

**CALVARY PANDAN  
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**DHW BIBLE CLASS**

**LESSON 1**

**THE BOOK OF ISAIAH**

**CHAPTER 1**

**Theme: “Holy Living Defines True  
Worship”**

**THEME VERSE**

**Isaiah 1:18** (KJV) “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.”

**INTRODUCTION**

The book of Isaiah was written by God’s prophet who ministered in Judah. He received his visions during the reigns of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah who were all Kings of Judah. Although he was stationed in Judah and Jerusalem, he ministered also to Judah’s northern neighbour Israel.

A man’s ministry defines his life and even his existence. This is very true of God’s prophets and in particular, of the prophet Isaiah. He was given a glimpse no other Old Testament prophet was privy to. He was the prophet who prophesied the virgin birth of Christ. Isaiah encapsulated the details of our

suffering Messiah so vividly that believers in the New Testament marvelled at what Isaiah, by the inspiration of God, had the privilege to see.

Isaiah ministered at a time when Israel would soon be destroyed by the Assyrians. Before this, Israel had never ever been destroyed from the time Joshua brought Israel into the Promised Land. These were very momentous times and Isaiah ministered during such times. He was courageous and his ministry of judgement and warning was always coupled with hope and the call to repentance. His message was never one of hopelessness but always a cry to God’s people to turn from sin and back to the LORD. Chapter 1 of Isaiah summarises the heart of this entire book. Judah had sinned and must repent of her sins or face the judgement of God. Those who were righteous should remain steadfast and not be moved by the temptations and persecutions that had come upon them. The LORD will do what is right in His time.

**OUTLINE**

1. A Parental Rebuke (vv.1-4)
2. If Not for God’s Mercy (vv.5-9)
3. Mocking the LORD (vv.10-15)
4. Sanctification Before Sacrifice (vv.16-24).
5. Separation of the Righteous and the Wicked (vv.25-31)

## COMMENTARY

### A Parental Rebuke – 1:1-4

Judah was a nation of God's people. At this time of Judah's existence, the once united nation of Israel was divided into the north and the south. The north called Israel was made up of ten of the tribes. The south called Judah was made up of the two tribes, Benjamin and Judah. Judah, being the more dominant of the two, became the name for the southern kingdom. [NOTE: The name, Israel, was not mentioned until verse 24 where the Lord described Himself as the Mighty One of Israel.] Just as Israel was the name of God, Judah would also be considered as bearing the name of God. Therefore when Judah lived in sin, God could not and did not leave Judah alone to sin with impunity. Isaiah was a prophet sent by God with the message from Judah's God to warn Judah of the impending chastisement that would befall her if she would not repent. Consequences of sins committed have always been certain under the rule of God's Law. No one can or will ever get away with sinning against God; least of all, God's own people.

God demands holiness from His people. There was no word of greeting that we usually find in a New testament epistle. The prophetic writings were very different. Isaiah went straight to the problems without any fanfare or delay. The urgency of the message and the impending judgement by the LORD mitigates such an approach. There was

no time to waste! The message must be sent forth as soon as possible!

The witness that the LORD used against Judah were the heavens and the earth! These were seen as eternal unchanging witnesses against a nation that had endured many different generations of leaders and forms of management. These witnesses were present when Israel came out of Egypt by God's strong hand. They were present when Joshua brought Israel through the successful conquest of the Promised Land. They were there when Israel entered into the period of Judges where every Israelite did what was right in his own eyes. They were there when Israel rejected the theocratic rule of the LORD and demanded for a king to rule over them like all the surrounding nations. The LORD could have destroyed Israel during any of these periods of rebellion and sin but He did not! He had been patient in dealing with Israel. However, the time had come for some serious introspection on the part of Judah. Judah could not be allowed to go on like this, expecting God to be merciful without any real or long-term repentance from sin and idolatry.

These witnesses would see how God had been merciful and patient in His dealing with Israel. Like a patient and loving parent, the LORD had brought Judah up. However, Judah had behaved like a rebellious and disobedient child. Using the analogies of the ox that knows its master and the ass that knows its master's crib, Judah was

likened to one who did not know who was feeding her and had brought her up. In comparison, Judah was worse than these two animals!

The report of the LORD before these witnesses was:- Israel was *“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.”* (Isaiah 1:4) After all that the LORD had done for her, Judah was ungrateful and had been characterised by sin and had weighed herself down with sin and more sin. They perpetuated their sin to their sons and daughters with their rebellion. Their children were corrupt. They had forsaken the LORD and provoked Him to anger by their idolatry and many iniquities! They had slidden backward.

