

# Notes on Isaiah

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## Introduction

### TITLE AND WRITER

The title of this book of the Bible, as is true of the other prophetic books, comes from its writer. The book claims to have come from Isaiah (1:1; 2:1; 7:3; 13:1; 20:2; 37:2, 6, 21; 38:1, 4, 21; 39:3, 5, 8), and Jesus Christ and the apostles quoted him as being the writer at least 21 times, more often than they quoted all the other writing prophets combined. There are also many more quotations and allusions to Isaiah in the New Testament without reference to Isaiah being the writer. The only Old Testament book referred to more frequently than Isaiah in the New Testament is Psalms.

"It would be difficult to overstate the importance of Isaiah for the Christology of the church."<sup>1</sup>

The name of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, is the only one connected with the book in any of the Hebrew manuscripts or ancient versions. Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote at the end of the first century A.D., believed that Isaiah wrote this book. He said that Cyrus read the prophecies that Isaiah had written about him and wished to fulfill them.<sup>2</sup> Josephus' statement is not necessarily true, but it does show that Josephus believed that Isaiah wrote Isaiah.

There is no record of any serious scholar doubting the Isaianic authorship of the entire book before the twelfth century when Ibn Ezra, a Jewish commentator, did so. With the rise of rationalism, moreover, some German scholars took the lead in questioning it in the late eighteenth century. They claimed that the basis for their new view was the differences in style, content, and emphases in the various parts of the prophecy. Many scholars have noted that it is not really the text itself that argues for multiple authorship as much as the presence of predictive prophecy in chapters 40—66, which antisupernaturalistic critics try to explain away. Many modern rationalistic critics believe the purpose of prophetic literature is simply to call a particular people to faith in God, not to predict the future. However, if the prophets did not predict the future, their theology is questionable. They frequently claimed that the fulfillment of their predictions would validate their theology, and it did. Six times in Isaiah God claimed the ability to predict the future (42:8-9; 44:7-8; 45:1-4, 21; 46:10; 48:3-6).

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<sup>1</sup>Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 319.

<sup>2</sup>Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 11:1:1-2.

The English word "prophecy" comes from the Greek *prophemi*, which means "to say before or beforehand." Before Samuel, prophets were normally called seers, because they could see into the future, with God's help. Form critics have distinguished three basic types of prophetic oracles or messages. These are: oracles of judgment (e.g., most of the Book of Nahum), oracles of repentance (e.g., much of the Book of Jeremiah), and oracles of salvation (e.g., the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants).

At first, critics of the Book of Isaiah hypothesized that the respective emphases on judgment in chapters 1—39 and consolation in chapters 40—66 pointed to separate writers: Isaiah and "Deutero-Isaiah." With further study, a theory of three writers ("Trito-Isaiah") emerged because of the differences between chapters 40—55 and 56—66. These critics conceived addresses to three different historical settings in these three parts of the book: Isaiah's lifetime (ca. 739-701 B.C.; chs. 1—39), the Babylonian exile (ca. 605-539 B.C.; chs. 40—55), and the return (ca. 539-400 B.C.; chs. 56—66).<sup>3</sup> One can make a case for Isaiah writing chapters 1—39 in preparation for the exile, chapters 40—55 as though he were in exile, and chapters 56—66 as though he were living after the exile. But that does not mean three different writers wrote these sections.

"Along with what is known as the JEDP theory of the origins of the Pentateuch, the belief in the multiple authorship of the book of Isaiah is one of the most generally accepted dogmas of biblical higher criticism today."<sup>4</sup>

Here is a chart of how "normative" biblical criticism dates Isaiah and some other Old Testament books.<sup>5</sup>

| EPOCH                                   | LITERATURE                           |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| <b><u>Pre-exilic (760-586 B.C.)</u></b> |                                      |
| <b>Early</b>                            | Amos                                 |
|   | Hosea                                |
|   | First Isaiah (chs. 1—35)             |
|   | Micah                                |
|   | Psalms of Zion (Pss. 46, 48, and 87) |
| <b>Late</b>                             | Jeremiah                             |
| <b><u>Exilic (586-539 B.C.)</u></b>     |                                      |
| <b>Early</b>                            | Jeremiah                             |
|   | Deuteronomist (Deuteronomy—2 Kings)  |
|   | Ezekiel                              |
| <b>Late</b>                             | Second Isaiah (chs. 40—55)           |
|   |                                      |

<sup>3</sup>See Eugene H. Merrill, "Survey of a Century of Studies on Isaiah 40—55," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144:573 (January-March 1987):24-43; and idem, "Literary Genres in Isaiah 40—55," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144:574 (April-June 1987):144-55. One modern commentator on Isaiah who advocated this approach is John D. W. Watts.

<sup>4</sup>John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1—39*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>Adapted from Bruce K. Waltke, "Micah," in *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, p. 170.

| EPOCH                              | LITERATURE                |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <u>Post-exilic (516—?350 B.C.)</u> |                           |
| <b>Early</b>                       | Zechariah                 |
|                                    | Haggai                    |
|                                    | Third Isaiah (chs. 56—66) |
|                                    | Ezra-Nehemiah             |
| <b>Late</b>                        | Malachi                   |
|                                    | Joel                      |

Internal and external evidence points to the unity of authorship. The title for God, "Holy One of Israel," which reflects the deep impression that Isaiah's vision in chapter 6 made on him, occurs 12 times in chapters 1—39 and 14 times in chapters 40—66, but only seven times elsewhere in the entire Old Testament. Other key phrases, passages, words, themes, and motifs likewise appear in both parts of the book.<sup>6</sup> Jewish tradition uniformly attributed the entire book to Isaiah, as did Christian tradition until the eighteenth century. The Isaiah Dead Sea Scroll, the oldest copy of Isaiah that we have, dating from the second century B.C., has chapter 40 beginning in the same column in which chapter 39 ends. All the major commentaries and introductions deal with the unity problem.<sup>7</sup>

Isaiah lived in Jerusalem, and that capital city features prominently in his prophecies. Isaiah referred to Jerusalem by using more than 30 names. His easy access to the court and Judah's kings, revealed in his book, suggests that he ministered to the kings of Judah and may have had royal blood in his veins. Jewish tradition made him the cousin of King Uzziah. His communication gifts and his political connections, whatever those may have been, gave him an opportunity to reach the whole nation of Judah. The prophet was married and had at least two sons, to whom he gave significant names that summarized major themes of his prophecies (8:18): Shearjashub (a remnant shall return, 7:3), and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (hastening to the spoil, 8:3). Hosea's children also received names with prophetic significance.

Isaiah received his call to prophetic ministry in the year that King Uzziah died (740 B.C.; ch. 6). He responded enthusiastically to this privilege, even though he knew from the outset that his ministry would prove fruitless and discouraging (6:9-13). His wife was a prophetess (8:3), probably in the sense that she was married to a prophet; we have no record that she prophesied herself. Isaiah also trained a group of disciples who gathered around him (8:16). His vision of God, which he received at the beginning of his ministry, profoundly influenced Isaiah's whole view of life as well as his prophecies, as is clear from what he wrote. As Paul's Damascus road vision of God shaped his theology, so Isaiah's vision of God shaped his.

The prophet had a very broad appreciation of the political situation in which he lived. He demonstrated awareness of all the nations around his homeland. Judah and Jerusalem were the focal points of his prophecies, but he saw God's will for them down the corridors of time, as well as in his own day. He saw that the kingdom that God would establish through His Messiah would include all people. He was a true patriot who

<sup>6</sup>See Oswalt, pp. 17-23.

<sup>7</sup>See particularly O. T. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah, A Study in Prophecy*; and Longman and Dillard, pp. 303-11.

denounced evils in his land, as well as giving credit where that was due. He condemned religious cults yet remained neutral politically. His understanding of theology was profound. He set forth the wonder and grandeur of Yahweh more ably than any other biblical writer. As a writer, Isaiah is without a peer among the Old Testament prophets. He was a poetic artist who employed a large vocabulary and many literary devices to express his thoughts beautifully and powerfully. Most of his prophecies appear to have been messages that he delivered, so he was probably also a powerful orator.

"Of all the O.T. prophets, Isaiah is the most comprehensive in range. No prophet is more fully occupied with the redemptive work of Christ. In no other place, in the Scriptures written under the law, is there so clear a view of grace."<sup>8</sup>

"In a very real sense, all Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament is Kingdom prophecy. Even those predictions which deal with Messiah's humiliation and sufferings cannot be separated from the context of regal glory."<sup>9</sup>

### Priests and Prophets in Israel

| PRIESTS  | PROPHETS  |
|--|---|
| Their threefold task<br>Offer sacrifices for the people<br>Teach God's Word to the people<br>Lead the people in cultic worship | Their threefold task<br>Receive messages from God<br>Deliver messages to the people<br>Lead them in heartfelt worship |
| Teachers of the people<br>Appealed to the mind<br>Goal: understanding by the people  | Preachers to the people<br>Appealed to the emotions and will<br>Goal: obedience by the people                         |
| Inherited their ministry   | Were called by God to their ministry  |
| Didn't foretell the future   | Foretold the future occasionally  |
| Lived in assigned towns ideally  | Lived anywhere  |
| Were very numerous   | Were not as numerous  |
| Came from one tribe and family   | Came from any tribe or family   |
| Were males only  | Were males and females  |
| Later were divided by "courses"  | Later lived in "schools"  |
| Were gifts from God to the people  | Were gifts from God to the people   |

<sup>8</sup>*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 713.

<sup>9</sup>See Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, ch. 18: "The Blessings of the Prophetic Kingdom," pp. 217-54, for a comprehensive exposition of Old Testament prophecies concerning blessings in the Millennium.

| <b>Varieties of Prophets</b>   |
|--|
| Solitary prophets (e.g., Abraham, Moses, Elijah)                     |
| Worship leaders (e.g., Miriam, the 70 Israelite elders, Saul, David) |
| Court prophets (e.g., Nathan, Gad)                                   |
| Preaching prophets (e.g., Ahijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah)                  |
| Writing prophets (e.g., Moses, David, Isaiah, Hosea)                 |

There is no historical record of Isaiah's death. Jewish tradition held that he suffered martyrdom under King Manasseh (697-642 B.C.) because of his prophesying. The early church father Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 150) wrote that the Jews sawed him to death with a wooden saw (cf. Heb. 11:37).<sup>10</sup> Another ancient source says he took refuge in a hollow tree, but his persecutors discovered and extracted him. This may account for the unusual method of his execution.<sup>11</sup>

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND DATE**

Isaiah ministered during the reigns of four Judean kings (1:1): Uzziah (792-740 B.C.), Jotham (750-732 B.C.), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.).<sup>12</sup> The prophet began his ministry in the year that King Uzziah (or Azariah) died, namely, 740 or 739 B.C. (6:1).<sup>13</sup>

During Uzziah's reign, Judah enjoyed peace because of her surrounding nations' lack of antagonism and hostility. However, in 745 B.C. Tiglath-pileser III mounted the throne of Assyria and began to expand his empire. His three successors (Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, and Sennacherib) proved equally ambitious. Aram (Syria) and Israel (Ephraim) felt the pressure of Assyrian expansion before Judah did, because they were closer to Assyria. But in King Ahaz's reign, Judah had to make a crucial decision regarding her relationship to Assyria. Isaiah played a major role in that decision (ch. 7).

A second major crisis arose during the reign of King Hezekiah. By this time Babylon had defeated Assyria, and it was also expanding aggressively in Judah's direction. Again Isaiah played a major part in the decision about how Judah would respond to this threat (chs. 36—39).

<sup>10</sup>See also *The Martyrdom of Isaiah* 5:1ff.

<sup>11</sup>See Appendix 1: "Old Testament Writing Prophets by century B.C.," and Appendix 2: "The Old Testament Writing Prophets," at the end of these notes for charts.

<sup>12</sup>See 2 Kings 15:1-7, 32-38; 16:1-20; 18—20; and 2 Chron. 26-32 for the biblical accounts of these kings' reigns. Edwin R. Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings*, p. 75.

<sup>13</sup>See Appendix 3: "Dates of the Rulers of Judah and Israel," at the end of these notes for a chart.

". . . Isaiah exercised his prophetic ministry at a time of unique significance, a time in which it was of utmost importance to realize that salvation could not be obtained by reliance upon man but only from God Himself. For Israel it was the central or pivotal point of history between Moses and Christ. The old world was passing and an entirely new order of things was beginning to make its appearance. Where would Israel stand in that new world? Would she be the true theocracy, the light to lighten the Gentiles, or would she fall into the shadow by turning for help to the nations which were about her?"<sup>14</sup>

Sennacherib outlived Hezekiah, who died in 686 B.C., and Isaiah recorded the death of Sennacherib in 681 B.C. (37:38). Just how long the prophet ministered after that event is impossible to determine, but he must have prophesied for at least 60 years. However, the bulk of the material in his book derives from the first 50 of those years (ca. 740-690 B.C.).

| <b>IMPORTANT DATES FOR ISAIAH</b> |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Years</b>                      | <b>Events</b>  |
| 745                               | Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria begins his reign  |
| 740                               | Uzziah of Judah dies; Isaiah begins his ministry   |
| 735                               | Ahaz of Judah begins his co-regency with Jotham; Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Aram ally against Assyria                                    |
| 733-32                            | Tiglath-pileser invades Aram and Israel  |
| 732                               | Damascus falls; Pekah and Rezin die; Jotham dies   |
| 727                               | Tiglath-pileser dies   |
| 722                               | Samaria falls; Shalmaneser V of Assyria dies and Sargon II begins to reign   |
| 715                               | Ahaz dies and Hezekiah begins his reign  |
| 711                               | Sargon attacks Ashdod and returns to Assyria   |
| 710                               | Sargon attacks Babylon   |
| 705                               | Sargon dies  |
| 701                               | Sennacherib of Assyria defeats Egypt at Eltekah and departs from Jerusalem; Merodach-baladan of Babylon sends messengers to visit Hezekiah |
| 697                               | Manasseh of Judah begins his co-regency  |
| 690                               | Tirhakah of Egypt begins his reign   |
| 689                               | Sennacherib of Assyria defeats Babylon   |
| 686                               | Hezekiah dies  |
| 681                               | Sennacherib of Assyria dies and Esarhaddon begins to reign   |
| 671                               | Esarhaddon imports foreigners into Israel and defeats Egypt  |
| 612                               | Nineveh falls to Babylon   |

<sup>14</sup>Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 1:4-5.

| <b>IMPORTANT DATES FOR ISAIAH (CONT.)</b> |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Years</b>                              | <b>Events</b>  |
| 609                                       | Nabopolassar of Babylon defeats Assyria and Assyria falls  |
| 605                                       | Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeats Egypt at Carchemish; first deportation of Judahites to Babylon |
| 597                                       | Second deportation of Judahites to Babylon   |
| 586                                       | Jerusalem falls to Nebuchadnezzar  |
| 559                                       | Cyrus II of Persia begins to reign   |
| 539                                       | Cyrus overthrows Babylon   |
| 538                                       | Cyrus issues his decree allowing Jews to return to Palestine                                     |
| 530                                       | Cyrus dies   |
| 518                                       | Darius Hystaspes of Persia destroys Babylon  |

Isaiah was arguably the greatest of four prophets who lived and wrote toward the end of the eighth century. Amos and Hosea ministered in the Northern Kingdom of Israel at this time, and Micah and Isaiah served in Judah. An easy way to remember these four is to remember the phrase "ah mi" made from the first letters of their names. Jonah also prophesied in Israel in the eighth century (2 Kings 14:25), but the book that bears his name records his ministry to Nineveh.

"Beyond all question, Isaiah was the greatest of all the OT prophets, for his thought and doctrine covered as wide a range of subjects as did the length of his ministry."<sup>15</sup>

### **AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE**

Isaiah ministered and wrote to the people of Jerusalem and Judah. His task was to explain to these chosen people that the old world order was passing away and that the new order—controlled by Gentile world empires that sought to swallow Judah up—required a new commitment for Israel to trust and obey Yahweh as His "servant" nation. The Assyrian threat called for this new dedication. This was a theological even more than a historical and political crisis for Judah. It raised many questions that Isaiah addressed.

"Is God truly the Sovereign of history if the godless nations are stronger than God's nation? Does might make right? What is the role of God's people in the world? Does divine judgment mean divine rejection? What is the nature of trust? What is the future of the Davidic monarchy? Are not the idols stronger than God and therefore superior to him?"<sup>16</sup>

The far-reaching nature of these questions called for reference to the future, which Isaiah revealed from the Lord. The Northern Kingdom had made the wrong commitment, which Amos denounced, but the Southern Kingdom still had an opportunity to trust Yahweh and live.

<sup>15</sup>Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, pp. 204-5.

<sup>16</sup>Oswalt, p. 28.

"Stated briefly, the purpose of Isaiah is to display God's glory and holiness through His judgment of sin and His deliverance and blessing of a righteous remnant."<sup>17</sup>

## **THEOLOGY**

The Book of Isaiah (1,292 verses), the fourth longest book in the Bible after Psalms (2,461 verses), Genesis (1,533 verses), and Jeremiah (1,364 verses), deals with as broad a range of theology as any book in the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup> In this respect it is similar to Romans. However, there are four primary doctrines, all arising out of the prophet's personal experience with God in his call (ch. 6), that receive the most emphasis. These are: God, man and the world, sin, and redemption.

Isaiah presented God as great, transcendently separate, authoritative, omnipotent, majestic, holy, and morally and ethically perfect. In contrast, he described sarcastically the stupidity of idolatry. God creates history as well as the cosmos, and He has a special relationship with Israel among the nations. The adjective "holy" (Heb. *qadosh*) describes God 33 times in Isaiah, but only 26 times in the rest of the Old Testament. Holiness is the primary attribute of God that this prophet stressed.

Isaiah showed the tremendous value that God places on humanity and the world, but also the folly of pride and unbelief. Assuming pretensions to significance leads to insignificance for the creation, but giving true significance to God results in glory for humanity and the world. As all the other eighth-century prophets, Isaiah condemned injustice.

Sin is rebellion, for Isaiah, that springs from pride. The book begins and ends on this note (1:2; 66:24). All the evil in the world results from man's refusal to accept Yahweh's Lordship. The prophet repeatedly showed how foolish such rebellion is. It not only affects man himself but also his environment. God's response to sin is judgment if people continue to rebel against Him, but He responds with redemption if they abandon self-trust and depend on Him. Sin calls for repentance, and forgiveness for the penitent is available.

God's judgment, the outworking of the personal rage of offended deity, takes many forms: natural disaster, military defeat, and disease being a few, but they all come from God's hand ultimately. The means of salvation can only be through God's activity. Substitutionary atonement makes possible God's announcement of pardon and redemption. This redemption comes through the promised Messiah ultimately, the Lord's anointed King. The goal of redemption is not just deliverance from sin's guilt but the sharing of God's character and fellowship. Salvation could only come to God's people as they accepted the role of servant. Deliverance cannot come to man through his own effort, but he must look to God alone for it. His emphasis on salvation has earned Isaiah the title of "evangelist of the Old Testament." One writer called the fifty-third chapter "the fifth Gospel."<sup>19</sup> Isaiah's name, "The Lord (Yahweh) is salvation," meaning the Lord is the source of salvation, summarizes his message.

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<sup>17</sup>Charles H. Dyer, in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 527.

<sup>18</sup>Kaiser, p. 204. See also Longman and Dillard, pp. 312-17

<sup>19</sup>David Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p. 3.



". . . in that one name is compressed the whole contents of the book!"<sup>20</sup>

Isaiah is also strongly eschatological. In many passages the prophet dealt with the future destiny of Israel and the Gentiles. He wrote more than any other prophet of the great kingdom into which the Israelites would enter under Messiah's rule.

"We stand precisely on 56:1, looking back to the work of the Servant (now fulfilled in the person, life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus) and looking forward to the coming of the Anointed Conqueror."<sup>21</sup>

Isaiah's emphasis on the coming Messiah is second only to the Psalms in the Old Testament in terms of its fullness and variety. God revealed more about the coming Messiah to Isaiah than He did to any other Old Testament character. Messianic themes in Isaiah include: the branch, the stone (refuge), light, child, king, and especially servant. In some of the passages in Isaiah, Israel is the servant of the Lord that is in view, in others he is Cyrus, in others the faithful remnant in Israel is the servant, and in still others a future individual, the Messiah, must be in view. As Matthew clarified, Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of what God intended the Israelites to be (Matt. 2:15; cf. Hos. 11:1-2).

"What is the overarching theme of OT theology? Perhaps it is the covenant. Here in Isaiah, God's special relationship with Israel is presupposed throughout. Perhaps it is the kingdom of God. The whole structure of the book brings out the implications of God's sovereign control of things in the interests of his kingdom. Perhaps it is promise and fulfillment. Here we see time and again the word of divine authority being fulfilled and further fulfillment thereby pledged. Perhaps it is simply God himself, Israel's Holy One. This book is one long exposition of the implications—for Israel and the world—of who and what he is. So this great prophecy—its whole structure unified by its teaching about the Holy One of Israel, who is true to his word, faithful to his covenant, and pursues the establishment of his kingdom—is a classic disclosure of the very heart of the OT faith."<sup>22</sup>

"The theological message of the book may be summarized as follows: The Lord will fulfill His ideal for Israel by purifying His people through judgment and then restoring them to a renewed covenantal relationship. He will establish Jerusalem (Zion) as the center of His worldwide kingdom and reconcile once hostile nations to Himself."<sup>23</sup>

### **GENRE AND INTERPRETATION**

The book is a compilation of the revelations that Isaiah received from the Lord. He presented this revelation as messages and compiled them into their present form. His disciples may have put finishing touches on the collection under divine inspiration. Most of the book is poetic in form, the prophet having been lifted up in his spirit as he beheld

<sup>20</sup>F. C. Jennings, *Studies in Isaiah*, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup>J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, p. 33.

<sup>22</sup>Geoffrey W. Grogan, "Isaiah," in *Isaiah-Ezekiel*, vol. 6 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>23</sup>Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "A Theology of Isaiah," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 305.

and recorded what God revealed to him. Much of the content is eschatological and therefore prophetic, though most of the ministry of the prophets, including Isaiah, was forth-telling rather than foretelling. Some of what is eschatological is also apocalyptic, dealing with the final consummative climax of history in the future. These portions bear the marks of that type of literature: symbols, analogies, and various figures of speech. Psalms, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation also contain apocalyptic writing.

Students of Isaiah have difficulty understanding the eschatological portions of the book. Some believe that we should look for a literal fulfillment of everything predicted. Others believe that when Isaiah spoke of Israel and Jerusalem he was referring to the church. More literal interpretation results in a premillennial understanding of prophecy, whereas spiritualization results in an amillennial or postmillennial understanding. The problem with taking every prophecy literally is that in many places the prophet used metaphors and other figures of speech to describe his meaning; what he wrote does not describe exactly what he meant.<sup>24</sup> The problem with spiritualizing all the prophecies is that one has to reinterpret "Israel," and the New Testament teaches that Israel will have a future in God's plans—as *Israel* (Rom. 11:26-27). The church will not replace Israel, though the church does participate in some of the blessing promised to Israel. The most satisfying position, for me, is to interpret Isaiah as literally as seems legitimate in view of other divine revelation, while at the same time remembering that some of what appears to be literal description, may in fact be metaphorical. This is the approach taken by most premillennialists.<sup>25</sup>

"Surely God may be expected to have one basic meaning in what he says. This is true, but just as human speech, especially when it is poetical, may suggest further levels of significance beyond the meaning conveyed by the passage in its context, so may the Word of God."<sup>26</sup>

## **STRUCTURE**

Occasional time references scattered throughout the book indicate that Isaiah arranged his prophecies in a basically chronological order (cf. 6:1; 7:1; 14:28; 20:1; 36:1; 37:38). However, they are not completely chronological. More fundamentally, Isaiah arranged his prophecies as an anthology in harmony with a unifying principle. That organizing principle seems to be that God's people should view all of life in the light of God's reality, and should therefore orient themselves to Him appropriately, namely: as His servants.

Isaiah built a huge mosaic out of his prophecies and used pre-exilic material to serve pre-exilic, exilic, post-exilic, and eschatological ends. It is not unreasonable to assume that after Isaiah had completed what we now have in chapters 1—39, he received new revelations from God along a different line, that led him to adopt the somewhat different style that is characteristic of the last part of the book. The first part (chs. 1—35) deals

<sup>24</sup>See Appendix 4: "Some Figures of Speech in Scripture" for definitions and examples of some of the more common figures of speech in the Bible.

<sup>25</sup>See Bernard Ramm, Chapter X: "The Interpretation of Prophecy," in *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 220-53; and Roy B. Zuck, Chapter Ten: "Interpreting Prophecy," in *Basic Bible Interpretation*, pp. 227-49; for more help in interpreting the prophetic genre.

<sup>26</sup>Grogan, p. 15.

primarily with the threat of Assyria and the second (chs. 40—66) with that of Babylonia, with chapters 36—39 forming a transition. Chapters 1—5 are an introduction to the whole collection of messages. Chapters 6 and 53 are the key chapters because they provide the most concise answers to the great questions raised in the book. The book contains many extended doublets: repetition of the same truth in the same consecutive steps.<sup>27</sup>

| <b>SIMILARITIES BETWEEN ISAIAH AND THE WHOLE BIBLE<sup>28</sup></b>                              |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Isaiah</b>  | <b>The Bible</b>  |
| 66 chapters  | 66 books  |
| Two sections: chapters 1—39 and 40—66  | Two Testaments: 39 OT books and 27 NT books   |
| Emphasis in chapters 1—39 on God's righteousness, holiness, and justice                          | Emphasis in the 39 OT books on God's righteousness, holiness, and justice   |
| Emphasis in chapters 40—66 on God's glory, compassion, and grace                                 | Emphasis in the 27 NT books on God's glory, compassion, and grace   |
| Chapters 1—39 emphasize Israel's need for restoration.   | The OT emphasizes humanity's need for salvation.  |
| Chapters 40—66 predict God's future provision of salvation in the Servant.                       | The NT describes God's provision of salvation in the Messiah.   |
| Isaiah begins with a description of Israel's rebellion and ends with predictions of restoration. | The Bible begins with a description of humanity's rebellion and ends with a depiction of salvation in Jesus Christ. |
| Message: A holy God will gain glory by judging sin and restoring His people.                     | Message: A holy God will gain glory by judging sin and saving those who call on the name of His Son Jesus.          |

## OUTLINE

- I. Introduction chs. 1—5
  - A. Israel's condition and God's solution ch. 1
    1. The title of the book 1:1
    2. Israel's condition 1:2-9
    3. God's solution 1:10-20
    4. Israel's response 1:21-31
  - B. The problem with Israel chs. 2—4
    1. God's desire for Israel 2:1-4
    2. God's discipline of Israel 2:5—4:1

<sup>27</sup>See Longman and Dillard, pp. 317-19, for a summary of the "bifid" (two part) approach to Isaiah proposed by W. H. Brownlee and followed by R. K. Harrison and C. A. Evans.

<sup>28</sup>Adapted from *The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1144.

3. God's determination for Israel 4:2-6
- C. The analogy of wild grapes ch. 5
  1. The song of the vineyard 5:1-7
  2. The wildness of the grapes 5:8-25
  3. The coming destruction 5:26-30
- II. Isaiah's vision of God ch. 6
  - A. The prophet's cleansing 6:1-8
  - B. The prophet's commission 6:9-13
- III. Israel's crisis of faith chs. 7—39
  - A. The choice between trusting God or Assyria chs. 7—12
    1. Signs of God's presence 7:1—9:7
    2. Measurement by God's standards 9:8—10:4
    3. Hope of God's deliverance 10:5—11:16
    4. Trust in God's favor ch. 12
  - B. God's sovereignty over the nations chs. 13—35
    1. Divine judgments on the nations chs. 13—23
    2. Divine victory over the nations chs. 24—27
    3. The folly of trusting the nations chs. 28—33
    4. The consequences of Israel's trust chs. 34—35
  - C. Tests of Israel's trust chs. 36—39
    1. The Assyrian threat chs. 36—37
    2. The Babylonian threat chs. 38—39
- IV. Israel's calling in the world chs. 40—55
  - A. God's grace to Israel chs. 40—48
    1. The Lord of the servant ch. 40
    2. The servants of the Lord chs. 41:1—44:22
    3. The Lord's redemption of His servant chs. 44:23—47:15
    4. The servant's attention to her Lord ch. 48
  - B. God's atonement for Israel chs. 49—55
    1. Anticipation of salvation 49:1—52:12
    2. Announcement of salvation 52:13—53:12
    3. Invitation to salvation chs. 54—55
- V. Israel's future transformation chs. 56—66
  - A. Recognition of human inability chs. 56—59
    1. The need for humility and holiness chs. 56—57
    2. The relationship of righteousness and ritual chs. 58—59
  - B. Revelation of future glory chs. 60—62
    1. Israel among the nations ch. 60

- 2. Israel under the Lord chs. 61—62
- C. Recognition of divine ability chs. 63—66
  - 1. God's faithfulness in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness 63:1—65:16
  - 2. The culmination of Israel's future 65:17—66:24

Another way of outlining the book is according to the groups of people to whom Isaiah apparently delivered his prophecies.<sup>29</sup>

- I. Prophecies to the people of Isaiah's day (pre-exilic Israelites) chs. 1—39
- II. Prophecies to the captives in Babylon (exilic Israelites) chs. 40—55
- III. Prophecies to the restoration community (post-exilic Israelites) chs. 56—66

### MESSAGE

In contrast to the New Testament prophets, Isaiah had very little to say about an individual's relationship with God. His concern was more the relationship of God's people as a whole to the Lord, specifically: the nation of Israel's relationship to God. This is true of most of the Old Testament writing prophets. Isaiah focused on Israel's past, her present, her near future, and her distant future. He also gave considerable attention to the fate of the Gentile nations.

In the first section of the book (chs. 1—39), Isaiah insists that judgment is necessary before there can be peace. He was dealing with judgment here and now: repentance and divine intervention. In the last section of the book (chs. 40—66), Isaiah stressed the importance of righteousness before there can be peace: righteousness here and now before there can be peace on earth in the future.

The great value of Isaiah is its revelation of the throne of God. This book clarifies the principles by which God rules the universe. In chapter 6, Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on His throne. This vision of God impacted the rest of Isaiah's ministry and the rest of his book. In chapter 53, the prophet revealed the Servant of the Lord, in whom and through whom God reigns. Isaiah balanced the transcendence of God with the immanence of God. These great revelations of Isaiah come together in the Book of Revelation 5:6: "And I saw between the throne and the elders a Lamb standing." God reigns through people, especially one crucial person. Isaiah had much to say about the coming Messiah throughout this book. One writer identified 22 prophecies in Isaiah as messianic.<sup>30</sup>

Isaiah lived the early part of his life under the reign of King Uzziah. Uzziah was a good king, and he provided stability for the kingdom of Judah. But when Uzziah died, everyone had questions about the direction Judah would go. It was "in the year that King Uzziah died" that Isaiah saw his vision of the throne in heaven (6:1). He realized in a

<sup>29</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 833, n. 13, used the critical terms "First Isaiah," "Second (Deutero-) Isaiah," and "Third (Trito-) Isaiah," "to designate different historical horizons, not to indicate any prophets other than the one identified in Isaiah 1:1."

<sup>30</sup>John A. Martin, "Isaiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 1049.

deeper way than ever before that the true king of Judah was Yahweh, and that Yahweh was still firmly on His throne.

There are two things that mark God's throne: government and grace. Isaiah's contemporaries needed a deeper appreciation of God's government and His grace, and so do all the readers of this book. When Isaiah spoke of God's government and His grace, the Israelites mocked him for presenting such a simple message (28:13). God told his prophet to expect rejection (6:9-10), and that proved to be Israel's characteristic response to Isaiah's ministry. We also need a reminder of the basic principles of God's government and His grace. It is not because they are unknown to us, but because people do not heed these truths that they are so needful today.

Let us consider, first, what Isaiah revealed about the government of God.

There are three principles by which God governs, according to Isaiah's emphases. These are holiness, righteousness, and justice. Holiness is the inspiration, righteousness the activity, and justice the result of God's government.

The most outstanding characteristic of God that this book reveals is His holiness.<sup>31</sup> The title "the Holy One of Israel" was Isaiah's hallmark. The angelic beings that Isaiah saw assembled around God's heavenly throne ascribed perfect holiness to Him: "Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of Hosts" (6:3). The holiness of God describes His "otherliness" from all His creation. God is different in His essence; He is spirit, whereas the creation is material. He is also different in His morality; He is absolutely upright, in contrast to the creation that has suffered from the Fall and its contacts with sin. All of God's government, how He governs, derives from His holiness.

Because God is holy, He always does what is right. Conduct issues from and reflects character. Because God is holy in His character, He conducts Himself in righteousness. There is a strong emphasis on righteousness in Isaiah—both God's righteousness, and the need for human righteousness. Isaiah's emphasis on righteousness is one of the reasons his book has been called: the Romans of the Old Testament.

The result of righteous conduct is justice. God deals with His own people, and all other people, in justice. He will do what is fair, what is straight, and what is proper. Because God is just, sin inevitably brings punishment. Much of this prophecy is designed to help the people of God know how to *avoid* sin and its punishment and how to *manage* sin and its punishment. Justice, both in interpersonal and in international affairs, is an important motif in Isaiah.

Whereas the *principles* of God's government are holiness, righteousness, and justice, the *methods* by which He governs are revelation, explanation, and prediction.

According to Isaiah, the outstanding characteristic of God that distinguishes Him from all false gods (idols) is that He has revealed Himself; He has spoken. Isaiah referred to three primary revelations of God to humankind: general revelation, special revelation, and

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<sup>31</sup>See Appendix 5 at the end of these notes for a chart of "Aspects of God's person and work that the prophets reveal."

incarnate revelation. God has built a revelation of Himself into His creation so that everyone can see that a true God does exist (cf. Rom. 1). Second, He revealed His will as well as His existence. The revelation of His will came to the Israelites through what God taught them, the Torah (instruction). Third, God revealed Himself through a person: the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord, the Divine Warrior. The revelation of how God would deal with the sin problem came through this person. Isaiah reveals that God would deliver Israel from destruction, from captivity, and from sin. He would make her, in the future, the servant of His that He always intended her to be, but which she failed to become because of her sin.

God went beyond just giving revelations, however. He also provided explanations. This was one of the major ministries of the prophets in general, and of Isaiah in particular. God explained through Isaiah why the Israelites and their neighbor nations were experiencing what they were going through, so they could learn from their past, walk in His ways in the present, and enjoy His blessings in the future.

Not only did God explain the past, but He also predicted the future. He did this to prove that He is the only true God. In order to predict the future accurately, one must be able to control the future. Yahweh is the only true God who can create history in time, as well as creating the material world in space. His ability to predict the future is the great testimony to His unique sovereignty.

The *characteristics* of God's government as revealed in Isaiah are also three: patience, persistence, and power.

God deals with people patiently. He allows them the opportunity to repent and return to Himself. God had been very patient with Judah, but the day of His patience would end, so she needed to repent while there was still opportunity. The day of salvation would not last forever.

Second, God deals with people persistently. He does not disregard people's sin after a time, but He always deals with it righteously. Likewise, He persists in blessing those who faithfully follow Him, even though they live among a nation of apostates.

Third, God ever demonstrates His supernatural power. What is natural does not limit Him. He can and does intervene to provide power that overcomes His sinful people and holds them in captivity. The expectation of more exoduses is strong throughout this book. Isaiah's audience looked ahead to captivity in Babylon, but beyond that there was the promise of liberation, and beyond that there was the promise of liberation from sin.

Parallel to these emphases on the *government* of God is an equally strong emphasis on the *grace* of God in Isaiah.

Along with the holiness, righteousness, and justice of God, we have an equally strong emphasis on the love, mercy, and goodness of God. Isaiah wrote that God's children had rebelled against Him. His "wife" had been unfaithful to Him. The broken heart of God is as clear a revelation in Isaiah as are the broken commandments of God.

Similarly, God's revelations, His explanations, and His predictions arise out of His mercy. God has revealed Himself in nature so everyone can enter into relationship with a gracious God. He has explained Himself so His people can understand His dealings with them as being gracious. He has predicted the future so everyone will appreciate that His plans for humanity are gracious plans involving redemption from captivity and sin.

God's grace is the reason He is patient with people. His grace is the inspiration for His persistence with people. And His grace is the passion of His power on behalf of people.

The timeless message of this book is that acknowledgment of God's sovereign rule is the key to successful human life on every level: individually, nationally, and historically. The only hope for human failure caused by enslavement to sin is divine redemption that a God of grace provides. God is not only *able* but also *willing* to save.

To enjoy the benefits of God's grace, people must submit to His government. To submit to His government, they must receive the benefits of His grace. Israel failed to enjoy the benefits of God's grace because she failed to submit to His rule. She failed to submit to His rule because she failed to appreciate His grace. God brings us into right relationship with His government through His grace. In order to enjoy the benefits of His grace, we must submit to His government. Both government and grace find their source in Yahweh and their ultimate expression in Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:2:89-106.



## Exposition

"The Book of Isaiah can be called 'a Bible in miniature.' There are sixty-six chapters in Isaiah and sixty-six books in the Bible. The thirty-nine chapters of the first part of Isaiah may be compared to the Old Testament with its thirty-nine books, and both focus primarily on God's judgment of sin. The twenty-seven chapters of the second part may be seen to parallel the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, and both emphasize the grace of God."<sup>33</sup>

### **I. INTRODUCTION CHS. 1—5**

The relationship of chapters 1—5 to Isaiah's call in chapter 6 is problematic. Do the first five chapters describe the prophet's ministry before he received his call—is the order chronological—or do they constitute an introduction to the anthology of prophecies that follow Isaiah's call—is the order literary? The commentators take both views. My preference is to view these prophecies not necessarily as the first ones Isaiah delivered in his ministry but as those he placed here to form an introduction to his whole book. They present in a succinct way the problems that the rest of the book deals with. They are typical of many of Isaiah's succeeding prophecies and set forth his major emphases. Isaiah's call (ch. 6) is the most concise statement of the solution to the Israelites' problem, and the chapters after that one spell it out in more detail. Probably Isaiah, or whoever arranged these prophecies in their final form, put these prophecies here to set before the reader the situation facing Israel that Isaiah addressed in the rest of the book.

#### **A. ISRAEL'S CONDITION AND GOD'S SOLUTION CH. 1**

As chapters 1—5 introduce the whole book, so chapter 1 introduces the rest of the introduction to the book (chs. 2—5). It presents the situation in Judah in the second half of the eighth century B.C. and reveals God's will for His people. This chapter summarizes all of Isaiah's characteristic and essential teachings. Judgment from the Lord had to come on the people of Judah because they had sinned against Him. This judgment would purify and perfect them because God had a future for them. God's indictment of His people is similar to a covenant lawsuit (i.e., a *rib* oracle). *Rib* oracles are quite common in judgment oracles.

"True prophets are like good doctors: They diagnose the case, prescribe a remedy, and warn the patient what will happen if the prescription is ignored."<sup>34</sup>

The prophetic books of the Old Testament are mainly collections of sermons or oracles—preached messages from God. Form critics have distinguished three basic types of oracles in the prophets: oracles announcing judgment, oracles appealing for repentance, and oracles predicting salvation.

<sup>33</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, "Isaiah," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Prophets*, p. 48.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

"... the prophets were proclaimers of righteousness who preached both law and promise to motivate the people to repentance and a life of obedience in the will and plan of God."<sup>35</sup>

### **1. The title of the book 1:1**

The book claims Isaiah as its author. His name ("The LORD Saves") summarizes the revelation of the book, namely, that it is Yahweh who saves. Obadiah was the only other writing prophet who described his book as a vision. This unusual title stresses that what Isaiah wrote reflects reality accurately; he saw it. This word does not mean that everything that Isaiah wrote is what he saw in one or more visions. Though unstated, this vision (the prophecies that constitute this book) came from God. According to Jewish tradition Isaiah's father, Amoz (not the prophet Amos), was the brother of King Amaziah, Uzziah's father, which would have made Isaiah King Uzziah's cousin. Isaiah ministered in and to the people of Jerusalem and Judah, but he saw them as the real Israel since they lived under the Davidic kings, in contrast to the residents of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The kings of Judah mentioned ruled from 792-686 B.C.

### **2. Israel's condition 1:2-9**

Israel was guilty of forsaking her God and, as a result, she had become broken and desolate.

1:2-3            God Himself charged the Israelites with their sin. He called the heavens and earth to witness His indictment against His people (cf. Deut. 30:19; 32:1). His people had not only violated His covenant but common decency and good sense. Isaiah's references to the Mosaic Covenant were less explicit than Jeremiah's were, though both men viewed the covenant as the basis of Israelite life.

It was unthinkable that children should revolt against a loving father who nurtured them. Even stupid oxen and donkeys know their master, but the Israelites did not realize who cared for them. The Israelites made animals look intelligent.

1:4-9            The prophet amplified God's charge and proved it by referring to Israel's condition. He lamented that Israel's state was the logical outcome of her behavior.

"The interjection 'ah' [v. 4] (the Hebrew word [*hoy*] is sometimes translated 'woe') was a cry of mourning heard at funerals (see 1 Kings 13:30; Jer. 22:18-19; Amos 5:16). When Isaiah's audience heard this word, images of death must have appeared in their minds."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Kaiser, p. 183.

<sup>36</sup>Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 15.

God's people had forsaken the Holy One of Israel, "the transcendent God, who is wholly separate from the frailty and finiteness of Creation (his majesty-holiness), and wholly separate from the sinfulness and defilement of man (his purity-holiness)."<sup>37</sup> Israel was consequently experiencing the destructive results of her sin in national disease and in political and social catastrophes (vv. 5-6; cf. 53:4-10; Deut. 27—30). It was customary in Isaiah's day for people to squeeze the puss out of a wound, to pull a cut together with a bandage, and to pour olive oil on sores to aid healing.<sup>38</sup>

Isaiah moved from describing Israel as a sick and injured body to a desolate, conquered land (vv. 7-9; cf. Lev. 26; Deut. 28—29). The description "daughter of Zion" (v. 8) emphasizes that God feels about His wayward people as a father feels about his daughter. He loves her, has committed himself to protecting her, and takes pains to guard her from all evil and danger.

Many Israelite families lived in villages but built little shelters in their fields and camped there during the harvest season. After the harvest these little shacks looked pitiful, abandoned, useless, and deteriorating. Unless the LORD of armies had preserved a few faithful in Judah, as He preserved Lot and his family, He would have destroyed the nation as He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 10; cf. Gen. 19; Rom. 9:29).

All the writing prophets except Ezekiel, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah used the title "LORD of Hosts" ("LORD Almighty") to stress that Yahweh has numberless assistants who are ready and able to carry out His bidding (cf. 2 Kings 6:15-18). This is also the first reference in Isaiah to the remnant, the faithful few in Israel who formed a distinct group within the apostate nation. This remnant (lit. "survivor[s]") constitutes a significant group and motif in the book.

### **3. God's solution 1:10-20**

The prophet laid out two alternatives for the people to choose between in relating to God in their pitiful condition. They could continue to rely on religious ritual (cult) to manipulate God (vv. 10-15), or they could change their ways and live morally and ethically pure lives (vv. 16-17). The choice was theirs (vv. 18-20).

#### **Ritual contrasted with reality 1:10-17**

1:10            Even though God had not yet destroyed Jerusalem as He had Sodom and Gomorrah, the city was like those corrupt towns in that the people and their rulers had turned from God's holy standard.

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<sup>37</sup>Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Isaiah," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 609.

<sup>38</sup>Young, 1:51-52.

"Sodom' and 'Gomorrah' were regarded as the epitome of sinfulness; to say that Jerusalem had become like those cities was a scathing condemnation (Rev. 11:8)."<sup>39</sup>

The people needed to heed the instruction (Heb. *torah*) of their God.

1:11-15 The Israelites tended to fall into a pattern of thinking that religious ritual and their pagan neighbors' worship encouraged. They thought that going through the motions of worshipping God exactly as He specified satisfied Him. They forgot that God intended their ceremonies to be symbolic of their attitude toward Him. Their attitude to Him was more important than their flawless performance of worship rituals. Even their prayers would be ineffective if their attitude to God was not right (v. 15). We have the same problem today. This passage repeats descriptions of the Israelites' worship so often that the reader gets tired of them, just as God did. Hands full of bloodshed (v. 15) is a figure of guilt for abusing others.<sup>40</sup>

1:16-17 Having shown what God does not want, Isaiah now told the people what He does want (cf. 66:1-4, 17). His demands are short and simple in contrast to the elaborate rituals described above (cf. Deut. 10:12-13; Mic. 6:8). Three negative commands relate to the past and five positive ones to the future. Washing (v. 16) is symbolic of repenting (cf. Acts 2:38; 13:24; Titus 3:5).

"The passage clearly reveals a concern over the social injustices of the time. Such social injustices, however, could only be corrected by a change of heart upon the part of individuals."<sup>41</sup>

### **The wisdom of obeying God 1:18-20**

The Lord now challenged Israel to a formal trial. In the light of Israel's condition (vv. 2-17), there was only one reasonable course of action. The Israelites could continue as they were and be destroyed, or submit to God's will and be blessed. If they were disposed to consent and obey, God would again bless them with fertility (cf. v. 3). If they decided to refuse and rebel, He would allow their enemies to defeat and destroy them. Behavioral change, the fruit of repentance, needed to demonstrate an attitude of repentance. It always does.

### **4. Israel's response 1:21-31**

While God's invitation to repent was genuine (vv. 16-20), the nation had so thoroughly departed from Him that repentance was not forthcoming and discipline was inevitable. The prophet bemoaned the depth of Israel's apostasy and announced that the Lord would have to purify His people in the furnace of affliction before they would become what He

<sup>39</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1113.

<sup>40</sup>Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 1:95.

<sup>41</sup>Young, 1:74.

intended them to be. The structural form of verses 21-26 is palistrophic, with verses 23 and 24 forming the center and focal point of the chiasm.

### **The depth of Judah's apostasy 1:21-23**

Spiritual rot had penetrated even the capital of Israel, and what marked Jerusalem characterized the whole nation. The people, seen in the personification of their capital, who had formerly been devoted to the Lord, had become unfaithful to Him by pursuing other gods. Former glories were now tarnished, and what was once strong was now weak. The leaders of the nation, who formerly had been pure and valuable, were now adulterated and cheap. Rather than serving the people, they served themselves. Idolatry had led to social injustice, as it always does unless checked.

### **The announcement of judgment 1:24-26**

Isaiah's unusual three-fold description of God as the sovereign (Lord) God of armies (hosts), who is the Mighty God of Israel, boded ill for Judah. Isaiah crowded together more names of God in verse 24 than he did anywhere else (cf. 3:1, 15; 10:6, 33; 19:4). The specter of God arising to judge His people for their sins just mentioned is a fearful prospect (cf. Heb. 12:29). God judges sin wherever He finds it, among pagans and among His own people.

"Any facile statement that God always hates the sin but loves the sinner needs to be countered by Isaiah's insistence that those who transgress are *my foes and my enemies*."<sup>42</sup>

God would subject His people to fires of adversity, but only to purify them, not destroy them. Just rulers would emerge and the city would once again enjoy a reputation for righteousness and faithfulness to God. This is the first allusion in Isaiah to a coming Judge who will establish justice and create righteous conditions, about whom the prophet revealed much more later. The restoration described here will find fulfillment in the millennial reign of Christ.

### **The fate of the wicked 1:27-31**

Even though Zion (a poetic synonym for Jerusalem) will experience redemption by God's justice and righteousness (vv. 25-26), the Lord will destroy individuals who continue in their sins and do not repent. This is the first occurrence of "redemption" as well as "Zion" in Isaiah, both of which received considerable attention from this prophet. The Israelites had turned to objects of idolatry ("oaks") and places of idolatry ("gardens," v. 29), and in doing so had forsaken the Lord. God had chosen Israel, but Israel had chosen a tree! It is impossible to turn from the Lord and not turn to an idol. God's people would feel betrayed because of their choice one day (cf. 29:3; 45:7; Ps. 34:5; 119:6). Those who consider themselves strong and self-sufficient, as oaks and gardens, but rely on the creation rather than the Creator to sustain them—will wither and dry up (v. 30). Both they and their works will inevitably burn in the fires of God's judgment, like felled trees.

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<sup>42</sup>Motyer, p. 49.

## **B. THE PROBLEM WITH ISRAEL CHS. 2—4**

This second major segment of the introduction to the book (chs. 1—5) contrasts what God intended Israel to be (2:1-5), with what she was (2:6—4:1), and what God will make of her in the future (4:2-6). Thus the progress of thought is from the ideal to the real and back to the ideal.

### **1. God's desire for Israel 2:1-4**

2:1a The presence of another superscription to the following prophecies (cf. 1:1), the only other one in Isaiah, bears witness to the composite nature of the book; it consists of several different prophecies. Probably one appears here to set off the prophecies that follow (in chs. 2—4 or chs. 2—5) from what preceded (in ch. 1).

2:1b-4 The glorious future of Israel presented here is in striking contrast to the condition of the nation in Isaiah's day described in chapter 1. An almost identical prophecy appears in Mic. 4:1-3 (cf. Pss. 2 and 46). Perhaps Isaiah quoted Micah here, or Micah quoted Isaiah, or both of them quoted another prophet.<sup>43</sup>

"The last days" is a phrase that describes a distant time from the perspective of the prophet. The Hebrews regarded history as a series of days, the days of their lives. The title of the Books of Chronicles means literally "the words of the days." When these days come to an end, in their last part, human history on this earth will end. New Testament Christians applied this term to the time following Messiah's coming (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3; 1 Pet. 1:5, 20; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 John 2:18). Here, it must mean after His second coming, since these conditions did not follow His first coming.<sup>44</sup>

"The expression 'the last days' (*acharith hayyamim*, 'the end of the days'), which does not occur anywhere else in Isaiah, is always used in an eschatological sense. It never refers to the course of history immediately following the time being, but invariably indicates the furthest point in the history of this life—the point which lies on the outermost limits of the speaker's horizon."<sup>45</sup>

The term "mountain" is sometimes a symbol of a kingdom, nation, authority, or rule elsewhere in the prophetic writings (e.g., Dan. 2:35, 44-45; Amos 4:1; Rev. 17:9-11). The ancients also regarded mountains as the homes of the gods. If Isaiah was using "mountain" as a figure of speech, he meant that Israel and her God would be the most highly exalted in the

<sup>43</sup>See Delitzsch, 1:111.

<sup>44</sup>See John H. Sailhamer, "Evidence from Isaiah 2," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, pp. 79-102.

<sup>45</sup>Delitzsch, 1:113.

earth eventually. This will be the case during Messiah's earthly reign. The reference to "the mountain of the house of Yahweh" (v. 2), however, may indicate that the prophet had a more literal meaning in mind. He may have meant that the actual mountain on which the temple stood would be thrust higher in elevation. This may happen (cf. Ezek. 40:2; Zech. 14:4, 10), but the primary implication seems to be that Israel and Yahweh will be exalted in the world.

"The analogy of streams is particularly apt, because the major traditional oppressors of Israel were associated with great rivers—the Nile, the Tigris, and the Euphrates (cf. 8:6-8)."<sup>46</sup>

Israel's God would be recognized as *the* God, and she would be seen as *the* nation among nations. Under the Old Covenant, the Israelites made pilgrimages to Jerusalem three times a year, but in the future the entire world will go there. In that day, Yahweh's instruction will go forth from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (v. 3). Jerusalem will be Messiah's capital city at this time.<sup>47</sup> He will judge everyone, and people will live in peace (v. 4). There will be a rebellion against Messiah's rule at the end of the Millennium (cf. Rev. 20:7-10), but this will involve unbelievers fighting against Him, not one another.

"The prophet saw the new Jerusalem of the last days on this side, and the new Jerusalem of the new earth on the other (Rev. xxi. 10), blended as it were together, and did not distinguish the one from the other."<sup>48</sup>

Isaiah's description pictures a return to paradisiacal conditions (cf. 11:6-9). The amillennial interpretation of this passage sees the church as fulfilling what Isaiah wrote of Jerusalem and Judah, and the gospel as going out to the whole world, as illustrated by the following quotation.

"Such instruments [as swords, plowshares, spears, and pruning hooks] are mentioned only as symbols"<sup>49</sup>

"From whence comes peace? From the recognition that God is the source of all good, that our needs and our destiny can be submitted to his judgment, and from the knowledge that he does all things well. . . . Until persons and nations have come to God to learn his ways and walk in them, peace is an illusion."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Grogan, p. 35.

<sup>47</sup>See John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy*, p. 121.

<sup>48</sup>Delitzsch, 1:113.

<sup>49</sup>Young, 1:109.

<sup>50</sup>Oswalt, p. 118.

Disarmament now is suicide because of man's greed and aggression. Nevertheless, modern people should trust in the Lord more than in their military power, as the next section emphasizes.<sup>51</sup>

## **2. God's discipline of Israel 2:5—4:1**

In contrast to the hopeful tone of the sections that precede and follow it, this one is hopeless. In contrast to the dignity of humanity there, Isaiah presented its folly here.

### **The results of trusting in people 2:5-22**

This emphasis is a major one in Isaiah 1—39, and the prophet introduced it at this point. Many in his day—and this is still true today—preferred to trust in strong people, especially nations, rather than in the Lord.

### **The prophet's first exhortation 2:5**

In view of what the nations will do eventually, Isaiah appealed to the house of Jacob (Israel) to do the same thing immediately, namely: walk in the Lord's light (presence and truth). Commit to following the Lord. This motivation is also applicable to present-day Christians (cf. Eph. 5:8-20). Virtually all the commentators recognized that this verse is transitional. Some make it the end of the previous section and others the beginning of the next.

### **The cause of the problem: self-sufficiency 2:6-9**

Several facets of Israel's national life, all evidences of self-sufficiency rather than trust in Yahweh, invited judgment (cf. Mic. 5:10-14).

- 2:6 Israel must walk in Yahweh's light because God had forsaken her in her present condition for departing from Him. Contrast the nations that will seek the Lord in the future (v. 2). Israel had stopped living as a distinct people in the world, had adopted the ways of other nations, and had relied on them rather than on the Lord. She had looked to the east (first Assyria and then Babylonia) for light rather than to the Lord, and had become like her despised enemies, the uncircumcised Philistines.
- 2:7-8 Specifically, Israel had filled herself with the wealth, armaments, and idols of the pagan nations (cf. Deut. 17:16-17; 1 Kings 10:26—11:8). King Uzziah's successful reign brought material prosperity to Judah, but this wealth had only encouraged Jewish materialism and neglect of God. Judah had accumulated these things to make herself secure, but she was only trusting in what she herself had made. Contrast the nations that will seek spiritual benefits (v. 3), enjoy peace (v. 4), and follow the Lord (v. 4).

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<sup>51</sup>See McClain



2:9 Glorifying created things rather than the Creator results in the humiliation and abasement of those who do these things (cf. Rom. 1). Forgiveness is unthinkable when people do these things (v. 9; cf. Exod. 34:7). "Do not forgive them" is an idiom meaning "for sure you will not forgive them."<sup>52</sup> Isaiah was not asking God to refrain from forgiving His people.

"A major motif in OT theology is here (and in vv 11-22): pride and ambition are humanity's besetting and most devastating sins. Idolatry is seen as an expression of this drive by which man seeks to exalt himself."<sup>53</sup>

### **The effect of the problem: humiliation 2:10-21**

Verses 10-21 are a poem on the nature and results of divine judgment. Note the repetition of key words and phrases at the beginnings and ends of the sections and subsections. This section breaks down as follows:

The Lord is exalted over *man and the world* (vv. 10-17)

The *fact* that the Lord is exalted and man is humbled (vv. 10-11)

The *demonstration* that the Lord is exalted over every exalted thing (vv. 12-17)

The Lord is exalted over *idols* (vv. 18-21)

The *fact* that the Lord is exalted and idols and man vanish (vv. 18-19)

The *demonstration* that the Lord is exalted and idols are exposed (vv. 20-21)<sup>54</sup>

2:10-11 The proud and lofty people would eventually try to hide from God's judgment of them when He exalts Himself in the day of His reckoning (see v. 12). Having boasted in earthly resources (vv. 6-8), they now have only the earth to turn to (cf. 1:24). Contrast the nations that the Lord will accept in the future (v. 4).

"In preaching as he does here, Isaiah is going contrary to modern psychological theories which assert that it is unwise and even wrong to use fear as a motif in preaching and teaching. How different God's appraisal of preaching! . . . The only way to run from God is to run to Him."<sup>55</sup>

2:12-17 Everyone, not just the Israelites, who exalts himself against the Lord will suffer humiliation. The Lord's day of reckoning (v. 12) is any day in which He humbles the haughty, but it is particularly the Tribulation—in which He will humble haughty unbelievers. Isaiah used nature and the works of

<sup>52</sup>Motyer, p. 56.

<sup>53</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 1—33*, p. 35.

<sup>54</sup>Adapted from *ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>55</sup>Young, 1:122.

man to symbolize people (cf. 1:30; 6:13; 9:10; 10:33—11:1; 44:14; 60:16). Here several of these symbols represent the spiritual pride of Israel (cf. Rom. 12:3; Eph. 4:2).

"Throughout this section (2:6—4:1) and many others in the Book of Isaiah, there is an interesting interplay between the judgment which the Lord will inflict on the nation by the Assyrian and Babylonian Captivities and the judgment which will come on Israel and the whole world in the 'last days' just before the Millennium. Probably Isaiah and the other prophets had no idea of the lengthy time span that would intervene between those exiles and this later time of judgment. Though many of the predictions in 2:10-21 happened when Assyria and Babylon attacked Israel and Judah, the passage looks ahead to a cataclysmic judgment on the whole world ('when He rises to shake the earth,' vv. 19, 21)."<sup>56</sup>

2:18-21 Even more explicit figures of speech picture Yahweh's humiliation of the self-aggrandizing. Here the similarity of Isaiah's description of the eschatological judgment is very close to the apostle John's in the Book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 6:12-17). When God acts in judgment, all attempts to glorify the creation over the Creator will appear vain. Valuable idols will be cast aside to the bats and mice and consigned to the dark, unattractive places where those creatures live.

"Idols are precious. They are always our hard-won silver and gold. That's why we prize them. They are beautiful, but also contemptible. J. R. R. Tolkien portrayed this in *The Lord of the Rings*. Everyone who wears the golden ring of power morphs into something weirdly subhuman, like Gollum, who cherishes it as 'My Precious.' So for Middle-earth to be saved, the ring must be thrown into the fire of Mount Doom and destroyed forever. Tolkien understood that the key to life is not only what we lay hold of but also what we throw away."<sup>57</sup>

"This portrayal of the Lord's day contains several parallels with ancient Near Eastern accounts of the exploits of mighty warrior kings and deities. First, the very concept of the Lord's 'day' derives ultimately from the ancient Near East, where conquering kings would sometimes boast that they were able to consummate a campaign in a single day.<sup>58</sup> Ancient Near Eastern texts also sometimes associate cosmic disturbances and widespread panic with the king's/god's approach (cf. 2:10, 19-21)."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup>Martin, p. 1039.

<sup>57</sup>Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., *Isaiah*, p. 54.

<sup>58</sup>See Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 2:36.

<sup>59</sup>Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," pp. 309-10.

### The prophet's second exhortation 2:22

This section (2:5-22) closes as it opened, with an exhortation, this one being negative. Isaiah called on his hearers to stop trusting in man. His life, after all, comes from God, who should be trusted (cf. Gen. 2:7; 7:22; Ps. 146:4). Human beings have no real value as objects of trust. Idolatry is but a result of man's self-glorification, not its cause. Human beings will never bring about Israel's glorious destiny. Only God can and will do that. This verse, like verse 5, is transitional, and bridges the preceding proclamation of universal judgment with the following more specific judgment.

### The folly of trusting in people 3:1—4:1

This section gives particular examples of the general statements that precede it. Isaiah's point was that depending on people will not yield the glorious destiny of Israel depicted in 2:1-4. The prophet used imagery to make his point rather than logical argumentation.

### The dearth of leadership 3:1-15

The emphasis in this pericope is on the lack of qualified leaders and the consequent collapse of society that would result because God's people put their trust in people rather than in Him. The name "the Lord [sovereign] God of Hosts [the Almighty]" forms an *inclusio* around this section (vv. 1, 15).

"To make great men the source of a nation's greatness is always to end up with a dearth of great men. Unless the greatness comes from within the community itself, a condition which is ultimately the result of trust in God, no great leaders will rise from it. Instead, the leaders will merely reflect the spiritual poverty of the community."<sup>60</sup>

- 3:1 "For" ties this section to the argument of 2:6-22. "Behold" (Heb. *hinneh*) commonly introduces a threat in prophetic material. The multiple names of God again hint at judgment to come (cf. 1:24; 10:16, 33; 19:4). God was going to remove what was essential from Judah and Jerusalem. "Supply" (Heb. *mash'en*) and "support" (Heb. *mash'ena*) are masculine and feminine forms of the same word in Hebrew, meaning a staff, suggesting that every type of support will be removed. The figures of bread and water stand for food and drink—famine will come—but in a larger sense these things also represent all that is essential to the nation.
- 3:2-3 The Lord would remove the leading men in the military, political, religious, and commercial spheres of life. These were people the Israelites depended on. This happened when the Babylonians conquered the city and the land (cf. 2 Kings 24:14), and earlier when the Assyrians defeated Israel.

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<sup>60</sup>Oswalt, p. 131.

3:4-5 This lack of leadership would result in incompetent individuals seeking and gaining positions of authority (cf. Lev. 19:32; 1 Kings 3:7). Verse 4 is reminiscent of the reign of King Rehoboam. Looking ahead, wicked King Manasseh began ruling over Judah when he was only 12, and Kings Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, who followed him later, proved capricious.

"Good government is one of God's best gifts to a sinful race. How great then is the sin of those who refuse to concern themselves with their responsibilities as citizens of the state!"<sup>61</sup>

3:6-7 Things would become so bad that the possession of a mere coat (an outer garment) would lead others to thrust its owner into leadership despite his protestations. Any type of superiority will seem like an indication that the possessor can provide desperately needed authority and power. Yet the chosen leader will refuse to take responsibility, even lying about his resources, because what he would rule is only a ruin and because he knows he lacks the qualifications to lead.

"Isaiah is in reality describing a breakdown in national character and seriousness; the spirit which treats national welfare, politics and leadership as a joke."<sup>62</sup>

People should not try to compel a person who is unqualified to run for office.

Note the stages in Israel's degradation that verses 1-7 trace. Good leaders disappear (vv. 1-3), and immature, capricious leaders (v. 4) who begin to oppress the populace (v. 5) take their place. Society becomes divided as age gaps open up and respect for the respectable breaks down (v. 5). Unqualified people get pressed into leadership, and a spirit of despair dominates elections (vv. 6-7). Even though Israel and Judah were monarchies, the people did have the opportunity and responsibility for choosing some of their leaders.

3:8 The reason for these conditions is that Israel was already defying Yahweh by depending on humans rather than on Him.

3:9 Instead of bowing before Yahweh's glorious face, the Israelites were with brazen faces rebelling against Him, as the people of Sodom did. So it would go hard for them. "Woe" is an interjection of threat or distress. This Hebrew word, *'oy*, and its companion, *hoy*, occur 22 times in Isaiah, more frequently than in any other prophetic book. The Israelites had brought the judgment of God on themselves by their pride.

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<sup>61</sup>Young, 1:145.

<sup>62</sup>Motyer, p. 60.

- 3:10-11 The faithful minority, however, would not simply get lost in the judgment of the unfaithful majority, but the Lord would remember them and send them good. Sin does bring its own wages (Rom. 6:23). Here the long-term blessing of the righteous contrasts with the short-term blasting of the unrighteous. There were these two groups among God's chosen people then as there are now. The faithful frequently suffer along with the unfaithful, but their ultimate ends are very different (cf. Rev. 2:10-11).
- 3:12 Isaiah personally bemoaned the plight of the people who had already begun to experience the frustration of incompetent leaders and who would have to endure still more of the same. In his day, women did not have the educational advantages that men enjoyed, and so were less equipped to lead than men. Children, in spite of their lack of maturity, experience, perspective, and wisdom, were nonetheless needed to lead adults. Unqualified leaders were leading the people astray and giving them confusing directions concerning God's will. God's special gift to His people throughout history involved furnishing inspired leaders. Now He would withdraw them.<sup>63</sup>
- 3:13-15 Yahweh is the ultimate Judge of His people, and He would contend with His human representatives who used their positions to fatten themselves rather than feeding their people (cf. Zech. 11:1-17). Their possessions witnessed to their stealing from their neighbors. The vineyard is a common figure for Israel (cf. 5:1, 7; Ps. 80:8-18; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 15:6-8; Hos. 10:1). The people belonged to the Lord, not these abusing leaders who crushed them and ground them down to get out of them as much as they could for themselves (cf. Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:20-21).

### **The death of liberty 3:16—4:1**

The Lord's condemnation of His people continues, but there is a change in focus. In verses 1-5 it was the male leaders who received criticism, but in this section the female citizens are more prominent. Undoubtedly what the Lord said about these women was true of them as females, but we should not limit their indictment to females alone. Men have been just as guilty of these sins as women, though in Isaiah's day they were more blatant among some women. The point is that the whole nation of Judah was guilty, not just the men.

- 3:16-17 Pride led these women to walk with their noses in the air, assuming superiority over others, and to lure men to themselves. They glanced coyly to see whether others noticed their elegance. They took small steps to give the appearance of humility and drew attention even to their feet. Everything they did was designed to attract attention.

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<sup>63</sup>Watts, p. 41.

"Wherever dress and splendour are carried to excess, there is evidence of ambition, and many vices are usually connected with it; for whence comes luxury in men and women but from pride?"<sup>64</sup>

God would humble them by making the hair that they loved so much a patch of scabs and the foreheads they decorated so carefully bare. Having delighted in immodest exposure, God gave them over to it (cf. Rom. 1). He did not condemn their luxurious lifestyle as much as their arrogant spirit, which their lifestyle demonstrated.

3:18-23 The Lord proceeded to condemn 21 (seven times three, a full measure) other personal decorations that evidenced pride, many of which were popular in Isaiah's day and some of which are still popular now. Many of these items originated in cult and in magic rituals.<sup>65</sup> Again, these things are not wrong in themselves, but they may assume too much importance in a person's life.

"It was the prophet's intention to produce a ludicrous, but yet serious impression, as to the immeasurable luxury which really existed; and in the prophetic address, his design throughout is to bring out the glaring contrast between the titanic, massive, worldly glory, in all its varied forms, and that true, spiritual, and majestically simple glory, whose reality is manifested from within outwards. In fact, the theme of the whole address is the way of universal judgment leading on from the false glory to the true."<sup>66</sup>

3:24 Disgrace would result from trusting self rather than God. These five exchanges and more took place when God humbled Israel in exile. They all represent the results of divine judgment for self-exaltation.

3:25-26 The woman in view is Jerusalem personified. She is seen as having lost her providers and defenders and all on whom she depended. She is utterly without joy and alone (cf. Lam. 1:1).

"There is extant a coin from [the time of the Roman emperor] Vespasian which pictures the conquered Jerusalem as a dejected woman sitting under a palm tree, a soldier standing before her, and which bears the inscription *Judaea capta*, or *devicta*. Jerusalem alone."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>John Calvin, quoted by Young, 1:161.

<sup>65</sup>Watts, p. 46.

<sup>66</sup>Delitzsch, 1:145.

<sup>67</sup>Young, 1:170.

4:1 This verse brings to a high point the horrors that were to come. War has always resulted in the decimation of the male population. For example, approximately one million French, one million German, and half a million English male soldiers died in World War I. So many men would die in Israel that women would be desperate for male companionship and support. They would be willing to humiliate themselves to escape the reproach of being unmarried and childless. Long gone is the hope to gain a man through seduction of the eyes (cf. 3:16). Now even begging and pleading would be ineffective. Women providing their own food and clothing is the reverse of God's intention in marriage (cf. Exod. 21:10). Likewise, women taking men's places and leading them, as Eve led Adam (Gen. 3), illustrates a desperate situation.

"Here is the final end of our desire to avoid dependence. We will become dependent in the most degrading and disadvantageous ways."<sup>68</sup>

All this will happen on "that day" (3:7, 18; 4:1), namely, when God judges His people for trusting in other human beings—and themselves—rather than Him. Many of the judgments prophesied in this section took place during the Babylonian Captivity, and during the Assyrian Captivity of the Northern Kingdom, but "that day" also anticipates Tribulation times.

### **3. God's determination for Israel 4:2-6**

Having begun this oracle by clarifying God's desire for Israel (2:1-4), the prophet proceeded to contrast her present condition. She depended on people rather than Himself, a condition that would result in divine discipline (2:5—4:1). Next, and in conclusion, he revealed that God would indeed bring what He determined for His chosen people to completion in the future (4:2-6). Israel's destiny would be glorious—in spite of intervening judgment.

4:2 "In that day" connects this section of the oracle with its earlier parts and shows that all of it deals with a future time (cf. 2:12, 17, 20; 3:8, 18; 4:1). However, here we learn that "that day" will be a day of glory and vindication for Israel, as well as retribution and judgment.

In a general sense "The Branch of the Lord" refers to Israel, but this is also a messianic title here as elsewhere (cf. 11:1; 53:2; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). It was regarded as a messianic reference here as early as the Targums, the Aramaic interpretive translation of the Old Testament that dates after the Babylonian exile or possibly during it.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Oswalt, p. 143.

<sup>69</sup>See Joyce G. Baldwin, "Semah as a Technical Term in the Prophets," *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964):93-97.

"[The branch is] a name of Christ, used in a fourfold way: (1) 'the branch of the LORD' (v. 2), i.e. the Immanuel character of Christ (Isa. 7:14) to be fully manifested to restored and converted Israel after His return in divine glory (Mt. 25:31); (2) 'the Branch' of David (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15), i.e. the Messiah, 'of the seed of David according to the flesh' (Rom. 1:3), revealed in His earthly glory as King of kings, and Lord of lords; (3) the LORD's 'servant, the Branch' (Zech. 3:8), Messiah's humiliation and obedience unto death according to Isa. 52:13-15; 53:1-12; Phil. 2:5-8; and (4) the 'man whose name is THE BRANCH' (Zech. 6:12), that is, His character as Son of man, the 'last Adam,' the 'second man' (1 Cor. 15:45-47), reigning as Priest-King over the earth in the dominion given to and lost by the first Adam. Matthew is the Gospel of the Branch of David; Mark, of the LORD's Servant, the Branch; Luke, of the Man whose name is the Branch; and John, of the Branch of the LORD."<sup>70</sup>

God would provide a source of fruitfulness and blessing, which a tree branch (stemming from David and ultimately from the Lord) is, to Israel (cf. 2 Sam. 23:5). The nation would not produce this on her own by trusting in people, but God Himself would provide it. "The fruit of the earth" probably refers to the fruitfulness of the earth that God would provide through Israel and, specifically, the Messiah. God promised earlier to judge Israel with lack of fruitfulness because of her sin (4:1).

Many conservative interpreters have understood "the fruit of the earth" to be a second messianic title, which is possible. Some of them felt that the first title referred to Messiah's divine nature, and the second to His human nature.<sup>71</sup> Others favored taking "the fruit of the earth" simply as a reference to the future agricultural abundance of the land.<sup>72</sup>

"The survivors of Israel" refers to those who would live through the judgments mentioned earlier in this passage. Since the time of these judgments includes the Exile and the Tribulation, and since the reference to the Branch points to messianic times, these survivors will probably be Jews who will still be alive at the end of the Tribulation (cf. Zech. 13:8). The daughters of Jerusalem previously sought to beautify themselves (3:16, 18; 4:1), but now the Lord would adorn them with fruitfulness.

4:3-4            The divine judgments that God will bring on the Israelites in the future (in the Tribulation) will have a purifying effect on many of them, specifically the elect (cf. 1:25; Ezek. 36:25-26; 39:23-26; Dan. 9:4-19; Mal. 3:2-5;

<sup>70</sup>*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 716.

<sup>71</sup>E.g., Delitzsch, 1:152-53.

<sup>72</sup>E.g., Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 317.



Matt. 3:11; Acts 13:48). Those left alive to the end will be holy in conduct, as well as set apart by God for His purposes. Similarly, God purified the Israelites through their oppression in Egypt and then liberated them so they could be a holy nation (Exod. 19:6)—in calling and in conduct. In both cases God Himself did it. This purification was only true to a very limited extent of those Israelites who returned from the Exile, as the post-exilic books of the Old Testament reveal.

The "daughters of Zion" throughout this oracle represent all the Israelites, not just the females in the nation (cf. 3:16, 17). The "spirit" in view (v. 4) is probably the abstract concept of "process" (cf. 19:14; 28:6; 29:10; 37:7). A less probable view is that the spirit is the Holy Spirit.

4:5-6 God definitely would not abandon His people Israel in the coming judgment, but would share His presence with them and care for them by providing protection and guidance. Failure in leadership marked Israel in Isaiah's day (3:2-7), but God Himself would lead the nation in the future. In the past, God had done this by sheltering the wilderness wanderers with a cloudy pillar, but in the future a similar covering would protect the dwellers at Mount Zion. The daughters of Jerusalem tried desperately to secure husbands (v. 1), but God Himself would finally provide a marriage canopy (chamber) for His beloved in the future.

The same fire that judged His people, God Himself, would warm and protect them in all of their circumstances (cf. Ps. 91). He would control the forces of nature that the pagans believed the gods controlled. The Israelites saw a literal cloudy pillar in the wilderness, and perhaps this one in the future will be literal too, symbolic of His presence.

This oracle (2:1—4:6) reveals events that would happen in a "day" yet future from Isaiah's perspective. History has shown that some of the predictions of judgment found partial fulfillment in the exiles of Israel that preceded Messiah's appearing. However, most of the judgment, and all the blessing connected to Messiah, lies in the future from our perspective (cf. Matt. 24:4-30). It is mainly the Tribulation, and Messiah's blessing of Israel in the Millennium to follow, that is in view here.

### **C. THE ANALOGY OF WILD GRAPES CH. 5**

This is the third and last of Isaiah's introductory oracles. The first one (ch. 1) introduced the book as a whole by presenting major themes with which the prophet proceeded to deal in chapters 2—66. The second, chiastic one (chs. 2—4), presented the tension between what God intended Israel to be, and what she had become. This third prophetic sermon (ch. 5) was a clever presentation of the present condition of Israel in Isaiah's day and its consequences. It starts out deceptively as a casual song, transforms into a courtroom drama, and ends with pure condemnation. Isaiah lured his listeners into hearing him with a sweet song and then proceeded to burn them with fiery preaching.

### **1. The song of the vineyard 5:1-7**

Isaiah, like a folk singer, sang a parable about a vineyard that compared Israel to a vineyard that Yahweh had planted and from which He legitimately expected to receive fruit. One cannot help but wonder if this passage lay behind Jesus' teaching on the vine and the branches in John 15:1-6. The prophet's original audience did not realize what this song was about at first. It started out sounding like a happy wedding song, but it turned out to be a funeral dirge announcing Israel's death. This chiastic "song" is only the first part of Isaiah's unified message in this chapter. His song flowed into a sermon. This is the first of several songs in Isaiah (cf. chs. 12, 35; 54:1-10; et al.).

"In a way similar to Nathan's, when he used a story to get King David to condemn his own action (2 Sam. 12:1-7), so Isaiah sets his hearers up to judge themselves . . ." <sup>73</sup>

- 5:1-2        Isaiah offered to sing a song for his good friend about his friend's "vineyard," a figure for one's bride (cf. Song of Sol. 1:6; 8:12). Actually, this song contains a harsh message about another person and His "vineyard," namely: Yahweh and Israel. Isaiah painted a picture of a man cultivating his relationship with his wife, only to have her turn out to be disappointing. But, as would shortly become clear, he was really describing God's careful preparation of Israel to bring forth spiritual fruit. The man double-fenced his vineyard and built a watchtower and a wine vat (storage tank) in it, indicating that He intended it to satisfy Him for a long time. Yet all His work was for naught; His finest vines (Heb. *sorek*) disappointed Him. Ezekiel observed that if a vine does not produce fruit, it is good for nothing (Ezek. 15:2-5; cf. John 15:6).
- 5:3-4        Isaiah next appealed to his audience, the people of Jerusalem and Judah, speaking for his well-beloved (God). He asked them for their opinion. What more could he have done to ensure a good crop? Why did his vines produce worthless (sour) grapes? In view of what the owner had done (vv. 1-2), the answers would have to be: "You could have done nothing more than you did," and: "The grapes were the cause of the disappointment, not you."
- 5:5-6        The well-beloved explained what he would do to his disappointing vineyard. He would stop protecting it and abandon it to the elements and to its enemies. He would invest no more labor on it and would even stop providing it with the nourishment it needed to flourish. Furthermore, he would assist in its destruction. This sounded like another Hosea and Gomer story (Hos. 1—3).
- 5:7         Isaiah now shocked his audience by identifying the characters in his parable by name. His well-beloved and the owner of the vineyard was Yahweh of Hosts, not some unnamed friend; the vineyard was Israel, not

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<sup>73</sup>Oswalt, p. 151.

his friend's wife (cf. 1:8; 3:14; Ps. 80:8-18; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 15:6-8; Hos. 10:1; Matt. 21:33-44); and the Judahites were the individual plants in this unresponsive vineyard.

"Before the fall of Samaria in 722 BC *the house of Israel* meant either the whole divided nation or its northern component. The prophets did not countenance the division, and whether specifically called to prophesy to north or south they tended to embrace the whole in their ministry (cf. Am. 3:1). Isaiah thus addresses the whole nation and then narrows his vision to the specially privileged men of Judah . . ."74

The good fruit God looked for was justice (the righting of wrongs; Heb. *mishpat*) and righteousness (right relationships; Heb. *tsedaqah*), but the bad fruit the vines produced was oppression (the inflicting of wrongs; Heb. *mispakh*) and violence (wrong relationships; Heb. *tse'aqah*; cf. 60:21; 61:3). Isaiah used paronomasia (a pun) to make his contrasts more forceful and memorable. Instead of *mishpat* God got *mispakh*, and instead of *tsedaqah* He received *tse'aqah*.

"The assonance would seem to point to the fact that the worthless grapes bore at least an outward resemblance to the good ones. In appearance at least the nation seemed to be the people of God."75

As the vineyard disappointed the Lord, so this song disappointed its original hearers. It proved to be confrontation, not entertainment.

## **2. The wildness of the grapes 5:8-25**

Yahweh's crop was worthless because it produced wild grapes that manifested six blights. The word "woe" (Heb. *hoy*), a term of lament and threat, introduces each one (cf. Amos 5:18; 6:1; Rev. 8:13; 9:12).

"The word 'woe' itself, appearing six times in the passage, does not just *denounce* our sins, it *laments* our sins. The same word is translated 'Ah!' in Isaiah 1:4 and 'Alas!' in 1 Kings 13:30. Remember that 'woe' is the opposite of the word 'blessed' (cf. Luke 6:20-26)."76

"He [Isaiah] holds up six clusters of wild grapes, as it were, to illustrate what's going wrong, six ways we resist the grace of God, six answers to the question 'Why?' Each is presented with a 'Woe.'"77

<sup>74</sup>Motyer, p. 69.

<sup>75</sup>Young, 1:204.

<sup>76</sup>Ortlund, p. 66.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

Two double "therefore" sections break the laments into two groups by concluding them (vv. 13-14, 24-25). The "woe" sections emphasize the crop produced, and the "therefore" sections the harvest (judgment) to come. In the "woes" there is a chiasmic progression.

- A The property motive (vv. 8-10)
- B Self-indulgence (vv. 11-12)
- C Sin pursued (vv. 18-19)
- C' Sin justified (v. 20)
- B' Self-conceit (v. 21)
- A' The money motive (vv. 22-23)<sup>78</sup>

One writer saw six things the Lord hates in these sections: greed (v. 8), hedonism (vv. 11-13), rebellion (vv. 18-19), immorality (v. 20), pride (v. 21), and injustice (vv. 22-23).<sup>79</sup>

### Sins of the upwardly mobile 5:8-17

This section identifies sins that marked the people among whom Isaiah lived—and their consequences. They are still very much with us.

#### Two initial woes 5:8-12

5:8-10 The first quality that spoiled Israel's fruit was greed, an example of which Isaiah detailed (cf. Mic. 2:1). The Israelites were buying out their neighbors, as they had opportunity or made the opportunity, to increase their land holdings. The wealthier or smarter members of the community took advantage of their less fortunate brethren and so deprived them of their opportunity to live on land that God had given them (cf. Lev. 25:23). The carpetbaggers who descended on the South following America's Civil War similarly took advantage of many southerners whose farms had been decimated by invading northern troops. They bought up their land for a fraction of its worth and drove the former owners into destitute poverty.

Buying additional land is not wrong in itself, but when it involves abusing other people it becomes wrong. Isaiah was not decrying large farms or estates per se; he was condemning squeezing out the small man to make oneself more prosperous, secure, and admired. Those who did this in his day ended up isolated, rather than enjoying the fellowship of their brethren (cf. Matt. 16:25-26; Col. 3:5).

God would judge this greed by causing the families of these isolated rich people to dwindle (v. 9). Ironically, by the time a person has enough

<sup>78</sup>Adapted from Motyer, p. 70. For a rhetorical critical study of the passage, see Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Structure, Style, and the Prophetic Message: An Analysis of Isaiah 5:8-30," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:569 (January-March 1986):46-60.

<sup>79</sup>Dyer, p. 531

money to build a mansion he is often too old to enjoy it, his family has grown up and moved out, and his spouse may die soon because she is usually old too. God would judge the farmers by decreasing the productivity of their crops (v. 10; cf. Deut. 28:20-24; Ps. 106:15; Hag. 1:5-6). The land-hungry would become hungry. No matter how many acres a person may own, God still controls the weather. Agricultural productivity was one of God's promised blessings under the Old Covenant (Deut 28:11-12; cf. Isa. 4:2).

- 5:11-12 The second blight on the "grapes" was pleasure-seeking. In Isaiah's day this vice manifested itself in drinking too much wine and strong drink, usually at a continuous round of parties (cf. 22:13; 28:1-8; Hos. 7:5; Joel 3:3; Amos 6:6). These people were "party animals" who paid no attention to the Lord or His works. Seeking pleasure is not wrong in itself unless it becomes too absorbing, as it had with many Israelites. Too much partying produces insensitivity to spiritual things.

"When the passion for pleasure has become uppermost in a person's life, passion for God and his truth and his ways is squeezed out."<sup>80</sup>

#### **The first explanation for the coming judgment 5:13-17**

- 5:13 The result of driving other people off their land and living only for pleasure would be, ironically, that the Israelites would be driven off their land and enjoy little pleasure. Instead of more food and drink there would be famine and parched throats for all the people (cf. 3:16-24). Each of the two double "therefore" sections contains a short description of the immediate consequences of the sins just mentioned (vv. 13, 24), and then a longer description of the long-term results (vv. 14-17, 24). Carousing would end in captivity.
- 5:14-15 Instead of pleasure-seekers opening their throats to drink wine, Sheol (the place of the dead) would open her throat to drink down the pleasure-seekers. This divine punishment would befall all the people because they shared the pride that marked the property-hungry and the pleasure-mad (cf. 2:9). The offenders' actions showed that they really did not know Yahweh in any life-changing way; the knowledge of God had had no practical effect on the way they lived.

"The word *sheol* (an infinitive form, like *pekod*) signified primarily the irresistible and inexorable demand made upon every earthly thing; and then secondarily, in a local sense, the place of the abode of shades, to which everything on the surface of the earth is summoned; or essentially the

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<sup>80</sup>Oswalt, p. 160.

divinely appointed curse which demands and swallows up everything upon the earth."<sup>81</sup>

5:16-17 In contrast to the humiliation of the Israelite proud, Yahweh of armies would enjoy exaltation because what characterizes Him is the opposite of what marked His people, namely: justice and righteousness.

*"Righteousness* is holiness expressed in moral principles; *justice* is the application of the principles of righteousness (cf. 1:21)."<sup>82</sup>

This difference between God and His people is an aspect of His holiness (i.e., His moral purity; cf. 6:3). When God's people were humiliated and He would be exalted, innocent lambs and unknown strangers would enjoy the property that the proud sought to secure. The Israelites had once been the strangers in this land, but now other strangers would dispossess them. God does not delight in taking revenge, but He has committed Himself to remaining true to His covenant with Israel.

### **Sins of the cynically unbelieving 5:18-25**

Isaiah proceeded to expose the attitude that resulted in the people not allowing their knowledge of God to affect the way they lived (cf. v. 13). They thought that God would not act and that they knew what was better for themselves than He did. The prophet identified more "sour grapes" that issued from these attitudes.

#### **Four additional woes 5:18-23**

5:18-19 The Israelites were deliberately sinning. They had not innocently fallen into sin, but they were pursuing it willfully. Rather than fleeing from it, they were holding it close to themselves. Even worse, they were doing so in an attempt to bait God to respond. They believed that He would not punish them. Their ties with sin were like the cords that the people used to lead their animals and the cart ropes that were much stronger and harder to break.

5:20 The fourth bad product of the Israelite vineyard was perversity. The people were calling good what God called evil, and vice versa. For example, glorifying adultery and treating committed believers as dangerous radicals turns the truth on its head. They were mocking God's ways publicly and privately. They refused to accept the standard of God's revelation.

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<sup>81</sup>Delitzsch, 1:172.

<sup>82</sup>Motyer, p. 72.

"Moral standards were destroyed by new definitions of sin (see Amos 5:7), people using God's vocabulary but not His dictionary."<sup>83</sup>

5:21 Their fifth error was conceit. They thought they were wiser and cleverer than Yahweh.

5:22-23 Sixth, they had adopted corrupt values. They glorified the "macho man" who did things that appeared great but were nothing more than sophisticated childishness. The more a person could drink, the greater the people honored him. They thought it "smart" to profit from the misfortune of others, even though that ran counter to God's will. Corrupt judges could do this easily (cf. Prov. 17:15).

"There is a reason why people binge on escapism. They are medicating their despair."<sup>84</sup>

### **The second explanation for the coming judgment 5:24-25**

The second double "therefores" (cf. vv. 13, 14) announce God's judgment for the sins mentioned in verses 18-22, but also those identified since verse 8. The condemnation is cumulative.

5:24 The people had challenged God to act speedily (v. 19), and Isaiah assured them that He would. God in judgment is seen as an external fire that would consume His people. He would also be to them as an internal disease that decimates a whole plant, from roots to shoots. The reason for judgment is the people's rejection of mighty Yahweh's revealed will (cf. v. 12).

5:25 In fact, many judgments had already come against Judah in her history (cf. 2 Chron. 28:5-6). God was removing the hedge and breaking down the wall around His vineyard (cf. v. 5). Nevertheless the nation had not repented, so more judgment would come.

### **3. The coming destruction 5:26-30**

The two brief sections explaining the reasons for Judah's judgment (vv. 13-17 and 24-25) give way to fuller clarification of these reasons here. This section is the climax of Isaiah's message in chapter 5.

5:26 The Judahites had taunted God to act in judgment, and had concluded that because He had not destroyed them, He could not. The prophet now revealed that Yahweh, as sovereign not only over their nation but over all nations, was preparing to call a foreign power to punish them (e.g., Egypt,

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<sup>83</sup>Wiersbe, p. 17.

<sup>84</sup>Ortlund, p. 72.

Assyria, and Babylonia). All He had to do was raise a flag, as in battle to summon troops, or whistle and they would respond swiftly, even though they resided in a remote part of the earth. The Assyrian army prided itself on its maneuverability and quickness.<sup>85</sup>

"The second figure is taken from a bee-master, who entices the bees, by hissing or whistling, to come out of their hives and settle on the ground."<sup>86</sup>

5:27-29 Israel's enemy was ready and prepared to do the Lord's bidding. She would devour Judah as hungry lions consume their prey.

5:30 The enemy's attack would be as irresistible as the pounding of waves on a shore. This may be one of many prophetic comparisons between the Gentile nations and the waters of the sea. Israel would find no hope by looking to the land for help because the clouds of God's wrath would darken it and make it foreboding. Israel would find no help anywhere, not from the sea or from the land.

". . . when the predicted darkness had settled upon the land of Judah, this would not be the end; but there would still follow an alternation of anxiety and glimmerings of hope, until at last it had become altogether dark in the cloudy sky over all the land of Judah . . ."<sup>87</sup>

This prophecy looks at a judgment coming on Judah and Jerusalem that was not far away in time. Perhaps the Assyrian invasion of the land that took place at the end of the eighth century (in 701 B.C.) fulfilled it. Judah receded to a lower level from which she did not recover after this invasion. Perhaps it is also significant that the founding of Rome occurred about this time, since it was another power that God raised up to humble His people.

"Thus Isaiah ends his preface. The message of the first two sections (1:2-31; 2:1—4:6) is that human sin cannot ultimately frustrate God's purposes and that, in God, mercy triumphs over wrath. But the third section (5:1-30) poses a shattering question: When the Lord has done all (5:4), must the darkness of divine wrath close in and the light flicker and fade? This was the day of crisis in which Isaiah ministered: a crisis for humankind, for the day of wrath has come and a crisis for God: can mercy be exhausted and defeated?"<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Watts, p. 65.

<sup>86</sup>Delitzsch, 1:182.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>88</sup>Motyer, p. 73.



## **II. ISAIAH'S VISION OF GOD CH. 6**

Many serious students of Isaiah have believed that the record of Isaiah's call in this chapter occurred before he wrote any of the prophecies in this book. The title "Holy One of Israel," Isaiah's trademark name for God, connects with his call, and he used that title for God throughout the book. Likewise, the prophet's emphases on glory, majesty, and righteousness are strong in chapter 6, and they also appear throughout the rest of the book. As already mentioned, the three messages in chapters 1—5 provide a perfect introduction to the rest of Isaiah, and it was probably for this reason that these chapters were arranged in the text before chapter 6. By placing the record of his call here, Isaiah also vindicated the prophecies in chapters 1—5 for his readers.<sup>89</sup>

"6:1-13 is not simply his justification for being a prophet but is more particularly the heart of his answer to the problems raised by his preface [chs. 1—5]. It speaks of the triumph of grace."<sup>90</sup>

Also, chapter 6 provides a good transition into the prophecies that appear next, in chapters 7—39 and, particularly, in chapters 7—12. It shows how the sinful nation could become the Lord's servant (a kingdom of priests), namely, by really looking to Yahweh and allowing Him to deal with her sin, as Isaiah did. It also explains the hardness of Israel that follows; she had not looked to God and had not responded appropriately to Him, as Isaiah did. In the call of Isaiah (Isa. 6) his message stands out, but in the call of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1-10) his person stands out.

### **A. THE PROPHET'S CLEANSING 6:1-8**

6:1           Why did Isaiah date this passage, since he did not date most of his others? Probably he did so because King Uzziah had been the best king of Judah since Solomon. Nevertheless, during the last part of his reign he suffered from leprosy, a judgment from the Lord for his pride (2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chron. 26:16-23). In this respect, his life foreshadowed the history of the nation he ruled. King Uzziah died about 740 B.C., after reigning for 52 years (2 Kings 15:2; 2 Chron. 26:3). When Uzziah died, most people in the nation would have felt a great loss. Who would lead them next, and would he provide for them all that Uzziah had? Assyria was growing in power and ambition to the east, so the threat of foreign invasion was real. Israel needed a strong king. As things turned out, Judah receded to a lower level from which she did not rise. At such a time Isaiah received a vision of Israel's true king, Yahweh, who was more than adequate to provide for His people. This unusual vision prepared the prophet to act and speak for God (cf. Gen. 32:30; Exod. 19:21; 20:19; 33:20; Deut. 18:16; Judg. 13:22). Even though God is invisible because He is spirit (31:3; John 1:18; 4:24), He has manifested Himself at various times so people can appreciate certain aspects of His personality.

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<sup>89</sup>Delitzsch, 1:204.

<sup>90</sup>Motyer, p. 75.

"How significant a fact, as Jerome observes in connection with this passage, that the year of Uzziah's death should be the year in which Romulus [one of the founders of Rome] was born; and that it was only a short time after the death of Uzziah (viz. 754 B.C. according to Varro's chronology) that Rome itself was founded! The national glory of Israel died out with king Uzziah, and has never revived to this day."<sup>91</sup>

Israel suffered God's judgment under five great powers that followed one another in succession: Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome.

Isaiah described Yahweh as sovereign ("Lord"), the overlord of all the earth. He was exalted by means of His throne on which He was sitting in royal attire. The glory of His person filled His awesome, celestial palace-temple (cf. 1 Kings 22:17-23; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Ezek. 1:3-28; 8:1-4; Dan. 7:2, 9-10; Zech. 3:1-5; Rev. 4—5).<sup>92</sup>

The apostle John wrote that it was Jesus' glory that Isaiah saw (John 12:41).

