

August 1

Scriptures: Read Isaiah 3, 4 & 5

Key Verse: “In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious;...” (Isaiah 4:2)

Overview

While chapter two looked far into the future, chapter three deals with the immediate situation in Judah and prophecies concerning the near future events. Unless the people of Judah repent and serve God, He will bring upon them numerous chastisements which will culminate in the destruction of Jerusalem (3:8). Interestingly, Isaiah writes about Jerusalem’s ruin as an accomplished fact, since it had already been decided upon by God. Judah was on the road to ruin because of her sinfulness. The actual physical destruction of Jerusalem, however, would not take place until almost 150 years later.

On their road to ruin, they would experience the judgment of the Lord. Firstly, God would send famine and drought to the land; then He would remove all the strong warriors and capable men of authority, replacing them with incompetent leaders (“children” and “babes”, 3:4) and women, which in that culture was rare since the women were unschooled (3:12). If the ungodly women that Isaiah describes in his day were the same type of women to later assume leadership roles, then it is no wonder the nation was in decay; those women were proud, rebellious, foolish, seductive, and more concerned with their own outward appearance than with pleasing God and living according to His Word (3:16-23). The Lord, however, would soon humiliate them, strip them of their lavish luxuries and adornments, and inflict them with disease (3:24). With the drastic depletion in the population of men because of war, the women would be further humiliated and put to shame by having to bear the reproach of not having a husband nor bearing children (4:1).

This sentence of divine judgment was partly fulfilled by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, when he invaded Judah several times and took away many captives (particularly 2 Kings 24:14-16), leaving Jerusalem in a state of chaos and on the road to total ruin, for the incompetent leaders led the nation deeper into sin (3:12). Finally, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed in fulfillment of prophecy (3:26; 2 Chron. 36:11-21).

In chapter four, we have a good example of Isaiah’s typical style in moving suddenly from warnings of judgment to messages of comfort (4:2-6). He leaves the subject of imminent judgment to speak of the future glory when Zion will prosper under the beautiful and glorious “Branch” (literally, “sprout”), a term referring to the Messiah (4:2; cf. Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12).

The promise here is not to the entire nation but rather to the faithful remnant who have escaped God’s wrath (Rom. 11:5). The Lord will purge the land, leaving only those who are “holy” to inhabit the New Jerusalem. The Lord’s presence in Zion will be symbolized by the pillar of fire and cloud, as it was in the days of Moses, and in the Lord’s millennial Tabernacle His people will find a place of refuge.

With the poetic allegory of the vineyard in chapter five, Isaiah clearly states that judgment will be certain on the unfaithful, unfruitful, and worthless vine. Isaiah was the first to use the vineyard as a symbol of Israel (1:8; 3:14; 5:1-7; cf. Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ps. 80:8-10; Ezek. 19:10-14). He laments that after God had cared and done everything to make His vineyard (His people) fruitful and good, such as cleaning, digging, removing all obstacles, and providing a tower for protection, they turned out to be like the bitter and useless wild grapes, because of their sin, injustice, and shedding of innocent blood (5:7). Their inevitable punishment was that God would remove His protective hedge and allow them to suffer destruction and desolation (5:5-6); this was to come by the hands of the Babylonians. Israel had failed to produce fruit. With this same picture in mind, Jesus declared, "I am the true vine" (John 15:1-7).

In the remainder of chapter five, we read a series of six "woes" as Isaiah condemns the sins of the people of Judah. They were guilty of selfish greed, hedonism (including alcoholic indulgence), materialism, reversing the standards, pride, self-sufficiency, and injustice. They despised and rejected the words of the Lord and were full of iniquity, but the Lord's justice would be vindicated. God would burn them like chaff (5:24) and raise up the nations to come and execute His judgment against them (5:26-30). They were to suffer humiliation, captivity, and eternity in hell (5:13-15), for they had rejected the Lord God of the Covenant.

Prayer

Dear God, may we perceive the beauty and glory of the "Branch of the Lord". May the fruit of the earth, the redeemed of the Lord, be excellent and appealing to others. Thank You for the escape from sin and its clutches we find in Jesus. Cause us to continually think about Your wonderful works.