

CHAPTER 1

The first verse of this chapter is intended for a title to the whole book, and it is probable that this was the first sermon that this prophet was appointed to publish and to affix in writing (as Calvin thinks the custom of the prophets was) to the door of the temple, as with us proclamations are fixed to public places, that all might read them (<sup>^{311D}Habakkuk 2:2), and those that would might take out authentic copies of them, the original being, after some time, laid up by the priests among the records of the temple. The sermon which is contained in this chapter has in it,

I. A high charge exhibited, in God's name, against the Jewish church and nation,

1. For their ingratitude (v. 2, 3).
2. For their incorrigibleness (v. 5).
3. For the universal corruption and degeneracy of the people (v. 4, 6, 21, 22).
4. For the perversion of justice by their rulers (v. 23).

II. A sad complaint of the judgments of God, which they had brought upon themselves by their sins, and by which they were brought almost to utter ruin (v. 7-9).

III. A just rejection of those shows and shadows of religion which they kept up among them, notwithstanding this general defection and apostasy (v. 10-15).

IV. An earnest call to repentance and reformation, setting before them life and death, life if they complied with the call and death if they did not (v. 16-20).

V. A threatening of ruin to those that would not be reformed (v. 24, 28-31).

VI. A promise of a happy reformation at last, and a return to their primitive purity and prosperity (v. 25-27). And all this is to be applied by us, not only to the communities we are members of, in their public interests, but to the state of our own souls.

ISAIAH 1:1

ISAIAH THE SON OF AMOZ

Here is,

I. The name of the prophet, *Isaiah*, or *Jesahiahu* (for so it is in the Hebrew), which, in the New Testament is read *Esaias*. His name signifies *the salvation of the Lord* — a proper name for a prophet by whom God gives knowledge of salvation to his people, especially for this prophet, who prophesies so much of Jesus the Saviour and of the great salvation wrought out by him. He is said to be *the son of Amoz*, not Amos the prophet (the two names in the Hebrew differ more than in the English), but, as the Jews think, of Amoz the brother, or son, of Amaziah king of Judah, a tradition as uncertain as that rule which they give, that, where a prophet's father is named, he also was himself a prophet. The prophets' pupils and successors are indeed often called their *sons*, but we have few instances, if any, of their own sons being their successors.

II. The nature of the prophecy. It is a vision, being revealed to him in a vision, when he was *awake, and heard the words of God, and saw the visions of the Almighty* (as Balaam speaks, Numbers 24:4), though perhaps it was not so illustrious a vision at first as that afterwards, Isaiah 6:1. The prophets were called *seers*, or seeing men, and therefore their prophecies are fitly called *visions*. It was what he saw with the eyes of his mind, and foresaw as clearly by divine revelation, was as well assured of it, as fully apprised of it, and as much affected with it, as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes. Note

1. God's prophets saw what they spoke of, knew what they said, and require our belief of nothing but what they themselves believed and were sure of, John 6:69; 1 John 1:1.

2. They could not but speak what they saw, because they saw how much all about them were concerned in it, Acts 4:20; 2 Corinthians 4:13.

III. The subject of the prophecy. It was what *he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem*, the country of the two tribes, and that city which was their metropolis; and there is little in it relating to Ephraim, or the ten tribes, of whom there is so much said in the prophecy of Hosea. Some chapters

there are in this book which relate to Babylon, Egypt, Tyre, and some other neighbouring nations; but it takes its title from that which is the main substance of it, and is therefore said to be *concerning Judah and Jerusalem*, the other nations spoken of being such as the people of the Jews had concern with. Isaiah brings to them in a special manner,

1. Instruction; for it is the privilege of Judah and Jerusalem that to them pertain the oracles of God.
2. Reproof and threatening; for if in Judah, where God is known, if in Salem, where his name is great, iniquity be found, they, sooner than any other, shall be reckoned with for it.
3. Comfort and encouragement in evil times; for the children of Zion shall be joyful in their king.

IV. The date of the prophecy. Isaiah prophesied *in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah*. By this it appears,

1. That he prophesied long, especially if (as the Jews say) he was at last put to death by Manasseh, to a cruel death, being sawn asunder, to which some suppose the apostle refers, ^{<81137>}Hebrews 11:37. From the year that king Uzziah died (^{<2061>}Isaiah 6:1) to Hezekiah's sickness and recovery was forty-seven years; how much before, and after, he prophesied, is not certain; some reckon sixty, others eighty years in all. It was an honour to him, and a happiness to his country, that he was continued so long in his usefulness; and we must suppose both that he began young and that he held out to old age; for the prophets were not tied, as the priests were, to a certain age, for the beginning or ending of their administration.
2. That he passed through variety of times. Jotham was a good king, and Hezekiah a better, and no doubt gave encouragement to and took advice from this prophet, were patrons to him, and he a privy-counsellor to them; but between them, and when Isaiah was in the prime of his time, the reign of Ahaz was very profane and wicked; then, no doubt, he was frowned upon at court, and, it is likely, forced to abscond. Good men and good ministers must expect bad times in this world, and prepare for them. Then religion was run down to such a degree that the *doors of the house of the Lord were shut up* and idolatrous *altars were erected in every corner of Jerusalem*; and Isaiah, with all his divine eloquence and messages

immediately from God himself, could not help it. The best men, the best ministers, cannot do the good they would do in the world.

