

## **TWO FALSE VIEWS OF SIN**

**22** The oracle concerning the Valley of Vision. What is the matter, what causes all of you to go up to the rooftops? <sup>2</sup>O you city full of shouting, a city full of revelry, a joyful town! Your slain have not been slain by the sword [after all], neither have they died in battle. <sup>3</sup>All your leaders fled together; they were captured without even using the bow. All your inhabitants who were found were bound together—they had fled far away. <sup>4</sup>Therefore I said, “Turn your eyes away from me, let me weep bitterly. Do not try to console me over the destruction of the daughter of my people.” <sup>5</sup>It is a day of tumult and of trampling down and of terror—from the Lord, Jehovah of hosts—in the Valley of Vision. [It is a day of] battering down the walls and crying out to the mountains. <sup>6</sup>Elam took up the quiver, with her charioteers and horsemen; and Kir uncovered the shield [for battle]. <sup>7</sup>And so it happened that your choicest valleys were full of chariots, and the horsemen took up their positions at the city gates.

<sup>8</sup>He removed the defense that covered Judah; but on that day you depended on the armor stored in the Palace of the Forest. <sup>9</sup>You saw that the city of David had many breaches in its defenses; you stored up water in the Lower Pool. <sup>10</sup>You counted the buildings in Jerusalem, and you tore down houses to fortify the wall. <sup>11</sup>You built a reservoir between the two walls to store the water of the Old Pool. But you did not look to him who had done this; neither did you express reverence for him who planned all this long ago. <sup>12</sup>On that day the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, called you to weep and to wail, to shave your head and to put on sackcloth. <sup>13</sup>But look! There was joy and revelry, [there was the] slaughtering of cattle and the killing of sheep, [there was the] eating of meat and the drinking of wine! You said, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die!’ <sup>14</sup>Jehovah of hosts has revealed his intention in my ears: “Surely, this iniquity will not be forgiven until you die,’ declares the Lord, Jehovah of hosts.”

<sup>15</sup>This is what the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, says, “Go to this steward, Shebna, who is in charge of the palace, and say to him, <sup>16</sup>‘What are you doing here and who gave you permission to cut out a tomb for yourself here?’—cutting out a tomb for himself on the height, chiseling a resting place for himself in the rock! <sup>17</sup>Listen! Jehovah, like a strong man, will violently hurl you away! Indeed, he will grasp you firmly, <sup>18</sup>wrap you up tightly like a ball, and throw you into a vast country. There you will die. There shall your splendid chariots remain—you disgrace to your master’s house! <sup>19</sup>I will depose you from your office, and you will be ousted from your position. <sup>20</sup>On that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim the son of Hilkiah. <sup>21</sup>I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around his waist; and I will hand your authority over to him. He will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. <sup>22</sup>I will lay the key of the house of David upon his shoulder; what he opens, no one will shut, and what he shuts, no one will open. <sup>23</sup>I will drive him like a peg into a firm place; he will occupy a seat of honor for his father’s house. <sup>24</sup>[But if] the whole weight of his father’s house should hang themselves upon him—its offspring and its offshoots; every little vessel, from the cups to all the jars; then, <sup>25</sup>on that day, declares Jehovah of hosts, the peg that was driven into a firm place will give way. It will be sheared off and fall, and the load hanging on it will perish. [Beware,] for Jehovah has declared it.” (Isa. 22:1-25)

## **Introduction**

Randy heard the phone ring, and then his mother's call, "Randy, it's for you."

Randy picked up the extension and said, "Hello?"

As soon as the click indicated that his mother had hung up the phone downstairs, the voice on the other end of the line poured out the news, "Randy, I'm really sorry, but you have been indicted on drug charges."

Randy listened to the details, then hung up in disbelief.

Randy had received Christ as his Savior, but when he got to high school he started hanging out with the wrong crowd. He began using drugs at parties, and then on his own at home, where he had some close calls with his parents. Once they found some suspicious paraphernalia in his room; Randy almost panicked, but he managed to keep his cool and talk his way out of a jam. As time went by, Randy's drug-dealing friends began to ask him to do "favors" for them. So it was that Randy began to make some deliveries. One day he walked right into a police sting operation; Randy played dumb; partly because they believed him, partly because they were after a bigger catch, they let him go. By the time Randy graduated from high school, he was dealing drugs himself. He always had a lot of cash in his pocket, and he secretly laughed at those guys who were sweating to make a living.

But now came the phone call. Apparently, there had been another drug bust, and under police interrogation, one of Randy's "customers" confessed that Randy was his drug supplier. This time there was no escape. Randy could not talk his way out of it; Randy could no longer play dumb, this time he was caught. As he contemplated his situation, Randy even considered suicide. But the police were at his door before he had the chance to do anything.

Finally the day came for Randy to appear before the judge for sentencing. To his amazement, he got off with nothing more than "a slap on the wrist:" a \$5000 fine and 1000 hours of community service. Randy was so happy he practically danced out of the courtroom. As he walked through those doors to freedom, Randy thought to himself, "Wow! This is cool! The LORD really took care of me! God is really neat!" And with that confidence, Randy was off to make another drug deal and continue his lucrative, but immoral and highly dangerous, practice.

