

**Why Regime Change Is Needed
The Situation with Jerusalem and Judah
Isaiah 3:1 – 15**

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As we move into chapter 3, we find that Isaiah, writing to us from 725 BC, continues to be relevant today as he writes to those of us alive and well entering the third decade of the 21st century. The warnings he is giving to the people of Judah are indeed relevant for our culture today. Yes, we are living under grace, but sin is rampant, and the law of sowing and reaping continues to be in effect.

The warnings to Judah are also warnings to us and to our culture in these last days.

The heart of Jesus today is the same as in Isaiah's day. He would prefer that we would repent and return establishing a relationship with Him. But it appears that the culture today would prefer to pound out an insistence on the other side of the coin, rejection of His grace in favor of doing life on their own terms. The bottom line, repentance = heaven for eternity, rejection = hell for eternity.

This is our choice; it is up to each one of us individually. It was also a choice available for Judah.

The closing thought from Isaiah in chapter 2 was a command to stop holding men, what they make, what they do, how they lead, and on and on, in higher regard than YAHWEH. Stop doing life on their terms and conditions. This was a problem for Judah, and it is a problem for us today.

It is amazing to me how most will ignore the clear testimony of the word of God and rely instead on what a line of thought is from men. The mindset of our culture today is one that aligns with the thoughts of Nietzsche.

When Zarathustra was alone, however, he said to his heart: "Could it be possible! This old saint in the forest hath not yet heard of it, that GOD IS DEAD!" (Nietzsche and Common trans. 1881, 3)

That line of thought colors much of our culture today. God is dead, He is no longer an item of interest. We run headlong into our cultural embrace of me, me, me and what we accept as truth from our handheld devices and Google. God has not changed though, and He has a response for Nietzsche. God's response is...Nietzsche is dead.

God's Response

Jesus made it very clear and continues to do so. In Revelation 22:13 He reflected that He is alive yesterday, today and forevermore when He said "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (NASB95)

No matter how hard our culture tries to come up with ways to prevent it, change it or create legacies that go beyond it, death is still a real thing that everyone must confront. We have the choice of our ultimate destination, but short of the rapture, Hebrews 9:27–28 will be the result of all. "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him." (NASB95) We live in a world filled with cemeteries.

For those who reject the greatest offer and promise ever made, the offer of eternal life through Jesus Christ, the final destination is shown to us in Revelation 20:11–12, it is not annihilation, but it is eternal separation from God. It is judgement. “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.” (NASB95)

Here in chapter 3, the folly of following men and their way of doing life rather than following God is exposed. Isaiah revealed what one of the primary tools God will use to turn Judah’s hearts back to Him. He will remove the leaders of Judah.

Remember again the way that a Jew in 525 BC would digest prophecy. A contrast with the present is being expanded on in order to describe the future that we began to explore in chapter 2. One of the hallmarks of prophecy in the Bible is the mixing of material that is to be fulfilled shortly with material that is a bit further out in the future with prophecy that we are still looking for the fulfillment of. The near-term fulfillment validates the prophet that they are communicating for God and as a result, all those other prophecies, even the ones in the far future, can also be assumed to be fulfilled just as completely as the near-term prophecy. We also see prophetic examples that can be referred to more than once.

The first fifteen verses of chapter 3 will expose the fact that the command of Isaiah 2:22 is not being followed by Judah or by Jerusalem.

Unless the greatness comes from within the community itself, a condition which is ultimately the result of trust in God, no great leaders will rise from it. Instead, the leaders will merely reflect the spiritual poverty of the community. (Oswalt 1986, 131)

Or as we see in our culture, leadership reflects the spiritual and moral condition of those they intend to lead. When a strong leader emerges, who goes against the flow, push back occurs. We see that today and we see that in the history of Judah.

The contrasts that we have already begun to see between the conditions of Judah as the ministry of Isaiah kicks off, are like the conditions that we see in our culture today.

