

## Lesson 4 Isaiah 2-4 Sin and Election

### Introduction

<b>Isaiah</b>		
"He will lift up a standard for the nations...he will set a sign among the peoples."		
Book of the King 1-39	Book of the Servant 40-55	Book of the Anointed Conqueror 56-66

Alec Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).  
\*Motyer views 38 and 39 as preface to the Book of the Servant.

In this lesson I am zooming out to cover three chapters at once. That's part of the method we will use as we study Isaiah. We are not going to zoom in on every passage. Isaiah is a long prophecy and I want to keep us moving.

Speaking of zooming out, let's back all the way out to look at the whole book and then zoom in to the three chapters of this lesson. Isaiah has 66 chapters. That's our top level. The standard way to view Isaiah recognizes three major divisions. To stay consistent, I'll be using Alec Motyer's titles throughout. Motyer titles 1-39, *The Book of the King*; 40-55, *The Book of the Servant*; and 56-66, *The Book of the Anointed Conqueror*. Motyer actually sees the bridge chapters of 38-39 as the preface to the second book. And the only major change I am making to his structure is keeping chapters 38-39 as the end of the first book. That's the division you will see most everywhere. So, our first level includes three divisions: 1-39, 40-55, and 56-66: *The Book of the King*, *The Book of the Servant*, and *The Book of the Anointed Conqueror*.

We are in the first book, *The Book of the King*. This book breaks down into five sections. It's helpful to think of these five sections in a chiasmic arrangement, where the outer two sections parallel one another, the inner sections parallel one another, and then we have one section in the middle.

<b>Isaiah</b>				
"He will lift up a standard for the nations...he will set a sign among the peoples."				
<b>Book of the King</b> 1-39				
Preface: Diagnosis and Prognosis  1-5	The Triumph of Grace  6-12	The Universal Kingdom  13-27	The Lord of History  28-37	Bridge: Hezekiah's Fateful Choice  38-39

Alec Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).  
\*Motyer views 38 and 39 as preface to the Book of the Servant.

At the beginning and end we have a preface and a conclusion. We are focused on the preface now. The first five chapters, *Diagnosis and Prognosis*. At the end, *Hezekiah's Fateful Choice* in 38 and 29 provides a bridge that concludes *The Book of the King* and introduces *The Book of the Servant*. The inner frames each emphasize a king of Judah. In *The Triumph of Grace*, chapters 6-12, Isaiah gives us a story about King Ahaz. In *The Lord of History*, chapters 28-37, Isaiah gives us a story about King Hezekiah. Motyer's title for the central section is *The Universal Kingdom*. That's chapters 13-27, where the prophecies turn outward from Israel to address the major and minor players on the international stage around Judah.

Kingship is a major theme for this book. Thus, the name, *The Book of the King*. We will see failure from both a wicked king and a good king. Both are sons of David. Both are lacking. We will also see a yearning for a king who could bear the weight of righteous government on his shoulders. In answer to that yearning for righteous leadership, we get prophecies of hope that one day a truly faithful son of David will sit on the throne.

That's *The Book of the King* in five sections. We need to continue zooming in to look more closely just at the first of those five sections, which we have titled, *Preface: Diagnosis and Prognosis*. And this first section breaks down further into three subsections. Motyer titles these, *Sin and Experience*, *Sin and Election*, and, *Sin and Grace*. We have already addressed *Sin and Experience*. That was chapter 1, where Isaiah diagnosed the sin of Judah in three passages, commenting first on the national situation

of Judah as a child which has rejected its father, then considering the religious state of Judah as a people whose worship God detests, and ending with a diagnosis of the social situation, describing the once faithful city of Jerusalem as faithless and corrupt.

From all three perspectives, national, religious, and social, the diagnosis was dire. Isaiah accompanied the diagnosis with a prognosis of destruction. The first remedy he recommended was to turn from evil and do good. He also alluded to the need for God to provide cleansing from sin. But he did not explain how that is possible. His focus was on the moral responsibility of Judah. Jerusalem had been a faithful city. And she will again be a faithful city. But she is not now a faithful city.

