

## WEEK #4

### Isaiah 1:10-20 - Repentance





# Isaiah by Mail

A Bible Study Born in the Midst of Covid

Monday, June 29, 2020

After nearly 4 months of Covid isolation, many of us are still not able to go to church - still longing to be in the midst of the sweet sound of voices raised in worship together, or for words from scripture strengthening us to live for God this week, or for the activities which bind us in friendship to other believers.

I'll be honest – I have come to a fresh and eye-opening understanding, in the last 4 months, of what church is all about. I love church – I love everything about church – but I never truly realized that I couldn't exist without it! You've heard the expression "no man is an island". Well, that applies to our walk with Jesus more than I ever knew. Christians are not supposed to be alone in their purpose in this world. Even the Christians whom we think we could live without – they are necessary to us. ☺ We were made for community.

But....and every one of us knows this deep in our hearts....quite often there is a hidden problem when believers gather together. This week's passage in *Isaiah 1:10-20* focuses in on that problem. It was written to Israel, not so much to the remnant, but to the broader group known as Israel – God's people on the outside, but what was underneath?

Jews in Israel gathered on Sabbath and Holy Days, worshipped together, listened to the Word of God taught in the temple and synagogues, and brought their sheep and goats to sacrifice at the altar in Jerusalem. They were doing all the right things, but this week's passage is brutally honest with them about the condition of their hearts.

Basically, the Lord says "You make me sick!". "You do things that look religious, but your heart is hard. It isn't about Me. You sing worship songs to Me, but they are really about you and how good they make you feel. You mingle with other believers, but you really don't like them, and you surely wouldn't give up your own comfort to be a help to them. You bring your offerings because you know it's expected of you, but not for Me.



You say you obey the law ...but you surely do not! You lie, you cheat, you gossip, and you walk right by the weak ones who need a miracle and can't protect themselves....you are just like murderers!

There is blood on those hands you raise in worship!



Wow! What is the Lord doing here? He is loving His people!

He is telling them the truth about themselves so they can get back to being the light they were supposed to be.

What are we, the church, supposed to learn from this?

Well, let's ask ourselves: How many of us are part of this broader group called "church", but our hearts are just like Israel's?

Before we can offer hope to a world lost in darkness, we have to look within. We have to attend church because we desperately want spiritual food, and because we know we can't make it without each other. We have to worship God....not ourselves...as we sing together. We have to bring our offerings in gratitude because we know for sure every blessing we have has come from God, not from ourselves. We have to look around and see who needs our help. We have to speak the name of Jesus often, and tell His story. In other words, is our faith genuine? Or just a habit?



Why did the Lord come down so hard on Israel? Because He wanted to forgive them. There was a time of trouble coming, and they had to be ready. Let this passage speak to you in whatever way the Lord wants for you – Jesus has work to do in this world, and He has chosen us to be a part of it!

- Kathleen

## Isaiah 1:10-20 – Repentance Questions

*Memory Verse for this week: Isaiah 1:18*

*“Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, ‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’”*

1. :10 Why is God addressing the Jewish people, and calling them “Sodom”, and “Gomorrah”?
2. :11 Why is God telling them He is tired of their sacrifices? Isn’t He the One Who told them to make sacrifices?
3. :12-14 What are some of the “religious” things the Jewish people are doing...things that God had told them to do, but now He hates?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
4. What are some “religious” things we do today which God may hate?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
5. :15 Why would God not hear their prayers?
6. Is it possible that God will sometimes not hear our prayers?
7. :16 What is the first thing the people of Israel need to do if they want to get things right with God?

8. :17 What is the second thing the people of Israel need to do if they want to get things right with God?

9. :18 When the people of God genuinely repent and turn and go in the other direction, what does God promise He will do?

10. The LORD knows, when He has Isaiah tell the people their sins can be washed away, that there is something He will have to do in order to make that possible. What is that something?

11. :19 &20 What will the results be of repentance? What will the results be of no repentance?

#### **APPLICATION:**

12. When did your scarlet sins become as white as snow?

13. Do you see yourself today as pure white?

14. How can you or I be pure white even when we, as Christians, still sin?

# Isaiah 1:10-20 Repentance

## Kathleen's Answers & Comments

*Memory Verse: Isaiah 1:18*

*"Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."*

God wants repentance and then obedience, not just religious activity. And when God says obedience, He means total obedience. Partial obedience is still rebellion.

