

The Book of ISAIAH – Chapters 1-39

Catholic Scripture Study

Memory Verse: *Isaiah 22:22-23*

And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house.

Valley of Vision - Judgment against Jerusalem (Isaiah Chapter 22)

I. OVERVIEW (ISAIAH 22:1-14)

Most of Isaiah from chapters 13-23 deals with oracles against the pagan nations. The main theme of the earlier chapters dealt with oracles against Judah and Jerusalem.

Chapter 22 tells of an oracle against Jerusalem - the Valley of Vision. But why is Jerusalem - God's city, God's dwelling place - included among the oracles to the Nations?

The answer is because the people of Israel are no better than the surrounding Gentile (pagan) nations. It's like saying that the Church is no better than the surrounding pagan society.

Israel has placed her confidence not in the living God, whose prophets dwell within her walls, but in that mighty power of man which found its supreme expression in the Babylonian empire.

For this reason **unrepentant** Jerusalem has in effect become like the worldly powers, and so she too is included in the list of oracles against the Nations.

In the oracle, the Lord is angry, saddened over the actions of the people of Jerusalem.

There is great dread and the people call for help from other nations. In expectation of an attack or siege:

- They seek weapons from the House of the Forest, a building established by Solomon for storing weapons and to prepare the city for battle.
- They planned a back-up water supply for the city and made the walls of the city stronger.
- They however neglected to look to the Lord, the city's Maker, for help.

The Lord expected to find the people weeping and in mourning, but instead they are celebrating. Why?

Isaiah 22:1-14 consists of four short prophecies. The most significant difference between this "oracle" and the rest is the emphasis on Judah's spiritual crimes:

- Their cowardice and empty pride (vv. 1-4),
- Their stubborn dependence on human resources (vv. 8-11),
- Their disobedience (vv. 12-13) and faithless fatalism (v. 13), and
- Their unforgivable and lethal iniquity (v. 14).

Commentators disagree as to what historical event(s) these prophecies apply. Some scholars see these verses as history rather than prophecy.

- In the following narrative they are treated as predictive prophecy.

II. COWARDICE AND EMPTY PRIDE (22:1-4)

A. Overview (22:1-4)

In general, the prophet appears to be referring to a past event of judgment where the destruction of Jerusalem was not total. Unfortunately the experience did not provoke repentance and trust, but revelry and the blind dependence on armaments.

In response to this reaction, Isaiah foresees a new and more devastating judgment ahead.

Although the identity of this event is not certain, most writers take it to be the deliverance from Sennacherib (the Assyrian king) in 701 B.C.

Read: Isaiah 22:1-4

[1] The oracle concerning the valley of vision.

***What do you mean that you have gone up,
all of you, to the housetops,***

***[2] you who are full of shoutings,
tumultuous city, exultant town?***

***Your slain are not slain with the sword
or dead in battle.***

***[3] All your rulers have fled together,
without the bow they were captured.***

***All of you who were found were captured,
though they had fled far away.***

[4] Therefore I said:

"Look away from me,

let me weep bitter tears;

do not labor to comfort me

for the destruction of the daughter of my people."

B. Blind Rejoicing (22:1-4)

The first three verses are addressed to the city of Jerusalem, **“the daughter of my people”** (v. 4).

God had spared Jerusalem many times after brutal and destructive battles. However, in 701 BC Sennacherib ravaged Judah, and prior to his coming, the Assyrian king attacked causing massive casualties and destruction in Jerusalem.

Many people also died of famine at that time. But, the people are so relieved at Sennacherib's departure that they are celebrating on the rooftops, instead of repenting and thanking God for their deliverance.

- They soon forget that they owed their deliverance to the Lord.

They are dancing and singing when in fact their leaders have deserted them and the land lies in ruins. Isaiah is desolated over the destruction, but even more so over the people's blindness regarding future judgment.

C. Destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC

They cannot see the longer view that the prophet has, namely, the events just before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, when king Zedekiah fled from the city with his bodyguard only to be captured near Jericho.

