

JERUSALEM FROM THREE PERSPECTIVES¹

Isaiah 2, 3, and 4

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Introduction

In Isaiah 1 the prophet unleashed numerous denunciations of God's people that spanned the reigns of Uzziah through Hezekiah. Judah and Jerusalem (especially Jerusalem) had become so corrupt that God sarcastically called their citizens "rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah" (v. 10). Through the prophet, God implored his people to come and reason with Him about the remedy for their sins (v. 18). Since they would not do so, but were determined to persist in their spiritual harlotry (v. 21), God promised to consume the transgressors and sinners among them (v. 28). However, they would not be utterly consumed. In His judgment upon them He would purge the dross and restore righteousness and justice to Zion (vv. 25–27). In chapters 2–4 Isaiah described Jerusalem from three perspectives. He first presents the perfected Jerusalem in its final, spiritual state (2:1–4), followed by a description of the polluted city he saw all about him as he wrote (2:5–4:1), and finally, he set forth the purified city (4:2–6). Now let us turn to a study of these inspired descriptions.

The Perfected Jerusalem—Isaiah 2:1–4

A Second Introduction (v. 1)

Verse 1: As he had done in 1:1, Isaiah introduced himself again. However, instead of the vision he saw in the former passage, he spoke of seeing the Word of the Lord in this passage. Perhaps the import of this is that he perceived and understood the meaning of the vision and message God gave him. He did not speak out of his own human knowledge and wisdom, but what he said was what "Jehovah hath spoken" (1:2), "the word of Jehovah" (v. 10), what "saith Jehovah" (v. 18), what "the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken" (v. 19), and what "saith the Lord" (v. 24). Isaiah unmistakably claimed inspiration from the beginning of his book, and it is this inspired Word which he saw and to which he referred in 2:1).

The Perfected City Described (vv. 2–4)

Verse 2: In this verse Isaiah uttered a prophecy involving several elements:

1. A certain time ("the latter days")
2. An institution ("the mountain of Jehovah's house")
3. The future establishment of that institution ("shall be established")
4. A general location for its establishment ("on the top of the mountains")
5. A place it would occupy above others ("and exalted above the hills")
6. The involvement all nations ("all nations shall flow unto it")

The latter days (*last days*, KJV) obviously refers to a time yet future to Isaiah, but when? Probably the most conclusive evidence of the time to which he pointed is Peter's quotation and application on Pentecost of Joel's prophecy : "And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour forth my Spirit upon all flesh..." (Acts. 2:17). Peter used this quotation from Joel to explain the miraculous phenomena the Holy Spirit demonstrated through the apostles on that occasion (vv. 1–13). Note the time element: "the last days." Actually, the statement from Joel 2:28 says, "And it shall come to pass afterward" (both ASV and KJV). Thus, Peter, by inspiration, used *last days* to interpret the time Joel referred to as "afterward." Very specifically, Peter said, "This [which you are seeing and hearing] is that [which the prophet described]..." None can doubt that this was the case without impugning the inspiration of the apostle. Note how closely Peter's description of the time in Joel's prophecy ("last days") compares with the description in Isaiah's prophecy ("latter days"). Daniel used the same words to describe the time when Nebuchadnezzar's dream would be fulfilled, which would eventuate in the establishment by God of an everlasting kingdom (Dan. 2:28, 44).

Clearly, such expressions as "afterward," "the last days," and "the latter days" (lit., "in after times") all refer to sometime in the future from that of the prophets. However, as Albert Barnes pointed out,

But as the coming of the Messiah was to the eye of a Jew the most important event in the coming ages...the phrase came to be regarded as properly expressive of that... The **last days**, or the closing period of the world, were the days of the Messiah.²

In arguing that *the latter days* is a reference to the Christian Age, Edward Young makes the following observations:

In the first place, it is thus often employed in the Old Testament of the time when the Messianic salvation will be accomplished. In the second place the New Testament definitely and clearly applies the phrase in this eschatological sense to that period of time which began with the first advent of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; Jas. 5:3; 1 Pet. 1:5, 20; 2 Pet. 3:3 and 1 John 2:18).³

When Peter applied Joel's prophecy to the events of the moment and thereby declared that its time of fulfillment had arrived, he was also, by extension and implication, declaring that the time of fulfillment for all of the other Messianic and kingdom prophecies had arrived. The reign of the Christ was indeed to be the last or latter days—His reign would be succeeded by none other. There would be no other age, world, or dispensation of time. While *the end of these days* (*these last days*, KJV) in Hebrews 1:2 is understood by some to refer to the end of the Mosaic Age and Judaism, it also is possible (cf. Young as quoted above) that these words are a reference to the Christian Age in which the Son of God reigns and through Whom God speaks. (Also, compare Paul's use of *the fulness of the time* [Gal. 4:4], *later times* [1 Tim. 4:1], *last days* [2 Tim. 3:1], and *end[s] of the ages* [Heb. 9:26; 1 Cor. 10:11].)