1:4c They have abandoned the LORD, They have despised the Holy One of Israel,  
They have turned away from Him.

Isaiah		
"He will lift up a standard for the nations...he will set a sign among the peoples."		
Book of the King 1-39		
Preface: Diagnosis and Prognosis 1-5		
<b>Sin and Experience</b> 1 Title (1) The National Situation (2-9) The Religious Situation (10-20) The Social Situation (21-26) Tensions Between Threat and Hope Resolved (27-31)	<b>Sin and Election</b> 2-4 Superscription (1) The Ideal Jerusalem (2:2-4) The Actual Jerusalem (2:5-4:1) The Future Jerusalem (4:2-6)	<b>Sin and Grace</b> 5 The Vineyard: A Total Work; A Total Loss (1-7) The 'Stink-fruit': The Crop Produced, The Harvest to Come (8-30)

Alec Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

We are now moving into the second sub-section of the preface, chapters 2-4. Here Isaiah develops the idea of Jerusalem further. Israel was chosen by God. Jerusalem is His chosen capital. He placed His Temple in the heart of the city. But the people have turned away from God to walk in sin. What do we do with this reality of sin and election? Sin and being chosen? That's the theme of this section. How do we understand God's responsibility toward a people He has called His own when those people walk away from Him? Will there be consequences? Will the promises of provision and protection still stand?

Isaiah gives us three passages in this section which we Motyer calls, the ideal Jerusalem, the actual Jerusalem, and the future Jerusalem. First, we consider the ideal Jerusalem in 2:2-4, then the actual Jerusalem in 2:5-4:1, and finally the future Jerusalem in 4:2-6. Though our first poem is brief, just 3 Bible verses, it is an important development of thought in Isaiah. So, I will spend a little more time on this ideal Jerusalem. We begin with the superscription in 2:1 and then have the poetic passage in 2:2-4.

### The Ideal Jerusalem (2:1-4)

- 1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
  - 2 Now it will come about that in the last days  
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,  
And all the nations will stream to it.  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
That He may teach us concerning His ways  
For the law will go forth from Zion
  - 4 And He will judge between the nations,  
And they will hammer their swords into plowshares  
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
- The mountain of the house of the LORD  
And will be raised above the hills;<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>3</sup> And many peoples will come and say,  
To the house of the God of Jacob;  
And that we may walk in His paths."  
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.  
And will render decisions for many peoples;  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
And never again will they learn war.

<sup>1</sup> Alter's translation has three phrases here on one line. I left the four phrases of the couplet as in the NASB.

This is the ideal Jerusalem. This is what the city of the people of God would look like in an ideal world. The superscription in verse 1 is the only superscription in the book apart from the one that appears in the very first verse of the book. Here it reads, “The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.”

A lot of scholars have debated why this superscription appears here but nowhere else in Isaiah. We do not know how much of the text the superscription alludes to. It could apply to all of Isaiah, but 1:1 already does that. So, this would seemingly apply to a shorter section. Some scholars think it applies to the immediate text of 2-4 and maybe also chapter 5. And they think these prophecies were delivered in some other form earlier in Isaiah’s ministry before being included in this larger life’s work.

An interesting bit of support for that idea is in Micah 4:1-3, which replicates almost exactly this description of Jerusalem in Isaiah 2:2-4. Scholars debate whether Isaiah wrote it and Micah copied it, or whether Micah wrote it and Isaiah copied it, or whether both copied it from a third source. The theory that Isaiah produced a smaller work, including all of 2-4 would explain both the superscription and would explain where Micah would have seen or heard the passage to include in his own work. In the end, we don’t know, but that’s a good possibility.

This passage definitely connects to last passage in chapter 1. There we encountered both faithfulness and faithlessness in Jerusalem, with an emphasis on faithlessness. These verses provide a positive contrast in their description of the ideal Jerusalem.

