

GOD'S THIRD CHARGE: INJUSTICE AND DECEITFULNESS

ISAIAH 01:21–31

Introduction

The scene is a courtroom trial. The presiding judge is the Lord Himself. The accused are the citizens of Judah and Jerusalem, the very people God had chosen to be His witnesses to the unbelieving nations of the earth. However, Isaiah's message in this passage is applicable to all who know the Lord, for all believers are called to be His witnesses. Thus as His professed followers, we are all standing before the bar of the Judge of the universe. We are on trial, defending ourselves against serious charges. And the Lord's case against us is as strong as it was against Judah and Jerusalem.

God's case is presented by the great prophet Isaiah, who makes a powerful, dramatic presentation of God's charges. But even as he pronounces the Lord's indictment, the love of God shines forth. With each charge, the Lord offers His people the hope of salvation. Even Isaiah's name offers hope, for it means *the Lord saves*.

Only the redeemed those who have been set free from sin and judgment — will live in the Holy City of God, the New Jerusalem. God will create New Jerusalem when Jesus Christ returns to set up God's kingdom on earth (see outline and notes, Rev. 21:9-23). Through Isaiah, God tells His people that if they will repent of their sins, He will forgive them. Furthermore, He assures them that they will live in this Holy City of righteousness where there will be no evil or injustice. This is, *The Lord's Indictment of His People*.

God's third charge: they were unjust and deceitful (vv. 21-31)

Isaiah 01:21–31 Injustice and Deceitfulness

God's third charge against His people was heart-rending: they were unjust and deceitful. Wickedness, lawlessness and violence ran rampant throughout Judah and Jerusalem. Even so, God had not given up on His people. There was still a remnant, a small number of true believers scattered here and there across the land. For the sake of these few who were righteous, and because of His own promise to Abraham, the Lord would restore Jerusalem and the promised land.

Note the charge of injustice levelled against the city of Jerusalem and its citizens (representing all Judah). Note also God's wonderful promise that some day in the future He would restore the great city and free its citizens from all enemies and oppressors.

1. Under David's leadership and during the early part of Solomon's reign, Jerusalem had been a faithful city, a just and righteous city. But since that time, Jerusalem and its citizens had become as unfaithful as harlots who had turned away from the Lord.
-

Now the city was full of murderers! In its early years, Jerusalem had been like pure silver, but now it had become like dross, like worthless scum (v. 22). Because of the unrighteousness of its citizens, Jerusalem had become like watered-down wine. The leaders of the city were corrupt, filled with a spirit of covetousness. Many of their associates were thieves, so the leaders often took bribes to keep silent. Ignoring their duty to serve the citizens of the land, the leaders refused to help and defend the orphans and widows when their cases were brought before them.

2. Isaiah predicted the verdict and sentence of God (vv. 24-31). And what he predicted would take place, for the Lord Himself was pronouncing it. To emphasize the certainty of God's verdict, Isaiah used three divine titles in making this declaration: it is the Lord, the Lord of hosts (Lord Almighty), the Mighty One of Israel who pronounces this verdict and sentence. The people could rest assured that what was now being declared would take place. Isaiah proclaimed five startling judgments:
 - a) The Lord will judge and get rid of all His enemies (v. 24). Vengeance will be executed upon all who oppose and rebel against Him. The profession and worship attendance of people will not matter. If they have lived sinful lives and engaged in false worship, they will face God's judgment.
 - b) The Lord will purge Jerusalem of all impurities (v. 25). Although He will execute judgment upon all who rebel and engage in false worship. His purpose is to purify the city so that no evil will dwell within its boundaries. The future capital of the world will be the New Jerusalem, the city of God in which the throne of the Lord Jesus Christ will sit. Thus the city must be cleansed.
 - c) The Lord will restore righteous and just leaders to serve His people (v. 26). Someday in the future, Jerusalem will be restored and called *The City of Righteousness, the Faithful City*.
 - d) The Lord will place all repentant people in the redeemed city of Jerusalem (v. 27). All who repent of their sins — turn away from their rebellion, false worship and injustice and return to the Lord — will be the citizens of the New Jerusalem. They will be the redeemed, the people set free from sin and the judgment of God.
 - e) The Lord will execute true justice against all rebels and sinners who forsook Him (v. 28). Having turned away from the Lord, the Creator of the universe, they turned to false worship. Now they must stand face-to-face with the Lord of the universe. In that day they will bear the judgment of God's hand. They will be ashamed and disgraced because of their false worship and they will perish. They had trusted and worshipped false gods; as a result, they will suffer the same fate as the things in which they trusted. Just as the leaves of an oak tree fade away, so they also will fade away. They will be like a garden without water: the ground soon turns to dust and blows away. Even the strong and mighty — they and their works — will be burned with unquenchable fire (v. 31). They will be consumed along with their wicked works.

Thought I. Treating people unfairly is an injustice and it involves all kinds of sins and acts of wickedness. Abusing or sexually assaulting children is an act of injustice, for children are unable to defend themselves. Verbally abusing a spouse is an injustice, for it is lashing out unfairly and unkindly. Far too many of us mistreat other people, committing all kinds of injustices against them, such as...

- committing criminal acts
- showing favouritism
- spreading rumours and malicious gossip
- lying, stealing and cheating
- oppressing others
- encroaching upon the property or rights of others
- holding prejudices and discriminating against people
- abusing the trust and responsibility placed in us by people

Covetous, corrupt leaders ruled the government in Isaiah's day. They were companions of thieves and willingly took bribes. Helping to meet the needs of their citizens was the farthest thing from their thoughts. They even neglected the fatherless and widows. Single mothers had to fend for themselves, no matter how many children they had. Few people in the community offered to help any of the needy. Each person was out for himself, living a selfish and self-centred life. As a result, injustice ruled supreme. The innocent and defenceless were discriminated against, treated unfairly and often oppressed. Listen to what God's Holy Word says about injustice and oppression:

Luke 16:10 *"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much."*

1 Cor 6:9-10 *Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

Eph 5:5 *For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person such a man is an idolater has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

1 Tim 5:21 *"I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favouritism."*

Exo 23:9 *Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourself know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.*

Lev 19:15 *Do not prevent justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great but judge your neighbour fairly.*

Deu 24:14 *Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns.*

Deu 24:17 *Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.*

Job 13:10 *He would surely call you to account if you secretly showed partiality.*

Psa 62:10 *Do not trust in extortion or take pride in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.*

Psa 82:2 *How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked?*

Prov 14:31 *He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God.*

Prov 28:3 *A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops.*

Prov 29:27 *The righteous detest the dishonest; the wicked detest the upright.*

Prov 31:4-5 *It is not for kings, O Lemuel — it is not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights.*

Eccl 3:16 *And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment — wickedness was there, in the place of justice — wickedness was there.*

Eccl 5:8 *If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. ■*