

God's first charge against Judah was rebellion (1:2). The second indictment was hypocritical worship (1:13). And in our passage today He brings the third charge with a warning and a prophecy. This time the charge is that His people have become His enemies.

*<sup>21</sup> How the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers.* Isaiah 1:21 This is God's lament over the backslidden condition of Jerusalem. It begins with the indictment of whoredom. The prophets often used this analogy (Jeremiah 2:20). Since God was to be loved with all their heart, to turn to other gods was described as playing the whore. The city was once faithful to worship God and truly love Him, but now they only sought after other gods. He specifically points to her former faithfulness to execute justice. The implication is that now injustice is the norm (Ezekiel 9:9).

Justice often has to do with financial obligations. Injustice is due to bribes or favors to those with wealth and power. **The other lover that lured the people from the love of God was wealth.** By perverting justice people were enriching themselves at the expense of those who were unjustly treated. Because God is just, this injustice was giving a false message to the people of the nation and to the foreigners who passed through the land.

When I was building my home I tried to hire Christian contractors. The one who had the cement contract claimed to be a prophet. Whenever someone has to tell you they are a prophet, it often has something to do with personal profit – for themselves.

When our slab was ready to pour we noticed there were footings that weren't dug. My wife and I rushed to make up for his mistakes. After the next advance he never returned to finish his work. We heard a few more stories of disastrous work he had done for his next clients, and eventually found out he never had a license and left the state. How many people heard about him representing Christ but then saw his actions were all about greed? I've heard people say, "Don't hire anyone with a fish on their name card." Misrepresenting Christ can turn one into an enemy of Christ. *How the faithful city has become a whore!*

Righteousness lived in Jerusalem, but now murderers. There was a day under kings Josiah and Hezekiah that the nations could observe the blessings of living under the Law of God. Foreigners inquired about the God of Israel. People encouraged one another to walk in the ways of God and treat one another with dignity and respect. Now they stab you in the back and rob you.

**Commented [PW1]: Isaiah 1:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.

**Commented [PW2]: Isaiah 1:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

**Commented [PW3]: Jeremiah 2:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> "For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds; but you said, 'I will not serve.' Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore.

**Commented [PW4]: Ezekiel 9:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, "The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great. The land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice. For they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see.'

God's complaint in the previous section was that when they lift their hands in prayer, that they are covered in blood (1:15). Again, I don't know if this is literal or poetically saying they have hearts filled with unforgiveness. Either way, they have gone from righteousness that honors life, to being unrighteous, disregarding the gift of life. 57 million babies have been aborted in this nation since Roe v. Wade. Worldwide the number is more than a staggering 1.3 billion! The most innocent among us have been snuffed out, the majority because of inconvenience or financial burden.

The cry of God here is the contrast of what once was to how far they have fallen. We expect the world to be sinful. They don't really know any other way. But we expect those who have the truth to be different. God expected them to be different as well! You see, sin is all the more hideous when the sinner knows that what he or she is doing is absolutely wrong and forbidden by their Creator (Romans 7:13).

*<sup>22</sup> Your silver has become dross, your best wine mixed with water.* Isaiah 1:22 I believe Isaiah is poetically saying that the very best among them have a watered down version of being a child of God. For silver to become dross is to say they went from being valuable to being garbage. The best wine mixed with water is not quite so bad a statement, but carries the same loss of real quality. This reminds us of the letter to the church of Laodicea, the lukewarm. God was about to spew them out of his mouth (Revelation 3:16).

As civilizations decline, their coinage becomes more and more dilute. The Romans had a coin that was 40% silver, the Antoninianus. Over time it had less and less silver until it simply had a silver wash. The Denarius, a day's wage, started out as silver with 5% alloy and eventually ended up with 50% alloy. This dilution often goes hand in hand with morals and integrity of a country. It's the way of man.

*<sup>23</sup> Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them.* Isaiah 1:23 The leaders of the country are rebels against God. The thieves they hang out with are lobbyists who offer bribes to push projects that will be lucrative to them. They lose a friendly wager on the golf course, intentionally. It's all about lining your pockets. And that quarter million dollar speaking engagement, that's all legal. That prince didn't push that project just because of that. Am I being too cynical or does this sound a bit too much like articles from the New York Times?

