

Stricken, Smitten by God – *Isaiah 1:2-9*

Introduction – The book of Isaiah is a single vision, a prophecy of judgment upon a rebellious people, and that vision is there from beginning to end (1:2, 66:24). And yet, within the walls of judgment, the mercy of the LORD for His people and His unthwarted plan for the salvation of the world swells in overwhelming triumph. But to see this “vision”, the mercy, the Good News of God’s salvation, men and women must first see, understand, and acknowledge the justice of God, the desolation wrought by God in His holy wrath, the Bad News of our attempted and failed insurrection.

The Wickedness of Judah (vv2-4) – The extent and depth of Judah’s rebellion to God is poetically declared.

The Song of Moses, the Insurrection (v2) – “*Hear*” and “*O heavens...and earth*” hearkens back to the Great Commandment of Moses (Deut 6:4-5) and his prophetic song (Deut 32:1). It is a monstrous thing that children should be disobedient to such a kind Father, and yet this is just what Judah has done. Judah will not listen; Judah does not love.

Dumber than a Stubborn Mule (v3) – His children make dumb animals look intelligent and stubborn animals easy to lead. Oxen and donkeys are stupid, but they know enough to go find their master who feeds them. Judah, dumber than an ox or a donkey (an unclean animal, representing the Gentiles), cannot distinguish between right and wrong and will not respond to the Master’s command.

A Fourfold Provocation (v4) – Four nouns of privilege and four adjectives of corruption describe the fullness of Judah’s estrangement. They are a “*nation habitually sinning*,” a people “*heavy/glorious*” with iniquity, the chosen seed has become a “*seed of evildoers*,” the privileged sons have turned into “*sons of corruption*.” They have forsaken the LORD, deliberately distancing themselves from Him (“*turned away backward*,” lit. “*estranged themselves*”) rather than seeking Him where He is to be found.

The Result of Divine Justice (vv5-8) – Isaiah is not laying out his prophecy chronologically; these consequences may be the result of the Assyrian invasion during Hezekiah’s reign leading up to 701BC. Verses 5-6 describe everything outwardly and inwardly as ruined; verses 7-8 give a stark description of a devastated land and a capital under siege.

Stricken Again and Again (v5) – The two lines could read, “*Why, seeing that you will be stricken again, will you rebel again and again?*” God had warned in Deuteronomy 27 that rebellion would lead to one chastisement after another, affecting every aspect of life, and the words “head” and “heart” symbolize that this has affected the outer and inner man. This reminds us that the consequences for our sin are never so bad that we cannot make things worse.

Beaten to a Pulp (v6) – The imagery becomes more grotesque; rebellion breeds sin and sins come in bunches, and the consequences are not simply portrayed as a body beaten as in a battle or torture scene – slash wounds, lacerations, and open, festering sores. Calvin thinks this portrays a person chastised as severely as possible and yet nothing has changed or brought Judah back. The medicine is right there to help, but “*they have not been closed up or bound up, or soothed with ointment*.”

Desolate (vv7-8) – The countryside is desolate and the city (Jerusalem) besieged. There is no place of protection other than an abandoned, temporary shelter in a vineyard. Instead of a sanctuary (*miqdash*), there is only a hut in a cucumber field (*miqshah*). There is no stopping the invasion and there is no moral reason it should be stopped. This is the holy justice of God.

The Remnant from Divine Mercy (v9) – “*Unless the Lord of Armies...*” The immediate application may be the divine intervention which turned Sennacherib away from his siege of Jerusalem (Isaiah 36-37). Because of a very small remnant (of people, or of God’s mercy, or both?), Israel is spared the deserved fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. Very true in Isaiah’s day, Paul teaches us that the fulfillment of this prophetic event in the life of Israel then takes place in the work of the gospel to the nations.

A Remnant Saved (Rom 9:29) – Paul is describing how it is that Israel has been cut out in his generation even though she had been the chosen nation (Romans 9-11). Quoting Hosea, Paul says that God would make the Gentiles His people now (Rom 9:22-26). He then quotes two passages from Isaiah about the saved remnant (Rom 9:27-29) but the word he chooses for “*very small remnant*” is “*seed*.” Who is this Seed? Who is this very small remnant?

Stricken, Smitten: The Remnant of One – The story of rebellion and judgment with a remnant saved and restored is the cyclical story of Israel. The fulfillment is found in Jesus, the only One who lived perfectly before His Father. Upon His arrest, Jesus found Himself forsaken by all His disciples (Mark 14:50). This remnant suffered for the sins of His people, as Isaiah prophesied (Isaiah 53:4-6, Mark 15:15-20). “*From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it*” (Isaiah 1:6). Isaiah is describing the condition of Judah, but the Servant comes precisely to bear that burden Himself.

Christ’s Afflictions – Why did Christ have to suffer such brutal torture? Old Israel, while under great affliction, refused to repent of her unrighteousness. New Israel, while under great affliction, refused to repent of His righteousness. Old Judah is abandoned (eventually into exile). New Judah is abandoned unto death, but is not abandoned, for He rises from the dead in triumph. That little seed became the salvation of the world.