



Isaiah 1:10-20

- Introduction : Justice, Not Hypocritical Worship

The Old Testament is full of references to sacrifices and the Jewish Sacrificial System. When contemporary believers hear these references, they tend to spiritually “check out” and ready themselves to move on to the next topic without making any real attempt to apply it to their lives. They assume it is an antiquated system that God commanded for a period of time that is now null in void do to Jesus’ sacrificial death on the Cross. Unfortunately, if we don’t grasp the significance and rigor of OT sacrifices to the Jewish people we will fail to understand the power of the Cross.

We’re not saying that the OT Sacrificial System surrounding temple worship should be reinstated at all. But, if we are to truly understand the Lord’s rebuke of these people’s sacrifices, we would be wise to look at the value that the Jewish people put on them and think how they might have felt being told that their obedience was now being apparently being rejected by Yahweh.

| English Standard (ESV) | Passion Notes | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Isaiah 1:10 Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹ “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.</p> <p>¹² “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. ¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.</p> | <p>x 1:10 Isaiah uses this command twenty-three times in this book.</p> <p>y 1:10 Although the Hebrew uses the word torah (“law, instruction”), it is used in the context to mean “correction or rebuke.”</p> <p>z 1:11 Outward sacrifices are empty if there is no inward reality (Ps. 51:16–17; Mic. 6:6–8; Matt. 23:23). God cannot be bought. He looks at the heart and requires offerings given in holiness and truth. The sacrifice of a fattened animal is an outward picture of what God wants to do inside of us. He wants to kill that “fattened” part of us that is stuffed only with the letter of the Word but not the humility taught by the Word (Deut. 8:2–3; 2 Chron. 7:14; Isa. 66:2; James 1:21).</p> <p>aa 1:13 Or “your gifts of nothing.”</p> <p>ab 1:13 Or “iniquity and obligatory assemblies,” a likely hendiadys. See also Jer. 7:11.</p> <p>ac 1:14 God has a soul with emotions and desires. He is perfect throughout.</p> <p>ad 1:14 God calls them “your feasts,” not his (Lev. 23:2). Their celebrations had become so shame-fully sin-stained that God didn’t even want his holy name associated with their sinful conduct on those sacred days. See Amos 5:21– 24.</p> | <p>Isaiah 1:10 Hear the word of Yahweh: x “You leaders of Sodom, heed the correction y of our God! People of Gomorrah, you’d better listen to his rebuke.” ¹¹ And Yahweh keeps saying: “Why such countless sacrifices—what use are they to me? I’ve had my fill of your burnt offerings of rams and your fattened animals. z I find no delight in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats! ¹² When you come before my face, who asked you to come trampling on my courtyards?</p> <p>¹³ Stop bringing your meaningless offerings. aa Your burning incense stinks! Your sin-stained celebrations, ab your new moon festivals, Sabbaths, your various pious meetings—I can’t stand them! ¹⁴ With all my soul ac I hate your new moon festivals and your feasts; ad they are nothing but a burden that I’m sick and tired of carrying.</p> |