When the leaders should be bringing justice to the needy, they spend all their time with the fat cats wheeling and dealing. The poor and needy they could truly help by the leader's position and influence go without. That is the real crime. It's not just what is done but also what is left undone (Isaiah 58:6-7).

*<sup>24</sup> Therefore the Lord declares, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: "Ah, I will get relief from my enemies and avenge myself on my foes.* Isaiah 1:24 Because of this

**Commented [PW5]: Isaiah 1:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

**Commented [PW6]: Romans 7:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

**Commented [PW7]: Revelation 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

**Commented [PW8]: Isaiah 58:6-7 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"

<sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

backslidden condition that misrepresents God, because the needs of the poor and oppressed are not met, the God of angel armies, the all-powerful God who plagued Egypt has something to say.

Ah! Or Alas! Or Woe! God will get relief from His enemies. Judah had gone from being His children and His bride to becoming His enemies. They are like a wayward wife who has gone to seek other lovers. The people of Judah had become God's foes upon whom He would avenge Himself (Hosea 1:2).

Considering the history of Israel and the times they had seen God miraculously devastate their foes, this was a wakeup call. If God could annihilate the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, you don't want to be opposed to Him. You don't want to be on the list of His foes (Job 41:10). But their backsliding had placed them on that list. Is America on that list or is there still hope? Are you on that list?

God said He would get relief from them. Their hypocritical worship was weighing on Him (1:14). Their bad example was angering Him. I was told about a man who had gone with my mother to visit scenic site in Arizona. He used a Christian vocabulary and put off a sense of being mister religion. They stopped at a restaurant for lunch. My mother said she was embarrassed by how he treated the waitress, demanding and verbally abusive. But to make matters worse, he left a tract instead of a tip. Is that a friend of God or His foe? Is that kind of person drawing people to God or away? God help us always be aware of how we represent Him lest we go from being the friend of God to His enemy.

Next follows a promise and then a warning. *<sup>25</sup> I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy.* Isaiah 1:25 While the hand of God had been against their enemies, it was now turned against Judah. But this was not to destroy them, but rather to purify them. The hand of the Lord was not going to a gentle tap on the shoulder as in the previous invitation, "Come and let us reason together (1:18)." It will be like a catalyst that sets the dross in a smelting pot ablaze. It is the hand of God's discipline. All the impurity was going to be removed. The compromising alloy that degraded the quality would be removed.

What a wonderful promise! What trying means. **The harder we become, the heavier God's hand of discipline upon us to turn us back.** The greater our grief for having rebelled against or loving Creator. As we go through Isaiah we will see God is referring to the destruction of the Temple and the 70 years of captivity. God would have a people ready for the coming of the Messiah no matter what it took. And He will have a bride adorned for her husband Jesus no matter what it takes. The dross of backsliding and the alloy of compromise must be removed and He knows exactly how to do it. How much better to listen to the invitation to come and reason with Him and let Him wash us white as snow.

**Commented [PW9]: Hosea 1:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD."

**Commented [PW10]: Job 41:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before me?

**Commented [PW11]: Isaiah 1:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

**Commented [PW12]: Isaiah 1:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Christian, are you silver or dross? How does God see you? And if you are silver how much alloy is there in that silver? He loves you enough to purify you. Make it easy on yourself and sit down and be honest with Him. Turn and let Him strengthen and transform you.

*<sup>26</sup> And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.*” Isaiah 1:26 God was not going to let them remain in their present compromising condition. He would restore them to their former state of integrity. The testimony of righteousness in Jerusalem would be restored. It would once again be called “the city of righteousness, the faithful city.” This was fulfilled to some degree before the coming of the Messiah. We see the struggle in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The people decided to follow the Lord and quit compromising. Their leaders were godly. The nation was preparing for the coming of the Messiah.

Once again **the ultimate fulfillment is in God preparing the bride of Christ for the Second Coming of the Messiah.** The true believers around the world should be “the city of righteousness, the faithful city.” But God has to do a lot of purging before we are seen that way in the eyes of the world.

The faithful judges are the elders of godly congregations that only want to see God’s will be done. They are like the counselors Israel had in the beginning.

*<sup>27</sup> Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness.* Isaiah 1:27 Zion is a hill in Jerusalem but was often used as another name for Jerusalem. It would be redeemed by justice. In other words, when the city is known again for justice, its name will be redeemed. It is justice or the lack thereof that makes a city what it is.

