

ISAIAH 1:1-20

I'm Fed Up to the Teeth with Your Worship

¹ The vision of Isaiah ben Amoz which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

- ² Listen, heavens, and give ear, earth,
because Yahweh has spoken.
I raised children and brought them up,
but they— they rebelled against me.
- ³ An ox acknowledges its owner,
a donkey its master's manger.
Israel doesn't acknowledge,
my people doesn't take any notice.
- ⁴ Hey, offending nation,
a people heavy with waywardness!
Offspring of evil people, decadent children,
they've abandoned Yahweh.
They've disdained Israel's holy one,
they've become estranged, backwards.
- ⁵ Why will you be beaten more,
continue rebelling?
The whole head [has come] to sickness,
the whole heart is faint.
- ⁶ From the sole of the foot to the head,
there's no soundness in it.
Bruise, blotch, fresh wound—
they haven't been pressed out,
they haven't been bandaged,
it hasn't been softened with oil.
- ⁷ Your country is a waste,
your cities are burned with fire.
Your land—in front of your eyes
foreigners are consuming it,
a desolation, quite overthrown by foreigners,
- ⁸ and Ms. Zion is left
like a hut in a vineyard,
like a night shelter in a melon field,
like a city besieged.

- ⁹ Had Yahweh Armies not left us a survivor,
we'd have been like Sodom,
we'd have resembled Gomorrah.
- ¹⁰ Listen to Yahweh's word,
rulers of Sodom!
Give ear to our God's teaching,
people of Gomorrah!
- ¹¹ What use to me is the abundance of your sacrifices?
(Yahweh says).
I'm full of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of well-fed animals.
In the blood of bulls and lambs and goats
I do not delight.
- ¹² When you come to appear [before] my face,
who sought this from your hands?
Trampling my courtyards—
- ¹³ you will do it no more,
bringing a meaningless offering.
Incense is an outrage to me, new moon and Sabbath,
the summoning of convocation;
I cannot bear wickedness and assembly.
- ¹⁴ Your new moons and set occasions
my whole being repudiates.
They've become a burden to me
that I'm weary of carrying.
- ¹⁵ And when you spread out your hands,
I shall lift up my eyes from you.
Even when you offer many a prayer,
there'll be no listening on my part.
Your hands are full of blood—
- ¹⁶ wash, get clean.
Put away the evil of your actions
from in front of my eyes.
Stop doing evil,
learn doing good.
- ¹⁷ Seek the exercise of authority,
put the oppressor right.
Exercise authority for the orphan,
contend for the widow.

- ¹⁸ Come on, let's argue it out
(Yahweh says).
If your offenses are like scarlet,
they are to be white like snow.
If they are red like crimson,
they are to be like wool.
- ¹⁹ If you're willing and you listen,
you will consume the country's good things.
- ²⁰ But if you refuse and rebel,
you'll be consumed by the sword;
because Yahweh's mouth has spoken.

We just came home from our Palm Sunday service at church, a great occasion. As usual we began by distributing palm crosses; I can never take for granted that in California we can make our palm crosses from palm branches on trees that grow in the church grounds. We reenacted the events of the first Palm Sunday as we processed around the church grounds and back into the street to the church's main entrance, singing the Palm Sunday hymn "All Glory, Laud, and Honor." Even more moving was the dramatized reading of the account in Mark's Gospel of the last week in Jesus' life, with members of the congregation taking different parts but all of us joining in those terrible, repeated words, "Crucify him!" More than one person commented on how this brought them near to tears, while someone who shared in the leading of the service with me said afterward, "Well, that was a well-done service."

Then I came home and read of God asking the people of Judah what use their worship was to him. The problem was not that it was only outward sacrifices—he refers to their prayers. He doesn't suggest that they worshiped only externally and not in their hearts. It looks as if they meant every hallelujah. The problem was the disparity between what they meant in their hearts as they worshiped and what they did in their lives outside the context of worship. He likens them to the rulers and people of Sodom and Gomorrah, because they're about as responsive to Yahweh as those two cities were. When they lift their hands to God in prayer, all God can see is the blood on these hands. They need to clean themselves up. The community needs to

cease to be the kind of city where people can be ill-treated and oppressed and can lose their lives for reasons that are nothing to do with them.