We have economic and military strength, but there are areas in our culture that are horribly lost. We have foreign influences, eastern religions and eastern religious thought, throughout our nation. We are distracted and misdirected and no longer paying attention to what got us here. All the same issues as Judah had.

It also leads to the same place spiritually as we see in Jerusalem of Isaiah’s time.

Today, nearly two-thirds of all young adults who were once regular churchgoers have dropped out at one time or another (64 percent). Our contention is that today’s society is especially and insidiously faith repellent. Certainly, God’s people have weathered hostile seasons in the past; church history reminds us that living faithfully has never been easy. But our research shows that resilient faith is tougher to grow today using the cultivation methods we relied on throughout the twentieth century. (Kinnaman, Matlock and Hawkins 2019, 15)

In his thesis entitled a “Cycle of Nations” in *The Decline and Fall of the Athenian Republic*, Sir Alexander Fraser Tyler stated: “A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves money from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the public treasury, with a result that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy, always followed by dictatorship. The average age of the world’s greatest civilizations has been 200 years. These nations have progressed through the following sequence— From bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to selfishness; from selfishness to

complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependency; from dependency back into bondage. (Tyler 2001)

YAHWEH's solution for Judah.

Isaiah 3:1–3

“For behold, the Lord GOD of hosts is going to remove from Jerusalem and Judah Both supply and support, the whole supply of bread And the whole supply of water; The mighty man and the warrior, The judge and the prophet, The diviner and the elder, The captain of fifty and the honorable man, The counselor and the expert artisan, And the skillful enchanter.” (NASB95)

It is not man, it is not earthly kingdoms, it is not things created by man that should be trusted. Isaiah uses the same title for YAHWEH he used back in chapter 1.

“...the Lord GOD of hosts,” or as we unpacked this before, the continuation of a pattern that we see specifically in Isaiah but also something we see in all the prophets who attest to being in front of the divine council. The first word is better translated master or sovereign. The Master, YAHWEH of Heavenly Armies, is the one who will be causing the events of verses 1 – 15 to take place. Not a man, but The Master.

But things are good...on the outside. God looks on the inside and Jeremiah tells us “The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, NASB95)

The glory of the kingdom at that time carried the wrath of Jehovah within it. The outbreak of that wrath commenced in the time of Ahaz; and even under Hezekiah it was merely suspended, not changed. Isaiah foretells this outbreak of wrath. He describes how Jehovah will lay the Jewish state in ruins, by taking away the main supports of its existence and growth. (Keil and Delitzsch 1996, 84)

YAHWEH is the one who is about to remove, as a result of judgement, something very specific from Jerusalem and Judah. This removal has taken place twice and will take place once more in the future. At the time Isaiah is writing this, the first removal was in view. The warnings of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 were about to become very real.

What is being removed, per the translation, is supply and support. Digging into the Hebrew though shows this to be a bit more thorough than that. Isaiah is saying, literally, what is being removed is support and support. A word play, yes, because he uses the same noun twice, but one is in the masculine and the other in the feminine.

Isaiah 3:1

“For behold, the Lord GOD of hosts is going to remove from Jerusalem and Judah Both supply and support, the whole supply of bread And the whole supply of water;” (NASB95)

The juxtaposition of the masculine and feminine from the same stem serves sometimes to express entirety; e.g. Is 3:1 *משען ומשענה* stay and staff, i.e. every kind of support. (Gesenius 1910, 394)

This is a complete and total removal of anything and everything that could even remotely be called upon to support someone.

How complete? Isaiah adds for emphasis that it will include even the basics of life, bread and water.

This should call to remembrance a something from the Torah.

Leviticus 26:25–26

“I will bring on you an avenging sword, a covenant vengeance. Although you will gather together into your cities, I will send pestilence among you and you will be given into enemy hands. When I break off your

supply of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven; they will ration your bread by weight, and you will eat and not be satisfied.” (NET)

And this did indeed happen, to Israel in the north and to Judah in the south. And to Jerusalem, twice. There is still one more round to come during the Great Tribulation (Zechariah 14.) Coming very soon for Isaiah’s Judah.

