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God's Case Against Isra'el

1: 2-4

God's case against Isra'el DIG: Chapters 1 through 5 contain sermons that Isaiah preached to the people. Though not arranged chronologically, they introduce major themes to be developed throughout the book. What is the purpose of God calling the heavens and earth to witness His complaint against His covenant people? What is His case against them?

REFLECT: Idolatry was one of the most serious sins that Isaiah addressed. What gods today compete most for your allegiance? What are some signs that these gods have succeeded in drawing you away from God? What can you do about it?



As in a courtroom, **the LORD** calls **His** people to the bar of **His** justice where, of course, they can only be found guilty, saying: **Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth (1:2a)!** The **heavens** and the **earth** are called in to be witnesses against **Isra'el** because both were present when the covenant was made between **God** and **His people** in the book of **Deuteronomy**. The relationship between **Deuteronomy** and the other three books of **Moses (Genesis, Leviticus and Numbers)** is that in **Deuteronomy**, **Moses** was speaking to a new generation, the children of **the Exodus** generation (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy**, **to see link click [Aj](#) - The Historical Prologue**), and **he** begins to repeat, sometimes word for word, many of the mitzvot already found in the other three. For that reason **Deuteronomy** means *second law* or *repetitious law*. But the reason **Moses** is repeating is not to be redundant, but to take the commandments in the other three books

and put them in covenant book form. And a covenant needs witnesses. Essentially, **Deuteronomy** says that if **Isra'el** will keep the commandments in **Genesis**, **Leviticus** and **Numbers**, they will receive material blessings. If they disobey these commandments **God** will eventually drive them out of the Land. This was the basis for the covenant (**Deuteronomy 4:26,36; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1**).

The genesis of every national problem is how the people relate to **God**. They cannot be right anywhere if they are wrong there. Consequently, **Isaiah** spells out the problem, which is **Isra'el's** rebellion. For **ADONAI** has spoken: **I have reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me (1:2b)**. The Hebrew word *reared* as in **I reared children** (the KJV is translated **sons**), means more than the English implies. It means *to be given a position of dominance*. Because of the covenant relationship with **God** they are called **the Sons of God**. No individual in the TaNaKh is ever called a *son of God* singularly. Jews are only called **sons of God** collectively. The basis for that is **Exodus 4:22-23**. **Deuteronomy 14:1** and **32:20** also brings out this **sons of God** motif. **Isra'el's** infancy was in the Land of Canaan during the time of the patriarchs and their childhood was in Egypt. Their stages of youth were lived out in the desert of Sinai, reaching manhood under **Joshua** and **Judges**, and then becoming great and dominant under David and Solomon. The Hebrew word for **brought them up** is a word that means *to be great*. He did not simply raise them to be grown up; He put them in a position where they were made great. They were given a position of dominance and made great by **the LORD**. But in spite of the unique position they had, they **rebelled against ADONAI**. The word **rebelled** means *to break away with violence*. This was not a passive rebellion; sometimes they actively went against **God** with full knowledge of what they were doing. So although **God** gave them every possible advantage, they nonetheless violently opposed Him and went against the covenant He made with them.

God then contrasts **Israel's** ignorance with that of animals. **The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manager, but Isra'el does not know, My people do not understand (Isaiah 1:3)**. **The ox** and **the donkey** were known for their stupidity. In **Proverbs 7:22** an **ox** is identified with human fools, and in **Proverbs 26:3** the same thing is said of **the donkey**. Yet even these animals know who their provider is. They recognize the **master** from whom they receive their nourishment. But as for **Isra'el**, they did **not** know! To make matters worse, they did not even think about it. They did not consider it, meaning they were more stupid than dumb animals. When **people** are spiritually blind, they are dumber than dumb animals.

Then, as evidence, **the LORD** lists seven counts of indictment against **Isra'el**. This verse is

a powerful piece of poetry that describes **Isra'el's** condition in terse, hard-hitting terms: **Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption (Isaiah 1:4a)**! Altogether they describe the sinfulness of the nation. The first indictment was that they were a **sinful nation**. Instead of being a holy nation (see my commentary of **Exodus De - You Will be for Me a Kingdom of Priests**), which was their calling, they had become a **sinful nation**. The second indictment was that they were a people **loaded with guilt**. **Isra'el's guilt is the heavier because** (the nation) **Jacob was chosen to reveal God's revelation**. The word **guilt** emphasizes *crookedness and perverseness*. The third indictment was that they were a **brood** (**seed** in the King James) **of evildoers**. Rather than being a true **seed** of Abraham, they had become a **seed of evildoers**. The fourth indictment was that they were **children given over to corruption** rather than being **children of God**. The effect was like a series of karate chops - short, sudden and devastating.

They demonstrated the opposite of what the people of **God** should be all about. The descendants should be better than their parents, but they were worse. The **children** should be a source of life, but these were a source of death. Consequently, as a people **Isra'el** had lost her way. What happened?

They had forsaken ADONAI. The fifth indictment was that they were guilty of apostasy of the heart. The sixth indictment was that **they had spurned the Holy One of Isra'el**. They were guilty of apostasy in the words of their mouths. In this indictment, **Isaiah** uses one of his favorite terms, **the Holy One of Isra'el**. This expression is used a total of 31 times in the TaNaKh and 26 of those are used by **Isaiah**. And the seventh indictment was that they **turned their backs on ADONAI (1:4b)**. This is not a very pretty picture. The language used here is very similar to that of **Deuteronomy 28:20, 29:25-26, and 31:16**, when it speaks of adultery. I'm sure **Isra'el** didn't realize how far they had strayed from **God**. This is a valuable lesson for us today. If anything gets between you and **the LORD, He** wants it out of the way.

Who was in control? **God** or **Isra'el**? This was their dilemma and it is our dilemma. When we, like **Isra'el**, try to control our own life it implies a denial of **God**. But yielding control is so frightening. Typically, **Isra'el** tried to keep both **God** and the gods, with miserable results. We are no different. For the most part they did not consciously abandon Him, but their attempt to keep both amounted to abandonment and was, in the eyes of the prophets, rebellion. Whose hands are on the steering wheel of your life?