

## ISAIAH – LESSON FOUR

### CHAPTER ONE (Vv. 21- 31)

#### **Vv. 21-23 – The Lament over Jerusalem**

When Saul and Jonathan died in battle with the Philistines, David composed his “How the Mighty Have Fallen” lament (2 Sam. 1: 19-27). Three times in these verses he cried, “how the mighty are fallen” (vv. 19, 25, 27). In these verses Isaiah raises a lament over Jerusalem in which he contrasts the Jerusalem of his day with that which it had been and that which God intended for it to be. In essence he is saying, “How the mighty are fallen.” The faithful city is now a harlot; the city once occupied by the just and the righteous is now occupied by murderers; the silver has become dross; the wine is diluted with water; the princes are rebellious and companions of thieves; bribes are common business and no one does anything without a reward; they neglect the fatherless and ignore the cause of the widow, taking bribes to deny her justice. There is no pay in care for the helpless.

Almost unnoticed in this scandalous list of unethical and immoral conduct is the fact that it begins at the top of society – her princes or leaders. Its leaders often dictate a society’s direction and Jerusalem was no exception. Its rulers did not judge criminals but associated with them and took bribes from them while ignoring the helpless. Judah has indeed gone backward (1:4). There is no repentance.

#### **Vv. 24-31 – Redemption Through Purging**

God had called Judah to reason. The invitation was not only rejected; Judah moved farther and farther away. Thus Jehovah now speaks not as the Holy One of Israel but as the Mighty One of Israel. Now there is no call to reason; judgment has come. The Mighty one of Israel will do away with his adversaries and enemies (v. 24). He will turn against them and purge them with fire to remove their dross (v. 25). Once they have been purged he will replace their judges and counselors so that righteousness will once again characterize Zion (v. 26). Zion will be redeemed with justice and her

converts redeemed with righteousness (v. 27). The end of the unrighteous will be far different. Transgressors and sinners will be consumed together; they shall be ashamed of their oaks<sup>1</sup> and their gardens<sup>2</sup> will confound them (vv. 28-29). Indeed, the idolaters will be like their oaks and their gardens – the one is dead and the other parched. Only a spark will ignite them and they shall both burn with unquenchable fire (vv. 30-31).

For once, little comment is needed on these self-explanatory verses. However, that does not mean that no comment is appropriate. First, Isaiah again emphasizes that true religion before God the Father has always and continues to possess the quality of mercy and charity toward the helpless. We must have a love relationship with God that separates us from the world and leads us to walk in his ways, one of which is love for our fellow man. In other words, a religion that is forensic only has never been acceptable to God.

Second, God never punishes just because he can. Punishment is never an end within itself, but is a means to an end<sup>3</sup>. God does not punish unless punishment is deserved. Deserved punishment is administered in love and always seeks the good of his children. Additionally, even when judgment is deserved God often defers it as long as he can, seeking purification without punishment. But when the “Come, let us reason together” invitation is rejected God has only two choices: send the transgressor away to die in his sin, or purge by punishment that leads to repentance and avoids perdition. He chose the latter course with Judah, but as we shall see, it was only a remnant that was redeemed.

Third, Isaiah warns of a sense of false security. This is a theme that we shall see throughout his prophecy. Isaiah is concerned that if his hearers heard only good

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1. The transgressors and sinners were idolaters. Their “oaks” (or terebinths) were either their idols or the wood from which their idols were made.

2. The places used for idolatrous worship that they have chosen in preference to Jehovah.

3. Even final judgment bringing final punishment has a purpose beyond the event. It glorifies Jehovah’s nature and being, especially his holiness that cannot look upon sin

things they would feel secure in their present life, sensing no need for repentance. Isaiah was not a false prophet who led his hearers to conclude that all was well with them and that they did not need to deal with their sin because there was no sin with which to deal. He was a true prophet who told them what they needed to hear. He consistently told them that God would keep his promises to Abraham and to Abraham's seed, but he also told them that if they continued in their sin without repentance they would have no part in those promises.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Vv. 1-4 – JERUSALEM: THE IDEAL AND THE REAL

#### V. 1

Isaiah again introduces himself. In chapter 1 he saw the vision. Here he sees the word. There is no difference. Judah and Jerusalem are the subject of both. Isaiah is the recipient of both. How can one "see" the word? The word is "seen" by being received and understood. It may also be a reference to the source of the word. God spoke to him in a vision. While the Messiah is not mentioned in these verses, it is clear that this language applies to the Messianic period. It is to Jehovah's house that the Messiah is to come. Mount Zion is where the house is to be established and from which Jehovah's law and word will go forth.

