

# Isaiah 1:1-20 • God's Refining Process

## Introduction

I'll confess that whenever I get sucked into a theological debate of whether or not one can "fall from grace" or truly come to the Lord and genuinely fall away from Him, that it gets very confusing, very quick. In the end, all I can tell you is that the Bible seems to be filled with examples of people who knew God—even worshiped Him—but at some point abandoned Him. When Jesus sent the 12 out to preach and work miracles, it's obvious that Judas was one of them. I don't know what "ism" that assigns me to, but I think we have to take Scripture literally, particularly in the lessons of how God dealt with Israel when it was faithful and unfaithful, and the changes in their lives in which it resulted. I call it "God's Refining Process".

<sup>1</sup>The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

<sup>2</sup>Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth;  
For the LORD speaks,  
"Sons I have reared and brought up,  
But they have revolted against Me."  
<sup>3</sup>An ox knows its owner,  
And a donkey its master's manger,  
But Israel does not know,  
My people do not understand."

<sup>4</sup>Alas, sinful nation,  
People weighed down with iniquity,  
Offspring of evildoers,  
Sons who act corruptly!  
They have abandoned the LORD,  
They have despised the Holy One of Israel,  
They have turned away from Him.

<sup>5</sup>Where will you be stricken again,  
As you continue in your rebellion?  
The whole head is sick  
And the whole heart is faint.  
<sup>6</sup>From the sole of the foot even to the head  
There is nothing sound in it,  
Only bruises, welts and raw wounds,  
Not pressed out or bandaged,  
Nor softened with oil.

## [Read v.1-4]

**Q: What is significant about the kings listed here, and the fact that the visions concern "Judah and Jerusalem"?**

A: These were all kings of the Southern Kingdom known as "Judah". The Northern Kingdom referred to as "Israel" disappears forever during the first half of Isaiah's ministry, conquered and taken into captivity by Assyria. (Hosea was the prophet alive at this time that was mainly sent to the Northern Kingdom.) "Jerusalem" refers to those that are supposed to be true followers of God in spite of which tribe they were born into.

**Q: What is the term God uses to describe those remaining? How does it provide insight into how God sees and feels about them?**

A: "Sons" (v.2 & 4). It shows His overwhelming concern as a parent and guardian, desirous to see His children follow the right path.

**Q: What is the problem with God's sons' behavior?**

1. "...they have revolted against Me." (v.2)
2. "...they have abandoned the LORD..." (v.4)
3. "...they have despised the Holy One of Israel..." (v.4)
4. "...They have turned away from Him." (v.4)

In a nutshell, they are rebellious. All of the terms used refer to someone who is intimately familiar with the person they are rejecting.

**Q: Although He calls them "Sons I have reared and brought up", how does God now see them as a result of their rebellion?**

A: "Offspring of evildoers". (v.4)

**Point:** The true children of God are the product of obedience, those that follow through their knowledge of Him with a heart for Him; otherwise they become another's children, completely unacceptable to and for Him.

## [Read v.5-6]

**Q: What is being conveyed in God's point that there's no place to strike them?**

A: To this point He has tried to use discipline to get them to change their behavior and return to Him as sons. But their rebellion is so severe that they've become immune to the effects of discipline—the beating such as a child might receive from a parent—so that it is no longer effective. To change their heart will require something severe and extreme.

**Point:** Have you ever known someone who knows they'll be punished for their behavior but just doesn't care? They begin to view punishment simply as a small price to allow them to do what they want. There's no realistic opportunity for change through that which they've grown accustomed.

<sup>7</sup>Your land is desolate,  
Your cities are burned with fire,  
Your fields—strangers are devouring  
them in your presence;  
It is desolation, as overthrown by  
strangers.

<sup>8</sup>The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter  
in a vineyard,  
Like a watchman's hut in a cucumber  
field, like a besieged city.  
<sup>9</sup>Unless the LORD of hosts  
Had left us a few survivors,  
We would be like Sodom,  
We would be like Gomorrah.

<sup>10</sup>Hear the word of the LORD,  
You rulers of Sodom;  
Give ear to the instruction of our God,  
You people of Gomorrah.

<sup>11</sup>What are your multiplied sacrifices to  
Me?"

Says the Lord.

"I have had enough of burnt offerings of  
rams

And the fat of fed cattle;

And I take no pleasure in the blood of  
bulls, lambs or goats.

<sup>12</sup>When you come to appear before Me,  
Who requires of you this trampling of My  
courts?

<sup>13</sup>Bring your worthless offerings no  
longer,

Incense is an abomination to Me.

New moon and sabbath, the calling of  
assemblies—

I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn  
assembly.

