

Isaiah



"Here am I. Send me!"

Isaiah 6:8

by Richard Rogers

SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY

Isaiah

Richard Rogers

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“Isaiah”

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and
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former instructors in
the Sunset International Bible Institute



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Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil Yocham and the staff of Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, Darlene Morris and to the staff of

Sunset Translation Center who edited the manuscripts and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

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Introduction to the Prophets

Introduction

This is the beginning of a 24 chapter study on the Old Testament prophets, particularly the prophet Isaiah. Most Bible scholars call Isaiah “the prince of the prophets.” This chapter will look at all of the prophets: the men, their mission, and their message as a unit and as individuals. This chapter will cover the question, “What kind of men were these prophets?” It is important to be able to understand the kind of men the prophets were so that the Book of Isaiah itself can be understood as well. The prophets approached their prophetic book and God’s Word not simply in a vacuum, but from the historical environment in which they were living and in every area of their own humanity. There are ten points that help to show what kind of men these prophets were.

The Character of the Prophet

The prophets were typically human in every sense that men are today. Sometimes that is hard to imagine because the men of the Bible often seemed like fairy tale characters. That is because they were saintly men of high character. That makes them appear sometimes less real to us than ordinary people are. They were men of great humanity, who in their humanity were preachers. Their primary function was to stand for God and to preach the Word of God. They were to say what God would have said if He was there. Preachers sometimes are not looked upon as ordinary people. Some people say there are three

classes of people: men, women, and then preachers. That is sometimes true simply because some preachers put themselves on a pedestal, or they allow themselves to be placed on a pedestal by others. The prophets were men of like passion — *“Elijah was a man just like us”* (James 5:17). The prophets were men who ate and drank; they lived with their wives and took care of their children. But in spite of all of that, they were called by God to be preachers of His Word.

The prophets were uncompromising individuals. The prophets stood for the Word of God and the will of God in their lives against all adversaries and against all criticisms. The great shepherd prophet, Amos, went from the south of Judah to the north of Israel to preach against the idolatry of that wicked nation. Amaziah, the prophet of that area, came to Amos and told him to quit preaching there because he was the preacher of that area (cf. Amos 7:10–17). Amaziah told Amos that he needed to preach smooth and pleasant things to Jeroboam’s house instead of the judgment he was declaring. Amos said, “Look! I wasn’t a prophet. God took me from following the sheep, and He told me to go preach to His people, the nation of Israel. You say, ‘Don’t speak any more in the name of Jehovah.’ I want you to hear what Jehovah says. God will bring judgment upon this land.” Amos refused to compromise the message that he was given in Judah when he went to preach in the North.

In the South at that same time there was a prophet named Micah. Micah talked about all the wickedness of the false prophets and false priests of that day who prophesied for payment of wine and strong drink (cf. Micah 3:1–12). He said, *“But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin”* (Micah 3:8). Micah said, “I am not like the false prophets. I am full of the power of the Spirit of Jehovah.”

The prophets were conscious of a divine call. The prophets did not volunteer to be prophets. God had called them

from wherever they were living and whatever they were doing. God called them to be His mouthpieces (spokesmen), and for that reason they had great spiritual insight given to them by God. They had great spiritual commitment because of that call. Amos declared:

... "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'"
(Amos 7:14–15).

The "*prophets' sons*" were those men who were being schooled by the prophets to replace them. Amos told Amaziah, "I am not a professional. I have heard the call of God."

The prophets were men usually with a certain ruggedness of body and character. The prophets were called from following sheep or climbing sycamore trees and picking figs. They were hard men, not only physically most of the time, but always in their character. They were usually lonely men because of that ruggedness and their job situations. When Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was allied with Ahab, king of Israel, to fight against the Ammonites, he asked if there was a "*prophet of the LORD here whom we can inquire of?*" (1 Kings 22:7), even though all the prophets of Ahab's house had assembled and all spoke with one voice. Jehoshaphat realized that in that wicked house there could not possibly be 400 true prophets of God. Ahab gave the greatest compliment ever given to a prophet when he said:

There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the LORD, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad.
... (1 Kings 22:8).

The prophets were men who were conscious of God's authority and God's backing in all emergencies. They knew that

they had the backing of God in every situation; God was behind them in what they were saying and in all that they were doing. They took a very strange stance for God, unlike what anyone else in Israel did. Because of this, their contemporaries were constantly challenging them.

The prophets were men of prayer and communion with God. Perhaps the prophet's loneliness helped them become men of prayer who longed for communion with God. If a man is a man of God, called by God, and placed there by God, that man is not really alone. God has promised to be with His people. He will sustain them and carry their word on to the end. A man all alone feels his need for God more, and that is when his communion with God can be the closest. These were men of prayer and communion with God.

The prophets were consecrated men in their lives and in their character. The message of the prophets was constantly being challenged by the evil, false teachers and preachers of their day. Search history and the words of the prophets; there is not one single breath of criticism of their personal lives. Each one of them lived a separated life. They were holy men dedicated to God.

The prophets had access to God and were outspoken critics of evil. They were aware of what was going to happen in the nations of Israel and Judah because they had the privilege of God's counsel. They knew they carried the secrets of God to men. As men of privilege to God's counsel, they were outspoken critics of specific evils in the social order. They did not deal in abstracts. They were not evasive in the messages they preached. They were not like many preachers today who really say very little. When Amos was preaching desolation and destruction in captivity to the nation of Israel and to the capital city of Samaria, he was very specific about what was going to happen to Israel (cf. Amos 7:10–17).

Micah did the same thing to the leaders of his day when he compared them to cannibals. He said, *"Therefore, because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a*

heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets” (Micah 3:12). Malachi spoke the same way to the priests of his day as he discussed the fact that they were robbing God by offering Him the remnants of the things that were left (cf Malachi 3:6–18). Preachers of God’s Word today need to speak plainly and specifically to the sins of the day so that people in the world might be snatched from the errors of life. Sometimes preachers today preach as if they do not want to offend anyone with the message of God and how it should change their lives.

The prophets were God’s agents in revealing the future. God gave His prophets the message of what was going to happen, not only to the nation of Israel and all the nations around them, but to that righteous “*remnant*” that was holding on to God. That “*remnant*” was to be preserved and saved, that “*remnant*” was to be the one to whom the Messiah would later come and bring salvation to the righteous within Israel and all the world. These were great men of God. Their number one characteristic was that they passed the Word of God on to people as they had received it — without addition or subtraction. They did not say to sinful Israel on its way to captivity, “Pardon me, but if you please, you need to begin to do a little bit better, or otherwise you will be accidentally lost for a few years in a true hell, somewhere, maybe.” That was not their message. Their message was, as one preacher put it, “Turn or burn! Repent or else!” And that is the message we need to have today.

The Mission of the Prophet: Spokesman for God

The mission of the prophet was a simple mission; he was to be a spokesman for God. His message was not really his own — he was God’s messenger carrying God’s message. He did not invent it or privately interpret it. Holy men of God spoke as

they were moved by the Holy Spirit. As it is said about John the Baptist, “. . . ‘*A voice of one calling in the desert, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him”*’” (Luke 3:4b). **Why** did they speak for God? Because they had been called. **What** did they speak from God? They spoke two things: judgment and salvation.

The prophets were God’s messengers of judgment for the wicked, but they were also God’s messengers of salvation to the righteous. Amos said these people were doomed, “*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins*” (Amos 3:2). Hosea said, “. . . *my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge . . .*” (Hosea 4:6). Micah said, “*Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets*” (Micah 3:12). Isaiah said, “You are unto me a Sodom and Gomorrah. I will utterly wipe you off the face of the earth” (cf. Isaiah 1:2–9). God through Isaiah said that He would destroy them except for “*the remnant.*” The prophets of God spoke the judgment of God.

The prophets were God’s spokesmen for salvation (hope) for the righteous. They spoke about the salvation of God. They gave hope to the righteous “*remnant.*” As dark as Amos’ book is, it speaks of a glorious day when the house of David would be rebuilt and the tabernacle of David that had fallen would rise again. Amos told the people of God they would find their joy, their fulfillment, and their harvest there (cf. Amos 9:11–14).

All the hope for righteousness culminates in the kingdom of God. Isaiah spoke of the day that the mountain of Jehovah’s house would be established upon the top of the mountains, and all nations would be found there (cf. Isaiah 2:2). Isaiah also spoke of a way being built in the wilderness — a simple and safe way that would be a highway of holiness and joy for the people of God (cf. Isaiah 35:8–10).

Basic Principles for Understanding the Prophets

There are some basic principles for understanding the writings of the prophets that are not the same as those used to understand the doctrinal books in the New Testament.

The first principle to remember is the prophet was a man who was moved and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is ultimately important to remember this about God's men. In his epistle to "... *those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours*" (2 Peter 1:1) Peter discussed the superiority of the prophetic word in the New Testament. He said:

*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were **carried along** by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).*

The phrase "*carried along*" literally means to be picked up and transported just as a moving company would come to a house, load up a truck, and carry the person's possessions from one place to another. The prophets were "*carried along*" or picked up and transported by the Holy Spirit.

The second principle to remember is the prophet of God was not one who gave his judgment about what was happening. He did not look at the things happening in Israel and say, "Here's what I think based on what has happened in the past." That is not at all what he did. He was given a revelation by God that he could not have found any other way. It was not his private interpretation of history; it was a vision given by God. At the beginning of the book of Jeremiah, God gave Jeremiah a vision:

The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?" "I see the branch of an almond tree," I replied. The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled" (Jeremiah 1:11–12).

Jeremiah did not go astray and say, "I've seen the rod of an almond tree, and that means that God's going to take a rod to whip every stiff-necked Jew in the land." That is not what he said. He simply said, "I've seen a vision, and God told me that vision meant that God would judge Israel."

A prophet could not introduce new or strange things. Moses said:

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you (Deuteronomy 13:1–5).

The function of the Old Testament prophets was to call the people back to the Law. They did not bring up new things except as they predicted the Messiah. Their function was to

point people to the Word of God, under which they were living, that they might live according to the Word of God.

The third principle to remember is the prophet's oracles always came to pass. The position and responsibility of the prophet began when God spoke to Moses. It can be argued that the first man to fill the position of a prophet on a full-time basis was Samuel. The fact that the prophets received their message from God through visions and not in direct communication with God shows that they did not fill the same role and responsibility as Moses. God warned His people about listening to, and weighing carefully, the words of every prophet due to the fact that many false prophets would attempt to gain the confidence and following of the people.

But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him (Deuteronomy 18:20–22).

This was not the only test of a prophet, but if his words did not come to pass, the people did not need to look at any other tests. If what he said was not accurate, or if what he said did not occur, then there was no need to look further into the possibilities of him being a prophet of God. The words of the prophets of God always came to pass.

The **fourth** principle in understanding a prophet's message is knowing that sometimes his prophecy could be conditional. There could be an "if" to the prophecy, whether or not it was spoken aloud. God spoke to Israel through Jeremiah:

“O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does? . . . Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand . . . If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it” (Jeremiah 18:5–10).

