

Isaiah 3:5-15
January 14, 2018

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What characteristics do you look for in spiritual leaders? [let people engage]

Q: How do you know when a spiritual leader is leading people in the wrong direction? [Let people engage]

I found myself raising these questions because I'm still intrigued how the *followers* of the leaders who sinned against God either didn't see it coming or just chose to "look the other way." These followers were not just a small group of people. It was a cultural shift among God's covenant people in Judah and Jerusalem. Weren't they capable of making different decisions that were pleasing to God – in spite of poor leadership?

Transition: We can study this passage through the lens of a leader and/or the lens of a follower. It will be interesting to see how this develops! As we dive into today's lesson, it is my hope that all of us CAN learn the importance of honoring God as a leader or a follower BY appreciating the WAYS God disciplines us when we don't!

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.5:

- People will oppress each other— man against man, neighbor against neighbor. The young will rise up against the old, the base against the honorable.

V.6:

- A man will seize one of his brothers at his father's home, and say, "You have a cloak, you be our leader; take charge of this heap of ruins!"

V.7:

- But in that day 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."

V.8:

- Jerusalem staggers, Jerusalem is falling; their words and deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence.

V.9:

- The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves.

V.10:

- Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds.

V.11:

- Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done.

V.12:

- Youths oppress my people, women rule over them. O my people, your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path.

V.13:

- The LORD takes his place in court; he rises to judge the people.

V.14:

- The LORD enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people: “It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses.

V.15:

- What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?” declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.5-7: Isaiah paints a picture in the next of how God’s people will react once people are removed from their leadership roles. What do you see?

- V. 5 People will oppress each other— man against man, neighbor against neighbor. The young will rise up against the old, the base against the honorable
- V. 6 A man will seize one of his brothers at his father’s home, and say, “You have a cloak, you be our leader; take charge of this heap of ruins!”
- V. 7 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.”

Q: How would you describe these reactions? [The people feel panicked, afraid, they will still look to others instead of God for leadership; they will feel inadequate to lead in the midst of great chaos and loss.]

Q: God’s discipline can be hard to endure. What do you think was the goal of His discipline? [To remove all forms of pride and ambition such that they would turn to Him and trust Him alone.]

Q V.8-9: Now we get a clue as to why all this discipline will come upon Judah and Jerusalem. What do you see? [Their words and deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence. They parade their sin like Sodom and don’t hide it.]

Observation: This is so basic, but the reason any of us experience God’s discipline is because of what we say and do that goes against Him. God’s people are getting ready to pay a big price for displacing their trust in man and glorifying themselves instead of God.

Q V.10: Finally, a word of encouragement! What is God’s message to the righteous? [All will be well with them. They will enjoy the fruit of their deeds.]

Q V.11: And what is in store for the wicked? [Disaster! The wicked will be paid back for what they did. This is a good reminder that vengeance belongs to the Lord.]

Q V.12: In case we’re wondering what the wicked deeds were, what did the Lord observe? [Youth were oppressing His people; women were ruling over them.]

Q: What was the problem with women ruling over His people? [In Judah’s male-dominated society, this would be a humiliating calamity.]

Q V.13-15: Let's look at the next three verses. First, on WHOM does God bring judgment? [The elders and the leaders of His people.]

Q: What sins bring God's discipline on His leaders? What did they do wrong?

- They ruined the vineyards
- They plundered poor people
- They crushed His people
- They "grinded the faces of the poor?"

Q: What does the "vineyard" represent? [God's people (5:1, 7; cf. Ps. 80:8–18; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 15:6–8; Hosea 10:1). Like husbandmen caring for a vineyard, the leaders were to care for the people.]

Q: What does "plundering the poor" look like? [They had taken advantage of the poor by stealing what little they had.]

Q: What do you think "grinding the faces of the poor" mean? That is an unusual phraseology. [The leaders materialistic, oppressive spirit was symptomatic of the leaders' self-centeredness. Rather than seeing their leadership positions as service opportunities they saw them as means of making money at the expense of others.]