It's because they have failed to be that kind of community that they have experienced the chastisement from **Yahweh Armies** that the first paragraph describes. Isaiah 1 is a collection of Isaiah's messages from different contexts, brought together to introduce his ministry as a whole. The trouble that the first main paragraph describes didn't come at the beginning of this ministry but near the end; the description here serves to introduce the account of his ministry as a whole. You want to know where Isaiah's ministry led, how the story ends? Well, here's the answer. Then the second main paragraph takes you back to look at why it ended that way.

It ended that way because of how the **Judahites** had related to their heavenly Father. They're not little children but teenage children or young adults who are part of an extended family living together in a village. Father is still the authority figure. He sets the moral standards. But they have stopped taking any notice of him. So he has disciplined them. And they have ended up like an individual son who's been thrashed yet who is asking for more punishment. The literal picture is one that will be painted by chapters 37–38, which describe how the **Assyrians** invade Judah and all but crush it. They take all the cities in Judah except for Jerusalem itself, which is left like the lonely hut that sits in the middle of a vineyard or a melon field as a shelter for people keeping watch over the produce. Judah is almost as devastated as Sodom and Gomorrah, down in the Jordan valley, which is quite appropriate, given that they have behaved like Sodom and Gomorrah.

We should go back for a moment to the actual opening of the book. It describes the chapters that are to follow as a vision. They weren't something Isaiah thought up. They are a vision "concerning Judah and Jerusalem." That phrase usually refers to the community in Judah after the **exile**, and it thus invites readers in that later context to see that Isaiah's message relates to them and not just to the people of Isaiah's day. This introduction sets Isaiah's own ministry in the context of four kings' reigns. It was common for a king to nominate his

successor (usually one of his sons) and make him co-king well before he died, a practice that should ensure smooth succession. Things were more complicated for Uzziah because he contracted the skin ailment commonly called leprosy, which meant he couldn't fulfill many public functions. So quite early in his reign he made his son Jotham co-king; actually Jotham likely died before his father. Uzziah's grandson Ahaz then succeeded Jotham as co-king. For practical purposes the kings who matter in Isaiah 1–39 are Ahaz and then Hezekiah. A key feature of their reigns is the political pressure on Judah arising from the development and aspirations of the Assyrian empire, which raise one sort of issue for Ahaz and a different sort for Hezekiah. Mentioning the kings at the beginning of the book draws our attention to the need to understand Isaiah's message in the context of the events of the day. What God has to say to people relates to where they are in their lives. Further, it comes to a particular prophet, Isaiah ben Amoz (not the Amos who appears in the book of Amos, whose name is spelled differently). It doesn't fall from heaven without human mediation. It comes through a human being who is himself an important part of his message. His very name makes the point: Isaiah means "Yahweh is deliverance."

ISAIAH 1:21–2:5

Second-Degree Manslaughter

- ^{1:21} Aah! The trustworthy town
has become an immoral woman.
It was full of the exercise of authority,
faithfulness dwelt in it, but now murderers.
- ²² Your silver has become slag,
your drink is diluted with water.
- ²³ Your officers are rebels, the associates of thieves;
every one of them loves a bribe, chases gifts.
They don't exercise authority for the orphan;
the widow's cause doesn't come to them.
- ²⁴ Therefore the declaration of the Lord Yahweh Armies,
the mighty one of Israel, is:

