

The Book of ISAIAH – Chapters 1-39

Catholic Scripture Study

Memory verse: Isaiah 2:3

***"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.***

Week 4 – Judah's Punishment and Glory (Isaiah 3:1-4:6)

I. OVERVIEW (3:1-15)

Chapter 2 described a picture of universal judgment. At the start of chapter 3, Isaiah proclaims the Lord's judgment specifically on Judah and Jerusalem.

Judah, because of its pride and self sufficiency, is to be deprived of the indispensable support of a good and stable government. In addition, they will lose their supply of bread and water.

The scene described here is one of anarchy, set in the context of a famine, in which Judah and Jerusalem will:

- experience the breakdown of law and order,
- be deprived of the basics of life, i.e., food and water, and
- have its false (corrupt) leaders removed.

Judah and Jerusalem have rejected God as their king. The people have replaced God with mere humans whom they depend on for protection and guidance.

As a result God will replace the false leaders by younger inexperienced ones who are less competent. This replacement of poor leadership with incompetent leadership will lead to chaos and anarchy in Jerusalem and Judah.

The following prophecies show the utmost seriousness of the calamity which is about to fall upon the people of God.

Read: Isaiah 3:1-7

***[1] For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts,
is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah
stay and staff,***

***the whole stay of bread,
and the whole stay 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 skilful magician
and the expert in charms.***

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

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

***[6] When a man takes hold of his brother
in the house of his father, saying:
"You have a mantle;
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;
in my house there is neither bread nor mantle;
you shall not make me
leader of the people."**

II. THE REMOVAL OF ORDER AND STABILITY

A. Jerusalem (3:1)

In this prophecy, the city is mentioned first, because it was a seat of the kingdom and would be the first to suffer by the removal of the officers of government.

From Jerusalem the anarchy would then spread out over all the land.

B. The Stay and the Staff (3:1)

God will remove from Judah every kind of support (***the stay and the staff***) beginning with bread and water - indispensable conditions for life. The godless leaders will also be removed.

The leaders mentioned in verses 2-3 are the sources of authority and stability for the state. Their removal will result in the breakdown of society.

(It was Assyrian policy to remove the military, political and religious leaders from conquered territories with just this object in mind).

The destruction of Judah therefore, was to begin, and as a matter of fact did begin, with the removal of the basic necessities of life.

C. Incompetent Rulers (3:4)

When competent and capable leaders are removed from positions of authority in government, it is to be expected that incompetent, indecisive and inexperienced rulers will take their place.

This is one of the judgments a sinful nation can expect.

D. Anarchy

The remainder of this section enumerates the conditions which will follow the loss of stable government and the breakdown of law and order - see v. 5 below - resulting ultimately in anarchy.

Read: Verse 3:5

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

III. APPLICATION

Good government is one of God's best gifts to a sinful race. How great then is the sin of those who refuse to concern themselves with their responsibilities as citizens of the state!

That is why St. Paul urges us to pray for the leaders of our government:

*I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people — **for kings and all those in authority**, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior...*" (1 Timothy 2:1-3)

IV. GOD PLEADS WITH FALLEN JUDAH (3:8-15)

A. Overview

Jerusalem, the city of the Great King, the city from which the law of the Lord and the word of God would go forth, the city in which the Temple was located; Jerusalem, the city set on a hill - even Jerusalem has stumbled.

Her stumbling has resulted in great misery, "**a heap of ruins**" (v. 6).

The remainder of the verses enumerates the people's sins, and warns them of the inevitable consequences.

Read: Isaiah 3:8-15

***[8] For Jerusalem has stumbled,
and Judah has fallen;
because their speech and their deeds are against the LORD,
defying his glorious presence.***

***[9] Their partiality witnesses against them;
they proclaim their sin like Sodom,
they do not hide it.***

Woe to them!

For they have brought evil upon themselves.

***[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 done shall be done to him.***

***[12] My people -- children are their oppressors,
and women rule over them.***

***O my people, your leaders mislead you,
and confuse the course of your paths.***

***[13] The LORD has taken his place to contend,
he stands to judge his people.***

***[14] The LORD enters into judgment
with the elders and princes of his people:
"It is you who have devoured 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?" says the Lord GOD of hosts.***

B. Partiality (3:9)

“Partiality” is the first crime on the list (v. 9). It points to the way Judah's leaders have been treating the poor (vs. 12, 14-15).

C. They Proclaim their Sins like Sodom (3:9)

The nation does not try to conceal its sins. It glories in them. They are something to boast about. There is no longer even the maintenance of external decency.

We see this brazen behaviour in our own society today. We do not conceal our sins; we boast of them; we flaunt them, much as Sodom did.