A prophecy of judgment was conditional upon whether or not a nation continued in evil. A prophecy of blessing was conditional upon whether or not a nation continued to do good.

Consider Jonah, the reluctant prophet. He did not really want to go to Nineveh, but when he finally made it there after his experience with the great fish, he preached *“Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned”* (Jonah 3:4). The king repented and he demanded that all of his people repent. They even draped sackcloth upon the people, the sheep, and all the beasts of the field so that when God looked down from heaven all He saw was sackcloth. God saw that Nineveh had repented so God did not destroy them. Why did God react that way? The prophecy, *“Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown,”* was conditional upon this statement *“unless they repent.”* The text does not tell whether or not Jonah used the phrase *“unless they repent,”* but it does tell that somehow this is what the king of Assyria was thinking. *“Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?”* (Jonah 3:9, KJV).

A **fifth** principle to remember is that sometimes a threat might be delayed, not totally canceled, but simply delayed by repentance. When Elijah was preaching to Ahab about what was going to happen to him because he had killed Naboth and

stolen his vineyard, Elijah told Ahab that he would be destroyed because of the evil he had done.

When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly. Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: "Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son" (1 Kings 21:27–29).

Ahab's judgment would still come, because wickedness must receive its just recompense, but it was delayed.

The **sixth** principle for understanding the prophets is to remember that they lived before and immediately after the Assyrian and the Babylonian captivities. In 722 B.C. the Assyrian army came down and totally destroyed the city of Samaria and carried all of the strong, virile men away from Israel into Assyria. In their place, they put a mixed race in order to destroy the nation of Israel. Then in 536 B.C., 135 years later, Nebuchadnezzar did the same thing to the southern nation of Judah. Therefore, any threat would probably be fulfilled in the exiles to Assyria and to Babylon. And any promises would be fulfilled in the return of the remnant from Babylon in 536 B.C.

A **seventh** principle for understanding the prophets is to remember that Christ's first coming and the beginning of the church was an important subject of Old Testament prediction: ". . . the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures" (Romans 1:2).

"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your

offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways” (Acts 3:24–26).

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (1 Peter 1:10–12).

All the prophets spoke of these days that were to come and then the prophets searched diligently for what manner and for when the things they were speaking about would be fulfilled. The prediction of international salvation was fulfilled in the coming of Christ and in the church. The Jew received his national glory in the church of Jesus Christ. The Gentiles were granted, by grace, entrance into this kingdom that had been promised to the Jews. Studying the prophets reminds God’s children today that the prophets spoke of Jesus, and that history becomes “His story” by revelation.

The **eighth** and last principle to remember and study about these Old Testament prophets is that God’s final revelation was made in, and by, His Son. The writer of Hebrews says:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, who he

appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe (Hebrews 1:1–2).

In one of the parables Jesus talked about a man who placed his possessions in the hands of stewards who misused them. So he sent messengers to get what belonged to him. The stewards killed the messengers. He sent other messengers and the stewards killed those messengers. The man must have decided that if he sent his own son surely the stewards would honor him. The man sent his son, and the stewards killed him, too (cf. Matthew 21:33–46). The phrase “*Last of all, he sent his son to them*” in Matthew 21:37 is important because “***last of all***” **God sent His Son, Jesus Christ.**

These are the last days. The words that settle the case for Old Testament prophecy are the phrases: “***this is that***” (Acts 2:16, KJV) and “***it is written***” (Acts 1:20). When there is a prediction in the Old Testament some try to guess what it means. What are the Old Testament prophets speaking of? The prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus told the people in the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath day, “*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*” (Luke 4:21b). This was after He had read from the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn (Isaiah 61:1–2).

When Peter said “No, ***this is that*** which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16, KJV) on the day of Pentecost that proved the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. And when the writers of the New Testament, Paul in particular, continually used the three words, “***It is written,***” it was so that

people would understand and see that these things were being fulfilled. That is the most important thing to remember, when the New Testament writer quotes an Old Testament scripture and says, “*This is that*” or “*It is written*” these scriptures settle any questions.

Introduction (2): The Book and the Man

Understanding the Book of Isaiah: Eight Things to Consider

The task of studying the Book of Isaiah is not always an easy one because most of Isaiah's writings are in symbolic language rather than straight forward prose. It can be difficult, but it is a very worthwhile study.

First, to better understand the Book of Isaiah, it is important to have a knowledge of the history of Isaiah's day and a knowledge of his world. The historical background is of extreme importance in studying any prophetic book, but particularly when studying Isaiah. The eighth century B.C., when Isaiah wrote, was an unusual time. The nation of Israel was about to go into captivity. The nation of Judah was not far behind. That was because in their historical background, they were facing the judgment of God.

Second, as with some other Old Testament literature, the Book of Isaiah has no regard for the chronological progression of time. Books normally progress from year to year advancing from an early time period forward. Many of the Old Testament historical and prophetic books do not do that. The history in 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles is a good example of this pattern. A king of Israel might be introduced and studied to the end of his reign, and then the text will go back in time and pick up a king of Judah, and maybe even cover more than one king of Judah, who reigned during that same period of time. The text

does not follow a chronological progression from beginning to end. The Book of Isaiah and many other Old Testament prophets are like that. Isaiah is not concerned with chronological progression. He is concerned with thought progression. He wanted to get one thought, then another, and then another thought across to his people. The book can not be viewed chronologically.

Third, the next difficulty in studying Isaiah is the confusing way in which the speaker will change from one person to another person. The text will begin with God speaking to Israel, and without any warning, someone else will start speaking. It may be the prophet, the nation, an enemy, or someone else other than God who begins to speak, and there is no warning that the speaker has changed. The context will determine who is speaking. That is why the prophets need to be read carefully so that there is no confusion about who is speaking.

Fourth, sometimes it is hard to tell who is being spoken to. In one verse, a prophet may be addressing the Lord, and before that verse is finished, the same prophet will be addressing the nation or some group within the nation or even some group outside the nation. This can be very confusing, so it is important to read carefully.

Fifth, there is the difficulty of deciding the period of ministry and the historical context that Isaiah was speaking in. Sometimes the reader is left wondering what period of Isaiah's ministry is in view and what the historical context is. Sometimes an educated guess is all that is available. Sometimes the reader just has to listen to the Word of God without being able to say exactly what it is talking about. That is confusing, but the book is worth all its difficulties.

Sixth, it is difficult having independent oracles talking about different things side by side within the context. The oracles deal with different times and different circumstances side by side in the book. Since stories are normally developed chronologically that causes some confusion. It is important to

remember that this is an Asian/Hebrew book written in the eighth century B.C., and they use this style of writing. They tend to discuss everything in a circle before they make their conclusion. This book has to be read while keeping in mind that it was written in a very different style. It is sometimes difficult to change from one style to the other.

Seventh, it is difficult to strike a balance between letting Isaiah speak in Old Testament times and letting him speak his truths as they are related to New Testament times. Isaiah is an Old Testament figure with a message to Old Testament people in an Old Testament context. To separate him from all of that harms his writing. It is best to look at his book historically, but in the light of the idea of Jewish national solidarity, and in view of God's purpose in Christ, with God's promise to Israel in mind.

It is not strange that Isaiah speaks for generations long after him. It is important to see his messianic fulfillment. Isaiah wrote about his day but everything he recorded was not given within an Assyrian context. Nor was everything he recorded messianic just because God's purpose would become complete in Christ. It is not always easy to have that balance. Striving for that balance of seeing the interpretation in a historical context of Isaiah's book is worth the effort. Many times the application, as well as the ultimate fulfillment of what Isaiah says, is in Jesus and the church. This is what makes this book just as applicable today as it was during the time that Isaiah spoke.

Eighth, it is difficult to see the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies since sometimes the prophecies were not fulfilled at all when conditions changed within Israel or other nations. Remember the principle upon which prophecy operated — prophecy of judgment was conditional upon the people continuing in their evil, and the prophecy of blessing was conditional upon the people continuing in their righteousness (Jeremiah 18:1–23). Isaiah made a prophecy about judgment that was to come upon Judah by Assyria, but that prophecy was delayed (cf. Isaiah 48:12–22). Assyria came, Babylon came

also, but because Isaiah and Hezekiah were faithful, God's judgment to be delivered by Sennacherib was delayed. Sometimes prophecies were only partly fulfilled for the very same reason. And sometimes the prophecies were expressed in non-literal speech. They were not intended to be fulfilled literally. Isaiah said:

“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:6–9).

This particular prophecy was not meant to be fulfilled literally. The day is not going to come when a child will play with a poisonous snake without being harmed. There is no reason to look for a day when a lion will no longer hunt man. This was symbolic language. This study will cover how we need to view these verses.

There are many pictures in the study of Isaiah. There are certain questions that need to be asked concerning the pictures. What is the picture itself? What does that picture symbolize? What does the picture of cows and yearlings and lions feeding together symbolize? What does the figure of a wolf living in the same house with a lamb without eating the lamb symbolize? What does the picture of a little child with his hand in the viper's den or a little child playing with a rattlesnake or a cobra symbolize? It symbolizes the change in nature. The lion's nature to eat the cow no longer exists. The cow's nature to be afraid of the lion no longer exists. Things that had been at war

with one another were at peace with one another. This is an example of the way those symbols must be interpreted.

What does it all mean today? What is the application? What should the church today do, believe, and feel, and how should they operate based on what they read? What kind of interpretation does the church need to make based on the picture they see and what it symbolizes? That is going to be particularly important also in studying the parables of Jesus, the Book of Revelation, parts of the Book of Romans, and the Book of Hebrews. Pictures are drawn and symbols are given and it can be a difficult task to draw the picture, interpret the picture, and then apply it to today.

Understanding Isaiah, the Man

The task of studying the Book of Isaiah is not an impossible task, but it is one that is going to take a lot of attention, dedication, and continuance. It will require getting involved in the book itself in order to see what this book is all about. It is a doable and understandable task, but one that will take study and time.

The Man and His Family

It is important to look at the man Isaiah because he, as the writer, was really writing himself into the book as well as what he saw. His name, Isaiah, means “Jehovah saves.” That is symbolic itself, because the theme of the book is “Jehovah saves.” Isaiah wrote about the salvation of the Lord — the salvation of Jehovah which makes his name very symbolic. Isaiah’s wife was never called by name. She was simply called the prophetess. Notice, however, the symbolic names of his two sons: “*Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz*” means “*quick to plunder, swift to the spoil*” (cf. Isaiah 8:3–4) and “*Shear-Jashub*” means “*a remnant will return*” (cf. Isaiah 7:3). The first boy’s name meant “Judgment is coming.” The second boy’s name meant “After judgment only a remnant will return.” Every time the

boys' names were called, "judgment" and "salvation" were described. And every time someone said the name "Isaiah," they were saying, "Jehovah saves." They were speaking of the Israelites' need even in this man's name.

The Character of Isaiah

Isaiah was a city prophet. He did not preach in the country. He preached in the city of Jerusalem. He was different from Amos and Micah and more like Hosea. Hosea seemed to be a man of the city of Samaria and Isaiah was a man of the city of Jerusalem. Nearly all (there are some exceptions — he spoke of the crops around the city) of his illustrations were from city life. The very few geographical references in the book are of cities: Babylon, Tyre, and Jerusalem, with the majority being references of Jerusalem, for that was his home. He was an urban man who probably did not understand the rural life. He understood the busy street life.