- 6:2 Fiery angels attended the Lord. "Seraphim," a transliteration of the Hebrew word, probably means "burning ones." (cf. Num. 21:6). This is the only reference to seraphim as angelic beings in Scripture. Usually this Hebrew word describes snakes (cf. Num. 21:6; Deut. 8:15; Isa. 14:29; 30:6). What John saw may have been dragon-like creatures. They covered their faces, as we do when we are in the presence of something extremely brilliant, to hide and protect themselves from the superlative glory of God. They covered their feet for the same reason and perhaps as an indication that they renounced going anywhere on their own. One writer suggested that the feet may be euphemisms for the genital areas (cf. 7:20; Exod. 4:25). In this case the creatures may have been expressing modesty.<sup>93</sup> They used their third pair of wings to fly, namely, to carry out the orders of their sovereign.
- 6:3 Their joy in God's presence was evident in their calling out to each other ascribing supreme holiness to Yahweh of armies. A triple appellation of holiness, a "trisagion," indicated that Yahweh's holiness is superlative, the greatest possible, and complete. Nowhere else in the Old Testament is there another threefold repetition of God's holiness, but there is in the New (Rev. 4:8). Other repetitions of words three times for emphasis are not uncommon (e.g., Jer. 22:29; Ezek. 21:27; Rev. 8:13). Holiness is

<sup>91</sup>Delitzsch, 1:189.

<sup>92</sup>See Allan J. McNicol, "The Heavenly Sanctuary in Judaism: A Model for Tracing the Origin of an Apocalypse," *Journal of Religious Studies* 13:2 (1987):66-94, for further discussion of the heavenly sanctuary motif in relation to apocalyptic.

<sup>93</sup>Watts, p. 74.

distinctness from all that is not divine, especially in reference to ethical behavior.<sup>94</sup> God's glory is His manifested holiness.<sup>95</sup>

"His holiness is simply his God-ness in all his attributes, works, and ways. . . . He is not like us, only bigger and nicer. He is in a different category. He is holy."<sup>96</sup>

Isaiah saw God as absolutely upright, correct, and true. His glory was not restricted to the throne room or to heaven, however, but it filled the whole earth. God's glory fills the earth in that the revelation of God's attributes fills the earth (cf. Ps. 19:1-3). God's glory refers to the outshining of His person.

- 6:4 The praise of one and then another of the seraphim was so powerful that it shook the heavenly temple to its foundations. Isaiah also saw smoke billowing throughout the space, suggestive of God's power to consume (cf. 33:14; Exod. 19:18; Deut. 4:24; Heb. 10:26-31; 12:29; Rev. 9:2), and of prayer (Rev. 8:4). It evidently arose from the altar of incense (v. 6).
- 6:5 Isaiah feared that he would be consumed since he was in the presence of the purest of all beings. He announced woe on himself; he was in deep trouble (cf. 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22). These are the first words that Isaiah himself spoke in this book, and they announce a prophetic woe on himself. He first had to become aware of his own sin and uncleanness before he could worship God as he should. Not only did he have unclean lips, but he dwelt among a people whose lips were very unclean and, therefore, unfit to praise or speak for God. King Uzziah died an unclean leper (2 Chron. 26:16-21). Unclean lips evidence unclean hearts (cf. Matt. 12:34). Whereas God was holy, Isaiah and the Jews were unclean, not upright, impure in their ethical conduct. Isaiah sensed his danger because he saw the real King of Israel who was Yahweh of armies. It is in seeing God for who He is that we can see ourselves for who we are and can, therefore, accurately evaluate our condition (cf. Job 42:5-6; Dan. 10:14-17; Rev. 1:17).
- 6:6 Isaiah only acknowledged his hopeless condition—he did not plead with God or make vows to God—and God then went into action. Confession must precede cleansing (cf. 1 John 1:9). The altar from which the seraph took the coal was probably the brazen altar in heaven, in which case the coal itself symbolizes substitute sacrifice.<sup>97</sup> Fire from the brazen altar lit the incense on the incense altar in Israel, so, whichever altar may be in view, the coal connects with sacrifice. Ultimately all sin is forgiven

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<sup>94</sup>Oswalt, p. 180.

<sup>95</sup>Delitzsch, 1:192.

<sup>96</sup>Ortlund, p. 77.

<sup>97</sup>Motyer, p. 78.

because of sacrifice.<sup>98</sup> Fire in the Old Testament symbolizes the wrath of God (Gen. 3:24; Num. 11:1-3), the holiness of God (Exod. 3:2-6; 19:18-25), His purifying process (Num. 31:22-23; Mal. 3:2-3), and the context of the Law (Deut. 4:12, 33, 36).

"A seraph peels off from his flight path around the throne, diving straight for Isaiah. He's holding a burning coal that he took from the altar with tongs, but not because it is hot. After all, a seraph himself is a burning one. He took this coal with tongs because it is a holy thing. It belongs to the place of sacrifice and atonement and forgiveness. But this holy thing touches Isaiah's dirty mouth, and it does not hurt him, it heals him. What we must see, in the context of the whole Bible, is that this burning coal symbolizes the finished work of Christ on the cross."<sup>99</sup>

6:7 God's purging agent touched Isaiah's mouth, and the angelic messenger assured the prophet that he had been completely cleansed of his uncleanness. We might call this Isaiah's conversion experience. Compare Acts. 9:3-11, which records the Apostle Paul's conversion and call.

6:8 God then asked for a volunteer to serve Him, evidently among any present in the throne room (cf. 1 Kings 22:19-20). "Us" is a plural, and the plural in Hebrew (but in no other Semitic languages) adds intensification (cf. Gen. 1:26; 11:7; 1 Kings 22:19-23). It only hints at plurality within the Godhead, but the New Testament makes that plurality clear (cf. John 12:41; Acts 28:25). This may be a plural of majesty, or the Lord may have meant Himself, the seraphim, and the heavenly host.

Note the balance of divine sovereignty and human choice in His words: He would send someone, but that someone needed to be willing to go. God's grace to him in not consuming him, but rather cleansing him, motivated Isaiah to volunteer to be God's servant.

This section is a major revelation of the grace of God and the condition for spiritual cleansing. It is one of the premier salvation passages in the Old Testament. God's grace on this occasion so impacted Isaiah that his ministry bore this hallmark, as we observe in this book.

"Here in this matchless passage we find the reason why so few are willing to serve God. They need above all the conviction of sin. Only when a man has been convicted of sin and has understood that the Redeemer has borne the guilt of his sin is he willing and ready joyfully to serve God, to go wherever God may call him."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1122.

<sup>99</sup>Ortlund, pp. 79-80.

<sup>100</sup>Young, 1:254.

Many preachers of this passage have pointed out that the order of events is very significant. First, after gaining a greater appreciation for God's holiness and his own sinfulness, Isaiah said "woe," acknowledging his own uncleanness. Second, the seraphim said "lo" ("behold" in the NASB), pointing to God's provision for cleansing. Third, God said "go" (v. 9), giving the prophet a mission to fulfill.

### **B. THE PROPHET'S COMMISSION 6:9-13**

The Lord proceeded to give Isaiah specific instructions about what He wanted him to do and what the prophet could expect regarding his ministry (vv. 9-10), his historic-political situation (vv. 11-12), and his nation's survival (v. 13).

6:9            God sent Isaiah back to the people among whom he lived, a people with unclean lips (v. 5). He was to tell them to listen and to look at the revelations he brought from God, but they would not fully understand what the prophet meant (cf. Deut. 29:2-4).

Does God really want to prevent people from understanding, repenting, and being healed? This verse and the next are strongly ironic. We could paraphrase Isaiah's message to the Israelites as follow: "Go ahead; be stubborn!"<sup>101</sup>

6:10           The effect of Isaiah's preaching would not be that the people would repent, but that they would harden their hearts against his messages (cf. Matt. 13:14-15; Mark 4:10-12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39-41; Acts 28:26-27; Rom. 11:8).

The Apostle John quoted this verse (and 53:1) in reference to the Jews' inability in Jesus' day to believe on Him (John 12:40). John then added, "These things Isaiah said, because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him" (John 12:41). Isaiah may or may not have realized that his words had prophetic significance, in addition to being applicable to his own situation.

". . . this chapter immediately follows and precedes examples of wrong reaction to God's word [5:24; 7:10-12]."<sup>102</sup>

God told Moses before he went to Pharaoh with the Lord's message that the Egyptian king would harden his heart (Exod. 3:19). From the divine viewpoint, God had raised Pharaoh up to demonstrate His sovereignty and power in liberating the Israelites. However, from the human viewpoint, Pharaoh had the freedom to choose to submit to God or resist. His freedom was not complete; human freedom never is. We cannot do everything we want to do. But his freedom was genuine; he really could have submitted

<sup>101</sup>The NET Bible note on v. 10.

<sup>102</sup>Grogan, p. 57.

to Yahweh. God justly held him responsible for his choice because he did have genuine, though limited, freedom.

In both cases, Moses' commission and Isaiah's, God was not ruling out the possibility of repentance from the start. He was letting His prophet see beforehand what the outcome of his ministry would be. In both cases, too, those who heard God's Word had the opportunity and the ability to respond to it positively, but they chose to respond negatively. Consequently, God as their Judge hardened their hearts so that they became harder, and eventually it became impossible for them to repent (Exod. 10:1; cf. Rom. 1:18-32; Heb. 6:4-6). The Israelites in Isaiah's day had already hardened their hearts against the Lord, and His retributive judgment on them had already begun when Isaiah received his commission.

"The elect are not saved because they are creatures of light; they too were creatures of darkness and in them there was no goodness, nothing that would attract the light. God, however, out of His mere good pleasure did choose them and ordain them to life eternal, and when the blessed gospel was heard by them, they were given a heart that was then willing and able to hear and to respond. Those, however, whom God did not ordain to life eternal, He passed by and for their sin ordained to dishonor and wrath."<sup>103</sup>

The success of our ministry should not be our prime motivation to continue in the work of the gospel. Our loving commitment to remain faithful to the Lord who has graciously saved us and called us into His service, despite our lack of outward success, should be.

6:11-12 The news that the Israelites would harden their hearts against Isaiah's message undoubtedly disappointed the prophet. So he asked the Lord how long he should continue to preach (cf. v. 9) and how long the Israelites would be unresponsive (cf. v. 10).<sup>104</sup> The Lord did not give him a certain number of years but implied that he should continue preaching until the full extent of God's judgment on the people because of their prolonged unresponsiveness had come. The penalty for resisting—that the Lord set forth in the Mosaic Covenant—culminated in military defeat and exile from the Promised Land (Lev. 18:25-27; Deut. 28:21, 63; 29:28). The Lord took full responsibility for this judgment, though He used other nations as His instruments to execute it.

6:13 Yet there was hope. A tenth of the nation would survive. The Lord would take His tithe from among the people. But the land would again face judgment. This "tenth" probably refers to the remnant left in the land when

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<sup>103</sup>Young, 1:261.

<sup>104</sup>Delitzsch, 1:201; Motyer, p. 79; Grogan, p. 58.

Nebuchadnezzar took the majority captive to Babylon (2 Kings 24:14). When the nation was thoroughly cut down and burned, there would be a little spiritual life in it that would eventually sprout. This happened when a small number of godly exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, and Ezra returned to the land and reestablished the nation. Antiochus IV of Syria almost consumed even this remnant during the inter-testamental period, when the land was again subject to burning. They were the initial holy seed (cf. 41:8; 43:5; 53:10; 59:21; 65:9; 66:22; 1 Kings 19:18; Rom. 11:5), but Messiah would be the ultimate holy seed (Heb. *zera*, a collective singular; cf. 4:2; 11:1) who would arise out of the chastened nation.

### **III. ISRAEL'S CRISIS OF FAITH CHS. 7—39**

This long section of the book deals with Israel's major decision in Isaiah's day. Would she trust in Yahweh or in other nations? The decision was a matter of faith; who is more worthy of trust, God or strong people? God promised that trust in the nations would result in destruction (ch. 34), but trust in Him would bring abundance (ch. 35). Israel's decision would also determine whether she had a message for the nations or not, and whether she would fulfill her mission to the nations or not. This decision is, of course, one that the people of God of all ages continually face.

#### **A. THE CHOICE BETWEEN TRUSTING GOD OR ASSYRIA CHS. 7—12**

This section of Isaiah provides a historical introduction to the theological problem described above (cf. 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chron. 28). King Ahaz had to make this decision of faith because he faced the threat of military invasion. Though warned by the prophet, the king made the wrong decision and experienced the bitter consequences. All four subdivisions of this section focus on Assyria and deal with the implications of trust in her rather than God. As Isaiah had faced his moment of decision (ch. 6), so King Ahaz did now. In chapter 6, Isaiah made the right decision to trust and obey God. In chapter 7, Ahaz made the wrong decision to distrust and disobey God. But with the bad news of Ahaz's apostasy comes the assurance that God would raise up a faithful Anointed One in the future.

##### **1. Signs of God's presence 7:1—9:7**

A unifying theme in this subsection is children. The children were understandably a major concern of the Israelites, threatened as they were with invasion. However, the children also embodied qualities that the adult Israelites needed to adopt to survive, such as innocence, trust, and acknowledged weakness (cf. Matt. 18:1-7). Indeed, a child promised in this passage, who turned out to be Jesus, would eventually save them. As Jesus appealed for an attitude of childlikeness in His hearers, so did Isaiah.

##### **The command to trust God 7:1-9**

This introductory segment provides the basic information about the historical situation that Judah faced, plus God's command concerning that situation. Would King Ahaz face

his threat from God's perspective or from man's? Would he trust in Yahweh or in soldiers? Would he exercise faith or resort to works?

- 7:1 King Ahaz, the grandson of King Uzziah (6:1), reigned in Judah from 735-715 B.C. altogether. Early in his reign King Rezin of Syria (Aram) and King Pekah of Israel allied against him (see 2 Kings 15:37; 16:5, 10-18; 2 Chron. 28:22-24). The fact that Isaiah referred to Pekah as the "son of Remaliah," rather than as the "king of Israel," may indicate disdain for him, since to call someone "the son of" someone was a way of denigrating him. Rezin and Pekah attacked Jerusalem to force Ahaz to ally with them against Assyria, which was growing stronger farther to the northeast, and threatening to annihilate them all (2 Kings 15:37).<sup>105</sup> God protected Jerusalem, and this dual enemy could not force Judah into a treaty. This verse summarizes the attack, and the following verses give more details about it. Another less probable view is that verse 1 refers to Assyria's first attack against Jerusalem (2 Chron. 28:5-8), and the following verses to its second invasion (2 Chron. 28:17-18).
- 7:2 When Ahaz ("the house of David" of all people!) heard that Syria had moved its army into the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim) and had settled down there, he and his people shook with fear. The date of this attack was probably between 736 and 734 B.C. This prophecy of Isaiah is dateable to 734 B.C. Ahaz had previously suffered defeat at the hands of both these enemies (2 Chron. 28:5-8). Edom and Philistia were also threatening Judah at this time (2 Chron. 28:17-18). What Ahaz would do would affect the future of his dynasty, the house of David.
- 7:3 God instructed Isaiah to take his son Shearjashub ("A Remnant Shall Return"; cf. 6:13) and meet Ahaz at a strategic water source for Jerusalem, which Ahaz was apparently examining. The location of this pool is uncertain, but it was a reservoir for Jerusalem (cf. 36:2), perhaps near the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley.<sup>106</sup> A vulnerable above-ground aqueduct brought water from it into the city. The fuller's field was a place where people washed clothes, fuller being another name for launderer.
- Shearjashub's presence may have been designed to encourage Ahaz to believe that his enemy would not destroy Judah completely, even though they had already defeated him previously (cf. v. 4). Still, the mention of only a remnant returning was sobering. This was the very spot on which Sennacherib's field commander later stood to hurl insults at Hezekiah (36:2), the fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction of an Assyrian attack.
- 7:4-6 Yahweh instructed His prophet to assure the king not to fear his enemies (cf. Deut. 31:6-7; Josh. 1:6-9). They had been firebrands, but now they were only smoldering embers. Today God might have referred to them as

<sup>105</sup>See the map of the ancient Near East in Isaiah's times at the end of these notes.

<sup>106</sup>Watts, p. 91.



burned-out cigarette butts.<sup>107</sup> Their threats of breaching Jerusalem's walls, terminating Ahaz's dynasty, and setting up a puppet ruler would come to nothing. Isaiah's references to Remaliah and Tabeel ("Good for Nothing") encouraged Ahaz to think about his own dynasty. The Tabeel family members were probably Judahites who had become prominent in Gilead.<sup>108</sup>

7:7-9

In contrast to what the two enemy kings said (v. 6), the sovereign God assured Ahaz that the evil that Judah's enemies had planned for her would not materialize. By pointing out that the head of Syria was Damascus and the head of Damascus was Rezin, God was contrasting the limited sovereignty of Rezin with His own. This is also the point of His reference to the "son of Remaliah" being over Samaria, which was Ephraim's capital. An additional point may be that these nations would remain as they were without the addition of Judah. They would not conquer Judah.<sup>109</sup> God promised that Israel would not be a people (i.e., would be destroyed as a nation) within 65 years. The Northern Kingdom suffered defeat in 722 B.C., only about 13 years from then. To make matters worse, in 671 B.C., about 62 years after this prophecy, King Esarhaddon began importing foreign settlers into the former Northern Kingdom, which made return and resettlement there impossible (cf. 2 Kings 17:24; 2 Chron. 33:11; Ezra 4:2, 10).

Ahaz's responsibility, and the responsibility of all who heard this prophecy (the "you" is plural), especially the government leaders, was to believe this promise of God and trust Him. If they would not believe it, they would not last.

"Only through trusting in the present and ultimate veracity of God is any real security possible."<sup>110</sup>

"God literally says, 'If you do not firm up, you will not be confirmed.' In other words, 'You'll live by faith, or you won't live at all. But if you do want my support, all you have to do is lean on me.' God is attracted to weakness and need and honesty. He is repelled by our self-assured pride."<sup>111</sup>

### **Ahaz and Judah's test 7:10—8:10**

Now Ahaz had to make a decision. Would he trust that God was with him and would protect Jerusalem, or would he reject God's promise and try to establish security another way?

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<sup>107</sup>Ortlund, p. 88.

<sup>108</sup>See Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, p. 370.

<sup>109</sup>See Young, 1:274.

<sup>110</sup>Oswalt, p. 202.

<sup>111</sup>Ortlund, p. 89.

### The sign of Immanuel 7:10-17

Isaiah next tried to move Ahaz to faith (vv. 10-12), then denounced the king for his failure to trust Yahweh (vv. 13-15), and finally forecast a calamity worse than the division of Israel's United Kingdom (vv. 16-17).

7:10 Evidently Isaiah's conversation with the king continued on the same day in the same place. The prophet gave Ahaz another message from the Lord.

"According to a very marvelous interchange of idioms (*communicatio idiomatum*) which runs through the prophetic books of the Old Testament, at one time the prophet speaks as if he were Jehovah, and at another, as in the case before us, Jehovah speaks as if He were the prophet."<sup>112</sup>

7:11 God commanded the king to ask Yahweh his God for a sign that He would indeed do what He had promised. Signs were immediate, physical confirmations that what a prophet had predicted further in the future would indeed happen. They either confirmed that God had caused something to happen (cf. Exod. 3:12), or they confirmed that He would cause something to happen, as here (cf. 37:30; Jer. 44:29-30).<sup>113</sup> Ahaz had the freedom to request any type of sign, and God promised to use it to bolster his faith (cf. Gideon).

7:12 Ahaz refused to ask for a sign. He did not want God to confirm that He would protect Judah because he had already decided not to trust God but to make other arrangements. He tried to justify his disobedience and his lack of faith with a pious statement that he did not want to test Yahweh (cf. Deut. 6:16). Testing the Lord got Israel into big trouble in the wilderness and at other times, but asking for a sign was not testing God when He commanded it. God prohibited testing Him (demanding proof) when His people doubted or rebelled against Him (cf. Ps. 95:9; Matt. 16:4; Mark 8:12; Luke 11:29), not when they wanted a sign to strengthen their faith (cf. Judg. 6:36-40; 2 Kings 20:8-11; Ps. 34:6; Mal. 3:10). Ahaz wanted to appear to have great faith in God, but he had already decided to make an alliance with Assyria.

"This was like a mouse sending for the cat to help him against two rats!"<sup>114</sup>

Ahaz may even have convinced himself that this alliance was the means God would use to deliver Judah. A sign from God would only prove that Ahaz's plan was contrary to God's will. Compare King Saul's refusal to obey God and its consequences.

<sup>112</sup>Delitzsch, 1:213.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Alfred Martin, *Isaiah: "The Salvation of Jehovah,"* p. 39.

7:13 Isaiah saw right through the king's hypocrisy. He warned him by addressing him as the representative of the house of David. The plural "you" indicates that Isaiah was addressing all the members of the house of David and perhaps the whole nation (cf. v. 9). Yahweh had made covenant promises that David's dynasty would continue forever (2 Sam. 7:16; 1 Kings 8:25). Ahaz should not have feared being replaced by a puppet king (v. 6). Ahaz had said he would not test God (v. 12), but by refusing to ask for a sign, that is precisely what he was doing—testing God's patience with him. He was also testing the patience of the godly in Israel who were looking to their king to trust God. The prophet had called Yahweh "Ahaz's God" (v. 11), but now that the king had rebelled against Him, Isaiah referred to the Lord as "my (Isaiah's) God." This change was ominous, suggesting that God would abandon the king. If Ahaz's decision resulted in God withdrawing support from the Davidic kings, the prophecy of Immanuel may imply that God would raise up His own King from David's house who would be faithful to Him. This could explain why God gave such a major messianic prediction at this time.

"To appreciate fully the messianic portrait of Isaiah 1—39, it must be viewed against the backdrop of the generally negative presentation of Judahite kingship in these same chapters."<sup>115</sup>

7:14 Israel's Sovereign Himself would give Ahaz and the house of David (plural "you") a sign that He was with His people—even though the king refused to ask for one. The sign no longer was an inducement to faith but a confirmation of divine displeasure. A particular pregnant young woman would bear a son and name Him "Immanuel" ("God with us"; cf. Gen. 16:11; 17:19; Judg. 13:3). The definite article ("the") describes "virgin" in the Hebrew text. This sign should have encouraged Ahaz to trust God's promise of deliverance and not rely on Assyria.

The Hebrew word for "virgin" is *'alma*, which means a young woman of marriageable age, but the word never describes a married woman in the Old Testament. It is the only word in Hebrew that unequivocally signifies an unmarried woman. As the rest of this passage will show (through 8:10), it seems most likely that Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hash-baz fulfilled the Immanuel prophecy initially.<sup>116</sup> In Hebrew society, an unmarried woman of marriageable age would be a virgin. Thus *'alma* had overtones of virginity about it and, in fact, sometimes described a virgin (cf. Gen. 24:43). This probably explains why the Septuagint translators chose the Greek word *parthenos*, meaning virgin, to translate *'alma* here. However, Hebrew has a word for virgin, *bethula*, so why did not Isaiah use this word

<sup>115</sup>Chisholm, *A Theology . . .*, p. 314.

<sup>116</sup>See Richard Niessen, "The Virginitly of the 'almah in Isaiah 7:14," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:546 (April-June 1980):133-50; *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1124.

if he meant the mother of the child was a virgin? Probably Isaiah used *'alma* rather than *bethula* because he did not want to claim the virginity of the mother necessarily, but this word does not rule virginity out either. God evidently led Isaiah to use *'alma* so the predicted mother could be simply a young unmarried woman or a virgin. This allows the possibility of a double fulfillment, a young woman in Isaiah's day and a virgin hundreds of years later (cf. Matt. 1:23).<sup>117</sup>

The naming of a child by its mother was not uncommon in Israel (cf. Gen. 4:1, 25; 29:31—30:13, 17-24; 35:18; Judg. 13:24; 1 Sam. 1:20; 4:21). In Jesus' case, it was appropriate that Joseph name Him rather than Mary, since He was the Son of God as well as Mary's son.<sup>118</sup> The child's mother evidently named her baby Immanuel ("God is with us" or "God be with us") since she believed God would demonstrate His presence with Judah by preserving the nation from the Syro-Ephraimitic threat. Whoever the child was, Ahaz must have learned of his birth since the birth was to be a sign to him. Some writers believed that Ahaz's son Hezekiah was the initial fulfillment. Whether the initial fulfillment was Maher-shalal-hash-baz, Hezekiah, or someone else, the name "Immanuel" may have been a secondary or less used name.

Some very fine scholars have believed that there was no initial fulfillment of this prophecy in Isaiah's day, that no child born then served as a sign. Conservatives in this group believe that the only fulfillment was the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>119</sup> The problem with this view is the lack of a sign in Isaiah's day. One response to this problem by an advocate of this view follows.

". . . the assurance that Christ was to be born in Judah, of its royal family, might be a sign to Ahaz, that the kingdom should not perish in his day; and so far was the remoteness of the sign in this case from making it absurd or inappropriate, that the further off it was, the stronger the promise of continuance to Judah, which it guaranteed."<sup>120</sup>

7:15-16      Eating curds (thick, sour milk) and honey, the diet of the poor, in contrast to bread and wine, pictures a time of poverty in the land (cf. v. 22) following the Assyrian invasion that would follow relief from the Syro-Ephraimitic threat. The child born in Ahaz's day would eat this type of

<sup>117</sup>See Paul D. Wegner, "How Many Virgin Births Are in the Bible? (Isa 7:14): A Prophetic Pattern Approach," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:3 (September 2011):467-84. For a list of 22 messianic prophecies in Isaiah, see *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 1049.

<sup>118</sup>See Willis J. Beecher, "The Prophecy of the Virgin Mother," in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, pp. 179-85; and Wiersbe, p. 19.

<sup>119</sup>E.g., Delitzsch, 1:216-20; Charles L. Feinberg, "The Virgin Birth in the Old Testament and Isaiah 7:14," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119:475 (July 1962):251-58; Dyer, pp. 532-33; and Alfred Martin, *Christ in Isaiah*, part 1, p. 23.

<sup>120</sup>J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, p. 171. See also *The New Scofield . . .*, p. 719.

food when he became personally responsible for his decisions, an age that Isaiah left ambiguous intentionally. However, before this child became responsible, both of Judah's threatening neighbors, Syria and Ephraim, would cease to exist. Assyria invaded Syria and Israel in 733-32 B.C., only a year or two after this prophecy. Damascus fell in 732, and Samaria fell in 722 B.C. Jesus Christ also grew up in the Promised Land when it was under the rule of an oppressive foreign power and when life was hard.

7:17 Yahweh would bring on Judah a worse threat than Judah had faced ever since Israel's United Kingdom had split in Rehoboam's day, namely: the king of Assyria. Even though Syria and Israel would disappear as threats to Judah, Ahaz had done the wrong thing in failing to trust God, because Assyria would pose an even worse threat. He had "taken a tiger by the tail."<sup>121</sup>

"Whatever a man trusts in place of God will one day turn to devour him."<sup>122</sup>

### **The threat of Assyria 7:18-25**

This section explains how the coming days would be the worst since the division of the kingdom (v. 17). Assyria was not just a powerful and brutal enemy, but it would be a tool in Yahweh's hand that He would use to discipline Judah.

7:18-19 Yahweh would summon the armies of Assyria and Egypt to do His bidding as one whistles (or hisses) at insects (cf. 5:26). The ancients could evidently control flies and bees by hissing at them.<sup>123</sup> Egypt was a land filled with flies, and the ancients spoke of Assyria as a country of beekeeping.<sup>124</sup> Enemy soldiers would swarm everywhere in Judah (cf. Judg. 6:1-6).

7:20 Judah's Sovereign would particularly use Assyria, as a barber uses a razor, to remove all the "hair" from Judah, to completely humiliate her (cf. 2 Sam. 10:4-5). Prisoners and slaves were shaved as a mark of dishonor, and this condition signified insult and disrespect.<sup>125</sup> Ahaz was already negotiating to hire Tiglath-pileser III, the king of Assyria, perhaps secretly at this time, to come and help Judah against the Syro-Ephraimitic alliance. However, Yahweh would "hire" the Assyrians (King Sennacherib) to do His will, implying that He would pay them for their efforts, which He did, not Ahaz.

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<sup>121</sup>Motyer, p. 87.

<sup>122</sup>Oswalt, p. 214.

<sup>123</sup>See Young, 1:296, for sources indicating this in Aeschylus' writings.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Watts, p. 107.

- 7:21-22 In that day of woe, instead of having flocks and herds, the Judahites would be fortunate to have only one heifer and a couple of sheep. There would be such a lack of abundance of milk that they would have to curdle it to preserve it. They would also have to resort to eating honey instead of the variety of food items that they previously enjoyed. Even though food and drink would be scarce, it would be good food and drink because God would provide for the people who survived the Assyrian invasion.
- 7:23-25 Valuable farmland would revert to wilderness (cf. 5:5-6), and it would only be good for hunting. Formerly cultivated land would be used for grazing because there would be so many briars and thorns and so few Israelites to take care of it.

"This ends Isaiah's address to king Ahaz. He does not expressly say when Immanuel is to be born, but only what will take place before he has reached the riper age of boyhood,—namely, first, the devastation of Israel and Syria, and then the devastation of Judah itself, by the Assyrians."<sup>126</sup>

#### **The sign of Maher-shalal-hash-baz 8:1-4**

Whereas the sign of Immanuel was for Ahaz primarily, the sign of Maher-shalal-hash-baz was for all the people of Judah. The preceding prophecies to Ahaz (7:10-25) are generally negative, but the following prophecies to the Judahites (8:1—10) are more positive. These instructions from the Lord evidently came to Isaiah in the midst of the Syro-Ephraimitic war.<sup>127</sup>

Robert Chisholm Jr. believed Maher-shalal-hash-baz was the immediate fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy of 7:14.

"The juxtaposition of the birth report narrative (8:1-8) with the birth announcement narrative (7:14-25) suggests a close relationship between the prophecy and the birth. The pattern of events (initial deliverance followed by punitive judgment) associated with the growth pattern of the child is the same in both chapters. Also, Immanuel is addressed in the conclusion of the prophecy in chapter 9 (cf. 8:8) as if He were already present on the scene. This address makes excellent sense if one understands the introduction of the same message (8:1-3) as describing his birth.

"The differing names present a problem (which, by the way, one also faces in Matthew's application of the Immanuel prophecy to the birth of Jesus). Perhaps Immanuel, understood as a symbolic name, focuses on God's involvement in Judah's history, whereas Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, the child's actual name, alludes to the specific purpose or effect of His

<sup>126</sup>Delitzsch, 1:226.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 1:228.

involvement. (In the same way, when applied to Jesus, 'Immanuel' attests to God's personal intervention in history through the Incarnation, whereas the Lord's actual name, Jesus, indicates the specific purpose or effect of that intervention.)"<sup>128</sup>

- 8:1 Yahweh instructed Isaiah to take a large flat surface (Heb. *gillayon*) appropriate for posting as a placard. He was to write clearly on it *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* ("Speeding to the Plunder, Hurrying to the Spoil").

"Soldiers would shout these words to their comrades as they defeated and plundered their foes."<sup>129</sup>

This public notice had a double purpose: to announce a coming attack on Syria and Israel and to announce the birth of Isaiah's son.

"Isaiah was to make his message as public and eye-catching as possible."<sup>130</sup>

- 8:2 God selected two men whom he wanted to witness the writing or posting of this document to confirm the date of this prophecy. When the predicted events happened, they could faithfully testify that Isaiah had predicted them. One of the witnesses was Uriah ("Yahweh is light"). He was probably the high priest who built an altar, like the one in Damascus that Ahaz had seen, and set it up in place of the brazen altar (cf. 2 Kings 16:10-16). The position that this Zechariah ("Yahweh remembers") occupied is unknown, but he may have been a prominent public figure like Uriah (cf. 2 Chron. 26:5; 29:12-13).

- 8:3 Then Isaiah had sexual relations with his wife. Since the expression "approached" is a euphemism used several times in the Old Testament for the first intercourse between a man and his wife, it is possible that Isaiah's first wife, the mother of Shearjashub (7:3), died and the prophet remarried.<sup>131</sup> In this case, the *'alma* of 7:14 could refer to Isaiah's second wife, and Immanuel could have been Maher-shalal-hash-baz. However, "approached" (Heb. *qrb*) often describes sexual relations in general (Gen. 20:4; Lev. 18:6, 14, 19; 20:16; Deut. 22:14; Ezek. 18:6). So this could have been Isaiah's first wife. By naming her son Immanuel, she made a prophetic statement: God would be with His people in the coming crisis. When she bore a son, Yahweh told Isaiah to name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz. The child's mother evidently gave him one name and his father gave him the other.

<sup>128</sup>Chisholm, *A Theology . . .*, p. 315. See also p. 316.

<sup>129</sup>J. Martin, p. 1050.

<sup>130</sup>Motyer, p. 90. Cf. Hab. 2:2.

<sup>131</sup>See Herbert M. Wolf, "A Solution to the Immanuel Prophecy in Isaiah 7:14—8:22," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972):454; *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1126; and Wiersbe, p. 19.

8:4 Before the boy grew old enough to speak distinctly, Assyria (Tiglath-pileser III) would carry off the wealth of Damascus and Samaria (in 732 B.C.; cf. 7:15-16; 2 Kings 15:29). This brought to a close a 200-year period in which the Aramean Kingdom played a leading role.<sup>132</sup> Thus Syria and Israel would not only fail in their attempt to bring Judah under their power (cf. 7:6), but the king of Assyria would bring them under his power. This second promise is almost identical to the earlier one in 7:4-9. Perhaps God intended it to be a second witness to the truthfulness of His Word.

"This is a specific prediction of the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians in 722 B.C."<sup>133</sup>

### The danger of Assyria 8:5-10

This section corresponds to 7:18-25. Both of them explain that the name to be given a child would have both a positive and a negative significance.

8:5-6 Yahweh spoke to Isaiah again (cf. 8:1). King Ahaz was not the only person in Judah who had failed to trust in the Lord but had put his confidence in man. The people of Judah had been guilty of the same folly. They had rejected God's faithful provisions for them, symbolized by the gently flowing Shiloah stream that carried water from the Gihon spring just outside Jerusalem into the city.<sup>134</sup> This water source was unimpressive, but it provided for the people of Jerusalem faithfully. Instead they had rejoiced in the anticipated destruction of the kings of Syria and Ephraim due to Ahaz's alliance with Assyria.

8:7 Judah's sovereign God would indeed sweep these enemies away by using Assyria as His instrument of judgment. Isaiah compared Assyria to the waters of the Euphrates, which seasonally overflowed and swept away all in its path. But it would be God, not Ahaz, who would be responsible for their defeat. Assyria would not inundate God's people Israel because her gods were stronger than Yahweh, but because the sovereign Lord would bring this judgment on them.

"Like Germany in 1939 and 1940, the Assyrians seemed almost superhuman. They could strike anywhere, it seemed, with speed and power."<sup>135</sup>

"The motif of the two rivers Shiloah (6) and the Euphrates (7) offers a telling contrast between the seeming weakness of faith and the seeming power of the world."<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>Watts, p. 114.

<sup>133</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1126.

<sup>134</sup>See *ibid.*

<sup>135</sup>Oswalt, p. 226.

<sup>136</sup>Motyer, p. 91.



- 8:8 The Assyrian tide would not stop at Syria and Israel, however, but would sweep into Judah as well. This invasion happened in 701 B.C. But its waters would stop short of completely engulfing Judah; they would reach only to her neck. Israel would drown, but Judah would keep her head above water. Seen from above, the deepening waters of Assyria's army filling every valley and rising higher and higher resembled the wings of a huge, ominous bird of prey that covered the whole land. Isaiah described the whole land as Immanuel's land. Probably this is a double reference to the child predicted to be born (7:14) and to Israel as a whole, the people whose God was with them and would not allow Assyria to devour its prey. The reappearance of Immanuel in this passage that predicts the birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz, and so closely parallels the Immanuel prophecies in chapter 7, suggests again that Maher-shalal-hash-baz was the initial fulfillment of the Immanuel prediction. In view of the later fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy in Jesus Christ, we have a reminder that Yahweh continued to be with His people and provided salvation for them ultimately in Christ.
- 8:9-10 The prophet called on the heathen nations to listen. They would be shattered—even though they girded themselves for battle against God's will. They could gird themselves for battle if they chose to, plan their plans, and propose their proposals, but they would fall because God was with His people.<sup>137</sup> Ultimately God's people would prevail.

### Clarification of the issue 8:11—9:7

Having received two signs of God's dealing with them in the immediate crisis that they faced, plus accompanying warnings, the people of Judah next received additional incentives to trust Yahweh.

### The importance of listening to God 8:11—9:1

- 8:11 Isaiah now passed along instruction that Yahweh had powerfully given him, warning him against following the popular reliance on human strength. God had been teaching Isaiah that He had brought the Assyrians to power. To oppose Assyria now was to oppose God.<sup>138</sup>
- 8:12-13 The Lord told him not to fear the armies of Judah's enemies, but God Himself, Yahweh of armies. He should not become paranoid and think that the enemy's conspiracy against the people of Judah would succeed, as the people of Judah did. Instead, he should make God the most significant fact in his thinking and thus sanctify Him as holy (cf. Matt. 10:28).

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<sup>137</sup>Oswalt, p. 229, wrote a good paragraph on the philosophical difference between God being with us and humankind's attempts to unite with God (pantheism and panatheism).

<sup>138</sup>Watts, p. 120.

- 8:14-15 This procedure would make God a refuge and a holy place of peace for the prophet. The Israelites generally, however, would not trust God and would, consequently, find that He tripped them up by bringing judgment on them (cf. Matt. 21:44; Luke 2:34; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8). He would trap them, eventually leading them into captivity.
- 8:16 Isaiah's audience needed to return to God's revelation and recommit themselves to it, which the prophet led the way in doing (cf. Josh. 24:14-15). Those who followed his lead became his disciples and disciples of the Lord.
- "Once his [Isaiah's] message had been rejected by the court (Isa. 7:1-17) and the people (Isa. 8:1-8), he turned to his disciples (Isa. 8:16-18), thus preparing the way for the judgment that God had already pronounced (Isa. 6:11-13)." Jesus did the same thing (cf. John 12—16).
- 8:17 Isaiah committed himself to waiting expectantly for the Lord to act in harmony with His Word, rather than turning to another source for strength and courage (cf. 40:31; Heb. 2:13). Presently God was not doing anything that indicated that He was working. The "house of Jacob" refers to the Northern Kingdom.
- 8:18 Nevertheless the prophet's own name, and the names of his two sons, were signs from "Yahweh of armies" that He would do what those names signified. Judah's enemies would descend on her soon, a remnant would return, and Yahweh would save. Even though He was presently silent, God was still on His throne.
- "The Epistle to the Hebrews (ch. ii. 13) quotes these words as the distinct words of Jesus, because the spirit of Jesus was in Isaiah,—the spirit of Jesus, which in the midst of this holy family, bound together as it was only by the bands of 'the shadow,' pointed forward to that church of the New Testament which would be bound together by the bands of the true substance."<sup>139</sup>
- 8:19 Loss of faith in God results in an increase in superstition. The unfaithful in Judah were encouraging their brethren to seek advice about the future from mediums, wizards, and spiritists—instead of from their God (cf. Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:11). Their unusual speech, used to call up spirits, portends unreliable revelations. How ironic it is to consult the dead for information about the living (cf. 1 Sam. 28:6-8)!

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<sup>139</sup>Delitzsch, 1:239.

8:20 Back to the Bible, Isaiah preached. If the predictions of the false prognosticators did not harmonize with written revelation, their counsel was darkness rather than light. The "law" probably refers to the Torah, and the "testimony" to royal tradition and theory. This "testimony" comprised the oral and written traditions passed down from former generations, which, while not inspired, were nevertheless important reliable sources of information.

"More than anything else today there is need that all our thinking be based upon and in conformity with the Holy Scriptures."<sup>140</sup>

8:21-22 The end of such occult advisers is difficulty, hunger, frustration, distress, darkness, gloom, and anguish. They will look up to their leaders and curse both their king and their God because things did not turn out as they foretold (cf. v. 17; Rev. 16:11, 21). They will look down to their fellows and find no help. Frustration meets them wherever they turn.

9:1 In contrast to the gloom of the false counselors, the residents of Galilee in Israel, who would experience the Lord's chastening, would enjoy glory. God would bring light when His people had lost all hope. Galilee, in northern Israel, was the first region in Israel to feel the lash of the Assyrian invaders. It was a melting pot and home to many Gentiles, as well as Jews, because the international highway between Mesopotamia and Egypt passed through it. Glory came to this region later when Jesus lived and ministered there (cf. Matt. 4:13-16). But it will enjoy even greater glory during Messiah's earthly reign, as will all of the Promised Land.

"The three phrases at the end of the verse—'the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles' or 'nations'—indicate administrative districts of the Assyrian conqueror Tiglath-Pileser III as a result of the three campaigns he waged in the west around 733 B.C."<sup>141</sup>

### **The faithful king to come 9:2-7**

In contrast to Ahaz, who refused to listen to and obey God, the Lord would raise up a faithful king who would be born and reign in the future (the Millennium). This pericope climaxes the present section (7:1—9:7) dealing with the signs of God's presence. Again a child is the centerpiece of the prophecy and provides a sign and hope for the future. Verse 2 begins chapter 9 in the Hebrew text.

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<sup>140</sup>Young, 1:320.

<sup>141</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1127.

- 9:2 Light would come to those walking in darkness—the Israelites—as they lived in a dark land (v. 1). Many prophetic perfects in this section assure the certainty of the things predicted. In Hebrew, a writer sometimes described as past what was really in the future. He used this verb tense to emphasize that what was future was as sure to happen as if it had happened already. God would enlighten those in darkness by bringing new light to them, even though they did not deserve it (cf. Matt. 4:15-16). This was revelation about the future that was sure, compared to the unreliable predictions of mediums and wizards (cf. 8:19).
- ". . . the very region where Assyrian armies brought darkness and death would be the first to rejoice in the light brought by the preaching of Christ (Mt. 4:15-16)."<sup>142</sup>
- "The darkness-light motif points to a creative work of God, who alone can make such a transformation (cf. 4:5; Gn. 1:2-3; 2 Cor. 4:6)."<sup>143</sup>
- 9:3 God would reveal His presence to His people, and the results would be national growth (cf. 7:20-23; 49:19-23) and abundance (cf. 5:10; 33:23; 35:1-2), really every type of joy.
- 9:4 God would deliver them from their enemies, primarily physical but also spiritual enemies. The Assyrians would impose a yoke on the Israelites, but God would break that yoke off (cf. Exod. 1:11; 2:11; 3:7-8; 5:4-7, 10-14; 6:6-7; Lev. 26:13; Matt. 11:29-30). This deliverance would be entirely of God and against overwhelming odds, as when God broke the yoke of Midian (Judg. 6—7, cf. especially 6:35; 7:2-14, and 20).
- 9:5 God would not just give victory to Israel, but He would cause wars to cease (cf. Ps. 46:9-10). His people would enter into the fruits of a past victory, namely, the victory of their Messiah.
- 9:6 The end of war depends on the coming of a person—a royal person—yet one never explicitly called a "king" here (cf. Matt. 11:27; 28:18; John 5:22). He would appear as a child (emphatic in the Hebrew text); He would not only be God come to earth, but God born on earth, i.e., both human and divine. The "child born" points to His humanity and the "son given" to His deity. Moslems deny that God could ever have a son.<sup>144</sup> God would not defeat Israel's enemies by using larger, more powerful armies, but through the influence of a child to be born (cf. Ps. 2:7; John 3:16).

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<sup>142</sup>*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 720.

<sup>143</sup>Motyer, p. 100.

<sup>144</sup>Koran, Sura 112.

"What the world needs, as the prophets saw clearly, is not primarily a better philosophy of government or a more perfect system of legislation, but a *Person* who has the character, wisdom, and power needed to rule for God among men. This is the central theme of prophecy from first to last."<sup>145</sup>

This child to be born to Isaiah's people would have traits that demonstrated God was with them. Thus He would be the ultimate fulfillment of the Immanuel sign (7:14). Four titles underscore His deity and humanity.

"Wonderful Counselor" is literally "wonder of a counselor" (cf. Judg. 13:18), though there is nothing in the Hebrew construction to prevent taking these as two separate names.<sup>146</sup> This ruler's counsel would transcend merely human wisdom (cf. 11:2); He would have no need of human counselors to guide Him. Jesus advised, for example, that strength lies in weakness, victory in surrender, and life in death. He would be "Mighty God," would possess all the power of God (cf. 10:21; Deut. 10:17; Neh. 9:32; Ps. 24:8; Jer. 32:18). He would not only be the father of the nation in the sense that Israel's kings were, but He would be the "Eternal Father" whose paternal reign would last forever, because He is God (cf. Ps. 72). This is not a reference to God the Father but to God the Son, who will provide a fatherly kind of reign throughout eternity.

"In the Bible eternity is not absolutely opposed to time, but is simply (at least in its forward aspect) an unending duration or succession of ages."<sup>147</sup>

In climax, He would be the "Prince of Peace," the monarch whose coming results in peace between God and man and between man and man (cf. Mic. 5:4).

"Isaiah does not intend that we should understand that in actual life the Child would bear or be addressed by these names, anymore than in actual life He should bear the name Immanuel. . . . The thought is that the Child is worthy to bear these names, and that they are accurate descriptions and designations of His being and character."<sup>148</sup>

"To summarize, the messianic ruler's titles depict Him as an extraordinary military strategist who will be able to execute His plans because of His supernatural abilities as a warrior.

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<sup>145</sup>McClain, p. 161.

<sup>146</sup>Delitzsch, 1:252.

<sup>147</sup>McClain, p. 145..

<sup>148</sup>Young, 1:331. Cf. Delitzsch, 1:250-51.

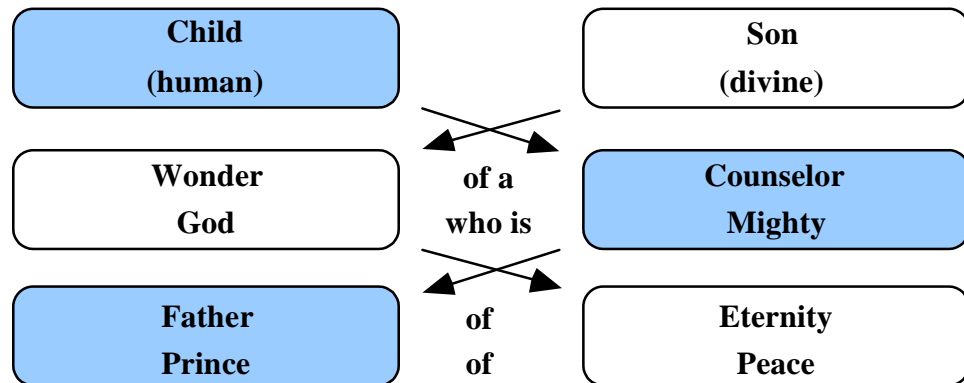
His military prowess will ensure His beneficent rule over His people, who will enjoy peace and prosperity because of His ability to subdue all His enemies."<sup>149</sup>

"God's answer to everything that has ever terrorized us is a child. The power of God is so far superior to the Assyrians and all the big shots of this world that he can defeat them by coming as a mere child. His answer to the bullies swaggering through history is not to become an even bigger bully. His answer is Jesus. . . .

"Look at Jesus. As the Wonderful Counselor, he has the best ideas and strategies. Let's follow him. As the Mighty God, he defeats his enemies easily. Let's hide behind him. As the Everlasting Father, he loves us endlessly. Let's enjoy him. As the Prince of Peace, he reconciles us while we are still his enemies. Let's welcome his dominion."<sup>150</sup>

The first two titles suggest divine wisdom and power, and the second two present the ends He would achieve through the use of those attributes, namely, fatherly care and sovereign peace.

There is an interesting alternation of the human and divine descriptions of the Messiah in this verse, which is especially clear in the Hebrew text.



9:7

He would be the final king whose reign would result in increasing peace forever. Most governments increase through war, but this one would grow through peace. He would be an eschatological figure, yet He would be a Davidic king—the perfect Davidic descendant who would accomplish for Israel all God intended in justice and righteousness (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-17). This would happen because Yahweh of armies Himself would bring it to pass for the welfare of His people (cf. 37:32). It is, therefore, certain of fulfillment.

<sup>149</sup>Chisholm, *A Theology* . . . , pp. 313-14. Cf. Wiersbe, p. 21.

<sup>150</sup>Ortlund, p. 99.

"The throne of David' is an expression as definite, historically, as 'the throne of the Caesars,' and does not admit of spiritualizing (Lk. 1:32-33)."<sup>151</sup>

Amillennialists spiritualize the throne of David by referring it either to the church or heaven.

## **2. Measurement by God's standard 9:8—10:4**

This section of the book focuses on the Northern Kingdom, and it ties in with the section immediately preceding concerning the Messiah (9:2-7). It explains why Ephraim's plans against Judah would fail. They would not fail because of Ahaz's alliance with Assyria but because God would frustrate them. Ephraim would not go into captivity because she lacked sufficient military strength but because she failed to measure up to the standard God had set for her. This standard lay in the area of moral rectitude through covenant obedience rather than military resources.

"The great light would not arise till the darkness had reached its deepest point. The gradual increase of this darkness is predicted in this second section of the esoteric addresses [8:5—12:6]."<sup>152</sup>

This section, a poem, consists of four strophes, each ending with the refrain: "In spite of all this His anger does not turn away and His hand is still stretched out" (vv. 12, 17, 21; 10:4; cf. 5:25). The progression of thought is from pride, to flawed leadership, to selfishness, to social injustice.

### **The pride of Ephraim 9:8-12**

Isaiah explained that because the Northern Kingdom had not turned to Him for safety but to an alliance with Syria, He would not defend her from her enemy.<sup>153</sup>

". . . *the* sin for Isaiah, the source of all other sin, is the pride which exalts humanity above God, which makes God but a tool for the achievement of our plans and dreams."<sup>154</sup>

9:8            The prophet announced that God had pronounced a message (Heb. *dabar*, word) of judgment against the Northern Kingdom. It had all the force of Yahweh's sovereign power behind it, but it would come subject to Ephraim continuing on the course it presently pursued. Prophetic announcements of judgment usually allowed for the possibility of repentance. If the people under God's promised judgment repented, the judgment would not fall (cf. Jer. 18:7-10; Jon. 3:4-10).

<sup>151</sup>*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 721.

<sup>152</sup>Delitzsch, 1:255.

<sup>153</sup>See Kemper Fullerton, "Isaiah's Earliest Prophecy against Ephraim," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages* 3:3 (1916):9-39.

<sup>154</sup>Oswalt, p. 251.

- 9:9a Everyone in Ephraim and Samaria would know the truth of God's Word.
- 9:9b-10 These people had demonstrated their pride by claiming that, if some things were destroyed by invaders, they would replace them with better things. They planned to overcome any disaster through their own work rather than by looking to the Lord for help.
- 9:11-12 Because of this pride, Yahweh would raise up strong adversaries from the northeast and the southwest: the Syrians (Arameans) and the Philistines (cf. Num. 20:12; 2 Sam. 11:27). He would teach them that they could not overcome these enemies on their own, and that they needed His salvation. Yet in spite of these judgments, the Lord's anger would still be against Ephraim, and His hand of judgment would be stretched out against her because she would not repent.

"This text is about sinners in the hands of an angry God. In fact, God, the most loving person in the Bible, is also the angriest person in the Bible."<sup>155</sup>

### **The corruption of Ephraim's leaders 9:13-17**

- "As the first stage of the judgments has been followed by no true conversion to Jehovah the almighty judge, there comes a second."<sup>156</sup>
- 9:13-14 Since the Lord's discipline of the nation would not cause her to repent, He would cut off her leadership abruptly and suddenly. This would make her see her need of Him more clearly. Isaiah described the totality of leadership as the head and tail of this national animal. Some leaders were eminent, as the erect palm branch, while others were lowly, like the bowing bulrush.
- 9:15-16 By the "head," Isaiah meant the leading person, and by the "tail," the false prophet. The leaders were leading the people astray by strengthening their self-confidence rather than urging them to trust Yahweh. Typically this results in leaders saying and doing things only to lengthen their own tenure in positions of power.
- 9:17 Therefore the Lord would not give the young men success in battle, nor would He take care of the defenseless at home. The people's corruption had descended to disregarding God, doing evil, and saying right is wrong and wrong is right. Consequently judgment would proceed.

"What is the wrath of God? His wrath is his active, resolute opposition to all evil. His delight is spontaneous and intrinsic to his being, but his wrath is provoked by the

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<sup>155</sup>Ortlund, p. 101.

<sup>156</sup>Delitzsch, 1:258.



defiance of his creatures. His love will never make peace with our evil. What we must understand is that God's wrath is *perfect*, no less perfect than 'the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience' (Romans 2:4). His wrath is not moody vindictiveness; it is the solemn determination of a doctor cutting away the cancer that's killing his patient. And for God, the anger is personal, not detached and clinical. This Doctor hates the cancer, because he loves the carriers of the disease and he will rid the universe of all their afflictions. He has already scheduled 'the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed' (Romans 2:5)."<sup>157</sup>

### **The selfishness of everyone 9:18-21**

- 9:18 Wickedness is not a little misguided playfulness but rebellion against God's order for life.<sup>158</sup> It proceeds from a little fire to a raging inferno because, like fire, wickedness has an insatiable appetite.
- 9:19 The Lord of armies uses human sin to consume sinners, and people consume one another trying to satisfy their own desires.
- 9:20-21 They even consume themselves to satisfy themselves. The tribes of Israel were consuming each other for the same purpose, even brother tribes like Ephraim and Manasseh that had come from one father, Joseph (cf. Judg. 12:1-6). The Hebrews described the members of their own tribe or family as their "arm" because they supported and sustained them. Whereas Judah had defended his brothers in the days of the patriarchs (Gen. 44:18-34), now the descendants of Joseph were trying to destroy the descendants of Judah. For this reason God's hand of judgment was still extended against Ephraim.

### **The oppression of the helpless 10:1-4**

Isaiah directed this last strophe against the unjust authorities and judges.

- 10:1-2 The Ephraimite leaders were using their positions to deprive the needy of their rights and to obtain what the poor had for themselves. They were evidently favoring legislation that resulted in these ends, as well as perverting the justice that was in place in the Mosaic system. The situation was so bad in Israel that the Lord chose to abandon His customary defense of the defenseless.

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<sup>157</sup>Ortlund, p. 102.

<sup>158</sup>Oswalt, p. 257.

10:3-4 When God brought Ephraim into judgment, he would have nowhere to hide and no one to protect him (cf. Matt. 24:45-51). Then *he* would be the needy without defense or recourse. For the fourth time, God promised that He would judge Ephraim (cf. 9:12, 17, 21).

Ephraim, the Northern Kingdom, had more reason to fear God than he had to fear Assyria. Yahweh would discipline him because of his pride, corrupt leadership, selfishness, and oppression of his vulnerable citizens. He would not suffer defeat because of military inferiority but for moral inadequacy.

### **3. Hope of God's deliverance 10:5—11:16**

Earlier God revealed that He would use Assyria to destroy Judah for her lack of trust in Yahweh (7:1—8:22). Now He revealed that He would also destroy this destroyer (cf. Hab. 2:4-20). It is God who is sovereign, not Assyria, and He was with His people.

"The Messianic prophecy, which turns its darker side towards unbelief in ch. vii., and whose promising aspect burst like a great light through the darkness in ch. viii. 5—ix. 6, is standing now upon its third and highest stage. In ch. vii. it is like a star in the night; in ch. viii. 5—ix. 6, like the morning dawn; and now the sky is perfectly cloudless, and it appears like the noonday sun."<sup>159</sup>

#### **The destruction of the destroyer 10:5-34**

This segment presents Yahweh as the transcendent God who controls the destiny of all nations. He creates history just as He created the cosmos. The victory of the Assyrians did not prove the superiority of her gods, nor did Judah's defeat mean that Yahweh was inferior. The whole passage contrasts sovereignties: Assyria's and Yahweh's.

#### **The instrument of destruction 10:5-11**

Assyria was simply an unwitting tool in Yahweh's hand that He would use to accomplish His purposes (cf. Hab. 1:12-17). This pericope is one of the greatest revelations of the relation between heaven and earth in the Bible.<sup>160</sup>

10:5-6 "Woe" (Heb. *hoy*) introduces a judgment oracle. Assyria was like a rod in God's hand; He controlled her actions. He would send her to discipline godless Judah, against whom God's fury burned: "to capture booty and to seize plunder" (v. 6, the meaning of Maher-shalal-hash-baz's name, 8:1, 3). However, Assyria was in for woe herself (cf. v. 1) because she failed to acknowledge that she was under the sovereign authority of Yahweh.

10:7 Assyria did not consciously serve God. She planned to pursue her own selfish purposes and to destroy many nations to expand her own empire. She mistakenly thought she was sovereign.

<sup>159</sup>Delitzsch, 1:264.

<sup>160</sup>Motyer, p. 112.

- 10:8-11 Assyria, in her unrealistic pride, boasted, in the person of her king, that her princes were the equivalent of kings, so great was their authority. She assumed that the cities of Judah were the same as the cities of other nations, namely, without Yahweh's special concern and protection. She mistakenly thought that Judah's God was just another god (cf. 2 Kings 18:33-35). Therefore she planned to do to Judah and Jerusalem just as she had done to other nations and their great cities. In each of the three pairs of cities listed (v. 9), the first is farther southwest than the second. The prophet portrayed the Assyrian king as thinking: "I took this one that is closer to me, so I can take that other one that is farther from me."

### **The object of destruction 10:12-19**

- 10:12 When God finished using Assyria as His rod to punish Mt. Zion and Jerusalem, He would punish Assyria, too, for her arrogance and haughtiness. The prose form of this verse, which serves as a climax in a long section of poetry, makes this major point stand out all the more clearly.

"God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are always in perfect balance in the Word of God. Even though we are not able to reconcile these paradoxical facts, we can believe both because the Bible teaches both. God is sovereign in His universe; and at the same time man is fully accountable to God for all his acts."<sup>161</sup>

- 10:13-14 Assyria, again personified (cf. vv. 8-11), manifested arrogance and haughtiness by boasting that all her victories were the result of her own strength and intelligence (cf. Rom. 1:19-21). She felt, as many nations have, including Nazi Germany, that she was superior and therefore had the right to determine the fates of inferiors. She had a right to steal from others who could not or would not defend themselves. Changing the boundaries of conquered nations was an integral part of Assyrian imperial practice, along with the relocation of captives.<sup>162</sup>
- 10:15 It is illogical, the prophet pointed out, for the impersonal instrument of judgment to exalt itself over the Person who wields it.
- 10:16 Because of Assyria's pride, sovereign Yahweh of armies would defeat this mighty foe. Isaiah described her fall as resulting from a wasting disease and a consuming fire. In Hebrew, in contrast to English, mixed metaphors add strength to a description rather than weakening it.

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<sup>161</sup>A. Martin, *Isaiah . . .*, p. 43.

<sup>162</sup>Watts, p. 150.

- 10:17-18 The Assyrians were jumping into a fire by invading Jerusalem. The fire would come from the light of Israel, namely: her holy God (cf. 8:12-15). This fire would consume the small and the great in Assyria: from the lowly thorns, to the beautiful garden plants, to the mighty trees of the forest.
- 10:19 The remaining trees (leaders) would be so few that a small child would be able to count them.

In 701 B.C. the Assyrians besieged Jerusalem and God slew 185,000 of them in one night (37:36-37). The Babylonians felled the Assyrian Empire in 609 B.C. One scholar believed that all of what Isaiah predicted in verses 5-19 was fulfilled between the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. and the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.<sup>163</sup>

### **The promise of restoration 10:20-27**

The focus of the prophecy shifts from Assyria to Israel.

- 10:20 In some future day, the remnant (cf. 6:13; 7:3) who escaped annihilation by the Assyrians would no longer trust in man for deliverance, as Ahaz and Judah did before the Assyrian takeover. They would learn this most important lesson and truly trust in Yahweh, the holy one of Israel. Thus Israel would be the really wise and strong nation, not Assyria (cf. v. 13). Israel, as well as Assyria (v. 19), would have a remnant left over after the Lord's destruction of both nations.
- 10:21 A remnant would return (Shearjashub, 7:3) to the genuinely mighty God. It would be a remnant of the whole house of Jacob, from all the Israelites. The reference to the mighty God (cf. 9:5), along with the sincere change of attitude in Israel—one that has not yet taken place—points to a time of fulfillment in the eschatological future. "That day" (v. 20), as elsewhere, is a millennial reference here.

"The remnant is not a super-spiritual elite looking down on others, but they do dare to live by faith in God."<sup>164</sup>

- 10:22-23 God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand grains of the sea (Gen. 22:17; 32:12). This did not mean, as the Israelites in Isaiah's day apparently concluded, that they would always be a large people. No, God would so thoroughly destroy them because of their sin that only a small number would survive (cf. Rom. 9:27-28). The sovereign Yahweh of armies would destroy them throughout the whole Promised Land, not just in the Northern Kingdom.

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<sup>163</sup>Archer, p. 620.

<sup>164</sup>Ortlund, p. 94.

10:24-27 The Lord used reminders of two previous deliverances to encourage the residents of Jerusalem to believe that they would survive the attack of a stronger and larger foe. He had delivered their forefathers from Egypt and the Midianites, and He had destroyed the Egyptians and the Midianites (Judg. 7:25). The rock of Oreb got its name from the Midianite Prince Oreb, who escaped death in the battle with the Israelites, but died when he fled. Similarly, Sennacherib did not perish with his army but died after he returned home. The Assyrian oppression would not last long (cf. 9:4), and God would then punish the disciplinarian of His people. God's blessing on His people would be responsible for the breaking of the yoke of bondage on them.

### **A description of Assyria's attack and judgment 10:28-34**

10:28-32 Isaiah foresaw the Assyrian army descending on Jerusalem from the north, passing through various towns, and finally arriving at Nob just north of Jerusalem. From that location, probably modern Mt. Scopus, which was somewhat higher in elevation than Mt. Zion, the enemy looked down on Jerusalem and shook his fist menacingly. All the towns and villages mentioned stood only a few miles north and east of Jerusalem.

10:33-34 The prophet now changed his perspective as well as his figure. Even though Assyria would menace and, indeed, destroy Jerusalem, Yahweh of armies would cut the enemy down to size as a lumberjack trimmed branches off a tree and finally felled it. God's irresistible instrument would cut back Assyria's many lofty leaders. This would be a felling as colossal as the harvesting of Lebanon's vast forests (cf. Ezek. 31:3).

"The . . . 'forest thickets' refers to thick underbrush that must be cleared to allow the fine trees to grow. . . . 'the Lebanon' refers, not to a country as today, but to a region on the slopes of Mount Hermon to the north of Israel. It was renowned for the magnificent gigantic trees which grew there."<sup>165</sup>

This prophecy found literal fulfillment when God Himself defeated the Assyrians in 701 B.C. (ch. 37).

### **Deliverance from Jesse's Shoot ch. 11**

This section gives the positive side of the deliverance of God's people, that is to come, in contrast to the negative side (10:5—34). God would put Assyria down, but the Messiah would lift Israel up by serving her ideally. The messianic hope, introduced at various points earlier in this major section (chs. 7—12), comes to full flower in chapter 11 (cf. 7:14; 8:23—9:6). Having promised Him, Isaiah now presented Messiah as ruling.

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<sup>165</sup>Watts, p. 166.

### The rule of the Shoot 11:1-9

Messiah would meet certain qualifications (vv. 2-3a) and would rule with absolute justice (vv. 3b-5)—with the result that people would live in peace (vv. 6-9)

- 11:1 The prophet had just described Assyria cut down like a forest of trees (10:15-19, 33-34). Likewise, Israel would have only a remnant left after God finished judging her (10:20-23; cf. 6:11-13). Now he pictured a shoot (Heb. *nezer*) sprouting from one of the stumps left after Israel's harvesting (cf. 4:2; 6:13; 53:1-3; Job 14:7). A shoot would sprout from Jesse's family tree stump. Some interpreters believe that Matthew had this shoot (*nezer*) in mind when he wrote that Jesus fulfilled prophecy by being called a Nazarene (Matt. 2:23).<sup>166</sup> The reference to humble Jesse, rather than to glorious David, stresses God's grace in providing a deliverer from a lowly family. It also indicates that Messiah would be another David, not just a son of David, and that the house of David would lack royal dignity when Messiah appeared. Other prophets referred to the coming ideal Davidic king as "David," picturing him as the second coming of David, so to speak (cf. Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 5:2). The figure of a "branch" (Heb. *neser*, sapling), referring to Messiah, also appears in Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15, and in Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12.
- 11:2 Clearly this shoot would be a person, and the qualities of God's Spirit would distinguish Him (cf. 61:1; Exod. 31:3; Judg. 14:6; 1 Sam. 10:10; 16:13; Luke 4:18; John 1:31-34; 3:34). Isaiah referred to the Holy Spirit more than any other Old Testament prophet (11:2; 30:1; 32:15; 34:16; 40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 48:16; 59:21; 61:1; 63:10-11, 14). Spiritual qualities had not distinguished many of the Davidic kings thus far (cf. 2 Sam. 23:2-3), but the future ruler would enjoy divine enablement and would manifest supreme godliness. This description presents Him as perfectly endowed by the Spirit with everything He needs to fulfill His kingly task (cf. Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:6). "Wisdom" and "understanding" are synonyms that, together, mean great wisdom. "Counsel" and "strength" suggest His ability to strategize wisely and then execute His strategy. "Knowledge" and "fear" refer to His acknowledgement of and loyalty to God. The source of these traits would be God's Spirit on Him.
- 11:3 The coming "David" would also delight in fearing the Lord, not fearing Him out of dread, much less, lacking respect for Yahweh. He would make decisions on the basis of reality rather than appearances, having the ability to see through issues. Such abilities demand more than a merely human ruler (cf. John 18:36-38). An earlier Messiah passage (9:6) showed Him to be divine, but this one presents Him as a dependent human being, "a combination that requires the Incarnation for its explanation."<sup>167</sup>

<sup>166</sup>E.g., Delitzsch, 1:282.

<sup>167</sup>Grogan, p. 87.

- 11:4 Justice for the poor was hard to find in the ancient world because the poor could not afford to bribe their judges, and they possessed little political influence. But Israel's coming king would do what was right for the poor and be fair with the afflicted (cf. Rev. 1:5; 3:14). His words of judgment would result in the death of the wicked rather than giving them preferential treatment for what they could do for the judge (cf. 55:10-11; Gen. 1:3; Heb. 4:12; 2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 1:16; 19:15, 21). Clearly, this king will acknowledge God as His sovereign.
- 11:5 Righteousness and faithfulness (to God) would be His outstanding and determining characteristics. These were the marks of the Israelites' God (cf. 5:16; 65:16; Ps. 40:10; 119:75, 142; Zech. 8:8). A "belt" in Isaiah's culture held together everything else that the person wore. So the figure here pictures everything about the king as thoroughly righteous and pleasing to God.
- 11:6-8 Security and safety would result from this king's rule. Whereas the conditions described may occur literally in the Millennium, Isaiah probably used them to represent those conditions figuratively. The presently rapacious—represented by the wolf, leopard, lion (twice), bear, cobra, and viper—will coexist peacefully with the defenseless—the lamb, the kid, the calf, the cow, the ox, the nursing child, and the weaned child. "The fatling" (NASB) breaks the parallelism and may be better rendered "will graze" (NET). People least able to control wild things will be able to exercise effective leadership over them then, because God will change their natures.
- In that day death itself will have lost its sting (cf. Hos. 13:14; 1 Cor. 15:55). People will have no fear of what is now fatal. The serpent will have been subdued (Gen. 3:15). Note again the recurrence of the child motif in this section, to stress the victory of humility over self-assertiveness (cf. Matt. 18:2-5). In short, these conditions indicate a return to paradise on earth (cf. Gen. 1:28-30; Ps. 8; 1 Cor. 15:25-28; Heb. 2:5-9).
- Amillennial interpreters do not believe there will be a future reign of Messiah on the earth for a millennium. They believe the conditions Isaiah described here are either figurative descriptions of the peace that Christ has brought to humanity through His saving work, or they describe conditions in heaven.
- 11:9 The enemies of humankind, those that are hurtful and destructive, will no longer hurt or destroy people in God's holy mountain (kingdom, cf. 2:2-3; Dan. 2:32, 45; et al.)—because everyone will know (relationally) the Lord (cf. Jer. 31:34). "Mountain" seems to refer metaphorically here to God's kingdom, since it is the whole earth, not just a small region, that will be full of the knowledge of the LORD. "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD" means: "there will be universal submission to the

LORD's sovereignty" (NET; cf. v. 2). The animals contrasted in verses 6-8 undoubtedly represent people. Peaceful conditions in the animal kingdom could not be all that Isaiah intended but global peace.

### The return under the Shoot 11:10-16

The rebellion of one Davidic king, Ahaz, would result in the defeat and dispersion of God's people (8:6-8), but the righteousness of another Davidic king, Messiah, would result in their revival and return to God and the Promised Land.

11:10 "In that day" points to the time when Messiah would rule (vv. 1-9). Then the Gentile nations would seek out the king who would represent His people, the Jews. The signal or standard in view seems to refer to a rallying point. The fulfillment could not be the return from Babylonian exile as the fulfillment, and the rallying of all sorts of people around Christ—as preached in the church age—does not fit the picture either. Many liberal interpreters prefer the first explanation, and amillennialists<sup>168</sup> prefer the second. It must refer to a future worldwide turning to Messiah in which the Jews will be prominent (cf. Rom. 11). No resting place of Messiah was especially glorious during His first advent, but when He returns, Jerusalem will become "a glory" because He will rule there.

The title "root of Jesse" presents the Messiah as the *source* of the Davidic line (cf. Gen. 3:15; 17:6), not just the *product* of that line (v. 1). It also suggests His humble origin, as opposed to being described as coming from a King's line.

11:11 Then there will be a second regathering of the Israelites to the Promised Land—from all over the world. The first regathering happened under Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, and Ezra. The present return of many Jews to the State of Israel cannot fulfill this second regathering prediction because, as Isaiah explained, that will happen when Messiah rules on earth. Assyrian and Babylonian sovereigns might defeat and disperse the Jews, but the ultimate sovereign, Messiah, will restore and reassemble them (cf. Ezek. 37).

11:12 The standard He lifts up for the nations is the flag of His kingdom; His will be an earthly kingdom. He will assemble under this banner a remnant of Jews from both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms who will be living all over the earth then. The northern tribes of Israel were not lost, as some cults claim. They have a future as Israel.

11:13-14 Internal strife among the tribes will cease. Instead of fighting among themselves, the Israelites will subdue their common enemies and gain the whole Promised Land. Evidently this conflict will precede the peace pictured in verses 6-9.

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<sup>168</sup>E.g., Young, 1:396.



11:15-16 God will defeat Israel's ancient enemies, Egypt and Babylonia. His judgments on them will involve the drying up of major barriers: the Red Sea and the Euphrates River (cf. Exod. 14:21; Rev. 16:12). This judgment will allow the Jews to return to the Promised Land, unhindered, from those parts of the world. They will be able to leave the territory of Assyria, where God had said He would send them captive, as easily as their forefathers left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea in the Exodus. Dividing the Euphrates into seven seasonal streams (Heb. *nahal*) may connote a perfect and complete taming, or even re-creation, by God.

"As God had provided a dry passage across the Red Sea in the first Exodus, so in the second Exodus He would remove any physical barrier that would hinder the return of His people."<sup>169</sup>

Thus, this section of the book, dealing with the hope of God's deliverance (10:5—11:16), culminates in the reign of Messiah on the earth. Israel will re-gather in the Promised Land—from all over the world—trusting in God. The Gentiles, too, will acknowledge His sovereignty, which both they and His own people have forever resisted.

#### **4. Trust in God's favor ch. 12**

This psalm of praise concludes the section dealing with Israel's choice between trusting God or trusting Assyria (7:1—12:6). It expresses the trust in God that Isaiah's revelations in this section encouraged. This is a song of redemption that the remnant will sing "in that day" of Messiah's triumph, but which the prophet anticipated in his own (cf. Exod. 15).

12:1 Isaiah prophesied that on the day Messiah reigned, the remnant who survived the harvesting of Israel would praise Yahweh for ending His discipline of them, and for comforting them. Previously in Isaiah's prophecy "that day" was one to be dreaded (cf. 2:20; 3:18; 4:1; 7:18, 20-21, 23), but now it is one to be hoped for. This is the eschatological "day of the Lord" so often referred to by the prophets, that will include judgment (in the Tribulation) and blessing (in the Millennium).

12:2 The focus of this song is God Himself. Finally the Israelites express their commitment to trust in Him rather than in other people (cf. 8:12—9:1). They acknowledge Him as their salvation, their strength, and their song (cf. Exod. 15:2; Ps. 118:14), not just as the provider of these blessings. Song is the natural expression of a free spirit. None of these things come apart from Him. Isaiah had tried to get King Ahaz to trust and not fear (7:2-9), but he would not believe that God was with him.

12:3 Water is a rich symbol of salvation, especially to a people who lived in a land as dry as Palestine. God had provided salvation in the form of water for the Israelites during their wilderness march (Exod. 15:27; 17:1-7). In

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<sup>169</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1133.

the future, Israelites could anticipate securing His salvation and sharing it with others, specifically the Gentiles (cf. Ps. 116:13). This verse became a common saying among the Jews and led to a water-drawing ceremony in Jerusalem (cf. John 4:15; 7:37-38). Water represents everything necessary for supporting life.

- 12:4-5 In the eschatological day, the remnant will give thanks to Yahweh, pray to Him because of His character revealed in His behavior, and tell the Gentiles about His deeds. They will remind others from all over the world that He is an exalted Person, and will praise Him in song for His excellent actions.
- 12:6 Praise and joy come with realizing that Yahweh is salvation (cf. Exod. 15:20-21; Jon. 2:9). The title "the Holy One of Israel" summarizes whom this hymn of praise honors, as well as what this whole section of the book is about. Only Yahweh is *the* Holy One of Israel!

## **B. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE NATIONS CHS. 13—35**

This major section of the book emphasizes the folly of trusting in the nations rather than in Yahweh. The section preceding it shows how King Ahaz trusted in Assyria and experienced destruction (chs. 7—12). The section following it shows how King Hezekiah trusted in the Lord and experienced deliverance (chs. 36—39). In this present section, the prophet expanded his perspective from Israel to include the world. The God of Israel is also Lord of the nations. This whole section of the book expands the idea that all the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of God and His Christ, Immanuel (cf. Dan. 2:44).

### **1. Divine judgments on the nations chs. 13—23**

"This second section of the book's first main unit [chs. 1—39] presents a series of judgment oracles against various nations (chapters 13—23). This litany of judgment sets the stage for a vision of worldwide judgment that ushers in the Lord's kingdom on earth (chapters 24—27)."<sup>170</sup>

The recurrence of the Hebrew word *massa'*, translated "oracle" or "burden," prescribes the boundaries of this section of text. There are 10 oracles beginning in 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1 and 23:1. Chapters 13—23 present the nations over which Immanuel is ruler, and they announce judgment on them all for their pride (10:5-34; cf. 2:6-22; 13:11, 19; 14:11; 16:6; 17:7-11; 23:9). They are announcements of doom on these nations, but they are also announcements of salvation for Israel if she would trust in Yahweh. Isaiah delivered them to the Israelites, rather than to the nations mentioned, at various times during his prophetic ministry. Thus they assured God's people of Yahweh's sovereignty over the nations with a view to encouraging them to rely in the Lord (cf. Jer. 46—51; Ezek. 25—32; Amos 1—2). It would be foolish to trust in nations whom God

<sup>170</sup>Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 46.

has doomed. The unifying theme is the pride of these nations. Exalting self and failing to submit to God results in destruction.

". . . He [God] will hold every nation accountable for its actions."<sup>171</sup>

Alec Motyer provided a helpful diagram of the structure of this section (chs. 13—23) and the one that follows it (chs. 24—27).<sup>172</sup>

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Babylon</b><br>(13:1—14:27)<br>Political overthrow  | <b>The desert by the sea<br/>(Babylon)</b> (21:1-10)<br>Religious overthrow                                 | <b>The city of emptiness</b><br>(24:1-20)<br>Broken laws and gates                                     |
| <b>Philistia</b><br>(14:28-32)<br>A Davidic king will yet<br>reign in Zion   | <b>Silence (Edom)</b><br>(21:11-12)<br>Indefinite continuance of<br>things as they are                      | <b>Zion's king</b><br>(24:21-23)<br>"After many days"  |
| <b>Moab</b><br>(chs. 15—16)<br>Moab in need, but through<br>pride suffers destruction in<br>spite of shelter in Zion | <b>Evening (Arabia)</b><br>(21:13-17)<br>Desert tribes in need: no<br>ultimate refuge in mutual<br>security | <b>The great banquet</b><br>(ch. 25)<br>All nations feasted in Zion<br>save Moab, excluded by<br>pride |
| <b>Damascus/Ephraim</b><br>(chs. 17—18)<br>Strong cities forsaken; the<br>forgotten rock                             | <b>The Valley of Vision<br/>(Jerusalem)</b><br>(ch. 22)<br>The city torn down                               | <b>The city of God</b><br>(ch. 26)<br>The strong city; the<br>everlasting rock                         |
| <b>Egypt</b><br>(chs. 19—20)<br>Co-equal membership:<br>Egypt, Assyria and Israel                                    | <b>Tyre</b><br>(ch. 23)<br>Holiness to the Lord   | <b>The final gathering</b><br>(ch. 27)<br>The harvest from Egypt and<br>Assyria                        |

Note that each of the first two columns of oracles (chs. 13—23) begins with Babylon, and the fourth section of each of these columns deals with Israel, which the peoples of the world surround in the literary structure of the passage. In the first column: Babylon is to Israel's north, Philistia to the west, Moab to the east, and Egypt to the south. In the second column: Babylon is to the north, Edom to the south, Arabia to the east, and Tyre to the west. Thus the selection of these nations in the literary structure of the passage suggests that Israel occupies the central place in God's plans, and the surrounding nations are vulnerable.<sup>173</sup>

"The oracles probably had a twofold purpose. For those leaders who insisted on getting embroiled in international politics, these oracles were a reminder that Judah need not fear foreign nations or seek international alliances for security reasons. For the righteous remnant within the nation,

<sup>171</sup>A. Martin, *Isaiah* . . . , p. 47.

<sup>172</sup>Adapted from Motyer, p. 133.

<sup>173</sup>See the map of Palestine at the end of these notes.

these oracles were a reminder that Israel's God was indeed the sovereign ruler of the earth, worthy of his people's trust."<sup>174</sup>

### The first series of five oracles chs. 13—20

The first series (column) shows that God has placed Israel at the center of His dealings with the Gentile nations. The second series of oracles projects the principles revealed in the first series into the future, moving from concrete historical names to more enigmatic allusions. The third series points far ahead into the eschatological future but shows that the same principles will apply then. God's dealings with the nations in Isaiah's day were a sign of His similar dealings with them in the future.

### The first oracle against Babylon 13:1—14:27

The reader would expect that Isaiah would inveigh against Assyria, since it was the most threatening enemy in his day, and since he referred to it many times in earlier chapters. However, he did not mention Assyria in this section but Babylon, an empire that came into its own about a century after Isaiah's time. Babylon was a symbol of self-exalting pride, and its glory, dating back to the tower of Babel (cf. 13:5, 10-11). Thus what he said about Babylon was applicable to Assyria and other similar self-exalting powers in the eastern part of Israel's world. Similarly, what marked the Medes (13:17-18) was their fierce destruction of their enemies, which was already in view but would become more obvious in the years that followed. When the prophet lived and wrote, Babylon was a real entity within Assyria, but Isaiah used it to represent all the nations in that area that shared its traits (cf. Gen. 9:20-25; Rev. 17—18). Behind *Assyria* Isaiah saw *the spirit of Babel*, which he condemned here. Yet this is also a prophecy against real Babylon. "Babylon" is the Greek name for "Babel."

The literary structure of this oracle, omitting the introduction (v. 1), is chiasmic.

- "A The day of the Lord: the beckoning hand, a universal purpose declared (13:2-16)  
 B The overthrow of Babylon: the end of the kingdom, the fact of divine overthrow (13:17-22)  
 C The security and future of the Lord's people: a contrasting universal purpose (14:1-2)  
 B' The overthrow of Babylon: the end of the king, the explanation of divine overthrow (14:3-23)  
 A' The end of Assyrian power: the outstretched hand, a universal purpose exemplified and validated (14:24-27)"<sup>175</sup>

". . . somewhat as a picture lacks the dimension of depth, the prophecy often lacks the dimension of time: events appear together on the screen of prophecy which in their fulfillment may be widely separated in time. Thus the student may find a prophecy having all the external marks of literary

<sup>174</sup>The NET Bible note on 13:1.

<sup>175</sup>Motyer, p. 135.

unity, yet referring to some event in the *near* future connected with the historical phase of the Kingdom and also to some *far-off* event connected with the Messiah and His Millennial Kingdom. When the first event arrives, it becomes the earnest and divine forecast of the more distant and final event. An excellent example may be found in Isaiah 13:17—14:4, a prediction which begins with the defeat of Babylon by the Medes and moves from that point immediately to a Babylon of the end-time, 'in the day' when Israel is finally delivered from 'sorrow' and 'fear' and 'hard bondage' (14:3)."<sup>176</sup>

13:1 A general title for chapters 13—23, and particularly the oracle against Babylon (13:2—14:27), opens chapter 13. An oracle (or burden) is a message from God. Babylon was at this time an ancient city, it would later be an empire, and it had been in the past the historical source of arrogant self-sufficiency (Gen. 11:1-9). When Isaiah wrote, it was a town within the Assyrian Empire that was asserting itself and was a real threat to Assyrian supremacy. Merodach-baladan was its king at this time (ca. 702 B.C.; cf. ch. 39). Isaiah "saw" the oracle in the sense that God enabled him to understand the things He proceeded to reveal (cf. 1:1).

13:2-16 This section is an introduction to all 10 oracles that follow in chapters 13—23, as well as to the first oracle against Babylon. It explains why God will judge Gentile nations: they refuse to acknowledge Yahweh's sovereignty and instead exalt and glorify themselves. The story of the building of the tower of Babel is the classic expression of this hubris (overweening pride; Gen. 11:1-9).

Isaiah related a message from God, summoning His warriors to assemble, so they could carry out His will in judging those with whom He was angry. Raising a flag on a hilltop and calling warriors to assemble pictures God doing this (vv. 2-3; cf. Rev. 9:16). Many warriors from many kingdoms far away would respond to the Lord's command, and gather together to do battle as His instruments (vv. 4-5; cf. Dan. 11:40-45; Rev. 14:14-20; 16:12-16; 19:17-19). The day of the Lord, the day in which He will actively intervene in history, would be close by (Heb. *qarob*). The Hebrew word describes the total preparedness of that day to dawn whenever the Lord decides that its time has come. It does not necessarily mean that the day is imminent. Therefore everyone should wail (or howl; cf. Amos 5:16-17). It would be a day when the Almighty would send destruction (v. 6; cf. vv. 9, 13).

"In the Hebrew Bible the title 'Almighty' (Heb. 'Shaddai') depicts God as the sovereign king and judge of the world who both gives and takes away life."<sup>177</sup>

<sup>176</sup>McClain, pp. 136-37.

<sup>177</sup>Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 48. For a study of proposed derivations of the Hebrew name, see T. N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God*, pp. 70-71.

The prospect of sudden, inevitable, inescapable destruction at the hand of the Almighty would make everyone tremble with fear. They would not know where to turn (vv. 7-8; cf. 1 Thess. 5:3). The coming judgment would desolate the whole earth and exterminate sinners from it, specifically those who miss the mark of righteousness (v. 9). This judgment would involve the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars (cf. 34:4; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15; Zech. 14:6-7; Matt. 24:29; Rev. 8:12). Since the pagans worshipped these objects, this announcement signals the judging of them as idols as well (v. 10).

The reason for this wrathful judgment is the evil of wicked people, especially their pride and haughtiness (v. 11). Rather than human pride resulting in increasing good conditions for ever-expanding numbers of people, it will result in the cutting back of the human population (v. 12; cf. Rev. 6:8; 9:15). The heavens and the earth would shake at the fury of Yahweh of armies when His anger would burn against the wicked (v. 13; cf. 24:18; Joel 2:10; 3:16; Hag. 2:6-7, 21-22; Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18). People will scatter like frightened gazelles and sheep in that day as they seek security (cf. Rev. 6:15-17). God's warriors will slay all the wicked that they can find. Children will be unmercifully slaughtered in the sight of their parents. Houses will be looted and women raped (vv. 14-16).

"If we don't have a just God to trust in, we will have no logical reason not to become violent ourselves. It is Isaiah's vision of God's final justice that moderates our anger and frustration right now."<sup>178</sup>

13:17-22 This pericope foretells the destruction of Babylon. Prophecies of the day of the Lord may describe the eschatological judgment coming (vv. 2-16), or a more recent, limited judgment coming (vv. 17-22). Each soon-coming judgment on a particular segment of humanity foreshadows the great eschatological judgment that will fall on the whole human race in the Tribulation. This destruction of Babylon was a judgment of the Lord in a day that would be closer to Isaiah's own time, a near and limited fulfillment of the day that the prophet just described. The fall of Assyria (14:24-27) was one fulfillment, and the later fall of Babylon (13:17-22) was another. The same principles that operate in the eschatological day of the Lord just described also operate in the earlier days of the Lord.<sup>179</sup>

Part of the Lord's warriors would be the Medes, who occupied what is now central Iran. In Isaiah's day, the Medes were already a powerful people that the Assyrians dreaded. They would destroy Babylon. They

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<sup>178</sup>Ortlund, p. 125.

<sup>179</sup>See G. von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 4:2 (1959):97-108; and A. Joseph Everson, "The Days of Yahweh," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93:3 (September 1974):329-37.

united with the Babylonians to destroy the last vestiges of the Assyrian Empire in 609 B.C. Still later, it was the Medes and the Persians who overthrew Babylon in 539 B.C. (cf. Esth. 10:2; Dan. 5:30-31; 6:8, 12, 15). The Medes valued silver and gold less than military conquest; they could not be bought off, but mercilessly slew every enemy (vv. 17-18). Revenge motivated them more than booty.<sup>180</sup>

"The Medes are probably mentioned here rather than the Persians because of their greater ferocity and also because they were better known to the people of Isaiah's day. According to the Greek historian Xenophon, Cyrus acknowledged that the Medes had served his cause without thought of monetary reward."<sup>181</sup>

In the late 700s B.C., Babylon was the showcase of the ancient world, specifically the showcase of the Assyrian Empire. She was culturally and economically superior to Assyria and was ascending politically. The Chaldeans were the ruling class that had been responsible for the supremacy of Babylon. However, Isaiah announced, Babylon would experience the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah: destruction from the Lord's hand (v. 19). After her judgment, Babylon would be uninhabitable even by nomads. Wild animals would be the only residents of the once great city. This destruction would come soon, and it would not be delayed (vv. 20-22).

Babylonia was under the Assyrian yoke when Isaiah gave this prophecy, probably during Hezekiah's reign (715-686 B.C.). She was one of the nations, along with Egypt, to which Judah was looking as a possible savior. This prophecy showed that Babylon was not a safe object for trust because God would destroy her.

Has this prophecy been fulfilled? Babylon suffered defeat in 689 B.C. when Assyria (including the Medes), under Sennacherib, devastated it (cf. 23:13), but the city was rebuilt. Many interpreters believe that the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. to Cyrus fulfilled this prophecy,<sup>182</sup> but Cyrus left the city intact. Others believe the destruction—that Darius Hystaspes began in 518 B.C., and that Xerxes later completed—was the fulfillment.<sup>183</sup> Some scholars believe that what Isaiah predicted here never took place literally, at least completely, so the fulfillment lies in the future.<sup>184</sup> Many

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<sup>180</sup>Delitzsch, 1:303.

<sup>181</sup>Grogan, p. 103. Cf. Delitzsch, 1:302-3.

<sup>182</sup>E.g., Archer, p. 621; the NET Bible note on 13:22.

<sup>183</sup>E.g., Delitzsch, 1:304.

<sup>184</sup>E.g., G. H. Lang, *Histories and Prophecies of Daniel*, pp. 33-34; Kenneth W. Allen, "The Rebuilding and Destruction of Babylon," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133:529 (January 1976):19-27; and Charles H. Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon: Sign of the End Times*; J. Martin, p. 1060.

conservatives argue for a near and a far fulfillment. I think the destruction in 689 B.C. that resulted in Babylon's temporary desolation fulfilled this prophecy (cf. v. 22b), and I believe there will also be an eschatological judgment of Babylon (Rev. 17—18), though not necessarily one that requires the rebuilding of the city. Destruction terminology, such as appears in this passage, is common in the annals of ancient Near Eastern nations. It speaks generally and hyperbolically of devastating defeat and destruction, but it did not always involve exact or detailed fulfillment.<sup>185</sup>

- 14:1-2 The focal point of this oracle against Babylon is Israel's security and future after this judgment. These verses summarize what Isaiah later recorded in more detail in chapters 40—66.

Earlier Isaiah predicted that Israel would experience defeat and captivity. After that Yahweh would have compassion on her, choose her again for blessing, as He had following the Exodus (Exod. 19:4-6), and resettle her in her own land. Consequently many Gentiles would voluntarily attach themselves to God's people. The Israelites would then have authority over those who formerly had authority over them (cf. 1 Sam. 17:8-9). They would take the lead domestically, militarily, and politically.

A second Exodus took place when the Israelites returned from captivity in Babylon, but a third Exodus will happen in the future when they return to their land following their present worldwide dispersion (cf. 56:6; 60:10; 61:5). Amillennialists interpret this as a prophecy of the inclusion of Gentiles into God's spiritual kingdom, the church.<sup>186</sup>

- 14:3-4a Having described the future destruction of Babylon (13:17-22), Isaiah now related the coming destruction of Babylon's king.

After Yahweh gave Israel rest following her captivity, she would taunt (Heb. *mashal*, bring to light the truth about) Babylon's proud ruler who had formerly taunted her (vv. 3-4a; cf. Rev. 18). His death would be an occasion for joy, not sorrow. In view of the description that follows, Isaiah evidently did not describe one particular past king of Babylon, but ascribed traits of many kings of Babylon to this representative official. One writer believed Isaiah described Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), but there are many differences between what Isaiah wrote here and what Sennacherib experienced.<sup>187</sup> Another identified him as Merodach-Baladan, who sent the delegation to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem (cf. ch. 39).<sup>188</sup> The king in view may be the eschatological Antichrist, since these verses describe conditions that will exist during the first half of the Tribulation.

<sup>185</sup>See Homer Heater Jr., "Do the Prophets Teach that Babylonia Will Be Rebuilt in the *Eschaton*?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:1 (March 1998):36, for further specifics.

<sup>186</sup>E.g., Young, 1:433-34.

<sup>187</sup>J. Martin, pp. 1061-62.

<sup>188</sup>Watts, p. 204,



14:4b-8 The first strophe of this poem rejoices in the peace on earth that would result from the king's death. Both animate and inanimate creatures could rest and be quiet after his reign of terror. The measure of an ancient Near Eastern king's power was how much he destroyed.<sup>189</sup>

Mesopotamian kings regularly took parties of lumberjacks to the forests of Lebanon to cut timber to build their palaces and public buildings. Such timber was unavailable in Mesopotamia and Palestine.<sup>190</sup>

14:9-11 The second strophe relates the joy in Sheol that would result when this king died. Other dead rulers there would rejoice because this great monarch now shared the humiliating fate of them all. Rather than honoring him, these dead leaders would mock him because in death he was not superior to them. Instead of an honorable bier he would get maggots for a bed and worms for a bedspread. What a final resting place for a king!

14:12-15 In the third strophe the scene shifts from the underworld to heaven and back to Sheol. This personification of Babylon's pride led Babylon's king to exalt himself to the position of God Himself. The five "I wills" in verses 13 and 14 express the spirit of the Babylonian rulers, not that any one of them ever said these precise words. He claimed to be as Venus, the morning star, the brightest light in the night sky. The name "Lucifer" means "Day Star" and referred to the planet Venus.<sup>191</sup> However, like Venus when the sun arose, he was no longer visible when God arose in His sovereignty. Mt. Zaphon (or Casius) to the north of Palestine was the mythical residence of the gods (as Mt. Olympus was the mythical residence of the gods to the Greeks; v. 13; cf. Ps. 48:2). Rather than being king of the gods, Babylon's king proved to be only human, albeit having weakened nations through his domination of them. Even though he had exalted himself to near deity status, he would die and go to Sheol like every other proud person (cf. Gen. 3:5, 22; 11:1-9).

"A popular interpretive tradition has seen in the language of 14:12-15 an allusion to the fall of Satan.<sup>192</sup> However, this subject 'seems a bit forced in this chapter.'<sup>193</sup> The object of this taunt is clearly "the king of Babylon" (v. 4a). Instead the language and imagery seem to have their roots in Canaanite mythology, which should not be surprising in a quotation ostensibly addressed by ancient pagan kings to another pagan king (the quotation of the kings' words is

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<sup>189</sup>See Oswalt, p. 317.

<sup>190</sup>Watts, p. 208.

