**Cottage in a Vineyard, Lodge in a Garden of Cucumbers (Isaiah 1:8):** Jerusalem, the place of God's house, was a city of beauty that was filled with goods. Yet, it became an abandoned hut in the midst of an empty melon patch. A "cottage in a vineyard" speaks to a booth or tent as a temporary shelter. "A lodge in a garden of cucumbers" has reference to a hut or hammock in a cucumber patch. Churches once filled with the Spirit and the Word of God had become nothing more than melon and cucumber patches. Bible truths have been denied and misplaced with a social message. Those who falsely claim the title of Christian are advocating the doctrines of devils. Their message tickles the ears rather than convicting hearts. There is no true beauty found in them.

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**Doing What God Had Not Required (Isaiah 1:12):** Judah had a form of worship, but it was empty hypocritical ritualism. They trampled the things of God and, therefore, He did not honor it, quite the contrary, He was totally disgusted with it. We are to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Ritualism tramples the blood of Christ, which is an act that God Himself shall judge (Hebrews 10:28-30). God is not satisfied with mere ceremony. Judah brought an abundance of sacrifices; however, God referred to them as false and useless. God said I am full of burnt-offerings, or I have had enough. There must be repentance and humbleness before God or else we make a mockery of our service.

not turned to sinful practices, especially idolatry. The prophet noted that God is a universally sovereign King who has armies at His disposal to do His bidding. Had He allowed the armies of Syria and Israel to completely prevail, that surely would have taken place, but for the sake of the remnant, Judah was not completely destroyed. It must be pointed out, however, that as Isaiah's prophetic ministry progressed, the situation in Judah would not get better, but would, indeed, progressively get worse. There would come a time when the nation would be taken captive and the land of Israel and Judah, as well as the city of Jerusalem, would lie in complete devastation. But for the immediate moment, the Lord spared the nation for the sake of the remnant who still honored, worshiped and sought to serve Him. The prophet's message is pertinent and relevant today; even though the secular culture has abandoned the Lord

and forsaken His ways as well as professing believers turning away from the faith and the plain teaching of the Word of God, our nation and world may well be somewhat protected because of the faithful remnant of God's servants who are still loyal to the Lord and seek to abide by His will and Scripture.

### God Judges His People

### Isaiah 1:10-15

Beginning in verse 10, the prophet rendered the two most despicable and insulting names for the nation of Judah, Sodom and Gomorrah, showing that their sins and participation in the evil ways of their Gentile neighbors demonstrated sin at its worst. In spite of the heinous description, the words "LORD" and "our" still show a semblance of covenant acknowledgement by the Lord and His servant, the prophet Isaiah. That relationship was unknown to the Gentile cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The prophet continued to show that the Lord in His righteous indignation showed utter disdain for the sacred observances of the people. It appears that the implication shows that the form of the various acts of worship were accurate and at least, from an external perspective, that all was well in Zion. The Lord God, then and now, is not impressed with the externals of religiosity, no matter how accurate or orthodox those externals appear to be. The rulers and people of Judah had turned their hearts away from the Lord, were serving the pagan deities of their Gentile neighbors, and, as a result, the Lord was insulted by their external acts of worship. Plainly stated,

the Lord wants His people to worship and serve Him from a pure heart. The external appearance of true worship without a true heart is no worship at all!

In verse 11, the narrative shows that the sacrifices supposedly given for the true worship of Jehovah actually well exceeded the requirements of the Law. This caused the Lord to be that much more furious at their attempts to show external worship without a true and pure heart. More than likely, the illicit worship of pagan deities required that those idols be “fed” constantly with an overwhelming number of sacrifices. So the blending of the externals of the worship of Jehovah and the practices of idolatry just heightened the effect of disdain the Lord had for their hypocrisy.