The first phrase of the poem tells us when this ideal will become a reality. “It will come about that in the last days” these things will be true. “The last days” is not a very specific timeframe in Jewish prophecy. The term shows up often. Isaiah’s listeners would not know how far off the last days were supposed to be, nor would they know how long the last days would last. We will have to pay attention to this phrase as we go to see what detail Isaiah will add. We will wait for Isaiah to tell us what will be included in the last days.

One of the things that will happen in these last days, whenever that will be, is that “the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains and will be raised above the hills.” Pagan religions often recognized a holy mountain as the seat of their god. Think of Mount Olympus. God Himself used the visually symbolic power of a mountain when He cut covenant with His people at Mount Sinai. And He also chose to establish His capital, Jerusalem, on a mountainous or hilly site. The Bible always speaks of going up to Jerusalem from whichever direction a person approaches. It is on a high place. The mountain of the house of the Lord is the hill in Jerusalem called, Mount Zion, on which the Temple stood.

The description of Jerusalem “established as the chief mountain and raised above the hills” emphasizes the primacy of God and His Temple over any other religious option. He is raised above all the others. God’s mountain is the true source of holiness and wisdom.

The mountain of the Lord will not be raised up only for the Jewish people to feel superior to their neighbors. And here is a special aspect of Isaiah’s Covenant understanding. The ideal Jerusalem is for Jews and non-Jews. The non-Jewish peoples will acknowledge God. “The nations will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, ‘Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob.’”

“Many peoples” is not the same as “many people.” Many people can be thousands and thousands of Jews. Many peoples is like John’s language in Revelation, “a great multitude...from every nation an all tribes and peoples and tongues.” These peoples are not coming to recreate the tower of Babel. The nations are not coming together in Jerusalem to vote on a truth they all find agreeable. They are not coming together to promote their own ingenuity. They are not coming together to bring God down to earth. This is not the United Nations, and it is not the Olympics. These people are coming to the house of Jacob. That is God’s house. And there is only one truth taught at God’s house. And only one focus in God’s house.

Let me pause to say one thing about the reference to Jacob. Why call the Temple “the house of Jacob?” Isaiah mentions Jacob 42 times in his book. This is one of those terms used regularly through all three major divisions of Isaiah, like the name “Holy One of Israel.” We find it throughout. Jacob is usually used as a reference to the Covenant people Israel. Several times in this book Jacob and Israel occur parallel to one another in the two phrases of one line of poetry as synonyms.

I do wonder if Isaiah uses the term “Jacob” to make clear that we are talking about the Covenant people, since the word “Israel” had two different meanings at this time. Sometimes Israel means the Covenant people of God, God’s elect nation, all Jews. But sometimes Israel is a reference to the Northern Kingdom that split off from Judah after the death of Solomon. That Israel has its capital in Samaria and will be conquered by Assyrians in 722 BC during Isaiah’s lifetime. When we see Jacob alone or Jacob parallel to Israel, we know we are not talking about that northern nation. We are talking about all twelve tribes, the whole Covenant people.

Why do the peoples of the Earth say to one another, “Let us go up...to the house of the God of Jacob”? Why do they want to go up to the Temple of Yahweh? Isaiah tells us.

That He may teach us concerning His ways	And that we may walk in His paths.”
For the law will go forth from Zion	And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Jerusalem here is pictured as a new kind of Mount Sinai. God gave His Law to the people Israel on that mountain. Now Mount Zion has become the source of God’s teaching. And we see that these peoples are not coming just to hear some interesting teaching and then make of it whatever they want. They are coming for instruction with an attitude of obedience, “that [they] may walk in His paths.”

God here is depicted as King of kings. “He will judge between the nations, and render decisions for many peoples.” The people come and will view themselves as faithful vassals, submitting to His judgments. And as the peoples turn to God as their rightful authority, a new era of peace ensues.

And they will hammer their swords into plowshares	And their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,	And never again will they learn war.

You see, because God has become their mediator, God is making judgment between them, and they are listening. They are obeying. This vision of an ideal Jerusalem belongs to the future. Judah is nowhere near this ideal. How is it even possible that sinful Judah arrives at this ideal future? The next passage shakes us back into the ugly present.

