

Isaiah 1:10-17
November 19, 2017

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Picture yourself at the Home of Hope. You've just participated in an hour of corporate worship. As you leave the sanctuary, how do you know if your worship of God was pleasing to Him or not? Do you even wonder about that?

Q: Let's look at that question from God's vantage point. After you leave the sanctuary, how do you think He evaluates our worship of Him? [He looks at our hearts. He looks for those who will humble their heart, confess sin, and desire to obey Him]

Transition: So you can imagine if someone comes to worship God, proclaims to be a Christ-follower, but his life doesn't demonstrate that day in and day out. We might call that person a hypocrite. Try to imagine how frustrating it is for God to endure the religious practices of His alleged covenant people, yet their hearts were far away.

Last week I introduced our study in Isaiah using the idea of a lawsuit being presented by the Lord, through His prophet Isaiah. Isaiah is presenting to us the "opening statements" of the Lord's lawsuit against Judah. Today we turn our attention to Isaiah's statements regarding their religious practices. The Lord is fed up with them, and we need to understand why. So as we study today's Scripture passage, it is my prayer that **all of us CAN please God with our worship and offerings BY learning to do right. He gives us EXAMPLES of what doing right looks like.** Let's see if we can find them. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.10:

- Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

V.11:

- "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.

V.12:

- When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts?

V.13:

- Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies.

V.14:

- Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

V.15:

- When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood;

V.16:

- wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong,

V.17:

- learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.10: Who is Isaiah addressing in this verse? [Both the leaders and the people of Judah – those in all levels of society. The message was for everyone.]

Q V.11: What is the first accusation in the area of religious practices? [Their multiple sacrifices are meaningless and does not please God.]

Q: Why? [Sacrifices and offerings brought by a worshiper whose life is not in conformity with God's standards causes displeasure with the Lord.]

Q V.12: What is the Lord's next accusation? [They have trampled His courts]

Q: What does He mean by that? [He's called them corrupt and a brood of evildoers. Again, how can you be a true worshiper of God and make a farce of His temple courts?]

Q V.13-14: The Lord's not finished. What else do you see? [He can't stand meaningless offerings! The incense is detestable; His soul hates the feasts and festivals]

Q: Do you think God is condemning the very practices of worship that He instituted? If no, what do we need to distinguish? [God does not condemn the practices of worship He, Himself, has instituted, only the false motivation or pretense that distorts them. He welcomes worship from those who repent of their sins and come to His house to glorify His name.]

Q V.15: How does He handle prayers from an evildoers? [He will hide His eyes from them; He won't listen to them.]

Q: Why? [Because their hands are full of blood!]

Transition: If you're looking for some good news, the Lord gives them a roadmap to restore fellowship with Him. Let's look at the next two verses.

Q V.16-17: What does the Lord command? [Wash and make yourselves clean!]

Q: What's another way of saying that? [Repent!]

Q: According to the Lord, what needs to change? [Stop evil deeds; learn to do right; seek justice; encourage the oppressed; defend the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow]

LOOK:

I am reminded of Sheila Walsh's quote in her book *Honest to God: Our life is one, long worship service to the Lord*. So when we come together to worship God and give our offerings, it is pleasing to Him – IF our lives are being lived in a way that is “right” before God. He's observing if we are seeking justice, encouraging the oppressed, defending the cause of the fatherless, or pleading a case for a widow. And the good news is that if we're missing the mark, the Lord opens the door for us to repent and to become obedient. If we are obedient, we will enjoy His blessings.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Is)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Theme

The Book of Isaiah divides itself into two sections, chapters 1–39 and chapters 40–66. The first section warns the Jews about the impending Assyrian invasion of Judah, while the second section encourages the captives returning from the Babylonian captivity.

The main theme of the first section is God's chastening of Judah for their sins, while the main theme of the second section is God's consolation of the captives after their suffering. Isaiah experienced the events of the first thirty-nine chapters, but he prophesied the events of the last section of the book. In the first section, Assyria was the chief foe; in the last section, Babylon was the enemy.

Historical Setting

You will recall that the nation divided after the death of Solomon; ten tribes in the north were organized as Israel, and two tribes in the south as Judah. The capital of Israel was Samaria; the capital of Judah was Jerusalem. Isaiah ministered in Jerusalem, but his messages touched both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms. Isaiah lived to see Israel (the Northern Kingdom) decline and finally go into ruin under Assyria.

The political scene was threatening to Judah at that time. Assyria was the menacing power and the other nations wanted to form a coalition to fight her. However, King Ahaz of Judah would not join the league. So, Syria and Israel united to attack Judah to try to force Ahaz to cooperate. Instead of trusting the Lord for help, Ahaz turned to *Assyria* for assistance and made a

secret pact. Assyria was only too glad to get her foot in the door; she defeated Israel in 721 B.C., but Judah became a vassal state to Assyria, the price Ahaz had to pay for his security. No sooner was Israel out of the way than Assyria decided to attack *Judah* and enslave the entire Jewish nation. Isaiah told the people to trust the Lord for help, but various groups told the king to turn to Egypt for aid. In chapters 36–39, Isaiah tells how God gave King Hezekiah victory over Assyria when the invading army was at the very walls of Jerusalem. However, Judah was so weakened from war, and her cities had been so overrun by the enemy, that the nation never really recovered. Assyria was defeated by the Egyptians; the Egyptians fell to the Babylonians; and in 606–587 B.C., the Babylonians took Judah into captivity. So, in the first half of his book, Isaiah counseled the nation concerning Assyria; in the last half, he comforted the remnant concerning their return from Babylon.