ISAIAH 1:2-9

THE DEGENERACY OF ISRAEL

We will hope to meet with a brighter and more pleasant scene before we come to the end of this book; but truly here, in the beginning of it, every thing looks very bad, very black, with Judah and Jerusalem. What is the wilderness of the world, if the church, the vineyard, has such a dismal aspect as this?

I. The prophet, though he speaks in God's name, yet, despairing to gain audience with the children of his people, addresses himself to the heavens and the earth, and bespeaks their attention (v. 2): *Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth!* Sooner will the inanimate creatures hear, who observe the law and answer the end of their creation, than this stupid senseless people. Let the lights of the heaven shame their darkness, and the fruitfulness of the earth their barrenness, and the strictness of each to its time their irregularity. Moses begins thus in ^{<591>}Deuteronomy 32:1, to which the prophet here refers, intimating that now those times had come which Moses there foretold, ^{<592>}Deuteronomy 31:29. Or this is an appeal to heaven and earth, to angels and then to the inhabitants of the upper and lower world. Let them *judge between God and his vineyard*; can either produce such an instance of ingratitude? Note, God will be justified when he speaks, and both heaven and earth shall declare his righteousness, ^{<301>}Micah 6:1, 2; ^{<306>}Psalms 50:6.

II. He charges them with base ingratitude, a crime of the highest nature. Call a man ungrateful, and you can call him no worse. Let heaven and earth hear and wonder at,

1. God's gracious dealings with such a peevish provoking people as they were: "I have nourished and brought them up as children; they have been well fed and well taught" (^{<596>}Deuteronomy 32:6); "I have magnified and exalted them" (so some), "not only made them grow, but made them great — not only maintained them, but preferred them — not only trained them up, but raised them high." Note, We owe the continuance of our lives and

comforts, and all our advancements, to God's fatherly care of us and kindness to us.

2. Their ill-natured conduct towards him, who was so tender of them: *"They have rebelled against me,"* or (as some read it) "they have revolted from me; they have been deserters, nay traitors, against my crown and dignity." Note, All the instances of God's favour to us, as the God both of our nature and of our nurture, aggravate our treacherous departures from him and all our presumptuous oppositions to him — children, and yet rebels!

III. He attributes this to their ignorance and inconsideration (v. 3): *The ox knows, but Israel does not.* Observe,

1. The sagacity of the ox and the ass, which are not only brute creatures, but of the dullest sort; yet the ox has such a sense of duty as to know his owner and to serve him, to submit to his yoke and to draw in it; the ass has such a sense of interest as to know his master's crib, or manger, where he is fed, and to abide by it; he will go to that of himself if he be turned loose. A fine pass man has come to when he is shamed even in knowledge and understanding by these silly animals, and is not only sent to school to them (^{<2066>}Proverbs 6:6, 7), but set in a form below them (^{<2087>}Jeremiah 8:7), *taught more than the beasts of the earth* (^{<2051>}Job 35:11) and yet knowing less.

2. The sottishness and stupidity of Israel. God is their owner and proprietor. He made us, and his we are more than our cattle are ours; he has provided well for us; providence is our Master's crib; yet many that are called the people of God do not know and will not consider this, but ask, *"What is the Almighty that we should serve him? He is not our owner; and what profit shall we have if we pray unto him? He has no crib for us to feed at."* He had complained (v. 2) of the obstinacy of their wills; *They have rebelled against me.* Here he runs it up to its cause: *"Therefore they have rebelled because they do not know, they do not consider."* The understanding is darkened, and therefore the whole soul is alienated from the life of God, ^{<2085>}Ephesians 4:18. *"Israel does not know,* though their land is a land of light and knowledge; *in Judah is God known,* yet, because they do not live up to what they know, it is in effect as if they did not know. They know; but their knowledge does them no good, because they

do not consider what they know; they do not apply it to their case, nor their minds to it.” Note,

(1.) Even among those that profess themselves God's people, that have the advantages and lie under the engagements of his people, there are many that are very careless in the affairs of their souls.

(2.) Inconsideration of what we do know is as great an enemy to us in religion as ignorance of what we should know.

(3.) *Therefore* men revolt from God, and rebel against him, because they do not know and consider their obligations to God in duty, gratitude, and interest.

IV. He laments the universal pravity and corruption of their church and kingdom. The disease of sin was epidemic, and all orders and degrees of men were infected with it; *Ah sinful nation!* v. 4. The prophet bemoans those that would not bemoan themselves: Alas for them! Woe to them! He speaks with holy indignation at their degeneracy, and a dread of the consequences of it. See here,

1. How he aggravates their sin, and shows the malignity that there was in it, v. 4.

(1.) The wickedness was universal. They were a sinful nation; the generality of the people were vicious and profane. They were so in their national capacity. In the management of their public treaties abroad, and in the administration of public justice at home, they were corrupt. Note, It is ill with a people when sin becomes national.

(2.) It was very great and heinous in its nature. They were *laden with iniquity*; the guilt of it, and the curse incurred by that guilt, lay very heavily upon them. It was a heavy charge that was exhibited against them, and one which they could never clear themselves from; their wickedness was upon them as *a talent of lead*, ~~scri~~ Zechariah 5:7, 8. Their sin, as it did easily beset them and they were prone to it, was a weight upon them, ~~scri~~ Hebrews 12:1.

(3.) They came of a bad stock, were a *seed of evil-doers*. Treachery ran in their blood; they had it by kind, which made the matter so much the worse, more provoking and less curable. They rose up in their fathers' stead, and

trod in their fathers' steps, to *fill up the measure of their iniquity*, ~~4634~~ Numbers 32:14. They were a race and family of rebels.

