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### **“SEVEN WOMEN SHALL TAKE HOLD OF ONE MAN”**

#### **—Future or Fulfilled?**

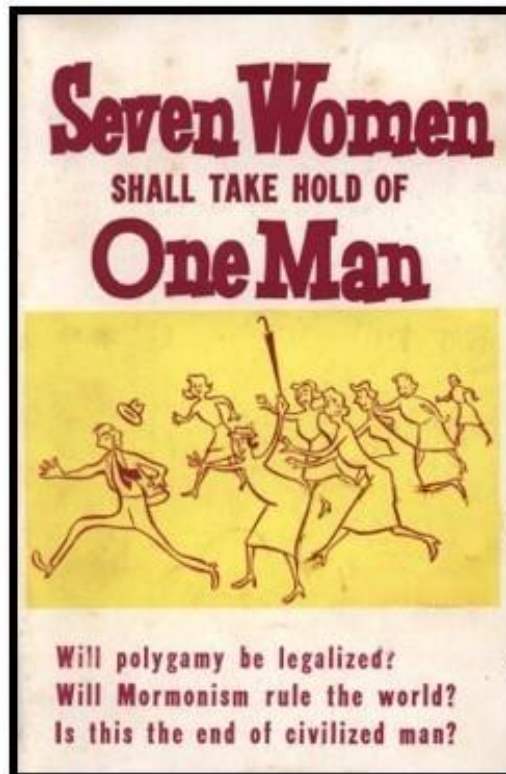
When I was a teenager, I read the book pictured here. This was probably the first time I knew about the passage in Isaiah:

**And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, “We will eat our own food and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach” (Isa. 4:1 NKJV).**

According to Old Testament custom, if a man took additional wives, he was to provide for them (Exod. 21:10,11). But here, the women were willing to bypass this rule, providing their *own* food and clothing. They would set aside jealousy and share a husband in order to be married and have children. To be childless was considered a “reproach” (Gen. 30:23; 1 Sam. 1:6; Luke 1:25).

Some believe that Jewish women—*especially* Jewish women—desired to have children, hopeful that their offspring might be in the Messiah’s lineage.

The number “seven” is often used to denote a “large” though “indefinite” number (Lev. 26:28; Prov. 24:16; Dan. 3:19; Matt. 12:45; 18:21). I don’t suppose we need to understand that *exactly* “seven” women in each case would take hold of one man. We might compare Zechariah 8:23 where we read that “ten” men would take hold of a man who is called a Jew. The numerical contrast illustrated the severity of what was coming.



We notice that Isaiah used the word “shall”—that seven women **shall** take hold of one man. Obviously, what he wrote was yet-future *at the time*. But because he lived over 2,500 years ago, it is certainly valid to ask if what he wrote is now **future or fulfilled**.

Our answer (which we believe is clearly indicated in the Scriptures), is that this prophecy was fulfilled long ago—back in Old Testament times.

The women mentioned were “daughters of Zion.” The setting for the prophecy involved *Jerusalem* (Isa. 3:1). This being the case, the prophecy does not pertain to London, Hong Kong, Moscow, Chicago, Los Angeles, or Salt Lake City!

The Isaiah passage has nothing to do with legalizing polygamy, or Mormons ruling the world, or bringing about the end of civilized man!

Nor was Isaiah 4:1 a rebuke about polygamy. As impractical as it was, numerous men mentioned in the Old Testament had more than one wife—Abdon, Abijah, Abraham, Ahab, Ashur, Caleb, David, Elkanah, Esau, Gideon, Jacob, Jehoiachin, Jehoram, Lamech, Moses, Rehoboam, Saul, Shahrarim, Solomon, Zedekiah, etc.

Generally speaking, chapter breaks are helpful. But we must keep in mind that these—having been added to the

text later—are not infallible. Because Isaiah 4:1 is actually a continuation of the line of thought expressed in Chapter 3, it could have been included as the last verse of that chapter. As Adam Clarke (1762-1832) pointed out: “The division of the chapter has interrupted the prophet’s discourse, and broken it off almost in the midst of the sentence.” Ferrar Fenton’s translation includes this verse as part of Chapter 3.

So, what we read at the close of Chapter 3, leading up to 4:1, is *weighty*:

“Your MEN shall fall by the sword, and your mighty in the war” (Isa. 3:25). This explains WHY Isaiah used wording about seven women taking hold of one man. There would be a severe shortage of men—a shortage due to WAR.

Some have applied “seven women shall take hold of one man” to the seven churches of Revelation taking hold of one man: Christ. Victorinus, an early church father, said: “The seven women are seven churches, receiving his bread [the Holy Spirit], and clothed with his apparel [immortality].” But a teaching like this distracts from the *actual* fulfillment which is clearly spelled out in Scripture.

Isaiah’s ministry spanned the reign of several kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jothan, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isa. 1:1). The death of Uzziah is recorded in Chapter Six—“...in the year king Uzziah died”—which suggests that the seven women prophecy was toward the early part of Isaiah’s ministry. When Ahaz came to the throne in Jerusalem, he led the nation away from God. Judgment fell upon the nation with many of their men being killed in war.