I conclude from the foregoing information that the time element of Isaiah 2:2 and Daniel 2:28, 44, as well as that of Joel 2:28–32, had arrived in the events described in Acts 2. (Note the memory aid: the events prophesied in Isaiah 2, Daniel 2, and Joel 2 find their fulfillment in the events of Acts 2.) The Pentecost Day on which Peter declared, “This is that...,” was the one immediately following the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of the Christ (Luke 23:32–24:53; Acts 1:1–2:16) in about A.D. 30.

“The mountain of Jehovah’s house,” which is the subject of Isaiah’s prophecy, was to be built in the “latter days.” *Mountains* is used as a figure for kingdoms in Psalms 76:4. Jeremiah referred to Babylon as a “mountain” (Jer. 51:25). I believe it was so used by Isaiah. The Jews therefore identified “the mountain of Jehovah’s house” with the Messianic kingdom. They looked for that everlasting kingdom and throne God had promised to a son of David (2 Sam. 7:12–13) and that kingdom which Daniel foresaw that would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44). I agree with W. W. Kay’s succinct identification of this “mountain of Jehovah’s house” as “The mountain which God will establish for His household, the Church—the antitypical Zion.”⁴ Paul’s description of the church as “the house of God” (1 Tim. 3:15) confirms the identity of the institution that was to be established in “the latter days” as the kingdom, the church of Christ. Jesus was speaking of this very same institution when He said He would build His church in spite of the mightiest force Satan could apply to prevent it (Mat. 16:18). The Lord immediately referred to His church as “the kingdom” (v. 19).

This kingdom/church was to be established “on the top of the mountains.” To those who heard these words this could only refer to their literal Zion, their holy city of Jerusalem. It was built upon the highest peaks of Judah. For this reason, therefore, from whatever direction one might approach the city, the Bible invariably speaks of going “up” to Jerusalem. When this description of topography is combined with the specific naming of Zion and Jerusalem in connection with related events in verse 3, the place at which the Lord’s house was to be established is unarguable. It is appropriate to notice that Paul, whom I assume wrote the Hebrews letter, made the church, God’s eternal kingdom, the anti-type of the literal Mount Zion and Jerusalem:

But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, ...to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.... Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe (Heb. 12:22–23, 28).

This house was not only going to be established, but it was going to be exalted above the hills surrounding it. Homer Hailey says simply: “It would transcend all the kingdoms of the world in greatness and grandeur.”⁵ Similarly, Daniel prophesied of a stone cut out without hands that

smote all other kingdoms and then became a great mountain that filled the whole earth (Dan. 2:35). The parable of the mustard seed and the leaven give us a similar message (Mat. 13: 31–33). However, it is possible that more than exaltation above secular kingdoms is meant. Since this was to be a spiritual kingdom, could it be that the point of its exaltation is that it would be vastly superior to every other religious system or institution? Whether or not this is the meaning of the prophecy, this most surely is the Truth. Using a different figure, Jesus said, “Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up” (Mat. 15:13). The church of the Lord is the superior institution, compared to which there is none other. The only religious institution on the face of the earth that exists with the approval of God is the church of Christ!

All nations, not merely the Jews, were to “flow unto it.” This is manifestly a prophecy of the inclusion of the Gentiles in this new spiritual kingdom God would build in Jerusalem in the latter days. It reaches all the way back to the call of Abram to be the father of God’s great nation and the promise God made to him that in him all of the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8). But some Gentile-hating Jew may have objected, “Isaiah did not say the Gentiles would be in it, but that they merely would come unto it.” The next verse makes it obvious that **they were to be in it**.

Verse 3: Here the Gentiles are called “many peoples.” This implies not only multitudes, but also people from all the Gentile races. They would be so attracted to this marvelous, exalted new kingdom that they would stream into the city. They would eagerly go themselves and urge others to go with them. Unlike the deaf and rebellious Jews of Isaiah’s time, the uncircumcised would zealously seek to learn the teachings of Jehovah that they might walk in them. Let us pause long enough to make two observations:

1. Correct teaching always precedes correct conduct. Likewise, corrupt teaching produces corrupt behavior. This is true in the areas of both doctrine and morals. One cannot be taught incorrectly on baptism and somehow “automatically” be Scripturally baptized as some are now insisting. This principle illustrates why there are some among us so vigorously attacking the Word of God by insisting upon a “new hermeneutic,” by calling it a mere “love letter” from God rather than “case law” to be rigidly obeyed, by denying the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, and by saying that fellowship with others should rest on only a few “core” principles of the Gospel such as belief in the Deity of Christ and His atonement for our sins. Their aim is to change and restructure the church of Christ utterly into their own denominational model. They know that they cannot do this without first destroying respect for the Word of God and its authority over our lives. Only when they have done this in a congregation (and they have been alarmingly successful already) can they then change the practices of the church (the worship,

the role of women, the organization, the plan of salvation, et al.) that will cause it to lose its identity as the Lord's body.

