

The Redemption of the Harlot-City – *Isaiah 1:21-31*

Introduction –The imagery of this Jerusalem being the wife of God runs through all of Scripture as does her unfaithfulness. This section of Isaiah begins with a lament and then a teeth-clenching promise from God that He will have His wandering bride back. In this we see that God's final purpose is never simply destruction but blessing achieved through purification.

Overview - The city (Jerusalem), once faithful and full of justice, has become a harlot and a dwelling place for murderers (v21). There are no just measures (v22) and the city is now run by corrupt princes and their companions who are thieves (v23a), exploiting the very ones they had been charged to protect (v23b). In great anger and lament, the mighty and sovereign God declares His own people to now be His enemies upon whom He will take vengeance (v24). Nevertheless, He will turn His hand upon them, not for ultimate destruction, but to purge away the evil corruptions (v25) and to restore the city so that it once again will be called faithful (v26). This will happen through Zion's redemption (v27) but those who forsake the Lord will be consumed (v28). All that they so proudly worshipped and built will become tokens of great shame and embarrassment (v29), their false-gods will dry up and die, burnt and unquenched (vv30-31).

The Harlot City (v21) – The relationship of the church to Christ is pictured for us by the relationship of a wife to her husband (i.e. Eph 5, Rev 21), and unfaithfulness to God is likened to harlotry (Side Note: and since God uses prostitution as a metaphor for idolatry, it follows that all sexual sins, even those which occur between two consenting adults, are sins). Idolatry never stays in the religious services only; it spreads to the city in the form of injustice, murder, bribery and corruption, exploitation of the weak and poor. This is because the Lord is the source of all life, justice, and mercy; to abandon the Lord results in the loss of the things of the Lord. The problems of the city stem from the idolatry in the church and in the hearts of the so-called worshippers of God. Perversions in the city are the results of idolatry in the sanctuary and become the shame of the city.

The Degenerate City (v22-23) – Silver that has become dross, strong drink that has been watered down, these are signs of corruption and deception. They look like one thing, but they are not; they are completely corrupt. They look after themselves and refuse to defend the weakest.

The Mighty One Relieved of His Enemies (v24) – Piling on His own names, God makes clear He is the absolute Master of all and that He can and will "ease" Himself of the great burden of this city's sin and corruption (Isaiah 43:24, Amos 2:13). God not only hates the sin; He calls the sinners His adversaries, His enemies, and He intends to take vengeance for His name's sake. It seems we should ask, "Why does God have any enemies if He could put them all down?" The answer is – He is longsuffering (2 Pet 3:8-9) and He always planned to reveal His gracious glory, not only to Israel, but to the entire world (Rom 9:22-25). And so, in our current crises we must remember, God has no problems.

The Hand of Redemption (vv25-27) – By the turning of His own hand, God will redeem Zion, granting them justice and righteousness, and reestablishing His new City with new faithfulness. As Christians, we have the privilege of seeing exactly Who brought that to us (Titus 2:13-14). Through Christ, God was able to be both just and the One Who justifies.

Gardens and Trees (vv28-31) – Old Israel would be shamed by her clinging to the false worship she pursued, cultic practices around gardens and trees. That is what all false worship is – the attempt to establish a faux Garden of Eden and Tree of Life. Those who remain with their false gods (or systems of salvation for mankind) will be ashamed. They and their cities will fall. But, even in this passage, we see the hints of how God plans to establish a faithful Garden-City; a New Jerusalem that will have the Tree of Life whose leaves will provide healing for all nations (Rev 22:1-2). That is what His strong arm will bring forth – and He will do so using the men and their works that stand against Him to accomplish His victory (which He did at the Cross). His judgment does not bring total destruction, but rather, total redemption and recreation.

The Only Way Out of Unquenchable Shame – There is no way out for any city, any nation, from the judgment of God outside of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, just as there is no way out for any individual. All that is left is shame and embarrassment for your unforgiven sin. Shame comes from our own sins and from sins committed against us. Shame is heavy and burdensome. Shame keeps us concealing ourselves from others, even those to whom we might be considered close. Shame kept Adam and Eve hiding from God. But Jesus, "*endured the cross, despising the shame...*" (Heb 12:2) took upon Himself your sin and your shame and paid for it all. He died for the sin and shame of cities and nations. He died to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29) and is the Redeemer of the world. The mighty One came and crushed sin and death.