

God Confronts

ISAIAH 1:10-20

¹⁰ **A** Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of **B** Sodom! Listen to the instruction of our God, you people of **B** 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 **C** appear before me, who requires this from you—this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Stop bringing **D** useless offerings. Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons and Sabbaths, and the calling of **B** solemn assemblies—I cannot stand iniquity with a festival. ¹⁴ I hate your New Moons and prescribed festivals. They have become a **B** burden to me; I am **C** 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. **H** Cleanse yourselves. Remove your evil deeds from my sight. Stop doing evil. ¹⁷ **I** Learn to do what is good. **O** Pursue justice. **K** Correct the oppressor. Defend the rights of the fatherless. **I** Plead the widow’s cause. ¹⁸ “Come, let us **M** 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 **N** willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land. ²⁰ But if you refuse and rebel, you will be **O** devoured by the sword.” For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- A** (1) “Pay attention” (Ex. 15:26); (2) “obey” (Ex. 24:7); (3) answer prayer (Judg. 13:9); (4) “understand” (Gen. 11:7); (5) “analyze” (Ps. 94:8-11).
- B** Isaiah compared Judah and Jerusalem to Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities God had destroyed for their iniquity (Gen. 19:24; Ezek. 16:49-50).
- C** God knows the posture of our hearts when we “worship” (GNT, NLT) Him.
- D** “Meaningless” (NIV); “futile” (NRSV). Idols are “worthless” (Ps 31:6; 119:37; Jer. 18:15).
- E** “Religious gatherings” (GNT).
- F** In Deuteronomy 1:12 Moses stated, “How can I bear your troubles, burdens, and disputes by myself?”
- G** “Weary of bearing them” (ESV); “They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them!” (NLT).
- H** To wash oneself from sin (Isa. 4:4).
- I** To teach in the sense of training. In Hosea 10:11, Ephraim was trained like a heifer by a yoke and goad.
- J** The children of Israel went to Moses to “seek” (ESV, NIV, NLT) the Lord’s understanding (Ex. 18:15).
- K** “Rescue the oppressed” (NRSV).
- L** “Defend” (GNT); “fight for the rights” (NLT).
- M** “Reason together” (ESV, KJV).
- N** Obedience requires our “consent” (NASB). David wasn’t willing to go with Absalom (2 Sam. 13:25).
- O** “Doomed to die” (GNT).

1. EMPTY RITUALS (Isa. 1:10-15)

- Isaiah compared the Israelites to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, questioning their sincerity in practicing religious rites and observing religious festivals.
- He declared God to be wearied by their insincere religious rituals and practices that had become a substitute for godly living.

2. TRUE FOLLOWERS (Isa. 1:16-17)

- Isaiah called on the Israelites to cleanse their hearts and demonstrate they had done so by living godly lives.
- Emphasize that the actions listed pointed to a changed life that was the result of repentance.
- Be careful to explain that righteous works do not secure salvation.

3. REPENTANCE REQUIRED

(Isa. 1:18-20)

- Isaiah declared that the people faced a choice: they could approach God in repentance and find forgiveness, or they could continue to rebel and face God's judgment.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God confronts His people about the consequences of their actions.

- 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.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Who's your favorite television judge, and why?

- Particularly, television judges have gained notoriety in popular culture. Lead the group to identify any judge personalities with whom they are familiar (ex.: Judge Faith, Judge Hatchett, Judge Judy, Judge Mathis, Judge Milian, Judge Wapner).
- Some television judges are renown for their no-nonsense approach to presiding over cases.
- As the righteous Judge, God has a no-nonsense approach and response when His people break covenant with Him.
- In Isaiah 1:10-20, the prophet presents God's indictment against the Israelites and the hope of receiving a pardon, if the people repent.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

ISAIAH 1:10-15

What was the significance of Isaiah addressing his fellow countrymen as "rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah"?

- Sodom and Gomorrah symbolized centers of sinful living (Gen. 13:13; 18:20-21; 19:5,24-25).
- The nation of Judah's offenses were so severe, they paralleled those of cities that God totally destroyed.
- Judgment awaits all of us, so we should be careful to avoid living ungodly lives and refusing to repent.

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

- Today, our "sacrifices" (v. 11) include offering our time, talents, and treasures (money). All are forms of worship.
- Outward expressions of worship are hollow if inwardly one's heart is unfaithful to God.
- Religious practices are no substitute for godly living.

Why didn't God take pleasure in the Israelites' sacrifices?

- Placing our faith in religious rituals more than in the God we worship is empty and ineffective.
- God values obedience more than religious activities (1 Sam. 15:22).
- Spiritual rituals are meaningless when they don't include obedience.

ISAIAH 1:16-17

How would you summarize Isaiah's instructions in verses 16-17? How do these actions connect?

- As God's chosen people, Isaiah urged the Israelites to turn from their sinful ways and return to godly living.

