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Your Rulers are Rebels

1: 21-23

Your rulers are rebels DIG: How had Jerusalem abandoned God? What was the evidence? The wife of the LORD had become a prostitute. How do you think He felt about it?

REFLECT: In what ways is spiritual adultery alive and well today? When was the last time you were tempted to abandon your love for the LORD and live in the world? What is your defense?

Isaiah then turned to the present condition of **Judah** and what **God's** response would be. **He** seems to be saying, "Yes, in theory, **Isra'el** could know forgiveness and healing (**1:18-20**); however, **her** condition is so far gone that destruction cannot be prevented." But, as throughout the book, **ADONAI's** final purpose is not for the nation's destruction, but blessing as a result of purification.



The contrast, between the original condition of **Jerusalem** under King David and the early years of Solomon's reign with the condition of the people in **Isaiah's** day, is detailed. **This is a lament on the moral decay of Jerusalem. See how the faithful city of Jerusalem has become a harlot** and representative of the nation as a whole! Only here and in **23:15-18** does **Isaiah** use the metaphor of sexual infidelity. The downfall of the nation started when they failed to act as a faithful wife. In the past **she was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her.** At one time **Jerusalem** was considered **faithful**, like a devoted wife. **But now**, instead of righteous living, **she** condoned **murderers**, or people who took advantage of the needy (**1:21**). Consequently, the **City** had become a **harlot** or

prostitute following after other gods. According to the Torah in **Exodus 34:15**, should **Isra'el** worship any other god than **ADONAI**, **they** would be guilty of spiritual adultery and prostitution.

The cause of **Isaiah's** dirge was not surprising. If Hebron, Lachish or Gezer became the center of rebellion, wickedness and idol worship, that would be bad. But the holy city of **Jerusalem** becoming a **harlot** revealed that the decay was not merely superficial and unfortunate, but central and catastrophic.

*Whenever corrupt leaders usurp the divine prerogative because **God** has not called **them** to serve, the voice of authority becomes the voice of opinion, proclamation is replaced by discussion, the Word of **God** is replaced by the word of people, and sermons become philosophical dissertations at best, or blasphemy at worst.*

The LORD pointed out her impurity when **He** spoke through **the prophet**, saying: **Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water (1:22)**. **Silver** and **wine**, which used to be valuable, had become worthless: **dross** metal and watered down **wine**. **Dross** is the waste left in the smelting pot after the pure silver was poured out. Like waste, the nation would be thrown away. The people would be exiled if they would not repent and return to **ADONAI**. This theme of spiritual adultery is expanded in detail in the book of **Hosea**. This was **Hosea's** main burden.

Jerusalem had become the center of oppression and greed. The pure had become impure, the precious had become worthless. **Her** rebellious **rulers** were leading **the people** into ruin by theft and injustice to the helpless. **God**, through **His prophet**, said: **Your rulers (the silver and the fine wine of Jerusalem), are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts**. The actions of those **rulers** provided a window to see everything we need to know about **their** society. **They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them (1:23)**. **The fatherless** and **widows** could not even get hearings because they had no money for bribing **the rulers**.

The Torah says that **Isra'el** is to be called to be pursuer of **peace**, or *shalom* (**Deuteronomy 20:10**); however, **Isaiah** called **them** pursuers of **bribes**, or *salmonim*. The ones who were to promote order were **themselves** rebels. **Isaiah** was a master of the Hebrew language and throughout **his** book **he** plays with these words. **He** changes one letter or one basic vowel pattern, a dot or a dash, and it

changes the whole meaning of the word, although it sounds very much like another word.

For the first time **Isaiah** makes an important connection between idolatry and social justice. **He** will bring this issue up again (**29:17-21; 46:5-13; 48:17-18; 56:9** through **57:12**), and other prophets (**Ezeki’el 16:47-52; Hosea 4:1-14; Amos 2:6-8** and **Malachi 3:5**), especially Jeremiah (see the commentary on **Jeremiah, to see link click [Ee - False Prophets Condemned](#)**) mention it repeatedly. They were saying that social injustice is ultimately the result of a broken relationship with a loving **God**. Whenever the leaders of society start to believe that there are no eternal consequences to their actions, the poor and the vulnerable begin to be abused. And the more helpless people become, the more devastating their abuse. Although the rest of the ancient Near East generally protected the helpless, they lacked the spiritual understanding as the basis for their actions. The irony of **Judah**, was although the Torah gave **them** the spiritual basis for why the helpless needed to be protected, **they** refused to obey it.