Lamentations 2:20

“Look, O LORD! Consider! Whom have you ever afflicted like this? Should women eat their offspring, their healthy infants? Should priest and prophet be killed in the Lord’s sanctuary?” (NET)

There would be a repeat of this during the siege of Jerusalem under Titus Vespasian. From Josephus.

Josephus

Now of those perished by famine in the city, the number was prodigious, and the miseries they underwent were unspeakable; for if so much as the shadow of any kind of food did anywhere appear, a war was commenced presently; and the dearest friends fell a fighting one with another about it, snatching from each other the most miserable supports of life. Nor would men believe that those who were dying had no food; but the robbers would search them when they were expiring, lest any one should have concealed food in their bosoms, and counterfeited dying: nay, these robbers gaped for want, and ran about stumbling and staggering along like mad dogs, and reeling against the doors of the houses like drunken men; they would also, in the great distress they were in, rush into the very same houses two or three times in one and the same day. Moreover, their hunger was so intolerable, that it obliged them to chew everything, while they gathered such things as the most sordid animals would not touch, and endured to eat them; nor did they at length abstain from girdles and shoes; and the very leather which belonged to their shields they pulled off and gnawed: the very wisps of old hay became food to some; and some gathered up fibers, and sold a very small weight of them for four Attic [drachmae]. (Josephus and Whiston 1987, 737)

That is exactly what Isaiah meant in verse 1.

Then he moves onto to discuss the systematic removal of leadership within Judah. This is an outline of what Nebuchadnezzar did, told in advance.

Isaiah 3:2–3

“The mighty man and the warrior, The judge and the prophet, The diviner and the elder, The captain of fifty and the honorable man, The counselor and the expert artisan, And the skillful enchanter.” (NASB95)

Under King Uzziah, Judah had become a military powerhouse and fielded a professional army, not just simply conscripts.

The first thing YAHWEH removes is that military leadership and power. We see all the prominent members of the government listed. Especially those with experience and education. Also listed, are all the prominent members of the religious establishment. Those businessmen responsible for the economic health of Jerusalem, gone as well. Finally, those experienced craftsmen, the metal workers, carpenters, stone masons; all of the journeymen tradesmen that were needed for doing life as normal, gone as well.

This all did take place under Babylon.

Another thing about the list is how complete it is to provide a picture of how confusing things are in Jerusalem, which was supposed to be a faithful city. The fortunetellers and the masters of black arts are also taken away. Jerusalem is a confusion of godless ritual and religion as well as Jewish ritual and some YAHWEH believers.

Remember from our study of Ezekiel that the believers have been marked and protected from the coming judgement. We see that was indeed the case because we have the books of Daniel and Ezekiel, both written by believers who were taken into exile.

A little bit about the master of black arts, the skilled enchanter. In Hebrew, this is another word play on a word we are familiar with from Genesis 3. "Lachash is the whispering or muttering of magical formulas; it is related both radically and in meaning to nachash, enchantment (Arabic nachs, misfortune); it is derived from lâchash, sibilare, to hiss (a kindred word to nâchash; hence nâchâsh, a serpent)." (Keil and Delitzsch 1996, 85-86)

We clearly see who their boss is.

Here is how all of this went down.

2 Kings 24:11–17

"King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to the city while his generals were besieging it. King Jehoiachin of Judah, along with his mother, his servants, his officials, and his eunuchs surrendered to the king of Babylon. The king of Babylon, in the eighth year of his reign, took Jehoiachin prisoner. Nebuchadnezzar took from there all the riches in the treasuries of the LORD's temple and of the royal palace. He removed all the gold items which King Solomon of Israel had made for the LORD's temple, just as the LORD had warned. He deported all the residents of Jerusalem, including all the officials and all the soldiers (10,000 people in all). This included all the craftsmen and those who worked with metal. No one was left except for the poorest among the people of the land. He deported Jehoiachin from Jerusalem to Babylon, along with the king's mother and wives, his eunuchs, and the high-ranking officials of the land. The king of Babylon deported to Babylon all the soldiers (there were 7,000), as well as 1,000 craftsmen and metal workers. This included all the best warriors. The king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in Jehoiachin's place. He renamed him Zedekiah." (NET)

And that brings us back to our text in Isaiah.

