

“Jerusalem Now...Jerusalem Then”
Isaiah 3:1-4:6
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For those of you who are new to our study, thank you for giving us a chance to be a resource in your pursuit to better get to know God, His truth, and His love for you. For those of you who are returning, it's great to see you again! For those of you who are new to People of the Word, we have a pattern of alternating one or more books from the Old Testament and one or more books from the New Testament each yearly session. Obviously, with this session being on Isaiah, we're in the Old Testament. However, during His 3-year ministry, Jesus quoted no other Old Testament book more, other than the Psalms (which He quoted the same number of times), than Isaiah. Furthermore, as Carol pointed out in her introductory lecture, Isaiah is kind of a Bible within the Bible. Just like there are 66 books of the Bible, there are 66 chapters in Isaiah. The first 39 chapters emphasize God's judgment on Israel, while the last 27 speak to the promised Messiah. My point here is that, despite this being an Old Testament book, there is much relevance for us to glean that will enhance our understanding of who God is and His character.

That being said, continuing pronouncements of judgment on sinful Israel in much of the Old Testament can get to be a bit of a slog at times. We lecturers are going to do our best to help remind you of the following as we go through this great book of the Bible:

- Many prophecies presented in Isaiah have been fulfilled by Jesus Christ. This gives us confidence that as-yet-unfulfilled prophecies will also be fulfilled.
- For those of us who have confessed Jesus as our Lord and Savior, all the judgment on sin we will be reading about has been-placed on Him. As a result, we are forgiven and free to move forward in His grace to discover our original design by Him, the love He has for each of us, and our purpose in His Kingdom.

As Carol so skillfully presented in her lecture on the first two chapters, Isaiah is pronouncing judgment on Jerusalem. Here in our lesson, he is expanding his judgments on Judah, or the Southern Kingdom of Israel. In today's reading, two words jumped out at me, and they are “*take from*” in verse 1. I prefer the NKJV of the Bible, so the words I'm going to use are “*take away*.” I find a progressive pattern in His taking away that I'm going to share with you that goes like this:

- Why He takes away.
- What He takes away.
- What happens to the unrighteous when He takes away.

Thankfully, God doesn't leave His children in judgment, so He offers hope for those who believe in Him. The last bullet point of the outline for today's lecture is:

- What happens when He reigns.

I'll conclude with some thoughts on God's taking away.

So, let's get to the reasons *why* the Lord felt compelled to take away things from the people of Jerusalem and Judah. Isaiah provides us a list of sins that had provoked the Lord to judgment. My guess is you might find these familiar to our present time in history. The first sin on God's list was "*their words and deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence.*" (Isaiah 3:8) Back in the days when there was true parental accountability, a child was viewed as a reflection of its parents. If a child was misbehaving, people would look to the parents' ability and willingness to properly discipline their children. As God's chosen children, what the people of Jerusalem and Judah were saying and doing were polluting, in the eyes of non-Jews, His holy presence and His character. This is something *we* need to remember as His adopted children. People who don't know the Lord are going to look at how well we conform to Jesus' two commandments as laid out in Matthew. We're to love God with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strengths; and we're to love each other as we love ourselves. Therefore, people who don't believe are closely watching how we love others to see if the love that we tell them God has for them is visibly in us. If people are seeing us being judgmental and critical all the time, why would anyone want to believe in a God whose children are acting like the rest of the non-believing world?

Isaiah points out in the next verse a second reason for the taking away, "*The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it.*" This is really a continuation of the first item on the list – their words and deeds were not only corrupting God's holiness, but also they were flagrantly flaunting their sins as if they should be deemed the new "progressive" social norm. Does this sound familiar?

Tragically, too much of the modern church has utterly failed in providing strong teaching of God's Word. This has happened, in my opinion, due to so many pastors and elders have become infatuated with building mega churches. They have sacrificed the truth of God's Word in exchange for secular methods of getting people to come to their debt-burdened buildings. The seeker-friendly model wants to make everyone feel welcomed, which, initially, is a good thing. However, there is a serious problem with this model. If they use secular methods to attract the non-believer to come to church, they're going to have to use secular methods to keep them there.