(4.) Those that were themselves debauched did what they could to debauch others. They were not only corrupt children, born tainted, but *children that were corrupters*, that propagated vice, and infected others with it — not only sinners, but tempters — not only actuated by Satan, but agents for him. If those that are called *children, God's children*, that are looked upon as belonging to his family, be wicked and vile, their example is of the most malignant influence.

(5.) Their sin was a treacherous departure from God. They were deserters from their allegiance: “*They have forsaken the Lord*, to whom they had joined themselves; *they have gone away backward*, are alienated or separated from God, have turned their back upon him, deserted their colours, and quitted their service.” When they were urged forward, they ran backward, *as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, as a backsliding heifer*, ~~4616~~ Hosea 4:16.

(6.) It was an impudent and daring defiance of him: *They have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger* wilfully and designedly; they knew what would anger him, and that they did. Note, The backslidings of those that have professed religion and relation to God are in a special manner provoking to him.

2. How he illustrates it by a comparison taken from a sick and diseased body, all overspread with leprosy, or, like Job's, with sore boils, v. 5, 6.

(1.) The distemper has seized the vitals, and so threatens to be mortal. Diseases in the head and heart are most dangerous; now the head, the whole head, is sick — the heart, the whole heart, is faint. They had become corrupt in their judgment: the leprosy was in their head. They were utterly unclean; their affection to God and religion was cold and gone; the *things which remained were ready to die away*, ~~4632~~ Revelation 3:2.

(2.) It has overspread the whole body, and so becomes exceedingly noisome; *From the sole of the foot even to the head*, from the meanest peasant to the greatest peer, there is *no soundness*, no good principles, no religion (for that is the health of the soul), nothing but *wounds and bruises*, guilt and corruption, the sad effects of Adam's fall, noisome to the

holy God, painful to the sensible soul; they were so to David when he complained (^{48B}Psalm 38:5), *My wounds stink, and are corrupt, because of my foolishness.* See ^{48B}Psalm 32:3, 4. No attempts were made for reformation, or, if they were, they proved ineffectual: The wounds *have not been closed, not bound up, nor mollified with ointment.* While sin remains unrepented of the wounds are unsearched, unwashed, the proud flesh in them not cut out, and while, consequently, it remains unpardoned, the wounds are not mollified or closed up, nor any thing done towards the healing of them and the preventing of their fatal consequences.

V. He sadly bewails the judgments of God which they had brought upon themselves by their sins, and their incorrigibleness under those judgments.

1. Their kingdom was almost ruined, v. 7. So miserable were they that both their towns and their lands were wasted, and yet so stupid that they needed to be told this, to have it shown to them. “Look and see how it is; *your country is desolate;* the ground is not cultivated, for want of inhabitants, the villages being deserted, ^{48E}Judges 5:7. And thus the fields and vineyards become like deserts, *all grown over with thorns,* ^{48B}Proverbs 24:31. *Your cities are burned with fire,* by the enemies that invade you” (fire and sword commonly go together); “as for the fruits of your land, which should be food for your families, *strangers devour them;* and, to your greater vexation, it is *before your eyes,* and you cannot prevent it; you starve while your enemies surfeit on that which should be your maintenance. The overthrow of your country is as the overthrow of strangers; it is used by the invaders, as one might expect it should be used by strangers.” Jerusalem itself, which was as the daughter of Zion (the temple built on Zion was a mother, a nursing mother, to Jerusalem), or Zion itself, the holy mountain, which had been dear to God as a daughter, was now lost, deserted, and exposed *as a cottage in a vineyard,* which, when the vintage is over, nobody dwells in or takes any care of, and looks as mean and despicable as *a lodge or hut, in a garden of cucumbers;* and every person is afraid of coming near it, and solicitous to remove his effects out of it, as if it were *a besieged city,* v. 8. And some think, it is a calamitous state of the kingdom that is represented by a diseased body, v. 6. Probably this sermon was preached in the reign of Ahaz, when Judah was invaded by the kings of Syria and Israel, the Edomites and the Philistines, who slew many, and carried many away into captivity, ^{48B-2}Chronicles 28:5, 17, 18. Note, National impiety and immorality bring national desolation. Canaan, the glory of all lands, Mount Zion, the joy of

the whole earth, both became a reproach and a ruin; and sin made them so, that great mischief-maker.

2. Yet they were not all reformed, and therefore God threatens to take another course with them (v. 5): “*Why should you be stricken any more, with any expectation of doing you good by it, when you increase revolts as your rebukes are increased? You will revolt more and more, as you have done,*” as Ahaz particularly did, who, *in his distress, trespassed yet more against the Lord,* ^{<4822>}2 Chronicles 28:22. Thus the physician, when he sees the patient's case desperate, troubles him no more with physic; and the father resolves to correct his child no more when, finding him hardened, he determines to disinherit him. Note,

(1.) There are those who are made worse by the methods God takes to make them better; the more they are stricken the more they revolt; their corruptions, instead of being mortified, are irritated and exasperated by their afflictions, and their hearts more hardened.

(2.) God, sometimes, in a way of righteous judgment, ceases to correct those who have been long incorrigible, and whom therefore he designs to destroy. The reprobate silver shall be cast, not into the furnace, but to the dunghill, ^{<2469>}Jeremiah 6:29, 30. See ^{<3213>}Ezekiel 24:13; ^{<3044>}Hosea 4:14. He that is *filthy, let him be filthy still.*

VI. He comforts himself with the consideration of a remnant that should be the monuments of divine grace and mercy, notwithstanding this general corruption and desolation, v. 9. See here,

1. How near they were to an utter extirpation. They were almost like Sodom and Gomorrah in respect both of sin and ruin, had grown almost so bad that there could not have been found *ten righteous men among them*, and almost as miserable as if none had been left alive, but their country turned into a sulphureous lake. Divine Justice said, *Make them as Admah; set them as Zeboim;* but Mercy said, *How shall I do it?* ^{<3118>}Hosea 11:8, 9.

