

Isaiah 1 Handout

Chapters 1-5 introduce the entire book of Isaiah. Chapter 1 introduces the rest of the introduction (chps 2-5). Isaiah 1 is a powerful opening to the book. God, through the prophet Isaiah, confronts Judah over their rebellion and empty religious rituals. He calls them to genuine repentance, and offers hope and restoration if they return to Him.

In the opening nine verses, we are going to see a summary of the charges God is bringing against the people of Judah.

Verse 1

We learn several things in this verse:

- This is a vision
- It concerns Judah and Jerusalem
- Isaiah saw this - he is the author of this book
- It happened during the reigns of Uzziah (Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah - kings of Judah.

Verses 2-3

In these two verses, we get the basic indictment. God even calls the heavens and earth to witness.

“Hear me you heavens! Listen, earth! For the Lord has spoken”

This is not the first time that God has called on the heavens and earth to bear witness.

(Deuteronomy 4:26, 30:19, 31:28 and 32:1)

What are the charges being brought against the people of Judah?

Who is bringing these charges? _____

It's like a courtroom setting here with the plaintiff, defendants and witnesses.

He points out in verse three that His people have seemed to have lost their common sense as well. An ox knows his master and a donkey its own manger.

What does He say about His people? _____

In verses 4-9 we are going to see the proof of their guilt.

Verse 4

The word “woe” is a strong phrase used to express grief, lament or judgment. It was often used in regards to impending disaster or condemnation.

Now we get to the heart of the matter. We know the indictment against Judah is their rebellion against God. Now we see a deeper level to their sin.

- They are a sinful nation whose guilt is great.
- Brood of evildoers
- Given to corruption
- They have forsaken the Lord
- Spurned the Holy One of Israel
- Turned their backs on Him

The name “Holy One of Israel” is used repeatedly throughout the book, showing a consistent view of God.

In the next four verses, Isaiah paints a graphic picture of the nation’s spiritual condition.

Verses 5-6

We see how sin against God comes with consequences.

What image is depicted in these two verses? _____

What happens when these kinds of wounds aren’t taken care of?

Verses 7-8

Isaiah goes from describing a sick, injured body to a desolate conquered land.

What terminology is used at the beginning of verse 8 for God’s people? _____

This shows how God feels about His people - like a father feels about his daughter. He loves her and wants to protect her and guard her from any evil or danger.

Reread verse 8. This verse is referring to the way that many families lived in villages and would build small shelters in their fields and would camp there during the harvest. After the harvest was over, these little shacks would look abandoned and run down. That’s what Isaiah is comparing the people to.

Verse 9

These ‘survivors’ is referring to the remnant God says He will always keep.

What two cities are referenced here? _____

Being compared to these two cities is not a complement. In Deuteronomy 18:20, this is what the Lord says about them, *“Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous.”* If you know the story, you know that God extends grace by allowing Lot and his family to escape before He rains down burning sulfur to completely destroy these two cities.

We see God’s grace being extended here as well by keeping a remnant.

In the New Testament, Paul quotes this verse as he expresses his anguish over the spiritual state of his fellow Jews, who have by and large rejected Jesus as the Messiah.

Israel’s alternatives (verses 10-17)

Verse 10

God had not destroyed the city of Jerusalem yet like He had done to Sodom and Gomorrah, but Judah was like those corrupt cities in that the people had turned from God and His standard for them. Sodom and Gomorrah were the encapsulation of sinfulness, so being compared to them was not good. God's people needed to heed His words of instruction.

Verses 11-15

In these verses, God cries out against their religious hypocrisy.

Why would God hate the practices that He had commanded them to do in the Mosaic Law?

- Their incense is *detestable* to God
- He cannot bear their *worthless* assemblies
- He *hates* their New Moon feasts and appointed festivals
- They are a *burden* to Him; He is *weary* of bearing them

What does He say He does when they pray (verse 15)? _____

Why? _____

This is referring to the way they lived - in violence, injustice and oppression towards others, despite their outward displays of religious observance.

Their prayers are not matched by godly lives. God is all about their hearts, not their rituals.

They were going through the motions without actually seeking to please God by the way they lived.

Verses 16-17

After seeing what God did not want, Isaiah now tells the people what He does want.

What is the first thing they are supposed to do? _____.

Washing is symbolic of repenting. They need to repent of their sins first.