Based on the relationship of a parent and his children, the LORD being a loving and righteous Heavenly Father, would have no choice but to chastise Judah. If He did not, He would be charged with dereliction of His parental duties!

### **If Not For God’s Mercy – 1:5-9**

The LORD described the state of Judah’s spiritual condition in this passage. The rhetorical question posed by the LORD said it all. Time had run out. There was no point in disciplining Israel any more. Judah would only revolt more and more with every act of discipline. Judah’s whole head was sick.

Her heart was faint. She was about to die!

Judah was so sick that the LORD described her as a sick person from head to toe. There was absolutely no soundness in her at all. What was found in Israel were only wounds, bruises and putrefying sores. A person with this kind of sickness was declared unclean. In Judah’s case, she was charged by the LORD as spiritually unclean. Hers were open wounds that were left unattended. Judah was unclean and full of diseases and about to die and she could not care less about her own sickly condition! Why would the Great Physician care if the sick person would not?

The turning point in this line of reasoning came in verse 7. The pointed declaration is seen in the use of the pronoun “your”. This links us back to verse 4 where the LORD called Judah “Ah sinful nation.” “Your” refers to the sinful nation. The sinful nation’s country was desolate. The cities were burned with fire. Strangers had devoured their land in their presence. It was desolate as if strangers had overthrown it. Judah had done this to herself. She had no one to blame but herself.

“The daughter of Zion” refers to the people who lived inside the capital city. They represented the nation of Judah. The LORD said that they were left as a cottage in a vineyard and as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers. This is a picture of desertion and loneliness. There was no help for them. They were like a besieged city. No one could enter

or come out of a besieged city. A besieged city is one that awaits destruction. There was no help from man. Only God could help Judah. If only she would turn to Him.

If the LORD had not been merciful to leave behind a remnant, Judah would have been totally destroyed as deserved. Since the very beginning of her existence as in the time of the Exodus, Israel had been a rebellious and complaining nation. Now in her state of divided existence, both nations had not learned repentance and holiness. The fact that she still existed was all due to God's grace. Judah deserved to be destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. These two cities were totally destroyed by the LORD and they did not rise from their ashes again.

It was a stark reminder to Judah that her very existence then was because of God's grace and mercy alone.

### **Mocking the LORD – 1:10-15**

Perfunctory worship even with right biblical procedures is an offence to the LORD. The LORD called them rulers of Sodom because that was precisely what these rulers have turned Judah into. The rulers were not the only culprits. The people of Judah were called the people of Gomorrah. The rulers and people were just as bad. All they needed to do was to obey the Word of God. The solution to their many sins was repentance and turning back to God.

The LORD was neck deep in the numerous sacrifices of Judah. He was full of their burnt offerings of rams, fat of the fed beasts and the copious amount of blood of bullocks or lambs or goats! As for the ritual of bringing offerings unto the LORD, the Jews did them faithfully and in large amount. However, the LORD was not impressed. In fact, He was quite fed up with their show of religiosity. There was no heart of obedience to the Word of God behind their external forms of worship. The animals listed here were expensive and the best clean animals acceptable to the LORD. But when they were not offered with a life backed by holy living, all the right animal offerings were regarded as useless.

Using a rhetorical question again, the LORD demonstrated that the entire Levitical system of worship was designed by Him and given to Israel by Him. Judah was to bring these offerings out of a broken spirit and a contrite heart. These offerings came from the LORD for Judah's well being. The meaning of "tread my courts" is to bring their offerings into the temple precinct where the altar of burnt offerings was located in one of the courts outside the Holy Place. The LORD called these offerings vain oblations as they were made without a heart for God and a holy life. The LORD commanded Judah to stop bringing any more of these vain offerings.

He also called the incense, that was supposed to make the place of

worship fragrant to signify that the LORD had accepted their many offerings, an abomination. Grievous sins such as witchcraft were called abominations. For the LORD to rank the sins of hypocritical worship as abomination is a stark reminder to all of us today that the same God of both the Old and New Testament demands the same sanctified standard of worship from His people. All the Jewish feast days or holy days were given by the LORD as well. The LORD now commanded them to stop observing them. All their solemn assemblies were iniquities in the eyes of the LORD.

