



Preaching Through The Bible, Michael Eaton

Isaiah

Part 7

Hope After Despair (4:1-6)

• Isaiah describes chaos of a society allowed to go its own way

• Such sufferings that a woman will do without the provision of food and clothing if she can just have the dignity of being married

1. The gospel is good news because the state of the world is bad news

2. God gives us undated and forward-looking plans for the future

• Jesus has yet to come

3. God's plan involves a Saviour

• Jesus – a branch of the house of David

• Eternal significance

4. God's plan will bring salvation for a sub-section of Jerusalem

Chapter 4:1 belongs with chapter 3, with its description of the chaos that arises when society is allowed to go its own way.

1In that day seven women will take hold of one man and say, 'We will eat our own food and provide our own clothes; only let us be called by your name. Take away our disgrace!'

In a well-ordered society, what does a woman want? In most cultures she wants someone who will be responsible for her, seeing she has food and clothing. And she wants the dignity and honour of being a respectable married woman. Isaiah sees such sufferings ahead of Israel that a woman will dispense with the provisions of food and clothing, if only she can have the dignity of belonging to someone, in a day when no one belongs to anyone.

1. The gospel is good news because the state of the world is bad news. Isaiah 3:1–4:1 is followed by Isaiah 4:2–6. Bad news is never the bottom line for God's people. God always has plans to act. Whether we shall see them in our generation is not guaranteed, but there is a guarantee that the gates of hell will never prevail against God's people. If 'old Jerusalem' fails (as it did especially when it crucified Jesus) God creates a new Jerusalem out of the old. God has a plan for Jerusalem¹. In Isaiah's day Israel had fallen far below its calling², but God has a plan to fulfil his purposes after all!

¹ 2:1-4
² 3:1-4:1

2. God gives us undated and forward-looking plans for the future. Isaiah says:

2In that day the Branch of Yahweh will be the adornment and glory, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and beauty of the survivors in Israel.

'In that day . . . ' looks into the future (from Isaiah's time) but gives no date. We are in the same position. Jesus has come to be our Saviour but the story is not finished. The church has yet to accomplish its task, and Jesus has yet to come.

3. God's plan involves a Saviour. Isaiah speaks of 'the Branch'. It is a title for the coming Saviour, the one whom we now know to be our Lord Jesus Christ. The house of David is envisaged as being like a tree. Out of the tree comes a small branch, someone who like David himself seems at first to be insignificant but who turns out to be God's ruler of his people. This seemingly insignificant Branch becomes in the eyes of his people 'adornment and glory'. He is for us the pre-eminent one and incredibly beautiful in our eyes. He is 'the fruit of the earth'. That is, he comes from this world, from the land of Israel. He is not an angel. Although he is divine (as we shall see later in Isaiah), that is not all that can be said about him; there is an earthly side to his origin and his personality. He comes as the apparently insignificant one, but he does something that will have significance for ever.

4. God's plan will bring salvation for a sub-section of Jerusalem. Isaiah says he is to be the Saviour of 'the survivors in Israel'. Not every person of Jerusalem is automatically saved by this coming Saviour. Verse 3 goes on to speak of 'those who are left in Zion'. Isaiah does not explain in any detail, but we know it is his teaching that even Jerusalem-based sinners will come under the judgement of God. Salvation will not be based on locality or earthly citizenship. The sub-section of Jerusalem (and we may say, plus gentile

• Not every citizen of Jerusalem will be saved

• Those who are saved are those cleansed by God himself

5. God's plan of salvation involves purification

• God's people will be cleansed – either by water or fire

• God's presence will be with His people

• Their marriage with God will give them perfect safety and shelter

• All fulfilled in the person of Jesus

• His new Jerusalem will fill the earth and be glorious

additions) are those who (as Isaiah will explain) enter into the salvation that 'the Branch' brings.

³*Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded unto life in Jerusalem.*

The ones who experience salvation are those who after judgement have been cleansed in some way by God himself. They are the predestined, those 'recorded unto life'.

5. God's plan of salvation involves purification.

⁴*Whenever Yahweh will have washed away the filth of the women of Zion, he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a Spirit of justice and a Spirit of burning.*

Since it is the women whose behaviour Isaiah has specially noted¹, it is they who are specially mentioned as receiving God's purification. But the women are one section representing the whole of God's people. Isaiah mixes his metaphors. The cleansing is both a washing with water and a burning by fire. What can be washed away is washed away. What requires more severe treatment is burnt away. In one way or another – gently or more forcefully – God's people will be cleansed.

¹ in 3:16-4:1

⁵*Then Yahweh will create over all of Mount Zion and over its assemblies a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a marriage-canopy.*

⁶*It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the downpour and the rain.*

In the days of the exodus, smoke and fire were ways in which God became visibly present with his people. Something similar – but more spiritual – will happen again. God's holy presence will be wonderfully with his people. 'Over all the glory will be a marriage-canopy.' In Bible times people who got married might spend their first night together in a marriage-tent (we remember the story of Jacob and Leah in Genesis 29:22–25). God will enter into a marriage with his people. Their relationship with God will give them perfect safety with shelter and protection in the midst of any kind of situation.

It is all fulfilled — in steps and stages — in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Israel (north and south) were exiled in different ways. A remnant came back to Jerusalem in the 530s BC. Jesus was born in Israel. The Branch from the line of David came. He died and rose again in Jerusalem, and poured out his Spirit in the same city. A remnant received him, and gentile believers were added to that remnant. He is still building his new Jerusalem. One day it will fill the earth and be visibly glorious. Meanwhile, even now our Lord Jesus Christ knows how to be 'a shelter and shade . . . a refuge and hiding place' in the midst of every circumstance, and we live in the expectation that soon sin will be banished from this world for ever.