

God Confronts

God confronts His people about the consequences of their actions.

ISAIAH 1:10-20



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5:13-14 These verses support the second
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(Eph. 2:1-3). Adam's sin had this broad
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5:15-16 The works of Adam and Jesus
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When have you ever taken a relationship for granted? How did it affect the relationship? Were you able to do anything to get the relationship back on track?

Paying bills, going to the grocery store, getting the car serviced—our days are filled with mundane tasks that we carry out on automatic pilot without much thought. Sometimes, church and devotions fall into a repetitive rut. Even relationships can become stale and fade into the background of routine. As a result, the failure of a relationship can catch us off guard.

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

Isaiah 1:1–4:6 lays the groundwork for Isaiah’s entire message. Here, Isaiah contrasted the sin and rebellion of Judah in his day to their future of blessedness and holiness in the last days. After briefly mentioning the kings who reigned during his ministry, Isaiah described Judah’s sinful ways like a prosecuting attorney with overwhelming evidence. We see a picture of a people who had abandoned God. Though God had raised them, provided for them, and cared for them in every way as a loving father would his children, with ingratitude they rebelled against Him (Isa. 1:2). They were worse than oxen or donkeys who at least know who feeds them (1:3).

God was using loving discipline to draw His people back to Himself, yet they stubbornly refused to return (1:5-9). Instead of trusting in the Lord, the people of Judah placed their trust in material things, military heroes, renowned leaders, and spiritual gurus. Therefore, God would remove their false sources of security so they might recognize their futility (3:1-3). Young and old, male and female, all would bear the consequences of their arrogant sin (3:5-26).

Such is the case with us. God never abandons His children but lovingly confronts us and, if need be, disciplines us so we will return to Him. Whatever God does to bring us to Himself is an act of loving kindness, no matter how difficult His discipline may seem.

The good news is that God’s announcement of judgment was not His only message. Even though His people’s present situation was dreadful, their future was bright. God was going to once again establish His temple, people from every nation would stream to it to worship the Lord and receive His instruction, and there would be peace (2:1-4). On that day, the Branch of the LORD, Jesus Christ, will be beautiful and glorious among them, the people of God will be called holy, and their names will be written in the book of life because the Lord has washed away their sin (4:1-6).

ISAIAH 1:10-20

10 Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of **Sodom** **A**! Listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah! **11** “What are all your sacrifices to me?” asks the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings and rams and the fat of well-fed cattle; I have no desire for the blood of bulls, lambs, or male goats. **12** When you come to appear before me, who requires this from you—this trampling of my courts? **13** Stop bringing useless offerings. Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons and Sabbaths, and the calling of solemn assemblies—I cannot stand iniquity with a festival. **14** I hate your New Moons and prescribed festivals. They have become a **burden** **B** to me; I am tired of putting up with them. **15** When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will refuse to look at you; even if you offer countless prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. **16** “Wash yourselves. **Cleanse** **C** yourselves. Remove your evil deeds from my sight. Stop doing evil. **17** **Learn** **D** to do what is good. **Pursue** **E** justice. Correct the oppressor. Defend the rights of the fatherless. Plead the widow’s cause. **18** “Come, let us settle this,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are crimson red, they will be like wool. **19** If you are **willing** **F** and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land. **20** But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Passage Outline

Empty Rituals
(Isa. 1:10-15)

True Followers
(Isa. 1:16-17)

Repentance Required
(Isa. 1:18-20)

Key Words

- A. Isaiah compared Judah and Jerusalem to Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities God had destroyed for their iniquity (Gen. 19:24; Ezek. 16:49-50).
- B. In Deuteronomy 1:12 Moses stated, “How can I bear your troubles, burdens, and disputes by myself?”
- C. To wash oneself from sin (Isa. 4:4).
- D. To teach in the sense of training. In Hosea 10:11, Ephraim was trained like a heifer by a yoke and goad.
- E. The children of Israel went to Moses to “seek” (ESV, NIV, NLT) the Lord’s understanding (Ex. 18:15).
- F. Obedience requires our “consent” (NASB). David wasn’t willing to go with Absalom (2 Sam. 13:25).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Isaiah began with a scathing indictment in verse 10. By saying, *you rulers of Sodom and you people of Gomorrah*, Isaiah was communicating how utterly depraved Judah's ways had been and how serious the consequences of such sin were. Verse 9 reveals that were it not for the Lord's mercy, Judah might have been completely wiped out like Sodom and Gomorrah. (See Gen. 19:23-25.) The Lord confronted His people about their sacrifices. He was quite clear about what He thought of their sacrifices: They meant nothing to Him; they added nothing to Him; and they did nothing for Him. When a person comes before the Lord with an insincere heart and selfish motives, it is unacceptable "worship" to God. Acceptable worship involves approaching the Lord on His terms. The Lord emphatically commanded the people to stop bringing their offerings to the temple because they were meaningless and detestable to Him.

