

Exegetical Notes – Isaiah 1:21-31

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(The first five chapters of the Book of Isaiah are indictments against the people of Judah because they have abandoned YHWH and failed to follow His commands. As we move through the season of Advent 2022, the time when we prepare for the birth of our Savior, we will examine the first indictment against Judah. Hopefully, the ancient words of the Prophet Isaiah will help us rededicate ourselves to YHWH and His word.)

Verses 21-23

See how the faithful city

has become a prostitute!

She once was full of justice;

righteousness used to dwell in her—

but now murderers!

²² *Your silver has become dross,*

your choice wine is diluted with water.

²³ *Your rulers are rebels,*

partners with thieves;

they all love bribes

and chase after gifts.

They do not defend the cause of the fatherless;

the widow's case does not come before them.

- The “faithful city” is Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. Jerusalem becomes the symbol for all that is wrong in the land.
- First, she has become a “prostitute.” She is no longer faithful to YHWH. She has forsaken His word and worships other gods.
- Second, she is no longer just. She does NOT use her laws to protect the powerless. Now, her streets are unsafe. They are full of murderers who are not prosecuted.
- Third, her money and valuable things have been devalued.

- Fourth, her rulers rebel against YHWH, make deals with dishonest people, accept bribes, and sell their favor. They do not protect the fatherless or the widowed. In essence, they look out only for themselves.

Verses 24-26

²⁴ Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares:

“Ah! I will vent my wrath on my foes and avenge myself on my enemies.

²⁵ I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities.

²⁶ I will restore your leaders as in days of old, your rulers as at the beginning.

Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.”

- YHWH, the God of Israel, YHWH ALMIGHTY, the god who is more powerful than any other; THE MIGHTY ONE OF ISRAEL, Israel’s one and only God, speaks with all His authority and power.
- YHWH will move against those who have made Jerusalem an unfaithful city. He will purge the nation of the evil they have propagated.
- YHWH will restore Judah’s leadership. He will give them leaders who are faithful to Him and His word.
- The result will be that Jerusalem will be known for righteousness and her faith in YHWH.
- Judah’s hope for the future is in YHWH and in YHWH alone.

Verses 27-31

²⁷ Zion will be delivered with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness.

²⁸ But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the LORD will perish.

²⁹ “You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen.

**³⁰ You will be like an oak with fading leaves,
like a garden without water.**

**³¹ The mighty man will become tinder
and his work a spark;
both will burn together,
with no one to quench the fire.”**

- YHWH will restore Judah, but those who forsook His ways, “rebels and sinners,” will be judged, “broken.”
- First, they will be ashamed that they worshipped false gods. The “sacred oaks” and the “disgraced gardens” are the places where false gods were worshipped. They will be ashamed that they frequented these places.
- Second, they will be like an oak with “fading leaves.” They will appear to be sick and dying.
- Third, the man who was once powerful but ungodly will be cut down and without power.
- Fourth, the once powerful ungodly leader will become like tinder and his work will become like the spark that sets it on fire. The man and his evil works will be burned up together and no one will be able to stop god’s judgment.

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