- “Aah, I will get relief from my adversaries,
take redress from my enemies,
25 turn my hand against you.
I will smelt your slag as with lye,
remove all your contamination.
26 I will restore your authorities as of old,
your counselors as at the beginning.
Afterward you will be called faithful city,
trustworthy town.”
27 Zion will find redemption through the exercise of authority,
and the people in it who turn, through faithfulness.
28 But [there will be] a crushing of rebels and offenders, all
together,
and the people who abandon Yahweh will be finished.
29 Because they will be shamed on account of the oaks that
you desired;
you will be disgraced on account of the gardens that you
chose.
30 Because you will be like an oak wilting of foliage,
like a garden for which there’s no water.
31 The strong person will become tinder,
his work a spark.
The two of them will burn all together,
and there will be no one quenching.
2:1 The word that Isaiah ben Amoz saw concerning Judah and
Jerusalem.
- 2 It will come about at the end of the time:
The mountain of Yahweh’s house
will have become established,
at the peak of the mountains,
and it will be higher than the hills.
All the nations will stream to it;
3 many peoples will come and say,
“Come on, let’s go up to Yahweh’s mountain,
to the house of Jacob’s God,
so he may teach us of his ways
and we may walk in his paths.”
Because teaching will go out from Zion,
Yahweh’s word from Jerusalem.

- ⁴ He will exercise authority among the nations
and issue reproof for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into hoes
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation;
they will no more learn war.
- ⁵ Jacob's household, come on,
let's walk by Yahweh's light.

The other Sunday, halfway on our five-minute drive to church there was a huge police presence off to the left of our street, with police cars and barriers and police officers apparently searching waste land and dumpsters. Some aspects of what happened are still disputed, but the story is approximately as follows: About midnight two teenagers had broken into a car and stolen a backpack with a laptop, and a man had called the police. To encourage a quick response he told them the youths were armed. The police came, chased the youths, and shot and killed one when they thought he was reaching for the gun that he didn't in fact have. The man who called the police has been charged with second-degree manslaughter.

You can be guilty in regard to someone's death whether or not you personally killed the person. In Jerusalem it was the position of the city as a whole, and so perhaps it is for my city. In Jerusalem it may have meant that there were people who were put to death on trumped-up charges like Naboth, whose story appears in 1 Kings 21. There will also have been widows and orphans such as are mentioned in this passage who were deprived of the land that had belonged to their families and/or not offered support by people who could have helped them. They were thus also guilty of second-degree manslaughter; failing to ensure that people such as refugees have adequate food kills them slowly, but it kills them surely.

The problem lies in whether **authority** is exercised in the city in a **faithful** way. Second Samuel 8 relates how David saw to the faithful exercise of authority in the city; those days are long gone. **Zion** has become like someone who is sexually unfaithful or like precious metal contaminated by slag or like watered-down liquor. Literally, the problem lies with the

administration, the people who ought to see to the faithful exercise of authority but are actually a hotbed of corruption and who implement policies that will ensure they themselves can do well rather than that serve the needs of the vulnerable.

So **Yahweh Armies** will crack down on them. Yet the aim won't be merely punishment but restoration, the turning of the city back into what it was supposed to be, so that authority is once again exercised with faithfulness. Admittedly this action won't necessarily benefit the administration. As is often the case, the announcement of what Yahweh intends to do presents people with a choice. Rebels and offenders and people who abandon Yahweh will be finished. People who return to Yahweh will enjoy the restoration Yahweh brings about.

The first paragraph began by describing the city as an immoral woman, which usually suggests religious unfaithfulness. Toward its end, it returns to that theme in speaking of oaks and gardens. The language presupposes practices belonging to the traditional religion of the land, one that seeks to reach out to God by means of nature—the allusion is too brief to be sure what precise kind of religious observances they are. Whereas the earlier part of the chapter referred to proper worship of Yahweh that was not accompanied by proper community life, here the problem lies in other forms of worship, offered outside the temple. Here, such worship that ignores the specifics of how Yahweh has been involved with Israel over the centuries accompanies a style of life that also ignores how Yahweh has been involved with Israel over the centuries.

So Jerusalem will be purged and restored to what it's supposed to be. That vision goes beyond its mere internal life, lived in isolation from the world around. It could hardly be otherwise. Israel always knew that Yahweh was not concerned only with Israel. Yahweh was, after all, the only real God, the God of the whole world. The psalms that people sang in the temple in Jerusalem frequently reminded people of that fact as they urged all the nations to acknowledge **Yahweh**, not least because of what he had done in Israel.

