

Lesson 1 | December 6, 2020

Sin, Judgment, and Restoration

Study Text: Isaiah 1:1 through 2:5

Central Truth: God will judge the sinner, but forgive and restore the penitent.

Key Verse: Acts 3:19

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord (KJV).

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Recognize that God's desire is not to punish sinners but to redeem and restore them.
- Appreciate God's mercy in offering forgiveness to the penitent.
- Extend God's invitation to receive forgiveness and restoration through faith in Jesus Christ.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: The cycle of disobedience, rebellion, and idolatry, followed by brief times of repentance and promises to serve God had been repeated throughout the history of God's people. Today's study is set in the southern kingdom of Judah. Early in Isaiah's time, the northern kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity in Assyria. Less than two centuries later, Judah would be captured by Babylon. Isaiah's prophecies were mainly directed to the Southern Kingdom. (***Play the video on Restoration, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.***)

Opening Activity—Your Favorite Pet Story

Ask. *If you own a pet (or know someone who does), how does that pet respond to its owner's presence?* Examples include joy, and obedience. Note that while even pets know who cares for them, humans tend to ignore or even rebel against the One who made them and takes care of them.

Say: Church leaders often have the task of delivering a difficult message from God to His people. Yet because of God's love, these unpopular and uncomfortable messages must be given—even if they make people feel convicted. Often, however, those messages are laced with hope if the hearers repent and obey. This was the case with Isaiah. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah was called to serve the Lord as a prophet in difficult times. Judah was isolated, with powerful enemies around her. And while the kingdom saw times of temporal

prosperity, spiritually the kingdom was struggling. Many worshipped idols. Injustice was rampant. Isaiah stood as a strong voice for the Lord, rebuking the people for their idolatry and wickedness, and calling on them to repent and be restored.

Part 1—Sins of a Nation a Nation Sins of a Nation Sins of a Nation

The People Are Unfaithful

Isaiah 1:1–4,10–15

[Isa 1:1-31 KJV] 1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, [and] Hezekiah, kings of Judah. 2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. 3 The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: [but] Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. 4 Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. 5 Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. 6 From the sole of the foot even unto the head [there is] no soundness in it; [but] wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. 7 Your country [is] desolate, your cities [are] burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and [it is] desolate, as overthrown by strangers. 8 And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. 9 Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, [and] we should have been like unto Gomorrah. 10 Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. 11 To what purpose [is] the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. 12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? 13 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; [it is] iniquity, even the solemn meeting. 14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear [them]. 15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will

hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

Say: Isaiah's prophecy began with a message to the rebellious nation of Judah. He even compared them, unfavorably, to animals who obey and respect their masters. In spite of God's faithfulness, His people rebelled against Him; they went through the motions of their religious observances but were unfaithful and disobedient. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah served the Lord as a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah from around 740- 700 BC during the reigns of four kings (Isaiah 1:1). His name means "the Lord saves." His message focused on how the Lord was at work to save not only the Jewish people from their sinful ways, but all who would turn to Him in repentance and faith.

In this opening vision, the Lord called the rebellious people of Judah to account for their waywardness (Isaiah 1:2–4). The heavens and earth are cited as witnesses to Judah's unfaithfulness. (Note that it was not unusual for Old Testament prophets to call upon nature to testify against the ungodly; see Micah 6:1–3.) The Lord had goodness, however, they had rebelled against Him.

This rebellion is illustrated by examples from husbandry (Isaiah 1:3). Oxen recognize and submit to their owners. Donkeys know their safety and care is found in their owner's stable. **The proper response of mere animals emphasizes the foolishness of rebellion, which would lead Judah to experience troubles and sorrows (verse 4).** They were guilty in God's sight because of their evil deeds and injustice. They were failing to keep His commandments, for they were not showing love for others or for God. They had forsaken the Lord and His ways.