According to verse 12, the Lord was increasingly put off by the parade of hypocritical worshipers with their overwhelming numbers of sacrificial animals. The word “tread” is translated from the word *ramas* and means trample. It may refer to two different ideas. First, the people brought the number of animals which far exceeded the requirements of the Law of Moses which, in actuality, showed a disobedience to the Lord. The Law was precise in its requirements and the lack of compliance gave evidence of the fact that their hearts were not in tune with the Lord and the Law. As such, the multitude of sacrificial animals was overwhelming and, thus, the hypocritical worshipers trampled the courts of the Temple. Second, the word *ramas* can also have a derogatory aspect to it. The people of Judah who were not worshiping nor serving Jehovah with a pure heart were desecrating the holy ground of the Temple area and were, thus, trampling the courts of the Lord.

Continuing in verses 13-15, the prophet reported that every single act of external, insincere worship was a cause of further disdain to the Lord. Ultimately, it got to the point that the Lord wanted them to cease in any attempts to legitimize their external acts because they were completely meaningless to Him. Even though the people of Judah were burdened with the guilt of their sins, the Lord was burdened with their abundance of religious practices which stemmed from idolatry. It was as if He were just another one of their gods. Such was an absolute insult to the only true and living God; He was to be worshiped exclusively and from a pure heart. There is an interesting correlation with respect to the Lord’s reaction to their idolatrous

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**New Moons, Sabbaths and Assemblies (Isaiah 1:13):** Is God still telling us today to listen and stop? Idols are not always graven images. Anything we allow to come between us and God is an idol. We must be on guard not to give in to the enticing of these said idols, lest we be guilty of trampling the courts of the Lord. The Lord’s command was to cease from false worship which had become a burden to Him. As a result of it, the people of Judah’s prayers were not heard. They practiced all the religious rites and observed all the holidays. They observed all the “new moons, and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies,” but they had set aside true worship for rituals. The meaningless services had become filled with “iniquity” or a time of nothingness that truly honored God. How are our services today? Have we filled them with rituals and holidays that bring little or no honor to God?

## Oblations

### Word Study #4503

**Isaiah 1:13.** A singular noun in Hebrew indicating an offering or gift. Predominantly translated meat offering. The old English word meat meant food. This word means a grain offering or cereal offering, not to be confused with an animal sacrifice.

ways. Just like their ridiculous idols who could not see, hear nor react in any way, because they simply were not real, is exactly how the Lord reacted to the people with reference to their empty sacrifices; God did not see or hear their prayers nor acknowledge their external religiosity. But unlike the idols, Jehovah their God did react to their sin; instead of accepting their plastic worship, He reacted in righteous judgment regarding their sin.

## God Seeks To Reconcile His People

### Isaiah 1:16-31

In verse 16, four Hebrew verbs are used to show how an erring sinner can be cleansed, forgiven and restored to a right relationship to God. But the structure of the original language makes it clear that self-reformation is not in view. The first verb “wash” from the word *rachats* and the fourth verb “cease” from the word *chadhal* are in the qal stem, referring to simple action with no other grammatical thing in mind beyond the context of the words. The second verb “make...clean” from the word *zakah* and the third verb “put away” from the word *sur* are in the hiphil stem which, in this particular context, refers to a causative nuance. As such, the actions being encouraged by the Lord through the prophet to the populace of Judah shows the necessary work of the Lord in the whole matter of spiritual restoration. True repentance and restoration are not the act of the will without divine intervention. The Spirit of God convicts and the Lord extends mercy to the erring sinner who cannot self-cleanse. The actual act of regeneration on the part of the lost and the restoration of an erring child of God is accomplished by the grace of God as He alone has the power and the authority to forgive sin. What the prophet Isaiah noted in this passage was not self-reformation but the singular response to the urging of God for the cleansing that could result from their penitent hearts of turning back to the Lord. Surely they could not cleanse themselves but could turn back to the Lord who, by His power, provided the needed cleansing of their sins and restoration to His intimate fellowship.