<sup>191</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1136.

<sup>192</sup>E.g., Archer, p. 622; *The New Scofield . . .*, p. 725; and Wiersbe, p. 24. For a history of interpretation of these verses, see Gerald Keown, "A History of the Interpretation of Isaiah 14:12-15," (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979).

<sup>193</sup>J. Martin, p. 1061.

most naturally extended through v. 15) [Cf. 24:21-22; 25:8; 27:1]."<sup>194</sup>

Though some expositors have applied this description of self-exaltation and judgment to Satan, it is clearly the pride and destruction of a human ruler's tyrannical reign that is in view, not only in verses 12-15 but in the immediate context (vv. 4b-21) and in the larger context (chs. 13—23). Satan may have rebelled against God in a fashion similar to what Isaiah wrote here, but this passage probably does not describe his rebellion.

"A suggested summary of the story would be: *Helel son of Schachar* was a great hero who determined to make himself the equal of a god, *El Elyon*. His ambition was to raise himself above the clouds, above all the *stars of god*, to the very *mountain in the farthest north* where gods gather and there to reign as king over the universe, including the gods. But the conclusion of this ill-advised ambition was his precipitous *fall into Sheol*, perhaps after a battle with El Elyon himself."<sup>195</sup>

"Who was the historical king of Babylon referred to here? If the prophecy anticipates the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. (as I argue below), then the king of Babylon taunted here may be Nabonidus (the official king of Babylon when it fell), Belshazzar (who was functioning as king at the time; see Dan. 5:1), or even Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled from 605-562 B.C. and made Babylon a world power. However, it is unnecessary to put a specific name and face with the king described here. Perhaps the 'king of Babylon' simply symbolizes Babylonian power as embodied in her successive kings, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar or his predecessor Nabopolassar."<sup>196</sup>

"It is a strange paradox that nothing makes a being less like God than the urge to be his equal, for he who was God stepped down from the throne of his glory to display to the wondering eyes of men the humility of God (Phil 2:5-8)."<sup>197</sup>

14:16-21      The fourth strophe returns to the reactions of people on the earth (cf. vv. 4b-8). They expected that such a "great man" would enjoy an honorable burial, but this man received no burial at all. He died covered with the

<sup>194</sup>Chisholm, *A Theology . . .*, pp. 319-20. See also idem, *Handbook on . . .*, pp. 50-51; Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, pp. 540, 542; John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 7:442; and Delitzsch, 1:311-12.

<sup>195</sup>Watts, p. 209.

<sup>196</sup>Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 51.

<sup>197</sup>Grogan, p. 106.

bodies of his fellow warriors rather than with earth. The pagans of Isaiah's day believed that to leave a corpse unburied not only dishonored the dead person but doomed his spirit to wander forever on the earth seeking a home (cf. 1 Sam 31:11-13; 2 Sam. 2:4-7). Viewing his unburied corpse, onlookers would wonder if this was really the infamous scourge of Babylon, who had ruined his own country, and ravaged his own people, as well as his enemies. They would view his lack of burial as divine judgment of him. They would then take measures to assure that his sons would not rise to power by cutting off his posterity, a common practice in the ancient Near East.<sup>198</sup> Hopefully they could remove his memory from the earth. I favor the view that the king of Babylon to be judged is the Antichrist.

The whole point of this poem is the futility and folly of self-exalting pride, which this idealized Babylonian king modeled (cf. Dan. 4:25).

14:22-23 Yahweh of armies promised to do to Babylon what the speakers in the poem above said. He would cut off the name and posterity of its rulers, and He would destroy the city to the extent that only wild animals would live in the swamps that remained there. Verses 22-23 form a conclusion to the poem as verses 3-4a introduced it.

14:24-27 This section of the oracle particularizes the judgment of Babylon in Isaiah's day. Here we see the exemplification and validation of God's universal purpose to judge human hubris that the prophet earlier declared (13:2-16). The particular manifestation of Babylonian pride that threatened Israel when Isaiah wrote was Assyria.

"Having announced the downfall of the Chaldean empire, the LORD appends to this prophecy a solemn reminder that the Assyrians, the major Mesopotamian power of Isaiah's day, would be annihilated, foreshadowing what would subsequently happen to Babylon and the other hostile nations."<sup>199</sup>

Yahweh of armies proceeded to swear that what He had purposed would happen (cf. Heb. 6:13-14), namely, the destruction of Assyria (v. 24). A stronger assurance is hard to imagine. God would defeat the Assyrians in His land, the Promised Land (cf. 37:36-37). He would break the Assyrian yoke off of His people, and thus remove the burden that the Assyrians were to the Israelites (v. 25; cf. 9:3; 10:27). This would be representative of what He would do to the whole world in judging sin and pride in the future (v. 26). No one would be able to turn aside His hand stretched out in judgment because He is God Almighty (v. 27; cf. 13:2).

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<sup>198</sup>Watts, pp. 211-12.

<sup>199</sup>The NET Bible note on 14:24.

The near fulfillment came in 701 B.C. when the angel of the Lord slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers who had surrounded Jerusalem (37:36-37). Later fulfillments came in 689 B.C., when the Assyrians under Sennacherib sacked Babylon, and in 539 B.C., when Cyrus the Persian destroyed it.

### **The oracle against Philistia 14:28-32**

Another nation that some people in Judah wanted to trust in for protection from the Mesopotamian threat was Philistia, on Judah's west, but she too was under the judgment of God.

14:28 This oracle came to Isaiah in the year that King Ahaz died, namely, 715 B.C. The dating of prophecies is rare in Isaiah, so probably this date has some bearing on the interpretation of the oracle.

14:29-32 The Philistines were rejoicing because some king or nation that had oppressed them had lost its power. This may be a reference to David, since with the death of Ahaz, the power of the Davidic dynasty was at its lowest level so far.<sup>200</sup> It seems more likely, however, that Assyria is in view (cf. vv. 31-32).<sup>201</sup> The "rod" and the "serpent" could refer to Shalmaneser V, who laid siege to Samaria and dominated Israel for so long; and the "viper" and "flying serpent" could be Sargon II, who followed Shalmaneser.<sup>202</sup> This setback led the Philistines to think that this enemy would not oppress them any longer. But Isaiah warned that the oppressor was not gone forever. A worse enemy would come from that nation in the future, probably Assyria or Babylon (v. 29). Only the poorest of the people would survive the coming enemy. Most of the Philistines would starve or be slaughtered (v. 30).

A disciplined enemy from the north would come against Philistia, totally demoralizing its inhabitants (v. 31). Evidently messengers from Philistia (and Egypt?) were seeking an alliance with Judea for mutual protection. The Lord advised the people, through Isaiah, to trust in Him, Zion being the place of His presence on earth, rather than in Philistia, since it was doomed (v. 32).

Sargon II the Assyrian invaded Philistia in 712 B.C., and in 701 B.C. another Assyrian, Sennacherib, punished anti-Assyrian elements in Philistia.

### **The oracle against Moab chs. 15—16**

"The Babylon oracle revealed that world history, even in its most threatening and climactic forms, is so organized that the people of God are cared for. The Philistia oracle confirmed this by insisting that the Davidic

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<sup>200</sup>Motyer, pp. 147-48.

<sup>201</sup>Watts, p. 219

<sup>202</sup>See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 208-10.

promises would be kept, and the Moab oracle corrects any impression that the hope expressed in the Davidic promises is exclusivist."<sup>203</sup>

The literary structure of this oracle is generally chiasmic, focusing the reader's attention on security in Zion (16:4b-5). It is very difficult to date. One writer believed this invasion took place around 718 B.C. when Sargon the Assyrian descended on the tribal peoples of northwest Arabia (cf. 21:16-17), but this is not at all certain.<sup>204</sup> Another speculated that Tiglath-pileser's 732 B.C. or Sennacherib's 701 B.C. invasions of Moab may have fulfilled this prophecy initially.<sup>205</sup> Moab lay east of Judah and the Dead Sea, between the Arnon and Zered rivers, and occupied an area about 30 miles long and 30 miles wide. The Moabites were more friendly neighbors of Judah than the Edomites or the Ammonites, who also lived east of the Jordan River. Notice the more friendly tone of this oracle compared with the two preceding ones. But hostility toward Judah due to land claims in Transjordan had a long history and resulted in deep antagonism (cf. Zeph. 2:9-10). The point of this oracle is that Judah should not rely on Moab because she would suffer destruction.

"There is no other prophecy in the book of Isaiah in which the heart of the prophet is so painfully affected by what his mind sees, and his mouth is obliged to prophesy."<sup>206</sup>

- 15:1            Isaiah began by announcing Moab's certain ruin. The two main cities, Ar on the Arnon and Kir in central Moab, would fall quickly.
- 15:2-4        The Moabites would express great grief over their national defeat. Dibon was the site of a temple to the Moabite god Chemosh. Many of the people would go there to bewail Chemosh's inability to save them. They would also mourn the loss of the towns of Nebo and Medeba in typical Near Eastern fashion. The residents of Heshbon and Elealeh in the north of Moab would be heard wailing in Jahaz to the south because the noise would be so great. Even soldiers would cry aloud in fear.
- 15:5-9        The Lord also expressed His grief over Moab's coming judgment through the prophet (cf. 21:3-4; 22:4; Jer. 9:1). Isaiah took up God's words in his own mouth and represented God's thoughts and words by using the first person singular (cf. 16:9). The Moabite refugees would move from place to place trying to find security. Their movement would be generally south, so the enemy may have descended from the north. The whole country would suffer devastation. Even though people would flee, they would not escape destruction. A lion is frequently an image of a fierce, implacable attacker in biblical poetry (v. 9; cf. Amos 3:12).

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<sup>203</sup>Motyer, p. 149.

<sup>204</sup>Grogan, p. 115.

<sup>205</sup>J. Martin, p. 1064.

<sup>206</sup>Delitzsch, 1:322.

- 16:1-4a Moab would plead for shelter from her enemy. Her leaders would send a lamb as a tribute from their hiding place in some wilderness stronghold (possibly Sela in Edom) to the king of Judah requesting help. The Moabite refugees would be as frightened as birds while they hovered on their border. They would seek refuge in Judah. Young believed this refers to a spiritual conversion of the Moabites, but this may be reading too much into these cries for deliverance.<sup>207</sup>
- 16:4b-5 Moab would find security in Zion because extortion and destruction had ceased in Judah, and oppressors would no longer dwell there. A merciful, faithful, just, and righteous Davidic king would judge there. This is clearly a reference to Messiah's rule during the Millennium (cf. 9:1-6; 11:1-9). Moab, then, will be one of the nations that comes to the mountain of God to seek His ways (2:1-4). This leap into the eschaton in the oracle extends Moab's desire to find security in Judah in Isaiah's day—far into the future.
- 16:6-8 The prophet explained the reason for Moab's destruction, pride (cf. vv. 1-4a), and its result, grief (cf. 15:2-4). Her excessive pride, arrogance, and insolence were the reason for her invasion; the invader was but the instrument of God (cf. 13:11). There was no basis in reality for her boasting. Moab was covered with grapevines, which the enemy would destroy. As a grapevine, Moab had extended its influence far beyond its borders, but now an enemy had cut back her fruitfulness. This would result in much despair and wailing in Moab. Raisin cakes appear to have been a major export of the nation that the Moabites relished as a delicacy in their homes (cf. 1 Chron. 12:40; Hos. 3:1).
- 16:9-12 Again the Lord grieved over Moab (cf. 15:5-9). Even when He must judge people, the Lord has pity on them and grieves over the destruction that He must send (cf. Hos. 11:1-9). Joy would end because the national product, grapes, would be unavailable due to hostile invaders. God's heart would break for these proud Moabites. When the Moabites would pray to their idols there would be no response, no help. How foolish, then, it was for the Judeans to trust in Moab for help.
- "In Moab everyone went to 'the church of his own choice.'"<sup>208</sup>
- 16:13-14 Isaiah concluded this oracle by announcing Moab's imminent ruin (cf. 15:1). The preceding verses describe an earlier revelation that the prophet received, but now he learned that Moab's invasion would be within three years. A hired man would count down the three years day by day, and the Judeans would do the same as they anticipated the degrading of Moab's glory and population. Only a remnant would survive.

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<sup>207</sup>Young, 1:463.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., 1:467.

The fulfillment came when Assyria invaded Moab sometime between 715 and 713 B.C. or, perhaps, when Sennacherib destroyed it in 701 B.C.

"The grief of the judge of all the earth is one of the two striking truths of this oracle. The other is that all this total loss and suffering arises from the single sin of pride (16:6)."<sup>209</sup>

### **The oracle against Damascus and Ephraim chs. 17—18**

This oracle deals with Syria (or Aram—Damascus was its capital) and the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Ephraim being its leading tribe), which had formed an alliance to Judah's north in 735-732 B.C. Even though the oracle is addressed to Damascus, it focuses quickly on Israel (17:4). It is probably a mosaic composition alluding to events that happened over many years of Isaiah's ministry that the prophet pieced together under divine inspiration. As in all these oracles, Isaiah's interest was not primarily in the course of events as such but the issues to which these events gave expression. Israel, as well as the other nations addressed in these oracles, refused to depend on God and trusted in man for protection. That is why they received a heavy message (burden) from the Lord.

"As the Lord organizes history for the good of his people (the Babylon oracle) and purposes to keep the Davidic promises (the Philistia oracle), opening them to the Gentiles also (the Moab oracle), his actions under all these headings are holy and just. Sin is not overlooked [even in Israel, (the Damascus Ephraim oracle)]."<sup>210</sup>

17:1-3        God announced that Damascus and the cities of Syria, plus Samaria ("the fortified city," v. 3), would soon fall. Assyria destroyed Damascus in 732 B.C. and Samaria in 722 B.C. These cities would lose their sovereignty and glory and would become grazing lands instead of population centers. Nevertheless the almighty God promised that there would be a few people left in Syria, as there would be in Ephraim (cf. 18:7).

17:4-6        Isaiah revealed the reason for this defeat. In the day of God's judgment (cf. vv. 7, 9), Jacob's prosperity would become lean, as when one grows old and loses his former strength, because of her unbelief: her lack of trust in God. She would experience a thorough reaping of her population, as reapers harvested abundant grain crops in the productive valley of Rephaim ("Shades" or "Ghosts," hence "Death") near Jerusalem. Yet a remnant would survive, like the few olives or fruits left after a harvest for gleaners to collect. This is what Yahweh, the God who had pledged Himself to Israel, declared.

"Judah need not fear her neighbors; it is God with whom she should come to terms."<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup>Motyer, p. 151.

<sup>210</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>211</sup>Oswalt, p. 351.

- 17:7-8 The coming destruction would result in the Israelites and the Arameans (Syrians) turning to their maker, the Holy One of Israel, in trust and away from idols.
- 17:9-11 The land would be a desolation because the Israelites forgot their God and tried to supply their own needs independent of Him. The description of cultivating plants in these verses represents a pagan custom designed to secure the favor of local gods. Rather than trusting in their saving God, the Israelites had planted little seedlings of faith in idols. The Israelites' horticultural attempts had been frustrating, as had their attempts to produce satisfaction in life and divine help by pursuing other gods.
- "What kind of a gardener is he who plants thistles and expects roses! Folly is Israel's action; she turns to the idols and expects protection."<sup>212</sup>
- 17:12-14 Many warriors would descend on Israel like the waves of the sea, but they would quickly dissipate because the Lord would rebuke them. They would disappear like dust before a strong wind. The terror that would be so strong would vanish overnight. God also gave such a deliverance to Judah when Sennacherib the Assyrian attacked Jerusalem (cf. 37:36), but that is not in view here. The fact that Isaiah did not mention a particular nation as the enemy, suggests that he had more in mind than just one foe, and a perspective that extended far beyond his own day. Many nations would punish Israel over the years.

What follows in chapter 18 is an example of how the nations are subject to God, the point of 17:12-14. It describes an eschatological defeat of superpowers—one of which would destroy Damascus and Ephraim in Isaiah's day.

- 18:1-3 The land that lies beyond the rivers of Cush was Cush (Nubia), notable for its ships, whose sails looked like the whirring wings of insects over water from a distance. Another view of the whirling wings is that they represent swarming hordes of people, including soldiers.<sup>213</sup> Cush was at the end of the earth in Isaiah's day and therefore symbolized the ends of the earth; it was a great distance from Judah. Some scholars believe Cush lay within what is now Ethiopia, but others think Cush included modern southern Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, and northern Ethiopia.<sup>214</sup> Envoys from Cush may have traveled to Moab, Philistia, and Judah seeking an alliance against Assyria.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup>Young, 1:472.

<sup>213</sup>Young, 1:474-75.

<sup>214</sup>See J. Daniel Hays, "The Cushites: A Black Nation in the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612 (October-December 1996):396-409.

<sup>215</sup>Oswalt, p. 360.



Isaiah called on these messengers from Ethiopia to go to a nation tall and smooth (shaven). This was a common description of the Nubians (or Cushites). They were to go to a people feared far and wide, perhaps the Egyptians or the Assyrians. They were to go to a powerful and oppressive nation whose land was divided by rivers, again perhaps the Egyptians, the Assyrians, or even the Medes. Taken together these descriptions represent all great, aggressive nations.

All the recipients of this message, the "inhabitants of the world and dwellers on earth" (v. 3), were to hear that a sovereign (the Lord) would issue a call to battle. No one could miss that call when it came.

18:4-7 This message by the Cushite envoys harmonized with what Yahweh had told Isaiah. Yahweh would look from His heavenly dwelling place quietly, like the shimmering heat in summer or the encroaching mist in autumn. These are figures that connote coming judgment.

He would prune the nations as a farmer pruned his grapevines and trees, but He would do it before they reached harvest time. In other words, His judging the nations would be perceived as premature. The nations would be so depopulated by this judgment that birds and beasts would feed on the remains of those judged (cf. Rev. 19:17-18).

Then the remaining representatives of all these once-powerful and aggressive nations (cf. v. 2) would worship the Lord Almighty (cf. Ps. 68:31; Zech. 14:16; Acts 8:26-36). They would bring their gifts to Him at Mt. Zion. This will be a time of global worship of Messiah.

### **The oracle against Egypt chs. 19—20**

This oracle clarifies that God's purposes for Egypt, another nation the Judeans wanted to trust for help during this time of Assyrian expansion, would involve judgment followed by blessing. The passage consists of three palistropic (chiastic) parts.

- A Egypt's smiting by God predicted 19:1-15
- B Egypt's healing by God 19:16-25
- C Egypt's smiting by God exemplified ch. 20

When Assyria swallowed up Syria in 732 B.C. and then Israel in 722 B.C., many of the Judeans began looking south to Egypt for help against their Mesopotamian foe (cf. chs. 30—31). Isaiah warned his countrymen against relying on Egypt, as he had warned them against putting confidence in other foreign powers. Whatever people trust in place of God eventually disappoints them.

The prediction of Egypt's smiting (19:1-15) begins and ends with references to the Lord's action (vv. 1, 14-15). In between, the prophet announced Egypt's social (vv. 2-4), economic (vv. 5-10), and political (vv. 11-13) collapse. The whole point is that God ultimately controls the fate of nations—not social, economic, and political conditions.

- 19:1 Sovereign Yahweh was about to visit Egypt, and when He did, her idols would prove impotent and her people fearful. He had done this at the time of the Exodus (Exod. 12:12), but Egypt was to receive a repeat lesson.
- 19:2-4 Egyptian society was notable for its lack of unity throughout its history. There was frequent conflict between the Upper and Lower Egypt geographical factions. Kingdom periods, during which the Pharaoh was worshipped as god, were interspersed with long periods when the 42 city-states ruled themselves and the people worshipped innumerable gods. Sometimes her god-king was strong and the people united behind him, but when he was weak there was little social solidarity.<sup>216</sup> Isaiah foresaw another period of social chaos coming when the Egyptians would look to idols and the spirit world for guidance. The sovereign God of armies would then deliver them over to the rule of a strong, cruel leader who would dominate them. The fulfillment may have been the Ethiopian Pharaoh Piankhi (715 B.C.), Pharaoh Psammetichus (670 B.C.),<sup>217</sup> one of the Assyrian kings (Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon in 671, or Ashurbanipal in 668 B.C.), or the Persian Artaxerxes III Ochus (343 B.C.). Several conservative scholars prefer Esarhaddon.<sup>218</sup> Depressed people are easy targets for despotic rulers.
- 19:5-10 Egypt's economy depended almost entirely on the Nile River. But the Nile would dry up, thanks to the sovereign control of Yahweh (cf. Exod. 7:14-25). The "sea" (Heb. *yam*) in view probably refers to the Nile River, a name the Egyptians used to describe it.<sup>219</sup> Then the economy would suffer and the people would become weak. How foolish, then, to trust in a nation that cannot control its own destiny but which Yahweh controls. The waters from the sea (v. 5) probably refer to the waters of the Nile, which looked like a sea at flood stage in Lower (northern) Egypt. Flax (v. 9) and all plants need water, but when there is drought the captains of industry, or the industries themselves ("pillars of Egypt"), that rely on these plants suffer, and their workers have no jobs.
- "When a nation's spirit evaporates and sectional interests predominate, when no plan seems to prosper, then the means to make industry thrive may well be there (and the Nile flow as before) but the will to exploit the asset is gone."<sup>220</sup>
- 19:11-13 The Egyptians were known for their wisdom and took great pride in it (cf. Matt. 13:54; Mark 6:2). Isaiah challenged their wise men to inform the people what Yahweh of armies had in store for them (cf. Joseph). He

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<sup>216</sup>See Finegan, p. 126.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid., pp. 128-29.

<sup>218</sup>See also Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 60.

<sup>219</sup>Delitzsch, 1:357.

<sup>220</sup>Motyer, p. 165.

could frustrate their plans, but they could not discover His. Their unwise politicians had misled the people by failing to diversify the economy, among other ways. Too much of their hope lay in the Nile, which the people worshipped as a god. Zoan (v. 11, Gr. Tanis) was a chief city and often the capital of Lower Egypt, and Noph (Gr. Memphis, v. 13) was another chief city and former capital of the same part of Egypt.

- 19:14-15 Though the wise men of Egypt could not reveal God's actions (cf. v. 1), the prophet of God could and did. The Lord had confounded the wisdom of the Egyptian leaders because they had resorted to idols and spirits rather than seeking Him (v. 3; cf. Gen. 11:1-9; Rom. 1:18-32). Consequently their national behavior resembled that of a drunken man, not knowing where to turn and befouling himself in the messes that he made. Such a person cannot accomplish anything productive, and neither would Egypt. How foolish Judah would be to trust in such a disabled drunk of a nation!

"To join with Egypt would be to associate with a nation under divine wrath (1), trust the promises of a divided people (2), look for help to a collapsing economy (5-10), expect wisdom where there was only folly (11-13) and believe that those who were unable to solve their own problems (15) could solve the problems of others!"<sup>221</sup>

The following section (vv. 16-25) gives the Lord's solution, point by point, to the problems of Egypt and, for that matter, of all powers and people that leave God out. The repetition of "in that day" (vv. 16, 18, 19, 23, 24) highlights a time yet future when God will reverse Egypt's fortunes. Isaiah used this phrase 42 times, comprising half of all its occurrences in the prophets and a quarter of those in the Old Testament. The same "Yahweh Almighty" who would bring the former smiting (vv. 4, 12) would also bring healing (vv. 18, 20, 25). Why turn to Egypt for help when one day Egypt will turn to Yahweh?

- 19:16-17 In a future day, Yahweh of armies would exalt Judah over Egypt so that the Egyptians would fear Israel and the Lord. This had happened at the Exodus (Exod. 10:7; 12:33; Deut. 2:25), and it would happen again by the manifestation of God's power. This has not yet happened, so the fulfillment must be eschatological.
- 19:18 In that day, the populations of five Egyptian cities would speak Hebrew out of deference to the Jews and commitment to Yahweh. While five is not many, Isaiah evidently meant that as many as five (quite a few in view of Egypt's previous massive idolatry), and perhaps more, would do so (cf. Gen. 11:1). One of these five would be called the City of Destruction (Heb. *heres*), perhaps because of the destruction that God would bring to Egypt. Another possibility is that "destruction" should read "sun" (Heb. *heres* with a *het* rather than a *he*). In this case the City of the Sun, On (Gr. Heliopolis), is in view. On was a center of the worship of the sun god in Egypt, so this may point to an end of idolatry there.

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<sup>221</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

19:19-22 Abraham built an altar to express his gratitude and commitment to the Lord (Gen. 12:8; cf. Josh. 22:34; 24:26-27), and Jacob erected a pillar when he memorialized God's covenant to him (Gen. 28:22). The Egyptians will do these things throughout their land to express those things in that day (v. 19). During the Inter-testamental Period, an altar was built to Yahweh in Egypt, as Josephus reported:

". . . the son of Onias the high priest, who was of the same name with his father, and who fled to king Ptolemy, who was called Philometor, lived now at Alexandria, as we have said already. When this Onias saw that Judea was oppressed by the Macedonians and their kings, out of a desire to purchase to himself a memorial and eternal fame, he resolved to send to king Ptolemy and queen Cleopatra, to ask leave of them that he might build a temple in Egypt like to that at Jerusalem, and might ordain Levites and priests out of their own stock. The chief reason why he was desirous so to do, was, that he relied upon the prophet Isaiah, who lived about six hundred years before, and foretold that there certainly was to be a temple built to Almighty God in Egypt by a man that was a Jew. . . . 'for the prophet Isaiah foretold, that there should be an altar in Egypt to the Lord God: and many other such things did he prophesy relating to that place.'"<sup>222</sup>

But the context of this prophecy is the end times. This prophecy has yet to be fulfilled.

Israelites during the Judges Period cried out to God because of their oppressors, and He sent them deliverers (Judg. 3:9, 15; 6:7; 10:10). Their great oppressor in the past, of course, had been Egypt herself. Similarly, when the Egyptians call out to God for help, He will send them a Savior and a Champion, Messiah (v. 20). The Lord revealed Himself to the Israelites and brought them into a saving relationship with Himself through bitter defeat in the Exodus (Exod. 7:5; 9:29; 14:4). He will do the same to the Egyptians in that future day (v. 21; cf. Jer. 31:34; Zech. 14:16-18), and they will respond with appropriate worship. Parents sometimes strike their children to bring them into line, and God will discipline Egypt to bring her to Himself. He will hurt them, but He will hurt them to heal them, like a surgeon (v. 22). This whole section is a picture of reconciliation still future.

"This is the point: the worship of Yahweh in Egypt will be open and official. . . . Historical fulfillment here, like historical fulfillment in each of the five 'in that day' passages, *did not occur*."<sup>223</sup>

<sup>222</sup>Josephus, 13:3:1. Cf. idem, *The Wars of the Jews*, 7:10:3.

<sup>223</sup>Watts, p. 258.

- 19:23 Human reconciliation between the major powers of the world will also characterize that day. Note the spread of peace from a few cities (v. 18), to a whole country (v. 19), and now to the whole world (v. 23). In Isaiah's day, Israel found herself caught between Egypt and Assyria, but in the future both of these enemies would join in worshipping Israel's God. A highway between these superpowers existed in the prophet's day, but marching armies often used it.
- 19:24-25 Finally, equality between Israel and its former enemies would prevail in that great day. Through Israel all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3), but blessed equally with Israel. God applied some of His favorite terms for Israel to Egypt and Assyria: "My people" (cf. 10:24; 43:6-7; Exod. 5:1; Jer. 11:4; Hos. 1:10; 2:23), and "the work of My hands" (cf. 60:12; 64:8; Ps. 119:73; 138:8). He reserved "My inheritance" for Israel (cf. Deut. 32:9).<sup>224</sup>

"Yahweh's divine *imperium* is seen to draw within its scope and purpose the entire known world."<sup>225</sup>

Premillennialists believe the fulfillment of this prophecy awaits the Millennium. Amillennialists see its fulfillment in the present age, as Gentiles along with Jews become one in Christ.<sup>226</sup>

"The point being made is that if Israel turns to the nations in trust she will be prostituting her ministry to them. Instead, she is to be the vehicle whereby those very nations can turn to her God and become partners with her in service to him and enjoying his blessings."<sup>227</sup>

In view of passages such as this, it is amazing that the Jews of Jesus' day (and earlier and later) resisted so strongly the idea that God wanted the Gentiles to enjoy blessing along with them.

The following incident illustrates that the world powers of Isaiah's day were indeed subject to Yahweh, just as the prophet had proclaimed (19:23-25). It is another sign, the third so far in Isaiah, that God could and would do in the distant future what Isaiah had predicted. It also involved a symbolic act.

- 20:1-2 The year in view was 711 B.C. Like 7:1, 20:1 introduces the historical setting for the events that follow. For four years, Egypt had encouraged the city-states of western Palestine to resist Assyrian aggression—with the promise of assistance. In 713 B.C., Ashdod, the northernmost Philistine

<sup>224</sup>For further study of these verses, see Duane L. Christensen, "A New Israel: The Righteous from among All Nations," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, pp. 251-59.

<sup>225</sup>Watts, P. 261.

<sup>226</sup>E.g., Young, 2:46-47.

<sup>227</sup>Oswalt, p. 381.

town that stood about 35 miles west of Jerusalem, had rebelled, and Assyria replaced her king, Ahimiti (Azuri), with another, a man named Yamani (Jaman). Rebellion continued, however, and pleas for help went out from Ashdod to Judah, Moab, and Edom. Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) responded to Ashdod's rebellion by sending his second in command, who reduced Ashdod to an Assyrian province. Egypt's promised help never materialized. In fact, the Egyptians handed Yamani over to the Assyrians in chains to avoid an Assyrian attack.

During that period, God instructed His prophet to dramatize a message. Jeremiah and Ezekiel often dramatized prophecies, but this is the only time Isaiah did as far as the text records. Isaiah was to take his clothes off, including his shoes. The word "naked" (Heb. *'arom*) can mean: clothed only with a loin cloth, or totally naked (cf. 58:7; Gen. 2:25; 1 Sam. 19:24; 2 Sam. 6:20; Mic. 1:8; John 21:7). If God wanted Isaiah to go totally naked He probably would not have mentioned his shoes. Isaiah may have been wearing sackcloth because he was mourning (cf. 15:3), but this may have been his normal garment (cf. 2 Kings 1:8).

"With the great importance attached to the clothing in the East, where the feelings upon this point are peculiarly sensitive and modest, a person was looked upon as stripped and naked if he had only taken off his upper garment. What Isaiah was directed to do, therefore, was simply opposed to common custom, and not to moral decency. He was to lay aside the dress of a mourner and preacher of repentance, and to have nothing on but his tunic (*cetoneth*); and in this, as well as barefooted, he was to show himself in public. This was the costume of a man who had been robbed and disgraced, or else of a beggar or prisoner of war."<sup>228</sup>

20:3-4 For three years, Isaiah appeared in public as God had instructed him, to portray the condition of the Egyptian and Cushite captives that the Assyrians would take in reprisal for stirring up trouble. A Cushite dynasty was in power in Egypt at this time, which accounts for the prominence of Cush in this prophecy. During those three years, Isaiah's observers doubtless concluded that his condition represented the fate of the people of Ashdod. At the end of three years, God told Isaiah to explain the significance of his strange behavior. That he had portrayed the Egyptians and Cushites, and not the people of Ashdod, would have shocked the Judeans, because many of them favored relying on Egypt and Cush for protection against Assyria. Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in 701 B.C. when the Assyrians defeated Egypt at Eltekeh. Another less likely possibility, I think, is Esarhaddon's conquest of Egypt in 671 B.C.

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<sup>228</sup>Delitzsch, 1:372.

20:5-6        Isaiah predicted the dismay of the pro-Egyptian faction in Judah when Assyria carried the Egyptians and Cushites off as captives. This happened in 701 B.C. The Judeans had hoped that they would get help from the Egyptians and Cushites against the Assyrians, but now how could they escape? The obvious though unstated answer is, Trust in the Lord, not Egypt!

### **The second series of five oracles chs. 21—23**

Compared to the first series of oracles against the Gentile nations, this second series is more negative. Also, the nations and cities against which they were sent, are not as clearly defined, suggesting that they apply more broadly to all the nations, not just the historical ones addressed.

#### **The second oracle against Babylon 21:1-10**

This is a message of the destruction of the anti-God religious and commercial system that Babylon has symbolized throughout history (cf. Rev. 17—18).

21:1        This oracle concerns the wilderness of the sea. This enigmatic title probably refers to the flat Mesopotamian plain northwest of the Persian Gulf, which the Assyrian and Babylonian empires occupied (cf. v. 9). This area would become a wilderness because of God's judgment. The oracle came as a sirocco (a hot, desert wind) from the Negev, a region infamous in Judah for its barrenness and heat. The destruction coming on Babylonia from a terrifying land would be similar to the devastation that blew into Judah periodically from the Negev.

21:2        Isaiah received this harsh vision. Treachery and destruction continued to mark the Persian Gulf area. Elam and Media were to go up against this foe to put an end to her evil ways that produced groaning in her victims. Elam ceased to oppose the Mesopotamian powers by 639 B.C., so Isaiah evidently gave this oracle before then, possible as early as the Babylonian Merodach-baladan's visit to Jerusalem about 701 B.C. (cf. ch. 39).

"Elam and Media were peoples from the Iranian highlands who were becoming active in Mesopotamian affairs near the end of the eighth century . . ." <sup>229</sup>

21:3-4        The thought that God would destroy Babylon completely undid the prophet (cf. 13:7-8). His reaction evidences some compassion for the Babylonians, even though they were a threat to Judah's security, as well as shock that the destruction would be so great.

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<sup>229</sup>Watts, p. 272.

- 21:5 If the setting for the prophecy was the embassy of Merodach-baladan, the people who set the table and provide a meal refers to the Judeans. They entertained representatives of the nation under divine judgment (Babylon) who, as they dined with the Judeans, planned war against them among themselves.<sup>230</sup> The Assyrians captured and destroyed Babylon in 686 B.C. Another possibility is that Isaiah saw a banquet in Babylon (cf. Dan. 5). The plan for battle would, in that case, be that of Babylon's invading enemy, perhaps the Medes and Persians.<sup>231</sup>
- 21:6-7 The sovereign God told Isaiah to post a reliable sentry who would report what he saw. When the sentry saw horsemen in pairs with a train of donkeys and camels, he should pay close attention. According to the Greek historian Xenophon, this is how the Persian army marched.<sup>232</sup>
- 21:8-9 The lion-like sentry reported to his sovereign Lord that he was not neglecting his duty but was paying close attention to what he saw. He reported that a troop of riders in pairs had appeared and had announced the fall of Babylon (cf. Rev. 18:2). Her fallen idols symbolized their inability to protect her from her enemy (cf. Jer. 51:47, 52). Babylon fell several times: to the Assyrians in 710, 702, 689, and 648, and to the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C., among others. The Medes were allies of the Babylonians in the earlier battles. But Babylon will fall again (Rev. 16:19; 17—18).
- 21:10 Isaiah concluded this oracle by telling the Judeans, a people whom he compared to a threshed crop because of their oppressions, that what he had announced about Babylon's destruction was from Yahweh of armies, the God of Israel.

This oracle would have admonished the Judeans to put their trust in God rather than in the Babylonians, as tempting as their power would have been. Babylon would come to an end.

### **The oracle against Edom 21:11-12**

Compared to the second oracle in the first series of five, this one reveals greater ignorance about what is coming.

- 21:11 An Edomite kept asking Isaiah, the watchman who saw by prophetic revelation how things would go (cf. vv. 6-9), how long the night of oppression on his nation would last. "Edom" is "Dumah" in the Hebrew text, a word play. Dumah also may have been the name of a place in Edom or the Akkadian designation for Edom (Udumu). The Dumah in Gen. 25:14 was one of Ishmael's rather than Esau's descendants. Dumah means

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<sup>230</sup>Motyer, p. 175.

<sup>231</sup>Oswalt, p. 394; Archer, p. 624.

<sup>232</sup>Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 1.6, 10; 4.3-5; 6.1, 28; 7.4, 17.



"silence," which is appropriate here since this oracle is silent (Heb. *dumah*) concerning Edom's (Heb. 'edom) ultimate fate.

"As a sick person lying awake through the long, agonizing hours of night cries out to know what the time is and how much of the night has passed, so Edom, feeling the oppression of Assyria, will call out to the prophet to ask him how much longer the oppression must endure."<sup>233</sup>

21:12 The watchman responded that there was hope, but there were also more bad things coming. When morning came, it would still seem like night. The Edomites could request further information about the future again later.

Edom would experience a kind of darkness that would last a long time before her night would pass, even though better times would come. Therefore it was foolish for Judah to trust in her.

### **The oracle against Arabia 21:13-17**

The preceding oracle promised prolonged recurring trouble for Edom, but this one warns that the Arabians would suffer defeat soon.

"Evening darkness is settling upon Arabia, and the morning-land is becoming an evening-land."<sup>234</sup>

21:13 "Arabia" describes the territory southeast of Edom, which was also in danger of Assyrian takeover. Dedan was a town in western Arabia. The Dedanite Arabian caravans would have to hide among the bushes because they were in danger from an enemy.

21:14-15 Other Arabians would provide sustenance for the refugees of war who would seek them out (cf. 16:2-3). Tema was an Arabian town and district northeast of Dedan (cf. Job 6:19; Jer. 25:23). It derived its name from one of the sons of Ishmael (cf. Gen. 25:15; 1 Chron. 1:30).

21:16-17 Within precisely a year, however, these Arabians would suffer destruction and their army would dissolve. Their end would be due to the sovereign Lord, not to the force of opposing armies. The Lord Himself assured the prophet of this.

"Kedar, in its restricted sense, denotes a nomadic tribe which inhabited the Syro-Arabian desert, but the name is often used in Scripture and in rabbinical literature as a collective term for the Bedouin generally."<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup>Young, 2:77.

<sup>234</sup>Delitzsch, 1:386.

<sup>235</sup>*The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Kedar," by J. D. Douglas.

The place that refugees from advancing Gentile armies would seek security, Arabia, would soon prove insecure. Israel should not trust in this neighbor but in her Lord.

### **The oracle against Jerusalem ch. 22**

As in the first series of oracles, God's people occupy the fourth place in this second series, which points further into the future, surrounded by the nations of the world. In the first series the Northern Kingdom was in view, but in the second series Judah takes the spotlight. Three aspects of life in Judah receive separate attention in this chapter: the city of Jerusalem (vv. 1-14), the individual Shebna (vv. 15-19), and the family of Eliakim (vv. 20-25). All three sections reveal the thoroughness of Israel's sin of seeking security in the world rather than in the Lord, namely: self-sufficiency.

" . . . Jerusalem is found cannibalizing itself to make itself safe, without a thought of looking to the Lord (verses 8-11); Shebna is portrayed as the man concerned only for his own worldly glory, before and after death (verses 16-18); and Eliakim is at risk of becoming the focal point of the security of others to his own and their downfall (verses 23-24)."<sup>236</sup>

The first part of the oracle deals with self-sufficient Jerusalem (vv. 1-14). At present there was joy in the city (vv. 1-2a), but in the future there would be sorrow (vv. 2b-7). Past actions (vv. 8-11) had produced the present joy, and they determined future consequences (vv. 12-14).

22:1 The prophet employed another enigmatic title that implied a contrast with the actual condition of the place described to indicate the object of this oracle (cf. 21:1). "Valley of vision" refers to Jerusalem (cf. vv. 5, 9-10). Isaiah pictured it as the depressed place (cf. Ps. 125:2) where he received a depressing vision, namely, the inevitable judgment that would come on the city. In this valley there was a notable lack of vision among God's people when it came to seeing things from His perspective. The mention of a valley suggests the valleys that surrounded Jerusalem on three sides, the Kidron Valley on the east and the Hinnom Valley on the west and south.

" . . . Jerusalem was an enclosed place, hidden and shut off from the world, which Jehovah had chosen as the place in which to show to His prophets the mysteries of His government of the world."<sup>237</sup>

Isaiah thought the residents of Jerusalem had behaved inappropriately by going up on their flat housetops to rejoice. Some turn of events in his day had resulted in the people feeling very secure. Perhaps Sargon's attack on Ashdod followed by his return to Assyria in 711 B.C., or God's deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib in 701 B.C. (cf. 37:36), was the historical occasion for their rejoicing.

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<sup>236</sup>Motyer, p. 180.

<sup>237</sup>Delitzsch, 1:390.

- 22:2-3 Such rejoicing was inappropriate, however, because Isaiah saw in his vision that they would fall to an enemy, not because of combat but starvation. This happened when the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and took it in 586 B.C. (cf. 2 Kings 25:3-4; Jer. 52:6). Jerusalem, as well as Babylon, would fall (cf. 2:6-22; 21:1-10).
- 22:4 Therefore Isaiah rejected the attempts of his fellow citizens to get him to participate in their celebration. The terrible end of the city drew tears from him that the present rejoicing could not stop. Isaiah was a compassionate person because he identified with his countrymen in their suffering.
- 22:5 The Lord Himself would bring this fate on Jerusalem. The residents would then panic, be subjugated and confused, and cry to the surrounding mountains for help as the city walls broke down.
- 22:6 The enemy would be Elam, an ally of Babylon's to her east, and Kir, whose exact location is unknown but was the destination of some Israelites taken into Assyrian captivity (cf. 2 Kings 16:9; Amos 1:5; 9:7). It was also the place (city or land) from which the Arameans originated (cf. Amos 9:7). Isaiah did not identify the main enemy, Babylon herself, but only two of her allies here, perhaps to emphasize the size (by merism) and or distance of the foe.
- 22:7 This enemy would conquer the countryside around Jerusalem and then set up a siege of the city outside her walls at her very gates.
- 22:8 Such an attack would be possible because the Lord would remove His defensive screen from around the city. The reason was that the people had relied on physical implements of warfare for their security rather than on Him. Evidently the "house of the forest" of Lebanon was an armory in Isaiah's day (cf. 1 Kings 7:2-5; 10:17).

"The Lord is always the ultimate agent in his people's experiences . . ." <sup>238</sup>

- 22:9-11 The people would try many forms of defense, but all would fail because they did not depend on the Lord who had made the city what it had become. Strong walls and adequate water would be their hope rather than their God. Hezekiah's strengthening Jerusalem's walls and securing her water source were not wrong in themselves. The people's reliance on these physical securities was their sin.

"Walled cities usually had two walls with a space between, allowing defenders the open space needed to overcome attackers who had penetrated the outer wall. In peace-time

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<sup>238</sup>Motyer, p. 184.

that space tended to be built up by squatters with temporary shacks which soon became permanent dwellings. The government apparently took two steps to meet this problem. The houses were demolished to regain the open space between the walls and parts of it were flooded with water from the old pool. This latter created a flooded moat and also ensured water reserves for the besieged city."<sup>239</sup>

"If it is true that God is the Sovereign of the universe, then our first task in a moment of crisis is to be sure that all is clear between him and ourselves. Then other preparations, if necessary, can follow."<sup>240</sup>

22:12 Rather, in that day, the people should turn to the Lord in repentance, and reaffirm their trust in Him for their security. He is the sovereign, almighty God who can save.

22:13 However, they would not repent but rejoice in their apparent security, believing that if they could not save themselves, nothing else could (cf. Rev. 9:20-21). Isaiah saw in the present rejoicing over security (vv. 1b-2a) the same attitude of self-sufficiency that would doom the Jerusalemites in the future.

Normally ancient Near Easterners used cattle and sheep for producing milk and wool; they did not slaughter them to eat very often because these animals produced valuable products. Killing them to eat, therefore, expresses the people's utter despair and their self-indulgence, thinking there was no future left for them (cf. 1 Cor. 15:32).

22:14 The Lord had revealed to Isaiah that He would not forgive their unbelief in Himself. As long as they continued to trust in themselves rather than in Him, He would not save them.

Unbelief persisted in until death is the only sin that God will not forgive. In the unsaved it results in eternal damnation, and in the saved it results in the loss of some eternal reward plus temporal punishment in some cases. However, as long as people can repent there is hope. Repentance was still possible for Isaiah's original audience when he gave this message. The warning passages in Hebrews explain that a time can come when people are no longer able to repent.

". . . the oracle stands here as the proclamation of a judgment deferred but not repealed."<sup>241</sup>

<sup>239</sup>Watts, p. 284. This writer provided a diagram of Hezekiah's pools and waterworks, and an excursus on the same, on pp. 282-84.

<sup>240</sup>Oswalt, p. 412.

<sup>241</sup>Delitzsch, 1:397-98.

The oracles against Shebna and Eliakim that follow are the only ones on individuals in chapters 13—27. They show that the choice between faith and works, with its attending results, is individual as well as national. They also provided immediate signs of the prophecies that Isaiah gave here concerning the fate of Jerusalem in the future. Shebna was as self-reliant individually, as the people of Jerusalem were collectively (vv. 15-19). Eliakim was an object of trust by the members of his family and the residents of Jerusalem and so risked taking the Lord's place in their affections (vv. 20-25).

22:15           The Lord commanded Isaiah to go to Shebna, who was steward (ruler) over the royal household (cf. Joseph; Gen. 39:8-9; 1 Kings 4:6; 18:3). This was the highest office of state in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, and sometimes the heir to the throne occupied it (cf. 2 Chron. 26:21). As the royal steward, Shebna stood nearest to the king and represented the king.

22:16           Isaiah's question is almost identical to the one in verse 1, tying Shebna's error to that of the people of Jerusalem. He had no personal right, or a right by reason of his position, to prepare a permanent and prominent tomb for himself. A person's tomb made a statement about his importance, and Shebna wanted to guarantee his future recognition by building himself a respectable monument in Jerusalem (cf. Haman; Esth. 3:1-2). Archaeologists have found the remains of a grave hewn by one Shebna on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem.<sup>242</sup>

"In this episode (a scene which deserves to be remembered beside 'Nero fiddled while Rome burned') the prime minister chooses the moment when Jerusalem's citizens are frantically arming for a last-ditch stand against the invaders to visit the elaborate mausoleum he was preparing for himself in the royal cemetery. . . .

"Why should he be preoccupied with dignity in death, while most people in Jerusalem were still hoping to live?"<sup>243</sup>

22:17-18       Shebna would not die in peace in Jerusalem as he anticipated. God would throw him, like a balled up rag that cannot control where it is going, into a distant land where he would die. Presumably the Assyrians took him captive. His emblems of greatness would also end up there rather than in the place where he wished to be remembered. His attitude of self-glorification made him unworthy of the office he occupied, in Isaiah's view (cf. 1 Cor. 10:12).

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<sup>242</sup>Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, p. 544.

<sup>243</sup>Watts, p. 291.

- 22:19 The Lord promised to drive Shebna out of his office, and to tear him down from his exalted position in which he took so much pride.
- 22:20-21 The Lord also predicted that He would appoint Eliakim to a special position of authority, complete with the symbols of that authority, to replace proud Shebna. In chapters 36—37 Shebna and Eliakim appear as officials who were both serving King Hezekiah when Sennacherib invaded Jerusalem (701 B.C.). Thus Shebna's humiliation and Eliakim's exaltation apparently occurred sometime after that. Eliakim would become a father to the people of Jerusalem in that he would care for them sacrificially at God's appointed time.
- "Shebna had been riding ostentatiously in his chariots and building a splendid grave for himself, seeking in all this the praise of men. How much better to have God's smile of approval and to be described, in a simple but eloquent phrase, as 'my servant' (v. 20; cf. 20:3; 42:1; 52:13)."<sup>244</sup>
- "When God designates a man *my servant*, He attributes high honor to that man; He asserts that that man is one who will serve Him."<sup>245</sup>
- 22:22 Eliakim would bear authority to administer the affairs of David's royal house, which the key on the shoulder symbolizes. His decisions would be binding, as when one unlocks or locks a door with a key (cf. Matt. 16:19; 18:18; Rev. 3:7).
- 22:23-24 He would also serve as a tent peg holding the royal house and all Jerusalem stable against the winds of adversity. He would bring glory to his father's house. He would be such a strong figure that many people would rely on him and commit much responsibility to him.
- 22:25 Unfortunately, Eliakim would not be able to carry all the weight of responsibility committed to him and would fail. Thus the people's trust in another human being, even a very capable person, would prove misplaced. They could only safely trust in the Lord Almighty; He is the only one who would not fail them. One writer believed that Eliakim would not fail.<sup>246</sup>

This oracle reproved the people of Jerusalem for trusting in the arm of flesh to protect them from their enemies. Isaiah epitomized and condemned this attitude by citing Shebna's self-confident behavior. He also showed that trusting in even the most capable of people, such as Eliakim, would prove disappointing. Rather their trust should be in their sovereign, almighty Lord.

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<sup>244</sup>Grogan, p. 143.

<sup>245</sup>Young, 2, 113.

<sup>246</sup>Archer, p. 625.

Christians face temptations similar to the ones Isaiah identified here. We may fail to trust the Lord first and to pray for His guidance, resting rather on our own or another's ability to solve problems. We may become so preoccupied with our own interests and reputations that we fail to serve the Lord and people. We may also put too much hope in our leaders and not enough in our God.

### **The oracle against Tyre ch. 23**

The first cycle of oracles closed by revealing that Egypt, the political oppressor of the Israelites, would come into equal status with Israel in the future (19:25). The second cycle similarly closes by disclosing that Tyre, the materialistic corrupter of God's people in the past, would come into a relationship of holiness (v. 18). Thus the climax of both revelations of judgment was the divine blessing of the Gentiles.

There are also parallels between Babylon, the first oracle in the first series, and Tyre, the last oracle in the second series. Babylon was the great land power of the ancient world, and Tyre was the great sea power. Babylon gained her power through warfare, whereas Tyre gained hers through peaceful trading. The descriptions of both cities meld into the view of future Babylon presented in Revelation 17—18. There the religious and commercial aspects of future Babylon are strongly reminiscent of Tyre. Note also the reference to a prostitute in both passages.

"Babylon's greatness lay in her glory, the list of her achievements and accomplishments, her sophistication and culture. Tyre did not have all of that, but she did have her wealth and her vast maritime contacts. So between the two of them, Babylon and Tyre summed up from east to west all that the world of that day—and this—thought was significant."<sup>247</sup>

This oracle consists of two parts: a poem describing Tyre's fall (vv. 1-14) and a prediction of Tyre's ultimate commitment to the Lord and His people. Tyre was the major city of Phoenicia at this time, and undoubtedly represents the other towns allied with it in the region, in some of the references in this chapter.<sup>248</sup> Similarly, Jerusalem represented all of Judah when used in a collective sense.

23:1           The prophet described news of Tyre's total destruction reaching sailors on ships of Tarshish moored in Cyprus. The Tarshish (lit. refinery) in view here was probably in Spain, but "ships of Tarshish" was a term that described the largest ships of the day capable of the longest voyages (cf. 2:16). Tyre was a very important Mediterranean seaport north of Israel, and its destruction would impact maritime trade everywhere.

"It is not improbable that the whole of the Mediterranean may have been called 'the sea of Tarshish;' and hence the rendering adopted by the Targum, Jerome, Luther, and others, *naves maris* . . ." <sup>249</sup>

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<sup>247</sup>Oswalt, p. 427.

<sup>248</sup>Watts, p. 305.

<sup>249</sup>Delitzsch, 1:406.

- 23:2-3      Isaiah also directed the residents of the Phoenician coast, including Sidon, another important port, to be silent and motionless, since Tyre had collapsed. Tyre had been the marketplace for the large wheat crops that came from Egypt and were distributed to other Mediterranean lands.
- 23:4      Isaiah also gave voice to the sea, the mother of Tyre, which bewailed its loss at Tyre's demise. Its children were the ships that plied its waters because of Tyre's commercial activity, or perhaps its colonies. This loss would be a source of embarrassment to Sidon since it was a sister city in Phoenicia.
- 23:5      The fourth entity to sorrow over the news of Tyre's downfall would be Egypt. Tyrian ships transported Egyptian products all over the Mediterranean region. Tyre's destruction would have far-reaching effects.
- 23:6-7      Isaiah advised refugees to flee from Tyre to Tarshish. How the course of Tyre's fate would change! She had for centuries been a world power, not as an empire but as a broker of international trade. Her ambitions were not political, to rule others, but commercial, to grow rich. As such, Tyre symbolizes one aspect of worldly endeavor.
- 23:8-9      Why had Tyre perished? When Tyre founded colonies, she set up rulers over them—bestowed crowns. Princes and the honored of the earth ended up serving Tyre's ends. Thus this ancient city had tremendous power and influence.
- "The reference [to the earth, or land, Heb. *ha'eres*] is to Palestine-Lebanon, extending to the Euphrates in the northeast and to the 'River of Egypt' and beyond to Egypt in the south. All this 'land' was served by Tyre's commerce and, accordingly, it treated Tyre with deference. All the 'land' envied Tyre's wealth and imitated her styles."<sup>250</sup>
- The reason for Tyre's death was the plan of the Lord Almighty. He desired to humble the proud and to humiliate the admired. He wanted to show the transitory nature of human glory and the folly of depending on such glory. God does not object when worthy people receive the credit due them. What He opposes is pride that seeks to live independent of Himself.
- 23:10      Tarshish could now expand freely, as the Nile overflowed Egypt, because God had removed her main competitor, Tyre.
- 23:11-12      The Lord had stretched His hand over the sea in judgment, as He had over Egypt long ago (cf. Exod. 14:16; 15:4-6, 12). The sea was His province, not Tyre's (cf. Jon. 1:3-4). He had made all kingdoms tremble by

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<sup>250</sup>Watts, p. 307.



condemning the whole Gentile Canaan region to judgment. The Phoenician coastal cities would have no more joy, peace, or security. Their residents would flee to Cyprus, Tarshish, and elsewhere but would not be able to find rest.

"Phoenicia called itself *Kena'an* (Canaan); but this is the only passage in the Old Testament in which the name occurs in this most restricted sense."<sup>251</sup>

23:13 The Tyrians would not find rest because the Assyrians would take revenge on any nation that gave them sanctuary.

God's agent in the destruction of Tyre was first Assyria, then Babylonia, and finally Greece. Tiglath-pileser of Assyria set up a military governor in Tyre in 738 B.C., and his successors imposed escalating restraints on the city because it stubbornly resisted foreign control. Alexander the Great finally wiped the city into the sea in 332 B.C., leaving it uninhabitable. Here Isaiah pointed to Assyria as the power God would use to cut back the influence of Tyre. Tyre came under attack at least five times from Isaiah's day until its end. Its invaders were Sennacherib (705-701 B.C.), Esarhaddon (679-671 B.C.), Nebuchadnezzar (585-573 B.C.), Artaxerxes III Ochus (343 B.C.), and Alexander (332 B.C.). Assyria had already done to the Chaldeans what the prophet foretold it would do to Tyre. Sargon II attacked Babylon in 710 B.C., and Sennacherib destroyed it in 689 B.C.

23:14 This repeated call to the ships of Tarshish, to wail, concludes Isaiah's announcement of Tyre's destruction, forming an *inclusio* with verse 1. Even though Tyre's demise would give Tarshish more control, Tarshish would suffer because Tyre determined the prosperity of the Mediterranean world. The ships of Tarshish would have no port to enter at Tyre (v. 1), and they would have no security for their enterprise (v. 14). How foolish it would be, then, for the Jerusalemites to pin their hopes on Tyre.

As in the previous chapter, Isaiah gave a sign that what he had predicted about Tyre's destruction would indeed happen (cf. 22:15-25). It would experience a brief revival in the near future. Looking into the far distant future, the prophet also announced the conversion of Tyre into a place of holiness to the Lord (cf. 19:16-25).

23:15-16 In the day that the Lord would execute His plan against Tyre, there would be a period of 70 years when Tyre would experience relief from her oppressors. Compare the 70 years of Israel's captivity in Babylon, probably not the same period. "Like the days of one king" refers to the book of days that kings kept in which they recorded the events of their reigns day by day. The meaning is similar to "as a hired man would count" (16:14; 21:16), namely, that these would be 70 literal, fixed years. Tyre

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<sup>251</sup>Delitzsch, 1:410.

did experience such a period of respite following the campaigns of Sennacherib in 701 B.C. During the next 70 years, Assyria was in decline and did not pay much attention to Tyre. Another view is that the 70 years followed Nebuchadnezzar's invasion. A third view is that the 70 years are the same as those of the Babylonian captivity of Israel (Delitzsch, 1:414, 420). A fourth interpretation is that 70 is a round number and indicates simply an extended period of time. Consequently Tyre regained some of her former strength.

- 23:16 Isaiah's comparison of Tyre's recovery to the self-advertisements of a harlot illustrates two realities. Tyre would attract interest in herself again, and what she did was selfish and strictly for money (cf. Amos 1:9).
- 23:17 At the end of 70 years, the Lord would restore Tyre to her former position of playing the materialistic harlot among the nations.
- 23:18 Unlike a selfish prostitute, however, Tyre would set aside her income to the Lord, and it would benefit those who dwell in the Lord's presence. The wages of a prostitute were unacceptable offerings to the Lord under the Old Covenant (Deut. 23:18). When the Jewish exiles returned from Babylon, the merchants of Tyre sold them building materials for the second temple (Ezra 3:7), as they had done for the first temple during Solomon's reign (1 Kings 5:1-12). But the change in the Tyrians' attitude that this verse promises did not mark them then; they still engaged in commerce for selfish ends. Thus this verse looks beyond the history of ancient Tyre to a time yet future when God will transform hearts and cause Gentiles worldwide to come and worship Him (cf. 60:5-9; Rev. 21:24-26). In the future Tyre will have a new status, a new spirit, and a new allegiance (cf. Ps. 87:4). She will join the Ethiopians, Egyptians, Assyrians (18:7; 19:18-25), and many other Gentiles in uniting to fulfill God's glorification of Israel.

"The care of a Phoenician widow once extended to a prophet (1 Ki. 17:8-16) will be the norm of coming relationships."<sup>252</sup>

The Judeans should not envy the Tyrians, nor should God's people of any era envy materialistic idolaters. Ultimately God's people will enjoy all the wealth of Tyre that will come to her God.

". . . chs. 13—23 seem to be saying that since the glory of the nations (chs. 13, 14) equals nothing, and since the scheming of the nations (chs. 14—18) equals nothing, and since the vision of *this* nation (chs. 21, 22) equals nothing, and since the wealth of the nations (ch. 23) equals nothing, don't trust the nations! The same is true today. If we believe that a system of

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<sup>252</sup>Motyer, p. 189.

alliances can save us, we have failed to learn the lessons of Isaiah and of history. God alone is our refuge and strength (Ps. 46:2 [Eng. 1])."<sup>253</sup>

## **2. Divine victory over the nations chs. 24—27**

This section of the text has similarities to the preceding oracles against the nations (chs. 13—23), but it is also different in certain respects. It is a third cycle, but not a cycle of oracles.<sup>254</sup> The content integrates with the oracles, but chapters 24—27 are one continuous whole. It is similar to the finale of a great piece of music; it is climactic but can be appreciated by itself (cf. Zech. 9—14).

Chapters 24—27 also parallel chapters 1—4 in that both sections contain messages of sin, judgment, and restoration "in that day." Likewise, 27:2-6 is another song about a vineyard (cf. 5:1-7). Chapters 28—33 contain six woes, like 5:8-30. Chapter 34 assures divine judgment on Gentile oppressors (cf. ch. 10), and chapter 35 promises kingdom blessings for Israel (cf. chs. 11—12).<sup>255</sup>

"As the book of Immanuel closes in ch. xii. with a psalm of the redeemed, so have we here a fourfold song of praise."<sup>256</sup>

The theme of this section is the triumph of God over His enemies for His people. Isaiah developed this theme by picturing the destruction of one "city" ("the city of chaos" [v. 10], which is the city "of man," i.e., "of the whole world"), and the establishment of another city (Mount Zion, Jerusalem, the city of God). These two "cities" are the focal points of the judgment and restoration that Isaiah alluded to in the preceding oracles. As the city of man falls under divine judgment, the songs of God-neglecting people disappear; and as the city of God appears, the songs of the redeemed swell.

"A city is not just a collection of buildings. It is a mechanism for living independently of God. It is a device for human self-salvation. It is a denial of human mortality. The city is man establishing his own enduring greatness. But even civilizations are mortal."<sup>257</sup>

"The prophet wants to make it plain that God is sovereign actor on the stage of history. It is not he who reacts to the nations, but the nations who respond to him. Thus Israel's [and all God's people's] hope is not in the nations of humanity. They will wither away in a moment under God's blast. Rather, her hope is in the Lord, who is the master of the nations."<sup>258</sup>

Temporally, the first five oracles (chs. 13—20) had strong connections to Isaiah's own times, and the second five (chs. 21—23) reached further into the future. This is not saying, however, that the first oracles were entirely restricted to Isaiah's time and the

<sup>253</sup>Oswalt, pp. 427-28.

<sup>254</sup>See the chart under "2. Divine judgments on the nations chs. 13—23" above.

<sup>255</sup>Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, p. 545.

<sup>256</sup>Delitzsch, 1:423.

<sup>257</sup>Ortlund, p. 142. Cf. Gen. 11:4.

<sup>258</sup>Oswalt, p. 443.

second were completely futuristic. The comparison is only general, not absolute, as exposition of the oracles has shown. This section (chs. 24—27) stretches even further into the future and is mainly eschatological. Many commentators refer to this section as "Isaiah's Apocalypse" because it reveals the culmination of history, though strictly speaking the language used is not apocalyptic but eschatological.<sup>259</sup> These are prophecies regarding the eschatological day of the Lord. Later scriptural revelation enables us to locate these judgments more specifically in the Tribulation, at the return of Christ, in the Millennium, and at the very end of human history on this earth.

The original settings of the prophecies that make up this section are even more difficult to nail down than those in the foregoing oracles. Chapters 24—27 develop the calls expressed in 2:2-4 and 5: calls to the nations and to God's people to come to Jerusalem, the magnet of the earth in the future. The structure of the passage is chiasmic, also centering on Mount Zion (25:6-12).

- A The Lord's harvest from a destroyed world (24:1-13: destruction, 1-12; gleanings, 13)
- B The song of the world remnant (24:14-16a)
- C The sinful world overthrown (24:16b-20)
  - D The waiting world (24:21-23)
    - E The song of the ruined city (25:1-5)
      - F Mount Zion (25:6-12)
        - E' The song of the strong city (26:1-6)
          - D' The waiting people of God (26:7-21)
            - C' Spiritual forces of evil overthrown (27:1)
              - B' The song of the remnant of the people (27:2-6)
- A' The Lord's harvest from a destroyed people (27:7-13: destruction, 7-11; gleanings, 12-13)<sup>260</sup>

There is chronological progression in this eschatological section: from the Tribulation (24:1-20), to the Second Coming (24:21-23), to the Millennium and beyond (chs. 25—27). The millennial sections explain various aspects of God's activity during this time.

### **The preservation of God's people within a world under divine judgment 24:1-20**

Isaiah revealed that the Lord's people are at the center of His plans for the world (cf. 14:2; 21:10). He will preserve them even though He will judge sinful humanity. It is believers who will be living on the earth during the Lord's devastation of this planet that are in view (Tribulation saints), not Christians living before the Tribulation who will be taken to

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<sup>259</sup>See Grogan, p. 149, for a brief discussion of prophecy, eschatology, and apocalyptic; Ronald Youngblood, "A Holistic Typology of Prophecy and Apocalyptic," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, pp. 213-21, for a fuller discussion; and Robert P. Carroll, "Twilight of Prophecy or Dawn of Apocalyptic?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 14 (1979):3-35.

<sup>260</sup>Motyer, pp. 194-95.

heaven in the Rapture before the Tribulation begins. This passage contains many connections with the Flood narrative (Gen. 6—9). Essentially, what God did in Noah's day—i.e., the preservation of the righteous—He will do in the future Tribulation (cf. Mark 13).

### Coming worldwide judgment 24:1-6

24:1 The prophet predicted that the Lord would lay the earth (land) waste, the sum total of all the nations, including those representative ones condemned in the oracles. Isaiah always used "behold" to introduce something future (cf. 3:1; 17:1; 19:1; 30:27; et al.).<sup>261</sup> He would do the reverse of what He did in the Creation, when He brought order out of chaos (cf. Gen. 1:2). He would devastate the earth, making it desolate. He would distort the surface of the earth, as when the Flood changed the topography of this planet. And He would scatter the earth's inhabitants, as He did at Babel (Gen. 11:9).

"It is not easy to know how literally these words will be fulfilled, but in these days of threatened ecological and nuclear catastrophe, it is not at all difficult to imagine a very literal fulfillment, and one which will indeed be the result of human greed and covetousness."<sup>262</sup>

24:2 God's actions will affect all individuals in all types of relationships, including religious, domestic, and commercial ones. Positions, possessions, and power will make no difference to God (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7).

24:3 The repetition of the revelation of this judgment (cf. v. 1), with the assurance that the Lord announced it, confirms its certainty (cf. 2 Pet. 3:5-7; Rev. 6; 8—9; 15—16; 21:1). The *fact* of the earth's destruction, rather than the precise methods and instruments He will use, were the focus of this prophet's revelation. Later revelation provided more detail. These things would happen simply because the Lord had spoken (cf. Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26; 2:16-17; 3:14, 16, 17, 22).

24:4 It is the people of the earth that are the objects of God's judgment, not just the planet itself. All of humanity, even the most exalted individuals, would mourn and fade under the withering judgment of Yahweh.

24:5 Sinful humankind has corrupted its environment. Humans refused to live by divine revelation, introduced an innovative morality, and refused to walk in fellowship with God as He specified in the biblical covenants (cf. Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-6; 9:12, 16; Lev. 24:8; 2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 105:10; Rom. 1—3).

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<sup>261</sup>Delitzsch, 1:425

<sup>262</sup>Oswalt, p. 444.

". . . human beings in sin are the supreme environmental threat."<sup>263</sup>

24:6 God has cursed sin (cf. Gen. 3:17-19), so when people sin they set His curse to work, and it devours the earth.

"Countries do not have sins, but people do. And countries suffer as a consequence of the guilt of their peoples."<sup>264</sup>

Those who sin are guilty before God and suffer the judgment due them. This is part of His covenant relationship with humankind (Gen. 2:17; cf. Deut. 27—28). The only reason all do not perish is that God graciously extends mercy to some (cf. Noah). Half the world's population will die during the seal and trumpet judgments (Rev. 6:8; 9:15). A remnant of believers will survive the Tribulation.

### The effects of the coming judgment 24:7-20

Isaiah expounded on the effects of human sin in a poem, which follows.

24:7 Wine, which people use to escape feeling the effects of sin, ultimately proves ineffective. Its source, the grapevine, decays (as a result of drought? cf. Rev. 6:5-6), and even the constitutionally lighthearted cannot escape groaning.

24:8 Music, likewise, cannot keep people's spirits up continually.

24:9 Even while people drink their wine they cannot bring themselves to sing for joy. Their beer is flat, as we say. It fails to provide the desired uplift.

24:10 Isaiah described the world as a city marked by meaninglessness (Heb. *tohu*, Gen. 1:2), like the earth before Creation (cf. Gen. 11:1-9; Jer. 4:23). That the city is the entire earth is clear. The word "earth" occurs 16 times in this section of the text (vv. 1-20). A spirit of fear pervades this city. Modern existentialist writers have done a good job of articulating the meaninglessness of life without God that Isaiah also described here.<sup>265</sup>

24:11 Shut up to life without God, humankind despairs because all remedies have been tried and found wanting. Stimulants fail to bring lasting joy, what joy there is sours, and gaiety is gone.

24:12 Life in the city (world) of meaninglessness is not only unsatisfying (v. 7), but it is also impossible. Not only is life desolate but it is also defenseless.

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<sup>263</sup>Motyer, p. 197.

<sup>264</sup>Watts, p. 317.

<sup>265</sup>See, for example, Albert Camus, *The Plague*.

- 24:13 God's judgment of the earth will be like a harvest in which He will remove the olives from an olive tree (cf. v. 6; 17:5-6; Rev. 14:19-20; 19:15). But there will be a few people left at the end of the harvest; a remnant will survive (cf. Matt. 24:13).
- 24:14 These survivors will rejoice over the Lord (cf. Matt. 25:21, 23).
- "One feature of chapters 24—27 that reminds the reader of the Book of Revelation is the way declarations of coming judgment are interspersed with songs of thanksgiving."<sup>266</sup>
- 24:15 Because the remnant will praise God in the west (v. 14), Isaiah called for praise of Him in the east (Heb. *'ur*, lit. place of fire) as well—for universal praise, in other words. Specifically, the Gentile nations (the coastlands of the sea, the people farthest from Israel) need to praise Him. Their response will be the beginning of a great pilgrimage to Zion to honor the Lord (2:2; Mic. 4:1).<sup>267</sup>
- 24:16 Isaiah anticipated himself and others hearing the remnant praise God for His righteousness (in judging the ungodly).
- But as the prophet contemplated this end-times scene, he also felt the condemnation of others as deeply as he formerly felt his own (cf. 6:5). Even though God was judging the wicked, they proceeded to act as bad as ever, betraying one another treacherously (cf. 21:2; Rev. 9:20-21).
- 24:17-18 Those who are the objects of God's judgment will not be able to escape it because He will use the forces of nature to judge them, above them and below them (cf. Gen. 7:11; Rev. 6:12; 8:5, 7; 11:13, 19; 16:18, 21). "Windows above and foundations below" is a merism indicating totality. God Himself would be the agent of their destruction (cf. 2 Sam. 22:8; Ps. 139:7-12; Amos 5:19).
- 24:19 Like a tall building in an earthquake, the earth will crack, begin to sway, and break apart (cf. Rev. 6:12-15). What God had created in the ordered world, would again become chaos (Heb. *tohu*, cf. v. 10).
- "This is what they chose: a world without the ordering hand of God and this, in faithful divine justice, is what they got."<sup>268</sup>
- 24:20 The prophet compared the earth under divine judgment to a reeling drunkard about to collapse and to an old shack about to fall down. A drunkard falls because of internal weakness, and a shack gives way

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<sup>266</sup>Grogan, p. 153.

<sup>267</sup>See Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13—39*, p. 188.

<sup>268</sup>Motyer, p. 204.

because of external pressures. What causes the destruction is the guilt of transgression that weighs heavily on the earth. This fall will be irrevocable.

This section of Isaiah's vision of God's victory over the nations (24:1-20) provides the basis for the following sections, which elaborate on features of the judgments previously described.

### **The coming King 24:21-23**

Isaiah hinted at the coming of a great future King in his oracles against Philistia and Edom (14:29-30, 32; 21:11-12). Now he revealed more.

24:21           When Yahweh brings universal judgment on the world again, He will sovereignly punish all unfaithful authorities both in the heavenly realm (evil angels, cf. Dan. 10:13; Eph. 6:12) and in the earthly (cf. Matt. 8:29; Rev. 12—13; 19:19; 20:2, 10). Rulers are the particular individuals in view.

24:22           Before God punishes them, He will confine them in a pit (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 17:8; 18:21; 19:3, 17-18, 20; 20:1-3, 11-15). "Many days" probably refers to the Millennium (cf. Rev. 20:1-3).

"What the apocalyptist of the New Testament describes in detail in Rev. xx. 4, xx. 11 sqq., and xxi., the apocalyptist of the Old Testament sees here condensed into one fact . . ." <sup>269</sup>

24:23           The moon and sun, the most glorious rulers of human life, in the physical sense, will be ashamed by the appearance of an even more glorious ruler (cf. Rev. 21:23). The sun and the moon were important gods in the ancient Near East, but no god can stand beside Yahweh. Isaiah's is a poetic description of relative glory. Isaiah did not use the astronomical words for moon and sun here but poetic equivalents, the "white" and the "hot." Yahweh Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem (cf. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-5; Zech. 14:9; Rev. 21:2, 10). Some amillennialists believe these are not real places but earthly names for the place from which God presently rules: heaven. Young wrote the following:

"Both Zion and Jerusalem are . . . figures of the seat of the eternal kingdom." <sup>270</sup>

Other passages reveal that Yahweh will reign in the person of Messiah (e.g., Rev. 20:4). Amillennialists believe that this will not be Messiah's rule over the earth; He will have no earthly rule in their view. But what

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<sup>269</sup>Delitzsch, 1:435.

<sup>270</sup>Young, 2:182.



Isaiah intended to reveal was that His spiritual rule, which has been in existence since Christ's first coming, they believe, will be all embracing.<sup>271</sup> His elders (vice regents) will be there and will behold His glory, as the elders of Israel beheld Yahweh's glory on Mount Sinai (Exod. 24:9-11; cf. Rev. 4:4, 9-11; 19:11-16).

"In each of the heavenly throne scenes there are other beings surrounding Yahweh's throne. 6:2 calls them . . . 'seraphs.' 1 Kgs 22:21 calls them . . . 'spirits.' Job 1:6 calls them . . . 'sons of god.' Here they are called . . . 'elders' (Rev 4—19 passim). They all seem to refer to the same beings who have the same functions."<sup>272</sup>

### **The world rejoicing in Messiah's reign ch. 25**

Isaiah next described the remnant, believers who will stream to Zion, praising God, at the beginning of Messiah's reign. Notice the many triadic formations in the structure of this chapter, creating a feeling of the completeness of joy. The prophet first pictured the pilgrims moving through a ruined world to Zion, singing of the wonder of their rescue and the Lord's power over their enemy.

"Soon after God in His judgment will wipe out sinful people (chap. 24) the Messiah's glorious kingdom will begin. In poetry Isaiah described the praise that will be ascribed to the Lord in the Millennium for His marvelous work."<sup>273</sup>

### **Pilgrims on the march 25:1-5**

25:1 The prophet reflects a personal knowledge of God; he is a saved person. He exalts and thanks Yahweh his God because He supernaturally and faithfully executed the outworking of plans that He had formulated long before.

The singer is probably Isaiah himself, who projected himself into the future time that he envisioned (cf. chs. 40—66). He spoke for the redeemed of that time, the beginning of the Millennium. Since Old Testament saints will be resurrected at the beginning of the Millennium (Dan. 12:2), Isaiah himself may utter this prophetic psalm of praise in the future. Isaiah included more praise of God among his prophecies than any other Old Testament writing prophet. We might even think of him as a psalmist as well as a prophet.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>271</sup>See *ibid.*

<sup>272</sup>Watts, p. 330.

<sup>273</sup>J. Martin, p. 1073.

<sup>274</sup>Grogan, p. 158.

- 25:2 What did God do? He destroyed the city of man, the world of city-state culture (cf. 24:10), as He said He would. The city, since the time of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9), was a biblical figure of self-salvation. In the Tribulation, God will humble the pride of man who seeks to save himself.
- 25:3 Strong people and groups of ruthless individuals will fear God and respect Him for what He has done. They will not necessarily become believers in Him, but they will acknowledge that He has done great things (cf. Rev. 9:20-21).
- 25:4 Specifically, they will confess how He delivered those who trusted in Him (during the Tribulation) in spite of the fierce antagonism of their enemies, which was like driving rain (cf. Ps. 61:2-4).
- 25:5 As a passing cloud provides relief from the heat during a drought, so the Lord gives His people relief by humbling the song of their ruthless foreign enemies.

"In either the sudden intensity of the cloudburst or the steady, enervating heat, life is threatened. Unless one has a stronghold against the flood (cf. Matt. 7:24-27) or a shade from the heat [Ps. 121:5], there is no hope."<sup>275</sup>

### **The coming great banquet 25:6-8**

Having delivered His people from the Tribulation and preserved them to enter His earthly kingdom, the Lord will invite them to rejoice with Him at a great banquet at the beginning of the Millennium (cf. Exod. 24:11).

- 25:6 All who enter the Millennium—everyone who does will be a believer—will stream to Mount Zion (24:23) where Yahweh will provide a joyful banquet for them. Amillennialists typically take Zion as a figurative representation of the church. According to Young, the banquet signifies "the spiritual blessings that God brings to mankind through His kingdom."<sup>276</sup> Inaugural banquets were fairly customary when ancient Near Eastern kings were crowned (cf. 1 Sam 11:15; 2 Sam. 6:18; 1 Kings 1:9, 19, 25; 8:62-65). The new king often bestowed favors on such occasions.
- 25:7-8 The Lord will also remove the curse of death that has hung over humankind since the Fall (cf. 26:19; Gen. 2:17; Job 19:26; Dan. 12:2; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:54; Heb. 2:15; Rev. 7:17; 21:4; 22:3). This will occur at the end of the Millennium, after the final rebellion and God's creation of new heavens and a new earth. Isaiah's vision of the future followed the course of events that later revelation clarified, but he did not

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<sup>275</sup>Oswalt, p. 462.

<sup>276</sup>Young, 2:192.

present the eschatological future as consisting of consecutive watertight compartments for two reasons. First, he did not see the future as clearly as later prophets did (1 Pet. 1:10-12), and second, he described the future here as a poet rather than as a historian. Isaiah here telescoped the millennial and eternal reigns of God—both aspects constitute His future kingdom—as He did the first and second advents of Christ (65:17-25).

Sovereign Yahweh will wipe the tears from each face (Rev. 7:17; 21:4), as a loving mother, and will remove the disgrace to His people from living in slavery to sin (cf. Josh. 5:9; Ezek. 5:13-17; Rom. 11:11-27). This is a promise from the Lord. It was customary for an ancient Near Eastern king at his banquet to demonstrate his power by performing some heroic act.<sup>277</sup>

### **The great joy to come 25:9-12**

The last part of this chapter returns to the emphasis of the first part: the joy that will come to God's people at this time.

25:9           The redeemed will rejoice that they are finally in the presence of the God, whose rule and care they had longed to be delivered to for so long (cf. Rev. 6:9-11; 7:9-12). Finally, hope will have given way to sight, and Old Testament saints will rejoice because they are finally with their Savior (cf. Rom. 11:25-26; 1 Cor. 13:9-10, 12).

25:10          The reason for their rejoicing is that God's hand of blessing that will rest on Zion then. In contrast, Moab, representing the godless nations antagonistic to Israel in the parallel oracle (chs. 15—16), will suffer judgment and humiliation under His foot. The mountains of Moab are visible to the east from the mountains surrounding Jerusalem.

"The same pride which held Moab back from seeking security in the divine promises in an earthly crisis (cf. 16:6) will exclude Moab from partaking of the heavenly promises. This is the ultimate tyranny of false choices."<sup>278</sup>

25:11-12      Moab would try to swim out of his predicament, as he had relied on himself and tried to save himself in the past, but the Lord will punish his clever pride. None of Moab's defenses against divine judgment will work. The Lord will bring them all down.

### **The future rejoicing of God's people ch. 26**

This section focuses on the remnant of Israel during the Millennium. It parallels the oracles against Ephraim (chs. 17—18) and Jerusalem (ch. 22) in the structure of this major part of Isaiah (chs. 13—27). Isaiah voiced the praise and prayer that will come to

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<sup>277</sup>Watts, p. 331.

<sup>278</sup>Motyer, p. 211.

God from Israel in the future because the Lord destroyed the "city" of man. He closed with a warning for the Israelites (vv. 20-21). The meaning of God's victory over the world for Israel is the theme.

### A song 26:1-6

26:1 The prophet revealed another song that will be sung "in that day" (the Millennium, cf. ch. 25) by those in Zion.

The New Jerusalem that God will set up will be a place of strength and security for the redeemed (cf. Rev. 21:9—22:5). I believe this will be a literal city with walls and gates, but many interpreters take the description as metaphorical. In that case what Isaiah meant was only that God would provide strength and security for His people.

26:2 Isaiah, writing as a psalmist, called on the porters to open the celestial city gates so the nation that was right with God could enter (cf. Ps. 15:1-5; 24:3-10; 118:19-22). The nation refers to Israel specifically in the context. Faithfulness and loyalty to the Lord will mark Israel then.

"God takes the very symbol of our rejection of him [i.e., a city] and transforms it into *Heaven*."<sup>279</sup>

26:3 The Lord keeps in true peace the mind-set that consistently trusts in Him (cf. Matt. 6:24; Phil. 4:7; James 1:6-8). Here believers are viewed corporately, but the same truth applies individually (cf. Ps. 112:7-8).

"Stayed upon Jehovah,  
Hearts are fully blest,  
Finding, as He promised,  
Perfect peace and rest."<sup>280</sup>

26:4 Isaiah urged everyone to trust in the Lord as a way of life, not just in a saving act of faith, because Yahweh, even Yahweh, is the very essence of what an everlasting rock should be (cf. 17:10; 30:29; 44:8; Exod. 33:21; Deut. 32:4; 1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 22:2, 32; Ps. 18:2; 19:14; 61:2; 1 Cor. 10:4). His presence is an unmoving place of refuge and protection from the elements and from all enemies. Augustus M. Toplady drew the inspiration for his hymn *Rock of Ages* from this verse.

"The issue of trust is the key to the entire segment beginning at 7:1 and concluding at 39:8. Will Judah commit her security to the nations or to God?"<sup>281</sup>

<sup>279</sup>Ortlund, p. 142.

<sup>280</sup>*Like a River Glorious*, by Frances R. Havergal.

<sup>281</sup>Oswalt, p. 472.

- 26:5 The New Jerusalem is secure because God brought down the city of the world and the proud who inhabited it (cf. 25:12). This is the reason God's people can and should trust in Him.
- 26:6 The feet of God's afflicted and helpless people will trample the fallen world (cf. Matt. 5:1-12), but it is the Lord alone who will subdue it.

### A prayer 26:7-19

Isaiah moved from a hymn of praise to a prayer that has two parts: present waiting for God (vv. 7-10) and future expectation from God (vv. 11-19).

- 26:7 Presently the path of the righteous is smooth in that the trip from justification to glorification is secure, though in experience we encounter many obstacles. Isaiah prayed that the "Upright One" would make the road that the righteous tread level in experience (cf. 40:3; Matt. 6:13). He used this unusual name for God because He wanted the One who is altogether right to make the path of His people altogether right.
- 26:8 The faithful people of God, Isaiah added, have waited for the Lord to act while following His commandments. They have sought a greater appreciation of Him rather than a change in their circumstances (cf. 1 John 1:1-4).

"Waiting is very difficult for most people, for it is an admission that there is nothing we can do at the moment to achieve our ends. Yet that admission is the first requirement for spiritual blessing. Until we have admitted that we cannot save ourselves, God cannot save us."<sup>282</sup>

- 26:9 Waiting was the experience of Isaiah individually as it was the experience of the faithful Israelites collectively. He sought the Lord rather than seeking a change in his circumstances. He recognized that God intends His commandments and His providential acts to teach people righteousness.
- 26:10 Yet the unrighteous do not learn the righteousness of God from His Word or His ways to the extent that they should. They do not understand but continue in sin and remain spiritually blind (cf. Rom. 3:9-18).<sup>283</sup>

Isaiah's concern changed from present to future conditions.

- 26:11 Even though the unrighteous do not recognize God's messages to them now, they will one day understand, when He brings these enemies of His into judgment.

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<sup>282</sup>Ibid., pp. 477-78.

<sup>283</sup>See Gary V. Smith, "Spiritual Blindness, Deafness, and Fatness in Isaiah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:678 (April-June 2013):166-78.

- 26:12 Yahweh would establish peace for His people (v. 3) because everything that they had done He had really done for them (cf. Phil. 2:12-13). We cannot establish peace for ourselves, but He will. Only He can break through the darkness of human depravity (Jon. 2:9).
- 26:13 Even though the Israelites had other earthly masters through their history (Pharaoh, the Philistines, et al.), it was Yahweh their God who kept them following Him.
- ". . . fidelity is not an attribute native to the people of God but a gift which he enables them to exercise."<sup>284</sup>
- 26:14 Those who oppressed God's people have died and are gone because God punished them. Many of their names have even been forgotten and are irretrievable by historians. The prophet was not denying the resurrection of the dead (cf. v. 19). He was simply affirming that these enemies neither continued to live, nor would they rise to bother God's people again.
- 26:15 Rather than Israel dying out as a nation, the Lord had increased her, as He promised Abraham (Gen. 15:5). This was not Israel's doing; the Lord had increased her borders and so gained great glory for Himself. During the reigns of David and Solomon the Israelites experienced numerical growth and geographical expansion. God would do the same for them in the future.
- "It is worth remembering that the land promised to Israel in Exodus 23:31 was never fully occupied, even in the days of David and Solomon, but that the bounds of the messianic kingdom are to be wider still (cf. Ps 72:8)."<sup>285</sup>
- Many amillennialists believe that the promises concerning the future increase of the Israelites found fulfillment in the inclusion of Gentiles in the church.<sup>286</sup>
- 26:16 The period of the judges is a good example of what the prophet wrote here. The Israelites suffered chastening from the Lord for departing from Him, but when they sought Him in their distress, even with just a whispered prayer, He saved them (cf. 1 Sam. 1:12-15).
- 26:17-18 During Isaiah's own times, Israel went through many pains, as a woman in labor. But rather than giving birth to something significant, the salvation of the world or many individuals, these experiences only proved painful for the Israelites. They had not learned from God's dealings with them any more than the nations had (v. 10).

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<sup>284</sup>Motyer, p. 217.

<sup>285</sup>Grogan, p. 166.

<sup>286</sup>E.g., Young, 2:221.

26:19 Was Isaiah referring to national survival or to individual resurrection here? Probably both.<sup>287</sup> He had been talking about the near-death experiences of Israel in the preceding verses (vv. 16-18), and he had already revealed that a remnant would enter the Millennium (25:6-10; cf. Ezek. 37). However, in the same passage the prophet also looked forward to the abolition of death itself (25:7-8). So probably we have both a figurative and a literal resurrection in view, a figurative resurrection of Israel in the future and a literal resurrection of Israelites in the future (cf. Dan. 12:2; Job 19:26). As dew descends, so God would come to the Israelites bringing refreshment and vitality (cf. Ps. 72:6; Hos. 14:5).

Interestingly, Young, who interpreted many of Isaiah's predictions figuratively, insisted, "The language [of verse 19] is not to be taken figuratively" (2:226).<sup>288</sup> He believed, correctly I think, that believers who actually died physically are in view here and that physical resurrection is in view.

### **A warning 26:20-21**

The prophet now addressed his people rather than God.

26:20 Before the restoration of Israel, however, God's people would experience hard times (in the Tribulation, cf. Rev. 12). Before God opened the gates of the new city to the redeemed (v. 2), they would need to shut their doors against their foes (cf. Gen. 7:1, 16; Exod. 12:22-23). Shutting the doors suggests both safety from danger and separation from others, in this case, pagans.

26:21 Yahweh would come out of His heavenly place of quiet to punish earth-dwellers during the Tribulation for their secret sins. The earth itself, with the forces of nature, would assist the Lord, metaphorically, by exposing sins that lay hidden (cf. v. 12).

### **The future regathering of God's people ch. 27**

The recurrence of the phrase "in that day" in verses 1, 2, 12, and 13 ties this chapter to what has preceded. Here is more information about the future, specifically the Millennium.

### **The defeat of Israel's enemies 27:1**

Leviathan was something very horrific (Job 3:8). It seems to have been a water beast either in reality or in myth (Job 41). The psalmist used it figuratively to describe Egypt, a powerful and deadly enemy of Israel (Ps. 104:26). Thus Leviathan was a symbol of the immense power arrayed against the Lord's people. It was also a figure in Canaanite mythology. Isaiah's reference to it does not mean he believed in the Canaanite myth. He

<sup>287</sup>See Chisholm, *A Theology . . .*, p. 322.

<sup>288</sup>Young, 2:226. See also Archer, p. 627.

simply used a term used in mythology to illustrate. Similarly, Christian preachers sometimes refer to fictional characters without believing that they really exist.<sup>289</sup> Here Leviathan's descriptions suggest that this dragon-like creature glides swiftly (possibly through the air, as a spirit being), that it is a deadly foe (like a coiling serpent), and that it inhabits the sea (a place notoriously uncontrollable by humans). In short, it seems to stand for the strong spiritual enemies of God's people. Some interpreters believe Isaiah had in mind Satan himself (cf. 24:21)—who occupies the air, the land, and the sea; he infests the whole creation. God will punish Satan and his host in the future (cf. 24:22-23).<sup>290</sup> Another view is that the swift serpent is an allusion to the fairly straight Tigris River, the coiling serpent to the more twisting Euphrates River, and the dragon by the sea to Egypt (the Nile River). Thus Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt are in view.<sup>291</sup> Still other interpreters favor taking the monsters and locations as representing all of Israel's human enemies.<sup>292</sup> I think the passage pictures God's punishment of Israel's enemies at the Second Coming.<sup>293</sup>

### The future blessing and former discipline of Israel 27:2-11

- 27:2            Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, announced that a delightful vineyard that produced wine was in view, and that the news about it was so good that the hearers could sing about it. The vineyard was an ancient and popular figure of the nation of Israel that Isaiah used earlier (5:7).
- 27:3            Yahweh had been its keeper, faithfully meeting its needs and vigilantly warding off its enemies (cf. 5:1-4; Ps. 121:4-5; Matt. 21:33; John 10:11-13).
- 27:4            He would not be angry with Israel in that future day (cf. Rom. 3:21-26; 5:8-11), as He had been in the past. If enemies tried to damage His vineyard, He would destroy them (cf. 5:6).
- 27:5            Enemies of the vineyard could come to the Lord for His protection and He promised to provide it (cf. 16:4-5). Peace would be possible for any enemies of God's people. In the Hebrew text the emphasis is on "with Me" in the first "Let him make peace with Me" and on "peace" in the second.
- 27:6            In the past, Israel had been a wild vine (cf. 5:2; Ps. 80), but in the future it would prove healthy and extremely productive. In fact it would be so vigorous that it would fill the whole earth with its goodness (cf. Gen. 49:22). Israel will have a positive influence on the whole world during the Millennium (cf. 35:1-3, 6-7; Gen. 12:3; Amos 9:13-14; Zech. 14:8).

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<sup>289</sup> See John N. Day, "God and Leviathan in Isaiah 27:1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:620 (October-December 1998):423-36; and Meredith G. Kline, "Death, Leviathan, and the Martyrs: Isaiah 24:1—27:1," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, pp. 229-49.

<sup>290</sup>Motyer, pp. 221-22; Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, pp. 547, 549.

<sup>291</sup>Grogan, p. 170; cf. Archer, p. 627.

<sup>292</sup>E.g., Young, 2:234-35. Cf. Delitzsch, 1:454-55.

<sup>293</sup>See also J. Martin, p. 1076.



"We can certainly see a spiritual fulfillment of this in the progress of the gospel throughout the world, for the Messiah is himself the true Vine (John 15:1-8) and his disciples the fruit-bearing branches. In this way God's purpose for Israel finds its expression in the supreme Israelite and those who are joined by faith to him."<sup>294</sup>

Grogan did not believe, however, that this interpretation exhausts the fulfillment of this passage that God intended, as many amillennialists do. He believed, as I do, in a literal future regathering and flourishing of Israel as a nation.

The figure of the vineyard ends here, and God's method of dealing with Israel follows.

27:7 Rhetorically Isaiah asked if the Lord had ever dealt as harshly with Israel as He had with Israel's oppressors. He had not, of course. He had always demonstrated special care and restraint when He dealt with His chosen people.

27:8 The Lord had scattered His people when they needed punishment, but He had not destroyed them. Since Isaiah used a feminine suffix here, it is possible that he alluded to a husband sending his wife away in divorce. He had let the fierce winds of His anger blow on them, but, as with the sirocco, His anger eventually subsided.

27:9 God would forgive Israel's iniquity in the same restrained fashion. He would provide for the pardoning of Israel's sin. This is a wonderful expression of salvation by grace. Consequently, Israel would not pursue idolatry any longer. Neither would there be any more need for sacrificial altars.

27:10-11 At that time the city of the world (24:10, 12; 25:2), notable for its fortifications, will lie overthrown and isolated. Some premillennialists regard this as a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.<sup>295</sup>

"Ruins testify to a commercial and militaristic civilization that has now become quietly pastoral."<sup>296</sup>

The prophet pictured the deserted condition of that city: calves grazing there and stripping the vegetation without human restraint, and women gathering dry wood for fires. Normally these activities took place outside cities. Dry limbs reflect a desolate condition since normally trees in cities were alive. The reason for the destruction of this city is that its inhabitants

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<sup>294</sup>Grogan, p. 171.

<sup>295</sup>See J. Martin, p. 1076.

<sup>296</sup>Watts, p. 350.

did not have discernment. They did not see their need to humble themselves and submit to God, even though He took great care to form them as His creatures.

### **The gathering of Jewish and Gentile believers 27:12-13**

- 27:12 The Lord would assemble the remnant of His people from the Promised Land as a farmer gathers up (gleans, cf. 24:13) his crops. Not only will He destroy His enemies then, but He will also gather redeemed Israelites into His kingdom (cf. Matt. 24:30-31; Rev. 14:15-16).
- 27:13 That day will prove to be the greatest Day of Atonement of all time (cf. v. 9). A trumpet blast will summon all the redeemed from distant parts of the earth, not just Jews from Palestine (cf. Zech. 14:9; Matt. 24:31). They, too, will come to Jerusalem and enter the millennial kingdom (cf. 19:24-25). Amillennialists typically interpret this gathering as a reference to the conversion of Gentiles to Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 1:10).<sup>297</sup> Isaiah used Assyria and Egypt here as he used Edom earlier (cf. 25:10), namely, as representative in his time of those areas of the world in the future.

