

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah
God's Call to Live in Light of the Future - 3:1-4:6
Fall & Winter Quarters 2015

INTRODUCTION:

What we know so far... Isaiah is preaching to God's people during a time when they have recently experienced material prosperity but now they are engaged in war or potential war - northern tribes of Israel have allied themselves with Syria (Damascus) against Assyria (Syro-Ephraimite War, 734-32 B. C.). Assyria is going to destroy Israel (Samaria) and come against Jerusalem. It's not going to be pretty.

The *reason* why is because of sin. Jerusalem has revolted against her Father, against her husband. She is sinful, weighed down with iniquity, evildoers, and corrupt (1:4). Forgiveness will be possible; it will be made available (1:18) but Judah must "consent and obey" (1:19).

Idol worship is their fundamental problem. They do not know God (1:3; that is, they do not have a relationship with Him) because they are worshiping false gods under the terebinth (oaks) (1:28-31).

The new, spiritual temple is going to be established in Jerusalem to which Gentiles will join and from which the law of God will be proclaimed (2:1-3).

In this new, spiritual temple peace will abound (2:4).

Israel needs to repent of pride, abusing the poor, and trusting in man, in his gods, his business, and his military. Is there a message there for us today? Indeed!

At the end of 2:22, God warned Israel to *stop listening to men!* Now, Isaiah will get deeper into the various categories of human leaders and the problems with each of them and why Israel needs a *new* leader, one who will again rule in "justice and righteousness" (1:21). Oswalt writes (130): "the materials in 2:6-4:1 support a single point: dependence upon humanity will not lead to a realization of the destiny depicted in 2:1-5."

JUDGMENT AGAINST THE LEADERS - 3:1-15:

3:1-7 - Verse one begins with "for" - tying this verse to 2:22. Why should Judah not trust in man? Here's why...

There was always a leadership problem in Israel. Even during the days of Moses, the problem was not with Moses himself (although he clearly had his own weakness) but Miriam and Aaron tried to usurp authority over Moses in Numbers 12 and Korah, Dathan, Abiram and On tried to usurp authority over Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16. In the days of the judges, Israel rejected God as their king and wanted to make Gideon their king (8:22-23). We are very familiar with what happened in the days of the prophet Samuel and the demand for a king was directly related to the immorality and ungodliness of Samuel's own sons, Joel & Abijah (1 Samuel 8:1-5). There has always been a dearth of leadership among God's people and it is no less true in the church of Christ today.

This "whole supply of bread" and "whole supply of water" sounds like a famine. That may very well be the case, a physical famine. But in context, it sounds more like a famine of leadership! Who is there to take the lead? It has always been the case that too few men have been willing to stand up and take the lead in bringing people (back) to God.

The "mighty man" and the "warrior" and the "judge" are all military leaders. The "prophet" is likely not true prophets of God; these would be men who *claim* to be prophets but do not speak the words of Jehovah God.

Again in verse 3, we have “captains of fifty” - military men; counselors (of course “Wonderful Counselor” will be one of the designations for the coming Son of David, the Messiah, in 9:6) and expert artisans, skillful enchanters - businessmen and spiritual men.

Who will be their leaders? No one will be left when God is finished but “mere lads” and “capricious children.” They will have a dearth of leadership! These are “leaders behaving with the unpredictability and thoughtless cruelty of children” (Motyer, 64). Smith likewise comments: “God will replace these leaders with ‘children’ ... a metaphorical way of saying that the new leaders would be people who act like immature, unwise, mischievous, strong willed, and ‘inexperienced children’” (146).

Once again, I warn us not to apply this text first and foremost to the US and our political leaders, although it is true because there is a principle involved. But its primary application for us would be relative to our church leadership - “when godly people fail to step into positions of leadership, then people with poor leadership or questionable moral qualifications get appointed or elected to positions of responsibility” (147). That’s why the qualifications of elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are so very important. Indeed, in the context of 1 Timothy 5 regarding elders, Paul warns Timothy not to lay hands on anyone too hastily (5:22).

Because there is no leadership, (vs 5), there will be chaos and civil strife. They will beg someone to be the leader, simply because he has a cloak! But that individual is not going to want to be the leader of a nation that is disintegrating. One of the most fundamental responsibilities of leaders is defense. The President of the United States is charged, fundamentally, with the defense of the country. That’s why he, in place of all others, is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. The elders in the church are fundamentally tasked, charged, with the defense of the sheep who are in their flock - spiritual defense - against false teaching and ungodly influences (Acts 20:28). If leaders fall down on that job - the job of defense - nothing else matters. Chaos and oppression are the result.