The inhabitants who repent are redeemed by righteousness. Their lives are witness to the validity of their repentance. That will one day be validated by the death and resurrection of Jesus who makes our repentance legally acceptable to God. After the heavy hand of God is upon the people, justice will again prevail and the people will repent of their sins. It often takes tragedy and hardship to wake us up. Man seems to need something to slap him out of his stupor so that he considers what is really of importance. Sometimes that is the death of a loved one, or the loss one’s fortune, or an illness. War can certainly turn many to God. And while God may not desire it, He allows man to do as he will and uses the situations to turn the lost to Him.

Considering the depressing view of their current condition, this was quite a promise for their future. It was something they could look forward to in hope. Just as the Lord encourages us with the promise of the future. Now for the warning. *<sup>28</sup> But rebels and sinners shall be broken together, and those who forsake the LORD shall be consumed.* Isaiah 1:28 That is a stern and specific warning like the one in verse 20. They are

rebels now, as we saw in verse 2. God is telling them that they must change or face the sword. If they don't change they will remain the enemies of God and the last verse of Isaiah speaks of their fate (Isaiah 66:24).

Judgment will not hold off forever. The day will come when those who insist on remaining in rebellion will face the God they have been resisting. To rebel and to forsake God, you had to know of Him first. We can't rebel against someone we are unaware of. We can't forsake something that was never offered to us. Those who will be broken and consumed are those who have fought the love of God and remain stubbornly opposed to it in their selfishness. It's all about them. They refuse to accept the love, care about others, and especially yield to another, even if He is their Creator.

*<sup>29</sup> For they shall be ashamed of the oaks that you desired; and you shall blush for the gardens that you have chosen.* Isaiah 1:29 This is a reference to places where pagan gods were worshiped. You can see the same thing today in Hindu and Buddhist areas. Old large trees become focal points of worship. Prayer centers to the gods are often made into gardens. God is telling the people of Judah that once God gets done dealing with them, they will be embarrassed that they ever worshiped these false gods. It will be a shameful part of their past.

They chose these gods who can neither hear nor see over their Creator who had done such great things for them. It is just like today when we choose money, or pleasure, or a drug, or anything other than the Lord. When we come to the Lord we are ashamed of how we once looked to those things as having any lasting value. We ask ourselves if we were so depraved as to put our hope in those things; and we have to confess that we were.

*<sup>30</sup> For you shall be like an oak whose leaf withers, and like a garden without water.*

*<sup>31</sup> And the strong shall become tinder, and his work a spark, and both of them shall burn together, with none to quench them.* Isaiah 1:30-31 We tend to become like what we worship. God said they would become like those oaks they worshiped, but no longer strong and secure but rather dried up and dead. Once they are dried they become tinder, fuel with which to start a fire. The work of those who were once so strong in worldly ways is their own spark (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Both the strong and their works, represented by tinder and the spark, will burn together. In other word they will come to nothing. There will be nothing that remains of their work. No one will remember them. All that they did was for the present.

Are we investing in things that last? Are we strong in this world but without spiritual strength? There was an oak in eastern Maryland that was estimated to be 400 years old. The trunk was 32 feet in circumference. The crown spread over 158 feet and was 105 feet tall. A few years ago a storm blew it over. While parts of the tree might be worked into furniture, much of it probably dried and became firewood. We can make a

**Commented [PW13]: Isaiah 66:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> "And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

**Commented [PW14]: 1 Corinthians 1:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

big show in this world and look larger than life, but death comes to all. What will remain? Will it be fuel for the fire, or something that remains (1 Corinthians 3:15)?

So ends this third prophecy. The purging wind of God's discipline was coming. The individual's reaction to God would determine his or her fate. They could be refined and restored to former greatness, prepared for the Messiah, or broken and consumed. It looks like the choice was clear for them, and the choice is the same for us.

**Commented [PW15]: 1 Corinthians 3:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

### Questions

- 1 What were the past and present charges against Jerusalem?
- 2 What was so bad about their actions?
- 3 How does dross apply today?
- 4 What are the princes up to?
- 5 What is the promise?
- 6 What will it take?
- 7 What is the warning?
- 8 What is the ultimate fulfillment?
- 9 Why are difficulties necessary?
- 10 What is the oak analogy?