

# Isaiah 1:21-26 Commentary

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Isaiah 1:21 [How](#) the [faithful city](#) has [become](#) a [harlot](#), she who was [full](#) of [justice!](#) [righteousness](#) once [lodged](#) in her, but [now murderers](#) ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**English Translation of the Greek** (Septuagint): How has the faithful city Sion, once full of judgement, become a harlot! wherein righteousness lodged, but now murderers.

**Amplified:** How the faithful city has become an [idolatrous] harlot, she who was full of justice! Uprightness and right standing with God [once] lodged in her—but now murderers. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

**NET:** How tragic that the once-faithful city has become a prostitute! She was once a center of justice, fairness resided in her, but now only murderers. ([NET Bible](#))

**NJB:** The faithful city, what a harlot she has become! Zion, once full of fair judgement, where saving justice used to dwell, but now assassins! ([NJB](#))

**NLT:** See how Jerusalem, once so faithful, has become a prostitute. Once the home of justice and righteousness, she is now filled with murderers. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Young's Literal:** How hath a faithful city become a harlot? I have filled it with judgment, Righteousness lodgeth in it--now murderers.

### How the faithful city has become a harlot, She who was full of justice! Righteousness once lodged in her, but now murderers:

- Faithful Isa 48:2; Nehemiah 11:1; Psalms 46:4; 48:1,8; Hosea 11:12; Zechariah 8:3; Hebrews 12:22
- Become Jeremiah 2:20,21; 3:1; Lamentations 1:8,9; Ezekiel 16:1-63; 22:1-23; Luke 13:34; Revelation 11:2,8
- Full of justice - Isa 5:7; 2Samuel 8:15; 2Chronicles 19:9; Ezekiel 22:3, 4, 5, 6, 7; Micah 3:2,3; Zephaniah 3:1, 2, 3; Acts 7:52

**Vine** sums up this next section writing that...

The lamentation which follows bewails the apostate state of the nation. The once faithful wife (pictured as a strong citadel) had become a harlot. Judgment had given place to violence and murder. The pure silver of righteousness had become dross, an amalgam of formal religion and vileness. The wine of divinely imparted wisdom (Pr 9:5) was diluted with the water of mere tradition. The princes, forsaking righteous judgment and the cause of the widow, had become lawless (Is 1:21, 22, 23). ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

**Faithful city** (see more discussion below) - Only other Biblical occurrence of "faithful city" is Isa 1:26 (this should have been a frequent phrase!). The faithful city has become unfaithful because it is composed of unfaithful people (cp "**aman**" in the phrase "did not **believe** in God" in Ps 78:22), God's chosen people who in spite of being chosen to be holy as He is holy (Lv 11:44, Ex 19:6) stubbornly, wantonly, knowingly chose to run after vain idols proving their unfaithfulness to God their "husband" (Hebrew word for husband = **ba'al** = lord, thus establishes ownership! [Israel rejected and forsook their **Ba'al** for a **false ba'al** = also used as the name of the pagan deity, the Canaanite storm and fertility god!] - Isa 54:5, Je 31:32, Ho 2:19).

**Faithful (0539) (aman)** is a verb which means to be firm and speaks of that which provides stability and confidence, as infants experience with their parents. **Aman** describes the **doorposts** of the temple which form the sides of the doorframe and thus provide stability (2Ki 18:16). The literal idea naturally leads to the figurative uses (as in this verse) where aman conveys the idea of that which one can lean their weight on (so to speak), that which one can fully depend upon (eg God in Dt 7:9, in Ps 19:7 = His word [testimony] = "sure" - it can be trusted!, God's mercies = Is 55:3). One of the most "famous" uses of aman is in Moses' description of God reckoning Abraham righteous when he "believed (aman) the LORD" (Ge 15:6, cp Ex 4:5, 2Chr 20:20).

**Harlot (02181) (zanah)** conveys the main idea in its literal meaning of a woman who commits illicit sexual intercourse! The zanah is not faithful to their spouse, "goes a whoring", and thus commits illicit acts just like a common prostitute (cp Ezek 16:4). (See God's assessment of His unholy people in Jer 2:20,21; 3:1)

This passage presents striking contrasts in what they should have been compared to what they had become!**faithful... harlot... justice... righteousness... murderers**

## RELATIONSHIP NOT RELIGION

**Keep the context of chapter one of Isaiah in mind** - Isaiah began his great prophecy reviewing God's indictment against Judah for their sins against Him. God even condemned the practices He Himself had prescribed including their sacrifices and celebration of feast days. He saw these practices as only external and not accompanied by changed hearts. Judah like so many in the church in America in these last days (2Ti 3:1-note) had a form of religion but lacked the power thereof (2Ti 3:5-note, Titus 1:16-note, cp Mt 23:27, 28, 2Co 13:5) because they lack the Holy Spirit Who alone can turn rotting religion into a righteous relationship. The people had become so numb to their sin that they felt that as long as they were religious, then everything was just fine between them and God. God did not want their religion. He wanted their heart. He wanted them to change their ways and turn from their abominable sins. And that is still God's desire - relationship not religion. Don't be deceived by the external trappings, in your delusion thinking these things make you holy. Our fallen flesh naturally gravitates toward "performance based" relationship with God in place of personal relationship manifest by humbling of our pride and submission of our wills to the Holy One of Israel. So as you read God's indictment against religious Judah, be open to allowing His Spirit to show you areas in your relationship with Him which are based more on "doing" than on "being".

