

Indictment and Invitation

1. For what period of history are you glad you weren't around? Why?

Invitation to Pray: Spend some time in petition for yourself. Ask the Almighty God to write the truths of this book deep in your heart.

Whenever we study a book of the Bible, it's important to have a general understanding of the times in which the author lived. The political, social, and religious conditions of the era greatly influence the author's message. So, let's begin by taking a quick tour of Isaiah's Near Eastern world.

By the time Isaiah was called to prophetic ministry, the nation of Israel had been in the Promised Land for almost 700 years. During the first 400 years Israel was ruled by judges and political leaders that God raised up as the occasion demanded. Then, for about 120 years, three kings reigned over all Israel: Saul, David, and Solomon. Before Solomon died God told him that due to his spiritual disobedience, he would lose most of the kingdom. In 917 B.C. Israel had a civil war and God tore the kingdom of Israel in two (1 Kings 12). The tribes of Judah and Benjamin formed the Southern Kingdom of *Judah*, with Jerusalem as their capital. The remaining ten tribes formed the Northern Kingdom of *Israel* and eventually made Samaria their capital.

The Northern Kingdom adopted calf-worship as a means of keeping the two kingdoms separate. As a result, multitudes were led into idol worship and all forms of disobedience to God. Soon afterwards they added Baal-worship, which also spread to the Southern Kingdom. It was at this time of crisis, when God's name was disappearing from the minds of men, that the *prophets* appeared. And it was onto this stage that Isaiah stepped to minister.

On the international scene, Assyria was growing in power under Tiglath-pileser and began to emerge as the first of the great world empires in the Near East. Isaiah's whole life was spent under the threatening Assyrian power and he himself witnessed the ruin of his entire nation at their hand, (except for Jerusalem).

2. **Read Isaiah 1:1-31** in several translations. These words, voiced by Isaiah, are in the form of a covenant lawsuit. Notice the metaphors and vivid word pictures. Notice how God is openly pouring out His heart as He pleads His case.
 - a. Now, **re-read** the opening lines of the book (vv.1). How is the content of the entire book described?
 - b. To whom is the book addressed?
 - c. During what period does Isaiah receive God's communication?

Note: A vision is not necessarily a visual experience, but what God enabled him to see in his mind's eye. The Hebrew word for "vision" means truth disclosed by God through supernatural revelation. Isaiah **saw** what God was doing with the nation, why He was doing it, and what the end result would be.

3. Who does God call upon to listen to His case against Judah (v.1)? (Compare Deuteronomy 32:1; 4:26; 30:19; 31:28.) What is significant about such an audience?

4. Mark off chapter one of Isaiah into these three parts: verses 1-9; verses 10-20; verses 21-31. Each part describes a different aspect of God's case against the nation. Now, read through the chapter again, keeping these segments in mind. Record the major sin that is exposed in each section.
National Condition (vv.1-9)

Religious Condition (vv.10-20)

Social Condition (vv. 21-31)

5. What impresses you about the picture God paints of His covenant people?

6. Verses 5-6, 7-8, 15 describe the devastating consequences of Judah's sin and persistent rebellion. Review each section carefully.
 - a. What is their pitiful condition like?

 - b. Are the people of Judah able to make the connection between their suffering and their unfaithfulness to God? Why or why not?

 - c. Why would comparing the leaders and the people to Sodom and Gomorrah be a way of getting their attention (v. 10)?

7. Even in the midst of their rebellion, Judah continued its religious ceremony and ritual. How is it possible for rebellion and religious worship to co-exist?

8. How does the secular image of adultery (v. 21) fit their spiritual state?

SEEING OURSELVES

Spend time quietly reflecting on what you have learned about sin—about its blinding power—about the depths of human depravity—and our tendency to serve two masters. Ask God to reveal any sin and idolatry in your life. Talk to God openly and honestly about these issues. Settle any differences you have with Him. Journal your thoughts on a separate sheet of paper.

9. In this opening accusation against sin, Isaiah introduces us to “the Holy One of Israel” (v. 4). This title for God occurs 25 times in Isaiah and only 6 times elsewhere in the Old Testament. **Holiness is the heart of the nature of God. God cannot be known apart from His holiness.** Why do you think this attribute of God is used so frequently in the context of Isaiah?

The name of “Israel” is used here and in similar contexts to denote all the covenant people of God, not the Northern Kingdom exclusively.

10. In Isaiah 1:16-17, God gives several commands for re-ordering their personal lives. What are they?
11. All this is merely preparation for the great truth that is set forth in verse 18. Here, Israel’s Accuser and Judge extends a gracious and astonishing invitation. What does this invitation offer?

A CLOSER LOOK

Scarlet, Red as Crimson: the color of a deep-red permanent dye. Its stain was virtually impossible to remove from clothing.

White as Snow, Wool: exemplifies what is naturally white and pure.

12. What spiritual truths are illustrated in the terms above? Personalize your answer.
13. How would you explain the fact that God can forgive and still remain just? (See Isaiah 53:4-5) Find at least two New Testament passages that support your answer.

The next few verses take on the form of a lament. The way of forgiveness has been rejected. In sorrowful anger the “Mighty One” acts! When God announced His judgment on the nation, He used a combination of names for Himself not found elsewhere in the book (v. 24). The names assert God’s sovereign control of the universe and show the absolute certainty of the judgment He will bring to pass.

14. **Thoughtfully re-read Isaiah 1:21-31.** Mark every occurrence of “I will” and “will”. Then summarize the main points of Isaiah’s prophecy (vv. 24-31).

This period of judgment runs throughout the history of Judah down to the end of this age, as indicated by verses 26-27, which speak of a time not yet realized in her experience.

“God promised to refine his people similar to the way that metal is purged with lye in a smelting pot. This process involves melting the metal and skimming off the impure dross until the worker can see his own image in the liquid metal.” (Life Application Bible) In the same way, we must be willing to submit to God and allow him to remove our sin so that we might reflect His image.

15. What is your response when God turns His hand against you to purge your dross?
____fear ____confusion ____acceptance ____submission
____cooperation ____love and adoration
16. How do these experiences help you *know, respect, and cherish* God more fully?
17. Take time to “reason” with the Lord as described in this chapter. What would it mean for you to be “willing and obedient” (1:19)?

SEEING GOD

The book of Isaiah presents more insights into the nature of God than any other book of the Old Testament. Spend some time thinking about all that God tells us about Himself in this chapter. Worship Him from the heart as you write out your reflections and insights.