2. In keeping with the above, there are many of the Lord's own people in these times who are less likely to hear what He says in His Word than those out in the world. They have no respect for the Bible, either in doctrine or morals. They, as did the Jews of the time of Isaiah, are walking in deafness to and rebellion against every plea for them to return to Him and serve Him faithfully as they once did. But it appears that we could sooner convert the Pope of Rome than to affect their repentance.

It was on that Pentecost described in Acts 2 that the "Great Commission" of our Lord began to be fulfilled, just as the Lord had instructed the apostles. That the Gentiles were included in that commission is incontrovertible. The Gospel of that commission was to be taken to "all nations" (Mat. 28:19), to "all the world," and "to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). Significantly, that saving Gospel was to be preached "unto all the nations, **beginning from Jerusalem**" (Luke 24:47, emp. DM). Likewise, just before His ascension, the Lord instructed the eleven apostles to stay in Jerusalem until they received power (i.e., were baptized in the Holy Spirit), after which they were to be His witnesses beginning **in Jerusalem** and finally "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:4–5, 8). Acts 2:1–4 describes the mighty power God exhibited that day when He baptized the apostles in the Holy Spirit. As noted earlier, Peter unmistakably identified what happened to them with the prophecy of Joel (vv. 16–21). Among those who marveled at the mighty miracles they saw were not only Jews "from every nation under heaven" (v. 6), but proselytes (i.e., Gentiles who had adopted Judaism) as well (v. 10). He went on to preach to all who would listen (Jew and Gentile alike) about Jesus as the Christ, convinced many of this fact, and then told them they must repent and be baptized by His authority if they would have remission of sins (vv. 37–38). He continued preaching thereafter and told them that "the promise" was to them and their children "and to all them that are afar off" (v. 39). The latter phrase is an obvious reference to Gentiles. We therefore see that Gentiles in Jerusalem on this Pentecost were inquiring about this new kingdom and desiring to enter it.

The building of this glorious kingdom in Zion would be characterized by the going forth of the Law from Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. This is simply the statement of the same fact in two expressions so that none could miss it. The law that was to go forth was not the Old Law God had given to Moses, for it had gone forth from Sinai some eight hundred years before Isaiah's time. Besides, that Old Law was not addressed to and did not include Gentiles except in a peripheral way. No, this Law and Word of the Lord that would go forth was to be a New Law to accompany the setting up of this glorious and exalted new kingdom in Zion.

Did a New Law go forth from Jerusalem on Pentecost? Indeed it did! The sermon that Peter with the eleven preached on that day was a message that had never been preached before. It not only proved that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the resurrected, ascended, and enthroned Son of God, but it told men for the first time ever how they could have complete and immediate forgiveness of sins. Ironically, it was through the blood of the very One Whom they had crucified only fifty days before that this new covenant and its full forgiveness was possible. He was the perfect sacrificial Lamb who took away the sins of the world through the sacrifice of His own blood (John 1:29; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 18–20).

This Law/Word that would go forth from Jerusalem was the New Covenant of which Jeremiah prophesied a century later (Jer. 31:31–34). Under it forgiveness of sins would be granted wherein sins would be remembered no more, rather than remembered year by year, as under the Old Covenant. Paul identified Jeremiah’s prophecy with the Gospel, our Lord’s New Testament, and said that it was a “better covenant, . . . enacted upon better promises” (Heb. 8:6, 8–12). The going forth of the Law/Word from Zion/Jerusalem in connection with the establishment of the “mountain of Jehovah’s house” is simply a prophecy that the universal Gospel would be preached when the church was established.

Verse 4: This verse declares that God will judge between the nations, which indeed He does concerning all the nations, whether His people or not (Psa. 2:10–12; Jon. 1:1–2; Mic. 1:2–4; 5:15; Mat. 28:18; et al.) However, we must remember that what Isaiah said here was said in the context of referring to the many nations that would come into His new house in Jerusalem. This is a description of His judgmental and governmental power pertaining to His church in particular. The way He would (does) judge them is through His Word that would be (was) issued at Jerusalem—first issued when His church began on Pentecost. That Word determined (judged) who was and who was not added to the church by declaring the terms of entrance (Acts 2:38–41, 47). It also determined (judged) what was and what was not acceptable behavior in the kingdom by its fuller teaching given through the apostles (v. 42).