In verse 17, the prophet urged the people of Judah to again learn the ways of the Lord and thus manifest the acts toward the Lord and others which would be reminiscent of those who had genuinely repented toward God and had thus approached Him with a pure heart. Genuine repentance bears fruit of its existence. In order for that fruit to be manifested and, later, to be found in abundance, the people had to accept the instruction concerning the ways of the Lord which they had long forgotten. The resulting fruit would include, but not be limited to, doing righteous acts versus the evil practices in which they had long been practicing, seek justice instead of the unfair practice of prejudicial and partiality in their dealings, rebuke others who were oppressors instead of passively turning away from righteous confrontation, defend the orphans versus neglecting their need for provision, and actively contend for the widows

instead of allowing them to be abused and neglected. Each of the aforementioned righteous acts would never exist in people who were impenitent. Only those who had been cleansed by the power of the Lord and properly restored to Him could the righteous acts described in the verse be shown in the lives of the people of Judah. There was a sense of urgency on the part of the Lord to encourage the people to repent and be cleansed (verse 16) and then show the righteous works of the Lord as a demonstration of the fruit of that repentance and cleansing (verse 17).

In one of the most famous and widely known verses in the entire Bible, the prophet's message turned from the Lord's confrontation concerning Judah's sin in verses 1-15, the necessary response to the Lord's pleas for their repentance and return to Him in verses 16 and 17, to the extension of the Lord's mercy to resolve the sin problem among the people of Judah so that the nation would abandon their illicit sinful practices and return to the Lord. According to verse 18, Jehovah God approached His people as the One who was seeking legal arbitration. The word "reason" is translated from the word *yakach* which means decide, prove, reprove, rebuke, judge, correct. The arbitration between God and His people was not based on our human understanding of that legal activity. Arbitration usually involves the seeking of a middle-ground solution to a legal difference. But when the Lord encouraged Judah to reason together with Him, He was not looking to compromise with the nation to effect a solution to their differences but was urging them to reasonably consider His righteous position and respond to it accordingly. The only possible change in the Lord's position was not His righteous standard but His approach to His people at that given point. He turned from His severe chastisement to His merciful intervention. In that posture the Lord was offering forgiveness and pardon for those who were guilty of sin.

In order for the sinners to be brought back to the intimacy of fellowship with Jehovah their God, they had to come to Him on His terms, not theirs. The word "scarlet," which described the sins of the people of Judah, is translated from the word *shani* and means scarlet, crimson. It refers to the bright red dye which permeates wool or other material. Many of the ruling class in the Middle East would wear garments which were double-dipped in the red dye to show the extravagance of the garment. The red,

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**Scarlet Sin (Isaiah 1:18):** The Lord's plea for the people of Judah was for them to sit down with the desire or wish to think logically and to correct and judge properly their need of repentance and pardon. The bright red scarlet was highly prized in biblical times. To set the color in the cloth, it had to be double-dipped. In contrast, we are double-dipped sinners. The stain has been deeply set so as to appear to be permanent. First, we are sinners by birth (Romans 5:12); second, we are sinners by choice (Romans 7:17, 20). Human means will not wash it away. Sin is deeply fixed, as the scarlet color in the double-dipped cloth. God's almighty power is needed to remove the stain of sin. David prayed for the same washing spoken of by Isaiah. His desire was to be whiter than snow and free from every speck of dust and dirt of sin.



## 14 / *Isaiah 1:1-31; 2 Kings 17:1-41*

scarlet dye was made from the eggs of the coccus illicus, a small insect which is found in the eastern Mediterranean. The Hebrew word is derived from the Arabic word which means to shine. One of the noteworthy aspects of the scarlet dye was that it was humanly impossible to remove the color from the garment as it neither faded nor washed out. Try as one might, the garment with the scarlet dye would remain that color. With that understanding, the simile shows that no matter how hard or often men try to hide or take away their sins through their own efforts, such will never avail. Only by the power of God can a guilty sinner be cleansed and a new heart created.

