

Isaiah - Study 1

Teacher Guide

Notes prepared by Dr. Ian A. H. Bond



You may use this study material in your personal Bible study or study group absolutely free. All we ask is that you acknowledge Free Online Bible Study and do not use this material on any website or for monetary gain. Thank you.

This study is part of a full college-level course on the Book of Isaiah taught by Dr. Ian Bond. The complete Teacher's Guide, Student Notes, illustrative Power Point, the lectures in MP3 format, and Dr. Bond's book *Insights into Isaiah*, Revised 2nd Edition, are available for purchase and download from Teach the Nations, Inc. For more information go to www.free-online-bible-study.org

*Copyright 2009 free-online-bible-study.org
This site is owned by Teach the Nations, Inc., a non-profit organization incorporated in the State of Georgia, which is exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code from Federal income tax.
Contributions are deductible under section 170.*

“Come Now, Let Us Reason Together.”

“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 as crimson,
they shall be like wool.”

Isaiah 1:18

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Isaiah is addressing the people of Judah, that is, people of praise.
1. The name *Judah* is derived from the Hebrew term *yadah*, meaning “praise” or “give thanks.”
 - a. In 1:2 Yahweh says to these praising people: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.”
 - b. The late Judson Cornwall appropriately describes these praising people as the “Select of the Elect.”
 - c. Nevertheless, they are told that they are a rebellious people.
- B. In its immediate context, this opening vision of the prophecy of Isaiah concerns a specific city and nation in the eighth century BCE.
1. Barry Webb insists that the vision “is in fact breathtaking in its scope” in its embrace of all nations and reach to the very end of time.
 - a. All believers discover in their own lives that rebellion in the heart did not cease when they received Christ as Savior, neither did it cease when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit.
 - b. That rebellion is still there and needs to be dealt with is because underneath the facade of religion there can still be a heart of rebellion.
 2. The believer really has no right to speak against the sin of the world until he or she has dealt with the sin that lives under his or her own skin.
 - a. Judgment must begin with at the house of the Lord (1 Pet. 4:17).
 3. In verses 2-9 the corruption of the nation is shown to be the result of rebellion towards Yahweh and the cause of the calamities that are coming upon the people.
 - a. According to Dr. John Watts, “God is determined to end Israel’s blind rebellion and to purge Jerusalem’s shallow worship.”
 - b. Isaiah articulates this rebellion in four arenas.

Copyright 2009 free-online-bible-study.org

This site is owned by Teach the Nations, Inc., a non-profit organization incorporated in the State of Georgia, which is exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code from Federal income tax.

Contributions are deductible under section 170.

II. REBELLIOUS IN KNOWLEDGE (Isaiah 1:3-4)

- A. The name of Yahweh that Isaiah employs here, “the Holy One of Israel,” is almost unique to Isaiah.
1. Isaiah had a unique revelation of Yahweh’s holiness (see. Isa. 6).
 2. To paraphrase, the Holy One of Israel is saying: “My people are even more stupid than the jackass, because at least a donkey knows its owner and knows his master’s crib, but my people do not know me!”
 - a. The apostle Paul affirms that the primary sin of humanity is that of not knowing God (Rom. 1:21).
 - b. Isaiah’s audience knew *about* Yahweh but they did not *know* him intimately and as a result their foolish hearts were darkened.
 - c. Prof. Walter Brueggemann points out that the term “rebelled” is one of active resistance.
 - i. “Israel has intentionally refused a relationship with Yahweh that is proper and indispensable to its very character.”
- B. Isaiah’s contemporary, Hosea, declared that God’s people are destroyed for lack of knowledge Hos. 4:1, 6)
1. What is it that destroys God’s people?
 - a. Not lack of sincerity or lack of good intentions.
 - b. Neither is it through lack of knowing facts about God.
 - c. One can know *about* God, but does one *know* him?
 2. The Hebrew word that is translated “knowledge” is *yada*, which means knowledge in the sense of an intimate embrace.
 - a. It is the word that is used in Genesis 4:1: “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain...” (KJV).
 - i. For Adam to *know* his wife so that she could give birth to a son, they had to know each other very intimately.
 - b. Both Hosea and Isaiah are concerned that the people were not intimately committed to Yahweh in a relationship.
 - i. What man may call ignorance Yahweh calls rebellion.
 3. One of the greatest problems of Protestantism is that traditionally it has been more concerned with knowing more *about* God than intimately *knowing* God.
 - a. The crucial question for all believers is do they know the Word of the Lord or do they know the Lord of the Word?

