EBS10 Isa 58-59

**Lesson 10: Isaiah 58:1-59:21**

**Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions**

**Objectives:**

1. The student will understand that how Israel treated others affected how God responded to their worship.
2. The student will understand that how Israel treated others affected how God forgave sin.

**Preparation:**

1. Review the sins that were being committed in Jerusalem in Isa 56-57.
2. Use a good Bible Dictionary or encyclopedia and look up the word sin. Explore the different words for sin and their meaning in the Bible.

**Theme:** The God high and holy sends a preacher.

**Background:**

1. Isaiah addresses three different time periods in his book.
	1. Isa 1-39 is addressed to 8th century Jerusalem.
	2. Isa 40-55 is addressed to the exiles.
	3. Isa 56-66 is written to post exilic Jerusalem.
2. The text gives clues about the historical background, but they can be confusing. It appears that the audience Isaiah addresses has returned to Judah and Jerusalem and at times is on the verge of rebuilding and other times well into the project. See the background section of Lesson 9.
3. Two broad biblical doctrines stand in the background of Isa 58-59.
	1. Worship.
		1. Beginning with the Ten Commandments, biblical teaching connects how individuals treat one another (the horizontal dimension) with how one relates to God in worship (the vertical dimension).
		2. Isa 1, especially vv 10-17, is about worship and how the horizontal relationships in the community affect worship. God does not accept worship from people who oppress others. Amos 5 takes up the same theme.
		3. Perhaps the clearest statement of the doctrine comes in 1 John near the end of the NT:
			1. 1 John 4:20 If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.
			2. John’s point is about the broader concern of love. One might easily see that worship is one way of saying, “I love God.”
	2. Forgiveness.
		1. The biblical story centers on the occasions when God forgives human sin (the vertical dimension) and yet also demands that humans live in communities marked by good relationships (the horizontal dimension).
		2. In Isa 1-12 God seeks to maintain fellowship with 8th century Jerusalem but they continue to oppress the weak and vulnerable (especially widows and orphans). God demands that the relationships in the community be righted before he grants forgiveness.
		3. Perhaps the clearest statement of the doctrine comes in the sermon on the mount which addresses the issue a couple times:
			1. Matthew 5:23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
			2. Matthew 6:12 And forgive us our debts, As we also have forgiven our debtors; 13 And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. 14 For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; 15 but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
	3. Isa 58 takes up the horizontal and vertical dimensions of worship while Isa 59 takes up the horizontal and vertical dimensions of forgiveness.

