

## CHAPTER THREE

## 3. THE VENGEANCE UPON DECADENCE 3:1—4:1

## a. THE WEALTHY

TEXT: 3:1-15

- 1 For, behold, the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah stay and staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water;
- 2 the mighty man, and the man of war; the judge, and the prophet, and the diviner, and the elder;
- 3 the captain of fifty, and the honorable man, and the counselor, and the expert artificer, and the skillful enchanter.
- 4 And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them.
- 5 And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbor: the child shall behave himself proudly against the old man, and the base against the honorable.
- 6 When a man shall take hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and let this ruin be under thy hand;
- 7 in that day shall he lift up his voice, saying, I will not be a healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing: ye shall not make me ruler of the people.
- 8 For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen; because their tongue and their doings are against Jehovah, to provoke the eyes of his glory.
- 9 The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have done evil unto themselves.
- 10 Say ye of the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.
- 11 Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for what his hands have done shall be done unto him.

- 12 As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they that lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.
- 13 Jehovah standeth up to contend, and standeth to judge the peoples.
- 14 Jehovah will enter into judgment with the elders of his people, and the princes thereof; It is ye that have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses:
- 15 what mean ye that ye crush my people, and grind the face of the poor? saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts.

### QUERIES

- a. What is the meaning of "babes" ruling over them?
- b. Why did they not hide their sin?
- c. How were "children" their oppressors?

### PARAPHRASE

The Lord of Hosts is about to cut off Jerusalem's and Judah's food and water supplies; He is about to kill her leaders; He will destroy her armies, judges, prophets, elders, army officers, businessmen, lawyers, expert craftsmen and magicians. Israel's kings will be immature boys and they will rule like capricious children. And the worst sort of anarchy will prevail—everyone stepping on someone else, neighbors fighting neighbors, youths revolting against authority, criminals sneering at honorable men. The days will be characterized by such widespread poverty, ruin and destitution, that when men find one of their brethren who seems to be prosperous they will try to force him to be their king, saying, you have extra clothing, so you be our king and take care of this mess we are all in. He will reply, Absolutely not! I do not want any part of leadership in such a state of affairs as these. Judah's civil government will be in utter ruin because its people have spoken against all that God stands for and have acted in the same way. They have refused to worship Him; they have exhibited their brazen rebellion before the eyes

of His glorious presence. The evil thoughts of their heart they brazenly manifest in their facial expressions. And they boast about their sins being as bad as those of Sodom—they show no shame about it at all. How utterly horrible! They have sealed their own doom! Still, all will be well for the godly man. Tell him that he will be rewarded with goodness because he has done goodness. But say to the wicked, Your doom is certain! You too shall be rewarded according to what you have done—evil! O My people! Can you not see what fools your rulers are? They are as weak and vacillating as women. They are as foolish and capricious as little children, playing at being king. True leaders? No, misleaders! They are leading you down the path of evil unto destruction. Look! The Lord is standing up—He is preparing to act as Prosecutor and Judge—to convict and sentence. First to feel the wrath of his judgment will be the elders and the princes, for they have defrauded the poor. They have grown prosperous with the properties they have extorted from the helpless poor. They have literally consumed the poor. How dare you grind My people by your greedy oppression into nothingness. You press them and squeeze them until there is nothing left of them. This is the accusation of the Lord God of Hosts!

### COMMENTS

v. 1-4 **RUINED GOVERNMENT.** Every necessity will be taken away from Jerusalem and Judah. Every stay and staff. Bread and water are essential for physical life, but they would disappear when God stepped forth to judge the land for its sins. Civil and cultural stay and staff (perhaps even more necessary than bread and water) would also be taken away. Every form of authority would disappear:

- a. mighty man — hero; man of valor already tested in battle
- b. man of war — common soldier; lower in rank than mighty man
- c. judge — civil officer who arbitrated civil cases
- d. prophet — one who delivered God's revelation to the people (with the prophet gone would come a "famine of

hearing the words of the Lord . . ." Cf. Amos 8:11)

- e. diviner — not a legitimate support, but one depended upon, nevertheless, by the people. The entire present order of things, the "Judean way of life" was to be changed radically.
- f. captain of fifty — designates a particular officer (Cf. II Kings 1:9; Exodus 18:25; I Sam. 8:12).
- g. honorable men — "favored persons"—those who had the favor of the king, probably occupied positions of responsibility
- h. counsellor — one who served the public in counselling
- i. expert artificer — one who is wise or skillful with respect to arts (Cf. II Kings 24:14ff; Jer. 24:1; 29:2).
- j. skillful enchanter — one who whispered or muttered magical formulas; not a legitimate office