Isaiah 3:4

"And I will make mere lads their princes, And capricious children will rule over them," (NASB95)

Ecclesiastes 10:16

"Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning." (NASB95)

When competent leadership is ignored and removed because of the whims of those being ruled, the result is incompetent leadership.

Once again, this too did indeed take place. Manasseh became King at 12, Amon at 22, Josiah was 8, Jehoahaz 23, Jehoiakim 25, Jehoiachin 18, Zedekiah 21.

2 Chronicles 36:11–14

"Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he ruled for eleven years in Jerusalem. He did evil in the sight of the LORD his God. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, the LORD's spokesman. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him vow allegiance in the name of God. He was stubborn and obstinate, and refused to return to the LORD God of Israel. All the leaders of the priests and people became more unfaithful and committed the same horrible sins practiced by the nations. They defiled the LORD's temple which he had consecrated in Jerusalem." (NET)

Josephus gives us more detail. "Now Zedekiah was twenty-and-one years old when he took the government; and had the same mother with his brother Jehoiakim, but was a despiser of justice and of his duty, for truly those of the same age with him were wicked about him, and the whole multitude did what unjust and insolent things they pleased; for which reason the prophet Jeremiah came often to him, and protested to him, and insisted, that he must leave off his impieties and transgressions, and take care of what was right, and neither give ear to the rulers (among whom were wicked men) nor give credit to

their false prophets who deluded them, as if the king of Babylon would make no more war against him, and as if the Egyptians would make war against him, and conquer him, since what they said was not true; and the events would not prove such [as they expected]. Now as to Zedekiah himself, while he heard the prophet speak, he believed him, and agreed to everything as true, and supposed it was for his advantage; but then his friends perverted him, and dissuaded him from what the prophet advised, and obliged him to do what they pleased.” (Josephus and Whiston 1987, 273)

Isaiah 3:5–7

“And the people will be oppressed, Each one by another, and each one by his neighbor; The youth will storm against the elder And the inferior against the honorable. When a man lays hold of his brother in his father’s house, saying, “You have a cloak, you shall be our ruler, And these ruins will be under your charge,” He will protest on that day, saying, “I will not be your healer, For in my house there is neither bread nor cloak; You should not appoint me ruler of the people.”” (NASB95)

The natural outcome of poor government, one that is capricious, is anarchy and oppression. This is not governmental oppression, but oppression caused by people who are doing whatever they want and looking out for number one, just like the government.

Respect for age and respect for education or station will disappear. Those who had all of that have been removed leaving those who were living on the extremes of society, now they are in control and they want leadership that will do things for them. Literally, the qualification is having a decent set of clothes. You look like a leader, be one. Leadership becomes based on public opinion.

But based on what we see in verse 7, conditions will be so bad, that even the one being sought out to lead will reject it. “The decently clad man entirely declines to be advanced to the helm of the state.” (Spence-Jones ed. 1910, 51)

What we are seeing described for us is that even when everything is as bad as is possibly imaginable, which we saw over and over again in the book of Judges, there is one thing we do not see that we do see in Judges, we see no repentance, we see no return to YAHWEH. This is not something Judah or Jerusalem can fix outside of the Lord.

Obedience and devotion must have a high priority, and all social and political systems must be based on that truth. The upbuilding of a country and of a society—including the life of the world today, even with all the developmental programs that are now available—depends upon taking this passage seriously. Material welfare does not automatically mean well-being for mankind; on the contrary, in fact, it can be disastrous. (Widyapranawa 1990, 16-17)

In our culture, our political leadership is dependent upon looking good to the general public. They must have the appearance of being a leader whether they are one or not. Those who are proven leaders from other environments are rejecting political leadership due to their inability to look good to the public eye.