2. What it was that saved them from it: *The Lord of hosts left unto them a very small remnant*, that were kept pure from the common apostasy and kept safe and alive from the common calamity. This is quoted by the apostle (^{<4127>}Romans 9:27), and applied to those few of the Jewish nation who in his time embraced Christianity, when the body of the people

rejected it, and in whom the promises made to the fathers were accomplished. Note,

(1.) In the worst of times there is a remnant preserved from iniquity and reserved for mercy, as Noah and his family in the deluge, Lot and his in the destruction of Sodom. Divine grace triumphs in distinguishing by an act of sovereignty.

(2.) This remnant is often a very small one in comparison with the vast number of revolting ruined sinners. Multitude is no mark of the true church. Christ's is a little flock.

(3.) It is God's work to sanctify and save some, when others are left to perish in their impurity. It is the work of his power as the Lord of hosts. Except he had left us that remnant, there would have been none left; the corrupters (v. 4) did what they could to debauch all, and the devourers (v. 7) to destroy all, and they would have prevailed if God himself had not interposed to secure to himself a remnant, who are bound to give him all the glory.

(4.) It is good for a people that have been saved from utter ruin to look back and see how near they were to it, just upon the brink of it, to see how much they owed to a few good men that stood in the gap, and that that was owing to a good God, who left them these good men. *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.*

~~2010~~ ISAIAH 1:10-15

THE VANITY OF MERE RITUAL OBEDIENCE

Here,

I. God calls to them (but calls in vain) to hear his word, v. 10.

1. The title he gives them is very strange; *You rulers of Sodom, and people of Gomorrah.* This intimates what a righteous thing it would have been with God to make them like Sodom and Gomorrah in respect of ruin (v. 9), because that had made themselves like Sodom and Gomorrah in respect of sin. The men of Sodom were *wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly* (~~1833~~ Genesis 13:13), and so were the men of Judah. When

the rulers were bad, no wonder the people were so. Vice overpowered virtue, for it had the rulers, the men of figure, on its side; and it out-pulled it, for it had the people, the men of number, on its side. The streams being thus strong, no less a power than that of the Lord of hosts could secure a remnant, v. 9. The rulers are boldly attacked here by the prophet as rulers of Sodom; for he knew not how to give flattering titles. The tradition of the Jews is that for this he was impeached long after, and put to death, as having cursed the gods and *spoken evil of the ruler of his people*.

2. His demand upon them is very reasonable: “*Hear the word of the Lord, and give ear to the law of our God; attend to that which God has to say to you, and let his word be a law to you.*” The following declaration of dislike to their sacrifices would be a kind of new law to them, though really it was but an explication of the old law; but special regard is to be had to it, as is required to the like, ~~1807~~ Psalm 50:7, 8. “Hear this, and tremble; hear it, and take warning.”

II. He justly refuses to hear their prayers and accept their services, their sacrifices and burnt-offerings, the fat and blood of them (v. 11), their attendance in his courts (v. 12), their oblations, their incense, and their solemn assemblies (v. 13), their new moons and their appointed feasts (v. 14), their devoutest addresses (v. 15); they are all rejected, because their hands were full of blood. Now observe,

1. There are many who are strangers, nay, enemies, to the power of religion, and yet seem very zealous for the show and shadow and form of it. This sinful nation, this seed of evil-doers, these rulers of Sodom and people of Gomorrah, brought, not to the altars of false gods (they are not here charged with that), but to the altar of the God of Israel, sacrifices, a multitude of them, as many as the law required and rather more — not only peace-offerings, which they themselves had their share of, but burnt-offerings, which were wholly consumed to the honour of God; nor did they bring the torn, and lame, and sick, but fed beasts, and the fat of them, the best of the kind. They did not send others to offer their sacrifices for them, but came themselves to appear before God. They observed the instituted *places* (not in high places or groves, but in God's own courts), and the instituted *time*, the new moons, and sabbaths, and appointed feasts, none of which they omitted. Nay, it should seem, they called extraordinary assemblies, and held solemn meetings for religious worship, besides those that God had appointed. Yet this was not all: they applied to God, not only

with their ceremonial observances, but with the exercises of devotion. They prayed, prayed often, made many prayers, thinking they should be heard for their much speaking; nay, they were fervent and importunate in prayer, they spread forth their hands as men in earnest. Now we should have thought these, and, no doubt, they thought themselves, a pious religious people; and yet they were far from being so, for

(1.) Their hearts were empty of true devotion. They came to *appear* before God (v. 12), *to be seen* before him (so the margin reads it); they rested in the outside of the duties; they looked no further than to be seen of men, and went no further than that which men see.

(2.) Their hands were full of blood. They were guilty of murder, rapine, and oppression, under colour of law and justice. The people shed blood, and the rulers did not punish them for it; the rulers shed blood, and the people were aiding and abetting, as the elders of Jezreel were to Jezebel in shedding Naboth's blood. Malice is heart-murder in the account of God; he that hates his brother in his heart has, in effect, his hands full of blood.

