

The Book of ISAIAH – Chapters 1-39

Catholic Scripture Study

Memory Verse: (Isaiah 2:4)

***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 any more.***

Week 3 – God’s Blessing and Judgment (Isaiah 2:1-22)

I. ISRAEL’S GLORIOUS DESTINY (2:1-5)

The main theme of the following chapters is that proud, self-sufficient Israel can become the witness to the greatness of God only when:

- she had been reduced to helplessness by his just judgment
- and then restored to life by his unmerited grace.

A. Overview

After the grim ending of chapter 1 and indeed the generally grim tone of that entire chapter, verses 1-4 come as a shock. They do not speak of the stubborn and rebellious Israelites worshiping trees in their groves or oppressing the poor.

Instead, we have all the nations streaming to **“the mountain of the LORD”** – that is, to His house, His temple in Zion – to learn His ways. They go there because that is the place where God’s law and word go forth.

Despite the sins of the people and the disastrous situation in Judah described in the first part of the book we see in this vision the messianic and eschatological restoration which shows that the salvation of the world centers on Zion, “the mountain of the Lord,” that is, Jerusalem.

Read: Isaiah 2:1-5

[1] The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

[2] It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it,

[3] and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

[4] He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide 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 any more.

[5] O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

B. Introductory Heading (2:1)

Chapter 2 begins with another introductory heading, similar to 1:1, but shorter. The title or heading identifies the author as the

prophet Isaiah and introduces the first main division of the book, a collection of prophecies of judgment **“concerning Judah and Jerusalem”** (chapters 2-12).

“The word which Isaiah . . . saw” seems like a strange expression. How can you see a “word?”

The word is the prophecy itself. In the Bible, prophecies are referred to as “the word” or “the word of the Lord. Here, the phrase refers to a revelation in a vision, which was communicated in words.

These expressions tell us that the prophets’ words are divinely inspired and authoritative as no other teaching – from priest, scribe or wise man – could ever be.

C. A Glorious Future for God’s People

The main focus of the prophecy is Judah and Jerusalem **in the latter days**, but more particularly it is Jerusalem, the city of David, the city of the Great King.

The **latter days** refers to the time of the end, the last part of human history, or some undefined time in the future. The vision is something that will take place in the future and Isaiah predicts that there will be a glorious future for Zion.

The partial fulfilment of this prophecy began with the first coming of Christ and will be totally fulfilled at His Second Coming.

D. The House of the Lord

“The house of the Lord” is the Temple at Jerusalem, built by Solomon, destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, rebuilt in the days of Haggai and Zechariah, and finally destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70.

The hill on which the Temple stood was known as mount Moriah, and according to Genesis 22, it was there that the “binding of Isaac” took place.

Although the Temple was located on a hilltop, it was not the highest hill in the area; even the neighboring Mount of Olives was higher.

What the text is saying is that while Zion may not be the highest of the mountains, it is still the mountain where the one true God is to be found. This is the mountain where all people should seek God.

- One day it would become clear that the religion of Israel was *the* religion; that her God was *the* God.

E. Out of Zion Shall Go Forth the Law (2:3)

At least once a year, devout Jews would *go up to the mountain of the Lord* in Jerusalem to worship.

However, in the latter days ***all the nations*** will go up to Zion, to the house of the God of Jacob, to hear the word of the Lord and to learn His ways by receiving instruction in His Law.

The prophet says that if one goes to Zion, God himself will teach him. Many who will come to Zion do not know God’s ways because they have not received instruction from the LORD.

- They must be taught what these ways are in order that they may walk in them (be obedient to them).

On the other hand, Israel, who had received instruction from the LORD, does not know him (Is. 1:3a).

There is a profound truth here. Those who will not leave their own pride and self-sufficiency and come to God cannot learn his ways or walk in His light.

But the learning is for the purpose of living. It is not an end in itself.

- Unless God teaches we cannot walk in his light, but unless we come to Him, He cannot teach.