But the nations' recognition of Yahweh was not a present reality. The vision in the second paragraph promises that the moment will come when it becomes so. It also appears in

Micah 4; Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah. We don't know which of these prophets delivered it first or whether it came from another prophet and was adapted into their books. Most prophetic books likely collect words from God that were given by prophets other than the one whose name appears at the beginning.

The vision will come about “at the end of the time,” literally “at the end of the days.” The expression makes a link with the time in which Judah lives; it doesn't imply merely “in the future” nor “at the end of days.” The end of the epoch in which Judah is involved will see these events. The mountain where the temple sits will be exalted above the mountains around. The image is figurative; the point is that it will be exalted in the eyes of the nations and will attract them. The implication isn't merely that it's geographically impressive but that there's something to be learned there. Maybe we should make a link with that earlier promise of restoration, because that was to involve the exercise of proper authority or government in Jerusalem, so that the idea is that the nations recognize their need of the proper exercise of authority and come to seek it. Specifically, it means their letting Yahweh be the one who sorts out their disputes and thus stops them warring with one another so that they gain a substantial peace dividend.

This vision has not been fulfilled yet. It gives Christians and Jews a promise on whose basis to pray. The immediate challenge to Israel was that the people itself should live in light of Yahweh's concern for the faithful exercise of authority and let Yahweh be the one who guides it, and to prove that this commitment brings it peace. Such a commitment might even be the means of Jerusalem being exalted in the world's eyes. But we should not turn the promise into a mere exhortation to accept a responsibility for bringing about peace. It's a promise.

ISAIAH 2:6–22

The Destiny of All That Is Humanly Impressive

²⁶ Because you have abandoned your people,
Jacob's household.

- Because they are full from the east,
yes, of diviners like the Philistines,
and they abound in children of foreigners.
- ⁷ Their country is full of silver and gold;
there's no end to their treasures.
Their country is full of horses;
there's no end to their chariots.
- ⁸ Their country is full of idols;
they bow down to the work of their hands,
to what their fingers made.
- ⁹ So humanity bows down, the individual falls down
(may you not carry them!).
- ¹⁰ Go into the cleft,
bury yourself in the dirt,
before the fearfulness of Yahweh,
from the dreadfulness of his majesty!
- ¹¹ Lofty human looks have fallen down,
the exaltedness of individuals has bowed down.
Yahweh alone will be on high
on that day.
- ¹² Because Yahweh Armies has a day
against all majesty and exaltedness,
against all that is high—
and it will fall down,
¹³ against all the cedars of Lebanon, exalted and high,
and all the oaks of Bashan,
¹⁴ against all the exalted mountains,
against all the high hills,
¹⁵ against every lofty tower,
against every fortified wall,
¹⁶ against every Tarshish ship,
against all the impressive vessels.
- ¹⁷ Human loftiness will bow down,
individuals' exaltedness will fall down.
Yahweh alone will be on high on that day;
¹⁸ idols—they will completely vanish.
- ¹⁹ People will go into caves in the crags,
into holes in the dirt
before the fearfulness of Yahweh,
from the dreadfulness of his majesty,

- when he arises to terrify the country.
- ²⁰ On that day humanity will throw away
its silver idols and its gold idols,
which they made for it to bow down to,
to the moles and bats.
- ²¹ to go into the clefts in the crag,
into the crevices in the rocks,
before the fearfulness of Yahweh,
from the dreadfulness of his majesty,
when he arises to terrify the country.
- ²² Get yourselves away from humanity,
that has breath in its nostrils,
because what is it to count for?

It's Holy Week, and for more than twenty years a magnificent church not far from where we live put on a glorious Easter pageant in the weeks leading up to Easter, "the largest and most spectacular passion play" in the world. The church seats over 2,500 and has been filled several times on a Sunday. Its pipe organ is one of the five biggest in the world. But over the past decade it got into financial trouble and couldn't pay its bills to people such as the woman who hired out camels and other animals for its pageants. It went bankrupt and a few weeks ago finalized the sale of its premises to another church. There were no sex scandals or financial scandals, though there were problems over the "succession" from its founder.