"These verses provide a fitting climax to chs. 24—27 with their emphasis upon God's sovereignty over the nations and his intention to restore his people from the nations. In this respect this is the second of three such passages. The others are 11:12-16 and 35:1-10. Each of these occurs at the end of a major segment. This fact suggests something about the structure of the book. . . . chs. 7—12 make the point that if you trust in the nations, the nations will destroy you. Nonetheless, God will not leave his people in destruction; he intends to deliver them from the nations. But this raises the immediate question: *Can* he deliver them from the nations? Chs. 13—27 answer that question with a resounding affirmative. They do so first in a particularizing way, showing that all nations, including Israel, are under God's judgment (chs. 13—23). Then chs. 24—27 make the same point in a more generalized way, asserting that God is the main actor in the drama of human history. These things being so, God can deliver his people, and the promise is reaffirmed in these two closing verses."<sup>298</sup>

"Chapters 1—12 reveal God's saving purpose for Judah and Israel. Chapters 13—27 reveal his saving purpose for the whole world."<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>297</sup>See Young, 2:252.

<sup>298</sup>Oswalt, p. 500.

<sup>299</sup>Ortlund, p. 144.

### **3. The folly of trusting the nations chs. 28—33**

Chapters 28—35 are somewhat similar to chapters 13—27 in content and form. The same general pattern of argument unfolds, but the historical context is somewhat later. The historical context of chapters 13—27 was mainly Ahaz's reign, in which Judah faced temptation to trust in Assyria for her safety rather than in the Lord. As mentioned above, however, these chapters evidently contain a mosaic of prophecies that Isaiah delivered at various times during his ministry and then arranged in their canonical order for literary purposes. This theological arrangement of material marks the whole Book of Isaiah. Yet a general advance chronologically is also observable.

The historical context of chapters 28—35 was mainly Hezekiah's reign, in which Judah faced the temptation to trust in Egypt. The Judeans began looking more to Egypt for help while Assyria declined as a hope for Judah's salvation—as Ahaz had considered her—and instead became an increasing threat to the Southern Kingdom's security. Interest in alliance with Egypt was especially strong between the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. and Sennacherib's unsuccessful attack on Jerusalem in 701 B.C. Also different is the emphasis in chapters 13—27 on Yahweh's sovereignty over the nations compared with the emphasis in chapters 28—35 on Judah's choice to trust Him or not. This is a matter of emphasis, however, since both sections deal with both issues.

The first part of the present section, chapters 28—33, serves the same general function as chapters 13—23: they focus on the particular situation in Isaiah's day to warn Judah against trusting neighbor nations. The second part, chapters 34—35, like chapters 24—27, again project further into the future and deal more with Israel's eschatological hope.

The presence of six "woes" also marks off chapters 28—33 as a distinct unit of Isaiah's prophecy (28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1; cf. 5:8-10, 18-23; Matt. 23:13-39; Rev. 8:13; 9:12; 11:14; 12:12). Delitzsch referred to this section (chs. 28—33) as "the book of woes."<sup>300</sup> It is quite similar to the Book of Micah. Like chapters 13—27, his section is also divisible into three parts. Chapters 28—29 paint the picture of Judah's foolish leaders concluding that something must be done at once, other than trusting God, to save the people from their enemy. Here the principles involved in Judah's situation emerge clearly. Chapters 30—31 focus on the *proposed* solution, trust in Egypt, and the folly of that option. Chapters 32—33 stress the *proper* solution, namely: acknowledgment of Israel's true King and trust in Him. In these last four chapters, the application of the principles in history and in the eschaton receive more attention.

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<sup>300</sup>Delitzsch, 2:2.

| <b>"Principles</b>   | <b>Applications</b>  |
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| <b>28:1-29</b> When God's people reject his word (9-13) and covenant (14-15), destruction follows (18-22), held within divine purposes (23-29)   | <b>30:1-33</b> Refuge is sought in Egypt (1-7), rejecting the Lord's word (8-12), but his ultimate (13-26) and immediate (27-33) purposes are settled  |
| <b>29:1-14</b> There is disaster and deliverance (1-8) but historical deliverance does not change people spiritually. This needs a further divine action (9-14), which is already planned  | <b>31:1—32:20</b> Divine deliverance scorns both Egypt's help and Assyria's enmity (31:1-9). Beyond lies the perfect kingdom with true king (32:1) and transformed people (3:8). The pattern of history will be repeated: overthrow (9-14) and transformation (15-20)  |
| <b>29:15-24</b> People may think to run the world without God (15), but he is the sovereign and his transforming purposes (16-17) will work out spiritually (18-19), morally and socially (20-21), fulfilling what began in Abraham (22) and establishing a truly renewed people (23-24) | <b>33:1—35:10</b> Treacherous people (33:1, 8) may seem to rule but divine sovereignty remains (33:3, 10). The perfect kingdom (33:13-24), morally and socially (33:15) and spiritually (33:24), will come. The enemy will finally be destroyed (chapter 34) and the redeemed will gather to Zion (chapter 35)" <sup>301</sup> |

In chapters 28—29, Isaiah pointed out that the situations in the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms were quite similar. Both nations faced threats to their security from a strong foreign enemy, and unworthy leaders who urged trust in man rather than in God ruled both nations. Judah was in a more dangerous position, however, because her leaders were cynical; they believed nothing and trusted no one. They had become spiritually dull (ch. 28), and they were hypocritical (ch. 29).

### **The woe against Ephraim and Judah ch. 28**

"The section begins (1-6) and ends (23-29) with double illustrations drawn from nature and agriculture. Between lies a meditation in eight broadly equal parts on how Jerusalem's leaders refused the word of invitation and inherited the word of wrath (7-22)."<sup>302</sup>

### **The folly of Israel's leaders 28:1-6**

The prophet began by exposing the folly of the leaders of the Northern Kingdom. He condemned them for their proud scoffing. The "woe" appears at first to be against them alone, but as the chapter unfolds it becomes clear that Isaiah was pronouncing woe on the leaders of the Southern Kingdom even more.

<sup>301</sup>Motyer, p. 228.

<sup>302</sup>Ibid., pp. 228-29.

- 28:1 "Woe" (Heb. *hoy*), as mentioned earlier (cf. 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22; 6:5), is a term of lament and threat. It expresses emotion, summons others, and connotes sympathy. Here the object of the prophet's "woe" was the leaders of Ephraim, the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The reason for his "woe" was the pride of these representatives that was their outstanding mark and that resulted in their complacent revelry (cf. Amos 4:1; 6:1, 6). This nation and its leaders had been objects of admiration, but now their glory was fading, like the flowers they wore in garlands on their heads as they indulged in drunken revelry. Ephraim's capital, Samaria, stood like a crown at the eastern end of the fertile Shechem Valley, which drained into the Mediterranean Sea to the west. A false sense of security led these leaders to spend too much time drinking wine, which now controlled them.
- "The metaphor of drunkenness dominates the episode. It is a figure of Israel's stumbling, bumbling life during the last decades of its existence (*ca.* 740-21 B.C.)."<sup>303</sup>
- 28:2 Ephraim was in danger because the Lord had an irresistible agent who would humble her pride, as a storm overwhelms the unprepared. Assyria was that agent, but the prophet did not name it, perhaps because he wanted to emphasize the principles involved in the judgment.
- 28:3 With prophetic perfect tenses, Isaiah predicted the overthrow of Ephraim and its leaders. It was as good as accomplished. With hand (v. 2) and foot (v. 3), God would throw down and trample His people.
- 28:4 Ephraim's pride (v. 3) made her ripe for judgment. Her enemy would pluck her and consume her as greedily and as easily as a person who sees a ripe fig on a tree at the beginning of the fig season picks it, pops it into his mouth, and swallows it (cf. Hos. 9:10; Mic. 7:1).
- 28:5-6 "In that day," when Ephraim would fall, the Lord would also preserve a remnant of the Northern Kingdom. He would be the true crown (king, cf. 11:1-9) of His people and a source of glory for them, in contrast to their present fading garlands (cf. v. 1; 4:2-6). He would also become the standard and facilitator of justice for their judges and the strength of their soldiers (cf. 11:2). This does not mean that the faithful Ephraimites would turn on their enemies and defeat them, but that they would find in the Lord all that they had looked for previously in the wrong places. Note that this note of mercy concludes a pronouncement of judgment.

### **The folly of Judah's leaders 28:7-22**

Isaiah now compared the pride and indulgence of the Ephraimite leaders to that of their Southern Kingdom brethren. The leaders of Judah were even worse. There is some debate

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<sup>303</sup>Watts, p. 362.

among scholars about where reference to Ephraim's rulers ends and where reference to Judah's leaders begins. It seems to me that the context favors the change occurring between verses 6 and 7.

28:7-8           The priests and the false prophets in Judah, on the other hand, drank so much that their visions and judgments were distorted, and they degraded themselves by vomiting all over their tables.<sup>304</sup> Isaiah chose onomatopoeic words in Hebrew to mimic the staggering and stumbling of the drunkards: *shagu—taghu, shagu—taghu, shagu—paqu*.

28:9-10           These drunken leaders mocked Isaiah for the simplicity and repetition with which he presented the Lord's messages (cf. Acts 17:18).

"Verses 9, 10 give us the jeering reply of the pro-Assyrian party of King Ahaz, who resisted the impact of Isaiah's words recorded in the previous paragraph. They scoffed at his remarks as 'Sunday School moralizing,' appropriate for infants but quite irrelevant to grown men who understand the art of practical politics."<sup>305</sup>

"His [God's] laws are like little petty annoyances, one command after another, or one joined to another, coming constantly."<sup>306</sup>

They accused Isaiah of proclaiming elementary teaching and of speaking to them like small children (cf. 6:9-10). What Isaiah advocated was trust in the Lord rather than reliance on foreign alliances for national security. Isaiah built his hearers' knowledge bit by bit, adding a little here and a little there. This is, of course, the best method of teaching, but it has never appealed to proud intellectuals who consider themselves beyond the simplicity of God's truth. Similarly, today, many modern university professors of religion ridicule those who believe we should take the Bible at face value.

"There is no more hardened nor cynical person in the world than a religious leader who has seared his conscience. For them, tender appeals which would move anyone else become sources of amusement. They have learned how to debunk everything and to believe nothing (Heb. 10:26-31), all the while speaking loftily of matters of the spirit (Jas. 3:13-18)."<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>304</sup>See Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, ch. 7: "False Prophecy in Israel," for a good discussion of this subject.

<sup>305</sup>Archer, p. 628.

<sup>306</sup>Young, 2:276.

<sup>307</sup>Oswalt, p. 509.

"How odd that the more correction we need, the less we think we need it."<sup>308</sup>

28:11-12 Isaiah turned his critics' words back on themselves; what they had said about his words in mockery would overtake them. If God's people refused to listen to words spoken in simple intelligibility, He would give them unintelligibility as a judgment (cf. Matt. 23:37). Since they refused to learn from a prophet who appealed to them in their own language, He would teach them with plunderers whose language (Akkadian) they would not understand, but whose lances they would take in. They would learn to rest on Yahweh from their foreign foe's treatment of them if they refused to learn that lesson from Isaiah.

The Apostle Paul used verse 11 to remind the Corinthians that messages in tongues (foreign languages), far from being a sign of spirituality, indicate that the recipients are spiritually immature (1 Cor. 14:20-21). Likewise, Isaiah revealed that when people are so spiritually dull that simple messages do not move them, God will teach them through experience.

28:13 The Lord would continue to teach them bit by bit, and a little here and a little there, through hardship. The result would be retrogression, brokenness, entrapment, and captivity.

". . . in order for maturity to be reached, the child must be allowed to suffer the consequences of its actions. For the parent to intervene constantly and to nullify the results is to give the child a wholly misshapen understanding of life."<sup>309</sup>

28:14-15 The rulers in Jerusalem scoffed at the Lord's Word, but Isaiah called on them to listen to it. The woe oracle against the northern kingdom's rulers in verses 1-13 was something that Judah's leaders needed to learn from. "Scoffer" is the strongest negative term that the Old Testament writers used to describe the wicked (cf. Ps. 1:1-2; Prov. 1:22; 13:1; 14:9; 21:24; 29:8). A scoffer not only chooses the wrong way, but he or she also mocks the right way. He or she is not only misled, but he or she delights in misleading others. The rulers had made a covenant with some nation (probably Egypt) that involved deception and falsehood (probably against Assyria). Israel had already made a covenant with Yahweh that guaranteed her security (Exod. 19—Num. 10). Why did she need to make another? The rulers thought that as a result of their covenant, the scourge of their dreaded enemy (Assyria) would not touch them. But Isaiah sarcastically told them that their covenant was really with Death and Sheol; death would be the outcome of their pact. They were the naive ones, not he (cf. vv. 9-10).

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<sup>308</sup>Ibid., p. 511.

<sup>309</sup>Ibid., p. 513.

28:16 "In contrast to this supposedly clever diplomacy of power politics, God declares the true basis of Israel's safety: the person and work of the Messianic Redeemer."<sup>310</sup>

The Lord God's response to His people's lack of faith in Him was to reveal that He was doing something too. He was laying a firm foundation in Jerusalem that they could and should build on. This huge "stone" was tested, planted securely, and a sound basis for security. Ancient cornerstones were not the same as modern western ones. They were the largest and most determinative stone in the foundation of a building. Builders oriented the rest of the foundation in reference to this stone (cf. Eph. 2:20), and it supported the major portion of the superstructure. What was this stone? I believe it was Messiah (cf. Ps. 118:22; Zech. 3:9; 10:4; Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Rom. 9:33; 10:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6).

The commentators have offered many interpretations of this cornerstone, and several of them have written extended discussions of the figure. In biblical usage, the figure of God as a stone goes back to Genesis 49:24 (cf. Deut. 32:4; Isa. 8:14-15). Since Messiah would be God (9:6), the interpretation of this stone as Messiah is in harmony with these other biblical uses of the figure (cf. 8:14). God was doing something that would make possible a stable edifice (Israel), namely, preparing for Messiah. Those in Isaiah's day who believed that God was working for His people would not panic. Perhaps Isaiah's hearers did not recognize this as messianic prophecy when the prophet gave it (cf. 7:14; 9:6). Perhaps they thought that Isaiah just meant that God was doing something hidden that would result in the security of their nation, and they should trust Him.

28:17 The rulers had made a covenant in which they hoped (v. 15), but God would make justice and righteousness the measuring standards by which He would act and judge His people. They thought they could avoid the "overwhelming scourge" (cf. 10:22, 26) of their enemy by taking refuge in a treaty (v. 15), but God would allow them to be swept away by an adversary (cf. v. 2).

28:18-19 Their signed agreements would prove meaningless. Their boast of immunity from catastrophe would prove hollow. They mocked a message leading to rest and chose to embrace a message resulting in terror. The scourge God would send would be like a marauding beast as well as a hailstorm and a flood.

"The Assyrian annals report numerous returns to the same areas, each return being accompanied by vast slaughter and pillage. The steady hammer blows of such an attack spread

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<sup>310</sup>Archer, p. 628.



out over years, whether calculatedly so, or as a result of political exigencies elsewhere, could be expected to reduce a people to shivering terror, as the prophet noted here."<sup>311</sup>

- 28:20 The resting place and the cover the Judahites had chosen for themselves (v. 12) would prove disappointingly uncomfortable. A treaty with Egypt would be inadequate.
- 28:21 A second reason for the Jerusalemites' terror (cf. vv. 18-19) would be divine hostility. The Lord would rise up against His people to defeat them, as He formerly rose up to defeat the Philistines at Mount Perazim (lit. breaking forth) "like the break-through of waters" (2 Sam. 5:20; 1 Chron. 14:11). He had also defeated the Canaanites in the valley of Gibeon with hailstones (Josh. 10:11). Defeating the Israelites was strange work for the Lord because He customarily defended them. Judgment is His "strange work," especially judgment of His own people, a work foreign to what He usually does, namely: bless.
- 28:22 Isaiah called on the rulers to stop being scoffers (cf. v. 14), or their punishment would be worse. It was unavoidable, but by repenting they could lessen it. Thus, this section of the "woe" that describes judgment coming on Judah ends with a note of mercy, just as the section describing judgment coming on Ephraim did (vv. 5-6).

### A call for repentance 28:23-29

How would the leaders of Judah respond? Would they continue in their chosen course of action and so suffer the fate of the Northern Kingdom, or would they repent and experience a milder judgment? Isaiah ended this "woe" by illustrating the alternatives and urging repentance (cf. chs. 5—6).

"Isaiah here proves himself a master of the *mashal* [proverb]. In the usual tone of a *mashal* song, he first of all claims the attention of his audience as a teacher of wisdom."<sup>312</sup>

- 28:23 The prophet appealed to his audience to listen to him (cf. Mark 4:3, 9), even though some of them were scoffers. What he had to say was very important for them. Failure to listen to God's Word had been the fatal flaw of the leaders, but they could still hearken and respond. The prophet used two illustrations.
- 28:24-26 A wise farmer follows a plan in his plowing and planting so each type of seed will grow best. Some seed requires planting under the ground and other seed on top. God teaches the farmer this discrimination just as God

<sup>311</sup>Oswalt, pp. 519-20.

<sup>312</sup>Delitzsch, 2:14.

Himself practices discrimination in dealing with people. Earlier in this chapter Isaiah offered a promise of blessing (vv. 5-6), but later he promised blasting (vv. 14-22). God would use both instruments to deal with His people. Using both was not inconsistent.

28:27-29 Likewise a farmer threshes dill, cummin, and grain in different ways. This is also wisdom that Yahweh of armies teaches. A simple farmer learns how to plow, plant, thresh, and grind from God, by studying nature, and as he applies what God teaches, there is blessing. How much more should the sophisticated leaders of Judah learn from Him to trust Him.

". . . God measures the instruments of His purpose to the condition of His people; He employs what will best carry out His holy will."<sup>313</sup>

"The farmer does not plow for the sake of plowing, but rather to prepare for his intended crop. So also God prepares his garden for the crop he wishes to reap—the crop of righteousness from a holy people. To this end God must employ the cutting and crumbling force of disciplinary judgments, perfectly adjusted to Israel's spiritual needs, just as the farmer (using the intelligence God gave him) uses the proper threshing instruments for each type of grain."<sup>314</sup>

An implication of these two parables (vv. 24-25 and 27-28), not stated, is that God might deal differently with the Southern Kingdom than He dealt with the Northern Kingdom. The Jerusalemites should not conclude that because God would allow the Assyrians to defeat the Ephraimites, the same fate would necessarily befall them. A change of attitude could mitigate their judgment. So this whole "woe" ends with an implied offer of grace.

As things worked out, of course, God did allow an invading army to take the Judahites into captivity, after a different invading army had first taken the Israelites captive. But that did not happen at the same time. Sennacherib destroyed Samaria but not Jerusalem. God postponed Judah's judgment because He found a measure of repentance there.

### **Two woes against Jerusalem ch. 29**

There are two more "woes" that deal with Jerusalem in this chapter (vv. 1-14, 15-24) in addition to the one in chapter 28. The first of these is similar to the previous "woe" (cf. vv. 1-8 with 28:1-6, and vv. 9-14 with 28:7-13). Isaiah condemned the Jerusalemites for their religious hypocrisy.

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<sup>313</sup>Young, 2:301.

<sup>314</sup>Archer, p. 629.

**Judah's religious hypocrisy 29:1-4**

29:1 Isaiah addressed this oracle to Ariel (lit. altar hearth, cf. Ezek. 43:15-16). Another meaning, "lion of God" (cf. 31:4; Gen. 49:9; 2 Sam. 23:20; 1 Kings 10:19-20; 1 Chron. 11:22), was probably not intended here since Isaiah described Ariel as the place where Israel's religious festivals took place. Clearly Ariel refers to Jerusalem, the city where David set up his headquarters (cf. 2 Sam. 5:9), and Mount Zion (v. 8), the site of Judah's worship.

"Jerusalem prides itself as being God's altar-hearth, the very heart of the only cult [system of worship] that pleases him. But, in fact, God is not pleased at all."<sup>315</sup>

The city also boasted of its heritage in David, but the present residents did not share David's heart for God (cf. v. 13). The prophet directed the city to continue to observe its annual religious feasts regularly. This seems to be a sarcastic call to continue offering the sacrifices, which the people thought assured their blessing by God, even though they were doing so as an empty ritual (cf. v. 13). These meaningless acts of worship would not avert judgment to come (v. 2; cf. Hos. 8:11-14; Amos 4:4-5).

"The true poignancy of the 'woe' here lies in the fact that the God who had enabled David to take it would now besiege this city himself, through its enemies (v. 5), and cause its destruction by fire just as if the whole city had become an extension of the [brazen] altar hearth within its temple."<sup>316</sup>

29:2 The Lord would bring the city into distress, lamentation, and mourning. It would become like an altar hearth in that it would become a place of death.

"If we treat lightly the sacrifices God has made available (and in the Christian era, The Sacrifice) then we ourselves become the sacrifice. If we will not accept God's substitution, we must carry the burden of our own sin (Heb. 10:26-27; Rom. 8:11-13)."<sup>317</sup>

29:3 Yahweh would bring Jerusalem under siege. David had camped there (v. 1), but God would camp there too. This probably refers to His use of Sennacherib and the Assyrians for this purpose in 701 B.C., though other armies also besieged Jerusalem (cf. Dan. 1:1).

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<sup>315</sup>Oswalt, p. 526.

<sup>316</sup>Grogan, p. 187.

<sup>317</sup>Oswalt, p. 527.

- 29:4 Both the status and the strength of the city would suffer humiliation. The people's weak voices would reflect their abject condition under Yahweh's sovereign discipline.

### **Restoration following judgment 29:5-8**

The prophecy now changes from judgment to restoration following judgment.

- 29:5 God would powerfully blow away the enemy, who would be as numerous and insignificant as dust and chaff, even though the enemy built great ramparts and siege towers to storm Jerusalem. His deliverance, like that of a storm, would be very quick (cf. 37:36). God would judge those whom He had sent to judge His people. God will do a similar thing at the end of the Tribulation (cf. Zech. 14:1-3).
- 29:6 The Lord Himself would be directing Jerusalem's judgment. He would use the audible, the visible, and the invisible, to shake, remove, and consume the city. These are probably not the instruments that He would use as much as expressions of His sovereign power. This is the classic language of theophany in which images express God's powerful intervention in the world (cf. Exod. 19:16-19; 1 Kings 19:11-13; Ezek. 20:47-48).
- 29:7 However, eventually "all" the enemies of Israel would vanish, just as the subject of a nightmare disappears when one wakes up (cf. 37:36-37). This points beyond the Assyrian invasion and includes all similar attempts to destroy Jerusalem in the future. The events of 701 B.C. were a partial fulfillment, but the ultimate fulfillment is still future (cf. Rev. 20:8-9). The Exodus was a similar earlier deliverance.

"Sennacherib's forces lifted the siege to fight the Egyptians at Eltekeh. It was on their return from that victorious engagement that the devastating stroke of God here predicted fell upon them."<sup>318</sup>

- 29:8 Israel's attackers would also dream of devouring their enemy, of drinking them down, but when they awoke to reality they would discover that their desires were unfulfilled. Israel has proved to be an elusive enemy, by God's grace, throughout history.

### **The reason for coming judgment 29:9-14**

Verses 9-14 explain the reason for Jerusalem's judgment (cf. 28:7-13).

- 29:9 Jerusalem's leaders would delay (actually, "be delayed," by their lack of perception) and wait to act in faith because they were spiritually blind and drunk (cf. 6:9-10). Isaiah was apparently speaking to them ironically again

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<sup>318</sup>Archer, p. 629.

(cf. v. 1). If the people of Jerusalem failed to see the importance of trusting God in the face of enemy attack, and failed to trust Him, they would find it even more difficult to see His will and do it later. When people see the will of God and refuse to do it, they become incapable of seeing it and doing it further (cf. Acts 28:26-28; Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; Heb. 4:1-11). This is serious spiritual blindness and drunkenness.

29:10 The people already found it more difficult to see God's will and act obediently because God had shut their eyes and covered their heads (cf. 6:9-10; 1 Sam. 26:12; 1 Kings 22:22; 2 Thess. 2:9-12). He had not given most of their prophets and seers insight into what was coming that they could share with the people. Isaiah and a few other faithful spokesmen were the exceptions.

". . . determined spiritual insensitivity becomes judicial spiritual paralysis."<sup>319</sup>

29:11-12 "The entire vision" probably refers to the whole Book of Isaiah.<sup>320</sup> God would hide His will from those who could know it but did not have the spiritual discernment to understand it. This would lead the people to appeal for an interpretation of His will for those who did not even have the intellectual ability to understand it. In other words, God would hide His plans from the people completely because all of them were spiritually obtuse, the literate and the illiterate.

29:13 The Lord had observed that the people of Jerusalem were going through the motions of worship without a vital, daily relationship of trust and obedience with Him. Their worship was a matter of traditional ritual observance, rather than a heartfelt desire to interact with Him (cf. Matt. 15:9; John 4:23-24).

29:14 Therefore He would again deal with them in a way that would cause others to marvel, as He had done in the past when they sank to this level. Their wise men would not be able to view life from God's perspective, and their discerning men would not be able to see through things to the real issues (cf. 28:29). Inability to see would be their punishment for choosing not to see (cf. 5:21; 11:2; 26:7-10; 1 Cor. 1:19).

### **The remedy for spiritual blindness 29:15-24**

The remedy for this spiritually blind state is the subject of the next "woe" (vv. 15-24). It begins with a word of condemnation for deception (vv. 15-16), proceeds to explain what God will do (vv. 17-21), and ends with a summary statement (vv. 22-24).

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<sup>319</sup>Motyer, p. 239.

<sup>320</sup>Watts, p. 386.

- 29:15 "Woe" announces divine condemnation of another trait of the Jerusalemites: their habitual and determined decision to try to hide from God (cf. Gen. 3:8). The political strategists seem to be particularly in view.<sup>321</sup> They tried to hide their plans from the Lord so they could be their own masters, as they thought, to live as they pleased rather than as He instructed them. Previously King Ahaz had tried to hide his appeal to Assyria for help (ch. 7).
- 29:16 These politicians turned things upside down. They denied the Lord's distinctiveness, sovereignty, and wisdom—and attributed those characteristics to themselves (cf. v. 14; 45:9; 64:8; Gen. 2:7; Jer. 18:1-6; Rom. 1:25; 9:19-21). They told the Lord what to do rather than trying to discover what He wanted to do.
- "It is the forgetting of God's right as Maker that leads to ethical relativism."<sup>322</sup>
- 29:17-18 The Lord would demonstrate His distinctiveness, sovereignty, and wisdom soon by reversing the conditions of the proud and the humble, symbolized by the forest and the field (cf. 2:13; 10:34; 33:9; 35:2; 37:24; 60:13; Matt. 5:5). This change will be literal in the Millennium. Note the mention of "just a little while" and "on that day," phrases that often introduce eschatological conditions. The deaf would hear and the blind would see (cf. vv. 9-12; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:4). Isaiah's point was that only God could do these things, not man. The fact that Jesus Christ was able to do this shows that He was God.
- "Lebanon probably represents man in his self-pride."<sup>323</sup>
- 29:19 The Lord would also cause the afflicted and the needy to be happy in the Holy One of Israel (cf. Matt. 5:3). True joy in worship would appear (cf. v. 13; Rev. 22:1-5).
- 29:20-21 God will destroy the mighty as well as elevate the helpless (cf. v. 17). He will correct social ills. The samples of wicked behavior that Isaiah offered have been all too prevalent throughout history. The ruthless are unscrupulous in wielding their power (cf. v. 5; 13:11; 25:3-5). Scorners deny moral absolutes (cf. 28:14, 22). Those intent on doing evil bend law and order to achieve their ends. Specifically, those who abuse the legal system by committing perjury, tampering with witnesses, and withholding protection from the innocent will come to an end. The prophet pictured false witnesses, crooked lawyers, and corrupt judges (cf. Hos. 4:1-2; Amos 2:6-8; 5:10-11; Mic. 2:1-2).

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<sup>321</sup>Ibid., p. 389.

<sup>322</sup>Oswalt, p. 537.

<sup>323</sup>Archer, p. 630.

29:22 The Lord, who began a good work of redemption in Abraham, would bring it to completion (cf. Phil. 1:6). Jacob may have felt embarrassed by all that his descendants had done, as—Isaiah suggested—Jacob looked down from heaven on them. But he would no longer feel ashamed of them, or fear God's dealings with them, when he saw the transformations that God would make in them. They would finally trust in the Lord as they should.

29:23 The Lord would halt the downward course of the history of Jacob's family, and transform them. The Israelites would at last confess their God as holy and acknowledge His holiness as central in their lives. They would be fruitful rather than barren. The text gives no basis for interpreting the people in view as the spiritual seed of Jacob, the church.<sup>324</sup>

"It is awe inspired by wondering gratitude that will bring about this profound sense of 'the godhood of God.' It is this deep awareness of God's goodness to them as a nation that will produce a penitent and receptive spirit in those formerly wayward and complaining."<sup>325</sup>

29:24 Those who are the work of God's hands, the Israelites, will demonstrate steadfastness in their lives. Their formerly incorrect understanding will be straightened out. Those who have been critical, feeling superior, will accept instruction. Deliverance leads to praise, which results in understanding, just as lack of understanding leads to pride resulting in judgment.

"Just as Abraham was separated from the human race that was sunk in heathenism, to become the ancestor of a nation of Jehovah, so would a remnant be separated from the great mass of Israel that was sunk in apostasy from Jehovah; and this remnant would be the foundation of a holy community well pleasing to God."<sup>326</sup>

When will all this happen? It will happen in "just a little while" (v. 17), "on that day" (v. 18), a day yet future but not specifically identified in the context. Since it has not happened yet, and since similar changes accompany Jesus Christ's millennial reign, that seems to be the day in view.

"The Redeemer will surely bring to pass his perfect plan for Israel, and forge them into a godly and reverent people, after they have repented and opened their hearts to the truth of Christ."<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>324</sup>This was the view of Young, 2:332.

<sup>325</sup>Grogan, p. 191.

<sup>326</sup>Delitzsch, 2:25.

<sup>327</sup>Archer, p. 630.

In the next three "woes" (chs. 30—33) Isaiah became more specific. In the first three (chs. 28—29) he stressed principles of God's dealings with His people, but in these last three (chs. 30—33) he applied the principles to the historical situation they faced. However, there is a blending of historical and eschatological emphases in these "woes."

### **The woe against rebellion by God's children ch. 30**

There are several thematic connections between this chapter and chapter 28.<sup>328</sup> The general structure of the chapter is chiasmic.

- "A Contemporary events: Egypt no help (1-7)  
 B Coming human events: the refusal of the word, the way of death (8-17)  
 B' Coming divine events: the waiting God, the sure glory (18-26)  
 A' Contemporary events: Assyria no threat (27-33)"<sup>329</sup>

The first two parts stress human unfaithfulness, and the last two emphasize divine faithfulness. The first section (vv. 1-7) is divisible into two parts, the first dealing with the embassy to Egypt (vv. 1-5), and the second an oracle about the animals of the Negev (vv. 6-7). The whole woe is for stubborn rebellion against God by seeking foreign alliances.

### **The folly of seeking help from Egypt 30:1-7**

30:1 Yahweh pronounced woe on the Judahites who were acting like rebellious children (cf. 1:2; Deut. 21:18-21). They were carrying out a plan that was not the Lord's. Specifically they were seeking an alliance with Egypt. Yahweh had forbidden returning to Egypt (Exod. 13:17; Deut. 17:16). He knew that Egypt would tempt them to do things contrary to His will. These Judahites added to the sin of acting without divine direction, the sin of seeking security from a source other than the Lord Himself.

Christians often do the same thing. God has said, "Do not go there," regarding some places that we may think will provide satisfaction for us (e.g., pornographic websites, restaurants where we can go to fill up so we feel better about some sorrow in our lives, a mall where we can buy something new that we think will make us feel better, etc.). In rebellion, we sometimes go there anyway.

30:2 How ironic that God's people thought they could find life in Egypt, which had historically been a place of death for them and from which they had fled formerly (cf. Exod. 1:22). Furthermore, they had done this without even consulting the Lord, a failure that had resulted in the Gibeonite compromise generations earlier (cf. Josh. 9:14). However, it seems that

<sup>328</sup>See the chart under my introductory comments to chapters 28—33 above.

<sup>329</sup>Motyer, p. 244.



failure to consult God's Word was their mistake here more than failure to pray. Rather than seeking safety under the shadow of the Almighty (Ps. 91:1), they had sought it under the shadow of Pharaoh.

"In Ashurbanipal's late reign and in those of his successors, Assyria had become less aggressive. But Psamtik I, Pharaoh of Egypt, increased in power and ambition. Jerusalem's leaders were determined to play the game of power politics, pitting one superpower against the one they thought would be its successor."<sup>330</sup>

30:3 The safety they had sought would prove to be a delusion. The supposed protection that Pharaoh offered would result in the disappointment of hope, and the shelter that Egypt promised would turn to disgrace. The Pharaoh at this time was Shabako, a Nubian. The Egyptians were not even strong enough to provide a native Egyptian to rule them. This was a weak period in Egyptian history. I am assuming that the historical context of this prophecy was shortly before Sennacherib's invasion of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.

30:4 Judah's ambassadors had reached Egyptian governmental centers at Zoan (Gr. Tanis), in the northern Nile delta, and Hanes, farther south, and were evidently received warmly.

30:5 Nevertheless, the Judahites were bound to be ashamed because the Egyptians would not help them fight against the Assyrians. Unwilling to humble themselves, Yahweh would humble His people by humiliating them.

"From the feared killer (Assyria) they seek help in the proved killer (Egypt)! It is ever so when alternatives to the Lord's salvation are chosen."<sup>331</sup>

30:6 Verses 6 and 7 may constitute an original separate oracle that Isaiah added to the preceding one, since it forms a fitting climax to his thought. Alternatively, the title "oracle" (lit. burden) may be wordplay with the objects of this prophetic message, the burden-bearers (beasts) of the Judean ambassadors. The title is very similar to those in 21:1, 11, and 22:1.

Rather than going directly to Egypt through Philistia, the Judean ambassadors had taken the circuitous and dangerous route through the Negev, probably to avoid Assyrian detection. They had taken roughly the same route as their ancestors who left Egypt in the Exodus, only traveling

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<sup>330</sup>Watts, p. 395.

<sup>331</sup>Motyer, p. 246.

in the opposite direction (cf. Num. 21:6; Deut. 8:15). This irony highlights the folly of returning to Egypt for help. The Lord expressed more concern for the animals that carried the ambassadors, than for the ambassadors themselves, since the ambassadors were rebelling against Him.

"A caravan loaded with treasure struggles through wild terrain infested with lions and snakes, all to buy the help of an old dragon who is in fact helpless. All the cost in effort and wealth will come to nothing, says the prophet."<sup>332</sup>

30:7 Egypt, of all nations, would not be a help to God's people. She would live up to the nickname that the Lord had given her (cf. Ps. 87:4). "Rahab" means pride, turbulence, arrogance, boastfulness. There is no intended connection with Rahab the harlot (Josh. 2). In popular Ugaritic legend, Rahab was a sea monster, or a dragon. Her promises of help would be worth nothing. Rahab was a "do nothing" ally. This dragon would prove to be toothless (unable to ward off Assyria).

Similarly, when God's people today go to places that God has prohibited, to find satisfaction apart from Him, the result is disappointing at best, and disastrous at worst.

#### **Punishment for trusting in Egypt 30:8-17**

The Lord now commanded Isaiah to record this condemnation for trust in Egypt so there would be a permanent record of it. There were two reasons he was to do this. First, Judah had refused revealed truth in general with the result that she incurred guilt before the Lord (vv. 9-14; cf. Luke 6:6-11). Second, she had refused a specific message that would result in destruction from an external enemy (vv. 15-17).

30:8 The Lord commanded Isaiah to write a public record on a table and a private one on a scroll, two enduring witnesses against His people's lack of trust in Him. The public record was for His people then to learn from, and the private one was for later generations. Other ancient Near Eastern nations recorded uniformly positive and complementary things about themselves, in contrast to what Isaiah wrote here about Judah. The content of what he wrote is unclear, but it was probably this oracle in some form.

30:9 These records were necessary because Israel had proved to be a rebellious, disappointing son of God who refused to listen to His instruction (Heb. *torah*). This is a general indictment.

30:10-11 In their attitudes and actions the Judahites had made the statements in these verses, though probably not with their mouths. They wanted innocuous preaching that did not confront them with the will of the Holy One of Israel.

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<sup>332</sup>Oswalt, p. 547.

30:12 But the Holy One of Israel would not let them escape His Word. They had rejected His will and had rested their confidence on what seemed best to them.

30:13-14 Consequently their iniquity would lead to disaster, similar to the sudden internal collapse of a high wall, and the severe external smashing of an earthenware jar. It would be complete, as when no useful pieces remain after the smashing of a pot. That judgment *had* not yet come was hardly grounds for concluding that it *would* not come (cf. Matt. 24:36-44; Mark 13:32-37; 2 Pet. 3:3-10).

"The interval from the first cracks until the actual collapse [of a wall] may be a long time, but when the collapse comes it is terribly sudden and irreversible. So it will be with this refusal to rely on God. Years may pass, but one day the Assyrians will stand at the door with all Judah in ruins behind them."<sup>333</sup>

When God miraculously slew Sennacherib's besieging forces around Jerusalem in 701 B.C., the Assyrians had already destroyed much of Judah.

30:15 The second, more specific reason for Judah's coming judgment (cf. v. 9), was her refusal to listen to a particular message from the sovereign Lord her God, the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah had called the people to repent and rest in the Lord for their salvation. He had promised that their quiet trust in Him would prove to be their strength (cf. 7:4, 10-12; 28:12). He had commanded "not alliance but reliance."<sup>334</sup> Yet the people refused to obey.

30:16 Their punishment would be talionic; their punishment would fit their crime. They would flee before their very swift enemy, because they chose to run away on swift horses rather than to rest in the Lord (cf. Matt. 26:52). When we rely on our swiftness and strength, it is only a matter of time before someone faster and stronger comes along and overtakes us.

"The film *Chariots of Fire* illustrates what this looks like in real life. It tells the story of two men, Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell. Both are great athletes on the same team, but there is a difference. Abrahams competes out of an inner drivenness. He is deeply insecure. He has a point to prove. It's all about him. Liddell also competes to win. But he runs out of a sense of God's goodness. He's not in bondage to himself. He runs for the glory of God. Two men, two motives, two inner lives — Eric Liddell competing in the

<sup>333</sup>Oswalt, p. 554.

<sup>334</sup>G. A. Smith, *The Book of Isaiah*, 1:128.

Holy Spirit, Harold Abrahams running on sheer adrenaline. It's the difference between spirituality, even in athletics, and self-absorption."<sup>335</sup>

30:17 The threat of only one man would so terrify a thousand Judahites that they would flee. The presence of only a few of the enemy would drive multitudes from their land (cf. Lev. 26:8; Deut. 32:30). Again, a double illustration (at the end of the verse) stressed a complete overthrow (cf. v. 14). A deserted flag or signal on a hilltop would be all that was left to indicate the former presence of the people of Judah (cf. 6:11-12). This is probably another reference to the remaining remnant.<sup>336</sup>

### **Distant restoration in spite of unfaithfulness 30:18-26**

Until now the emphasis in this "woe" was on human activity, but now divine activity takes the spotlight, especially God's faithfulness ultimately (vv. 18-26) and imminently (vv. 27-33). Human unfaithfulness does not destroy divine faithfulness (cf. 2 Tim. 2:13). This section is also structurally chiasmic.

30:18 Yahweh is a God of justice; He will do what is right at the right time. Since He promised to bless His people, He will also, after punishing them for their lack of trust, extend grace and show compassion to them. So those who long for Him will experience blessing when their waiting is over.

30:19 After the tears will come comfort and caring. It is the people of Zion and Jerusalem that will experience this. God will answer their prayers and they will be joyful. This happened in measure at the return from captivity, but the ultimate fulfillment will be at Christ's second coming.

30:20-21 After God hid Himself from His people, having given them privation and oppression as their daily food and drink, as a prison sentence, He would finally reveal Himself to them again. As their teacher, God would guide them in His moral will (cf. v. 15; 26:9; 28:9-13; 29:11-12). Then their eyes would see Him and their ears would hear His voice correcting their deviations from His path (cf. vv. 9-11).

30:22 They will demonstrate a change of attitude and commitment as well. Idolatry will no longer appeal to them, and they will abandon false gods.

30:23-24 There will be plenty of rain so the harvests will be bountiful. The agriculture of Palestine depended totally on rain.<sup>337</sup> There will be such abundant pastureland for the cattle that they will eat the best food.

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<sup>335</sup>Ortlund, p. 174.

<sup>336</sup>Delitzsch, 2:33.

<sup>337</sup>Watts, p. 401.

30:25-26 There will also be an abundance of water, even on the hilltops, when the Lord defeats His enemies (at Armageddon; cf. v. 19; 2:12-17; 25:1-5; Rev. 16:16; 19:17-21). Increased light and the healing of God's formerly broken and bruised people will also mark "that day" (cf. 24:23; Rom. 8:21). The point is that things will be much better then than now. It may be impossible for life as we know it to exist if there were literally seven times as much light as there is now. Yet a renovation of nature as well as humankind is in view.

"Evidently [this is] a description of the glories of the Millennium (since this kind of prosperity has no appropriateness for a heavenly existence)."<sup>338</sup>

Young interpreted these blessings as referring to the blessings of salvation.<sup>339</sup>

### **Imminent restoration in spite of unfaithfulness 30:27-33**

From the distant future (millennial blessings), Isaiah turned to the immediate future and promised deliverance from the Assyrian threat. In spite of the Judahites' sinful reliance on Egypt, God would spare them from defeat at the hands of the Assyrians.

30:27-28 The Lord would involve Himself in Judah's situation personally, His name being the summation of His character (cf. Exod. 3:15; Ezek. 1:28). He would come from heaven to judge the nations. The imagery of the passage is strongly anthropomorphic and theophanic (cf. Exod. 13:21; 19:18; Ps. 18:7-15; 50:3; Nah. 1:3-8; Hab. 3:3-15). "Anthropomorphic" means in human form, and "theophanic" means Godlike in appearance. God's anger burned like fire, and His judgment would overwhelm people like a flood. He would sift the nations in judgment like grain in a sieve, and He would control them as a rider directs his horse.

30:29-30 The Judahites would rejoice as they worshipped the Lord because of His deliverance (cf. Exod. 15:21; 17:1-7). It would be spectacular. The storm god with upraised arm was a familiar motif in ancient Near Eastern art.<sup>340</sup>

30:31-32 Assyria would tremble at God's judgment of her. The Lord's blows would be matched by His people's rejoicing at the defeat of their enemy (cf. Rev. 19:1-10).

30:33 Topheth refers to a funeral pyre. The Hebrew word means a disgraceful "burning place" or "fireplace." The Lord had prepared it long ago for the king of Assyria (cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:10; 21:8). Sennacherib met his defeat in Jerusalem when the Lord slew many of his soldiers there, but he

<sup>338</sup>Archer, p. 630. Cf. Delitzsch, 2:39.

<sup>339</sup>Young, 2:360-63

<sup>340</sup>Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient . . .*, pp. 481, 484, 486, 490, 531, 532.

personally died in Nineveh shortly after that. Topheth was an area in the valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem where the Israelites sometimes sacrificed their children to the Ammonite idol Molech (2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:31).

"When the OT speaks of burning bodies it is taken as a sign of vengeance or degradation (cf. 1 Sam 31:12; Amos 6:10; Lev 20:14; 21:9; Josh 7:25; *ISBE* 1:812; *IDB* 1:475)." <sup>341</sup>

The overthrow of Assyria took place at Charchemish, in northern Syria, when the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar II ended Assyrian dominance in the ancient Near East and also defeated Egypt, in 605 B.C.

### **The woe against rejecters of God's help chs. 31—32**

Like the third "woe" (ch. 30), this fourth one deals with the folly of trusting in Egypt for security rather than the Lord. It applies particularly the principles set forth in the first part of the second "woe" (29:1-14), as is clear from the many word and thought links in these passages.

#### **Imminent disaster and later deliverance 31:1-5**

The first five verses constitute a prologue to this "woe" and deal with imminent disaster followed by later deliverance.

"Without any particular break in the thought Isaiah continues his denunciation of those who look to Egypt for aid." <sup>342</sup>

31:1 The prophet condemned those in Judah and Jerusalem who were relying on the brute strength, the military might, and the trained personnel of Egypt to provide security for their nation (cf. Deut. 17:14-20). Going down to Egypt to secure these things revealed a lack of trust in the Holy One of Israel who had long ago proved His sovereignty over Egypt. Rather, the people should have simply looked to the Lord and cultivated a relationship with Him.

". . . when any people feel that special weapons can relieve them of dependence upon God, they are on the road to destruction." <sup>343</sup>

31:2 The politicians in Jerusalem who advocated alliance with Egypt undoubtedly considered their policy wise (cf. 5:21; 19:11-15; 28:14-15; 30:1-2). But Isaiah, in irony, pointed out that the Lord, who purposed disaster for those who refused to trust Him, was the truly Wise One. He

<sup>341</sup>Watts, p. 406. *ISBE* is the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1979), and *IDB* is the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962).

<sup>342</sup>Young, 2:373.

<sup>343</sup>Oswalt, p. 571.

would be faithful to His Word to oppose the party of evildoers and those wicked "helpers" in whom the Judeans trusted.

31:3 The contrast between the relative strength of humans and God is stark.

"To us 'flesh' seems so substantial, because visible and tangible, while 'spirit' may seem ethereal. . . . Nothing could be further from biblical thinking, as a glance at passages like Zechariah 4:6 and John 3:5-8 will disclose."<sup>344</sup>

Yahweh would stretch out His hand in powerful judgment to defeat the helpers (Egypt) as well as the helped (Judah) because they trusted in human power rather than in God (cf. Deut. 4:34; 7:19; John 4:24).

31:4-5 The Lord had told Isaiah that He would be as a lion and as a bird to Judah. As a lion attacks its prey with focused purposefulness, He would decimate the Judahites, and the shouts of the Egyptian shepherds that the Judahites had hired to protect them would not scare Him off. As a bird that protects its young from other animals, the Lord would protect Judah from its predator, Assyria (cf. Exod. 12).

"He who protects is He who is strong as a lion to accomplish His purposes."<sup>345</sup>

### **Another call for repentance 31:6-9**

The prophet now called his audience to repent with the prospect of salvation that lay in the future.

31:6 Many Israelites had been seriously unfaithful to the Lord, and Isaiah appealed to those of them in Judah to return to Him with their heart, not just because he had announced coming judgment.

31:7 "In that day" points to the eschatological revival of Israel (cf. 2:20). The Judahites of Isaiah's day needed to return to the Lord, because in the future, Israel as a whole would do so. The time for decisive action was now.

31:8 The immediate situation also called for Judah to repent. Since the Lord promised to defeat Assyria Himself, His people needed to get into a right relationship with Him. To say that the Assyrian young men would become forced laborers was to say that Assyria would herself be overcome.

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<sup>344</sup>Grogan, p. 202.

<sup>345</sup>Young, 2:379.

31:9 The rock of Assyria, her king (cf. 30:29), would panic, and her princes would tremble at the evidence of divine intervention. The Assyrians would face a fire in Jerusalem that they could not endure. The Lord's judgment on Sennacherib's army at Jerusalem in 701 B.C. was the beginning of the demise of the Assyrian Empire.<sup>346</sup>

"A friend of mine kept a card in his office desk that read: Faith Is Living Without Scheming. In one statement, that is what Isaiah was saying to Judah and Jerusalem, and that is what he is saying to us today."<sup>347</sup>

### **Coming deliverance in the future 32:1-8**

Having introduced the eschatological day of the Lord (31:7) and the interim day of the Lord (31:8-9), Isaiah proceeded to reveal more about these times. He also contrasted the king of the Assyrians (31:9) with the messianic King to come.

"The destruction of the Assyrian army points prophetically to the final world conflict, which will usher in the rule of Christ, the perfect King of Israel. Christ's kingdom will fulfill God's ideal of a holy commonwealth, administering a perfect righteousness throughout the earth. God's King will provide complete shelter to all who seek refuge in him, and he will satisfy their thirsty souls with living water."<sup>348</sup>

32:1 The king and the princes of the future will not panic but will rule righteously (cf. 31:9). This is Messiah (chs. 9; 11) who embodies righteousness. His princes are His executives, His vice-regents.<sup>349</sup> They stand in contrast to the unrighteous princes of Judah who advocated alliance with Egypt (cf. 29:15-16; 30:1-2).

32:2 Each of these rulers will be a person of integrity and will be a source of provision and refreshment for the people of God, providing every beneficial care (cf. 29:20-21; Matt. 20:28; John 10:11).

32:3-4 God will transform all the shortcomings of humanity. Physical, but mainly spiritual, transformation is in view. People will perceive, receive, understand, and communicate the truth as they would not and could not before (cf. 6:9-10).

32:5 The characters of the amoral and the unscrupulous will experience transformation as well.

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<sup>346</sup>See Finegan, pp. 210-14.

<sup>347</sup>Wiersbe, p. 38.

<sup>348</sup>Archer, p. 631.

<sup>349</sup>See Douglas K. Stuart, "The Prophetic Ideal of Government in the Restoration Era," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, pp. 283-92.



32:6-8 These verses expound further on the changes that will take place in fools and rogues. Their present characteristics are all too familiar, but these will change with the coming of Messiah. Fools disregard their moral and spiritual obligations. Rogues work deviously for their own advantage at the expense of others. In contrast, noble people are liberally outgoing to God and others.

### **An appeal to Judah's women to repent 32:9-18**

Isaiah had appealed to the sons of Israel to return to the Lord (31:6), and now he appealed to the women of Israel to rise up in repentance (32:9; cf. 3:16-26). Appeal to both sexes stresses the importance of everyone repenting. As in his appeal to the men, the prophet also announced an immediate threat and a more distant disaster.

32:9 The women of Judah blandly assumed that nothing would disturb their present secure circumstances. Isaiah challenged them to listen to him. They were not secure.

32:10 In just over a year something devastating would happen that would preclude the harvest of grapes that they must have anticipated eagerly.

32:11-12 These women needed to prepare for captivity and to mourn at the prospect of an enemy invasion and its consequences.

32:13-14 Land once cultivated would become deserted, and their homes, even the palaces, would be left empty. Animals would occupy what humans formerly inhabited (cf. 5:17).

"The devastation caused by Sennacherib's wind would be completed by Nebuchadnezzar's whirlwind."<sup>350</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C., 115 years after Sennacherib besieged it in 701 B.C.

32:15 These reversals would not be final, however. God's Spirit would effect an even greater change later in the future (cf. Ps. 104:30; Ezek. 36:26-27; Joel 2:28; Zech. 12:10). Then the wilderness would become fertile, and what was presently considered fertile would become a veritable jungle so full of large plants would it be (cf. 30:23-26). The creation will burgeon, the divine curse will be removed, and the damage that sin has caused will be reversed (cf. 29:17).

32:16-17 Justice and righteousness will be everywhere. The effects of this righteousness will be peace, rest, and security (cf. 11:4-9). This will come about because people will be right with God (cf. 30:15).

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<sup>350</sup>Grogan, p. 207.

"The person who has received the grace of God's forgiveness is at peace with God. Knowing himself to be at peace with the Sovereign of the universe, it is no longer necessary to project his own turmoil upon those around him (Phil. 3:12-17). Furthermore, the person for whom God's character has become central will be less likely to oppress others in a frantic attempt to supply his or her own needs."<sup>351</sup>

32:18 God's people who responded to the appeals in 31:6 and 32:9 would live free from external threats, not erroneously thinking they were secure (cf. v. 9).

### **A summary of coming blasting and blessing 32:19-20**

The last two verses of this "woe" serve as an epilogue (cf. the prologue, 31:1-5). Again there is an abrupt transition from present terror to future tranquillity. Judgment and glory both lay ahead for the Israelites, and it was time for them to choose to return to the Lord. God has revealed the distant future, as well as the immediate future, so people will get right with Him now.

32:19 The forest is a figure of soldiers (10:18, 33-34) and of the fallen world (2:12-13). The city refers to Jerusalem, but it also represents humankind organized in rebellion against God (24:10). Thus both the near and the far views of God's actions blend here. God will destroy, the hail representing His devastating intervention in human life, both the Assyrian soldiers soon and the fallen world later (cf. 10:34). He would devastate Jerusalem soon and rebellious humankind later.

32:20 The blessed residents of the land in the distant future will enjoy the best existence, represented here in a pastoral setting. They will be in right relation to God, having responded to His invitations to return to and hear the Lord (31:6; 32:9). Their blessing will consist of divine favor (cf. Ps. 32:1), personal fulfillment (cf. Ps. 112:1), and total rectitude (cf. Ps. 2:12; 37:8-9). Many amillennial interpreters take the eschatological blessings of verses 1-8, 15-18, and 20, as well as 31:7, as marking the future heavenly reign of Christ throughout eternity.

In the near future, the Judahites could experience a measure of deliverance from the Assyrians by repenting. Some of them did repent. Sennacherib was not able to take Jerusalem, even though he devastated much of Judah. In the far future, the Israelites will enjoy salvation from all their enemies because they will repent at the second coming of Christ (cf. Zech. 12:10-14; 14:14). This did not take place after the Exile or after Pentecost on the scale that Isaiah envisioned here. God does not wait for people to repent before He acts in mercy. Rather, the goodness of God leads people to repentance (cf. Rom. 2:4; 11:22).

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<sup>351</sup>Oswalt, p. 588.

"This concludes the four [five] woes, from which the fifth [sixth], that immediately follows, is distinguished by the fact, that in the former the Assyrian troubles are still in the future, whereas the fifth [sixth] places us in the very midst of them."<sup>352</sup>

### **The woe against destroyers of God's people ch. 33**

There is general correspondence between this sixth "woe" and the third one (29:15-24), but this one deals more with application and the third one more with principles. It is the most eschatological of the "woes," though it contains many references to the Assyrian invasion. It is the only "woe" directed against a foreign power, the others being addressed to the Judahites. This is a woe against Assyria for its destructive opposition to Yahweh and His plans. The first six verses anticipate the salvation of Zion and contain a prayer for deliverance.

#### **The hope of the Judahites 33:1-6**

33:1 The destroyer and treacherous one in view is Assyria. So far Assyria had practiced destruction and treachery without having them come back on her, but eventually they would (cf. Deut. 19:18-19). Sennacherib accepted a large sum of money that King Hezekiah sent to him so he would not besiege Jerusalem, but Sennacherib accepted the money and attacked Jerusalem anyway (2 Kings 18:13-17). That is treachery. Yahweh was the opposite of the Assyrian king. He was always true to His promises, and the Davidic kings were to follow His example as His vice-regents. To behave the opposite from how God behaves is to court divine discipline.

"As the royal annals demonstrate, Assyria took great pride in her capacity to destroy anyone who had the temerity to stand against her. By the same token, she had no qualms about breaking agreements which were not to her advantage, all the while punishing with great severity any who broke agreements with her."<sup>353</sup>

33:2 The faithful remnant in Judah prayed to the Lord, evidently as the enemy approached Jerusalem. These godly Judeans asked for Yahweh's grace on the ground that they had trusted in Him (cf. 30:18-19). They asked Him to be the daily strength of those who opposed the destroyer, Assyria. They also requested deliverance for the Jerusalemites when Assyria attacked.

"Never underestimate the power of a praying minority."<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>352</sup>Delitzsch, 2:54.

<sup>353</sup>Oswalt, p. 592.

<sup>354</sup>Wiersbe, p. 40.

- 33:3 The prayer continues as the remnant anticipated the Lord creating a tumult and rising up to defend His people. When He would do that, enemies would flee and their nations disperse.
- 33:4 When the Lord arose against Israel's enemies, the battle would be over almost as soon as it had started (cf. Rev. 19:19-20). The Jerusalemites would loot the spoils of war as voraciously as caterpillars and as swiftly as locusts (cf. 37:36-37).
- 33:5 The result would be glory for God. He is the sovereign ruler of the world. He would fill Zion with justice and righteousness (cf. 1:26-27; 32:1, 16). Here Isaiah began to look into the distant future.
- 33:6 The Lord Himself would be the sure foundation of the blessed Zion. His people would then enter into their time in history, a time marked by salvations (pl.) of many kinds, wisdom in following God's ways, and knowledge of the truth.

"Wisdom is the true and correct evaluation of things, whereas knowledge is the true recognition of what things are. It emphasizes the objective, whereas 'wisdom' brings to the fore the subjective aspect."<sup>355</sup>

Fearing the Lord will be the key to the treasures that He has laid up for His people. The practical meaning of the fear of the Lord is admitting that one's destiny lies in His hands.

### **Judah's lament and Yahweh's response 33:7-12**

Verses 7-12 provide the background for the hope just articulated. This pericope describes Judah's judgment by the Assyrian invaders. It contains a lament (vv. 7-9) and God's response (vv. 10-12).

- 33:7 The siege of Jerusalem is underway. The brave warriors are weeping in the streets of the city, and the ambassadors who had returned from peace talks (probably with Sennacherib at Lachish, 2 Kings 18:13-16; cf. Isa. 36:22) also grieve publicly. Both "hawks" and "doves" realize that trust in humans rather than in God proved ineffective.
- 33:8 People are afraid to go out onto the highways to travel about the land (cf. Judg. 5:6). The enemy has broken his treaty, having no regard for the cities or the individuals he is now attacking.
- 33:9 All parts of Israel suffer because of the invading Assyrians. Lebanon was a forested region in the north, Sharon a beautiful plain to the west, and Bashan and Carmel were fertile areas to the east and north respectively. Assyria had decimated all the best (most fruitful) parts of the land.

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<sup>355</sup>Young, 2:409.

- 33:10 God's people having been punished in measure, it was time for the Lord to arise in their defense. The critical moment for Him to act had arrived, and He would now exalt Himself by delivering them.
- 33:11-12 The Judahites had done their best to bring forth victory through their own efforts, but all they yielded was chaff and stubble, nothing substantial. Now God would thoroughly consume the little that they were able to produce. It is possible that the Lord addressed Assyria in these verses, but I think Judah is the more probable "you." He would also destroy Israel's enemies as thoroughly as limestone and thorns.

"The tragedy of sin is that it ruins the life of the sinner; the danger of sin is that it excites the wrath of God."<sup>356</sup>

### The people of Zion 33:13-16

Isaiah now turned to focus on one aspect of the future hope of the nation: Zion. It will consist of a people and a king. The prophet concentrated on the people first (vv. 13-16) and then their king (vv. 17-24).

- 33:13 God summoned, through His prophet, the entire earth, those far and near, to pay attention to what He had done to His people. It has worldwide significance. God's powerful acts toward Israel in the past will cause the nations to stream to Zion in the future.
- 33:14 The spectacular demonstration of God's holiness in Assyria's defeat would terrify sinners in Zion, those Jews who were unrepentant in Isaiah's day. They would realize that they could not reside in His holy presence because of their sins.

"That Yahweh is *a devouring fire* is understood throughout the OT as a symbol of his holiness. The essence of worship is to recognize the gift of his mercy which makes it possible and even desirable to live in near contact with the Holy One."<sup>357</sup>

- 33:15 Only the righteous may dwell in Zion where God resides. Various activities mark the righteous person (cf. Ps. 15; 24:3-6); they do not make him righteous before God. His righteousness is not just private but public. His speech is pure, he does not extort money from others, and he does not take bribes (because he does not love money). He does not listen to anything connected with hurting other people, and he will not look at anything vulgar, evil, or perverted (cf. Ps. 119:37). That is, he will not participate in these things. These last two characteristics are particularly

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<sup>356</sup>Motyer, p. 265.

<sup>357</sup>Watts, p. 427.

challenging to us who live in an age of motion pictures, television, and Internet.

- 33:16 Such a righteous person will dwell with God, who dwells on the high places (v. 5). He will be safe from attacks by enemies since God is his refuge. And God will provide for his needs (cf. Matt. 6:33). In other words, he will enjoy God's fellowship, protection, and provision (cf. Ps. 15; 24:3-6).

"This is the picture of a man who has no need to be alarmed at the judgment of God upon Asshur."<sup>358</sup>

### **The King of Zion 33:17-24**

The subject now shifts from the people who will inhabit the future Zion to the king who will rule there. This is a revelation of Messiah's universal rule. It is a picture that stands in stark contrast to the one Isaiah painted of the present Jerusalem in chapters 28—31.

- 33:17 The prophet now assumed that his audience was righteous. Not only will the righteous be with God in the future (v. 16), but they will even see the excellent king (cf. Ps. 45:3). They will also see a broad land in which there can be freedom of movement. An amillennial interpretation follows.

"It is the Messiah in the glory of His wondrous reign over His Church that is here in view."<sup>359</sup>

- 33:18-19 There will be no fear there of enemy officials who noted things down, weighed things out, and assessed Israel's strength by taking inventories. Neither will there be terror caused by invading armies that used incomprehensible speech (cf. 28:11, 19). Foreign tax collectors who spoke an alien language may also be in view. These were all fears that the Judeans had when the Assyrians invaded.

- 33:20 Zion had a future that Isaiah's audience needed to contemplate. It would be a place where God's people would feast and rejoice in fellowship with Him. It would be a peaceful, secure, durable habitation—in contrast to the temporary and vulnerable tents of their nomadic forefathers, and of all the Israelites during the wilderness wanderings. The seemingly endless pilgrimages of the Israelites would finally be over.

- 33:21 The mighty king over this Zion will be Yahweh Himself, a divine ruler—even Messiah (cf. 53:11).

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<sup>358</sup>Delitzsch, 2:63.

<sup>359</sup>Young, 2:421.

"The meaning is, that, by virtue of Jehovah's dwelling there, Jerusalem had become a place, or equivalent to a place, of broad streams, like those which in other instances defended the cities they surrounded (*e.g.* Babylon, the 'twisted snake,' ch. xxvii. 1), and of broad canals, which kept off the enemy, like moats around a fortification."<sup>360</sup>

33:22 Messiah will be the Judge (leader and governor), lawgiver (legislator and chief), and (permanent) ruler of His people. He will be the head of all branches of government—judicial, legislative, and executive. He will provide deliverance in every situation.

This verse, which is a climax to chapters 28—33, was the basis for the Mayflower Compact, the covenant that the Pilgrims made when they left England for America in A.D. 1620. It was also the basis for the government of the United States, which had its roots in the Mayflower Compact.

33:23 The enemy of Israel, represented here as a disabled ship, would not be able to overcome other cities or pursue trade by normal means.<sup>361</sup> Some interpreters believe the ship refers to Israel or Jerusalem,<sup>362</sup> but this seems less likely. Zion would take the spoil of a conquest that her king had gained that was now past. The physically weak would take the plunder of the strong (*cf.* Matt. 5:5). Assyrian kings boasted of the spoil that they took in war, but even the lame among God's people will take plunder.

33:24 Physical sickness and spiritual sin will be totally absent from eschatological Zion (*cf.* Ps. 103:3). This description pictures the absence of all disabilities. Iniquities will also be forgiven (*cf.* Lev. 16:21-22). The basis for this forgiveness is the sacrifice of Christ (*cf.* 53:4, 14; Heb. 10:17-18).

This is one of the grand pictures of life during the coming reign of Jesus Christ on earth. That kingdom will begin following His second coming, continue for 1,000 years, and then extend forever into eternity (*cf.* Rev. 19—22).

#### **4. The consequences of Israel's trust chs. 34—35**

This section concludes the major section of Isaiah that deals with God's sovereignty over the nations of the world (chs. 13—35). Here the lessons stand out clearly. Pride leads to humiliation, whereas trust in the Lord results in exaltation (*cf.* Matt. 23:12). Chapters 34—35 bring to a head chapters 28—33, just as chapters 24—27 topped off chapters 13—23.

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<sup>360</sup>Delitzsch, 2:64-65.

<sup>361</sup>Harold R. Holmyard, III, "Does Isaiah 33:23 Address Israel or Israel's Enemy?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):273-78.

<sup>362</sup>*E.g.*, Delitzsch, 2:65-66.

"In both instances the special prophecies connected with the history of the prophet's own times are followed by a comprehensive *finale* of an apocalyptic character."<sup>363</sup>

"These two chapters form a fitting climax to the judgment and salvation motifs which have been spoken of extensively by Isaiah. . . . Discussion of the judgment on Assyria (30:27-33; 31:8-9; 33:1, 18-19) naturally led to a discussion of God's judgment on the whole world in the Tribulation. God's vengeance on the world will be followed by millennial blessing on His covenant people, Israel."<sup>364</sup>

These themes of judgment and blessing, of course, were prominent in the sixth "woe," so there is a strong connection with what precedes in chapter 33. Chapters 34 and 35 present the contrasting images of a productive land turned into a desert (ch. 34), and a desert turned into a garden (ch. 35).

"To align oneself with the nations of the earth is to choose a desert; to trust in God is to choose a garden."<sup>365</sup>

### **Yahweh's day of judgment ch. 34**

This poem depicts the effects of Yahweh's wrath on the self-exalting nations. His judgment will be universal (vv. 1-4). Isaiah particularized it with reference to Edom, a representative nation (vv. 5-17; cf. 25:10-12).

"Here we have depicted the scene of carnage that will ensue upon the Battle of Armageddon."<sup>366</sup>

"This chapter is remarkable for its combination of the general and the particular, the universal and the local. It reminds us of the Greek word *hekastos* ('each one individually') used in so many descriptions of judgment in the NT."<sup>367</sup>

"There are many passages in Jeremiah (viz. ch. xxv. 31, 33, 34, xlvi. 10, 1, 27, 39, li. 40) which cannot be explained in any other way than on the supposition that Jeremiah had the prophecy of Isaiah in ch. xxxiv. before him."<sup>368</sup>

### **Universal judgments 34:1-4**

34:1            Isaiah called everyone in the world to hear what follows (cf. 1:2; Ps. 25:1; 96:1-3; 97:1; 98:1-2, 4). It has universal significance and scope.

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<sup>363</sup>Ibid., 2:66.

<sup>364</sup>J. Martin, p. 1084.

<sup>365</sup>Oswalt, p. 609.

<sup>366</sup>Archer, p. 633.

<sup>367</sup>Grogan, p. 217.

<sup>368</sup>Delitzsch, 2:67.



34:2 The first reason (cf. vv. 5, 6, 8) everyone should listen is that the Lord is very angry with the nations. He has determined to devote them to destruction, to put them under the ban (Heb. *herem*; cf. 11:15; Josh. 6:21; 1 Sam. 15:3).

"In the Hebrew setting at least two implications [of the ban] are significant: spoils are devoted to God to show that God alone has won a battle (Jericho); when a nation has deliberately blocked the flow of God's love to the world, it forfeits itself into God's hands (Amalek)."<sup>369</sup>

What humankind must hear, then, is a sentence of judgment on the whole earth (cf. Ps. 2:9).

34:3 The blood of the slain nations will stink and soak the mountains of the earth in such quantities that they run red. Unburied corpses were, and still are, shameful things (cf. Ezek. 39; Rev. 19:17-18).

34:4 Evidently the whole universe will be involved in this judgment. The sins of nations, and the necessary divine reaction, affect all creation.<sup>370</sup> The Lord will roll up the heavens like a scroll that He has finished reading. The sun, moon, and stars will wither and fall like grapes or figs (cf. Matt. 24:29; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 6:13-14). This implies also the destruction of the pantheon of gods that these heavenly bodies represented in the ancient world.

### **Edom as an example 34:5-17**

The prophet now introduced Edom, as a case in point, whose end would be typical of the whole earth (cf. 11:14; 63:1-6). If Edom alone had been in view, Isaiah probably would have dealt with it as he did the other nations in the oracles earlier in the book (chs. 13—23). But why Edom? The Old Testament consistently treats Edom as the antithesis of Israel (cf. Obad.). Isaac told Esau that he would live in an infertile area (Gen. 27:39-40).

"Recollecting 29:22 and the establishing of the family of Jacob, the overthrow of the people of Esau makes the end the exact fulfilment [*sic*] of what was promised at the beginning (Gn. 25:23)."<sup>371</sup>

34:5 A second reason for God's worldwide judgment is that when His sword, a symbol of His judgment (cf. Deut. 32:41-43; Josh. 5:13; Judg. 7:20), has done all it can do to the heavenly host, it will fall on the nations represented by Edom. That the literal destruction of Edom is not in view should be clear from two facts. A judgment on the heavenly hosts has not

<sup>369</sup>Oswalt, p. 608.

<sup>370</sup>John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 9.

<sup>371</sup>Motyer, p. 269. See pp. 268-69 for a concise and illuminating review of biblical references to Edom.

yet happened. Edom did not experience such a destruction as this passage presents during her history. Edom ceased to exist as a nation long ago, so a future destruction of Edom is not possible.

Humans must pay. Everyone belongs to God. If human beings do not submit to Him voluntarily, He will force them to do so against their wills. This will be God's judgment on the world for rebelling against Him.

34:6-7 Using sacrificial imagery, the Lord will seek what is peculiarly His in judgment. He will take what He alone has a right to take. Sin is a matter of life and death. All sin must be atoned for with sacrificial blood (cf. Lev. 4:1-12; Isa. 53). Those who repudiate the sacrifice of Christ for their sins will forfeit their own lives as sacrifices to God.

A sacrifice is necessary, therefore, third (v. 6b), if the demands of divine holiness are to be met. No rebel would be spared. Bozrah ("impenetrable," modern Buseirah), the capital of Edom, stood about 25 miles south southeast of the Dead Sea.

"The *sacrifice* announced here is enormous. Not only lambs, goats, bull calves, and bulls are to be sacrificed, but also *wild oxen* . . . which are otherwise never mentioned for sacrifice. . . . Wildberger (1343) understands the passage to picture a sacrifice greater than any that has ever been offered."<sup>372</sup>

"He who really takes offense at what is here related has no true conception of the heinous character of sinful rebellion against the Holy One of Israel."<sup>373</sup>

34:8 A fourth reason for this slaughter is that the Lord will take vengeance on those who have trodden down Zion. He will act for His people against those who have cursed them (cf. Gen. 12:3). Even though we do not know when this will happen, God has a timetable for this judgment and will keep to it.

34:9-10 The prophet described Edom's overthrow in terms reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gen. 19:24-28; Deut. 29:23; Ps. 11:6; Jer. 49:18; Rev. 14:10-11), which lay in the same general direction as Edom from Jerusalem. Edom's actions brought on this destruction. The world's end will be total, and its territory will be uninhabitable from then on (66:24; Rev. 19:3; cf. Lev. 6:13). The absence of specific references to Edom in verses 9-17 helps the reader appreciate that a judgment far

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<sup>372</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 11. His reference is to H. Wildberger's three-volume German commentary on Isaiah 1—39.

<sup>373</sup>Young, 2:435.

beyond that one nation's future is in view. The only reason people will be able to inhabit the earth during the Millennium, following the Tribulation, is because God will renovate it (chs. 35; 40—66). Human sin affects humanity's environment.

- 34:11-13 Human leaders will be no more, and only wild animals and weeds will occupy the land (cf. 13:21-22; 14:23). "Desolation" and "emptiness" (Heb. *tohu* and *bohu*, cf. Gen. 1:2) point to chaotic conditions that existed before Creation. Measuring the land indicates that the Lord has a standard by which He evaluates its inhabitants and metes it out to whomever He will (cf. v. 17).
- 34:14-15 So devoid of human population will the earth be that animals that people have tried to control in the past will be safe enough to multiply. Even the goat demon and the night monster, representing the most detestable animals, will roam the land. Lilith (lit. nocturnal) was a feminine night monster in Assyrian and Babylonian mythology that was especially hurtful to children (cf. Tobit 8:3; Matt. 12:43).
- 34:16-17 In closing, Isaiah's thought turned back to verse 1. Those summoned to listen to this remarkable revelation might need to assure themselves of its certainty by referring to the written record of it in this prophecy and elsewhere (cf. 13:21-22). The Lord's mouth commanded this judgment, and His Spirit will execute it (cf. Gen. 1:2). God sovereignly gave Canaan to His people, and in the future He will give the Edoms of this world to the desert creatures.

How does this picture of devastation, so thorough that no human beings remain alive, harmonize with other revelation concerning the Tribulation? According to Revelation 6:8 and 9:18, half of the world's population will have perished by the end of the sixth trumpet judgment. Many more devastating judgments will fall on earth-dwellers after the sixth trumpet judgment, specifically the seven bowl judgments, the worst ones of all in the Tribulation. Therefore what Isaiah pictured may be what the earth will look like at the very end of the Tribulation, just before Jesus Christ returns to the earth. There will be some people left alive on the earth then, but Isaiah's description was perhaps hyperbolic to make the point that God will judge all the earth's inhabitants. A common amillennial understanding of this chapter, is that it describes the final judgment of humankind, at the end of history—just before the beginning of eternity.

### **Yahweh's day of blessing ch. 35**

In contrast to the preceding chapter, this one is full of joy and rejoicing. There God turned the world into a desert; here He transforms that desert into a garden. The order of events is significant because they rule out postmillennialism, which teaches that the world will get increasingly better—until the utopia (Millennium) described in this chapter comes about—following which Messiah will return to the earth. Genesis 12:3, one of the original promises to Abraham, even suggests the order explained in Isaiah 34 and 35: cursing followed by blessing, both on a universal scale. References to "be glad" and

"gladness" begin and end the poem, forming an *inclusio*. "Shout of joy," "shout for joy," and "joyful shouting" appear at the beginning (v. 2), middle (v. 6), and end (v. 10). The structure is chiasmic, centering on hope (vv. 5-6). However, Isaiah tantalized his readers by offering images that create questions in their minds that only further reading can answer. The chapter increasingly builds to an intellectual resolution and an emotional climax in the last verse.

35:1-2       References to the wilderness and desert tie this chapter to the preceding one. The wilderness that God so thoroughly judged, personified here, will eventually rejoice because it will blossom profusely. The beauty and glory that formerly marked Lebanon and Carmel, before the devastation of chapter 34, will mark these places again, but more so. Their transformation, at God's hand, will enable them to appreciate the inherent value and majestic dignity of Israel's sovereign Lord (cf. Rom. 8:13-25).

"If we will give God his glory, then he will give his to us."<sup>374</sup>

35:3-4       Those who are alive at the end of the Tribulation will be a small remnant of believers and some unbelievers. Isaiah called the reader to encourage the exhausted and feeble believers of his or her time. They would need to keep their eyes on God. God would come to take vengeance for them and to deliver them (cf. Deut. 31:6-7, 23; Josh. 1:6-7, 9, 18; Rev. 13:9-10; 14:12). He would reward them; they will enter Messiah's millennial kingdom.

35:5-6b      The former limitations of these believers will end, and they will rejoice (cf. 6:9-10; 29:9-12, 18; 65:20; Luke 7:18-23; Acts 3:8). The Israelites' blindness and deafness was in reference to God's call to participate in His work.<sup>375</sup>

35:6c-7      Water gushing out in the arid wilderness and Arabah would be a sign of blessings that they would shortly experience (cf. vv. 1-2; 41:18; 43:19-20; 44:3-4; Deut. 28:1-14). The desolate resting place where only jackals lived would become verdant with grassy growth. Reversal and transformation will mark this time.

35:8         A highway will be there leading through the then-lush landscape to Zion (v. 10). It will be used by the ransomed of the Lord (v. 10) to travel to Messiah's capital. It will be a highway marked by holiness because only redeemed people will travel on it. Fools, the morally perverse, will not wander onto it because they are unholy. Is this a literal road? It may be, but it certainly pictures God's people at that time streaming to Zion through a renovated earth.

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<sup>374</sup>Oswalt, p. 622.

<sup>375</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 15.

35:9-10 Nothing will threaten or endanger the redeemed as they travel the holy highway to the holy city. This is the first of 24 occurrences of "redeemed" in Isaiah. The redeemed will come rejoicing into Zion, the New Jerusalem, where there will be no more sorrow or sighing, just unbreakable happiness, gladness, and joyful shouting (cf. 51:11; Ps. 23:6; Ezek. 36:24-28; 40—44; Zech. 14:16-19; Rev. 21:1-4).

While what Isaiah described here parallels to a limited extent the Jews' return from Babylonian captivity, the context of the chapter, as well as its terminology, point to a fulfillment in the future that *that* return only prefigured. Another foreview was the converging of pilgrims on Jerusalem from all over the world to celebrate the annual feasts of Judaism. Amillennialists normally interpret this chapter as depicting the blessings that would come to the church through the first advent of Christ (cf. John 16:33).

Verse 10 not only climaxes chapter 35, but also the whole section of Isaiah dealing with God's sovereignty over the nations (chs. 13—35).

"Chs. 7—12 posed a question: 'Is God Sovereign of the nations?' Can God deliver from an Assyria? Or is he just one more of the gods, waiting to be gobbled up by a bigger god? In short, can God be trusted? Chs. 13—35 have sought to answer that question in four main sections: chs. 13—23; 24—27; 28—33; 34—35. In the first, God's lordship over each of the nations is asserted. In the second, it is shown that God is not merely the reactor to the nations, but is in fact the sovereign Actor on the world's stage. In the third, the superiority of God's counsel over that of the merely human leaders is shown. Finally, the last two chapters show the ultimate results of the two courses of action, with ch. 35 ending at exactly the same point as chs. 11—12, with the promise that God can, and will, redeem. He may be trusted. However, the issue remains: is this merely abstraction or can it become concrete reality? Ahaz had proved that the nations cannot be trusted. But what of God? Can his trustworthiness be demonstrated or only asserted? Must his promises for the distant future be clung to blindly or can an earnest of their reality be experienced now? This is what chs. 36—39 are about."<sup>376</sup>

Similarly, Romans 9—11 vindicates God's righteousness.

### **C. THE TESTS OF ISRAEL'S TRUST CHS. 36—39**

Chapters 36—39 conclude the section of the book dealing with the issue of trust by giving historical proof that Yahweh will protect those who rely on Him. In these chapters, King Hezekiah represents the people of Judah.<sup>377</sup> These lessons from history should encourage God's people to trust in Him rather than in the arm of flesh. Chapters 40—66

<sup>376</sup>Oswalt, p. 627.

<sup>377</sup>See Young, 2:540-55, for an extended discussion of his reign.

contain oracles in which Babylonian captivity looms large. So the present section (chs. 36—39) forms a bridge from emphasis on Assyria (chs. 1—35) to emphasis on Babylonia (chs. 40—66). They are also almost identical to 2 Kings 18—20 (cf. 2 Chron. 29—32), except for the inclusion of Isaiah's poem in Isaiah 38:9-20. The matter of which account came first (the one in Kings or the one in Isaiah) is of academic interest only. Many of the commentators have discussed the issue, which see. I think Isaiah's account was probably the first one. These chapters consist of more narrative material and fewer oracles than the sections that precede and follow it, in which the opposite is true.

This section contains two parts. The first one (chs. 36—37) involved King Hezekiah's trust in God and deliverance when Sennacherib's Assyrian army besieged Jerusalem. The second (chs. 38—39) involved Hezekiah's failure to trust God and his consequent judgment by God when the Babylonian envoys peacefully visited Jerusalem. In chapters 36—37 we see Judah's deliverance accomplished, and in chapters 38—39 we hear Judah's captivity announced. Thus a major hinge of the book occurs between chapters 37 and 38, where emphasis on Assyria ends and emphasis on Babylonia begins.

"Hezekiah faced three crises in a short time: an international crisis (the invasion of the Assyrian army), a personal crisis (sickness and near death), and a national crisis (the visit of the Babylonian envoys). He came through the first two victoriously, but the third one tripped him up."<sup>378</sup>

### **1. The Assyrian threat chs. 36—37**

In chapters 7—8, Isaiah tried to persuade King Ahaz to trust God in the face of the Syro-Ephraimitic threat against Judah. Ahaz refused to do so and instead turned to Assyria for help, with disastrous results. Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, faced a similar challenge during his reign, but this time the threat came from Assyria. Hezekiah learned from his father's failure and from Isaiah's preaching, made the right choice, and trusted the Lord. The result was deliverance. Thus chapters 36—37 contrast with chapters 7—8.

"Here we are presented with a historical test to demonstrate once and for all whether Jehovah is the one true God, the Sovereign over all the earth."<sup>379</sup>

". . . chapters 36—37 put the rock of history under the fabric of eschatology."<sup>380</sup>

"This is history at its best, no dull recital of statistics and dates but an account which enables us to sense the haughty arrogance of the Assyrian and the chilling clutch of despair at the hearts of the Israelites."<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>378</sup>Wiersbe, p. 43.

<sup>379</sup>Archer, p. 634.

<sup>380</sup>Motyer, p. 276.

<sup>381</sup>A. E. Cundall, *Proverbs-Isaiah 1—39*, p. 91.

### The Rabshakeh's challenge 36:1—37:7

This section demonstrates Hezekiah's commitment to God, but the next one (37:8-35) shows an even stronger commitment by the king to commit his own fate and the fate of his people to God. The present section stresses Assyrian pride and its result: divine judgment (cf. 10:15-19). Isaiah did not record Hezekiah's attempt to buy off Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:13-16), probably because he wanted to focus on the Judean king's good example of trusting God.

#### An ultimatum 36:1-20

36:1 The fourteenth year of Hezekiah was 701 B.C.<sup>382</sup> On an Assyrian record, Sennacherib claimed to have taken 46 cities of Judah during this campaign (cf. 2 Chron. 32:1). The record is on the Prism of Sennacherib, also called the Taylor Prism, now in the British Museum.<sup>383</sup>

"He went from the north along the coast defeating (among others) the towns of Aphek, Timnah, Ekron, and Lachish. Lachish was then his staging area for attacking a number of other towns."<sup>384</sup>

"The army of Sennacherib is swarming over Judah like a horde of Tolkienian Orcs, and only Jerusalem remains (Isaiah 8:8)."<sup>385</sup>

36:2 Rabshakeh is a title that seems about equivalent to field commander. The word literally means "chief cup-bearer," but this appears to have been the name of the original office from which the present one evolved. The chief cup-bearer was the king's personal advisor (cf. Neh. 1:11). Lachish stood about 30 miles southwest of Jerusalem. A bas relief, now in the British Museum, shows Sennacherib besieging Lachish.<sup>386</sup> Interestingly, the place where the Assyrian commander took his stand near Jerusalem was the same place where Isaiah had stood when he urged Ahaz to trust God 23 years earlier (cf. 7:3). 2 Kings 18:17 records that three military officials represented Sennacherib, but Isaiah referred to only the speaker among them. It was because Ahaz failed to trust God earlier that the Assyrian official stood there now (cf. 8:5-8). The very nation that Ahaz had trusted proved to be the greatest threat to her safety only one generation later. Father and son both faced a threat of destruction, both recognized the inadequacy of their own strength, but one trusted man and suffered defeat whereas the other trusted God and enjoyed deliverance.

<sup>382</sup>See E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 118-54.

<sup>383</sup>See J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 288; or Young, 2:566-69, or Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, p. 557, who reproduced Sennacherib's translated description of his campaign into Palestine.

<sup>384</sup>J. Martin, p. 1086.

<sup>385</sup>Ortlund, p. 207.

<sup>386</sup>See J. B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*, pp. 129-32.

36:3 Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah were all important officials in Hezekiah's government (cf. 22:20-23). Some commentators believed that Isaiah's prophecy of 22:20-23 had been fulfilled at this time, since Eliakim was now the prime minister and Shebna was the secretary, a lower position. This may be true, or the exaltation of Eliakim and the humiliation of Shebna may have come later.

The point of the Rabshakeh's first speech (vv. 4-10) was that there is no salvation in faith; no deliverance would come from trusting Yahweh. Judah should surrender because Egypt would not help her (v. 6), Yahweh would not help her (v. 7), she did not have enough military manpower to win (vv. 8-9), and Assyria had authority from Yahweh to attack Jerusalem (v. 10). This speech challenged everything Isaiah had been preaching.<sup>387</sup>

36:4 The Rabshakeh told the Judean officials to give Hezekiah—he did not call him a king—a message from "the great king," a title the Assyrian monarchs arrogantly claimed for themselves (cf. 10:8; 30:33). He questioned Hezekiah's confidence that led him to rebel against Sennacherib. Clearly Sennacherib wanted the Judahites to know that he regarded Hezekiah as a minor chieftain incapable of resisting the massive power of the Assyrian Empire.

36:5 The commander claimed that Hezekiah's strategy lacked wisdom and arms, that it only amounted to empty words (cf. 28:9-11). Ironically, it would be the "empty words" of a rumor that would defeat him (cf. 37:7-9).

36:6 He knew that some of the Judean nobles had put their trust in Egypt and had sent ambassadors there to make a treaty (cf. 30:1-7). But he also knew, better than those officials, that Egypt was not only an unreliable ally but a dangerous one, an opinion Isaiah shared (cf. ch. 20; 28:15; Ezek. 29:6). Sennacherib had already defeated the Egyptians, who for the first and last time had unsuccessfully come to the aid of the Philistines, at Eltekeh northwest of Lachish.

36:7 The Rabshakeh knew about Hezekiah's religious reforms in which he had removed many of the altars from the land (cf. 2 Kings 18:1-7; 2 Chron. 29—31). Evidently the commander believed that removing altars would antagonize Yahweh, but Hezekiah was really purifying Yahweh worship. However, many of the Judeans probably believed that the removal of those altars was a bad thing, and it was to those people that the Rabshakeh was evidently appealing.

36:8 Judah was so inferior militarily that the commander felt safe offering his enemy 2,000 horses. He believed that the Judeans did not have enough cavalry soldiers to ride them. His offer was the equivalent of giving one's rival a long lead in a foot race.

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<sup>387</sup>The Hebrew word for "trust" occurs seven times in the Rabshakeh's speech (vv. 4-10) making it the key word.



36:9 The Judeans did not have enough strength to repulse even a minor Assyrian officer or enough soldiers to man the horses and chariots that they were looking to Egypt to supply.

36:10 Perhaps the commander was referring to 10:5-6, Isaiah's prophecy that God would send Assyria against His people. Alternatively, he may have just been claiming divine authorization for Sennacherib's invasion when there was none. It was not unusual for ancient Near Eastern conquerors to claim that the god of the invaded people had joined the invader.<sup>388</sup>

Hezekiah's officials interrupted the commander when they heard this last unsettling claim.

36:11 Aramaic was the common language of diplomacy; politicians normally conducted diplomatic talks in that language. It did not become the common language of Palestine until many years later. The Rabshakeh, however, spoke to the kings' officials in the common Hebrew that all the people of Jerusalem understood. He probably did this so all the people, not just the king's officials, would understand his message and take it as an insult to the king's officials. By using Hebrew the commander was also implying that they did not know Aramaic, that they were backwater ignoramuses.

36:12 He explained that his message was for all the people, many of whom were sitting on the city wall listening, not just the politicians in Jerusalem. All the people were, after all, doomed to the horrible conditions of siege warfare. He wanted to separate the people from their king and his policy of resisting Sennacherib. He also wanted to shock and terrorize the people by using the most crude and disgusting terms he could to picture siege warfare.

The commander then resumed his prepared speech. In his second speech (vv. 13-21), the Rabshakeh used the word "deliver" eight times (in Heb.).

36:13-17 The Rabshakeh next addressed the people of Jerusalem who could hear him. He appealed to them to listen to Sennacherib's message to them. Hezekiah could not deliver them, he boasted, nor would trusting in Yahweh work. Evidently the Assyrians knew that Isaiah's policy of trusting Yahweh was a popular one with many of the Jerusalemites. The Rabshakeh promised that if the city surrendered, the people would enjoy peace and prosperity rather than war and starvation. They would be deported, a well-known Assyrian policy toward conquered peoples, but he portrayed the land where they would go as similar to their own but even better.

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<sup>388</sup>See Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near . . .*, pp. 277, 278, 283, 286, 289, 290, 291, 293, 301, 312-15, 462.

36:18-19 The commander made the fatal mistake, however, of comparing Israel's God to the gods of the nations, specifically Aram (Syria). Even Samaria had fallen to Assyria 21 years earlier; their gods, including Yahweh, did not deliver them. Of course, Yahweh had handed over the Northern Kingdom to Assyria because of her idolatry, but the commander viewed its demise as a result of Assyrian supremacy.

"The Assyrian accuses Hezekiah of seducing the people (v. 18); in fact, it is the Assyrian who has been seduced by his own power."<sup>389</sup>

36:20 The Rabshakeh stated the people's choice in terms that the first part of this book presented. Was Yahweh able to deliver His people when they simply trusted in Him, or was He no better than all the other gods of the nations?

### **The response to the ultimatum 36:21—37:7**

How would the Judeans respond to this blasphemous challenge? How they did, determined their destiny—not only at that moment, but for years to come.

36:21 The people listening to this invitation did not respond out loud because Hezekiah commanded them to remain silent.

36:22 Hezekiah's officials then returned to their king, who had not dignified the occasion with his presence, to report what had happened. They tore their clothes as a sign of extreme distress over the present crisis.

37:1 Hezekiah's response was also extreme grief, but he went into the temple. He wanted to seek the Lord's wisdom and help in prayer.

"Happy the nation that has such a ruler."<sup>390</sup>

It is not clear how involved Hezekiah had been in making the treaty with Egypt, but his personal repentance here set the pattern for the nation.

37:2 Then the king sent some of his highest officials and some of the leading priests, who were also in mourning, to visit Isaiah. Notice that Hezekiah did not summon Isaiah into his presence. This reflects the respect that the king felt for the prophet (cf. 2 Kings 6:12).

37:3-4 The leaders of Judah, speaking for their king, acknowledged that he had come to the end of his rope. The Assyrian invasion of Judah had been like labor pains for the king, but now the crisis had peaked and there was no human strength left to expel the enemy. Hezekiah confessed that he

<sup>389</sup>Oswalt, pp. 640-41.

<sup>390</sup>Young, 2:472.

deserved the adversity that had overtaken him, which had signaled an end of hope and resulted in great embarrassment. Yet he did not appeal for divine help on the basis of his own needs but because of the Lord's honor and the needs of His people (cf. 1 Sam. 17:26, 36). The king appealed for Isaiah's prayers on behalf of the remnant, the remaining Judahites who had not already been devoured by the Assyrians.

"This kind of admission of helplessness is frequently a necessity before divine help can be received. So long as we believe that we only need some assistance, we are still treating ourselves as lords of the situation, and that latent pride cuts us off from all that God would give us."<sup>391</sup>

The saying "God is my copilot" may reflect a similar attitude.

37:5-7 So the officials came to Isaiah, and the prophet responded by sending them back to the king with a message from Yahweh. Hezekiah was not to fear the blasphemous claims of Sennacherib's underlings. The Lord promised to lead the invading king away from Jerusalem and back to his own country where he would die by the sword. A report placed in Sennacherib's ear would be the sovereign Lord's instrument. The lack of reference to the decimation of the Assyrian troops already gathered around Jerusalem (cf. 36:2) focuses the promise on the central issue, divine punishment for the king's blasphemy (cf. 14:24-27; 31:8).

### **King Hezekiah's challenge 37:8-35**

This section contains two parts: Sennacherib's letter to Hezekiah, and Hezekiah's response to it.

#### **The royal letter 37:8-13**

37:8-9a The Rabshakeh returned to his master, having learned that Hezekiah would not surrender. He found him five miles closer to Jerusalem than Lachish, at Libnah, where he was fighting the Judahites. The message that Tirhakah, King of Ethiopia, was coming to engage him in battle, caused Sennacherib to decide to terminate further campaigns in Palestine and return to his homeland temporarily. Tirhakah was about 20 years old at this time and did not accede to the throne of Egypt and Ethiopia until 690 B.C. However, he was the military leader that Sennacherib did not want to engage at this time.

". . . it is a common practice of Ancient Oriental writers to refer to people and places by titles and names acquired later than the period being described."<sup>392</sup>

<sup>391</sup>Oswalt, p. 645.

<sup>392</sup>K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, p. 82.

37:9b-13 Sennacherib warned Hezekiah, through messengers and a letter (v. 14), not to let messages from Yahweh deceive him into thinking that Jerusalem would survive. After all, all the lands that the Assyrian kings had invaded had fallen to them, he claimed. None of the powerful cities of the upper Euphrates received help to overcome Assyria from their gods. Likewise, the cities of Aram had not been able to resist takeover.

### The response to the letter 37:14-35

37:14-15 When Hezekiah received Sennacherib's letter, he took it with him into the temple and laid all the enemy's words before the Lord in prayer.

37:16-20 Hezekiah began his prayer—did Isaiah witness it?—by acknowledging Yahweh's uniqueness. Yahweh was not like the gods of the nations but the only true God, who dwelt among His people, the Creator who rules and determines everything. Theologically this confession climaxes the whole first part of the Book of Isaiah. Hezekiah asked the living God to pay attention to the reproachful blasphemies of the Assyrian king. He acknowledged the Assyrians' superiority over the nations they had overrun, but he ascribed this to the fact that those nations had only gods of wood and stone to defend them. Finally, he asked God to deliver Jerusalem so the nations would know that Yahweh alone was God. In short, he prayed for the glory of God.

