

We saw last time in ch 2 how the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty...

Introduction: The Call to Walk in the Light (2:1-5)

Chapters 2-4 sets forth

“the word that Isaiah the son of Amoz *saw* concerning Judah and Jerusalem.”

This is the basic message of the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah sees a vision of the latter days,
 when the mountain of the house of Yahweh—Jerusalem—
 “Shall be established as the highest of the mountains;
 and shall be lifted up above the hills;
 and all the nations shall flow to it.”

There will come a day when Zion will be the center of worship for the nations.
 Yahweh will be acknowledged as the true God.
 No longer will Jerusalem be the feeble capital of a beleaguered little kingdom,
 but the city of God will be the exalted above all the cities of the earth!

And many peoples will say,
 “Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh,
 to the house of the God of Jacob,
 that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” (2:3)
 The nations will desire to hear the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.
 And because they will accept Yahweh as the judge of the nations,
 they will no longer need their weapons.
 “He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples;
 and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
 and their spears into pruning hooks;
 nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
 neither shall they learn war anymore.” (2:4)

This is the vision that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

And Isaiah uses it to call the house of Jacob to repentance.
 One day the nations will say “come, let us go up to the house of the God of Jacob;”
 Someday the nations will seek to learn the law of Zion
 so that they might walk in the paths of Yahweh.
 If the nations will seek those paths, shouldn’t the house of Jacob?

“O House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of Yahweh.”

But there are two basic problems with Judah.

We heard of those in chapter 1.

In chapter one we saw that Judah's worship was unacceptable because of their failure to provide justice for the poor.

Here in chapters 2-4 Isaiah expands on the problem.

Judah has been compromised by idolatry and oppression.

Chapter two focuses on the idolatry of Judah, while chapter three deals with oppression.

Put simply, God's people have become like the nations.

Idolatry is what happens when we do not love the LORD our God with all our heart.

And oppression is what happens when we do not love our neighbor as ourselves.

And tonight we are looking particularly at our lack of love for our neighbors.

You can see in your bulletins how the passage is outlined.

Chapter 3 starts by looking at the catastrophic failure of the men of Judah – and ends with the haughty extravagance of the women.

Isaiah generally uses masculine imagery when referring to Judah or Israel and feminine imagery when referring to Jerusalem.

Part of this is simply because of the grammatical gender in Hebrew.

Nations are masculine – cities are feminine.

Israel is my son – my firstborn.

But Jerusalem is the bride – the daughter.

Chapter three speaks of the judgment that is coming upon Judah and Jerusalem.

And just as Judah is masculine and Jerusalem is feminine,

so also God proclaims judgment upon both men and women.

Verses 1-12 start with the destruction of the Leaders of Jerusalem and Judah

1. The Coming Day of the LORD (2:6-22)

a. God's People Have Become Like the Nations (v6-11)

b. The Day of the LORD Against All That Is Lifted Up (v12-19)

c. In That Day Mankind Will Cast Away Their Idols (v20-21)

d. So Stop Regarding Man! (v22)

2. The Coming Judgment upon Jerusalem (3:1-4:1)

a. A Catastrophic Failure of Men (v1-12)

For behold, the Lord GOD of hosts

is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah

support and supply,^[a]

all support of bread,

and all support of water;

² *the mighty man and the soldier,
the judge and the prophet,
the diviner and the elder,*
³ *the captain of fifty
and the man of rank,
the counselor and the skillful magician
and the expert in charms.*

When Isaiah says that the LORD is taking away “support and supply” –
he explains that he means “all support of bread, and all support of water.”

The basic necessities of life will be removed.
But the rest of the sentence focuses on the issue of *rulers*.

“The mighty man and the soldier, the judge and the prophet,
the diviner and the elder” –
these leaders who had led Judah into this mess!

Think about the last few elections.
How often do you say to yourself – “really, are these the only candidates for president?”
Well, that’s very much the place that Isaiah said that Judah would be.