They are to:

- Stop doing wrong
- Learn to do right
- Seek justice - take up the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow.

We see here a great concern about the social injustices of the time. These would only be corrected if there was a change in the hearts of the people.

Verses 18-20

Verse 18 starts with God saying, "come now, let us settle the matter". God is calling them to draw near to Him, even in their filthy, sinful state. God is opening up a line of communication with them, and challenging them to do their best thinking.

At the core of this call is repentance. **They will be forgiven if they are what?**

Verses 18 and 19 contain some of the richest promises of total forgiveness that we see in the Bible. Their sin had left a huge, deep, red stain. But God is willing to wash them white as snow.

We also get a very terrifying warning.

What will happen if they aren't willing and obedient? _____

This is a warning of destruction.

God is very clear here with them: If you are stubborn and rebel, it will bring destruction. If you submit, are obedient and change your lives, you will be forgiven and restoration can take place.

Which choice makes the most sense? It's completely up to them. From what we read earlier, it seems even an ox or a donkey could figure that out!

I think we can miss the last line in verse 20 - "For the mouth of the Lord has spoken". This emphasizes the absolute certainty and authority of what God has said. This is such a powerful closing to what has been stated in the previous verses. God has been patient with them for a very long time, giving them time to repent and turn things around. If they don't get it turned around, judgment will surely be coming. God has spoken!

Verses 21-23

These verses take us back to the depth of Judah's sin. **What had the city become?**

We see a contrast between Judah's past faithfulness and their present state of moral corruption.

- Faithful city – has become a prostitute
- Once full of justice and righteousness – now murderers
 - Silver has become like dross (worthless)
 - Wine is diluted with water
 - Rulers are rebels; partner with thieves; all love bribes; chase after gifts

And once again, they are accused of social injustices.

Notice how these three verses go completely against what God is calling them to in verses 16-17.

Verses 24-25

We get three names for God in verse 24. These names emphasize the seriousness of God's message to His people and His ability to bring about the announced judgment and restoration

What are the three names?

- _____
 - This is God's personal and covenant name. It shows His relationship with His people and His faithfulness to them.
- _____
 - This emphasizes God's absolute power and authority over all things. It also shows His ability to fulfill His purposes no matter the obstacle.
- _____
 - This points to God's power and strength, specifically in relation to Israel. It shows His ability to act on their behalf as well as to defend them. It also shows His right to judge them when they forsake Him.

Is there anything that shocks or strikes you about what God says here in these two verses?

Notice what it says in verse 25: "I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove your impurities."

Does that sound like total destruction?

What does it sound like?

God isn't going to abandon His people. He is going to take them through the fire and restore them.

Verses 26-27

What is the first thing He says He will do? _____

They will be called the "City of Righteousness"; "the Faithful City"

Verse 27 talks about justice and righteousness for Zion.

Verses 28-31

What will happen to rebels and sinners according to verse 28? _____

Those who forsake the Lord will perish.

We get a description of the consequences of Israel's idolatry by using imagery of shame, destruction and burning. They will be ashamed of their choices. They will be like withered trees and barren gardens and will ultimately face burning as the consequences of their sin.

Look at how the chapter ends - "with no one to quench the fire". That is a sobering statement.

As you look back through this first chapter of Isaiah, focus on the person of God. What we learn from Him, His attributes, and His ways of dealing with human beings. What are some things you see?

Key themes from this chapter:

1. **God's Heartache Over Rebellion** (Isaiah 1:2–9)
God is portrayed as a parent grieving over rebellious children. His love is deep, but His justice cannot ignore sin.
2. **Empty Religion vs. True Worship** (Isaiah 1:10–15) The
people are bringing sacrifices and taking part in religious acts, but their hearts are far from God. He rejects hypocrisy and demands integrity.
3. **A Call to Repent and Do Good** (Isaiah 1:16–20)
God invites them to "wash and make yourselves clean"—He calls for action: seek justice, defend the oppressed, and live righteously.
4. **Judgment and Redemption** (Isaiah 1:21–31)
God promises to refine and restore those who return to Him—but warns of judgment for those who persist in sin.

How do we keep from just going through the motions— empty religion vs true worship? Are there practical steps we can take to keep this from happening?

How do you see God's grace in this chapter?

How does the promise of a redeemed future in Isaiah 1 impact your perspective on current global events?

If you have time this week, look through chapter 1 again and choose a verse or short passage to meditate on.