Our culture is right where Jerusalem wound up being.

Again, Isaiah is speaking to us today.

The solution is the same as for Judah...repentance and that begins first with His own people, the church.

But where is the church today?

1 Timothy 4:1–3

“Now the Spirit explicitly says that in the later times some will desert the faith and occupy themselves with deceiving spirits and demonic teachings, influenced by the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared. They will prohibit marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” (NET)

Jude 4

“For certain men have secretly slipped in among you—men who long ago were marked out for the condemnation I am about to describe—ungodly men who have turned the grace of our God into a license for evil and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” (NET)

The offer that YAHWEH made to Judah is an offer that is still on the table for us today.

Isaiah 1:18

“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.” (NASB95)

1 John 1:9

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (NASB95)

YAHWEH told Solomon they key for this. It is the same offer as the one made in Isaiah 1.

2 Chronicles 7:13–14

“If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” (NASB95)

For Judah and Jerusalem, they had moved too far. The offer is there, things can turn around, but here is what they have done.

Isaiah 3:8–9

“For Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen, Because their speech and their actions are against the LORD, To rebel against His glorious presence. The expression of their faces bears witness against them, And they display their sin like Sodom; They do not even conceal it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves.” (NASB95)

The word we have translated as “for” is the Hebrew word כִּי (ki). This word being used as a conjunction meaning it is tied to the previous verse as the reason why leadership is being rejected, in fact this is the reason for what we just looked at in verses 1 – 7.

The reason is simple. “The capital and the land are against Jehovah both in word and deed...” (Keil and Delitzsch 1996, 88)

The speech of the people Judah breaks the law of God, and where the speech is, the actions follow. In what they say and do, the people of Jerusalem are breaking the law.

“They speak as if they rule in heaven, and lay claim to the earth.” (Psalm 73:9, NET)

In Jerusalem is the Temple of YAHWEH, in the Temple is the Holy of Holies and inside the Holy of Holies is the Ark of the Covenant and Mercy Seat on top. That is where the glory of the Lord still visibly resides. The actions of the people who live in Jerusalem, their open rebellion through what they say and do, is demonstrating that rebellion to the world, and that is part of the problem. They are rebelling against the fact that the presence of YAHWEH is visibly there in the Temple. That level of rebellion is characteristic of man and will happen again at the end of the millennial reign of Messiah (Revelation 20:6.)

One of the first things Jesus addressed at the beginning of His ministry is the expectation of faithful followers to be salt and light. The same expectation that was there for Israel and Judah.

Matthew 5:13–16

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (NASB95)

Jerusalem and Judah no longer reflect believing loyalty to YAHWEH.

Isaiah sees this sin as compounded in the case of his people for it is not an occasional lapse nor a shameful secret but a public and unabashed way of life. (Motyer 1996, 61)

Isaiah 3:9

“The expression of their faces bears witness against them, And they display their sin like Sodom; They do not even conceal it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves.” (NASB95)

For the second time, Isaiah compares Jerusalem to Sodom. The city of Sodom had many things going against it, but the arrogance about their sin became a primary focus of YAHWEH.

Ezekiel 16:48–50

“As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “Sodom, your sister and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it.” (NASB95)

The citizens of Jerusalem were proud of their sin alternative lifestyle. They had come out of the closet about their Molech and Baal worship. They were proud of their new freedom to live life as they choose. They were proud of their alternative lifestyle to being a faithful YAHWEH follower. Killing their own children by having them pass through the fire to Molech was acceptable as was the sexual immorality connected with Baal worship.

Does this sound anything like our culture today? We see the same going on around us today, a certain pride in living an alternative lifestyle to the one based on a Biblical worldview.