Dallas Willard, in his book "*Renovation of the Heart,*" speaks to the Biblical view of what a church is supposed to be. Its function is to be a hospital for the hurting and provide spiritual training via the teaching of the Word of God for spiritual formation and heart transformation. Without the truth of God's Word, people will never understand the depth of God's love for them. Worse, they think it's ok to remain in their sins without concern for consequences. This is a major reason our society is in the very place Isaiah points out in verse 9. Any effort to withhold God's Word, will fling open the door for the enemy to infiltrate with destructive temptations and lies.

The third item on Isaiah's list is the treatment of the poor as noted in verse 14 & 15 in Chapter 3, "*It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?*" Jesus had a huge heart for the poor in the Gospels. If He has such a heart for them, then those of us who identify ourselves with Him should also have a similar passion. From the Millionaire Match website, Orange County is the seventh wealthiest county in the United States. Yet, according to the

Census Reporter, approximately 9.2% of people in Orange County live below the poverty line. This means about 296,000 out of 3.13 million residents are living in poverty.

I'm not here to put a guilt-trip on any of you. However, when I read these two contrasting statistics, I find myself feeling very convicted that I need to follow my Lord's passion to raise my level of genuine concern to feed and care for those who are less fortunate than me. I'm convinced that when we come face-to-face with our Lord at the Bema seat, He will be asking what we have done with the blessings He's given us. Whether it's money, time, talent, or anything else God gives us, they are not to be hoarded or used for our own gain. They are to be shared as a testimony to all that God has shared with us and wants to share with every other member of His creation.

So, we've covered the *why* God is taking away from the people of Jerusalem and Judah, now we're going to get into *what* He's taking away. These are covered in the first three verses in chapter 3. The list includes supply, support, and supplies of food and water. Furthermore, He's taking away the hero and the warrior, the judge and the prophet, and the diviner and the elder. Finally, he's taking away the military, the counselor, the skilled craftsman, and clever enchanter. As I read through this list a few times, I found two themes:

First, the Lord is taking away things that the people are trusting in instead of trusting in Him to provide them. It is all too easy to forget God when we're comfortable. I'll speak to my personal experience in this area in my conclusion. The second theme I see God taking away is their sense of protection and luxuries. As we learn in the book of Revelation, there is no army that can defend God. God's protection is infinitely greater than anything man can produce. *He* is where we find our safety and care. As for taking away the skilled craftsman, they are the ones providing the luxury items. Personally, I see this as a direct consequence of their previously rebuked ignoring the needs of the poor. Finally, by Isaiah including the diviner in the list of things to take away, he's not endorsing these evil doers. He's likely making a point they have no place within the community of God's chosen ones.

When God takes away His provision and protection, what happens to the behaviors of both believer and the people who don't know Him is telling. Here are just some of the things that happen when God takes away:

- People will oppress each other (3:5)
- The young will rise up against the old – the nobody gets honored (3:5)
- Unqualified and reluctant leaders will be put in places of leadership (3:6)
- Women will become obsessed with their appearance and possessions and have insatiable appetites for attention. In today's gender-denying society, you can include many men in this category. (3:16-23)

The common theme I see in this list is a void of agape love. When God pulls back His presence, something is going to fill the void. The Holy Spirit is not just residing in each of us as believers, He's influencing the hearts and minds of even the non-believer. Without His prompting, the lack of Divine love's presence releases the flesh to do what it wants to do – serve itself. Older people and their important wisdom and experience will be dismissed, and young

people will not only become the focus of society, but also in their inexperience, glorify, or, in a perverse way, honor those for their faults. This is what much of social media has become – a playground, or cesspool depending on your perspective, to sensationalize the beautiful and point out, mock, and humiliate the unfortunate in judgment.

At this point, perhaps some of you are thinking, “Gee, Dan has officially become a grumpy old man.” Perhaps you’re right, but our reading does provide hope for these people. Praise God, He does not leave His children abandoned in judgment. Most of what I’m going to mention are unfulfilled prophecies for when the Jews are reunited with God after the Great Tribulation is over, but they do offer promises of hope. Here are some of His reassuring promises:

- “Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds.” (Isaiah 3:10) We can receive this promise as we have inherited the righteousness of Christ by faith. Read Romans 4:13 to see that this is true.
- “In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel.” (Isaiah 4:1)
- “Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 4:2)
- “Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over everything the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.” (Isaiah 4:5-6) This should sound familiar to what we saw of God’s protection and provision during the Exodus.