You have heard the saying "**As \_\_\_\_\_ goes, so goes the nation.**" In this section of Isaiah we could insert "Jerusalem" in the

blank, for as the capital of Judah which was in the "heart" of Judah went, so went the nation. And so in this section Isaiah employs a figure of speech known as personification, personifying their capital city as representative of the people themselves.

**The faithful city** - Jerusalem had a history of being home to men such as David who had single hearts that sought God first (cp Mt 6:33-note, Jn 6:27, Isa 55:6, 7, Pr 8:17) and turned from idolatry. However, past faithfulness was no guarantee of future faithfulness and did not absolve one of just recompense for unfaithfulness. The tragedy is that the holy city had become a cheap harlot following after other "lovers" who could not save her. Such is the **deceitful nature of sin** (see Spurgeon's discussion of **"Sin's Deceiving Power"** cp He 3:13b-note, Pr 28:26, Isa 44:20, Obadiah 3, Ro 7:11-note, Ep 4:22-note, Jas 1:14-note, Jas 1:16-note). The city that had produced a pleasant aroma of praise to Jehovah now produced nothing but a fetid stench with their rotted religiosity. Spiritual rot does not happen in a moment beloved, but over time imperceptibly sets in, replacing justice with injustice, righteousness with unrighteousness, until one day the deception is so thoroughly pervasive that the infected victim of this dread malady begins to call evil good and good evil. Isaiah is saying in essence, woe to the nation and the people who have backslidden into such bondage to sin!

### **SIN IS LIKE A BOA CONSTRICTOR!**

Are you beginning to tolerate **"pet"** sins? If you are, then you need to remember the fate of the man with the **pet boa constrictor** (Do a Google search - use the following search terms and keep the parenthesis sign as written >> **"pet boa" killed**). After 15 years of living with his owner, one day the "pet boa" would not let its "owner" out of its grip resulting in the owner's tragic death. Wild animals remain wild and so does **Sin**. Do not be deceived (Stop being deceived)!

**Entanglement by the Cords of one's own Sin** - Not long after a wealthy contractor had finished building the Tombs prison in New York, he was found guilty of forgery and sentenced to several years in the prison he had built! As he was escorted into a cell of his own making, the contractor said, "I never dreamed when I built this prison that I would be an inmate one day." (cp Nu 32:23)

Sin will take you further than you ever wanted to stray!  
Cost you more than you ever dreamed you would pay!  
Keep you longer than you ever thought you would stay!

**Justice... righteousness** - What a contrast are these traits with a city that had become polluted by spilling innocent blood. Formerly she was devoted to the one true and living God, but now she was unfaithful, pursuing gods who are no gods. Her former glory was now in the gutter so to speak. Her idolatry had led to a total breakdown of social/moral standards (**sounds like America, doesn't it dear reader? Woe!**) which led to social injustice, one of the most abominable forms of which is the taking of another person's life. If idolatry in any form is allowed to go unchecked, it always manifests itself in a breakdown of the moral fabric of a society. It did in ancient Judah and it is doing so in our modern world. There is only one solution to this "social devolution" and it is "spiritual revolution". The pulpits in America must jettison the preaching of seeker sensitive pious platitudes and return to the purity of the Gospel, not shrinking away from the sound doctrine (1Ti 4:6, 2Ti 1:13, 14-note, 2Ti 4:2-note, 2Ti 3, 4-note, Titus 1:9-note) found only in the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:20, 21, 27, Pr 30:5). Another ancient prophet, Jeremiah has some words of warning against Judah which could well apply to the modern church...

Your prophets have seen for you false and foolish visions; and **they have not exposed your iniquity** so as (explains the purpose of Word centered, Spirit empowered, God glorifying proclamation of the pure Word of God) to **restore you from captivity**, but they have seen for you false and misleading oracles. (Lam 2:14)

... for My people have forgotten Me. They burn incense to worthless gods and they have stumbled from their ways, from the **ancient paths**, to walk in bypaths, not on a highway (cp **"the highway of holiness"** Isa 35:8), (Jer 18:15)

"The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?" declares the LORD. **"Is not My word like fire?"** declares the LORD, **"and like a hammer which shatters a rock?"** (Jer 23:28, 29)

**Righteousness** ([06664](#)) (**tsedeq** - see related adjective - **tsaddiq**) refers to that which conforms to an ethical or moral standard. Men have a standard but the Biblical standard is God's righteousness, His nature and will. "The Lord is righteous (tsaddiq) in all his ways and holy in all his works" (Ps 145:17-note). God's righteousness demands and provides (in Christ = the Messiah - 1Co 1:30, 2Co 5:21) the power to carry out right attitudes and right actions.

**Matthew Henry** (who has excellent comments on the moral/ethical teaching in Isaiah but generally inaccurate exposition on prophetic teaching) writes...