Isaiah spoke of how the people had suffered greatly because of their unfaithfulness (Isaiah 1:5–9). Only the Lord's mercy had kept them from being wiped out as Sodom and Gomorrah had been. The Lord called on the people to hear and listen, likening them to the people and rulers of the two destroyed cities (verse 10). The implication was that they faced suffering the same fate. **The people needed to understand that their religious observances meant nothing to God (verses 11–15). Their observances were instead burdensome to Him, for He delights in obedience, not sacrifices (1 Samuel 15:22).**

Resource Packet Item 1: Obedience Required?

Distribute the worksheet and divide your class into groups of two to four people. Assign one of the Scriptures to each group and have them answer the questions. Then have the groups share their answers with the class.

Discuss

? What would you define as the key differences between focusing on sacrifices versus focusing on obedience in serving God?

? What can cause people who have experienced the goodness of the Lord to turn away from Him?

Injustice Prevails

Isaiah 1:21–23

[Isa 1:21-23 KJV] 21 How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. 22 Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: 23 Thy princes [are] rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

Say: Often, leaders are held to a higher standard, even in the Church today. Through the prophecy of Isaiah, God seemed to have an especially harsh message for Judah's leadership who allowed injustice to prevail. **The leaders were looking out for their own personal interests, even while refusing to take care of the most needy among them.** Their unfaithfulness contributed to the unfaithfulness of those they led. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah used powerful imagery to decry the woeful condition of the Jewish people, especially of their leaders (Isaiah 1:21–23). Judah was portrayed as an unfaithful wife because the people were worshipping idols. This nation was once known as a place of justice and righteousness, but **those in authority had allowed injustice to flourish. The Lord deemed them to be murderers because of the injustices against the poor and powerless they permitted.**

These corrupt leaders and judges were likened to dross (mineral waste left from the process of purifying metal) and mixed (or diluted) wine. Both of these things were worthless (verse 22). The leaders were not providing justice for the poor and powerless. Instead they perverted justice by accepting bribes and gifts. **They had become self-serving, forgetting they were answerable to God.**

When a society abandons the welfare of its most vulnerable members, injustice will prevail. When the rights of the poor and powerless are disregarded, wickedness will increase, leading to a decline in morality and the loss of hope.

Discuss

? What are some common forms of injustice in the world today, and what are some ways Christians can respond?

? What can you do to promote justice in your sphere of influence?

Part 2— Call to Repentance and Cleansing

Call to Repentance

Isaiah 1:16–17

[Isa 1:16-17 KJV] 16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; 17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Say: The solution to rebellion, unfaithfulness, disobedience, and injustice begins with repentance. While everyone is guilty of sin, God offers cleansing and reconciliation. But He does not force such cleansing on His people—then or now. True repentance—marked by a change in behavior—is essential (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Aware of the unfaithfulness and injustice of the people, the Lord issued a call for the people to repent (Isaiah 1:16–17). **The commands in these two verses emphasize the urgency of what God was commanding them to do. The Lord instructed them to make themselves clean. They had the moral responsibility to change their ways, for repentance is a change of mind that acknowledges how sin defiles the sinner and dishonors God. The Lord cleanses those who repent.**

The Lord described several actions that would reveal true repentance. **The people needed to stop the evil things they were doing and start doing what was right and just. Promoting the welfare of the poor and vulnerable would be evidence of their changed hearts.**

Discuss

? How does Isaiah 1:16–17 compare with Mark 12:30–31 and Leviticus 19:18?

? How is seeking justice related to loving your neighbor as yourself?

Promise of Cleansing

Isaiah 1:18–20

[Isa 1:18-20 KJV] 18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. 19 If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: 20 But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken [it].