2. When sinners are under the judgments of God they will more easily be brought to fly to their devotions than to forsake their sins and reform their lives. Their country was now desolate, and their cities were burnt (v. 7), which awakened them to bring their sacrifices and offerings to God more constantly than they had done, as if they would bribe God Almighty to remove the punishment and give them leave to go on in the sin. *When he slew them, then they sought him,* ^{Psalm 78:34} *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee,* ^{Isaiah 26:16} Many that will readily part with their sacrifices will not be persuaded to part with their sins.

3. The most pompous and costly devotions of wicked people, without a thorough reformation of the heart and life, are so far from being acceptable to God that really they are an abomination to him. It is here shown in a great variety of expressions that *to obey is better than sacrifice*; nay, that sacrifice, without obedience, is a jest, an affront and provocation to God. The comparative neglect which God here expresses of ceremonial observance was a tacit intimation of what they would come to at last, when they would all be done away by the death of Christ. What was now made little of would in due time be made nothing of. "*Sacrifice and offering, and prayer made in the virtue of them, thou wouldest not; then said I, Lo, I come.*" Their sacrifices are here represented,

(1.) As fruitless and insignificant; *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices?* v. 11. They are *vain oblations*, v. 13. *In vain do they worship me*, ⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Matthew 15:9. Their attention to God's institutions was all lost labour, and served not to answer any good intention; for,

[1.] It was not looked upon as any act of duty or obedience to God: *Who has required these things at your hands?* v. 12. Not that God disowns his institutions, or refuses to stand by his own warrants; but in what they did they had not an eye to him that required it, nor indeed did he require it of those whose hands were full of blood and who continued impenitent.

[2.] It did not recommend them to God's favour. He delighted not in the blood of their sacrifices, for he did not look upon himself as honoured by it.

[3.] It would not obtain any relief for them. They pray, but God will not hear, because they regard iniquity (⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ Psalm 66:18); he will not deliver them, for, though they make many prayers, none of them come from an upright heart. All their religious service turned to no account to them. Nay,

(2.) As odious and offensive. God did not only not accept them, but he did detest and abhor them. "They are *your sacrifices*, they are none of mine; I am full of them, even surfeited with them." He needed them not (⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ Psalm 50:10), did not desire them, had had enough of them, and more than enough. Their coming into his courts he calls *treading them*, or trampling upon them; their very attendance on his ordinances was construed into a contempt of them. Their incense, though ever so fragrant, was an abomination to him, for it was burnt in hypocrisy and with an ill design. Their solemn assemblies he could not *away with*, could not see them with any patience, nor bear the affront they gave him. *The solemn meeting is iniquity*; though the thing itself was not, yet, as they managed it, it became so. It is a *vexation* (so some read it), a provocation, to God, to have ordinances thus prostituted, not only by wicked people, but to wicked purposes: "*My soul hates them; they are a trouble to me*, a burden, an incumbrance; I am perfectly sick of them, and *weary of bearing them*." God is never weary of hearing the prayers of the upright, but soon weary of the costly sacrifices of the wicked. He hides his eyes from their prayers, as that which he has an aversion to and is angry at. All this is to show,

[1.] That sin is very hateful to God, so hateful that it makes even men's prayers and their religious services hateful to him.

[2.] That dissembled piety is double iniquity. Hypocrisy in religion is of all things most abominable to the God of heaven. Jerome applies the passage to the Jews in Christ's time, who pretended a great zeal for the law and the temple, but made themselves and all their services abominable to God by filling their hands with the blood of Christ and his apostles, and so filling up the measure of their iniquities.

ISAIAH 1:16-20

A CALL TO REPENTANCE

Though God had rejected their services as insufficient to atone for their sins while they persisted in them, yet he does not reject them as in a hopeless condition, but here calls upon them to forsake their sins, which hindered the acceptance of their services, and then all would be well. Let them not say that God picked quarrels with them; no, he proposes a method of reconciliation. Observe here,

I. A call to repentance and reformation: “If you would have your sacrifices accepted, and your prayers answered, you must begin your work at the right end: *Be converted to my law*” (so the Chaldee begins this exhortation), “make conscience of second-table duties, else expect not to be accepted in the acts of your devotion.” As justice and charity will never atone for atheism and profaneness, so prayers and sacrifices will never atone for fraud and oppression; for righteousness towards men is as much a branch of pure religion as religion towards God is a branch of universal righteousness.

1. They must *cease to do evil*, must do no more wrong, shed no more innocent blood. This is the meaning of washing themselves and *making themselves clean*, v. 16. It is not only sorrowing for the sin they had committed, but breaking off the practice of it for the future, and mortifying all those vicious affections and dispositions which inclined them to it. Sin is defiling to the soul. Our business is to wash ourselves from it by repenting of it and turning from it to God. We must put away not only that evil of our doings which is before the eye of the world, by refraining from the gross acts of sin, but that which is before God's eyes, the roots and habits of sin, that are in our hearts; these must be crushed and mortified.

2. They must *learn to do well*. This was necessary to the completing of their repentance. Note, It is not enough that we cease to do evil, but we must learn to do well.

(1.) We must be doing, not cease to do evil and then stand idle.

(2.) We must be doing good, the good which the Lord our God requires and which will turn to a good account.