III. REBELLIOUS IN HEALING (Isaiah 1:5-6)

- A. The contemporary church has tended to emphasize just physical healing in its teaching about the healing ministry of our Lord.
1. Jesus demonstrated had great compassion on the physically sick, and he who is the same yesterday, today, and forever continues to heal.
 2. Isaiah challenges Judah that the greatest and most destructive sickness is that which is on the inside—the spiritual, emotional, and mental, not just

the physical.

- a. If the focus is merely on the outward and the physical then ministry will deal with effects rather than with causes.

B. Divine healing flows essentially through two channels.

1. Healing flows as an evangelistic gift.
 - a. When the Christian evangelizes he or she is going out like a salesman for the kingdom of God with a case full of samples.
 - b. Many Christian witnesses have been amazed at how instantaneously the unbelieving inquirer can receive healing.
 - c. It represents the point of first contact with the Holy Spirit as the inquirer discovers the reality of an all-loving, all-mighty God who knows them and cares for them.
2. Healing for the believer, which operates by a different set of parameters.
 - a. Healing for the unbeliever is often part of the evangelistic process to demonstrate the outflow of God's *mercy*.
 - b. Healing for the believer is an outflow of God's *covenant*.
 - i. Exodus 15:26 establishes the covenant of healing for the believer and it reveals one of Yahweh's covenant names *Yahweh Rapha*, which means "I am the Lord your Healer."
 - ii. *Rapha* means to cure, to heal, to repair, to mend, to restore to health.
 - iii. The participle form of the word *rapha* is *rophe*, which is the same word that is used in modern Hebrew to refer to a doctor or a physician.
 - c. Yahweh in his very nature is a physician and as a physician he declares that the root of mankind's sickness is disobedience.
3. The Divine Physician comes to heal causes, not mere symptoms.
 - a. The outward sickness in a person's body can sometimes be an expression of what is happening inwardly (comp. 1 Cor. 11:29-30).

C. Isaiah complains the people have failed to treat the wounds and sickness adequately.

1. They have "not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil" (1:6).
 - a. The New Testament associates the figure of anointing with oil with the Holy Spirit (see 2 Cor. 1:21-22.).
 - b. God's people had not allowed the Holy Spirit to touch the sore places in their in their relationships, in their finances, in their homes, in their attitudes, and in their marriages.

IV. REBELLIOUS IN IGNORING THEIR INHERITANCE (**Isaiah 1:7**)

- A. The prophet reminds Judah that their country is the land that Yahweh had promised to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 - 1. He challenges them that this land was not even valuable enough to them to motivate them to continue to contend for it.

- B. This is indicative of the historic cycle of every move of God through church history, which relates to the challenge of passing on the values and vitality of that movement to subsequent generations.
 - 1. The first generation that is on the front line of a move of God are prepared to die in order to preserve that move.
 - 2. The second generation comes along, move in and enjoy it and they might even have to fight a little, but often the third generation will retain the outer façade of the move, but the blessing, the power, and the vital ministry has gone.

- C. Spiritual enemy number one is not the devil, but “self,”
 - 1. The selfish unwillingness to maintain the disciplines required to secure one’s spiritual inheritance.
 - 2. If one can remember a time past when passion for Jesus and God’s kingdom was greater than it is today, one has ceased to contend for one’s inheritance.
 - a. Yahweh calls this rebellion.