But notice among the list of leaders –
in verses 2 and 3 you have the diviners, and the skillful magicians,
and the expert in charms.

Balaam was a diviner (Joshua 13:22) –
and Dt 18:10, 14 declared that there shall not be found among you a diviner.
1 Samuel 8 speaks of the Philistines calling for diviners –
and 2 Kings 17 says that the northern kingdom of Israel
was condemned by the LORD because they used divination.

Divination is the practice of trying to consult with spirits –
either the spirits of the gods – or deceased humans.
Divination refuses to go to God the way that he commanded us to!
Divination is an attempt to manipulate the spiritual world to get what we want.

The term is *never* used positively in the whole Bible.
So when Isaiah says that the diviners will be taken away,
that is sort of a good thing –
except for the fact that they were there in the first place!

The ESV translates the next verse in this light:
“the skillful magician and the expert in charms” –

but I'm not convinced that these are good translations.

The King James Version provides somewhat more neutral translations:
“the cunning artificer and the eloquent orator.”

I like this better because this simply communicates the basic idea –
without passing judgment on it in advance!

A cunning artificer is someone who is good at concocting potions.
He is the pharmacist of the ancient world.
Every town should have someone who is good at concocting potions
if you're having trouble sleeping – or having trouble getting pregnant...

The term *can* have magical connotations –
and in the ancient world, concocting potions was considered “magic.”
But you don't find the “cunning artificer” *condemned* in Scripture.

Likewise, the “expert in charms” (which the King James renders “eloquent orator”),
is one who is discerning in his “whispering” –
which *can* be used for prayer –
whispering in a quiet voice to God (Is 26:16) –
but it can also be used for incantations or enchantments
(it's the term used for “charming” snakes).
The image here is one who “charms” in his words –
one who uses his voice to manipulate.

If you think about it,
the difference between the ancient world and the modern world is not all that great.

They trusted in skillful artificers – those who could concoct herbal remedies.
We trust in skillful artificers (called *pharmacists*) who do the same thing!
They trusted in eloquent orators – those who use their voices to charm and manipulate –
and so do we – therapists and counselors – we now have “life coaches”!

What I find interesting is that Deuteronomy only *condemns* the diviners.
Herbal remedies are never condemned –
after all – God is the one who made all things!
Therefore, if you are using the things that God made in honor of him,
that's great!
You can be a pharmacist and worship the LORD!
The problem comes when we value created things
more highly than we value the Creator!

In the same way, it's fine to be a therapist, a counselor, and a life coach!

The eloquent orator only becomes an “expert in charms”
when the diviner has taken his place among the elders!

The point here in these opening verses is that the *men* of Judah will be removed.

All of those who were *trusted leaders* will be taken away.

The military leaders,
the spiritual leaders,
the civic leaders,
and the neighborhood leaders (even the pharmacist and the therapist)!

And what happens when you have a crisis in leadership?

i. Infants Rule – People Oppress (v4-5)

⁴ *And I will make boys their princes,
and infants^[b] shall rule over them.*

⁵ *And the people will oppress one another,
every one his fellow
and every one his neighbor;
the youth will be insolent to the elder,
and the despised to the honorable.*

Judah will have no one left but boys to lead them.

Notice that Isaiah does not say that only the boys will be left alive!

No, verse 5 makes clear that “the youth will be insolent to the elder,
and the despised to the honorable.”

The problem is a fate *worse* than death:

why are infants ruling over them?

(Imagine the tyranny that would exist if a two-year old was in charge!!)

Because no one else will!

Indeed verses 6-7 express the desolation of the land nicely:

ii. Failure of Rule (v6-7)

⁶ *For a man will take hold of his brother
in the house of his father, saying:*

*“You have a cloak;
you shall be our leader,*

*and this heap of ruins
shall be under your rule”;*

⁷ *in that day he will speak out, saying:*

*“I will not be a healer;^[c]
in my house there is neither bread nor cloak;
you shall not make me*

leader of the people.”

