

- The first step to restoring their relationship with God is decisive and genuine repentance - Judah must repent of her sins. It is not merely sorrow over consequences but a hatred of sin itself. True repentance involves spiritual and moral transformation, not mere words, emotions or rituals (Jas 4:8; Ps 51:1-10). Repentance requires removing sin, not just outward rituals. They must make things right with God.
- God specifies what genuine repentance looks like in everyday life: *"Learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."* These are not optional extras - they are the evidences of a changed heart. Confession without transformation is self-deception. True repentance produces visible fruit - justice, compassion, obedience, humility - that proves a person's heart has truly changed (1 John 4:20; Jas 1:27). God looks for broken hearts and humble obedience (Ps 51:17).
- After the call to genuine repentance, then comes God's gracious invitation: *"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD..."*
 - Come" - God commands His people to return. Despite Judah's rebellion, He reaches out in love, offering grace if they will repent.
 - "Now" stresses urgency. Repentance is not for tomorrow (Heb 3:7-8). Now is God's time. Repentance delayed is repentance denied.
 - "Reason" carries the sense of settling a case in court. Astonishingly, the Judge calls the guilty not to condemn but to pardon. Despite Judah's rebellion, God still reaches out in mercy.
- God makes an astonishing promise to those who come to Him with a broken and contrite heart: *"though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."*
 - Sin cannot be removed by human effort. No ritual, good work, suffering, or time can erase it. Only God can cleanse.
 - This promise ultimately points to Christ and the cross (Ps 103:12; 1 Cor 6:9-11; 1 John 1:7). Only the blood of Christ can make sinners white as snow.

This invitation still stands today. No one is beyond grace. Except we repent, we shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:3; cf 2 Pet 3:9).

(ii) *Promise and Warning, 1:19–20*

- The LORD concludes with a solemn choice:
 - Obedience → blessing & restoration
 - Rebellion → judgment & destruction

A Call to Repentance & Cleansing (1:2–31)

- Isaiah 1-5 serves as a preface and theological overview to the entire Book; it exposes the deep spiritual corruption of Judah, cataloguing her sins and moral decay. Though outwardly prosperous and religious, Judah was morally corrupt, spiritually sick, and the people's hearts were far from God (29:13).
- Isaiah 1 unfolds like a covenant lawsuit: the LORD summons His people to court, calls witnesses, presents His charges, exposes their sins, pronounces judgment, and then – remarkably - extends an invitation to repentance and cleansing.

1. The LORD's Case Against Judah (1:2–9)

(i) *Judah's Rebellion, 1:2–4*

- Heavens and earth are summoned as witnesses against Judah, underscoring the gravity and public nature of Judah's sin. God portrays Himself as a loving Father who has raised His children with care and provision - yet those children have wilfully rebelled against Him.
- *"For the LORD hath spoken"* – represents the covenant name of God, often rendered Yahweh or Jehovah (Exo 3:14). Isaiah's words therefore carry divine authority because he is transmitting the unchanging, living word of Yahweh, which remains binding today.
- Judah's sin is portrayed as rebellion - children turning against the very One who raised them. Their rebellion included false worship, moral corruption, and contempt for God's holiness. This was not isolated acts of disobedience but a sustained breach of covenant relationship and loyalty. Irony: ox and donkey recognize their master – but God's people do not.
- Judah's rebellion (+ ingratitude) was grievous. What grieves God most is not the unbelievers; it is God's own redeemed people. God speaks as a Father betrayed by His own children. Despite all that God had done, they rebelled against Him. Their sin was one of wilful rebellion (cf Rom 1:21). Sin is most grievous when committed by those who know God.
- Judah is described as: *"Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters"* (cf John 8:39-47). Apostasy has infected every dimension of life. They have forsaken the LORD (heart), provoked the Holy One of Israel (words), and gone backward (actions). Though religious activity flourished - sacrifices, tithes, and temple attendance continued - God saw through the rituals to their backslidden

hearts. They have sinned against “the Holy One of Israel,” which emphasizes God’s absolute holiness and the seriousness of sin. Sin is grievous because it is committed against a holy God (Ps 51:4; 1 Cor 8:12).

