

The Book of Isaiah, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: The Mountain of the Lord and the Day of Reckoning

Isaiah 2:1–4:6

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Your central task in this lesson is to help the class read the 'mountain of the LORD' (2:2–4) correctly, because this is where a great deal of popular but mistaken teaching goes wrong. Many today expect this prophecy to be fulfilled in a future, rebuilt temple and a restored political nation of Israel ruling the world from earthly Jerusalem. Help your class see, from the New Testament itself, that this glorious mountain is God's spiritual kingdom, established when the gospel went forth from Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2) and now embracing the nations in the church. Hebrews 12:22–24 says believers have already 'come to Mount Zion.' The fulfillment is present and spiritual, in Christ and His people, not deferred to an earthly millennium.

The second great theme is the leveling of human pride. Chapters 2 and 3 expose a prosperous, self-confident society that had quietly replaced God with the work of its own hands. Three times Isaiah declares that 'the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.' Use this to press the class toward honest self-examination. Pride is not just an ancient problem; it is the air we breathe in a culture of self-promotion and self-reliance. The Day of the Lord theme reminds us that every human height will one day be brought low, and only what was built on God will remain.

Finally, do not let the lesson end in the rubble. Isaiah closes (4:2–6) with the 'Branch of the LORD,' a clear messianic image fulfilled in Christ (compare Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 6:12), and a cleansed Zion sheltered under God's canopy, recalling the cloud and fire of the exodus. Show the class that after God humbles the proud, He shelters the penitent. The same God who levels self-built mountains gathers a washed, forgiven people under His own protection, which is exactly what He is doing now in the church. Help the class leave humbled but hopeful, having seen both the falling of pride and the rising of the Branch.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 2:2–3. Isaiah says 'in the last days' the mountain of the Lord's house will be established and 'all nations shall flow unto it' to learn His ways. According to the New Testament, where and when did this begin to be fulfilled, and why is it important to see this 'mountain' as God's spiritual kingdom, the church, rather than a future earthly building in Jerusalem?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Isaiah 2 opens with a heading marking a distinct vision (2:1) and then lifts our eyes to a breathtaking scene: 'in the last days... the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it' (2:2). After the lawsuit of chapter 1, this is pure hope. God's purpose is not finally judgment but the gathering of all nations to Himself.

The phrase 'in the last days' is a key New Testament marker for the Christian age, the era inaugurated by Christ. Peter quotes Joel's 'last days' language on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16–17), and Hebrews opens by saying God 'has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son' (Hebrews 1:2). So Isaiah is looking forward to the gospel age, the time of Messiah and His kingdom.

The image of the mountain 'established in the top of the mountains' speaks of supremacy. God's kingdom would tower above every rival kingdom and false religion. And the nations 'flowing' to it reverses the normal direction of water; this is rivers running uphill, a picture of God drawing all peoples to Himself in a way only divine power could accomplish.

The teacher should set the trajectory here: this mountain is not a literal future structure but God's exalted spiritual kingdom, the realm of His reign. The next verses will make its nature even clearer, but from the start the class should see that Isaiah is describing something supreme, universal, and gloriously hopeful, fulfilled in Christ's church drawing the nations in.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- 'The last days' is New Testament language for the present Christian age (Acts 2:16–17; Hebrews 1:2).
- The mountain of the Lord pictures God's supreme, exalted kingdom over all rivals.
- Nations 'flowing' uphill pictures God drawing all peoples to Himself by divine power.
- After the lawsuit of chapter 1, God's ultimate purpose is gathering, not destroying.
- This sets up the kingdom as spiritual and universal, fulfilled in Christ, not a future earthly structure.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the image of nations 'flowing' uphill to the mountain tell us about how God's kingdom grows?
- Why is it significant that Isaiah's mountain rises 'above all the hills,' the other kingdoms and religions?
- How does it change your reading to know that 'the last days' refers to the age we are living in now?

Question 2

Student Question:

Isaiah pictures people saying to one another, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD' (2:3). When was the last time you genuinely invited someone else to come and learn the ways of God with you, and what holds you back from doing that more often?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 3 unfolds what happens on the mountain: 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD... and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go

forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.’ Notice that the great attraction of the mountain is teaching. People come to learn God’s ways and to walk in them.

