

The Haughty and Holy Daughters of Zion – Isaiah 3:16-4:6

Introduction – The haughtiness of men is the downfall of the leadership of a nation (3:1-15). The haughtiness of women brings about another kind of affliction. False glory contrived by self-worship will bring forth, from the hand of God, the very loss of those things upon which we hung our glory, and will be replaced with great shame and bondage. Yet Isaiah declares hope through the very punishment for sin; the fiery judgment will be the means of His own glorification project.

Haughty Daughters (3:16) – In biting satire, Isaiah’s portrait of the daughters of Zion reads as though he has been watching Paris/New York fashion shows, the latest music videos, and walked the malls and upscale bars of America. These women, riding on the riches that come from their men “*grinding the faces of the poor*” (v15) adorn themselves with extravagant seduction. It is an age-old truth: fallen men love to lust and fallen women love to be lusted after. Men love their swagger and bravado; women love their trend-setting luxury and allure. Both love their self-made glory and security. Both are twisting the good gifts of glory and beauty in perverse ways. Note carefully: Haughtiness, and not glory or beauty, is the problem. “*First let the heart be right with God, and other matters will take care of themselves*” (Calvin, and see 1 Pet 3:4).

The Affliction of God (3:17-4:1) – “*In that day*” (again), God declares that without warning He will strip the finery of Zion away. Secure in her luxury, she will be reduced to a begging hag covered in scabs, the very parts of her seduction uncovered in shame (v17). A five-fold disgracing is brought upon them by God (v24). Stench, rope, baldness, sackcloth, and tattoo-branding – all pictures of the disgrace of slaves and prisoners hauled away because they abandoned their God.

Parallel Afflictions – The inventory of perfumes, clothes, and jewelry parallels the big shot leaders in 3:2-3. Both images merge into one in vv25-26 where the mighty men are fallen and the women sit desolate upon the ground. Of course, this occurred a century later when Babylon carried Jerusalem off into exile, but even that was only a type of the final fall of the Temple in 70AD (ironically, a Roman Vespasian coin portrays Judea as a woman sitting in desolation).

Present Temptations – The risen Jesus warned the churches as Jerusalem neared that judgment to be careful not to be haughty in a similar manner (Rev 3:17-19). Similarly, Paul warned the Roman church (Rom 11:19-22). Pride is a perennial problem, a constant temptation in the ongoing work of our sanctification.

Fiery Judgment that Also Brings Purifying Salvation (4:2-6) – Again, “*in that day*,” God will act in His full sovereignty and without warning. This is the seventh time this, or a similar phrase, is used in this section (Chs 2-4). The listeners must have heard the phrase and winced, only to find in it a promise of transformation and not condemnation – for those with ears to hear. The “*Branch of the Lord*” that comes forth is the title pointing to the Messiah in His kingly and priestly offices (Jer 23:5; 33:15, Zech 3:8; 6:12). There is this contrast of a humble, little sprout and the absurd extravagance of the mighty man provoking the eyes of God (3:8) and the perverse ostentatiousness of the wanton woman (3:16). But here is the prophecy of the future church, the New Israel. He is the remnant and He brings forth a remnant.

Beauty for Beauty and Glory for Glory – When the judgment comes, those who are left in the true Zion will be holy (v3), manifesting the beauty and glory that lasts forever (v2). These are the ones whose names are recorded in the New Jerusalem (v3b, Rev 21:27) and so to have survived the calamity would never be an accident but arises from God’s unconditional election. In order to do this, the Lord Himself would wash the filth away (there is no filth He cannot wash away), and purge the blood-guiltiness (and there is no blood guilt that cannot be purged) – v4. God takes away the false glory and then bestows His true glory upon Mount Zion, His glory-cloud (vv5-6). Isaiah combines word-pictures of creation, the Exodus, and the glory-presence of Yahweh over and among His people. Jesus is the Mediator of that glory for His people (Luke 2:32, John 1:14; 2:11; 11:4, 2 Cor 4:6, Col 1:27).

The Flow of Redemptive History in the Here and Now – There is hope in proclaiming the gospel and gospel-obedience to this and the next generations because the Branch has come, the fiery judgment was finished in principle at the Cross, and the glorious, beautiful bride of Christ is being prepared. If the promise were only for the “sweet by and by,” what hope would we have to instruct our boys to be godly men, leaders, husband, fathers, and citizens, fruitful for the kingdom of God? What hope would we have to raise up our daughters to delight in godly purity from the heart and the true beauty and honor that comes from following the Lord Jesus as faithful women, daughters, mothers, and wives – the salt and light of true community? The church has lost her hope because her prophets preach no hope for the here and now, no gospel potency for “me and my house,” for “to me and to my children and to my children’s children, to a thousand generations,” for “these nations that will flow to the mountain of the Lord.” May the Lord bring a sanctifying fire to the tongues of present-day Isaiahs.