Anyone who has a cloak is sufficient to be king of rubble!
But no one will take the job.

All this is because...

iii. Because Jerusalem Has Become Sodom (v8-9)

⁸ *For Jerusalem has stumbled,
and Judah has fallen,
because their speech and their deeds are against the LORD,
defying his glorious presence.^[d]*
⁹ *For the look on their faces bears witness against them;
they proclaim their sin like Sodom;
they do not hide it.
Woe to them!
For they have brought evil on themselves.*

Just look at them!

You can tell from the look on their faces that they have sinned.

They proclaim their sin like Sodom –
they don't hide it!
When people are ashamed of their sin – they hide it.
But Jerusalem no longer hides it.
They are openly proclaiming their rebellion.

And Isaiah proclaims two woes against them:

1) Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves.

God's justice is a sort of poetic justice.
The judgment fits the crime.

iv. The Righteous and the Wicked Shall Receive Their Due (v10-11)

¹⁰ *Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them,
for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds.*
¹¹ *Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him,
for what his hands have dealt out shall be done to him.*

And in verses 10-11 there is a contrast made between the righteous and the wicked.

It shall be well with the righteous – for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds.
Again we see God's poetic justice at work!
Those who sow justice will reap justice.

Those who practice righteousness will receive a harvest of righteousness in return.

I can't tell you how many times I have heard parents say:

“I taught my children better than that!!”

A few times I have known them long enough –

or had sufficient relationship with them! –

to ask, “Yes, but what did you *model* for them?”

How did you live in front of them?

We are called to live faithfully.

We are called to do justice and righteousness!

Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them,

for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds.

But then comes the second woe:

2) Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him,

for what his hands have dealt out shall be done to him.

Notice that the righteous are spoken of in the plural (God views them collectively);

But the wicked are addressed in the singular (God views them individually).

God will single out the wicked and ensure that they get what they deserve!

We heard earlier, in verses 4-5,

that I will make boys their princes and infants shall rule over them.

And the people will oppress one another, every one his fellow...

When two-year olds are in charge, all hell breaks loose!

But now in verse 12 Isaiah changes the tune slightly:

v. Women Rule – Infants Oppress (v12)

¹² *My people—infants are their oppressors,
and women rule over them.*

*O my people, your guides mislead you
and they have swallowed up^[e] the course of your paths.*

Isaiah laments in verse 12

“My people—infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them—

O my people, your guides mislead you

and they have swallowed up the course of your paths.”

Isaiah is speaking in the days of Ahaz and Hezekiah –

just 100 years after the death of Queen Athaliah (the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel).

King Uzziah (remember that Isaiah is called to prophesy “in the year that King Uzziah died”)
Uzziah is the grandson of Joash – who himself was the grandson of Athaliah.

So when Isaiah says that “women rule over them” –
you are supposed to remember Athaliah, who murdered her own grandchildren,
and Jezebel (her mother) who murdered the innocent.

Why was there never a ruling queen of Judah?

Some have argued that there is a biblical principle here –
John Knox tried to use this as an argument in his
“First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women.”
He objected strenuously to Mary Tudor –
the Queen of England known to history as “Bloody Mary” –
and also opposed Mary Stuart, Mary, Queen of Scots
(and the third Mary – Mary Guise,
who served as Queen Regent in Scotland before her daughter,
Mary Stuart, came to power).

But I would suggest a very different reason:
The Son of David is not merely a king.
His kingship is not just a “model” for earthly kings.
He is the forerunner for the Messiah.

And a woman could not be the Messiah.
The Messiah had to be born of woman
(the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent) –
but he had to be a man –
he had to be the second Adam.

