

# Pre – Isaiah Lesson 4

## The Prosecution of YHWH (The Legal Context)

### INTRODUCTION

We have spent the last three weeks building a bridge from the New Testament back to the Old.

- Lesson 1: We traced the Narrative of the Seed and the Plan.
- Lesson 2: We established how the apostles used Isaiah to identify the Messiah.
- Lesson 3: We defined the Hermeneutic of "Prophetic Foreshortening" (The Mountain Peaks).

Now, we must address one final question before we open the text of Isaiah in January: Why the sudden explosion of writing prophets?

God has always used prophets; Abraham, Moses, and David were all prophets. When the kings began with Saul, David, and Solomon, the ministry of a prophet was adjacent, and for centuries, figures like Nathan or Elijah worked through spoken words and miraculous actions. Yet, in the 8th Century BC, something changed. The prophets stopped merely speaking to kings in private and began writing massive public documents.

Why the shift from miracles and spoken proclamation to manuscripts?

The answer is not capricious; God is not simply changing how He communicates; it is legal. Isaiah is not only a poet writing a lament, but he also lays out a case; he is a prosecuting attorney filing a formal indictment because the nation's leadership had collapsed. To understand Isaiah, you must understand the courtroom of YHWH.

### I. The Failure of the Administration & The Escalation of the Lawsuit

In Lesson 1, we saw that God's plan was to be administered by specific officers: the Priest (to intermediate between God and man) and the King (to execute the Law and justice of God). By the 8th Century, these offices were corrupted.

#### A. Evidence Exhibit A: The Corruption of the Kings

The King was commanded to write a copy of the Law and not return the people to Egypt or rely on foreign powers (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). The Kings of Isaiah's day violated this explicitly.

- Uzziah (The Pridelful Failure): Though successful militarily, Uzziah corrupted the separation of powers. In 2 Chronicles 26:16-19, his heart was lifted up to his destruction. He entered the Temple to burn incense, a role strictly reserved for priests. He tried to be both King and Priest, violating the Law.

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- Ahaz: Uzziah's grandson, Ahaz, is the prime example of the broken administration.
  - Political Treason: Instead of trusting YHWH during the Syro-Ephraimite war, he surrendered to Assyria, saying to Tiglath-Pileser: *"I am your servant and your son"* (2 Kings 16:7). He submitted the Davidic Throne to a pagan emperor.
  - Covenant Violation: He revived the detestable Canaanite practice of child sacrifice, burning his own son in the fire (2 Kings 16:3).

#### B. Evidence Exhibit B: The Corruption of the Priesthood

The Priests were the "guardians of the sanctuary," but they had become accomplices to the crimes of the state.

- Urijah: When King Ahaz saw a pagan altar in Damascus and wanted a copy built in God's Temple, Uriah the High Priest did not resist. He built the pagan altar in the court of YHWH (2 Kings 16:10-16). The priesthood had completely sold out for political expediency.
- The Drunken Leaders: Isaiah explicitly targets the moral state of the priests in Isaiah 28:7-8: "These also reel with wine and stagger from strong drink: the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink... For all tables are full of filthy vomit, without a single clean place."
- Injustice: Isaiah's contemporary, Micah, provides the cross-reference for their motivation. Micah 3:11 states: "Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, Her priests instruct for a price, And her prophets divine for money."

#### C. The Result: Escalation to Indictment

Because the "Administration" (Kings and Priests) was actively breaking the Covenant rather than enforcing it, God intensified the prophetic office. The Prophet steps out of the shadows. He is no longer just advising the King; he is prosecuting him.

- From Action to Documentation: In the previous century (9th Century), Elijah and Elisha used miracles (fire, rain) to warn the North.
- From Warning to Indictment: By Isaiah's time, the warning was over. God commanded Isaiah to write the indictment (Isaiah 30:8) to create a permanent legal record that the judgment was just.

#### D. Isaiah's Specific Role

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Isaiah is not the first to write; Amos (justice) and Hosea (spiritual adultery) had already begun filing briefs against the Northern Kingdom. Isaiah's role was to bring this legal precedent into the Court of David (Jerusalem). He stands before the corrupt Ahaz and the drunk priests and declares: *"The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people"* (Isaiah 3:14).

The crisis in Judah, the tragedy of Isaiah's day, was not just that the kings failed, but that they ignored the legal precedents set right next door in Israel.

- The Northern Kingdom was collapsing under the weight of its own covenant judgment (Assyrian invasion).
- The Southern Kings (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz) should have seen this and returned to YHWH by means of reestablishing the Covenant. Instead, they continued in corruption.

Isaiah's Specific Role: The Supreme Court Prosecutor – this is where Isaiah fits. He is not the first to write, but he has a unique assignment.

- While Amos spoke to the fields and Hosea spoke to the streets, Isaiah was sent to the palace.
- He brings the Covenant Indictment directly into the court of David.
- His message is the culmination of the prophetic movement: *You have seen what happened to Israel (North). Now, the Great King (YHWH) is calling YOU (South) to the answer for your corruption.*

The Prophets were no longer just working miracles (like Elijah); they were now documenting the case for the coming Exile. Isaiah joins this "writing chorus" to ensure that when Jerusalem falls, no one can say God was unjust. The evidence had been submitted, and Judah is being judged.