<sup>14</sup>I hate your new moon festivals and your  
appointed feasts,

They have become a burden to Me;

I am weary of bearing them.

<sup>15</sup>So when you spread out your hands in  
prayer,

I will hide My eyes from you;

Yes, even though you multiply prayers,

I will not listen.

Your hands are covered with blood.

### [Read v.7-9]

#### **Q: So what is God's next step?**

A: To completely remove the unresponsive unfaithful and begin again with a responsive faithful remnant.

#### **Q: Weren't some people saved out of Sodom and Gomorrah?**

A: Saved **OUT** is the correct description, not saved to start it all over again. There's a difference between God's final judgment—when all sin must be destroyed—and judgment for sin leading to changed lives that live as they know they should.

### [Read v.10-15]

#### **Q: What is significant about His actually calling them "rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah"?**

A: It's the strongest message possible in terms that they'd understand that opportunity is running out, that it is no longer discipline that is coming from God but final judgment.

#### **Q: What is significant about the fact that the people were making sacrifices, burnt offerings, burning incense, celebrating the sabbath and holy days, and even meeting in His temple and praying?**

A: They were **DOING** all the things that was required by the Old Testament Law.

#### **Q: Well...isn't that what they're SUPPOSED to be doing? What's wrong with that?**

A: Note that it's all for the sake of outward appearance—inwardly they are following the desire of their heart. God sees through their farce.

**Application:** How do you approach the things of God? Is your heart and mind committed to the same degree as your outward appearance would suggest? Do you realize that to take the things of God for granted is one of the earliest warning signs that your spiritual relationship is in trouble?

#### **Q: What does it mean "your hands are covered with blood"?**

A: The Law and its rituals were intended to be the **END** of the process wherein someone is overcome with the desire to make amends for sin, goes through the rituals with a penitent mind and heart, and emerges cleansed from their guilt. "Your hands are covered with blood" means that no matter how many times they perform the rituals, their sin is never cleansed because of the condition of their heart, and therefore the blood-guilt remains.

#### **Q: What is the word that best describes these people?**

A: Hypocrites. What they say and do is superficial to hide their true self.

<sup>16</sup>“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;  
Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight.  
Cease to do evil,  
<sup>17</sup>Learn to do good;  
Seek justice,  
Reprove the ruthless,  
Defend the orphan,  
Plead for the widow.

### **[Read v.16-17]**

**Q: What is the contrast between these verses and the preceding section?**

A: God doesn't ask them to do the religious practices of the Law—which they were already doing superficially—but to live His Law according to **these** specific actions, none of which are “rituals” or require a temple or priesthood.

**Application:** *How do you act outside of church, away from Christian groups or activities? Would someone be able to tell you're a Christian from the way you adhere to His ways, treat other people, and come to the aid of the defenseless?*

<sup>18</sup>“Come now, and let us reason together,”  
Says the LORD,  
“Though your sins are as scarlet,  
They will be as white as snow;  
Though they are red like crimson,  
They will be like wool.  
<sup>19</sup>If you consent and obey,  
You will eat the best of the land;  
<sup>20</sup>But if you refuse and rebel,  
You will be devoured by the sword.”  
Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

### **[Read v.18-20]**

**Q: Why is it so astounding that God declares “let us reason together”?**

A: He is speaking to His children, “sons I have reared and brought up”. (v.2) They are not ignorant of Him personally nor of His ways. It's exactly like a parent that takes a grown child aside and says, “Are you going to do what you know is right or not?” It's a conscience choice with which we're presented.

**Q: What is the choice that they have to reason out?**

A: Whether to “consent and obey” (v.19) or “refuse and rebel” (v.20). It's the only choice left for those that are no longer responsive to discipline and are faced with their last chance before final judgment.

**Q: What is God refining or changing?**

A: Literally, the separation of the faithful from the unfaithful. Every example of final judgment provided throughout Scripture is the result of this choice.

### **Overall Application**

- *Do you realize that the people to whom this was originally spoken had literally witnessed the final judgment of the Northern Kingdom and had first-hand knowledge of the inevitable results of “refuse and rebel”? Yet most of them chose the same path. Do you think you will always have time enough to change and so continue in your own sin? Do you understand that every appeal to your heart and mind may be the last?*
- *How do you approach the things of God? Is your “faith” more of an outward appearance or is it reaffirmed by the condition of your heart and the actions of your life away from Sunday morning church?*
- *How does this study motivate you to treat fellow Believers that are **NOT** living faithfully? Do you still believe it's “none of my business” and that you have no role in speaking the plain truth to them? What do you need to do on their behalf?*