D. Elders and Princes (3:14)

The leaders (“*elders and princes*”) of Judah are just as guilty as the leaders of all the other nations of the world. Their greed and inhumanity are no better than that of their Gentile neighbors. The damage they have done to the vineyard of the Lord, that is to say, Judah (5:1-7), is no less inexcusable.

V. FROM GLORY TO SHAME (3:16-4:1)

A. Overview

Isaiah now turns his blistering language in the direction of the haughty and wealthy women of Jerusalem.

This prophecy deals with the unspeakable horrors about to fall upon Jerusalem, especially its women. It is well known that women suffer the most in a time of war, and this prophecy is a graphic, heart-rending illustration of that fact.

Isaiah describes the desolation into which Judah will be plunged. The haughty, vain and showy lifestyle of the women of Jerusalem will be turned into humiliation and torment, and they will not be able to find husbands because so many of their men will have died in battle.

In this prophecy, the Lord addresses the wives of the wealthy and powerful.

[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] the Lord will smite with a scab
the heads of the daughters of Zion,
and the LORD will lay bare their secret parts.**

**[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 scarfs;

**[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 garments of gauze, the linen garments, the turbans, and
the veils.**

**[24] Instead of perfume there will be rottenness;
and instead of a girdle, a rope;
and instead of well-set hair, baldness;
and instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth;
instead of beauty, shame.**

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

**[26] And her gates shall lament and mourn;
ravaged, she shall sit upon the ground.**

**[1] 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."**

B. The Fate of the “Daughters of Zion” (Isaiah 3:16-17)

The prophet sums up the condition of the women and of Zion in one graphic verse (4:1)

These wealthy and prominent women will experience utter shame and defilement. Instead of being concerned for the poor and downtrodden the women of Zion have accumulated much fashionable and expensive clothing and jewelry for themselves.

Their preoccupation with exterior beauty will be replaced by exterior ugliness: perfume becomes stench, elaborate hair styles are replaced with baldness (shaven heads), rich robes turns to sackcloth.

Verse 16: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty . . .

The direct cause of the humiliation of the women of Jerusalem is their attempt to exalt themselves – their pride and arrogance and neglect of the poor.

The woman who depended for her identity on her elegant neck, her flirtatious eyes, and her dainty walk (produced by the hobbling effect of ankle chains) finds herself with a shaven head; the worldwide sign of female disgrace.

The Lord will smite with a scab . . . (v. 17)

The fate of these proud women is described in verse 17. They will suffer the consequences of some disfiguring disease and be stripped naked.

C. Superstitious Adornments

Amulets (v.20): Among the jewellery worn by the women of Jerusalem were “amulets” or “charms,” which were superstitious items perhaps inscribed with an incantation.

Today many Christian women wear, knowingly or unknowingly, wear superstitious charms such as the “evil eye” jewellery supposedly used to protect themselves from evil.

Your men shall fall by the sword and your mighty men in battle (Isaiah 3:25).

Previously God was with Israel in war and they enjoyed feasting on the spoils of the victorious battles. But now, since God's people have been unfaithful and fallen into idolatry, many men will die in war. Thus there will be a shortage of men compared with women.

And seven women shall take hold of one man

Having lost God's favor, unmarried women rather than being courted by men, must now pursue and compete for a man to avoid the disgrace of remaining single and childless.

They are willing to give up their rights to food and clothing for male protection.

This last sad verse (4:1) brings us to the lowest ebb of Jerusalem's fortunes, and it is at this point that she finds hope.

VI. APPLICATION

Is God, through Isaiah, condemning fashionable clothes and jewellery? Is there no place in life for the beauty of adornment? Does God condemn beauty and ornament as such?

No! It is not the fine clothes and various articles of jewellery in themselves which are the object of His condemnation. Something more serious is at stake.

When the women are totally vain and self-centered, the cancer of moral decay is already consuming the nation's heart. In Jerusalem there was an inner pride and corruption of the heart which manifested itself outwardly.

- This is what the prophet condemns.

Proper adornment and true beauty in women should be a reflection of the glory of God.

When women cultivate and cherish beauty only for itself, they are infringing upon and detracting from the glory and beauty that belong to God.

That ordinary women of the world should be vainglorious might be expected. But the daughters of Zion, who live in the city of God, under the very shadow of the Temple, should have set the example of the beauty of holiness. Instead they are proud and self-centred, pre-occupied with external beauty and lack compassion for the poor.

VII. ISRAEL RESTORED (4:2-6)

A. Overview

Verse 4:1 predicts that the haughty women of Jerusalem will be reduced to abject misery by the coming exile.

But does this predicted destruction mean that God will give up on Israel, that, in fact, her destiny (see 2:1-5) will become unattainable?

The following verses (4:2-6) answer this question with a resounding “No!” God will not give up on his people. In fact, the coming fires of the Exile will only serve to make his people more what God has always wanted them to be (v. 4).