"Like all true prayer, Hezekiah's is preoccupied with God: who he is (16); his honour (17); his uniqueness (18-19); and the revelation of his glory to the world (20).

". . . The heart of prayer is not its petitionary content but the acknowledgment of God."<sup>393</sup>

"Hezekiah's prayer (Isa. 37:15-20) is saturated with biblical theology and is not unlike the prayer of the church in Acts 4:24-31."<sup>394</sup>

God responded to Hezekiah's prayer by giving Isaiah a message for the king. The prophet first explained what God would do (vv. 21-29). Then he gave the king a sign that He would indeed do it (vv. 30-35).

37:21-22 The Lord explained that it was Hezekiah's trust in Him, expressed through his prayer, that led to his receiving information about what He would do. Hezekiah would see the Lord's hand at work more clearly because he had prayed.

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<sup>393</sup>Motyer, p. 281.

<sup>394</sup>Wiersbe, p. 45.

Assyria had mocked a "person" who was especially dear to the Lord, namely, His "virgin daughter," Jerusalem (cf. 1:8; 47:1). No foreign foe had penetrated Jerusalem. Thus Assyria had incurred His anger.

- 37:23 Moreover, Assyria had spoken disparagingly of the Holy One of Israel. She had reproached, blasphemed, spoken out against, and lifted her eyes proudly against Him. As the person of God filled Hezekiah's prayer (vv. 16-20), so the person of God filled Isaiah's response.
- 37:24-25 Assyria's sin included her failure to recognize God's hand in her fortunes. She proudly thought that her own might was responsible for the victories she had gained and that she controlled her own destiny. She considered herself omnipotent rather than acknowledging that Yahweh was. These verses read much like the portions of the Assyrian annals in which the kings boasted of their conquests.
- 37:26-27 Assyria had not heard the truth. She lacked the divine revelation that helps people see the realities of life. It was the Lord, not the Assyrians, who was responsible for all of Assyria's conquests. He not only planned them long ago, but He also brought them to pass. That explains why she was able to subdue her enemies and take over their territories. *God* is sovereign.
- 37:28-29 The Lord knew everything about the Assyrians, including their raging against Himself. Because they raged against Him and felt complacent about controlling their own destiny, He would teach them who was sovereign. He would lead them away as they had led prisoners they had taken captive in war, by putting hooks in their noses. Assyrian monuments picture this. As they directed the horses they took so much pride in, God would put a bit in their mouths and turn them back to their homeland.

Isaiah next offered a sign to Hezekiah to assure him that God would indeed do what he had said. Compare the sign that God gave believing Hezekiah's unbelieving father Ahaz (7:14; cf. 38:7; Exod. 3:12).

"Some signs are aids to faith, like that in 38:7. But others, like this one, aid later recognition that God was indeed at work."<sup>395</sup>

- 37:30 For two years normal agriculture would be impossible around Jerusalem, but God would cause the land to produce enough to sustain the inhabitants. Probably the two years of interruption resulted from Assyrian military activity in the region. Fruitfulness has always been God's blessing on those who trust Him. Then the third year, planting and harvesting as usual would resume. It was particularly unusual that the Judahites would be able to plant vineyards and eat their fruit shortly after that because it often took several years for new grapevines to yield a crop.

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<sup>395</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 45.

- 37:31 Additionally, the surviving remnant of the Judahites would increase in numbers and become stronger, like the plants just mentioned. They would enjoy security and prosperity.
- 37:32 The Lord would preserve a people for Himself from among the Jerusalemites. This would include the Davidic line of kings, as He had promised (2 Sam. 7:16; cf. Isa. 9:6). His own zeal to remain true to His Word and to bless His people would perform this (cf. 9:7; 59:17). It would not depend on the faithfulness of His people (cf. 2 Tim. 2:13).
- 37:33-35 The Lord promised Hezekiah, in closing, that Sennacherib would not even besiege Jerusalem, let alone attack it, either from close range or from farther away. He would, instead, return to his own land the same way he came. On his prism, discovered by archaeologists, Sennacherib claimed to have shut Hezekiah up like a bird in a cage, but it was really Yahweh who protected Hezekiah.<sup>396</sup> Yahweh would defend Jerusalem and preserve it, not so much for the sake of Hezekiah and as a reward for his faith, but for the Lord's own reputation and for David's sake, to whom He had promised an everlasting dynasty, which culminated in Messiah.<sup>397</sup>

### **The Lord's deliverance 37:36-38**

Isaiah had predicted that God would break Assyria's power in the Promised Land (14:24-27). This short section records how He miraculously fulfilled that promise. This divine act of massive proportions settled the issue of Assyria's fate and provided the crowning demonstration that Yahweh controls world history. He will always fulfill His promises. The literal fulfillment of these near prophecies should encourage us to look for a literal fulfillment of Isaiah's far distant prophecies.

- 37:36 The Lord Himself slew 185,000 of the Assyrian soldiers in one night. Evidently this was an act of the angel of the Lord similar to the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn before the Exodus (Exod. 12:12-13, 23; cf. 2 Sam. 24:1, 15-16; Luke 12:20). The angel of the Lord may have been the preincarnate Christ, since He is identified as the Lord (Yahweh), and yet distinct from the Lord, in various Old Testament passages. Some scholars believe the angel of the Lord was an angel whom the Lord sent who was intimately identified with the Lord in the Old Testament because he represented the Lord and carried out His will precisely. Probably the phrase designates the preincarnate Christ in some places and simply an angelic representative of Yahweh in others. The verb "to smite" implies smiting with a disease.<sup>398</sup> Sennacherib had sent a messenger to intimidate Hezekiah's people and, ironically, Yahweh responded by sending a

<sup>396</sup>See Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near . . .*, pp. 287-88.

<sup>397</sup>See Avraham Gileadi, "The Davidic Covenant: A Theological Basis for Corporate Protection," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, pp. 157-63.

<sup>398</sup>Young, 2:505. Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 10:1:5.

messenger to destroy Sennacherib's army. George Robinson reproduced Lord Byron's famous poem, "The Destruction of Sennacherib."<sup>399</sup>

37:37 Sennacherib, the great "king of Assyria" (cf. 36:4, 13), then returned to Assyria, having lost a large part of his army, and having heard a rumor about the advancing Ethiopian ruler (vv. 7-9). He lived in Nineveh for 20 years before his death, and he conducted other military campaigns, but none in Palestine.

37:38 Ironically, it was while worshipping in the temple of his idol in Nineveh that God effected Sennacherib's assassination, whereas it was while worshipping the true God in His temple in Jerusalem, that God moved to spare Hezekiah's life. Hezekiah went into the house of his God and got help, but Sennacherib went into the house of his god and got killed. The Babylonian royal chronicles recorded the assassination of Sennacherib and the accession of Esarhaddon in 681 B.C.<sup>400</sup> It was not the Assyrian way to record their national disasters, so it is understandable that archaeologists have discovered no Assyrian accounts of Sennacherib's humiliations.

## **2. The Babylonian threat chs. 38—39**

The events in these chapters evidently predate those in chapters 36—37 by a few months (cf. 38:1, 6). Isaiah apparently placed them here, out of chronological order, to make them a historical prologue to chapters 40—66. This section opens with Hezekiah contemplating death (38:1a) and ends with him contemplating life (39:8). In between, Isaiah delivered two messages to the king (38:1b-7; 39:3-7). Hezekiah's dedication (38:8-22) followed the prophet's first message, and his defection (39:1-2) precipitated the second message. Thus the structure of these two chapters is chiasmic.<sup>401</sup>

### **Hezekiah's illness 38:1-8**

38:1 The phrase "In those days" evidently identifies the event in Hezekiah's reign just referred to in chapters 36 and 37, namely: the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib (cf. 39:1). Verse 6 clarifies that Hezekiah became mortally ill before God delivered Jerusalem from Sennacherib. Consequently the events of chapters 38 and 39 must predate those of chapters 36 and 37. Since the Lord added 15 years to Hezekiah's life (v. 5), and since Hezekiah died about 686 B.C.,<sup>402</sup> the time when he became mortally ill was evidently early in 701 B.C.

The formal introduction of the prophet signals a new section of the book. Isaiah visited the king with a message from the Lord—to set his domestic affairs in order, because he would not recover from his illness but die (cf.

<sup>399</sup>George L. Robinson, *The Book of Isaiah*, pp. 122-23.

<sup>400</sup>Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near . . .*, pp. 288-89. See also Finegan, pp. 214-15.

<sup>401</sup>Motyer, p. 290.

<sup>402</sup>Thiele, *A Chronology . . .*, p. 75.

2 Sam. 17:23; 1 Kings 2:1-9). Sometimes what God announced through His prophets seemed inevitable, but when His people prayed it became negotiable (cf. Gen. 32:26; Exod. 32:7-14; James 4:2).

38:2-3 Perhaps Hezekiah turned his face to the wall to concentrate or to make his prayer private. Perhaps he felt completely devastated and withdrew into himself (cf. 1 Kings 21:4). He requested God's mercy in the form of lengthened life, though he did not voice the request in so many words. He based his appeal on his godly walk before God and his wholehearted devotion to God. Hezekiah was a good king who reformed his nation spiritually (cf. 2 Chron. 29—31). He appealed for longer life on the basis of his godliness, because God promised to bless the godly who lived under the Old Covenant with long life (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:33; 7:12-15; 30:16). His bitter tears showed the depth of his sorrow. He would apparently die without an heir to the throne, in the full strength of his manhood, and with his nation in an unsettled state.

38:4-5 God sent His answer to Hezekiah's prayer back to him through Isaiah (cf. 2 Kings 20:4). The Lord identified Himself as the God of David, his forefather. Perhaps the reference to David helped Hezekiah remember God's promises to David about the perpetuity of his dynasty (2 Sam. 7). This reminded the king that God would remain faithful and care for His people.

God had noted Hezekiah's prayer and his tears, and they had touched Him. The Lord graciously promised him 15 more years of life. Long life was a blessing that God had promised the godly under the Old Covenant, so His grace was in harmony with His promises.

38:6 The Lord furthermore promised unconditionally to deliver Hezekiah and Jerusalem from the king of Assyria. This deliverance happened later in 701 B.C. (chs. 36—37).

"The close association of Hezekiah's recovery with the city's deliverance suggests that the king epitomizes the city. Both Hezekiah and Jerusalem came to the threshold of death, but both were given a new lease on life because of the king's faithful deeds."<sup>403</sup>

Verses 21 and 22 fit chronologically at this place in the narrative.

38:7-8 The Lord also graciously gave Hezekiah a sign that He would indeed do what He had promised, in response to Hezekiah's request for a sign (v. 22; 2 Kings 20:8).

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<sup>403</sup>Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 91.



The stairway of Ahaz was evidently an exterior stairway that led to his upper room on the roof of the palace, where Ahaz had erected altars (2 Kings 23:12). This stairway was probably not built as a sundial, but it served that purpose as the sun cast its shadow on more or fewer steps depending on the time of day. That stairway may have been constructed as a sundial, or a different stairway constructed for that purpose could be in view. One writer believed it was an obelisk that rested on a stepped base and served as a sundial.<sup>404</sup> Evidently Hezekiah could see it from his sickbed. The passing away of daylight on the stairway symbolized the passing away of Hezekiah's life, and the return of sunlight represented the restoration of life.

Was this miracle a local or a global phenomenon? What the Lord promised was the movement of the shadow, not the sun that cast the shadow. This opens the possibility for a local miracle in which the shadow moved backward while the earth continued to rotate as usual (cf. 2 Chron. 32:31).

The reference to King Ahaz recalls the earlier incident involving the sign that God gave that king. God had told him to request a sign as high as heaven (7:11). Now God gave Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, a sign from heaven. Ahaz had refused to ask for a sign because he did not want assurance that God would destroy his allies. Hezekiah requested a sign because he wanted assurance that God would spare his life. Ahaz did not want to trust God, but Hezekiah did.

### **Hezekiah's record of his crisis 38:9-22**

The bulk of this section is a psalm of lamentation and thanksgiving that Hezekiah composed after his recovery (vv. 10-20). It is the only extant narrative in the Old Testament written by a king of Judah after the time of Solomon.<sup>405</sup> Compare King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon's similar testimony of praise, after God delivered him from insanity (Dan. 4:34-35). This psalm is also chiasmic in structure. It begins with reference to the gates of Sheol and sorrow at the prospect of shortened days (v. 10), and it ends with reference to the house of the Lord and joy at the prospect of lengthened days (v. 20). The king began by referring to the land of the living being exchanged for the departed (v. 11), and he ended with reference to the land of the departed exchanged for the land of the living (vv. 18-19). In the middle, he contrasted God's hostility (vv. 12-14) with His restoration (vv. 15-17).<sup>406</sup> Hezekiah described his condition first (vv. 9-14), and then he praised God for His mercy (vv. 15-20).

38:9            King Hezekiah wrote the following song after his illness and recovery. This verse is quite similar to the titles of many of the psalms.

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<sup>404</sup>Delitzsch, 2:114-15.

<sup>405</sup>*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 744.

<sup>406</sup>Motyer, p. 292.

- 38:10 When the king had heard Isaiah's prophecy of his impending death (v. 1), he bemoaned the fact that he would enter Sheol, the place of departed spirits, in the prime of his life. Evidently the king felt that God was depriving him of years that He owed him, possibly because he was a righteous man or perhaps just because most people think they will live a normal lifespan.
- 38:11 He sorrowed because his contact with God and with people as a living human being would end. He was not saying anything about his relationship with God after death. He only meant that his present relationship with God and people would end when he died.
- 38:12 Hezekiah viewed his life as fragile as a shepherd's temporary tent, which shepherds frequently moved from place to place. His life was like a weaver's finished piece of cloth that the weaver cuts off decisively and rolls up to take away. Both images are of objects that suddenly disappear from their expected places. Before the day of his life was out, the Lord would end it.
- "The thought is that in the morning one did not expect anything untoward to occur, and by evening, when darkness had come, the event had already taken place (cf. Job 4:20)."<sup>407</sup>
- 38:13 The king had composed himself; he had prepared for a normal future. But the Lord had interrupted his plans as an attacking lion surprises its prey and springs on it, breaking its bones.
- 38:14 His incessant prayers to the Lord reminded Hezekiah of the twittering of birds. He looked to the Lord for help in the oppression of his illness and for security.
- 38:15 The king was amazed at the change of events (cf. v. 5). Nevertheless the bitter disappointment that had come into his heart because of the prophet's announcement of impending death (v. 1) was something he would never forget.
- 38:16 He prayed that others would learn from his experiences, as he himself would, and that the Lord would indeed restore his health and his life. Another interpretation of the last line of this verse sees the king rejoicing that the Lord would restore him.
- 38:17 The Lord's announcement, at first bitter to Hezekiah, had turned into a learning experience for him (cf. Rom. 8:28). He had learned that God loved him, and he rejoiced in that. God had forgiven his sins, and he

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<sup>407</sup>Young, 2:520.

would not descend into the grave. The figure of God casting sin behind His back pictures Him throwing it away, out of His sight, because it is of no further interest to Him. Evidently Hezekiah believed that his premature death would have been a punishment for sin.

- 38:18 Those who die cannot thank and praise God for delivering them from death, but Hezekiah could because God had promised him mercy.
- 38:19 Rather it is the living who can praise the Lord and tell their children about His faithfulness to His promises to them.
- 38:20 Hezekiah concluded his poem of praise by affirming his belief that God would be faithful to him and would keep him alive for as long as He had promised (v. 5). This would be the basis for his continuing public praise of God in His presence for the rest of his life.
- 38:21 The poem having ended, Isaiah now added a postscript giving more detail about Hezekiah's recovery. Verses 21 and 22 are more smoothly integrated into the story of Hezekiah's recovery in 2 Kings 20 than they are here. This fact has led scholars to speculate about which account was first, which was second, or did both draw from a common source? There is no way to answer this question for sure. Hezekiah had evidently suffered from a boil, but the boil was probably only a symptom of a more serious disease (cf. v. 1). When Isaiah, acting as a physician, applied a fig poultice to the boil, the king recovered (cf. James 5:14).

"This is an example of healing occurring because of a combination of prayer, medicine, and God's work."<sup>408</sup>

- 38:22 Hezekiah had requested the sign that God had sent (vv. 7-8). He wanted assurance that he would recover so he could worship the Lord again in public. He did not just anticipate recovering, but he looked forward to worshipping after he recovered.

This chapter can stand alone in the text as a positive lesson on prayer, faith, and worship. But, as the next chapter reveals, chapter 38 also records the Lord's preparation of Hezekiah for another very significant incident in his life. Ahaz had refused to trust God and had refused to ask for a sign. Hezekiah trusted God but then failed to continue to trust Him in spite of a sign. Jerusalem, like Hezekiah, had received a reprieve from God, but it would only be a temporary one for the same reason.

### **The Babylonian envoys ch. 39**

- 39:1 The phrase "At that time" (cf. 38:1) anticipates a specially significant event and ties it to what preceded in chapter 38. As this verse explains, the events that follow happened after Hezekiah had recovered from his illness

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<sup>408</sup>J. Martin, p. 1090.

(38:5). This was most likely during the year 701 B.C. before Sennacherib's invasion of Jerusalem (chs. 36—37; cf. 38:6; 2 Kings 18:16).

Merodach-baladan (Cuneiform "Marduk-apal-iddina," lit. the god Marduk has given a son) raised Babylon to a position from which it threatened and eventually overthrew Assyrian dominance in the ancient Near East (cf. 21:1-10). He was the first king of Babylon, and he led that nation during two periods: 721-710 B.C. and 703-702 B.C. The historians vary in their dating of the ancient Near Eastern kings' reigns by a few years, but I believe the dates above are fairly accurate. In 710 B.C. Sargon, another Babylonian leader, ousted him, but in 702 B.C. the Assyrians defeated Merodach-baladan. After this defeat, he continued to foment revolt against Assyria in the Fertile Crescent. This seems to have been his motivation for cultivating Hezekiah's friendship by sending letters and a present when he heard of Hezekiah's recovery.

"The miracle of the sundial (38:8) would have held special interest for the astronomy-minded Babylonians (2 Chr. 32:31)."<sup>409</sup>

39:2 Hezekiah received Merodach-baladan warmly since he had expressed sympathy toward him and because the Babylonians shared Judah's antagonism toward Assyria. But showing the Babylonians all of his wealth and military resources went beyond what Hezekiah needed to do for such a friendly visitor. The Lord Jesus' responses to the flattery of Nicodemus (John 3) and the rich young ruler (Mark 10) provide examples of how Hezekiah should have responded. Hezekiah's response expressed a desire to share these resources with an ally who might help Judah oppose Assyria. Thus Hezekiah's act demonstrated trust in Babylon and reliance on her for safety.

"Here was a ready-made opportunity for Hezekiah to glorify God before the pagan Babylonians, to tell of his greatness and of his grace. Instead, he succumbed to the temptation to glorify himself and to prove to the Chaldeans that he was a worthy partner for any sort of coalition they might have in mind. There is no indication that they were interested in such an alliance, however. Much more likely they simply wished to encourage someone whom they viewed as a petty kinglet without making any commitment on their part."<sup>410</sup>

This visit constituted a divine test of Hezekiah's heart. Second Chronicles 32:31 reads, "And even in the matter of the envoys of the rulers of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that had happened in

<sup>409</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1171.

<sup>410</sup>Oswalt, p. 695.

the land [namely, Hezekiah's recovery], God left him alone only to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart."

39:3-4 God's Spirit and Hezekiah's failure to trust the Lord undoubtedly moved Isaiah to confront Hezekiah. First, the prophet asked about the visit of the Babylonian ambassadors and what Hezekiah had done with them. Hezekiah told the truth and put his actions in the best light, but he did not relate what the envoys had said or explain his motive. He put the best possible light on his actions. Nevertheless he put his own neck in the noose by answering Isaiah's simple questions as he did (cf. Gal. 6:7).

39:5-6 Isaiah informed the king that the Babylonians would end up taking everything that Hezekiah had shown the ambassadors back to Babylon—not as resources for opposition to Assyria but as the spoils of war. This is the first explicit reference to the Babylonian captivity in Isaiah. Many critics of the Bible who do not believe in predictive prophecy have used this reference as evidence of a much later date of writing than Isaiah's day. The ambassadors had come "from Babylon" (v. 3), and they would carry everything off "to Babylon" (v. 6). Hezekiah had shown them "all" (v. 4), and they would take "all" (v. 6, twice) to Babylon. This happened finally in 586 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kings 24:13; 25:13-15; 2 Chron. 36:18; Jer. 20:5). Isaiah's mention of Babylon as the enemy undoubtedly shocked Hezekiah because at this time Assyria was the great threat to Judah. Furthermore, Isaiah had previously predicted the demise of Babylon (ch. 14).

". . . Isaiah's message to Hezekiah is the same as it was to Ahaz, whose trust was in Assyria. 'That which we trust in place of God will one day turn and destroy us.'"<sup>411</sup>

This one sin of Hezekiah's did not doom Judah to Babylonian captivity. However, it illustrates the pride that the whole nation and its leaders manifested that ultimately resulted in the captivity.

39:7 Some of Hezekiah's descendants would also be taken (captive) to Babylon. It is very probable that at the time of the events in chapters 36—39 Hezekiah had no children. His son, Manasseh, began reigning when he was 12 years old, and Hezekiah died a year later, in 686 B.C. Thus, Isaiah's announcement here may have sparked a hope—in Hezekiah's mind—for some descendants. As usual, God's promise of judgment contained some hope. This prediction of Hezekiah's descendants became true of the king's physical seed: his son Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:11), King Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:12), and King Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:7). It also became true of many of Hezekiah's people, his children in that sense, when Nebuchadnezzar carried three deportations of Judahites off to Babylon (cf. 2 Kings 24:12-16; 2 Chron. 33:11; Dan. 1:3-4, 6).

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<sup>411</sup>Oswalt, p. 696.

39:8 Hezekiah's response to Isaiah's announcement of God's punishment for his lack of faith was deeply disappointing. Formerly, when Isaiah had announced coming divine judgment, the king had mourned and fasted (38:1-2), and God had relented (38:5-6). This time, Hezekiah simply rejoiced that it would not come in his lifetime. Another less probable view is that Hezekiah was simply thankful that God was being merciful to him personally.<sup>412</sup> The king acknowledged that Judah deserved divine judgment, but his lack of concern for his people's welfare shows that he did not really have the heart for them that the predicted Davidic ruler would need in order to rule in righteousness. Hezekiah could not be the promised child of 7:14.

The chronological relationship of the events in chapters 36—39 is difficult to understand, but clearly all these events happened at about the same time, probably within a year or two.<sup>413</sup> During this period Hezekiah trusted God twice and failed to trust God once. This should teach us that it is possible for a person to trust God in very difficult circumstances and turn right around and trust in people and things with the next temptation. We need to demonstrate consistent trust in the Lord, by His grace. We can do this by maintaining a daily intimate relationship with Him, marked by humility and prayer. We also need to learn not to trust in human leaders, because their faith wavers, but in the Lord Himself, whose faithfulness never varies.

". . . chs. 36—39 make chs. 40—66 a necessity. Given that God may be trusted, what then? Given that salvation is not in Hezekiah, where is it? Given that one-time trust is not enough, how is a life of continuous trust possible? Given that the best of God's people fail, where is our hope?"<sup>414</sup>

#### **IV. ISRAEL'S CALLING IN THE WORLD CHS. 40—55**

This part of Isaiah picks up a theme from chapters 1—39 and develops it further. That theme is God's faithfulness to His promises to give His people a glorious future after He disciplined them for their unfaithfulness. The Lord did not have to make these promises, but He did so in grace. Israel would have a glorious future, not because of, but in spite of, herself.

"The second half of the Book of Isaiah, consisting of the last twenty-seven chapters, is the sublimest and richest portion of Old Testament revelation. It forms a single continuous prophecy which occupies the same position in the prophetic Scriptures as the Book of Deuteronomy in the Pentateuch, and the Gospel of John in relation to the Synoptic Gospels."<sup>415</sup>

<sup>412</sup>See, for example, Grogan, p. 240, Young, 2:539, or Wiersbe, p. 47.

<sup>413</sup>See Young, 2:556-65, for an extended discussion of the nature and authorship of Isaiah 36—39.

<sup>414</sup>Oswalt, p. 673.

<sup>415</sup>Baron, p. 5.

"Isaiah's rhetorical approach in chapters 40—66 may be compared to an aging grandfather who writes a letter to his baby granddaughter and seals it with the words, 'To be opened on your wedding day.' The grandfather knows he may not live to see his granddaughter's wedding, but he understands the challenges she will face as a wife and mother. He projects himself into the future and speaks to his granddaughter as if he were actually present on her wedding day. One can imagine the profound rhetorical impact such a letter would have on the granddaughter as she recognizes the foresight and wisdom contained within it and realizes just how much her grandfather cared for her. When God's exiled people, living more than 150 years after Isaiah's time, heard his message to them, they should have realized that God had foreseen their circumstances and that he cared enough about them to encourage them with a message of renewed hope."<sup>416</sup>

Isaiah's audience was not in Babylonian captivity when he wrote these chapters. He was prophesying about the people of God in that captivity.<sup>417</sup> Chapters 40—66 presuppose the Exile.

"When one turns from the thirty-ninth to the fortieth chapter it is as though he steps out of the darkness of judgment into the light of salvation."<sup>418</sup>

"Whereas the first portion of the book (chaps. 1—39) is filled with messages of judgment, this portion emphasizes restoration and deliverance."<sup>419</sup>

| <b>Isaiah 1—39</b>                 | <b>Isaiah 40—66</b>                          |
|------------------------------------|--|
| The focus is on Assyria.           | The focus is on Babylon.                     |
| The primary theme is judgment.     | The primary theme is deliverance.            |
| Historical details are present.    | Historical details are absent.               |
| Messiah is the "shoot from Jesse." | Messiah is the "Servant of the Lord."        |
| The life of Isaiah is prominent.   | The life of Isaiah is absent. <sup>420</sup> |

Some students of Isaiah have seen an emphasis on each of the members of the Trinity in the three sections of this part of the book: the Father in chapters 40—48, the Son in 49—57, and the Spirit in 58—66.<sup>421</sup>

<sup>416</sup>Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 14. See also John N. Oswalt, "Who Were the Addressees of Isaiah 40—66?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:673 (January-March 2012):33-47.

<sup>417</sup>See Gary V. Smith, "Isaiah 40—55: Which Audience Was Addressed?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:4 (December 2011):701-13.

<sup>418</sup>Young, 3:17.

<sup>419</sup>J. Martin, p. 1091.

<sup>420</sup>Adapted from Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, p. 561.

<sup>421</sup>E.g., Walter Kaiser, pp. 213-19; and Wiersbe, p. 12.

### **A. GOD'S GRACE TO ISRAEL CHS. 40—48**

These chapters particularly address the questions, raised in the minds of Isaiah's contemporaries, about the coming exile: *Could* God deliver—and *would* God deliver the Israelites?

"We emerge in 40:1 in a different world from Hezekiah's, immersed in the situation foretold in 39:5-8, which he was so thankful to escape. Nothing is said of the intervening century and a half; we wake, so to speak, on the far side of the disaster, impatient for the end of captivity. In chs. 40—48 liberation is in the air; there is the persistent promise of a new exodus, with God at its head; there is the approach of a conqueror, eventually disclosed as Cyrus, to break Babylon open; there is also a new theme unfolding, to reveal the glory of the call to be a servant and a light to the nations."<sup>422</sup>

"In these chapters the prophet reminded the people of their coming deliverance because of the Lord's greatness and their unique relationship with Him. He is majestic (chap. 40), and He protects Israel and not the world's pagan nations (chap. 41). Though Israel had been unworthy (chap. 42) the Lord had promised to regather her (43:1—44:5). Because He, the only God (44:6—45:25), was superior to Babylon He would make Babylon fall (chaps. 46—47). Therefore Isaiah exhorted the Israelites to live righteously and to flee away from Babylon (chap. 48)."<sup>423</sup>

#### **1. The Lord of the servant ch. 40**

Would the coming Babylonian exile prove that God *could not* deliver His people or that He *would not* because they had been so sinful? Isaiah's answer was a resounding no! The new historical situation did not signal a change in God or His plans. Rather it would show even more clearly than ever that God is sovereign and that people can trust in Him to deliver.

This chapter is an introduction to the remainder of the book, in that it deals with the basic issues and sets the stage for what follows. It also serves as a bridge carrying over such themes as comfort (ch. 12), the highway (chs. 11; 19; 33; 35), and hope (ch. 6). Also, the revealed Word of God is prominent again as the source of hope for God's people. Chapter 40 also contains an expansion of Isaiah's call (ch. 6; cf. 40:1-11 and 6:1-13; 40:3 and 6:3; 40:5 and 6:3; 40:6 and 6:4; 40:9 and 6:11).

"The occasion of God's renewing comfort is our failure. It's as if Isaiah had fallen asleep at the end of chapter 39. While he slept, Judah was taken into exile. And it's as if, in a prophetic dream, Isaiah was lifted into God's heavenly court to hear Judah's predicament being discussed (cf. 1 Kings

<sup>422</sup>F. Derek Kidner, "Isaiah," in *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, p. 611.

<sup>423</sup>J. Martin, p. 1091.



22:19-23). But now in chapter 40, Rip Van Winkle-like, Isaiah wakes up in (to him) a new historical situation. He reveals to the Jews what he heard in the heavenly throne room. God has summoned his prophets to take a message of hope to his demoralized people."<sup>424</sup>

### **The comforting Lord 40:1-11**

This first section of encouraging revelation stresses the comfort that God has planned for His people Israel. We can break it down into three strophes (sections).

#### **God's intention for Israel 40:1-2**

The first strophe of this poem (vv. 1-2) sets the tone for the rest of the chapter and for the rest of the book. It is an introduction to an introduction (cf. ch. 1). In spite of affliction that lay ahead for the Judahites, God's ultimate purpose for them was life, not death—and salvation, not enslavement.

40:1 As chapter 1 began with a command (1:2), so does this second major part of Isaiah's prophecy. In both places the Word of God is prominent, and in both places Israel is God's people (1:3).

The God of Israel commanded His mouthpieces, especially Isaiah, to comfort His covenant people. Forms of the Hebrew word translated "comfort" appear 13 times in chapters 40—66. One writer believed the comforters were the Jewish exiles in Mesopotamia who called out to the city of Jerusalem (v. 2): announcing its revival, rebuilding, and rehabilitation, following the exile. He saw chapters 40—55 predicting the Jews' return to Judah from Babylon following the exile, not an eschatological return from all over the earth.<sup>425</sup>

This is the language of covenant (37:35; cf. Exod. 6:7; 2 Sam. 10:2; Jer. 16:7). We may imagine a heavenly court scene in which God issued this command (cf. 1 Kings 22:19). The double imperative "Comfort" suggests emotional intensity. "Keeps saying" is a better translation than "says" and stresses the importance of this message.

40:2 Jerusalem, the personification of God's people, the Israelites, needed persuading to respond to the Lord's love for her. Her lover had not cast her off. Judah's period of educational discipline involving duress (the Babylonian Captivity) was over. Punishment for her iniquity (by the sacrifice of the Lord's servant) had been accepted as satisfactory.

"Here is the first intimation of the truth to be more fully revealed in the fifty-third chapter of the book."<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>424</sup>Ortlund, p. 235.

<sup>425</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 80.

<sup>426</sup>Young, 3:23.

Indeed, Israel had received a double pardon, by God's grace (cf. 61:7). She had also suffered a double penalty for her sins (cf. 51:19). Paying back double may be an expression indicating proportionate payment, making the punishment equivalent to the crime.<sup>427</sup> I tend to believe that the meaning is that Israel will receive twice as much blessing as she had received judgment (cf. Jer. 16:18; Zech. 9:12; Rev. 18:6).

"Jerusalem had not suffered more than its sins had deserved; but the compassion of God regarded what His justice had been obliged to inflict upon Jerusalem as superabundant."<sup>428</sup>

This verse is programmatic for chapters 40—66 of Isaiah. Chapters 40—48 assure that Judah's captivity in Babylon will end, that "her warfare has ended." Chapters 49—57 promise that God will provide a sacrifice for sin, that "her iniquity has been removed." And chapters 58—66 guarantee that Israel will receive her promised kingdom blessings, that "she has received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins." Throughout, deliverance is in view.<sup>429</sup>

". . . no one will ever reverence God but him who trusts that God is propitious [i.e., favorably disposed] to him."<sup>430</sup>

### **Divine intervention 40:3-5**

Here begins explanation of how God could offer sinful people comfort. He would break into history (cf. 52:7-10).

40:3-4        Isaiah announced that someone was calling out to prepare a highway in the desert, because the Lord was coming to His people's aid (cf. Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23; 3:30). It was customary to construct processional avenues for approaching dignitaries and for idols carried in parade. The wilderness and desert represent the barren waste of Babylon where God's people dwelt, complete with obstacles and impediments to overcome, and through which He would come to them with refreshment, as He did formerly at Mount Sinai. The idea is that He was certainly coming and His people should prepare for His appearing.

40:5        God would appear, acting for His people, and by that acting, manifest His glory to the whole world. All flesh would marvel at His liberating the Israelites and bringing them back into their land. Even more, everyone would stand amazed at His saving humankind through the coming of

<sup>427</sup>See *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Archaeology," by D. J. Wiseman.

<sup>428</sup>Delitzsch, 2:140.

<sup>429</sup>Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, p. 562.

<sup>430</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.2.

Messiah. Still more impressive would be the eschatological demonstration of His glory that would accompany Messiah's return to the earth to rule. All these occasions of salvation are probably in view in this verse. This revelation was certain because it was an announcement from the mouth of Yahweh Almighty.

"Isaiah's tendency to add some emphatic statement like 'for the mouth of the LORD has spoken' (v. 6; cf. 9:7; 37:32) anticipates Christ's 'truly I say to you.'"<sup>431</sup>

### Human inability 40:6-8

The third stanza stresses the opposite of the second one, namely, the inability of humans to deliver themselves.

- 40:6 The same divine voice continued to call out (cf. v. 3). This time a messenger (Isaiah) asked what to call (cf. ch. 6), and the voice instructed him. He was to announce the brevity of human life, comparing it to the grass that quickly turns brown in Palestine and to the wildflowers that only last a few weeks (cf. 1 Peter 1:24). Israel's oppressors were no stronger or more reliable than grass. Their loveliness (Heb. *hesed*, constancy) was ephemeral.
- 40:7 The breath (Heb. *ruah*, sometimes translated "Spirit") of the Lord not only brings life (cf. Gen. 1:2), but it also brings death to people, even His people, as well as to their enemies and to the grass and flowers. The Apostle James combined these figures into one: "flowering grass" (James 1:10). The hot winds that blew into Israel from the east quickly withered the grass, and the prophet likened this wind to God's wilting judgments on humankind.
- 40:8 In contrast to this withering and wilting, the Word of Yahweh remains forever alive and fresh (cf. 55:10-11). That is, what God says will stand regardless of time or tragedy (cf. Mark 13:31; 1 Pet. 1:25; 2 Pet. 3:8-10). God's promise of hope could overcome the devastation of His judgment.

### Worldwide blessing 40:9-11

God's deliverance of His people was not just for their own blessing, however. It was to be for the blessing of the whole world.

- 40:9 The voice now summoned the people of Israel, collectively identified with Zion and Jerusalem, to announce the coming of their God. They were to go up on a high mountain and speak loudly without fear, so everyone else would hear their message of good news (cf. Acts 1:8).

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<sup>431</sup>Grogan, p. 242.

"The essence of the message is: 'Look, it's God.'"<sup>432</sup>

- 40:10 The sovereign Yahweh was coming to exercise His strong rule (cf. 53:1; Deut. 4:34). He was bringing His "reward" and "recompense" (synonyms) with Him for His people (cf. Rev. 22:12). These are the fruits of His victory, which He will share with His people (cf. 61:6; 66:12).
- 40:11 However, He would rule like David, the shepherd-king. He will be very sensitive to the needs of His people as He rules over them. Intimate and loving care will mark His reign. The two different uses of God's arm in this verse and the preceding one illustrate the two complementary sides of God's activity. Chapters 1—39 feature His arm of judgment, and chapters 40—66 emphasize His arm of compassion and deliverance.

### **The incomparable Lord 40:12-26**

The preceding section answered the question that the people of Isaiah's day had about God's *desire* to deliver them. Yes, He *wanted* to deliver them. This section answered their question about whether He *could* save them. Yes, He *could* save them. Isaiah used the doctrine of God to assure the Judahites of their security and of God's faithfulness. He is the sole Creator, and He is infinitely greater than the created world. The passage has two parts (vv. 12-20 and 21-26), each introduced by several questions.

### **The incomparable Creator 40:12-20**

- 40:12 The opposites of waters and heavens, and dust and mountains, express the totality of God's careful and effortless workmanship in creation. The question is rhetorical (cf. Job 38:41). No one but the Lord is the Creator. His omnipotence and immensity are in view.
- 40:13-14 The questions in these verses call for the same response. God was not only alone in the work of creation, but He is alone in the wisdom needed to execute it (cf. Job 38:2—39:30).

"He who has measured the creation cannot be measured by the creation."<sup>433</sup>

"In Babylonian mythology, the creator god Marduk could not proceed with creation without consulting 'Ea, the all-wise', but the Lord works with unaided wisdom. In both Babylonian and Canaanite creation stories the creator must overcome opposing forces before the way opens for the work of creation."<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>432</sup>John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40—66*, p. 54.

<sup>433</sup>Young, 3:44.

<sup>434</sup>Motyer, p. 303.

The Spirit of the Lord was the executive of God in creation (cf. Gen. 1:2). It is very difficult to tell how much of the triune nature of the Godhead the ancient Israelites understood. In Jesus' day (and in ours) Jews resisted the idea that God exists in three persons, as do Moslems today. It is the New Testament that clarifies the relationships of the persons within the Trinity. In Old Testament times, monotheism as opposed to polytheism was the distinctive belief of the Jews and the emphasis of the prophets. The issue for them was not how many persons compose the Godhead. So when they read references to "the spirit of the Lord," they did not think of a Person in the Godhead who was distinct from the Father and the Son, but of an aspect of God in a more general sense.

We could interpret "Spirit" as the mind of the Lord (cf. Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16). This is how the Septuagint translators rendered *ruah* here and in 1 Chron. 28:12 and Ezek. 20:32. It may refer to the volitional, effective, and cognitive aspects of God's intelligence, in other words, His inner workings. God alone saw to the heart of things in creation and made the correct decisions at the proper time. No one advised Him in His creation or in His administration of the world. Now His omniscience is in view.

- 40:15-17 The product as well as the process of creation reflect on God's immensity. He is larger than human collective strength, than the inanimate creation, than human worship, larger even than the totality of humankind. The creation is no challenge to the Creator. Now His sovereignty is in view.
- 40:18 The transcendent God (Heb. *'el*) is incomparable; no one and nothing approaches Him in His greatness and glory.
- 40:19-20 How ridiculous, then, it is to practice idolatry (cf. 41:6-7; 44:9-20; 46:5-7). Idols were likenesses of gods, but Yahweh is beyond compare. The value of an idol depended on the financial condition of the devotee. Idols are less impressive than the metals that people use to make them and less strong than the trees from which they fashion them. The best idols are immobile; they will not topple over (cf. 1 Sam. 5:2-5). But the living God is active in life, not just a product of the earth. Isaiah poured on the irony in these verses.

"Right now two idols dominate our world. One idol is enormous. The other is smaller but influential. The big idol is secularism. I mean not only naturalism as a technical philosophy but also a general outlook that makes man the measure of all things. . . . The other rival to God, the smaller idol, is alternative spiritualities. . . . Secularism and superstition—despite their obvious differences, they're both allied against the God who loves rationalists and pagans and is inviting them into his glorious kingdom with open arms. The door stands open to both atheists and witches and everyone in between."<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>435</sup>Ortlund, p. 241.

### The incomparable Sovereign 40:21-26

The prophet's emphasis shifted from God as Creator to God as Ruler, but still the point is His incomparability.

40:21        There are lessons that people should draw from the uniqueness of God as Creator that He has revealed. God has given both the objective revelation of Himself and the ability to understand its implications to human beings. The Israelites possessed this knowledge of God because He revealed it to them. Special revelation is probably in view here rather than natural revelation.

"According to this verse there are two reasons why men who practice idolatry are without excuse. On the one hand, the very foundation of the earth is a testimony that God is the Creator. On the other, from the beginning the truth has been taught by word of mouth, so that those who have not been willing to hear it are without excuse [cf. Rom. 1]."<sup>436</sup>

40:22        The same God who created the world presides over its affairs. He creates history as well as the material universe. The "vault" or "circle" of the earth probably refers to the heavens above as people perceive them (cf. Job 22:14) or, perhaps, to the horizon (cf. Job 26:10; Prov. 8:27). Isaiah was not revealing that the earth is round. God sits above them both. He is so great that people are as small as grasshoppers in comparison. The whole of the universe, the heavens and the earth, are as a tent to Him because He is so immense.

40:23-24    People of position and office, as well as the decision-makers of the world, may appear to wield power, but they are really under the enthroned God's authority. He can dispose of any human leader because He is over all of them. He can dispense with them just as easily as He can make flowers wither and blow chaff away (cf. vv. 6-8). He can reduce them to a state of comparative nothingness (Heb. *tohu*; cf. Gen. 1:2). Thus He is not only superior but sovereign. Furthermore, He is imminent as well as transcendent. God did not just create the world and then abandon it, as deism teaches.

40:25        This verse restates the question in verse 18, but puts it in the mouth of God this time. Not only is God infinitely superior to anyone else—in power, wisdom, dignity, sovereignty, and authority—but, far more significantly, in His holiness. He is unattainable and unassailable in His moral perfections; He is wholly other.

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<sup>436</sup>Young, 3:56-57.

40:26 The stars were objects of worship and signs of divine activity in Babylonian and Canaanite worship (cf. 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3). But they were only creations. The pagan cults assigned them names, but the Lord summons and directs them using their real names, the names that He as their sovereign assigns them. In the ancient world, to know the name of something was to know its essence and so to have power over it. Innumerable as they may be to humans, the Lord knows and controls each one of the heavenly bodies.

"Isaiah has insisted on the absolute transcendence of God: he is not part of the cosmos in any way, and the cosmos is not part of him [in contrast to pantheism and panentheism]. But to carry that line to its logical conclusion as Aristotle did is to end with a passionless, colorless force as the source of everything. It is to say that personality is an accident in time. Isaiah will not go that way. He insists on transcendence, but leaves no doubt that the Transcendent is a person with all that that means. When all is said and done, the combination of these two may be Israel's greatest contribution to human thought."<sup>437</sup>

"Why does the glory of God sit lightly on believers today? It may be the fault of those of us who are preachers. Is our constant message to the people, 'Behold your God'? Or have we changed the subject? We seem to have sunk to the level of quick-stop churches where God is expected to lubricate the vehicle of American selfishness."<sup>438</sup>

| <b>GOD'S SUPERIORITY TO ALL POSSIBLE OPPOSITION<sup>439</sup></b>  |                    |                   |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Argument</b>  | <b>Question(s)</b> | <b>Conclusion</b> |
| His superiority to the nations is shown by His creation of the earth.  | 40:12-14           | 40:15-17          |
| His superiority to idols is seen in the fact that they are created by craftsmen.                                 | 40:18              | 40:19-20          |
| His superiority to the rulers of the earth is seen in the fact that He is transcendent while they are temporary. | 40:21              | 40:22-24          |
| His superiority over other "deities" is shown by His creation of the heavenly bodies.                            | 40:25              | 40:26             |

<sup>437</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 70.

<sup>438</sup>Ortlund, p. 242.

<sup>439</sup>Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, pp. 563-64.

### The dependable Lord 40:27-31

Isaiah now applied this knowledge of God to the discouraging prospect that the Judahites faced, namely: Babylonian captivity (cf. 39:6). Even though Isaiah spoke to the nation from the perspective of the captivity being past, he still addressed his pre-exilic contemporaries. He encouraged them by pointing to the sufficiency of their God. Since the Creator knows the name of everything in His complex creation, how could He, the God of Israel, possibly forget His covenant people? Since He is as powerful as He is, how could He be incapable of helping them?

40:27           The Judahites kept saying: "How can God do this to us? He has forgotten us and no longer cares about us." They questioned God's nature (He could not see them) and His dealings with them (He would not defend them).

Perhaps the double names "Jacob" and "Israel" are more than poetic synonyms. Isaiah may have been implying that the Judahites, God's covenant people, were in a position as desperate in their own eyes as was Jacob, when he came to the end of himself, and God changed his name (Gen. 32:22-32).<sup>440</sup> This happened, they would remember, after his exile in Mesopotamia.

God is not too great to care. He is too great not to care (cf. Gen. 18:25).

40:28           The people needed to open their eyes and ears to what they already knew about their God (cf. v. 21). He is eternal, not bound to the present, as we are. He is Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God. He is the Creator of all the earth, not restricted to only one locale at a time. He does not grow tired, because He is omnipotent. He is inscrutable, because He is omniscient. This is why we cannot always understand why He allows things to happen as they do. He is unlimited by time, space, power, and understanding.

"Their God is such (eternal, Creator, untiring) that they need never doubt his capacity; he is also such (possessing unfathomable wisdom) that they must never expect to understand all his ways."<sup>441</sup>

"Everything that matters in life hangs on who God is."<sup>442</sup>

40:29           God does not just possess all these qualities, but He shares His strength with those who need it. He has all energy, and He has energy to spare and to share. Whether we buckle under life's pressures or lack innate strength, He provides durable, stable power (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9).

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<sup>440</sup>Motyer, p. 307.

<sup>441</sup>Ibid.

<sup>442</sup>Ortlund, p. 252.



40:30-31 Circumstances may overcome even the strongest young people in their prime, either through lack of inner resources or because of the hardness of life. Yet those who continually rest on, trust in, and wait for Yahweh will receive renewed and different—divine—strength. The Hebrew verb translated "gain" suggests an exchange of strength, our inadequate strength for His abundant strength.

"This expression ["those who wait for the Lord"] implies two things: complete dependence on God and a willingness to allow him to decide the terms."<sup>443</sup>

". . . the Old Testament applies to faith a number of synonyms denoting trust, hope, and longing, and thus describes it according to its inmost nature, as *fiducia* and as hope, directed to the manifestation and completion of that which is hoped for."<sup>444</sup>

They who wait on the Lord will be able to overcome natural drawbacks, endure with energy to spare, and keep on living without becoming excessively tired.

"The threefold description forms a climax, not its opposite; for the exceptional flying and the occasional running do not require, as does the constant walking, an ever-flowing stream of grace."<sup>445</sup>

The intent of this great chapter was to encourage the Israelites, as they looked forward to captivity, to continue to depend on, and submit to, the Lord. He could and would deliver them eventually. The Christian can also find encouragement here, in view of the greatness of our God and His promises to deliver us, too.

## **2. The servants of the Lord 41:1—44:22**

There is an emphasis on the uniqueness of the Lord compared to other gods in this section, a theme that Isaiah introduced earlier (ch. 40 especially). The prophet particularly stressed Yahweh's ability to control history in this connection. He did this to assure Israel that God loved her and had a future for her beyond the Exile, specifically to serve Him by demonstrating to the world that He is sovereign over history. These emphases become increasingly apparent as the section unfolds. Calls to praise form bridges from one section to the next (42:10-13; cf. 44:23; 45:8).

### **God's promises to His servants 41:1—42:9**

The intent of this unit of material was to assure Israel that God had both the *power* and the *desire* to deliver her and to bring salvation to the whole world. It contains three basic

<sup>443</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 74

<sup>444</sup>Delitzsch, 2:156.

<sup>445</sup>Grogan, p. 246.

themes: the pagans' inability to refute Yahweh's sovereignty, the promise to deliver fearful Israel, and the divine plan to use an ideal servant as redeemer.

### **Fear of the future 41:1-20**

The Lord, through His prophet, assured fearful Israel in this segment. Israel need not fear the nations (vv. 1-7) because Yahweh remained committed to His people and would use them to accomplish His purposes in the world (vv. 8-20). This expression of God's grace would have encouraged and motivated the Israelites to serve their Lord.

The courtroom setting pictured in verses 1-4 enabled Isaiah to make God's transcendent monotheism clear and compelling (cf. 1:18; 43:26; 50:8). Verse 1 is a call to judgment, verses 2-4 set forth God's case, namely, his acts in history.

41:1           The "coastlands" were the farthest reaches of the Gentile world: the ends of the earth then known. By summoning them to be silent, the Lord was appealing to all the Gentiles to listen to Him (cf. 1:2). In chapter 40 Isaiah spoke of God in the third person, but in this chapter, God Himself speaks. Note this oscillation in the chapters that follow. By heeding Him they would gain new strength, the same strength that was Israel's privilege (cf. 40:31). The Gentiles were to be fellow heirs with Israel (cf. 19:24-25; 27:13). But before that could happen, they had to meet with the Lord and arrive at a decision (cf. Job. 38:3).

"The words are addressed to the whole of the heathen world, and first of all to the inhabitants of the western islands and coasts. This was the expression commonly employed in the Old Testament to designate the continent of Europe, the solid ground of which is so deeply cut, and so broken up, by seas and lakes, that it looks as if it were about to resolve itself into nothing but islands and peninsulas."<sup>446</sup>

41:2-3       The Lord asked the nations a question: Who had righteously summoned a conqueror from the East who would defeat nations and overcome kings as easily and swiftly as one blows away dust and chaff? Later, Isaiah would identify this conqueror as Cyrus the Persian (44:28; 45:1), but here the emphasis is on the One who sovereignly called him into action, namely: Yahweh. The four Mesopotamian kings who invaded Canaan in Abraham's day and took Lot captive were the prototype of this invader, as were Sargon, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar. Jesus Christ will be the ultimate fulfillment when He returns to the earth east of Jerusalem (on the Mount of Olives), and overcomes His enemies, who will have assembled in Palestine. Cyrus came from Persia (modern Iran), which was east of Mesopotamia. This invader would proceed safely over previously unused routes.

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<sup>446</sup>Delitzsch, 2:157.

41:4 The Lord has always been the one who has called forth such conquerors to carry out His will in the world. The military history of the world is simply the outworking of God's sovereign plan. As A. T. Pierson used to say, "History is His story." God is the ultimate strategist who controls history. It has always been so, and it will always be so, because no other god preceded Yahweh, neither will any other succeed Him. He has no genealogy (cf. John 8:58; 18:5; Rev. 1:8, 17; 22:13).

Verses 5-7 relate the frightened response of the Gentile nations. Rather than submitting to the only true God, the pagans typically seek help from idols.

41:5-6 Upon hearing this message of Yahweh's sovereignty, the nations fear and try to encourage each other. They do not bow before the Lord but gather together and quake (cf. Ps. 2:1-2).

41:7 Furthermore, they proceed to build idols. Rather than turning to the Lord, they make gods to whom they turn. In 40:18-20, Isaiah contrasted the idols with the God of creation, but here he contrasted them with the God of history. It is not these idols who strengthen their worshippers, but the worshippers who strengthen their idols.

"What a god he must be that needs a common laborer to pass inspection and declare that he is in good condition!"<sup>447</sup>

"The purpose of all this detail is not clear, but the prophet may want to heighten the ironic effect by showing what a complex and arduous task idol making is. Thus he is implicitly asking his hearers if simply trusting the sovereign Lord is not a great deal easier. Another purpose may be to point out how dependent the gods are. They cannot be created by just one person; it takes a whole host of people to keep them going."<sup>448</sup>

Regardless of the nations' refusal to acknowledge Yahweh, He would intervene in history for the welfare of His fearful servant Israel. Israel did not need to fear like the nations, because the Lord would be with His chosen people and protect them.

41:8 The Lord turned from addressing the nations to speaking to Israel. God had chosen the Israelites for special blessing because He chose to love them more than other peoples. Election rests on love (cf. Deut. 7:7-8). The reference to Jacob recalls the unworthiness of the Israelites, and the mention of Abraham the fact that Abraham loved God (Gen. 18:17-19), the proper response to electing love (cf. 1 John 4:19). Both references also connect to God's covenant with the patriarchs. God had called Israel to be

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<sup>447</sup>Young, 3:80.

<sup>448</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, pp. 85-86.

His servant. This is the first of 31 references to a servant of the Lord in Isaiah.<sup>449</sup>

"Old Testament slavery/servanthood must never be thought of on the model of the West Indian slavery of the Christian era. Mosaic legislation extended protection to the slave and—such was the institution—had to make provision for the slave who loved his master and would not leave slavery (Ex. 21:2ff.). Such a 'slave', as a matter of social status, may have been at the bottom of life's heap, but in another sense he was as powerful as his master, for should he ever have been molested, it was the master the molester had to reckon with."<sup>450</sup>

41:9 God reminded His people that He had called them from the remotest part of the earth to be His servant. He did this in Abraham's case when He called him out of Ur into the Promised Land, and He did it in Jacob's case when He brought him back into the land from his sojourn near Haran. God had determined not to reject His people. Israel had nothing to fear (cf. John 15:14-15).

41:10 Moreover, the Israelites did not need to fear because God was with them, and He had committed Himself to them (cf. Matt. 28:20). They need not look one way and then another trying to find safety (cf. vv. 5-6). Furthermore their God promised to help them in every way with His powerful right hand, a symbol of strength, and to do what was right (cf. 40:10-11).

"Even though no exiled nation had ever before in history been brought back to start life anew in their ancestral homeland, and even though the Gentile government would have no practical means of inducing the Jews to return home, nevertheless God would bring this seeming impossibility to pass."<sup>451</sup>

41:11-12 "Behold" urges continued attention to more promises. The anger of Israel's enemies against her would prove to shame them. Their claims against Israel would come to nothing, their opponents would vanish, and their enemies would cease to exist. Increasing opposition would become increasingly ineffective. Those nations that would meddle with this servant would have to contend with an all-powerful Master.

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<sup>449</sup>See Allan A. MacRae, "The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121:483 (July 1964):218-27, for a study of the progressive revelation of the servant of the Lord in Isaiah. For a good overview of the title "Servant" in Isaiah, see Willis J. Beecher, "The Servant," in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, pp. 187-204.

<sup>450</sup>Motyer, p. 312.

<sup>451</sup>Archer, pp. 637-38.

- 41:13 Yahweh restated His promise and His exhortation from verse 10. Israel's God would strengthen, encourage, and help His people. He would stand with them while He defended them because He was Yahweh their God (cf. Exod. 20:2).
- 41:14 The Lord employed a second picture to comfort the Israelites. He would enable what was essentially weak to become strong (cf. 2 Cor. 12:10). Israel was like a worm in that she was insignificant, despised, weak, and vulnerable. However, she had a next of kin (Heb. *go'el*, redeemer)—the Holy One of Israel—who would take on her care and provide all that she, His family, needed—and more. This is the third time in this passage that Yahweh explicitly said He would help His people (cf. vv. 10, 13).
- 41:15 The Lord would transform the helpless worm, a tiny thresher of the soil, into a powerful threshing sledge—by giving her His power. Threshing sledges were heavy wooden platforms fitted with sharp stones and pieces of metal underneath. Farmers dragged them over straw to cut it up in preparation for winnowing. The sledge that Yahweh would make of Israel, however, would be so good that it could chop down mountains and hills, not just straw. The modern equivalent would be giant earth-moving equipment.
- 41:16 Yet this sledge would do more. It would winnow the nations as well as threshing them. The strong wind that God would provide would drive Israel's enemies away, as the wind separated the wheat from the chaff and blew the chaff away.

". . . every hindrance to God's ultimate purposes in the international scene is overcome through a judgment executed through Israel [cf. Mic. 4:10-13]."<sup>452</sup>

Israel would then rejoice and make her boast in her great God, who had both empowered her and removed her enemies.

Though presently in a drought-like condition, the Lord promised to bring His people into a paradisiacal garden-like existence.

- 41:17 A third picture unfolds. It is of Israel thirsting in the wilderness. The Lord promised to answer the prayers of His crushed and helpless people for their need Himself. He promised to come to their aid and not forsake them because He is their God.
- 41:18 He would provide by innovation (water where it did not usually appear, on hilltops), multiplication (more water where there was some, in valleys), and transformation (water where it never existed, in deserts; cf. 35:6-7).

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<sup>452</sup>Grogan, p. 251.

- 41:19 He would also provide the other necessity in the wilderness of life's experiences beside water, namely: shade. All the trees mentioned (seven in all) were shade trees, but they did not normally grow together. This enhances the picture of God working wonders to provide for His people. Seven may symbolize the complete perfection of God's work in this connection.<sup>453</sup> The emphasis on water and trees also marks Genesis 2:10-17, suggesting a return to Edenic conditions.
- 41:20 The Lord would do this so the afflicted and the needy (v. 17), His people, would reflect and learn that their God had done a powerful creative work for them.

"The righteous God of verse 8:13 and the Redeemer of verses 14-17 is now the Creator (20), transforming his creation (18-19) for the benefit of his needy ones (17)."<sup>454</sup>

### **The Creator of history 41:21-29**

How is it clear that Yahweh, and not the idols, directs world history? Yahweh alone can predict the future and then bring it to pass. The court case with the nations—began in verses 1-4, but interrupted with comfort for the Lord's servant Israel in verses 5-20—now resumes. Before it ends, however, the Lord will explain the ministry of His Servant, Messiah (42:1-9). The emphasis in verses 21-24 is on the inability of any other god to predict the future and explain the past.

- 41:21 The Lord, through Isaiah, challenged the idolaters to prove that their gods were truly deity. The Lord presented Himself as the King of Jacob, from the nations' perspective no more than one national god among many, but He is really the King of Kings.
- 41:22-23 He ordered the idolaters to bring their gods in and have them explain the flow of past history. Can they explain history? Are they able to explain how past events will unfold in the future? Can they predict the future and bring it to pass? In a word, are they transcendent? This would prove that they were really gods. Indeed, the Lord challenged: Have them do anything, good or bad, so that they might have some real effect on people.
- 41:24 Since these challenges go unanswered, the Lord judges the idols as nothing, and their supposed work amounts to nothing (cf. 1 Cor. 8:4). Furthermore, people who worship them are an abomination because they follow such nonentities and because in doing so they become like their gods.

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<sup>453</sup>Archer, p. 638.

<sup>454</sup>Motyer, p. 314.

"It is not the idea of polytheistic idolatry that is abominable [in itself], but rather the act of replacing the truth with that system [cf. Rom. 1:18-23]."<sup>455</sup>

In contrast to the idols, the Lord predicted that He would raise up, from the northeast, one who would serve Him. Exactly what God would do is not revealed here, except that this individual would dominate his enemies. The emphasis in verses 25-29 is on God's ability to predict this man's appearance ahead of time.

- 41:25 The Lord, in contrast to the idols, claimed that He would do something in the future and predicted what it would be. He would arouse a conqueror from the north, one who was presently dormant, as if sleeping. This individual proved to be Cyrus the Persian (44:28; 45:1), who originated in the East and the North in reference to Palestine.<sup>456</sup> He would call on the Lord's name in that he would proclaim the reputation of the Lord by fulfilling His prophecy (cf. Ezra 1:2-4), not by worshipping Yahweh exclusively. He would thoroughly defeat his enemies.
- 41:26 Yahweh is the only predictor of Cyrus, and His prediction proves Him unique among the "gods." In Isaiah's day the pagans claimed that their gods sent them messages, but these messages were vague and not specific. The fulfillment of this prediction would prove that Yahweh was the true God. Many scholars believe that the writer of this part of Isaiah, if not the whole book, lived after Cyrus began his conquests about 545 B.C. If that were so, the whole point of this passage loses its force.
- 41:27 Yahweh had announced to His people that Cyrus' invaders would come. Cyrus would be a messenger of good news in two senses: his coming would validate the truthfulness of Isaiah's prediction of his coming, and his coming would mean return from captivity for the Jewish exiles (cf. Ezra 1:2-4).
- 41:28-29 When the Lord looked for a messenger from another god who predicted the coming of Cyrus, He could find none. Not one of them could give any information about his coming (cf. 40:13). So He concluded as He began (v. 24), but this time passing judgment on the idolaters rather than on the idols. "Behold" ends each subsection (vv. 24, 29). The idolaters are false in the sense of being untrue and delusive. Their works—the idols—are worthless, and their idol images amount to nothing.

### **The greatest Servant of the Lord 42:1-9**

Since Yahweh is the God of Israel, does He have any regard for the Gentile nations? Yes, a servant of the Lord will bring forth justice to the nations (42:1-9).

<sup>455</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 102.

<sup>456</sup>C. R. North, *The Second Isaiah*, p. 105.

Yahweh had challenged the nations to behold the folly of idols (41:24) and idol worshippers (41:29), but now He urged them to behold His Servant (42:1). This Servant would reveal God to the world, something the idols could not do. The Lord first spoke *of* His Servant (42:1-4) and then *to* His Servant (42:5-9). Who this Servant is does not become clear until later (cf. Isaiah's identification of Cyrus).

Earlier (41:8-16) the servant was Israel, so the readers would naturally assume that Israel is the servant here too. Other references to Israel as the servant of the Lord are verse 19; 43:10; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; and 48:20. Only later does it become clear that this Servant must be an individual, namely: Messiah. The context and the characteristics ascribed to the servant in each reference to him dictate his identity. That the Servant is not Cyrus is clear from the contrasts between them.<sup>457</sup> He will be the ideal representative of Israel who will accomplish for the Lord what Israel did not regarding the world (cf. Gen. 12:3). Matthew quoted 42:1-4 as finding fulfillment in Jesus Christ (Matt. 12:18-21).

"Isaiah's unique contribution to Old Testament theology is his anonymous suffering servant songs."<sup>458</sup>

"The idea of 'the servant of Jehovah' assumed, to speak figuratively, the form of a pyramid. The base was Israel as a whole; the central section was that Israel, which was not merely Israel according to the flesh, but according to the spirit also [i.e., saved Israel] ; the apex is the person of the Mediator of salvation springing out of Israel [i.e., Messiah]. And the last of the three is regarded (1) as the centre of the circle of the promised kingdom—the *second David*; (2) the centre of the circle of the people of salvation—the *second Israel*; (3) the centre of the circle of the human race—the *second Adam*."<sup>459</sup>

| THE "SERVANT SONGS" |             |             |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Number              | Passage     | Post Script |
| 1                   | 42:1-4      | 42:5-9      |
| 2                   | 49:1-6      | 49:7-13     |
| 3                   | 50:4-9      | 50:10-11    |
| 4                   | 52:13—53:12 | chs. 54—55  |
| 5                   | 61:1-3      | 61:4-9      |

Bernard Duhm coined the term "Servant Songs" in his German commentary on Isaiah published in 1892.<sup>460</sup> The commentators vary somewhat in how much of the context they regard as part of these songs. John Martin, for example, took the first song as running

<sup>457</sup>See F. Duane Lindsey, "The Call of the Servant in Isaiah 42:1-9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139:553 (January-March 1982):12-31.

<sup>458</sup>Waltke, *An Old . . .*, p. 845.

<sup>459</sup>Delitzsch, 2:174.

<sup>460</sup>Berhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja*.



through 42:17.<sup>461</sup> The first two postscripts, or trailing passages, are divine confirmations of the Servant's work. The last two are exhortations to respond to the Servant. Likewise the number of "Servant Songs" has been disputed. Some scholars view only the first four (above) as "Servant Songs," and others include the fifth passage as one.

The Lord revealed that He would raise up another Servant who would establish justice on the earth (vv. 1-4).

42:1                    "The *hen* (behold) in ch. xli. 29 is now followed by a second *hen* [in 42:1]. With the former, Jehovah pronounced sentence upon the idolaters and their idols; with the latter, He introduces His 'servant.'"<sup>462</sup>

Yahweh called on the nations to see (give attention to) His Servant, in contrast to the idols (cf. 41:29). The Old Testament used "servant" to describe the relation of God's people to Himself (cf. Ps. 19:11, 13). Individuals described themselves this way (e.g., Moses in Exod. 4:10; Joshua in Josh. 5:14; and David in 2 Sam. 7:19 and 1 Chron. 17:17-19, 23-27), and others described them this way (e.g., Moses in Exod. 14:31; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Exod. 32:13; and David in 1 Kings 8:24). "Servant of the Lord" describes Moses 21 times and Joshua twice. The Lord referred to the following entities as "my servant": Israel (14 times, including seven times in Isa. 40—55), Moses (six times), David (21 times), the prophets (nine times), Job (seven times), and Nebuchadnezzar (twice). Isaiah's explicit references to Cyrus call him Yahweh's "shepherd" (44:28) and His "anointed" (45:1).<sup>463</sup>

Yahweh would uphold, or grip firmly, this Servant; He would sustain Him with deep affection. He would be one in whom the Lord delighted wholeheartedly, not just one He would use (cf. Matt. 3:17; 17:5). The Lord would place His Spirit on this Servant, blessing Him with His presence and empowering Him for service (cf. 11:2-4; Num. 11:16-25; 1 Sam. 16:13; Ps. 33:6; 139:7; Matt. 3:16; Luke 4:18-19, 21). This Servant would bring forth justice to the nations of the world (cf. 9:7; 11:3-4; 16:5). Justice (Heb. *mishpat*) connotes societal order as well as legal equity. The Gentiles would not find this justice on their own, but the Servant would bring it to them (cf. 11:1-5; 32:1). Jesus Christ will do this at His second coming. The Targum equated the Servant with Messiah. Modern Jews believe the Servant is Israel or the faithful within Israel. This was also the interpretation of Codex Vaticanus, but the following explanation of the Servant passages should rule out this view.

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<sup>461</sup>J. Martin, p. 1095.

<sup>462</sup>Delitzsch, 2:174.

<sup>463</sup>Motyer, p. 319, n. 1.

42:2 He would not serve the Lord ostentatiously, nor would He advertise Himself. His ministry would be quiet, non-aggressive, and unthreatening. Obviously Cyrus was not this Servant.

"In verse 1 we met the quintessential servant; here is quintessential service. It was forecast by Isaiah, exemplified perfectly in the Lord Jesus Christ, and is to be reproduced in all who would serve the Lord with true service."<sup>464</sup>

42:3 The Lord's Servant would be gracious and patient. He would not discard what seemed to others useless, and He would not extinguish what seemed to others too spent. His calling was to save, not destroy. He would be faithful to His calling to bring forth justice to the nations (v. 1; cf. 11:3-4).

42:4 Not only would He not break or extinguish others, but the pressures and blows of others would not break or extinguish Him. This reflects the Spirit's empowerment in His life (cf. v. 1). He would complete His mission of establishing justice on the earth. The furthest reaches of the earth will, therefore, anticipate the coming of His law, as Israel did at the base of Mount Sinai (Exod. 19; cf. Isa. 2:3). They would do so eager for justice to come to the earth, not necessarily eagerly anticipating it to come through the Lord's Servant.

The Lord now turned from describing His Servant's task by speaking *about* Him to confirming His task by speaking *to* Him. This is a pattern in the Servant Songs: confirmation follows description (cf. 49:7-13; 50:10-11; 54:1—55:13; 61:4-9). Two aspects of the Lord's glory that earlier exposed the plight of the Gentile world, namely, that the Gentiles do not know the only true God and that they worship idols, bracket this passage dealing with Gentile hope.<sup>465</sup> The task of the Servant, not His identity, continues to be the focus of attention. Each segment begins with a reaffirmation of the identity of the true God (vv. 5, 6, 8).

42:5 The speaker identified Himself, for the benefit of the idol-worshipping nations (cf. 40:1). He was the transcendent God who created all things (Heb. *ha'el*, cf. 40:18), namely, Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God of Israel. He described Himself further as He who established the earth and who alone cares for it and sustains its inhabitants. The Servant's ministry will fulfill the Creator's original intention for the earth.

42:6 Yahweh not only called an invader in harmony with His righteous purposes for humankind (41:2), but He alone also called this Servant at the right time, in the right place, and for the right purpose.

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<sup>464</sup>Ibid., p. 320.

<sup>465</sup>Ibid., p. 321.

"The righteousness of God is the stringency with which He acts, in accordance with the will of His holiness."<sup>466</sup>

Cyrus would destroy, but Messiah would build. The Lord promised again to uphold His Servant (cf. v. 1). The Servant would fulfill the covenant requirements and promises that God had given His people, becoming a covenant to them in that sense, and so bring them into intimate fellowship with Himself (cf. 49:6-8). Thus this Servant cannot be all of Israel or even saved Israel or the prophets. Some commentators view this covenant as the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), which Christ would ratify with His blood.<sup>467</sup> I think both the Old and the New Covenants may be in view, since Christ ended the Old and inaugurated the New. Still others believe that this is a reference to the "covenant of grace" that Christ made available to people by dying on the Cross.<sup>468</sup> The coming conqueror would drive the nations further into idolatry (41:5-7), but the Servant would lead them to God by serving as a light to the nations who sit in darkness (cf. Luke 2:32; John 14:6). The Lord Himself would do all this through His Servant (cf. Exod. 3:15; 6:3).

- 42:7 As light, the Servant would heal disabilities (physical and spiritual), end restrictions that others imposed, and transform individual circumstances (cf. Luke 1:79; John 1:4; 8:12; 9:5, 39-41; 12:46; Acts 26:18). He would bring people out of bondage, including their bondage to sin (cf. 61:1; John 8:32; Col. 1:13).
- 42:8 The Lord—Yahweh is His covenant name—is a distinct person with His own name (cf. Exod. 3:13-15). He would keep His covenant with Israel. He is not an idol that someone made and received the glory for making. The praise for His great acts belongs to Him, not to some image fashioned by one of His creatures (cf. 41:21-29).
- 42:9 "Behold" concludes this passage as it began it, forming an *inclusio* (cf. v. 1). The former things that God had predicted through the prophets—that had come to pass already—provided assurance that the new things that Yahweh just revealed, about Cyrus and Messiah, would also happen. Another view is that the former things are the predictions concerning Cyrus, and the new things are the things having to do with the restoration of Israel.<sup>469</sup> But the predictions about Cyrus had not yet come to pass. Yahweh had revealed all these things before they happened, thus proving His uniqueness and superiority over the gods of the nations. This is the first of six times God claimed to predict the future in Isaiah (cf. 44:7-8; 45:1-4, 21; 46:10; 48:3-6).

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<sup>466</sup>Delitzsch, 2:178.

<sup>467</sup>See *Ibid.*, 179-80; Grogan, p. 255; and Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 100-101.

<sup>468</sup>See Young, 3:120-21.

<sup>469</sup>Delitzsch, 2:180.

Thus ends Yahweh's disputation with the gods (41:1—42:9). The appearance of Cyrus, more than 150 years after Isaiah's prophecies about him, would be a kind of sign that the prophecies about the ultimate Servant would also come to pass—in the more distant future.

### **God's purposes for His servants 42:10—44:22**

The section of Isaiah that I have titled "God's promises to His servants" (41:1—42:9) sets the stage and introduces themes that Isaiah proceeded to develop in this section. Those themes are the certainty of redemption (42:10—43:7), the witness to redemption (43:8—44:20), and the memory of redemption (44:21-22).

#### **The certainty of redemption 42:10—43:7**

God had not forgotten, nor was He unable to deliver His people (cf. Exod. 3:7-9). Their redemption was certain.

"This vision of what God will accomplish through his Servant is so exciting that Isaiah breaks into the ecstatic hymn of praise (vv. 10-13), which then functions as a bridge from this section, 41:1—42:9, into the next, 42:10—44:22."<sup>470</sup>

- 42:10-12      A new song arises in Scripture when someone has learned of something powerful and good that God has done or will do (cf. ch. 12; Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; Rev. 5:9; 14:3). Here it is salvation through the Servant that prompts this song of praise (cf. 6:3). Isaiah called on everyone to praise the Lord because the Servant's ministry would benefit the whole earth. People living on the farthest seacoasts and in the desert lands should praise Him. Kedar, a son of Ishmael (Gen. 25:13), was also the name of a town in the Arabian Desert (cf. 21:16-17; 60:7). Sela was near modern Petra and was the mountain fortress city of Edom (cf. 16:1). These people in various places represent diverse sources from which universal praise should come to the Lord.
- 42:13      This verse gives the reason for the praise just called for. Isaiah gloried in the fact that Yahweh would one day arise as a mighty warrior to overcome His enemies. He did this when He moved Cyrus to allow the Israelites to return to their land. He did it more mightily when He sent Messiah to accomplish redemption. And He will do it most dramatically when Messiah comes back to the earth to defeat His enemies at Armageddon (Rev. 14:14-20; 19:17-19).
- 42:14      God Himself explained that He had remained quiet a long time, but in the future He would cry out, as a pregnant woman does just before she gives birth. The cry (cf. v. 13) signals a mighty act. God would bring forth a new thing.

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<sup>470</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 109.

- 42:15 Nothing in all creation would be able to resist and prevent the Lord from acting. His coming to judge sin and sinners would be as devastating to them as the searing east wind was to Palestinians.
- 42:16 However, He would lead His own people, those unable to find their way through the blinding storm of His judgment, to safety (cf. Rev. 12:14). The people of Israel were blind and could not bring the Gentiles into the light, but God would lead His blind servants (cf. v. 7). He promised definitely to do this.
- 42:17 That deliverance would spell humiliation for idolaters because they, and others, would see the impotence of their gods compared to Yahweh. Return from the Exile provided a sign of what God would do for His people in the eschaton. Both acts of God seem to be in view here.

The rest of this chapter addresses Israel's present condition of blindness (cf. Rom. 10). Yahweh now disputed with His people, not with pagan idolaters, as formerly. Motyer analyzed the structure of this part of Isaiah differently and saw a parallel between national redemption in 42:18—43:21 and spiritual redemption in 43:22—44:23.<sup>471</sup>

- 42:18 The Israelites had concluded that Yahweh was blind and deaf to their situation, namely, impending destruction. Now He revealed that it was they who were blind and deaf to what He would do for them. He challenged them to comprehend what they had missed.
- 42:19 It is the servant of the Lord, and of all people—*Israel* (cf. 41:8-16)—that was blind and deaf. How ironic it was that God's messenger to the world, the one that He had brought into covenant relationship with Himself, was blind and deaf, blinder and deafer than any other. Israel, above all others, needed to be able to see and hear what her Lord told her so she could tell it to the world (cf. ch. 22). The nations were blind (cf. vv. 6-7), but Israel was both blind and deaf (cf. 6:9-10; 30:9-11; Amos 2:4).

"As Isaiah was the messenger of God to Israel, so Israel was called to be the messenger of God to the world. But the still unanswered question was: What kind of coal from the altar would it take to bring the nation to its senses and cleanse its lips for service?"<sup>472</sup>

- 42:20 As the Lord had told Isaiah at the beginning of his ministry (6:9), the Israelites saw but did not perceive, and heard but did not comprehend (cf. Deut. 29:2-4). The Israelites' response to the Mosaic Law is primarily in view.

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<sup>471</sup>Motyer, p. 326.

<sup>472</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 131. Cf. 6:6-7.

"The cardinal sin of the people of God is to possess the divine word and to ignore it."<sup>473</sup>

- 42:21 Here is what the Israelites were blind and deaf to: the teaching of Yahweh. The law in view here probably includes all of what God had revealed to His people that enabled them to come into relationship with Him and to live lives of fulfillment as His creatures. The Lord glorified this instruction (Heb. *torah*) because He is righteous; He does what is right for the welfare of people, and that involves revealing His gracious will to them.
- 42:22 In contrast to God's purpose for Israel (cf. Exod. 19:5-6), the nation was in a position, because of her own sin and God's discipline of her, from which she could not deliver herself, much less lead the Gentiles into the light (cf. 45:14-25; Deut. 28:49-53). Each description of Israel in this verse contrasts with what she should have been in the will of God.
- 42:23 The prophet despaired that no one among the Israelites was learning from God.
- 42:24-25 God's people needed to observe that sin had led them into their present wretched condition, and that whenever their ancestors had gotten into such a condition, repentance brought restoration to usefulness. Their relationship to God was the key. The Torah, of course, explained what God promised to do if His people obeyed or disobeyed Him (cf. 1:4-8; Lev. 26; Deut. 28—29), but the Israelites had not paid attention to this teaching. Since they chose to go their own way, the judgment of God had burned them. Most of Isaiah's contemporaries were still claiming that they did not deserve the hardship that God had sent them.

Chapter 42 thus contains a strong contrast. It opens with one Servant who will discharge His ministry successfully, and it ends with another servant—in servitude to his captors—having failed to minister effectively. The Servant Messiah obeys God and fulfills His task, but the servant Israel refuses to listen to God and draws His judgment.

Even though Israel had failed to learn from the Lord (42:18-25), He would still deliver her in the future out of pure grace (43:1-7). He had not cast off His covenant people (cf. Rom. 11:1).

- 43:1 The Lord called His people not to fear, even though they were blind, deaf, and suffering for their sins. God had created the nation with painstaking care, had redeemed (Heb. *ga'al*) it in the Exodus, and adopted it as His special treasure at Mount Sinai. His acts for her, not her acts against Him, guaranteed her future. The dual reference to Jacob and Israel stresses God's tenderness in dealing with the nation He had created.

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<sup>473</sup>Motyer, p. 328.

"Thirteen times within the compass of chapters 40—49 Isaiah uses this double designation, and with one exception (41:8), in this order. Jacob was the deceiver and had to become an Israel [prince with God]. Hence in this order of the names there may be a hint that the Jacob character of the nation had to be abandoned. Implied also may be the thought that in *Israel* is expressed the true destiny of the people. They are to become an Israel, and as such the heirs of the promises that had once been made to their ancestor Israel."<sup>474</sup>

- 43:2 "Water" and "fire" are traditional symbols for *testing* that suggest totality when used together (cf. Ps. 32:6; 42:7; 66:12; James 1:2). God promised to protect His people from total destruction when they underwent their various trials. He had done this in the past, and He would do it in the future because He would be with His special people (cf. Dan. 3; Rom. 8:31-39).
- 43:3 Three names heighten God's unique relationship to Israel, and the Exodus and Sinai experiences had taught their meaning to the people. God would even sacrifice other nations to preserve Israel for Himself. Perhaps the Lord meant that He would give Persia rulership over Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba—as rewards for allowing the Israelites to return to their homeland.<sup>475</sup> I tend to favor this view. Another option is that He meant that He had given over Egypt and its southern extremities to redeem Israel at the Exodus.<sup>476</sup> A third view is that these nations represent the heathen nations in general, whom God did not favor when He redeemed Israel.<sup>477</sup> In another larger sense, God sacrificed His Son as a ransom in the place of many whom He had called (cf. 53:8-12; Matt. 20:28; 2 Cor. 5:21).
- 43:4 Yahweh would sacrifice other nations for Israel because of what the Israelites were to Him, in spite of themselves, as well as because of what He was to them (v. 3).
- 43:5-6 Again, the Israelites should not fear (cf. v. 1; 7:4; 8:10). The reason is again that God was with them (cf. vv. 1, 2, 3). Worldwide scattering would not prevent Him from fulfilling His promises and giving them a future in the Promised Land (cf. 11:11-12; 27:13; 49:12; 60:4; Deut. 30:3-6). He would reassemble His sons and daughters from the ends of the earth (cf. Jer. 30:10-11; Ezek. 37). Return from Babylonian captivity would not be from the four compass points and so does not qualify as the complete fulfillment. He will do this when Jesus Christ returns to the earth (cf. 5:26;

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<sup>474</sup>Young, 3:139.

<sup>475</sup>J. Martin, p. 1097.

<sup>476</sup>Motyer, pp. 331-32.

<sup>477</sup>Young, 3:143.

Matt. 24:31). Amillennialists often take this as the spiritual gathering of lost sinners to Jesus Christ.<sup>478</sup>

43:7 What qualifies these people for such treatment is their relationship to Yahweh. They are called by His name and are, therefore, part of His family (cf. Deut. 28:10; Jer. 14:9; 15:16; Ezek. 36:20). Furthermore, God brought them into existence to glorify Himself (cf. v. 1). Their condition reflects on Him, and unless He restores them they cannot fulfill His purpose for them in the world.

There are many allusions in this section to Creation, the Exodus, the Exile, and the return from exile.<sup>479</sup> However, complete fulfillment of these prophecies of restoration awaits the eschaton.

### **The witness to redemption 43:8—44:20**

Isaiah continued to show that Yahweh was both willing and able to deliver His people, a theme begun in 42:10. He confronted the gods, again (cf. 41:21-29), but this time he challenged them to bring forth witnesses to their deity, namely, people who could confirm their ability to predict the future. The captive Judeans were Yahweh's witnesses. They would, despite their spiritual blindness and deafness, give witness to His ability to predict their salvation and to accomplish it.

God would make His people the evidence of His deity (vv. 8-13).

43:8 Isaiah summoned an unidentified authority to bring out the Israelites: the spiritually blind and deaf (cf. 42:18-25; cf. Deut. 29:4; Jer. 5:21). The setting of this scene is a courtroom. The prophet was summoning them so God could address them (v. 10) as His witnesses. Imagine calling blind and deaf people as witnesses in a court of law! Yet the Lord would use even them to testify to His greatness.

43:9 Isaiah pictured all the nations in this courtroom. Some had already assembled, and others were on their way. Who among them, the prophet asked, could proclaim former things? These "former things" probably refer to things predicted in the past that had since come to pass.<sup>480</sup> No one among the nations, none of their gods, could predict the future and then bring it into existence. Only Yahweh could do this. Furthermore, no one could serve as a witness that the idols could do this or confirm the testimony of someone else that they could.

<sup>478</sup>See *ibid.*, 3:144-45.

<sup>479</sup>See Eugene H. Merrill, "Pilgrimage and Procession: Motifs of Israel's Return," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, pp. 261-72.

<sup>480</sup>See A. Schoors, *I Am God Your Savior: A Form-Critical Study of the Main Genres in Is. XL—LV*, pp. 94, 225.



Undoubtedly some pagan prognosticators claimed to be able to foretell the future and that their predictions had come to pass, just as today some psychics make such claims. However, none of them could predict with the specificity and accuracy that Yahweh did through His prophets. The biblical prophecies that had already been fulfilled were in an entirely different class than the predictions that marked the nations. If this were not the case, Isaiah would not have dared to claim what he did here.

- 43:10 Yahweh pointed to the people of Israel, His servant, as those who would be His witnesses that He could predict the future and bring it to pass. For example, He had promised to make Abraham a great nation, to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, to give them Canaan, and to make David's dynasty secure. He had fulfilled all these promises and more. In the process He had made the Israelites His witnesses so they would learn that He alone is the true God (cf. Exod. 3:14). Similarly, Jesus told His disciples that they would be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). They had witnessed His works for several years and could testify to His uniqueness, even His deity. Thus the early confession of the church became "Jesus is Lord."
- 43:11-13 Yahweh alone, among all the "gods," is the only real deliverer, the one who knows the future, and the sovereign. He is unique. None of the idols was Yahweh. The Israelites could bear witness to that, but they were blind and deaf. Therefore the Lord had to testify in His own behalf.

"In the first part of his book, Isaiah had demonstrated that God alone can be trusted, that all other resources, especially the nations, would fail. Now he is showing that when we have refused to trust and have reaped the logical results of our false dependencies, God alone can save."<sup>481</sup>

Yahweh was the only God from the very beginning. Since He is the only deliverer, no other god can deliver people from His hand or overrule His decisions. It was foolish, then, for the Israelites, as it is for all God's people, to look to anyone or anything else for salvation. Someone said, "In our world it's cool to search for God, but uncool to find him."<sup>482</sup>

In the future, God would use Israel to demonstrate to the world in a fresh way that He was the only Savior, as He had done in the past. He would make His people the evidence of His deity by delivering them from captivity in Babylon (43:14—21) and from their sins (44:1-5). His salvation would be in spite of their lack of righteousness (43:22-28).

- 43:14 Yahweh, Israel's Redeemer and the Holy One of Israel (cf. 41:14), would bring judgment on Babylon for the sake of the Israelites. His judgment would be for their sake in two senses: it would demonstrate His sovereignty to them in a fresh way, and it would fulfill His covenant promises to preserve them. The Babylonians would flee as fugitives from

<sup>481</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 148.

<sup>482</sup>Quoted by Ortlund, p. 283.

the Lord and His instrument of punishment, the Medo-Persians. Isaiah pictured them fleeing in boats, sailing south down the Euphrates River. Note the similarity between the Babylonians in their ships on their river and the Egyptians, who also sailed ships on their river, the Nile. The Chaldeans, so-called by the Assyrians, were the warriors of southern Mesopotamia who forged the Babylonian Empire.

- 43:15 Reminders of who Israel's God is (vv. 14a, 15) bracket the promise of deliverance (v. 14b). God would not deliver His people because of *who* they were but because of *whose* they were. He was Yahweh, who had revealed Himself to them at Sinai and made a covenant with them. He was their Holy One who had showed them how to share in His holiness and so enjoy His fellowship. He was the Creator of Israel who had brought them into existence from nothing. And He was their King who was the true sovereign and father of their nation, who owned them, and to whom they owed their allegiance.
- 43:16-17 The prophet gave an unusually long description of the Giver of the promise to follow (vv. 18-21) because of the unusual content of the promise. The One giving the prediction was the One who in power, love, and faithfulness had delivered His people from Egypt in the Exodus. His destruction of the Egyptian adversary had been final.
- 43:18 Obviously God did not want His people to forget what He had done for them in the Exodus, but neither did He want them to look back on that event and conclude that it was His only act of redemption or the only method He could use to redeem them. The Exodus exemplified God's ability, but it did not set a pattern that He had to follow thereafter (cf. Jer. 23:7-8).
- 43:19-20 God was going to do a new thing for Israel, something that would appear unexpectedly, like a sprout from barren soil. The Israelites would become aware of it even though they had no knowledge of it at that time. He would do for the captives in Babylon what He had done for their ancestors in Egypt, namely, make a highway for them through the wilderness and provide them with water (cf. Exod. 17). Instead of turning a sea into dry land, He would turn the dry land into waterways (cf. 35:6-7). These images picture a second Exodus. Even the animals would acknowledge God's greatness as they observed His acts and benefited from His goodness to His people.

"Here we see the acts of God bringing the whole world into harmony, a feature which will be perfected in the Messianic day (11:6-9[; 65:25]). Here, the journeying people are met by a transformed world (19cd) into which the animal creation gladly enters with benefit."<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>483</sup>Motyer, p. 337.

One writer took the water as symbolic of God's sustaining provision for the Jews, and the animals as figures representing Gentile nations that will benefit from the witness of the restored Jews.<sup>484</sup>

43:21 More important, God's chosen people, whom He carefully formed for Himself, not ultimately for their own welfare, would praise Him. God created Israel for His own praise, as human witnesses to His greatness. This continues to be the function of God's people (cf. Luke 1:74-75; Eph. 1:4-6; 1 Pet. 2:9).

"Still a third and more glorious 'Exodus' will take place when the Messiah returns to regather His people (cf. 43:5-6) and establish His millennial reign on earth."<sup>485</sup>

Isaiah now clarified that the reason for this great blessing that God promised the Israelites lay in Himself, not in them (43:22-28). Their salvation would come out of His grace; it would not be a reward He owed them for their obedience (cf. Eph. 2:8-9).

43:22 The Israelites would genuinely worship God for His coming deliverance of them (v. 21), but at present they were not doing so. They had forsaken their God, and their praise was only formal rather than heartfelt (cf. 1:11-14; 66:3; Jer. 7:5-10; Hos. 6:6; Amos 4:4-6; Mic. 6:3-8; Mal. 1:13; 2:17; Matt. 15:9).

43:23-24 The people had brought few sacrifices and offerings to the Lord, even though His requirements of them in this regard were not excessive, and even what they had brought had not touched Him. Sweet cane (calamus) was an ingredient in the anointing oil (cf. Exod. 30:23; Jer. 6:20). What they had brought to Him in abundance was sin and iniquity. He was wearier of their worship than they were.

43:25 The Lord Himself (cf. v. 11) would forgive His people for His own sake, not because they had earned forgiveness with their worship. Forgiveness of sin is a divine prerogative (cf. Matt. 9:2-6). He pictured forgiveness as erasing something previously written on a record (cf. 44:22; 2 Kings 21:13; Ps. 51:1, 9). Another figure, forgetting sins committed against Himself, strengthens the promise of forgiveness (cf. Jer. 31:34; Mic. 7:18-19). Since God is omniscient He never forgets anything, but in this promise He compared Himself to a person who does forget things (an anthropomorphism, cf. v. 24) to illustrate the fact that He would not hold their sins against them. He would not call their sins to mind with a view to punishing them. It was sin, not captivity, that was the root trouble that needed dealing with. Later, Isaiah revealed that God would deal with it through His Servant's ministry (53:10-12).

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<sup>484</sup>Archer, p. 639

<sup>485</sup>J. Martin, p. 1097.

43:26 Here God offered His people the opportunity to correct Him if what He had said was false, or to remind Him of something that He may have forgotten (v. 25; cf. 1:18). This heavily ironic offer would have drawn a silent admission of guilt from honest Israelites. Their sin was the root of their troubles, and all their goodness could not get them out of their difficulties.

". . . until we recognize our need for grace, all our energies, energies designed for the praise of God [v. 21], will be spent in fruitless self-justification."<sup>486</sup>

43:27 Israel's sin was traceable all the way back to her namesake, Jacob (v. 22; cf. Deut. 26:5; Hos. 12:2-4). Other possibilities are that Adam or Abraham is in view. Even the leaders of Israel had consistently sinned against the Lord (cf. 9:15; 28:7; 29:10; Jer. 5:31); it was not just the present generation that was unacceptable to Him.

43:28 God would also pollute the priests with guilt since they had for generations polluted His sacrifices with their guilt (cf. 2 Chron. 24:5). They, of all people, should have been holy since they dealt with the holy things connected with Israel's worship (cf. 65:2-5; Lev. 10:3). God would consign the whole nation to the ban (Heb. *herem*), something devoted to destruction. Israel had become like Canaan (cf. 1:9-10; Josh. 6:17; 1 Sam. 15:21), and it would become the object of Gentile reviling as Canaan had been for the Israelites.

God would make His people the proof of His deity by delivering them from captivity in Babylon (43:14-21) and from their sins (44:1-5). The next pericope expands the focus of God's promise from physical to spiritual deliverance, and extends it from an approaching to a more distant fulfillment.

44:1 The Lord again summoned His chosen servant Israel to pay attention to what He was about to say (cf. 43:1). Judgment was not Yahweh's final word to His people. This new word would be good news in contrast to what had immediately preceded (cf. 43:28).

44:2 Yahweh, the covenant God who formed Israel into a nation, would help her. Therefore His chosen servant should not fear (cf. 41:10, 14; 43:1) even though Israel had fallen far short of God's desires for her. The endearing name "Jeshurun" means "upright one" (cf. Deut. 32:15; 33:5, 26). Even though Israel had stumbled badly, she was still upright because God had held her up. "Jacob" (deceiver) may represent what Israel was in the past and "Jeshurun" (upright) what she would be in the future.

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<sup>486</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 161.

44:3 The Lord promised to pour out His Spirit on the Israelites in the future. This gift would have the same effect for the nation as pouring water on dry ground would have for the landscape. It would bring refreshment and new life, indeed, a whole new spiritual attitude (cf. 32:15; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26-27; 37:7-10; Joel 2:28-29). Blessing would come to the descendants of Isaiah's audience. Isaiah in this verse may have meant that God would bring both physical and spiritual refreshment. Other passages reveal that He will send physical refreshment (cf. 35:6-7; 41:18).

Since this is a promise specifically to the Israelites, they would be the special recipients of this outpouring. Thus it must still be future. The giving of the Spirit in the apostolic age, first on the day of Pentecost and then on several subsequent occasions, was not a gift to Israel but to the church, not to Jews uniquely but to Jews and Gentiles equally (cf. Acts 11:15). Both outpourings have the result of making the recipients witnesses.

44:4 Then the Israelites would grow like flowers among the grass and like poplars planted beside streams of water (cf. Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:8). The Old Testament writers often regarded numerous progeny as a sign of divine blessing (cf. Gen. 15:5; Ps. 127:3-5).

44:5 In that day it will be an honor to be a member of the nation of Israel (cf. Ps. 87:4-6), not a dishonor (cf. 43:28; Ezek. 36:19-20). Many people will come to Yahweh because of His blessing on Israel. It is difficult to know whether the "ones" mentioned here are Israelites or Gentiles. Some will even write their identification with Yahweh on their hands. The Mosaic Law forbade the Israelites from disfiguring their bodies (Lev. 19:28). These Israelites will not be living under the Mosaic Law, which Jesus Christ ended. Besides, these names may not be permanent disfigurements. This was a practice of some people in the ancient world who wanted to make their commitment to some individual prominent (cf. Deut. 6:8). A soldier sometimes wrote the name of his commander on his hand, a slave bore the name of his master, and a devotee did the same with the name of his god. This is probably not a reference to people taking the mark of the Lamb and His Father during the Tribulation (Rev. 7:3; 14:1). That mark will appear on the foreheads of the 144,000. Moreover, the Tribulation will not be when people will honor the Israelites. That will follow, in the Millennium.

