

ISAIAH 1

THE GREAT SUIT: JEHOVAH VS. JUDAH

The beautiful Song of Solomon has ended, and now we enter upon a part of the Word of God that is very different from everything that we have studied up to this point. The prophecies of the Old Testament form a very important part in the Word of Divine Truth. Even as early as the Book of Genesis, we find that the spirit of prophecy manifested the Lord's will from the earliest times. In that gracious promise which folds in its bosom the entirety of redemption, and which was given immediately after Adam and Eve's Fall, the first dawn of prophecy appeared (Gen. 3:15). For when the Lord Himself delivered the promise that the Seed of the Woman would bruise the serpent's head, every succeeding revelation unfolded, illustrated, and confirmed this leading truth! The Spirit of Christ was in the holy men of ancient times who penned the words of our Bibles, and directed them to write nothing but the truth. Therefore, the great theme of all their prophecies pointed uniformly to the sufferings of the coming Messiah, and the glory that would follow.

Concerning the Prophet Isaiah, the preface at the opening of this first chapter gives us all the information that we need to know about him. His ministry covered a period of about 60 years (circa 760-700 BC), during the reigns of several kings over the Southern Kingdom of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The prophet's name is somewhat remarkable, for *Isaiah* signifies "the salvation of the Lord" – just like the Hebrew name *Joshua* and the Greek name *Jesus*. And Isaiah's name becomes even more noteworthy from the peculiar theme of his writings, for they are steeped with Gospel! This is why many call him the Evangelical Prophet, and his Book "the Gospel according to Isaiah."

At the time when Isaiah began to prophesy, the land of Canaan was divided into two kingdoms. Ten of the twelve tribes formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel, of which the capital was Samaria; and the two remaining tribes formed the Southern Kingdom of Judah, of which Jerusalem was the capital. In this chapter, we are reading prophecies that were spoken to Judah and Jerusalem. And what a terrible picture Isaiah draws here of the state of that kingdom and people! "A sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers!" (verse 4) "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint" (verse 5).

From these opening verses, we may learn what a dark and evil thing sin is! In verse 2, the Lord says, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me!" Let us always bear in mind that every sin which we commit is an act of rebellion – not only against our Almighty Creator, but al-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ An indictment against the Jews for the corruptions among them – verses 1-9
- ❖ Severe censures against their hypocritical forms of worship – verses 10-15
- ❖ Exhortations to repentance and reformation – verses 16-20
- ❖ Judah's state is lamented, and gracious Gospel-promises are given – verses 21-31

so against our loving and tender Father! Has not God nourished and brought up each one of us? Has He not supplied our needs, healed our sicknesses, multiplied our pleasures, instructed our ignorance, and even given His well-beloved Son for our salvation? And shall we rebel against Him?

In verses 7 and 8, we have a description of the judgments which the people of Judah had brought upon themselves by their sins. Their cities were burned, and their land was desolate. National impiety brings national desolation. Still, however, we read of a remnant that was left (verse 9). Even in the worst of times, the Lord mercifully preserves a remnant of His redeemed people. It was for the sake of this small remnant that the Kingdom of Judah had not already been destroyed, like Sodom and Gomorrah were.

Few things are more striking throughout the Books of prophecy, than the manner in which promises of mercy are intermingled with threatenings of judgment. The love and tenderness of God toward sinners beam out continually in the midst of the expressions of His hatred against sin. The Lord is both just and merciful, and we see Him in both characters in this chapter. Verses 16 and 17 teach us the plain duty of every sinner who desires to be saved. He must forsake his sins at once! It is quite true that God's grace alone can change a person's heart; but he who quietly sits down in his sins, waiting for the grace of God to convert him, is as foolish as the person who would sit down in a burning house



and expect that God will interpose to extinguish the flames! The message of the Lord is this: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (chapter 55:7). This does not mean that a man is to expect,

by any efforts of his own, to purchase the forgiveness and favor of the Lord. Forgiveness is God's free gift that has been purchased by Christ, Who suffered the punishment that sin deserved, in order that sinners might be delivered. And how freely that forgiveness is offered, we may plainly see in the 18th verse. Not a single condition limits the gracious promises which are there made, and the Scripture abounds with promises that are just as gracious and as free as this one. "Come now," He graciously invites, "and let us reason together!" "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool!" When this message finds its way into a person's heart, what light and joy bursts in upon him! How quickly does all his selfishness and pride and rebellion melt away, and how readily does he yield himself and all that he has to the service of such a gracious and merciful Redeemer!

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your merciful promise to us in the 18th verse of this chapter. We give You thanks that Your perfect sacrifice cleanses us from our scarlet-red sins, and makes us as clean and white as snow and wool! Amen.