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Judgment Against the Elders and Leaders of His People

2:22 to 3:15

Judgment against the elders and leaders of His people DIG: Here is a more specific prophecy of judgment that is coming upon Judah. What is their essential problem in 2:22? What things will the LORD take away from their supply and support? What would happen to a society where all their partners in crime were removed as well? What types of social chaos will come about as a result of God's judgment? If you had lived during a time like this, what would you expect to see around you? How would you feel about your future? Your family? Your money? What attitudes and actions precipitate God's judgment here? By what "legal" means might the leaders plunder the poor?

REFLECT: How do we trust in mere humans today? What examples come to mind of how poor people in your world are oppressed by "legal" means? How much of this do we see in our own world today? What can you learn from reading the book of Isaiah to help you through possible tough times ahead? How have you done with tending the garden of what God has given you to take care of?

The people of **Judah** had been lulled to sleep by their gradual descent into a sinful lifestyle. Gradually, they developed an attitude of entitlement, pride and arrogance. They believed that because **ADONAI** had given them the Land, the Torah and the Temple, nothing could happen to them. **Elohim** just wouldn't allow it. After all, weren't they **the apple of His eye (Deuteronomy 32:9)**? Consequently, they took **the LORD's** unconditional love and turned it into lawlessness (**Romans 6:1-4**). **Isaiah** keeps driving one point home that will be reiterated by Jesus in the Gospels: the leaders of Israel led the people astray. This will be repeated over and over again. So here **God** enters an indictment, through His prophet **Isaiah**, of the Jewish leadership.

ADONAI says to **stop trusting in mere humans who lead you astray after**

false gods. This verse makes it plain that the passage is not talking primarily about idolatry. It does not say **stop trusting in** idols – it says **stop trusting in mere humans**. Idolatry is not the cause, rather it is worship of **mere humans** that results in idolatry.

They **have but a breath in their nostrils (2:22a)**. Our entire existence is dependent upon our ability to breathe. Take the air away, and we cease to exist. The point of this statement is the frailty of human life. **Breath** is the foundation upon which their trust rests, and yet it can be quickly taken away and we can be reduced to nothing. If so, **why hold mere humans in** such high **esteem (2:22b)?** That is exactly what is going to happen to the leaders of Israel because later in **3:1-7, God** will remove all of Israel’s competent leaders. *Competent* here does not mean godly leadership, but merely competent, even in an ungodly way. **Isaiah** prophesied that Isra’el would be left with incompetent ungodly leaders, and as a result, anarchy in Isra’el would be widespread.



First, **God** announces a famine, and because all **food and water** is removed, so is the leadership of **Jerusalem and Judah**. **Isaiah** prophesied: **See now, the Lord, ADONAI of heaven’s armies, is about to take from Jerusalem and Judah both supply and support (3:1a)**. It is the Sovereign **God**, not sovereign man, who holds their destiny in **His** hands. The opening: **See now, the Lord**, typically introduces a threat in prophetic speech. **Supply**, or *masen*, and **support**, or *masena*, are closely related in Hebrew. **Supply** is in the masculine and **support** in the feminine gender. The word play here by **Isaiah** depicts their total removal. The equivalent phrase in English would be “bag and baggage.” **All the supplies of food and water** were about to be removed (**3:1b**). Because of her sin, **God** would take away everything the people had relied on, including her incompetent leaders.

The Lord will take away four kinds of leaders: military leaders, **the hero, warrior and captain of fifty**; political leaders, **the elder, judge, counselor, and men of rank**; religious leaders, **the prophet, soothsayer, and the clever enchanter**, or members of the occult who had become leaders of Israel at that point, **and skilled craftsman (3:2-3)**. This is exactly what happened when Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Isra'el (**Second Kings 17:24**), and when king Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians defeated the southern kingdom of **Judah** and the city of **Jerusalem (Second Kings 24:14)**. Leaders who could stir up rebellion were deported, and only the poorest and the most docile remained. Because **Judah and Jerusalem** had relied on human leadership rather than divine discernment, a day would be coming when they would be forced to rely on the leadership of **the Lord** once again.