The Israelites would be God's witnesses (44:6-8), but the idols have no true witnesses (44:9-20). This is the climactic section of 42:10—44:22, "God's purposes for His servants." God's claims (vv. 6-8) contrast with the folly of idolatry and the worldview from which it springs (vv. 9-20). God's initiative contrasts with human initiative.

44:6 With the titles he chose, the Lord highlighted His special relationship with Israel, His intentions for the nation, and His ability to fulfill those intentions. As Israel's near kinsman, He would not allow her to perish. He

is incomparable; there is no one like Him. The gods are not God. The same terminology used in this verse describes Jesus Christ later in Scripture (Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13).

44:7 The proof of God's uniqueness is His ability to foretell the future and then bring it to pass. Anyone who claims to be able to do this must prove to God that he has done it. God's creation of Israel and His revelation of the future to and through her is the great proof of His deity.

44:8 The Israelites should not fear even though they were heading for captivity. God had told them that they would return from captivity as well as go into it. When they did return, they would be able to witness to the world that the Lord had predicted and performed both events. In the meantime they could seek refuge in their Rock, their only support and protector.

"The character of God is the ultimate assurance of His people."<sup>487</sup>

Seeking refuge in idols is not only fruitless but fatal (vv. 9-20). The idols have no witnesses to their ability to forecast and control the future. They are nothing (vv. 9-11), and their worshippers are confused (vv. 12-17) and blind (vv. 18-20). If Isaiah could show that it was foolish to think that supreme power resided in an idol, he could expose the heresy of paganism. This he did in this pericope.

"This extended exposé was doubtless intended to strengthen the Jews against the allurements of paganism during the long captivity in Babylon."<sup>488</sup>

44:9 The prophet began by stating his premise. Idol makers engage in futile (Heb. *tohu*) activity because the idols they make do not profit people. Those who promote idol worship do not see the folly of idolatry themselves, and they will be ashamed by the failure of their gods.

44:10 This rhetorical question means, who would be so foolish as to fashion an idol when it does not profit anyone? The whole idea of making idols seemed ridiculous to Isaiah (cf. 40:18; 43:7, 10).

"Isaiah points to the mere humanity of the craftsmen (10-11), their frailty (12) and the man-dominated conceptions governing their theology (13)."<sup>489</sup>

44:11 All the companions of the craftsman who makes an idol, other idolaters, will be put to shame, namely, idol worshippers as well as idol makers. The reason is that the makers of these gods are mere men. Rather than God creating man, man creates gods (cf. Rom. 1:23). This makes man superior to his gods. The fact that there are many people in this group of idol

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<sup>487</sup>Motyer, p. 345.

<sup>488</sup>Archer, p. 640.

<sup>489</sup>Motyer, p. 347.

makers and worshippers does not change the fact that all of them will be ashamed by the impotence of their gods.

Verses 12-17 describe the construction of an idol, which process witnesses to the inability of idols to do anything. This whole section bristles with sarcasm.

". . . man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols."<sup>490</sup>

44:12 The man who would make a god has to expend a great deal of effort on it. Some English translations give the impression that in this verse the blacksmith is fashioning a tool with which to make an idol, but the idol itself is really in view. Making an idol is a laborious and exhausting process. God, of course, did not grow weary making man; He made him with a word. Furthermore, because God made the Israelites, they did not need to grow weary (40:28-31). Because He carried them (45:20; 46:3), they did not need to become hungry and thirsty (43:19-20).

44:13 Idol-making is a complex process involving many steps and requiring much activity and some human skill. The whole idea is to create a god in the closest possible likeness to man, supposedly the highest form of life, complete with man's needs. Here a carpenter rather than a blacksmith is the craftsman. The type of craftsman really does not matter since any human will do. One idol may be in view in verses 12 and 13, first carved out of wood and then adorned with metal, or Isaiah may have had in mind two different idols, one metal and the other wood.

"We have not progressed beyond that today. The doctrine called humanism is only an abstract form of this age-old effort. We will be God, and God will be us."<sup>491</sup>

44:14 As shepherds raised some sheep for sacrifice, so the idol craftsman, here a forester, planted a tree with a view to making a god out of it one day "for himself." He wanted wood that would not rot, but the type of wood itself really does not matter. The god is perfectly passive and dependent on its human creator throughout the whole process. How can such a creation possibly help people?

44:15-16 The craftsman uses one piece of wood to make an idol, and another piece out of the same tree—as fuel—to warm and feed himself. Actually, the piece he burns does him more good than the piece he worships. The piece burned serves man and delivers him from the cold and hunger, but the piece not burned demands human service and only promises deliverance (cf. Acts 17:29; 1 Cor. 8:4-8). Instead of thanking the Creator for the wood, the idolater uses what the Creator has made to make a god in his own image that he thanks (cf. Rom. 1:18-23).

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<sup>490</sup>Calvin, *Institutes* . . . , 1.11.8.

<sup>491</sup>Oswalt, *The Book* . . . 40—66, pp. 180-81.

44:17 The leftover piece becomes the idol. How can what is the result of human effort and care, an idol, put forth any effort and care for its builder? Worshipping and praying to a graven image is absurd (cf. Matt. 6:7-8).

"Diagoras of Melos, a pupil of Democritus, once threw a wooden standing figure of Hercules into the fire, and said jocularly, 'Come now, Hercules, perform thy thirteenth labor, and help me to cook the turnips.'"<sup>492</sup>

"John Knox, in decrying the idolatry of the Mass, parodied this passage with devastating effect: 'With part of the flour you make bread to eat, with the residue you fashion a god to fall down before!'"<sup>493</sup>

Isaiah concluded his exposé of paganism by highlighting the blindness of idol worshippers.

44:18-19 Pagans do not see the folly of idol-worship because God has blinded their minds (cf. 6:9-10; 29:14). Having chosen to refuse the revelation of God that He has given them in nature, He makes it impossible for them to see the truth (cf. Rom. 1:18-24; 2 Thess. 2:10-11). If this were not the case, they would understand and abandon their practices, since it is so clear that man-made gods are not deity.

Modern man is in the same position as his ancient counterpart. Westerners do not cut down trees and fashion blocks of wood into idols that we put on shelves in our houses and bow down to. But we work long hours to be able to purchase some man-made object (of clothing, jewelry, transportation, communication, entertainment, etc.) that we then hope will provide us with what only God can provide. Tragically, we do not even view this as idolatry because we, too, are blind.

44:20 Pursuing idols is like feeding on ashes. No satisfaction, but instead eventual disgust and death, follow. The idol is good for nothing but burning (v. 15), and the person who worships an idol will finally find himself with nothing but ashes instead of an idol. The person who pursues this path to satisfaction has been deceived by his own heart. He cannot deliver himself out of such a trap. He has become addicted. He must cry out for deliverance to Another—who has the power to enlighten the blind.

### **The memory of redemption 44:21-22**

This brief section is a call to God's people to embrace God's promises. It concludes this section of the prophecy (42:10—44:22) by affirming that God would not abandon the Israelites because of their sins, but would deliver them, and even use them to demonstrate His unique deity.

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<sup>492</sup>Delitzsch, 2:211.

<sup>493</sup>Archer, p. 640.



44:21 This chiastic verse reiterates a theme from Deuteronomy, namely, remembering what God has revealed (cf. Deut. 8:2, 11, 18; 9:7). God called His people to remember the truths about Himself that this section of the book emphasizes: He is the only God who foretells and then creates history, and the idols of the nations are nothing. Bearing these truths in mind would enable Israel to fulfill her purpose in the world, namely, to be the Lord's servant. The nation had not yet fulfilled that purpose, and the Lord would not forget her but would enable her to fulfill it. He would not cast her off.

"Within the immediate context the call to 'remember' (21) forges a link with what has preceded: (i) the idolater has been busy 'fashioning' (9-10, 12) his idol, but Israel has been 'fashioned' (21; NIV *made*) by the Lord; (ii) the idolater is bound to his idol (18-20), but Israel is the Lord's bondman (*servant*; 21); (iii) the idolater prayed pathetically *Save me* (17), but to Israel the Lord says *I have redeemed you* (22-23); (iv) the idolater bowed to a block of wood/'tree stump' (*bul 'es*; 19), but now every tree (*kol 'es*) is summoned to rejoice in the Lord (23)."<sup>494</sup>

44:22 What Israel needed above all was forgiveness and cleansing from her sins (cf. 43:25). The Lord had taken the initiative to provide this for His people. He would blow their sin away as quickly and as easily as a wind blows a cloud or mist away.

"The clouds intervene between heaven and earth as sin and transgressions intervene between God and His people."<sup>495</sup>

"Jehovah has blotted out Israel's sin, inasmuch as He does not impute it any more, and thus has redeemed Israel."<sup>496</sup>

Yet God's people must respond to His initiative by returning to Him. He had provided redemption in the Exodus, but it was only the first of several redemptions that He would provide. He would redeem them from captivity by using His servant Cyrus (v. 28), and He would redeem them from sin by using His Servant Messiah at His first advent. He would also redeem them from captivity in the Tribulation by using His Servant Messiah at His second advent.

The summary reference to redemption in verse 22 (cf. 42:10—44:22) prepares the reader for the next section of Isaiah's prophecy.

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<sup>494</sup>Motyer, p. 349.

<sup>495</sup>Young, 3:183.

<sup>496</sup>Delitzsch, 2:214.

### **3. The Lord's redemption of His servant 44:23—47:15**

Isaiah began this section of the book dealing with God's grace to Israel (chs. 40—48) by glorifying God as the incomparable Lord of His servant Israel (ch. 40). Then he explained God's promises to (41:1—42:9) and His purposes for (42:10—44:22) His servants. This leads into a more particular revelation of the redemption that God had in store for Israel (44:23—47:15).

#### **The announcement of redemption 44:23-28**

The section begins with an announcement of the salvation that God would provide for His chosen people.

44:23 This verse concludes the thought expressed in the preceding one, thus many translations and commentators regard it as the end of the preceding section. However, it is a hymnic call to praise similar to the one in 42:10-13, and it seems to introduce what follows, as that earlier call to praise did. The content of the praise also points ahead to what follows, rather than backward to what has preceded. It provides a very smooth transition.

Isaiah again called on all the elements of the created universe to witness something. Earlier they witnessed Israel's rebellion (cf. 1:2), but now they witness Israel's salvation. As in the previous verse (44:22), redemption is spoken of as already complete. This is the translation of the Hebrew prophetic perfect tense verb that speaks of things in the future as though they had already happened in the past—because they are certain to occur. A future redemption is in view that will manifest Yahweh's glory. This becomes clear in the verses that follow.

44:24 The Lord prefaced His stunning prediction with a reminder of who was making it. He was Yahweh, Israel's covenant God who had redeemed her and would yet redeem her. He had brought her into existence by Himself, as He had created all things including the heavens and the earth (cf. 40:12-14, 21-22). The often repeated phrase "Thus says the LORD" in this part of Isaiah engenders confidence in the promises of redemption that follow (cf. 45:1, 11, 14, 18).

44:25 God embarrasses astrologers, diviners, and fortunetellers by controlling history in ways that deviate from past patterns. Ancient and modern prognosticators usually base their predictions on the belief that things will work out in the future as they have in the past. But Yahweh can move future events in entirely new directions. Archaeologists have discovered many predictions of the future of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires among Babylonian writings, but they are consistently optimistic; none are messages announcing the fall of these kingdoms.<sup>497</sup> He can do things never before done.

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<sup>497</sup>See C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40—66*, pp. 156-57.

44:26 Conversely, Yahweh could bring the predictions that He had revealed to His servant Isaiah (cf. 20:3), and His messengers the prophets, to pass. Here he predicted that Jerusalem and the cities of Judah would be rebuilt, after their destruction by the Babylonians.

44:27 God is the one who dried up the Red Sea during the Exodus. He could likewise dry up rivers in the future to bring His will to pass (cf. 48:21). Herodotus wrote that Cyrus overthrew Babylon by diverting the Euphrates River that ran under its walls. He then used the riverbed to storm the city. Young claimed that cuneiform records from the region have shown that Herodotus' account was in error.<sup>498</sup> God's promises covered both the rebuilding of Judah's cities (vv. 26, 28) and the exiles' return home.

44:28 God announced that Cyrus would be the person who would allow Jerusalem to be rebuilt and the temple foundations relaid. The mention of his name climaxes this prophecy (vv. 24-28). Cyrus would be the Lord's shepherd, the one who would lead the Israelites back into their land by permitting its restoration. He would carry out all God's desire (cf. 41:2-3, 25).

The title "My Shepherd" was one that God used of the Davidic kings (cf. 2 Sam. 5:2; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezek. 34:23). The fact that He used it here of a pagan monarch shows that God would use pagans to fulfill His wishes—since the Davidic kings had proved unreliable (cf. 7:13; 39:7). This was indeed a new thing that God had not done before (cf. 43:19).

"In a wonderfully ingenious way, just as the foreigner, Ruth, became an ancestress of David (Ruth 4:13-22), the foreigner Cyrus typifies the Davidic Messiah (Isa. 53:10; Zech. 11:4; 13:7; John 8:29; 10:11)."<sup>499</sup>

Cyrus (559-530 B.C.) issued his decree to allow the Jewish exiles to return and rebuild Jerusalem in 538 B.C.<sup>500</sup> This happened about 190 years after Isaiah announced this prophecy. Josephus recorded that Cyrus read Isaiah's prophecy predicting that he himself—Cyrus—would send the Israelites back to Palestine to rebuild the temple, and that he desired to fulfill this very prediction.<sup>501</sup> Josephus also dated Isaiah's prophecy 140 years before the destruction of the temple, namely, about 726 B.C. The Persian monarch had not even been born at this time. When Isaiah made this prophecy his hearers probably said to one another: "Who did he say would do this? Who is Cyrus?"

This prophecy is the primary reason that critics on the unity of Isaiah have insisted that Isaiah of Jerusalem could not possibly have written this

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<sup>498</sup>Young, 3:191.

<sup>499</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 197.

<sup>500</sup>See Finegan, pp. 230-33.

<sup>501</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 11:1:2.

prediction. It must have been written, they say, sometime after Cyrus issued his decree.<sup>502</sup> However, the point that Yahweh was making throughout this book was that He alone could predict and create the future. For a similar prophecy involving Josiah, who had not yet been born, see 1 Kings 13:2.

Motyer noted parallels between 44:24—48:22 and 49:1—53:12.<sup>503</sup> These sections provide the solutions to Israel's double need: national bondage (cf. 42:18—43:21) and spiritual sinfulness (cf. 43:22—44:22).

| <b>The work of Cyrus (44:24—48:22)</b>  | <b>The work of the Servant (49:1—53:12)</b>   |
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| The task stated and the agent named (44:24-28)  | The task stated and the agent named (49:1-6)  |
| The task confirmed: to Israel and the world (45:1-7)  | The task confirmed: to Israel and the world (49:7-12)   |
| The response: prayer (45:8)   | The response: praise (49:13)  |
| Israel's disquiet (45:9-25)   | Israel's despondency (49:14—50:11)  |
| • The Lord's purpose affirmed (45:9-13)   | • The Lord's love affirmed (49:14-16)   |
| • Israel and Gentiles (45:14-22)  | • Israel and Gentiles (49:17-26)  |
| • Those who find righteousness and strength in the supreme Lord and those who oppose Him (45:23-25) | • The Servant, the exemplar of those who find strength and vindication in the Almighty Lord (50:1-11) |
| The Lord's care for Israel - from the beginning through to the coming salvation (46:1-13)           | The Lord's care for Israel - from the beginning through to the coming salvation (51:1-16)             |
| Babylon: from the throne to the dust (47:1-15)  | Zion: from the dust to the throne (51:17—52:12)   |
| Redemption from Babylon (48:1-22)   | Redemption from sin (52:13—53:12)   |

### **The instrument of redemption 45:1-13**

This section begins with God's promise to Cyrus (vv. 1-8; cf. Pss. 2; 110) and concludes with a vindication of God's right to use whom He will (vv. 9-13).

#### **God's promise to Cyrus 45:1-8**

The promise to Cyrus was, of course, for the benefit of the Israelites who wondered how God would restore them to the land as He promised.

45:1 Yahweh shockingly referred to Cyrus as His "anointed" (Heb. *mashiah*), a title normally reserved for Israel's prophets, priests, and kings. One exception is Hazael whom Elijah was to anoint as King of Aram (cf.

<sup>502</sup>See Allis, pp. 51-61, for refutation of this common viewpoint.

<sup>503</sup>Motyer, p. 352.

1 Kings 19:15-16). Hazael was also the Lord's anointed. It also refers to the Messiah. The Israelites thought of their anointed leaders as those whom God uniquely raised up to accomplish His purposes. By calling Cyrus His anointed, the Lord was teaching them that He was the Lord of all the earth, not just Israel. He could and would use whomever he chose to deliver His people.

"Sometimes we forget that God can use even unconverted world leaders for the good of His people and the progress of His work."<sup>504</sup>

"Traditionally, the ruler of Babylon took the hand of Bel in the New Year's festival. Assyrian rulers coveted this affirmation of their authority. Here Yahweh claims that he has seized Cyrus by the hand (42:6) and strengthened [*sic*] his hold on his realm."<sup>505</sup>

Cyrus' election for this task was not due to anything in himself (cf. Rom. 9:16). The Lord had taken him by the right hand, as a parent does with a small child, and would enable him to conquer and subdue those nations and kings whom he would.

"Since Israel in exile had no king, Cyrus functioned in a sense as her king (the anointed one) to bring about blessing."<sup>506</sup>

"Cyrus is the only Gentile king who is called God's 'anointed.' Since this is the translation of the Hebrew word which we spell in English as *Messiah*, Cyrus is in a sense a type of the Anointed One, the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . The only intended resemblance is in the fact that Cyrus was the anointed one who delivered the people of Israel from their captivity. As such he points us to the greater Anointed One who saves His people from their sins."<sup>507</sup>

45:2-3      God would precede and prepare the way for His conqueror. He would find it relatively easy to overcome his enemies, Lydia and Babylon, and to take even their hidden treasures, those kept in secret vaults. One reason God would do this was so Cyrus would learn that Yahweh, the God of Israel, had blessed him. This is not a promise that Cyrus would become a believer in Yahweh but that he would know that Yahweh was behind what had happened to him (cf. the Pharaoh of the Exodus). On the famous Cyrus

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<sup>504</sup>Wiersbe, p. 51.

<sup>505</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 156.

<sup>506</sup>J. Martin, p. 1099.

<sup>507</sup>A. Martin, *Isaiah . . .*, pp. 77-78. See also Archer, p. 641.

Cylinder, Cyrus credited Marduk, a Babylonian idol, for his victories.<sup>508</sup> Yet, in 2 Chron. 36:23 and Ezra 1:2, he gave Yahweh some credit. Probably Cyrus, being a polytheist, honored many gods—including Yahweh—for his victories.

- 45:4 Second, God chose to use Cyrus for the sake of the Israelites, so He might fulfill His promises to them. It was Yahweh's choice of him that had resulted in Cyrus' honorific titles (Shepherd, 44:28, and Anointed, v. 1). People do not have to be believers in Him for God to use them and bless them. The choice is His; He is sovereign.
- 45:5 The issue is who the Lord is, not who Cyrus is. Yahweh is the only true God, so He could choose whom He would, even though Cyrus did not know Him.
- 45:6 Third, God chose Cyrus so everyone would come to know that He is the only true God. Note the progression in the reasons for Yahweh's choice of Cyrus: that he might know, that Israel might know, and that the world might know who is the only true God. This is important, not because God has a huge ego, but because it is true and because only as people recognize Yahweh for who He is, that they will stop ruining their own lives with idolatry. God's use of Cyrus preserved the Israelites and thus made the Incarnation possible. That event, in turn, has made salvation available to the whole world.
- 45:7 The point is that Yahweh alone is ultimately responsible for everything in nature and history. Everything that is in the universe, exists because of the creative will of God. God was not claiming that He creates moral "evil" (AV), but both well-being (Heb. *shalom*) and calamity (Heb. *ra'*). He causes (allows) bad things to happen to people for His own reasons (cf. Job 1—2), as well as good things, but He does not cause people to make morally evil decisions (cf. James 1:13).
- "Persian religion dealt in opposites of light and darkness. Yahweh claims not to be those conditions, but to *create* both, and thus to overcome the inherent dualism in his sovereign rule over them."<sup>509</sup>
- 45:8 Since God is who He is, the earth can anticipate salvation. God's transcendence and uniqueness are not just abstract truths to be believed. They have practical and positive ramifications. Since God created the earth, He can pour out blessings on it: fertility and salvation. Even though God is ultimately responsible for everything that happens, His creation can rejoice because He will only and always do what is right.

<sup>508</sup>See Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near . . .*, pp. 315-16.

<sup>509</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 157.

". . . the saving of his people is the clearest expression of God's essential character, to do right [righteousness]."<sup>510</sup>

In view of the Exodus, this announcement of a second exodus from Babylon would have been good news to Isaiah's audience. But that God would reveal Himself to a pagan and use him to lead them out, rather than another Moses, must have come as an almost unbelievable shock. Truly God would do a new thing (cf. 43:19; 48:6). Some of the Israelites would not believe that God would do such a thing. Thus the following section sought to convince them to believe God's promises concerning Cyrus.

### **God's right to do as He pleases 45:9-13**

The Creator can do anything He wishes that is consistent with His own character and stated purposes.

- 45:9 "Woe" is a funeral cry that, in this context, indicates the extreme folly of dictating to the Creator how He may work (cf. chs. 5; 28—33). The Israelites, and we, must let God be God. People are clay vessels that God has made for His own purposes (cf. 29:16; Jer. 18:6; Rom. 9:20-21). We have no right to dictate to our Maker how He should behave, any more than the works of our hands have a right to question how we make them.
- 45:10 The same principle applies in the family realm. It is folly to tell parents that their children should not have been born or should look different. The parents are responsible for the birth of their children and the appearance of their children, and no other people have anything to do with it. Obviously grandparents and other ancestors play a part, but parents are the instruments God uses to bring children into the world. Likewise God is the Father of humanity, and He alone is ultimately responsible for His children. The use of "woman" instead of the more parallel "wife" in this verse may have been done to avoid identifying Yahweh with the mother goddesses of the ancient Near East.
- 45:11 Since Yahweh is Israel's Lord, Holy One, and Creator, what right did the Israelites have to question His decision to use Cyrus to deliver them in the future? The question in this verse is probably ironic in meaning: go ahead and question my judgment concerning my sons (Israel and Cyrus), and command me concerning the work of my hands!
- 45:12 Again, God has the right to do with His creation what He chooses. If God created the universe, He certainly has the right to shape human history as He will.
- 45:13 God's raising up of Cyrus was consistent with His righteousness. He would enable Cyrus to succeed. Cyrus would be responsible for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the release of the Israelites from Babylonian

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<sup>510</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 206.

exile. The Almighty Yahweh would do this without even rewarding Cyrus. Cyrus' action would not put him in the Lord's debt because he would simply be carrying out the will of the sovereign God (cf. Luke 17:9-10).

"It is ironic, but typical, that Cyrus obeys without question, while Israel rebels."<sup>511</sup>

### **The God of redemption 45:14—46:13**

This section develops the ideas that preceded, by unfolding the characteristics of Yahweh that His people needed to appreciate, in view of the shocking news that their new Moses would be Cyrus. It opens with an emphasis on God as Savior (45:14-19), then contrasts Yahweh with idols (45:20—46:7), and closes with an emphasis on God as righteous (46:8-13). The purpose of the unit was to strengthen the Israelites' confidence in God.

#### **God as Savior 45:14-19**

- 45:14 Yahweh affirmed (cf. v. 1) that because of what He would do in redeeming Israel from Babylonian captivity, Gentiles from the ends of the earth would submit to Israel, having learned of Israel's great God (cf. 43:3). The Sabeans probably lived in Upper Egypt between Egypt and Sudan.<sup>512</sup> Perhaps one evidence of this happening was the Ethiopian eunuch's reverence for Yahweh (cf. Acts 8:26-40). No matter how remote, wealthy, or regal they may be, Gentiles will voluntarily acknowledge Yahweh's deity (cf. 1 Cor. 14:24-25). One writer argued for the historic evangelical doctrine of exclusivism in salvation, and used it to argue against religious inclusivism (pluralism). He commented on many verses in Isaiah that support this belief.<sup>513</sup>
- 45:15 The nations that will come to God, or perhaps Isaiah himself or Israel, observed that God hides His acts of salvation so they are not obviously apparent. They become clear to those who carefully observe what He has done, and whom God enlightens, but they do not inevitably impress every single individual. One might say the same thing about Jesus' claims. They could have been clearer, but to those who really considered them, and whose eyes God opened, they were clear. This is essentially a testimony to God's transcendence (cf. Rom. 11:33).
- 45:16-17 The idols would humiliate their makers when it became clear that they have no power to save. But God's ability to save His people forever will not result in His being put to shame. Yahweh's deliverance of Israel to continued existence would impress the Gentiles after Cyrus' decree

<sup>511</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 157.

<sup>512</sup>See Young, 3:207.

<sup>513</sup>Wayne G. Strickland, "Isaiah, Jonah, and Religious Pluralism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:609 (January-March 1996):31-32.



(vv. 14-15). But God would provide an eternal salvation for His people that only Gentiles after the coming of Christ could appreciate (cf. Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:6).

45:18 Again the Lord affirmed (cf. vv. 1, 14) that He created the heavens, and there is no other God beside Him (cf. Exod. 20:1-3; Deut. 6:4). These affirmations indicate that what follows substantiates what has gone before. God is trustworthy, and will not embarrass or humiliate His worshippers, because He is the almighty Creator. Isaiah's elaboration on this statement stresses that God's creative activity was for the welfare of His creatures.

Some readers of this verse have understood the statement that "God did not create the earth waste" (Heb. *tohu*) as clarifying the creation process. When God created the heavens and the earth, did He create them unformed and then form them, or does the waste condition of Genesis 1:2 describe the universe before Creation? I think this verse means that God's intention in Creation was not to create something permanently without form but to create an environment for His creatures that He suitably formed for their habitation. Thus this verse says nothing about the steps God may have taken in creating the cosmos. It rather explains His purpose in creating the cosmos.

"The Lord created the earth 'to be inhabited,' not to be desolate, as the Assyrians and Babylonians had left the land of Israel (6:11; 7:18, 19; 27:10, 11; 33:9; 44:26, 28)."<sup>514</sup>

45:19 Since God made the world for human habitation, it is reasonable that He would communicate His plans and purposes to humans. This is what He has done. God made Himself known to the Israelites. What He has revealed is in harmony with how He created the world. He has done what is right and has not distorted the truth. He has not hidden Himself (cf. v. 15; John 18:20).

". . . the point appears to be to contrast God's method of revelation with the dark practices of the heathen soothsayers."<sup>515</sup>

### **God and idols 45:20—46:7**

In the following segment (vv. 20-25), God contrasted His salvation with that of the Babylonian idols.

"Throughout chs. 40—55, the people of Israel are envisioned as being in bondage in Babylon. . . . Has not the God of Israel been thoroughly discredited? Should not Israel adopt the gods of her captors? . . . Instead,

<sup>514</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1185.

<sup>515</sup>Young, 3:212. Cf. Delitzsch, 2:227-28.

- he [Isaiah] insists that it is the captors, the Babylonians, who need to look to their deliverance. Far from Israel being concerned over whether their God can deliver them from Babylon, it is the mighty Babylonians who should be worrying over whether the gods whom they have served can deliver them!"<sup>516</sup>
- 45:20 The Lord again summoned the people of the world, possibly after Cyrus' judgments, for a debate (cf. 41:1, 21; 43:8-9). He claimed that pagan idol-worshippers were ignorant (cf. 44:9). They carried their gods of wood, rather than being carried themselves by a personal God (cf. 1 Sam. 4—5). And they prayed to gods that could not save.
- 45:21 God challenged the idol-worshippers to consult together and to present a case in defense of their idols. Who was the challenger who claimed "this?" Evidently the prophecies about Cyrus are the "this" in view (cf. 46:9-11)? He was Yahweh—the only true God—who does what is right and who saves.
- 45:22 Since Yahweh alone saves, people and nations around the world should turn to Him for salvation (cf. Num. 21:8-9). In so doing they could experience the same salvation that Israel would enjoy. Yahweh is the saving God of the whole earth, not just Israel, so salvation is available to all, not just Israel. God used this verse to bring the light of salvation to the English preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon when he was a youth.
- 45:23 God Himself swore (cf. Gen. 22:16) that everyone will eventually bow to His authority (some as condemned sinners and others as pardoned worshippers) and appeal to Him (cf. Rom. 14:10-12; Phil 2:9-11). In view of this, it is only reasonable to call on Him for salvation now. This word from God, confirmed with His oath, is as reliable as His promises to Abraham and His words predicting Cyrus' activities.
- 45:24-25 The only hope of all humankind is in Yahweh. Pagans will turn to the Lord in repentance because of His power to deliver, His faithfulness to His promises, and His complete righteousness. The Israelites will also eventually bow in submission to the only true God, enjoying His salvation and glorifying Him. This will happen when Jesus Christ returns to the earth.

The emphasis now shifts from God as the true Savior (45:20-25) to the idols who cannot save (46:1-7). The following pericope sums up the argument that Yahweh is superior to pagan gods, and expands the idea introduced in 45:20: that a god that people need to carry cannot save.

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<sup>516</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 220.

46:1-2 Bel and Nebo were the two chief gods of Babylonia. *Bel* ("lord," cf. the Canaanite Baal) was the title of the father of the gods in the Babylonian pantheon, whose name was Enlil. Bel was also later the title of Marduk, the city god of Babylon and the hero of *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian Creation account. *Nebo* was Bel's son, and he was supposedly a wise administrator. The names Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar ("Nebo, protect the boundary"), and Nabonidus, among others, show reverence for Nebo, and the name Belshazzar ("Bel, protect the king") honored Bel.<sup>517</sup> Nebo was the god of learning, writing, and astronomy. The Babylonians carried images of these prominent gods in their New Year's Day parades.

Isaiah envisioned Bel and Nebo as bending over as the Babylonians carried their images in procession (cf. 1 Sam. 5:3-4). These images rode on carts that beasts of burden hauled with some difficulty, evidently because of their weight. The gods, which the images both represented and contained, were a burden to these animals. Rather than lifting burdens, these idols created them for their worshippers. The prophet foresaw the idol images and the Babylonian gods being carried off into captivity (by Cyrus), powerless to aid their worshippers.

46:3-4 Addressing the remnant (house) of His people, Yahweh reminded the Judahites that He had carried Israel (as a burden sometimes) throughout her history (cf. 63:9; Exod. 19:4; Deut. 1:31; 32:11; Ps. 28:9), and He would continue to do so. This, of course, is the opposite of what the Babylonians had to do to their idols (vv. 1-2). The Israelites had never carried Him, but it was He, and only He, who had always carried them.

"Normally, we expect that as children reach maturity, they do not need to be carried any longer. Furthermore, there usually comes a time when the child must begin to carry the aged parent. This is where God transcends the imagery. There will never come a time when we outgrow our dependence on God. . . . Nor will there ever be a time when a doddering old grandfather-God will somehow need to lean on us, and we will need to find a young, virile god for a new age."<sup>518</sup>

46:5 There is no comparison between the true God and false gods (cf. 40:18).

46:6-7 This is Isaiah's fourth and last exposé of the folly of idol worship (cf. 40:19-20; 41:6-7; 44:9-20). How foolish it is to spend a lot of money and effort to make something that cannot care for itself much less its worshipper. It has no power to respond in any way, much less to save.

<sup>517</sup>See Archer, p. 642.

<sup>518</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 230.

"There are two kinds of gods in this world: the kind you carry and the One who can carry you."<sup>519</sup>

### God as righteous 46:8-13

The last segment of this section (45:14—46:13) returns to the subject of God as the righteous deliverer (cf. 45:14-19).

46:8 God admonished the transgressing Israelites to remember what He was about to say, which would summarize the point being made in this section. It would give them confidence whenever they recalled it in the future. Again, remembering is the antidote to unbelief. Israel needed much encouragement, as well as stern warnings, because she was only a small island of monotheists in a sea of polytheists.

46:9 The Israelites needed to remember all that God had done going all the way back to Creation. Only then would they become convinced that Yahweh was unique, the only true God.

46:10-11 God had throughout history predicted how history would unfold, including things that had not happened previously. His revelations were in harmony with His purpose to carry out His beneficial will for humankind. Most recently He had predicted Cyrus, who would descend on Babylon like an eagle on a rabbit. His audience could count on this prediction coming to pass, because it was just the latest example of what He had done since the beginning.

46:12 God challenged the hard-hearted Israelites, who found it hard to believe that God would deliver them, to pay attention to Him (cf. v. 3). They were far short of fulfilling the righteous act of believing God, which constitutes conformity to His will.

"Those who are far from righteousness are those who are far from being right with God, and so are deep in their own sin and depravity."<sup>520</sup>

46:13 God would be faithful to His covenant promises and bring salvation to Zion (cf. 44:26-28; Rom. 3:21-25; 5:8; 1 Cor. 1:30). He would soon bring the righteousness that His people lacked. This deliverance would glorify His name. Some have interpreted the "stubborn-minded" in verses 12 and 13 as the Babylonians, rather than the Israelites, but this is a minority view.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>519</sup>Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, p. 569.

<sup>520</sup>Young, 3:229.

<sup>521</sup>E.g., J. Martin, p. 1101.

"This proves to be Isaiah's final appeal to Israel to accept the Lord's will, to believe what he says and trust what he does, though even as he make [*sic*] his appeal he senses that it is falling on deaf ears (12)."<sup>522</sup>

### **The nation to be judged ch. 47**

This section of Isaiah on "The Lord's redemption of His servant [Israel]" (44:23—47:15) has so far included: an announcement of redemption (44:23-28), the identification of the instrument of redemption—Cyrus (45:1-13), and a reminder of the uniqueness of the God of redemption (45:14—46:13). It now concludes, by depicting Babylon—the nation from which the Lord would redeem His people from captivity—as a proud woman full of self-confidence. In her case, as in so many others, pride goes before a fall. This section is another oracle against a foreign nation (cf. chs. 13—23; Jer. 46—51; Ezek. 25—31) and an oracle of salvation for Zion (cf. 45:14—46:13). The main point of this chapter is not primarily to predict Babylon's fall, however, but to glorify the power and grace of Yahweh, using the destruction of Babylon as a backdrop.

### **A call to Babylon 47:1-4**

The first four verses constitute the introduction to the oracle.

- 47:1 God depicted Babylon here as a rather prissy virgin. The city, representing the kingdom of Babylon, had, like a virgin, thus far not experienced the breaching of her walls by invaders. The Lord summoned her to sit on the ground, rather than on the throne that she intended to occupy. Sitting in the dust was an act that depicted great mourning (cf. Jon. 3:6). She thought that she would be a queen, but in reality she would become a common, even a humiliated, beggar. Other peoples had regarded her as superior, but she would no longer be that. The Chaldeans were the residents of southern Mesopotamia, who had been the leaders in throwing off Assyrian dominance, and had provided the leadership for Neo-Babylonia.
- 47:2 Babylon would need to do servile work, grinding meal by rotating a millstone (cf. Exod. 11:5; Job 31:10; Matt. 24:41). She should remove her veil, which she, as an upper-class lady, had worn previously to hide her beauty from commoners. Removing her veil would disgrace her. She should also take off her long skirt and uncover her legs, so she could work in the fields, and wade through the irrigation ditches of the rivers. She would become not only a beggar (v. 1), but a servant.
- 47:3 In the ancient world, people regarded nakedness as a shame because it left them open to the gaze of others, and so rendered them defenseless. People seen naked were often taken advantage of. Thus to be uncovered was to be shamefully exposed. Babylon had regarded herself as someone special and superior, but now it would become clear that she was just like every other

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<sup>522</sup>Motyer, p. 370.

nation. God promised to take vengeance on Babylon for exalting herself to a place that He alone deserves. He would not spare anyone deserving humiliation.

- 47:4 The foregoing description of God humbling Babylon, for essentially the same reason He humbled Egypt in the Exodus, drew an exclamation of praise from Isaiah. Almighty Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, would again redeem His people from a nation that had lifted up itself in pride and had oppressed God's chosen people.

"These verses assert two principles which lie at the heart of divine providential government of the world: retribution (3cd) and the centrality of the people of God (4)."<sup>523</sup>

### **The sins of Babylon 47:5-11**

The Lord became more specific about Babylon's sins and the reasons He intended to punish her in the following pericope (vv. 5-11).

- 47:5 Babylon would no longer be the queen of the nations, having many other kingdoms under her authority. Rather than enjoying the public activity and prominence that go with being a leader, Babylon would find herself sitting in silence and darkness.

"From the glare of world publicity and the glare of the palace lights to the silence of obscurity (v. 5)!"<sup>524</sup>

- 47:6 Babylon had not been kind to the Israelites whom Yahweh had handed over to her. She had not really conquered Judah; God had given the Judahites over to the Babylonians. The Babylonians had been unmerciful toward the Israelites and had made life hard even for their elderly, those who deserved mercy simply because of their age. The Babylonians were not as hard on the Israelites as the Egyptians and the Assyrians had been. It was their arrogance more than their physical cruelty that made them unmerciful.
- 47:7 The mark of Babylon's arrogance was that she assumed that she would continue to rule the world forever. She had defeated Assyria, which had been the most powerful world ruler for 300 years, and there was no power on the horizon that Babylon could see that would threaten her sovereignty. She had not considered that all nations are subject to Yahweh's sovereignty, that no nation is self-sufficient or self-existent. She had failed to consider that someone more powerful than herself could call her to account for her treatment of the people she had conquered.

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<sup>523</sup>Ibid., p. 372.

<sup>524</sup>Grogan, p. 277.

47:8 Babylon was sensual (a lover of luxury) in that she assumed that what she enjoyed were her rights by virtue of her superiority. Her present condition had led her to think that she would always enjoy provision, protection, status, and security. But she could not avert the doom that would come on her because she had exalted herself to God's place. The pleasure-loving lady of leisure would become a childless widow.

47:9 She would lose her empire and her population with unexpected suddenness. In spite of the sorcery and magic that Babylon relied on for protection, God would bring judgment on her.

"Babylon was proverbial in the ancient world for its development of the magical arts. So firm was this association that in Daniel, 'Chaldean' is a term for magician (1:20; 2:2, 27, etc. . . .). The great Babylonian interest in astronomy was prompted by an even greater interest in astrology. The names given to the astrological constellations today are translations of the ones originated by the Babylonians. More than anything else, magic is engaged in to ensure good fortune and prevent misfortune."<sup>525</sup>

47:10 Babylon felt secure in mistreating people because her great learning and wisdom in the magical arts had led her to conclude that she was superior and invulnerable. Knowledge puffs up, and one of the delusions it spawns is that people who know more are as morally and ethically responsible as everyone else, since they are *not*. A corollary is that if I can get away with something, it's all right. Such thinking forgets that there is a sovereign and righteous God in heaven to whom we are responsible.

"Chaldean Babylon . . . combined the practical atheism of the freethinker with astrology, necromancy, and crass superstition."<sup>526</sup>

47:11 In spite of how the Babylonians thought, God would bring judgment on them suddenly that incantations would not affect, sacrifices could not deflect, and magic could not anticipate. Daniel 5 describes Belshazzar's feast, which took place on the night Babylon fell. Cyrus took the Babylonian king and his city completely by surprise, and the empire fell suddenly.

"Cyrus took Babylon effortlessly, and by morning every citizen of the empire was not a Babylonian but a Persian."<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>525</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 249.

<sup>526</sup>Archer, p. 642.

<sup>527</sup>Motyer, p. 372.

### The doom of Babylon 47:12-15

Yahweh's denunciation of Babylon comes to a climax in the final four verses. In spite of her pride, Babylon would need a savior, but there would be none for her.

47:12-13 God sarcastically challenged the Babylonians to continue to trust in their mediums and horoscopes, as though they might be able to deliver them from the fate He announced. They were not about to humble themselves, as the Ninevites did in Jonah's day. If there was any time the Babylonians needed help from their wise men, it was before the Lord visited them with judgment.

47:14-15 However, their powers would be no match for the consuming judgment of God that was coming on them like a fire. It would sweep everything in its path away, the astrologers as well as their predictions. They would become the fuel for this fire that would be like a wild forest fire, not a comfortable campfire.

"They [the astrologers] do not even have the enduring power of wood in the fire, for they are consumed instantly [as stubble], and are not able to save themselves from the flame that devours them. If they cannot save themselves it is foolish to look to them to save Babylon."<sup>528</sup>

False religion offers the comfort of a fire, but it turns into a furnace of destruction. The philosophical leaders of Babylon would not be saviors in that day of judgment. In fact, there would be none to save them.

"These few words at the end of v. 15 capture the whole argument of chs. 40—47: everybody needs a savior; the gods and the magical worldview on which they rest cannot save; the Lord who stands outside the cosmos and directs it according to his good purposes can save; which shall we choose?"<sup>529</sup>

The fulfillment of this prophecy came when Cyrus invaded Babylon in 539 B.C. But the similarities between this chapter and Revelation 17 and 18 remind us that a future eschatological destruction of Babylon is also coming.

"Those who have turned from the living God to the daily horoscope in our own society would do well to heed this passage."<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>528</sup>Young, 3:243.

<sup>529</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 256.

<sup>530</sup>Grogan, p. 278.



"The point of chapters 41—47 is that the entire structure and system of the Babylonian Empire (represented by her idols) was developed by humans [cf. the Tower of Babel, Gen. 11]; Babylon had no lasting divine sanction. Just as an idol is of human fabrication, with no autonomous power or usefulness of its own, so the entire Babylonian system of society, economics, and politics was a human fabrication which in time would collapse. Israel, then, must reserve her worship, her ultimate commitment, for YHWH. This commitment must stand above all other systems and values. YHWH may grant these systems (including Assyria, Persia) temporary sanction to do his will, but he also reserves the right to repudiate and destroy them. Only YHWH deserves worship."<sup>531</sup>

#### **4. The servant's attention to her Lord ch. 48**

This chapter climaxes Isaiah's arguments for Yahweh's superiority over pagan idols. The prophet was led to use the Israelites' exile in Babylon to prove his point. Isaiah had demonstrated God's trustworthiness (chs. 7—39) and had promised that He would graciously redeem His people (chs. 40—47). Now it was up to the Israelites to trust Him. Chapter 48 consists of exhortations to the impenitent and unbelieving in Israel, during the captivity, to *truly* listen to their God.

"The most striking feature of this chapter is the severity of its diagnosis of Israel . . ."<sup>532</sup>

#### **The former failure 48:1-11**

This section recapitulates the revelation that Yahweh predicts the future, so that when the event He predicts happens, people will recognize that He is the only true God. He can cause new things to happen because He alone is the Creator. This prophecy has been the source of much critical attack on Isaiah.<sup>533</sup> Again, the critics' disbelief in God's ability to predict the future and then bring it into being is the problem.

#### **Israel's inveterate unbelief 48:1-5**

48:1-2        The Lord called on His people to pay attention to what He had to say to them and to respond appropriately (cf. 42:18; 46:12). The many descriptions of the Israelites in these verses reminded them of their origins and their identity, their commitments to and their appreciation for Yahweh, and their present relationship with Him. In view of all this, they needed to heed what He said. They had not done that as they should have in the past.

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<sup>531</sup>John D. W. Watts, "Babylonian Idolatry in the Prophets As a False Socio-Economic System," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, p. 121.

<sup>532</sup>Motyer, p. 375.

<sup>533</sup>See Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, pp. 270-72, for discussion.

- 48:3 God had frequently in Israel's past predicted what He would do, and then He did it. Sometimes the fulfillments were not what His people had expected, illustrating His sovereign creativity. Nevertheless, He had remained true to His Word.
- 48:4-5 God had done this because His people were stubborn when it came to trusting Him. If He had not done this, they would have concluded that some idol had been responsible for the turn of events. They, like all people, resisted trust in a sovereign God, preferring rather to make their gods in their own image and so control them. People are by nature like animals, in that they often refuse to go a certain way, simply because their Master wants them to *go that way*. The "neck of iron" pictures unwillingness to bow in submission. The "brazen forehead" represents an opinionated person with a closed mind, or a shameless person who persists in sin.

### Israel's need for faith 48:6-11

Having reminded His people of His ways, God now gave them a new prediction.

- 48:6 God directed His people to consider carefully what He had just revealed, and they would have to admit that it was true. It was important that they come to a clear understanding of His ways because He was making other predictions about the future (i.e., Cyrus, return from exile, the coming Servant). They needed to know that He is in charge and that He is dependable. What He revealed was hidden, in that its time and method of fulfillment were not specific, but the content itself was clear enough, having been revealed generally before (cf. Gen. 15:18-21; Deut. 30:1-5).
- 48:7 What God was predicting was brand new; it was not something He had revealed previously. His people had not heard this specific prediction before. Moses or another prophet had not revealed it. God chose when to reveal it as well as what to reveal.

"It [predictive prophecy] is given not so we can know the future, but as confirmatory evidence that we can and should trust God. To use it for the purpose of knowing the future and thus making ourselves secure is only another form of idolatry."<sup>534</sup>

- 48:8 The Israelites had not listened to the message that predictive prophecy was to teach them. They did not welcome the idea that God could surprise them and so keep them trusting Him. Instead they wanted to know the future so they would not have to trust Him. Rebellion against God is part of human nature. They did not know what He was going to do, but He knew their hearts.

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<sup>534</sup>Ibid., p. 268.

- 48:9 Even though Israel had been prone to idolatry (v. 5) and had been congenitally rebellious (v. 8), God had not cast her off. Why? He had made commitments to be gracious to Israel, and to honor Himself in His dealings with her, so that the rest of the world would trust Him. The fact that God did not abandon Israel when He could have done so justly manifested His grace.
- 48:10 By allowing the Babylonian exile, God was not casting off His people, but disciplining them so they would come to their senses, and follow Him more faithfully thereafter. The difficult times Israel had been through were fires of refining, not fires of destruction. Fire was one of Isaiah's favorite figures for judgment, and often it was God's people whom he described as in the fire. Unfortunately many readers think only of hell when they read of judgment fire in Scripture. In refining silver, the craftsman burns away all the dross. If God had refined Israel that way, there would have been nothing left of the nation. Affliction is a sign that God has chosen and loves His people; it is not a sign that He has not chosen and does not love them (cf. Heb. 12:3-13).
- 48:11 Ultimately, however, it is for His own sake that God does what He does. He is the only true God, so people must see this. They come to see it in His just but merciful dealings with Israel. Then they give Him glory, where alone it belongs.

### **The present possibility 48:12-22**

In a sense, verses 12-22 are the "second verse" of the song, and verses 1-11 are the "first verse." God was making much the same point, though with a slightly different emphasis.

### **God's trustworthiness 48:12-16**

- 48:12 This segment opens like the first one (cf. v. 1). However here, the emphasis is on who God is, rather than on who the Israelites are. He is the eternal, self-existent God who called Israel to Himself for a special purpose. This is the basis for His claim to predict the future and to use whomever He will to carry out His will.

"As *first* God was not pressed by any external agency into what he initiated; as *last* he stands unchallenged by any force that may have tried to oppose; and he brings to triumphant conclusion what he started. At the start, there was his uninhibited freedom to do as he chose; at the end, the untarnished gold of his completed work."<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>535</sup>Motyer, p. 380.

- 48:13 God is also the Creator who maintains control over His creation. As such He can create history as well as the cosmos. Isaiah referred to creation in 40:12-14, 22, 26, 28; 42:5; 44:24; and 45:12, 18.
- 48:14 The Israelites needed to listen because only the Lord could reveal what He would do. Specifically, Yahweh revealed His love (choice, cf. Deut. 4:37; Mal. 1:2-3) of Cyrus, who would fulfill God's will on Babylon by defeating the Chaldeans (cf. 44:28). The Israelites, in view of who their God is, should not resist His choice of Cyrus or reject the revelation about him. The idols, "them," could not reveal this.
- 48:15 What God had decided and declared would stand. Cyrus would prosper in his assignment because God had called him to do it. As surely as God had called the host of heaven (v. 13), Israel (v. 12), and Assyria (cf. 10:6), He had called Cyrus.
- 48:16 God again urged His people to listen carefully (cf. vv. 1, 12, 14). From the beginning, God's promises concerning the future had *not* been vague and ambiguous. They could be verified easily, and they evidenced Yahweh's nearness in human life. God was there when He made those predictions.

"When Jesus Christ incarnated God on earth, this was not some shocking new modality of revelation; it was the logical endpoint of all that God had been doing in and through Israel up to that point."<sup>536</sup>

The speaker of the last part of this verse is unclear. God appears to have been speaking in the first part of the verse, but now we read that God sent "Me." This may be Isaiah speaking.<sup>537</sup> If so, the point is that God and His Spirit had sent Isaiah to communicate and to confirm the truthfulness of what God had just said. Another view is that Messiah, the Servant, speaks (cf. v. 12).<sup>538</sup> The point then would be that the Messiah would testify to the truth of what God had just said—empowered by the Spirit. A third view is that the speaker is an unknown leader.<sup>539</sup> I prefer the second view. The Servant speaks again in 49:1-6. Since the speaker in the context is the Lord, it seems more natural that a member of the Godhead would say these words than the prophet. If true, this is one of the clearest Old Testament intimations of the Trinity.

### **God's will for the exiles 48:17-22**

The remaining verses in this chapter conclude this section (vv. 12-22) and this chapter of Isaiah, as well as the whole segment of chapters 40—48 .

<sup>536</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 278.

<sup>537</sup>Ibid.

<sup>538</sup>Motyer, p. 381; Grogan, p. 281; Young, 3:259; J. Martin, pp. 1102-3; Delitzsch, 2:253; Jennings, p. 564; Archer, p. 643; and Ortlund, p. 320.

<sup>539</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 178.

- 48:17 The titles of God give the reasons the Israelites should listen to Him. They should listen because of who He is and what He had done for them. Additionally, God is essentially one who teaches His people how to make a net gain of their lives (not necessarily a profit in business). He is also the one who guides His people through dangers to safety and fulfillment.
- 48:18 Failure to listen and hear the Lord's instruction (cf. vv. 1, 4, 8) in the past had limited Israel's peace (Heb. *shalom*) and her right conduct (Heb. *sedaqa*). Things could have been far better if she had only listened and obeyed. She could have experienced a ceaseless, powerful flow of His blessings.
- "Every sensitive teacher knows the pain of heart that comes when he pours himself out for students who prove to be unteachable. Israel proved to be like that (cf. v. 8); and God expresses his deep concern for them, because they are themselves the losers."<sup>540</sup>
- 48:19 Israel could also have enjoyed the blessings promised to Abraham more fully, and sooner, than she has. Israel's identity as a nation among other nations ceased because of her sin, but her identity as the chosen people of God did not. This verse does not teach that the *future fulfillment* of the promises to Abraham was contingent on Israel's obedience. God gave those promises unconditionally (cf. Gen. 12:1-3, 7; 15:5; 22:17). It does reflect that the *present enjoyment* of those benefits depended on her obedience (cf. Deut. 28—29).
- 48:20 In view of the new promises concerning Cyrus and return from exile, Isaiah called on the Israelites in captivity to depart from Babylon when they could (cf. Rev. 18:4-5), and to publicize the promise of the second Exodus. It was as good as accomplished. In view of this prophecy, it was wrong for the Israelites to remain in Babylonia after Cyrus permitted them to return to the Promised Land. Yet many did remain.
- This verse is, "A summons beforehand to Jews who would be captives in 539 B.C. not to tarry in the pagan soil of Babylon, but to take advantage of Cyrus' permissive edict and return to Judah."<sup>541</sup>
- This "missionary challenge" to take good news to the nations fittingly climaxes the message of chapters 40—48.
- 48:21 In terms reminiscent of the first Exodus, Isaiah anticipated God's miraculous and abundant providential provision of refreshment for His people when they returned to the Promised Land from Babylonia (cf. 43:18-29).

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<sup>540</sup>Grogan, p. 281.

<sup>541</sup>Archer, p. 643.

48:22 God's final word that His people needed to hear was a word of warning (cf. 57:21). For the wicked there is no peace (Heb. *shalom*, the fullness of divine blessing, cf. v. 18). The wonderful promise just summarized (vv. 20-21) was no guarantee that Israel would enjoy God's richest blessing if she continued to practice wickedness. The wicked Babylonians would not enjoy His *shalom*, and neither would they.

By way of application, God has similarly promised to build His church (Matt. 16:18). But that is no excuse for Christians to conclude that because our election is secure, we can sin with impunity and disregard God's commands.

## **B. GOD'S ATONEMENT FOR ISRAEL CHS. 49—55**

In the previous section (chs. 40—48), Isaiah revealed that God would redeem His servant Israel from Babylonian captivity by using one of His servants, Cyrus. Israel's sin had resulted in her going into the furnace of Babylon for a period of refinement.

In this section, the prophet revealed that God would also deal with the more serious problem of sin in Israel that had resulted in her captivity. He would do this by using another Servant of His, the Messiah. This Servant would not only take care of Israel's sin problem but that of the whole world. Thus Isaiah passed from dealing mainly with physical deliverance to dealing with spiritual salvation, and from Cyrus to Christ.

### **1. Anticipation of salvation 49:1—52:12**

This first segment focuses on the anticipation of salvation. Israel needed to believe the promises of God concerning the coming salvation. The possibility of a restored relationship between Israel and her God becomes increasingly clear as this section unfolds. Likewise, the cosmic dimension of this salvation becomes increasingly obvious. The section reaches its climax with the announcement that God has won victory and the people are free (52:7-12).

"These chapters present God's Servant, Messiah, in three important relationships: to the Gentile nations (49:1—50:3), to His Father (50:4-11), and to His people Israel (51:1—52:12)."<sup>542</sup>

#### **Comfort through the Servant 49:1-13**

Isaiah began this pericope by clarifying the calling and ministry of the Servant. He referred to this Servant earlier (42:1-9), but now he reiterated and reinforced what he had revealed in preparation for further revelation about this key figure.<sup>543</sup>

<sup>542</sup>Wiersbe, p. 54.

<sup>543</sup>See F. Duane Lindsey, "The Commission of the Servant in Isaiah 49:1-13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139:554 (April-June 1982):129-45.

### The Servant's calling 49:1-7

"The first [biographical Servant] Song was a word from the Lord to the world about his Servant: 'Your plight is known, my Servant will deal with it' [42:1-4]; but the second [autobiographical] Song is the Servant's testimony how that world-wide task devolved upon one who was already commissioned to minister to Israel."<sup>544</sup>

"If . . . the first song can be viewed as contemplating the ministry of Jesus the Servant in prospect from the perspective of his baptism, this second song seems to be looking back on that ministry from its close."<sup>545</sup>

49:1 Using the same terminology with which the Lord had appealed to Israel to listen to Him (cf. 41:1; 46:3, 12; 48:1, 12), someone called the world's population to pay attention to what he had to say. He claimed a divine calling from his birth; God had commissioned him to announce what he would reveal (cf. Jer. 1:5; Matt. 1:21; Luke 1:31-33, 41; 2:21; Gal. 1:15). There was more to announce than just that Yahweh would redeem Israel from Babylonian captivity (cf. 48:20). Who is the speaker? What follows, which this description of Him corroborates, is that the Servant Messiah is speaking, not Israel,<sup>546</sup> or the believing remnant in Israel, or Cyrus, or Isaiah. Several of the Messiah predictions, including this one, refer to His mother (cf. 7:14; Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:10-11; Mic. 5:2).

"When Assyria was coming to prominence Isaiah predicted the coming of the King, the virgin's Son [7:14]. Now that the world power is exercising its might and will take God's people captive, Isaiah announces the Servant of the Lord as the true Deliverer. Thus the two epochs point us to the Messiah, first to His Person and then to His work."<sup>547</sup>

49:2 Cyrus' calling was to liberate Israel with the sword, but this speaker's calling was to announce words from God, piercing, incisive words that would cut like a sword (cf. 1:20; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 1:16; 19:15).

"His is an office of the mouth, his task a declaration of the Truth; for he is a prophet *par excellence*, and his word is the Gospel . . ."<sup>548</sup>

The Servant would be available for His Master's use whenever needed. He would not be prominent at all times but would be protected and hidden until summoned into use. Both the sword and the arrow were offensive weapons, the former used at short range and the latter at longer range.

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<sup>544</sup>Motyer, p. 384.

<sup>545</sup>Grogan, p. 285.

<sup>546</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 187.

<sup>547</sup>Young, 3:268.

<sup>548</sup>Ibid.

Likewise this Servant's words would be instruments that would defeat enemies. Jesus Christ was the embodiment of this word from God (cf. John 1:1-4, 14-15).

- 49:3 Yahweh called His Servant "Israel." Israel would indeed prove to be an instrument of God by which He demonstrated His glory, but in the context, the Servant appears to be an individual. Messiah was Israel, in that, He was the personal embodiment of the ideal Israel, what the nation should have been but never attained. Furthermore, He was the "Prince with God" that neither the nation nor its namesake ever fully became. When God referred to His Servant as Israel He was referring to the Servant's function, not His identity. Throughout this book we have seen that the nation Israel was not able to carry out her function of being a light to the nations because she was blind, deaf, and rebellious. God would provide an individual to do what the nation had failed to do.

"Faced with Israel's failure, God does not wipe out the nation; he simply devises another way in which Israel's servanthood could be worked out: through the ideal Israel."<sup>549</sup>

This description eliminates Isaiah or any other simply human prophet as the possible Servant in view (cf. vv. 5-6).

- 49:4 In spite of the Servant's calling it would appear, even to Himself, that He was less than successful (cf. John 1:10-11). If the previous verse describes a more than human Servant, this one presents a fully human Servant. When Jesus Christ died it appeared that He had accomplished very little. Most people regarded His life as a waste. He even prayed on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

"God does not approach the arrogance and oppression of the world with greater arrogance and greater oppression. Rather, he comes with the humility, the vulnerability, and the powerlessness of a child."<sup>550</sup>

Nevertheless, the Servant's work would please God, if not men. Man's justice gave Messiah the Cross, but God's justice gave Him the crown. The Servant would commit His work to God and would trust Him for a just reckoning.

This verse clarifies that feelings of futility and faith in God need not be mutually exclusive. The Servant trusted God for the final outcome of His ministry, though as He was carrying it out, it appeared to be ineffective.

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<sup>549</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 291.

<sup>550</sup>Ibid.



The Apostle Paul took the same view of his ministry (cf. Rom. 8:31-39; 1 Cor. 4:1-5).

". . . despondency arises through listening to ourselves and our self-assessment *etc.*, instead of looking to God, recalling his purposes, living according to our dignity in him and rediscovering in him our source of power."<sup>551</sup>

49:5-6      The Servant's calling would be more than bringing Israel back to God in repentance and revival, a calling we have yet to see, since this was not Israel's response to Jesus' earthly ministry. It would include bringing the light of the knowledge of God and His salvation to people all over the world (cf. 5:26). The preaching of the gospel accomplishes both of these goals only partially. They will be fully attained in the Millennium when all Jews and Gentiles will turn to the Lord (cf. Phil. 2:10-11).

Clearly the Servant cannot be Israel in the light of these verses, neither can the believing remnant within Israel. Neither group has saved or can save the world. No merely human Hebrew prophet, including Isaiah, could be the savior of the world either. Cyrus' calling was to restore Israel to the land of Judah, but Messiah's calling, from His very birth, was to restore Israel and the Gentiles to God. Indeed, it was to *be* salvation (cf. Luke 2:32; Acts 13:46-47). The Servant marveled at God's grace in choosing Him for this calling and affirmed His dependence on God to accomplish such a great salvation (in the parenthetical statement in verse 5).

Watts understood this servant to be Cyrus.<sup>552</sup> He interpreted "the nations" to be the other nations of Palestine. He believed the Book of Isaiah was written about the time of Ezra (ca. 435 B.C.).<sup>553</sup> Thus he believed the writer of Isaiah was looking back on history, not forward in prophecy.

49:7      Yahweh, Israel's Redeemer and Holy One, assured the Servant—who the Israelites and the Gentiles, whom He came to save, would despise—that eventually even rulers would bow before Him. This would happen because Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, who had called Him, was faithful to fulfill what He had set out to accomplish through His Servant. Again, the success of a servant of the Lord, any servant of the Lord, is due to the Lord because He enables the servant to be successful (cf. 48:15). Watts' interpretation was as follows:

"This oracle accurately predicts the rapid, if violent, rise of Darius [I, Hystaspes] to power in Persia and claims credit for Yahweh who *chose* him for the office."<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>551</sup>Motyer, p. 387.

<sup>552</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 187.

<sup>553</sup>Idem, *Isaiah 1—33*, p. xxx.

<sup>554</sup>Idem, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 188

This verse distinguishes two aspects of the Servant's ministry: the first characterized by rejection and humiliation (cf. v. 4; 52:13—53:12), and the second marked by acceptance and glorification. The first advent of Christ fulfilled the first aspect and His second advent will fulfill the second aspect. All that Israel had experienced—being despised, abhorred, and used—the Servant would experience (cf. vv. 25-26). And all that God intended Israel to be—admired, respected, and served—the Servant will become.

"... to be the chosen of God does not mean glory along the way, but it does mean glory at the end of the way."<sup>555</sup>

### The Servant's ministry 49:8-13

Isaiah now announced more about the work of the Servant (cf. 42:5-9). He will enable people around the world to return to God, similarly to how the Israelites would return to Jerusalem after the Exile. The response to God's saving work will be universal joy (cf. 42:10-13).

49:8 In response to the Servant's feelings of frustration (v. 4), the Lord promised that at the appointed hour of salvation, He would support and enable His Servant (cf. Ps. 22:19-21). (Watts interpreted this servant too as Darius.<sup>556</sup>) God would make the Servant a covenant of the people, namely, He would make a new covenant with His people that the Servant would embody (cf. 42:6; Jer. 31:31; 32:40; Ezek. 37:26; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-12). The Servant would fulfill God's covenants with Israel.

"To speak of the Servant as the covenant means that while, as we know, it is through his work that covenant blessings become available, it is only in him, in the union of personal relationship, that these blessings can be enjoyed. Prophets preached the covenant and pointed away from themselves to the Lord; the Servant will actualize the blessings and point to himself."<sup>557</sup>

The Servant would restore the land, make the Israelites inherit desolate areas, and (v. 9) free captives. The terms used in this verse (v. 8) recall the relief that came to the Israelites in their Jubilee Year (cf. Lev. 25:8-22). The salvation in view will appear in the Millennium, which the Jubilee Year anticipated. Then too the Servant will represent Israel.

The Apostle Paul quoted this verse in 2 Corinthians 6:2. To him the present day was the day of salvation that Isaiah predicted. I take it that

<sup>555</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 295.

<sup>556</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 188.

<sup>557</sup>Motyer, p. 391.

Paul meant that the day of salvation had begun because Christ had died on the cross, not that everything that will mark that day had arrived. Clearly God has not yet restored the land to Israel. The day of salvation will come to its glorious climax in the future Millennium.

- 49:9 Part of the salvation to appear in that favorable time will involve the liberation of captives, physical and spiritual (cf. 61:1-4). God's sheep will enjoy feeding, even on the roads and formerly barren heights of their land (cf. 17:2; 40:10-11; 41:18; 43:19; 63:11). This is a picture of abundant pasturage, and it represents millennial blessings.
- 49:10 The picture continues along the lines of the Good Shepherd providing for and protecting His flock, compassionately leading them and supplying all their needs (cf. Exod. 12:21; 17:6; Ps. 23; Rev. 7:16-17).
- 49:11 God will also make His mountainous barriers as flat as a road so His people can come to His habitation. He will also build His highways so they will be thoroughfares for His people (cf. 11:16; 19:23; 36:8; 40:3-4; 42:16; 62:10).
- 49:12 People will come from all over the world to worship God (in Jerusalem) at that time (cf. v. 22; 43:6). What Isaiah described was more than just the return from exile in Babylon. Sinim may refer to Aswan in southern Egypt, which marked the southern border of the civilized world in Isaiah's day. Some older commentators suggested that "Sinim" may be a reference to China.<sup>558</sup>
- 49:13 Isaiah concluded by calling on the whole created universe to rejoice because the Lord had comforted His people (cf. 40:1; 47:6) and had shown compassion on His formerly afflicted nation (cf. 42:10-13; 44:23; 45:8; 52:8-9; 55:12-13). This is rejoicing over deliverance from sin, not just exile. When the Servant completes His work of salvation, the whole creation, not just humankind, will experience liberation from the effects of the Fall (cf. Rom. 8:19-22).

### **God's remembrance of Zion 49:14—50:3**

This pericope focuses on God's salvation of the Israelites through the future ministry of the Servant. Isaiah used the figure of Zion being the wife of Yahweh to present the Lord's relationship with His chosen people.

"The Lord assures them of His love by comparing Himself to a compassionate mother (vv. 14-23), a courageous warrior (vv. 24-26), and a constant lover (50:1-3)."<sup>559</sup>

<sup>558</sup>See Delitzsch, 2:267; Young, 3:294; and *The New Scofield . . .*, p. 755.

<sup>559</sup>Wiersbe, p. 55.

### Zion's prominence before God 49:14-26

God had not forgotten Israel. Even though He would leave her for a time, He would re-gather all her children from all over the world to Himself. Therefore she should continue to trust in Him.

49:14 Having heard the promises that precede, promises that God will bring the whole world to Himself, Israel, personified as Zion, complained that the Lord had forgotten about her. What about the special relationship that He had promised she would always have with Him? That appeared to be over. Isaiah often used Zion when he spoke of Jerusalem or the Israelites in the future, as here.

"The sense of anticlimax at 49:14 could hardly be stronger. Reminiscent of the 'Why do you say, O Jacob?' of 40:27 after the assurances of 40:1-26, the complaining voice of Zion contrasts sharply with the world song over the work of the Servant [v. 13]."<sup>560</sup>

49:15 God's response to His "wife's" complaint was to assure her of His unflinching commitment to her. Human mothers may possibly neglect the children they cared so much for that they nursed, though this is unnatural. They may even stop showing compassion to the children they carried in their wombs for nine months, though this is inconsistent. Yet Yahweh would never, ever forget (abandon) His chosen people (cf. Ps. 27:10).

"This is one of the strongest, if not the strongest expression of God's love in the Old Testament, and is often compared with Jeremiah 31:20."<sup>561</sup>

49:16 Some servants inscribed the names of their masters on their hands in Isaiah's day, but masters did not write the names of their servants on their hands. Yet Yahweh had written (lit. engraved, cf. Ezek. 4:1) the name of Zion on His palms so that He would not forget her, but be reminded of her frequently. The profile (skyline) of the city was constantly in His thoughts.

49:17 Isaiah saw the builders of Jerusalem's breached walls hurrying to rebuild them after their destroyers had departed. In other words, Jerusalem would not be in a vulnerable condition for very long, relatively speaking. The builders were the sons that Zion thought had been denied her. The Hebrew word translated "builders," *bonayik*, is almost identical to the word translated "sons," *banayik*, and may have been deliberately ambiguous to communicate both ideas. Originally only the consonants, which are identical, appeared in the text.

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<sup>560</sup>Motyer, p. 392.

<sup>561</sup>Young, 3:285.

- 49:18 Zion was to look around her. Her builder-sons would gather around her. They would be to her as jewels are to a bride, her prized glory and adornment. The Lord swore on His life that this would be so. Only a relatively few Israelites responded to Cyrus' edict and returned to rebuild Jerusalem. The majority decided to stay in Babylon. Thus this prediction must be looking into the future.
- 49:19 Jerusalem's waste and desolate places would one day be full of people. Her destroyers would be gone and in their place would be so many inhabitants that the land would overflow with people.
- "The city's growth is cited as an unmistakable sign of Yahweh's grace."<sup>562</sup>
- 49:20 The Israelites who had once been far away would return, but would complain about the difficulty of finding room to live, because so many other Israelites would have returned.
- 49:21 Zion would then say to herself: "Where in the world did all these children of mine come from? I thought all my children were dead and gone and that I was an old, forsaken widow. But now my children surround me." Her many children will not simply be the product of her own fertility, but a supernatural gift from God (cf. Gen. 18:12-14; Ruth 4:13-17).
- 49:22-23 Sovereign Yahweh further promised that the Gentiles would be responsible for ushering many of the Israelites back into their land. Even Gentile kings and princesses would carry Hebrew children back to their ancestors' homeland. An amillennial interpretation follows:

"We are not to look for a literal fulfillment of this promise. It rather refers to a conversion of the Gentiles, who as converted bring to Zion [heaven, in his view] the converted sons of Israel."<sup>563</sup>

God would raise His hand and an ensign (banner, signal), Messiah, to summon the nations to do this (cf. 5:26; 11:10, 12; 13:2; 30:17; 62:10). They would show an uncharacteristic concern for the welfare of the Israelites and would even bow down before them in submission. Young interpreted this as follows:

"Even the highest and most powerful rulers of the heathen nations will reverence the Church [the new Israel, in his view] and devote to her all their wealth and power."<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>562</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 189.

<sup>563</sup>Young, 3:290.

<sup>564</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:291.

Previously the Israelites had to bow before the Gentiles. The "times of the Gentiles," the times of Gentile supremacy over Israel in the world, will have ended (cf. Zech. 12:2; 14:2-3; Luke 21:24; Rev. 11:2; 19:17-19). The times of Gentile supremacy in the world began when Nebuchadnezzar removed Israel's sovereignty, in 586 B.C., and will conclude when Jesus Christ returns at His second advent and restores Israel's sovereignty, in the Millennium. This will prove that Yahweh is the true God since He predicted this reversal of Israel's fortunes and will bring it to pass. Those who believe His promises will not be embarrassed or disappointed, because He will fulfill them.

"All the nations are flowing to Jerusalem to bow at her feet, yes, to beg mercy for the wrongs done, and yes, to bring back with apology those who had been dragged away, but also to try to learn something of this amazing God who has been able to lift his people from barren widowhood to being the laughing grandmother of nations."<sup>565</sup>

The prophet now turned from emphasizing the children who will return, to the oppressors who will be destroyed.

49:24        Isaiah addressed an objection that some in his audience evidently entertained. Is it possible that Yahweh could really overturn the power of the mighty nations that scattered the Israelites and kept them from their land? Of course! God had already rescued Israel from one mighty man at the Exodus. Typically, mighty men and tyrants tenaciously cling to their prey and captives.

The Masoretic Text presents the tyrants as righteous. If accurate, the meaning would be: "Can a captor who has every right to his captives be deprived of them?" The answer (v. 25) would be: "The Lord will do what is right to redeem His people as well as exercise His power to do so."

49:25        Yahweh replied that He would indeed save the Israelites' descendants from their tyrannical captors even though that would be humanly impossible. He is stronger than they.

49:26        The Lord would cause these Gentile oppressors to consume one another, "reduced to their last extremity."<sup>566</sup> This will happen when the nations fight one another at Armageddon. Jesus Christ will return from heaven, the assembled armies will turn on Him, and He will defeat them with a word from His mouth. This will open the way for Israel to return to her land as the honored of the earth in the Millennium (cf. Dan. 11:40-45; Rev. 16:14; 19:19-21). These events will demonstrate to everyone that Yahweh is Israel's Savior, Redeemer, and the Mighty God of Jacob.

<sup>565</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 310.

<sup>566</sup>Michael Dahood, "Textual Problems in Isaiah," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22 (1960):404-5.

Are these descriptions just impressionistic pictures of Gentiles coming to Christ for salvation, or should we look for a more literal fulfillment of these promises? Amillennialists say they are figurative descriptions of Gentiles coming to salvation through Christ. Premillennialists say they describe a literal return of Israelites to their land with an accompanying exaltation of the physical descendants of Jacob in the earth. One of the cardinal rules of hermeneutics is that if the interpreter can understand something literally it should be taken that way unless other indications in the text or context point to a non-literal interpretation. Amillennialists concede that it is possible to take these prophecies literally, and that if one does, he or she will come out a premillennialist. But they say that a literal fulfillment was not intended, and that these predictions are being fulfilled spiritually through the church. Premillennialists view this chapter, and most of chapters 50—57, as revealing Messiah's restoration of Israel to her land at the beginning of the Millennium.

### **God's will and power to deliver 50:1-3**

The Lord turned from addressing His "wife" to her children. Both figures describe Israel, collectively and particularly. This pericope is transitional, but it is more of a conclusion to what has preceded than an introduction to what follows. God has both the desire and the ability to save the Israelites from their sin.

- 50:1           The Lord continued to speak through His prophet. He addressed again Zion's charge that God had forsaken and forgotten His people (49:14). He had not issued Israel a certificate of divorce (cf. Deut. 24:1-4); He had not stopped desiring to have her for Himself (cf. 49:14-18; Judg. 2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7).<sup>567</sup> Neither had He sold the Israelites to one of His creditors, since He had none; no one had forced Him to send them into captivity (cf. 49:22-26). No, He had temporarily sold the Israelites into captivity because of their own sins (as had been the case with Samaria, cf. Jer. 3:8).
- 50:2a           The Lord asked two more questions of His people that amount to one. Note the prominence of questions as a teaching device in this chapter (vv. 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 11). Why had they not responded to His calls for repentance and faith (which came through the prophets)? Had they done so, He implied, He would not have sold them into captivity. Was His lack of deliverance when they called to Him for help the result of His inability to save them? No, He could reach them, and He was strong enough to save them. The figure of God's hand saving shows that God Himself saves. This is one of many references to the Lord's hand or arm in Isaiah, a common figure in the Old Testament for strength (cf. 51:5, 9; 52:10; 53:1). As Isaiah would reveal, the Lord's power was great enough not only to rescue the Israelites from captivity, but to provide salvation from sin.

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<sup>567</sup>See Joe M. Sprinkle, "Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:4 (December 1997):541, and Richard D. Patterson, "Metaphors of Marriage as Expressions of Divine-Human Relations," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:4 (December 2008):689-702.

50:2b-3 The proof of God's strength is His control over nature. The nature miracles of Jesus proved His deity (cf. Matt. 8:27; 14:33). In spite of the vast amount of water in the sea, God can dry up the sea. Even though the sky above is apparently limitless, He can make it dark. The images here recall the Creation and the Exodus (cf. Exod. 15:16; Deut. 26:8, 23-24; Ps. 77:15), but the point is that God has the power to change anything as He chooses.

### **The Servant's confidence 50:4-9**

This is the third Servant Song (cf. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 52:13—53:12; 61:1-3). Like the second song, this one is autobiographical, but unlike the first and second songs it contains no reference to the Servant. That it is the Servant who is speaking becomes unmistakable in verses 10-11, the "tailpiece" of this song. But what the Servant says, even without that specific identification, leaves little doubt that it is He who is speaking. The obedient and faithful Servant, though deeply troubled, expresses confidence in His calling to proclaim the Lord's Word and in His ultimate vindication. The reason for the Servant's uneasiness becomes clearer in this passage. It is because obedience to God would lead to physical and emotional suffering (vv. 5-6). The extent of this suffering comes out most clearly in the fourth song.<sup>568</sup>

50:4 The "Sovereign Lord" (used four times in this passage, vv. 5, 7, 9) had given (appointed) the Servant the ability to speak as a disciple, namely, as one who had learned from intimate association with the Lord what He should say.

"The title [translated Sovereign Lord] indicates the truth that God is the owner of each member of the human family, and that he consequently claims the unrestricted obedience of all."<sup>569</sup>

His words were to benefit people (cf. John 3:17); they were not for Him simply to enjoy knowing personally.

". . . the Messiah would speak as one to whom God has taught his true message of comfort for those who are weary of sin."<sup>570</sup>

Watts identified this servant as Zerubbabel, the post-exilic leader in Jerusalem who was responsible for rebuilding the temple.<sup>571</sup>

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<sup>568</sup>See also, F. Duane Lindsey, "The Commitment of the Servant in Isaiah 50:4-11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139:555 (July-September 1982):216-27.

<sup>569</sup>Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, p. 34.

<sup>570</sup>Archer, p. 645.

<sup>571</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 201.



"Nothing indicates a tongue befitting the disciples of God, so much as the gift of administering consolation . . ." <sup>572</sup>

The Servant's words had come to Him through daily, direct interaction with the Lord as an obedient disciple (cf. Gen. 3:8; Mark 1:35; Heb. 5:8).

"The tongue filled with the appropriate word for ministry is the product of the ear filled with the word of God. . . . The *morning by morning* appointment is not a special provision or demand related to the perfect Servant but is the standard curriculum for all disciples." <sup>573</sup>

50:5 The Servant claimed to have always responded obediently to whatever God had spoken (cf. John 8:29). Clearly, the Servant could not be Israel or any mere human person or group of people. Opening the ear is something that God had done for Him; He had given the Servant the ability and the desire to hear and respond obediently to the Word of God. On the other hand, the Servant had not turned back from it once He had heard it (cf. Exod. 4:13; Jon. 1:3; Jer. 20:9, 14).

50:6 Disdain and abuse are the inevitable consequences of obeying God consistently by declaring His messages. All the true servants of the Lord experience this to some extent (2 Tim. 3:12). This is only the second reference to the Servant as a sufferer (cf. 49:7). This theme receives major exposition in the fourth Servant Song. The Servant said He gave Himself over to this type of treatment. It is one thing to endure such treatment, but it is quite another to gladly submit to it without defending oneself. These descriptions picture persecution that Jesus Christ endured literally (cf. Matt. 26:67; 27:30; Mark 14:65; 15:16-20; Luke 22:63). If we did not have the fulfillment of this prophecy in the life of the Lord Jesus, it would be easy to interpret this verse as only a figurative, poetic description of suffering. The literal fulfillment of this and other first advent prophecies should encourage us to expect the literal fulfillment of second advent prophecies. Jesus laid down His life on His own initiative (John 10:17-18).

"It would be impossible for any sinful human being, no matter how fine a person he was, to undergo the sufferings herein described without a spirit of rebellion welling up within him. And if a spirit of revenge took hold of him, we might well understand. Even Jeremiah complained at the way he was being used (cf. Jer. 20:9, 14ff., and note Job 3). Only one who was entirely without sin could undergo such suffering without a rebellious spirit [cf. 1 Pet. 2:22-23]." <sup>574</sup>

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<sup>572</sup>Delitzsch, 2:277.

<sup>573</sup>Motyer, p. 399. Cf. Wiersbe, p. 56.

<sup>574</sup>Young, 3:301.

50:7 The Servant counted on the help of Almighty God and so refused to feel disgraced; He knew that God would vindicate Him for being faithful to His calling. He had not suffered because He was guilty, as submitting to public humiliation meekly might suggest to observers, but in spite of His innocence. Earlier in this book, Isaiah instructed the Israelites to trust God, rather than the nations, when faced with attack by a hostile enemy (chs. 7—39). The Servant modeled that trust for God's servant Israel and for all God's servants. The belief that God would not allow Him to be disgraced in the end, emboldened the Servant to remain committed to fulfilling the Lord's will (cf. Luke 9:51). God would eventually show that the Servant had not taken a foolish course of action.

50:8-9 The Servant could, if He chose to do so, stand up in court and declare His righteousness. No one, such as a prosecuting attorney, could condemn Him by showing Him to be wicked (cf. John 18:38). God would stand near Him as His defense attorney and would vindicate Him (cf. 1 John 2:1-2). The beginning of Jesus' vindication was His resurrection (cf. Acts 2:23-24; 3:15; 13:29-30).

The end of those who falsely accused the Servant, would be a slow but inevitable wasting away and disintegration, rather than cataclysmic destruction. God did not vindicate Messiah by judging His accusers immediately, in some dramatic way that resulted in people connecting their judgment with their antagonism toward Messiah. Rather, He allowed them to continue to live but to experience a decline in their fortunes (cf. Pilate, Herod, the Jewish leaders, the Gentiles).

"The setting of vv. 8-9 is clearly forensic, and the trials of Jesus in the Gospels make this peculiarly appropriate."<sup>575</sup>

### **Obedience to the Servant 50:10—51:8**

The following section is a call to listen to the Servant, to follow His example, and so experience God's salvation. Failure to do so will result in sharing the fate of His opponents (cf. 50:9; 51:8).

#### **Walking in light or darkness 50:10-11**

This short pericope is another transition. It connects with the third Servant Song, but it introduces a new speaker and develops a different topic. The new subject is the importance of listening to the Servant and the Lord.

50:10 The Lord (v. 11) now addressed the Israelites through Isaiah again (cf. v. 1). He picked up the "whos" from verses 8 and 9 and asked who among His people feared the Lord and obeyed the instruction of the Servant.

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<sup>575</sup>Grogan, p. 290.

Fearing the Lord and obeying the Servant are synonymous. The Israelites too, like the Servant, were walking in darkness, not the darkness of sin but the darkness of being called by God to a mission that involved suffering and misunderstanding (cf. v. 6; 42:6; Exod. 19:4). Such a people should trust in the reputation and character of the Lord, and rely on Him, like the Servant (cf. vv. 7-9; Col. 2:4-7).

50:11 The Lord contrasted the way of sorrow, in this verse, with the way of trust, in verse 10. The Israelites who refused to trust God and obey the Servant in their dark mission, and instead tried to escape the dark by lighting their own fires, would experience torment. They would encounter this if they refused to trust God for deliverance from the Babylonians, and they would encounter it in their larger relationship with God. The Lord would send them torment, not vindication (cf. vv. 8-9). The Lord may have been using the figure of a person binding a flaming torch to himself so he could keep his hands free while working his way out of darkness. In such a case, it would have been only too common for people to set their own clothes on fire accidentally. The prophet used fire here to describe human wickedness, not divine wrath. Jesus claimed to be the Light of the World (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:35). Anyone who follows Him will not walk in darkness.

### Listening to the Servant 51:1-8

This section of Isaiah, like the preceding one, reflects on the third Servant Song (50:4-9). Here the emphasis is on the expectations of those who will listen to the Servant, as well as encouragement for those who are followers of righteousness. From this point through 52:12, the Servant theme builds to its climax in 52:13—53:12.

God directed His people three times, in verses 1-8, to listen. They should listen and look back, to remember what He had done (vv. 1-3). They should listen and look up, to remember who God is (vv. 4-6). And they should listen and not fear, to remember what God had promised (vv. 7-8).<sup>576</sup>

51:1 The Lord appealed to the righteous in Israel to listen to Him (cf. 50:10). Watts believed the speaker, through v. 4, was Darius.<sup>577</sup> These were the Israelites who sincerely wanted to trust and obey God, but found it difficult to do so because impending captivity seemed to contradict God's promises. The Lord directed them to consider their history, their origin.

"Abraham was the rock from which his descendants were hewn—having a rocklike quality imparted to him by God's faithfulness and grace."<sup>578</sup>

<sup>576</sup>Adapted from Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, p. 573.

<sup>577</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 204.

<sup>578</sup>Archer, p. 645.

51:2 Consider Abraham and Sarah, God counseled. From old Abraham and his barren wife, God had made a whole nation of people.

51:3 Even though the Babylonians would reduce the population of Jerusalem almost to zero, the God who gave Abraham numerous descendants could and would repopulate Zion (cf. 49:20). He would comfort His people, personified as Zion, by doing this. He would reverse Zion's fortunes, transforming her desert wilderness areas into another Eden.

*"Like Eden is not simply a figure of beauty and plenty but also one of the absence of the divine curse consequent upon sin."*<sup>579</sup>

God would turn her sorrow and wailing into joyful singing and thanksgiving. The implication is that as Abraham was strong in faith and believed God's promises, so should the Israelites of Isaiah's day (cf. Gen. 15:6).

*"As Sarah gave birth to Isaac after a long period of barrenness, so Zion, a second Sarah, will be surrounded by a joyous multitude of children after a long period of desolation. [cf. 49:14-21]."*<sup>580</sup>

51:4 Again the Lord urged His nation to listen attentively to Him (cf. v. 1). What God would do for His people, in preserving them and returning them to the land, would be a lesson (Heb. *torah*, instruction, "law") to the whole world. His justice in fulfilling His promises to the Israelites would lead many of the Gentiles out of their darkness and into His light. This is what Isaiah revealed earlier that Messiah the Servant would do (9:7; 11:4; 16:4-5; 42:1-4; 49:6).

51:5 The righteousness, salvation, and strong judgment that the Lord promised to bring would be greater than just Israel's emancipation from Babylon, however, because the nations would anticipate it. Cyrus brought deliverance to the Israelites from Babylon, but the Servant would bring salvation to the nations of the world. The furthest reaches of humanity wait expectantly for God's delivering power, in the sense that everyone wants someone to correct the mess we are in, not that they know how salvation will come. This salvation was imminent, the Lord promised, as imminent as Messiah's appearing.

51:6 The sky and the earth may appear to be permanent, but the really permanent realities are God's promises of coming everlasting salvation and righteousness (cf. Luke 21:33).

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<sup>579</sup>Motyer, p. 404.

<sup>580</sup>Delitzsch, 2:283.

- 51:7 For a third time the Lord urged His people, who already knew something of righteousness, to listen to Him (cf. vv. 1, 4). They were the people who had received God's instruction by special revelation and who treasured it in their hearts. They were the godly remnant in Israel. They could count on unbelievers reproaching and reviling them. Nevertheless, they should not fear them or lose heart, but follow the example of the perfect Servant by trusting God to fulfill His Word (50:4-9; cf. 2 Pet. 3:3-13).
- 51:8 Their unbelieving critics would pass away in time, the product of natural decay (cf. 50:11). But God's righteousness and salvation will last forever, and so will those who trust in Him who will bring them to pass (cf. 50:10).

### **Awakening to deliverance 51:9—52:12**

The presence and repetition of the call to awake (51:9, 17; 52:1) identifies this unit of prophetic material as one. The Israelites were to wake up to the power of God that had not changed (51:9-16), and to the purpose of God, namely: His plan for their life (51:17-23). They should also wake up to the peace of God, since He would not abandon them (52:1-12).<sup>581</sup> The section begins with the question of whether God can and will save His people from their enemies (51:9-16). The answer is that He will cause Israel's enemies to suffer (51:17-23), and that He will deliver Israel from her enemies (52:1-12).

#### **The Lord's arm 51:9-16**

The Israelites cried out for God to act for them. He had done so in their past history, but they needed His help now. Probably the believing remnant was requesting help.

- 51:9 Israel's call for God to awake assumes that He had not been active in helping His people recently. Isaiah, speaking for the Israelites, described the Lord's delivering power in action for His people as His "arm" (cf. v. 5; 53:1). His arm had defeated the Egyptians and Pharaoh in the Exodus in the past, here described respectively as Rahab (lit. proud one, cf. 30:7; Ps. 87:4) and the dragon (cf. Ezek. 29:3). Rahab and the dragon were also part of the mythological lore of the ancient Near East. By using these names, Isaiah was undoubtedly stressing Yahweh's ability to overcome all the pagan gods and every other power opposing Israel's salvation.
- 51:10 The pagans credited their gods with drying up a sea of material chaos and creating the world in prehistory. Isaiah pointed to God drying up the Red Sea in the historical Exodus as evidence that He could redeem His people again.

". . . the Old Testament insists on setting the rock of history  
(actual event, actual testimony) under its theology."<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>581</sup>Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, p. 573.

<sup>582</sup>Motyer, p. 408.

Isaiah frequently used the image of God making a way, pathway, or highway for His people so they could enter into the blessings that He had planned for them (cf. 9:1; 11:16; 19:23; 30:11, 21; 35:8; 40:3; 42:16; 43:16, 19; 48:17; 49:11; 57:14; 62:10). I wonder if this is the origin of the early Christian use of "the way" as a title for Christianity.

51:11 The consequence of the Lord's arm again providing redemption for His people was that the exiles would return to Zion from Babylon with great joy (cf. 35:10). The joy at this return was only a foretaste of the joy His people would experience as a result of His redemption through the Servant and their return to the Promised Land in the Millennium (cf. 55:12).

Verses 12-16 record the Lord's response to the cry just recorded.

51:12 The Lord described Himself again as the only true, self-existent God. Such a one as He would indeed comfort His people (cf. 40:1). Who were the Israelites that they should fear the Babylonians, or any other human enemy? They were only mortals. The immortal God would defend them.

51:13 The Israelites had forgotten the type of person Yahweh—their Maker, the Creator—was, or they would not have been afraid.

". . . to live in fear of humans is to have effectively forgotten God. . . . It is easy to say certain theologically correct things, such as that he is both the world's and our maker, that he is the one who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth, while giving the lie to those fine words by our continually living as though he can do nothing to prevent humans from doing ultimate harm to us [cf. Rom. 8:39]. . . . Yes, oppressors may hurt us, even kill us, but they do not have the power to make us fear them or hate them."<sup>583</sup>

51:14 God promised to free the exiles soon and to supply their needs. Westerners tend to read verses like this one through individualistic glasses. We ask if there were not individuals who died in exile. There probably were. The prophet's perspective was much more collective; he viewed the Israelites as a unit. By saying they would not die in exile he meant that the nation would not cease to exist while in captivity. While this was true of the Babylonian exiles, the promises of salvation in this section of the book anticipate a larger spiritual redemption as well, as I have noted. In fact, life in Babylonian exile was far from harsh for most of the Israelites (cf. Jer. 29:4-7), so much so that most of them chose not to return to the Promised Land when they could.

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<sup>583</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 346.

- 51:15 The Israelites would not perish because of who their God was. He is Yahweh Almighty, who causes movements among nations just as surely as He causes the waves of the sea to move.
- 51:16 Though God spoke this verse to Israel, it is clear that only the ideal Israel, the Servant, could be the ultimate fulfillment of what He said. Watts again identified this servant as Darius.<sup>584</sup> He had put His words in the mouth of the Israelites but would also do so uniquely for His Servant (cf. 49:2). He had provided compassionate care for the nation but would do so in a special way for His Servant (cf. 49:2). He would use the Israelites to create new heavens and a new earth, in the spiritual sense of their being His instruments of transformation in the Millennium. However, He would use His Servant Messiah to create new heavens and a new earth literally at the end of the Millennium (cf. v. 6; Rev. 21:1—22:5). And He would use the Servant Messiah to reaffirm His commitment to Israel in the future. How God would use the Servant to do all this becomes clearer in 52:13—53:12, the fourth Servant Song. This was a fitting culminating assurance to the Israelites.

### **Drunken Jerusalem 51:17-23**

God now turned the tables on His people and called on them to awake (cf. v. 1). They needed to wake up to the fact that He would comfort them and punish their oppressors (cf. 40:2; Lam. 1—2). The fact that the Babylonian Captivity continues to lie unmentioned specifically in the text, strengthens the impression that God had more than that historic deliverance in view in what He promised. A greater future redemption is also in view, namely, the one that the Servant would effect.

- 51:17 Jerusalem had drunk a powerful liquid at the hand of her God. He had given her punishment to drink for her sins (cf. Mark 10:38). Drinking a cup of wine is a figure of judgment (cf. 29:9; 63:6; Ps. 75:8; Jer. 25:15-16; Rev. 14:10). Jerusalem now lay in a state of stupor but needed to arise because the Lord had a future for her.
- 51:18 She was unable to stand up and walk on her own, so devastating had been the effects of the Lord's judgment against her. Moreover, she had no children (inhabitants) to help her go home.
- 51:19 Widowhood and childlessness had befallen Israel (cf. 47:9), and there were none to mourn for her. Furthermore, devastation, destruction, famine, and the sword had overtaken her. Since she deserved her punishment, the Lord could not comfort her as He could have if she had been an innocent victim.

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<sup>584</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 213.

- 51:20 The children were just as helpless as the mother. In one sense Israel had no children to help her. This is one way of saying she could not help herself. But in another sense the children she did have, her descendants, could not help her either. The mother and her children are both figures of Israel. The children lay at major intersections of the city as exhausted as an antelope (oryx) caught in a net by its hunters. They too had suffered the wrath and rebuke of their God (cf. vv. 2, 17).
- 51:21 "Therefore" marks the transition from peril to promise. Isaiah appealed to afflicted Israel to listen to God's message. The Israelites had suffered the effects of intoxication, not from drinking real wine but the wrath of God (v. 20).
- "Unlike Babylon, who sees herself as voluptuous (47:8), Zion knows herself as *afflicted*. But the same God speaks to both, telling Babylon to go down into the dust, and telling Zion to arise from the dust (52:2). Babylon thought herself independent and self-existent (47:10), but Zion believes the very opposite about herself: she is a helpless victim who can do nothing about her situation (40:27; 49:14). All this could be changed; if she would only listen to the voice of God (through the Servant, 50:10), she could stand in quiet confidence."<sup>585</sup>
- 51:22 The God offering Israel a comforting promise was her master, Yahweh, the God of the covenant, the God who had taken her to Himself, who consistently defends His people. He promised that the Israelites would never again experience the outpouring of His wrath as they had. Obviously the Jews have experienced worse persecution in recent history than they did during the Babylonian exile: the German holocaust, the Russian pogroms, etc. And they will undergo the worst trials of their history in the Tribulation (cf. Jer. 30:4-7). I take it that God meant that He would not punish them as He had because He would provide the Servant to drink the cup of His wrath for His people. They would not have to suffer in the future as they had in the past because God would provide a Savior who would suffer in their place. That so many of the Jews have suffered terribly and will yet do so is because they have rejected the Savior that God provided.
- 51:23 Instead, God would give Israel's enemies His cup of wrath to drink. They had walked all over Israel, but that would end. The figure of walking on the backs of enemies stresses the victor's desire to humiliate the captives, not to slay them (cf. Josh. 10:24).