| English Standard (ESV) | Passion Notes | Passion Translation |
|---|--|---|
| <p>¹⁵ When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. ¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.</p> <p>¹⁸ "Come now, 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 become like wool. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; ²⁰ but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."</p> | <p>ae 1:15 See 1 Tim. 2:8; Ps. 66:18.</p> <p>af 1:16 This was also the message of John the Baptizer (Matt. 3:8).</p> <p>ag 1:17 Or "Vindicate the victim." ah 1:17 See Ps. 9:18; Isa. 58:7; Jer. 22:16; James 1:27. ai 1:18 Or "Come now and let us argue it out together." This is taken from the Hebrew word yākah, which has clear judicial overtones with an implication of a verdict in court.</p> <p>aj 1:18 Instead of pronouncing judgment to the guilty, Judge-Yahweh, in his grace and mercy, offers complete forgiveness.</p> <p>ak 1:18 The Hebrew for "scarlet" is taken from a root word for "double (dyed)" or "twice (dipped in scarlet dye)," making a permanent color.</p> <p>al 1:18 The word for "crimson" (Heb. tola) is also the word for a worm that, when crushed, bleeds a deep crimson color and is then used to dye fabric a permanent color. Jesus called himself a "worm (tola)" while on the cross, as one who was crushed and bleeding crimson blood. See Ps. 22:6.</p> <p>am 1:18 Snow and wool are both naturally white. The Lord will not only deal with our outward sins but he will cleanse our nature, changing us from the inside out. Grace includes full amnesty.</p> <p>an 1:19 Or "the best of the land." For the believer today, this is the land of grace that the meek inherit. The best of the land is the fruit of the life of Jesus (Gal. 5:22, the harvest of the Spirit). The devouring sword is the flashing sword of the Word, exposing and piercing us to the innermost part of our being (Heb. 4:12).</p> <p>ao 1:20 The Hebrew text contains an obvious wordplay. "If you listen, you will eat the harvest; if you rebel, you will be eaten by the sword."</p> | <p>¹⁵ When you stretch out your hands to pray, I will hide my eyes from you. ae Repeat your prayers all you want, but I will not listen, for your hands are stained with innocent blood. ¹⁶ Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean. Remove your evil actions from my sight and stop sinning! af</p> <p>¹⁷ Learn what it means to do what is good by seeking righteousness and justice! Rescue the oppressed. ag Uphold the rights of the fatherless and defend the widow's cause. ah ¹⁸ Come now and let's deliberate over the next steps to take together. ai Yahweh promises you over and over: aj "Though your sins stain you like scarlet, ak I will whiten them like bright, new-fallen snow! Even though they are deep red like crimson, al they will be made white like wool!" am ¹⁹ If you have a willing heart to let me help you, and if you will obey me, you will feast on the blessings of an abundant harvest. an ²⁰ But if you are stubborn and refuse to obey, the sword will eat you instead." ao The mouth of Yahweh has spoken."</p> |

- Commentary: Bible Knowledge Commentary, John A. Martin

- 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 has not established the sacrificial system. But this is wrong. Isaiah's point is that people assumed that merely by offering sacrifices at the altar they would be made ceremonially clean before God. Even the 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 [Vol. 1, p. 1036] (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). God then invited the sinful people to come to their senses (Isa. 1:18) and admit they had been wrong in their attitudes and practices. The invitation Come now, let us reason together was more than a call for negotiations between the people and God. The word “reason” is a law term used of arguing, convincing, or deciding a case in court. The people were to be convinced by their argumentation with God that He was right and they were wrong about their condition. (Other court terms in this chapter are justice ... defend, and plead, v. 17.) If they acknowledged the depth of their sins—that their iniquities were like blood-colored stains on their souls (scarlet, a red dye made from a worm, and crimson, red-colored cloth)—then God in His grace would cleanse them, making them spiritually white like snow or wool. Acknowledgment of sin was to precede God's cleansing. And the same is true today.

The obedient (v. 19) would eat the best from the land, that is, they would have bountiful crops as promised in the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28:3-6, 11). By contrast, those who refused to turn to God (rebels; cf. Isa. 1:23, 28) would be defeated by enemies (devoured by the sword, v. 20; Deut. 28:45-57). This was certain for the ... Lord has spoken (cf. Isa. 40:5; 58:14).

- Discussion Questions:

1. When the Lord said he “had enough” of the people's sacrifices and offerings, how do you think the people would have interpreted his rebuke and how might they have altered their practices as a result of the rebuke?

2. In verse 12, the Lord says, “Come now, 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 become like wool.” How was this going to happen if the practice that rid the people of their spiritual cleansing was being challenged?
3. Assuming that modern believers are still called to “sacrifice” to the Lord, what is it that we lay down before him that might be considered an offering?
4. For you and I, what are the “cost and benefits” of living a truly sacrificial lifestyle in today’s world?
5. Does the Lord ever say to you, “Come let us reason together?” If yes, what are some of the areas of life that might be up for discussion?