Isaiah understood the courts, because he was a court prophet. He was not just a city prophet, he was a prophet in the court of the king. Jewish tradition states that he was the cousin of King Uzziah. Isaiah had access to the court's procedures, because he was the chronicler of the Judean courts (cf. 2 Chronicles 26:22). Isaiah, the historian, would have had knowledge of what was happening, nationally and internationally, because his job was to write down what took place at court. Before he was called by God to be the prophet of Israel at Uzziah's death, Isaiah was Judah's historian (Isaiah 6:1–8).

Isaiah was married, and he called his wife a "*prophetess*" (Isaiah 8:3). It is possible that she did not really hold the office of prophet, but was called a prophetess because she took care of Isaiah. Isaiah's wife could be compared to Sara, who according to Peter, cared so much for Abraham that she called him, "*Master*" (cf. 1 Peter 3:6). Isaiah and his wife had two sons. Even with all his duties as the prophet of God, Isaiah was still a husband and a father. He had a wife to care for and

children to raise. He was not so work-centered that he was not also the man he ought to be before God. He was a balanced person, a husband, a father, and a prophet.

Isaiah was also a sinful prophet with human limitations. He was afraid when God called him to be a prophet. He needed the encouragement of God in order to do what he needed to do. He made his confession of sinfulness:

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty” (Isaiah 6:5).

Isaiah acknowledged the fact that he was not all he ought to be. He said himself at the very beginning that he was indeed a sinner among sinners (cf. Isaiah 6). He needed to know that he was a sinner to be the proper spokesman of God. Anyone who believed that he was not in need of the forgiveness, love, and mercy of God would never be a prophet of God. Check throughout the Bible to see if this is true. If the prophet was a proud man to begin with, God could not use him. Moses is perhaps an example of this; Moses killed an Egyptian because he was afflicting one of his brother Israelites. But then, he saw two Israelites arguing, and he tried to settle their dispute. Luke recorded an account of this: *“Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not” (Acts 7:25).* At the time, he was too proud to be a worker of God, so God sent him to the wilderness where he had to keep another man’s sheep for forty years. Moses had to stop thinking only of himself so that he might realize that he was a sinner and needed the help of God in order to do the work of God.

In spite of his sinfulness, Isaiah was a faithful prophet. He was going to do the work that God had called him to do in spite of his inadequacy and in spite of his sin. With God’s help and power he would accomplish the work of God. He was told from

the very beginning that his message would basically fall on deaf ears (cf. Isaiah 6:9–13). He never found “success,” but he preached anyway. He never found acceptance with the people to whom he preached, but he preached anyway.

As a preacher not finding acceptance can be a very, very difficult thing to experience. Preaching all your life with no visible sign that the work is being accepted would be an extremely difficult task. Not a single prophet of the Old Testament found acceptance with his people. Prophets were not called to pat people on the back. They were really not called to tell people how good they were doing. That was more the work of priests, wise men and women, counselors, and elders. The prophetic ministry was to declare the sins of the people. A prophet’s ministry was to say: “Repent or else!” or “Turn or burn!” or “The destiny of the whole nation depends upon your repentance in response to this message!” Near the end of Hezekiah’s life, Isaiah was still faithfully proclaiming God’s message to an undeserving people. Hezekiah had been told he was going to die, but he prayed, and his life was extended fifteen years (cf. Isaiah 37:1–38). Hezekiah’s death was not a threat to Isaiah’s preaching of the Word. He continued to proclaim the message of Christ.

The Character of the Times

This was a stirring time of national prosperity. Israel and Judah had never been richer than they were during the time Isaiah was preaching. These two nations had never been more powerful. They had extended their borders from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates River. All the land that God once promised to Abraham, David, and Solomon was in their possession. They were making treaties with all the nations of the world. Nobody was at war with them. Assyria had begun preparing for war, but as Isaiah began to preach, no one was at war with Judah. They had everything they needed. They lived in a land flowing with milk and honey. They lived in peace and prosperity.

Maybe because the Israelites lived in peace and prosperity, or maybe in spite of that fact, they were the worst they had ever been morally. In Israel the people submitted only to Jeroboam's paths making them an inferior nation. They bowed down to the god Baal and to the gods of all of the world. In the south Solomon had married women from many different nations, built idols for all his wives and temples for their gods all over the city of Jerusalem. It was a wicked time.

Men and their sons were known to worship pagan idols and to share the same prostitute to fertilize the sacrifices they had made. Worshipers laid down on the clothes they had taken from the poor. Marriages among the Israelites were so mixed with the other nations that they were under close scrutiny and judgment from God. When a poor man went into court, he could not possibly win his case because all the judges took bribes. The court system was corrupt. Even the best judges worked for money. There was no justice for the poor because "Justice was for sale." That is not justice at all.

The priests offered profane sacrifices. They took leftovers from the people and offered those to God rather than giving God the best. The preachers and prophets told the people exactly what they wanted to hear instead of what they needed to hear. If the people wanted to hear a message that said it was all right to continue to be greedy for money, opening their shops on the Sabbath, and cheating the people with their scales, then that was what the preachers and the prophets would say.

This was a time period comparable to the days Paul wrote Timothy about when people would not want to hear the truth, so they would turn their ears away from the truth and be led astray into all the things of the world (cf. 2 Timothy 4:3–4). The prophets of God, who were supposed to be presenting God's demands for His people, were allowing them to wallow in their sin, in their greed and adultery, and in their lust.

Israel needed someone to call them back to God. In the eighth century B.C. four great men arose. Hosea and Amos preached to Israel in the north. Amos came from the south to

preach, but he declared to Israel that judgment was so imminent that they had no ability to change. In the south, Micah preached on the streets, and Isaiah preached in the court; both of them telling Judah that they could come home because there was still time, but that it was the last time, the last chance. If they did not come and accept God now, their nation would be destroyed.

At the very beginning of his book, Isaiah declared that although the Israelites were as the sands on a seashore only a “*remnant*” would be saved. Isaiah, through God, offered that “*remnant*” a great promise. It is to that “*remnant*” today that there is hope offered through Jesus. There is peace in believing the Gospel as it is found in Isaiah and as it is found in the New Testament.

The Prophet's Call

Isaiah 6:1–13

Introduction

This third chapter in the study of the Book of Isaiah will still be dealing with the introduction. A prophetic book takes more introductory material than a doctrinal book, because it is important to know several things in order to really understand the books of the prophets. These are the things about the prophet himself that need to be understood. The most important part of any prophet's life was his call, that moment when God came to him with an initial, inaugural vision and told him, "I have chosen you to be a prophet for my people." This initial call is found in enough of the prophetic books to obtain a visual of what the call was like. Amos made reference to his call in the Book of Amos when Amaziah told him not to preach anymore. He said:

... "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'" (Amos 7:14–15).

Amos could think back during his ministry to the time when he heard Jehovah's voice.

God called the timid, young man named Jeremiah by saying:

... “What do you see, Jeremiah?” “I see the branch of an almond tree,” I replied. The LORD said to me, “You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled. . . .Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them” (Jeremiah 1:11–12, 17).

Jeremiah could look back to the time of his call and never doubt that he was the man of God doing the will of God, speaking the word of God by the power of the Spirit of God. Isaiah could also look back to the moment of his call by God.

Isaiah's Call to Be a Prophet

The Inaugural Call

The first five chapters of Isaiah talk about the message God had given Isaiah. That is actually more important than his call, which he told about in chapter six as his manuscript appears in today's Bibles. Isaiah wrote about his call to defend his rights to speak the words of judgment that he was going to give them. His initial vision was:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live

among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for.” Then I heard the voice of the LORD saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” He said, “Go and tell this people: “Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” Then I said, “For how long, O LORD?” And he answered: “Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land” (Isaiah 6:1–13).

After Isaiah told about his vision, he went right back to preaching his words of judgment, but this time he preached particularly to one king, King Ahab. What a beautiful call! The time of that call was “. . . in the year that King Uzziah died.” Some scholars (e.g. Jim McGuiggan in his book on Isaiah) believe that up until this time Isaiah trusted God and Uzziah. After this vision, Isaiah placed all of his confidence about the future in God. Many people trust in God and preachers, in God and themselves, in God and the elders, in God and a commentary, in God and a Bible paper, or in God and somebody else. Everyone needs to come to the point Isaiah

came to and see that anyone in whom they trust other than God is flesh; and since all flesh perishes, he will perish. That One in whom people place their trust must be God. He is the only One worthy of trust. Whatever it takes to “*see the Lord high and lifted up*” (Isaiah 6:1, KJV) is a good thing and a good time in that person's life. The place that Isaiah saw this vision was in the temple where God placed the sign of His presence with the sinful people.

Remember the pillar of smoke and the pillar of fire that were over Israel and guided them (cf. Exodus 13:20–22). The cloud gave them shade from the sun, and the fire gave them heat at night. When they moved the fire became a pillar, and they followed it. That pillar of smoke or the pillar of fire became a Presence in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and the temple. It was a sign that God was still in their midst, that God would still guide and protect them and provide them shelter from heat and protection from the cold. It was a sign that God would give them all that they needed. Isaiah was as close as a non-priest could get to the sign and the significance of the very holiness of God. The pillar of fire in the tabernacle could be seen outside the tabernacle as the people looked toward the Holy place. From a distance they could still see that God was there. It was like the flag on a king's palace that declared the king was in residence.

I was in Thailand one year driving with a missionary friend from Bangkok. As we were traveling along at about 80 miles an hour, there went eight Mercedes Benz around us. The middle one was decorated with flags. My friend said, “That's the king. He is going to his summer palace.” Traveling on down the road we came to that summer palace, and my missionary friend pointed to the hillside. He said, “There is the king's palace. See the flag.” I looked and there was a huge flag of the country of Thailand flying high over the palace. My friend said, “That means the king is in residence in his palace.” The King was still in residence in His palace as Isaiah wrote this book, but He would soon leave it. The sins of Judah would become so wicked

that the Temple would fall, the Ark of the Covenant would be destroyed, and the presence of God would be taken from them. At this time though, the King was still in His house.

A Three-Fold Vision

In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah was in the house of the Lord when he had a vision that was really three fold. First, it was a vision of God. Second, it was a vision of himself and the people as being sinners. And third, it was a vision of the salvation that would come by the power of God.

In this vision, Isaiah learned that the Lord is holy — “*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty.*” That word “*holy*” literally means separated, distinct and unique. God is separated from all other beings. In the Book of Revelation, when the throne of God is pictured, God is there in all His glory on the throne (cf. Revelation 4:1–11). Around His throne are twenty-four thrones upon which His people sit. Between their thrones and His throne there is a glassy sea that only Jesus, the One who walks on water, can walk across. God is above and separate. God is unique and supernatural. God is unlimited; man is limited. Beyond all-seeing, God exists. Beyond all-being, God exists. Beyond all-creation, God exists. Beyond all-history, God exists. Uzziah died; the Lord did not. In the year Uzziah died, the Lord was still enthroned. Isaiah looked from man to God and saw the holiness of God.