Verses 13-15 then portray the LORD standing to judge the peoples:

b. The LORD Will Judge Those Who Grind the Face of the Poor (v13-15)

¹³ *The LORD has taken his place to contend;
he stands to judge peoples.*

¹⁴ *The LORD will enter into judgment
with the elders and princes of his people:
“It is you who have devoured¹⁴ the vineyard,
the spoil of the poor is in your houses.*

¹⁵ *What do you mean by crushing my people,
by grinding the face of the poor?”
declares the Lord GOD of hosts.*

Yahweh will not sit silent.

He has taken his place to contend; he stands to judge the peoples.

Yahweh is not merely a local deity who judges Judah alone,
he judges all peoples.
But now he turns his judgment against his own people,
and especially their elders and princes.
“It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses.
What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?
declares the Lord Yahweh of Hosts.”

Do you hear echoes of how Jezebel handed the vineyard of Naboth to Ahab?
“you have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses”?

You are to use your power to love those around you and protect them.
You may not have much power.
That’s okay.
But when you see someone in a vulnerable place,
what do you do?
Do you help them?
Or do you take advantage of them?

“Come, let us reason together, says Yahweh,
though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.”
That’s what Isaiah had said in chapter 1:18,
but remember the caveat in the next verse:
“If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land;
but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword.”

As the covenant lawsuit progresses, it’s not looking very good for the leaders of Judah.

c. The Haughty Extravagance of the Women (v16-4:1)

And neither is it looking very good for the daughters of Zion.
The first half of the chapter spoke of the failure of male leadership.
The second half of the chapter turns to the haughty extravagance of the women.

i. The Haughtiness of the Daughters of Zion Leads to Judgment (v16-17)

¹⁶ *The LORD said:
Because the daughters of Zion are haughty
and walk with outstretched necks,
glancing wantonly with their eyes,
mincing along as they go,
tinkling with their feet,
¹⁷ therefore the Lord will strike with a scab
the heads of the daughters of Zion,*

and the LORD will lay bare their secret parts.

When “daughter Zion” is used in the singular it generally refers to Zion – who is the daughter.
But when “daughters of Zion” is used in the plural,
it generally refers to the cities of Judah.

(Verse 26 is what convinced me finally of this – “her gates” is speaking of a city!)

It may also have some reference to the women who lived there –
but you should not imagine that all the women of Jerusalem
(including the little old ladies)
were glancing wantonly with their eyes as they walked down the street,
“mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet”!

The point is that when a city forgets the LORD,
that will have practical implications:
the city will be looking around for protection –
looking around for who to “love” –
and when faced with powerful enemies,
the city will be willing to sell herself to the highest bidder.

And that happens to women.

When a woman feels unprotected,
she knows that she is vulnerable.

She has this unique and amazing power to reproduce the image of God in her womb.

But she knows that there are men out there who would take advantage of that.

Faced with an uncertain future –

if she forgets the LORD, she will be looking around for protection –
looking around for who to love –

and she may well “sell herself” to the highest bidder (the “best option”).

Do you see why Isaiah portrays the cities of Judah as women?

You are looking for love in all the wrong places.

And you have abandoned the one who *loves you!*

And so again we hear the phrase “in that day.”

We last heard it at the end of chapter 2,
as God spoke of the judgment that was falling upon
the idolaters of Judah and indeed, of all mankind.

But in that day...

ii. All the Finery Will Be Replaced by Rotteness (v18-24)

¹⁸ *In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents;*

¹⁹ *the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves;* ²⁰ *the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the*

perfume boxes, and the amulets; ²¹ the signet rings and nose rings; ²² the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; ²³ the mirrors, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils.

*²⁴ Instead of perfume there will be rotteness;
and instead of a belt, a rope;
and instead of well-set hair, baldness;
and instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth;
and branding instead of beauty.*

You sought wealth and outward beauty –
you sought to use all your finery and adornments to promote yourself.