All of these promises made back then are still true to this day as they speak to God’s millennial rule that will commence after Jesus returns to pronounce God’s judgment on a non-believing world. I’m in the pre-tribulation rapture camp, so praise the Lord, we’re not going to have to be around during this time. We will, though, join Him in His second coming and be living in this time that Isaiah speaks to in chapter 4.

We covered in this lecture:

- Why He takes away.
- What He takes away.
- What happens to the unrighteous when He takes away.
- What happens when He reigns.

Now I want to share my thoughts on this phrase “takes away” from chapter 3, verse 1. Throughout the Bible, God gives Himself many names. Each of these names are descriptives of a component of His character. Some of the more well-known names are Elohim, Yahweh, Adonai, and Prince of Peace. One of my favorite names of His comes out of Genesis 22, which is where we’re given the story of the Lord commanding Abraham to sacrifice his only son (from God’s perspective), Isaac. Abraham is about to slay Isaac, but the Lord puts a stop to it. A ram for the sacrifice is found in a nearby thicket, so Abraham gives us a name of God – *Jehovah Jireh, or the Lord Will Provide*.

When we think of God providing, we think of Him *giving* us something. He gives us countless things such as the air and the ability to breathe it, our senses, our abilities and talents, our family, our friends, etc. These provisional things are acts of *giving*. What struck me as I read through our lesson's reading were those two words used in the first verse of chapter 3, "*For behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah....*" (my emphasis added). Why would Jehovah Jireh, the Lord Will Provide, take away, something? Isn't that counterintuitive to our notion that this name implies His provision is about giving?

In today's reading, God is taking away from Jerusalem and Judah His favor as judgment for their repeated disobedience to His law. As I alluded to earlier, in the old days, when parents actually disciplined their children, if a child misbehaved, the parent delivered consequences for their bad behavior. If you saw a toddler walking around with a knife, a sane person would take away the knife. In this case, the *taking away* action is a form of *giving provision* – you are giving protection to the child from the consequences of its dangerous behavior.

This statement may sound like an oxymoron, but God's judgment of taking away is, in a spiritual reality, a giving provision. One of God's character traits is He is holy. If He did not respond to unholiness, or sin, in the form of judgment, He would be invalidating His holiness. Let's get back to the toddler walking around with the knife. If the parent doesn't take away the knife, the child is eventually going to hurt itself and/or someone else. What would you expect the first question from the doctor, or anyone else for that matter, to ask when treating the child or the victim of the knife's wounds? "*Where were the parents?*"

The enemy has done a masterful job at deceiving today's world that freedom of choice does not come with consequences. Furthermore, the idea that consequences, or judgment, for bad choices is just another form of hate. This mindset is completely unbiblical, and I believe that is the evidence that Satan is the influencer. I believe this mindset is a subliminal message to humanity that there is no judgment for sin. Take this a little deeper, and what this mindset is saying is either God is not holy, or He doesn't care how we live our lives. The real spiritual objective of this mindset is Christ crucified – God's only begotten Son's sacrifice – was meaningless and unnecessary. If there is no sin, then Jesus' crucifixion has no value. Who, of all people, would want to get this message out? Satan, who was defeated at the cross.

I think most of us will understand the concept of God taking away things out of judgment. However, God, in His sovereignty, takes away things for other reasons. When we went through our trial that was rooted in my wife Vickie's health issues, God took away a lot of things from us. First and foremost, Vickie's health, but He also took away our home, time with our grandchildren in their formative years, the majority of our possessions, and a big chunk of money. During that period of time, neither of us were seeing any evidence of the Lord Will Provide. Now that we're, mostly, on the other side of that trial, we can see the Lord's provisional giving hand.

Please allow me to add some context. Prior to the trial, our life was, from a human perspective, very blessed. We had a nicer home than either of us thought we would ever have – one in which we could comfortably spend the rest of our lives. Our health was pretty good. Our children were doing well. We had young grandchildren, and we were very much a part of their

lives. I had a good job. Life was good. However, we realized our walks with God were not as deep as they could be, so we prayed to the Lord we did not want to be fence-sitting Christians – not fully committed to Him. It was a prayer He had been waiting to hear from us, because He took almost immediate action. This action resulted in my previously mentioned long list of taking away.