Say: God promised cleansing for His people if they would repent. Otherwise they would receive judgment. We still face that choice today: Serve God and be blessed or reject Him and be punished. **If we choose to repent, He cleanses us. We do not clean up our lives and do the right things in our own power. Rather, the blood of Jesus cleanses us, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to live for Him. But we still must make the choice to turn from sin and follow Him.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Lord called on the people to “reason together” (Isaiah 1:18, KJV; “settle the matter,” NIV), that is, to **reach the obvious conclusion to what He has been saying to them. If they will repent and change their ways, cleansing from sin is promised.** “Scarlet” and “crimson” refer to dyes. Scarlet dye was a fast color that could not be washed out. Crimson dye was used primarily to color wool. The Lord was assuring the people that repentance would bring cleansing that would make them pure despite their impurities—as white as snow and as untainted as undyed wool. God’s assurance was that He could forgive and cleanse them of any sin.

A willingness to worship the Lord and serve Him as commanded in His covenant with His people would lead to bountiful blessings (Isaiah 1:19). However, **if they continued to live in rebellion, they would experience judgment (verse 20). Isaiah’s play on words drew out the sharp contrast between the consequences of their choice: Obey and eat the good of the land or disobey and be eaten by the sword.**

The promise of cleansing was not just for people in Old Testament times. Jesus provided cleansing from sin by His sacrificial death on the cross (Ephesians 1:3,7). All who confess and repent of their sins have the assurance of forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

Resource Packet Item 2: You Don’t Know What I’ve Done

Distribute the case study and discuss the questions, either in small groups or as a class.

Discuss

? On what basis can we feel assurance that God is able and willing to forgive even our most terrible sins?

? How would you respond to someone who thinks his or her sins are so terrible they could never be forgiven?

Part 3—Judgment and Restoration Promised The Penitent Are Restored; the Rebellious Are Judged Isaiah 1:24–31

[Isa 1:24-31 KJV] 24 Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: 25 And I will turn my hand upon thee,

and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: 26 And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. 27 Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. 28 And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners [shall be] together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed. 29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen. 30 For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water. 31 And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench [them].

Say: God calls people to repent, but when they do not repent, He will send judgment. Throughout history, God had sent judgment upon the enemies of His people, even as His own people had chosen to rebel. Consequently, His judgment would come upon them. Yet, there was still hope in Isaiah's message. Sprinkled throughout his prophecies of judgment are promises such as the one in 1:26–27, that Jerusalem would “be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City” (verse 26, NIV). God would never forget His people and His covenant with them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 1:24 sounds an ominous tone in its threefold identification of God as He declares judgment on the people. **The Lord reminded the people that He was their Master, and He was calling them to task for their failure to obey Him. The phrase “Lord of hosts” (KJV; “Lord almighty,” NIV) could be translated “Lord of armies.”** The phrase speaks to His supreme power. Unlike idols, the Lord was able to bring the judgment He decreed. The “mighty One of Israel” was another reminder of His strength. **No one can stop the Lord when He chooses to act.**

Unlike times past when the Lord moved against the enemies of His people, now His hand would be turned against His people to enact judgment (verse 25). **The Lord's actions against His people would result in cleansing—forgiveness and restoration were His goal in judgment (verse 26).** Jerusalem would again be known as a place of righteousness and faithfulness. God would restore justice and righteousness for those who turned to Him in repentance (verse 27).

Yet just as certain as the Lord's promise of restoration was His pronouncement of judgment (verses 28–31). Those who continued in their rebellion against the Lord would perish. They would be ashamed of their idolatry, which included the worship of the pagan fertility gods, likely referenced by the mention of the oaks and gardens. The idolatry the people thought would make them strong would instead make them weak and vulnerable. The people's unfaithfulness and

injustice is likened to a spark that sets tinder on fire. God's judgment would be a fire that burned away both idol and idolaters. No one could stop God's just judgment of the rebellious who failed to repent.

Discuss

? How should we respond to Old Testament declarations of God's judgment?

? How are proclamations of God's coming judgment on sinners received today? Why do you think this is so?