Therefore, Isaiah was not speaking of the world at large, but of the populace of the new kingdom of God when he wrote of the conversion of the instruments of war into instruments of peace and productivity. Unregenerate men will lead their respective nations into wars until time is no more. Far from any reference to a mythical millennial kingdom of the Messiah in which all of the nations of the world would destroy their armaments and live in perfect peace on the earth, Isaiah was speaking of the peace the Gospel would bring among former enemies who obeyed it. They would then be in one kingdom, all fighting their mutual foes together, instead of fighting one another. The Law of the Prince of Peace, when fully obeyed, results in peace because those who live by it are peacemakers rather than war- and strife-makers (Mat. 5:9). Jesus came as our

Peacemaker and preached peace both between God and man and between men who were once enemies (Jew and Gentile) (Eph. 2: 14–19).

”But,” some will say, “why then is there factionalism, unrest, and division in the church?” The answer is, “For the same reason there were these things in the new kingdom when the inspired apostles and prophets walked the earth and delivered the New Law infallibly” (Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 1:10–13; Gal. 1:6–9; Eph. 5:11; et al.). The degree to which peace fails to reign in the kingdom is not the fault of the King, His law, or His kingdom, but it is in direct proportion to the failure of His subjects to submit to His Divine authority. It is strange indeed that many moderns among God’s people have thrown off the very Law of God for His kingdom and are publicly demonstrating and preaching that they will walk no more in it. It is further oddly ironic that the division they are causing through their carnal lusts for denominational and intellectual prestige they are blaming on God’s perfect pattern for His church and on those who are determined to follow it! We plead with these brethren to beat their new hermeneutical ”swords” into “plowshares” of reverence for the Truth. Let them beat their liberal “spears” that mock God into “pruning-hooks” of the fear of God. Only then will be able once more to march as a solid and unified phalanx against the powers of darkness and the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12).

That Isaiah foretold in this remarkable prophecy the establishment of the church on the first Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Christ is beyond doubt.

1. It was the right time—the “latter days” (Acts 2:16:17)
2. It was the right place—the tops of the mountains, Zion, Jerusalem (Acts 1:4, 12; 2:14)
3. It involved the right circumstance—the issuance of the Word of the Lord, the Gospel of Christ (Acts. 2:14–40)
4. It involved the right people—all nations, the Gentiles as well as the Jews (Mat. 28:19; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:47; Acts 2:10, 39)
5. It involved the right result—people were told how to enter into it and about three thousand did so that first day (Acts 2:38, 41)
6. It involved the beginning of the right institution—the kingdom, “Jehovah’s house,” the church was established as the result of the events of that day (Acts 2:41, 47)

We ask the skeptic, the atheist, the agnostic, the modernist, “What mere man could ever see into the future seven centuries and foretell what would occur with such stunning accuracy as Isaiah did here without the guidance of One who can see the future as plainly as He can the past?” This passage provides a powerful argument, not only for the inspiration of Isaiah and by implication for the Bible as a whole, but for the very existence of God!

We must not pass from this section without at least some comment on the fact that almost word for word, and certainly with identical meaning, this same prophecy appears in Micah 4:1–3. Commentators (many of them skeptics and modernists) have made many foolish

conjectures about whether Isaiah copied Micah, Micah copied Isaiah, or they both copied an anonymous source. Of course, for those who believe in the inspiration of both prophets there is no problem whatsoever. My judgment on these parallel passages remains what it was in my earlier commentary on Micah: “A senseless controversy has long existed concerning which prophet borrowed from the other. The simple truth is that the same Spirit moved both of these men who lived at the same time and addressed the same people to serve as two independent witnesses of this prophecy of surpassing significance.”⁶

The Polluted Jerusalem—Isaiah 2:5–4:1

Transition from Predicted Perfection to Present Pollution (2:5–11)

Verse 5: The description of the submission of even the heathen nations to the will of God in the perfect kingdom (vv. 2–3) provides a foundation for Isaiah to appeal to God’s own people to do so in the present. He issues first a command for them to come from their evil ways and then exhorts them to walk with him in the Lord’s way (“the light of Jehovah”).

Verse 6: This verse begins an address to God (which I suppose we could refer to as a prayer), rather than to the people, which address extends through verse 9. Isaiah was in agony over his people. God had forsaken them because they had taken up the pagan and superstitious ways of foreigners. Contrast this with God’s ideal kingdom in Jerusalem wherein the heathen would come to learn of the ways of God (v. 3). Moses had specifically warned them not to associate with the uncircumcised nations because He knew that just such corruption of His people would occur (Deu. 7:1–5). Do those in the kingdom today who take greater delight in associating in compromising ways with those in the denominations than they do with their own faithful brethren please the Lord any more than those Isaiah thus condemned?

