

Part 1: God's Charge Against the Israelites

Isaiah 1:10-20

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I. Historical Background & Biblical Context

Isaiah paints the picture of the spiritual state of the children of Israel. The prophet is speaking to the people of the Southern Kingdom of Israel, Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. God shows to His prophet in a vision the sinful and rebellious state of His chosen people that were leading them to deconstruction. God does not stop calling them His children but is disappointed in their rebellion toward Him. They had provoked the Lord in anger. It seems though they had forgotten all that God has done for them and who they were to God. God had rescued them out of slavery in Egypt, led them into the promised land, raised up judges to judge the land and to rule over them. Most of all, He has been a loving Father providing, caring for and protecting them. He has given them priests and prophets to provide guidance and direction. God referred to Israel as "His people" (Deuteronomy 7:6) and "His treasured possession" (Psalm 135:4). God did not choose Israel because they were strong but mighty. He chose Israel when they were small and weak, a people without a land. They were chosen and blessed by God, not only for their own sake, but to be a blessing to all nations, for all time. God chose Israel to be a light to be a to the nations. Through Israel, other nations would know what obedience to God would bring and what would follow because of disobedience. God chose Israel to be a people would show forth His redeeming grace and righteous judgment. Yet they rebelled against God. Some of them had chosen to worship idols. The only thing that will stop the judgment of God from falling on them, is repentance and return to God.

When we look at Judah and its sinful condition, it should be like a mirror looking at the state of our nation. God has been good to us, given life, provided for our needs, guided us through life from the conception all the way to this present moment. He has been faithful and treated us with loving kindness. He has been patient, waiting for those who are called by name to humble ourselves, pray, seek His face

and turn from our wicked ways, so we can hear from heaven, be forgiven, and the land be healed. God has a plan of hope and redemption for His people through Jesus Christ.

II. The Lesson: Part 1: God's Charge Against the Israelites

1. **v. 10.** "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah!"

In this verse, we see that God had stop speaking using imagery and metaphor and is now focusing on the actual sin of the people. The prophet addressed the people of Judah as if they were the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Those were places that were so wicked in their deeds that utterly destroyed them. The prophet gave them a dire warning of what was to come if they did not repent and return to God from their evil doings. Isaiah was trying to convey the word of the Lord, he wasn't offering suggestions, of what was popular, or a fable, he was offering them God's word. He was telling the people to listen to the instructions of God. How will they know what is right and pleasing to God except they hear His word and adhere to its instruction. The prophet's plea to them was to hear and listen to the word of the Lord before it was too late.

2. **vv. 11-15.** "The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me? says the Lord. I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths, and convocations – I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood!"

God was fed up with their meaningless sacrifices. God had enough of them going to motions without repentant hearts. Sacrifice without true repentance is not acceptable to God. God does not want formality, he wants sincerity. Carrying out the required sacrifices had

become a practiced habit, not an act of love. The people were heavily committed to many prayers and many offerings that were done in the pattern of worship, but the clear hearts were far from God. He asked the question, “Who invited you into my courts? They were coming and going through the religious exercises. They were still observing the Sabbaths, New Moons, and feast days, but God had enough of their meaningless sacrifices. As David put in Psalm 51:16 and 17. “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.”

3. **vv. 16-17.** “Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

The answer to their problem was to repent of their sins and turn back to God. This washing does not mean they could cleanse themselves or that any ritual washing could rid them of their sins. The cleansing can only be done by God. The proof of that cleansing is they would live a life in obedience and love to God. They would stop their evil doings and things that are empty and hollow in the sight of God. This would be illustrated by their love and care for needy people. They had the religious ceremonies right but their love and care for the downtrodden, orphan, and widow were lacking. James 1:27 tells us what true religion is and accepted by God, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

4. **vv. 18.** “Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

God is always ready to meet us with grace and mercy. This is a compassionate call to the people to settle the matter of their rebellious state. God is a God of another chance. The invitation is to come now. Don't put off getting the matter resolved. Come now, tomorrow is not promised. Tomorrow may be too late. God does not want His people to

be on a destructive another moment. There is no way we can do away with our own sins. Even the blood of the animals could just cover the sin for a year and not clear the conscience.

But God has prepared a perfect Lamb before the foundation of the world, before the creation of man, to take away the sins of the world. Jesus took upon Himself the stain of our sins. God judged sin perfectly and completely in Jesus, so we can be accounted white as snow and as wool. Our good works can't clean the stain, nor our best intentions or promises. Time can't clean the stain or death. Only Jesus can make us white as snow. What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh! Precious is the flow that makes me white as snow; no other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Praise God, Jesus can take away the power of sin, the shame of sin, the guilt of sin, the domination of sin, and pain of sin.

5. **vv. 19-20.** "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

God offered Judah a choice. They could be willing and obedient, or they could refuse and rebel. There were consequences either way. They could find hope in the midst of their chastisement, relief from empty religious rituals, and cleansing from their sins, if they surrender their hearts before God. If they were willing and obedient to God, they will eat the good things of the land. There would be blessings. If they resisted and rebelled, it would certainly bring judgment and curses. This can also be found in Deuteronomy 28th chapter. The fact that the Lord has spoken means that what the prophet given to the people will happen. God cannot lie.

III. Conclusion

God is the only authority to declare what is right and wrong in this world. He is both judge and savior. Though we were found guilty of sin, Jesus pleaded our case by dying on Calvary, we are now saved by grace. God has dropped the charges. We can live a holy upright life in obedient and love to God. God requires us to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.