

## Isaiah 2-5

### BACKGROUND

- “Chs. 1-5 differ from chapters 6-12 in the absence of any historical markers... This detachment of these oracles from the situations which first called them forth is deliberate. We have here a balanced presentation of truths about Judah whereby we enter with Isaiah into the initial circumstances of his ministry and share his fears and hopes.”<sup>1</sup>
- On the siege described in ch. 3: “In parts of Judah the prophecy no doubt was beginning to come true by the time the Assyrians had done their pillaging and deporting..., but its real fulfillment waiting a century to Nebuchadnezzar’s removal of the ablest citizens to Babylon (cf. 2 Kings 24:14), leaving behind an utterly weak and irresponsible regime” [IVP’s *New Bible Commentary*].

### QUESTIONS

1. What sins are condemned in Isa 2-4? (Use the *Outline* to spot the judgment passages.) List four points of contrast between the sins in 2:6-9 and the vision of the city of God in 2:1-5.
2. Does the punishment differ for those who (a) actively sin; (b) sit by while sin occurs?
3. Regarding ch. 2, D. A. Carson writes,

How much more do large swaths of the confessing church in the West stand under similar judgment? ‘Their land is full of silver and gold; there is no end to their treasures’ (2:7). But we are not a people characterized by great humility and zeal for the Lord’s glory. The solution is the same as in Isaiah’s day: ‘Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?’ (2:22).

The Lord may forgive the Church its sins, but that doesn’t mean he protects us from their effects. Should we also expect our Church to suffer as Judah did? Or even our society?



Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, 1794-1872

4. 3:16-4:1 is a bitter tirade against the arrogance of the wives of the leaders of Judah. Isa 3:15 is especially vitriolic—Isaiah leaves no doubt of God’s deep and thorough disdain for them. As D. A. Carson says, “Material blessings have made them unbearably arrogant (2:7-9).”

This sort of opulent pride is not unknown among the spouses of the leaders of the modern church. Does God get *angry* toward Christians who practice these sins? Do you think God is ever angry at you?

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<sup>1</sup> Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (IVP, 1993), p. 40.

5. When reading passages like this from the OT it can be hard to know whether and how to appropriately apply them to other contexts. Evaluate this rule of thumb:

If the prophecy describes the *natural results* of Israel's actions, it is reasonable to consider applying it to people in other times and places who do the same. Beware re-contextualizing predictions of *God's actions*, since God is sovereign and may decide differently in different situations.

6. Read 4:4-6. Here Isaiah deliberately calls to mind God's protection in the Exodus. Why did God rescue Israel out of Egypt but not from Assyria and Babylon?<sup>2</sup>
7. N. T. Wright and others argue that Isaiah envisioned not just God's eventual restoration of Israel, but also his reign again in Zion, much as he dwelt with his people during the exodus (*see handout*).<sup>3</sup> This hope was not realized before the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. A.D. N. T. writes,

...the geographical return from exile, when it came about under Cyrus and his successors, was not accompanied by any manifestations such as those in Ex 40, Lev 9, 1 Kings 8, or even... Isa 6. Never do we hear that the pillar of cloud and fire which accompanied the Israelites in the wilderness has led the people back from their exile. At no point do we hear that YHWH has now gloriously returned to Zion... This expectation remained basic to Judaism in the time of Jesus.

He asserts that Jesus' preaching of the coming kingdom of God entailed the fulfillment of precisely this hope:

...in the announcement of the dawning kingdom we find the persistent emphasis that now, at least, YHWH is returning to Zion... If YHWH was visiting his people, that would mean that the exile was over, that evil was defeated, and that sins were forgiven. Conversely, if those things were happening, it would be the sign that YHWH was returning at last.

How does Isaiah 4:2-6 look through the lens of Jesus' teaching? If a God-fearing Ethiopian eunuch asked you to explain Isa 4:2-6, could you credibly claim its fulfillment in the Church?

8. Read Isaiah 5. Who is being accused, and why? In Mt 21:33-46 and parallels, Jesus retells this parable. Given their familiarity with Isaiah, how would the Pharisees have understood Jesus' parable? Name any parallels between the fates of 8<sup>th</sup>-cent. and 1<sup>st</sup>-cent. Israel.



*Fun fact:* "The hymn, 'Glorious things of thee are spoken', basing one of its verses on [Isa 4:2-6], rightly sees here God's presence 'for a glory and a covering' over and around his church. Cf. v. 6 with 25:4-5" [IVP's *New Bible Commentary*].

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<sup>2</sup> Is this a trick question?

<sup>3</sup> *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress, 1996), pp. 615-24.

# The Hope of YHWH's Return to Rule over Zion

## As Envisioned by Isaiah

(Not an exhaustive list)

<sup>4:5</sup> Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. <sup>6</sup> It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

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<sup>24:23</sup> The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed;  
for the LORD Almighty will reign  
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,  
and before its elders, gloriously.

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<sup>40:3</sup> A voice of one calling:  
"In the desert prepare  
the way for the LORD;  
make straight in the wilderness  
a highway for our God.

<sup>40:4</sup> Every valley shall be raised up,  
every mountain and hill made low;  
the rough ground shall become level,  
the rugged places a plain.

<sup>40:5</sup> And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,  
and all mankind together will see it.  
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

<sup>52:7</sup> How beautiful on the mountains

are the feet of those who bring good news,  
who proclaim peace,  
who bring good tidings,  
who proclaim salvation,  
who say to Zion,  
"Your God reigns!"

<sup>52:8</sup> Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices;  
together they shout for joy.  
When the LORD returns to Zion,  
they will see it with their own eyes.

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<sup>59:17</sup> He put on righteousness as his breastplate,  
and the helmet of salvation on his head;  
he put on the garments of vengeance  
and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.

<sup>59:19</sup> From the west, men will fear the name of  
the LORD,  
and from the rising of the sun, they will revere  
his glory.  
For he will come like a pent-up flood  
that the breath of the LORD drives along.

<sup>59:20</sup> "The Redeemer will come to Zion,  
to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,"  
declares the LORD.