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<sup>585</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 355.



To summarize God's plans for Israel as revealed in Isaiah, unless she repented she would experience His judgment. God would use surrounding nations to punish His people. After this punishment, God would restore Israel and punish her oppressors (cf. Hab. 1—2).

### Released Zion 52:1-12

God next called on His people to prepare to receive the salvation that He would provide for them. They would have to lay hold of it by faith for it to benefit them.

"The third 'wake-up call' (Isa. 52:1-6) is also addressed to Jerusalem and is a command not only to wake up but to dress up! It is not enough for her to put off her stupor (51:17-23); she must also put on her glorious garments."<sup>586</sup>

The first "wake-up call" is in 51:9-16.

52:1 God called on Israel to awake and to be strong (in the strength that God provides). The Israelites did not need to call on Him to awake and to be strong, as they had done (51:9). He was ready to save them. But were they ready to trust Him for their salvation (cf. 40:27-31; 42:23-25; 43:22-24; 45:9-13, 15, 18-19; 46:8-13; 48:1-22; 49:14—50:3)? The Lord instructed the people of Zion to put on the beautiful garments of salvation that God would provide for them. How He would provide salvation for them is the subject of the next Servant Song (52:13—53:12). God saw His people as comprising a holy city, and they needed to view themselves that way too, as holy people (cf. 4:2-6; 1 Cor. 1:2). References to Jerusalem as "the holy city" appear in Neh. 11:1, 18; Isa. 48:2; 52:1; Dan. 9:24; Matt. 4:5; 27:53; and Rev. 11:2. The Lord would forbid any uncommitted and unclean people from having a part in His future for them.

"Notwithstanding the priestly house of Aaron and the royal house of David, the ideal of a royal, priestly people (Ex. 19:4-6) had never been realized, but while Zion slept (1a) a marvel occurred so that on waking she finds new garments laid out (1bc), expressive of a new status of holiness (1d)."<sup>587</sup>

52:2 Israel could not deliver herself, but she needed to rise up from her humiliated and bound condition and respond to the Lord's deliverance of her (cf. 47:1). Salvation is not by works of righteousness, but it does require faith. Humans cannot break the chains that bind them, but they must remove them, with His help, since God has promised that He will break them.

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<sup>586</sup>Wiersbe, p. 57.

<sup>587</sup>Motyer, p. 416. Cf. Zech. 3.

- 52:3 Yahweh announced that since no one forced God to sell Israel into slavery (cf. 45:13; 50:1), neither would anyone force Him to redeem her. He would free her of His own free will, just as He had sent her into captivity of His own free will (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19). There was, therefore, no impediment to His redeeming her.
- 52:4 Sovereign Yahweh further declared that the Israelites had gone down to Egypt of their own volition in the days of Jacob. Later the Assyrians had taken them captive against their will. These earliest and most recent oppressions represented all of them that Israel had undergone. The implication is that since God can freely liberate (v. 3), He could redeem His people from enemy-imposed captivity as easily as He could redeem them from self-imposed captivity.
- 52:5 Yahweh reflected on the present situation: What have we here? Israel was in captivity but not because God had to give her over to a superior person. Furthermore, Israel's leaders wailed because of the shame of their defeat. Finally, the victors held Yahweh's name in contempt because they concluded He was weaker than *their* strongest gods.
- 52:6 The Lord's conclusion to the situation was twofold. First, He would so deliver His people that there would be no question in their minds that He was the only true God (cf. Ezek. 36:21-32). Second, Yahweh would prove that He is who He claimed to be, by fulfilling what He had predicted He would do. "In that day" anticipates a time, yet future, in which God would act decisively for His people to vindicate His name.

A hymn of praise ends this promise of redemption (cf. 42:10-12; 44:23; 49:13; 54).

"The prophet sees in spirit, how the tidings of the redemption, to which the fall of Babylon, which is equivalent to the dismissal of the prisoners, gives the finishing stroke, are carried over the mountains of Judah to Jerusalem."<sup>588</sup>

- 52:7 Isaiah exulted in the good news that the Lord had just revealed. The news had reached His people through a messenger whom the prophet pictured as running across mountains with his message (cf. 40:9; 41:27; Nah. 1:15). The messenger's feet were beautiful because they carried him and his message of peace, happiness, and salvation (cf. Matt. 10:1-7; Rom. 10:15). His message is that Yahweh is the only true God and that He reigns as the sovereign over the universe and all supposed gods. Watts believed the rejoicing was due to Darius seizing the reigns of power from the Babylonians.<sup>589</sup>

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<sup>588</sup>Delitzsch, 2:298-99.

<sup>589</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, pp. 216-17.

"What does God's rule entail? It entails a condition where all things are in their proper relation to each other, with nothing left hanging, incomplete, or unfulfilled (*peace, shalom*); it entails a condition where creation purposes are realized (*good, tob*; cf. Gen. 1:4, 10, etc.); it entails a condition of freedom from every bondage, but particularly the bondage resultant from sin (*salvation, yeshu'a*). Where God reigns, these follow. Of course, this is exactly congruent with what the Christian faith considers its good news (*euangelion*) to be."<sup>590</sup>

52:8 Watchmen along the walls of Jerusalem saw the messenger coming, and they joined in the rejoicing as they realized that he brought a message of Yahweh's approaching victory for Zion.

52:9 Now all the people of Jerusalem, even the downtrodden, joined the chorus and praised God for coming to comfort and redeem His people.

"To give thanks in advance is the highest form of faith. The person praising God for what he or she does not yet possess is the person who truly believes the promises of God."<sup>591</sup>

52:10 God would display His power (roll up His sleeves) before all the nations by redeeming His people (cf. 18:3). It was customary for warriors to bare their right arms up to their shoulders so they could fight without the encumbrance of a sleeve.<sup>592</sup> God's power is holy in that it is perfect and transcendent, and it is also for a holy purpose, namely, the salvation of His people (cf. Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34). His salvation would become visible to the whole world.

52:11 In view of this salvation, the redeemed should depart from the unclean place where they had been, and purify themselves. The Babylonian exiles, who would be set free, should return to Jerusalem to reestablish their holy lives, in a holy city, in a holy land. The decision of many Israelites to remain in Babylon rather than returning with Zerubbabel, Ezra, or Nehemiah, was sinful rebellion against God's revealed will for them. Some of them, such as Daniel perhaps, may not have been able to return, however. The recipients of spiritual salvation, which these Babylonian exiles represent, should also respond to redemption by living lives separated from sin unto God (cf. Lam. 4:15; 2 Cor. 6:17). The vessels in view are those things needed to worship God as He prescribed (cf. Ezra 1:7).

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<sup>590</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 368.

<sup>591</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>592</sup>Delitzsch, 2:300.

52:12 The redeemed would not need to run away from their former captor as fast as they could, or to depart as fugitives, as they had to do when they left Egypt in the Exodus. They were completely free. Yahweh would go before to lead them and behind to protect them as they journeyed to their Promised Land (cf. Exod. 13:21-22; 14:19-20).

In this section, the dual implications of the prophet's promises are very clear. Babylonian captivity lay behind what he said, but he had the larger issue of slavery to sin in mind, primarily. Release to return to the land was in view, but even more, the opportunity to return to the Lord through spiritual redemption was his point. God would deal with the result in Israel's case, captivity, but He would also and more importantly deal with the cause, sin.

"Both the Exodus and wilderness, and in a lesser sense the Egyptian slavery, have become not only pivotal historical episodes but the photographic negatives from which the prophets, by the inspiration of their God, developed the beautiful eschatological pictures of the future."<sup>593</sup>

## **2. Announcement of salvation 52:13—53:12**

The second segment of the section in Isaiah dealing with God's atonement of Israel (chs. 49—55), after the anticipation of salvation (49:1—52:12), is the announcement of salvation. This is the fourth and most famous Servant Song.

"The profoundest thoughts in the Old Testament revelation are to be found in this section. It is a vindication of the Servant, so clear and so true, and wrought out with such a pathos and potency, that it holds first place in Messianic prophecy."<sup>594</sup>

"The exaltation of the Servant of Jehovah is the theme of the prophecy which follows."<sup>595</sup>

The reader of the promises that God would redeem His people with His mighty arm (cf. 50:2; 51:5, 9; 52:10) could reasonably expect that redemption to come with a great display of overwhelming power. But the careful reader of the previous Servant Songs has picked up some hints that the Servant would not fit the mold of the traditional action hero. In this passage, Isaiah filled out the previously sketchy picture of the Servant with more detail concerning His work, character, and nature. God's greatest power is evident in His ability to return love and forgiveness for hatred and injustice, not in His ability to crush all opposition.

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<sup>593</sup>C. Hassell Bullock, "Entrée to the Pentateuch Through the Prophets: A Hermeneutics of History," in *Interpreting the Word of God: Festschrift in honor of Steven Barabas*, p. 76.

<sup>594</sup>Robinson, p. 145.

<sup>595</sup>Delitzsch, 2:304.

"No subject connected with the Old Testament has been more discussed than the question of the identity of the Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah."<sup>596</sup>

This Song consists of five stanzas of three verses each. The first and last stanzas record God's commendation of the Servant, and the middle three describe the Servant's commitment to God's will. The central one focuses on His substitute death. Two key contrasts mark the passage: the contrast between the Servant's humiliation and His exaltation, and the contrast between the reader's expectations of the Servant and reality.<sup>597</sup>

### **The Servant exalted 52:13-15**

52:13 "Behold, My Servant" marks a new section in the development of Isaiah's argument, but it also directs the reader to fix his or her attention carefully on the Servant (cf. 42:1; Zech. 3:8; 6:12; 9:9). The Servant would succeed in the sense of fulfilling the purpose to which God had called Him (cf. 42:1; 49:2-3; 50:7-9). Watts identified this servant as the Persian king Darius I (Hystaspes, 521-486 B.C.) in the whole passage (52:13—53:12). He took this Servant Song as describing the unlikely Persian king whom God had raised up to bring His people back into their land following the exile.<sup>598</sup>

"The implication is that he would act with such intelligence as to succeed in his objectives."<sup>599</sup>

In view of this success, He would be high, lifted up, and greatly exalted.

"Some commentators see in these three verbs a hint of the stages in the exaltation of our Lord, His resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of the Father. Yet the prophet's purpose seems not so much to present the actual details of our Lord's life as to set forth a picture of the suffering servant as such."<sup>600</sup>

The terms high, lifted up, and greatly exalted describe God elsewhere (cf. v. 17; 6:1; 33:10; 57:15). One writer noted several similarities between these two sections of the book and used them to argue for a single writer of the entire prophecy.<sup>601</sup> Thus the Servant would take a place of equality

<sup>596</sup>H. H. Rowley, "The Servant of the Lord in the Light of Three Decades of Criticism," in *The Servant of the Lord and other Essays on the Old Testament*, p. 3.

<sup>597</sup>For a study of the rhetorical variations that stress the Servant's sufferings and exaltation, see Ronald Bergey, "The Rhetorical Role of Reiteration in the Suffering Servant Poem (Isa 52:13—53:12)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:2 (June 1997):177-88.

<sup>598</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, pp. 229-33.

<sup>599</sup>Archer, p. 646.

<sup>600</sup>Young, 3:336.

<sup>601</sup>Herbert M. Wolf, "The Relationship Between Isaiah's Final Servant Song (52:13—53:12) and Chapters 1—6," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, pp. 251-59.

with God (cf. Acts. 2:33; 3:13, 26; Phil. 2:9; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22). This could in no way refer to Israel, the remnant in Israel, or any merely human person.

52:14 The Servant would experience the same humiliation and degradation that had marked the Israelites. Rather than appearing to be the strongest and most attractive representative of Yahweh, the Servant would appear extremely weak and unattractive to people. This description probably presents all aspects of His being: physical, mental, social, spiritual, etc. Jesus did not impress people as being the best looking, the most brilliant, the most socially engaging, or the most pious individual they had ever met, according to the Gospels. In His trials and crucifixion, Jesus' underwent beatings that marred His physical appearance, but far more than that is in view in this description of Him. By saying that His appearance was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men, Isaiah was saying in a very strong way that His sufferings would be very great.

*"Many is a theological term within the Song, referring to the whole company for whose benefit the Servant acts (15a, [53:]11c, [53:]12ae). It appears here for the first time and provides a telling contrast 'with the one, the solitary . . . servant'."*<sup>602</sup>

52:15 The Servant's sufferings, however, would have worldwide effects; He would sprinkle "many nations."

The interpretation of the Hebrew word *yazzeḥ*, translated "sprinkle" or "startle," has led students of this verse to two different understandings of the prophet's line of thought. If "sprinkle" is correct, Isaiah meant that even though the Servant was such an unlikely candidate as Yahweh's representative, He would still perform the priestly function of cleansing the world of its sins (cf. Lev. 4:6; 8:11; 14:7; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; Heb. 10:22).

*"Men regarded the servant as himself unclean and in need of purification, whereas he himself as a priest will sprinkle water and blood and so purify many nations."*<sup>603</sup>

If "startle" is correct, the prophet meant that since the Servant was such an unlikely candidate as Yahweh's representative, He would shock the world (when He made His claims and when God would exalt Him). Both meanings are possible, and both harmonize with other revelation about the Servant. Most English translations have "sprinkle," and this is probably the primary meaning. There are other priestly allusions in the following

<sup>602</sup>Motyer, p. 425. His quotation is from J. Muilenberg, *Isaiah 40—66*, p. 617.

<sup>603</sup>Young, 3:339. Cf. Delitzsch, 2:308; Baron, pp. 64-66; and Ortlund, p. 354. See John 19:34.

verses (53:6, 7, 10, 11). I think Isaiah may have used a double entendre at this point so his readers would see both truths. Isaiah was a master of multiple allusions, as we have seen.

Another problem is why the kings would be speechless. Would it be because of His lowly appearance (v. 14) or because of His exaltation (v. 13)? According to the first view, even kings would be shocked at the lowly state of the Servant (cf. John 19:19). What they had not known was that Israel's redeemer would be a humble Servant. According to the second view, even kings would be speechless at the Servant's exaltation (cf. v. 13). They had never heard that one who took such a lowly place could ever sit on the throne of God.

Again, since people and kings were shocked at both the Servant's humiliation and His exaltation, it is very hard to tell what was in Isaiah's mind. Perhaps the first view is better because the thought of verse 15 flows directly out of verse 14. However, the Apostle Paul applied this verse to the preaching of the gospel in virgin and largely Gentile territory, and the gospel includes both the sufferings and glory of Messiah (cf. Rom. 15:21).

"Kings shall shut their mouths—both from amazement and from their inability to say anything by way of self-justification."<sup>604</sup>

Suffering in God's service leads to exaltation and glorification.

### **The Servant despised 53:1-3**

Expositors have called this chapter the holy of holies of Isaiah. It is also the middle chapter in part two of the book (chs. 40—66). Most of the approximately 80 references to Isaiah in the New Testament come from this chapter.<sup>605</sup> It is the most quoted or alluded to Old Testament chapter in the New Testament.

"Beyond question, this chapter is the heart of the Hebrew prophetic writings."<sup>606</sup>

53:1            Isaiah marveled at the message that the Lord had revealed to him, that he and the Israelites were to declare to the world as lights to the nations (42:6; 43:10-12; cf. vv. 3-6; 16:6; 24:16; 42:24; 52:15; 64:5-6; John 12:38; Rom. 10:16). It was almost unbelievable.

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<sup>604</sup>Archer, p. 646.

<sup>605</sup>A. Martin, *Christ in . . .*, part 2, p. 12

<sup>606</sup>Baron, p. 4. For a history of the ancient and modern Jewish and the rationalistic Christian interpretations of this chapter, with rebuttals, see *ibid.*, pp. 16-47, 143-58.

"It [the rhetorical question, "Who has believed our report?"] does not demand a negative answer, but is designed simply to call attention to the paucity of true believers in the world and especially among the Jews."<sup>607</sup>

The prophet also was amazed that the Lord had revealed His arm to His people. When the Lord would bare His arm to save humankind (51:9-10; 52:10; 63:12), that manifestation of His strength was not at all impressive. We might say that when God rolled up His sleeve, the arm that He exposed was not the powerful arm of a weight lifter but a very ordinary looking arm. Nevertheless that arm would prove to be stronger than any other arm. The Arm of the Lord appears here as a person distinct from the Lord Himself, namely, the Servant of the Lord.

"When God made the universe, He used His fingers (Ps. 8:3), and when He delivered Israel from Egypt, it was by His strong hand (Ex. 13:3). But to save lost sinners, He had to bare His mighty arm!"<sup>608</sup>

53:2 This verse elaborates on the humble nature of the Servant's person and ministry (cf. 52:14). Instead of appearing as a mighty oak or a flourishing fruit tree, the Servant would grow up before the Lord as a sucker, a normally unwanted shoot that sprouts up from a root (cf. 11:1; 1 Sam. 16:5-13). The Hebrew word, *yoneq*, literally means a "suckling," but Isaiah used it figuratively here in a horticultural sense to describe a tender sucker.<sup>609</sup> Gardeners usually snip off such shoots as soon as they appear because they rob nourishment from the main plant. A parallel figure is a sprig that sprouts up in a barren landscape. Usually these little sprigs die very quickly from lack of moisture. The synonymous descriptions point to the apparently earthly, natural origin of the Servant, with a family tree, and to the arid spiritual environment in which He grew up.

The Servant, moreover, would have no striking appearance that would draw the attention of people and make them think, Wow, look at him! There would be nothing about His appearance or His conduct that would attract people to Him as a distinctive, special person (cf. David, 1 Sam. 16:18).<sup>610</sup>

"Deliverers are dominating, forceful, attractive people, who by their personal magnetism draw people to themselves and convince people to do what they want them to do. People who refuse to follow that leadership frequently find

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<sup>607</sup>Young, 3:340.

<sup>608</sup>Wiersbe, p. 60.

<sup>609</sup>Baron, p. 70.

<sup>610</sup>See Delitzsch, 2:307, n. 1.



themselves crushed and tossed aside. This man does not fit that picture at all."<sup>611</sup>

Jesus entered the world as a baby, not a king. He was born in a stable, not a palace. He asked the great preacher of His day to baptize Him; He did not announce the beginning of His ministry publicly and summon everyone to come to Him for baptism. Even John the Baptist did not recognize Jesus for who He was at first; He blended into the crowd and was not outstanding.

"While there is reason to believe from other passages of Scripture that the winsome character of the Lord Jesus appealed even to some of the most hopeless of men, yet this prophecy makes clear that which some Christians have not fully comprehended, that the Lord Jesus Christ did not appear in such a way as to attract the natural man. While the power of His deity was evident on occasion, and His presence was no doubt always commanding, there was no mere glamour about Him."<sup>612</sup>

53:3 The English word "despised" carries strong emotional overtones, but its Hebrew source means to be considered worthless and unworthy of attention. The Servant would not be the object of scorn, Isaiah meant, though He was that (Mark 10:33-34; Luke 18:31-33), as much as He would be hastily dismissed. One writer believed the primary meaning is that the Servant would provoke abhorrence.

"No person in the history of the Jews has provoked such deep-seated abhorrence as He who came only to bless them, and who even on the cross prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' . . . And all through the centuries no name has provoked such intense abhorrence among the Jews as the name of Jesus."<sup>613</sup>

People would reject Him because they would not see Him as having any significance for them (6:10; John 1:10-11; 12:37-41). They would not give Him a second look.

"The chief men of His nation who towered above the multitude, the great men of this world, withdrew their hands from Him, drew back from Him: He had none of the men of any distinction at His side."<sup>614</sup>

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<sup>611</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 382.

<sup>612</sup>A. Martin, *Christ in . . .*, part 2, page 15.

<sup>613</sup>Baron, p. 74.

<sup>614</sup>Delitzsch, 2:314.

People would also avoid the Servant because He would appear to them as one who had His own problems. Since He knew pain and grief, others would conclude that He was not in a position to help them. He would appear to them as a loser, and who goes to a loser for help or looks to one for leadership? This description does not mean that the Servant would always be sickly and morose (cf. 1:5-6). It means that the way He presented Himself would not lead people to look to Him for strength.

"When all that the human eye saw and the human mind apprehended was added up the result was zero."<sup>615</sup>

"Thus the revelation of the arm of the Lord that will deliver the Lord's people is met with shock, astonishment, distaste, dismissal, and avoidance. Such a one as this can hardly be the one who can set us free from that most pervasive of all human bondages: sin, and all its consequences. To a world blinded by selfishness and power, he does not even merit a second thought."<sup>616</sup>

People typically disregard those who suffer as they serve the Lord, as they continue to despise and reject the Servant.

### **The Servant wounded 53:4-6**

It becomes clear in this stanza of the song that the Servant's sufferings were not His own fault, as onlookers thought. They were for the sins of humankind and resulted in our healing. Furthermore, He would not merely suffer because of the sins of the people, because He was one of them. He would suffer in their place. The substitute nature of His sufferings is clear in the descriptions Isaiah presented, in the context of the arm of the Lord references, and in view of the nature of sin. Since sin is against a holy God it does not just require physical suffering, which Israel had experienced in abundance, but spiritual suffering: separation from God. Animal sacrifices covered human sin only temporarily, but a perfect sinless human sacrifice was necessary to remove the sin of humanity (cf. Heb. 9:13-14).

53:4           The Servant's humble appearance and unattractiveness were for the benefit of humankind. It was the consequences of *our* sins that He would bear, not those of His own sins (cf. Matt. 8:17). Yet onlookers would consider that God was striking, smiting, and afflicting Him for His own sins. This is a typical response to suffering. People often conclude that a person is suffering because he or she has done something bad, and God is punishing him or her. This was the viewpoint of Job's friends. Because the Hebrew word for stricken, *nagua'*, refers to smiting with leprosy in 2 Kings 15:5, a tradition arose among the Jews that Messiah would be a leper. This view also appears in some of the ancient Greek versions.<sup>617</sup> The Servant did not

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<sup>615</sup>Motyer, p. 429.

<sup>616</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 384.

<sup>617</sup>Young, 3:346.

just suffer *with* His people but *for* them. His atonement was substitutionary.

"His suffering and death would be vicarious, and he would take care of the sin that has brought much temporal and eternal suffering (53:4-7)."<sup>618</sup>

Who were the people that Isaiah had in mind when He described the benefits of the Servant's work? Were they only those who would become the people of God by faith in the Servant, or were they all people? Isaiah did not make this distinction in His prophecy. He did not contribute to the debate about limited and unlimited atonement. What he wrote does not enable us to solve the question of for whom Christ died.

53:5 "But" continues the contrast between the Servant and the rest of humankind. He would not only experience affliction for us but injury as well. "Pierced through" and "crushed" describe extreme distress resulting in death (cf. 51:9; Job 26:13; Ps. 109:22; Lam. 3:34). The Hebrew words behind these terms are the strongest ones in that language for violent and excruciating death.<sup>619</sup> Transgressions are willful and rebellious sins, and iniquities are sins that result from the perverted quality of human nature due to the continuing effects of the Fall.

"Thus, verse 4 demands the noun 'substitution', and verse 5 adds the adjective 'penal'. "<sup>620</sup>

Looking back from the Cross, we can see how appropriate these terms were in view of the death Jesus died, death by crucifixion. It was God who was behind the piercing and crushing of the Servant (vv. 6, 10). It was as though the Servant took the whipping that we deserved for being rebellious children (cf. Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3; Heb. 5:8; 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24-25).

"This is not a matter of a raging tyrant who demands violence on someone to satisfy his fury. It is a God who wants a whole relationship with his people, but is prevented from having it until incomplete justice is satisfied."<sup>621</sup>

"What else, we ask again, can these words mean than that He suffered *vicariously*? Not merely *with*, but *for* others? By no exegesis is it possible to escape this conclusion."<sup>622</sup>

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<sup>618</sup>Stephen J. Bramer, "Suffering in the Writing Prophets (Isaiah to Malachi)," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 151.

<sup>619</sup>Delitzsch, 2:318.

<sup>620</sup>Motyer, p. 430.

<sup>621</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 388.

<sup>622</sup>Baron, p. 89.

What the Servant would do in bearing the consequences of humankind's sins would bring about positive results for many people. This shows again that the Servant's sufferings were not just *with* His people but *for* them. He would bear away sins so people could experience healing and well-being (Heb. *shalom*, the fullness of God's blessing). This is far more than just physical healing; the whole passage is dealing with redemption from sin.<sup>623</sup>

But does it include physical healing? Is there healing in the atonement? Does what the Servant did guarantee physical healing for every believer? Ultimately it does. Eventually we will experience good health since poor health is one effect of sin. But immediately it does not in every case. We have yet to enter into all the benefits of Christ's death for us, and must continue to struggle with some of the consequences of the Fall until we see the Lord.<sup>624</sup>

53:6 A simile now reinforces the point just made. Sheep are notoriously shortsighted; they go after the next clump of grass without regard to where their feet may lead them. They are also self-centered; their only thought is how they can satisfy themselves with no concern for the welfare of other sheep. Consequently sheep often get lost. Humans are the same.

"Sheep tend to travel together, so if the leading sheep turns aside from the path for grass or some other purpose, usually all the sheep do so. They tend to follow the lead sheep which is often dangerous. Similarly all Israel [even all people] had turned aside (cf. 1 Peter 2:25) from following the Lord, from keeping His commandments."<sup>625</sup>

But Yahweh would cause the consequences of our natural sheep-like tendencies to fall on the Servant. Rather than every person having to bear the consequences of sin himself or herself, as Job's friends argued he or she must, God would make His Servant suffer for the iniquity of all sinners (cf. Lev. 16; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22-25).

"Under the Law of Moses, the sheep died for the shepherd; but under grace, the Good Shepherd died for the sheep (John 10:1-18)."<sup>626</sup>

Suffering in God's service is frequently vicarious. It often involves suffering because of the sins of others as well as for our own sins.

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<sup>623</sup>See Bruce R. Reichenback, "By His Stripes We Are Healed," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:4 (December 1998):551-60, for a helpful study of how the Old Testament views the linkage between sin, sickness, suffering, and death, contrasted with modern views.

<sup>624</sup>See Baron, p. 86.

<sup>625</sup>J. Martin, p. 1108.

<sup>626</sup>Wiersbe, p. 61.

### The Servant cast off 53:7-9

Isaiah continued the sheep metaphor, but applied it to the Servant, to contrast sinful people and their innocent substitute. Here it is not the sheep's tendency to get lost but its non-defensive nature that is the characteristic feature. The prophet stressed the Servant's submissiveness, His innocence, and the injustice that others would deal Him.

53:7 In spite of God's punishment for sin, the Servant would bear it without defending Himself (cf. 42:2-3; 49:4-9; 50:5-7; Jer. 11:18-20; 12:1-3; Matt. 26:63; 27:12-14; Mark 14:61; 15:5; Luke 23:9; John 19:9). He would allow others to "fleece" Him and even kill him without even protesting (cf. Acts 8:32-33; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). Israel protested God's shearing of her (40:27; 49:14; 63:15). He would not be a helpless victim but one who knowingly and willingly submitted to death (cf. Luke 9:51). Jeremiah used the same figure to describe himself—but as a naive person who did not know what would happen to him (Jer. 11:19). The sheep metaphor is apt because the Israelites used lambs as sacrificial animals to cover their sins (cf. Gen. 22:7-8; Exod. 12:3, 5; Lev. 5:7; John 1:29).

"The servant . . . does nothing and says nothing but lets everything happen to him."<sup>627</sup>

"All the references in the New Testament to the Lamb of God (with which the corresponding allusions to the passover are interwoven) spring from this passage in the book of Isaiah."<sup>628</sup>

53:8 The Servant's treatment at the hands of others would be unjust from start to finish. Oppressive legal treatment and twisted justice would result in His being taken away to suffer and die (cf. Matt. 26:59-61; Luke 23:2-4, 13-16). This was not the case in Israel's suffering in captivity. That suffering was in harmony with what justice prescribed. However, it was for the transgressions of the prophet's people that the Servant would suffer a fatal blow (cf. Gen. 9:11; Exod. 12:15; Dan. 9:26; Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 1:13-14, 19-20). This does not rule out His dying for Gentiles as well. Perhaps Isaiah identified Israel as the beneficiary of the Servant's death here because Israel's sins had been so great and Isaiah's ministry was to Israel. Miscarried justice would be only the means to that end.

It is quite clear that the Servant did not just die for the Israelites. Some of what Isaiah wrote about "my people" might lead the reader to this conclusion. However, the testimony of Scripture, which statements in Isaiah support, is that the Servant paid for the sins of all humanity (e.g., 1 John 2:2). Note that the Servant referred to here cannot be the Israelites since He would die for the transgression of "my people," namely, the Israelites.

<sup>627</sup>David J. A. Clines, *I, He, We and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>628</sup>Delitzsch, 2:323.

Those of the Servant's generation who observed Him dying would not appreciate that He was dying as a substitute (cf. vv. 1-3). The Hebrew of this verse may point to a meaning beyond this. The Hebrew word *dor*, translated "generation," also means "line." If that is the meaning (or one of the meanings) of this word here, Isaiah may also have meant that no one would consider that the Servant died childless. Childlessness in His culture suggested a futile existence and a curse from God. People would conclude that He died cursed by God rather than as a substitute sacrifice.

". . . the language of the fourth song certainly allows for the servant's suffering to be vicarious (note esp. 'he will justify many'), but it does not demand such an interpretation in and of itself. The full import of the language awaits clarification by subsequent revelation . . ." <sup>629</sup>

53:9 The final insult to the Servant would be that people would plan to bury Him among the wicked, implying His own wickedness. Likewise, burial among the rich—instead of among the humble—would cast doubt on His righteousness, since the rich were often oppressors of the poor (cf. Ps. 49:5-6; 52:7; Prov. 18:23; 28:6, 20; Jer. 17:11; Mic. 6:12). Yet, in another sense, since Jesus' corpse received honorable treatment after His death, this suggested that He was unworthy of such an ignominious martyrdom. Isaiah seems to have meant that somehow wicked people and a rich man would be involved in the Servant's burial (cf. Matt. 27:57-60). This is somewhat paradoxical.

". . . without the commentary supplied by the fulfilment [*sic*], it would be impossible to understand ver. 9a at all." <sup>630</sup>

"Like the other enigmas of this Song, this too is written so that when the turn of events provides the explanation we shall know for certain that we stand in the presence of the Servant of the Lord." <sup>631</sup>

The Servant would not defend Himself (v. 7), but neither would He be guilty of anything worthy of death (cf. 1 Pet. 2:22). Lack of "violence" and "deceit" represents total guiltlessness. The Servant would always speak the truth. Truly, the Servant would have to be more than a sinful human or the sinful nation of Israel (cf. John 8:29; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Those who suffer as God's servants should do so willingly, knowing that they are fulfilling their calling.

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<sup>629</sup>Chisholm, *A Theology* . . . , p. 331.

<sup>630</sup>Delitzsch, 2:327.

<sup>631</sup>Motyer, p. 436.

### The Servant satisfied 53:10-12

This final stanza gives the explanation for the Servant's submissive suffering for sinners and so completes the song.

53:10           The apparent miscarriage of justice just described (v. 9) would not be what it would appear to be. It would be the deliberate act of Yahweh. It would please Yahweh to crush His Servant and to put Him to grief. The Father did not find the sufferings and death of His Son something pleasurable (or enjoyable) to behold, but they pleased (satisfied) Him because they fulfilled His great purpose of providing redemption for humankind.

"The faithful God of the Bible would certainly not visit bad things on innocent people, would he? Yes, he would if some greater good would be served (cf. Job)."<sup>632</sup>

The greater good in this case was that the Servant would be the perfect and final guilt (trespass) offering for sin thus taking away the sins of the world (John 1:29). The subject of this sentence, "He" or "His soul," may be Yahweh or the Servant. The point is moot, however, because both Yahweh and the Servant made the Servant an offering for sin. The guilt offering in Israel made reparation, compensation, and satisfaction (Lev. 5:1-13). Rather than dying childless, Yahweh would bless the Servant with many spiritual children, future believers (cf. v. 8). He would also prolong His days by resurrecting Him (cf. v. 9).

"Only his bodily resurrection could serve to fulfill such a prediction as this."<sup>633</sup>

"The Old Testament testifies uniformly that the dead are alive, and in this sense it is no surprise to find the Servant alive after death. But things are said about him after death that set him apart from all others."<sup>634</sup>

Seeing one's offspring was a blessing on those whom God favored (cf. Ps. 127:3-5; 128:6; Prov. 17:6), as was living a long life (cf. Ps. 21:4; 34:12; Prov. 3:2). The Servant would also accomplish Yahweh's good purpose for His life (cf. 52:13; 55:11; Josh. 1:7; 2 Chron. 20:20; Ps. 1:3; John 17:4). Thus the Servant's life would not be futile after all.

53:11           After His sacrificial work had ended, the Servant would look back on it with satisfaction, as would Yahweh (cf. 1 John 2:2). The "many" would obtain justification through the knowledge of Him and His work. The

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<sup>632</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 400.

<sup>633</sup>Archer, p. 647.

<sup>634</sup>Motyer, p. 440.

"many" is a distinct group, numerous but not all-inclusive, namely: believers. No other work is required but believing what one comes to know, namely: to rely on Him and His work. It is possible that Isaiah meant that the Servant alone would possess knowledge regarding what God required in relation to sin and what He should do about that, but this seems unlikely. One scholar argued that it was the Servant's knowledge of God, and of God's unfolding purpose for the peoples of the world, that satisfied Him and ultimately made many righteous.<sup>635</sup> The one Righteous Servant would make many people righteous by bearing their iniquities, not His own (cf. vv. 4-6; John 10:14-18; Rom. 5:18-19). As Cyrus was God's anointed servant to restore the Israelites to their land, so the Servant would be God's anointed Servant to restore humanity to Himself. He would accomplish what the Old Covenant sacrificial system prefigured and anticipated.

53:12 Because of His work and its results, God would exalt the Servant (cf. Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 5:12). He would give Him a reward with the many great ones whom He justified, and would divide this booty with the many who would become strong by virtue of His work for them (cf. Eph. 4:8; 6:10-17). Another interpretation sees Yahweh giving the Servant the many great ones (believers) as booty, specifically as a token of redemption completed. He would also give the Servant the strong ones (unbelievers) as spoil, which the Servant would dispose of at the proper time.<sup>636</sup>

"The thought is that the servant will be as successful and triumphant in his mission as other victors were in theirs. There are many who are victors and they will receive the spoils of their victory. Among them is the servant."<sup>637</sup>

The reason for the Servant's exaltation is that He would surrender Himself to death (cf. Matt. 26:38-39, 42) and consent to being numbered among the rebels against God; He would take His place among sinful humans (cf. Matt. 26:50-54; Mark 15:27; Luke 22:37). Yet He would do more than simply identify with the rebels. He would bear their sin (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21) and intercede for them (cf. Heb. 7:25). This intercession is more than prayer; it would also involve intervention (cf. 59:16; Heb. 9:12-14).

This final promise of exaltation returns to the thought with which this passage began (52:13). The Servant's exaltation is for accomplishing redemption.<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>635</sup>James M. Ward, "The Servant's Knowledge in Isaiah 40—55," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, pp. 129, 135.

<sup>636</sup>See Motyer, pp. 442-43.

<sup>637</sup>Young, 3:358.

<sup>638</sup>See F. Duane Lindsey, "The Career of the Servant in Isaiah 52:13—53:12," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139:556 (October-December 1982):312-29, and 140:557 (January-March 1983):21-39., for another exposition of this passage.



Suffering in God's service is pleasing to God.

### **3. Invitation to salvation chs. 54—55**

This section of Isaiah's prophecy joyfully announces Yahweh's salvation and invites participation in it. Joy and invitation are the result of the announcement of salvation through the Servant (52:13—53:12).

"The first two Servant Songs are followed by tailpieces concerned with divine confirmation of the Servant's task and promises of its success (42:5-9; 49:7-13). The third and fourth Songs are followed by invitations to respond to the Servant and what he has done (50:10-11[; chs. 54—55]). Response is the keynote of chapters 54—55. . . . In his saving work, the Servant has done everything, removing sin, establishing in righteousness, creating a family. The way is therefore open for response, pure and simple: to sing over what someone else has accomplished (54:1), to enjoy a feast for which someone else had paid (55:1)."<sup>639</sup>

#### **Yahweh's everlasting love ch. 54**

The theme of this segment is God's love for His people. He can dispose of His righteous anger quickly, and He delights to bless His people.

"The image in this chapter is that of Jehovah, the faithful husband, forgiving Israel, the unfaithful wife, and restoring her to the place of blessing."<sup>640</sup>

#### **The restored wife 54:1-10**

The prophet emphasized the gracious character of Yahweh as the source of restoration for His people. Returning to the metaphor of the Lord's people as his wife (51:17-20), Isaiah presented the joyful prospect of reconciliation due to the Servant's work. Significantly, the name "Zion," which has been prominent in 49:14—52:8, does not appear again until 59:20. Zion is the personification of Israel. In the present passage, however, the absence of the name "Zion" suggests that a larger field of God's people is in view here, not just Israel but all the redeemed. However, the many allusions to Israel in this passage focus on a future for Israel.<sup>641</sup> If the people of God are only Israel here, are they only Israel in 52:13—53:12? Did the Servant die only for Israel? Obviously He did not.

"The only appropriate response to a great work of God is joyous praise, which is exactly what we find here, not for the first time (cf. e.g., 12:5; 26:1; 35:10; 42:10-11), nor for the last (cf. 61:10-11)."<sup>642</sup>

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<sup>639</sup>Motyer, pp. 443-44.

<sup>640</sup>Wiersbe, p. 62.

<sup>641</sup>See J. Martin, pp. 1109-10, for an exposition that limits the people of God to Israel.

<sup>642</sup>Grogan, p. 308.

54:1 The theme of the barrenness of human strength and the bounty that the Lord can provide supernaturally is common in both Testaments (e.g., Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Elizabeth, et al.). Here we have another instance of rejoicing because God would miraculously bless those who, because of unbelief, were formerly spiritually barren and unproductive (cf. 51:1-3; 1 Sam. 2:1-10; Gal. 4:27). They would become more fruitful than those who enjoy blessings apart from a relationship with God. It would be cruel to ask a barren woman to sing for joy unless you gave her what would make her happy. But that is precisely what Isaiah did because of what the Lord would do.

"Just as God could make a barren Sarah more fruitful than a fertile Hagar, so he can take those who are 'dead in trespasses and sins' (Eph. 2:1, AV) and use them to bring abundant blessings to the entire world."<sup>643</sup>

54:2 Women were responsible to erect and maintain the family tents in the ancient Near East, so it was appropriate for the Lord to call this formerly barren woman to enlarge her tent. She should prepare for a larger family with urgency and exuberance (cf. Jer. 10:20). The figure is an old one reaching back into the patriarchal period of Israel's history and the wilderness wanderings. Most Israelites did not live in tents in Isaiah's day. This type of living recalls, therefore, the Lord's faithfulness to the patriarchs in fulfilling His promises to them, and to the Israelites, in bringing them into the Promised Land.

54:3 The number of God's people would increase, as God promised Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3, 7; 28:14). Future generations, from Isaiah's perspective, would dispossess the nations (cf. the conquest of the land, Deut. 9:1; 11:23; 12:2; 31:3). Believers would take over what had belonged to unbelievers (cf. Matt. 5:5).

"Many Gentiles will undoubtedly be surprised and even chagrined to find that Israel is to have the leading place in the earth."<sup>644</sup>

54:4 God's third command (cf. vv. 1, 2) was not to fear. These were not idle promises; God would stand behind them and bring them to pass. Sarah initially felt ashamed because she did not believe the Lord would give her a child (Gen. 18:12-14; cf. Gen. 16:4; 1 Sam. 1:6, 25; Luke 1:25). Nevertheless, God stood by His promise, gave her a child, and she had no reason to feel ashamed. The relative barrenness of God's people throughout their lifetime would end, and their reproach would pass away. Israel's youth included Egyptian slavery (cf. Jer. 2:2-3), and her widowhood involved Babylonian captivity.

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<sup>643</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 416.

<sup>644</sup>A. Martin, *Isaiah . . .*, p. 102.

- 54:5 The cause of this reversal of fortunes is the husband of this woman, God. He created her and redeemed her. Since He made her, He could remake her. He took up the role of the kinsman-redeemer to provide children for this barren wife (cf. Boaz). He is the Almighty Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel (the transcendent yet immanent God), the God over the whole earth.
- 54:6 The Lord called His people back to Himself, even though they had been unfaithful to Him (cf. Hosea). He would transform their attitude from that of an abandoned and brokenhearted wife, because her sins had separated her from her God, to that of a new bride whose relationship with her husband was unstained.
- 54:7 The Lord's brief separation from His people, because of their sins, was short compared to the long relationship of intimacy that lay ahead for them (due to the salvation that the Servant provided).
- 54:8 God did not lose control of Himself when His people sinned, but He became very angry because sin destroys people and breaks the fellowship that He desires to have with them. He had to turn away from sinners (hide His face from them) because He is holy. But that separation was short-lived compared with the everlasting compassion that His loyal love (Heb. *hesed*) requires. *Hesed* is "the unfailing love that is ever loyal to its pledge, love as a settled disposition . . ." <sup>645</sup> The Lord would buy His bride back to Himself.

"When God 'spanks' His erring children, He may hurt them,  
but He never harms them." <sup>646</sup>

- 54:9 Yahweh's restoration of His people to Himself would be permanent; they would never again experience estrangement from Him. As the Lord kept His promise to spare humanity from another universal flood, so He would keep His promise to spare humankind the judgment of separation from Him again. He would neither flood them with His anger nor rebuke His people. This looks toward an eternal change in the relationship between the Lord and His people. One covenant premillennialist wrote the following.

"Since the Jews actually were driven into exile again after their revolt against the Romans in A.D. 135, this can only mean that God accounts the Christian Church as true Israel." <sup>647</sup>

Covenant premillennialists, like amillennialists, believe the church will fulfill God's promises to Israel. But unlike amillennialists, covenant premillennialists believe in an earthly millennial reign of Christ.

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<sup>645</sup>Motyer, p. 448.

<sup>646</sup>Wiersbe, p. 63.

<sup>647</sup>Archer, p. 648.

Dispensational premillennialists believe that Israel will fulfill God's promises to Israel.

54:10 Even the most substantial and immovable of things do not compare with the firmness of God's promise. The Lord will again reshape the surface of the earth, as He did with the Flood, only the next time it will be with a great earthquake (cf. Rev. 16:17-21). Even global changes would not alter this promise to preserve His people in intimate relationship with Himself. This promise is so firm and formal that it constitutes a covenant, a covenant guaranteeing peace with them and for them (Heb. *shalom*, wholeness of divine blessing). This is probably a reference to the New Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31; 32:40; Ezek. 37:26; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-12).<sup>648</sup> Young, 3:368, interpreted it as a reference to the theological covenant of grace.<sup>649</sup> Another scholar claimed that the covenant of peace was an ancient Near Eastern motif in primeval myth.<sup>650</sup> Yahweh would renovate the earth because He has compassion on His people; He desires to bless them.

"How was it possible for God to enter into the Sinai Covenant with his people? They had to be delivered from Egypt by 'Moses, my servant' (e.g., Num. 12:7). How is it possible for God to enter into a (new) covenant of peace with Israel and all the nations of the world? It is possible through the deliverance brought about by the self-sacrifice of 'my Servant,' who is the expression of the eternal love of God. 'Break forth with a shout!'"<sup>651</sup>

"Just as the Noahic settlement was formalized into a perpetual covenant, so the work of the Servant leads to a covenant pledging peace in perpetuity."<sup>652</sup>

Throughout this passage more than just the deliverance of Israel from the exile is in view. More than the deliverance of Israel from sin is in view. The deliverance of all humanity from sin by the Servant is in view. However, Israel is the primary focus of the prophecy.

### **The rebuilt city 54:11-17**

Isaiah changed his illustration from a restored wife to a rebuilt city, but the point remains the same. The contrast between the city of man and the city of God is one that Isaiah developed quite fully (cf. 1:26-27; 2:2-4; 4:2-6; 12:1-6; 24:10; 25:1-9; 26:1-6; 35:10; 47:1; 52:1; 66:10-14). The people of God can anticipate a glorious future. The prophet

<sup>648</sup>See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, pp. 164-77.

<sup>649</sup>Young, 3:368.

<sup>650</sup>Bernard F. Batto, "The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected ancient Near Eastern Motif," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987):187-211.

<sup>651</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 424.

<sup>652</sup>Motyer, p. 449.

was not describing the rebuilding of Jerusalem following the Jews' return from exile. He was using the image of rebuilding a city to convey the joy and security that lay in the future for all God's people, particularly Israel.

- 54:11-12 Presently God's people were wretched, but they would be redeemed. They were bereft of support, without stability, and in despair, all of which God in His compassion noted. They would enjoy richness, abundance, completeness, and variety. Antimony was a black powder that masons added to mortar that held stones in place. It set off the beauty of the stones by providing a dark edging for them. Women also used this powder as mascara to color their eyes (cf. 2 Kings 9:30). Foundations of sapphires (lapis lazuli, a prized dark blue stone) would be foundations of the highest quality and greatest beauty. The battlements Isaiah saw were bright red rubies. The gates were clear crystal, and the walls were a mosaic of other precious stones. This description recalls the picture of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:9—22:5. Is that just a poetic description of an ideal city, like this one, or is it a literal description of a specific city? Probably it, too, is a poetic description of the ideal residence of the redeemed throughout eternity, but the New Jerusalem is nonetheless a real place (cf. John 14:1-2). This picture, of wealth, stability, and confidence, contrasts strongly with the conditions of poverty, insecurity, and despair in verse 11. The key is God, who will effect the change: "I will."
- 54:13 All the spiritual descendants of the redeemed in that era would be disciples of the Lord. They would follow Him faithfully, and they would enjoy the highest quality of spiritual life (cf. 1:26). Jesus saw a foreview of this condition during His earthly ministry (John 6:45).
- 54:14 The righteous would be secure in the love and plans of God. Oppression and terror would not come anywhere near them, so they would not fear (cf. 32:17).
- 54:15 Whatever trouble might come to them would not come from God as discipline, as in former times. Moreover, God's people would be able to overcome all their opponents. This indicates that conditions for the redeemed will not be completely placid at this time, as they will be in the eternal state where nothing offensive will assail God's people. Isaiah rather described conditions during the first part of the renovation of all things, the Millennium. It seems that assault by enemies is not just a theoretical possibility that Isaiah raised to stress the security of believers, but a real possibility for two reasons. First, the prophet spoke of this hostility at some length (vv. 15-17). Second, he already said enough about the security of the redeemed, so raising the *theoretical* possibility of opposition is unnecessary and disturbing.
- 54:16 Whatever happens to the redeemed in that era would be by the will of God, who not only raises up destroyers to destroy, and provides the weapons that they use, but creates the blacksmiths who make the weapons.

All that the people of God would experience would be part of God's good intention and design for them.

"This verse is very instructive for the study of divine providence. It teaches that nothing occurs, not even the destroying acts of the enemies of God's people, apart from God Himself. At the same time we are not to blame Him for the evil that men do (cf. the express statement of the previous verse), but in His secret providence God governs the efforts and actions of men and employs them as the instruments of His anger."<sup>653</sup>

54:17 Even though opponents might arise, they would be ineffective against God's invincible people. Hard steel or a hot tongue, two forms of antagonism that represent all forms of it, would not prosper. Yahweh's vindication of His people would be the heritage of His servants in that peaceful era. That heritage would include restoration to intimacy with God (cf. vv. 1-10), and, for Israel, fulfillment of the promises in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3, 7).

"Beginning here and throughout the rest of the book, Israel is referred to as *servants* (pl.), and the Servant who restores his people to the covenant and brings justice to the nations is not referred to again as such [contrary to the AV]. . . .

"The purpose then in the shift to the plural at this point seems to be to finalize the distinction between the 'servant' of the Lord, who receives benefits, and the 'Servant' of the Lord, who makes those benefits possible."<sup>654</sup>

The historical setting for the fulfillment of this prophecy is the time following the Servant's full redemption of His people. This full redemption will take place at His second advent. Even though Jesus Christ died for our sins and defeated Satan during His first advent, He has not yet destroyed the effects of sin in the creation, including humanity, or punished Satan. He will do this at His second advent. Thus, the joy Isaiah described in this chapter will come to fruition during the Millennium, and thereafter, throughout eternity.

"If all the future blessings promised in Scripture to the nation of Israel are to be fulfilled spiritually in the church, as many allege, why are not those same interpreters willing to take upon themselves all the curses pronounced against Israel? Scarcely anyone is willing to do this."<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>653</sup>Young, 3:372.

<sup>654</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, pp. 431, 432.

<sup>655</sup>A. Martin, *Christ in . . .*, part 2, p. 22.

### Yahweh's gracious invitation ch. 55

This chapter is part two of Isaiah's celebration of the Servant's work of redemption. In view of what God would do for humankind (ch. 54), people would need to appropriate the salvation that he provided (ch. 55).

"All things are ready; the guests are invited; and nothing is required of them except to come."<sup>656</sup>

As in the preceding sections (52:13—54:17), the people of God in view are primarily Israel but not exclusively Israel. As the Lord's salvation extends to all people, so do the benefits of that salvation—for as many as take advantage of it. This chapter contains one of the warmest gospel invitations in the whole Bible. It forms a fitting climax to this section of Isaiah that deals with God's provision of salvation (chs. 49—55).

"Redemption has been accomplished. Both in the introduction and in the conclusion of the fourth servant passage it was predicted that the heathen would belong to the servant [52:15; 53:11-12]. The Blessings the servant has obtained for his people have been set forth abundantly (chap. 54), and now the invitation is extended to all that are in need to come and to partake of the salvation the Lord offers."<sup>657</sup>

### Free salvation 55:1-5

The people would need to listen to and rely on God's unconditional promise, but their salvation would cost them nothing.

55:1 "The introductory particle (*hoi*) is mainly an attention-getting device, but it expresses a slight tone of pity. The prophet is an evangelist with a concern for the souls of men and a realization of their desperate condition without the blessings that the servant has obtained."<sup>658</sup>

After getting their attention, Isaiah, speaking as God and for God, called the thirsty to come and drink freely, and to the hungry to enjoy a free meal (cf. Prov. 9:5-6; Matt. 5:6; John 4:13-14; 6:32-35; Rev. 22:17). Water, that formerly represented the Holy Spirit (cf. 32:15; 44:3), was now available to the people because of the Servant's work. Jesus extended a similar invitation to those in His day to come to Him to receive this water (i.e., eternal life through the Spirit; John 4:10-14; 7:37-38). The Lord's offer was to buy what was free. The only way to do this is to use someone else's money to purchase it. It was the Servant's payment for sin that made salvation free for those who count His "money" good.

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<sup>656</sup>Delitzsch, 2:353. Cf. Matt. 22:4; Rom. 11:6.

<sup>657</sup>Young, 3:374.

<sup>658</sup>Ibid.

"The abundance and freeness of the water of refreshment (44:3), the wine of joy (25:6-8) and the milk of richness ([nourishment] Ex. 3:8) and supremacy (60:16) is figurative of the Lord's salvation with the Servant at its centre (see verses 3-5)."<sup>659</sup>

55:2 It is ridiculous to spend one's hard-earned money for what does not satisfy, yet that is what multitudes of people do when they pursue things of only temporal value. The Lord urged the hearers to listen carefully to Him. They should choose what was satisfying and what would yield true abundance (cf. Matt. 6:19-21). People can either work for nothing or receive for nothing (cf. Rom. 6:23).

55:3 Again the Lord urged the hearers (everyone) to come to Him. He pressed them to listen to what He was saying, twice. God Himself is the feast. The result for them would be life, real life as opposed to the vain life described above (v. 2). Real life would involve living under an everlasting covenant that God would make with His people. This is probably a reference to the New Covenant, since the implication is that God would make it in the future (cf. 54:10).

While Jeremiah 31:31 says that Yahweh would make a new covenant "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah," that covenant is the one under which all the people of God have lived since Jesus ratified it (2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-12). Its benefits are not all exclusively for Israel, though some of its benefits are exclusively for Israel and these benefits will only come into Israel's possession in the Millennium. Jesus terminated the Mosaic Covenant (Mark 7:19; Rom. 10:4; 14:14; Heb. 8:6—9:22; et al.) and ratified the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25) with His blood when He died on the Cross.

However, this could be a reference to the Davidic Covenant, which is also eternal (cf. 2 Sam. 7:16).<sup>660</sup> This new covenant would be in full harmony with God's promises to David, in the Davidic Covenant, regarding David's descendant who would rule over his house forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16; 1 Chron. 17:23-26; Ps. 89:35-38; cf. Isa. 9:6; Luke 1:32-33; Acts 13:34).

55:4 "Behold" introduces this verse and the next, and suggests comparison of them. The readers are not only to listen to what the Lord says but to look at what He presents. God is the speaker, but who is the "him" that is a witness to the nations and a leader and commander for the peoples? It could be David (v. 3), who witnessed to the character of Yahweh in his ministry. It could be Messiah, who would be a witness (light) to the nations and lead them. It is probably not Israel, since "him" is an unusual

<sup>659</sup>Motyer, p. 453.

<sup>660</sup>J. Martin, p. 1110; Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, p. 576.



way of referring to Israel in this context. Nor is it the people of God more generally. I think the witness is the Servant Messiah, whom David anticipated and prefigured. Watts believed he was Darius.<sup>661</sup> "The faithful mercies of David" (v. 3) point beyond David; they are the faithful mercies promised to David.

". . . the book of the King ([Isaiah] chapters 1—37) portrayed the Messiah as the fulfilment [*sic*] of the ideal in its royal aspects, but now Isaiah brings the values of the Servant-Messiah within the basic Davidic-Messianic model. It is the Servant, with his prophetic task (42:1-4; 49:2-3; 50:4), who fulfils the role of Davidic witness to the world [cf. 49:1]."<sup>662</sup>

55:5 The problem in this verse is the identity of "you" (sing.). It does not refer to the "anyone" addressed in verse 3 since this is too broad a field of reference for what the verse describes. It could be the people of God generally, since what the verse describes could apply—to some extent—to all the redeemed. It could be the Servant, in which case the verse means that the whole world would be flocking to David's Great Son. It could also refer to Israel. In the Millennium, glorified Israel will appeal to Gentile nations (a collective singular *goi*) that would run to her because of her God. It is clear that more than one nation is in view, because the verbs translated "knows" and "run" are plural in the Hebrew text. The last interpretation harmonizes with what Isaiah wrote elsewhere that Israel would do (cf. 2:3; 35:2; 42:4; 46:13; 49:3; 60:9, 21; 61:3; 62:3; 66:18, 21). Perhaps the Servant as the leader of Israel, which also would call the nations, is the solution.

### Transforming salvation 55:6-13

This pericope repeats and refocuses the invitation just extended (vv. 1-3). The offer continues to be to *come* to God, but the focus shifts from receiving satisfaction to resting in faith, and from salvation's freeness to its transforming power.

55:6 The Lord had reached out to humanity by promising free salvation through His prophet. The listeners needed to respond to Him because those promises would not always be available to them.

"We could translate *while he may be found* as 'while he permits himself to be found' (tolerative niphal), indicating a divinely determined day of grace and salvation."<sup>663</sup>

<sup>661</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 246.

<sup>662</sup>Motyer, pp. 454-55.

<sup>663</sup>Motyer, p. 456.

"God cannot be found at any time but only when He desires to be found. What is implied is that the present, when these commands are given, is the time of salvation. The thought is similar to that expressed in 2 Corinthians 6:2 and John 12:35."<sup>664</sup>

Seeking and calling on the Lord represent reaching out to Him in faith (cf. Acts 2:21; 15:17; 17:27; 22:16; Rom. 3:11; 10:14; 2 Tim. 2:22). This is necessary because there is no peace for the wicked (48:22; 57:21).

55:7 The way was open for anyone to return to the Lord who may have wandered away from Him or rebelled against Him. The promise of a compassionate reception and abundant pardon applied, even to the wicked in act and the unrighteous in thought—in other words: to any sinner (cf. Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28).

Repentance is not something a person must do before God will accept him or her. It is simply a description of what seeking the Lord looks like. In other words, cleaning up one's life is not a precondition for acceptance by God. The person who genuinely seeks the Lord and calls on His name has come to grips with his or her sin and is willing to turn it over to the Lord. After all, an unsaved person cannot forsake sin—or even desire to do so—without the Lord's help.

God can pardon sinners because of the Servant's work in paying the debt of their sins in their place. Clearly, a way back from Babylonian exile is not what Isaiah was describing here—but a way back to God.

55:8-9 Sinners need to forsake their ways and thoughts (actions and attitudes, v. 7) because they are not God's ways and thoughts. God's way is forgiveness and His thoughts are compassionate (v. 7), as far different from those of sinners as the heavens are higher than the earth. Sinners must make a break with their thoughts and ways to have fellowship with a holy God. The Servant's work makes *relationship* with a holy God possible, but our work, having appropriated the Servant's work by faith, makes intimate *fellowship* with a holy God possible.

55:10-11 There is a second reason sinners need to change their ways and thoughts, with the Lord's help, and that is because the Word of the Lord is absolutely dependable. All that God has said is reliable, including His promise of pardon and compassion (v. 7; cf. 53:10). God's Word is like the rain and snow, the gifts of God from heaven to earth (cf. v. 9). Rain and snow are water in its two forms as it normally comes from heaven to Palestine. Isaiah's use of both rain and snow may indicate the totality of His blessing; every time God sends water from heaven, in whatever form,

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<sup>664</sup>Young, 3:380.

it brings blessing because it nourishes the earth. Both rain and snow achieve their purpose of bringing life, nourishment, and blessing to humanity (cf. Jer. 29:11; Mark 4:1-20; Heb. 6:7-8). Therefore, since God has promised compassion and forgiveness for those who seek Him, people can count on the fact that if they seek Him, this will be His response.

"As the rain furnishes both seed and bread, so the word of God plants the seed of repentance in the heart and feeds the returning sinner with the blessed consequences repentance produces."<sup>665</sup>

55:12 The "For" (Heb. *ki*) that begins this verse serves to introduce the conclusion to this pericope (vv. 6-13), and the entire section dealing with God's atonement (chs. 40—55). "Surely" (the asseverative use of *ki*) would be a good translation.

Throughout this section Isaiah was describing another exodus, a redemption from sin, that the Servant would make possible. In view of that redemption, sinners need to seek the Lord, to come to Him for it (vv. 6-11). Now the prophet concluded, by describing the redeemed, led forth from their "Egypt," going out on their journey to their "Promised Land." They would do so with joy and peace because of the redemption that the Lamb of God would provide. As they would do so, all creation would rejoice because sin had been dealt with for all eternity. This description also fits the return of God's people to the Promised Land, in the Millennium, that the prophet spoke of earlier (51:11).

55:13 The replanting of productive, desirable trees and shrubs (representing all creation), in place of plants bearing the marks of the Fall and its curse, symbolizes the rejuvenation of creation. This transformation, and behind it the redemption accomplished by the Servant, would be a memorial that would honor Yahweh. It would be an everlasting sign of God's salvation that would remain forever.

Isaiah mentioned three things that would be everlasting in chapters 54 and 55: His lovingkindness (Heb. *hesed*, 54:8), His covenant with His people (55:3), and this sign. This sign recalls the sign of the child to come (7:14). As that sign would be an immediate and physical proof that Messiah would come, so this sign would be the same kind of proof that the Servant had come.

The transformation of the world following the lifting of the curse will be observable. While this description is obviously figurative—hills do not shout for joy, and trees do not clap their hands literally—it represents a real change in nature, not just the joy that will pervade all creation. This is

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<sup>665</sup>Motyer, p. 458. Cf. Delitzsch, 2:359.

a description of millennial conditions on the earth after Jesus Christ returns to the earth to rule and reign (cf. 35:1-2; 41:18-19; 44:3). If it were not so, there would be no everlasting sign. As the Passover was a sign to the Israelites of God's first redemption of them from Egyptian bondage, the transformed earth and people will be a sign to all God's people of His second redemption of them from Satan's bondage.

## **V. ISRAEL'S FUTURE TRANSFORMATION CHS. 56—66**

The last major section of Isaiah deals with the necessity of living out the righteousness of God (cf. Rom. 12—16). These chapters emphasize what the characteristics of the servants of the Lord should be. Again, the focus is on Israel primarily but not exclusively. All God's people are in view, though God's will for Israel and His promises to Israel were Isaiah's chief concerns.

Many liberal interpreters of Isaiah believe that a "Trito-Isaiah" wrote these chapters, a "Deutero-Isaiah" wrote chapters 40—55, and Isaiah of Jerusalem wrote chapters 1—39.<sup>666</sup> Most conservative commentators believe that Isaiah of Jerusalem wrote the whole book.

"These chapters are about the internalization of the law by means of an intimate relationship with the God who alone can enable people to live holy lives."<sup>667</sup>

This section also clarifies the relationship between works and grace, both of which Isaiah spoke of as essential in his earlier chapters. The structure of this section is as follows.<sup>668</sup>

- A** Foreign worshipers 56:1-8
- B** Ethical righteousness 56:9—59:15a
  - C** The divine warrior 59:15b-21
    - D** Eschatological hope chs. 60—62
  - C'** The divine warrior 63:1-6
- B'** Ethical righteousness 63:7—66:17
- A'** Foreign worshipers 66:18-24

## **A. RECOGNITION OF HUMAN INABILITY CHS. 56—59**

It is important that God's people demonstrate righteousness in their lives, but that is impossible without divine enablement. These chapters clarify the roles of God and man in demonstrating righteousness. This section consists of two parts, each of which concludes with a promise from God to help His people (chs 56—57 and 58—59). Each of the two

<sup>666</sup>See the Old Testament Introductions in the bibliography of these notes for extensive discussion of this issue.

<sup>667</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 453.

<sup>668</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 465.

parts has three segments: an example of realized righteousness (56:1-8 and 58:1-14), a reflection on the situation (56:9—57:13 and 59:1-15a), and an announcement of the Lord's help (57:14-21 and 59:15b-21).

### **1. The need for humility and holiness chs. 56—57**

These chapters introduce the main subject of this section of the book, which grows out of what Isaiah revealed previously. If salvation depends on God's grace, do God's servants have any responsibility other than receiving that grace? Simply being a member of the covenant community of Israel and fulfilling the cultic (worship system) requirements of the Mosaic Law might seem to be an adequate response for some Israelites. Isaiah revealed that God had redeemed them so they could demonstrate His righteousness in their lives in the world. This would glorify Him, bring others to Him, and result in Israel's greatest blessing. But demonstrating that righteousness was impossible for them to do by themselves (cf. chs. 1—39). They needed to appropriate His grace as redeemed people—redeemed from captivity (chs. 40—48) and redeemed from sin (chs. 49—55)—to become the servants of God that He intended them to be. Chapter 56 contains moral exhortations in view of God's salvation.

#### **The basis of acceptance and blessing 56:1-8**

This transitional pericope introduces the problem that the previous sections of the book posed, which I have tried to explain just above. It also begins the explanation of the solution by placing in stark contrast two opposing views of what pleases God: simply being a child of Abraham, versus living in loving obedience to God.

56:1 This pericope flows smoothly out of the previous section of the book dealing with God's provision of salvation for Israel and the world. The Lord had more to say to Isaiah's audience: "Thus says the LORD."

Since His salvation was about to appear, in return from captivity and in the atoning work of the Servant, His people should practice justice and righteousness (cf. Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Titus 3:8). They had a responsibility beyond just believing His promises (chs. 54—55). Notice that practicing justice and righteousness does not accomplish salvation. They should be its consequence; they cannot be its cause (cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

"We would indeed be blind not to observe that 56:1 reflects precisely where the church stands today: looking back to the once-for-all redemption at Calvary (52:13—53:12) and awaiting a final divine act which will rescue the church from sin, failure and opposition and deal finally with any and every counterforce."<sup>669</sup>

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<sup>669</sup>Motyer, p. 462.

56:2 Ethical conduct will result in divine blessing. Profaning the Sabbath and doing evil are the opposite of preserving justice and doing righteousness. They represent specific acts of obedience (observing the Sabbath) and an attitude toward life (doing good). By refraining from work on the Sabbath, the Israelites expressed trust that God would provide for their needs as He promised. Next to circumcision, keeping the Sabbath was the central sign of the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Exod. 31:13-17; Ezek. 20:12-17). God's standard is perfection: His people were to keep their hands from doing "any evil" (cf. Matt. 5:48).

"Those who have received mighty blessings from the Lord have an obligation faithfully to do His will, and in the Old Testament dispensation this would be accomplished by keeping the law and observing the sabbath"<sup>670</sup>

56:3 In view of the priority of heartfelt obedience over mere ritual observance of the Law, the foreigner and eunuch, for example, should not feel hopeless, i.e., considering themselves lifeless or fruitless. All who genuinely seek the Lord (55:6) would find acceptance by Him, even though they might not qualify for participation in the cultic worship of Israel (cf. Exod. 12:48-49).

God's exclusion of foreigners and eunuchs from Israel's public worship (Deut. 23:1-8) was not because these types of people were intrinsically evil and therefore unacceptable to Him. God excluded foreigners because He wanted to teach His people that opposition to His will and His people has abiding consequences. He excluded eunuchs because He wanted His people to learn that the destruction of sexual organs that He created has consequences. These consequences affected their worship of the Holy One of Israel, as well as their public life and their private life. Ruth and the Ethiopian eunuch are the proof that God accepts people on the basis of their faith in Him—in spite of their ancestry or personal history. Non-Israelites and disabled Israelites could enjoy the blessings of God's salvation (personal salvation and millennial blessings) along with normal believing Israelites. This passage helps us understand the qualifications for elders and deacons in the New Testament. While the office may be closed to a particular individual because of acts he committed previously that have continuing consequences, he is fully acceptable to God and capable of serving Him in equally significant ministries.

56:4-5 The prophet prefaced his shocking explanation of the spiritual acceptability of ritually unacceptable people with, "For thus says Yahweh." This was not just his opinion but divine revelation.

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<sup>670</sup>Young, 3:388.

The Lord would give eunuchs who obeyed Him out of love: an eternal reputation, far greater than what they would have had if they had not obeyed Him, but instead had borne children to perpetuate their reputations on the earth. The Lord's perpetuation of the Ethiopian eunuch's reputation in Acts 8:27-39 is only one example of how God can do this. He has been remembered for his faith far longer than if he had only had sons and daughters. This promise can be very comforting to childless couples. If they follow God faithfully, He will bless them more greatly than He would bless them if they only had physical children. This promise of an eternal reward anticipates Jesus' teaching that His disciples should pursue eternal rewards rather than treasures on earth (cf. Matt. 6:1-24).

56:6 Similarly, God would bless foreigners (non-Israelites) who came to believe in Yahweh, and sought to love and follow Him for His sake rather than for personal benefit (cf. Ruth 1:16). They could serve the Lord by ministering to Him. The Hebrew word translated "minister," *sharet*, usually describes priestly service (cf. 60:7, 10; 61:6). Foreigners might even serve the Lord in ways that would be as significant as serving as priests in Israel, though that particular ministry was not open to them under the Law.

"The six marks of the foreigner (v. 6) provide a beautiful description of true godliness, with love as its great dynamic, the very antithesis of Pharisaic legalism."<sup>671</sup>

56:7 The Lord Himself would conduct such Gentiles to the future Jerusalem, as He would bring the Israelites back from exile. There they would have the same blessings as the redeemed Israelites: sins atoned for and access to God in prayer (cf. 1 Kings 8:41-43; Mal. 1:11).

"All of Israel's separation from the world was in order to keep Israel from being absorbed into the world and thus losing the ability to call the world out of itself into the blessings of God. But should Israel ever come to believe that its separation was so that Israel could keep her God and his blessings to herself, then all was lost."<sup>672</sup>

It was this latter attitude that so infuriated Jesus Christ when He saw how hard the Jews had made it for Gentiles to come to God and worship Him in the temple (Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; cf. John 2:16).

". . . here the temple is called 'the house of prayer,' from the prayer which is the soul of all worship."<sup>673</sup>

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<sup>671</sup>Grogan, p. 316.

<sup>672</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 461.

<sup>673</sup>Delitzsch, 2:363.

56:8 With an unusually strong declaration (cf. 1:24), sovereign Yahweh affirmed that He would gather many other Gentiles to Himself along with the Israelites (cf. 19:25; 49:6-7; 51:5; 55:5; John 10:16). He would not save only Israelites, but Gentiles as well. The new revelation, or mystery, concerning the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the church (Eph. 2—3), was not that God would save Gentiles as well as Jews. It was that in the church He would deal with Jews and Gentiles on the same basis. Jews would have no advantage over Gentiles as they did previously. Now both types of people could come into relationship with God directly through faith in Christ. Formerly Gentiles came into relationship with God indirectly—through Israel—through faith in Yahweh. The Lord was not referring to the Babylonian exile or to geographical dispersal, but to those scattered from Himself.

### **The basis of rejection and cursing 56:9—57:13**

Whereas heartfelt love for and trust in the Lord make anyone acceptable to Him, reliance on one's position or ability for acceptance will not.

### **Wicked leadership 56:9—57:2**

The leaders of Israel were responsible for the people's failure to appreciate the difference between a real relationship with God and membership in the covenant community of Israel.

"The critique of leadership offered here is wholly one of character not of policy. The opinion that from the point of view of the public it matters only what the government's policy is, but the private lives of leaders is their own affair, finds no support. The juxtaposition of 56:9-12 with 57:1-21 insists that private wrong and public right do not co-exist."<sup>674</sup>

56:9 Isaiah summoned the beastly enemies of Israel to come and feed on the flock of God's people (cf. Jer. 12:9; Ezek. 34:5, 8).

56:10 The false prophets, who were God's watchmen over His flock, were blind to the dangers that faced Israel (cf. 21:6; 52:8). They were like dogs that should have barked when danger approached but were silent. Instead of being on guard, they were asleep, dreaming of an unrealistically rosy future for the nation. They were unaware of those things that should have gripped their attention.

"When the minister does not warn the flock of false doctrine, he ceases to be a faithful undershepherd of the sheep, and instead becomes a dumb dog that cannot bark."<sup>675</sup>

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<sup>674</sup>Motyer, p. 468.

<sup>675</sup>Young, 3:397.



- 56:11 These prophets and leaders of the people were greedy to satisfy their own desires and so were never satisfied. They had no understanding and so pursued their own personal agendas (cf. 28:7-8; 29:9-11).
- 56:12 Rather than caring for the sheep unselfishly, these shepherds went off and got drunk—repeatedly. They indulged themselves at the expense of their charges, and in the process, became enslaved and incapable of fulfilling their responsibilities.
- 57:1 As the leadership of the nation grew worse, the number of righteous people shrank, without people perceiving what was happening. God allowed this disappearance of the devout to spare them the judgment He would bring on the evil nation and its ungodly rulers. Few people in the nation, however, understood this reason for the depletion of the righteous.
- "Such deaths are not understood by the godless, for they do not realize that God in His goodness often takes righteous men to Himself to deliver them from some impending catastrophe."<sup>676</sup>
- God will do this when He removes the church from the earth before He brings the Tribulation on it. He did it in the past when he removed Lot before He destroyed Sodom.
- 57:2 The righteous person entered a condition of peace by dying and going to his or her eternal reward. The end of the righteous, then, contrasts with that of the wicked leaders (56:9-12).

### **Rampant apostasy 57:3-13**

Isaiah identified another mark of Israel, which boasted in its election by God and viewed righteousness in terms of correct worship ritual. This was the widespread departure of the nation from God (apostasy). She had forsaken God and had pursued idols.

- 57:3 God summoned the idolatrous Israelites, in contrast to the righteous (vv. 1-2), to come before Him for judgment. Rather than behaving like descendants of Abraham and Sarah (cf. 51:2), these wicked Israelites were acting as though their father was an adulterer and their mother a sorceress and a prostitute. That is, they were congenitally selfish, unfaithful to God, and wayward.

"Adultery . . . expresses the principle (unfaithfulness to the covenant); prostitution the practice (devotion to lovers other than the Lord). The adulterer gives his love elsewhere; the prostitute takes other lovers."<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>676</sup>Ibid., 3:399-400.

<sup>677</sup>Motyer, p. 472.

- 57:4 Evidently the people these wicked Israelites mocked were the righteous minority among them. Like children, they ridiculed the righteous for being different from themselves. They were rebellious and deceitful in their relationship to the Lord.
- 57:5 They were rebellious and deceitful in that they practiced fertility worship and child sacrifice. They believed connection with nature, rather than a spiritual relationship with the Creator, would yield fertility. They also believed that sacrificing the next generation would guarantee the preservation of the present generation. Of course, the opposite is true. God's people burned with lust as they carried out these pagan rites in the places thought to be most conducive to their success. "Oaks" (terebinths, Heb. *'elim*) may refer to large trees, not a particular variety of tree. These trees were the places and objects of idol worship.<sup>678</sup> How different a relationship with Yahweh based on trust would have been.
- 57:6 Having chosen to worship in the wadis, the apostate Israelites would have to be content to have the rocks of the wadis as their gods (cf. Rom. 1:20-25). A wadi (Heb. *nahal*) is a streambed that is dry most of the year but in the rainy season becomes a rushing torrent. As mountaintops became places of worship because they were close to heaven and the gods, so wadis in valleys became places of worship because they were close to Sheol and the dead. The unfaithful in Israel even made drink and grain offerings to these rocks. This was not the kind of behavior that would cause God to change His mind about bringing judgment on His people.
- 57:7 The Israelites also worshipped idols on mountains, as the pagans did to get closer to their gods. Such worship constituted infidelity to the Lord and adultery with loved idols. Thus Israel had made her bed and slept with another man when she worshipped as she did. However, Isaiah's language was more than figurative since worship of these nature deities involved sacred prostitution.
- 57:8 The unfaithful Israelites were evidently setting up memorial objects to the idols in their homes as well. The Scripture portions that they were to place on their doorframes (Deut. 6:9; 11:20) were to remind them of the Lord, but they had installed rival reminders inside their homes. The holder of these Scripture portions is called a *mezuzah*, and many observant Jews still install them on their doorframes, even today. The Lord's "wife" had turned her back on Him and had gone to bed with other lovers. She had been unfaithful to her covenant with Yahweh and had covenanted to worship idols, since she loved the physical aspects of their worship.
- 57:9 Some Israelites had also traveled far from home to worship other gods. This may be a reference to making political alliances with other nations and then worshipping their gods with them (cf. Ezek. 23). The king in

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<sup>678</sup>See *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Trees," by F. N. Hepper.

view may be the most prominent foreign ruler at the time Isaiah wrote this prophecy. These political trips involved great distances. The negotiators would take the oils and perfumes used in the worship of foreign gods with them. Over time these instances of idolatry had increased. But instead of going to foreign nations, Isaiah said these envoys were really going to Sheol because God would slay His people for their unfaithfulness to Him.

57:10 These trips to obtain political security through idolatry wore the envoys out. Rather than ensuring that security did not come in that way, however, they persevered in their wickedness in spite of their weariness.

"As with any addiction, the memory of former gratification drives one on, even when the gratification grows steadily less and less. To admit that the quest is hopeless would be to drive one back into the arms of God, whose invitation to surrender all control and live in trust one has already rejected."<sup>679</sup>

57:11 Yahweh asked the Israelites a question. Who had terrified them that they betrayed the truth (cf. Prov. 30:6), their covenant partner, and their concern for Him (cf. v. 1)? Obviously it was not a great threat that had made them unfaithful, but neglect of Him. Perhaps if He had been more active in judging their sins they would have remembered Him. But, graciously, He had been silent about their sins, and so they had not paid attention to Him.

"Possibly we have here an example of Isaiah's preaching during the long dark days of Manasseh."<sup>680</sup>

57:12 God would bring Israel into judgment and make known her "righteous" deeds (cf. Matt. 13:24-30; Rev. 20:12). What she considered righteousness, the blending of her elect calling and paganism, was anything but that (cf. 56:1). She would come out lacking in that reckoning.

57:13 In that day of judgment, the idols that the Israelites had trusted in, even in captivity, would be of no help. They would be as useless and lightweight as what the winds blow away. In contrast, those who made Yahweh their refuge from the storms of life would inherit the land and possess the Zion of the future Millennium (cf. 11:9; 24:23; 25:6-8; 65:25; 66:20; Matt. 5:5).

"One of the best ways to find out whether we have idols in our lives is to ask ourselves, 'Where do I instinctively turn when I face a decision or need to solve a problem?' Do we reach for the phone to call a friend? Do we assure ourselves that we can handle the situation ourselves? Or do we turn to God to see[k] His will and receive His help?"<sup>681</sup>

<sup>679</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 481.

<sup>680</sup>Motyer, p. 474.

<sup>681</sup>Wiersbe, p. 66.

### The divine enablement 57:14-21

This pericope concludes the section begun at 56:1 dealing with the need for humility and holiness in the redeemed people of God. Isaiah explained that the basis of God's acceptance and blessing of His redeemed people was righteousness (56:1-8). Then he showed that Israel lacked that righteousness (56:9—57:13). Her leadership was wicked (56:9—57:2) and her populace was apostate (57:3-13). Now he explained that the solution to Israel's predicament was Yahweh's enablement (grace). The only way she could be what she should be was with the Lord's help. This section explains how the promise that ended verse 13 could possibly come to pass.

The structure of this section is the opposite of the former one. There, threatening ended with a brief promise, but here, promise ends with a short threat.

57:14 In the future, someone would give an order to prepare the way for the Israelites to return to their land and to their God (cf. 40:3; 62:10). Watts took this as an exhortation to the Jews in Babylonian exile to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.<sup>682</sup> The speaker is probably God, but the speech is more important than the speaker. The figure is of building a roadbed for a highway that would become the route of the Israelites.

57:15 The reason for this proclamation is that God is who He is. He is the utterly transcendent God in relation to space (high and lifted up, cf. 6:1; 52:13), time (lives forever), and character (holy). Yet He is also immanent, dwelling among repentant and humble people. He dwells among them to encourage and enable them. The holy God is with His humble people (cf. 7:14). One writer called this verse "one of the finest one-sentence summations of biblical theology in the Bible."<sup>683</sup>

"Earthly sovereigns are thought of as dwelling with the exalted and proud ones; the great Sovereign of all dwells with the humble believer."<sup>684</sup>

57:16 God will not always be angry with sinners; His anger will come to an end because He has made provision for human sin through the Servant. He *becomes* angry, but He *is* love (cf. Ps. 30:5). If God remained angry with sin, humanity could not endure His wrath and everyone would perish (cf. Gen. 6:3). Obviously God remains angry with sinners who refuse His grace, but He does not need to remain angry with the humble who accept His provision for their sins.

57:17 The Lord had been angry with the proud Israelite because of his desire for unjust gain, namely, for more and more for himself. Greed is the essential sin that results in idolatry (cf. Col. 3:5; 1 Tim. 6:10). God's anger led Him

<sup>682</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 262.

<sup>683</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 487.

<sup>684</sup>A. Martin, *Isaiah . . .*, p. 104.

to discipline the proud Israelites and to become inaccessible to their calls for help. Israel, instead of repenting and returning to the Lord, continued in her sinful ways.

57:18 In spite of Israel's response, Yahweh would heal, lead, and strengthen the nation's inhabitants who mourned over their sinfulness. He would take the initiative by providing the Servant—to strengthen as well as to save (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-19). It is not so much grace for redemption that is in view here, as *grace to overcome* the attraction of sin for people already redeemed.

"The unmerited nature of God's favor has rarely been expressed more beautifully than in v. 18."<sup>685</sup>

57:19 The result would be that those delivered would praise the Lord. Consequently, there can be peace for the humble because God would heal them, whether they live near in Israel, or far off among the Gentiles (cf. Eph. 2:17). The duplication of a word like "peace" is a Hebrew idiom for something superlative in kind and total in extent (cf. 6:3; 21:9; Gen. 14:11; Deut. 16:20; Rev. 14:8; 18:2). Since *shalom* was a conventional word of greeting, the speaker may have intended to give the wayward a warm welcome home (cf. John 15:11-24).

57:20-21 The wicked contrast with the humble who take advantage of God's provision of grace. Far from being at peace, their existence is as tumultuous as the tossing sea, which is incapable of being at rest. Their constant agitation creates many other problems, like the raging sea casts up debris and mud. No *shalom* is the portion of the wicked (cf. 48:22).

"Hence if persons have experienced the unmerited grace of God as mediated through the Savior, and then expect to live lives dominated by greed (v. 17) and self-will, propitiating God from time to time with religious behavior, they will find not peace, but constant upheaval."<sup>686</sup>

## **2. The relationship of righteousness and ritual chs. 58—59**

The structure of this section is similar to that of the previous section of the book (chs. 56—57). First, Isaiah depicted true religion (ch. 58); second, the people's failure (59:1-15a); and third, God's action for His people (59:15b-21).

### **What God wants ch. 58**

Again Isaiah presented the folly of simply going through a system of worship without changing one's attitudes and conduct, especially in relationships (1:10-20; cf. Zech. 1; Matt. 5—7). In chapter 1, God threatened His people with destruction if they did not

<sup>685</sup>Grogan, p. 320.

<sup>686</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 492.

change. Here He promised them blessing if they did change. The difference is due to His provision of the Servant. God appealed to redeemed people to change.

". . . the religion which is exposed here rests on Canaanite rather than Yahwistic principles. The essence of Canaanite religion was to put the gods under pressure to perform their functions (hence, for example, what we would call orgiastic rites designed to stimulate Baal to acts of fertility). . . . The essence of Israelite religion, however, is response. Not doing things to influence the Lord but doing them to obey him; not works looking for reward but faith acting in obedience."<sup>687</sup>

### **False worship 58:1-5**

Many of the Israelites were relying on their practice of the Mosaic rites to satisfy God. The true meaning of the rites had not affected their lives. God intended the system of worship He prescribed to illustrate the importance of a heart relationship with Himself that should affect interpersonal relationships. This pericope exposes the superficial attitude of many of God's people with strong irony.

- 58:1           The transgressions and sins that the Lord called Isaiah to proclaim to His people were so serious that the prophet needed to grab their attention with loud announcements. The name "the house of Jacob" calls attention to the Jacob-like quality of the nation that God would expose, namely: the people's attempts to manipulate God.
- 58:2           Even though the Israelites sinned, they sought the Lord constantly and inquired concerning His ways. They claimed to be a righteous people who had observed the Mosaic Law carefully. They asked God for justice, and they delighted in the thought that He was near them.
- 58:3           They could not understand why God had not blessed them—because they had fasted and humbled themselves (cf. Mal. 3:13-15). The only fast that the Mosaic Law commanded was on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-32). But the Israelites also fasted voluntarily, even in Isaiah's day.<sup>688</sup> The reason God had not blessed them was that when they fasted, they did not demonstrate the attitudes and activities that fasting represented. They did not really sacrifice their own desires, and they continued to treat other people inconsiderately. They pursued their personal interests and worked when they fasted, and they insisted that their employees keep on working. They were practicing religious ritual to try to manipulate God into blessing them.

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<sup>687</sup>Motyer, p. 478.

<sup>688</sup>On the practice of fasting, see Kent D. Berghuis, "A Biblical Perspective on Fasting," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):86-103.

"But repentance is not for the purpose of getting God to do anything; it is an expression of the conviction that my ways are wrong and God's ways are right, whether he does anything for me or not."<sup>689</sup>

- 58:4 The spiritually insensitive Israelites did not consciously fast so they could be contentious and strive and beat each other up, but these were the results of their fasts. Fasting made them grouchy and belligerent, and they took these sinful feelings out on their neighbors. It would have been better for their neighbors if they had not fasted at all. These religious hypocrites were really fasting for reasons other than mourning over their sinfulness.
- 58:5 This was not the type of fasting God approved (cf. 1:11; Ps. 51:16-17; Luke 18:9-14). It consisted only in His people bowing their heads, not their hearts. Bowing the head like a reed expresses formal worship, like a reed automatically bending in response to wind. The people sat in sackcloth and ashes, but they did not really mourn over their disobedience to the Lord. They thought their outward fasting, bowing, dressing, and adorning were more important than their attitudes and behavior, though they probably did not realize it and certainly did not admit it (cf. James 1:27; 4:8).

"When we worship because it is the popular thing to do, not because it is the right thing to do, then our worship becomes hypocritical."<sup>690</sup>

#### **True worship 58:6-14**

Isaiah contrasted God's conception of fasting with that of His people (cf. Matt. 6:16-18).

- 58:6 The type of fasting that pleases God is: giving up wickedness, oppression, enslavement, and binding of other people—not just food. Isaiah did not mean, of course, that God had no concern about His people going without food (cf. Lev. 16:31). The prophet was going to the opposite extreme to make a point (cf. 1:10-20; Amos 5:25-27; Mic. 6:6-8; Luke 14:26).

"If they want to deprive themselves, let them do it for the sake of the oppressed, the needy, and the helpless, not for the sake of their own religiosity. God's nature is to give himself away to those who can never repay him. There is no clearer evidence of the presence of God in a person's life than a replication of that same behavior."<sup>691</sup>

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<sup>689</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 497.

<sup>690</sup>Wiersbe, p. 66.

<sup>691</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 503.

God wants people to be free. That is why He sent the Servant, and that is why He liberated the Israelites from Egypt and Babylon. He wants His people to set others free, too.

"To *loose the chains of injustice*/'fetters of wickedness' points to the need to labour for the abolition of every way in which wrong social structures, or wrongdoers in society, destroy or diminish the due liberty of others. To *untie the cords of the yoke* refers to the need to eliminate every way in which people are treated like animals."<sup>692</sup>

58:7 Likewise, helping the poor is more important than helping oneself. Feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and clothing the naked are more important to God than living well oneself. What is the point of fasting if we do not give what we would eat to others? Self-denial should be for others, not for oneself (cf. Matt. 25:35; Luke 3:11; 10:31-32; Heb. 13:2).

"No religious observance has value for Jehovah that is not supported by a godly, law-abiding life, and compassion towards those in need."<sup>693</sup>

58:8 This type of reality would produce many good consequences. Light would dispel the Israelites' darkness. They would recover their spiritual wholeness quickly. Their righteousness (God Himself) and their right conduct (cf. 56:1) would precede them, and God's glory would protect them. The piling up of blessings for repentance is clear in the "then . . . and" lists in verses 8, 10-12, and 14.

58:9 The Lord would hear their prayers, and they would enjoy His presence (cf. vv. 1-3). Making self the focus of life, in contrast, results in darkness (cf. 5:20; 8:20; 47:5; 60:2), disease (cf. 1:5), defeat (cf. 1:7), and separation (cf. 1:4). For these blessings to come, God's people needed to stop oppressing others, and to stop mocking and showing contempt for others with wicked speech (cf. 57:4; 66:5). Notice the "if . . . then" constructions in verses 9, 10, and 13-14. It is possible that "the pointing of the finger" may refer to being critical of others who are not as socially sensitive as oneself.<sup>694</sup>

58:10 Positively, God's people needed to alleviate hunger in others (more than creating it in themselves by fasting), and to pour out their lives for others. Then they would have light, even in gloom, because God would be with them, and God is light (cf. 1 John 1:5).

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<sup>692</sup>Motyer, p. 481.

<sup>693</sup>Archer, p. 650.

<sup>694</sup>Motyer, p. 482.



- 58:11 God would also guide and sustain His people in their desert experiences. Strong bones contrast with bones that tremble or waste away because of fear, sorrow, or guilt. Physical health is often a byproduct of spiritual health (cf. James 5:15-16). Truly repentant people will also be a pleasant source of delight, encouragement, and nourishment to others (cf. 1:30). They will refresh others, as well as themselves, because God, the source of life within them (cf. John 4:14; 7:37-39), will manifest Himself through them.
- 58:12 True worshippers would also rebuild what their sin had previously torn down. This refers not only to the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem and Judah following the exile.<sup>695</sup> It also refers to the Promised Land in the Millennium and to the restoration of other types of "ruins" caused by sin.

The remaining two verses continue the explanation of true worship begun in verse 6, but they also conclude this chapter by returning to consider proper response to a specific aspect of the Mosaic legislation, namely: Sabbath observance.

- 58:13 If the Israelites practiced the Mosaic legislation with the right attitude and applied it properly to their lives, God would be pleased. Isaiah was not saying the Mosaic legislation was wrong, only that the legislation as his audience was practicing it was not pleasing to God. They were obeying to further their own selfish purposes. They should have obeyed to further God's purposes out of love for Him (cf. Matt. 6:10). For the Israelites, Sabbath observance was best suited to teach this lesson. The Sabbath day provided an opportunity for them to reorient themselves to spiritual reality once a week. It was not a fast but a feast day.

"The Lord is more interested in enjoyment of his blessings through obedience than in self-imposed deprivations."<sup>696</sup>

"Turn your foot" means walk away from.

- 58:14 Turning from a false approach to the Sabbath, and all the Law, would mean turning to the Lord with the proper attitude of delight. Then the Israelites would experience the exaltation of being His partners and would enjoy the inheritance promised to their all-too-human ancestor Jacob (cf. v. 1). If they would give themselves to God and others rather than pursuing selfish goals, they would experience personal and national fulfillment and receive His rewards. This was a promise from the mouth of Yahweh.

### **What Israel did 59:1-15a**

As mentioned above, this second segment of the section dealing with the relationship of righteousness and ritual (chs. 58—59) deals with the inability of God's redeemed people

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<sup>695</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 276.

<sup>696</sup>Motyer, p. 483.

to produce righteous behavior in their own strength. Chapter 57 dealt with their inability to break with idolatry in their own strength.

"In chapter 57 he [Isaiah] condemned adulterous paganism, in chapter 58 hypocritical fasting, while here it is chiefly injustice that calls forth his condemnation. Each of these chapters speaks about prayer. In chapter 57 it was not answered because it was not addressed to the true God (57:13); in chapter 58 because the petitioners are hypocrites (58:4); while here in vv. 1-2, it is because of their sins and particularly, as later verses indicate, their injustice."<sup>697</sup>

### **Isaiah's evidence 59:1-8**

"This passage describes the appalling moral breakdown of Jewish society—which perfectly accords with what we know of the degeneracy of Manasseh's reign."<sup>698</sup>

The prophet resumed his accusations against God's people (cf. 58:1-5).

- 59:1           The people were complaining that God was not answering their prayers (cf. 58:1-3). Isaiah assured them that His silence was not due to His inability to help them (a shortened hand) or to His disinterest in them (an insensitive ear).
- 59:2           Rather the problem was with them, not Him. It was their sins that had separated them from their holy Lord (cf. Gen. 3:6, 16; Jer. 5:2-6; Hab. 1:13; 1 John 1:6).

The evidence to support Isaiah's indictment follows.

- 59:3           Violence and bloodshed among God's people were signs of their sinfulness. Lies and deception were others.
- 59:4           Justice was not coming out of the courts, but legal maneuvering and loopholes had taken the place of straightforward decisions. The people were using and abusing the legal system for their own ends rather than allowing it to sit in judgment on their actions. They were trying to confuse the issues and lie their way out of their responsibilities. Instead of conceiving the truth that would issue in righteousness, they were conceiving mischief that would bear iniquity (cf. Job 15:35; James 1:15).
- 59:5-6         The results of such a society are serpents' eggs and spider webs. Instead of receiving nourishment from the eggs, the eggs either poison or, if hatched, fatally attack the eater. Instead of receiving warmth from the beautifully

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<sup>697</sup>Grogan, p. 325.

<sup>698</sup>Archer, p. 650.

woven web, the web fails to clothe and instead entangles its wearer. This was because the work the people expended to secure food and clothing was self-centered. People even resorted to physical violence to get what they wanted for themselves. Such a society promises much but delivers little, and what it does deliver turns around and kills it.

59:7-8 Instead of running from evil, God's people were running to it, even hastily shedding innocent blood to secure their ends (cf. Rom. 3:15-17). Again Isaiah used "way" to describe the moral life. Their hands and feet only manifested what was in their hearts, however. Their imaginations and thought processes were corrupt. All human ways are utterly futile apart from the Lord's intervention. Note the repetition of "iniquity" four times in verses 3, 4, 6, and 7.

"His highways are peace and redemption (11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 40:3; 49:11; 62:10), but the human highways are destruction and confusion (7:3; 33:8; 36:2; 59:7). In his way there is guidance and confidence (2:3; 30:12), but in our ways there is discord and strife (3:12; 8:11; 57:17; 65:2)."<sup>699</sup>

#### Israel's confession 59:9-15a

Isaiah, speaking for the sinful Israelites in captivity (cf. 6:5), first acknowledged the consequences of their behavior (vv. 9-11) and then confessed their guilt (vv. 12-15a).

59:9 Because they had denied justice and righteousness to others, the Israelites had not experienced justice or righteousness themselves, from the hands of God or men.

"*Justice* is not 'the just society' as such but the rule of God which will set everything to rights; *righteousness* has the same meaning as in 56:1, the coming act of God in which he will vindicate and display his righteousness and fulfil [*sic*] all his righteous purposes."<sup>700</sup>

They had hoped for a bright future in view of God's promises, but their present condition was dark. They had expected to walk in the brightness of His presence, but they were groping in gloom because He had withdrawn the light of His presence from them (cf. 58:10).