Verse 7: The little nation of Judah had accumulated much silver and gold and many horses and chariots, both of which Moses specifically forbade the kings of God’s people to do (Deu. 17:16–17). At least four good reasons indicate why these things were dangerous to God’s people:

1. The accumulation of great possessions easily becomes an insatiable lust for even more.
2. The wealth, horses, and chariots would tend to make them feel self-sufficient rather than to trust in God.
3. Great riches generally tend toward the breakdown of spiritual and moral principle in those who possess them.
4. The wealth and the multiplying of horses and chariots would attract unfavorable attention from their enemies.

The first three of these dangers remain for citizens of the spiritual kingdom who set their minds on heaping up earthly riches and power (1 Tim. 6:9-10, 17).

Verse 8: The greater tragedy than a land filled with wealth and power was that the land was filled with idols, which they had fashioned with their own hands. Later, the prophet well argued the utter folly and vanity of falling down before an idol thus crafted (44:9–20). The picture he paints is tragically humorous—a man uses a piece of wood to cook his food, then takes an unburned piece and carves an idol before which he bows down and is too stupid to realize what he has done! However, those today who still bow before idols of wood, stone, or metal, or the no-less-real gods of false philosophies, carnal appetites, or mere human demigods are just as full of nonsense and are just as repugnant to God and all right-thinking men.

Verse 9: Now the consequence of the Godless behavior just described is stated: all men, whether of low (“mean”) or high (“great”) estate will be brought low, humiliated. The people are so corrupt that they do not deserve forgiveness and Isaiah does not intercede for them. The prophet’s address to God thus ends.

Verse 10: He addresses the people again with advice that they seek shelter in the rocky caverns of the hills or the dusty holes in the ground from the impending judgment of God upon them (cf. v. 19). Of course, it is impossible to thus hide from God, but Isaiah was trying to impress upon them the terribleness and awfulness of God’s judgment upon them for their apostasy. He would come in glorious majesty and would strike terror to their hearts. Just so, the final Judgment of our Lord will be at His coming to those who have not obeyed Him (Mat. 25:31–46; 2 The. 1:7–10).

Verse 11: This verse is a recapitulation of verses 6–10. The self-exaltation and haughtiness of God’s people that led them to despise God and depart from Him will all be brought to nought. In their place, God alone will be exalted. The immediate judgment came upon those people a century later when God sent Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian against Jerusalem, totally destroyed it, and took Judah into captivity. However, all lesser judgments against evil and which result in the exaltation of God are but typical of the great and final Judgment when all evil shall be put down and God and His Son shall be exalted forevermore. Paul used a passage from Isaiah to describe that Judgment to end all judgments when each shall bow before God and give account of himself (Rom. 14:10b-12; cf. Isa. 45:23).

Accomplishments of the Day of Jehovah (2:12–22)

Verse 12: These words serve as an introduction to the remainder of the section, telling us once more (cf. v. 11) that all haughty men must be crushed. The following verses of the section itemize how thoroughly this would be done to all of the things in which God’s people were trusting.

Verses 13–18: In order to illustrate the fullness of the judgment of the “day of the Lord” Isaiah listed five pairs of exalted things that would be crushed:

1. The cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan (v. 13)
2. The high mountains and the hills (v. 14)
3. The lofty towers and the fortified walls (v. 15)
4. The ships of Tarshish and “all pleasant imagery” (“ships of pleasure”⁷), thus, all ships, whether for commerce or for pleasure (v. 16)
5. The loftiness and haughtiness of man (v. 17)

In graphic terms the thoroughness of the judgment of God upon Judah was set forth so that it could not be misunderstood. The first four of these couplets are not of themselves objectionable to God, but the fact that His people had come to trust in them and thus to reject Him in their pride was the reason even those material things must be destroyed. In this way alone could man’s own pride be exposed and could He see God in His true light, alone exalted! Perhaps for the sake of emphasis the prophet isolated the utter destruction of idols from among God’s people in that day of God’s judgment (v. 18). I know of no subsequent idolatry (at least involving tangible idols of wood, stone, or metal) practiced in Israel after her return from the Babylonian exile. At least it appears that they learned that lesson well, if none other (cf. 17:7–8).

Verses 19–21: Here we learn of the effect the “day of Jehovah” would have upon the people. When these events would transpire the terror would be so consuming that men would flee to the caves and holes in search of shelter (v. 19; cf. v. 10). Then would men see how powerless their senseless idols were and they would fling them away or desert them to likewise senseless creatures, although made of valuable gold or silver (v. 20). They would leave all things behind in their vain attempt to find shelter from the judgment of God upon them (v. 21; cf. Rev. 6:15–17).

Verse 22: This verse exhorts every reader to place no trust or confidence in man himself. It is not that man is worth nothing, for indeed He is valued so highly that God sent His Son to die for His salvation (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). However, proud and haughty men who reject and mock God and His law are vain. We must not place our trust in mere men and their thoughts, ways, and creations. Man has no plan of salvation. He knows nothing of his own real needs apart from God’s revelation of them. There could be no stronger exposure of the Humanism that grips so many in the modern world than this short verse: “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?” To the same apostates Jeremiah later cried out: “O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in many that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Verse 22 is a good transitional verse to that which follows, in which the consequences of their utter humanistic philosophy are catalogued.