**Righteousness lodged** in it, was constantly resident in their palaces and in all their dwellings, not called in now and then to serve a turn, but at home there. Note, Neither holy cities nor royal ones, neither places where

religion is professed nor places where government is administered, are faithful to their trust if religion do not dwell in them

What it had now become. That beautiful virtuous spouse was now debauched, and become an adulteress; righteousness no longer dwelt in Jerusalem (*terras Astraea reliquit*—Astrea left the earth); even murderers were unpunished and lived undisturbed there; nay, the princes themselves were so cruel and oppressive that they had become no better than murderers; an innocent man might better guard himself against a troop of banditti or assassins than against a bench of such judges. Note, It is a great aggravation of the wickedness of any family or people that their ancestors were famed for virtue and probity; and commonly those that thus degenerate prove the most wicked of all men. *Corruptio optimi est pessima*—That which was originally the best becomes when corrupted the worst, Lk 11:26; Eccl. 3:16; See Je 22:15, 16, 17.

**Murderers (merassehim)** is first used as a prohibition in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:13, cp Ex 24:5). Jesus' proclamation in Luke 13:34 makes it clear that this was not a problem restricted to pre-exilic (prior to Babylonian exile) Israel.

**Have you ever considered sin (including murderer) is a "pollutant"?** Our world is preoccupied with pollution and speculation about global warming and yet is blind to the most prevalent pollutant on the planet - personal sin against the Holy One of Israel!

Isaiah 1:22 Your **silver** has **become dross**, your **drink diluted** with **water**. (**NASB: Lockman**)

**English Translation of the Greek** (Septuagint): Your silver is worthless, thy wine merchants mix the wine with water.

**Amplified:** Your silver has become dross, your wine is mixed with water. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water:

**NET:** Your silver has become scum, your beer is diluted with water. ([NET Bible](#))

**NJB:** Your silver has turned into dross, your wine is watered. ([NJB](#))

**NLT:** Once like pure silver, you have become like worthless slag. Once so pure, you are now like watered-down wine. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Young's Literal:** Thy silver hath become dross, Thy drink polluted with water.

**Your silver has become dross, your drink diluted with water:**

- Jeremiah 6:28, 29, 30; Lamentations 4:1,2; Ezekiel 22:18, 19, 20, 21, 22; Hosea 6:4) (Drink - Hosea 4:18; 2Corinthians 2:17

**Silver... dross** - Speaks of worthlessness -- silver can contain some alloy and still be silver but if it has become **dross**, it is totally worthless. This is what sin will do to a person.

**Jeremiah** also uses the divine **Metallurgist metaphor**...

All of them are stubbornly rebellious, going about as a talebearer. They are bronze and iron; they, all of them, are corrupt. The bellows blow fiercely. The lead is consumed by the fire. **In vain the refining goes on, but the wicked are not separated.** (In other words, God's is trying to refine them but they refuse to respond to the refining fires of discipline. **Are you currently being disciplined or "refined" by the Lord? How are you responding? Is He getting your attention? Remember, He does it out of His holiness and love and for our good.** He 12:10-note, He 12:11-note). They call them **rejected silver**, because the Lord has rejected them. (Jer 6:28, 29, 30)

**THOUGHT-** Beloved, don't read over these verses too quickly thinking "Well, Isaiah's talking about Israel, and this isn't relevant in my life." Wrong! Stop and ponder your life (Ps 139:23, 24, 2Cor 13:5) - are you growing in holiness (2Pe 3:18-note) or are you going toward unholiness? Beware, for as discussed in the previous verse note, sin is deceitful (He 3:13b-note) and once you are entrapped (Pr 5:22-note), you won't even realize that you have become "dross"!

Pure wine with water added is no longer pure. The picture that is portrayed is that of the leavening effects of sin (1Co 5:6), which

when it enters contaminates every part of a person.

**Harry Ironside** - In place of silver, speaking of atonement (cf. Ex 30:11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16), was the dross of complacent self-sufficiency; and the wine of joy was diluted with the foul water of earth's broken cisterns (Is 1:21, 22). (**Ed:** I'm not sure one can make the association of silver with atonement in this context. While I greatly respect Dr Ironside, his comment makes the point that each Bible student needs to be a Acts 17:11-note; Berean - consider **inductive Bible study**)

**Isaiah 1:23** Your **rulers** are **rebels** and **companions** of **thieves**; **Everyone** loves a **bribe** And **chases** after **rewards**. They do not **defend** the **orphan**, **nor** does the **widow's plea** come before them. (**NASB: Lockman**)

**English Translation of the Greek** (Septuagint): Thy princes are rebellious, companions of thieves, loving bribes, seeking after rewards; not pleading for orphans, and not heeding the cause of widows.

**Amplified:** Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes and runs after compensation and rewards. They judge not for the fatherless nor defend them, neither does the cause of the widow come to them [for they delay or turn a deaf ear]. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

**NET:** Your officials are rebels, they associate with thieves. All of them love bribery, and look for payoffs. They do not take up the cause of the orphan, or defend the rights of the widow. ([NET Bible](#))

**NJB:** Your princes are rebels, accomplices of brigands. All of them greedy for presents and eager for bribes, they show no justice to the orphan, and the widow's cause never reaches them. ([NJB](#))

**NLT:** Your leaders are rebels, the companions of thieves. All of them take bribes and refuse to defend the orphans and the widows. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Young's Literal:** Thy princes are apostates, and companions of thieves, Every one loving a bribe, and pursuing rewards, The fatherless they judge not, And the plea of the widow cometh not to them.