This is one of the clearest keys to the whole prophecy: ‘out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.’ This is precisely what happened in Acts 2. On the day of Pentecost, in Jerusalem, the gospel went forth for the first time, and people ‘out of every nation under heaven’ (Acts 2:5) heard the word and three thousand were added. The word of the Lord literally went forth from Jerusalem to the nations.

This is the decisive evidence that the mountain is the kingdom Christ established, the church, not a future earthly temple. The teacher should walk the class through the parallel deliberately: Isaiah says the word goes out from Jerusalem; Acts 2 shows the word going out from Jerusalem; Jesus told the apostles to begin ‘at Jerusalem’ (Luke 24:47). Isaiah was seeing Pentecost and the spread of the gospel from afar.

It is worth pausing on the people’s words: ‘Come ye, and let us go up.’ The growth of the kingdom happens person by person, one inviting another. This is evangelism in its simplest form, neighbor saying to neighbor, ‘Come and learn the ways of God.’ The mountain rises as people invite people to climb it together.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The word of the Lord going forth ‘from Jerusalem’ is fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2; Luke 24:47).
- The mountain’s attraction is the teaching of God’s ways, the gospel and the apostles’ doctrine.
- This is decisive evidence the mountain is the church, not a future earthly temple.
- Kingdom growth happens by invitation: ‘Come, let us go up.’
- Walking in God’s paths, not mere visiting, is the goal of coming to the mountain.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Acts 2, the gospel going forth from Jerusalem, fulfill Isaiah’s words so precisely?
- Why does Isaiah emphasize learning and walking in God’s ways as the heart of the mountain experience?
- Whom could you say ‘come, let us go up’ to, inviting them to learn God’s ways alongside you?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 2:4. The Lord ‘shall judge among the nations’ and people will ‘beat their swords into plowshares.’ How does the gospel actually produce this kind of peace among formerly hostile people, and what does that tell us about the nature of Christ’s kingdom (compare Ephesians 2:14–16)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 4 describes the result of God's reign from the mountain: 'he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.' Where God reigns, hostility turns into peace.

It is important to read this rightly. This is not a promise that earthly nations will sign treaties and end all warfare before Christ returns; history has not borne that out, and that is not the kind of peace the kingdom brings. The peace here is the peace Christ creates among those who submit to His reign, former enemies reconciled to God and to one another in His kingdom.

Ephesians 2:14–16 is the key New Testament commentary. Christ 'is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition,' reconciling Jew and Gentile, ancient enemies, 'in one body' through the cross. The plowshares-from-swords image is fulfilled wherever the gospel takes hostile people and makes them family. The weapons of hatred become tools of cultivation.

The teacher should help the class see this peace as real but spiritual and relational, not political. In the church, people who would otherwise be divided by race, class, nationality, and old grudges sit at one table. That is the swords-into-plowshares miracle, and it is happening now wherever Christ reigns in human hearts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The peace of the kingdom is reconciliation in Christ, not a political end to all earthly war.
- Christ Himself is our peace, breaking down the wall between former enemies (Ephesians 2:14–16).
- The gospel turns weapons of hostility into tools that cultivate and build.
- This peace is real and present wherever people submit to Christ's reign.
- The church displays the swords-into-plowshares miracle by uniting the divided.

Discussion Prompts

- What kind of 'peace' does Christ's kingdom actually create, and how is it different from political peace?
- How have you seen the gospel reconcile people who would otherwise be divided or hostile?
- What 'swords' in your own relationships might Christ be asking you to beat into 'plowshares'?

Question 4

Student Question:

Isaiah 2:5 pleads, 'O house of Jacob, come, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.' In what specific area of your life do you most need to start 'walking in the light' rather than in your own shadows, and what is one step toward that this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After the soaring vision, Isaiah turns to plead and then to diagnose. 'O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD' (2:5) is a tender appeal: live now in the light of the kingdom you have been shown. But then the indictment begins (2:6–9), and it is an indictment of prosperity gone toxic.

Look at the inventory of Judah's heart: 'their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures... full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots... full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands' (2:7–8). Three times 'full,' and not one of those fullnesses is God. Silver, military strength, and idols had crowded Him out.

Here is the deep insight the teacher should draw out: prosperity is spiritually dangerous precisely because it feels like success. When the silver piles up and the defenses look strong, the heart quietly concludes that it does not need God. Self-made security becomes a functional idol, 'the work of their own hands,' which they then bow down to and worship.