One of the most destructive lies of our time is that it is wrong or hypocritical to have a standard that we don't live up to. No one has always told the truth, yet it is right and good to teach our children, “Don't lie.” It would be wrong, and destructive, for someone to answer, “You can't tell your child not to lie. You have lied in the past. You are a hypocrite.” This attitude in our society translates into a certain result: a wholesale lowering of standards. Also, the charge of hypocrisy is false. It is not hypocritical to promote a standard you don't perfectly meet. Hypocrisy is when you pretend to keep the standard when you do not, or think it is fine for you to not keep the standard, when you think others should. (Guzik 2000, Is 3:8-12)

Isaiah 3:10

“Say to the righteous that it will go well with them, For they will eat the fruit of their actions.” (NASB95)

YAHWEH makes a couple of aside comments amid His discussion of the judgement that is coming. His first comment is for those who are continuing in their faith and loyalty to YAHWEH and living a life that reflects that, one of righteousness.

For those who have taken His offer of settlement seriously and listened to what He told Solomon, they will enjoy the “fruit of their actions.”

While the rest of the world is running full speed in the same direction on the broad road, those of us who have chosen to walk on the narrow path that Jesus discussed will see the results of that faithfulness in our lives. Here in Isaiah, we see being presented a concept that tracks through the entire Bible and was also discussed by Jesus, the concept of reaping from life what you sow into it.

For the Lord loves to reward those who walk in his ways and give obvious tokens of his good pleasure. Though there may be exceptions to this rule, as we well know, it is nevertheless of so general a nature and so commonly observed by the Lord in his dealings with men that it may be here set forth as a general maxim. (Leupold 1971, 92)

This concept of sowing and reaping, which exists as a natural law used regularly by those in agriculture, is extended here and elsewhere in the scriptures to be a law of the spiritual world as well.

This principle works both positively and negatively. “The one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward” (Proverbs 11:18b), but “whoever sows injustice reaps calamity” (Proverbs 22:8a). (Got Questions Ministries 2002-2013)

Hosea expanded on this concept and then Paul provided additional guidance for us.

Hosea 10:12–13

“Sow with a view to righteousness, Reap in accordance with kindness; Break up your fallow ground, For it is time to seek the LORD Until He comes to rain righteousness on you. You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice, You have eaten the fruit of lies. Because you have trusted in your way, in your numerous warriors,” (NASB95)

Paul took the principle and also used it in his discussion in Galatians.

Galatians 6:7–10

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.” (NASB95)

Isaiah is letting those who remain or become faithful, that despite what they see going on around them, He is in control and they will be recipients of a much better future than those around them.

Those who were faithful would see things that would dismay them and make them wonder about the faithfulness of God. Habakkuk pointed this out and YAHWEH's response shows up elsewhere in the new testament.

Habakkuk 1:12–13

“LORD, you have been active from ancient times; my sovereign God, you are immortal. LORD, you have made them your instrument of judgment. Protector, you have appointed them as your instrument of punishment. You are too just to tolerate evil; you are unable to condone wrongdoing. So why do you put up with such treacherous people? Why do you say nothing when the wicked devour those more righteous than they are?” (NET)

YAHWEH's response answers all the questions that we would have as a result of the quandaries of seeing evil in our culture going on.

Habakkuk 2:2–4

“The LORD responded: “Write down this message! Record it legibly on tablets, so the one who announces it may read it easily. For the message is a witness to what is decreed; it gives reliable testimony about how matters will turn out. Even if the message is not fulfilled right away, wait patiently; for it will certainly come to pass—it will not arrive late. Look, the one whose desires are not upright will faint from exhaustion, but the person of integrity will live because of his faithfulness.” (NET)

Habakkuk 2:4

“Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.” (NASB95)

The key...live by faith. Paul picked up on this and repeated the words provided to Habakkuk in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and the writer of Hebrews repeated it in Hebrews 10:38.

The other half of the concept being enumerated by Isaiah, what about those who are wicked?

Isaiah 3:11

“Woe to the wicked! It will go badly with him, For what he deserves will be done to him.” (NASB95)

With the side comments made to the two groups in verse 10 and 11, something else is also being set up as well, the idea of a believing remnant who will be cared for by the Lord.