God is not only holy, He is Almighty. Isaiah said, “*The LORD Almighty*” (Isaiah 6:3). Men have might, but God has all might. Men have power, but God has all power. Isaiah saw that God was also glorious — “*The whole earth is full of his glory*” (Isaiah 6:3). When Isaiah saw the glory of God, he had a vision of himself that he really needed to see. Up until that time, Isaiah probably thought he was a pretty good guy. When he saw God in all of His holiness, power and glory, Isaiah’s first words are, “*Woe to me!*” (Isaiah 6:5). He fell on his face before this great vision, and he said, “. . . *I am a man of unclean lips . . .*” He realized that all his people were just like him, they also had

unclean lips. Isaiah believed he was cursed because he had seen the glory of God. But, praise God, he saw the vision of salvation.

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for" (Isaiah 6:6–7).

He did have unclean lips, but God cleansed his lips, and he was chosen to be the spokesman for God. He received a commission. Isaiah was commissioned to go preach — after the vision, he had a mission. God told him that he must preach a word of judgment and that the people would not accept his message. God accepted Isaiah, but the people would not accept his message because of the fruitlessness of their lives. God told Isaiah, "They won't hear you. They will be deaf. They will be blind. They will not see what you are saying. They will not hear what you are saying. They will not have the ability to perceive. They will not have the ability to understand, but I want you to keep on preaching." Isaiah said, "Lord, if they are not going to hear me, how long am I going to have to do this? If I'm not going to be successful, if they aren't going to accept my message, how long am I going to have to preach?" God said, "Until there are no more nations. Until everything lays desolate. Until they are languishing in a land that is not theirs. Until there are no more people in the land." Isaiah would prophesy through three kings' rule, because they would not accept the message that he preached. This is a very difficult task for a preacher. Isaiah was an honorable man, because all of his life he preached to deaf ears. Nobody except Hezekiah really heard his message. Nobody really said, "Boy, that's a good lesson, Isaiah. I really appreciated it! It will change my life!" Nobody did that, instead they did all kinds of bad things to him to try to silence his message. That was the circumstances of Isaiah's call.

The Prophet's Scope of Influence

Isaiah had the broadest scope of influence of any of the prophets. He spoke against Babylon, Moab, Philistia, Syria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Edom, Arabia, and Phoenecia (cf. Isaiah 13:1–23:18). There was not a single powerful nation of the world that Isaiah did not speak against in his book. He was the broadest and most internationally centered prophet of all the prophets in the Bible. Specifically, he spoke to and against Judah and Jerusalem: *“The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah”* (Isaiah 1:1). Whatever he said about Babylon, he was also saying it concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Whatever he said about Edom, he said it concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Whatever he said about any nation, he also said it concerning Judah and Jerusalem. He looked northward to Israel and around to all the nations of the earth, but everything he said was to be fulfilled in a message concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

Isaiah has two themes. There is a national theme in which what he said carried a message of deliverance and exile. He was speaking to them of their coming judgment, of the exile that they would have after that judgment. There is also a theme of national glory. This theme covers the Messiah. He spoke with hope to people that were to be judged about coming back to the land. He spoke ultimately to these people that were to be judged to tell them that they would have a national glory in the coming Messiah. It is important to see that Israel was promised that one day they would come into national glory in the King of Kings — a King like David.

The Prophet's Character

There really is not a single passage that tells specifically about Isaiah's character. It is inferred from his call, his writing, and the activity within his writing. This prophet combined earthly wisdom with earthly shrewdness. He combined courage with conviction. He had a multitude of gifts. Isaiah had a

singleness of purpose in his life. He combined this with a clear, unmistakable vision, and with spiritual intuition as he looked into the secrets of God. Isaiah had a love for the righteousness of God seen in His character and in the performance of those qualities. An appreciation of Jehovah's majesty and holiness came from his vision, and he never lost it. He was a man whose head was in the clouds, whose feet were upon the ground, whose heart was on eternal things, whose mouth was on timely things, whose spirit was in the eternal counsel of God, and whose body was in the definite moment. He was not a person who believed only in things to come. He was a person who was here for a definite moment and with a definite purpose. That purpose was to declare Jehovah's message unto Jehovah's people to reach Jehovah's result. The result was their repentance and their continuation as a nation.

Isaiah was a patriot. He loved his nation, but he could not be optimistic about an immediate future by saying complimentary things to a doomed people. He was a patriot, but he was also a realist. This is seen in the fact that he denounced the false prophets of his day with severe, righteous and beautiful condemnation. He condemned the faithless and fruitless leaders of the people. He called them cannibals and all different kinds of symbolic terms to indicate that they were one of the reasons the nation was going into captivity.

There is purity in the way Isaiah proved that Judah was a fruitless people. It is not an easy thing to stand in front of a people that you love more than you love your own life and speak of their coming judgment. That was the work of a prophet. The priests taught the people. The wise men gave them the instruction on how to do what the priest said, but the prophet was the one who came and said, "You are disobeying God. You are in rebellion to the Word of God, and the only thing that you can expect unless you turn is the burning judgment of God. Turn or burn!" That was the message of the prophets.

The Prophet's Literary Style

The prophet's literary style is not eternally significant, but it is important in understanding his book. Isaiah had a certain style of writing, much like the other prophets, and yet a little different. Isaiah was an expert at using picturesque illustrations. He spoke of the nation and Judah as being God's vineyard, the place of God's planting. God said:

*I will sing for the one I love
a song about his vineyard:
My loved one had a vineyard
on a fertile hillside.
He dug it up and cleared it of stones
and planted it with the choicest vines.
He built a watchtower in it
and cut out a winepress as well.
Then he looked for a crop of good grapes,
but it yielded only bad fruit.*

*Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.
What more could have been done for my vineyard
than I have done for it?
When I looked for good grapes,
why did it yield only bad?
Now I will tell you
what I am going to do to my vineyard:
I will take away its hedge,
and it will be destroyed;
I will break down its wall,
and it will be trampled.
I will make it a wasteland,
neither pruned nor cultivated,
and briers and thorns will grow there.
I will command the clouds
not to rain on it.*

*The vineyard of the LORD Almighty
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are the garden of his delight.
And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed;
for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.*
(Isaiah 5:1–7)

God did everything He could to cultivate and help His vineyard grow. He planted good seed, watered and cared for it, but all He found was bitter grapes and vinegar.

Isaiah also spoke of God being “*wells of salvation*” from which the nation of Israel could drink (cf. Isaiah 12:1–6). He spoke about Israel being a tilled ground in which God planted trees of righteousness which would be fruitful throughout all time (cf. Isaiah 28:23–29). God spoke of Himself as being a hiding place, a covert, and a rock behind which His children could hide from the storms of life and a rock upon which they could stand (cf. 32:1–8). These are just a few of the illustrations in the Book of Isaiah. He used witty statements and metaphors (a metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is spoken of as if it were something else).

Isaiah spoke of God's judgment being a flood, a storm, a loud noise, and a loud sound. He used dialogue when he called the people to trial and debated with them over and over. He used exaggerations that were not meant to be taken literally and parables where he stretched things far beyond their meaning to try to get the people to see the greatness of God's blessings as well as the greatness of their own judgment.

It is very helpful to understand Hebrew which was the language of the Old Testament. In the Hebrew language there are many puns (the humorous use of a word to suggest a different meaning, or of words of the same sound and different meanings) which Isaiah used. The vocabulary that Isaiah used is the largest of any book in the Bible. Ezekiel used 1535 separate words; Jeremiah used 1653. The psalmists used 2170

and Isaiah used 2186 separate words. He was a literary genius. He was inspired, but inspiration had to be used within the ability of a man's life.

Paul talked about the gifts that were given to the first century church of the Lord (cf. Romans 12:6–8). The first gift he mentioned was *“prophesying.”* He said, *“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith”* (Romans 12:6). A gift could only be used to the degree of a person's faith even when the gift was miraculous as in Isaiah or Paul's case. Paul also said, *“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ”* (Romans 10:17). Knowledge and faith will be a determining factor in someone's ability to use the gifts of God.

The Prophet's Poetic Oratory

Notice Isaiah's poetic oratory in studying this book. He was an orator. That can be seen throughout the book (cf. Isaiah chapters 12, 25, 26, 38, 42, 49, 50, 52, 60, 62, 65, 66). Over and over again, Isaiah stirred the souls of the people. The people who listened to him should have gone away saying, “I will do this! I will do what Isaiah said! I will stand firm for the Lord, and in that stance find my victory! I will walk in that holy, high and raised way he preached to me (cf. Isaiah 35). I will find holiness, peace and honor. I will look heavenward! I will look for a new heaven and a new earth where all the blessings of God are to be found. I will not take my stand on earthly things. I will stand on heavenly, spiritual things. I will look for a new city where righteousness dwells. I will look for victory and the foundation of God.” Isaiah is not just a book that condemns. It is a book that stirs people with poetic oratory to have faith in God. This study can produce faith in the lives of those who are blessed by the study of His word.

The Prophet's World

Introduction

This chapter will look at the prophet's world, because it is important to be aware of the historical background in which he preached. Biblical texts for that historical background begin in 2 Kings 14 and 2 Chronicles 25. These chapters (and those following) discuss the world of Judah and Israel as they faced the nation of Assyria and the rising nation of Babylon. Isaiah was speaking to the people who lived during this time.

The Political Background of Isaiah's World

The Kings of Judah

Amaziah's reign over Judah actually began before Isaiah began to preach (cf. 2 Kings 14:1–22; 2 Chronicles 25:1–28). At the beginning of Amaziah's reign, he was a decent man. He had the flaws that any righteous man would have, but he was a man of God, and he sought to do the will of God and walk in the ways of David: *"He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, but not wholeheartedly"* (2 Chronicles 25:2). He had 300,000 fighting men and hired 100,000 Israelites to fight with his own troops. *"A man of God"* advised him not to use the Israelite troops in his battle against the Edomites, so he sent the Israelites home. While Amaziah and his army were in battle in the Valley of Salt, he killed 10,000 men, but he returned home to find that the Israelites had raided Judean cities, killed 3,000 people, and carried off the plunder. It is not always easy to serve God. It sometimes costs a good deal to be faithful to the

Word of God, the way of God and the will of God. This cost Amaziah some soldiers, because he refused to go to battle with the wicked nation of Israel fighting by his side. He finally had to fight them and in doing so, he lost some of his men.