It is hard if not impossible to get big and stay big. The bigger they are the harder they fall. Isaiah implies that a theological principle underlies this fact. When you get big, you become godlike. Your success may mean you get proud or overconfident, but Isaiah's point is that merely in your greatness, your majesty, your loftiness, your exaltation you become godlike, and it may be inappropriate for you to stay that way and obscure the truth about who is really God.

So "**Yahweh Armies** has a day against all majesty and exaltation," the **Day of the Lord**. It's not merely a day when individuals will be judged. It's a day when all human and earthly majesty will be put down. The Old Testament often uses the imagery of a violent storm with the associated quivering of the

ground to picture **Yahweh's** coming to act powerfully in the world. Isaiah pictures the tumultuous arrival of Yahweh's day as a storm that fells trees, shakes mountains and hills, demolishes walls and towers, and wrecks oceangoing ships. (There are several possible identifications of Tarshish in countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Carthage, and Spain, but the point is they were big ships.) All those objects are strong and impressive; they would have seemed indestructible and unassailable, like the *Titanic* and the twin towers once seemed.

Before speaking of the Day that is coming, Isaiah has already identified the strengths in which Judah is trusting. The country is full of horses and chariots, the ancient equivalent to tanks and Humvees. It's also full of financial resources that can keep its army well-equipped, make it possible to fortify its cities, and enable them to last out a siege. Judah has every reason to feel safe. Interwoven with the description of its material resources is reference to its spiritual resources. There are its idols, the images of gods other than Yahweh; how foolish to be bowing down to something their own hands made! There are its means of guidance such as divination, learned from the peoples around them, to which it looks rather than to the Torah and to prophets such as Isaiah. With some poetic justice, whereas they have been bowing down to those idols, they will now find themselves bowing down in a different way and for a different reason. They will leave their idols to the moles and bats, because they will have been proved useless.

It's not surprising that Yahweh has abandoned Judah. Isaiah opens this section with that horrifying statement addressed to Yahweh, "you have abandoned *your people*." It doesn't mean they're simply doomed. Isaiah does have an ironic exhortation to them—go on then, try hiding from this storm. Hide in a cave. The second half of the line suggests how ironic the exhortation is, when it bids people hide in the ground. Caves and pits in the ground were burial places. Isaiah's words recall the reminder in Amos and in Psalm 139 that there's nowhere you can hide from Yahweh, who can reach you even in **Sheol**, the realm of death.

The chapter closes with another exhortation of a less ironic kind, challenging the hearers to dissociate themselves from the general run of humanity among whom they live, people who

have the kind of attitude and follow the kind of practices the chapter has described. You could say that Isaiah is challenging people to become a faithful **remnant**. But the chapter also implicitly issues another invitation. The prophet wants Judah as a whole to heed his warning. He wants the entire community to turn from idols and from its trust in its wealth and its weaponry. He doesn't directly tell the community as a whole that it needs to repent and that Yahweh will then cancel the coming of his Day. Prophets often omit to issue a call to repentance. They speak as if catastrophe is inevitable. It's how they seek to break through to people. There's another example of Isaiah's indirect form of speech in his bidding Yahweh not to **carry** the people in their rebelliousness—that is, not to forgive them. He of course wants Yahweh to forgive them, but he knows they have to be brought to their senses in order for them to seek forgiveness, and expressing the desire that they may not be forgiven as long as they continue as they are is both a way of honoring God and another way of trying to break through to them.

Nor is it surprising that Yahweh is coming in that storm to show who is really God. The description of their trust in their resources (military, financial, and religious) points toward what Yahweh's chastisement will more literally look like. It will involve military invasion and humiliation, the capture and destruction of cities. It will involve the devastation of places of worship. It will involve the loss of wealth. It will involve the imposition of another culture's laws and policies. Subsequent chapters of Isaiah will describe how Isaiah's warning came true; indeed, we have already seen that the opening chapter has included at least one prophecy from the time of fulfillment. It wouldn't be surprising if one of the reasons why Isaiah's prophecies were preserved and ended up as Scripture is the way they were fulfilled and vindicated.