Thus, the people are rejoicing at the moment over a short-term lifting of the Assyrian threat, while the prophet sees how this whole episode will end 125 years later and weeps bitterly – **“let me weep bitter tears . . .”** (22:4).

He sees what they cannot see because of their spiritual blindness.

Historical Note: Zedekiah was the last king of Judah (ca. 597 – 586 BC). His accession to the throne came after Nebuchadnezzar had already deported many of Judah's leading citizens to Babylon.

Zedekiah rebelled against the Babylonians which led to the final destruction of the kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem. With the fall of the city, Zedekiah fled only to the captured near Jericho and brought to Nebuchadnezzar.

III. SIEGE AND DEFEAT OF JERUSALEM (586 BC?)

Read: Isaiah 22:5-7

***[5] For the Lord GOD of hosts has a day
of tumult and trampling and confusion
in the valley of vision,
a battering down of walls
and a shouting to the mountains.***

***[6] And Elam bore the quiver
with chariots and horsemen,
and Kir uncovered the shield.***

***[7] Your choicest valleys were full of chariots,
and the horsemen took their stand at the gates.***

Verses 5-7 are still addressed to Jerusalem and suggest the description of the siege and defeat of 586 BC.

The shouts, the tumult and the exaltation of triumphant victory celebrations have turned into a tumult of another kind, the trampling and confusion of siege panic and the shouts of pain and despair. An event which has not yet happened.

IV. DEPENDENCE ON HUMAN RESOURCES (22:8-11)

A. Overview

Verses 8-11 are about defense and protection, but without God's protection, human defenses are of no avail. In the words of Psalm 127: *"Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain."*

Verse 8 says, **"He has taken away the covering of Judah.** There are many suggestions as to what the word "covering" means, but in any event it means the divine protection that saved Jerusalem in 701 has been removed.

Frantic human efforts are then made to defend Jerusalem against a siege.

- **The House of the Forest** was an important part of the palace complex, used as an armory.
- There is an allusion to the efforts of Hezekiah to protect the city's water supply, and a
- Reference to attempts to reinforcing the city wall with stones taken from demolished houses.

But throughout these verses the emphasis is on Judah's attitude to the crisis and to their God; **"you looked . . . you saw . . . you counted . . . you did not look to him who did it or have regard for him who planned it long ago."**

Read: Isaiah 22:8-11

[8] He has taken away the covering of Judah.

In that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest,

[9] and you saw that the breaches of the city of David were many, and you collected the waters of the lower pool,

[10] and you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke

down the houses to fortify the wall.

[11] You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or have regard for him who planned it long ago.

B. Preparations for the Siege

Faced with the threat of imminent attack, **Hezekiah** (king of Judah and son of **Ahaz**), makes a choice as to his first priority. That priority is physical preparation rather than turning to God for wisdom and direction.

- He looks to his armaments; ***“weapons of the House of the Forest . . .”*** (v. 8b)
- To his walls; ***“and you saw that the breaches of the city of David were many . . .”*** (v. 9a, 10), and
- To his water supply; ***“you collected the waters of the lower pool . . .”*** (v. 9, 11).

Such preparations were prudent and Isaiah does not condemn them. What he does condemn is the order of priorities.

Before looking at the physical, Hezekiah should have looked at the spiritual; before paying attention to what is made, he should have paid attention to the Maker.

C. They Built an Underground Aqueduct

You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool.

At some time during his reign Hezekiah had an underground aqueduct excavated from rock, to carry water from the spring of **Gihon**, outside the city walls, to the pool of **Siloam**, to keep the city supplied with water during a siege. This tunnel exists to this day.

D. They Do not Learn from their Mistakes

But you did not look to him who did it, or have regard for him who planned it long ago (22:11).

Despite calamity and disaster, the people still refuse to turn to God in repentance. They failed to learn from their mistakes.

V. DISOBEDIENCE AND FATALISM (22:12-14)

Not only had Judah offended the Lord GOD by depending on her own defenses instead of on him (vv. 8b–11), but she had also responded to his call for repentance with parties whose intended purpose was to put out of mind the terrible events which might soon engulf them.