(3.) We must do it well, in a right manner and for a right end; and,

(4.) We must learn to do well; we must take pains to get the knowledge of our duty, be inquisitive concerning it, in care about it, and accustom ourselves to it, that we may readily turn our hands to our work and become masters of this holy art of doing well. He urges them particularly to those instances of well-doing wherein they had been defective, to second-table duties: “*Seek judgment*; enquire what is right, that you may do it; be solicitous to be found in the way of your duty, and do not walk carelessly. Seek opportunities of doing good: *Relieve the oppressed*, those whom you yourselves have oppressed; ease them of their burdens, ²³⁰⁶Isaiah 58:6. You, that have power in your hands, use it for the relief of those whom others do oppress, for that is your business. Avenge those that suffer wrong, in a special manner concerning yourselves for the fatherless and the widow, whom, because they are weak and helpless, proud men trample upon and abuse; do you appear for them at the bar, on the bench, as there is occasion. Speak for those that know not how to speak for themselves and that have not wherewithal to gratify you for your kindness.” Note, We are truly honouring God when we are doing good in the world; and acts of justice and charity are more pleasing to him than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices.

II. A demonstration, at the bar of right reason, of the equity of God's proceedings with them: “*Come now, and let us reason together* (v. 18); while your hands are full of blood I will have nothing to do with you, though you bring me a multitude of sacrifices; but if you wash, and make yourselves clean, you are welcome to draw nigh to me; come now, and let us talk the matter over.” Note, Those, and those only, that break off their league with sin, shall be welcome into covenant and communion with God; he says, *Come now*, who before forbade them his courts. See ²³⁰⁸James 4:8. Or rather thus: There were those among them who looked upon themselves as affronted by the slights God put upon the multitude of

their sacrifices, as ^{258B}Isaiah 58:3, *Wherefore have we fasted (say they) and thou seest not?* They represented God as a hard Master, whom it was impossible to please. “Come,” says God, “let us debate the matter fairly, and I doubt not but to make it out that *my ways are equal, but yours are unequal,*” ^{268B}Ezekiel 18:25. Note, Religion has reason on its side; there is all the reason in the world why we should do as God would have us do. The God of heaven condescends to reason the case with those that contradict him and find fault with his proceedings; for *he will be justified when he speaks,* ^{250A}Psalm 51:4. The case needs only to be stated (as it is here very fairly) and it will determine itself. God shows here upon what terms they stood (as he does, ^{268B}Ezekiel 18:21-24; 33:18, 19) and then leaves it to them to judge whether these terms are not fair and reasonable.

1. They could not in reason expect any more then, if they repented and reformed. they should be restored to God's favour, notwithstanding their former provocations. “This you may expect,” says God, and it is very kind; who could have the face to desire it upon any other terms?

(1.) It is very little that is required, “only that you *be willing and obedient, that you consent to obey*” (so some read it), “that you subject your wills to the will of God, acquiesce in that, and give up yourselves in all things to be ruled by him who is infinitely wise and good” *Here is no penance imposed for their former stubbornness, nor the yoke made heavier or bound harder on their necks; only, “Whereas hitherto you have been perverse and refractory, and would not comply with that which was for your own good, now be tractable, be governable”* He does not say, “If you be *perfectly* obedient,” but, “If you be *willingly* so;” for, if there be a willing mind, it is accepted.

(2.) That is very great which is promised hereupon.

[1.] That all their sins should be pardoned to them, and should not be mentioned against them. “Though they be as red as scarlet and crimson, though you lie under the guilt of blood, yet, upon your repentance, even that shall be forgiven you, and you shall appear in the sight of God as white as snow.” Note, The greatest sinners, if they truly repent, shall have their sins forgiven them, and so have their consciences pacified and purified. Though our sins have been as scarlet and crimson, as deep dye, a double dye, first in the wool of original corruption and afterwards in the many threads of actual transgression — though we have been often dipped, by our many backslidings, into sin, and though we have lain long

soaking in it, as the cloth does in the scarlet dye, yet pardoning mercy will thoroughly discharge the stain, and, being by it purged as *with hyssop, we shall be clean*, ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 51:7. If we make ourselves clean by repentance and reformation (v. 16), God will make us white by a full remission.

[2.] That they should have all the happiness and comfort they could desire. “Be but willing and obedient, and *you shall eat the good of the land*, the land of promise; you shall have all the blessings of the new covenant, of the heavenly Canaan, all the good of the land.” Those that go on in sin, though they may dwell in a good land, cannot with any comfort eat the good of it; guilt embitters all; but, if sin be pardoned, creature-comforts become comforts indeed.

2. They could not in reason expect any other than that, if they continued obstinate in their disobedience, they should be abandoned to ruin, and the sentence of the law should be executed upon them; what can be more just? (v. 20); “*If you refuse and rebel*, if you continue to rebel against the divine government and refuse the offers of the divine grace, *you shall be devoured with the sword*, with the sword of your enemies, which shall be commissioned to destroy you — with the sword of God's justice, his wrath, and vengeance, which shall be drawn against you; for this is that which *the mouth of the Lord has spoken*, and which he will make good, for the maintaining of his own honour.” Note, Those that will not be governed by God's sceptre will certainly and justly be devoured by his sword.

“And now life and death, good and evil, are thus set before you. *Come, and let us reason together*. What have you to object against the equity of this, or against complying with God's terms?”

~~202~~ ISAIAH 1:21-31

THE DEGENERACY OF JERUSALEM

Here,

I. The woeful degeneracy of Judah and Jerusalem is sadly lamented. See,

1. What the royal city had been, a faithful city, faithful to God and the interests of his kingdom among men, faithful to the nation and its public

interests. *It was full of judgment*; justice was duly administered upon the thrones of judgment which were set there, the *thrones of the house of David*, ^{<1005>}Psalm 122:5. Men were generally honest in their dealings, and abhorred to do an unjust thing. *Righteousness lodged in it*, was constantly resident in their palaces and in all their dwellings, not called in now and then to serve a turn, but at home there. Note, Neither holy cities nor royal ones, neither places where religion is professed nor places where government is administered, are faithful to their trust if religion do not dwell in them.