Here is the story of a young man who seriously misunderstood God and who held two false views of sin. First, when he was brought to accountability, he despaired of any hope, even contemplating suicide. Then, when the LORD withheld the full measure of punishment that the young man's sinful conduct deserved, he foolishly concluded that God was tolerant of sin.

The story of this young man and his attitude towards sin illustrates the situation we find in Isaiah 22. The people of Judah found themselves in a disastrous predicament because of their sinful conduct; they came to the point of despair, convinced that they were without hope. Then, when they were mercifully delivered from their perilous plight, they foolishly concluded that the LORD tolerates sinful conduct in the lives of His people.

We, too, have the tendency to entertain false views of sin, erring either in the direction of false optimism—thinking that God is tolerant of sin, or in the direction of fatalism—thinking that we are beyond hope and beyond forgiveness. In the light of Isaiah 22, may we be instructed to avoid entertaining any false view of sin.

### **I. Do Not View Sin Fatalistically: As Something that is Beyond Forgiveness (Isa 22:3-14)**

According to verses 5-7, it was the LORD who sent the Assyrian armies against Judah, allowing them to march to the very gates of Jerusalem. It was the LORD who had removed the protective covering from Judah: *“he [the LORD] removed the defense that covered Judah”* (vs. 8a.) Since the people had spiritually and morally withdrawn themselves from the LORD, He withdrew His protective covering from them. If we spiritually and morally withdraw ourselves from the LORD, He will likewise withdraw His protective covering from us. This is not referring to the sensitive Christian who grapples with his sins and who takes God’s commandments seriously and who desires and strives to live in fellowship with Christ his Lord. On the contrary, this is referring to the person who becomes careless about his spiritual and moral life with a carelessness that eventually leads to callousness—if the process is not arrested by the disciplinary work of the LORD and the response of repentance.

When the people of Judah were confronted with this impending disaster of conquest by the Assyrians, according to verses 8b-11a, how did they respond? They looked to their own arsenal of weapons in a futile hope of defending themselves (vs. 8b.) They tore down the houses of Jerusalem in an effort to fortify the walls, and they fashioned a reservoir to assure themselves of a water supply (vs. 9-11a.)

But, as verse 11b, indicates, *“you did not look to him who had done this”*—they did not look to the LORD, acknowledging His righteous judgment against them, pleading for His mercy, and returning to the LORD their God. When we encounter difficulties in our lives or even court disaster because of sinful conduct, do we become defensive? Do we seek to blame other people for our predicament? Do we even accuse God of dealing unfairly or too harshly with us? Do we refuse to own up to our sins as the cause of our dilemma, although in our hearts we know the truth? Or do we honestly confess our sins when the LORD addresses them, surrendering them to Christ, asking His forgiveness, and asking Him to restore us and help us to grow in obedience?

When it became obvious that they could not defeat the Assyrians and all appeared to be lost, what did the people of Judah do? They resigned themselves to their fate and determined to have one last wild revelry, convinced that it was inevitable that they were about to succumb to utter defeat and destruction. This was their reaction when the LORD had intended for their present situation to bring them to mourning and repentance:

*On that day the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, called you to weep and to wail, to shave your head and to put on sackcloth. <sup>13</sup>But look! There was joy and revelry, there was the slaughtering of cattle and the killing of sheep, there was the eating of meat and the drinking of wine! You said, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die! (Isa. 22:12-13)*

Do we appreciate the truth expressed in Ecclesiastes 3:1,4, *“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven ... <sup>4</sup>a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance”*? Are we spiritually sensitive to recognize when rejoicing is appropriate and when godly sorrow is required? Note James 4:8-10,

*Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup>Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (Jas. 4:8-10)*

Seeing this response made by the people, the LORD solemnly declares to Isaiah about these people: *“Surely, this iniquity will not be forgiven until you die,’ declares the Lord, Jehovah of hosts”* (vs. 14.) When there is resignation (a sense that all is lost), instead of repentance; when there is ungodly laughter, instead of godly sorrow; then there is no place for forgiveness. In contrast to such an attitude, consider the case of the Prodigal Son, there we find that godly sorrow and repentance is met with mercy, compassion, and restoration:

*After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup>He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>When he came to his senses, he said, “How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup>I will set out and go back to my father and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.’”<sup>20</sup>So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (Lk. 15:14-18,20)*

Let us not view sin pessimistically, viewing it as something that inevitably leads to judgment and for which there is no hope of redemption; consequently, leading us to either contemplate suicide (as was the case with Randy, as mentioned in

the introduction) or else to engage in a final outburst of unrestrained revelry before our unavoidable doom (as was the case of Judah.) Note the testimony of the Apostle John: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from **all** unrighteousness"* (1 Jn. 1:9.) Note, too, the counsel of Proverbs 28:13, *"He who conceals his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."*

## **II. Do Not View Sin Optimistically: As Something God will Tolerate (Isa. 22:1-2,15-19)**

In verse 1a we find Isaiah inquiring, *"What is the matter, what causes all of you to go up to the rooftops?"* He is asking, "What is all the commotion?"