Anarchy in Jerusalem Described (3:1–7)

Verse 1: Isaiah began the section by using a summary statement. The absolute Lord and master of all Who is really in control, the God of Heaven, would deprive Judah and Jerusalem of

their bases of support in every way. “Stay and staff” is a summary statement that is all encompassing. These two words are the masculine and feminine form of the same word, which exhausts the category of every kind of support.⁸ Now, more particularly, this support would include the very barest necessities of life—food and water. Moses promised just such curses if the people rebelled against God (Lev. 26:25–26; Deu. 28:49–57). These very things occurred in the siege of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar (Eze. 4:16–17). The famine was so great that men and women alike ate the flesh of their own children, parents, and mates (Jer. 19:9; Lam. 2:20; 4:10; Eze. 5:10). According to Josephus, the same tragedy occurred during the siege of Jerusalem by Titus of Rome that resulted in its destruction in A.D. 70.⁹

Verses 2–7: One by one the elements upon which the national life of Judah depended are enumerated and their respective failures are depicted. The fighting men would no longer be there to protect them. Both civil and religious leaders, and even the forbidden soothsayers upon whom they had come to depend would be taken away, along with their respected men of wisdom—their elders (v. 2). Military officers, those favored of the king, those qualified to give counsel, those skilled in the arts, and the forbidden enchanters they loved to consult would all disappear (v. 3).

In place of the competent, experienced, and qualified men, for their rulers they would be given children to rule over them (v. 4). In the absence of government and authority to enforce law, the rule of “might makes right” would prevail, respect for the elderly and the honorable would cease, and both life and property would be constantly at risk (v. 5). National life would be so degenerate that the mere possession of a coat would be counted a qualification for office (v. 6a). The need to conscript a ruler when in most cases men are competing to be rulers is another indication of utter dissolution in Judah, described as “this ruin” (v. 6b). The nation would need a healer all right (cf. 1:6), but the one conscripted would refuse, denying that he had either food or clothing, much less the ability to heal the terrible moral and spiritual cancers of Judah (v. 7).

Woes Pronounced Upon Jerusalem and Judah (3:8–15)

Verses 8–9: The reason none will accept the rulership among God’s people is because she is ruined beyond repair. They have set themselves against Jehovah in word and deed and their behavior has provoked the all-seeing eyes of His glory (v. 8). Furthermore, they have no shame anymore so that they blush at nothing—as the Sodomites (Gen. 19:4–9), they do not even try to hide their evil deeds (v. 9a). They therefore have brought deserved dire consequences upon themselves (v. 9b).

Verses 10–11: Here Isaiah gives us his version of the principle of sowing and reaping. The righteous shall partake of the fruit of his goodness and it shall be well with him (v. 10). Likewise, the wicked must partake of the bitter woes they bring upon themselves by their evil

deeds (v. 11). “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). This principle applies with no less force to nations.

Verse 12: It is no wonder the nation was in such a state of ruin and anarchy. Those who were supposed to be her rulers were behaving as children and they were under the control of women (v. 12a). Not only did evil, irresponsibility, and chaos, but likewise the corrupt spiritual leadership marked the political situation. “They that lead thee” (*measherim*) are the prophets entrusted with the spiritual leadership of the people (Mic. 3:5).¹⁰ Even the prophets were prophesying falsely and withholding the Word of God from the people, thus causing them to err (v. 12b; cf. Mic. 2:11). We see the same dreadful action in God’s spiritual Israel, the church, in our time. There is apostasy and confusion in the church because of the faulty and erroneous leadership of university boards and administrations, elders in the churches, and preachers and teachers who themselves are in error and who have caused countless thousands of others to err. It is still true: “And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit” (Mat. 15:13).

Verses 13–15: First, God is depicted as standing to judge the people in general (v. 13). However, the principal point of these verses is to warn of the more terrible impending judgment upon the rulers and leaders. The elders and princes are accused of devouring the gain of others, especially the poor, and storing the incriminating evidence in their houses (v. 14). The Lord asked them how they dared commit such horrible crimes (v. 15).