After his triumph over Edom, Amaziah brought some of their gods home with him to worship. Because of Amaziah's actions, God came to curse him. There is a lesson here to remember. When good men do bad things, it brings judgment from God. Amaziah was taken captive along with many hostages in a battle with Jehoash king of Israel. The Israelites took all of the treasure from the royal palace and the temple and tore down one of the walls of Jerusalem. Again, because Amaziah began to do that which was evil, God brought curses upon him. That was because of the covenant God had made with all Israel on the plains of Moab (cf. Deuteronomy 28). This is called the "covenant of blessing and cursing." This covenant was in addition to the one that was made at Sinai. These two covenants were given to govern their lives. The covenant of blessing and cursing was simple. It said, "If you do My will and obey My laws, then you will be a blessing to Me and I will bless you and everything that you do. If you do not do My will and if you serve other gods, then I will bring curses upon you in the house, in your fields, and in battle" (cf. Deuteronomy 28). This is what was happening to Amaziah. He should have realized that his way was not God's way, but he did not. Amaziah continued in his wickedness. He had to flee to Lachish to escape a conspiracy against him. In the end he was killed outside the city of Jerusalem, but because he was basically a good man and king, he was brought back to Jerusalem and buried there with the kings of Judah.

Uzziah (Azariah) the son of Amaziah took the throne and reigned as co-regent with his father for ten years. He ruled a total of fifty-two years (cf. 2 Kings 15:1–7; 2 Chronicles 26:1–23). Uzziah was one of Judah's better kings. His names are significant. He was called Uzziah which means "Jehovah is my strength," and Azariah, which means "Jehovah is my help."

So in both of the names the Bible gives him, Jehovah is honored. This man was not only a righteous king, but he was militarily successful to a remarkable degree. He extended the borders of Judah all the way back to the river of Egypt, which was the promised limit in Genesis 15. At the same time, Jereboam II, who was the king of Israel in the north, extended his border all the way to the entrance of Hamath, which was the northern promised limit. During this time, because of the military might of the King of Judah and the King of Israel, the people again possessed all the Promised Land. The fact that he was a righteous man, militarily successful, and financially prosperous explains why Isaiah trusted Uzziah.

Uzziah had to die before Isaiah really saw his vision and began his mission. Uzziah did bring prosperity back to Judah by his trade among the nations and by his promotion of agricultural pursuits. It is a fact that a nation can only be as strong as its agricultural pursuit is strong. I read a history book a number of years ago that said that agriculture is the backbone of a nation's financial ability. This was one of the ways that Uzziah brought great prosperity to his people. His one great mistake was his own pride and presumption. He tried to take the function of a priest and offer the incense that only a priest could offer. When he tried that, he was opposed by the faithful priest for stepping outside of his God-given place, and he was smitten with leprosy by God. He spent the latter part of his life shut up in his own residence which was made into an infirmary.

Jotham (cf. 2 Kings 15:32–38; 2 Chronicles 27:1–9), Uzziah's son, was co-regent with him for the last ten years of his life. Jotham was a righteous king, as Uzziah his father had been, and he took care not to make the kind of mistakes his father had made of pride and presumption. Jotham was very successful in war during Isaiah's time of prophesying, and the people grew even more in prosperity under Jotham than they did under Uzziah. Even though there was a righteous ruler pointing the people to the Law, the people still did that which was evil. Good leadership normally leads people to God, but

Scripture does not reveal the reasons this did not happen during Jotham's reign.

The people of Judah had prosperity, and that might have been their problem. Maybe they had too much prosperity to place their trust in God. Maybe they began to trust in their riches and their possessions, and this led them back into idolatry. Pressure was mounting from Assyria and Israel, and Syria was trying to get Jotham to make an alliance with them because Assyria was threatening to come down upon the land. Jotham steadfastly refused to make any alliance with a wicked nation. He was a righteous king all of his life.

Jotham's son, **Ahaz** (cf. 2 Kings 16:1–20; 2 Chronicles 28:1–27) came to the throne in 735 B.C. Uzziah and Jotham had been righteous kings in spite of the people's corruption, but in Ahaz the people found a king who would be their example in wickedness. They found a king like themselves that would lead them into wicked endeavors spiritually and financially. Ahaz refused to make an alliance with Israel and Syria, but it was not because he trusted God. He lost over 100,000 soldiers in several battles. He lost many captives who were taken to Damascus for captivity in Syria.

God sent Isaiah to encourage Ahaz and still he refused to return to God. God told Ahaz, "You may ask any sign you want to ask. Ask it in the heaven above or the earth beneath, and I will give that to you to show you that I will be with you if you will just be with me" (cf. Isaiah 7:11). Instead of using God, Ahaz called upon Assyria for help and paid the Assyrian king. He depleted the treasures of Judah. Assyria came down and defeated the nation of Syria. So, Ahaz went up to visit the king of Assyria in Damascus and to pay him tribute. While he was there, Ahaz saw the Assyrian gods, and he made some just like them in Jerusalem, introducing idolatry of all kinds to the people of God there. As soon as he began to turn away from God, it was very easy for him to meddle in other areas of God's business. He perverted the priests, closed the temple activities, and pursued all kinds of spiritual and moral evils. Ahaz was a

weak, ungodly, wicked king all the days of his life. Isaiah delivered his most negative rebukes during Ahaz' reign.

Hezekiah (cf. 2 Kings 18:1–20:21; 2 Chronicles 29:1–2:33) came to the throne in 715 B.C. and reigned until 686 B.C. He was a good man, with a normal supply of faults and sins. This may sound contradictory, but it is true of anyone who tries to be thoroughly good. There is a normal supply of faults and sin in each life. Hezekiah led his nation in a thorough religious reform, and he removed all the shrines that his father had set up. These reforms were wide-spread throughout all the land. Even though it was a widespread reform, they were shallow and did not reach the depths of the people's hearts. The people, in spite of all of Hezekiah's goodness and all of Hezekiah's reforms, still wanted to follow the idols that Ahaz had brought in. It is easy to see how shallow the reforms were when the people willingly and fully followed his son Manasseh into idolatry and sin at the death of Hezekiah.

At first Hezekiah was loyal to Assyria. His father, Ahaz, had set up alliances, and he was trying his best to be a loyal Assyrian vassal (one country serving another country). When Babylon began to war against Assyria, then Hezekiah rebelled against this vassalage to Assyria because he did not like the evil Assyrian gods. Hezekiah became ill to the point of death, but he pleaded with God to remember his devotion (cf. Isaiah 38–39). During this time, agents from Babylon came to him, and he showed them all the temple treasures. By doing this he linked himself to anti-Assyrians. When King Sennacherib surrounded the city, Hezekiah was in the temple pleading with God for help. He knew he could not defeat the Assyrians. He knew that his link to Babylon would not help him. He knew that an alliance with Egypt would not allow him to defeat the Assyrians. And he knew that if he surrendered to the Assyrians, he would become the Assyrian's vassal and slave again. God sent a destroying angel that night into the Assyrian camp and slaughtered 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. It must have been quite a scene the next morning for Sennacherib to see so many of his

soldiers dead. He had to return home defeated because one man was loyal to God. Hezekiah died while the city of Jerusalem and all of Israel was at peace with God. The fall of Jerusalem in the future was caused to some degree by Hezekiah's arrogant pride in the worldly treasures. The fall of Jerusalem did not come until after his death because of his righteousness, and it was not at the hand of the Assyrians (cf. Isaiah 39:5–8). But, because he had shown the temple treasures to these agents of Merodach-Baladan, the king of Babylon, God said, "These people will come back and get these riches that you have shown them." And they did during the years of 606–586 B.C.

Hezekiah's son, **Manasseh** (cf. 2 Kings 21:1–17; 2 Chronicles 33:1–20), ruled from 697–642 B.C. He was the most wicked king Judah ever had. Hezekiah was the most righteous king since David, and yet he has the most wicked son in all of Judah's period. It was Manasseh's sin that led them into the most corrupt condition of their history. Although they were religious in every way including both true and false worship, their morality and spirituality were at an all time low. This is true sometimes in any nation's history. A nation can be religious from the top to the bottom with religious people all around them, and yet the morality, spirituality, and character of the nation declines because their heart is not in their religion. Because of this moral and spiritual low, the nation had nothing to keep them from going into captivity (cf. 2 Kings 21–23). Manasseh was carried into Babylon and imprisoned there. He came to his senses and repented of his sins while he was in captivity. God caused him to be released, and he came back to the land and attempted a reformation to undo all the harm he had done. It was a good, sincere effort, but it was too late.

Amon, the son of Manasseh, had learned all too well from his wicked father's past, and he continued the evil journey into oblivion and caused Judah finally to cease to exist in the year 586 B.C.

The Kings of Israel

Most of this chapter has been spent on Judah's kings because Isaiah spoke concerning Judah and Jerusalem. While all of this was going on in Isaiah's homeland, Israel, in the north, was not doing as well. **Jehoash** (cf. 2 Kings 13:10–14:23; 2 Chronicles 25:17–25) was the king during Isaiah's time. Jehoash was a successful warrior who ruled Israel for sixteen years. He warred against Judah and defeated them. He captured Amaziah and tore down one of Jerusalem's walls. He took many hostages, sacked the temple, and robbed it of its temple treasures.

Jeroboam II, the son of Jehoash, (2 Kings 14:23–29) ruled from 793–735 B.C. He was a very powerful man who restored the borders of Israel to their promised limits, and brought great prosperity to the nation as Jonah, the prophet, had predicted (cf. 2 Kings 14:25). Amos and Hosea were the only true prophets during his rule. Jeroboam fostered the most wicked time that Israel had ever known. Poor people were exploited. Slavery became rampant in his land. The priests were immoral, the prophets were hirelings, preaching was done only for what they would receive from the wickedness of their prophecy. **Zechariah**, the son of Jeroboam (cf. 2 Kings 15:8–16), reigned for only six months before **Shallum** assassinated him. Then Shallum only reigned for one month and he was assassinated by Menahem.

Menahem (2 Kings 15:14–22) came to the throne in 753 B.C. and ruled until 742 B.C. Menahem was defeated by Pul of Assyria who took away a great number of captives and required a very heavy tribute from him.

Pekahiah, the son of Menahem, (2 Kings 15:23–26) reigned for only two years, and he continued the evil policy of his father. **Pekah** (2 Kings 15:27–30, 37) reigned from 752–732 B.C. He may have tried to set up a rival kingdom to Menahem (cf. Hosea 5:5; 2 Kings 15:29). He made an alliance with Syria even though he had previously hated them because of the oppression that Syria brought upon him; but his war with

Pul forced him into an alliance with his previous enemy. They tried to defeat Judah under Ahaz, but were really never able to be totally successful in spite of all of Ahaz's wickedness.

Hoshea (2 Kings 15:30; 17:1–6; 18:10) came to the throne in 732 B.C. and reigned until 722 B.C. He was the last king of Israel. He served as an Assyrian vassal and ruled over very small remnants of a once large and proud nation. When Pul (Tiglath-Pileser III) died he made an alliance with So, Pharaoh of Egypt. When Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, heard about this, he laid siege to Samaria for three years. He carried away many of the Israelites to Assyria and left a mixed multitude to inhabit the land. The Samaritan people of the New Testament came from this mixed race. The nation of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, was buried at last, never to rise again. They had one wicked king after another, until finally God could stand their wickedness no longer.

