

Isaiah 1:16-26

In a parallel to the Torah reading's call for purity in the camp in **Deuteronomy 23:9-20**, Isaiah calls for purity and cleansing of the heart and actions.

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

Ten Commands

Rashi - Wash, cleanse yourselves, remove, learn, seek, strengthen, perform justice, plead, go: Ten exhortations of the expression of repentance are [listed] here, corresponding to the Ten Days of Penitence and to the ten verses of Kingship, Remembrances, and Shofaroth [in the musaf service of Rosh Hashanah].

- **Psalm 51:2** - "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin"

- **Jeremiah 4:14** - "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved."

Jesus' command is even more radical:

- **Mark 9:43** - "And if thy hand offend thee (causes you to sin), cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched"

i.e. to truly "put away evil" is to "pick up your cross," reckon yourself as dead, and let Christ's blood wash you clean.

"relieve the oppressed" - i.e. the poor that are oppressed by their neighbors that are richer and mightier than they, right their wrongs, and deliver them out of the hands of their oppressors. (Mishnah Sabbath, c. 9. sect. 3.; Babylonian Talmud, Yoma, fol. 67. 1.)

The righteousness Isaiah requires is social righteousness, *iustitia civilis*, a public life so ordered as to secure for each individual his personal rights. The prophets' passion for justice is always inspired by a deep sense of the value of the human personality in the sight of God. - Cambridge Bible

(See **Exodus 22:22-24; Deuteronomy 10:18; Deuteronomy 24:17; Deuteronomy 27:19**)

Isaiah 1:18 - "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."

Not a calm discussion between equals, but a judicial term: "Let us sum up the pleadings" The Jewish translation has "debate." Still, if they would only confess and turn, there is still time for cleansing and forgiveness.

A scarlet cloth was tied to the door of the porch in the Temple on Yom Kippur. Once the scapegoat was sent into the wilderness, if the cloth turned white, it was a sign their sins were forgiven, if not they were retained.

For 40 years before the destruction of the Temple, i.e. after Christ's crucifixion, the cloth no longer turned white. (The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo'ed Yoma, Volume 1, Yoma 39b)

Isaiah 1:19-20 - "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."

This in fact is what happened, both in 587 B.C. and in 70 A.D.

It was prophesied earlier in **Leviticus 26:25**, if they rebelled against His word - "...I will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of the covenant; when you are gathered together within your cities I will send pestilence among you; and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy."

Isaiah 1:21 - "How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers."

- **Matthew 12:39** - "...a wicked and an adulterous generation"

- **Matthew 23:37** - "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee..."

Isaiah 1:22 - "Your silver is become dross, your wine mixed with water:"

i.e. corrupted, diluted until it has lost its value and its very identity.

Rashi - They would make copper coins and plate them with silver, in order to cheat with them.

Hypocrisy and adulteration were the order of the day. Like "the salt that has lost its savor" - **Matthew 5:13**.

Isaiah 1:23 - "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."

Their spiritual state is exposed by how they treat the poor and vulnerable.

"companions of thieves" - corrupt officials don't hobnob with burglars, they're usually in different social classes. But they are "companions" because their crimes are the same.

Targum Jonathan paraphrases: One man says to another, Do me a favor in my case, and I will repay you in your case. This refers to a judge who was a robber, and the robbery victim complains about him before another judge. This one says to him, Declare me innocent today, and I will repay you when they complain about you before me. This is the meaning of running after payments.

Rashi - "and the quarrel of the widow does not come to them": The widow comes to complain, and the orphan is coming out, when this one [the widow] meets him and asks him, What did you accomplish in your case? He replies, All day long I toiled at work, but I did not accomplish anything. And this one turns around and says, If this one, who is a man, did not accomplish anything, surely I will not. This is the meaning of, "the orphan they do not judge, and the quarrel of the widow does not come to them" at all.

i.e. because the widow is a woman, she will have even less success at justice than the orphan, who is a man and failed. Neither has anything to offer as a bribe. The judges turn a deaf ear, and put off the hearing of their cause with indefinite procrastination.

Isaiah 1:24-25 - "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: And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:"

The words "ease" and "avenge" in the Hebrew have nearly the same sound (*nicham* and *niqqam*), and come from the same root, the primary thought being that of the deep breath which a man draws in the act of throwing off a burden.

- **Malachi 3:2-3** - "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.

Isaiah 1:26 - "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.

Many of the rabbis considered this as referring to the days of Messiah.

This was accomplished at Pentecost. Tongues of fire appeared above the disciples, burning away and purging the dross and the chaff of their old identities. Israel's judges and counselors were restored in the appointing of apostles, pastors and deacons.

- **Matthew 19:28** - "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

- **Zechariah 13:8-9** - "And in all the land, declares the LORD, two-thirds will be cut off

and perish, but a third will be left in it. This third I will bring through the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'"

"the city of righteousness" - this is the New Jerusalem, visible now in Christ's church, Zion, the Israel of God. Believers are citizens of both, seated with Him in the heavenlies.

- **Revelation 21:2-3** - "Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."