Isaiah 3:13-15 Commentary

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Isaiah 3:13 The LORD arises to contend, and stands to judge the people. (NASB: Lockman)

English Translation of the Greek (Septuagint): But now the Lord will stand up for judgement, and will enter into judgement with his people.

Amplified: The Lord stands up to contend, and stands to judge the peoples and His people. (Amplified Bible - Lockman)

KJV: The LORD standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people.

NET: The LORD takes his position to judge; he stands up to pass sentence on his people. (NET Bible)

NJB: Yahweh has risen to accuse, is standing to pass judgement on the people. (NJB)

NLT: The LORD takes his place in court. He is the great prosecuting attorney, presenting his case against his people! (NLT - Tyndale House)

Young's Literal: Jehovah hath stood up to plead, And He is standing to judge the peoples.

The LORD arises to contend, and stands to judge the people:

- Stands Ps 12:5; Pr 22:22,23; 23:10,11; Ho 4:1,2; Mic 6:2

Contend… judge - This brings to mind the words "All rise, Jehovah has now entered the courtroom"! The charges against **the elders and the princes** (Isa 3:14) are (1) that they had **devoured the vineyard** (God's people) and (2) plundered **the poor**… crushing God's **people** and **grinding the face of the poor** (Is 3:15). God is unique in that He is both the Prosecutor and the Judge.

Contend (07378)(**rub**) means to dispute ("quarrels with His maker" Is 45:9) or even to conduct a lawsuit (cp **plead** [rub] for the widow"). Isaiah uses this verb 8 times (Is 1:17; 3:13; 27:8; 45:9; 49:25; 50:8; 51:22; 57:16).

God uses the verb ***rub*** in a great promise near the end of Isaiah's prophecy…

> For I will not **contend** (Heb = rub, Lxx - ekdikeo = inflict appropriate penalty for wrong done) forever, Neither will I always be angry; For the spirit would grow faint before Me, And the breath of those whom I have made. (Is 57:16)

Messiah uses this verb ***rub*** declaring that…

> He who vindicates Me is near; Who will **contend** (rub) with Me? Let us stand up to each other; Who has a case against Me? Let him draw near to Me. (Is 50:8)

The people - This is directed specifically as explained in Isa 3:14 at the leaders in Jerusalem and Judah. The **Septuagint** translates "His people".

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Isaiah 3:14 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. (NASB: Lockman) (NASB: Lockman)

> **English Translation of the Greek** (Septuagint): The Lord himself shall enter into judgement with the elders of the people, and with their rulers: but why have ye set my vineyard on fire, and why is the spoil of the poor in your houses?
>
> **Amplified**: The Lord enters into judgment with the elders of His people and their princes: For [by your exactions and oppressions you have robbed the people and ruined the country] you have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. (Amplified Bible - Lockman)
>
> **KJV**: The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof: for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses.
>
> **NET**: The LORD comes to pronounce judgment on the leaders of his people and their officials. He says, "It is you who have ruined the vineyard! You have stashed in your houses what you have stolen from the poor. (NET Bible)
>
> **NJB**: Yahweh is about to try the elders and the princes of his people, 'You are the ones who have ravaged the vineyard, the spoils of the poor are in your houses. (NJB)
>
> **NLT**: The leaders and the princes will be the first to feel the Lord's judgment. "You have ruined Israel, which is my vineyard. You have taken advantage of the poor, filling your barns with grain extorted from helpless people. (NLT - Tyndale House)
>
> **Young's Literal**: Jehovah into judgment doth enter With elders of His people, and its heads: 'And ye, ye have consumed the vineyard, Plunder of the poor is in your houses.

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.":

- Enter - Job 22:4; 34:23; Ps 143:2
- Elders Is 3:2,3
- Devoured - Is 5:7; Job 24:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7; Je 5:27; Amos 4:1; Mic 2:2; 6:10; Mt 21:33)

The LORD enters into judgment with the elders ("the ancients") **and princes of His people** - Notice first it is Jehovah Himself Who brings the just judgment. Rightly does the psalmist plead with God…

> do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no man living is righteous. (Ps 143:2)

The leaders are the focus of God's judgment and deserve to be judged first because of the greater responsibility they bore as leaders to see to the welfare of the nation and the fair administration of the government.