The Kings of Assyria

During the time of Isaiah, the nations were ruled by the kings of Assyria. It will be good to go back and talk about these kings of Assyria. **Tiglath-Pileser I** came to the throne in 1116 B.C. He led the nation to new heights of military power and conquest. He set a policy of showing absolutely no mercy to their enemies and it was never changed. Reports of his cruelty struck terror in the hearts of those he was about to conquer. This policy was to be followed by most, if not all, of his successors. The details of the things that the Assyrians did to their enemies are sickening. They put hooks in their noses and their ears and pulled them behind their horses until they fell and finally the skin was pulled away. They put hooks all over the body until there was no other place that could hold a hook. When they got them back to Assyria, they made them serve 24 hours a day until finally they died from exhaustion and a lack of food. Tiglath-Pileser also built many of the great cities, palaces and strongholds that later kings would inhabit.

A king named **Adad-nirari** came to the throne and continued this policy of accepted cruelty. He burned the defeated cities to the ground, beheaded thousands of captives, and flayed (to strip the skin off of something) thousands of people alive. Knowing about this cruelty helps us understand the total terror Assyria held over all men (cf. Hosea 13).

Ashurnasirpal was probably the greatest war general that Assyria ever knew. He built the Assyrian army into the greatest war machine the world had ever seen. He is reported to have built a tower a hundred feet high covered with the skins of his flayed enemies. His conquest ended at the Mediterranean Sea where he washed his swords and shields of the blood, symbolizing his boast to have conquered all the world. He did not go down into Israel and Judah simply because he saw nothing there to be gained by such a campaign.

Shalmaneser came to the throne in 859 B.C. His conquests brought him nearer to Israel than any of his predecessors. In his account of the battle of Karkar on the Orontes River, he claimed to have defeated twelve kings including Ahab of Israel and Ben-Hadad of Damascus. During his reign, Assyria suffered a great plague which greatly weakened the nation. It was at this time that God sent Jonah to give Assyria one last chance to enjoy His fellowship and His love.

Tiglath-Pileser III, (Pul) (cf. 2 Kings 15:19) came to the throne and began the conquest of Assyria by carrying part of the northern tribes of Zebulon and Naphtali into captivity. He came to Ahaz's aid against Israel and Syria and defeated them soundly, but his help was at great cost to Ahaz. **Shalmanesar V and Sargon** came to the throne. Shalmanesar began the siege of Samaria, and Sargon finished the destruction of Samaria in 722 B.C.

Sennacherib came to the throne as a brilliant general, but he was extremely arrogant and hated by all, including his own two sons, who would eventually slay him while he was worshiping his gods (cf. Isaiah 37). He destroyed over forty cities in Israel and Judah and besieged Jerusalem. He was

turned back by the direct hand of God who killed 185,000 of his soldiers and sent him home in total defeat.

In 612 B.C., the Assyrian capital of Nineveh fell to the Babylonians who were assisted by the Medes. This fall of Nineveh is graphically portrayed in the Book of Nahum. Assyria served as a buffer between God's people and the barbaric hordes of the North. They left the world a superior standard of architecture, science, literature and sculpture. On the negative side, they left the world bigger and better ways of killing each other in war.

These were stirring times when God was moving in a direct way to preserve His people. He was teaching Israel the lessons they needed to learn as they went into captivity in Assyria, never to exist again as a nation. In all of this, though, He was trying to tell Judah that this is the way you are going to go as well if you do not turn away from idolatry, immorality, pride, and luxury. He wanted them to turn back to Him in simplicity and purity. They had a chance to do this because they had faithful people who still wanted to serve Him; they had a righteous king in Hezekiah and they had a fabulous prophet in Isaiah. God raised up Isaiah to declare unto Israel their transgressions and coming doom at the hand of Assyria. To Judah, Isaiah declared their sin and the danger of that same destruction by Babylon in days to come if they did not repent. It is possible to learn the lesson from history and, therefore, not repeat its mistakes and lead ourselves into sin and judgment.

The Writer of Isaiah

Reasons to Believe Isaiah Was Written by a Single Author

Chapter five of this study of the Book of Isaiah continues to cover some introductory material. This chapter will cover the question of “How many prophets wrote Isaiah?” It is the conclusion of many modern liberal scholars today that the Book of Isaiah was written by multiple authors over several centuries. It is this author’s conclusion that one single author wrote this book during the eighth century. This view is also held by others. In fact, many of the details from this chapter were taken from The Book of Isaiah by Jim McGuiggan. It is an excellent book to use as a resource during the study of Isaiah. There are several reasons to be firmly persuaded that the Book of Isaiah was written by a single author named Isaiah in the eighth century B.C.

New Testament Writers Attribute the Book to Isaiah

The prime reason for believing that the Book of Isaiah was written by one author is that the New Testament writers quote all sections of the Book of Isaiah and attribute them to Isaiah. Modern scholars divide the book into as many as seven different authors. Primarily, though, they think there are two authors. One wrote chapters 1–39, then in the sixth century B.C., another author wrote chapters 40–66.

New Testament writers looked at Isaiah as the author of the book that bares his name. Read the New Testament scriptures, especially the ones from Jesus’ own mouth, and notice the use

that Jesus made of this book. Notice what section of Isaiah was quoted and how it says that **Isaiah himself** was writing or speaking:

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judah and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” This is the one who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’” (Matthew 3:1–3).

This is a quote of Isaiah 40:3 recorded by Matthew, an inspired writer, as he was telling about John the Baptist being the one who would fulfill what Isaiah had prophesied. Matthew was not just repeating what the prophets had said; he was not just quoting from the Book of Isaiah; he said, “*This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the desert . . .’*” Matthew, **the inspired writer**, believed that Isaiah wrote chapter 40:

Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali — to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles — the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (Matthew 4:13–16).

This scripture is a quote from Isaiah 9:1–2. Matthew said that John the Baptist fulfilled Isaiah 40, and he said that Isaiah wrote it (cf. Matthew 3:3). In Matthew 4, he said that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 9 and that Isaiah wrote this as well. Matthew was convicted that Isaiah had spoken and written both chapter 9 and chapter 40 of Isaiah.

When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases" (Matthew 8:16–17).

Matthew quoted Isaiah again in Matthew 8:17 when he quoted Isaiah 53 and said it *"was spoken through the prophet Isaiah."* Matthew was convicted that Isaiah 40, Isaiah 9, and Isaiah 53 were all spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

Aware of this, [Jesus was aware that they were trying to kill him] Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, warning them not to tell who he was. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope" (Matthew 12:15–21).

In this passage Matthew quoted Isaiah 42:1–4: *"This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet, Isaiah . . ."* preceding the quote. Isaiah spoke it. Isaiah wrote it. This proves that Matthew believed Isaiah wrote chapters 40, 9, 53, and 42 of Isaiah.

In Matthew 13, Matthew recorded the parable of the sower as Jesus told it to a crowd that had gathered around him. Within that parable, Jesus Himself quoted from Isaiah to explain to them why he was speaking in parables.

This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand." In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them" (Matthew 13:13–15).

Jesus quoted Isaiah 6:9–10. Within the Book of Matthew, Isaiah was given credit for having written and spoken chapters 6 through 53 in the Book of Isaiah. These were not just Matthew's recollections or his inspired writings. Jesus Himself talked about the prophecy of Isaiah being fulfilled. In Matthew 15, Jesus said:

You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you. "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are rules taught by men" (Matthew 15:7–9).

Jesus was talking to some of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law when He told them that Isaiah was right about them. This was a quote from Isaiah 29:13.

Matthew is not the only New Testament writer to quote from Isaiah. Luke wrote about Jesus being in the synagogue in Nazareth, and He stood up to read:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has

sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down (Luke 4:17–19).

Notice how this passage begins — “*The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.*” It is interesting that Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1–2, and Luke said He read from “*the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.*” During Jesus’ time the Book of Isaiah was thought to have been written by only one man.

The Apostle John also quoted from the Book of Isaiah:

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still did not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: “Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (John 12:37–38).

This is a quote from Isaiah 53:1. So in addition to Matthew, John was also persuaded that Isaiah wrote chapter 53. Then, in the very next verse, John quoted from Isaiah 6:10:

For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: “He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts nor turn — and I would heal them.” (John 12:39–40).

Luke, as the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, recorded the encounter Philip had with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:

This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot and reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” Then Philip ran

up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. The eunuch was reading this passage of scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who shall speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth" (Acts 8:27b–33).

The eunuch was reading from a scroll that was written by the prophet Isaiah. The passage that he was reading was Isaiah 53:7–8. This passage in Isaiah 53 is part of the second half of the book that modern scholars say was not written by Isaiah. Luke as an inspired writer recorded that it was written by Isaiah. Luke recorded Paul preaching to the leaders of the Jews while he was still under guard in Rome. He wrote:

Some [This was some of the leaders of the Jews who had come to speak to Paul about Christ.] were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: 'Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."'" (Acts 28:24–26).

This is the same passage that is quoted four times in the New Testament from Isaiah 6:9–10.

The uniform statement throughout all the New Testament could be: “Isaiah said it! Isaiah wrote it!” The men who wrote the New Testament by inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God seem to prove that Isaiah wrote everything from Isaiah 1–66. Here is a listing of some quotations made in the Book of Romans from the Book of Isaiah:

Romans 9:27–28 — Isaiah 10:22–23

Romans 9:29 — Isaiah 1:9

Romans 9:33 — Isaiah 8:14, 28:16

Romans 10:16 — Isaiah 53:1

Romans 10:20–21 — Isaiah 65:1–2

Romans 15:12 — Isaiah 11:10

The Jewish Nation Has Always Accepted the Unity of Isaiah

The second reason to believe that Isaiah is the only author of the Book of Isaiah is historical. The Jewish nation to whom the Book of Isaiah was written always accepted the unity of its authorship. The Jews, who were custodians of the book, thought it was written by one person. The entire Book of Isaiah, as it is today, was contained in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Most of these were written in or before the first century. When the religious monks were copying the Book of Isaiah, they did not even skip a space between the end of chapter 39 and chapter 40 even though this is the area where modern scholars believe there is a division and another author involved. The book is entitled “*Isaiah*” in every single scroll that has been found. Isaiah himself claimed to be the author of the book in fifteen separate places within his book. It is possible that through inspiration Isaiah was anticipating that there would be a controversy about his book and its authorship. Most authors do not feel the need to name themselves as the author over and over again within one manuscript.

The Uncertainty of Those Who Oppose the “One Author” View

Another reason behind opposing the view to more than one author is the fact that it becomes a more and more complex issue. Even among the supporters of this view, they cannot agree on who wrote this verse or that verse. There is no clear reason to believe that Isaiah was written by more than one author. The rest of this chapter will give a summary of some of the arguments that have been made for reference purposes. It is recommended that the reader acquire a copy of Jim McGuiggan’s Book on Isaiah for more information.

Some believe that the linguistic differences within the book are a reason for more than one author. However, an author may change his style several times within a manuscript depending on the audience he is writing or speaking to. The different styles of writing contained in one book are not sufficient enough evidence against two thousand years of testimony to prove that there is more than one author.