#### v. 2

The big question here is the meaning of "the last days." The Hebrew scholar Delitsch says that the term never refers to the time immediately following its use, but applies to the furthest point that lies on the outermost point on the speaker's horizon. Young says that it refers to that which is hindmost or farthestmost. It may have a spatial meaning<sup>4</sup> or a temporal meaning. A temporal meaning could be either chronological or suggest that there is a process which will come to fruition when the last days have

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4. In Psalm 139:9 it refers to the uttermost parts of the sea.

come. It is clearly this latter sense in the Old Testament. God's eternal purpose to redeem fallen man through Jesus Christ was being worked out and that process would be completed in "the last days."

That this so can be seen from others uses in the Old Testament and fulfillment in the New Testament. Some 150 years after Isaiah the prophet Daniel used the same term. In Daniel 2:28 Daniel wrote that "there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and he hath made known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." Daniel's revelation of the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream continued through the 4 kingdoms until the culmination of the process was reached in 2:44 which disclosed the establishment of a kingdom that would never be destroyed. *The latter days* were to be during the reign of the kings of Rome.

The New Testament confirms this fact. In Acts 2:17 Peter disclosed what Joel meant by the word "afterwards" in Joel 2:28. Peter said that what Joel had prophesied was being fulfilled in *the last days*. In Acts 3:24 Peter, speaking of events that occurred with Christ's incarnation (first coming) said that all of the prophets from Samuel and after "told of these days." There can be no doubt that Peter considered *the last (latter) days* to be in his lifetime.

Most significant, the New Testament says that Isaiah 2:2-4 was fulfilled in New Testament days. Christ himself quoted Isaiah 2 and said that his apostles "were witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:46-49). Since the apostles were witnesses of events that prophecy said would occur in *the last days*, there can be no doubt that *the last days* were then occurring.

Daniel 2:44 described it as a kingdom established by God that shall never be destroyed. Isaiah 2:2 calls it "the mountain of the Lord's house." One need not speculate about the meaning of "the mountain of the Lord's house" because Zechariah 8:3 defines it: Thus saith Jehovah: I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called The city of truth; and the mountain of Jehovah of hosts, The holy mountain." It is plain that Isaiah 2 and Daniel 2 meet and merge in Hebrews 12 which describes Christians as having "come unto mount Zion,

and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel” (12:22-24).

Those who see a millennial passage here must ignore and deny plain passages of scripture that say Isaiah 2:2-4 has already been fulfilled. It is not millennial; it is Messianic. Those who claim that there will be an earthly reign of Christ in Jerusalem for a thousand years have missed it a thousand miles!

God’s mountain would be established above all other mountains; it would transcend all of the world’s kingdoms in glory and grandeur. This mountain is the mountain of the new covenant unto which all nations would flow. Not only is it great in number, but it is broad in its reach. All nations will be included; none will be excluded. All will be taught how to walk in his ways for the law will go forth from Zion and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> God himself will judge between the nations and decide concerning many peoples. Thus, God’s word will be the standard by which all things are to be judged (John 12:48). The character of the citizens of the kingdom will be such that “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 any more.” Isaiah cannot have been speaking of the world here because they will continue their wars (see Matt. 24:6, speaking of the time preceding the destruction of

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5. In commenting on this passage Young makes the following cogent statement: “Two points must be stressed. First, God and God alone can teach the truth, for He only is the source and foundation of truth. Hence, those who proclaim the Word of God must exercise supreme care that what they preach is the Word of God. This can be accomplished only when the messenger bases his message squarely upon and makes it consonant with the written Word of God, the Bible. When the minister preaches, God must be heard. Secondly, this passage teaches that what unbelievers need above all else is teaching or doctrine. What blinds the understanding of men is ignorance, and ignorance can only be dispelled by truth. Hence, the missionary and evangelistic activity of the church must be doctrinal in character.

Jerusalem).

Zechariah, who prophesied some two centuries after Isaiah, wrote: **9** “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass. **10** And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off; and he shall speak peace unto the nations: and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth (9:9-10). Matthew 21:5 quotes this language and applies it to the Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It was in his kingdom that implements of war would be extinguished and peace would be proclaimed to the nations (Eph. 2:17). The Lord’ kingdom would be neither extended nor defended by carnal warfare; its weapons are spiritual (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-17).