Devoured the vineyard - The leaders and officials in Judah instead of caring for His vineyard have ruined it.

Devoured (01197)(**ba'ar**) (90v in the OT and 17 times in Isaiah - Is 1:31; 3:14; 4:4; 5:5; 6:13; 9:18; 10:17; 19:11; 30:27, 33; 34:9; 40:16; 42:25; 43:2; 44:15; 50:11; 62:1) means burned up, "eaten up", consumed (as with fire), and in context pictures the pervasiveness of the perfidy perpetrated by the leaders against the people (**vineyard**). Young renders it those you "have depastured".

Vineyard (03754) (**kerem**) literally describes a plot of land on which grapes were grown and which needs to be cultivated and tended, functions the elders and princes failed to perform for the nation in general and specifically for the poor. See Isa 5:1, 7- note where the "**vineyard**" = God's people, the nation of Israel, cp Ps 80:8-18, 14,15; a choice vine = Je 2:21; Je 12:10; Ezek 15:6, 7, 8; Ho 10:1)

Plunder (01500)(**gezelah**) describes that which is stolen or taken by force, stealth or deception. **Ezekiel** explains that the righteous person avoids this robbery or plunder (Ezek 18:7), but the evil person engages in it (Ezek. 18:12; 33:15). The **plunder** of those in Judah witnessed to their stealing from their neighbors.

The **Septuagint (LXX)** translates **gezelah** in this verse with **harpage** which describes the action of carrying off someone's belongings by force or seizure and in context describes the product of what has been seized from the poor.

Poor (06041) (**aniy**) (78v in the OT and 13 times in Isaiah - Is. 3:14, 15; 10:2, 30; 14:32; 26:6; 32:7; 41:17; 49:13; 51:21; 54:11; 58:7; 66:2) means to be low and thus lowly in the world's estimation. These are the afflicted, the humble, those who are suffering or in a state of poverty, oppression or misery especially because of lack of finances. These are those in society who are without (sufficient) property and therefore dependent on others.

The **Septuagint** translates **aniy** in this verse with the Greek word **ptochos [word study]** (from ptosso =crouch, cringe, cower down or hide oneself for fear, a picture of one crouching and cowering like a beggar with a tin cup to receive the pennies dropped in!) is an adjective which describes one who crouches and cowers and is used as a noun to mean **beggar**. These poor were unable to meet their basic needs and so were forced to depend on others or on society.

Motyer remarks that …

> It was a mark of true Israelite social morality to copy the Lord in his concern for the poor (Lv 19:10; Dt 15:7, 8, 9, 10, 11). They had forsaken both the letter and the spirit of the law. (Motyer, J. A. The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press)

The **Mosaic Law** was very clear about how the **poor** were to be treated…

> You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns. You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he may not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you. (Dt 24:14,15)
>
> If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks. (Dt 15:7, 8, cp the NT teaching 1Jn 3:7, Acts 9:36; 10:4, 31; 24:17; Jas 1:27; 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)
>
> Now in case a countryman of yours becomes poor and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. 'Do not take usurious interest from him (Dt 23:20), but revere your God, that your countryman may live with you. 'You shall not give him your silver at interest, nor your food for gain. (Lv 25:35, 36, 37)

Ed Young remarks that…

> This particular sin is singled out as an example of the lack of responsibility, the injustice and greediness of those who were in authority. It is a peculiar example of cruelty, and, for that reason, God will come to exact vengeance upon those who have been guilty of it.