Ahaz “was delivered...into the hand of the king of Syria...and into the hand of the king of Israel, who defeated him with a great SLAUGHTER. For Pekah the son of Remaliah killed ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY THOUSAND in Judah in one day, all valiant MEN.” So many were killed, it was described as “a rage that *reaches up to heaven*” (2 Chron. 28:1-9).

In a different battle, there was “a great slaughter ...FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND choice men of Israel fell slain” (2 Chron. 13:17).

The shortage of men would be so great in Jerusalem and Judah that the LORD said: “Their WIDOWS will be increased *more than the sand of the seas*” (Jer. 15:8).

With the shortage of men, seven women would “**take hold**” of one man. Those words were also used earlier in this passage: a man would “**take hold**” of his *brother*, asking for help, only to learn his brother was no better off (see verses 6-7).

This desperate situation was like that described in the Ray Charles song about being “busted” by poverty:

**I went to my brother to ask for a loan 'cause I was busted.**

**My brother said, “There ain’t a thing I can do,  
My wife and my kids are all down with the flu,  
And I was just thinking of calling on you...I’m busted!**

The Third Chapter of Isaiah (which leads up to the wording in Isaiah 4:1) predicted difficult times that would come upon Jerusalem and Judah. The actual, historical **fulfillment** is given in the book of Lamentations—often using wording *very similar*.

The prophecy in Isaiah said: “Her *gates* shall *lament and mourn*, and she being *desolate* shall *sit on the ground*” (Isa. 3:26). The **fulfillment**: “All her *gates* are desolate...He has made me *desolate...mourning and lamentation*...the elders of the daughter of Zion *sit on the ground*” (Lam. 1:4, 13; 2:5, 10).

Isaiah said the LORD would take away their ornaments and fine clothing; the “beauty” of the “daughters of Zion” would depart (Isa. 3:16, 24). The **fulfillment**: “From the daughter of Zion all *her beauty is departed*...Jerusalem remembered...all her pleasant things she had in the days of old...those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets; those who were brought up in scarlet embrace ash heaps” (Lam. 1:6,7; 4:5).

Instead of fine clothing, Isaiah said they would have a “girding of *sackcloth*” (Isa. 3:24). The **fulfillment**: “They have girded themselves with *sackcloth*” (Lam. 2:10).

In the stress of the times that would come upon Jerusalem, “The whole supply of *bread*” would be taken away (Isa. 3:1). The **fulfillment**: “All her people sigh, they seek *bread*” (Lam. 1:11).

Isaiah linked Jerusalem with Sodom: “They declare their sin as *Sodom*...they have brought evil upon themselves” (Isa. 3:9). The **fulfillment**: “The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of *Sodom*...with no hand to help” (Lam. 4:6).

Isaiah said: “Your men shall fall by the *sword*” (Isa. 3:25). The **fulfillment**: “Young and old lie on the ground in the streets...fallen by the *sword*” (Lam. 2:21).

Isaiah prophesied: “The LORD...takes away from Jerusalem and Judah...*the mighty man* and the man of war,” etc. (Isa. 3:1,2). The **fulfillment**: “The LORD has trampled underfoot all my *mighty men*” (Lam. 1:15).

“We have become orphans and *fatherless*...our *fathers* sinned and are *no more*” (Lam. 5:3,7).



“The punishment of your iniquity IS accomplished, O daughter of Zion” (Lam. 4:22). In view of such statements, can there be any doubt that the prophecy under consideration was fulfilled?

In the closing portion of Judges, we read about a reverse situation—a time when there was a shortage of WOMEN. Because of massive slaughter, the tribe of Benjamin was nearly wiped out—men, women, and children. But 600 men of the tribe of Benjamin survived by hiding four months at the rock of Rimmon. Unless wives were obtained for these men, and children were born, the tribe could not survive.

Without a numerical address or a GPS (as today), these men were given directions to a yearly feast of the LORD at Shiloh: it would be held north of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes to Shechem, and south of Lebonah.

There they could hide in the vineyards and do girl watching: “...*watch*; and when the daughters of Shiloh come out *to perform their dances*, then come out from the vineyards, and every man *catch a wife for himself*...And the children of Benjamin did so; they took themselves enough wives for their number from those who danced who they *caught*” (Judges 21:19-21,23).



As crude as this was, the tribe of Benjamin survived. Centuries later, Paul the apostle would come from this line! (Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:5).

In the verses leading up to Isaiah 4:1, Isaiah listed the fine garments and ornaments the women of Jerusalem enjoyed. These, along with ordinary things like bread and water, would be taken away in the approaching disaster, which would also bring about a shortage of men.