There are arguments for more than one author based on the **difference of topic** and the **difference of prophetic methods** that are used in the book. There are many methods of approaches to the truth within this book. That is a flimsy argument. Every author uses a different style in the very same work. Read William Shakespeare, Will S. Durant, and Ariel Durant. Each of these writers changes their approach and method many times because they are talking about different things. Differences do exist in Isaiah, but is that because of multiple authors or is it because he has different things to say to different people?

The strongest argument that the other scholars make in behalf of more than one author for the Book of Isaiah is the **historical setting of Isaiah 40–66**. There is no doubt that when other prophets were predicting a future event they characteristically spoke to their own generation about future generations or future events. They did not usually speak to the future generations in the present tense, as if they were already

there and as if they already existed. Compare Deuteronomy 28–29 and nearly any prophecy about the future. The future tense was used when prophecy was made about the future. Isaiah 40–66 does speak to the people as if they were already in captivity. The other scholars' argument says this proves this section was written in the sixth century since that was when the people were in captivity. They gather material from nearly every prophet who wrote to show that the tense and predictive prophecy used is future tense rather than the present. They say that since Isaiah, son of Amoz, was not alive in the sixth century B.C., the author of Isaiah 40–66 was the work of some other man.

Notice some things in response to this argument. **Number one**, there is “historical perfect” tense used in scripture. God speaks of things that are not as though they were. That is what Paul says in Romans 4:17. Paul was talking about Abraham as the father of many nations:

*He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed — the God who gives life to the dead and **calls** things that are not as though they were. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be” (Romans 4:16b–18).*

When God said this to Abraham, it was before Isaac ever “was.” He did not exist except in the purpose and the mind of God, yet God “called” him as if he already existed. Compare Isaiah 9:2–6 with Matthew 4:15–16. Isaiah spoke as if the Messiah already lived in Galilee, but the time when Jesus would live in Galilee was a long time in the future. Matthew said that this is what Isaiah spoke of to be fulfilled by Jesus. Just because the present tense was used does not mean that it cannot be the future he was speaking about.

Number two, there are large sections of scripture which deal with future events and yet describe them as present and sometimes even past events. In Daniel 7, Daniel saw a vision of *“Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea”* (Daniel 7:3). These beasts represented empires that were not in existence, but it sounds like they were already there. In Ezekiel, the death of Pelatiah was spoken of as a future event (cf. Ezekiel 11:1–13). Past tense was used to speak of future events. Present tense had been used to speak of the future events. God was not bound and tied down to one method of dealing with people through His spokesmen: *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways”* (Hebrew 1:1). It is possible that Isaiah was supernaturally transported in his visions to speak to the generations in Babylonian captivity and to deliver God’s message to them.

Number three, it is not clear that Isaiah 40–66 speaks of generations and events beyond the lifetime of Isaiah. Notice the description of Israel’s wickedness mentioned in various points in Isaiah 40–66, particularly 56–58 and 65. He spoke of the terrible wickedness going on in the eighth century B.C. Remember that Isaiah probably wrote chapters 40–66 after the northern nation of Israel had already gone into captivity. The promises of the return from exile could refer to a captivity that had already begun.

Number four, there is some question concerning the Babylonian captivity and rescue and whether or not it is indeed part of the eighth century B.C. from the view point of modern scholars, but Micah 4:10 explicitly mentions the Babylonian captivity: *“Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to **Babylon**; there you will be rescued. There the LORD will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies.”* Isaiah speaks of Israel’s future return from Babylonian captivity before they are even in it (cf. Isaiah 13–14). He speaks of Babylon as being the world’s leading nation, even before it

becomes a nation at all (cf. Isaiah 14). He speaks of how a restored Israel will speak after the exile in Babylon before they have even begun that exile. The flagrant idolatry mentioned in chapters 40-66 did not occur during or after the exile. That only occurred during the eighth century B.C.

Number five, there are many indications in the later chapters of Isaiah that it was written in Canaan rather than in the flat lands of Babylon. The physical lay-out, the mountains, the trees, and many of the descriptions are of Palestine. There is no legitimate reason to believe that this book was written in the sixth century B.C. It is too plain that this book was written by one man, Isaiah the son of Amoz, in the eighth century B.C.

In the final analysis, this is not that important to the study of Isaiah. The important issue is two-fold for the student: Do you believe the Bible is fully inspired? Do you believe it is the pure, actual, and literal word of God? And — do you purpose to live by His word? Those are the two issues. It is important that any student of the Bible believes, honors, treasures, and obeys it. God can bring each one peace in believing in the Messiah that Isaiah presents.

The New Testament Writers' Use of the Old Testament Prophets

Introduction

This chapter will continue the introduction of the Book of Isaiah. The study of a prophetic book needs to be approached in a different way. The final principle for approaching the study of Isaiah, or any other Old Testament prophetic book, is to approach it in the same way the prophetic books were approached by the New Testament writers. It is important to view the Old Testament prophets from the point of view of this New Testament era.

The Gospel Writers' Use of the Old Testament Prophets

They Used the Prophets to Proclaim that Jesus Christ Was the Messiah

This chapter will begin by looking at the gospel writers who used the prophets to proclaim that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. They proclaimed that Jesus was the One of which the Old Testament prophets wrote. The archangel Gabriel was very clear in his testimony about John the Baptist to Zechariah:

And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and the power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to

their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous — to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17).

In this one verse, Gabriel alluded to Malachi 4:4–5 and Isaiah 40:3. Luke quoted both Malachi and Isaiah through the angel Gabriel to prove that John the Baptist was to be the forerunner of Jesus.

Luke also recorded an angel speaking to Mary: *“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David . . .”* (Luke 1:32). This is a quote from Isaiah 9:7. The angel was telling Mary about Christ’s deity. In Matthew 1:1–17 and the parallel verses in Luke 3:23–37 these two New Testament writers were very careful to trace both Mary and Joseph all the way back to David’s line because of the widespread knowledge of this prophecy that the Messiah was to be the son of David. The New Testament writers used the prophet to prove that Jesus was the Messiah.

Luke also quoted or alluded to Isaiah 9:7, Daniel 2:44, and Isaiah 2:1, 4: *“And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end”* (Luke 1:33). The emphasis here is upon the eternal duration of the Messiah’s kingdom and also on its continual increase. There will never be a decrease in its power.

Although he was not a gospel writer, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, also prophesied and quoted from the prophets.

His father [“His” is speaking of John the Baptist.] Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy

prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us . . .” (Luke 1:67–71).

Zechariah prophesied as he quoted from the prophet Isaiah and the prophet Zechariah (cf. Isaiah 40:10, 12:2–3, 11:13,15; Zechariah 9:9). He was speaking of Jesus as Salvation and of His power. Jesus will lead His church in triumph over all of His enemies:

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; and you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace (Luke 1:76–79).

Luke quoted these verses from Isaiah 40:2–3, 9:2 and Malachi 4:2. This is a beautiful picture of His kingdom when vicious men will be converted and become humble and gentle ambassadors. An example of this is found in Saul of Tarsus when he became the great Apostle Paul (cf Acts 9:1–31). In all these verses the early New Testament writers and the gospel writers used the prophets to prove that Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus’ Message Was Sustained by the Predictions from the Old Testament

There are other early quotations of the prophets that are interesting. It is interesting to see how the New Testament opens with such a notable emphasis on the prophets. God was not calling His people to a blind leap of faith. He was telling them from the beginning that His message, Jesus’ message, was substantiated by the predictions of the Old Testament.

Notice the following quotations just from the gospel of Matthew: “*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham*” (Matthew 1:1). In the very first verse of the Book of Matthew it says that Jesus was the son of David and the son of Abraham. That is Old Testament history. Further along in Matthew there is a quote from Isaiah 7:14 about the virgin birth of Jesus:

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us” (Matthew 1:22–23).

Two things are emphasized in the birth of Christ. Number one, the fact that it is the virgin conception, and number two, the fact that God has visited our planet and is here in our midst.

Micah 5:2 is quoted in Matthew 2:6. After Jesus’ birth, wise men from the east came looking for the one that was to be born “*the King of the Jews.*” When they asked about where this baby had been born, the chief priests and teachers of the Law replied:

“In Bethlehem in Judea . . . for this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel’” (Matthew 2:5–6).

No sooner was the question asked than the answer was given. The priests and the teachers of the Law knew the prophets and were, therefore, able to answer this question. They knew that the Messiah was going to be called “*the King of the Jews,*” the governor of Judah, the shepherd of Israel, worthy of worship and the divine deliverer.

Hosea 11:1 was quoted in Matthew 2:15. This was when Herod was seeking to kill Jesus. Jesus' parents fled with him to Egypt: *"Where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"* The Messiah was to be called out of Egypt. Reading Hosea 11, it sounds like he was talking about calling the nation of Israel out of Egypt, but the New Testament writer says that was talking of Jesus' coming out of the land of Egypt.

Jeremiah 31:15 told of the slaughter of babies in Bethlehem six hundred years before it occurred. Isaiah 11:1 is possibly the Old Testament passage that is being referred to in Matthew 2:23. Isaiah 9:1 speaks of the future honor that will be given to Galilee. Isaiah 40:3 is quoted in Matthew 3:3 when Isaiah spoke of John the Baptist preparing the way for the Messiah.

The next few quotations in this chapter are a series related to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. When He was tempted to make the stones into bread, He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 in Matthew 4:4. Satan quoted Psalm 91:11–12 when he tried to get Jesus to tempt His father in Matthew 4:6. Matthew 4:7 quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 when Jesus told Satan that he should not test the Lord. When the devil tried to get Jesus to bow down and worship him in Matthew 4:10, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13 and said that the only God He would ever have was His Father:

Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles — the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Matthew 4:15–16).

This is a quote from Isaiah 9:1–2. This passage of scripture in Matthew says that after his rejection in Nazareth Jesus moved to live in Capernaum to fulfill the scriptures according

to what Isaiah had prophesied. This text has long been held by the teachers of Israel to be messianic. That is why Matthew used it to apply to Jesus.

Jesus' Use of the Prophets

Jesus' Attitude Toward the Old Testament Prophets

The New Testament scriptures do not contain the complete words of Jesus. John said that all that Jesus had said and done could not be written in a book:

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written (John 21:25).

There is more than enough within Scripture though to show Jesus' attitude toward the Old Testament fathers. One of the last experiences of Jesus is recorded in Luke. He was talking to the two brothers who were on their way to Emmaus:

He told them: "This is what I told you while I was still with you: 'Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'" Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: 'The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem'" (Luke 24:44-47).

Jesus continued this discussion with them. He explained that all the prophets spoke of Him, and everything must be fulfilled. Notice how much of the Old Testament was fulfilled in Him — "*the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.*"

Everything in the Old Testament spoke of Jesus. Jesus' words throughout His life spoke clearly to this fact.

Luke 7:22–23 (and the parallel scripture in Matthew 11:2–6) contains Jesus' answer to the question, "*Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?*" Rather than simply saying, "Yes, I am the one you should look for." He replied by telling them that He was doing everything the prophets said the Messiah would do. When He told them, "You go back and tell them that deaf people hear, blind people see, that lame people walk, that dead people are raised and the poor have the gospel preached to them," He was nearly quoting Isaiah 61:1–3, Isaiah 35:5–6, and Isaiah 29:14 which speak of the merciful mission of the coming Messiah. These verses prove beyond all doubt to those who look for the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy that Jesus was the Messiah. John did not look for another after he heard that, and neither should searchers today.