This is not an ancient problem only. We may not carve statues, but we build portfolios, reputations, and safety nets and then quietly trust them for the security only God can give. Verse 9 says man 'boweth down,' and Isaiah warns that such self-exaltation sets a person directly in the path of the Day of the Lord. The cure is verse 5: stop trusting the work of your hands and walk in the light of the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Prosperity is spiritually dangerous because self-sufficiency crowds out dependence on God.
- Self-made security (wealth, strength, achievement) becomes a functional idol.
- Idolatry is 'worshiping the work of our own hands,' trusting what we have made.
- The appeal of 2:5 is the cure: walk in God's light rather than our own shadows.
- Modern idols (portfolios, reputation, safety nets) operate the same way ancient ones did.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does prosperity so often weaken our sense of needing God?
- What does it mean to 'worship the work of our own hands' in modern terms?
- How can we enjoy God's material blessings without letting them become idols?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 2:6–9. Judah was full of silver, gold, horses, chariots, and idols, and 'they worship the work of their own hands.' How does material prosperity tend to feed pride and idolatry, and why is self-made security such a subtle and dangerous form of idol worship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now Isaiah introduces the great refrain of these chapters. 'The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be

exalted in that day' (2:11). This sentence, in slightly varied form, appears again in 2:17 and is the spine of the whole Day of the Lord passage.

Verse 12 announces it as a divine appointment: 'the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low.' Isaiah then piles up images of tall things, the cedars of Lebanon, the oaks of Bashan, high mountains, lofty towers, ships of Tarshish (2:13–16), every impressive, towering thing humbled before God.

The point is unmistakable and it is the heart of the lesson: there is only room for one exalted one. When human pride lifts itself up, it is competing for a throne that belongs to God alone. The Day of the Lord is, at its core, the day when that competition ends and God is shown to be supremely high while every human height is leveled.

The teacher should make this personal and present, not merely future. While the ultimate 'Day' is the final reckoning, God has a way of humbling proud people now, of toppling the towers we build. The wise response is not to wait for the Day to humble us but to humble ourselves now (compare James 4:6, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble). The question for each student is simple: am I building a tower for my own glory, or bowing so the Lord alone is exalted?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- 'The LORD alone shall be exalted' is the refrain and heart of the passage (2:11, 17).
- Human pride competes for a throne belonging to God alone.
- The Day of the Lord levels every human height; nothing proud survives it.
- God humbles the proud and gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).
- Wisdom is to humble ourselves now rather than wait to be humbled.

Discussion Prompts

- Why can there be only one 'exalted one,' and what does that mean for our pride?
- What are the 'high towers' and 'tall cedars' that modern people build for their own glory?
- What is the difference between being humbled by God and humbling ourselves before Him?

Question 6

Student Question:

Read 2:11–12. 'The lofty looks of man shall be humbled... for the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud.' Where do you catch yourself relying on your own strength, reputation, or accomplishments rather than on God, and how might He be calling you to lower those 'lofty looks'?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 18–22 drive the Day of the Lord to its climax. The idols 'shall utterly abolish' (2:18), and terrified people will flee 'into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of

the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth' (2:19). The very things they trusted will be useless on that Day.

There is a darkly comic image in 2:20: people will take the silver and gold idols they once worshiped and throw them 'to the moles and to the bats,' tossing their gods into the dark holes where vermin live. When the true God arises, the absurdity of every false god is suddenly exposed. What seemed worth worshiping becomes trash to be discarded in panic.

Then comes the great application verse: 'Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?' (2:22). After showing the collapse of every idol and every proud height, Isaiah states the lesson plainly. Stop putting your ultimate trust in mere humans, whose very breath is a fragile, borrowed thing that God could withdraw in an instant.