#### Your rulers are rebels and companions of thieves:

- Rulers - Isa 3:14; 2Chronicles 24:17, 18, 19, 20, 21; 36:14; Jeremiah 5:5; Ezekiel 22:6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12; Daniel 9:5,6; Hosea 7:3, 4, 5; 9:15; Micah 3:1, 2, 3,11; Acts 4:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
- Companions - Proverbs 29:24; Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46)

**Rulers** ([08269](#)) (**sar**) speaks of one in rank over others - prince, chief, captain, ruler, governor, keeper, chief captain, steward, master.

In chapter 3, **Isaiah** addresses the judgment on these wicked **rulers** recording that...

The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people, "It is you who have devoured the vineyard; The plunder of the poor is in your houses." (Is 3:14)

**Rebels** ([05637](#)) (**carar/sarar**) conveys the root meaning of to be stubborn and thus lays stress on one's attitude (which of course usually plays out in one's action), whereas the related Hebrew word **marad** (first use - Ge 14:4) emphasizes the rebellious actions.

**Isaiah** uses the verb **sarar** again writing...

"Woe to the **rebellious** (**sarar**) children," (**Their attitude**) declares the LORD, (**Their action**) "Who execute a plan, but not Mine (**Beloved, does this accusation not convict every one of us?! How often I say "It's my way or the highway!"**), and make an alliance, but not of My Spirit (This suggests that God meant for the Holy Spirit to be active in the lives of OT saints), in order to add sin to sin (This is very dangerous "mathematics"!), who proceed down to Egypt without consulting Me, to take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt! (Is 30:1, 2)

In **Hosea** God uses **sarar** in comparing Israel to a brute animal...

Since Israel is **stubborn** (**sarar**) like a **stubborn** (**sarar**) heifer, can the LORD now pasture them like a lamb in

a large field? (Ho 4:16)

The prophet **Zechariah** uses **sarar** in a similar charge against Israel...

"Thus has the LORD of hosts said, 'Dispense true justice, and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.' **But (When we have just heard the Lord's will for our life and begin response with "But..." that is usually a sign of at best "delayed obedience" which itself is really disobedience! Notice the rebellious "triad" that follows the Lord's clear call to holy living!**) they (1) refused to pay attention, and (2) turned a **stubborn (sarar)** shoulder and (3) stopped their ears from hearing. (Zech 7:9, 10, 11)

**Companions of thieves** - In a parallel thought in proverbs we read...

He who is a partner with a thief hates his own life; He hears the oath but tells nothing. (Proverbs 29:24)

The rulers, princes, leaders who should have set the high standard of obedience to the law of the Lord were stubborn, morally refractory and rebellious. Sounds a lot like our political leaders in America circa 2008-9!

**Everyone loves a bribe and chases after rewards They do not defend the orphan, nor does the widow's plea come before them:**

- Isa 33:15; Ex 23:8; Dt 16:19; Pr 17:23; Jer 22:17; Ezek 22:12; Ho 4:18; Mic 7:3
- Isa 10:1,2; Jer 5:28,29; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5; Lk 18:2, 3, 4, 5

These sins speak of self care and the next group of sins express a care less attitude for the less fortunate.

**Motyer** writes that...The widow and orphan are test cases of the quality of biblical society (Ex. 22:22; Dt. 14:29; 16:11, 12, 13, 14). The Lord looks to his people to be like him (cf. Dt. 10:18; Ps10:4; 68:5)

**Isaiah 1:24** **Therefore the Lord GOD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, declares, "Ah, I will be relieved of My adversaries and avenge Myself on My foes. (NASB: Lockman)**

**English Translation of the Greek** (Septuagint): Therefore thus saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, Woe to the mighty men of Israel; for my wrath shall not cease against mine adversaries, and I will execute judgement on mine enemies.

**Amplified:** Therefore says the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will appease Myself on My adversaries and avenge Myself on My enemies. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies:

**NET:** Therefore, the sovereign LORD who commands armies, the powerful ruler of Israel, says this: "Ah, I will seek vengeance against my adversaries, I will take revenge against my enemies. ([NET Bible](#))

**NJB:** Hence, the Lord Yahweh Sabaoth, the Mighty One of Israel, says this, 'Disaster, I shall get the better of my enemies, I shall avenge myself on my foes. ([NJB](#))

**NLT:** Therefore, the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, says, "I will pour out my fury on you, my enemies! ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Young's Literal:** Therefore--the affirmation of the Lord--Jehovah of Hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: Ah, I am eased of Mine adversaries, And I am avenged of Mine enemies,

**Therefore the Lord GOD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, declares, "Ah, I will be relieved of My adversaries and avenge Myself on My foes:**

- Mighty One - Isa 30:29; 49:26; 60:16; Jeremiah 50:34; Revelation 18:8
- Deuteronomy 28:63; 32:43; Proverbs 1:25,26; Ezekiel 5:13; 16:42; 21:17; Hebrews 10:13

**S Lewis Johnson** - For God, you see, will avail himself of other means to see that his will is carried out. And if we do not respond to mercy and forgiveness, then he will reach his goal through judgment. And that is the appeal of the last part of the section. It, of course, has some magnificent promises within it. He says in Is 1:27 "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment and her converts with righteousness." This is quite an introduction to his prophecy. And the prophet is making it very plain that the nation is not on good terms with the Lord. But in spite of that fact he has magnificent words of the Messianic King and the kingdom that is to come in the future. How important it is for us to be real in the practice of our truth. ([Messianic Prophecies in Isaiah](#))