V. REBELLIOUS IN WORSHIP (**Isaiah 1:10-15**)

- A. Sacrifice is recorded as a part of Old Testament worship from Abraham onward and is firmly anchored in the *Torah*.
 - 1. From Samuel onward, prophets insisted that sacrifice be considered secondary to obedience and faith (1 Sam. 15:22).
 - a. According to Dr. Watts the problem is “the failure to accompany sacrificial and festal worship with a lifestyle of justice and righteousness,” and “the latter invalidates the former.”
 - b. Imagine if God challenged today’s churches: “Your worship services, your Sunday school classes, your Bible conferences, your revivals, my soul hates!”
 - 2. The problem in eighth century Judah and in the contemporary church is that ritual so easily replaces reality and wherever this happens God calls it rebellion.
 - a. According to Prof. Brueggemann concludes: “It is not a particular, priestly practice that is rejected by Yahweh. It is rather every effort at communion that is rooted in pretense, dishonesty, and disobedience.”

VI. THE REMEDY FOR REBELLION (**Isaiah 1:16-18**)

- A. Isaiah instructs repentant rebels to do three things:
1. Wash and make yourselves clean.
 2. Take your evil deeds out of my sight.
 3. Learn to do right.
 - a. Watts summarizes: “When one’s hands are bloody one needs to wash up, clean up, and change one’s way of life.”
- B. Then Yahweh invites them to reason together with him.
1. The verb *yakah* is a law term used of arguing, convincing, or deciding a case in court.
 2. Yahweh’s reasoning with Judah is usually understood to mean that a real change is possible—the bloody color of sin can turn to the innocence of snow.
 - a. Brueggemann writes, “What has been the crimson mark of disobedience can become innocence again.”
 3. Dr. Cornwall suggests an alternative interpretation based upon the figure of the progressive steps of leprosy.
- C. The progressive steps of leprosy
1. This terrible skin disease begins as a tiny red spot which is treatable, but if it is not treated at this early stage, the crimson spot will eventually progress to the final stage of leprosy, which is incurable when the whole body has become white as snow.
 - a. In the Old Testament the phrase “white as snow” is invariably used to describe the final incurable advanced stages of leprosy rather than used as a metaphor for righteousness or being washed from sin.
 - i. “Then the LORD said, ‘Put your hand inside your cloak.’ So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was leprous, like snow” (Exodus 4:6).
 - ii. “When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy” (Num. 12:10).
 - b. The historical background to the first six chapters of Isaiah adds further plausibility to Cornwall’s interpretation.
 - i. 1:1 lists the various kings whose reigns were spanned by Isaiah’s ministry, the first of which is Uzziah.
 - ii. 6:1 begins “In the year that King Uzziah died...,” which implies that the oracles of chapters one through five were delivered during the days of the latter part of the reign of King Uzziah.

- iii. 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 recounts that toward the end of his reign Uzziah went into the temple to burn incense.
 - a) As king he was not authorized to burn incense before Yahweh, which was reserved for the priests.
 - b) Yahweh judged Uzziah, who contracted leprosy. Uzziah spent the final ten years of his life in a leper colony while his son Jotham ruled the nation.
- 2. The remedy for dealing with the first red spot of leprosy that appeared on the hand, which was drastic but effective—cut the hand off!
 - a. Jesus alludes to this in Matthew 5:30: “And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”
 - i. Scholars agree that Jesus is speaking in a hyperbole—there is no record that the early church took this literally.
 - ii. It is a figure of speech intended by Jesus to convey the need to take drastic action in dealing with sin.
 - b. To use Isaiah’s figure: when the little red spot of sin appears in one’s life, one must immediately deal with it before it grows into incurable spiritual leprosy in one’s life.
- 3. The message: “Get rid of the sin while it is still small enough for you to deal with, before it becomes so big that you no longer control it and it starts to control you.”
 - a. Christ’s blood will do more than wash one whiter than snow; it will cleanse the believer from all sin and all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7, 9).
 - b. Brueggemann sums up this passage: “The poet confronts the community of Israel with the central life-or-death Yahwistic question: Existence is on the terms of Yahweh or there is no existence. There is no third alternative!”

II.