This passage returns to the supreme hope that centers on Jerusalem. In spite of everything, whatever befalls her, a new city will arise on Mount Zion, purified and protected by God.

- Only after suffering and death is true resurrection possible.

Chapter 4:2-6 is a superb illustration of how tragedy can be turned to hope. Even the blackest disasters are part of God's plan, and so now that they are over we can expect restoration and a new world created by God.

Read: Isaiah 4:2-6

[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 glory of the survivors of Israel.

[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.

[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 and a pavilion.

[6] It will be for a shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

B. The Branch of the Lord (4:2)

The **branch of the Lord** traditionally refers to the Messiah. It is a title belonging to the king in the line of David.

Verse 2 describes a restored land containing all the aspects of restoration: victory and spiritual renewal; beautiful vegetation; and the new Davidic messiah to lead the people.

The Messiah will bring salvation and the return to paradise, to enjoy the fruit of the land. The survivors or remnant **will be called holy** because they survived the purification of Jerusalem.

It is not only the holy remnant of Israel that will survive and see the glory of the purified Jerusalem, but also the messiah, David's son.

Everyone who has been recorded for life (v. 3) is those who fear God and keep his commandments. Their names are recorded in the "Book of life," while the names of those who do not are blotted out of that book (see Revelation chapters 5-8).

C. Cleansing of Jerusalem (v. 4)

The holiness of the remnant will be achieved by the washing away of their sins, that is, the washing away of **“the filth of the daughters of Zion and . . . the bloodstains of Jerusalem.”**

Here, the “daughters of Zion” refers more to the inhabitants of the city as a whole rather than just to the women.

The **bloodstains of Jerusalem** refer to the violence and bloodshed of its people.

Ironically, the people of Isaiah's time saw no need for penitential washing, it regarded itself as pure.

The agents of divine intervention here, by which the people are to be cleansed, is described as **a spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning**, images that point unmistakably to the representation of Judgment Day.

The final cleansing process will be painful until the “fire” of judgment has done its work.

D. Aftermath of the Cleansing

There are three results of that raging firestorm of judgment:

1. The people will be holy (4:3) that is; they will belong to God alone and will reflect the character of their owner.
2. They will be cleansed of their “filth” and “bloodstains,” that is, the accumulated guilt of all their sins (4:4);
3. They will experience the presence of God not as a threat but as a blessing (4:5).

After the cleansing, God will provide a cloud by day and fire by night. The cloud and fire were symbols of God's presence that led the Hebrews through the wilderness after the exodus through the Red Sea (Ex.13: 21-22).

The cloud also represented God's presence over the tent of meeting.

Thus, the survivors will once again experience the presence of God in their midst. By his presence (“the glory”), he will provide the very security for which they had turned to idols.

VIII. APPLICATION/COMMENT

A. The Purpose of Judgment

What are we to make of the abrupt shift after 2:22-4:1?

- At the least, it is underlining again the fact that God does not intend judgment to be his last word.

If it is true that there are certain inevitable consequences that follow sinful choices, it is also true that God can take us through those consequences and bring us out on the other side without the consequences having annihilated us.

- **Judgment is not intended to destroy but to cleanse.**

The only issue is whether we will be among those who allow the judgment to do its cleansing work.

B. God's Plan for Us

This passage also speaks of the unchanging nature of God's plans for his people. From the Exodus onward, it is plain that God's ultimate goal is to live among his people and, in fact, not merely among them but in them.

- He means to provide the security, the comfort, the well-being that we so desperately crave.

However, if God is to dwell among us – indeed, in us – two things must happen.

1. There must be a means of cleansing us from the accumulated guilt of the past. God cannot live in a filthy temple. That is what Leviticus 1-9 is about.

2. God's character must somehow be replicated in us. As Amos says it, two cannot walk together unless they are agreed (Amos 3:3).

IX. CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE

Too easily when difficulties come upon us, we think that God has abandoned us or that the devil is oppressing us. In many of these cases, the adversity is the judgment of God. We have sinned in our lust for comfort, pleasure, and security, and we are now experiencing those results.

But it is not a cruel God who brings those things upon us, and it is not a rejecting God who abandons us to the fire. Rather, it is a loving God who sees no other way to bring us to the place where he can live in us.

The fact is, God is not too concerned whether we are happy or not.

- But he is very concerned over whether we are holy.
- We can be happy and on our way to hell.

But if we are holy, it is only because the Holy One is at home in his temple, our hearts. So we ought to take a long look at adversity and ask what Jesus, the Branch, means to burn out of us so that he can take us into his tabernacle, where he abides with the Father.

Preparation for Week Five

A Harvest of Wild Grapes (5:1-30)