**Prophetic Passage** - This verse is not as clear but in context appears to be a prophetic passage. The question is **when** will God **avenge** Himself on His foes? And while we know that the wrath of God has been and is even now being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Ro 1:18-note), this verse certainly could apply to the pouring out of His righteous wrath in the events of the book of the Revelation as described in more detail in the following notes. As an aside, some scholars have identified more than 500 references from the Old Testament in the book of the Revelation. For example **Arnold Fruchtenbaum** writes...

there are over five hundred references to the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation. The following is a list of such references (**Ed**: refer to his book for this list), but it makes no claim to being exhaustive or complete. Some of these references back to the Old Testament do speak of the very same thing as the Revelation. However, in others, the Revelation merely borrows a phrase or motif for the purpose of developing a new area. This distinction should be kept in mind in the study of those Old Testament references. (Fruchtenbaum, A. G. The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events. Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries)

My point is that the book of the Revelation deals significantly with Israel even as God dispenses wrath to His foes (some of which will be ethnic Jews, cp Zech 13:8, 9). In fact Fruchtenbaum lists over 70 references from Isaiah (some with multiple verses) as references in the Revelation. It follows that a proper understanding of the eschatology of Isaiah rests on a good grasp of the eschatology of the Revelation and of Daniel for Daniel's prophecies in chapter 2, 7, 9-12, are closely linked with and form a firm foundation for the book of the Revelation. I will attempt to provide background or ancillary explanations where appropriate in order to aid the understanding of Isaiah's great prophecies, many of which are yet future.

From rebellious rulers we now turn to the sovereign King.

**Therefore - Why "therefore"?** Because of the fact that the faithful city has become a harlot, full of murderers, etc (Isa 1:21, 22, 23). Based on the evidence, God declares the verdict and punishment against Judah (cp Isa 1:1 "concerning Judah and Jerusalem").

**Lord GOD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel** - Literally this name is the **Lord--Jehovah of hosts (of armies), the Mighty One of Israel** - this unusual description of God (which is in the context of judgment) is very emphatic. In Isa 1:9 **Jehovah of hosts** left "a few survivors" (cp remnant). The One Who can judge, can also save, as Isaiah goes on to explain in this same section.

**The Mighty One of Israel** (or **Jacob**) - The Hebrew word for might ('abiyr) is used only of the name of God in all 6 OT uses = Ge 49:24, Ps 132:2, 5, Isa 1:24, Isa 49:26, Isa 60:16.

**God's "amplified title"** (remember His Names always speak of His attributes and His character - see the **Name of the LORD is a Strong Tower**) in this verse emphasizes that He is mighty and fully able to exert righteous judgment and also to graciously bring about merciful restoration ("I will smelt... I will remove... then I will restore... a faithful city" Isa 1:25, 26) **Why?** Amazing grace as emphasized in Dt 7:7, 8, 9. He is faithful to keep His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cp Ge 22:16, 17, 18, note how Moses' appealed to God's faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant - Ex 32:12, 13, 14) (And as an aside, God is just and faithful to keep His New Covenant promises to you dear saint [eg, He 13:5b-note, Jn 10:27, 28, 29], so if you are genuinely saved, never doubt that the lovingkindness and grace of God is enough to keep you **eternally** secure! You cannot lose your salvation, even to the thousandth generation!)

**My adversaries** - These are not some foreign, pagan, Gentile nation, but in context refer to the unfaithful ones in the covenant community, His chosen people.

In Isaiah 63:1 He is **mighty to save**, but here He is mighty (and justified) to take vengeance.

**Ah (hoy)** in an interjection meaning Woe or Alas. It is used to draw one's attention.

**I will be relieved** ([05162](#)) (**naham/nacham**) means to comfort.

**Avenge** ([05358](#)) (**naqam**) means to to exact satisfaction for (a wrong) by punishing the wrongdoer. This verb is used 3 times in

Nahum 1:2 A jealous and **avenging** God is the LORD; The LORD is **avenging** and wrathful. The LORD takes **vengeance** on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies.

In inflict **vengeance** is to render punishment in retaliation for an injury or offense. If one stops with this verse, it looks as if God is seeking to "get even." But the next verse clearly shows that the just and merciful God avenges His chosen people in order to remove the moral/ethical impurity and turn His people back to Him

**Motyer** comments that...The Lord will get relief (naham) and avenge (naqam) himself. The former term, with its root idea of 'comfort', points to soothing the hurt given to God; the latter to the objective requital merited. Any facile statement that God always hates the sin but loves the sinner needs to be countered by Isaiah's insistence that those who transgress are my foes and my enemies. They have made themselves the adversaries of the helpless (23), therefore the sovereign Lord holds them as his enemies. (Motyer, J. A. The Prophecy of Isaiah. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press)

**Ironside** - Because of all this, the Lord Himself would awake to judgment, and pour out His vengeance upon those who, posing as His friends, were in reality at enmity with Him.

**Isaiah 1:25** I will also **turn** My **hand against** you, and will **smelt** away your **dross** as with **lye** and will **remove all** your **alloy**. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**English Translation of the Greek** (Septuagint): And I will bring my hand upon thee, and purge thee completely, and I will destroy the rebellious, and will take away (make lower or humble) from thee all transgressors.

