

Woe to the Leaders and Elders Who oppressed the People.

Isaiah 3:8-15

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I. Historical Background and Biblical Context

During the time Isaiah wrote this book, the Israelites were under the leadership of King Uzziah. He was a wise and godly king. However, a time was coming when the nation would not have a strong spiritual leader. Isaiah predicted that leadership would be given to a younger generation without the necessary experience. They would be a generation who would turn against the wisdom of their forefathers. Like a spoiled child, these inexperienced leaders would make impulsive decisions without consulting the Lord. They would be driven by their own power and desires that would lead toward instant gratification, not what was best for the people.

Certain leaders rise and fall in the church today based on their spiritual maturity. High moral character, humility and self-sacrifice are important or required for raising up great leaders. Many times, the wisdom needed to lead is formed through countless trials and severe persecution. Chapter 3 of Isaiah describes how corrupt leaders brought about the collapse of the social condition of Jerusalem; It also contains Isaiah's prophecies that "For the sin of the people, God will take away the wise men, and give them foolish princes" (Is. 3:4). Thus, Israel had hardened its heart, did as it wanted and lived life boldly out in the open, even though its choices went against God's commands. We must choose to heed God's warnings or roadblocks instead of walking right into them. His warnings are for our own protection.

II. Woe to the Leaders and Elders Who Oppressed the People

1. vv. 8-9.

Jerusalem and Judah have sinned in what they said and did. We are commanded to glorify God by what we say just as much as by what

we do. Jesus said in Matthew 12:36-37, “For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned”. Israel was already defying God by depending on man rather than on God. Instead of submitting to God, the Israelites were, with brazen faces, rebelling against Him as the people of Sodom did; thereby bringing upon themselves the judgment of God. So it would be hard for them. This judgment occurred on multiple occasions.

The very look on their faces was evidence of their guilt. Their own countenances witnessed against them. Either they had the smirk of the reprobate or the downcast gaze of those who had been convicted. They had brought the judgment of God on themselves by their pride. “Woe” is a word portraying a threat or distress. God did not have to do anything unique or special to bring judgment on Jerusalem and Judah. All He had to do was leave them alone and allow them to bring evil upon themselves.

2. **vv. 10-11.**

The faithful minority would not simply get lost in the judgment of the unfaithful majority, but the Lord would remember them and send them good. Sin brings its own wages (Rom. 6:23). Here the long-term blessing of the righteous contrasts with the short-term blasting of the unrighteous. There were two groups among God’s chosen people then as there are now. The faithful frequently suffers along with the unfaithful, but their ultimate ends are very different (Rev. 2:10-11). God will give both the righteous and the wicked the reward they deserve. For the righteous, this is a comfort; for the wicked, it is a curse.

3. **v. 12.**

Isaiah personally bemoaned the plight of the people who had already begun to experience the frustration of incompetent leaders and who would have to endure still more of the same. In his day, women did not have the educational advantages that men enjoyed and were less equipped to lead than men. Women ruling over them was a curse, not a blessing. Certainly, God did raise up particular women at

particular times to be leaders in different spheres. Deborah and Esther were examples of this. But this is entirely different from a society where, in general, women rule over them.

Children, in spite of their lack of maturity, experience, perspective and wisdom were, nonetheless, needed to highlight the utter failure of male leadership in adults. Unqualified leaders were leading the people astray and giving them confusing directions concerning God's will. God's special gift to His people throughout history involved furnishing inspired leaders. Now He would withdraw them. When the Lord gives a nation the leadership they desire and deserve, it can be either a blessing or a curse. In Judah's case in the time of Isaiah, it was a curse.

4. **vv. 13-15.**

God is the ultimate Judge of His people, and He would contend with His human representatives who used their positions to fatten themselves rather than feeding their people. Their possessions witnessed their stealing from their neighbors. The vineyard is a common figure for Israel in Scripture (Ps. 80:8-18; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 15:6-8). "Burned the vineyard" may mean "destroyed Israel and Judah". The Assyria army would destroy Israel in 722 B.C, and the Babylonian army would destroy Judah in 587 B.C, However, the Prophet Isaiah was saying here that Israel and Judah would really destroy themselves because they were not obeying God's laws.

The people belonged to the Lord, not these abusing leaders who crushed them and ground them down to get out of them as much as they could for themselves. Here the Lord was both a Prosecutor and a Judge against Judah. When one is in court, and the prosecutor and the judge are the same person, he knows he will be found guilty. In other words, God's charge against the elders and the princes of Israel was not that they have failed to help the poor. That was bad in itself. But far worse than that, they have robbed the poor and taken advantage of their poverty to enrich themselves.

III. Conclusion

The lure of sin is far-reaching. It envelopes our minds through temptation. Sin is wrong no matter how society dictates and in the long run brings destruction and heartache. For Israel, they found themselves where they were and of which Isaiah spoke against because of a single decision. That decision led to many others and in time led to the hardened hearts, the seared conscious and deliberate actions that were detrimental.