### **Actual Jerusalem (2:5-4:1)**

First, we have an exhortation in verse 5. This exhortation could be seen as the last verse of the previous passage, since the motivation for the exhortation comes from considering the ideal Jerusalem. The exhortation can also be seen as the first verse of the next passage, since the need to exhort Judah comes from the current wayward state of the people. This is the exhortation. It is short.

*The first exhortation (2:5)*

<sup>5</sup> Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.

In the future other peoples will say, “Let us go up to... the house of the God of Jacob... that we may walk in His paths.” So, what do you have to say right now, house of Jacob? If future peoples will recognize the rightness of walking in God’s light, should not His chosen ones walk in the light of the Lord right now? Should not His chosen ones always choose to walk in the light of the Lord?

*The actual Jerusalem: its religious condition (2:6-21)*

As we have already seen in chapter 1, Judah is definitely not walking in the light of the Lord. And similar to chapter 1, we are going to consider their religious condition. That is the rest of our chapter 2, verses 6-21. And then we’re going to consider their social condition, 3:1-4:1.

We begin verse 6 with a statement of abandonment. In 1:4 it was Judah who abandoned God. Here it is the other way around. You do have to pay attention to the pronouns. Biblical poets don’t mind

switching around who is speaking and to whom they are speaking. Here, Isaiah speaks to God in verses 6-9. As he does so, he conveys hopelessness. He begins with the reality that God has abandoned His people and he ends with the exhortation, “Do not forgive them.”

- <sup>6</sup> For You have abandoned Your people,                      the house of Jacob,  
      Because they are filled *with influences* from the east,    And *they are* soothsayers like the Philistines,  
  And they strike *bargains* with the children of foreigners.
- <sup>7</sup> Their land has also been filled with silver and gold    And there is no end to their treasures;  
      Their land has also been filled with horses           And there is no end to their chariots.
- <sup>8</sup> Their land has also been filled with idols;              They worship the work of their hands,  
  That which their fingers have made.
- <sup>9</sup> So the *common* man has been humbled                      And the man *of importance* has been abased,  
  But do not forgive them.

Wow. That poetically piles up the blessings and then pounces on the idolatry. Isaiah started out by denouncing the spiritual influences allowed into Judean culture. Then he listed their blessings of silver, and gold, and treasures. False religion does not always immediately bring about poverty. Judah is still riding on the blessings of a society with God’s Law as the foundation. They have turned aside but society didn’t immediately crumble. They continued to build up wealth. Isaiah says, “Do not misinterpret your success, people of Judah!” Yes, you are filled with gold and treasure. You are filled with horses and chariots. But you are also filled with idols. Your wealth does not follow obedience. In your wealth, you have turned away from the living God to ridiculous gods that you have made with your hands, with your own little fingers.” Isaiah ends with the righteous cry, “Do not forgive them.” And God will not. Not unless they turn back to Him.

The following verses further denounce Judah’s idolatry while playing with varying perspectives of a high and low theme. I will read verses 10-17. Listen for the words that play on high and low, words like “pride” and “humility,” being “exalted” and being “abased.” Isaiah is not looking at God when he speaks these words. He has swiveled around again. These words are addressed to the people of Judah.

- <sup>10</sup> Enter the rock    and hide in the dust  
      From the terror of the LORD                                      and from the splendor of His majesty.

Notice how “splendor of His majesty” contrasts the extravagant wealth amassed in Judah. You know, you have all this gold and silver, but now hide from this wonder of God’s majesty.