The teacher should press this practical takeaway. So much of our anxiety and idolatry comes from leaning the full weight of our hope on people, including ourselves, who simply cannot bear it. Human breath is 'in his nostrils,' here today and gone tomorrow. Only God is worthy of our ultimate trust. This verse is a hinge: turn from trusting frail man to trusting the eternal God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Everything we trust instead of God proves useless on the Day of reckoning.
- The absurdity of idols is exposed when the true God arises ('to the moles and bats').
- 'Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils': do not place ultimate trust in frail humans.
- Much anxiety comes from leaning our full weight on what cannot bear it.
- Only the eternal God is worthy of our ultimate trust and worship.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Isaiah picture people throwing their idols 'to the moles and bats'? What does that reveal?
- What does it mean practically to 'cease from man' and stop trusting frail humans for ultimate security?
- Where have you been leaning the full weight of your hope on a person, including yourself, who cannot bear it?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 2:17–22. Isaiah says people will cast their idols to the moles and bats and hide in the rocks from the terror of the Lord, and he ends by saying, 'Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils.' What is Isaiah teaching about where we must, and must not, place our ultimate trust?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 3 brings the Day of the Lord down to street level, showing what happens to a society when God removes His supports. 'The Lord... doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff' (3:1), and then a list follows: the mighty man, the soldier, the judge, the

prophet, the elder, the skilled counselor (3:2–3). When God withdraws sound leadership, a society begins to come apart.

The result is chaos and the collapse of order: ‘children are their oppressors, and women rule over them’ (3:12); ‘the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable’ (3:5). The normal structures of respect and wise authority invert. This is a picture of a culture under judgment, where leadership fails and the inexperienced and self-serving rise to the top.

The teacher should handle this passage as a sober warning about the gift of godly leadership and the catastrophe of its absence. When a people reject God, one of the consequences is that God may simply remove the steadying influence of wise, faithful leaders, and the society reaps the whirlwind of foolish and self-interested rule.

There is also a personal application about example and influence. Verses 8–9 say Jerusalem fell because ‘their tongue and their doings are against the LORD’ and ‘they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not.’ A society that flaunts its sin without shame is far gone. Each of us shapes the moral climate around us, especially for those who are younger or who follow our lead. The legacy we leave, whether of reverence or rebellion, matters.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Godly leadership is a gift; its removal is itself a form of judgment.
- When God withdraws wise leaders, society fragments and the foolish rise.
- A culture that flaunts sin ‘as Sodom,’ without shame, is in grave danger (3:9).
- Each person shapes the moral climate for those who follow their example.
- The legacy we leave, of reverence or rebellion, has real consequences.

Discussion Prompts

- What happens to a society, or a church, when God removes wise and godly leadership?
- Why is the loss of shame (‘they declare their sin as Sodom’) such a dangerous sign?
- What kind of example are you setting for those who are younger or who follow your lead?

Question 8

Student Question:

Isaiah 3 describes a society where leadership collapses and children oppress their elders (3:1–12). When you look at the example you are setting for those younger or under your influence, what kind of legacy are you leaving, and what would you want to change?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The second half of chapter 3 turns a spotlight on the proud women of Zion, not to single out women uniquely, but as a vivid example of the self-absorbed luxury that infected the whole society. ‘The daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton

eyes... mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet' (3:16). It is a portrait of vanity on parade.

Isaiah then lists, in almost overwhelming detail, the finery they trusted in: the ornaments, the chains, the bracelets, the bonnets, the rings, the fine linen (3:18–23). The piling up of luxury items mirrors the piling up of 'tall things' in chapter 2. This is the same pride, now expressed in fashion and display rather than towers and chariots.

The reversal in 3:24 is devastating: 'instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness... and burning instead of beauty.' Everything they exalted in will be stripped away. The teacher should let the class feel how thoroughly judgment undoes misplaced glory; what we exalt ourselves in is exactly what God will humble.

The wider lesson is not about any one gender or about clothing as such, but about the universal human temptation to find our worth and security in display, in being seen, admired, and envied. Whether through wardrobe, status symbols, social media, or accomplishments, we all face the pull to build a self-image and trust it. Isaiah warns that this glory is fragile and fading. True and lasting worth is found only in belonging to God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Vanity and luxury are presented as one more form of the pride that fills the whole society.
- What we exalt ourselves in is exactly what God will humble and strip away.
- The lesson targets self-display and craving admiration, not any one gender or clothing itself.
- Modern equivalents (status symbols, image-building, social media) operate the same way.
- True, lasting worth is found in belonging to God, not in being seen and admired.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Isaiah focus on outward display and finery as a picture of the deeper sin of pride?
- What are today's versions of 'walking with stretched forth necks,' seeking to be admired and envied?
- Where are you tempted to find your worth in being seen rather than in being God's?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 4:2–6. After all the judgment, Isaiah promises 'the Branch of the LORD' will be beautiful and glorious, a cleansed Zion sheltered under God's canopy of cloud and fire. How does this Branch point us to Christ, and how is the cleansed, sheltered Zion fulfilled in the purified people of God in the church rather than in a restored earthly nation (compare John 15; Revelation 21:3)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The judgment reaches its lowest point at the start of chapter 4: so many men will fall in battle that seven women will take hold of one man, begging only to bear his name and remove their

reproach (4:1). It is a picture of a society devastated, its strength gone, the normal order of life shattered by the consequences of sin. The bottom of the valley has been reached.