ISAIAH 3:1–4:6

On Dresses, Shawls, and Purses

^{3:1} Because there—
the Lord Yahweh Armies

is removing from Jerusalem and from Judah
supply and support—
all supply of bread
and all supply of water,
2 warrior and soldier, authority and prophet,
diviner and elder,
3 centurion, important person, counselor,
the person expert in charms
and knowledgeable in chanting.
4 I will make youths their officials;
infants will rule over them.
5 The people will oppress one another,
each his neighbor.
The youth will be arrogant toward the elder,
someone belittled toward someone honorable.
6 Because a man will seize one of his brothers,
his father's household:
“You have a coat, you will be our leader,
this ruin will be under your charge.”
7 On that day he will shout,
“I won't be one to bind up.
In my house there's no bread and no coat—
you won't make me leader of the people.”
8 Because Jerusalem has collapsed,
Judah has fallen.
Because their tongue and their deeds were toward Yahweh,
rebelling against his glorious eyes.
9 The look on their faces testifies against them;
they declare their offence like Sodom
and don't hide it.
10 Aagh, for their lives,
because they have brought about evil for themselves.
Say of the faithful person, “It will be good,”
because they will eat the fruit of their deeds.
11 Aagh, for the faithless person, “It will be evil,”
because the reward of his hands will be done to him.
12 My people—infants are their bosses,
women rule over them.
My people—your guides make you wander;
they have swallowed up the course of your paths.

- ¹³ Yahweh is taking his stand to contend,
he is rising to decide for peoples.
- ¹⁴ Yahweh will come with authority
to his people's elders and their officials.
“You—you have ravaged the vineyard,
the lowly person's plunder is in your houses.
- ¹⁵ What do you mean that you crush my people,
grind the faces of lowly ones?”
(a declaration of the Lord Yahweh Armies).
- ¹⁶ Yahweh has said:
because Zion's daughters are lofty
and walk outstretched with their neck,
flirting with their eyes,
walking and mincing as they walk,
and they jingle with their feet,
- ¹⁷ my Lord will bare the crowns of Zion's daughters,
Yahweh will expose their forehead.
- ¹⁸ On that day my Lord will remove the splendor of the anklets,
the bands, and the necklaces, ¹⁹ the earrings, the bracelets, and
the veils, ²⁰ the hats, the armllets, the scarves, the amulets, and
the charms, ²¹ the rings and the nose rings, ²² the dresses, the
capas, the shawls, the purses, ²³ the gowns, the vests, the tiaras,
the veils, and the sashes.
- ²⁴ It will come about [that]:
instead of perfume there will be a stench;
instead of a wrap, a rope;
instead of a hairstyle, a shorn head;
instead of a robe, wrapping of sack;
branding instead of beauty.
- ²⁵ Your men will fall by the sword,
your manhood by battle.
- ²⁶ Her gates will lament and mourn;
she will be empty, she will sit on the ground.
- ^{4:1} Seven women will take hold of one man
on that day, saying,
“We will eat our food,
we will wear our clothes,

only may your name be pronounced over us—
take away our shame.”

- 2 On that day, Yahweh's shoot will be
for beauty and for honor
and the country's fruit [will be]
for majesty and for splendor for Israel's survivors.
- 3 What is left in Zion,
what remains in Jerusalem—
“holy” will be said of it,
everyone who has been written down for life in
Jerusalem.
- 4 When my Lord has washed away
the filth of Zion's daughters,
and cleanses in its midst
the blood shed in Jerusalem,
by a spirit of authority
and a spirit of fire,
- 5 Yahweh will create over the entire site of Mount Zion
and over its meeting place
a cloud by day, and smoke,
and a brightness of flaming, by night,
because over all the splendor will be a canopy,
⁶and it will be a shelter
for shade by day from the heat
and for refuge and a hiding place
from storm and from rain.