#### **Vv. 5-11 – CORRUPTION: THE PEOPLE HAVE FORSAKEN JEHOVAH**

From the ideal Jerusalem or Zion, Isaiah now turns to describe Jerusalem as it was in his day. He had invited them to go up to the mountain of Jehovah, learn of his ways and walk in his paths. He now invites them to come and walk in the light of Jehovah. Light reveals things. It can reveal a path, and danger, and even filth. It enables one to at least have the opportunity to walk in the right direction. The Psalmist said that God’s word was a light to his path (119:105). It enabled him to see a situation for what it was and to take the right steps. Such conduct is the only way in which the ideal Jerusalem can be accomplished. But instead of continuing to address the people, Isaiah addresses God and states that God has forsaken his people. His statement is not a charge against God. Indeed, it is no more than a repetition of God’s statement in 1:15 that his eyes are closed and that he will not hear their prayers. As God gave a reason for his rejection in 1:15 (their hands were full of blood), Isaiah proceeds to give reasons for his statement:

- they are filled with customs from the east;
- they are soothsayers like the Philistines;

- they strike hands with the children of foreigners;
- their land is full of silver and gold;
- there is no end of their treasures;
- their land is full of horses;
- there is no end of their chariots;
- their land is full of idols; and
- they worship the work of their own hands.

There was certainly a breach between God and his people, but it was not of the making of God. It was the result of the conduct of his people. They had abandoned their God. They engaged in unholy conduct; they made unholy alliances; they trusted in their wealth and their army<sup>6</sup>; they wallowed in idolatry; and they believed that if they could not do it it could not be done. They lived for present prosperity believing it would create security; they had no eye on the future consequences of their conduct.

It is no wonder that judgment was coming. Judah had filled itself with the earth's knowledge and followed that by adopting its values. Judgment would come upon men of both high and low estate. They would be bowed down and brought low. Seeing no hope for change, Isaiah cries out that they would not be forgiven. They may seek safety in the rock (caves) and in the dust, but they will find no escape from the terror and glory of Jehovah's majesty. Man's lofty (prideful) look will be wiped from his face and his haughtiness brought low, but Jehovah will be exalted and his glory displayed.

### **Vv. 12-22 – A DAY OF JEHOVAH**

Proverbs 16:18 is still true: "Pride goeth before destruction, And a haughty spirit before

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6. Horses and chariots were the most powerful weapons of the day. God prohibited their multiplication in Deuteronomy 17:16. Thus Solomon's disobedience in 1 Kings 10:26-29 was a serious transgression.

a fall.” There will be judgment day (12). It will be a time of God’s choosing (12). It will be wide sweeping (13-18). There will no escape (19). It will be too late to repent (20-21). Everything upon which they had relied will not only be thrown out, it will be thrown out to the most unclean of animals – the moles and the bats (20). There is only one way to avoid it – stop trusting in man! He is only a man and he has neither sufficient power nor wisdom to redeem and save you (22). His breath can cease at any moment.

Isaiah surely has a message for our day. This passage warns that God’s judgment is a frontal assault on our pride. Where do we truly place our trust? It is so easy to place “In God We Trust” on our coins. It is even easier to place it on our lips. But in what do we really trust? Read the list of things in which Judah trusted and see if it does not ring bells both nationally and personally. The entire list of many allegations really boils down to one sin – pride. They trusted in themselves, their allies, and their combined ingenuity. We should hear Isaiah’s warning: Man may be due respect because he is made in the image of God, but as objects of ultimate trust they are of no value at all!

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONFUSION**

#### **V. 1-12 – The Wages of Sin**

Having called upon Judah to cease relying upon man’s power and wisdom, Isaiah now proceeds to show the folly of such conduct. They are first reminded that judgment is coming. That judgment will remove Judah’s staff and stay, bread and water. The most meager of diets will not be available (1). It will take away all of those upon whom society depends – the mighty man (heroes are gone), the man of war (defense is impossible), the judge (justice is unavailable), the prophet (neither true nor false word from God), the diviner (No more sorcery or “reading of tea leaves”), the elder (no wisdom of age; no city council members sitting at the gate), the captain of fifty (even if there were military there would be no leaders), the honorable man (no more who could be looked up to), the counselor (no wise guidance or good advice), and expert artificer (no one skilled in engraving wood or shaping metal to make their gods), and



the skilful enchanter (another occupied with magic and divination) (2-3).

Who would replace the loss of the countries leaders? Children will be their princes and babes shall rule over them (4). This would result in a complete breakdown of society (v5).<sup>7</sup> The final evidence of society's breakdown would be the futile efforts of the people to put Humpty-Dumpty together again. Anybody who had a coat would be asked to be a ruler. However, no one was willing to assume the task (6-7).

In vv 8-9 Isaiah once more identifies arrogance as Judah's downfall. They provoked the eyes of his glory in both word and deed. What greater arrogance can there be than to do that which is wrong right in the face (eyes) of the one whose command we are breaking? They openly declare their sin and make no attempt to hide it. But who is being harmed? They have done evil unto themselves. The result is "woe unto their soul."

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7. This prophecy would ultimately come to pass more than 100 years after Isaiah's death. The Babylonians would be God's instrument. See the description in 2 Kings 25:1-12.