Martin concludes that…

> A materialistic, oppressive spirit was symptomatic of the leaders' self-centeredness. Rather than seeing their leadership positions as service opportunities they saw them as means of making money at the expense of others. (Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary. 1985. Victor**or** Logos)

Roland Q. Leavell writes that…

> A social sin which was prevalent in Judah and Israel, a sin which aroused the prophets to indignant denunciation, was that of accursed greed for land and money. They were not inveighing against private ownership nor were they advocating socialism. They preached against an economic order which fostered mortgages and such heavy taxation that poor people were reduced to practical slavery. The merchants had two standards of measurement, a big measure to buy with and a small one to sell by. Worse than that, they put the bad wheat on the bottom of the bushel measure and the good on the top (Amos 8:5, 6). Isaiah was genuinely aroused. When greed of gain and covetousness were sapping the moral strength of the people and the nation, he thundered (the words in Isa 3:14, 15)

Isaiah 3:15 "What do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the face of the poor?" Declares the Lord GOD of hosts. (NASB: Lockman) (NASB: Lockman)

> **English Translation of the Greek** (Septuagint): Why do ye wrong my people, and shame the face of the poor?
>
> **Amplified**: What do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the faces of the poor? says the Lord God of hosts. (Amplified Bible - Lockman)
>
> **KJV**: What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord GOD of hosts.
>
> **NET**: Why do you crush my people and grind the faces of the poor?" The sovereign LORD who commands armies has spoken. (NET Bible)
>
> **NJB**: By what right do you crush my people and grind the faces of the poor?' says the Lord Yahweh Sabaoth. (NJB)
>
> **NLT**: How dare you grind my people into the dust like that!" demands the Lord, the LORD Almighty. (NLT - Tyndale House)
>
> **Young's Literal**: What -- to you? ye bruise My people, And the faces of the poor ye grind.' An affirmation of the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, And Jehovah saith:

"What do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the face of the poor?" Declares the Lord GOD of hosts

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- Ezek 18:2; Jonah 1:6
- Crushing - Is 58:4; Ex 5:14; Amos 2:6,7; 8:4, 5, 6; Mic 3:2,3

Why do you mean by crushing My people - This rhetorical question (ask for effect - Ortlund refers to it as "loving indignation") expresses the Lord God of hosts' outrage at what the leaders have done to the poor. The Lord God had entrusted them the stewardship of His vineyard and they had acted irresponsibly and irreverently.

Crushing (01792) (**daka**) speaks figuratively (and a vivid metaphor) of beating down, bruising or oppressing the people with the severest of maltreatment. In Is 53:5, 10KJV **daka** is translated **bruised**, speaking of our Redeemer's suffering.

Grinding the face of the poor - How? By plundering them in Is 3:14. This is a vivid metaphor that pictures the action of a millstone which in turn speaks of unmerciful severity by the **elders and princes**.

Grinding (02912) (**tahan**) means literally to grind mill as when grain between heavy millstones. As noted above in this verse **tahan** pictures the extreme degree of oppression exercised by the leaders against the poor, who were without human defenders.

Tahan - 8v in the OT - Exod. 32:20; Nu 11:8; Dt. 9:21; Jdg 16:21; Job 31:10; Eccl. 12:3; Is 3:15; 47:2

Walter L Wilson writes that **grinding the face**…

> refers to the suppressing of the poor until their faces show the anxiety and the distress that they are suffering from such oppression. (Wilson's Dictionary of Bible Types)

As strong as the expression grinding the face, **Micah** (prophesied to the Northern Kingdom circa 700BC contemporary of Isaiah, 740-680BC) is even more vivid declaring…

> And I said, "Hear now, heads of Jacob And rulers of the house of Israel. Is it not for you to know justice? 2 "You who hate good and love evil, who tear off their skin from them And their flesh from their bones, 3 And who eat the flesh of my people, Strip off their skin from them, Break their bones, And chop them up as for the pot And as meat in a kettle." (Micah 3:1, 2, 3).

Declares the Lord GOD of hosts - This section begins and ends with this title of God (see Is 3:1see notes). He is Adonai, the Sovereign Master, Elohim of the armies, and His Name undergirds His ability to accomplish the punishment He decrees against Judah and Jerusalem. Their judgment is indeed certain!