

Pentwater Bible Church

Isaiah Message 3

December 16, 2018



The Adoration of the Golden Calf by Nicolas Poussin cir. 1634

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Isaiah

Message Three

INSINCERE WORSHIPPING

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Isaiah 1:10–17

¹⁰Hear the word of Jehovah, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. ¹¹What unto me is the multitude of your sacrifices? saith Jehovah: I have had enough 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. ¹²When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? ¹³Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies, —I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. ¹⁴Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵And 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. ¹⁶Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; ¹⁷learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow (ASV, 1901).

JERUSALEM HAS BECOME SPIRITUAL SODOM

Isaiah 1:10

¹⁰Hear the word of Jehovah, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah (ASV, 1901).

God uses the same Hebrew imperative verbs in this verse to draw the Israelites attention to the importance of what He is saying as He did in the second verse of this chapter. He first says *hear then give ear* to emphasize the message. Before He called on heaven and earth but, now He is directing the message to the sinful people themselves. He begins by calling them rulers of Sodom and rulers of Gomorrah. This comparison is attesting to the spiritual status of the ancient Israelites at this time (Revelation 11:8).

Sodom and Gomorrah were evil wicked cities that the Lord destroyed. The Bible tells us that “*The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against Jehovah exceedingly* (Genesis 13:13).” The men of Sodom were exceedingly outwardly wicked. The Hebrew word for a “wicked” man is *rasha*. It comes from the root word *ra*, which means “evil”. We can compare the high degree of human wickedness just prior to the Flood to the men of Sodom prior to their destruction. God will not allow this extreme wickedness to endure for long. The people of Sodom were outwardly righteous. In Hebrew the word for “righteousness” is *tzaddik*. This Hebrew word has two spellings. This one is missing the second yod, which appears as an apostrophe to us. So, this is

the indication that the men of Sodom had “an imperfect righteousness”. God knew who was righteous in Sodom, and who was not. The Sodomites were counterfeit righteous. The source of all their problems was their pride (Ezekiel 16:49). Jehovah brought sulfur and fire out of heaven upon the cities of the plains with the exception of Zoar. So, Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other cities of Admah and Zeboim on the Plain were destroyed. This is the first mention of fire in the Bible, and it always accompanies judgment by God.

This destruction was complete in that all the cities perished along with the inhabitants in this region of the plain. This area was as fertile as the Garden of Eden until this destruction. Now it is only arid desert. In fact, there has been much archeological excavation in this region to find any traces of these cities, and none can be found. Biblical critics use this as their evidence that the biblical account of these events is false. The truth is that when God destroys something, it is complete. Only God can create, and only God can destroy. The Hebrew word for the verb to “overthrow” is *hafach* which parallels the New Testament Greek word that gets translated into English as “cataclysm”. It is a term for complete and total destruction.

Now in the previous section we saw that a remnant of the Jews would be spared in the future judgments on the nation Israel. Sodom and Gomorrah were complete and not one was spared except righteous Lot, Abraham’s nephew. God granted a much more benevolent judgment to Jerusalem than to the cities of the plain. That was not because there was any merit found in Jerusalem, for she was a city of hypocrites. This is all because the sovereign God who controls the destinies of cities and nations in His own goodness had chosen not to destroy Jerusalem utterly. He promised to provide a future to His chosen people (Romans 11:26) all because of His promises to the patriarchs.

FALSE SACRIFICES CONDEMNED

Isaiah 1:11

¹¹What unto me is the multitude of your sacrifices? saith Jehovah: I have had enough 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 (ASV, 1901).

On the surface of this verse I one could misconstrue what the Lord is saying. He commanded the intricate Mosaic Law with its 613 commandments and sacrificial system. He brought this system of observance of His to the ancient Israelites. He is also bringing it back in the Messianic Kingdom for them to recognize that it is Him that the world should worship. When He says, “*I have had enough 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*” He is saying it is the manner in which they are doing it, not the practice itself.

Initially, the idea of the sacrifices was for the person bringing the sacrifice to realize their sinful nature and ask God make temporary atonement for it. Here the people are bringing multiple offerings to the Temple as if God wants only these physical offerings. These outward activities are meaningless to Him without their sincerity, repentance, justice to the needy, and observance to His Law. It is their hearts He wants wedded to Him in obedience to His Law. When God says,

“*I have had enough,*” He is making a comparison to one who has eaten too much and is nauseous, on the verge of being sick to his stomach. These attempts to please God are at best insincere and hypocritical. In referencing the *fat* and *blood* which, were abundant in the “fatlings” thrown on the altar, He is saying that He is offended by those who think they can appease Him with the quantity rather than the quality and integrity of their personal service to Him and others.

ABOMINATIONS TO GOD

Isaiah 1:12–13

¹²When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? ¹³Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies, —I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting (ASV, 1901).

The purpose of the people in coming to the Temple (*My courts*) was to worship the LORD their God. Perhaps some of the worshipers were sincere. Sincerity is not sufficient; it is no substitute for obedience to God’s commands. Unless one worships God in the manner, and only in the manner, which God Himself has prescribed, he is being disrespectful to the LORD’s courts. Without sincerity the offerings are worthless. They were essentially just going through the motions. Their hearts were not really in it. By saying that the *incense is an abomination unto me*, He is saying that it should be a satisfying aroma to Him (Leviticus 2:2). But instead it is an abomination to Him. God is well pleased when His people worship Him in spirit, obedience, as well as practice. Without the spiritual effort behind the offering it is sheer hypocrisy.