From verse 4 we learn that Isaiah had gone into seclusion to bewail what appeared to be the certain destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Assyrians: *"Therefore I said, Turn your eyes away from me; let me weep bitterly. Do not try to console me over the destruction of the daughter of my people."* But now, to his surprise, Isaiah hears shouts of celebration; and he discovers that the celebration is due to the fact that the imminent conquest by the Assyrians has been averted: *"O you city full of shouting, a city full of revelry, a joyful town! Your slain have not been slain by the sword [after all], neither have they died in battle" (vs. 2.) "Your slain have not been slain with the sword [after all];"* is a reference to the fact that in the face of the threatened invasion by the Assyrians, the armies of Judah viewed themselves as dead men, slain in battle, but now that devastating defeat has been averted.

Note that verse 3 depicts the dishonorable, cowardly conduct exhibited by the rulers on this occasion of national crisis—they are described as fleeing from the advancing enemy, what is revealed here is the moral weakness of the nation. 2 Kings 18:13-16 describes the dishonorable and spiritually deplorable manner in which the city of Jerusalem was delivered:

*In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. <sup>14</sup>So Hezekiah king of Judah sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish, "I have done wrong. Withdraw from me, and I will pay whatever you demand of me." The king of Assyria exacted from Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. <sup>15</sup>So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple of Jehovah and in the treasuries of the royal palace. <sup>16</sup>At this time Hezekiah king of Judah stripped off the gold with which he had covered the doors and doorposts of the temple of Jehovah, and gave it to the king of Assyria. (2 Kgs. 18:13-16)*

Sennacherib demands the equivalent of eleven tons of silver and one ton of gold; Hezekiah pays the price by robbing the temple of the LORD and emptying the royal

treasury. But the people rejoice that the city is delivered, and they respond with a tremendous celebration.

Some time after this delirious celebration, one of the chief officials, Shebna, begins construction of an elaborate mausoleum for himself. The LORD now sends Isaiah out to the construction site to rebuke Shebna:

*This is what the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, says, "Go to this steward, Shebna, who is in charge of the palace, and say to him, <sup>16</sup>'What are you doing here and who gave you permission to cut out a tomb for yourself here?'—cutting out a tomb for himself on the height, chiseling a resting place for himself in the rock!" (Isa. 22:15-16)*

Hewing out a sepulchre indicates that Shebna expected to peacefully live out his life in Israel and be laid to rest in the land of promise; being at peace with God in life and in death. Furthermore, Shebna's act was a public declaration to the nation of his confidence that the LORD was on their side and would shelter them, no matter how they might live. Based upon the "miraculous" deliverance from the Assyrians—secured at the price of robbing the LORD's temple and oppressing the people with a hefty tax to raise the demanded ransom money—Shebna had apparently concluded that the LORD would be tolerant of His people's sinful conduct and continue to take care of them despite their lifestyle of unrepented sin.

Do we entertain the same false view that was evidenced by Shebna and the people of Jerusalem? Have we been practicing a lifestyle of sin or engaging in sinful conduct without repentance, and thus far been spared from the awful consequence of our sin, so that we draw the false conclusion that God is tolerant of our sin? If such is the case, let us carefully consider Psalm 50:17-22,

*You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. <sup>18</sup>When you see a thief you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers. <sup>19</sup>You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. <sup>20</sup>You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother's son. <sup>21</sup>These things you have done and I kept silent; so you thought that I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face. <sup>22</sup>Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue. (Psl. 50:17-22)*

Through His prophet, Isaiah, the LORD declares His judgment against Shebna:

*Listen! Jehovah, like a strong man, will violently hurl you away! Indeed, he will grasp you firmly, <sup>18</sup>wrap you up tightly like a ball, and throw you into a vast country. There you will die. There shall your splendid chariots remain—you disgrace to your master's house! <sup>19</sup>I will depose you from your office, and you will be ousted from your position. (Isa. 22:17-19)*

Like a man hurls a ball, so will the LORD hurl Shebna out of the Promised Land and into a large and distant land, and there he would die—exiled from the Promised Land, separated from the blessing of God and consigned to His righteous judgment.

Let us not view sin optimistically, falsely viewing it as something the LORD will tolerate and for which He will not hold us accountable. Let us heed the admonition of the Apostle Paul: *Do you not realize that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor those who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.* (1 Cor. 6:9-10) Also, let us not lose sight of the purpose for which the Lord has redeemed us: *"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins"* (Matt. 1:21.)

## **Conclusion**

Like Randy, and like the people of Judah, we, too, have the tendency to entertain false views of sin, erring either in the direction of false optimism—thinking that God is tolerant of sin, or in the direction of fatalism—thinking that we are beyond hope and beyond forgiveness. But in the light of Isaiah 22, may we learn to take sin seriously—and to take our sins to Christ the Savior.