(ii) *The Consequences of Judah’s Rebellion, 1:5–9*

- Judah is portrayed as a body ravaged by disease - wounded from head to toe - depicting total moral and spiritual corruption. Yet Judah persisted in rebellion. As a result of their rebellion and disobedience, the nation was already suffering under God’s judgment – land desolate, cities burnt, fields devoured by strangers. Sin had already brought ruin, but Judah chose misery over repentance (2 Chron 28:19,22).
- Jerusalem is reduced to a besieged, isolated city. Once glorious, Jerusalem now stands vulnerable and exposed - like a lonely hut in a field. Sin has stripped the city of its strength and security. Sin wounds, disfigures, and robs God’s people of peace, joy, and testimony. God’s people shine brightest when forgiven, holy, and devoted to Him (1 Peter 2:9-10).
- Yet hope remains: God preserves a remnant. God’s wrath is real, but it is never without mercy. Only God’s mercy has kept Judah from total destruction (Rom 9:29). We stand only by God’s mercy (1 Tim 1:15). Sin wounds, but God heals. His discipline is not vindictive but parental (Heb 12:6). Even in chastening, God’s purpose is restoration.

2. The Futility of Empty Religion (1:10–15)

(i) *God Rejects Their Worship, 1:10–14*

- The rulers of Judah are addressed as “rulers of Sodom,” and the people as “people of Gomorrah.” Despite their covenant status and religious heritage, Judah has become morally indistinguishable from the 2 cities destroyed for immorality, wickedness, and pride.
- Despite their rebellion, Judah continued with its sacrifices, incense, new moons and sabbaths, sacred assemblies, solemn feasts and appointed seasons. Outwardly, their worship was lavish, extravagant, and impressive - “the fat of fed beasts,” bulls, lambs, and goats. But God rejects them. God’s verdict: “I delight not...Bring no more vain oblations...Incense is an abomination...My soul hateth...They are a trouble unto me...I am weary to bear them.” God denounced their false worship (cf Matt 23:23). God is not rejecting the sacrificial system He Himself instituted (Exo 23:17; Lev 1:9). He is rejecting worship that is divorced from repentance and obedience.

- The problem was not the rituals but their hearts were in rebellion against God, and their lives lived in sin. Judah practiced ritual without repentance, form without faith, ceremony without obedience. Their worship has become a religious mask for continued rebellion (1 Sam 15:22).
- Ritual without repentance offends God. Outward religion can mask inward pride, hypocrisy, and secret sin (2 Tim 3:5). God looks beyond outward appearances to the heart (1 Sam 16:7). He desires genuine worship that stems from a heart of obedience and love, rather than mere ritualistic practices. True worship is not just about rituals or ceremonies; it’s about living a life that reflects God’s character. Our religious practices should reflect a sincere relationship with God (Prov 15:8; 1 Sam 15:23; John 4:24).

(ii) *God Rejects Their Prayers, 1:15*

- God refused to listen to the prayers of His people because their hands lifted in prayer were stained with blood - symbols of violence, injustice, oppression, and exploitation (cf Matt 21:13). Judah’s prayers were frequent, eloquent, and passionate - but utterly rejected (Ps 66:18). God is not obligated to hear the prayers of the unrepentant hypocrite. True communion with God requires clean hands and a pure heart (Ps 24:4).
- Judah lived compartmentalized lives - religious on the Sabbath, corrupt the rest of the week. But God sees the whole person; He demands integrity and authenticity. Our faith should manifest in actions that promote justice, humility and obedience. True worship flows from a transformed life. When worship is divorced from holiness, what is meant to delight God offends Him instead (John 4:23).
- What makes Judah’s condition worse is not only that they had departed from the LORD, but that they were ignorant of their departure. If they had realized their departure, repentance might have followed. Instead, they lived in false security. They were like the Church of Laodicea (Rev 3:15-17). God values authentic faith, not empty religion (Rom 12:1).

3. A Call to Repentance (1:16–20)

(i) *God’s Gracious Call to Repentance, 1:16–18*

- After exposing Judah’s rebellion and condemning their empty religion, the LORD issues a clear and gracious call to genuine repentance: “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil.”