The weekly festival of the *sabbath*, the monthly one of the *new moon*, and the annual *assemblies* or *solemn meeting* (2 Chronicles 8:13), were the central occasions of Jewish worship. The manner in which at this time they were conducted, was repugnant to God. They were all spoiled with the insincerity (self absorbed) of their efforts. God begins verse 13 by issuing a prohibition in the form of a command saying, “*Bring no more vain oblations.*” He is saying that enough has already been brought to Him and they cannot add to it by bringing more. This is an utter condemnation of what the people of Jerusalem had been practicing in place of sincere worship of God. The last clause says, “*I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting.*” This was a convocation on the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:36; Numbers 29:35). It is the name given also to the convocation held on the seventh day of the Passover (Deuteronomy 16:8).¹ Iniquity and the solemn meeting do not belong together. The last two words thus bring out the heart of the entire matter. The religious practices of Judah were mixed with iniquity. The people worshiped God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. They divorced doctrines and practice. It is one thing to know what to do but another to not do it and pretend you are. In God’s economy this is a procedure that always ends with disastrous results. Hence, their worship had become mere idolatry. These phony ceremonies were outwardly impressive but were actually dishonest because the people brought thoughts of idolatry to the solemn assemblies. Outwardly they looked religious, but God looks at the heart

¹ Easton, M. G. (1893). In [*Easton’s Bible dictionary*](#). New York: Harper & Brothers.

1 Samuel 16:7

But Jehovah said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have rejected him: for Jehovah seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh on the heart (ASV, 1901).

CARNAL FESTIVALS

Isaiah 1:14

¹⁴Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary of bearing them (ASV, 1901).

Since their Temple services were false He says that He detests their festivals. Israel celebrated the festivals for their own carnal purposes. It resembles the manner in which the world celebrates Christmas. They remove the purpose, our Lord Jesus and carry on with gift giving and festivities. God had lost patience with their bogus piety. He seems to be saying that the more He forgives them the worse they get. They had specific ceremonies to be observed at the opening of each month (Numbers 28:11–15.) The appointed feast were the great festival times such as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. These do not include the Sabbath or the new moon with which they are, here contrasted (1 Chronicles 23:31; 2 Chronicles 31:3). God's patience is worn thin as He expresses this by saying, "*I am weary of bearing them.*" As patient as He is, His patience is drawing to an end. Hence the prophecy in verse seven *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.*

UNCONFESED SIN BLOCKS PRAYERS TO GOD

Isaiah 1:15

¹⁵And 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 (ASV, 1901).

In addition, the people's *many prayers* were ineffective because of their guilt. The words *spread forth your hands* denoted asking for help (1 Kings 8:22; Lamentation 1:17). The priests also practiced this when blessing the people. Those hands, however, were *full of blood*. By treating the needy unfairly (v.v.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. God will never *hear* (answer) such prayers.

Psalms 66:18–20

¹⁸If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear: ¹⁹But verily God hath heard; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer. ²⁰Blessed be God, Who hath not turned away my prayer, Nor his lovingkindness from me (ASV, 1901).

INWARD RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST ACCOMPANY OUTWARD RITUAL FOR THAT RITUAL TO MEAN ANYTHING TO GOD.

There are several specific reasons that our prayers to the Lord can be hindered.

I Peter 3:7

⁷Ye husbands, in like manner, dwell with your wives according to knowledge, giving honor unto the woman, as unto the weaker vessel, as being also joint-heirs of the grace of life; to the end that your prayers be not hindered (ASV, 1901).

Peter makes it obvious by not treating your wife honorably your prayers will be hindered. Other reasons are:

1. The prayer goes against God's will

John 5:14

¹⁴And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us (ASV, 1901).

2. The person praying acts rebelliously

Isaiah 1:15

¹⁵And 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 (ASV, 1901).

3. Prayers will be hindered by a lack of compassion to the poor

Proverbs 21:13

¹³Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, He also shall cry, but shall not be heard (ASV, 1901)

4. Pride and selfishness

James 4:3

³Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures (ASV, 1901)

5. Unbelief and doubt

Hebrews 11:6

⁶and without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him (ASV, 1901).

6. Disobedience

I John 3:22

²²and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight (ASV, 1901).

7. Unforgiveness

Mark 11:25–26

²⁵And whensoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any one; that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses (ASV, 1901).

8. Unconfessed sin

Psalm 66:18–20

¹⁸If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear: ¹⁹But verily God hath heard; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer. ²⁰Blessed be God, Who hath not turned away my prayer, Nor his lovingkindness from me (ASV, 1901).

HEAL YOUR EVIL WAYS

Isaiah 1:16–17

¹⁶Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; ¹⁷learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow (ASV, 1901).

Pleading with God while in a sinful state will not alleviate the condition. There is only one way to be blessed by God and have Him hear our prayers. There is only repentance. God is essentially

saying that if you would have your sacrifices accepted, and your prayers answered, you must begin your work of righteousness

1. They must cease to do evil, must do no more wrong, shed no more innocent blood. This is the meaning of washing themselves and *making themselves clean* Sin is defiling to the soul. We must wash ourselves from it by repenting of it and turning from it to God.
2. They must learn to do well. This was necessary to the completing of their repentance. It is not enough that we cease to do evil, but we must learn to do well. He urges them particularly to those instances of well-doing wherein they had been defective.
3. They must *also Seek judgment*. This is to seek to devote ourselves with zeal to the pursuance of justice.
4. Seek opportunities of doing good such as to Relieve the oppressed, those whom you yourselves have oppressed; ease them of their burdens. God is saying that you, that have the ability to provide relief to those that others also oppress. Avenge those that suffer wrong, such as caring for the fatherless and the widow. We are truly honoring God when we are doing good in the world; and acts of justice and charity are more pleasing to him than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices.

Next message: GOD'S SOLUTION TO ISRAEL'S SIN

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