Instead of allowing the situation to prompt them to look at possible causes, they only let the grim effects unhinge their moral restraints. In the Lord's eyes, this is the final mark of apostasy.

Read: Isaiah 22:12-14

[12] In that day the Lord GOD of hosts called to weeping and mourning, to baldness and girding with sackcloth;

[13] and behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine.

"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

[14] The LORD of hosts has revealed himself in my ears:

"Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you till you die,"

says the Lord GOD of hosts.

A. Hedonism instead of Repentance (22:13)

"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Instead of a deep grief over a long series of offenses against a holy God, Jerusalem responds with an outburst of merry-making and self-indulgence.

The proper response to the catastrophe that had befallen them was weeping and mourning, shaving the head and putting on sackcloth (v. 12). But Jerusalem disregards the word of God spoken by his prophet and abandons itself to eating and drinking.

Imagine the situation in our own country in the wake of a nuclear attack. Those who remain alive, expecting to die in a further attack or of radiation poisoning, could turn to God in repentance and faith or they could engage in one last orgy of looting, indulgence, and passion.

What would you do? Our choice would say volumes about the true nature of our commitments.

The proverbial saying, *"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,"* is quoted by St. Paul in a discussion of life after death. He says,

If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good morals. Come to your right mind, and sin no more (1 Cor. 15:32-34).

VI. KEEPER OF THE KEYS OF DAVID (22:15-25)

A. Overview

Previously the prophet has denounced the careless and sinful condition of the nation in the face of approaching disaster.

He now gives an example of the self-centeredness and luxury-loving attitude of the people exemplified in a single individual – a royal official by the name of Shebna.

Shebna was a scribe, a high official similar to a secretary of state or prime minister, but Shebna was corrupt and a social climber. He was a proud man, who tried to advance and control his fate by accruing weapons and involving himself in pro-Assyrian politics.

Isaiah denounces him, ***I will thrust you from your office, and you will be cast down from your station*** (Isaiah 22:19). And indeed Shebna was later demoted from his high office.

The prophecy foretells his untimely death in a foreign land, and the subsequent appointment of one greater than he, Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, in whose charge will be placed the keys of the kingdom of David.

The passage could be described as a “messianic prophecy” since it is concerned with the future establishment of the House of David from which the Messiah would come.

The prophecy points to the Book of Revelation:

*“The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the **key of David**, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens”* (Rev 3:7).

Read: Isaiah 22:15-25

[15] Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, "Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the household, and say to him:

[16] What have you to do here and whom have you here, that you have hewn here a tomb for yourself, you who hew a tomb on the height, and carve a habitation for yourself in the rock?

[17] Behold, the LORD will hurl you away violently, O you

**strong man. He will seize firm hold on you,
[18] and whirl you round and round, and throw you like a ball
into a wide land; there you shall die, and there shall be your
splendid chariots, you shame of your master's house.
[19] I will thrust you from your office, and you will be cast
down from your station.
[20] In that day I will call my servant Eli'akim the son of
Hilki'ah,
[21] and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your
girdle on him, and will commit your authority to his hand;
and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and
to the house of Judah.
[22] And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of
David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut,
and none shall open.
[23] And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he
will become a throne of honor to his father's house.
[24] And they will hang on him the whole weight of his father's
house, the offspring and issue, every small vessel, from the
cups to all the flagons.
[25] In that day, says the LORD of hosts, the peg that was
fastened in a sure place will give way; and it will be cut down
and fall, and the burden that was upon it will be cut off, for
the LORD has spoken."**

B. Shebna Rebuked (22:16)

What have you to do here. . . In effect, the prophet says to Shebna, "What right do you have to be here (in Jerusalem) at this time of calamity? You should be working for the kingdom, not engaged in satisfying your selfish desires."

"Instead, you have carved out an elaborate tomb for yourself here. This is not the place or time for self-serving pride, but for concern over God's kingdom."

Shebna will be removed from office and exiled to a foreign land where he will die, punished like the other leaders of Judah for his self-sufficiency and lack of concern for the people of God.