2. What it had now become. That beauteous virtuous spouse was now debauched, and become an adulteress; righteousness no longer dwelt in Jerusalem (*terras Astraea reliquit — Astrea left the earth*); even murderers were unpunished and lived undisturbed there; nay, the princes themselves were so cruel and oppressive that they had become no better than murderers; an innocent man might better guard himself against a troop of banditti or assassins than against a bench of such judges. Note, It is a great aggravation of the wickedness of any family or people that their ancestors were famed for virtue and probity; and commonly those that thus degenerate prove the most wicked of all men. *Corruptio optimi est pessima — That which was originally the best becomes when corrupted the worst*, ^{<2125>}Luke 11:26; ^{<2135>}Ecclesiastes 3:16; See ^{<2225>}Jeremiah 22:15-17. The degeneracy of Jerusalem is illustrated,

(1.) By similitudes (v. 22): *Thy silver has become dross*. This degeneracy of the magistrates, whose character is the reverse of that of their predecessors, is a great reproach and injury to the kingdom as the debasing of their coin would be and the turning of their silver into dross. Righteous princes and righteous cities are as silver for the treasury, but unrighteous ones are as dross for the dunghill. *How has the gold become dim!* ^{<2301>}Lamentations 4:1. *Thy wine is mixed with water*, and so has become flat and sour. Some understand both these literally: the wine they sold was adulterated, it was half water; the money they paid was counterfeit, and so they cheated all they dealt with. But it is rather to be taken figuratively: justice was perverted by their princes, and religion and the word of God were sophisticated by their priests, and made to serve what turn they pleased. Dross may shine like silver, and the wine that is mixed with water may retain the colour of wine, but neither is worth any thing. Thus they retained a show and pretence of virtue and justice, but had no true sense of either.

(2.) By some instances (v. 23): “Thy princes, that should keep others in their allegiance to God and subjection to his law, are themselves rebellious, and set God and his law at defiance.” Those that should restrain thieves (proud and rich oppressors, those worst of robbers, and those that designedly cheat their creditors, who are no better), are themselves companions of thieves, connive at them, do as they do, and with greater security and success, because they are princes, and have power in their hands; they share with the thieves they protect in their unlawful gain (~~21B~~ Psalm 50:18) and *cast in their lot among them*, ~~21B~~ Proverbs 1:13, 14.

[1.] The profit of their places is all their aim, to make the best hand they can of them, right or wrong. They love gifts, and follow after rewards; they set their hearts upon their salary, the fees and perquisites of their offices, and are greedy of them, and never think they can get enough; nay, they will do any thing, though ever so contrary to law and justice, for a gift in secret. Presents and gratuities will blind their eyes at any time, and make them pervert judgment. These they love and are eager in the pursuit of, ~~20B~~ Hosea 9:18.

[2.] The duty of their places is none of their care. They ought to protect those that are injured, and take cognizance of the appeals made to them; why else were they preferred? But *they judge not the fatherless*, take no care to guard the orphans, *nor does the cause of the widow come unto them*, because the poor widow has no bribe to give, with which to make way for her and to bring her cause on. Those will have a great deal to answer for who, when they should be the patrons of the oppressed, are their greatest oppressors.

II. A resolution is taken up to redress these grievances (v. 24): *Therefore saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel* — who has power to make good what he says, who has hosts at command for the executing of his purposes, and whose power is engaged for his Israel — *Ah! I will ease me of my adversaries*. Observe,

1. Wicked people, especially wicked rulers that are cruel and oppressive, are God's enemies, his adversaries, and shall so be accounted and so dealt with. If the holy seed corrupt themselves, they are the foes of his own house.

2. They are a burden to the God of heaven, which is implied in his easing himself of them. The *Mighty One of Israel*, that can bear any thing, nay,

that upholds all things, complains of his being *wearied with men's iniquities*, ^{<23624>}Isaiah 43:24. ^{<3023>}Amos 2:13.

3. God will find out a time and a way to ease himself of this burden, by avenging himself on those that thus bear hard upon his patience. He here speaks as one triumphing in the foresight of it: *Ah. I will ease me.* He will ease the earth of the burden under which it *groans* (^{<4182>}Romans 8:21, 22), will ease his own name of the reproaches with which it is loaded. He will be eased of his adversaries, by *taking vengeance on his enemies*; he will *spue them out of his mouth*, and so be eased of them, ^{<6136>}Revelation 3:16. He speaks with pleasure of the *day of vengeance* being *in his heart*, ^{<2504>}Isaiah 63:4. If God's professing people conform not to his image, as the Holy One of Israel (v. 4), they shall feel the weight of his hand as the Mighty One of Israel: his power, which was wont to be engaged for them, shall be armed against them. In two ways God will ease himself of this grievance: —

(1.) By reforming his church, and restoring good judges in the room of those corrupt ones. Though the church has a great deal of dross in it, yet it shall not be thrown away, but refined (v. 25): “*I will purely purge away thy dross. I will amend what is amiss. Vice and profaneness shall be suppressed and put out of countenance, oppressors displaced, and deprived of their power to do mischief.*” When things are ever so bad God can set them to rights, and bring about a complete reformation; when he begins he will make an end, will take away all the tin. Observe,

[1.] The reformation of a people is God's own work, and, if ever it be done, it is he that brings it about: “*I will turn my hand upon thee; I will do that for the reviving of religion which I did at first for the planting of it.*” He can do it easily, with the turn of his hand; but he does it effectually, for what opposition can stand before the arm of the Lord revealed?