When we are going out for the evening, and if the time of year requires it, I will put a sweater on top of whatever I have been wearing all day. It's a delight to me when, in contrast, my wife disappears into the closet and reappears in her finery for us to go out, having chosen an appropriate combination of earrings and bracelets and gowns and scarves. I don't know why it should be that women bear chief responsibility for dressing up. In our local arboretum it's the male peacocks that possess exotic finery and look as if they really enjoy displaying it. I'm glad I don't have to do so, and I would be grieved if my wife couldn't do so, because I'm proud to go out with someone who can make herself look so fine.

The middle paragraph from this section of Isaiah looks as if it presupposes the same attitude and is therefore disturbing both for men and for women. So far Isaiah's polemic has mainly concerned the **Judahite** men. They're the leaders, the warriors, the elders, the people who exercise **authority** who are in a position to contend for the weak, who sign the contracts for purchasing the military hardware. The women no doubt exercise some influence over their husbands behind the scenes, but their official job is to look nice, and it's the oppression on the part of their husbands in which they collude that makes it possible for them to look nice.

So the judgment declared on them in this middle paragraph presupposes that not being directly part of the action or the decision-making doesn't exempt us from the judgment that comes on our society. In the women's case it corresponds to their position and role in the capital's life. It will include the loss of their men with the indignity that will bring in a patriarchal society, which assumes that every woman needs to take the name of a man and cannot imagine women looking after the community's affairs. The first paragraph portrays other aspects of the social disorder that will result from **Yahweh's** act of judgment. The city will be run by children. Parallel to the picture of seven women seeking the protection of one surviving man is the picture of one man trying to get another to take charge of a family's affairs on the basis of his having managed to maintain some vestige of respectable appearance. He doesn't want to accept any leadership responsibility in the chaotic situation that is presupposed.

The prophecy again issues challenges and makes promises to individuals as well as declaring the destiny of the community as a whole. Its aim is to turn the community around. But it knows that God deals with individuals, too. Sometimes people put too much stress on the individual, but it's also possible for individuals to evade responsibility or abandon hope because they think their own destiny is determined by the community. The prophecy reminds them of truths they know about God's involvement with individuals. Things will go well for the faithful person and badly for the faithless person; both will eat the fruit of their deeds. It makes clear its recognition that things

don't always work out that way; it refers to the way lowly people who count as Yahweh's people are being crushed and ground down. It's nevertheless a generalization not to forget.

The last paragraph makes for a nice contrast with the paragraph about the trouble coming on the women. While Isaiah prophesies in order to get people to change, the arrangement of the book also envisages their failing to do so. What happens then? The picture of the city's restoration pairs with the earlier picture of Jerusalem drawing the whole world, but this second picture focuses on the good news for the city itself. The Bible often pictures Israel as like a tree, so Israel's judgment is like the felling of a tree. Here God promises that the felling of the tree won't be the end. God will make new growth come from the felled tree. Indeed, this new growth will be more splendid than anything one could imagine (again there's a parallel with that earlier vision of a new Jerusalem). The people there may be only survivors, only leftovers, but they have survived; it means they're people who have been written down for life. They're the nucleus of a holy people, a people whom God is marking off in connection with his purpose as the holy one. They will be a people whom God has cleansed. They will experience the kind of protection that Israel experienced on its original journey to the promised land. In due course, the fall of Jerusalem will bring the worst embodiment of Yahweh's Day so far in Israel's history, and after that event it's a message that the little beleaguered community in Judah and Jerusalem will have good reason to find encouraging.

ISAIAH 5:1–24

A Singer-Songwriter's Strange Song

- ¹ I'm going to sing a song for my friend,
my love song about his vineyard.
My friend had a vineyard
on a fertile ridge.
- ² He dug it and stoned it,
and planted it with choice vine.
He built a tower in the middle of it,
and also hewed a press in it.