BIBLE SKILL: Compare related passages. Compare Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. What reasons are given for celebrating the Sabbath in these verses? How are the reasons different and how are they the same? What do these verses reveal about God's desires? How does this compare to what we find in Isaiah 1?

What are causes and ways believers today may fall into a pattern of unacceptable worship of the Lord? What warnings should we draw from Judah's mistakes?

Taken together, the three sets of commands signify authentic repentance and true devotion to the Lord. The washing and cleansing of themselves called for sincere repentance so that there no longer would be a disconnect between their hearts and their acts of worship. The authenticity of their repentance would be demonstrated by their actions: turn away from their sinful ways, learn what God's will is, and do it.

If being devoted to God in faithful obedience does not earn our salvation, then why is it necessary for believers to be faithfully obedient to God?

KEY DOCTRINE: Salvation.

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God (Isa 55:7).

God invited His sinful people to come to Him in repentance and faith. He promised to cleanse them of all their sin. The Lord confronted His people with a choice: either repent, obey, and enjoy God's blessing, or *refuse and rebel* and suffer the consequences.

How does God take the initiative today to bring people into a relationship with Him? How does His approach today compare with the approach found in Isaiah 1?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Relying on religious rituals alone falls short when approaching the holy God.
- God expects His followers to demonstrate righteousness and justice.
- God offers forgiveness to those who repent.

Ask God to examine your heart and to reveal any sin in your life that might be hindering your worship of Him. What actions do you need to take in response to what God shows you?

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being completed, how would you rate how well you do the nine commands found in verses 16 and 17? What do you need to do to more completely follow these commands?

Discuss as a group the difference it should make to believers as they go through their daily routine to remember that our sins are forgiven and have been made “white as snow.” Begin to memorize Isaiah 1:18.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: We must listen to God's instructions.

Read Isaiah 1:10, underlining the words hear and listen.

The words *hear* and *listen* both mean “hear and obey.” So the message is straightforward. The people needed to hear and obey the Word of God. Verse 10 contains several personal elements.

LORD, often denoted as Yahweh from Hebrew, is God's personal, covenantal name. Israel was Yahweh's treasured possession and holy nation, devoted for God's personal mission of blessing all other nations. God chose Israel to be a conduit of blessing for every people group on the earth.

The expression *our God* emphasizes that while the other nations had a multiplicity of gods, Yahweh was Israel's God, the one and only God.

The word *instruction* is the Hebrew word *tora*, and even though it is authoritative, it has the idea of affectionate personal instruction, such as what a parent would share with a son or daughter.

Why do you think God started this passage with the firm instruction to listen?

In what areas of your life is God calling you to listen and heed His Word?

Day 2: Insincere sacrifices are offensive to God.

Read Isaiah 1:11-12, noting God's frustration with their sacrifices.

Sacrifices were meant to be outward expressions of true commitment to the Lord. God knows what is in the heart of every person, and He knows when a sacrifice is offered insincerely. Outward formality cannot hide degenerate hearts. This verse is reminiscent of 1 Samuel 15:22, “Does the LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.”

The *fat of well-fed cattle* represents offering to God one's best, and the *blood* represents devotion to God. But it was all a sham. The people were blemished with sin and absent of true devotion to God. It would be like offering a gift to a spouse who knows the one giving the gift is cheating on him or her. Instead of being a blessing, the gift would be offensive because of the infidelity. Similarly, their sacrifices were offensive to God.

Why didn't God take pleasure in the Israelites' sacrifices? How might our sacrifices be offensive to God?

Day 3: True worship is required for God's favor.

Read Isaiah 1:13-15, considering how their festivals may have become irreverent.

The *New Moons* festival consecrated each new month to the Lord by expressing to Him repentance, devotion, and fellowship. The institution of the *Sabbath* was so important that it was included as the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8-11). Israel was required to cease from all work and rest because the Lord rested on the seventh day of creation. The Sabbath was a sign of the covenant the Lord made with Israel (Ex. 31:12) and reminded the people of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:15). Keeping the Sabbath was meant to provide a designated, focused time to worship the Lord, as David demonstrated in Psalm 92.

Other prescribed festivals included Passover, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. God instituted these holy days as times for Israel to celebrate God's wondrous acts and blessings upon them and to express their gratitude, love, and devotion to Him. Instead, they turned them into something repulsive. The people worshiped the Lord with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. (See Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8.)