C. Application

This prophecy teaches an important principle:

He who is entrusted with authority in the Church and abuses that authority, making it serve his own desires, will be banished and die in a distant land separated from the people of God.

D. Eliakim, Son of Hilkiyah (22:20-25)

Shebna's removal paves the way for the Lord to raise up **my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah** to take his place.

The name **Eliakim** means "God has established."

God calls Eliakim His servant and chooses him to be a father to his people. He will be given authority over the House of David.

And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house (Isaiah 22:22-23).

E. Key of David

The key is a symbol of authority because the power to open and close the palace doors leads to control of the government.

The key to the gates and doors of the royal palace, including, no doubt, those of the armory and the treasury, gave the holder enormous power.

The symbol of the key is found in Matthew 16:18-19 where Jesus entrusts the keys of the kingdom to Peter who has authority to bind and loose.

Isaiah 22:22 is also quoted in Revelation 3:7 to describe Jesus as having authority over the New Jerusalem. Jesus, the Messiah, as the new David opens the doors of heaven.

Thus the “key of David” (Rev 3:7) or “the keys of the kingdom” (Matt.16:19) became, in the hands of Jesus Christ and his Church on earth, the symbol of the power to give entry into the kingdom of heaven.

The keys represent absolute power to rule. They are owned by the King of Israel who entrusts them to his representative the "master of the palace."

Christ is the true King of Israel. Just as in Isaiah 22 above where the keys are handed down to the successors of the king's prime minister we see Christ giving His keys to his designated "master of the palace," his chief minister, St. Peter.

Eliakim is the typological equivalent of Peter.

F. The O Antiphons

The **Key of David** is a title of the Messiah. It is one of the titles found in the seven antiphons that are recited (or chanted) preceding the Magnificat during Vespers of the Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office).

They cover the special period of Advent preparation known as the Octave before Christmas, Dec. 17-23, with Dec. 24 being Christmas Eve and Vespers for that evening being for the Christmas Vigil.

The importance of the **O Antiphons** is twofold: Each one highlights one of the titles of the Messiah:

O Sapientia (O Wisdom), O Adonai (O Lord), O Radix Jesse (O Root of Jesse), **O Clavis David (O Key of David)**, O Oriens (O Rising Sun), O Rex Gentium (O King of the Nations), and O Emmanuel.

Also, each one refers to a prophecy of Isaiah concerning the coming of the Messiah.

The antiphon incorporating the title **Key of David**, recited on December 20, reads as follows:

O Key of David, O royal Power of Israel controlling at your will the gate of heaven: come, break down the prison walls of death for those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death; and lead your captive people into freedom.

The Advent hymn, **O Come, O Come, Emmanuel** is based on the seven O Antiphons.

G. The Fall of Eliakim

In that day, says the LORD of hosts, the peg that was fastened in a sure place will give way; and it will be cut down and fall, and the burden that was upon it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken."

How can Eliakim, who has been so highly praised, be the one who fails and is cut off?

Eliakim was merely human and if the nation reposed all its hopes in him, those hopes would certainly be dashed. The nation's only hope was in God and in that kind of repentance which would enable wholehearted commitment.

But Judah would be unable to do so.

Despite being placed by God in a secure spot, Eliakim will fall, when once again the people put their trust in their human leader, rather than in God.

This drama plays out again and again, when pride induces God's people to seek human glory rather than submitting to the Lord of history for His honour and glory.

Like Judah, we refuse to trust in God and instead deify human leaders in the hope that they can save us. Inevitably, we must be disappointed, as Judah was. Our only hope is in God.

Preparation for Isaiah Week 17

The End of the World (Isaiah 24)

1. Read Isaiah, Chapter 24
2. Read Chapter 6, pgs 51-52, in *Come and See Catholic Bible Study – Isaiah*.
3. Answer questions 1-8 in *Come and See* (pg. 56-57).
4. Read the following paragraphs from the CCC:

Article 3 – Sacred Scripture

Section III – The Holy Spirit, Interpreter of Sacred Scripture –

Paragraphs – 120-123: The Canon of Scripture