



18'Come now, let us reason together,' says Yahweh. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.'

The thought in Isaiah chapter 1 has moved from the nation's political crisis ¹⁸1 to the uselessness of its religion²². But there is still hope for them. No matter how sensational and attention-grabbing their sins may be ('scarlet . . . crimson') God has not totally given up on his people. God wants them to think. Religion is generally mindless routine or submission to demanding religious 'leaders', but repentance involves thinking. God says, 'Come now, let us reason . . .' Repentance is changing your mind, thinking again, facing the facts as they really are. Then, because of a changed mind it leads to a changed life. Thinking (New Testament Greek metanoia) is first; an amended life (New Testament Greek epistrophe) follows soon after. But we have to face ourselves and pull ourselves up from the way we are going. And that will involve doing some hard thinking. Even at the time Isaiah is presenting his edited book (at a guess, around 700 BC?) some lines of preaching that he had used earlier still represent his thought, and he reuses them in this edited preface of his.

¹⁸1 1: 2-9
²²2 1:10-17

• God has not given up on His people

• God wants them to think and repent

• This leads to a changed life

19'If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; 20but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.' For the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.

Now Isaiah turns to the ghastly social situation in the land.

1. Sin produces decay

1. Sin produces decay. Jerusalem was meant to be a city of righteousness, but it had so deteriorated it became the centre of violence, greed and insensitivity to the sufferings of the needy. Isaiah continues his analysis.

21How the trustworthy city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her – but now murderers!

• Unfaithfulness, violence and greed

Once there was trustworthiness; now there is only unfaithfulness, violence and greed among the leaders of the land.

22Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. 23Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts.

• No compassion for the needy

Worst of all there was no compassion for the needy.

They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them.

And yet the very function of leadership is to give guidance to the confused and protection to those who can be easily exploited.

2. Sin rouses God's anger

2. Sin rouses God's anger. God finds the sin of his people an immense burden upon his heart. His people have become his enemies because they are so unlike him. He must and will act in severe judgement eventually, and Isaiah knows that the time for such severity is close indeed.

• God's severe judgement is needed

²⁴Therefore – this is the word of the Lord Yahweh Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel – 'Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies.'

3. God takes action to get for himself a people who have been restored to righteousness

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²⁵'But I will bring back my hand upon you; I will thoroughly wash away your dross as with lye, and remove all your impurities.

²⁶I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.'

• He will cleanse and purify His people

God does not give up easily! 'I will bring back my hand upon you,' he says. He will act in power and do something about the wanderings and rebellions of his people. He will cleanse away their dirt as if he were using some powerful chemical detergent. He will purify them. He will work in such a way that his people are led by counsellors and judges who are full of righteousness and wisdom. God's people will become a city of righteousness again.

²⁷With justice a ransom-price will be paid for Zion, and her returning people will be redeemed with righteousness.

• God's Jerusalem will be restored by a sacrifice for sin – the death of Jesus Christ

Verse 27 is the high-point of the chapter. This future-restoration of God's Jerusalem will take place in and through a sacrifice for sin that ransoms men and women from their bondage to sin and its punishment. A price-paying sacrifice will be made. The old covenant believer must have thought of this as some kind of 'passover lamb' like that which had redeemed Israel before. He must have thought of the sacrifices for sin in Israel's sacrificial system. The Christian knows what it all points to: the atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

• God's people must turn back to Him

For the restoration to actually take place there has to be a turning back to God. It is 'her returning people' who are restored.

• The forgiveness of sins takes place by an act of justice

The forgiveness of sin takes place by an act of justice. God does not look at our sins and say, 'I'll forget the whole matter.' He looked at our sins and says, 'I give something that fulfils righteousness' and brings forgiveness at the same time. God is just and the justifier of the one who holds to the faith of Jesus.

4. The alternative to submission is to perish

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²⁸But rebels and sinners will both be suddenly broken. Those who forsake Yahweh will come to an end.

²⁹'For you [lit. they] will reap shame from the trees which you have desired; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen

³⁰You will be like an oak with fading leaves,

• Those who refuse restoration find God's judgement sudden, disgraceful and totally destructive of all that is good

*like a garden without water.
31The mighty man will become tinder
and his work a spark;
both will burn together,
with no one to quench the fire.'*

Those who refuse the restoration find God's judgement is sudden, disgraceful and eventually totally destructive of all that is good. The persistent rebel destroys himself.

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