Woes Pronounced Upon the Women of Judah (3:16–24)

Verses 16–17: The women of Jerusalem (“daughters of Zion”) came under special condemnation because of their worldliness. Their behavior was marked by a haughty manner, proud posture, seductive eyes, an attention-getting walk, and anklets that jangled as they walked (v. 16). All of these were designed to call romantic attention to themselves. They would get what they sought, but not in the way they desired (v. 17). Homer Hailey said it well: “To their shame and humiliation, the sexual features to which they would attract attention will be laid bare in the hands of crude, rough, barbarous captors.”¹¹

Verses 18–23: When the Lord brought their judgment upon them he would take away all of their jewelry, their headdresses, their cosmetics, their mirrors, and even their fine clothing (over twenty items altogether). Likely the Lord would take these from them through their captors who would seize them as booty and spoils of war. Due to the profound effect women have in society, one can always get a picture of the spiritual health of a nation by observing the spiritual health of its women. Here were women who lived in the very shadow of the temple of God and who should have been demonstrating to all the world what it meant to reverence and serve God in all modesty and purity. Instead of evincing the beauty of holiness, they had adopted the sensual and carnal habits of the nations about them. It is not the adornments nor the adorning

that were intrinsically wrong, but that they were vain and evil beneath it all and their superficial beautification could not hide the turpitude that lay beneath the surface. Likewise, Peter did not forbid outward adornments per se, but emphasized the much more important inner beauty of the heart and spirit that women should cultivate (1 Pet. 3:1–5). How sad that Christian women, in spite of the ideal of purity and inner beauty before them, still often pattern their behavior and their dress after the unregenerate world.

Verse 24: The wanton behavior of the women would bring them great calamity. Foul odors would replace their sweet perfumes, the rough rope of slaves would replace their decorative sashes, baldness would replace their fancy hair-dos, rough sackcloth would replace their soft robes, and they would be branded as slaves or prisoners, thus defacing their beauty.

Woes Pronounced Upon the City (3:25–4:1)

Verses 25–26: Isaiah turned from the women to address the city in general in these verses. The catastrophic judgment that God would bring upon them because of their rebellion is now identified. It would be a war that would decimate the ranks of their men, even their men of might (v. 25). The slaughter would be so great that the very gates of the city, usually filled with the sounds of laughter and commerce, would mourn (v. 26a). The city would be deserted and would sit in utter desolation and destruction (v. 26b).

Chapter 4:1: This verse is but a continuation of the description of the depths to which Zion and Judah would be plunged in the conflagration God would visit upon them in judgment. There would be so few men left that seven women would approach one man to be his wives so that their reproach of being husbandless and childless might be removed. They were so desperate that they would offer to provide their own food and clothing if they could just be called by his name. So here we have the completed picture of the polluted people of God in the days of Isaiah. If the awful consequences of sin cannot be seen from the grievous description Isaiah gave us of Judah and Jerusalem, it can never be seen!

The Purified Jerusalem—Isaiah 4:2–6

Hope Proclaimed Through the “Branch of Jehovah” (4:2–3)

Verse 2: “In that day” takes us back to the beginning of this section of the book and its reference to “the latter days” (2:2). The fierce judgment of God upon His people has now been completed and the pollution and filth of their apostasy has been removed. In the latter days when the exalted new house of Jehovah would be built in Jerusalem, another accompanying phenomenon would occur. There would appear the beautiful and glorious “branch of Jehovah.” A century later Jeremiah was far more specific in his description of this Branch from the Lord (for so I believe the phrase to mean): “Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will raise unto

David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (Jer. 23:5; cf. 33:15). Without a doubt, this is a reference to the Messianic Son of David Who was to be given an everlasting throne (2 Sam. 7:12–13). Zechariah used *Branch* as a proper name for the One the Lord would bring forth and Who would build His temple (3:8; 6:12). Isaiah refers to the same One in calling Him “a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of His roots” (11:1). Although he uses a different Hebrew word for *branch* in the two passages, the identity is unmistakable.¹²

The Branch would be beautiful and glorious in contrast to the ugliness and shame of Judah and Jerusalem that had to be purged. The “fruit of the land” should be understood as spiritual fruit, even as the “branch” is spiritual in nature. These fruits will be delightful to the eye and will be only for those who have “escaped out of Israel.” This refers to a remnant of God’s people who would be spared when God would bring judgment upon her because of her sins. Isaiah elsewhere wrote of the remnant at length (10:20–22). Since Isaiah was writing of things to come to pass in the “latter days” (the Christian Age), he was speaking of the spiritual descendants of that literal remnant. These were the remnant “according to the election of grace”—those who have obeyed the Gospel of Christ and have thereby been added to the church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47), translated into the kingdom (Col. 1:13–14), whether Jew or Gentile by race.

Verse 3: The remnant is further discussed and described here. They would be called “holy,” again, likely in contrast to the unholiness which was characteristic of polluted Jerusalem. Peter wrote to Christians that they were “...built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). In the same context he called the saints to whom he wrote “a holy nation” (v. 9). No human beings but Christians are called “holy” in the Christian Age. The reference to their “living in Jerusalem” is a figurative reference to their being members of the church of Christ, the “heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22–23).