Q: I told you several lessons ago that I was intrigued by the fact that the Lord, through Isaiah, is judging a whole nation of people, not just a couple of characters. I get that each of us are accountable before the Lord for anything we say and do. I get that a loving father will discipline us when we miss the mark. BUT...how does a whole nation miss the mark together? How does that happen?! Based on today's lesson, what do you think the answer is? [It starts at the top! It starts with leaders and elders. *Leaders can lead us into sin.*]

Observation: When the Lord gives us a leadership role, He's giving us His trust that we'll treat others well and care for them well.

LOOK:

Everything the nation said and did was **against** her covenant God. The people defied God and were open about **their sin**. But the righteous need not fear; they will be justly rewarded for their deeds. But the wicked will be paid back for their deeds.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 1040). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

3:5-7. Anybody who could be grabbed would be placed in charge of the people, his only qualification (v.6) being that he owned a **cloak**. **But** the only thing over which he would rule anyway would be a **heap of ruins**. The leaders would have no solution to the problem shortages the people would face (v.7). Isaiah was speaking of the coming devastation of Judah by the Babylonian army.

3:8-9. The reason such destruction would come on **Judah** (v. 1) is that everything the nation said and did was **against** her covenant God. The people defied God and were open about **their sin** much like the people of **Sodom** (cf. Gen. 18:20; 19:1-11; see comments on Isa. 1:9-10). Therefore the coming **disaster** was **brought** on by **themselves**. **Woe** (*'ôy*) is an interjection of distress or of a threat voiced in the face of present or coming disaster. Isaiah's book includes 22 occurrences of that word or its companion word *hôy*, more than in any other prophetic book.

3:10-12. When God judges, **the righteous** need not fear; they will be justly rewarded for **their deeds**. But **the wicked** will be recompensed (**paid back**) for ... **their deeds** (cf. comments on Rom. 3:7-11). God's judgment is always fair. Wicked people often think that sinful living is the way to get ahead in life. Isaiah noted, however, that it is far better for a person to live righteously. The leaders (**guides**) were turning the nation away **from the proper path** (Isa. 3:12). **Youths** may refer to minors in age or to adults who were naive like the young. The reference to **women** may mean that wives were influencing their husbands who were rulers, or that the male leaders lacked vigor.

3:13-15. Isaiah pictured **the LORD** seated in a courtroom ready to judge **the people** and especially the **leaders**. By stating that **He rises to judge** Isaiah meant that God, having the authority to judge, was about to do so. Two charges were leveled against the leaders. The first is that they had **ruined** God's **vineyard** (v. 14), that is, God's people (5:1, 7; cf. Ps. 80:8-18; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 15:6-8; Hosea 10:1). Like husbandmen caring for a vineyard, the leaders were to care for the people. But they had ruined the **people** by oppressing (**crushing**, Isa. 3:15a) them. The second charge is that they had taken advantage of **the poor** (vv. 14b, 15b) by plundering them (stealing what little they had) and **grinding** their **faces**. This violated the commands in the Book of Deuteronomy not to oppress others, especially widows, orphans, and the poor. Concern for the poor is also encouraged and illustrated in the New Testament (Acts 9:36; 10:4, 31; 24:17; James 1:27; 2:1-9). A materialistic, oppressive spirit was symptomatic of the leaders' self-centeredness. Rather than seeing their leadership positions as service opportunities they saw them as means of making money at the expense of others.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 997-998). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

3:10-11 God's covenant with Israel established a broad relationship between obedience and blessing, disobedience and curse (Lv 26:1-45; Dt 27-28). The book of Proverbs is based on this fundamental relationship between right actions and beneficial consequences, and the converse. Isaiah reaffirmed this principle, that "it will go well" for the righteous but badly for the wicked.

This does not mean that righteousness or innocence, even when consistent, bring an immediate earthly reward—as the Bible’s examples of Joseph (Gn 37–45), Job (Job 1–2), the man blind from birth (Jn 9:1–4) and Jesus’ own unjust execution (Mt 27) make clear. But the long-term biblical view (in those instances, and many others) affirms that the principle is valid. In the end, the righteous person is vindicated, in the resurrection (see Acts 10:36–41) if not before.

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