

“Come Now, Let Us Reason Together (Isaiah 1:18)”

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Come Now, Let Us Reason Together - Isaiah 1:18 - 123RF Photo - Used under license

"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

This lesson is the first in a series on the "Comes" of God's word. This lesson describes God's invitation in Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

Consider. In Isaiah 1:18-20 (Old Testament), God's forgiveness was conditional on the people's obedience to God. How do people today receive God's forgiveness now that Christ has paid the penalty for sin?

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Introduction. Being accused of having hands full of blood was a serious accusation. Yet, that is exactly how the Lord accused the people of Judah and Jerusalem (Isaiah 1:1) in Isaiah 1:15, "Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood." Having hands full of blood is a symbol for the cruel wrongs the people had committed including the guilt of actual murder (Isaiah 1:21, Ref. 1). Isaiah had already spoken against the people for their rebellion against God (Isaiah 1:2) and for the insincerity of their sacrifices, offerings, festivals, and prayers (Isaiah 1:11-15).

Come Now. In Isaiah 1:18, God says "Come now." The Hebrew word for *come* is *halak*, which means *to go, come, walk* (Ref. 2). Here in Isaiah 1:18 "Come" is a summons for the recipient of the message to approach the speaker (God). Although God does not force the people of Judah and Jerusalem to come to him, God strongly urges the people to come to him that they might receive his pardon. Likewise, today God strongly urges all sinners to come to him.

Let Us Reason Together. The Hebrew word for *let us reason together*, *yakach*, means *to decide, adjudge, prove, and argue* (Ref. 3, Job 13:15). The idea is that of a legal process in which each party maintains his own case (Ref. 4, Isaiah 43:26). God proposes to present to the people of Judah and Jerusalem the principles on which he is willing to forgive their sins and bestow his pardon (Ref. 5). God describes the terms for pardon in Isaiah 1:18-20.

Though Your Sins Are Like Scarlet. The stain of the people's sins are bright red and indelible like the scarlet dye used by the ancients. The ancients made scarlet and crimson dyes from the dried bodies of the insect (worm), *Coccus ilicis* found on oak trees in Spain and in the countries east of the Mediterranean (Ref. 5, Ref. 6, Ref. 7). (Refer to the image on the next page).

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The Crimson or Scarlet Worm (Ref. 7)

When it was time for the female *Coccus ilicis* to give birth, she would attach herself permanently to an oak tree. Her body protected her eggs until the larvae were hatched and able to live on their own. As the mother died, she oozed a crimson fluid which stained her body and the surrounding wood. The death of the female *Coccus ilicis* paints a picture of the death of Christ who sacrificed his blood on the wood of the cross that others, by believing in him, may live (Ref. 7, Ref. 8).

The scarlet dye was indelible. Cotton material was dipped in this color twice so the stain was permanent (Ref. 5). The stain of the red dye (and likewise the stain of sin in the human heart) could not be washed away by man alone. That is why we as sinners need God's action to wash us clean.

The scarlet dye was known since early in the Old Testament times, centuries before the prophet Isaiah. For further study, I suggest you check these additional references for scarlet in the Bible:

- Genesis 38:24-30 - A midwife tied a scarlet thread on Perez's hand at birth.
- Joshua 2:1, Joshua 2:15-18, Joshua 6:22-23 - Rahab saved the Israelite spies and her family with a scarlet cord.
- Exodus 26:1, Exodus 36:8 - The tabernacle curtains included scarlet material.
- Proverbs 31:10, Proverbs 31:21 - The excellent wife clothed her household in scarlet.
- Matthew 27:27-28 - Soldiers put a scarlet robe on Jesus before they crucified him.

They will be White as Snow. Only God can forgive sin. Only God can cleanse people and wash away their sin. David recognized this principle. He prayed to God, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast

love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!" (Psalm 51:1-2). David also wrote, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7). White symbolizes innocence and purity (Ref. 9). "White as snow" is "a powerful figurative description of the result of forgiveness" (Ref. 10 below).

Scarlet



Hex Color #FF2400
RGB (255,36,0)

Crimson



Hex Color #DC143C
RGB (220,20,60)

Scarlet and Crimson Colors (Ref. 11)

Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. Scarlet and crimson are similar reddish colors. Scarlet is bright red with an orange tint. Crimson is a strong, bright, deep red color combined with some blue or violet, resulting in a small degree of purple (Ref. 11). Crimson is associated with the stain of blood (Isaiah 1:15, Ref. 12). The ancients employed crimson color to dye wool (Ref. 5).

The Hebrew word for *red* in the phrase "red like Crimson" is *adam*, which means *glaring, flagrant* in Isaiah 1:18 (Brown-Driver-Briggs, Ref. 13).

Though their sins are flagrant and appear as deep stains, God, upon their repentance and reformation, will remove their sins so they will be like wool restored to its original, undyed whiteness (Ref. 14).

Forgiveness - by Obedience or By Faith? In the Old Testament, God's relationship with man was based on obedience to God. Isaiah confirms this point in regard to God's forgiveness. In Isaiah 1:18 God offers forgiveness and cleansing to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. However, God's forgiveness and cleansing was conditional based on their willingness to obey God. Isaiah 1:19-20 describes the conditions for God's forgiveness, and the consequences for not obeying God. "If you are *willing* and *obedient*, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you *refuse* and *rebel*, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isaiah 1:19-20, italics added). For further study on God's relationship with man in the Old Testament based on obedience, I suggest reading Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

In the New Testament, God's relationship with man is based on faith in Christ. The Apostle Paul writes, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). *Faith in Christ* means *believing in, trusting in, and having confidence in Christ* (Ref. 15). Peter preached to the Gentiles gathered in Cornelius' house that through the name of Jesus everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:34-43). God's power to cleanse our sins "white as snow" is through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7).

Let's review the main principles in this lesson:

1. God invites all sinners to come to him that we might receive his pardon (Isaiah 1:18).
2. The stain of sin is red as scarlet (Isaiah 1:18).
3. Only God can wash our sins white as snow (Isaiah 1:18, Psalm 51:7). As a result of Christ's death, we know that it is the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).
4. In the Old Testament, God's forgiveness was conditional on the people's obedience to God (Isaiah 1:18-20). In the New Testament, God provides forgiveness and cleansing through faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8, Acts 10:43).

Apply. If you do not know Christ, come to him, confess your sin, and ask him to forgive you. Put your faith and trust in him and walk in the cleansed life that Christ has given you. If you do have faith in Christ as your Savior, walk with him in the light. Thank him for forgiving your sin and for cleansing you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-9).

(References next page)

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