In the place of experienced and sagacious adult authorities, God would cause "children" and "babes" (literally: puerilities) to rule over them. Incompetent, inexperienced, childish, bratlike rulers would be substituted for Jerusalem and Judah. A whole line of youthful kings followed Hezekiah. After him, only one was 25 years of age (the legal age of a Jew was 30):

Jehoahaz - 23 yrs. old; II Kings 23:31

Amon - 22 yrs. old; II Kings 21:19

Zedekaih - 21 yrs. old; II Kings 24:18

Jehoiachim - 18 yrs. old; II Kings 24:8

Mannasseh - 12 yrs. old; II Kings 21:1

Josiah - 8 yrs. old; II Kings 22:1

It is the hotheadedness, the over-confidence, and the recklessness of youth that is stressed here. The lack of maturity in judgment and decision would be the ruin of the nation. As an Arabian writer said, "A blow in the face by an axe is easier to take than the rule of a boy." Young writes: "When respect for age goes, moral anarchy is at hand . . . Respect for old age had been coupled in the law with the fear of God (Lev. 19:32). When all authority passes, respect for age also passes. One evidence of the degeneration of a government and people is seen in the manner in which the aged are treated." The N.T. clearly teaches Christians to respect the authority of age (especially of those appointed

elders and overseers of the Lord's church) (Cf. I Tim. 3:1-13; 5:1-24; II Tim. 3:2; Titus 3:1ff; Heb. 13:7; 13:17; I Pet. 5:5; Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20, etc.). The childish vexation of Ahab, king of Israel, because he could not have Naboth's vineyard, (Cf. I Kings 21:1ff) is a pointed example of what type of rulers would soon come to Judah because of their sin, (Cf. Eccl. 10:5-7; 10:16-17).

v. 5-7 **RESULTING CHAOS.** Social chaos is inevitable. Oppression by one another ("everyman did that which was right in his own eyes, for there was no king in Israel" [Judges 17:6, etc.]), is the certain result of such moral anarchy. The spirit of Rehoboam (rebellion) would take precedence over the spirit of Solomon (wise judgment) and the result would be rashness, recklessness and failure. Those who should occupy a place of subserviency arrogate to themselves places of power. Men will seek to appoint rulers on the mere basis of possessing a few garments. The extremely critical condition of Judah appears in this prophecy. Anyone who possesses extra clothing will be accosted and forced to try to rescue the nation from civil economic and international ruin. The one accosted will vehemently refuse the pressure. In the first place he does not consider himself to possess the means necessary to alleviate the existing conditions; and in the second place he considers the circumstances impossible—the ruined nation beyond all help—and he does not want the responsibility. He refuses to be a "healer" because Judah is beyond being "healed." It is indeed tragic, in nation or church, that conditions can become so calamitous that a righteous man will refuse to undertake the responsibilities of leadership!

v. 8-12 **THE REASON—THE PEOPLE.** In word and in deed—speaking and acting in rebellion against the Lord. It is not out of ignorance they have sinned! It is deliberate sin. They have done it knowing full well the eyes of the Lord of Glory are upon it—their brazenness is like that of Sodom. They boast of their sin (Cf. Jude 8-16; II Pet. 2:1-22; II Tim. 4:3-4; Rom. 1:32).

By such blatant disregard of the moral and spiritual government of God, they have earned for themselves the consequences of moral and spiritual anarchy. They have "cut off their noses to

spite their faces." They have done evil to themselves! If man and his universe is to be governed by any moral principles of right and wrong at all, then wrong must be punished. Anyone who deliberately does wrong deserves punishment, he deserves the fruit of his doings.

But God is not unjust or unmerciful to forget the intentions and deeds of the righteous. God is fair! God is merciful! If a man is righteous of heart (wanting to do right) and righteous of deed (doing right—though sometimes sinning ignorantly), God will reward that man with the fruit of his doings, (Cf. Matt. 25:31-46). God's judgment is not indiscriminate—He judges omnisciently as well as omnipotently.

Those who were supposed to lead the people were oppressing them and leading them into abject slavery, morally and politically. Their rulers were capricious as children and vacillating as women. They lacked the stability that grown men naturally had.

v. 13-15 RESPONSE OF JEHOVAH. It is not merely with foreign nations they shall have to contend—Almighty God, the Lord of Hosts, arises to contend with this people. The great sin of the time was oppression of the poor by the rich. God is represented as the advocate and helper for the cause of the downtrodden. He enters into judgment with the leaders and elders of Judah and accuses them of having oppressed and defrauded His people (Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, accuses the rich of "skinning the poor alive!"). Such sin exemplifies precisely the injustice, greed, and irresponsibility of the rich and ruling and is a perfect example of the cruelty which God hates. The rich and ruling had devoured for themselves what did not belong to them—God's own people ("vineyard"). When the prophets came to warn them to leave the harvest of God's vineyard to Him, they killed the prophets. And when the Heir (the Son) came, they killed him (Cf. Lk. 20:9-18). How brazen could they be—how did they dare to mistreat the precious heritage of the Almighty God?