The following description is from the *King James Version* (including some clarifications in brackets):

“The LORD will take away their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls [a netting for the hair], and their **round tires like the moon** [circular ornaments]



“The chains [pendants for the ears], and the bracelets, and the mufflers [long veils], the bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs [chains on the ankles],

“headbands, and the tablets [boxes for perfume], and the earrings, the rings, and nose jewels, the changeable suits of apparel [festival robes], and the mantles [cloaks], and the wimples [shawls], and the **crisping pins** [purses, bags], the glasses [mirrors], and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils” (Isa. 3:18-23).

It will be of some interest to take a closer look at two of the items on this list:

**Crisping pins?** Some have supposed this refers to women using *hair curlers*. How a King James translator came up with “crisping pins” remains a mystery. It certainly is not based on the Hebrew wording. Most translations say *purses*. Even in the King James Version, the *one* other time this Hebrew word appears, it is translated *bags* (2 Kings 5:23).

**Round tires like the moon?** I have heard that when there was a shortage of rubber for automobile tires during World War II, some quoted Isaiah 3:18 (KJV): “The LORD will take away...their round **tires** like the moon.” Even though the setting for this chapter was an Old Testament war which involved Jerusalem—and even though the “round tires” were mentioned within a list of ornaments worn by women in Isaiah’s time—the vague similarity in wording caused some to suppose prophecy was being fulfilled before their eyes!

We need to understand that in the old English of the King James Version, “**tire**” meant (as we would say today) “**attire**.” It could refer to how the head was *attired*, as with a hat, or (as in the Isaiah passage) being *attired* with a circular ornament suspended from the neck. In Judges 8:21 this word is translated “ornaments” (worn on the necks of camels).

Jezebel “painted her face, and **tired** [attired] her head” (2 Kings 9:30).

Ezekiel was told: “Bind the **tire** [attire] of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet” (Ezek.

24:17). “Your **tires** shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet” (Ezek. 24:23). Newer translations (correctly) use words like “turbans” to describe the way they *attired* their heads.

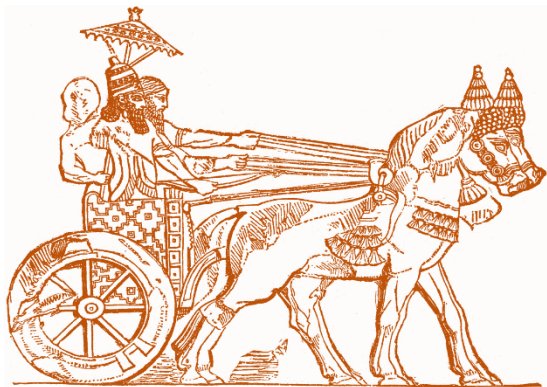
They definitely did not wear *automobile* tires!

It has sometimes been supposed that the prophet Nahum, looking far into the future, predicted the invention of automobiles:

“The chariots rage in the streets, they jostle one another in the broad roads; they seem like torches, they run like lightning” (Nah. 2:4).

It is supposed that Nahum used the term “chariots” because this was the closest word he was familiar with—that what he *really* envisioned was automobiles, high-speed travel, and wrecks on modern-day freeways!

But the very first verse of Nahum totally disproves this claim. This prophecy was about the overthrow of NINEVEH. That happened long ago!



As seen in the above illustration, the chariots mentioned by Nahum were war chariots, were pulled by *horses*, driven by *horsemen* with whips, who also used swords and spears (Nah. 3:2,3).

In the stress of the conflict, these chariots would move quickly—symbolically likened to *lightning*—and would *rage* on the broad roads of Nineveh. Such wording was commonly used by prophets: “Come up, O horses, and *rage*, O chariots! And let the mighty men come forth” (Jer. 46:9).

As Nahum had prophesied, Nineveh was burned with fire, as were also the “chariots” mentioned (Nah. 2:13; 3:15). None of this had anything to do with modern-day automobiles.

Some have wondered if Isaiah 58:14 might refer to airplanes: “I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth.” But the same was said regarding the Israelites coming out of Egypt (Deut. 32:13; Exod. 19:4)! Unless we believe Moses and the Israelites had airplanes, we should not try to stretch figures of speech beyond their intended meaning.

Tracts have been written—no doubt with good intentions—which claim the biblical writers predicted numerous modern inventions: **deep sea divers**—“Have you walked in search of the depths?” (Job 38:16); **electricity**—“who has divided...a path for the thunderbolt” (verse 25); the **telephone, radio, and television**—“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds...can you send out lightnings, that they may...say to you, Here we are?” (verses 34,35); **submarines**—“men like fish of the sea” (Hab. 1:14); **drawbridges or river locks**—“the gates of the rivers are opened” (Nah. 2:6); **flying saucers, UFOs**—“brightness...a wheel in the middle of a wheel...lifted up from the earth” (Ezek. 1).

Bits and pieces of verses like these may provide some interesting similarities, but none actually speak of modern inventions, when taken in context.

Something that is more important, more wonderful, more thrilling, more far-reaching than whether the Bible mentions—*or does not mention such things*—is that grand truth expressed in the best-known verse in the Bible:

“For God so *loved* the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever* believes in Him should not perish, but have EVERLASTING LIFE” (John 3:16).

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**“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7).**



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