#### II. The Source: Deuteronomy 28-30

You cannot understand the book of Isaiah without understanding the book of Deuteronomy. When Israel entered the land, they signed a contract (Covenant). This contract had clear terms, outlined in Deuteronomy 24-28:

- Obedience leads to Blessings (Deuteronomy 28:1-14): Rain, victory, economic prosperity.
- Disregarding the Covenant leads to Curses (Deuteronomy 28:15-68): Drought, defeat, economic collapse, and ultimately, exile.

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Isaiah's message is not a random emotional outburst. It is a line-by-line application of Deuteronomy 28. When Isaiah says, "The ox knows its owner... but Israel does not know" (Isaiah 1:3), he is legally citing the breach of contract.

This makes our study objective. We are not interpreting symbols; we are reading a legal brief based on a prior written agreement.

### III. The Legal Framework

The central literary and theological device in Isaiah is what scholars call the "Covenant Lawsuit." To understand this, we must look at a specific Hebrew term that appears repeatedly in the Prophets.

The Hebrew Word: רִיב *riv* - A legal dispute, a controversy, a case at law, or a litigation.

This word is technical. It describes a formal legal proceeding where a plaintiff brings a charge against a defendant.

- **Isaiah 3:13:** "The LORD rises to contend (*riv*), And stands to judge the people."
- **Hosea 4:1:** "Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, For the LORD has a case (*riv*) against the inhabitants of the land."
- **Micah 6:2:** "The LORD has a case (*riv*) against His people."

### The Courtroom Structure

When we read Isaiah, we are observing a trial.

1. **The Plaintiff:** YHWH (God).
2. **The Defendant:** Judah and Jerusalem.
3. **The Prosecutor:** Isaiah.
4. **The Witnesses:** The Heavens and the Earth.

This explains the very opening verses of the book. Isaiah 1:2 says: "*Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the LORD speaks...*"

Many read this as poetic imagery. It is not. It is a proper legal procedure. In Deuteronomy 30:19, Moses said: "*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today...*" God is calling the witnesses to the stand.

### Examples of the Courtroom in Isaiah

The "Lawsuit" is not limited to Chapter 1. The entire book is structured around these legal proceedings.

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**1. The Trial of the Leadership (Isaiah 3:13-15)** Isaiah presents God not as a shepherd here, but as a Judge taking His seat.

- **The Text:** *"The LORD rises to contend (riv), And stands to judge the people. The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people"* (v. 13-14).
- **The Charge:** The leaders have "devoured the vineyard" and "crushed My people."
- **The Legal Context:** This is the direct prosecution of the "Administration" (Kings/Priests) we discussed in Section I. The immunity of the princes is revoked.

**2. The Juridical Parable (Isaiah 5:1-7)** This famous "Song of the Vineyard" is actually a bait for the men of Judah.

- **The Argument:** God presents a case of a farmer who did everything right (cleared stones, planted choice vines) but got bad fruit.
- **The Verdict:** He asks the men of Jerusalem to "judge" between Him and the vineyard (v. 3).
- **The Reveal:** Once they agree the vineyard is worthless, God reveals *they* are the vineyard (v. 7). He acted according to the Covenant, but they produced bloodshed (breach of contract).

**3. The Trial of the False Gods (Isaiah 41:21-24; 43:8-13)** Later in the book, the courtroom expands. God puts the idols of the nations on trial.

- **The Summons:** *"Present your case," the LORD says. "Bring forward your strong arguments"* (Isaiah 41:21).
- **The Challenge:** God challenges the idols to call their witnesses. Can they predict the future? Can they explain the past?
- **The Verdict:** They are silent. They are proven to be "nothing" (v. 24).
- **The Conclusion:** YHWH is the only valid God because He alone can prove His claims in the court of history.

When we read Isaiah, we must realize that God is building a case. Whether He is judging the corrupt princes (Ch 3), the fruitless nation (Ch 5), or the false gods (Ch 41), the verdict is always based on evidence, not emotion. The exile was not an accident; it was a court-ordered execution of judgment.

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### IV. The Verdict and The Hope

Why does this matter?

If Isaiah is a lawsuit, and if Israel is guilty (which the text clearly demonstrates), then the only legal outcome under the Mosaic Covenant is Death and Exile (the Curses of Deuteronomy 28).

The lawsuit ends in a guilty verdict. This creates the theological necessity for the New Covenant, as we saw in our first lesson in Pre-Isaiah Lesson 1. If the Law brings death, there must be a mechanism to bring life.

This sets the stage for the second half of Isaiah (Chapters 40-66).

- **Chapters 1-39:** The Lawsuit (*riv*). The guilt is proven. The condemnation is just.
- **Chapters 40-66:** The Solution. The "Servant of YHWH" arrives to take the penalty of the lawsuit upon Himself.

### Conclusion

As we prepare to enter the text of Isaiah in January, we take in the evidence as presented. The witnesses will be called. The verdict will be read. And in the darkness of that guilty verdict, the light of the Messiah (the Suffering Servant) will shine brightest.

We have a lot to cover, starting in 3 weeks. I hope these lessons simply begin the unpacking of this amazing critical book.