The evil which comes upon the wicked is that which he has earned and merited through his own works. This verse represents the attitude of a true evangelist, namely, a note of anguish that the evil who have refused to hearken to the voice of God are now to be requited with the result of their own doings. Salvation is purely of unmerited grace; destruction is brought upon us through the labors of our hands. Salvation is a gift of God; destruction is the reward of our own efforts. (Young 1965, 155)

Isaiah 3:12

“O My people! Their oppressors are children, And women rule over them. O My people! Those who guide you lead you astray And confuse the direction of your paths.” (NASB95)

The Lord, after His side comments, goes back to His people. One of the problems, again restated, is the leadership of the nation.

...the prophet is saying that in one sense Judah is already ruled by those incompetent to do so (vv. 4, 5). Their incompetence is seen in their inability to lead aright. The very persons who should show them the right way are causing them to go off the path. (Oswalt 1986, 137-138)

We discussed earlier the ages of the Kings of Judah post Uzziah. That youth combined with the inability to seek wisdom from others is being addressed. He is also talking about the general conduct of the nation as well.

In his day women did not have the educational advantages that men enjoyed and so were less fit to lead than men. Children, of course, because of their age lack the experience, perspective, and wisdom needed to lead adults. Unqualified leaders were leading the people astray and giving them confusing directions concerning God's will. (Constable 2003, Is 3:12)

Because of the ages of those who were becoming King, there was a recognition of the influences that their mothers were having on the first few years of rule. We even saw that with Solomon.

1 Kings 2:19

“So Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah. And the king arose to meet her, bowed before her, and sat on his throne; then he had a throne set for the king's mother, and she sat on his right.” (NASB95)

But it appears that the influence now was much heavier. We also need to understand that these were eastern kings who, because of their failure to fully be faithful to YAHWEH, were trying to look like an eastern king, and that appearance included having a harem.

Remember what happened to Solomon in his last years as a result of having too many influences in his harem. Motyer ties this together neatly.

In other words, the divine ideal of kingship has been corrupted and the holder of the office is an inadequate. Women possibly refers to the royal harem. If the king was a spoiled brat then likely enough his wives were numerous and manipulative, fitting what we sense of the reign of Ahaz (but cf. Am. 4:1).

The reference may be to dominant and demanding women, the 'power behind the throne' and not only in the palace! (cf. on verse 16). With the cry O my people, outrage becomes concern and we sense the Lord's heart of love for his own. Your guides (me'aššreykâ) are 'those who set you right' (cf. 'set right', 1:17). Isaiah's choice of this word is heavily ironical. It expresses what is expected of a leader but the reality is the opposite; they lead you astray, i.e. they enact laws which misdirect. And this is only half of their mischief for also (lit.) 'they swallow up the way of your paths'; the old established signposts for right living are as completely obliterated as if someone had swallowed them! (Motyer 1996, 62)

We don't see any of that in our culture today...right?

So with that, we come into a scene straight from the courtroom. YAHWEH is the prosecutor and He is the one asking the questions.

Isaiah 3:13–15

"The LORD arises to contend, And stands to judge the people. The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people, "It is you who have devoured the vineyard; The plunder of the poor is in your houses. "What do you mean by crushing My people And grinding the face of the poor?" Declares the Lord GOD of hosts." (NASB95)

As we can tell from the situation so far in chapter 3, there is deep concern on the part of the Lord, but He is thorough as a prosecutor and the picture being drawn is applicable for Judah, but it is also maybe applicable universally.

It is YAHWEH who is standing now, and He is doing so to present His legal argument concerning the facts that have just been outlined. He is also standing as He is fully prepared to execute the judgement necessary based on the legal arguments to be presented.

The argument for why this is not just for Judah alone, but has a more universal aspect to it is because the word people in verse 13 is in the plural in the Hebrew Masoretic Text. "And stands to judge the peoples."

One commentator, Motyer, points this out.