**Learning Experiences:**

1. Isa 58—The horizontal and vertical dimensions of worship.
	1. Isa 58:1-7—Worship rejected because of oppression.
		1. Opening dialogue—Isa 58:1-3.
			1. God announces the sins of the community in a voice that sounds like a trumpet (v 1).
			2. The people complain that they have fasted and humbled themselves in their worship but God has ignored them (3).
		2. God declares that those who worship him must treat others in righteousness—Isa 58:1-3, 5.
			1. Israel seeks God regularly as if they did righteousness, but they do not (cf. the same hypocrisy in Isa 48:1ff).
			2. They want God to treat them righteously but they do not practice it with each other.
		3. God identifies their unrighteousness—Isa 58:4-7.
			1. God lists what he finds offensive.
				1. They seek their own pleasure—v 3.
				2. They oppress their workers—v 3.
				3. They quarrel and fight with violence—v 4.
				4. They bind people by their wickedness—v 6.
				5. They put people in the yoke of oppression—v 6.
				6. They do not share their bread with the hungry—v 7.
				7. They do not open their homes to the homeless—v 7.
				8. They do not clothe the naked—v 7
				9. They do not take care of the needy of their own family—v 7.
			2. Isa 56:1 indicated that God called for a community of justice and righteousness.
				1. Justice meant that the community worked to make sure each person was treated fairly. Instead the vulnerable found peace only in death (Isa 57:1) and many were without the basic necessities of life (Isa 58:4-7).
				2. Righteousness meant that each person treated the other the way they wanted to be treated. Instead those who complain to God are treating others in Jerusalem (even in their own families) as lesser citizens.
			3. The complainers fasted, went to worship, and sought out God each day but:
				1. They ignored the needs of the vulnerable.
				2. They put yokes and thongs in places that kept people in their oppressed and vulnerable positions.
				3. They imposed acts of violence on this vulnerable group.
			4. God rejected their worship.
	2. Isa 58:8-14—The blessings of a caring community.
		1. God responds to the oppression of the worshippers by outlining a different course of action with a different result.
		2. God calls for these actions—Isa 58:9-10, 13.
			1. Remove the yoke (cf. Isa 58:6)—v 9.
			2. Stop pointing fingers and speaking wickedness—v 9.
			3. Pour yourself out for the hungry—v 10.
			4. Satisfy the desires of the afflicted—v 10.
			5. Remove the foot on the Sabbath (i.e. stop oppressing people on the day of worship)—v13.
			6. Practice self-denial in actions and speech—v 13.
			7. Honor the Sabbath day—v 13.
		3. If the people give attention to God’s actions, these results will follow—Isa 58:8-14.
			1. Live in the light—vv 8, 10.
			2. Speedy healing—v 8.
			3. Righteous will go before them—v 8.
			4. God’s glory will protect their rear guard—v 8.
			5. God will respond to their calls (accept their worship)—v 9.
			6. God will guide them continually—v 11.
			7. God will satisfy them with good things—v 11.
			8. God will make their bones strong—v 11.
			9. Their lives will be like well-watered gardens—v 11.
			10. Their cities will be rebuilt—v 12.
			11. They will find delight in the LORD—v 14.
			12. They will ride on the heights of the earth—v 14.
			13. They will feed on the heritage of Jacob—v 14.
		4. Comments.
			1. There are two “if then” sequences in this section:
				1. If—vv 9-10, then—vv 10-12.
				2. If—v 13, then—v 14.
			2. Righteousness is a theme of the section.
				1. The people think they are righteous because they worship, but because of the way they treat others they are not righteous—v 2.
				2. The people seek righteousness from God but he is unwilling to acknowledge their worship because he hears the cries of the people they oppress. God hears both praise and pain from Jerusalem—v 2.
				3. When a people seek justice in the community then their righteousness goes before them—v 8.
			3. Sabbath keeping.
				1. In Isa 56 the eunuch and alien who kept the sabbath and the covenant were accepted.
				2. In Isa 58 the Judean who kept the sabbath but failed to practice righteousness in the community is rejected.
2. Isa 59—The horizontal and vertical dimensions of forgiveness.
	1. This complex chapter falls into three parts:
		1. Isa 59:1-8—Israel’s refusal to give up sin.
		2. Isa 59:9-15—The prophet confesses for sinful Israel.
		3. Isa 59:16-21—God as warrior comes to attack sin.
	2. Isa 59:1-8—Israel’s refusal to give up sin.
		1. The crucial issue is not God’s power over sin, he can and will forgive sin, but the crucial issue is Israel’s refusal to give up sin and the terrible implications for society.
		2. God has power over sin—Isa 59:1.
			1. Isa 40-66 regularly addresses the people’s sin and God’s response.
				1. The grand vision for post exilic Jerusalem outlined in Isa 40-55 is never achieved because the people’s sin set the whole vision to the side.
				2. Isa 56-66 regularly insists that God can give the vision reality and forgive sin. The problem is not a problem with divinity.
			2. Note the use of body parts imagery with regard to the high and holy God. Here he is said to have a hand and ears.
		3. The issue is Israel’s sin—Isa 59:2-8.
			1. Israel’s sin keeps them from turning to God to enjoy his forgiveness or to achieve his vision for the community.
			2. Their sin is described in several ways:
				1. The use of multiple body parts indicates the totality of their guilt.

Defiled hands—v 3.

Fingers of iniquity—v 3.

Lips that speak lies—v 3.

Tongues that mutter wickedness—v 3.

Grope as if they have no eyes—v 10.

Violent hands—v 6.

Feet run to evil—v 7.

* + - * 1. The use of multiple words for sin indicates that the comprehensiveness of their sin—they sin in all areas (the list goes into the next section).

Iniquity—vv 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 12.

Sin—vv 2, 12.

Defiled—v 3.

No justice—vv 4, 9, 11, 15.

Mischief—v 4.

Wickedness—v 3.

Violence—v 6.

Shed innocent blood—v 7.

Evil—vv 7, 15.

Lies—vv 3, 4, 13.

Transgress—vv 12, 13, 20.

* + - * 1. Their sin affects all areas of community life:

Law courts—v 4.

Violence and bloodshed—vv 6-7.

Highways filled with desolation and destruction—v 7.

No peace or justice—v 8.

Darkness pervades the land—vv 9-10.

No truth in the public squares—v 14.

* + - * 1. The animal images for sin in 59:5-6 require interpretation.

The adder/viper eggs seem to suggest that their sins inject danger and poison into the community.

The spider webs cover the community not with protection but with offense and oppression.