F. Universal Peace (2:4)

In contrast with the strife and desolation that sin brings in its wake (cf. 1:2-9), peace is the outcome of reverence for God and readiness to obey his precepts - love of God and love of neighbor.

Isaiah sees that “in the latter days” there will be a time of universal peace. The weapons of war will be transformed into tools for agriculture and development.

- However, as long as men are sinful, the threat of war will hang over them, and hang over them it will until the return of Christ.

Where disputes are now settled by the sword, “in the latter days” they will be settled by peaceful means.

And where men now spend time and energy preparing for and waging war, there will come a time when instead they will use all their energy and resources as Solomon did, to establish peace and justice in the world.

G. Come, Walk in the Light of the Lord (2:5)

This passage is a plea to both present and future generations to abandon their foolish rebellion and embrace their calling in God.

It is an appeal to the people of God to remember his ways (v. 3), and to live up to their mission to be “a light to the nations.”

II. APPLICATION

Those who will not leave their own pride and self-sufficiency and come to God cannot learn his ways or walk in His light.

This truth is no less applicable to the Church today than it was to Israel then. The Church’s future is secure in Christ. The only question is whether we choose to be part of that future through present obedience to the Lord of the Church.

The House of Jacob Forsaken (2:6 – 4:1)

I. JUDAH’S PRESENT CORRUPTION (2:6-11)

After a glimpse of the glorious future of Israel, the next section consists of a series of bitter criticisms of the current situation of “the house of Jacob”– of its greed, arrogance, idolatry, dishonesty and injustice.

Read: Isaiah 2:6-8

***[6] For thou hast rejected thy people,
the house of Jacob,
because they are full of diviners from the east
and of soothsayers like the Philistines,
and they strike hands with foreigners.
[7] Their land is filled with silver and gold,
and there is no end to their treasures;
their land is filled with horses,
and there is no end to their chariots.
[8] Their land is filled with idols;
they bow down to the work of their hands,
to what their own fingers have made.***

A. Overview (2:6-8)

In contrast with the dignity of humanity under God, here Isaiah depicts the foolishness of humanity attempting to exalt itself. Verses 6-11 depict the cause of the problem (human pride and self-sufficiency) and state briefly the effect (humiliation).

There is no room for God. So full of their own successes are they that they have forgotten that “the Lord alone will be exalted,” a theme that runs throughout Isaiah’s prophecies.

B. God Has Forsaken His People (2:6)

Why is it necessary that the people of Israel learn to “walk in the light of the Lord”? Because God has forsaken them in their present condition and the hope of future glory cannot obscure that fact.

They cannot, in the expectation of some ideal future, continue to live in their sin. Rather, that expectation ought to motivate them to deal with their present corruption, at the center of which is human arrogance.

If they will not change their ways (as in fact they did not), then restoration can only come to them through humiliation and the destruction of their false hopes.

C. Diviners and Soothsayers from the East (2:6)

Isaiah charges Israel with adopting the pagan ways of the East – practices such as divination (the effort to learn the future by occult means) and magic.

These practices were strictly forbidden to Israel, for by them the pagans sought to divine the future, gain control of their own destinies, and to manipulate the gods.

But God called the Hebrews to commit their future and security to Him, to place their trust in Him, and to give their attention to justice and righteousness.

This was a dilemma Israel faced throughout her history. Listen to God or listen to the pagan nations? At this point, the prophet says they have listened to the nations.

D. The Exaltation of Man (2:7-8)

Having made the general accusation that Judah and Jerusalem are full of pagan ways, Isaiah now proceeds to detail those ways. The charge is that they are full of wealth (**silver and gold**), armaments (**horses and chariots**), and **idols**.

Their desire for this world’s security led to an assimilation of the world’s gods.

Everything that could make Judah great, physically speaking, she had. But unless that wealth and power were understood to be God’s gift alone and not the work of human hands through idols, it would finally prove to be a curse.

The danger is that in all the fascination with new ideas, new languages, new possessions and new inventions, God will be forgotten – just as in our day.