Blessings of God for Those Purified (4:4–6)

Verse 4: I believe Cook has the right idea to end verse 3 with a period and begin a new thought with verse 4.¹³ This verse teaches us what will follow “in those days” (v. 2) after Jerusalem has been purified by judgment. The filth of the women (see 3:16–24) must first be washed away and the blood of the innocent victims of tyranny and anarchy (see 3:5–15) must be purged before the named blessings can be bestowed. The people had become so reprobate that they could not be cleansed by repentance. The cleansing could only come by the purifying blast of God’s fiery justice and judgment upon them. An anonymous psalmist wrote of God’s judgment upon sin in similar terms: “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. A fire

goeth before him, and burneth up his adversaries round about” (Psa. 97:2b–3). The cleansing was done first by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian hordes a century after Isaiah’s time, and then again, finally, by the Romans in A.D. 70.

Verse 5: The purification done, the blessings could now be given. The language in this and verse 6 is highly figurative in nature. Isaiah used the figures of the cloud by day and the fiery pillar by night by which God guided Israel through the wilderness as symbols of His guidance and presence for the inhabitants of spiritual Zion. God gives His spiritual nation guidance only through His written Word (Rom. 10:17), by which He also makes known His promise to ever be with them (Mat. 28:20; Heb. 13:5; et al.).

These blessings would be for all of Zion in its completeness, but would also be there for the individual assemblies within her, wherever God’s people might come together to worship Him. Perhaps Hailey is right: “This thought foreshadows the idea of independent congregations of the Lord’s people, all of which are in turn an integral part of the new spiritual Zion.”¹⁴ The word “create” is the same word used in Genesis 1:1 of the original act of God’s creation. Spiritual Zion, the church, would be something new and fresh, unlike anything before known—not a patch on the old garment of Judaism. Even its inhabitants are called a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17, f.n.).

Verse 6: In contrast with the desolate booth in the vineyard to which the old corrupt Jerusalem of Isaiah’s day was likened (1:8), for His new Zion God would furnish a pavilion of protection. This would provide protection from the burning sun of the day and shelter from the storms that would assail them. In this beautiful figurative language we have the description of the wonderful “peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Phi. 4:7) which those who are in Christ alone possess. When the storms of life rage and when we feel the heat of persecution we have a refuge in His eternal kingdom that will help us survive every danger and fear.

Conclusion

Isaiah and his contemporaries lived seven centuries before the things of which he wrote came to pass. We live almost twenty centuries since they have come to pass. The “branch of Jehovah” came and built the “mountain of Jehovah’s house” in the place, at the time, and under the very circumstances foretold by Isaiah. It is the church of Christ to which the Lord has been adding people as they are saved since its beginning (Acts 2:47). Any religious organization founded by some other person, in some other place, at some other time, and under different circumstances than those prophesied by Isaiah cannot be and is not the church of Christ.

Anyone who is mentally capable of being accountable to God for his own actions can be a member of it and enjoy its blessings. Further, if one desires to be saved eternally in Heaven, **he must be a member of it**—it is made up of those who are saved by being forgiven of their sins (Acts 2:47) and it is what the Christ will save when He returns in judgment (Eph. 5:23; 1:22–

23). Men are saved and enter it at one and the same time and by the same process. Upon hearing the Gospel of Christ, one must believe that Jesus is the Son of God and he must be willing to confess his faith before others (Rom. 10:9–10). Further, he must repent (turn from) his sins and errors and determine to follow Christ alone (Acts 17:30). He must then be baptized in water by the authority of Christ in order to receive the forgiveness of sins or to be saved (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; et al.). One must then live as a faithful child of God in His church to be saved at last (1 Cor. 15:58). Dear reader, if you have not done this, I urge you to do so immediately.

What marvelous wonder there is in the way God has worked out His plan for man's redemption through the ages and made these plans known through His prophets, particularly His prophet Isaiah.

Endnotes

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1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
 2. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament—Acts*, ed. Robert Frew (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1959), p. 31.
 3. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981 reprint), 1:98–99.
 4. W. W. Kay, *The Bible Commentary*, ed. F. C. Cook (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981 reprint) 5:38.
 5. Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 48.
 6. Dub McClish, *The Minor Prophets*, ed. Thomas B. Warren, Garland Elkins (Southaven, MS: Church of Christ, 1990), p. 173.
 7. Young, pp. 128–29.
 8. Young, pp. 137–38.
 9. Flavius Josephus, *Josephus' Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Pub., 1960 ed.), pp. 578–79 (“Wars of the Jews,” vi, 3, 3–4).
 10. C.F. Keil, F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament—Isaiah*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., reprint. 1973), vii, 139.
 11. Hailey, pp. 56–57.
 12. Cook, p. 51.
 13. Cook, p. 52.
 14. Hailey, p. 62.

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