An interesting irony is also involved in the simile of the scarlet turned to pristine white: the bright red color of the dyed garment is considered the sin in the analogy; the cleansing power of the blood of Christ is what turns the scarlet sin into the whiteness of the imputed righteousness of Christ. The word play was used by the prophet to show the sins of the people being plain and obvious but which could be transformed through repentance and spiritual restoration. The term “white as snow” is especially significant in the theology of the verse. The white color of newly-fallen snow has a pristine appearance; it appears pure and undefiled. As such, the gracious act of God’s forgiveness of a penitent sinner is one of the most amazing aspects of His holy character. When the sinner repents, God forgives the sin, removes the guilt associated with the sin and restores the penitent sinner to a pristine condition. Their restored standing is as if they had never sinned in the first place. The prophet used another simile to further describe God’s merciful act of restoring sinners by comparing a garment which is “crimson” in color with the restoration of the original white color of the woolen garment effected as if the dyeing of the garment had never taken place.

In verse 19, the prophet rendered the divine stipulations of the Lord in order to restore them to the intimacy of His fellowship and the bestowing of His bountiful blessings as He once did. The word translated “willing” is from the word *avah* which means willing, give consent. The word is used in this context to refer to the fact that the people of Judah had turned away from the Lord so long and so often that their habitual nature was one of alienation. The prophet urged the people to consider returning to the Lord on His terms which meant agreeing to the stipulations of obedience and conformity to the Law. Based on the sins which existed in the nation, that meant complete repentance, turning away from the worship of pagan deities and turning exclusively to the worship of Jehovah which included, among other things, a response of obedience. At that point, the Lord promised that they would, again, benefit from all that the land of promise offered them as the Lord would abundantly bless them. The consequences of refusing to listen, given consent to the way of the Lord, and obey His statutes, as given in verse 20, give the stark contrast between the two potential decisions on the part of the nation: repent, comply and obey the Lord and receive His restoring grace and the abundance of His blessings or refuse to repent and be subject to the permissive will of Jehovah who would raise up foreign countries to destroy them. In the last part of the verse, the prophet Isaiah noted the indisputable authority of the Lord as He spoke words of finality that all He said would surely come to pass. The statement is reminiscent of an earlier statement

in the Pentateuch which says, “And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste” (Leviticus 26:33).

In Isaiah 1:21, the prophet changed his demeanor as he noted with an exclamation that the nation that had once been prominent during the reigns of David and Solomon as a result of their righteous rule turned to the devastation of the decadent rulers who ceased to rule with righteous justice and were guilty of turning the people of the nation into murderers. The sin of harlotry is especially significant in the context of the passage. The unfaithfulness of the people of Judah toward their true God, Jehovah, in turning to the idols of the pagan deities of their Gentile neighbors, actually shows a violation of the terms of the covenant between them and God. God’s purpose for calling them out as a special people meant that He had the intention of being the husband and they, His wife, in an exclusive relationship. The ironic thing involved in the nation’s spiritual adultery is that the pagan religions included temple prostitution as one of the expressions of their worship of idols. The lure of the false worship came about as a result of the lure of the sin of illicit sexual behavior. The exclusive worship of the people of God required the strength of their convictions and the personal discipline to avoid the allurements of deviant conduct. Satan uses any number of tempting allurements to provide the potential of any of God’s people to turn away from the Lord and turn to the ways of the flesh.

In verse 22, the metaphor of “silver” versus “dross” is used to show the spiritual deterioration of the people and, especially, those who were the later rulers. Refined silver occurs when the silver ore is mined which is an alloy with other metals. During the process of smelting, when the lead is separated and skimmed off, the refined silver emerges as the precious metal which was turned into coins and used in other ways of commerce. In this passage, the metaphoric use of “silver” describes the nation of Judah in earlier years when the rulers led the people in righteous rule. The word “dross” is translated from the Hebrew word *sug* and means turn back, move back and refers to the idea of silver being turned back into the unrefined alloy it once was. The rulers of Judah had led the people to turn back to their sinful ways, much like refined silver would be turned back to the dross of silver ore in its original state. The word “wine” is translated from the word *soveh* and refers to the strong content of any type of alcoholic beverage. Without giving the moral indecency of such, the prophet used the word along with the word for water to show the lack of value for the beverage once the introduction of the diluting water. The metaphor is used to show the spiritual dilution or disintegration of the succession of the kings of Israel and Judah. Righteous rule had turned to riotous anarchy and murder.