This is spelled out in verse 8: it is possible to worship one’s possessions instead of God, one’s own achievements in place of God, and that is unforgivable (v.9).

- For idolatry is ultimately the creation of God in man’s image for the purpose of achieving human ends.
- It is thus the utmost exaltation of mankind.

II. MAN IS HUMBLLED (2:9-11)

Isaiah now passes from a description of the sins (v. 8) to their consequences. In Isaiah’s day, however, this humbling had not yet taken place. The prophet is expressing with prophetic certainty that the humbling will come as just punishment from God for their arrogance and idolatry.

All men, therefore whatever their station in life may be, whether low or high, will be humbled - **brought low**.

Read: Isaiah 2:9-11

***[9] So man is humbled,
and men are brought low --
forgive them not!***

***[10] Enter into the rock,
and hide in the dust
from before the terror of the LORD,
and from the glory of his majesty.***

***[11] The haughty looks of man shall be brought low,
and the pride of men shall be humbled;
and the LORD alone will be exalted
in that day.***

A. Forgive them not! (2:9)

Here Isaiah speaks to God. He is saying, “There can be no pardon; you cannot possibly pardon them.” By his direct address to God Isaiah inserts himself into the midst of the condemnation.

This phrase exposes the problem of sin. It cannot simply be forgotten, it must be punished; otherwise, the whole chain of cause and effect upon which the world is built would be broken.

Because of the sinful practices described in the preceding verse (especially insolent pride, self-sufficiency and utter confidence in man alone) the humbling judgment of God will come upon all men, and then it’ll be too late for forgiveness.

B. Judgment is Inevitable (2:10)

Isaiah warns that God’s judgment is surely coming. It will be a terrible judgment, and if anyone would seek to escape it, if that were possible, he should take refuge in the rocky mountain caves.

- It is of course impossible for man to hide from God. The only way to run from God is to run to Him.

The land of Judah was mountainous, and there were many caverns and caves which would have provided suitable hiding places for escape from an enemy. From the **terror of the LORD**, and **the glory of his majesty**, however, there will provide no refuge.

Here, Isaiah is not pleading for repentance he’s trying to impress upon his people the awfulness of the punishment to come.

The time for repentance is past and Isaiah would have the nation realize its terrible predicament.

III. APPLICATION

The Church faces the same challenge today – listen to God, or listen to the world! How would Isaiah judge the Church and our secular society today?

To take one example from verse 6: like the Israelites, we have run after the Eastern religions and adopted their practices just as the Israelites in Isaiah’s time!

- Many Catholics participate in the New Age Movement.
- A Campus Chaplain at a Catholic university recommends crystals for personal help.
- A Catholic women’s college offers workshops in Wicca (witchcraft) and the goddess within.
- A Chicago parish hosts a professional astrologer to lecture on the stars and inform parishioners where they can go for further astrological consultations.
- A Franciscan convent offers “enlightenment” classes that include Wicca (witchcraft), *I Ching* (Chinese fortune-telling), and Oriental meditation. The sisters staff “The Christine Centre for Meditation,” teaching yoga, astrology, and Tarot

card readings (*Catholics and the New Age* by Mitch Pacwa, S.J.).

IV. THE DAY OF THE LORD (2:12-22)

A. Overview

Isaiah now announces God’s judgment on the pride and arrogance of men with particular reference to a number of objects (mighty trees, high mountains, huge fortified towers and beautiful, tall-masted ships) in which man has placed his confidence and faith, instead of in God.

We may summarize the prophet’s thought in 2:12-22 as follows.

In that day the **LORD** alone will be exalted, for, as a matter of fact, there is a day which belongs alone to the LORD. Man has had his day, a day in which he has chosen idols of silver and gold to be his supports. Now, the **LORD** is to have his day, and that day of His will affect all that in the sight of man is “high and lifted up.”

The passage is a challenging call to the people of Judah and Jerusalem to review their values and put their trust in God, the only one who is of any account (v. 22).