- <sup>11</sup> The proud look of man will be abased                      And the loftiness of man will be humbled,  
      And the LORD alone will be exalted                          in that day.
- <sup>12</sup> For the LORD of hosts will have a day *of reckoning*       Against everyone who is proud and lofty  
      And against everyone who is lifted up,                      That he may be abased.
- <sup>13</sup> And *it will be* against all the cedars of Lebanon       that are lofty and lifted up,  
  Against all the oaks of Bashan,
- <sup>14</sup> Against all the lofty mountains,                                Against all the hills that are lifted up,  
<sup>15</sup> Against every high tower,                                      Against every fortified wall,  
<sup>16</sup> Against all the ships of Tarshish                              And against all the beautiful craft.
- <sup>17</sup> The pride of man will be humbled                            And the loftiness of men will be abased;  
      And the LORD alone will be exalted                      in that day,

Do you hear all that high-low, proud-humble language? This is Babel versus Sinai. The tower of man versus the mountain of God. When humankind rises up presumptuously in their own success and their own humanistic religion, touting idols fashioned out of their own minds and by their own hands, God will eventually bring them crashing back down to Earth, with great force if necessary. We ended with verse 17.

- <sup>17</sup> The pride of man will be humbled                            And the loftiness of men will be abased;  
      And the LORD alone will be exalted                      in that day,



promised to be a shield to Abraham. He is going to remove that shield from Jerusalem. He will remove their whole supply system, shutting off access to the basic necessities of bread and water. And He will remove their trained leadership from every sector of society. Listen to that removal in 3:1-3.

- <sup>1</sup> For behold, the Lord GOD of hosts is going to remove from Jerusalem and Judah  
Both supply and support, the whole supply of bread  
And the whole supply of water;
- <sup>2</sup> The mighty man and the warrior, The judge and the prophet, the diviner  
and the elder,
- <sup>3</sup> The captain of fifty and the honorable man, The counselor and the expert artisan, and the  
skillful enchanter.

The society has no substitute for leadership. The whole structure breaks down.

- <sup>4</sup> And I will make mere lads their princes, And capricious children will rule over them,  
<sup>5</sup> And the people will be oppressed, Each one by another, and each one by  
his neighbor;  
The youth will storm against the elder And the inferior against the honorable.
- <sup>6</sup> When a man lays hold of his brother in his father's house, *saying*,  
"You have a cloak, you shall be our ruler, And these ruins will be under your charge,"
- <sup>7</sup> He will protest on that day, saying, "I will not be *your* healer,  
For in my house there is neither bread nor cloak; You should not appoint me ruler of the people."

Isaiah follows the breakdown of leadership with a statement of judgment in 3:8-11.

- <sup>8</sup> For Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen,  
Because their speech and their actions are To rebel against His glorious presence.  
against the LORD,
- <sup>9</sup> The expression of their faces bears witness And they display their sin like Sodom;  
against them,  
They do not *even* conceal it.
- Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves.
- <sup>10</sup> Say to the righteous that *it will go well with them*, For they will eat the fruit of their actions.
- <sup>11</sup> Woe to the wicked! *It will go badly with him*, For what he deserves will be done to him.

Verses 12-15 then depict the leadership of Judah being indicted in the court of God.

- <sup>12</sup> O My people! Their oppressors are children, And women rule over them.  
O My people! Those who guide you lead *you* astray And confuse the direction of your paths.
- <sup>13</sup> The LORD arises to contend, And stands to judge the people.
- <sup>14</sup> The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people,  
"It is you who have devoured the vineyard; The plunder of the poor is in your houses.
- <sup>15</sup> "What do you mean by crushing My people And grinding the face of the poor?"  
Declares the Lord GOD of hosts.

In the last part of the passage Isaiah is not going to allow the women of Jerusalem to escape responsibility. Judging by the wealth implied in the description, he is about to give of makeup, and clothes, and jewelry. The women targeted here are those who enjoy the wealth and luxuriousness of a society that has ungratefully turned away from God. There is also the suggestion of sensuality that goes beyond humble beauty. Isaiah is speaking of women here who do not walk in the light of the Lord but embrace the values of a fallen society.