In verse 23, the prophet disclosed one of the prevailing problems in the nation of Judah. The leaders were severely corrupt. Those who were counted on to mete out justice made their determinations on the basis of the bribes they received. Because of that sin, their judgment was tainted with no ability to remain impartial. The word “gifts” is translated from the word *shachadh* and means bribe, ransom, gifts. It refers to the idea of a judge turning a blind eye to true justice on the basis of his receiving gratuity if he judges in a partial way.



The same word is used in the Pentateuch to indicate the prohibition of receiving bribes. In Exodus 23:8, the Law states: “And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous.” The word “rewards” is translated from the word *shalmon*, used only in this verse, and describes the overall condition of the one receiving the bribe. With the judge’s mind preoccupied with his compensation for illicit bias in his rulings, he was beyond any ability to rule with objective concern for those clearly in need of relief according to the Law of Moses, such as orphans and widows. According to the Law, the language was clear concerning the provisions for both. In Isaiah’s time, the judges were so corrupt that they were completely blinded to any sense of true justice because they were only interested in their ill-gotten gain.

In Isaiah 1:24, the prophet indicated the Lord’s complete displeasure with how things had turned in the nation of Judah, just as He had regarding the Northern Kingdom of Israel earlier. The pronouncement of judgment was highlighted by three distinct references of the names of the Lord. The first was the name “Lord,” translated from the Hebrew word *adhonh* and often refers to a master, one who is in complete control of those under his authority. The prophet Isaiah uses this term more than any other Old Testament writer. It is often used in anticipation of a pronouncement of judgment. The second “LORD” translated from the word *yehowah* refers to the supreme power of the Lord and is often linked to the word *adhonh*. The phrase, “the mighty One of Israel” is used solely to describe God’s particular strength and authority over His covenant people Israel.

The latter part of verse 24 is a sad commentary on the sentiments of the Lord regarding His own covenant people. They are considered His adversaries and foes. What a sad indictment that the Lord considered His own people his enemies. However, based on their overall rejection of Him, their heinous acts of sin and their loyalty to other gods left the Lord with no other alternative; He had to pronounce judgment upon them. In spite of their sins and in spite of the need for the righteous God to impose His chastening hand against them, He was

not going to utterly destroy them. By use of the symbolism of the smelting process of silver described in verse 25, the prophet showed that the Lord was going to remove the portions which lent themselves to sin and preserve the untainted. Such could very well be an allusion to God preserving a faithful remnant of His people who would then represent the nation as a whole. If that is true, the allusion also refers to the messianic age of the Millennium. In verse 26, the prophet gives an overall picture of how the Lord, the righteous Judge, used His chastisement of His people as a

means to the end of cleansing them and eventually restoring them. During their release from captivity after seventy years in submission to Babylonia, there was

**Dross**  
**Word Study #5509**

**Isaiah 1:25.** Literally, this is lead oxide which was worthless, impure material separated from silver in the purging or refining process. Its figurative use in this verse refers to Israel’s unwanted or impure lifestyles, actions or motives which God would remove with disciplinary actions.

a partial view of restoration, but certainly not to the point which is described by Isaiah. His prophetic statements had to do with a full restoration of God's people which will find its fulfillment during the Kingdom Age. Verses 24-26 show the contrast between God's judgment, His love for His own people in spite of their sinful ways and the anticipation of their full cleansing and restoration.