This cloak in verse 6 (*simlah*) is the garment of the poor. There is such chaos that the poorest is begged to be the leader. “It is indeed tragic that conditions can become so calamitous that a righteous man will refuse to undertake the responsibilities of public office” (Young, 149). God forgive us if we talk so badly about our elders and preachers that we influence the next generation - as godly as they might be - to refuse to accept either the office of an elder or the responsibility of a preacher. If we have young men who grow up in this congregation who refuse to be an elder or a preacher - it is a shame on us who have influenced them. *We must* be very careful how we speak about elders and preachers in front of the next generation of young men.

GOD PLEADS WITH FALLEN JERUSALEM - 3:8-15:

Why has all this befallen Jerusalem and Judah? Verses 8-15. In one word: SIN! “Their speech and their actions are against the Lord.” Again, they “rebel” against His glorious presence. “Glory” is also a key word in Isaiah, being used 37 times. Judah was ruined by the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 B. C. but Jerusalem would be entirely laid waste by Babylon in 586 B. C. “If the foundations are destroyed, what shall the righteous do?” (Psa. 11:3; a psalm of David). The foundation of *any* society must be righteousness and justice *as defined by God* - whether the society is as small as a husband-wife relationship, the family, the church, a community, the state, or a nation. If the foundations of faith in the God of heaven are destroyed, chaos will result.

These Jews are braggarts about their sin - like the men of Sodom (the second reference to that wicked city). They do not try to conceal it. But, “they have brought evil on themselves” - Galatians 6:9.

For the righteous survivors, God will bless their actions - 3:10. Stay faithful!

But largely, their leaders are deceptive - verse 12.

At verse 13, Isaiah brings back into mind the courtroom scene that we had in chapter 1. God is accusing His people of immorality and ungodliness, in particular, the leaders (verse 14). Largely speaking, the “poor” is equivalent to the “righteous” in the prophets and psalms.

I do not necessarily want to pick on Donald Trump but he puts himself nicely in this characterization. First, the 5th Amendment to the Constitution:

The [Fifth Amendment](#) of the [U.S. Constitution](#) provides, "No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the militia, when in actual service in time of war or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation."

Now, the *Kelo versus New London* Connecticut case. The case originated with a development project in the Fort Trumbull area of New London, a small city in Connecticut. The neighborhood had fallen on difficult economic times in the 1990s after the closure of a naval research facility. City officials and others hoped to revitalize it. The administration of Republican Governor John Rowland hoped to expand his political base by promoting development in New London. The NLDC produced a development plan that would revitalize Fort Trumbull by building housing, office space, and other facilities that would support a new headquarters that Pfizer, Inc. – a major pharmaceutical firm – had agreed to build nearby. Seven individuals and families, who between them owned fifteen residential properties, refused to sell despite the pressure. One was Susette Kelo, who wanted to hold on to her “little pink house” near the waterfront.

The city try to force the families out. The State Supreme Court sided with the developers and the case went to the Supreme Court. In June 2005, in a 5-4 opinion by Justice Stevens, the Supreme Court ruled that the “public use” requirement of the Takings Clause of the Fifth Amendment permitted the City of New London to exercise its eminent domain power in taking property from homeowners and transferring it to another private owner as part of an economic development plan.

A month later, in July of 2005, Donald Trump was on a TV program with Neil Cavuto and he said this: “But I happen to agree with it 100 percent, not that I would want to use it. But the fact is, if you have a person living in an area that’s not even necessarily a good area, and government, whether it’s local or whatever, government wants to build a tremendous economic development, where a lot of people are going to be put to work and make area [sic] that’s not good into a good area, and move the person that’s living there into a better place — now, I know it might not be their choice — but move the person to a better place and yet create thousands upon thousands of jobs and beautification and lots of other things, I think it happens to be good.” What we have here is a modern fulfillment of the sin condemned by Isaiah here in 3:14-15.

Oswalt writes (137): “It is against this backdrop that the longing for, and the promise of, one who will rule in justice and righteousness stands out.” We’ve got a Messiah who is coming!

JUDGMENT AGAINST THE WOMEN - 3:16-4:1:

But, it is not just the men whom God condemns. It is also the leading, influential women.

The women are focused on themselves, on their physical attractiveness but God will strike them where they will hurt the most. She “finds herself with a shaven head, the worldwide sign of female disgrace” (Oswalt, 141).

God’s judgment on the women will be so thorough that their perfume will smell like a rotting corpse. “Pride has no place in the life of God’s people” (Smith, 152). It is easy to see the New York fashion reflected in these verses (18-23). The question we must ask ourselves as God’s children is: Are we allowing New York fashion (or Hollywood fashion) to influence us or our sons and daughters in how they dress? Or are we dressing in a way that glorifies our modest and humble Savior?

Verses 25-26 summarize the result of God’s judgment against Jerusalem and Judah. Oswalt suggests these terms picture the coming exile (142) and writes: “In any case, the picture is one of disgrace, the disgrace which results from abandoning God for trust in man (cf. Deut. 28:56, 57)” (143).