- <sup>16</sup> Moreover, the LORD said, "Because the daughters of Zion are proud  
And walk with heads held high and seductive eyes,  
And go along with mincing steps And tinkle the bangles on their feet,
- <sup>17</sup> Therefore the Lord will afflict the scalp of And the LORD will make their foreheads bare."  
the daughters of Zion with scabs,

<p>18 In that day the Lord will take away 19 the crescent ornaments and dangling earrings, 20 headdresses, ankle chains, 21 finger rings, nose rings,</p> <p>23 hand mirrors, undergarments, 24 Now it will come about that instead of     sweet perfume there will be putrefaction;     Instead of well-set hair, a plucked-out scalp;</p> <p>25 Your men will fall by the sword 26 And her gates will lament and mourn, 4:1 For seven women will take hold of     saying, “We will eat our own bread     only let us be called by your name;</p>	<p>the beauty of <i>their</i> anklets and headbands, bracelets, and veils, sashes, perfume boxes, amulets, 22 festal robes, outer tunics, cloaks,     money purses, turbans and veils. Instead of a belt, a rope;     Instead of fine clothes, a donning of sackcloth;     And branding instead of beauty. And your mighty ones in battle. And deserted she will sit on the ground.     one man in that day,<sup>3</sup>     and wear our own clothes,     take away our reproach!”</p>
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By calling the women pictured here “daughters of Zion,” Isaiah emphasizes the heritage they have walked away from. Don’t you know who you were meant to be? That you were meant to walk in the light? At the same time Isaiah is condemning Jerusalem. These are the kinds of daughters that this present Zion, this society, produces. They are not daughters of the ideal Zion. They are daughters of the present, worldly, fallen, rebellious Zion.

**Future Jerusalem (4:2-6)**

In 4:2-6, we look ahead again to Jerusalem’s future. This vision is not separate from ideal Jerusalem. We can view the whole section as a simple three-part chiasm. Ideal Jerusalem and future Jerusalem are parallel at beginning and end. Actual Jerusalem forms the center. But the description of future Jerusalem is not a mere repetition of ideal Jerusalem. The ideal had not yet addressed the question of apostasy among God’s elect people. It’s that question I asked at the beginning of this lesson: what happens when God’s chosen, elect people walk away from Him? Do all the promises still stand?

Jerusalem is the chosen city. The capital of the chosen people. What happens when the majority of that people turn away from God, both in their hearts and in their behavior? We see that they experience the consequence of their own sin, both in the present and in a future judgment. You know, in that day when an army comes to punish them. But what about the far distant future of Heaven? Will they still participate in the ideal Jerusalem when there is no more war? And the answer is “no.” God’s election of Israel does not mean that every Israelite will participate in the new Jerusalem. Paul recognized this theology in Isaiah. It’s the theology of Romans 9-11. In fact, Paul quotes Isaiah 1:9 in Romans 9:29, “Unless the LORD of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom, we would be like Gomorrah.” There are only a few survivors, not the majority.

This future image of Jerusalem assumes the ideal pictured in 2:2-4 while also limiting those Jews who will be present as a remnant in that ideal Jerusalem. Not only will many peoples stream into Jerusalem, but only a remnant of Jews will be there to participate in the new reality with them.

<p>2 In that day the Branch of the Lord will be     and the fruit of the earth will be</p> <p>3 It will come about that he who is left in Zion     will be called holy—</p> <p>4 When the Lord has washed away the filth of     the daughters of Zion</p>	<p>beautiful and glorious, the pride and the adornment     of the survivors of Israel. and remains in Jerusalem everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem. and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem     from her midst,     by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning,</p>
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<sup>3</sup> Motyer, Oswalt and Alter all recognizes 4:1 as the end of this poem, starting the next passage at 4:2.



- <sup>5</sup> then the Lord will create over the whole area and over her assemblies  
of Mount Zion  
a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire  
by night;  
for over all the glory will be a canopy.
- <sup>6</sup> There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day,  
and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain.<sup>4</sup>

There will be provision and protection. But only for the remnant. The first phrase begins with “in that day.” Four times here in chapter 2 and 3 “in that day” referred to the humbling Judah would receive at the hands of an avenging army. It gives an ominous start to this chapter. Reading on though, we realize that this day is equivalent to “the last days” of ideal Jerusalem. In that day when God restores Jerusalem. That’s a good day.