## QUIZ

1. Why mention the taking away of bread and water only?
2. What is a “mighty man” and an “expert artificer”?
3. What is meant by saying that “children and babes” would rule Judah?
4. Why seek a man with clothing to be ruler?
5. Why would such a man refuse to rule?
6. Why mention the righteous here?
7. Did women actually rule over the nation of Judah at this time? What does verse 12 mean?

## b. THE WOMEN

TEXT: 3:16—4:1

- 16 Moreover Jehovah said, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet;
- 17 therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and Jehovah will lay bare their secret parts.
- 18 In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of their anklets; and the cauls, and the crescents;
- 19 the pendants, and the bracelets, and the mufflers;
- 20 the headtires, and the ankle chains, and the sashes, and the perfume boxes, and the amulets;
- 21 the rings, and the nose jewels;
- 22 the festival robes, and the mantles, and the shawls, and the satchels;
- 23 the hand-mirrors, and the fine linen, and the turbans, and the veils.
- 24 And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet spices there shall be rottenness; and instead of a girdle, a rope; and instead of well set hair, baldness; and instead of a robe, a gird-

ing of sackcloth; branding instead of beauty.

25 Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war.

26 And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she shall be desolate and sit upon the ground.

4:1 And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name; take thou away our reproach.

### QUERIES

- a. What are "mincing" steps?
- b. Why was God displeased with the finery of the women?
- c. Why would seven women plead with one man to become his wife?

### PARAPHRASE

In addition to the foregoing judgments, Jehovah will judge the haughty women of Judah who walk along with their noses in the air, looking suggestively and seductively at men with their eyes; mincing and affecting their steps so that the tinkling bracelets on their ankles will direct attention to them. Because of their unashamed haughtiness, the Lord will strike them with repugnant scabs and wounds to ornament their heads, and those who delight in immodest exposure the Lord will permit to be immodestly exposed at the hands of vile men. No longer shall they call attention to themselves by tinkling as they walk. For the Lord will strip away their facade of beauty when He takes away their anklets, amulets, crescents, pendants, bracelets, veils, headdresses, armbands, sashes, perfume boxes, charms, rings and nose jewels, holiday dresses, overtunics, cloaks, ornate purses and combs, mirrors, lovely lingerie, beautiful dresses and veils. Instead of smelling of perfume, they shall stink; for sashes they shall wear ropes like prisoners and slaves; their well-kept



hair will begin to fall out; they will wear sackcloth instead of robes. Their beauty will be marred with the branding iron of their captors. Their husbands shall die in battle; the women, alone and helpless, shall mourn. The city herself shall be desolate and alone and have nothing left to do but sit and mourn. At that time so few men will be left alive that seven women, all fearing childlessness, will all fight over one man and say, Let us all become your wives! We will furnish our own food and clothing—only give us a name and children.

### COMMENTS

v. 16 **THE REASON:** Wantonness (i.e., undisciplined; unruly; unchaste; lewd; licentious; extravagant; arrogant recklessness) of the women. "The daughters of Zion" means the women of the covenant nation. The women were haughty and proud and concerned with luxurious adornment of themselves in order to bring attention to themselves. This is immodesty! They copied every fad and fashion of their heathen neighbors. "Outstretched necks" probably means walking with the "nose in the air." "Mincing steps" means to walk with short little steps so as to affect primness or daintiness. It was all exaggeration in order to draw attention to themselves. Fabulous amounts of money were spent on adornment. Many hours of each day were wasted by these women primping and beautifying themselves. When women are wholly vain and self-centered, the cancer of moral decay has begun to consume a nation or a people. Proper adornment and true beauty in women should never call attention to themselves but should direct the beholder's attention to God and His Son. When women cultivate beauty only for itself, they are infringing upon and detracting from the glory of God. Such vainglory might be expected in women of the world, but "the daughters of Zion" (which today is the church) must exemplify the beauty of holiness!