But in that same day God will also bring judgment upon the daughters of Zion
for their worldly ways.
All of their fancy clothes, and perfumes, and jewelry will be taken away.
And as he used the phrase “against all” of that which was haughty and lifted up,
now he speaks of five replacements for the beauty of women:
“Instead of perfume there will be rotteness
Instead of a belt, a rope;
instead of well-set hair, baldness;
instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth;
and branding instead of beauty.”

These women had once tried to allure men with their charms and their fancy clothes,
but now they will have nothing to offer.

iii. The Seven Women (v25-4:1)

*²⁵ Your men shall fall by the sword
and your mighty men in battle.*

*²⁶ And her gates shall lament and mourn;
empty, she shall sit on the ground.*

*4 And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, “We will eat our own bread
and wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name; take away our reproach.”*

But of course, given what has happened to all the men,
they will have no one to offer it to! (3:25-4:1)
With their men slaughtered in battle,
the daughters of Zion will seek for a husband just like Judah sought for leaders,
and with about the same success.
All of their worldly allurements are of no use.

Verses 25-26 are sobering.

Isaiah seems to suggest that the enticing allurements of the daughters of Zion
are connected to the death of their mighty men in battle.

Her gates – the city gates – are empty.

Judgment has fallen on the daughters of Zion.

We have no leaders – and our cities are empty.

3. Jerusalem's Purification (4:2-6)

a. The Branch of the LORD (v2)

² In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel.

But in that day,
and after hearing that phrase twice now to their damnation,
we are expecting the worst!

But “In that day the branch of Yahweh shall be beautiful and glorious,
and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel.”
Frequently the “Branch” language refers to the branch of David,
but here it is the branch of Yahweh.
God has pruned away most of the tree,
but he has left himself a branch.
And this branch is everything that the degraded daughters of Zion are not:
Beautiful and glorious!

The Branch will come, the fruit of the land, which will be the pride and honor of Israel
Yes, that is Israel, not just Judah.
Isaiah speaks of the restored kingdom.
A restored kingdom that will once again be centered in Jerusalem.

b. Purification by Fire (v3-4)

³ And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, ⁴ when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning.^[g]

There is a day coming when Jerusalem shall be restored as the city of the Great King,
when “he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy,
everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem,
when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion
and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst
by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning.”

A day will come when God will cleanse his holy city,
and all the remnant of Israel will be holy.
But this cleansing is a cleansing by a spirit of judgment and burning/or purging.

It is this sort of description that led John the Baptist to say that Jesus would come with a baptism of spirit and fire.
Spirit and fire baptism is at the heart of the coming of the Messiah.

The Messiah – and Isaiah is plainly referring to the Messianic age – will come and purify Zion,
not just restoring the glory of Moses,
but fulfilling the glory of Moses,
bringing about that to which Moses himself only pointed.

(Read 5-6)

c. Cloud by Day and Fire by Night – the Presence of the LORD (v5-6)

⁵ Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. ⁶ There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

The canopy in the OT is always a marriage chamber
(this will be a prominent theme later in Isaiah)
Isaiah uses the language of Mosaic glory–
the cloud by day and smoke and shining flame by night–
but this is not simply a pillar of cloud over the tabernacle,
but a canopy over the entire “site of Mt Zion”

Isaiah sees the glory of the Messianic age and he calls those on the brink of exile to forsake their foolish ways.

Why are you focused on temporary gain?!
Why do you oppress your neighbor?
Why do you concern yourself with how good you look?
Why do you run after your own pleasures?

God is going to remove all those things.

For those of us who live as elect exiles in the midst of a kingdom that is not our home, we need to hear these words as well.

The only way that Isaiah’s hearers can survive the coming wrath of God, is to keep their hearts and minds fixed upon the beautiful and glorious branch.

To endure through the dark hours of exile,
you must remember the vision of the glory of the shining flame of fire
that will rest over the whole site of Mount Zion.
you must remember the canopy–the marriage chamber–
where God himself will bring you at the consummation of all things.