Consequently, when the people *spread out their hands in prayer*, God would *refuse to look* at them. When the Lord shines His face upon His people and looks at them, it is a way of expressing His favor. To refuse to look at them was His way of saying He was withdrawing His blessing from them.

**What are ways you may fall into a pattern of unacceptable worship of the Lord?
What warnings should you draw from Judah's mistakes?**

Day 4: We demonstrate our love of God through faithful obedience.

Read Isaiah 1:16-17, numbering the nine commands listed.

The Lord gave nine commands for the people to correct their ways and demonstrate they were true followers of God. These commands were not given to secure salvation but to demonstrate the authenticity of their salvation. The first three deal with the inward removal of sin. The second three address outward devotion to Yahweh. The last three pertain to relationships with others, showing how true repentance would affect how they related to others. Instead of being the oppressors, they would oppose oppressors. Also, they would champion the cause of those who could not care for themselves, such as *the fatherless* and *widows*.

**If being devoted to God in faithful obedience does not earn our salvation,
then why is it necessary for you to be faithfully obedient to God?**

Day 5: God calls for sincere repentance.

Read Isaiah 1:18-20, identifying God's request.

The Lord takes no pleasure in disciplining His children. It is necessary for their correction, but He would rather enjoy them in sweet fellowship. If their sins are *scarlet*, they will be made *white*, non-existent. Here, the Lord made clear that He alone can cleanse us of sin. When He calls us to wash and cleanse ourselves, that washing and cleansing can happen only when we come to Him in sincere repentance (v. 16).

The Lord Jesus Christ graciously and mercifully calls to us: Whosoever will, come to Me, and I forgive you, cleanse you, and give you abundant, eternal life. Reject Me and spend eternity separated from Me. It is a choice every person must make. The Lord offers forgiveness and cleansing to all who repent—to the lost who needs salvation and to believers who seek restored fellowship with Christ (1 John 1:9).

How does God take the initiative to bring you into a relationship with Him? How does His approach today compare with the approach found in Isaiah 1?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 1, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

What thoughts come to mind when you hear the words *worthless, burdensome, and meaningless*? What thoughts come to mind when you hear these words as descriptors of worship?

When have you seen godly actions being well displayed in a person's life or in a church?

Through Isaiah God foretold the outcome of obedience and of rebellion. How can we correlate these outcomes to our daily choices?



For additional context, read “Isaiah’s Messianic Prophecies,” an archived *Biblical Illustrator* article provided via digital download in the Fall 2020 Explore the Bible Leader Pack.



God Confronts

FOCUS ATTENTION

BEGIN: As the group arrives, invite them to share about times they felt that someone took their relationship with them for granted. Allow them to express how they felt on the “took for granted” side of the relationship and how they realized what was going on.

RESPOND: After most have arrived, call attention to the first paragraph on page 13 and the questions included. Direct them to respond silently. ***When have you ever taken a relationship for granted? How did it affect the relationship? Were you able to do anything to get the relationship back on track?*** (p. 13) Point out that one relationship we may need to consider when answering these questions is our relationship with God.

TRANSITION: Explain that the Israelites took their relationship with God for granted, and God confronted them about it. Challenge the group to consider during today’s study if they are taking God for granted and the actions they may need to take as a result.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Explain that the group is beginning a new study of Isaiah. Share a summary of the Introduction to Isaiah on page 8. Call attention to **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Themes of*

Isaiah), encouraging the group to look for these themes as they go through the study. Lead the group to locate the Outline of Isaiah on page 9 and point to **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of Isaiah*) that is displayed on the wall. Highlight the first point of the outline to transition into today’s study.

SUMMARIZE: Briefly summarize Isaiah 1:1-9, pointing out that God confronted Israel about them being so far away from Him that they no longer recognized Him. God told Israel His intent to bring them back to Him as a loving Father would bring back a wayward child.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Isaiah 1:10-15, while the rest of the group looks for ways the people of Israel offended God.

- **(1:13)** The offerings were useless because, in and of themselves, they did not accomplish anything. The Israelites thought that the offerings appeased God and earned them His blessings. This idea of trading offerings and sacrifices for a deity’s blessing and protection was prevalent among the cultures around Israel, and God’s people had adopted the same view.
- **(1:14)** Observing the Sabbath demonstrated trust in God. The story of God providing manna for the Israelites is found in Exodus 16:22-28. In the episode, the people were told not to gather more manna than they needed daily.