- A changed heart leads to a change in behavior.
- Righteous actions (e.g., caring for the poor, fatherless, and oppressed) flow from the hearts of God's followers.
- Salvation isn't secured through our actions. Faith in Christ alone saves us (Eph. 2:8-9).

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

- Discuss the results of their actions, and brainstorm ways to show Christ's love in your community.
- Pause to pray for any people or churches identified.

ISAIAH 1:18-20

Why did God offer the Israelites the choice to repent rather than force them to do so?

- God is committed to maintaining a love relationship with those who love and obey Him (Ex. 19:5; 1 Chron. 16:15; Neh. 1:5).
- Choosing to obey God's commands reflects our love for Him (John 14:15).
- True repentance is voluntary and from the heart (2 Cor. 7:10).

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

- We can choose to obey God or suffer the consequences of our disobedience.
- Choosing to obey yields bountiful blessings. Choosing to disobey brings judgment and destruction.

What's the significance of Isaiah's invitation from God to make Judah's sins "as white as snow" (v. 18)?

- No matter how severe the offense, God is willing to forgive those who repent.
- God is able and willing to cleanse the stain of sin from our hearts.
- Forgiveness and salvation are available to all who confess and repent of sin, believe in Jesus Christ, and accept Him as Savior and Lord.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Reflect on your average day, including your thoughts and attitudes. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any area(s) in need of cleansing.

- **Personal Challenge:** As you participate in worship practices this week (e.g., church attendance, Bible reading and study, prayer, Christian service), ask God to reveal and replace any empty practices with a heart devoted to loving and living for Him.
- Pray our actions, behavior, thoughts, and attitudes reflect righteousness and show us as true followers of God.



OBJECT LESSON

AN INVITATION

Display an invitation (a wedding or wedding shower, baby shower, birthday celebration, special event, etc.). If a paper invitation isn't available, search the Internet for an electronic example. Ask the group: *What emotions or thoughts stir within you when you receive an invitation to attend a special event?* (Responses may vary.) Explain that for many of us, being invited to participate in a gathering or celebration brings excitement, joy, and enthusiasm. We feel special, included, and welcomed to join in the festivities.

Now lead the group to consider the emotions or thoughts experienced when they're excluded from being invited to a significant event or special occasion. While we may value receiving an invitation to some gatherings more than others, exclusion yields discomfort and is unpleasant for most of us.

Draw the group's attention to and read Isaiah 1:18. Emphasize that the Israelites received a divine invitation from the Lord: "Come, let us settle this." The Holy One of Israel invited His chosen people to repent and seek forgiveness so their relationship with Him could be restored. Note that although the people's wickedness was deserving of destruction (as suggested by Isaiah's reference to Sodom and



Gomorrah in v. 10), God graciously offered to "wipe the slate clean" and cleanse their sin-stained hearts.

In His mercy, God extends the same invitation today. All humanity is "invited" to have a love relationship with the righteous God. None of us are deserving, but all are welcomed. God requires a response of a repentant heart and placing one's faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Thank God for His invitation to be in relationship with Him. Encourage the group to consider family, friends, or associates with whom they can share God's invitation.



DIG DEEPER

FROM SUPERFICIAL TO GOD-HONORING

God judges, and yet, He doesn't arbitrarily judge. Instead, God desires to challenge His people concerning the reason for their actions. Isaiah began the Book of Isaiah by creating an atmosphere of a courtroom. Isaiah stated, "Listen, heavens, and pay attention, earth, for the LORD has spoken: 'I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me'" (Isa. 1:2). Judah "rebelled against" God. In a charge to Judah, Isaiah stated, "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's feeding trough, but Israel does not know; my people do not understand" (v. 3). Isaiah continued by noting that Judah was a "sinful nation" who was "weighed down with iniquity" (v. 4). Therefore, God allowed an attack by an enemy to destroy all but Jerusalem (vv. 5-9). Yet, those in Jerusalem continued to offer sacrifices and live as though they were right with God (vv. 10-17).

Gary Smith comments that "many of these people were offering detestable sacrifices, shedding innocent blood, and not upholding justice" (Is 1:15-17).¹ Judah was just as sinful as Sodom and Gomorrah had been; the difference was that God spared Jerusalem.

But, why? It wasn't for the sacrifices. In fact, God saw their sacrifices as nothing more than a superficial, sanctimonious act. As a consequence, God saw their practices as nothing more than defiling or trampling His temple. Sacrifices were supposed to create an aroma that was pleasing unto the Lord. Yet, the sacrifices Judah made weren't pleasing to Him in any way.

However, Isaiah didn't allow Judah to wonder what God wanted with their temple practices. He provided seven standards to cleanse themselves: (1) Cease doing evil; (2) learn to do good; (3) seek justice; (4) rebuke the oppressor; (5) defend the fatherless; (6) plead for the widow; and (7) reason with the Lord (vv. 16-18). The Bible instructs followers of God to obey His principles. By following His precepts one can have fellowship with God.

1. Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39, The New American Commentary*, 15A (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 94.