Walk in the Light

Isaiah 2:1–5

[Isa 2:1-5 KJV] 1 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, [that] the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. 5 O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Say: The hope briefly mentioned in Isaiah 1:26–27 is further described in the next vision of Isaiah. No doubt, many who heard Isaiah's prophecies did not see the long separation between the judgment of the coming exile and the wonderful future that God has in store for those who love and serve Him. Yet they held onto that hope. During New Testament times, the Jews were looking forward to the Messiah, but they did not realize that the time of restoration was even further into the future. God's timing is in His hands. **Just as the Jews of Isaiah's time and even the believers in the Early Church did not understand God's plan, we are often puzzled by it. But God calls us to repent and be prepared for Jesus' second coming.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah was likely troubled by the vision recorded in chapter 1 (see verse 1). While it held out the promise of forgiveness and restoration if the people would repent, it also made clear the judgment that would take place if they continued in their unfaithfulness and injustices. Chapter 2 presents another vision, which continues through chapter 4. The vision opens with hope for those who will be redeemed and restored in Judah and Jerusalem (2:1). **This hope looks to the millennial reign of Christ, when the Messiah will come to reestablish true worship and rule in peace (verses 2–4). Of course, as Christians we understand that Jesus is the Messiah.**

The prosperity the Messiah’s rule will bring includes the reestablishment of the true worship of God. The people of Isaiah’s day had been chastised for their empty worship, which included meaningless ceremonies and worthless sacrifices at the temple (1:11–15). In the last days, true worship at the temple of the Lord will be practiced (2:2). The preeminence of godly worship is portrayed by stating that the mountain the temple rests on will be raised above other mountains and hills.

Another aspect of the Messiah’s rule will be that all nations will be drawn to worship and serve the one true God (verses 2–3). **Not only will the Jewish people rightly worship the God of Jacob, but Gentiles also will come to learn of Him and His ways. Instruction in God’s Word will play a major role in this religious revival.**

These future days of the Messiah’s rule will also be a time of peace (verse 4). Military solutions to disputes between nations and peoples will be a thing of the past. The efforts and resources that had previously been used to bring destruction will be turned to productivity that benefits people.

This vision of such a wonderful future prompted Isaiah to call the people to follow the Lord (verse 5). They could trace their lineage back to the patriarchs, and their heritage included the promises made to their ancestors—including living in peace and prosperity in the land God had given them. They could experience these blessings if they would choose to walk in the light of the Lord.

Resource Packet Item 3: Jerusalem: Old and New

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to review the Scripture passage, then highlight the contrasting features they have found.

Discuss

? How would you describe what it means to live by the light of the Lord?

? Why is God’s Word essential to spiritual renewal?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: In Isaiah 1:2, God refers to the people of Judah as children He has brought up, yet they have rebelled. Such stories are all too prevalent in family relationships. Sometimes major issues, such as outright rebellion, are a cause, but other times the efforts to stay connected wane until it seems the distance is just too great. Family relationships are far

too important to be taken for granted. But our relationship with God is also broken by rebellion and disobedience. We must be aware that we cannot take our relationship with God for granted. Even after our repentance, it takes commitment on our part for our relationship with Him to grow stronger and deeper. God cleanses His people from sin and restores them to himself and others. Even His correction and discipline are proof of His ongoing love for us.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Take time to examine your heart to see if any repentance is needed.
- Pray for those around you who do not have a relationship with God.
- Share the hope of salvation with someone this week..

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God's Case Against Israel.
Jeremiah 2:4–13

Tuesday:

God's Wayward Wife Restored.
Hosea 2:14–23

Wednesday:

Judgment and Restoration of the Nations.
Zephaniah 3:6–15

Thursday:

Consequences of Neglecting Christ's Commands.
Luke 6:46–49

Friday:

Betrayal Forewarned and Restoration.
John 13:36–38; 21:15–19

Saturday:

Penetrating and Healing Words.
Revelation 2:12–17

[Rev 2:12-17 KJV] 12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; 13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, [even] where Satan's seat [is]: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas [was] my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. 14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth [it].

