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Wash and Make Yourselves Clean

1: 16-17

Wash and make yourselves clean DIG: What did God want from the nation of Isra'el? What are those things evidence of? Why had Isra'el gotten away from doing those things? Was God asking something simple or complex from the nation? Were they easy to do? Why?

REFLECT: Some define spirituality in personal moral terms, while others see it as a matter of working for social justice. Which better reflects your background? Or where do you presently worship? How are both of these concerns interrelated in this chapter? How is your church or messianic synagogue seeking justice and encouraging the oppressed in your community? What risks would that entail? Someone has said that justice is finding out what belongs to whom and returning it to them. Another said that justice is loving people you don't know. How do you respond to those statements? How would you define justice?

After declaring what **ADONAI** does *not* want, **Isaiah** announces what **He** *does* want. In contrast to their complex ceremonial codes, **His** demands are really quite simple (**Deuteronomy 10: 12-13**). **Micah**, a contemporary of **Isaiah**, would reduce it to this: **act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8b)**. Therefore, the way back to a relationship with **God** was the actions **Isra'el** would take in obedience to **Him**. Obedience is the key virtue of **God's** people, and disobedience is their worst nightmare. There are nine commands that fall into three groups that describe what **ADONAI** wanted **the Israelites** to do in the future.



In the first grouping, they were to **wash and make** themselves **clean** before **God** by confessing their sin and asking for forgiveness (**1:16a**). Dealing with purification of sins is

always by means of forgiveness. **ADONAI** said: **Take your evil deeds out of my sight (1:16b)**, for what good are sacrifices if you do **evil**?

Secondly, **God** wanted them to individually **stop doing wrong, and learn to do right (1:16c-17a)**. **A negative attitude to evil is not enough; it must be accompanied by positive acts of righteousness.** These were three commands to reorder their personal life: **stop** what they were doing; **learn** to cultivate a new mindset and set different objectives; and **seek justice and do** what is **right** in **God's** sight. Later, **Isaiah** would declare that the Messiah, **the LORD's servant . . . would bring justice to the nations, and in His Torah they would put their hope (42:1, 3-4)**.

The third triad of commands calls for society to be reformed. While it is true that we are saved by faith and not by works (**Romans 2:8-9**), it is also true that once saved, good works are the *evidence* of our salvation. **Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit .** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click [Dx](#) - Watch Out For False Prophets**). So here, **Isaiah**, in accordance with the Torah, said they needed to *evidence* their trust in and obedience to **God** by helping needy people. They were to **encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow (1:17b)**. In other words, they needed to replace their **evil deeds** with right actions. **James** would later say it this way: **Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says (James 1:22)**.

In light of **Isaiah's** many attacks upon the leadership of Judah and **Isra'el**, it is quite probable that this message was especially relevant to their kings. They had been especially grievous in neglecting justice for the poor and the helpless. In the ancient Near East, protection of the oppressed was the particular responsibility of the king. Among the Gentile kings, it was done as a sense of protocol. But among the Hebrews, it was expected because it was an expression of the very character of **ADONAI Himself**. **He** cared for the outcasts, the poor and the helpless; and if the king represented **Him**, he needed to reflect that concern. This is also seen in the Torah, where many individual commands were similar to those in other countries. But the motive for keeping them was the love of **the LORD**, not the fear of kings.

This motivation for the religious practices of **the Israelites** is seen again and again in the book of **Isaiah**. **His** question for them is this: Do you worship out of vain repetition or out of relationship? Are you merely going through the motions or do you really love **God**? These same questions are just as relevant for us today as they were for them then.