Look at this example of the far-reaching effects of either total rebellion or partial obedience:

- Remember Jacob and Esau, sons of Isaac? And remember how Jacob loved the Lord God, and **Esau** did not? He was totally rebellious. Esau eventually moved away from the family of Jacob, because he did not want to raise his family to have faith in the One, True God. One of Esau's grandsons was **Amalek**.
- **Amalek** was evil, and he was a true result of Esau's decision to not believe in the One, True God. When the descendants of Jacob were fleeing Egypt, many years later, the rebellious descendants of Amalek attacked them, and nearly annihilated them. *Exodus 17:8-16*. The Lord God was angry with Amalek for this, and pronounced His judgment on his whole tribe – He would totally destroy this branch of Esau's family someday.
- In the days of **Saul, King of Israel**, the Lord was ready to fulfill that judgment on **Amalek**, and He told Saul to kill and destroy the Amalekites. *1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15:1-23*. But **Saul, rebelling against God's** direct command, decided not to actually kill King Agag of the Amalekites. He let him live. God was furious with Saul for this partial obedience. Eventually Saul lost his kingship because of this rebellion of partial disobedience.
- Many years later a **descendant of Agag the Amalekite** was still around (because Saul had not killed Agag), and was filled with hatred for the children of Jacob. In the book of Esther, this descendant of Agag (**named Haman**) nearly finished the job his ancestors had begun so many years before. He tried desperately to totally wipe out the people of Israel as they were captive in Babylon. *The Book of Esther*.
- But God stepped in, through a young Jewish girl named Esther, and saved His people one more time.
- This near extinction of God's people happened because **Esau**, son of Isaac, rebelled, and **Saul, King of Israel**, refused to obey completely.

God says in *Isaiah 1:13* that He cannot tolerate the combination of sin mixed in with religious activities. *"I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting."*

They are wearing Him out with their hypocrisy and partial obedience. They are being “religious”, but their hearts hold on to their sin.

What do they need to do? Wash. Admit the sin. Let God point out the filth. *Psalm 139:23&24* Turn away from the evil. Stop doing it. Start truly believing in God and doing the good things God always wanted you to do.

*Psalm 139:23&24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

1. :10 Why is God addressing the Jewish people, and calling them “Sodom”, and “Gomorrah”?

If you remember from last week’s lesson, God sees the people of Israel as just as guilty as Sodom and Gomorrah.

2. :11 Why is God telling them He is tired of their sacrifices? Isn’t He the One Who told them to make sacrifices?

God told them to make sacrifices not only with their hands, but with their heart. The people of Israel had begun to worship only with their activities and their motions, but not with their hearts.

3. :12-14 What are some of the “religious” things the Jewish people are doing...things that God had told them to do, but now He hates?

- d. Coming to the temple.
- e. Making animal sacrifices, burning incense, special holidays.
- f. Attending public worship services.

4. What are some “religious” things we do today which God may hate?

A casual glance will probably tell us they could be the very same type of things the Israelites were doing:

- a. Coming to church or Bible Studies.
- b. Praying, attending special days and Easter and Christmas services.
- c. Singing in church, listening to sermons, fellowshiping with others.

If these activities, or work with our hands, are simply religious motions, and not from a heart tender to God and listening for His guidance, then God hates them!

5. :15 Why would God not hear their prayers?

Because they were hypocrites. They were acting religious, but holding on to their sin. They had blood on their hands, just like murderers.

6. Is it possible that God will sometimes not hear our prayers?

God will always hear the sincere prayer of "I'm sorry, I was wrong." *1st John 1:9*. But if we are acting like we love God on Sunday or at Bible Studies, but living like we don't love God, then the "prayers" we make are not actually prayers at all. And no, God doesn't hear and answer fake prayers.

7. :16 What is the first thing the people of Israel need to do if they want to get things right with God?

Admit your sin. Agree with God that you are walking around not believing in Him. Repent. Stop what you are doing. Seek cleanliness.

8. :17 What is the second thing the people of Israel need to do if they want to get things right with God?

Go the other direction. Do the next right thing. Does doing the right thing "save" them? No, but it shows that their repentance is real. Not fake. If repentance is genuine, changes happen.

9. :18 When the people of God genuinely repent and turn and go in the other direction, what does God promise He will do?

A miracle. They will change from dirty and bloody to clean and pure.

10. The LORD knows, when He has Isaiah tell the people their sins can be washed away, that there is something He will have to do in order to make that possible. What is that something?

He knows the day is already planned when He will have to give them "cleanness" as a gift. He knows they cannot make themselves clean.

This "cleanness" will have to be a gift He pays for Himself someday. He will have to redeem them from the slavery in which they placed themselves. He will die for their sins, then conquer death and come back to life – so that they can not only be clean, but be clean forever.



So how does this future death and resurrection help them be “clean” during Isaiah’s day?

Just like today, a person had to admit and repent of his sin, believe God’s promise, and their faith in what God could do and would do is credited to them as if they were totally righteous.

When we look back at the cross, our faith in what He did is credited to us as righteousness. When they looked ahead to the cross, their faith in what He was going to do was credited to them as righteousness. Their good works didn’t save them. And our good works don’t save us. It has always been the gift from God that saves us (grace), never works.

11.:19 &20 What will the results be of repentance? What will the results be of no repentance?

Repentance: New life and forever blessings. No Repentance: Same old life, war and death.