* + - 1. The point of the passage is that their sin imposes such a weight on the community and on their relationship with God that the horizontal issues cloud the vertical ones.
	1. Isa 59:9-15—A confession for sinful Israel.
		1. The community is overcome with sin. Various images are used including:
			1. Justice far away—v 9, 11, 14.
			2. Righteousness tries to catch up with the community but it cannot—v 10, 14.
			3. Those seeking light find only darkness—v 10.
			4. People at the height of their physical life are like the dead—v10.
			5. The people sound as sad as a growling bear or moaning dove—v 11.
			6. Salvation is far away—v 11.
			7. It is not a matter of a single sin, but multiple transgressions that grow exponentially—v 12.
			8. The community denies God and turns from following him—v 13.
			9. They lie in their hearts—v 13.
			10. There is no truth in community life—v 14.
			11. Uprightness cannot enter the community—v 14.
			12. Those who try to become good are hunted down like an animal—v 14.
		2. Who speaks in this section:
			1. Some suggest the prophet confesses the sins of the community.
			2. Others argue that there are two groups in post-exilic Jerusalem, one engaged in idolatry and oppression, while the other calls for a return to the LORD. The latter group speaks here.
		3. The sequence of the chapter follows this outline:
			1. Unremitting sin grips the community (Isa 58:1-8).
			2. The faithful recognize the depth of the problem but seem helpless to stop the sin (Isa 58:9-15).
			3. God responds to the sin with discipline. He is willing to forgive sin, but the community does not seek forgiveness choosing rather to hide their faces from him (Isa 58:16-21).
	2. Isa 59:15-21—God as warrior comes to attack sin.
		1. God travels to Jerusalem to address the sin issue.
			1. God regularly visits the earth (beginning in Genesis and climaxing with the incarnation of Christ).
			2. God’s response to sin is outlined:
				1. Isa 58:15—God sees the sins described in Isa 56:9-58:15. He is high and holy, but not blind or unaware.
				2. Isa 58:15—God is displeased.

He is not powerless (Isa 59:1) or unable to forgive sin.

His displeasure is that the people show no awareness of the covenant they have made with him or his interest in their welfare and that their sin destroys the community, his community, in Jerusalem.

He is displeased that there is no justice (Isa 59:15, cf 58 and 59:9, 11, 14).

He is displeased that no one champions his cause—Isa 59:16. God will return to this reality in Isa 63:5.

* + - * 1. Isa 58:16-18—God comes as a warrior.
		1. God resorts to violence after continual pleas, offers of blessing and rewards and regular confrontations.
			1. His clothing is metaphorical describing what he brings to sinful Jerusalem:
				1. Breastplate of righteousness—Righteousness is one of the themes of the section and represents God seeking relationship with his people and calling for good relationships among his people.
				2. Helmet of salvation—The book of Isaiah constantly seeks the salvation of God’s people. Isaiah’s name contains the word “salvation.”
				3. Garments of vengeance—Since the community is mired in sin, God comes to take vengeance on the sin.
				4. Mantle of fury—God is angry with sin, especially sin that leads to injustice and oppression.
			2. Paul uses this image in a slightly different and expanded way in Eph 6:14.
		2. God’s appearance is compared to a warrior (vv 17-18) and to a rushing stream (v 19).
		3. God’s appearance on earth has certain goals including:
			1. Repaying sinners for their evil deeds—v 18.
			2. Showing his anger to his adversaries—v 18.
			3. Showing requital to his enemies—v 18.
			4. Reestablishing the fear of the LORD among those who do wrong—v 19.
			5. Reestablishing his glory—v 19.
			6. Ultimately God seeks to redeem Israel and reestablish his covenant with them—vv 20-21.
			7. He hopes his covenant will continue throughout the generations—v 21.

**Continuities:**

1. Discuss the vertical and horizontal aspects of worship. Why does God reject the fasts of the people who sought him out while engaged in oppression? Why does God so abundantly reward those who care for the vulnerable?
2. What form does oppression take? How were these people being oppressed? Give examples of current oppression.
3. What does it mean to keep people in a yoke and a thong? What are examples of a yoke today? What does it mean to undo a yoke? Evaluate contemporary benevolent practices. Do they undo the yoke?
4. Discuss the relationship between God and human sin. Why does God need to announce that he can forgive sin? Why does he not forgive the sins of Isa 59? Why does God come as a warrior?
5. Compare the use of the warrior image in Isa 59 and Eph 6. What are the similarities? What are the differences? How do God’s goals differ from the purpose of the image in Eph 6?

**Assignment: Read Isaiah 60-63.**

**Additional Study:**

1. God puts on the helmet of salvation in Isa 59:17.
	1. Study the appearances of salvation in the book of Isaiah: Isa. 12:2f; 17:10; 25:9; 26:1; 33:2, 6; 45:8, 17; 46:13; 49:6, 8; 51:5f, 8; 52:7, 10; 56:1; 59:11, 17; 60:18; 61:10; 62:1, 11.
	2. Consider the different ways in which salvation is used:
		1. Saving the vulnerable in the community from oppression.
		2. Saving the exiles in Babylonian captivity and bringing them home.
		3. Saving people from their sins.
		4. Saving the Israelites from Egyptian slavery.
	3. What other meanings are there for salvation in the Bible?
2. Study the violence and anger of God.
	1. See the lesson on Isa 35 in the Isa 1-39 EBS.
	2. See Chapter 14, “Violence: God and the Sword” in Harold Shank, *Listening to His Heartbeat—What the Bible Says About the Heart of God*. Joplin, Mo: College Press, 2009.
	3. God’s anger is regularly mentioned in Isaiah: Isa. 5:25; 7:4; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4f, 25; 12:1; 13:3, 9, 13; 14:6; 30:27, 30; 42:25; 48:9; 63:3, 6; 66:15.
	4. Violence is regularly mentioned in Isaiah: Isa. 22:17; 24:19; 28:2; 53:9; 59:6; 60:18.