In the final section of chapter 1, the prophet initially continued the idea of God's intended restoration of His people in verse 27 by stating that "Zion," often referred to the citizens of Jerusalem or Judah as a whole, which shall eventually find its residents who are, indeed, redeemed. It took the judgment of the Lord to cleanse the nation by allowing their Babylonian captors to take them hostage to a foreign land. There many of them realized that the gods of the Gentiles could not provide anything they requested because they simply did not exist. Some repented to the Lord and confessed their sins, receiving forgiveness and a full pardon to restoration. Isaiah's consistent theme in his prophetic revelation has to do with God's desire to redeem His people and restore them. A remnant will be preserved as a result of responding to their Messiah in redemption. This will ultimately take place when the remnant finally realizes that the Lord Jesus Christ is their true Messiah and that He will restore them so that they will have a prominent position in the messianic kingdom period. The word "converts" is translated from the word *shuv* and means penitent ones, returning ones.

According to verse 28, those who ultimately refuse to repent will have their final destiny unchanged and it will be as though they had never had any identification with Jehovah. The plight of impenitent Hebrews will be exactly that of Gentile unbelievers; they all will be separated from the Lord and utterly consumed in hell. The covenant blessings of God for His people will be granted only to those who are spiritually restored to Him through redemption. The remnant will be the recipient of those blessings. It should be pointed out that the Lord will redeem those who repent and return as the condition for His acceptance of them. Any idea that the Lord will exercise His redemptive grace on them through any other condition is certainly not biblical.

In verse 29, the prophet alluded to the oak or terebinth tree as being sacred to those Jews who had turned the wood into idols. They were guilty of preferring the groves of the terebinth trees as the place where they worshiped their Canaanite deities instead of worshiping the true God in His sanctuary. The word "ashamed" is translated from the word *bosh* which means disappointed, put to shame, ashamed. Once the Hebrew captives were in Babylon, many would realize that the idols made from the wood of the terebinth trees would sorely disappoint them. Additionally, the gardens which produced the lustrous flowers or fruit were also used in connection with their idolatrous practices. The calamity associated with the Lord's judgment upon His people when they were taken captive in Babylon caused the people to realize that their supposed gods granted them no protection. It was the Lord's intended goal to allow His people to come to the realization, through the Babylonian captivity, that their precious idol gods were worthless, hoping that the people would be convinced to return to the Lord. Some of them did, but others continued in their rebellion.

**Tow**

**Word Study #5296**

**Isaiah 1:31.** Used only twice, here and Judges 16:9, this term refers to an extremely flammable substance that is shaken off the flax. Samson easily broke bow strings as if they were tow, or kindling put to the fire. Isaiah used the term in a figure of speech, a simile, to express how weak the strong would become.

Continuing the symbolism of the previous verse, the prophet informed the people that their sins of idolatry and those which eventuated as a result of them caused them to be like the precious terebinth tree in the midst of a grove that, while other trees flourished, the one associated with their sin withered. During the very hot summers in the Judean desert, it is crucial that those who have groves and gardens supplement the lack of water through irrigation. The sins of Judah had reached the point that God's

judgment upon them would be like the parched land of the desert receiving no relief as a result of the lack of water. Another point in the symbolism is that sin bears no worthwhile fruit. It causes spiritual barrenness. Judah could only expect the pending judgment of Jehovah which would cause their land, once rich in the blessings of their God, to be destroyed and left desolate.

In verse 31, the narrative continues to describe the overall spiritual condition of the nation of Judah. The strong leaders, comprised of the judges, princes and military leaders in whom the people placed so much confidence for their protection and safety would be like the tow of the flax stock. The word "tow" is from the Hebrew word *ne'oreth* and means tow, flax strand, hemp which describes the part of the flax which is shaken and is easily and quickly consumed in fire. The labor of the harvester is considered like a spark; both the "tow" and the "spark" are quickly consumed together in the fire of judgment. The wicked works of the people of Judah were likened to the tow and the spark; namely, they would be consumed quickly and be found completely lacking in anything worthwhile. The fires of God's pending judgment would be swift and all consuming.