The text also connects back to the perverted beauty of the immoral daughters of Zion whose sweet perfume was exchanged for the smell of putrefaction. That kind of evocative imagery sets Isaiah apart as a poet. You can almost smell it, sweet perfume to putrefaction. Instead of putrefaction, here we see life. And instead of immoral daughters, we see the beauty and glory of the Lord’s branch.

The term “branch” refers to a branch on a family tree. In the prophets, “branch” almost always refers to the Messiah as a branch of the line of David. Here, it is the Branch of the Lord. If this is the same Branch, then the Messiah who will reign in future Jerusalem, will be of both the line of David and of the line of God. For now, we are not even sure we are talking about the Messiah, not yet. That is another trademark of Isaiah. He introduces themes and then waits to develop those themes later in the book. This is in fact a reference to Jesus, but that picture needs to become clear. It’s not clear yet, and we will get back to the branch in chapter 11.

The new Jerusalem is connected to the full manifestation of the Branch’s beauty and glory. At that time the fruit of the Earth will belong to the survivors of Israel. In the period of judgment, they had no bread or water. Society was completely broken down. Here they have plenty. Society is flourishing. It is their pride and adornment.

We also recognize a development of the remnant theme. There will be survivors. Those who remain in Jerusalem will be called “holy.” They are those who remain after the purifying fire of God’s wrath. Along with the Messiah and the remnant, God’s presence will be over Jerusalem as a cloud by day and fire by night, a clear reference back to the Exodus. Here, God’s presence is among them. And here, the 2<sup>nd</sup> section of the preface ends.

It is not always easy as Christians to self-identify with the extreme fallenness of Judah in this period. Its easier to apply this critique of false religion and corrupt society to our secular cultures. I hope our churches have not rejected the Lord and embraced the kind of idolatry and immorality pictured here. I do, however, find myself strongly identifying with Isaiah’s exhortations. What if we did this? What if we considered who we will one day be: a holy nation, made up of many peoples, living with God in our midst? What if we considered our future reality and tried our best to live that out today? We recognize one day Jesus will reign among us in the New Jerusalem. But He is reigning today from Heaven. And so, what if we received these exhortations and lived this out?

<sup>2:5a</sup> Come, house of Jacob...

<sup>2:22</sup> Stop regarding man, whose breath *of life* is in his nostrils;  
For why should he be esteemed?

<sup>2:5b</sup> ...let us walk in the light of the LORD.

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<sup>4</sup> My English Bibles all format this section as prose. But Robert Alter formats it as poetry, commenting, “the diction is manifestly poetic, and it is possible to scan it as poetry, even though it is somewhat looser metrically than other Prophetic poems.” I will read it as poetry following Alter’s formatting of the text.

## Reflection questions

1. Read Isaiah 2:1-4. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
3. Choose one image in Isaiah 2:6-21. Imagine what it might look like. What picture is the poet drawing in your mind? How does Isaiah connect that image you just imagine to a more concrete reality?
4. Choose a second image in Isaiah 3:1-4:1. Imagine what it might look like. What picture is the poet drawing in your mind? How does Isaiah connect that image you just imagine to a more concrete reality?
5. Follow the flow of thought in Isaiah 2:5-4:1. What are one or two themes that especially stand out to you? How does the movement from phrase to phrase help emphasize that theme?
6. Consider the effect of the exhortation in 2:5 when you read it only with the image of ideal Jerusalem in 2:1-4. Then consider the effect of the exhortation in 2:5 when you read it with 2:6 and following. How does that exhortation feel different from those two different perspectives?
6. Read Isaiah 4:2-6. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
7. What truths or ideas are added in the depiction of future Jerusalem in 4:2-6 that are not included in the depiction of ideal Jerusalem in 2:1-4? How do those additional truths relate to or flow from the depiction of actual Jerusalem in 2:5-4:1?
8. In light of Isaiah's depictions of ideal, actual and future Jerusalem, how do you understand the relationship between the election of Israel and individual salvation for Israelites? Does the sin of Judah disrupt God's plan in choosing Israel as his people?
9. What would it look like for you personally to put into practice the exhortation in 2:5 and 2:22?