

NO MORE WORTHLESS OFFERINGS

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THERE IS A LOT OF HOPELESSNESS IN THE WORLD TODAY. The people of Israel are reeling as the enemy, Hamas, slaughtered so many loved ones. We watched in horror as unbelievable atrocities were revealed. There is no one unaffected by the war, the rise in anti-Semitism and the increasing numbers of devastated families. Our hearts mourn with our Jewish brothers and sisters.

As Christians, we have hope in the soon coming of Jesus (Yeshua), but many are losing hope that God will work in the here and now. In prayer, I asked the Lord to give hope to His people. In fact, I wanted to write a message of hope. As I continued to seek the Lord's heart, I felt Him leading me in another direction. As I walk in faith, I have come to realize that it is important for me to see things from God's perspective. What is important to the Lord as we walk through these difficult times? I want to start in Isaiah 1.

We often see patterns in the Bible. I have written about some of those in the past. Today, I want us to consider the following pattern:

1. There is a situation
2. There is a description of how God feels about what is happening
3. The consequences are often explained
4. Finally, there is a way out, a way of rescue

Many biblical accounts follow this pattern. It is important to remember that God is a God of mercy. When He described Himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6–7, most of the descriptive phrases

were about His mercy. In Jewish thought, this passage is called the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. However, it is also important to remember that God is a God of judgment. The last part of the passage spells that out for us. In the Writings of the Apostles (NT), we read a lot about the love and grace of God. However, it would be wrong to ignore that He is a God of judgment and justice in both the *Tanakh* (Gen.–Mal.) and the Writings of the Apostles. A rabbi friend once told me that God’s mercy far outweighs His judgment. He cited Exodus 34:6–7, where it says that His forgiveness is extended to thousands, which my friend took to mean thousands of years, while His judgment is limited to the third or fourth generation. As Christians, we also believe that His grace is far reaching.

This teaching letter was written before the war broke out in Israel, and is in no way a commentary of God’s judgment. I do know that in times of great pain, God is with His people and we have an increased need to draw close to Him. We have all seen that the nation of Israel is drawing strength from the God of Israel at this difficult time. Soldiers are requesting prayer and are wearing *tzitzit* (knotted fringe of the prayer garment) to recognize that they are under God’s protection.

Isaiah 1

The prophecy contained in the first chapter of Isaiah is harsh. The prophet describes a sinful nation, corruption and abandonment of the Lord, saying that the people have turned away from God. The situation is so bad that the prophet cannot imagine where else the people could be stricken. Verses 5–6 say, “*The entire head is sick and the entire heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing healthy in it...*” This is a merism, a figure of speech the prophet uses to say that the whole being is affected. The head symbolizes the thinking; the heart symbolizes the emotions and psyche as well as the body. This is a picture of society where the entire culture was damaged. Verse 9 is particularly damning. “*If the LORD of armies had not left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom, we would be like Gomorrah.*” The next verse cites the leaders of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah. There are very few times when God destroyed whole populations, and this is one of them. As such, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah came to symbolize everything rebellious, depraved and sinful.

Yet in the midst of depravity, sinful behavior, rebellion and murder, the people were still bringing their offerings to the Temple. God was not fooled by their outward acts of piety. He rejected their “worthless offerings,” saying *“I cannot endure wrongdoing and the festive assembly”* (v. 13b). The word worthless in some translations can also be translated as futile. Make no mistake, religious ritual or exercise combined with unrighteousness is useless, futile and worthless.

What does God say as a result? *“So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you offer many prayers, I will not be listening. Your hands are covered with blood”* (v. 15). How horrifying to think that God would not listen to their prayers.

God hates hypocrisy, when we say one thing, but our actions are far removed from our words. When I stepped into leadership at Bridges for Peace, a wise counselor told me, “Becky, wherever you go, you take the leader of Bridges for Peace.” Everyone I met would judge the organization by my actions and character. In a similar fashion, wherever God’s people go, whatever they do, those who observe them are forming opinions about faith and God. God hates hypocrisy because His people are supposed to reflect His character to a hurting, hopeless world. God is always true to His Word. There is nothing false in Him, but unbelievers form opinions of Him based on His followers. As we know, these opinions are not always true.