59:10 All the parallel descriptions in this verse stress the hopelessness and vulnerability of the Israelites due to their natural blindness to God's ways (cf. 6:10; 8:16-17; 42:7; Deut. 28:29).

<sup>699</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 516.

<sup>700</sup>Motyer, p. 486.

"They are 'blind' as to vision and clarity for guiding life, 'stumbling' as to constancy and stability of life, 'dead' as to vitality and 'get-up-and-go'."<sup>701</sup>

59:11 They could not even articulate their grief but simply growled and moaned like angry bears and pitiful doves (cf. Mark 7:34; John 11:38; Rom. 8:22-23). This lament closes as it began, with an admission that justice and salvation were far from God's people.

59:12 The reason justice and salvation were far away was the Israelites' multiplied transgressions, sins, and iniquities. But they had finally acknowledged their condition (cf. Ps. 51:5). Therefore, hope was now possible, that God would step forward and deliver them (cf. 1 John 1:9).

"Hatred of the consequences of sin and its destructive effects on one's own life are not necessarily evidence of true repentance. It is when we face sin as rebellion against the holy God who loves us that we begin to see it, in some degree, as he sees it."<sup>702</sup>

59:13 The people acknowledged sins against God and against other people. They also admitted sins of omission and sins of commission, sins of action and sins of attitude, sins of the mouth and sins of the hands.

59:14 These are the reasons justice and righteousness stood far removed from the people. Truth had collapsed, so uprightness could not enter the company of the redeemed (cf. 1:21-23).

59:15a Where truth is lacking, as it was in Isaiah's society, the person who turns aside from evil to do good makes himself a prey to others who take advantage of him. This is the final irony of many ironies in this pericope. It corresponds to the earlier expressions of bad conditions resulting from iniquity (cf. vv. 4, 7-8). Isaiah was not advocating this type of behavior. He was saying that unless God intervenes for His people, this type of behavior is all that they can expect.

### **What God would do 59:15b-21**

This is the third and last pericope, parallel to 57:14-21, which announces that God would deliver His people from the sin that plagued them as redeemed people (cf. 6:5). The section also closes the part of Isaiah that deals with the recognition of human inability (chs. 56—59).

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<sup>701</sup>Ibid., p. 487.

<sup>702</sup>Grogan, p. 326.

"This is the ultimate development of the Divine Warrior motif in the Bible: God comes to destroy the final enemy of what he has created: not the monster Chaos, but the monster Sin."<sup>703</sup>

59:15b        Though Israel was blind (v. 10), the Lord saw. He saw the true state of His people, as He sees everything. He saw that there was no justice in Israel or for Israel (vv. 9-15a).

59:16        God also saw that there was no human being who could mediate between Himself and His people, who could appeal effectively to Him for them (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1). Aaron and Phinehas had done this for Israel in the past (Num. 17:12-13; 25:7). So God Himself acted in power to deliver them, in faithfulness to His promises.

"In saying that God was astonished the prophet does not mean that God had been ignorant of the situation until He saw it and then this sight brought astonishment to Him. Rather, the language speaks of a genuine astonishment, which would express itself in displeasure and yet in compassion for His own to such an extent that He Himself acts."<sup>704</sup>

"Man's failure to avail himself of God's gracious provision to have a share in the restraint of wickedness and the promotion of righteousness through the ministry [*sic*] of intercession is a definite cause for divine astonishment."<sup>705</sup>

59:17        As a warrior preparing for battle, the Lord made ready to defend His people (cf. Eph. 6:13-17).

"No weapon is mentioned, neither sword or bow; for His own arm procures Him help, and this alone."<sup>706</sup>

59:18        God would take vengeance on His enemies and on those forces that opposed His people. He would pay them back according to their dealings. While the context refers to deliverance from sin in a general sense, the reference to the coastlands suggests that the Lord will also defend and deliver Israel from Gentile opponents (at His second coming). Ultimately, of course, the Lord will subdue every enemy of His.

59:19        God's deliverance of His people will result in the whole world fearing Him for this display of His glory. His coming deliverance would be swift and forceful (cf. Rev. 6:15-17; 16:17-21). Water rushing down a wadi may be in view.

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<sup>703</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 527.

<sup>704</sup>Young, 3:438.

<sup>705</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, *Working with God: Scriptural Studies in Intercession*, p. 89.

<sup>706</sup>Delitzsch, 2:405.

59:20 God would redeem His people, as the next of kin came to save the helpless widow. But it is His people who have turned away from their transgressions that He saves (cf. Rom. 11:25-27). They will have given up on their ability to deliver themselves, or to secure deliverance from another source, and will have turned to the Lord (cf. 55:6). That is the picture of "Jacob" that Isaiah gave in the preceding verses (vv. 9-15a; cf. 58:1, 14). Repentance in the sense of forsaking sin, apart from faith, is not a condition for deliverance from sin's *penalty*, but God only delivers believers from the *power* of sin who seek Him for deliverance.

59:21 In closing, God promised with a covenant promise that He would not withdraw His Spirit or His Word from His people on whom He would place them (cf. Jer. 31:31-44). This is a reference to the New Covenant. The Spirit would abide on His people forever, and His Word would remain in their mouths so they could be the witnesses to Him that He created them to be. Since this has not yet happened, it appears that it will happen at the Lord Jesus' second advent (v. 18).

There is debate about whether the Lord has already given His Spirit permanently to all His people, but there is no question that He has not yet made His people the witnesses that they should be. He has given the Spirit to Christians, but not to all Israelites (cf. Joel 2:29). Christians are relatively ineffective witnesses now, but Israel will be a faithful witness in the Millennium (Jer. 31:33-34; Ezek. 36:27b). Israel will witness to the greatness of Yahweh and will draw the nations to Him (cf. 2:2-3; 60:1-3). This is the purpose for which He will redeem them.

"The true people of God will ever be a witnessing people, faithfully proclaiming the truth of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit."<sup>707</sup>

### **B. REVELATION OF FUTURE GLORY CHS. 60—62**

These chapters present Israel as the restored people of God displaying God's salvation to the earth. Isaiah's focus was beyond the return from Babylonian exile to the messianic kingdom. Numerous promises of blessing and salvation mark this section of the book.

"If it is true that Israel's God is the only Holy One, that it is his glory alone that fills the earth, and that he is King of the universe, then what does that mean for Israel both in relation to God and in relation to world [*sic*]? In many ways, the rest of the book is an exploration of those issues, and in chs. 60—62 they come to their broadest expression and resolution."<sup>708</sup>

Eight themes run through these chapters.<sup>709</sup> Isaiah introduced these truths earlier, but he emphasized them strongly in this section.

<sup>707</sup>Archer, p. 650.

<sup>708</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 535.

<sup>709</sup>*Ibid.*

1. God will save Israel.
2. God will give Israel light.
3. God will share His glory with Israel.
4. Israel will draw the nations to God.
5. The nations will bring the Israelites back to Zion.
6. The nations will bring their wealth to Zion.
7. God will exalt Israel over the nations.
8. Israel will experience and exemplify God's righteousness.

As Cyrus was the Lord's anointed to set the Israelites free from Babylonian captivity, so the Servant Messiah is His Anointed to set them free from their captivity to sin. He is the great Warrior behind this section who will achieve for Israel all that the Lord promised. The word "glory," in one form or another, occurs at least 23 times in chapters 60—66.

### **1. Israel among the nations ch. 60**

The focus of this chapter is Israel's position of prominence among the nations in the future.

". . . the poem centres on the Abrahamic theme that those who bless him will be blessed and those who curse him will be cursed (Gn. 12:3; 27:29)."<sup>710</sup>

#### **The nations drawn to Israel 60:1-9**

Light would dawn on Israel, and as a result: the Gentiles would seek her out.

60:1 God had called Israel to be a light to the nations (43:10), but presently she was darkness (56:9—57:13; 59:1-15a). The Lord had promised that He would enable His people to fulfill their calling (57:14-21; 59:15b-21). Now Isaiah summoned the nation to rise up and shine because her light had arrived (cf. 51:17; 52:1). God's glory, rather than His discipline, will rise as the sun upon her. Like a city gleaming in the light of the risen sun, Israel will shine with a glory that is not her own. God will not share His glory with false gods (42:8; 48:11), but He will share it with His people through His Servant (11:10; 35:2; 43:7; John 1:14; 17:4, 22; Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Pet. 4:13-14).

The first coming of Christ anticipated the dawning of a new day for Israel, but His second coming will see the fulfillment of these prophecies of Israel's glorification (cf. Rev. 2:28; 22:16).

60:2 God's glory will rise on His people when there is much darkness on the earth, the darkness of sin and wickedness (cf. 8:19-22; 59:9-10). He had given light to His people in the past when He led the Israelites out of dark Egypt (Exod. 10:23). The second Exodus from Babylon would be similar.

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<sup>710</sup>Motyer, p. 493.

This was true also before Jesus appeared the first time, and it will be true before He appears the second time. His second coming will end the Great Tribulation.

60:3 In the future manifestation of light, the Gentile nations and their leaders will look to Israel for light (righteousness and illumination). They will not seek Israel because she is light but because of the light that she will reflect and make manifest to the world. We can see a foreview of the revelation of God's light coming through the 144,000 Jewish missionaries who will preach the gospel during the Tribulation (cf. Rev. 7:1-8). This preaching will not fulfill this promise, however. The present preaching of the gospel by the church is only a foretaste of what is also to come through Israel.

"Though everyone entering the Millennium will be saved, people will be born during that 1,000-year period of time. Many of them will come to salvation because of God's work on Israel's behalf."<sup>711</sup>

60:4 The nations and their leaders will bring the disbursed Israelites back to their land as well (cf. 11:12; 49:18). They will also bring their wealth and give it to the Israelites (cf. v. 11; 61:6; Hag. 2:7-8; Zech. 14:14). This will delight the Israelites, as well as surprise them, since throughout history the nations have taken from Israel.

These verses hardly found fulfillment in the return from Babylon (the regathering is worldwide), or in the church (the church goes to the world), though a foreview of fulfillment is unmistakable. Liberal interpreters favor the first option, and most Christian interpreters have favored the second. The second is the amillennial position. Unsaved people may be coming to Christians to learn about God now, but they are hardly exalting Christians in the world and making them rich to the extent envisioned here. The typical reaction to the preaching of the gospel now is rejection of it, and often persecution follows for its preachers (cf. 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3).

"In the end, God will keep his ancient promises in the land of Israel and there will demonstrate his rule within history."<sup>712</sup>

60:5 Israel will rejoice and be amazed because the nations will bring their wealth and give it to Israel. The nations will do this because Israel will be the Lord's vehicle for bringing the knowledge of God to them. The gifts are really in praise of the Lord, not to gain Israel's favor, or to repay her for her sufferings, or because she is a superior race.

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<sup>711</sup>J. Martin, p. 1115.

<sup>712</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 539.



- 60:6 Gentiles will also come from other parts of the world bringing treasure to honor Israel. The visit of the wise men at Jesus' birth suggests a fulfillment (cf. Matt. 2:11). The visit of the Magi should have alerted Israel to the identity of Jesus. But again, the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem was only a foretaste of what Isaiah predicted would come to all Israel. Isaiah saw camels as thick as flies on meat covering the land around Jerusalem. These Gentiles will express thanks that Israel has brought the Word of God to them, in its written, spoken, and incarnate forms.
- 60:7 Isaiah saw other nations, ancient enemies of Israel, bring offerings typical of their way of life. Evidently there will be a literal temple and altar in Zion then (cf. Ezek. 40—43). The sacrifices offered there will be for thanksgiving to God. God will glorify the millennial temple as the focal point of worship at this time. Isaiah's vision of the future Jerusalem included a temple and altar (cf. v. 13), but John's vision of the future Jerusalem excluded both (Rev. 21:22). The solution is probably that Isaiah described the millennial city, and John the eternal city.
- 60:8 The prophet further saw people coming from the west as thick as clouds into the Promised Land. They reminded him of doves flying to their dovecotes. Who are these, he asked?
- 60:9 They are a combination of Gentiles and Israelites who have come to bring gifts and to escort God's chosen people back to their land. Watts believed King Artaxerxes of Persia was the speaker in verses 9-10a, 11-12, 14, 17a, 18, and 21a, as well as in 61:4, 6-7, and 10-11.<sup>713</sup> Gentiles and Israelites are waiting for God because they have come to worship Him for what He has done in Israel's experience and character. Israel will finally fulfill her calling as a kingdom of priests, bringing all other kingdoms to the Holy One of Israel—her God (Exod. 19:5-6).

### **The nations serving Israel 60:10-16**

Now the relationship of the nations to Israel becomes even clearer. The Gentiles will come to Israel because of her God, will submit themselves to Israel because of what the Lord will do for her, and will serve the Lord with Israel.

- 60:10 Foreigners will rebuild Jerusalem (cf. 56:3, 6), having formerly torn it down, and will minister to Israel in many ways. Peace will have arrived (cf. v. 17; 57:19). Formerly God disciplined His people for their sins, but He will bless them because He provided forgiveness for them.

"Any fulfillment of this after the Exile was only partial. The Persians made possible the rebuilding of the walls but did not do it themselves (v. 10). Its true fulfillment lay beyond the OT era altogether."<sup>714</sup>

<sup>713</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, pp. 291-92, 296-97.

<sup>714</sup>Grogan, p. 330.

- 60:11 Open gates indicate peaceful conditions. Isaiah foresaw the nations, led by their kings, bringing their riches into Jerusalem to offer them as gifts to the Lord (cf. Rev. 21:24-27). The kings follow the lead of another, probably the Lord Himself, who draws their allegiance. This will be a great triumphant procession.
- 60:12 Any nation that does not submit to Israel's greatness in this time will suffer destruction. Thus worship of the Lord and thanksgiving for Israel's mediatory ministry will be voluntary, and some may not choose to submit.
- 60:13 The nations will bring all their finest products to Jerusalem as gifts to the Lord. For example, Lebanon will probably bring its famous forest products, as it did for Solomon, who built the first temple in Jerusalem. This will all result in the beautification of the temple (cf. 1 Chron. 28:2) and, therefore, the glorification of Israel's God.
- 60:14 The descendants of Israel's persecutors (cf. 39:7) will end up bowing down to the Israelites, honoring them and submitting to them (cf. Esth. 8:2). They will acknowledge the Israelites collectively as Zion, the city of Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel.

Does this mean that "Zion" is a figure for the future redeemed Israelites and not the name of a real city? Certainly Zion does stand for the future Israelites collectively in Isaiah, but it was also a synonym for Jerusalem, a real city, throughout the Old Testament. Here Isaiah employed the collective meaning of the name.

"The earthliness of this setting seems to preclude assigning it to heaven."<sup>715</sup>

- 60:15-16 The prophet summarized what he had said. In the past Israel had been abandoned, hated, and isolated from other nations. In the future she would be an object of pride and joy in the world forever. She would draw from the wealth of the nations, and she would know through her experience that Yahweh, the Holy One of Jacob, was her Savior and Redeemer. It is easy for us to see how Gentile nations will sustain Israel in the future, because ever since 1948, certain Gentile nations have sustained the modern state of Israel.

"This is the point that God has been trying to drive home to Israel, and through Israel, to the world, at least since ch. 40. Chs. 1—39 show that he is the Sovereign of the nations, but chs. 40—66 show that he is the Savior of the world. He begins to show this in chs. 40—48, by predicting the deliverance from Babylon. But chs. 49—55 show that the

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<sup>715</sup>Archer, p. 651.

real need of Israel is for deliverance from sin. Now in chs. 56—66 he is showing that Israel's witness to God's saviorhood is to, and for, the world."<sup>716</sup>

### Contrasts with the present 60:17-22

- 60:17 Everything will be better in Israel's millennial future. The contrasts appear to be with regard to Zion (v. 14). Peace and righteousness will be the governing principles in that city. If peace and righteousness are the slave drivers and inspectors, what will the best be? Another view is that Isaiah personified peace and righteousness as vice-regents of God, in order to indicate that human leaders would no longer be necessary. The Israelites could not produce peace and righteousness (59:9-13), but God will provide them.
- 60:18 Israel will be safe and secure in her land, in contrast to her former vulnerable and insecure condition. Zion's defense will be the salvation that God provides. Her gates will be so full of praise (i.e., people who praise) that potential enemies cannot enter.
- 60:19-20 The glory of the Lord would outshine that of the sun and moon. He would provide for His people the light and health which these heavenly bodies formerly produced (cf. Rev. 21:4, 23). The night, because of its darkness, is a time of mourning (cf. Ps. 30:5), but there will be no mourning for Israel because God will enlighten and brighten her.
- 60:21 All the Israelites will be righteous, whereas formerly they had been unrighteous, in their standing and in their state. And they will possess the Promised Land forever, rather than having to leave it because of their sins (cf. Gen. 17:8). Young wrote, "Inheritance of the land is a symbol of the future spiritual blessings that come to man through Christ."<sup>717</sup> If this is so, why did God give specific geographical boundaries for the Promised Land several times after Israel possessed the land partially? Israel would be the plant that God had nourished, and would now be healthy and thriving (cf. 4:1; 5:1-7; 6:13; 11:1; 27:2-6; 53:2; John 15:1-5). Her condition would glorify Him.
- 60:22 The Lord would also bless His people with fertility so they would become the ancestors of numerous descendants. He would make of them what He had made of Abraham (cf. 51:2). With posterity come glory, influence, and power (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-31). The guarantor of these promises was Yahweh, who brought Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land (cf. Exod. 20:2). He will bring these promises into fulfillment quickly in their proper time (cf. Gal. 4:4).

<sup>716</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 551.

<sup>717</sup>Young, 3:456.

## 2. Israel under the Lord chs. 61—62

These chapters explain the character of the Israelites in the era following the Lord's future provision of salvation for them. The salvation in view is the redemption that the Servant would provide in His first and second advents. The fact that the Servant would accomplish His ministry in two advents, separated by thousands of years, was unknown to the Old Testament prophets. Salvation includes deliverance from the power of sin, as well as deliverance from the penalty of sin. Chapter 60 presented the blessings that Israel would enjoy in the future, as a city lit by the rising sun. Chapter 61 begins by introducing the One who would bring those blessings, the "Sun" that lights that city.

### **The mission of the Anointed One 61:1-3**

These two chapters begin with an introduction of the Servant (Messiah) and His mission. Some scholars regard 61:1-3 as a fifth Servant Song.<sup>718</sup> I agree with them. That the Servant of the Servant Songs is the same person as the Anointed One (Messiah) of chapter 11, is clear from what Isaiah wrote about Him.

"The Anointed One now appears for the second time. As in the second Servant Song (49:1-6), he speaks in his own person about himself and his God-given ministry."<sup>719</sup>

61:1            Isaiah spoke for the Messiah, as is clear from what he said about Him (cf. 49:1; 50:4).

"The passage may also refer to Isaiah, but if so, he is only a pale shadow of Christ."<sup>720</sup>

The Spirit of sovereign Yahweh would be upon Him (cf. 11:2; 48:16). This is a verse in which all three members of the Trinity appear. This verse indicates that He would possess supernatural wisdom and capacity (cf. Gen. 41:38; Exod. 31:3; Num. 11:17, 29), and that He would be able to bring justice and righteousness to the earth through His spoken word (cf. 11:2; 32:15-16; 42:1; 44:3; 48:16; 59:21). His possession of the Spirit is a result of God anointing Him for His mission. He would need divine enablement by the Spirit to fulfill it (cf. 1 Sam. 10:1, 6-7; 16:3; 2 Sam. 23:1-7; Matt. 3:16-17). This Anointed One would do the Servant's work.

The mission of the Anointed One would be to announce good news to distressed people (cf. Ps. 25:16-21; Matt. 9:12-13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31-32). In other occurrences of this verb, it is the hope of Israel that is in view, specifically deliverance from Babylon and deliverance from sin (cf.

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<sup>718</sup>E.g., Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "The Christological Fulfillment of Isaiah's Servant Songs," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:652 (October-December 2006):401-4, regard 61:1-3 thus; *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1210.

<sup>719</sup>Motyer, p. 499.

<sup>720</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1210.

40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 60:6). What "announcing good news to the afflicted" means, follows next (through verse 3). First, it means He would mend the hearts of those so broken by life that they despair of having any hope. Second, it means the Anointed One would liberate those so enslaved that they could not break free (cf. 1:27; 11:3-5). Captives are in bondage to another person, and prisoners are bound to a place.

61:2 Third, proclaiming good news means He would bring, for God, a year of favor and a day of vengeance. God's favor would last much longer than His vengeance. A prolonged time of blessing is in view, followed by a short time of punishment for oppressors.

When Jesus Christ read this passage in the Nazareth synagogue and claimed that He fulfilled it, He stopped reading after "the favorable year of Yahweh" and did not read "and the day of vengeance of our God" (Luke 4:18-19). He meant that He was the Anointed One of whom Isaiah spoke, and that He had come to bring salvation. The day of salvation had begun (cf. 49:8; 2 Cor. 6:2). However, the day of vengeance would not begin until much later, specifically at the end of the Tribulation when He will return (cf. 34:8; 35:4; 63:4; Dan. 7:21, 24-27; Mic. 5:15; 1 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 12:13-17; 19:15-20).<sup>721</sup>

Fourth, announcing good news means the Anointed One would comfort those who mourn because they believe their sins have doomed them (cf. ch. 12; 40:1-2; 49:13; Matt. 5:3-4). God would accept them in spite of their sin because of the Servant's work.

61:3 Fifth, proclaiming good news means He would give joy to the mourners among the Israelites in place of their sorrows. Sixth, it means they would become a blessing like large trees are, flourishing in righteousness by demonstrating the saving and enabling grace of God, and so glorifying Him. God's righteousness would make them strong and durable.

### **The benefits of the mission of the Anointed One 61:4-11**

The Anointed One would fulfill God's ancient promises to Israel.

"The Servant of Jehovah celebrates the glorious office committed to him, and expounds the substance of the gospel given him to proclaim. It points to the restoration of the promised land, and to the elevation of Israel, after its purification in the furnace of judgment, to great honour and dignity in the midst of the world of nations."<sup>722</sup>

<sup>721</sup>See Gary Yates, "The Use of Isaiah 61:1 (and 58:6) in Luke 4:18-19," *Exegesis and Exposition* 2:1 (Summer 1987):13-27.

<sup>722</sup>Delitzsch, 2:428.

- 61:4 Those who formerly mourned in Israel, because of their downtrodden and deprived conditions, would rebuild their land, which others had destroyed. These destructions had come on Israel because of her sins. God predicted that the cities that opposed His people would suffer destruction and never rise again (cf. 13:19-22; 34:8-17). But the cities and land of His people, though terribly decimated throughout history, would be rebuilt (in the Millennium).
- 61:5 Flocks and crops would again flourish in the Promised Land, and the Israelites would be so blessed that their former Gentile oppressors would even serve Israelite farmers.
- 61:6 However, the Israelites would not oppress their former oppressors. Rather than tilling the land and tending flocks, the Israelites would serve in the exalted position of being priests of Yahweh. They would mediate between God and the Gentiles. As the priests in Israel lived off the contributions of their fellow Israelites in the past, so all the Israelites would live off the contributions of the Gentiles in the future. The nation would finally become the kingdom of priests that God intended it to be (cf. Exod. 19:6; Deut. 33:10).
- "All that we can safely infer from his prophecy is, that the nationality of Israel will not be swallowed up by the entrance of the heathen into the community of the God of revelation."<sup>723</sup>
- 61:7 Instead of the shame that Israel suffered formerly because of God's judgments on her, she would enjoy the double portion of blessing bestowed on the favored firstborn son in Israelite society (cf. Deut. 21:17). As God's firstborn son, Israel would enter into her promised bountiful and joyful inheritance (Exod. 4:22).
- 61:8 Israel could count on these promises because of who Yahweh is: a lover of justice (faithful to His promises to Israel) and a hater of iniquitous robbery (Israel's enemies taking what did not belong to them). God would give Israel her inheritance and would make a new, everlasting covenant with her (cf. 49:8; 55:5; Jer. 31:31; 32:40; Ezek. 16:60; 37:25-26; Mal. 3:1-2; Matt. 26:27-28; Heb. 9:11-22; 13:20).
- 61:9 The physical seed of Abraham would continue to exist and to be identifiable as Israel, as God promised the patriarch and his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3). Furthermore, Israel would be a witness to the rest of the earth's population. Thus all the earth would be able to worship and praise Yahweh.

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<sup>723</sup>Ibid., 2:429.

- 61:10        Isaiah now spoke for Zion, who rejoiced in the Lord for the gifts that He would give her in the future. Yahweh will have clothed her in garments of salvation and wrapped her in a robe of righteousness, like a bride for her wedding day. Salvation is "unto" (for the purpose of and expected results toward) righteousness. Israel's joy in that day (the Millennium) will be like that of a bride on her wedding day, ecstatically adorned with a turban and jewels.
- 61:11        Finally, the harvest of righteousness that the Lord planted in Israel, when He redeemed her by the Servant's work, would come to fruition (cf. 55:10-11). With that righteousness will come praise, not only from Israel, but from the whole earth.

### **The certainty of these benefits 62:1-9**

It seemed to Isaiah's audience that the promises in chapter 60 could hardly come to pass, since the Babylonian exile was still looming ahead of them. The Lord assured them that He would surely fulfill these promises.

"Much of this chapter speaks of preparation being made for the coming of the Lord and for the restoration of His people, thus expanding the thoughts in 40:3-5, 9."<sup>724</sup>

- 62:1        Evidently God is the speaker (cf. v. 6). Other possibilities are the Servant Messiah (cf. 61:1-3) or Isaiah. Watts believed the speaker was Jerusalem's civil administrator.<sup>725</sup> God assured His people that even though they thought He had been silent to their prayers for deliverance (cf. 42:14; 45:15-19; 57:11; 64:12; 65:6), He would indeed provide righteousness and salvation for them. He would do it for the love of His people, for Zion's sake.
- 62:2        All the Gentiles would see Israel's righteousness and her reflected glory. Her new name, that sovereign Yahweh would give her, would identify the change in her character (cf. Gen. 32:28).
- "So often in the OT a new name (v. 2) is the pledge of divine action to change the status or character of a person (cf., e.g., Gen 17:5, 15[; John 1:42])."<sup>726</sup>
- 62:3        The Lord would make Jerusalem as a beautiful crown—fit for a king—that He would hold securely, safe in His hand.

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<sup>724</sup>J. Martin, p. 1116.

<sup>725</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, pp. 309, 311-12.

<sup>726</sup>Grogan, p. 336.

- 62:4 The new name promised in verse 2 would be Hephzibah (My delight is in her; cf. 2 Kings 21:1) and Beulah (Married). These names would replace former designations of Israel's condition: Azubah (Forsaken; cf. 1 Kings 22:42) and Shemamah (Desolate). These new names would reflect God's delight in His people and His work of uniting them with their land. ("Immanuel" is another symbolic name, but it refers to Messiah; cf. 7:14).
- 62:5 Future generations of Israelites would be married to the Promised Land in the sense that they would not leave it. From a different perspective, the Lord Himself would be Israel's bridegroom and would rejoice over her as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.
- "In all that Israel was to endure, what a source of comfort God's pet name for them: 'My-Delight-Is-in-Her' (v. 4) must have been. It is still true today. When circumstances and failure and blighted hopes combine to convince us that our name is 'Forsaken,' that is the hour to hear the whisper of the Bridegroom to his Bride (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:27; Rev. 21:2, 9), with the name that it is his alone to give and hers alone to hear."<sup>727</sup>
- "The Lord had, as it were, divorced Zion (see 54:5-7), but now he will remarry her (v. 5)."<sup>728</sup>
- 62:6 The Lord revealed that He had appointed watchmen, whose job it was to remind Him of His promises to Israel, so that He would not forget them (cf. 36:3; 2 Sam. 8:16; 1 Kings 4:3; Luke 2:36-38). Obviously the Lord does not forget His promises, but this assurance, in the language of the common practice of the day, underscored the fact that He would not forget. The watchmen in view may be angels and or human intercessors (cf. Ezek. 33; Dan. 4:13; Luke 11:5-10; 18:1-8).
- 62:7 These watchmen were to give the Lord no rest—to keep reminding Him—until He fulfilled what He had promised, namely: making Jerusalem an object of praise in the earth (in the Millennium; cf. Matt. 6:10). Christians who pray "Thy kingdom come" do this today.

"The prophets of the last times, with their zeal in prayer, and in the exercise of their calling as witnesses, form a striking contrast to the blind, dumb, indolent, sleepy hirelings of the prophet's own time (ch. lvi. 10)."<sup>729</sup>

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<sup>727</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, pp. 581-82.

<sup>728</sup>Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 131.

<sup>729</sup>Delitzsch, 2:438.



- 62:8 Not only did the Lord promise that enemies would never again invade the Promised Land and rob His people of their hard-earned food and drink, but He confirmed His promise with an oath. He swore by Himself, the highest authority, specifically: by His right hand that would personally execute His will, and by His strong arm that would powerfully accomplish His plan.
- 62:9 Unlike the days of Gideon (Judg. 6), when the Israelites grew their grain only to have it stolen at harvest time, they would harvest and eat what they had sown. They would drink the wine that they harvested, in the security of the Lord's sanctuary, as an act of worship.

### **The need for faith 62:10-12**

Having learned of the mission of the Anointed One to bring salvation to Israel, and having received promises of benefits that would accompany His salvation, the Israelites needed to believe these promises—in spite of impending exile in Babylon. This pericope concludes the section of Isaiah dealing with the revelation of future glory (chs. 60—62; cf. 40:1-11; 52:1-12).

- 62:10 With now familiar figures for preparing a highway (cf. 7:3; 11:16; 19:23; 33:8; 35:8; 36:2; 49:11; 59:7), Isaiah called on God's people to plan for the fulfillment of the promised redemption, return to the land, and Gentile worship. They should not just wait passively, but should take steps to express and to bolster their faith in these promises. They should march through the gates of Babylon and return to their homeland.
- 62:11 By proclaiming to the end of the earth that Yahweh would save the Israelites, the Lord was guaranteeing that He would do it. This was not just a private promise to Israel but one that the world could anticipate. Here the prophet personified Salvation as coming with the Anointed One. When the Anointed One came, Salvation would come with Him. Salvation would receive a reward from Yahweh for saving His people, as well as compensation, namely: His redeemed people themselves. Consequently everyone needed to get ready.
- 62:12 Then the nations would call the Israelites "the holy people" (in standing and state; cf. Exod. 19:6; Deut. 7:6), "those whom Yahweh had redeemed" (physically and spiritually), and "sought out." They would refer to Jerusalem as "the city that the Lord had not forsaken." In short, Yahweh would restore His people's relationship with Himself.

### **C. RECOGNITION OF DIVINE ABILITY CHS. 63—66**

The third and final subdivision of this last part of the book (chs. 56—66) returns to many of the themes in the first subdivision (chs. 56—59). However, the structure of this subdivision is the mirror opposite of that one.

"Whereas chs. 56—59 begin with a discussion of the foreign converts (56:1-8) and end with a description of the Divine Warrior who battles alone for his people (59:15b-21), this final subdivision (63:1-6) begins with the description of the Divine Warrior (using some of the same language as a previous one), and ends with a treatment of foreign converts (66:18-24). But beyond that, in each case the central section deals with the inability of the people to produce the ethical righteousness called for (56:8—59:15a; 63:7—66:17)."<sup>730</sup>

In chapters 56—59, the major emphasis was on human inability to produce the righteousness that God requires, and the minor emphasis was on God's power to enable humans to live righteously. In chapters 63—66, the opposite pattern of emphases exists. Both sections, of course, flank chapters 60—62, with its emphasis on future eschatological glory.

### **1. God's faithfulness in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness 63:1—65:16**

Isaiah proceeded to glorify the faithfulness of God by painting it against the dark background of Israel's unfaithfulness. Even though people cannot attain righteousness on their own, God makes it available to them through the work of His Servant.

#### **The solitary Warrior 63:1-6**

The Lord explained how Israel could possibly rejoice in the repossession of its homeland, even if such malicious neighbors as the Edomites still surrounded it.

"Having described the exaltation of Zion and her enlargement through the influx of the Gentiles, the prophet turns to describe the destruction of Zion's enemies."<sup>731</sup>

"The oracle is most dramatic. The only OT passage that in any way resembles it is the account of Joshua's encounter with the angelic captain of the Lord's host (Josh. 5:13—6:5). There too, as here, there are two questions and two answers; and there is a similar anxious inquiry: 'Are you for us or for our enemies?'"<sup>732</sup>

63:1            Isaiah described a watchman observing a Warrior coming from the southeast, the direction of Edom (red) and its capital Bozrah (vintage; cf. 52:8). Edom was Israel's perennial enemy, but here it quite clearly represents, by synecdoche, all of Israel's enemies.

"Babylon and Edom are always to be taken literally, so far as the primary meaning of the prophecy is concerned; but they are also representative, Babylon standing for the violent and tyrannical world-power, and Edom for the

<sup>730</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 593.

<sup>731</sup>Young, 3:475.

<sup>732</sup>Grogan, p. 339.

world as cherishing hostility and manifesting hostility to Israel as Israel, *i.e.* as the people of God."<sup>733</sup>

This Warrior was coming to Israel, having defeated Israel's enemies. He was a mighty man, strong and majestic, wearing vivid garments. The Warrior identified Himself as someone who speaks (cf. John 1:1-2, 14). This is the outstanding characteristic of God from Genesis 1:3 to Revelation 21:5. His words were right and His strength was for salvation. Watts viewed this warrior as follows.

He is "a symbol of Persian imperial power fighting Jerusalem's and Yahweh's battles for them. Perhaps he is best thought of as Megabyzus, the redoubtable Persian general who served as satrap of Beyond the River during this period [*i.e.*, the post-exilic period] . . ."<sup>734</sup>

63:2 The watchman asked the Warrior why His garments were red, stained red as when one treads grapes in a winepress (cf. 5:2).

63:3 The Warrior replied that He had indeed been treading grapes, but not literal ones. He had been angry with these "grapes," and their juice had stained His garments. Furthermore, He had trodden them by Himself; no one had assisted Him in His task (cf. 44:24; Rev. 19:13). The blood in this scene is not the blood of the Warrior, but that of the enemies He had slain.

63:4 The Warrior continued to explain that this treading judgment was in order that redemption might come. The day of vengeance had arrived, and He had finally punished evildoers (cf. 61:2). His bloody victory was not due to a temper out of control but was part of the plan of God.

"The work of redemption was accomplished in chapter 53, but from 56:1 onwards the people were called to wait for the promised salvation. The ensuing chapters reveal the need to be rescued from a stressful and hostile environment and from the plague of sin and failure (57:1ff.; 58:1—59:13). Thus, when the Anointed One acts as *mighty to save* (1) and when the 'day of my redeemed' has come, the burden of the activity is the exaction of final vengeance on every foe."<sup>735</sup>

63:5 The Warrior found no one to help Him execute His task, so He did it all by Himself. His own arm accomplished the salvation that resulted from His executing wrath against His enemies (cf. 59:16).

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<sup>733</sup>Delitzsch, 2:444.

<sup>734</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 321.

<sup>735</sup>Motyer, p. 511.

"Verse 5 reminds us of Revelation 5 and the search for someone to open the Book of Destiny, with its revelation of the ultimate judgments. This in fact testifies to the universality of sin."<sup>736</sup>

63:6           The Warrior explained that He had trodden down the people whom He had purposed to judge, and had killed them. He explained that the figure of treading grapes represented putting human beings to death.

This is a picture of Messiah on earth, following His second advent, having defeated Israel's enemies (cf. 52:7-12; Zech. 14:3; Rev. 14:17-20; 16:16; 19:13, 15-21). The enemies are unbelievers living in the Great Tribulation who refuse to accept the Warrior's previous sacrifice of Himself for their sins—hostile enemies of the Israelites (cf. Rev. 12:15-19).

### **The delayed salvation 63:7—64:12**

If the Lord was capable of defeating Israel's enemies, as the previous revelation of the Warrior claimed, why had He not acted for Israel already? This intercessory communal lament explains that delayed salvation was not because of Yahweh's inability or disinterest, but because of Israel's manipulative attitude toward Him. Isaiah's other prayers on Israel's behalf are in 6:11; 25:1-5; 51:9-10; 59:9-15; and 62:1 (cf. 1 Sam. 12:19-25; Jer. 15:1; Amos 7:1-6). Israel's experiences were a result of her relationship with the Lord.

"The Isaianic literature is characterized by a wonderful perception of the future, yet every time we are brought to the point where all seems to be fulfilled we meet a 'not yet'. Chapter 12 sings in joy over the glory of the coming king (chapters 6—11), but chapters 13—27 intervene to remind us of the scale in time and space on which the Lord is working. Again, we trace the work of the Servant to the point where all is done and only the enjoyment of the Messianic banquet remains (chapter 55), and then we discover (56:1) that salvation is still to come. Finally, we reach the sombre [*sic*] but marvellous [*sic*] 63:1-6. Surely now, with the overthrow of every foe, the redeeming work is fully done! But no, the remembrancers take their place on the walls to give the Lord no rest till he fulfils all that is promised."<sup>737</sup>

"The glories of chapters 60—62 and the vision of the decisive action in 63:1-6 stir the prophet to one of the most eloquent intercessions of the Bible as he surveys the past goodness of God and the present straits of his people."<sup>738</sup>

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<sup>736</sup>Grogan, p. 339.

<sup>737</sup>Motyer, p. 512.

<sup>738</sup>Kidner, p. 623.

### The reminiscence 63:7-14

This part of Isaiah's lament consists of a review of Israel's relationship with the Lord (vv. 7-10) and a call for Israel to remember who He is (vv. 11-14).

63:7 The poetic prophet announced that he would reflect on the loyal love (Heb. *hesed*) of Yahweh toward His people Israel. The Lord had been super-abundantly good and compassionate in blessing them.

63:8 God had elected Israel as His son. This was not due to anything in Israel but totally due to God's loving selection of Abraham and his descendants for special blessing (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9-10). God had a right to expect that the nation, so chosen, would respond with loyalty and integrity toward Him. This mutual commitment would have resulted in God delivering His people whenever they needed salvation. Note that the result would not be God insulating the Israelites from difficulties but delivering them from them.

63:9 The Israelites had responded to God's grace in electing them by committing themselves to Him (Exod. 19:8). Consequently, Yahweh had participated in their afflictions with them and rescued His people from them throughout their history.

The identity of "the angel of His presence" is the messenger who came from the Lord's presence to deliver His people. This is the only place in the Bible where this title appears. This may refer to an angel, but it probably refers to the second person of the Trinity, the primary agent of salvation according to the New Testament.

"Verse 9 is one of the most moving expressions of the compassionate love of God in the OT, reminding the reader of some of the great passages in Hosea, Isaiah's older contemporary."<sup>739</sup>

"Just as a man can feel pain, and yet in his personality keep himself superior to it, so God feels pain without His own happiness being thereby destroyed."<sup>740</sup>

63:10 Even though the Israelites pledged themselves to follow the Lord faithfully, they rebelled against Him and so grieved His Holy Spirit. This verse helps us understand what grieving the Holy Spirit involves, namely, rebelling against the Lord (cf. Eph. 4:30). This verse, the next, and Psalm 51:11 are the only places in the Old Testament where "holy" describes God's "Spirit." We offend the holiness of God when we rebel against Him.

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<sup>739</sup>Grogan, p. 342.

<sup>740</sup>Delitzsch, 2:453.

Of course, we also offend His love since we "grieve" or "hurt" Him. Holy behavior is impossible without a will that is compliant rather than rebellious toward God.

"Most commentators recognize that the understanding of the Holy Spirit here and in v. 11 is close to the fully developed NT concept of the third person of the Trinity. Here he is clearly a person who is capable of being hurt by human behavior, and in v. 11 he is the empowering and enabling presence in the human spirit. As Delitzsch says, 'He is the Spirit who is both holy in himself and capable of producing holiness.' In v. 12, although the adjective 'holy' is not used, the same Spirit is the one who guides and provides for the people of God."<sup>741</sup>

However, these verses make perfectly good sense if we read "holy spirit" in place of "Holy Spirit." Yahweh, the angel of His presence, and the Holy Spirit are distinguishable as three persons of the Trinity.

The Israelites' rebellion led God to oppose them by fighting against them, resisting them. It was not God who changed but His people. He consistently resists sin.

63:11 Having experienced the chastening of the Lord for some time, the Israelites then reflected on former times when God had fought *for* His people rather than *against* them. Watts took the questioner to be the preacher of this section.<sup>742</sup> The Exodus is the occasion in view, and Israel's shepherds were Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (cf. Ps. 77:21; Mic. 6:4). Then God's Holy Spirit was obviously among His people.

63:12 Then God had manifested His power through Moses, His right-hand-man in the Exodus. The Lord had divided the waters of the Red Sea and had divided the waters of the Jordan River. He had thereby earned an everlasting reputation among His people and even among the nations.

63:13 He had led them through every obstacle as their deliverer, and made them as sure-footed as a horse traversing open country.

"God's power enables His people to go in confidence and nobility, not being overcome or falling because of any obstacles in the way."<sup>743</sup>

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<sup>741</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, pp. 607-8.

<sup>742</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 332.

<sup>743</sup>Young, 3:486.

63:14 The Lord had also given His people rest in Canaan, as cattle go down into a valley and there find rest and refreshing provisions. He had done all this for them to demonstrate His character to them and to the whole world.

God's commitment to His people had led Him to discipline them for their sins, as well as to deliver them in their need. Consequently a change in Israel's rebellious attitude toward God was the key to their experiencing His blessing again. He did not need to change; they did.

### **The complaint 63:15-19**

Isaiah next appealed to God, on behalf of the nation, to have pity on Israel. The prophet was speaking for the faithful remnant after the exile who found little evidence that God was among them, in the way He had been during the Exodus and wilderness wanderings.

"Isaiah is teaching us how to pray. We don't learn to pray by listening to one another. We learn to pray by reading the Bible."<sup>744</sup>

63:15 Isaiah called on God to condescend to look down from His holy and glorious habitation, heaven, on His miserable chosen people below (cf. 1 Kings 8:44-53). The prophet could see no evidence of His zeal and mighty deeds for them. Even His affection and compassion for them were hidden from view (cf. Ps. 22:1). The poet knew of God's commitment to His people (vv. 7-14), but he saw no evidence of it.

63:16 He reminded God that He was Israel's true Father. Abraham and Israel (Jacob) may have forgotten their children and may have been incapable of helping them, but the Lord had not forgotten and could help. A second basis for appealing for help was that Yahweh had been Israel's Redeemer in the past as well as its Father (cf. vv. 12, 14). Fathers characteristically feel affection and compassion for their children (v. 15), and redeemers (kinsman-redeemers) normally demonstrate zeal and perform mighty deeds for their relatives (v. 15).

63:17 Isaiah, and all Scripture, does not present God as the direct cause of sin, unless this is the only verse in the Bible that does so, and it is not. God allows sin, and He allows people to sin, but He does not make it inevitable that they sin in any given instance of temptation (James 1:13). Isaiah meant that God had caused Israel to sin and had hardened the hearts of the people in a judicial sense (cf. 6:9-13; Rom. 1:18-32). Because they had chosen to continue in sin, He judged them by allowing sin to dominate them. Isaiah wanted to place as much responsibility for the Israelites' condition on God as possible. He had not saved them, so He could be said to have caused them to stray from Him and to harden their hearts. Really Israel had done these things, but because God had allowed it He could be said to be responsible for it.

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<sup>744</sup>Ortlund, p. 429.

"Why do you make us wander from your ways? is not an attempt to lay the blame on the Lord but, in Old Testament thought, a recognition of guilt of such proportions that the Lord could not let it pass but judicially sentenced his people to the consequences of their own choices."<sup>745</sup>

Similarly, Isaiah called on God to return to His people. In actuality, the people needed to return to Him. By asking Him to return to them, Isaiah was asking God to act for them, to step in and deliver them. He strengthened his appeal by referring to Israel as the Lord's "servants" and His "heritage," terms of relationship that God Himself had used to describe His people (cf. 41:9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1; 45:4; Deut. 4:20).

"This is the prayer of intercession, the passionate entering into of the need of those for whom we are praying, and a storming of the gates of heaven with every tool we can use. Why? Because God is callous and uncaring? No, because we are callous and uncaring, and until our passion is in some small way connected to the great passion of God, his power is in some way restrained. This seems almost unimaginable, but the testimony of history and of Scripture is that it is so."<sup>746</sup>

- 63:18 The holy people that the Lord had redeemed were dispossessed following the Exile. They had possessed the temple only briefly. The first temple stood in Jerusalem from about 959-586 B.C. or approximately 374 years. Instead of God treading down Israel's adversaries, those adversaries had trodden down the temple.
- 63:19 The Israelites had become like those nations with whom Yahweh had no special relationship. Isaiah's reason for pursuing this line of argument was to move the Lord to act in salvation for His people, and change their hearts.

#### **The confession 64:1-7**

- 64:1 The prophet called on God to make another appearance among His people, as He had done at Mt. Sinai and at other times (cf. Exod. 19:18-20; Judg. 5; Ps. 18; Mic. 1:3-4; Hab. 3). The Israelites' condition was so desperate that another special visitation from God was what they needed. The next time God did this was at the Incarnation.
- 64:2 Had God appeared, He would have ignited the brushwood of people's lives and brought them to a rolling boil in judgment. Then the nations would know who Yahweh really was, and they would tremble at His presence.

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<sup>745</sup>Motyer, p. 517.

<sup>746</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 614.



64:3 At the Exodus, God had done awesome things that no one had expected. Isaiah wished that instead of remaining quiet, the Lord would do something spectacular again—something that would motivate the Israelites and the nations to respect Him.

"We too who are so often baffled by the way the Lord runs the world can identify with the spirit which wonders why he has acted in some other way—why he has not done something to check evil, change circumstances and people, rescue his own—rather than, as it appears, doing nothing!"<sup>747</sup>

64:4 Isaiah respected Yahweh because he knew who Yahweh was, but so many of his contemporaries were spiritually blind and deaf that they could have profited from a dramatic revelation (cf. Ps. 31:20; Matt. 13:17; 1 Cor. 2:9).

64:5 The prophet knew that God has fellowship with those who practice righteousness and who "remember His ways," i.e., to walk in them. He wondered if there was any hope of Israel being saved, since she had sinned so much for so long, and since this sinning had angered God.

64:6 Israel's sins had thoroughly polluted her and had placed her in an apparently hopeless position (cf. 6:5). Furthermore, she could not stop sinning. Was there any hope for her? She was as unclean as a leper, as repulsive as menstrual cloths, and as spiritually lifeless as a dead leaf on a tree ready to be blown away by more sin.

64:7 Furthermore, none of the Israelites felt concerned enough about their sinful condition to seek the Lord, and to try to lay hold of Him in prayer. This was understandable, since God had hidden Himself from His people; they saw no hope that He would respond, even if they should now pray (cf. 59:16; 63:5).

### **The appeal 64:8-12**

64:8 Yet Isaiah *did* appeal to God for help. He appealed on the basis that Yahweh had brought Israel into existence and was, therefore, responsible for her—regardless of her condition (cf. 63:16). She was just inert clay, but He was the Potter who had formed Israel as the work of His own hands (cf. Jer. 18:1-6; Rom. 9:19-21).

64:9 The prophet pled with God not to be overly angry with Israel and to put the memory of her sins behind Him. God should look on Israel in mercy simply because Israel was Yahweh's chosen people.

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<sup>747</sup>Motyer, p. 519.

- 64:10 Judah lay desolate. Jerusalem was in ruins. The holy cities of the holy God reflected nothing of His greatness.
- 64:11 The holy temple had been burned, and all the precious things associated with Yahweh worship in it were gone. Isaiah was speaking for the Israelites who lived after the Exile had begun. Thus the Israelites were *ashamed* as well as ruined. Would God not do something in view of a situation that reflected so negatively on Him and His promises?
- 64:12 In conclusion, Isaiah asked the Lord if He would restrain Himself from acting in view of all these conditions. One could paraphrase here: "Lord, how can You not do something after all that has happened?" Would He remain silent to His people's prayers and allow their affliction to continue beyond what they could endure? Would He show no compassion?

The next two chapters give the Lord's response to this impassioned prayer of intercession for hopeless Israel.

### **The divine response 65:1-16**

The Lord responded, through the prophet, to the viewpoint expressed in the preceding prayer (63:7—64:12).

"The great mass [of the Israelites] were in that state of 'sin unto death' which defies all intercession (1 John v. 16), because they had so scornfully and obstinately resisted the grace which had been so long and so incessantly offered to them."<sup>748</sup>

### **Superficial righteousness 65:1-7**

- 65:1 God replied that He had been gracious in allowing a nation to call on Him—and to obtain responses from Him—since that nation did not normally pray to Him. The Apostle Paul applied this verse to the Gentiles, people to whom God had responded before they called (cf. Rom. 10:20). This was the "nation" that Isaiah had in view when he originally gave this prophecy.

"To pray in God's name means to submit to him and to pray in terms of his revealed character and will."<sup>749</sup>

- 65:2 The Lord had not hidden His face from the Israelites, but on the contrary, had offered Himself to His people. It was not He who needed to change in His orientation toward them, but they needed to change. They were rebellious and pursued their own agenda (cf. 59:1-2; Rom. 10:21). He was

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<sup>748</sup>Delitzsch, 2:474.

<sup>749</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 342.

not unresponsive. They wanted to have Him on their own terms (cf. 55:6-11).

65:3 The Israelites provoked the Lord by offering their sacrifices in ways that were unacceptable to Him—and then claimed that He was unresponsive to them. Gardens were unauthorized places for sacrificing, and bricks were unauthorized materials for an altar (cf. Exod. 20:25; Deut. 27:5-6; Josh. 8:31).

65:4 The Israelites also engaged in pagan practices that rendered them unclean, and they were not careful to avoid the defilement caused by disregard for God's will. God's standards of discipline and holiness were of no concern to them (cf. Rev. 21:8; 22:15).

*"Sitting in the tombs and lodging between the rocks appear to be rituals of the cult of the dead, that is, necromancy in which one contacts the spirits of the dead by spending the night in the cemeteries."<sup>750</sup>*

65:5 The Israelites' assumption of spiritual superiority over others disgusted the Lord (cf. Matt. 23). Rather than being a pleasing aroma in His nostrils, the smoke of their offerings repulsed Him. Their ceaseless sacrifices were a needless burning instead of pleasing acts of worship.

In this whole pericope, Isaiah was speaking in the Lord's behalf about the Israelites who felt that their rituals of worship should have resulted in God's blessing, or at least His responding to them when they prayed. They failed to appreciate that God dictates how people should worship Him because He is God. They felt that because they worshipped Him *on their terms*, He should respond as they demanded, even though they worshipped Him in unacceptable ways.

65:6 The Lord announced that judgment was sure and inescapable. The people had demanded that He speak, but they did not appreciate that when He spoke, His word would be a word of judgment, not a word of deliverance. His repayment would go to the very center of their lives.

65:7 Repayment would be for the sins of all His people, since dependence on cultic righteousness had long been their sin. They had heaped up guilt from generation to generation, and failure to break with the past resulted in their having to accept the inheritance of the past. They had worshipped Yahweh at mountain shrines for a long time, and this amounted to scorning, not worshipping, the Lord. He would, therefore, pay them back in measure for their sins.

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<sup>750</sup>Ibid., p. 343.

"If they gave a little more attention to the real character of their religion, they might be less hasty in begging him to split the heavens and come down."<sup>751</sup>

The Israelites had prayed for God to deliver them, but He explained that if He did respond it would be with punishment rather than deliverance.

### Consistent faithfulness 65:8-16

The Lord proceeded to explain that even though He would destroy the ungodly, He would also spare the truly godly among His people (cf. Gen. 18:23-25).

65:8 Yahweh promised not to destroy the whole nation (cluster of grapes), but just the sinners among them (the bad grapes). The whole nation constituted His servants, but most of them were unprofitable servants.

"Reading chs. 40—55 alone might give one the impression that all that is necessary to be part of the remnant is to believe God's promises to deliver. Chs. 56—66 make plain that those who are truly the servants of God are those who believe his promises enough to obey his covenant."<sup>752</sup>

65:9 God would preserve a godly remnant from among His people who would inherit His promises to the patriarchs concerning His land and kingdom. Messiah was one of these descendants (cf. Mic. 5:2) but not the only one.

65:10 The faithful who truly sought the Lord would inhabit the fertile western coastal plain and the barren eastern area west of Jericho, in other words, the whole land. Some interpreters regard both the Sharon and the valley of Achor as favorite places in Palestine.<sup>753</sup> Those who sought the Lord were not necessarily those who engaged in religious activity but those who obeyed His covenant requirements.

65:11 In contrast to these faithful were those who forsook the Lord, who forgot Jerusalem as the specified place of His worship, and who participated in ritual meals to the gods Fortune and Destiny (cf. 1 Cor. 10:21-22). Isaiah was using examples of idolatry that were present in his generation of Israelites to represent the idolatry that would exist after the exile. "Fortune" (Heb. *gd*) was an Aramean god (cf. Josh. 11:17; 15:37), and "Destiny" (Heb. *mny*) means "apportionment (of fate)" and may have a connection with the goddess "Manat" of Arabian mythology.<sup>754</sup> These may have been what became identified later with the planets Jupiter ("the greater luck") and Venus ("the lesser luck"), or with the sun and moon.<sup>755</sup>

<sup>751</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 641.

<sup>752</sup>Ibid., p. 646.

<sup>753</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 344.

<sup>754</sup>Young, 3:509.

<sup>755</sup>Delitzsch, 2:483-85.

- 65:12 These Israelite hypocrites would be the objects of His judgment because when *He* had called, *they* had not responded with obedience (cf. 64:12). Far from controlling their own fortune and destiny, Yahweh would control it. They had chosen the things in which the Lord did not delight—they had rebelled—so He would bring discipline on them (cf. Matt. 22:7; 23:37; Luke 19:27; Acts 13:46).
- 65:13-14 The Sovereign Lord's true servants, those in Israel who obeyed His covenant, would enjoy blessings of body and spirit, all types of blessings, whereas those who rebelled would experience all types of curses.
- 65:15-16 The reputation (name) of the rebellious Israelites would remain as a curse to all the Israelites, and Sovereign Yahweh would slay them. This is not a replacement of all Israel by the church, but a replacement of all who depended on formal worship for their relationship with God by those who genuinely loved and obeyed God. But those who faithfully served the Lord by keeping His covenant would have another reputation, namely, the reputation of the God of *truth* (lit. amen). People would bless and swear by *this God*, whom the "godly" served. Their godly conduct would testify to their solidarity with Him. In contrast to those whom He would slay (v. 15), the faithful would be those whom He had forgiven.

## **2. The culmination of Israel's future 65:17—66:24**

As the book opened with an emphasis on judgment (chs. 1—5), so it closes with an emphasis on hope (65:17—66:24). Amid judgment, Israel could have hope. References to "new heavens" and a "new earth" form an *inclusio* for this final section of the book (65:17; 66:22).

### **New heavens and a new earth 65:17-25**

God not only will be faithful to His promises in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness (63:1—65:16), but He will demonstrate His ability and desire to provide righteousness for sinful humankind by creating new heavens and a new earth. Most of this section describes God's renovation of creation during the Millennium.

"The prophets sometimes saw future events not only *together*; but in expanding their description of these events, they seem occasionally to *reverse* the time sequence in their record of the vision. An example of this may be seen in Isaiah 65:17-25, which opens with a divine announcement: 'For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.' Then follows a remarkable picture of millennial bliss which clearly is *on earth*. . . . It is apparent, therefore, that Isaiah saw *together* on the screen of prophecy both the Millennial Kingdom and the Eternal Kingdom; but he expands in detail the former because it is the 'nearest-coming' event and leaves the latter for fuller description in a later New Testament revelation."<sup>756</sup>

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<sup>756</sup>McClain, p. 138.

65:17 This verse is an overview of what follows. God announced, in substantiation of everything He had said since 56:1, that He would create a restored and renovated universe (cf. Gen. 1:1). Things will be so much better than they are now that people then will not even think about things as they used to be (cf. Rom. 6:14; Rev. 21:4). This should motivate God's people to obey Him in the present. Not only would God perform another Exodus, bringing Israel out of Babylon and into the Promised Land, but He would also create another Creation. Watts, who understood chapters 40—66 of Isaiah to refer only to the Jews' return to Palestine following the Exile, believed that the renovation in view is not eschatological or worldwide but restricted to Jerusalem and Judah.<sup>757</sup>

Isaiah described the future in general terms as "a new heaven and a new earth." In the New Testament, we have further particularization of what this will involve: the making of all things new for those in Christ presently (Gal. 2:20), the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:4-6), and the "eternal state" (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). Thus Isaiah's use of "new heavens and a new earth" is not identical with the Apostle John's (Rev. 21:1). What Isaiah wrote about this new creation is true of various segments of it at various stages in the future; it is not all a description of what John identified as "new heavens and a new earth," namely: the eternal state.

"The establishment of the Mediatorial Kingdom on earth will bring about sweeping and radical changes in every department of human activity; so far reaching that Isaiah speaks of its arena as 'a new earth' (65:17)."<sup>758</sup>

"The designation **new heavens and a new earth** is applied to the Millennial kingdom only as a stage preliminary to the eternal glories of heaven (the New Jerusalem of Rev 21; 22)—just as Pentecost was to be regarded (Acts 2:17) as ushering in the 'last days,' although it occurred at least nineteen centuries before the Second Advent."<sup>759</sup>

65:18 This new creation is a cause for ceaseless hope and rejoicing among God's people. The New Jerusalem would be a place of rejoicing, in contrast to present mourning, and its people would be eternally happy (cf. Rev. 21:9—22:5).

65:19 God Himself would also rejoice in the new city and in the new people in that new city. Isaiah wrote many times that God presently lamented over old Jerusalem and her inhabitants (e.g., 24:7-12). Weeping and crying would end in that new city (Rev. 21:4).

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<sup>757</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 354.

<sup>758</sup>McClain, p. 217.

<sup>759</sup>Archer, p. 653.

65:20 Specifically, death will not have the power that it has had. Infant mortality will be virtually unknown, and people's life-spans will be much longer. This seems to describe a return to conditions before the Flood, when people lived hundreds of years (Gen. 5). In short, one of the sources of sorrow and weeping, namely, Death, will suffer defeat. Christians need not fear the second death even now. Believers alive in the Millennium will live longer on this earth than they do now, but they will die.<sup>760</sup> And in the eternal state, even physical death will be gone.

". . . verse 20 expresses a double thought: death will have no more power and sin no more presence."<sup>761</sup>

"This prediction requires the conditions of an earthly city, where babies are born and older people die (even though the average lifespan is to be much prolonged)."<sup>762</sup>

65:21-22 Likewise there will be abundant safety and plenty when God brings new life to the world (cf. 17:11; Lev. 26:16; Deut. 28:15-46; Amos 5:11; Zeph. 1:13). Again, people will live longer: longer than God's other creations such as trees, and longer than their own "creations," such as buildings and bridges that normally outlive them (cf. 40:6-8).

"What a promise, to have the time to do something right and then the opportunity to enjoy it to the full!"<sup>763</sup>

Note that people will continue to work. The blessing of work will characterize the messianic age, though people will not have to labor as they did under the curse (Gen. 3:17-19).

". . . suffering in this fallen world does not last forever in God's plan."<sup>764</sup>

65:23 Life will not be futile or frustrating, labor will amount to something, and children will be born for productive lives rather than for tragedy. This is true in one sense for the Christian now (cf. Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 15:58), but it will be true in a larger sense for all the redeemed in the future. Isaiah identified three generations of the blessed of the Lord in this glorious future state. This reflects the truth that the basic unit of society is the male and female couple, not the individual (cf. Gen. 2:18, 23-24).

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<sup>760</sup>See Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "The Future for Israel in God's Plan," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, p. 175.

<sup>761</sup>Motyer, p. 530.

<sup>762</sup>Archer, p. 653.

<sup>763</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 660.

<sup>764</sup>Bramer, p. 151.

65:24 Perfect communication with God will be another blessing of this peaceable kingdom. Christians already enjoy good communication with Him (Matt. 6:8; 1 John 5:14-15), but in the future it will be even better.

"What greater privilege than to have a God whose love is so great that He answers before one calls to Him!"<sup>765</sup>

65:25 Another cause of present weeping that will end is nature, which is sometimes harmful. In the future, it will not be harmful because the effects of the Fall will have been erased. Nature will no longer be man's enemy. The Lord's curse on the snake, which has only been fulfilled figuratively so far—snakes do not literally feed on dust now but on plants and animals—will find complete fulfillment (cf. Gen. 3:14). Chisholm believed that Isaiah was not alluding to Genesis 3:14 here but was simply using the serpent as another illustration of an animal that formerly posed a danger but would not in the future.<sup>766</sup> This verse is a hint that the change will come because of the "seed of the woman" described earlier in Isaiah as the Servant, Messiah (cf. 11:6-9).

"The only point in the whole of the new creation where there is no change (cf. verse 20fg [*sic*]) is in the curse pronounced on sin, which still stands (cf. Gn. 3:14)."<sup>767</sup>

No evil or harm will come to anyone or anything in all God's holy kingdom (cf. 66:22). Watts interpreted this change as indicating only the absence of violence that would follow the Jews' return to their land after the Exile.<sup>768</sup> However, this is hardly the picture of life in Jerusalem and Judah that the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah paint.

"But to what part of the history of salvation are we to look for a place for the fulfillment of such prophecies as these of the state of peace prevailing in nature around the church, except in the millennium?"<sup>769</sup>

Delitzsch believed in an earthly Millennium. He distinguished himself from "anti-millenarians" and "antichiliasts."<sup>770</sup> But he also believed that some of the prophecies regarding Israel's future blessings have found fulfillment in the church, whereas some will yet find fulfillment in Israel.

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<sup>765</sup>Young, 3:517.

<sup>766</sup>Chisholm, *A Theology . . .*, pp. 337-38, and *Handbok on . . .*, p. 136. See also the note on this verse in *The NET (New English Translation) Bible*.

<sup>767</sup>Motyer, p. 531.

<sup>768</sup>Watts, *Isaiah 34—66*, p. 355.

<sup>769</sup>Delitzsch, 2:491-92.

<sup>770</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:492.



Isaiah revealed several new things for Jerusalem in this section. Joy would replace weeping and crying (vv. 18-19). Longevity would replace sorrow and death (vv. 20-23). Answered prayer would replace God's previous silence (v. 24). And universal peace would replace violence (v. 25).<sup>771</sup>

The kingdom in view in this passage, and in chapter 66, is not just the millennial kingdom. It is the kingdom that God will bring into existence through the redemptive work of His Servant. Since the King has come, some features of this kingdom are present in the world today. But since the King has yet to come to accomplish fully His work of redemption, many features described here will be seen after His second advent. Part of these changes will take place on this earth during the Millennium. Other changes will happen when the Lord creates completely new heavens and a new earth (Rev. 21:1). How do we know that all that Isaiah predicted is not fulfilled in the present age through the church, or in the Millennium, or in the eternal state? The New Testament provides a more specific description of which of these promises will be fulfilled when and in what ways.

"The prophet appears, therefore, to refer to that Jerusalem, which is represented in the Apocalypse as coming down from heaven to earth after the transformation of the globe. But to this it may be replied, that the Old Testament prophet was not yet able to distinguish from one another the things which the author of the Apocalypse separates into distinct periods."<sup>772</sup>

### **Humility rather than sacrifice 66:1-6**

This section introduces judgment into the mood of hope that pervades this section describing Israel's glorious future (65:17—66:24). Oppressors of the godly remnant will not prosper, nor will those who depend on externals for their relationship to God.

66:1-2      Yahweh reminded His people that He is sovereign over His universe (cf. 65:17). They should not assign too much importance to the temple and its service, since they built the temple for God (cf. 2 Sam. 7:4-14; 1 Kings 8:27; Ps. 11:4; 103:19; Jer. 7:12-14; 23:24; Matt. 5:34-35). It was a symbol of Him. They should consider more important that He had created all things Himself (cf. Acts 7:48-50). It is people who are not self-assertive or preoccupied with their own rights, but rather who delight in the Lord's Word, that He favors (cf. Exod. 20:18-21; Luke 18:9-14; 23:39-43).

"If cult is performed to curry favor with God, to satisfy God's supposed needs, and thereby get something for ourselves from him, we should shut the doors of the temple at once and abandon the whole thing. But if our attitude in worship is the opposite of such arrogance as to think we can do something for God, and is instead the humble recognition that we can do nothing either for or to him (*afflicted*), the awareness that we deserve nothing but

<sup>771</sup>Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, p. 585.

<sup>772</sup>Delitzsch, 2:492-93.

destruction from him (*broken in spirit*), and the desire to do nothing other than what he commands (*trembles at my word*), then the expression of such a spirit through the medium of ritual and symbolic worship is entirely pleasing to God."<sup>773</sup>

"The Lord's priority is the individual who has a trembling reverence for his word."<sup>774</sup>

66:3-4 The person who relies on ritual to satisfy God is repulsive to Him. The Lord regards the slaying of sacrifices by such a person as no better than murder. There is no difference to Him between the sacrifice of an acceptable lamb or an unclean dog when a person relies on ritual. A grain offering can be as abominable to Him as offering a swine's blood. Burning incense with such an attitude is just pagan worship (cf. 43:23-24; Jer. 7:21-22; Amos 5:21-25; Mic. 6:6-8; Mal. 1:10; Matt. 23:27).

"The most sacred exercises of true God-given religion are like the worst of sins when they are divorced from humility of spirit."<sup>775</sup>

Such worshippers chose to worship God as they pleased rather than as He pleased, so He would deal with them as He pleased, not as they pleased. He would do this because they proved unresponsive to His words and insensitive to His desires.

66:5 The Lord addressed the faithful who *did* tremble at His Word (v. 2). He would put to shame their ritualistic brethren, who hated them for their reality and excluded them for emphasizing genuineness. Those who obeyed God's Word would find great joy and comfort in that Word.

These two groups of Israelites emerged conspicuously following the return from exile, but they also existed in Isaiah's day (cf. 5:19; Luke 6:22; John 16:2). One group worshipped God for His sake, and the other for their own benefit. The ritualists challenged the "spiritual" to find their joy in the Lord, while not really believing—they themselves—that obedience was the key to that joy. God promised that as they had shamed their spiritually sensitive brethren, so He would shame them in the end.

66:6 God would intervene with a word announcing and effecting judgment. The superficial worshippers had called for God to act (v. 5), and He would. They had called on Him to give them the comfort they thought He owed them (cf. 57:18). He would give them what they deserved, but it would be judgment rather than comfort. These were enemies of His, not His true worshippers.

<sup>773</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 667.

<sup>774</sup>Motyer, p. 532. Cf. Ortlund, p. 449.

<sup>775</sup>Grogan, p. 352.

### The future glories of Jerusalem 66:7-14

The mood now reverts back to hope (cf. 65:17-25). In contrast to all the bereavement and deprivation that Jerusalem had experienced and would yet experience (cf. 26:16-18; 37:3; 51:18-20), the ultimate future of the city and its inhabitants remained bright.

66:7 The subject of this prophecy is Zion (v. 8). Isaiah pictured Zion as a pregnant woman giving birth to a baby, without any pain. She would give birth to a boy before she began experiencing labor pains. This is, of course, the opposite of what usually happens. This may be a prophecy of Messiah's appearing (the Rapture) before the Tribulation (the pain), the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7; cf. Gen. 3:16).<sup>776</sup> It may also be a prediction of joy and delight coming to Zion in the future. However, in light of the next verse, it seems that the boy is the nation of Israel (cf. Rev. 12:1-2).

"Israel's return to the land will be so remarkably quick that it will be like a woman giving birth to a son before (v. 7) or as soon as (v. 8) she has any labor . . . pains."<sup>777</sup>

66:8 Such a reverse order of things seems incredible. Nevertheless, Israel would come (back) into existence quickly and painlessly. This would be a supernatural work of God. It will happen at Messiah's second advent. He will recreate Israel as a nation after Antichrist and the combined Gentile nations of the world have sought to destroy her (cf. Dan. 11:40-45; Rev. 12). However, the whole rebirth of Israel from the Exile to the Millennium may have been in the prophet's vision. Similarly, he saw the entire re-creation of the earth as a completely new planet (65:17-25).

66:9 God promised to bring the nation of Israel to birth. Her emergence as a nation in the future might appear impossible, but Yahweh would accomplish it (cf. Zech. 12:10; 13:1; Rom. 11:26).

"Political Israel was born on May 14, 1948, but 'the new Israel' will be 'born in a day' when they believe on Jesus Christ."<sup>778</sup>

66:10 God called Jerusalem's friends to rejoice with her at the prospect of her bearing a nation in the future. God would do for Jerusalem what He had done for Sarah and Abraham. He would give her a supernatural birth. Jerusalem's friends had formerly mourned her condition because God had called her enemies to trample her down (cf. 5:5-6; 49:19) and because she could not be righteous in herself (cf. 57:18; 59:9-15a). Young believed it

<sup>776</sup>*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 768.

<sup>777</sup>J. Martin, p. 1120.

<sup>778</sup>Wiersbe, p. 71.

was only the believing remnant that God would bless, not the whole nation.<sup>779</sup> This is a typical amillennial interpretation.

66:11 As a new mother, Jerusalem would be able to nourish her newborn. The city would supply the needs of her inhabitants and would comfort them with contentment and fulfillment (cf. v. 13; 40:1). The godly would draw strength from Jerusalem in the future.

66:12 The Lord would extend peace (Heb. *shalom*) to Israel as a constantly flowing river. He would bring glory from the nations to her, glory that she had sought in the wrong ways in the past, and Israel would enjoy preferential treatment from Him.

66:13 God would comfort Israel—as a mother comforts her child—by tenderly showering Jerusalem with blessing.

"Isaiah changes the figure. Not only as children sucking the mother's breast does God comfort His people, but also as a mother comforts her grown son."<sup>780</sup>

66:14 The result would be that God's people would see His supernatural work, would rejoice in it, and would receive strength from observing it. His servants, the godly among His people, would appreciate that God Himself had revived Israel. But He would punish His enemies.

### **Worship or destruction 66:15-24**

This pericope concludes the sections on the culmination of Israel's future (65:17—66:24), Israel's future transformation (chs. 56—66), Israel's hope (chs. 40—66), and the whole book—Yahweh's salvation. Like 56:1-8, it clarifies the difference between being a true servant of the Lord and one of His enemies, i.e., a rebel.<sup>781</sup>

"God does not deliver his servants so that they can revel in the experience of sharing his glory (cf. chs. 60—62). Rather, he delivers them so that they can be witnesses of that glory to the world (cf. 6:1-10). . . . This book is not about the vindication of Zion, but about the mission of Zion to declare the God whose glory fills the earth (6:3; 66:18) to all the inhabitants of that earth (12:4; 51:5; 60:9; 66:19)."<sup>782</sup>

66:15 Yahweh "coming with fire and in chariots like whirlwinds" is a picture of Him coming in judgment against His enemies (v. 14; cf. Zech. 14:3).

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<sup>779</sup>Young, 3:525.

<sup>780</sup>Ibid., 3:527.

<sup>781</sup>See Gary V. Smith, "Isaiah 65—66: The Destiny of God's Servants in a New Creation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:681 (January-March 2014):42-51.

<sup>782</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 684.

- 66:16 The judgment in view in verses 15-17 seems to be the one that will take place when Messiah returns to the earth (cf. Zeph. 2:12; Matt. 24:22; Mark 9:49; 13:19-20; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 19:11-21).
- "Perhaps it is justifiable to say that in the world of nature God judges through fire and in history through the sword, but too sharp a distinction must not be made."<sup>783</sup>
- 66:17 Those who pursue ritualistic idolatry then (cf. 65:3), and follow the false prophet of that day, will come to their final end (cf. Rev. 13:11-18; 14:14-20; 19:17-19).
- ". . . when people cease to heed the word of revelation, it is not that they then believe nothing but that they will believe anything—gardens, pigs, and rats included."<sup>784</sup>
- 66:18 The Lord knows the works and thoughts of rebels against His will, and He will assemble them all to witness a display of His glory. At Babel, humankind assembled to display its own glory (Gen. 11:1-9), but God will bring all the rebels together to witness His glory. The church's preaching of the gospel is hardly the fulfillment in view. It is rather the return of Christ to the earth and the judgment of the nations then (cf. Matt. 25:32).
- "Vv. 18-24 have a close affinity with Zech. 12—14, so much so that one could consider the Zechariah passage to be an expansion on these verses in Isaiah."<sup>785</sup>
- "In New Testament perspective, this final section [vv. 18-24] spans the first and second comings of the Lord Jesus Christ: his purpose for the world (18), his means of carrying it out (19-21), the *sign* set among the nations, the remnant sent to evangelize them (19) and the gathering of his people to 'Jerusalem' (20) with Gentiles in full membership (21)."<sup>786</sup>
- 66:19 God promised to set a sign among His people (cf. Exod. 10:2; Ps. 78:43), the Israelites. This probably refers to the Cross, which He would raise up before He brought judgment on the world at the second advent. Young took the sign to be "the whole wondrous series of events that occurred when the ancient Jewish nation was cast off and the Church of Jesus Christ founded."<sup>787</sup> Then the Lord would send survivors of His people among the nations to proclaim His glory. This may refer to the 144,000 Jewish missionaries that God will send throughout the earth during the

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<sup>783</sup>Young, 3:530.

<sup>784</sup>Motyer, p. 540.

<sup>785</sup>Oswalt, *The Book . . . 40—66*, p. 687.

<sup>786</sup>Motyer, p. 540.

<sup>787</sup>Young, 3:532.

Tribulation (cf. Rev. 7:1-8; 15:1-4). The nations mentioned include Tarshish (Spain), Put (Libya), Lud (either western Turkey or an African tribe), Meshech (archers?), Rosh (Russia), Tubal (eastern Turkey), and Javan (Greece). Scholars dispute some of these identifications. The point is that this message will go to the farthest reaches of the earth (cf. Rom. 11:25).

66:20 The message having gone out, the Gentiles will escort the Israelites back to the Promised Land—and the holy city of Jerusalem—as a thank offering to the Lord (cf. Zech. 8:23; John 11:52). Evidently many Israelites will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ during the Tribulation and will return to their ancient homeland to worship Him (cf. 11:10-16). Jews will evangelize Gentiles (v. 19), and Gentiles will evangelize Jews.

"The only offering brought in a container was the firstfruits (Dt. 26:2). The converts of the nations come as the firstfruits of the harvest of the world—not a token of what will yet come but as that which is notably holy and peculiarly the Lord's."<sup>788</sup>

66:21 Evidently the Lord will "take" some of these converted Gentiles and make them leaders in His worship (cf. 56:5-6). He would accept Gentile believers as freely as Israelite believers, and would bless them with equal privilege in His service.

". . . all the nations will in fact be blessed through Israel (cf. Gen. 12:3)."<sup>789</sup>

66:22 Just as surely as God would create new heavens and a new earth (cf. 65:17), so He would preserve the Israelites (cf. 1:2; Gen. 12:1-3).

66:23 In the future, all people left alive after the Lord's judgments—Israelites and Gentiles—will worship Him continually in the New Jerusalem (cf. chs. 25—26; Zech. 14:16-21).

66:24 The worshippers would be able to view the corpses of those whom the Lord will judge. This probably includes those killed in the battle of Armageddon and those sentenced to eternal damnation. The picture is of Jerusalem-dwellers going outside the city to the Hinnom Valley, where garbage and corpses burned constantly, and where worms (corruption) and fire (holy wrath) were always working (cf. Matt. 5:22; Mark 9:43; Luke 12:5). As those who worship God rejoice before Him perpetually, so those who rebel against Him will die perpetually (cf. Matt. 25:46).

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<sup>788</sup>Motyer, p. 542.

<sup>789</sup>J. Martin, p. 1121.

"Perhaps the most enduring lessons from the Book of Isaiah are the reminders that (a) there is a God, (b) He is coming back, and (c) our eternal destiny is determined by our response to Him in this life."<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>790</sup>Dyer, in *The Old . . .*, p. 587.

## Conclusion

I would say that the theme of Isaiah is the salvation of God. It has been called "the Gospel according to Isaiah" because in it the good news of eternal salvation, not just national restoration, is clear and appealing. The *need* for salvation is also clear, as is the divine *provision* of salvation in justification, sanctification, and glorification. The agent of God's provision of salvation in all its aspects is the Servant of the Lord. People have come to salvation through passages in Isaiah alone (e.g., 1:18; 44:22; 45:22; ch. 53; 64:6). Isaiah, then, is very similar to Romans in its emphasis on salvation.

Here is a summary of what Isaiah predicted about the coming Messiah. He would possess both human and divine natures. He would be virgin born. He would conduct an earthly ministry. He would perform miracles. He would die, and He would die as a substitute sacrifice for humanity. He would rise from the dead. He would intercede with God for needy human beings. His career would include both suffering and glory. Isaiah also clarified His relationships to Israel, the nations, creation, war, peace, and world government. The Book of Isaiah provides unusually great insight into the person and work of Christ, compared to other Old Testament books.

Isaiah's writing style is the highest in Hebrew literature. The book is mentioned at least 80 times in the New Testament, second only to the Psalms in frequency. Isaiah arranged his prophecies basically chronologically, but also thematically. The book touches all the major doctrines of the Bible except the church. The unity of the book is the main question among critics of it. The prophet also strongly stressed the importance of holiness (personal righteousness) in our lives. And the book provides a plan of salvation that is especially effective with Jewish people, in view of its emphasis on the salvation that God provides.



## Appendix 1

### The Old Testament Writing Prophets by century B.C.

| <i>Century</i> | <i>Israel</i> | <i>Judah</i>                      | <i>Foreign</i>    |
|----------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Ninth</b>   | Joel          |                                   | Obadiah           |
| <b>Eighth</b>  | Amos<br>Hosea | Micah<br>Isaiah                   | Jonah             |
| <b>Seventh</b> |               | Zephaniah<br>Jeremiah<br>Habakkuk | Nahum             |
| <b>Sixth</b>   |               | Haggai<br>Zechariah               | Ezekiel<br>Daniel |
| <b>Fifth</b>   |               | Malachi                           |                   |

## Appendix 2

**The Old Testament Writing Prophets**  
(in probable chronological order)

| Time periods | Empire periods | Prophets         | Dates | Homes   | Destinations      | Kings  | Scriptures                        |
|--------------|----------------|------------------|-------|---------|-------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Pre-exilic   | Assyrian       | <b>Obadiah</b>   | 845   | Judah?  | Edom              | Jehoram  |                                   |
| Pre-exilic   | Assyrian       | <b>Joel</b>      | 835   | Judah?  | Judah             | Joash  |                                   |
| Pre-exilic   | Assyrian       | <b>Jonah</b>     | 780   | Israel  | Nineveh & Israel  | Jeroboam II  |                                   |
| Pre-exilic   | Assyrian       | <b>Hosea</b>     | 760   | Israel  | Israel            | Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Jeroboam II                                | Hos. 1:1                          |
| Pre-exilic   | Assyrian       | <b>Amos</b>      | 760   | Judah   | Israel            | Uzziah, Jeroboam II  | Amos 1:1                          |
| Pre-exilic   | Assyrian       | <b>Isaiah</b>    | 740   | Judah   | Judah & Jerusalem | Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah   | Isa. 1:1                          |
| Pre-exilic   | Assyrian       | <b>Micah</b>     | 735   | Judah   | Judah             | Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah   | Mic. 1:1                          |
| Pre-exilic   | Assyrian       | <b>Nahum</b>     | 655   | Judah   | Nineveh & Israel  | Manasseh   |                                   |
| Pre-exilic   | Babylonian     | <b>Zephaniah</b> | 630   | Judah   | Judah             | Josiah   | Zeph. 1:1                         |
| Pre-exilic   | Babylonian     | <b>Jeremiah</b>  | 625   | Judah   | Judah             | Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah                          | Jer. 1:2-3                        |
| Pre-exilic   | Babylonian     | <b>Habakkuk</b>  | 605   | Judah   | Chaldea & Judah   | Jehoiakim  |                                   |
| Exilic       | Babylonian     | <b>Ezekiel</b>   | 593   | Babylon | Babylon (Jewish)  | Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar   | Ezek. 1:1-3                       |
| Exilic       | Babylonian     | <b>Daniel</b>    | 535   | Babylon | Babylon (Gentile) | Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, Cyrus | Dan. 1:1-2; 5:1, 30-31; 6:1; 10:1 |
| Post-exilic  | Persian        | <b>Haggai</b>    | 520   | Judah   | Judah             | Darius   | Hag. 1:1                          |
| Post-exilic  | Persian        | <b>Zechariah</b> | 520   | Judah   | Judah             | Darius   | Zech. 1:1                         |
| Post-exilic  | Persian        | <b>Malachi</b>   | 432   | Judah   | Judah             | Artaxerxes   |                                   |

## Appendix 3

### Dates of the Rulers of Judah and Israel

Adapted from Edwin R. Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings*, p. 75.

| <b>Judah</b>                        | <b>Israel</b>                                   |         |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------|
| Rehoboam                            | <i>Jeroboam I</i>                               | 930-913 |
| Abijah                              | Nadab   | 913-910 |
| Asa                                 | <i>Baasha</i>                                   | 910-869 |
| Jehoshaphat, coregency with Asa     | Elah  | 872-869 |
| Jehoshaphat, total reign            | <i>Zimri</i>                                    | 872-848 |
| Jehoram, coregency with Jehoshaphat | Tibni   | 853-848 |
| Jehoram, total reign                | <i>Omri, overlap with Tibni</i>                 | 853-841 |
| Ahaziah                             | Ahab  | 841     |
| Athaliah                            | Ahaziah   | 841-835 |
| Jehoash                             | Jehoram   | 835-796 |
| Amaziah                             | <i>Jehu</i>                                     | 796-767 |
| Azariah, overlap with Amaziah       | Jehoahaz  | 792-767 |
| Azariah, total reign                | Joash   | 792-740 |
| Jotham, coregency with Azariah      | Jeroboam II, coregency with Jehoash             | 750-740 |
| Jotham, official reign              | Jeroboam II, total reign                        | 750-735 |
| Jotham, total years                 | Zechariah                                       | 750-732 |
| Ahaz, overlap with Jotham           | <i>Shallum</i>                                  | 735-732 |
| Ahaz, official years                | <i>Menahem, overlap with Pekah</i>              | 732-715 |
| Hezekiah                            | <i>Pekah, overlap with Menahem and Pekahiah</i> | 715-686 |
| Manasseh, coregency                 | <i>Pekahiah, overlap with Pekah</i>             | 697-686 |
| Manasseh, total reign               | <i>Hosea</i>                                    | 697-642 |
| Amon                                |   | 642-640 |
| Josiah                              |   | 640-609 |
| Jehoahaz                            |   | 609     |
| Jehoiakim                           |   | 609-598 |
| Jehoiachin                          |   | 598-597 |
| Zedekiah                            |   | 597-586 |

The rulers in italics above began new dynasties.

## Appendix 4

### Some Figures of Speech in Scripture

| <b>Figure</b>    | <b>Definition</b>  | <b>Example</b>  |
|------------------|--|---|
| <b>Hendiadys</b> | the expression of a single complex idea by joining two substantives with "and" rather than by using an adjective and a substantive | "the sacrifice and service of your faith" = the sacrificial service of your faith             |
| <b>Hyperbole</b> | overstatement for the sake of emphasis   | cut off your hand if it causes you to stumble = deal radically with instruments of temptation |
| <b>Litotes</b>   | the statement of a negative to stress its positive opposite  | "no small thing" = a very large thing   |
| <b>Merism</b>    | the identification of two extremes to represent the whole  | "heaven and earth" = the universe   |
| <b>Metaphor</b>  | a comparison in which one thing is likened to a different thing by being spoken of as if it were that other                        | "All the world is a stage."   |
| <b>Metonymy</b>  | the use of the name of one thing for that of another associated with or suggested by it  | "Jerusalem" = Israel; "the White House has decided" = "the President has decided"             |

|                        |  |  |
|------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Oxymoron</b>        | the joining of contradictory or incongruous terms to make a point                                | "an hour is coming and now is" = what will characterize the future is present even now |
| <b>Personification</b> | attributing the qualities of a person to an inanimate object                                     | "the stones would cry out"   |
| <b>Polarization</b>    | expressing the extremes to highlight the difference between them                                 | "as far as the east is from the west" = a very great distance                          |
| <b>Simile</b>          | a comparison in which one thing is likened to a different thing by the use of "like," "as," etc. | a heart as big as a whale  |
| <b>Synecdoche</b>      | the use of the whole to represent a part of it, or the use of a part to represent the whole      | "all the world" = all the Roman world, or "bread" = "food"                             |

## Appendix 5

Aspects of God's person and work that the prophets reveal

Isaiah: the *holiness* of God

Jeremiah: the *judgment* of God

Lamentations: the *sorrow* of God

Ezekiel: the *glory* of God

Daniel: the *sovereignty* of God

Hosea: the *love* of God

Joel: the *severity* of God

Amos: the *righteousness* of God

Obadiah: the *justice* of God

Jonah: the *compassion* of God

Micah: the *leadership* of God

Nahum: the *wrath* of God

Habakkuk: the *trustworthiness* of God

Zephaniah: the *day* of God

Haggai: the *zeal* of God

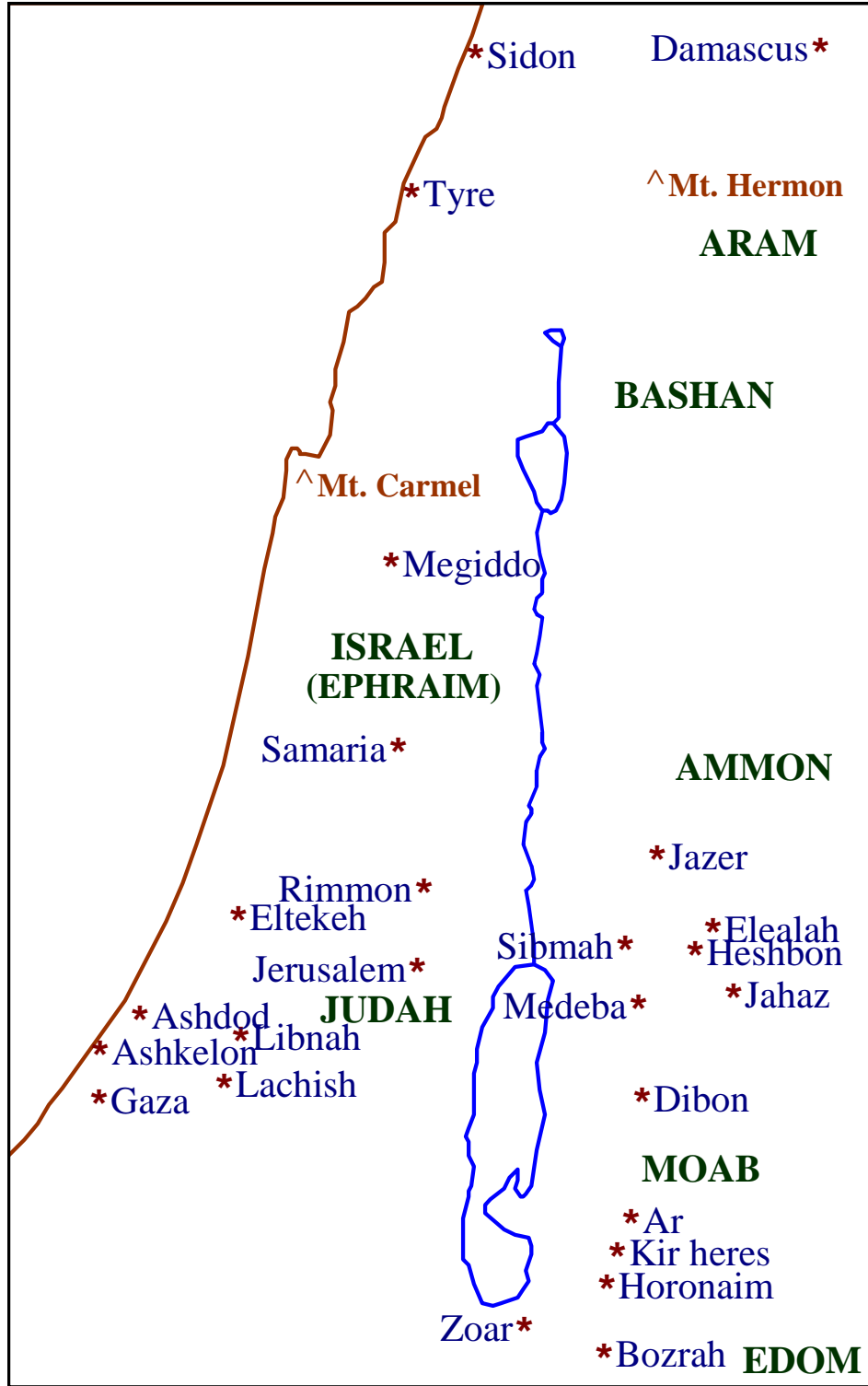
Zechariah: the *agent* of God

Malachi: the *patience* of God

### End Maps

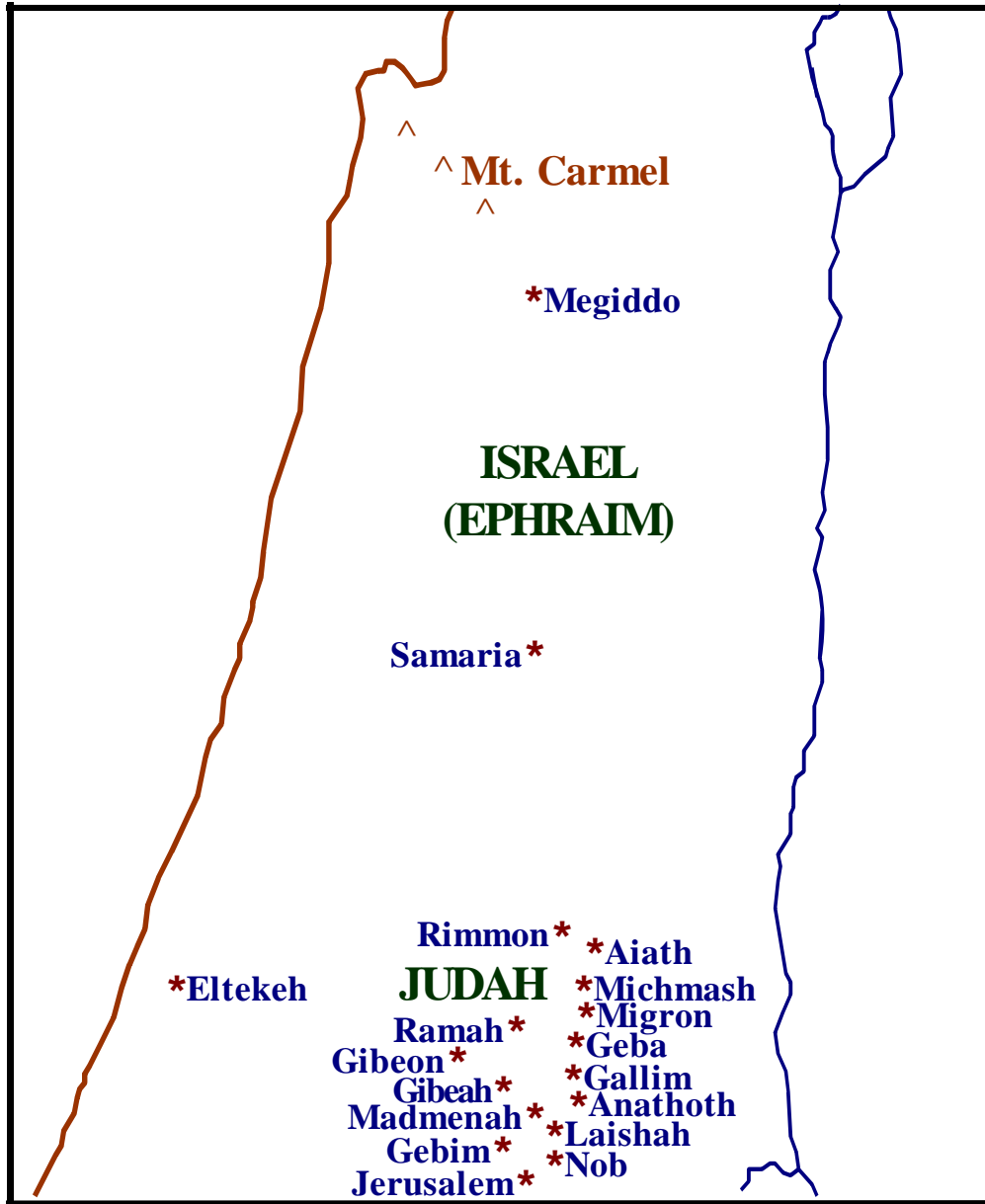


THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST IN ISAIAH'S TIMES



CANAAN IN ISAIAH'S TIMES





JUDAH AND ISRAEL IN ISAIAH'S TIMES

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