Still, some took more and tried to save it. The manna rotted, but God did not chastise the people. On the sixth day, the people took a double portion and the extra portion for the Sabbath did not rot. Yet, some people still went out to try to collect more manna on the seventh day. At this point God chastised the people and asked how long it would take them to truly trust Him.

- **(1:15)** The ultimate reason for this rejection is because the peoples' *hands were covered with blood*. This language represents violence toward each other and toward the innocent. The people were acting much like the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Israelites did not expect this to matter to God as long as they made the appropriate sacrifices, but Isaiah showed them just how wrong they were.

IDENTIFY: Lead the group to identify the different ways the worship of the Israelites offended God. Allow them to include why the action was offensive. Lead the group to explore possible reasons that their worship practices had become unacceptable.

DISCUSS: *What attitudes might have made these practices unacceptable?*

STUDY: Focus on verses 13-15. Place the group into pairs, designating one person as the Exodus person and the other as the Deuteronomy person. Call attention to the Bible Skill (p. 15), directing each person to locate the passage from their assigned book. Allow partners to complete the Bible Skill. Invite volunteers to share their findings.

DISCUSS: *What are causes and ways believers today may fall into a pattern of unacceptable worship of the Lord? What warnings should we draw from Judah's mistakes?* (p. 15) *How should we approach God when we worship Him?*

TRANSITION: *Isaiah delivered God's remedy for their unacceptable worship.*

READ: **Direct the group to silently read Isaiah 1:16-17** and circle the commands given.

- **(1:16)** For Isaiah's audience, *washing* was more than physically bathing. The word implies a ritual bath done as part of preparation to enter into the Lord's presence. Similarly, *cleansing* oneself meant putting away all sources of ritual impurity. Given the context of the passage, washing and cleansing implied an internal cleansing.

CHART: On a writing surface, list the nine commands found in Isaiah 1:16-17. Lead the group to compare various Bible translations, looking for different ways the commands are worded. Record any variances next to the corresponding command. Guide the group to suggest synonyms for each word. Use information from the Explore the Text (p. 15) and the Day 4 Daily Exploration (p. 18) as needed.

ASK: *How does following these commands fix the problems identified in verses 10-15? How is following these commands an expression of faith in God?*

DISCUSS: *If being devoted to God in faithful obedience does not earn our salvation, then why is it necessary for believers to be faithfully obedient to God?* (p. 15)

READ: Encourage the group to listen for the choice given as someone reads aloud Isaiah 1:18-20.

- **(1:18)** While God was rejecting ritual without relationship, He was not rejecting ritual and sacrifice altogether. Even though their sins were scarlet and crimson red, they could become white as snow and wool. Such a transformation involved sacrifice and the spilling of blood. Ironically, the blood of the sin sacrifice would change the crimson red of sin to the white that represents purity. If the people were willing to truly settle things with God and have their scarlet sins transformed to white, then they would be obedient to God and His commands.
- **(1:20)** The phrase, *the mouth of the LORD has spoken*. These words demonstrate that what Isaiah had said was by the authority of God. They also closed the debate. There was no more negotiation at this point; all that was left was for the people of God either to listen and obey or to continue in their rebellion. The choice was theirs and ours.

DISCUSS: Highlight verse 18, characterizing God as taking the initiative. **ASK:** *How does God take the initiative today to bring people into a relationship with Him? How does His approach today compare with the approach found in Isaiah 1?* (p. 15)

HIGHLIGHT: Explain that verse 18 is the memory verse for this week. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*), challenging the group to memorize verse 18 this week.

CLARIFY: Call attention to the Key Doctrine (Salvation; p. 15). Emphasize that God was calling the people to repent and turn to Him. Note that God continues to make that offer today. **ASK:** *How important is the message of repentance to the message of the gospel? How important is this message to believers?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Direct the group to review Isaiah 1:10-20, looking for what God seeks in those who worship Him. **ASK:** *What do these actions reveal about the nature of worship?*

SUMMARIZE: Reintroduce **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Themes of Isaiah*). Lead the group to identify any of the themes that were in today's passage. Refer them to Apply the Text (p. 16) for assistance.

RESPOND: Prior to the group time, select one of the question sets under Apply the Text (p. 16). Lead the group to respond to the selected questions. You may choose to lead them to respond silently, challenging them to revisit this section later in the day.

PRAY: Conclude the group time with prayer, thanking God for taking the initiative to call us back to Him. Ask for courage to repent and return to Him when He confronts us about our own sin.

AFTER THE SESSION

Contact group members who need to be encouraged, reminding them that a new study is beginning, making it a great time to get back into the habit of participating in the group time.