In Jewish thought, there are two phrases that describe how we represent God: *kiddush HaShem* and *hillul haShem*. The first means the sanctification of God's name and the second means the defamation of God's name. This originates in the Bible, "*So you shall keep My commandments, and do them; I am the LORD. And you shall not profane My holy name, but I will be sanctified among the sons of Israel; I am the LORD who sanctifies you, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, to be your God; I am the LORD*" (Lev. 22:31–33). The idea is that we should intentionally act in such a way that God's name and reputation shine.

It infuriated God that the people of Isaiah's time were outwardly religious while their actions were evil. He even told them He will not listen to their prayers. The story doesn't end there though.

Our gracious Lord always gives a way of escape! Isaiah records the words, "*Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Stop doing evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, obtain justice for the orphan, plead for the widow's case*" (1:16–17).

Some Christians reading this might say, "Well, Becky, that was in the *Tanakh* times. Now we are under grace." I agree that we are under grace. However, so were those in the time of the *Tanakh*. God never changes. He has always been a God of mercy and grace. Some are actually saying that Israel is receiving God's judgment, a judgment they think this nation has long deserved. But the Scriptures tell us that judgment begins in the house of the Lord (1 Pet. 4:17). For us as Christians, that is the Church. So what is Jesus saying to us?

What Did Jesus Say?

"*Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. 5:16). Once we enter into a relationship with the Lord, it is our privilege to let our lives reflect that reality through our words and our deeds. That way, those without hope and those who are hurting will see the true, merciful nature of our God. They should not be able to see deeds of darkness in our lives.

I could write to you more from the Gospels on this topic, but let's move to the epistles.



Jude

There is a similarity between Isaiah 1 and the book of Jude. The most obvious is that Sodom and Gomorrah are cited once again. The readers immediately know that God's judgment on rebellious, sinful mankind is at stake. Experts believe that Jude wrote around AD 60, when Nero was ruling in Rome. The morality of the Roman Empire at that time is well documented. The reference to Sodom and Gomorrah would have certainly resonated to Jude's readers. It was an immoral and dangerous time.

Jude's short epistle warns believers to guard over the congregation, saying words like *"contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all time handed down to the saints"* (v. 3). It seems ungodly elements had crept into their midst. *"Ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into indecent behavior and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ [Yeshua the Messiah]"* (v. 4). Jude goes on at some length to describe these people, finishing with the words, *"These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage"* (v. 16). Jude reminds his readers of the words of the apostles, *"In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts," These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit"* (v. 18b-19). God hates hypocrisy like this, because the watching world sees the actions of the Church and dismisses God.

Following the pattern in Isaiah, Jude gives his readers direction. *"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting"* (vv. 20-21).

James

I am convinced that we should all read the book of James frequently. It is so plain spoken and practical. James speaks to the fact that we must not only believe but also act out our faith, *“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not just hearers who deceive themselves”* (1:22).

Paul

At the end of the book of Romans, Paul urges believers: *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect”* (Rom. 12:2). A little later in the chapter, Paul gives a list of how we can live in a godly fashion, which is similar to the list in Isaiah. He says, *“Love must be free of hypocrisy. Detest what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor, not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Rom. 12:9–13, 21)

Today’s World

Just as in the times of Isaiah and the Roman Empire, our world is deeply troubled. Many choose to satisfy their own lusts instead of seeking the one true God. Modern societies mock God and His Word. Yes, the situation is grim. Many Christian leaders today again reference the similarities to Sodom and Gomorrah. You can be sure that He is not pleased. But God! As in the other instances mentioned in this writing, God in His mercy always gives an alternative. It is up to us to choose to walk in His light; to choose to do good. He is asking us, His followers, to show the hopeless world that alternative. I believe that the lack of hope in the world is indicative of a lack of alignment with God and His ways.

I close with direction from the Apostle Paul to the believers in Ephesus. *“‘Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ So then, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of your time, because the*

days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, in which there is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your hearts to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to our God and Father; and subject yourselves to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph. 5:14–21).

I pray that God will look at our endeavors and see that they bring glory to His name. May He not call our offerings “worthless.” Please continue to pray for the people and nation of Israel. When we stand with Israel, we are listening to the heart of God: the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

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Scripture from New American Standard Bible

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.—Deut.)

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