**Amplified:** And I will bring My hand again upon you and thoroughly purge away your dross [as with lye] and take away all your tin or alloy. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:

**NET:** I will attack you; I will purify your metal with flux. I will remove all your slag. ([NET Bible](#))

**NJB:** 'I shall turn my hand against you, I shall purge your dross as though with potash, I shall remove all your alloy. ([NJB](#))

**NLT:** I will turn against you. I will melt you down and skim off your slag. I will remove all your impurities. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Young's Literal:** And I turn back My hand upon thee, And I refine as purity thy dross, And I turn aside all thy tin

**I will also turn My hand against you, and will smelt away your dross as with lye and will remove all your alloy:**

- Zechariah 13:7, 8, 9; Revelation 3:19)
- Isa 1:22; 4:4; 6:11, 12, 13; Jeremiah 6:29; 9:7; Ezekiel 20:38; Zephaniah 3:11; Malachi 3:3; Matthew 3:12)

**Prophetic Passage** - While "will" does not always signal a prophecy, in many contexts it does, so be alert to the use of the future tense. This is clearly a prophecy and in context will ultimately be fulfilled at the **Second Coming** of Christ.

**I will turn My hand against you** (cp "hand of the LORD" against Israel - Jdg 2:15, 1Sa 12:15) - My hand is an anthropomorphism (human character figuratively attributed to God to help us understand His action - His "hand" spoke of His power, His omnipotence and could be used for blessing [cp Ezra 7:9, 10-] or as is this passage judgment/punishment) **Against who?** In context His hand will be against the unfaithful city, against Zion or Jerusalem. But Zion is populated predominantly by Jews and thus God's hand will be against the Jews. **When?** This prophecy most likely has a near and far fulfillment. The near fulfillment is when Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem and eventually destroyed the Holy Temple in 586BC, but in context with the description in the following verse (Isa 1:26), the ultimate fulfillment will be in the last days in the **time of Jacob's distress** (Jer 30:6, 7), which Jesus designated as the **Great Tribulation** (Mt 24:15, 21, 30, cp Da 9:27-note).

**What is the justification for this interpretation?** It is only after Messiah returns at the end of the last half of **Daniel's Seventieth Week**, at the end of the 3.5 year period ( the **Great Tribulation**) that Jerusalem will be called the **city of righteousness**, and be a **faithful city** (Isa 1:26). At that time Messiah, the Righteous One, will reign in Jerusalem, and He is ultimately the reason it will be righteous and faithful. In Jeremiah, Jerusalem is named

**Smelt** ([06884](#)) (**tsaraph**) describes the purifying process of the metallurgist who refines the impure ore by heating so that the dross



comes to the top to be skimmed off, this process leaving a pure substance (Pr 25:4) **Sarap** refers to the Word of God "As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times" (Ps 12:6).

Every word of God is **tested** (sarap); He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. (Pr 30:5)

**Sarap** is used of the purifying effects of external trials (Ps 66:10; 105:19; Is 48:10) which God often uses to discipline His people from sin (Isa 1:25; Zec 13:9 - both refer to the time of the **Great Tribulation**) or to remove the wicked from the righteous from His people (Jer 6:29; Mal. 3:2, 3 - the latter refers to the time of the **Great Tribulation**).

**Daniel** recorded the angel's answer to his question concerning the outcome of the holy people (Israel) declaring that...

Many (referring to Israel and specifically those who would believe = **remnant**) will be purged, purified and **refined** (sarap); but the wicked will act wickedly (their evil acts confirm their uncircumcised hearts, Ro 2:28, 29-note), and none of the wicked will understand (cp 1Co 2:14), but those who have insight will understand (cp Da 11:33, 35). (Daniel 12:10)

**Dross** (05509) (**sug**) is the scum that forms on the surface of molten metal. It is a vivid picture of evil and how it must be separated from the good metal so that it is useful! In 1Ki 18:27 the Hebrew word **sug** is used metaphorically as a euphemism to mock the false god who might have been too busy to intervene because he was busy relieving himself. The word suggests dross or waste, excrement (1Ki 18:27). Isaiah used this same Hebrew word in Isa 1:22 and the prophet Ezekiel uses **sug** (dross) to describe the "house of Israel" (Ezekiel 22:18)!

The **1828 Webster's** says **dross** is the

The excrement (waste matter, refuse) or despumation (skimming off the surface scum) of metals; the scum or extraneous matter of metals, thrown off in the process of melting.

**I... will smelt away your dross** - Harry Ironside explains that Jehovah...

would correct in measure. His discipline would have the effect of removing the unjust and unholy, purging the nation from its dross and sin, from all that was base and displeasing to God, after which He would restore their judges as at the first and their counselors as of old.