**The Beginning of the End in the Northern Kingdom**

**2 Kings 17:1-23**

During the time of Isaiah's prophetic ministry to the Southern Kingdom of Judah when Ahaz was the king, the final history of the Northern Kingdom was taking place. After a succession of the most notoriously wicked kings of Israel, Hoshea became king during a military coup wherein King Pekah was assassinated and Assyrian King Shalmaneser V enabled Hoshea to ascend to the throne. The king of Assyria believed he had a loyal vassal who would keep Israel under the yoke of the Assyrian Empire. Hoshea made the alliance with Tiglath-pileser III who had made him king instead of Pekah. In the first four years of his reign, he was not accepted by the general populace of the people. He continued to be a vassal king under the dominion of Assyria. However, in the eighth year of his reign, which would occur in the twelfth year of the reign of King Ahaz of the south, he was acknowledged as the king of Israel. Once he received acceptance, he established a relationship with the Pharaoh of Egypt, Tefnekht,

and distanced himself from Shalmaneser V. Hoshea reigned nine years which occurred during the last four years of the reign of King Ahaz of Judah, followed by the first five years of the reign of King Hezekiah. King Hoshea miscalculated his alliance with the Pharaoh Tefnekht who had to deal with severe internal problems in Egypt but who also wanted to take advantage of his alliance with Israel. As a result of Hoshea's decision to sever ties with Assyria, Shalmaneser V led a revolt, taking Hoshea as a prisoner and proceeded to annihilate the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. Many were taken captive to Mesopotamia and Media.

The people of Israel were reminded that it was Jehovah God alone who had secured their release from Egyptian bondage and preserved them through the arduous journey in the wilderness, finally enabling them to secure the Promised Land. The Lord expected His delivered and special covenant people to worship and serve Him as a witness to the nations of His majesty and authority. However, they repeatedly turned away from Him and He had no alternative but to pronounce judgment upon them for their sins. Even in that, God used the captivities in Assyria and, later, in Babylon to bring His people to the point where they grew to despise the gods of their captors and return to the exclusive worship and service of their God. The kings of Israel were especially responsible for the spiritual demise of the Northern Kingdom in that they wielded the authority of leadership. Invariably, the nation rose or fell according to the people's response to their kings.

Another serious sin was the deceitfulness of the kings and the people to pretend to externally worship the Lord through the various sacrifices and observances, only to be exposed by the Lord that such was never internal. They tried to put on a show but they had become so spiritually inept that they must have forgotten that the Lord was omniscient which meant that nothing was outside of His sovereign observation. Despite the fact that the Lord sent His prophets to warn the people, they continued to rebel and grew increasingly bold in their cultic observances and worship of idols.

The prophet further stated that the nation of Israel would suffer the same fate as those among the Canaanites who had been judged by God, causing their being removed from the Promised Land which was to be secured by the covenant people of the Lord. As a result of the brazen defiance of the Law of Moses and turning to the illicit worship of the Canaanite gods, the Lord pronounced judgment on His own people by allowing the Assyrians to remove the people of the Northern Kingdom from the Promised Land, taking them captive into Assyria. Every imaginable evil was practiced from the worship of the calves which King Jeroboam I had erected to the incredibly evil practice of casting live children in the fires during the worship of the god, Molech. It was one thing to violate and deny the covenant between Jehovah and Israel, but quite another to deny the God of the covenant. The Lord God had claimed the people as His own which included His sovereign right to govern them and insist on His exclusive right to be worshiped and served.

The inevitable outcome of the grievous sins of the people of Israel, their chiding of God's attempts to warn them and call for their repentance and

their blatant practice of openly observing the cultic practices of their Gentile neighbors all pointed to the sad reality of the necessity of divine judgment. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, had plenty of opportunity to see the end result of the sister to the north which included Israel's ultimate demise. One would think that such a sobering reality would cause the people of the south to consider their progressive evil ways. Unfortunately, Judah did not learn the needed lessons by observing the overthrow of the nation of Israel to the north.

