

GOD'S SECOND CHARGE: INSINCERE WORSHIP ISAIAH 01:11–20

Introduction

The scene is a courtroom trial. The presiding judge is the Lord Himself. The accused are the citizens of Judah and Jerusalem, the very people God had chosen to be His witnesses to the unbelieving nations of the earth. However, Isaiah's message in this passage is applicable to all who know the Lord, for all believers are called to be His witnesses. Thus as His professed followers, we are all standing before the bar of the Judge of the universe. We are on trial, defending ourselves against serious charges. And the Lord's case against us is as strong as it was against Judah and Jerusalem.

God's case is presented by the great prophet Isaiah, who makes a powerful, dramatic presentation of God's charges. But even as he pronounces the Lord's indictment, the love of God shines forth. With each charge, the Lord offers His people the hope of salvation. Even Isaiah's name offers hope, for it means *the Lord saves*.

Only the redeemed those who have been set free from sin and judgment — will live in the Holy City of God, the New Jerusalem. God will create New Jerusalem when Jesus Christ returns to set up God's kingdom on earth (see outline and notes, Rev. 21:9-23). Through Isaiah, God tells His people that if they will repent of their sins, He will forgive them. Furthermore, He assures them that they will live in this Holy City of righteousness where there will be no evil or injustice. This is, *The Lord's Indictment of His People*.

God's second charge: they were insincere, unacceptable in their worship (vv. 11-20).

Isaiah 01:11–20 Insincere and Formal Worship

God's second charge against His people was sad and tragic. Their worship was insincere; thus it was unacceptable to God. The people of Judah and Jerusalem worshipping, but their worship was false. Isaiah used strong language to express God's disgust with false worship.

1. God charged His people with phony, empty, ritualistic worship (vv. 11-12). Note that the people were worshipping the Lord. They were faithfully attending worship services and offering their sacrifices to the Lord. But their worship was hypocritical, for in their hearts they were rebelling against God (vv. 2-4, 10). They refused to obey His Word and were living sinful lives. As soon as they left the worship services, they returned to their immoral, lawless and selfish ways.

Remember that the burnt offering was sacrificed in order to bring about reconciliation with God (see notes, Lev. 1:1-17). Thus in making their offerings, the people were seeking to be reconciled with God. However, they were unwilling to turn from

their sins and turn back to God. They were unwilling to keep His commandments, unwilling to live righteous lives, unwilling to commit all they were and had to Him. As a result, God rejected their offerings. He took no delight in them.

The people's coming before Him to worship amounted to nothing but trampling His courts. They were hypocrites — people who professed to know God, but whose hearts were far from Him. Their worship was nothing but outward show. Their sacrifices had become nothing more than a ritual, a formal and insincere ceremony that God hated. They had become a weary burden to Him. Keep in mind what God wanted: obedience. To obey is better than sacrifice, that is, worship (1 Sam. 15:22).

2. God issued a strong warning through Isaiah: His people must immediately stop their false worship (vv. 13-15).

=> They must stop making meaningless offerings.

=> They must stop bringing detestable incense. Remember that incense was a symbol of prayer ascending to the Lord.

=> They must stop their evil assemblies — not only their regular worship services, but also their special festivals, feasts and gatherings (v. 14).

=> They must stop their formal prayers. God did not hear their prayers because their hands were as murderers who treated the needy unfairly and unjustly and in some cases murdered them (v. 15).

3. Surprisingly, despite the people's hollow and hypocritical worship, God made the astounding offer of full pardon. The people could be spiritually cleansed from their sin (vv. 16-18). But three steps were necessary:

- a. They must first repent, turn from their evil ways, and learn to do right (vv. 16-17). They must...

- seek justice
- help the oppressed
- defend the fatherless and orphans
- plead and fight for the rights of widows

- b. They must come to the Lord and reason with Him (v. 18). They must admit that their sins were as scarlet, the deepest colour of red, and that they were as guilty as murderers who shed the blood of innocent people.

- c. They must come to the Lord for forgiveness. Believing the promise of God, they must confess their sins and ask God to forgive them. Though their sins have stained them as red as scarlet, the Lord can make them as white as snow, as white as wool.

4. Isaiah warned God's people of two possible verdicts (vv. 19-20). If they were willing to be cleansed and to obey God, they would be rewarded (v. 19). The people would

once again eat the very best fruit of the land and live fruitful and productive lives.

However, if the people continued to turn away from the Lord, they would be destroyed. Judgment was certain, for the Lord Himself had declared it. His Word was the guarantee that judgment would fall on all who continued to rebel against Him and disobey His holy commandments.

Thought 1. False worship is unacceptable to God. When people truly believe and obey God's Word, their worship is acceptable; but when they continue in sin, their worship is unacceptable. No matter how much they worship, their worship is meaningless, for they are just going through the motions. They are insincere and hypocritical. As soon as they leave the worship service, they continue in their sinful ways. They profess one thing, but live another. In truth, their hearts are far from God.

Think of the millions of churches and worship sites throughout the world. There is one within walking distance of almost every person living in a major city of the world. Yet crime, immorality and greed flood these same cities. Churches and organized religion seem to make little difference. It is as though they have become irrelevant to society.

Why? Because the worship of so many people is insincere. Think of the number of people who own a Bible and claim to be religious, but whose behaviour exposes them as hypocrites. Many attend worship services, but as soon as they walk out the church doors, they return to their sinful ways. In God's eyes their worship is meaningless. Listen to what God's Holy Word says about false worship:

Mat 7:21-23 *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'"*

Mat 23:13-14 *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to."*

Mat 23:28 *"In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."*

Mark 7:6 *He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.'"*

Luke 6:46-49 *"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me, and hears my words, and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on a rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house, but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice*

is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

Rom 14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

Gal 4:10-11 *You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

2 Tim 3:1-6 *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy; without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires.*

Titus 1:16 *They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.*

1 John 3:18 *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

Psa 51:16 *You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

Psa 78:35-36 *They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues.*

Prov. 26:23 *“Like a coating of silver dross on earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart.”*

Eccl 5:1 *Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.*

Isa 29:13 *The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.”*

Isa. 48:1 *“Listen to this, you descendants of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel, and are come from the line of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of the Lord, and invoke the God of Israel — but not in truth or righteousness.”*

Isa. 58:1-7 *“Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. For*

day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commandments of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it?' Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen only a day for people to humble themselves? It is only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the kind of fasting [religion] I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

Ezek 33:31-32 *My people come to you [the prophet, the preacher], as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.*

Hosea 6:6 *"For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings." ■*