**Remove** (05493) (**sar**) means to turn away.

**Your alloy** (0913) (**bediyl**) - This refers to the alloy of lead, tin (Amplified = "your tin", KJV = "take away all thy tin" , etc., separated by smelting from the silver. The **TWOT** writes that **bediyl**...

denotes that which is separated from precious metal or metal ore and thus in Isa 1:25 refers to metal which in combination with precious metal reduces the precious metal to dross. It is used in that sense figuratively of Israel (Ezek 22:18). ([Harris, R L, Archer, G L & Waltke, B K Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Moody Press](#))

**Bediyl** - 6x in the OT - Nu 31:22; Isa. 1:25; Ezek. 22:18, 20; 27:12; Zech. 4:10

**F B Meyer** - Isaiah 1:25 I will purge away thy dross, and take away thine alloy.

The silver had become dross. Jerusalem, the chosen city, was filled with infidelity, formalism, impurity, and deeds of violence. She had been full of judgment, righteousness had lodged in her; but now, murderers. And this was the reason for the blows that had fallen upon her with such unsparing force. The whole land was now desolate; the cities burned with fire; only a small remnant of the people was left. The prophet, his patriot heart wrung with grief, compares her to a sick man in the last stage of disease, the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness in it. Would it not be well for us to search our hearts, and ask whether there may not be some counterpart to this in our declension from our God, and the consequent suffering to which we have been brought? He loves us too well to allow the process of deterioration to go unchecked.

But here the Almighty Lover of his people resolves to bring his hand to the work of entire purging and cleansing. He will no longer simply punish. He will take away the men who had been his adversaries and enemies from the midst of his people, thoroughly purging away the dross and taking away all the tin. There is an immeasurable difference between punishing and refining. It is a great matter for the soul, when God ceases from the one and commences the other; and when we no longer suffer from the results of past sins, but are restored as at the first, and converted as at the beginning. (Our Daily Homily)

Isaiah 1:26 Then I will [restore](#) your [judges](#) as at the [first](#), and your [counselors](#) as at the [beginning](#); [after](#) that you will be [called](#) the [city](#) of [righteousness](#), a [faithful city](#). ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**English Translation of the Greek** (Septuagint): And I will establish thy judges as before, and thy counselors as at the beginning: and afterward thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful mother-city of Sion.

**Amplified:** And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning; afterward you shall be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.

**NET:** I will reestablish honest judges as in former times, wise advisers as in earlier days. Then you will be called, 'The Just City, Faithful Town.'" ([NET Bible](#))

**NJB:** 'And I shall restore your judges as at first, your counselors as in bygone days, after which you will be called City of Saving Justice, Faithful City.' ([NJB](#))

**NLT:** Afterward I will give you good judges and wise counselors like the ones you used to have. Then Jerusalem will again be called the Home of Justice and the Faithful City." ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Young's Literal:** And I give back thy judges as at the first, And thy counselors as in the beginning, After this thou art called, 'A city of righteousness--a faithful city.'

### Then I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning

- Isa 32:1,2; 60:17,18; Numbers 12:3; 16:15; 1Samuel 12:2-5; Jeremiah 33:7,15, 16, 17; Ezekiel 34:23,24; 37:24,25; 45:8)

**Prophetic Passage** - This is prophecy which has not obviously been fulfilled, so that the ultimate fulfillment looks to the future when Christ returns to triumph over His enemies.

**Then - Then** (see expressions of time in inductive Bible study) marks sequence and in this case marks the termination of this present age which is brought to a close by the **Second Coming** of Messiah at the end of **Daniel's Seventieth Week**, the time period in Israel's future history which Jeremiah referred to as **the time of Jacob's distress** (Jer 30:6, 7). This period constitutes the last three and one-half years of **Daniel's Seventieth Week**, the time Jesus referred to as the **Great Tribulation** (see notes; Mt 24:15, 21, 30, cp Da 9:27-note)

After Judah's 70 year exile in Babylon there was a partial restoration (cp Da 9:2, 2Chr 36:20, 21, Jer 25:11, 12, 29:10), but God's promise in this verse looks forward to complete and permanent restoration of God's people Israel (saved Israel, not the church!). At that time, in the **Millennium**, Israel and Jerusalem will be over all the world's nations (Jer 3:17, Ezek 5:5, Micah 4:2, Zech 8:22, 14:16).

**Your judges** - "Your" refers to the **faithful city** Jerusalem that at the time Isaiah penned these words had become a city unfaithful to Jehovah (Isa 1:21).

**Scofield** interprets this verse to signify that...

Under the future kingdom the ancient method of administering the theocratic government over Israel is to be restored. (In the book of Judges) The judges were tribesmen in Israel upon whom the LORD laid the burden of Israel's apostate and oppressed state. They were men raised up by God, the theocratic King, to represent Him in the nation. They were patriots and religious reformers because national security and prosperity were inseparably connected with loyalty and obedience to the LORD.

**Jamieson** who is one of the more **literal interpreters of the OT** (more so than Albert Barnes, Adam Clarke, and Matthew Henry) explains that...