This is a message that never goes out of date, and it needs to be heeded by those who are so confident today in science and technology, so content with their standard of living, that they forget about those in need and gave no thought to God.

- All of their apparent successes and possessions will be of no avail when the day of the Lord comes (v.12)

The chapter ends with a grim conclusion. Why would anyone put ultimate trust in humanity when every human being is only one breath away from extinction?

Read: Isaiah 2:12-22

**[12] For the LORD of hosts has a day
against all that is proud and lofty,
against all that is lifted up and high;
[13] against all the cedars of Lebanon,
lofty and lifted up;
and against all the oaks of Bashan;
[14] against all the high mountains,
and against all the lofty hills;
[15] against every high tower,
and against every fortified wall;
[16] against all the ships of Tarshish,
and against all the beautiful craft.
[17] And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled,
and the pride of men shall be brought low;
and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.
[18] And the idols shall utterly pass away.
[19] And men shall enter the caves of the rocks
and the holes of the ground,
from before the terror of the LORD,
and from the glory of his majesty,
when he rises to terrify the earth.
[20] In that day men will cast forth
their idols of silver and their idols of gold,
which they made for themselves to worship,
to the moles and to the bats,
[21] to enter the caverns of the rocks
and the clefts of the cliffs,
from before the terror of the LORD,
and from the glory of his majesty,
when he rises to terrify the earth.
[22] Turn away from man**

***in whose nostrils is breath,
for of what account is he?***

A. The Day of the Lord (2:12)

The day is coming when the present order will be overthrown by divine judgment. Everything will be turned upside down. All that is tall, strong or powerful will be brought down, because these are the very things that the people have placed their ultimate faith in.

Among the examples given are cedar and oak trees, mountains, ***every high tower***, and prideful people. In that day people will throw aside their wealth and idols in order to run and hide from the terror and Glory of the Lord.

B. Every High Tower

When we hear about high towers, we are reminded of the biblical Tower of Babel, and, in our day, the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City.

At the time of their completion these ***proud and lofty*** towers were the tallest buildings in the world. They took about 5 years to build but were brought down in only one hour.

In our secular, materialistic world, the tower is considered lofty and glorious – it reaches up to the heavens. Some may even regard it as indestructible, just as the builders of the Titanic considered it unsinkable.

And we are always trying to build taller and taller towers.

But all man’s works and successes are temporary and fleeting: they pass away and cannot compare with the glory and majesty of the Lord of hosts.

C. Summary (2:2-22)

Men show their arrogance in their reliance on their treasures (e.g., science and technology), their weapons and armies and those they seek advice from (and who tell them what they want to hear).

- However, this overweening pride is defeated when they have to appear before God.
- Those who trusted in themselves will be brought low by the majesty of God.

This passage is a challenging call to the people of Judah and Jerusalem (and to us), to review their values and put their trust in God, the only one who is of any account (v. 22).

All of man’s apparent successes and possessions will be of no avail when the Day of the LORD comes (v. 12). In that day man will be brought low and God will be exalted.

In that day in a pathetic act of repentance, too late to protect them from the terror of the Lord, they throw away their cherished **idols of silver and their idols of gold**.

V. SUMMARY AND APPLICATION

Again and again throughout the book, Isaiah mocks the practice of idolatry as the use of human hands to make gods and questions how something made by us can possibly take care of us.

Putting our trust in the creation instead of the Creator and trying to elevate ourselves to the place of God can only result in humiliation when the true God is revealed.

The prophet declares (vs. 20-22) that those things that human hands created and human minds pronounced holy will be hastily cast away when He who is truly holy is revealed.

They will not merely be cast away but will be cast away to **the rodents and bats**, the most unclean of animals.

Those who tried to make themselves as tall as the trees or as high as the mountains will be cowering under the rocks, seeking the lowest holes in which to hide from the One who is truly lofty (see Luke 23:30).

Why would the Israelites (or anyone for that matter) put their trust in something worthless and unclean when they can trust in their living God?

Preparation for Week 4 Downfall of Judah and Jerusalem