With the removal of their competent leaders, only incompetence remained. The prophet's sense of contrast is clear. **Judah** will go from a **mighty man to a child**. **God** raised up foolish, weak leadership, saying: **I will make boys of their officials; mere children will govern them**. The rulers behaved with the unpredictability and thoughtless cruelty of **mere children**. **People will oppress each other - man against man, neighbor against neighbor. The young will rise up against the old, the base against the honorable**. Anarchy followed and the requirements for leadership became rather simple. If a **man** owned either a **coat** or a loaf of bread, it was sufficient for him to become a leader in Israel. **A man will take hold of one of his brothers at his father's house, and say: You have a coat, you be our leader; take charge of this heap of ruins! But in that Day of Judgment he will cry out: I have no remedy. I have no food or clothing in my house; do not make me the leader of the people (3:4-7)**. The leaders of **Judah** will not be able to feed or clothe their **people** and will not accept the responsibility. **Isaiah** seems to say, "How the mighty have fallen!" **Judah** would go from a time when no position was too great to assume, to a time when even a **heap of ruins** was more responsibility than a person would want. Therefore, the childish leaders would have no solution to the problem of shortages **people** would be facing during the coming devastation of **Judah** by the Babylonian army.

For Jerusalem staggers, Judah is falling. Staggers and falling are prophetic perfects that are used to describe events so certain that they are seen as having already occurred. But at the same time, a case could be made that they described the present condition during **Isaiah's** day because **Jerusalem** had already fallen and was staggering in a moral and spiritual way. The coming military destruction

would merely be a reflection of it. **Their words and deeds** were **against ADONAI**, brazenly **defying His glorious presence (3:8)**. Why was **Judah** reduced to this state of anarchy? It was because of **her sins**. **She** had violated her covenant with **God** and sinned in both word and deed, **defying His glorious presence**. **The look on their faces** testified **against them; they** paraded **their sin like Sodom and they did not hide it**. **Woe to them! They** had no one else to blame because **they** had **brought disaster upon themselves (3:9)**. Their **sins** were obvious and they made no attempt to **hide** them (see the commentary on **Genesis, to see link click Ey - The Two Angels Arrived in Sodom**). They had become like the rulers of **Sodom** and Gomorrah. **Sin** was no longer called **sin**; it was the new morality.

In the true form of Wisdom writers, **Isaiah** affirms the principle of just reward for both the righteous and the wicked. When **God** judges, **the righteous** will not need to fear **for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds**. But **disaster** will fall **upon the wicked (Romans 3:7-11)! They will be paid back for what their hands have done (3:11)**. **God** would protect **the righteous**, but **the wicked** will be destroyed. **God's** judgment is always fair. It is impossible for Him to act in any other way. **Wicked people** often think that sinful living is fun and the way to get ahead in this life. However, as **Isaiah** reminds us, it is always better to live a life of holiness and righteousness. This could have been a word of encouragement to the faithful remnant that were about to be swept away with the wicked. This was the same message that will be given to another faithful remnant (see the commentary on **Revelation Ba - The Church at Smyrna**).

Youths oppress My people, women rule over them. O My people, your guides lead you astray, they turn you from the path (3:12). Ironically, **Isaiah** uses the word **guides**, meaning *those who set you right*, which is the responsibility of a true leader; but here *those who were supposed to set them right - set them wrong!* The phrase, **they turn you from the path**, literally means *and the road of your paths they swallow up*. So here **Isaiah** refers to **the path** of righteousness. The old established signposts of righteousness were gone from Israel as if someone had *swallowed them up*.

ADONAI, in judging the peoples, declares that the social and political leaders are responsible for the oppression and exploitation of the helpless poor. By closing their eyes to the evils that they could have prevented, they become accessories to the fact. The rulers had become **children** and women, and had led **the people** astray. So **God** was then ready to judge His

people. What were these rulers actually guilty of? **The LORD takes His place in court and rises to judge the people (3:13).** He has the authority to judge and was about to do so.

ADONAI will not allow the practices of the Jewish leadership to go unpunished. He **enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of His people** and testifies against them. Sooner or later, they will have to deal with Him (**Psalm 82:1-8**). He leaves no doubt as to the condition of the land and the **people** when He declares: **“It is you who have ruined My vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your homes. What do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the faces of the poor?” declares the LORD GOD of Hosts (3:14-15 CJB).** They had plundered **the poor**, taking what little they had (**Deuteronomy 24:19-21**). **Their** greed was symptomatic of **their** self-centeredness. Rather than being servant leaders, they were only interested in becoming rich at the expense of others.

God says **they** are condemned for spoiling **the vineyard**. **Isaiah** will elaborate on this theme in **Chapter 5**. **The vineyard** is the nation of Isra’el and **God** allowed **the leaders** to come into it so that they would take care of it. But He says they **ruined it (Isaiah 5:1 and 7; Psalm 80:8-18; Jeremiah 2:21 and 12:10; Ezekiel 15:6-8)**. This is emphasized again when Jesus struggled with the Pharisees during the inspection of the Lamb, or the five days leading up to the Passover (**Mark 11:27 to 12:43**).