But then, like dawn after the darkest night, the tone changes completely: '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' (4:2). After all the falling, something begins to rise, the Branch of the Lord.

'The Branch' is a rich messianic title throughout the prophets. Jeremiah promises a 'righteous Branch' raised up to David (Jeremiah 23:5), and Zechariah names a man 'whose name is The BRANCH' who will build the temple of the Lord (Zechariah 6:12). This is Christ. After God humbles every proud human height, He raises up His own Branch, beautiful and glorious, fruitful where humanity had only produced wild grapes. The teacher should make this connection clearly: the hope on the far side of judgment is a Person, the Messiah.

Notice too the phrase 'them that are escaped of Israel.' The hope belongs not to the proud mass but to a remnant, the survivors, the humbled and penitent. This continues the theme from chapter 1. God's saving work is always among those who will be made low enough to receive it. The Branch is beautiful precisely to those who have stopped trusting their own glory.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- After judgment levels human pride, God raises up His own Branch, the Messiah.
- 'The Branch of the LORD' is a messianic title fulfilled in Christ (Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 6:12).
- Real fruitfulness comes from God's Branch, not from human effort or glory.
- The hope belongs to the humbled remnant, 'them that are escaped,' not the proud mass.
- The hope on the far side of judgment is a Person, not merely a better circumstance.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the title 'the Branch of the LORD' tell us about Jesus and where true fruitfulness comes from?
- Why does Isaiah place this beautiful image right after the lowest point of judgment?
- Why does the hope of the Branch belong to the humbled remnant rather than the proud?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking across these three chapters, Isaiah holds up two mountains: the mountain we build for ourselves out of pride and possessions, and the mountain of the Lord to which the nations stream. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you to come down off your own mountain this week and let Him alone be exalted in your life. What is the next concrete step of surrender He is forming in you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The section closes with a beautiful picture of a cleansed and sheltered people (4:3–6). Those who remain ‘shall be called holy,’ once ‘the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem... by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning’ (4:3–4). The same refining fire from chapter 1 reappears, and now we see its purpose: a washed, holy people.

Then God spreads His own protection over them: ‘the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion... a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night... 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’ (4:5–6). This deliberately recalls the exodus, when God led Israel by cloud and fire and dwelt among them. God is again sheltering His people with His own presence.

Here is the doctrinal heart of the lesson’s hope. This cleansed and sheltered Zion is not fulfilled in a future restored political nation or a rebuilt earthly temple. It is fulfilled in the purified people of God in the church, washed clean and dwelling under God’s abiding presence. Revelation 21:3 echoes the same promise: ‘the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them.’ What Isaiah saw from afar, God accomplishes in Christ among His holy people now and forever.

The teacher should bring the whole lesson to rest here. The chapters began with a mountain rising and the proud falling; they end with a washed people sheltered under God’s canopy. That is the trajectory of the gospel itself: God humbles us, washes us, and then dwells with us. The same God who levels self-built mountains gathers a cleansed people under His own protection. Help the class see that this is precisely what He is doing in the church today, and invite each one to leave their own mountain and find refuge under His.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s refining fire has a purpose: to produce a washed, holy people (4:3–4).
- The cloud and fire recall the exodus; God shelters His people with His own presence.
- The cleansed, sheltered Zion is fulfilled in the church, not a future earthly nation or temple.
- God dwelling with His people (4:5–6) is fulfilled now and forever in Christ (Revelation 21:3).
- The gospel trajectory: God humbles, washes, and then dwells with His people.
- The invitation is to leave our own mountain and find refuge under God’s canopy.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the purpose of God’s refining ‘spirit of burning,’ according to 4:3–4?
- How is the cloud-and-fire shelter of 4:5–6 fulfilled in God dwelling with His people in the church today?
- After walking these chapters, what ‘mountain’ of your own is Jesus calling you to leave so He alone is exalted?