[2.] He does it by blessing them with good magistrates and good ministers of state (v. 26): “*I will restore thy judges as at the first, to put the laws in execution against evil-doers, and thy counsellors, to transact public affairs, as at the beginning,*” either the same persons that had been turned out or others of the same character.

[3.] He does it by restoring judgment and righteousness among them (v. 27), by planting in men's minds principles of justice and governing their lives by those principles. Men may do much by external restraints; but

God does it effectually by the influences of *his Spirit*, as a *Spirit of judgment*, ^{<2904>}Isaiah 4:4; 28:6. See ^{<850>}Psalm 85:10, 11.

[4.] The reformation of a people will be the redemption of them and their converts, for sin is the worst captivity, the worst slavery, and the great and eternal redemption is that by which *Israel is redeemed from all his iniquities* (^{<1018>}Psalm 130:8), and the *blessed Redeemer* is he that *turns away ungodliness from Jacob* (^{<6126>}Romans 11:26), and *saves his people from their sins*, ^{<402>}Matthew 1:21. All the redeemed of the Lord shall be converts, and their conversion is their redemption: “*Her converts, or those that return of her* (so the margin), shall be redeemed with righteousness.” God works deliverance for us by preparing us for it with judgment and righteousness.

[5.] The reviving of a people's virtues is the restoring of their honour: *Afterwards thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city;* that is, *First*, “Thou shalt *be so*;” the reforming of the magistracy is a good step towards the reforming of the city and the country too. *Secondly*, “Thou shalt have the *praise* of being so;” and a greater praise there cannot be to any city than to *be called the city of righteousness*, and to retrieve the ancient honour which was lost when *the faithful city became a harlot*, v. 21.

(2.) By cutting off those that hate to be reformed, that they may not remain either as snares or as scandals to the faithful city.

[1.] it is an utter ruin that is here threatened. They shall be destroyed and consumed, and not chastened and corrected only. The extirpation of them will be necessary to the redemption of Zion.

[2.] It is a universal ruin, which will involve the transgressors and the sinners together, that is, the openly profane that have quite cast of all religion, and the hypocrites that live wicked lives under the cloak of a religious profession — they shall both be destroyed together, for they are both alike an abomination to God, both those that contradict religion and those that contradict themselves in their pretensions to it. *And those that forsake the Lord*, to whom they had formerly joined themselves, *shall be consumed*, as the water in the conduit-pipe is soon consumed when it is cut off from the fountain.

[3.] It is an inevitable ruin; there is no escaping it. *First*, Their idols shall not be able to help them, *the oaks which they have desired, and the gardens which they have chosen*; that is, the images, the dunghill-gods, which they had worshipped in their groves and under the green trees, which they were fond of and wedded to, for which they forsook the true God, and which they worshipped privately in their own garden even when idolatry was publicly discountenanced. “This was the practice of the transgressors and the sinners; but they shall be ashamed of it, not with a show of repentance, but of despair, v. 29. They shall have cause to be ashamed of their idols; for, after all the court they have made to them, they shall find no benefit by them; but the idols themselves *shall go into captivity*,” ²³⁶¹ Isaiah 46:1, 2. Note, Those that make creatures their confidence are but preparing confusion for themselves. You were fond of the oaks and the gardens, but you yourselves shall be,

1. “*Like an oak without leaves*, withered and blasted, and stripped of all its ornaments.” Justly do those wear no leaves that bear no fruit; as the fig-tree that Christ cursed.

2. “*Like a garden without water*, that is neither rained upon nor *watered with the foot* (⁵¹¹⁰Deuteronomy 11:10), that had no *fountain* (²⁰⁴⁵Song of Solomon 4:15), and consequently is parched, and all the fruits of it gone to decay.” Thus shall those be that trust in idols, or in an *arm of flesh*, ²⁴⁷⁵Jeremiah 17:5, 6. But those that trust in God never find him as a wilderness, or as waters that fail, ²⁴²³Jeremiah 2:31. *Secondly*, They shall not be able to help themselves (v. 31): “*Even the strong man shall be as tow* not only soon broken and pulled to pieces, but easily catching fire; and *his work* (so the margin reads it), that by which he hopes to fortify and secure himself, shall be as a spark to his own tow, shall set him on fire, and he and his work shall burn together. His counsels shall be his ruin; his own skin kindles the fire of God's wrath, which shall burn to the lowest hell, and none shall quench it.” When the sinner has made himself as tow and stubble, and God makes himself to him as a consuming fore, what can prevent the utter ruin of the sinner?

Now all this is applicable,

1. To the blessed work of reformation which was wrought in Hezekiah's time after the abominable corruptions of the reign of Ahaz. Then good men came to be preferred, and the faces of the wicked were filled with shame.

- 2.** To their return out of their captivity in Babylon, which had thoroughly cured them of idolatry.
- 3.** To the gospel-kingdom and the pouring out of the Spirit, by which the New-Testament church should be made a new Jerusalem, a city of righteousness.
- 4.** To the second coming of Christ, when he shall thoroughly purge his floor, his field, shall gather the wheat into his barn, into his garner, and burn the chaff, the tares, with unquenchable fire.