The truth of our former life is we had become complacent and, even worse, dependent on our blessings as opposed to becoming dependent on the Blesser. From the taking away of so much of our life, God was giving to us an extremely painful but needed lesson. That lesson was if we truly wanted to have a closer relationship and walk with Him, then He needed to take away those things that were getting in the way of such a pursuit. In His providence and in His awareness of at least my hard-heartedness, His wisdom was that this lesson had to be clear and painful if we were going to truly learn from it.

Now, I need to be very transparent with you that my arriving at this assessment of our trial took many years. During this process of understanding what God was doing, I was angry, hurt, scared, frustrated, confused, and at one really dark moment – questioning my faith in a God who would do or allow this. I can *now* look back that what the Lord was doing in His taking away was Him living up to His name, the Lord Will Provide – Jehovah Jireh. He was *giving* us His answer to our prayer to not wanting to be fence-sitting Christians. I'm sure some of you might be thinking, “Jeeez, I need to be careful what I pray for.”

Our situation forced me to examine the question, “Why would an allegedly loving God allow or create (there is no difference between the two since God is in control of everything) such taking away actions?” He’s brought to my attention the following verses that speak to, for me, the key character traits of God that are now the bedrock of my faith.

- God is love: 1 John 4:8
- God is good: Psalm 34:8
- God is holy: Leviticus 19:2

And as for God’s thoughts towards me (and to each of you, as well), they are beautifully presented in Jeremiah 29:11, “*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*”

If you’re going through a taking away phase of your life, my heart goes out to you. It is extremely painful. Furthermore, I can relate to some of the emotions you are likely experiencing. You may be wondering about things like if you’re being punished or God has abandoned you. My encouragement for you is to look upon these truth-laden verses I just quoted and try to see that what He is initiating or allowing is coming from a place of loving provision. His taking away is really giving you something better – more of Him. The Apostle Paul understood this and arrived at this objective in the midst of his trials in Philippians 3:8, “*Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.*”

I had a different ending to this lecture, but in light of last week's events, I feel compelled to briefly speak to them. First and foremost, the assassination of Charlie Kirk, the Colorado student shootings, and the memories of 9/11 are **human tragedies**. Forget the political, societal, and every other comments. Human beings' lives were ended and severely injured. The emotions for everyone directly and indirectly impacted run wide and deep. I would imagine for many of us who profess Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we're wrestling with an important question. If God is sovereign – meaning He is in control of everything (and He clearly is according to His Word), how can we wrap our thoughts and hearts around why He didn't use His sovereignty to stop these blatant acts of evil? There's no doubt in my mind He could have stopped all of these tragedies, but He didn't. How do we deal with this? These are not easy answers to find.

Loved ones, faith is not about having all the answers. Faith is about trusting in the One who **does** have all the answers. This forces us to examine the character of our Sovereign God. I just mentioned the bedrock verses that speak to God's love, goodness, and holiness that have sustained me through difficult times. Yet, when we think of Jeremiah 29:11 that testify to God's thoughts towards us being of peace and not of evil, how do we reconcile this claim against what happened last week? This is an important moment for us to consider God's character. For me, His character is wrapped up in Romans 5:8, "*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" God's love, goodness, and holiness are on their grandest display with God's only begotten Son crucified.

To the nonbeliever, the cross makes no sense. They can't see beyond the death of an innocent man. To the believer, we discover supreme goodness as it opens the door to forgiveness, redemption, sacrificial love, purposeful new lives, and the discovery of a spiritual eternal existence at peace with the Lord. God provided tremendous goodness in the death of His Son. I have no doubt He will do the same through the events of last week. God has allowed this taking away for reasons we may never understand. May our prayers be just as Abraham answered his son Isaac when asked where the sacrifice was, "God will make Himself the sacrifice." May He be the one to become the replacement for what was taken away in the hearts and minds of all those who have been impacted. May He do the same for us today, every other day for the rest of our lives, and on into eternity. Let's pray.