Is Isaiah, or the Bible, against all feminine or masculine adornment? Hardly! It is the misuse of adornment against which

the Bible speaks. In fact, God has made certain parts of the human body to be alluring and attractive. The Song of Solomon gives a great deal of detail about both natural beauty of the human body and the adornment of it. But the Song does not indicate such beauty and adornment should be used for prideful purposes, rather for God-ordained purposes of love.

When one pauses to consider the disparity between the billions of dollars spent each year by American females (and males) on vain and selfish cosmetics and clothing and the few dollars given each year to the work of the Gospel which transforms men and women into the beauty of holiness, one wonders what God must think!

v. 17-24 THE JUDGMENT: They will reap what they sow. Those who delight in immodest exposure will be rewarded with immodest exposure at the hands of vile men. Why are those women who delight in overtly attracting men by their immodesty always so shocked and offended when immodest and vulgar men demonstrate their attractions?! "Laying bare their secret parts" probably means they will be raped by pagan soldiers. Their indulgences will inevitably result in physical afflictions and loss of real beauty. There will be a loss of their luxury when their pagan neighbors, attracted by their exaggerated showiness, will plunder their jewels and finery.

- a. anklets: ornamental chains with bangles attached which made a tinkling sound when they "minced" along.
- b. cauls: front-bands, head-bands, amulets
- c. crescents: some sort of metallic jewelry in the shape of moons
- d. pendants: like small pearl earring, or tear-drop shaped earrings.
- e. bracelets: decorated bands to fit about the arms (or necks)
- f. mufflers: or veils, to muffle the face
- g. headtires: diadems, or circlets of gold or silver
- h. ankle chains: may have been chains designed to force short steps
- i. sashes: wide, gaudy, expensive bands of cloth around the waist

- j. perfume boxes: probably like the alabaster boxes of Lk. 7:37 etc.
- k. amulets: charms, probably inscribed with incantations,
- l. rings: finger rings with jewels, etc.
- m. nose jewels: nose rings, (Cf. Esth. 3:12; Gen. 41:42; 24:22, 47).
- n. festival robes: festal robes, state gowns, holiday dresses
- o. mantles: overtunics
- p. shawls: cloaks
- q. satchels: purses
- r. hand-mirrors: small metallic mirrors, highly polished metal
- s. fine linen: lingerie, undergarments of expensive cloth
- t. turbans: head wrappings, head garments
- u. veils: same as mufflers

Isaiah predicts that all this finery will be replaced with ugliness because of their selfish, haughty, unbelieving perversion of it all. Instead of rich sashes, they will wear the ropes of captivity and slavery around their waists; instead of intricately coiffed hair-dos, their hair will either fall out or be cut off by their enemies; instead of rich garments, they will be wearing the sack-cloth of mourning; instead of beauty marks, they will wear the ugly scars of the branding-irons, (it was a practice of pagan armies in that day to brand or disfigure slaves—especially by castrating men and using branding-irons on women—to forever mark them as slaves).

v. 25—4:1 FINAL DEGRADATION: With the moral decay of womanhood comes the weakening of all the fibres of the nation—including its men. When its male leaders become morally weak the nation becomes filled with rebellion, anarchy and conflict. War is a consequence. The male population will be destroyed in war (Cf. Lam. 2:21). A great disproportion between the sexes will appear. Instead of the God-intended ratio of one woman for one man, there will be seven or more women for every male.

The great curse of the Hebrew female was to be unmarried and childless. (Cf. Sarah and Abraham, Hannah, etc.). It was the fear of a lack of seed that had led the daughters of Lot to act in

the shameful manner described in Gen. 19:32ff. Women to whom Isaiah preached would some day no longer live as normal women—they would have no offspring since their husbands would be slain in the wars. For this reason they would abandon their natural modesty and take the initiative in a bold and shameful way, openly asking a man to marry them. Thus the order instituted in Eden is reversed. No longer is man the head of the wife. He does not seek her, but she him.

And so, womanhood, always the last stronghold of a people's morality, strength of character, and hope for the future, crumbles and falls into decadent disarray. With it goes the whole nation. God-fearing women have always been the handmaidens of the Lord (Moses' mother; Samuel's mother; women judges; Ruth; Esther; John the Baptist's mother; Jesus' mother, etc.). God-fearing women have wrought salvation of whole nations through their faith. But when women go bad, their degradation can cause such an upheaval in society that the very foundations of that society are destroyed.

### QUIZ

1. Why did the prophet condemn the women for adorning themselves?
2. What is "mincing"?
3. What is the meaning of "laying bare their secret parts"?
4. Is adornment categorically condemned by all the Bible?
5. Why mention "branding"?
6. Why were seven women concerned to marry one man?
7. How important is God-fearing womanhood to any nation?