4:1 pictures the women as yearning for some leader to guide them, to provide for them security, assurance, peace...

GOD’S LEADER - 4:2-6:

“In that day” - In what day? The fundamental day Isaiah has been talking about is the day of the Lord’s judgment (2:12). The initial day of the Lord’s judgment would be the coming of the Assyria nation against Jerusalem and Judah. Yet we know that the coming of Jesus is not for 700 years. So, this “day of the Lord’s judgment” has to telescope forward through the Assyria invasion, the Babylonian invasion, the Persian Empire, the Greek desolation, as well as the Roman Empire until the coming of Jesus.

For we know this “Branch of the Lord” is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. He is the Leader that Israel needs. They do not know the Lord (1:3). They need to come to Jerusalem to learn the ways of the Lord (2:3). The Branch is the One who will lead them and teach them. This is the first time we have this reference to the Branch and Isaiah will elaborate further on this leader (11:1 - identifying Him as the seed of David) but Jeremiah (23:5-6; 33:15-16) and Zechariah (3:8; 6:9-13) will also pick up on the “Branch” and further identify Him for us - most notably, that He will be both King and Priest. As King, He will provide the Law and the Leadership that Jerusalem needed. As Priest, He will provide the forgiveness of sins that Judah needed - by the sacrifice of Himself. Israel’s problem was sin; the Branch is the answer.

Notice that the Lord’s appearance will be “beautiful” and “glorious.” Isaiah had just talked about the “glorious presence” of the Lord (3:8). Here, then, He equates the Branch with the God of Heaven. The fruit this Branch will produce will result in pride and the adornment of the survivors - the remnant, the ones who would consent and obey (1:19). The fruitfulness of the land (spiritually speaking) under the Branch is in contrast to the desolation of the land of Jerusalem under their idol worship.

Through this Branch, the one who was left in Zion and in Jerusalem would be called “holy.” That’s what Israel needed; that’s what separated them from the God of heaven - they were not holy. God had called Israel, when He brought them out of Egypt and assembled them around the base of Mount Sinai, to be a “holy nation, a royal priesthood” (Exo. 19:6). By and large, they failed to do that. The Branch, though, would make them holy. Isaiah says these are “recorded for life in Jerusalem” - likely a reference to the “Book of Life” mentioned elsewhere (Exo. 32:32-33; Psalms. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Mal. 3:16); here, it is referring to those who have gone to Jerusalem to learn the law of the Lord (2:3).

All of Mount Zion becomes holy here - please observe. There will no longer be a *single physical temple* that is holy and restricted only to the priests of the tribe of Levi of the people of Israel. Again, Isaiah is a universal prophet - this is a spiritual temple that is in view.

The "Lord" will wash the filth of the daughters of Zion and purge the bloodshed from her midst (up to and including the bloodshed of Jesus Christ, the Branch, at the hands of the Jews!). This cleansing is pictured as effected by the "spirit of judgment" and the "spirit of burning." If we read the word "spirit" as "Spirit," then we've got a picture of the purifying work of the Holy Spirit who would come with the promised Messiah and bring about judgment and cleansing. Zechariah also picks up on this "washing" idea and ties it in with the Son of David, the Branch: "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness" (13:1).

As a result of this washing, the Lord will create a cloud of protection during the day - just as God protected Israel when they left Egypt and stood at the Red Sea (Exo. 13:21-22; 14:19-20, 24). The flaming fire would cover them by night, providing guidance and protection. I might also suggest that this smoke and fire are reminiscent of God's presence in the temple; so here again, we have pictured the establishment of a new, spiritual temple (cf. 2:1-4).

Motyer (68) points out that "canopy" here refers to the marriage chamber (Psa. 19:6; Joel 2:16). In which case, we have an allusion to the husband/wife relationship that Isaiah will make explicit later (54:5) but which won't be made available in its purity until Jesus comes.

Back in 1:8, God had portrayed Israel as a shelter in a vineyard and a hut in a cucumber field - defenseless. Here, God will provide the defense but He'll do it through His Branch and He'll do it by washing the filth from the daughters of Zion and purging the bloodshed from Jerusalem. This defense is a spiritual defense. Never forget that spiritual matters are far more important than physical, material, secular matters. "Thus, the author is saying that there is nothing in the created universe which can harm those who belong to God" (Oswalt, 149).

Both this "shelter" and the "shelter" in 1:8 is *sukkah*, the singular for *sukkot* the word for "tabernacles." Some suggest this verse pictures the blessings of the Branch in terms of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-43), a feast that plays a role in the ministry of Jesus (John 7).

KEY POINTS:

Israel's leaders were not guiding men back to God. Subsequently, God would provide His own leader (4:2). To *Him*, the "survivors" would listen!