The LORD hates Judah's observance of the new moons, and appointed feasts. In fact, they were a trouble to Him. He was tired of receiving them from hypocritical Jews who only offered him ritual worship. When Judah came for worship with their hands raised as if to show the LORD that their hands were clean and holy, the LORD would hide His eyes from Judah. When Judah prayed to the LORD, the LORD would not hear their many prayers, because their hands were full of blood.

The LORD is never mocked by false believers who pretend to worship Him. They pay Him lip service. These false believers are those who live a double life. They have the appearance of holiness and godliness in their external demeanour every Lord's day. However, they would have an opposite persona from Monday to Saturday. They live a life full of sin and debauchery where lying to cover up their sins is

common practice. There are many such people in churches today. Are you such a person?

### **Sanctification Before Sacrifice**

**– 1:16-24**

The LORD did not say to Judah not to bring offerings to Him. The problem did not lie in the bringing of offerings. These were offerings that the LORD had set up for Israel. They were good for Israel and Judah. However, when the bringing of offerings was practised merely as a ritual without a repentant heart, the LORD would reject them for they were without substance. Judah must back up her life of offerings and devotions with holy living. The LORD did not say to them not to bring their offerings at all but rather, to do so with the right heart and life.

The way to a righteous and holy life is repentance from sins committed against God and man. Terms like 'wash', 'cleanse' and 'put away evil' are used here by the LORD to make it clear to Judah that this is the way back to God. The LORD wants His people who bear His holy Name to reflect His holy character. Judah must stop her evil ways immediately. After that, Judah must learn to do what is right. She must seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, vindicate the fatherless and plead the cause of the widow. These people were defenceless. They had absolutely no recourse if they were ill treated. They merely had to bear with the ill treatment they received. However, the people of

Judah must not only turn away from their evil ways but to turn towards righteousness and to defend the weak who were bullied by the strong.

The LORD called Judah to come and reason together with Him. He had made His observations and drawn His conclusion and made them plain and clear to Judah. Judah needed to sit down before the LORD and be accountable to Him. There are no sins so heinous and dark that the blood of Christ cannot cleanse. They might be as scarlet or red like crimson; they shall become as white as snow or wool. All Judah needed to do was to humble herself and return unto the LORD. If she would repent and turn back to the LORD, she would be forgiven immediately by God. She would remain in the Land of Promise and eat of the good of the Land.

But if Judah would refuse and rebel against the LORD, she would be “devoured with the sword.” The LORD had spoken! What had happened to Jerusalem which began as a faithful city but had now become a harlot? Jerusalem had filled herself with spiritual adultery. She was full of righteous judgement once upon a time. Where had the judgement gone? Righteousness used to live in Jerusalem but now it had become a haven for murderers to reside in. The list of sins was long. Her silver had tarnished which means that her shine or glory has waned and disappeared. Her wine was mixed with water to demonstrate the state of

poverty Jerusalem was in. Her princes were rebellious and were companions of thieves. They sold their judgements for filthy lucre. They loved gifts and followed after rewards as they became puppets to their masters who bought them.

They refused to defend the fatherless and the causes of the widows. The reason was that they were bought by those who could afford to buy them. The LORD’s judgement against them would soon come. The LORD called Himself the Mighty One of Israel. This means that both nations were under His sovereign control. He would be consoled (i.e. ease) of His enemies and avenge for Himself His enemies. In short, if they would not repent soon, these enemies of the LORD would be severely punished by the LORD and would perish!

### **Separation of the Righteous and the Wicked – 1:25-31**

If Judah would return to the LORD as the LORD desired them to, He would turn His hand upon them and purge them of all her dross and take away all her tin or sins. (tin is an impure metal which here represented sin). The LORD’s desire was for Judah to come back unto Him like a father’s for his wayward son. The LORD would restore Judah’s judges to their original state as if they had never sinned. He would do the same for Judah’s counsellors. After all these restorations by the LORD, Jerusalem would return to her former glory and the people would call her “the city of righteousness, the faithful city.”

What a glorious state Israel began with. How did she become so evil?

