

Isaiah 10:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed;

Analysis

A woe oracle targets unjust lawmakers who create oppressive legislation. 'Decree unrighteous decrees' refers to enacting unjust laws. 'Write grievousness' means recording oppressive regulations—making injustice official policy. This demonstrates that individual sin isn't the only concern; systemic, institutionalized injustice incurs divine wrath. When legal systems become instruments of oppression rather than justice, God pronounces judgment. The Reformed tradition has always emphasized both personal and structural righteousness.

Historical Context

In 8th century BC Israel and Judah, corrupt judges and lawmakers systematically oppressed the poor (Amos 5:10-15; Micah 3:9-11). Legal systems favored the wealthy and powerful. Prophets like Isaiah condemned not just individual crimes but legal structures that perpetuated injustice. Babylonian law codes and court records from this era reveal widespread corruption. When legal systems fail to protect the vulnerable, societies deserve judgment.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How do unjust laws and policies multiply oppression beyond individual acts of wickedness?
2. What is our responsibility as citizens to advocate for just laws that protect the vulnerable?
3. How should Christians engage with legal and political systems to promote biblical justice?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵת הַנְּתָנוּ לְעֵתָה יְמִינָה
Woe unto them that decree decrees
H1945 H2710 H2711 H205

פִּתְבּוֹן וְאֵת כְּתָבָה
and that write grievousness
H3789 H5999

פִּתְבּוֹן
and that write
H3789

Additional Cross-References

Luke 11:52 (Parallel theme): Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.

Matthew 23:23 (Parallel theme): Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Isaiah 5:8 (Parallel theme): Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!

Habakkuk 2:6 (Parallel theme): Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!

Matthew 26:24 (Parallel theme): The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

Matthew 23:29 (Righteousness): Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

Matthew 23:27 (Parallel theme): Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

John 9:22 (Parallel theme): These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.

John 19:6 (Parallel theme): When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him.

Habakkuk 2:12 (Parallel theme): Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and establisheth a city by iniquity!