A Study in Isaiah 4:1–6

Seven Women — The Branch of Jehovah — Washed, Holy, Covered by Glory

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We are reading Isaiah chapter 4, beginning at verse 1.

> *"And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach."*
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> *"In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel."*
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> *"And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning."*
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> *"And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain."*

Seven Women — and the Shame of Verse 1

The opening verse of chapter 4 is still connected with what preceded it. The daughters of Zion who walked with stretched necks and wanton eyes and all their ornaments of display — those women whose men fell by the sword — are now seen in verse 1 as women without men, in reproach. Seven women take hold of one man, offering to provide their own food and clothing, asking only to be called by his name so that their reproach might be taken away. What was the essence of all that display in chapter 3? Trying to appear to be something. Trying to project beauty, wealth, status, attractiveness. And the end of it is reproach and shame. The ornaments are gone. The perfume is gone. And instead there is a desperate reaching for a name to cover shame — which is precisely what those ornaments were hiding all along.

This is not Christ and believers in a spiritual sense, as Covenant Theology has sometimes read these early chapters of Isaiah. The mystery of Christ and the church was kept secret — hid from ages and from generations (Colossians 1:26). It is stated in Ephesians 3 that this mystery was not made known in other ages. The church is not prophesied in the Old Testament; it is a mystery revealed by the apostle Paul. To find the church scattered throughout Isaiah under various headings is to directly contradict the plain statements of the New Testament about its hiddenness. When it says in that day in verses 1 and 2, the day referred to is the day of the Lord that has been the subject of these chapters — the day of judgment and of the Lord's appearing.

The Branch of the Lord — Four Appearances, Four Gospels

In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious. The word branch or sprout is used of the Messiah in four distinct ways in Scripture, and it has long been observed that each of the four corresponds to one of the four Gospels. Here in Isaiah 4:2, He is the branch of Jehovah — the divine Person springing forth in His relation to God. That corresponds to John's Gospel, which

presents Him as the eternal Son, the Word who was with God and was God. In Zechariah 3:8, Behold my servant, the Branch — Mark's Gospel, presenting Him as the perfect servant. In Zechariah 6:12, Behold the man whose name is the Branch — Luke's Gospel, presenting Him in the perfection of His manhood. And in Jeremiah 23:5, a righteous Branch shall reign as king — Matthew's Gospel, presenting Him as the son of David, the king.

The branch of Jehovah shall be beautiful and glorious. All those things in chapter 3 — the ornaments, the display, the cosmetics, the finery — were attempts to be something. To have beauty, to be glorious. In the day of the Lord's appearing, He is beautiful and glorious. Not by display and ornament, but in himself. And the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. The word comely in Darby's translation is ornament. The great ornament for the escaped of Israel will not be anklets or nose rings or turbans — it will be the produce of the promised land, the fruit of Immanuel's land, the land that God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The land that flows with milk and honey. That is their ornament in the kingdom.

Song of Solomon 5:16 sets the highest standard: His mouth is most sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved and this is my friend. The altogether lovely one is the great beauty of the millennium. He is what Israel was looking for under all their vain displays.

In That Day — the Same Day, an Extended Period

Both verse 1 and verse 2 begin with in that day. This is the same day, but the day of the Lord is not twenty-four hours. It is an extended epoch. It begins with the appearing of the Lord in glory, encompasses the judgments on the nations, extends through the entire millennium, through the little season, and resolves into the new heavens and the new earth. So verse 1 describes consequences that follow the judgments at the beginning of that day, and verse 2 describes the

character of the Messiah's manifestation that is central to all of it. Both are in that day.

The Remnant — Escaped of Israel — The Truth Wigram Saw

For them that are escaped of Israel. This phrase is of great doctrinal importance. G. B. Wigram reportedly said something to the effect that until he saw the truth of the remnant of Israel, he could not understand the prophetic word correctly. The reason is plain: if there is no Jewish remnant in the last days — a company of godly Israelites preserved through the great tribulation — then one is left with no alternative but to put the church through the tribulation. The existence of a Jewish remnant in that day is the key that unlocks the distinction between Israel and the church, and thereby the whole prophetic scheme.

He that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy — every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem. Every surviving member of that remnant will be the Lord's. There will be a great purging — a vast reduction of the nation — and what remains will be all righteous. The Deliverer will come to Zion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob, and so all Israel shall be saved (Romans 11:26). A nation born in a day, Isaiah asks rhetorically in chapter 66 — and the answer is yes, in exactly that manner. By the sovereign action of the Messiah, that remnant is formed under the new covenant as the new nation of Israel.

Matthew 24:16 says: Let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains. The escaping of the remnant is not passive — they flee. They respond to the signal of the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place. They obey the Lord's word. And they escape with their lives from the judgments of those days, to form the nucleus of the nation that enters the millennial kingdom.

The Spirit of Judgment and the Spirit of Burning — Prerequisites for Glory

Verse 4 is the hinge of the chapter: when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning. Here are the two instruments by which the cleansing takes place. And they should be understood in connection with the great vineyard song that opens chapter 5: Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could I have done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? The spirit of judgment is the faculty of judging rightly — of seeing things as God sees them, agreeing with his verdict about what is good and what is evil, not making excuses.

Malachi illustrates the failure of this. I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? They did not have right judgment. They could not discern the love of God toward them. To have the spirit of judgment is to be able to see things truly — to call what is beautiful, beautiful, and what is filthy, filthy. The world has very deep convictions about beauty — in its art, its literature, its music, its theater. And it calls filth, culture. It says that is good literature. That is fine art. That is excellent theater. Whereas what it really is filled with is the glorifying of human lusts. Without the spirit of judgment — without being able to see things as God sees them — one cannot do what is necessary. The match alone is not sufficient. You must first be able to discern what must be burned.

And the spirit of burning follows from the spirit of judgment. Once the judgment is clear, the burning is the carrying out of it — the actual removal of what has been identified as unclean. Isaiah 3:24 already pointed forward to this: burning instead of beauty. That burning in verse 24 of chapter 3 is the negative side, the judgment that falls. The spirit of burning in chapter 4:4 is the sovereign work of God that purges and cleanses, making way for what follows.

The result of judgment is rest. The result of refusing to judge is unrest — constant churning, like the sea that cannot rest, the nations in perpetual upheaval. The closing verses of chapter 4 are words of peace: a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night. Every dwelling place of Mount Zion covered by the glory. A tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime, a covert from storm and rain. Every Israelite alive to those words would have heard in them an echo of the wilderness — the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, God's presence with Moses and the children of Israel all through the wilderness journey. What was given in the wilderness is restored to every dwelling place, to all of Zion's assemblies, in the day of the kingdom.

The cloud of glory had departed in Ezekiel's day — driven away by idolatry, by the wickedness that God showed the prophet hidden in the walls of Jerusalem. Before it can return, the filth must be washed away and the blood purged by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning. The glory and the cleansing are inseparable. The cloud will not rest on what is unclean. But when the cleansing is accomplished — and it will be accomplished, by sovereign grace — upon all the glory shall be a defense.

In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious — and upon all the glory shall be a defence.