The people should be 'peoples'. Divine judgment often has a universal setting (cf. 2:10–22 where the point at issue is his people's religious deviation but the act of judgment covers the whole world). The reason for this is that judgment is one aspect of the day of the Lord when his just account is settled against all without exception. (Motyer 1996, 62)

The SINGULAR comes from the LXX followed by the Peshitta. The MT has the PLURAL. In this context the SINGULAR fits best because the prophet is addressing Judea (i.e., v. 14). (Utley 2001, 61)

Masoretic Text

Any text of the Hebrew Bible produced by the Masoretes (from Heb. ba'âlê hammâsôrâ), textual scholars concerned with the precise transmission of the text who were active ca. 600–950 C.E. (Mynatt 2000, 868)

Septuagint

General designation for the Jewish-Greek Scriptures, which consist primarily of various translations of the books of the Hebrew Bible. Also included are additions to some books of the Hebrew Bible as well as independent works, some of which are translations while others were composed in Greek. The texts are believed to have been produced from the 3rd to the 2nd or 1st centuries B.C.E., and at least partly in Alexandria, Egypt. (McLay 2000, 1185)

Which One?

Really, the cardinal rule for all this (again, that I was taught in textual criticism in graduate school) is that the best reading is the one that allows you to explain how all the other ones could have arisen. Granted, sometimes that's not possible, but that is really an excellent rule of thumb. If you're trying to make a decision between different manuscript variations, really if you can find one that explains all the others, chances are that's the one that's the best and probably closest to the original. (Heiser 2014)

As it pertains to scripture, context is king. We are going to look at this section of Isaiah 3 as directed towards Judah.

YAHWEH is prepared to judge His people, Judah.

He then presents His argument to the defendant table as He is pronouncing judgement on the leaders, and He differentiates between elders and princes.

Isaiah 3:14

The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people, "It is you who have devoured the vineyard; The plunder of the poor is in your houses." (NASB95)

Elders and Princes

The elders were the ones responsible for the welfare of the nation. These elders were the heads of the houses, families and tribes, and had been appointed in the wilderness to aid Moses (cf. Num. 11). (Young 1965, 157)

The princes were officials of the government. It is thus those who were responsible for the welfare and administration of the government who were the objects of God's punitive judgment, for they should have manifested this responsibility toward God's people. (Young 1965, 157-158)

Based on that definition, no one has been left out. This condemnation includes family leaders, fathers, grandfathers, priests, Levites, tribal leaders, military leaders, up to the King and His court.

It is that group, combined, who are being subjected to judgement here because they, collectively, have devoured the vineyard.

The word translated devoured is **בָּעַרְתֶּם** (biartem) coming from a root word **בער** (br). "There are at least three different roots containing these consonants: (a) One means "to burn" ... (b) Another means "to exterminate, feed on or graze" ... (c) Still another means "to be stupid..." (Ringgren 1977, 201)

Knowing that, we can see a clearer picture of the charge. They have burned up, exterminated, spoiled like animals, been stupid with, the vineyard. The vineyard is the nation which we will get a clearer picture of in chapter 5.

The specific charge leveled as to how the leadership is doing this, they are doing it by taking away from those who they were supposed to be caring for, the poor. They were stealing from their neighbors.

Leading into verse 15, we have already confronted one negative charge that they, the leaders, have done. Two more are coming.

Isaiah 3:15

"What do you mean by crushing My people And grinding the face of the poor?" Declares the Lord GOD of hosts. (NASB95)

You "grind the faces of the afflicted." Apparently the figure is that of a man fallen prostrate, face in the dust, having his face pushed cruelly into the earth again and again. (Leupold 1971, 95)

YAHWEH's assessment of what the leadership has done

Devoured, burned, exterminated, ruined, been stupid with
Crushed or beaten
Grind the face

With that argument from YAHWEH and the charges, we will stop for now and pick up as He moves towards charges against the women of Judah.

As we can see, the responsibility of care for God's people is a heavy one that even continues today.

James 3:1

"Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." (NASB95)

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