### **The Change in Population in Samaria**

**2 Kings 17:24-41**

After the siege of the Assyrian armies, the people of the Northern Kingdom were taken captive to live in Mesopotamia. At the same time, the Assyrian king exercised an earlier mandate which had been enacted by Tiglath-pileser III and required that Babylonians and Arameans be sent to occupy the land of Israel vacated by the Hebrews. The purpose for such an arrangement was to encourage the people to resettle occupied territories for the ultimate purpose of providing loyalty to the Assyrian Empire. However, since the land of Israel, just like His people the Jews, were His by divine authority, the Lord sent lions into the land because the new occupants were idol worshipers and the land was dedicated to the sole worship of Jehovah. When it was learned that the God of Israel had shown His displeasure of the new occupants of His land, the Assyrian king made inquiry as to how the people would know and understand the requirements of the God of the Hebrews. It should be pointed out that the land of Israel is holy land, just as the Jews were to be a separated and holy people.

According to verse 27, the king of Assyria commanded that an exiled priest be sent back to teach the new occupants the ways of the Lord. There is an interesting irony to the story. If the people of Israel had exclusively worshiped and served the Lord their God, God would not have allowed the Assyrian captivity. The people could have been a witness toward their Gentile neighbors about the blessings of serving their God. Instead, the people chose to worship and serve the gods of the surrounding nations and, as a result, the Lord judged His people by means of the Assyrian captivity and the loss of their land. With the repopulation of Samaria, the Lord ensured that the new occupants would know that He was the sovereign God of all. With the priest sent back to Israel in order to teach the Gentile inhabitants the ways of the Lord, it was the intent of the Lord that the new inhabitants not only begin to worship Him, but do so exclusively.

At this point it is good to have an understanding of the polytheistic mindset. A polytheist, a worshiper of many gods, would have no problem adding Jehovah to the list of gods to be worshiped; this would be just one more god to add to the collection, so to speak. But one of the needed provisions of worshiping and serving Jehovah, the God of Israel, is that He expects to be worshiped exclusively. That meant that the polytheists not only had to learn of the ways of the Lord, but to abandon their worship of pagan gods, and that is where they drew the line. Even though the priest in exile was sent back to Samaria, he set

up the Temple at Beth-el as the place of worship. However, that priest, like his predecessors, had long abandoned the Lord and what was instituted was the continuation of false religion initially instituted by King Jeroboam I. The end result was an admixture of the tainted worship of Israel and the addition of the cultic observances of the new inhabitants of the land. The various kinds of worship depended on the particular people who settled in the cities of the north.

Beginning in verse 29, a lengthy list is given of the various gods of the particular inhabitants of certain Samaritan cities. Those from Babylonia worshiped Succoth-benoth; those from Cuth continued their practice of worshiping Nergal, the god of pestilence. Among those of various Syrian establishments, they worshiped the various pagan gods associated with their different cults. One can only imagine the confusion the author noted in verse 34. While the inhabitants continued to serve and worship their various cultic gods, they also sought to worship Jehovah, simply to be relieved of His judgment upon them. Their attempt to worship the Lord was severely tainted by the instruction of the priest whose only point of reference was the false worship instituted by the initial king of the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam I. The Law of Moses had very clear commands on the subject of true worship and the true faith. It also needs to be understood that such confusion really had its origin in the careless and disobedient actions of the true covenant people, Israel. Whether then, or now, the truth of God cannot be compromised in the slightest degree. The world is full of religion, including Christendom, which seeks to only partially worship the Lord. Jesus best said it when He observed, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

### **Conclusion**

Chapter 1 of the prophecy of Isaiah and the historical narrative of 2 Kings 17 serve as an introduction to the later events in the future demise of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. These passages describe the sad events of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the captivity of the people by the Assyrian armies, all of which occurred as a result of God's judgment upon His own people because of their sins, especially that of their practices of blatantly worshiping the pagan gods of their Gentile neighbors. The various warnings rejected by the Northern Kingdom, which resulted in the Lord's judgment, was to serve as an example and reminder to those of the Southern Kingdom of what would transpire if the people of Judah continued on their current course. Unfortunately, the people of the south did not learn the lessons and would later experience their own spiritual demise.