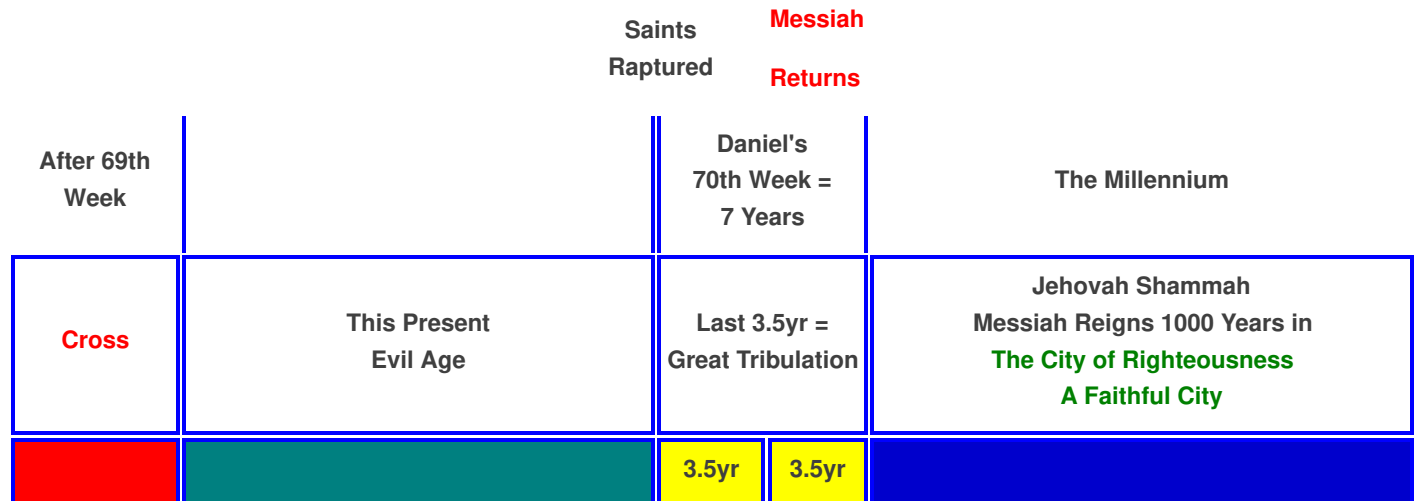
As the degeneracy had shown itself most in the magistrates (Isa 1:17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23), so, at the "restoration," these shall be such as the theocracy "at the first" had contemplated, namely, after the Babylonish restoration in part and typically, but fully and antitypically under Messiah (Isa 32:1 Isa 52:8 Jer 33:7 Mt 19:28).

**Jesus** may have been alluding to this future judgeship when He declared...

Truly I say to you (in answer to Peter's question Mt 19:27), that you who have followed Me (He is referring to His disciples in this context), in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Mt 19:28)

**Paul** also alluded to a future judgeship for all believers...

Or do you not know that the saints will **judge** the world? (cp the role of believers in the **Millennial Kingdom** - see Re 2:26-note, Re 2:27-note, Re 3:21-note, Re 20:4-note, cp Da 7:22) And if the world is **judged** by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall **judge** angels? How much more, matters of this life? (1Cor 6:2,3)



**After that you will be called the city of righteousness, a faithful city.** (Is 1:21; 60:21; 62:1; Je 31:23; Zeph 3:9,13; Zech 8:8; Re 21:27)

**After that - After what?** After the return of Messiah who defeats the Antichrist (Re 19:11, 12, 13, 14, 15-note, Re 19:16-note, Re 19:19-note, Re 19:20-note [beast = Antichrist], Re 19:21-note) and the establishes His **Millennial Kingdom** and reigns on earth from Jerusalem (Mt 25:31, Re 20:6). Then and only then will Jerusalem be a truly righteous, faithful city (cp Similar description of Kingdom privileges [Ro 14:17-note] available to those in whom the King now reigns by grace through faith).

**The city of righteousness** - This name for Jerusalem reflects the identification of the **Place** with the **Person and Presence** of the **Righteous Branch, the Messiah** (Jer 23:5, 33:15 -see below). In short, the city unfaithful city will finally and fully take on the same characteristics as the LORD, the Righteous One, Who dwells within her. God's presence is made unforgettable in the very name of the city -- **The Lord is Our Righteousness** (Je 33:16).

**In Jeremiah** Jehovah, the covenant keeping God, gives a parallel prophetic promise...

**Behold** (Hebrew = hinneh = This interjection functions like a command calling the reader/listener to pay special attention to what follows), **days are coming,**' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good word (the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant [see Abrahamic vs Old vs New] he had just explained - Je 31:31, 32, 33) which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 'In **those days and at that time** I will cause **a righteous Branch of David (Messiah)** to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and **righteousness** on the earth (cp Re 19:11, 12, 13, 14, 15-note, Re 19:16-note, Re 19:19-note, Re 19:20-note [beast = Antichrist], Re 19:21-note).

**In those days** Judah shall be saved (the believing Jewish remnant = see Zec 12:10, 13:8,9, Ro 11:26, 27-note; cp the **Second Coming of Christ**) and Jerusalem shall dwell in safety; and this is the name by which **she** (Jerusalem is personified as a woman) shall be called: the **LORD is our righteousness**. 17 "For thus says the LORD, 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel (the **Davidic Covenant** 2Sa 7:14, 15, 16) 18 and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to prepare sacrifices continually.'" (Jer 33:14, 15, 16, 17, 18)

**Faithful city** - Like a **faithful** wife. No longer a (spiritual) harlot (Is 1:21, Je 2:20, 21, 3:1, Ezek 15, 16, 17ff) a spiritual adulterer who gives her "affection" to idols that are no gods at all (cp Dt 32:17, 2Ki 19:18, Je 2:11, Ho 8:6, 7, Acts 19:26b). After the final purging, the only Jews who will enter the **city of righteousness** are those who are also righteous (by grace through faith in their Messiah).

## Related Resource

- [Chart Depicting God's Plan for Jerusalem](#)