Christ in Isaiah

Isaiah gives a rich prophetic picture of Jesus Christ. We see His birth (7:14 with Matt. 1:23; also Isa. 9:6); the ministry of John the Baptist (40:3–6 with Matt. 3:1ff); Christ anointed by the Spirit (61:1–2 with Luke 4:17–19); Christ the Servant (42:1–4 with Matt. 12:17–21); Israel’s rejection of Christ (6:9–11 with John 12:38ff, Matt. 13:10–15, and parallel references in the Gospels; also Acts 28:26–27 and Rom. 11:8); the Stone of Stumbling (8:14 and 28:16 with Rom. 9:32–33 and 10:11, 1 Peter 2:6); Christ’s ministry to the Gentiles (49:6 with Luke 2:32, Acts 13:47; see also 9:1–2 with Matt. 4:15–16); Christ’s suffering and death (52:13–53:12); His resurrection (55:3 with Acts 13:34; 45:23 with Phil. 2:10–11 and Rom. 14:11); and the Coming King (9:6–7, 11:1ff, 32:1–2; 59:20–21 with Rom. 11:26–27; 63:2–3 with Rev. 19:13–15).

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 1035–1036). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

b. The Lord’s instructions on how the nation should deal with her guilt (1:10–20)

1:10. Building on his reference to **Sodom** and **Gomorrah** in verse 9, Isaiah likened the **rulers** and **people** of Judah to those evil cities. Both the leaders and the populace—those in all levels of society—were to **hear** (cf. v. 2) God’s **word**.

1:11–15. The Lord rejected the people’s appeal to several aspects of religious ritual—including animal **sacrifices** (v. 11), **incense** (v. 13a), festivals and feasts (vv. 12, 13b–14), and prayers (v. 15)—as compensation for their iniquity.

Some people have mistakenly said (from v. 11) that God had not established the sacrificial system. But this is wrong. Isaiah’s point is that the people assumed that merely by offering sacrifices at the altar they would be made ceremonially clean before God. Even multiple sacrifices are **meaningless** (v. 13) and therefore do not please God when the “worshiper” does not bring his life into conformity with God’s standards. Also the careful observance of monthly **offerings** (**New Moons**; cf. Num. 28:11–14) and **Sabbaths** (weekly as well as annual Sabbaths on the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles, Lev. 16:31; 23:34, 39) were **meaningless** to God when they were not done with the proper attitude. The same was true of their **assemblies** on the Sabbath (Lev. 23:3), and the **festivals** and **feasts** including the Passover (Lev. 23:4–7), the Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:15–21), the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24), the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26–27), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34).

Such observances God called **evil** because they were carried out hypocritically, with sinful hearts (cf. Isa. 1:4). Therefore those national gatherings, rather than pleasing God, were an obnoxious **burden to Him** (v. 14).

In addition, the people's **many prayers** were ineffective because of their guilt (v. 15). The words **spread out your hands** denoted asking for help (cf. 1 Kings 8:22; Lam. 1:17). Those hands, however, were **full of blood** (Isa. 1:15). By treating the needy unfairly (cf. vv. 16–17), the people were like a murderer spreading out his bloodstained hands to God in prayer. This spiritual condition made Judah's religious ritual ludicrous. Obviously God would never **listen** to (i.e., answer) such prayers! (cf. Ps. 66:18) Inward righteousness must accompany outward ritual for that ritual to mean anything to God.

1:16–20. The Lord offered complete forgiveness to the repentant, but promised judgment on the rebels who continued to reject Him. The people had the mistaken idea that they could live any way they pleased so long as they made restitution in the sacrificial system. But instead of trusting in religious ritual (vv. 10–15) the people were to obey God and have the right attitudes toward Him and the right actions toward others.

The people needed to be **clean** inwardly (like a murderer washing his bloodstained hands). And they needed to replace their **evil** (cf. v. 13) deeds with right actions. As stipulated in the Mosaic Covenant they needed to evidence their trust in and obedience to the Lord by helping needy people—the **oppressed ... the fatherless**, and **the widow** (cf. v. 23; 10:1–2; Deut. 24:17, 19–21; 26:12; 27:19).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 993-994). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

1:11–15 The Lord directed the people of Israel to build the tabernacle (Ex 26–31), established the theological significance of the sacrifices (Lv 1–6), and appointed the nation's festivals (Ex 34:18–26; Lv 23). But here Isaiah, speaking in the Lord's name, appears to condemn these God-ordained institutions. Israelite prophets typically expressed themselves in extreme language, so attuned were they to the Lord's sense of betrayal by the people He had chosen. The institutions of Israelite worship were designed so that the people could sense God's presence in their midst, confess their sins, and renew their covenant relationship. They were to participate in these feasts in a heart-felt celebration of His past acts of grace. But the nation had grown careless; its worship had become shallow, carried out as popular custom—a casual “trampling” (v. 12) of the courts of the Lord. There was a profound disparity between the people's professed loyalty to the covenant and the “iniquity” (v. 13) and injustice (v. 15) they tolerated in violation of that very covenant's precepts. Under such conditions, it is hardly surprising that the Lord found their offerings “useless” (v. 13) and was disgusted by their prayer, incense, festivals, and other religious practices. God does not condemn the practices of worship He, Himself, has instituted, only the false motivation that distorts them. He welcomes worship from those who repent of their sins and come to His house to glorify His name.