

Idolatry in religion leads to a society that has neither justice nor compassion, neither capable leaders nor responsible citizens. Isaiah moves from analysing Jerusalem's idolatry to a portrayal of the social conditions in the capital city. God will soon blast the whole city into ruin. He will take away their supplies and the people whom they rely on.

1. Most people need leaders to follow

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2. It is a day of judgement when no worthy leadership can be found

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¹See now, the Sovereign Lord,
Yahweh Almighty,
is about to take from Jerusalem and Judah
both supply and support:
all supplies of food and all supplies of water,
²the hero and warrior,
the judge and prophet,
the fortune-teller and the elder,
³the captain of fifty and man of rank,
the counsellor, skilled craftsman and the one
instructed in whispering to the dead.

• The most incompetent and inexperienced people will grab leadership

The 'one instructed in whispering to the dead' is the religious specialist who reckons he can talk to the spirits of the dead. But God will take away every kind of leader, every would-be guide. Then the most incompetent and inexperienced people will be grabbing positions of leadership.

⁴I will make boys their officials;
mere children will govern them.

• Social collapse

The result will be social collapse, and that shows itself in ruthlessness and greed on all sides.

⁵People will oppress each other,
man against man, neighbour against neighbour.
The young will rise up against the old, the
nonentity will rise up against the person who
deserves honour.

• Idea of leadership becomes useless

Eventually the whole idea of leadership becomes a useless concept since there is no one around who qualifies for leader.

⁶A 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!'

And who wants to be the 'leader' of a heap of rubbish?

⁷But in that day he will cry out,
'I will not be a healer;
I have no food or clothing in my house;
do not make me the leader of the people.'

• Bad people produce bad people leaders

What is the cause of society without leadership? Isaiah says that in his day the useless leadership of the nation arose because the people were not worthy of having a good leadership. Bad people produce bad leaders; bad leaders produce bad people. Leaders and people deserve each other! Isaiah explains:

⁸For Jerusalem has stumbled,
and Judah has fallen;
for their tongue and their deeds are against Yahweh,
designed to offer rebellion to the eyes of his glory.

⁹The look on their faces testifies against them;
they tell of their sin like Sodom;
they do not hide it.
Woe to them!
They have repaid themselves with disaster.

• *Retribution comes upon sin*

In Isaiah's day there was open wickedness of the kind that brought disgrace upon Sodom and its eventual annihilation. Retribution comes upon sin. Judgement falls in exact repayment. God has a way of protecting his people.

¹⁰Tell the righteous it will be well with them,
for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds.

But sin will be repaid fully and precisely.

¹¹Woe to the wicked! Disaster!
The full repayment will be made for what his hands have done.

3. God himself feels deeply about this matter

3. **God himself feels deeply about this matter.** God looks upon his people with great distress when they neither have good leaders nor are worthy of good leaders. In Isaiah 3:12 God speaks with great emotion. First he considers the leaders.

¹²My people! Youths oppress them!
Women rule over them!
O my people, those who set you right lead you astray!
They obliterate the way of your paths!

• *God is distressed by poor leadership*

The text has the feel of great tragedy, a tragedy which touches God deeply. God himself is distressed when he sees inexperienced youths or women in positions with which they cannot cope. Because of his great distress, he must act. Isaiah says.

¹³Yahweh takes his place in court;
he rises to judge the peoples.

• *God brings judgement and salvation to His people*

God brings judgement and salvation on to his people. He will bring judgement upon leaders who have exploited the chaos of society for their own purposes.

¹⁴Yahweh enters into judgement against the elders and leaders of his people:
'It is you who have stripped bare my vineyard;
the plunder from the poor is in your houses.
¹⁵What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?'
— oracle of the Sovereign Lord, Yahweh Almighty!

• *He also addresses the women*

But the people are not deserving either! God addresses the women:

¹⁶Yahweh says, 'The daughters of Zion are arrogant,
walking along with outstretched necks,
flirting with their eyes,
tripping along with mincing steps,
with ornaments jingling on their ankles.
¹⁷Therefore Yahweh will bring sores on the heads of the daughters of Zion;
Yahweh will strip them naked for all to see.'

• God describes the sufferings of the women as prisoners of war

• God still has the plight of the women in mind even when he speaks of the men

• God's plan for Jerusalem is one of glorious worldwide influence

• Where there is spiritual decline bad leadership continues

• Good news comes when you look at God and what He is able to do

¹⁸In that day Yahweh will snatch away their finery: the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, ¹⁹the earrings and bracelets and veils, ²⁰the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes, the high collars and charms, ²¹the signet rings and nose rings, ²²the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses ²³and mirrors, and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls.

In great sadness God – speaking through Isaiah – describes the sufferings the women will experience when they become prisoners of war.

²⁴Instead of fragrance there will be a stench; instead of a sash, a rope; instead of well-dressed hair, baldness; instead of fine clothing, sackcloth; branding instead of beauty.

God still has the plight of the women in mind even when he speaks of the men.

²⁵Your men will fall by the sword, your warriors in battle.
²⁶The gates of Zion will lament and mourn; destitute, she will sit on the ground.

We must try to keep the large sections of Isaiah in mind as we proceed. Remember Isaiah 2:1–4! God's plan for his 'Jerusalem' is one of glorious worldwide influence. But in the actual event the people of Israel – although destined for great usefulness in the kingdom of God – are allowed to reveal what they are in themselves before God raises them. Isaiah 3 describes Israel as the nation was in itself. This section of Isaiah has no solution to the matter of poor leadership. Good leadership is part-and-parcel of revival. Where there is spiritual decline there is no solution to the problem of bad leadership. The answer is spiritual revival. When the gospel recovers its influence the good leaders that arise are themselves part of God's good news. Isaiah's book does not end at Isaiah 3:26. The note of great distress in 3:12 gives us a hint that the leader-less position of his people is one that moves the heart of God. It gives us the hope that it is not the last word and that God might do something for his people. And it turns out that way. Isaiah 3:1–4:1 is followed by Isaiah 4:2–6. Bad news is followed by good news. The bad news comes when you look at the human race. The good news comes when you look at God, and what he is able to do.



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