Zion, the city of Jerusalem, will be redeemed by the LORD and her converts with righteousness. These converts would be the believers in Jerusalem. He will save them and made them right and just before Him. However, those who refuse and insist on sinning against the LORD will be consumed. The LORD will destroy the transgressors and the sinners together. They will never escape. The ones who forsake the LORD i.e reject the LORD's call to repent and return to Him will be consumed! They shall be ashamed of the oaks that they desire and the gardens that they have chosen for these will reveal the lust of their eyes. These unrepentant sinners will be like an oak whose leaves had faded and a garden that has no water. These are pictures of great desolation. The leaves of the evergreen oak are not supposed to fade at all but they have, just like Judah with all her first glory and strength has now faded away. Israel was the Land of Promise flowing with milk and honey. Today, should she repent not, the land will become barren and desolate.

These strong unrepentant sinners would be like tow i.e. the refuse of flax and the maker of these strong men is as a spark such that both of them shall burn together. They will destroy each other in their state of sin and rebellion. No one will be able to quench their flames of mutual destruction.

## PRACTICAL VALUE

The patience and longsuffering of the LORD cannot be comprehended by sinful man. It seems so inexhaustable. The manner in which the LORD dealt with Judah and Israel is a case in point. He so very patiently appeals to Judah again and again hoping that she will be a holy nation again. He will never give up on them. They might sin with impunity and the LORD, like a loving parent, would patiently urge her to return to Himself.

The justice of the LORD was not set aside even as He desires greatly with all his heart for Judah to return and be holy again. He did not lower His standard of holiness just to get Judah to return at any cost. There was a careful balance of justice tempered with mercy in all of God's dealings with His rebellious children. With firmness and steadfastness, the LORD kept on urging Judah to come back to Himself. We too must not give up on one another especially on our own rebellious friends and children. Keep on praying and maintaining righteousness at all costs even as we pray and hope for their return to the Lord.

The warnig against Mocking the LORD by paying Him lip service every Sunday is a warning found in this first chapter of Isaiah. This is a very appropriate beginning to this major prophetic book. Turning the worship of God into a ritual is a real problem today.

Our lives in church on Sunday and our lives from Monday to Saturdays must be congruent. Anything short of that is hypocrisy. Even when we sing the right hymns and praise him at the top of our voices, God is not impressed by our appearance of piety. The life we live outside the church is just as important as that we show inside the church every Sunday. The external circumstances and surroundings might change but the Christian remains the same within wherever he goes. He will always be a child of God no matter where or what state he is in.

God did not ask Judah not to bring their offerings but rather, to bring their offerings with a repentant heart. The offerings were given by the LORD to help Judah deal with her sins. The entire Levitical system of worship was a type of Christ. However, we must ensure that who and what we are in behaviour, thoughts and motives must be in accordance with God's holy and perfect Word. All that we do in church to worship and serve the LORD must be backed by a holy and righteous life. AMEN

## DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Daily Readings

**MONDAY:** Isaiah 1:1-15.

**TUESDAY:** Isaiah 1:16-31.

**WEDNESDAY:** Isaiah 1:1-31.

**THURSDAY:** Isaiah 1:1-31.

**FRIDAY:** Isaiah 1:1-31.

### Discussion Questions

1. What was the urgency in Isaiah's time that prompted him to open his book without any fanfare but went straight to the point ?

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2. Is it true that when a believer is in sin, he is not able to see his own sin? If this is true, explain why.

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3. Can we interpret all calamities that we believers face, as from the LORD? What about the calamities that occur in the world around us such as tsunamis and earthquakes?

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4. When is our worship unacceptable to the LORD? What is wrong with saying that we want the sinner to feel at home during worship and therefore we have bands and contemporary songs in our church?

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5. If someone says that we should not celebrate Christmas and Easter because they originated from heathen practices, what would your response be? What is the biblical basis, if any, for our church to celebrate Christmas and Easter?

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6. Is it wrong to raise our hands during worship on the Lord's day? Please explain. If it is not wrong, why do we not do it in our church?

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7. Can you cite, with biblical reference, three reasons why the LORD will not hear the prayers of His people.

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8. What happens to a believer's service unto the LORD when service comes before sanctification?

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9. Are there sins that the blood of Christ cannot cleanse? What about the unpardonable sin?

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10. What sins will cause the glory of God to depart from His church? Has the glory of God departed from CPBPC? What about the BP Movement?

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11. How do you explain the phrase "obedience is better than sacrifice"?

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12. Should the church be involved in social work? Is running a Kindergarten not a form of social work?

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13. Do you think the sad state of affairs in the BP Movement can be turned around?

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14. Are you prepared to do anything to ensure that CPBPC will not fall by the wayside? What are some of the things that you can do to make a difference?

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