

WEEK 01

ISAIAH 1 | God has the power to refine His people through the expulsion of the wicked and the removal of sins. Therefore, His people are to live according to His will.

Preface

The Book of Isaiah begins with a chapter that was likely written very late in Isaiah's life, probably after he had finished most of the book. The text is formatted to mimic a covenant lawsuit, similar to the negotiations that might take place before a trial, like an arraignment.

Several key indicators are:

- Accusations brought before the defendant (verses 2-9)
- Defensive reasoning is refuted (verses 10-15)
- Unexpected exhortations on acceptable behavior (verses 16-17)
- One party offers to resolve the case (verses 18-20)
- Consequences of positive and negative responses (verses 21-31)

The historical context of Chapter 1 indicates that it must have been written after a major military event, giving us four possibilities of the time of writing:

1. Syro-Ephraimite War (734-732BC). This is when Israel and Syria attacked Judah to force Judah to join their coalition (cf 2 Kgs 16)
2. During the attack on Judah by Sennacherib (701 BC), where the whole nation was destroyed except Jerusalem
3. After the attack by Sennacherib (701 BC) during the reign of Manasseh (most likely)
4. Or a prophesy about the FUTURE fall of Jerusalem in 586BC.

Observation

1. What was Jerusalem being condemned for? (Isa. 1:1-4, 21-23)
2. What was the state/condition of Jerusalem as a result of their rebellion? (Isa. 1:5-9)
3. What are the consequences of Jerusalem's unfaithfulness? (Isa. 1:10-15, 24-26)
4. What did God command Jerusalem to do? (Isa. 1:16-17)

Interpretation

1. What does the comparison between Jerusalem and Sodom and Gomorrah reveal about Jerusalem's sins and God's character?

Leaders' note: Sodom and Gomorrah are two cities that were destroyed in Genesis 19 for their wickedness. The people of Judah had sinned greatly and God's justice would necessitate their destruction. However, God is gracious and faithful to His promises that He would preserve the people.

2. What intrigues you about God's command in Isa. 1:17?

3. What does the phrase "let us settle the matter" in Isa. 1:18 imply about sin?

Leaders' note: Sin is being equated to a dispute that must be settled. However, the only way it is settled is through God's grace.

4. What is the relationship between obedience (Isa. 1:19) and grace (Isa. 1:18)?

Leaders' note: There seems to be a human responsibility in being made clean from sin.

Potential follow-up question: How do we reconcile being obedient while at the same time knowing that God's grace is unmerited?

Application

1. Are we as a society, just as guilty as Israel? In what ways?

2. What keeps you from living out verse 17: "learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause"?

3. What is a new way you can begin to incorporate more of verse 17 into your life, both personally and as a community?

Optional Prayer Exercise: Fasting and Corporate Prayer of Repentance

In Scripture, God made promises through a mediator and to a people. In response, corporate acts were recorded in the Bible as an essential element in the spiritual life of God's people. Our study this week reminds us of the grievance of our sins. Although we might not contribute directly to the injustices in our society, we ought to grieve and confess the sins of the world.

In the Bible, repentance is usually expressed by prayer and fasting, where God's people grieve outward tragedies and demonstrate the genuineness of their inward contrition. When we pray and fast together with our community, it helps us set aside our agendas while we focus on asking God to do what He has promised to do for the sake of His name. In addition, fasting can function as a magnifying glass to our sins and a reminder of our dependence on God.

Practical Instructions:

Fasting is the voluntary act of abstaining from food for a specific period and for spiritual purposes where we dedicate the time to praying and seeking God. The purpose of fasting and prayer is to set aside our fleshly "appetites" to clear out space for God to come and fill our hearts with His Presence.

- Block out a specific time to fast so we can pray and seek God.
- Set a specific objective. For corporate repentance, focus on asking God to reveal to us our sinful nature and our desire for God to establish His kingdom where He reigns and justice is done.
- Prepare ourselves by reading the Word (ex: Joel 2, Daniel 9, Nehemiah 9) and pray.
- Focus on praying and worshiping God during our time of fasting. Journal our experiences and share.