Luke wrote, "*The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it*" (Luke 16:16; Matthew 11:13). The things that the prophets proclaimed were fulfilled in Jesus. They do not apply beyond that time. The prophets were no longer to be the guide of the people. Jesus is now the guide that all people must follow. On a mountain in Galilee, God spoke from heaven with Moses standing on one side of Jesus and Elijah on the other:

While he [The "he" is Peter as Peter was suggesting that they build a shelter for each one standing there.] was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:33).

Though the Messiah is David's son by ancestral lineage, He is David's Lord by divine heritage. The divinity of the Messiah is predicted again and again by the prophets:

Then Jesus said to them, "How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David? David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."' " David calls him "Lord." How then can he be his son? (Luke 20:41–44).

Then, according to Luke 21:32, Jesus spoke of Jerusalem being surrounded with armies and totally destroyed. (This was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman soldiers.) He said:

"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

These are words of vengeance saying that all the things that are written will be fulfilled. Everything will be accomplished.

The prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, the establishment of the church, and the conquest over the world through the Messiah. There are too many other passages and quotations of the prophets in the New Testament to cover all of them. Read the following passages:

Matthew 12:17–21 Jesus quoted Isaiah 42:1–3 — His ministry.

Matthew 13:1–15 Jesus quoted Isaiah 6:9–10 — stupidity of the Jews, hearing Him, not accepting.

Matthew 27:9–10 quoted Zechariah 11:12–13 — refers to the death of Christ

Matthew 27:9–10 quoted Jeremiah 19:1–13

John 12:38–40 quoted Isaiah 53:1

John 13:18 quoted Psalm 41:9

John 15:25 quoted Psalm 35:19

All of these quotations taken as a whole and/or individually are used in the background to establish the fact that Jesus Christ is the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies. These scriptures are useful in talking to people about Jesus to prove that He is divine. This is also proof that His father is omnipotent (all powerful) and omniscient (all knowing), because He predicted hundreds of years before any of this occurred the exact things that would be fulfilled.

What the New Testament Writers Did Not Do with the Old Testament Prophecies

The New Testament writers did not misuse the Old Testament scriptures as many people do today. Not once did the New Testament writers quote an Old Testament prophet to apply his message to a coming millennial kingdom. They said that all the prophecies spoken were fulfilled in the Messiah and fulfilled in the kingdom that the Messiah would establish. Not once did they apply an elaborate prophetic “test of system” to anything beyond their day. Not one time did they look beyond their day for the fulfillment of the passages that were listed there. Less than one percent of the passages look beyond the day in which they were spoken and written. Less than one percent could apply to any age other than the age of the first century. The New Testament writers always applied the Old Testament prophets’ messages to their situation, even if it did sound apocalyptic. Even if it did figuratively refer to the end of time with phrases like “*nations shaking*,” “*heaven falling*,” “*the earth rolling up as a scroll*,” and “*the stars falling as ripe figs*,” the New Testament writers still used those passages to refer to the end of the Jewish nation in their day and time.

It is important to remember that all of the prophets spoke to the Jews. It is important to remember that Christ came to the

Jewish nation and not to the Gentile nation. It is important to remember that all the writers of the New Testament except one were Jewish. There was a Jewish Messiah that came to a Jewish nation to establish a Jewish church, and, therefore, all these Jewish scriptures within the Old Testament are culminated in the Hope of Israel. Their Hope was in the Messiah. He was the individual that was to come to bless all the nations of the earth. He was the seed of the woman who was to come to bruise the serpent's head. He was the star of Jacob who would give light to all the world. He was the root and the branch of David that came to bless His people and all the nations of the earth.

There are a few passages (4) that may seem to have reference to some aspect of what we call "the end time" or the time of Jesus' second coming. None of these passages are extensive and all of them are questionable. Not a one of them refers just to the end of time and the second coming. They could refer to Jesus' coming to bless Israel and to the fact that Israel would bless all the world. That was God's intent. His plan was that the Messiah would come to Israel and Israel would go to all the world. The promise of blessing was made to the Jews, and the Jews were the ones to go and bless all the earth.

Anyone who reads the New Testament can trace its use of the Old Testament prophets. Anyone can see that the New Testament writers employed what might be a non-literal or spiritual interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. The stars did not fall from the sky. The earth was not rolled up like a scroll. God did not literally shake the world when the Messiah came and preached to Israel as He prophesied that He would in the Book of Haggai (cf. Haggai 2:1–23). So, what does that mean? The prophets spoke, as people often do, in pictorial language. When an American today says, "I was scared out of my skin," they do not really mean that they literally lost their skin. They just mean that they were very scared. People today say, "I was saved by the skin of my teeth." They do not mean

that there is any skin in their teeth. They mean that they had a narrow escape.

There are many other things that people say in all cultures that have a pictorial meaning. These phrases appeal to the inner eye of man because man is visual by nature. That is exactly what the Old Testament prophets did as they spoke of the Messiah and His kingdom. This is the way Old Testament prophets taught. This is the way the New Testament writers wrote. This is what people today must do. They did not feel by taking these passages non-literally that they were taking all the glory from the kingdom. They did not think they were downplaying the Messiah. They thought they were exalting the word of God to its ultimate, as they looked at the pictures about God and the pictures about the Messiah. This is not wrong as long as those using this method of teaching do not go beyond what the New Testament writers did with the scriptures.

Notice the burden of Old Testament eschatology (end-time talk). The burden of Old Testament prophecy about the end is a prophecy of the end of Judaism, a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah, the prophecy of the establishment of the Kingdom, and a prophecy of spreading the Kingdom throughout all the world. The New Testament writers said this had come to pass. Judaism had ended. The Messiah had come. The Kingdom had been established. The Kingdom had been preached throughout all the world.

The New Testament says the events about which the Old Testament spoke have been fulfilled. The burden of Old Testament "end-time talk" has been fulfilled. The burden of New Testament talk is the eternal bliss that God's children will enjoy with God in heaven. These two burdens are not the same. The covenants (testaments) are not the same. The Messiah had come. The New Covenant had been instituted. God made all things new. And the Old Testament must be viewed as a prediction of that, and not a prediction of something yet to come. God's children today possess the Kingdom of God. That

is what Jesus said in the Beatitudes — “*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:3).

As the conclusion of the introduction to the Book of Isaiah, it is important to remember there are characteristic phrases that are descriptive of the Messiah that occur over and over in the prophets. Isaiah used these descriptive phrases. He spoke of the latter days and of kings. He spoke of life and of the branch of the root. He spoke of righteousness and peace. He spoke of the highway and of water in a dry place. He spoke of the stone and of the kingdom. He spoke of the conquest of enemies and of the coming of the Lord. He spoke of singing and everlasting joy. When was all of that fulfilled? When did it all come to pass? The prophet said it would happen in the future. The New Testament says it is right now. God gives us peace in accepting all of the promises the Old Testament has made for us today.

Though the Messiah is David’s son by ancestral lineage, He is David’s Lord by divine heritage. The divinity of the Messiah is predicted again and again by the prophets.

Condemnation of Zion's Corruption and Religious Formalism

Isaiah 1:1–4:6

Review and Introduction

The past six chapters have introduced the idea of prophecy by looking at the Book of Isaiah. These chapters can be applied to all of the books of prophecy and answer the questions of: What kind of men were the prophets? What kind of books did they write? What was the intent of their lessons? The chapters showed that these men were men of God speaking to the sinful nation of God and calling them to repentance.

This chapter will begin the study of the Book of Isaiah itself. Isaiah confronted the sinful nation of Judah and spoke to them the faithful word of God. The next two chapters will cover the introductory message of Isaiah 1–6 and scope the message of the rest of the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah's call to be a prophet is found in Isaiah 6. Chapters 1–35 are really a unit of prophecies of judgment on Zion, the nation of Judah. There are 66 chapters in this book. Rather than study each chapter in detail, this book will try to find the total picture of what God is saying through Isaiah.

Condemnation of Zion's Corruption and Religious Formalism

The very first verse of Isaiah really sets the date of the book and tells who will be under consideration. It says, "*The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah*" (Isaiah 1:1). This dates Isaiah's book in the corrupt eighth century B.C. during the time of Amos, Hosea, and Micah. Of the kings mentioned here, only Jotham and Hezekiah are truly good kings. Uzziah was basically a good king who turned bad, and Ahaz was one of the most wicked kings that ever ruled Judah.

As the study of Isaiah continues remember that Isaiah was dealing specifically with the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. This group of people is also referred to as "*Zion*" and "*Israel*" in this study. The name Israel is used to refer to the people of God in general because of the name He gave Jacob long before this time in the Israelites' history. In this context it does not refer to Israel as the northern kingdom during the divided kingdoms. The nation of Israel specifically had already been taken into captivity. This is an important factor to remember during the study of the Book of Isaiah.

The first six chapters of Isaiah set the tone and give the outline for the rest of the Book of Isaiah. For this reason it is a good idea to take a close look at the first six chapters. Chapter 1 is a condemnation of the social corruption and the religious formalism of Israel. The first verses of chapter 1 give **God's complaint against His people**:

The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have

rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption. They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness — only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege. Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah (Isaiah 1:1–9).

The Lord had a complaint against Israel. That complaint was based on three things: first, He was their God, the one who had created them and He was their father, the one who had begotten them (cf. Isaiah 1:2). Second, He was their master; He had oxen and donkeys who obeyed His commands; they should have obeyed in like manner (cf. Isaiah 1:3a). Third, He was their teacher; He had taught them, but they did not understand (cf. Isaiah 1:3b).

So God made this demand upon the nation of Judah: "*Hear, O heavens! Listen O earth!*" God wanted them to listen and pay attention to Him. This demand was intended to produce two results. **First**, it was to convict them of their sin, which He listed (cf. Isaiah 1:4–6). They were "*. . . given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him*" (Isaiah 1:4b). **Second**,

He told them they needed to be fearful of the judgment He was going to bring upon them because of their lack of attention to Him. He even told them the nature of that judgment: *“Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers”* (Isaiah 1:7–9). They would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah, totally and absolutely destroyed, if God had not left some survivors because of His love and mercy toward them.

God rejected the nation of Judah because they had become like Sodom and Gomorrah. Their sacrifices had become only rituals:

Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! “The multitude of your sacrifices — what are they to me?” says the LORD. “I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations — I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean” (Isaiah 1:10–16a).

Remember that all of the things God said He detested and would not accept were the very things He commanded them to do under the Law. The reason He rejected these rituals now was because of the nature of their sacrifices. He said their sacrifices

were worthless, detestable, and profane. He hated their assemblies and would not accept them or their feast days because their hearts were not in what they were doing. They were simply obeying His laws. They were not worshiping their creator. Their prayers were offered with bloody, unclean hands, so God would not listen to their prayers. He saw them, but He would hide His eyes from them, and He would not listen because they came to Him with unclean hands that were worshiping from an unclean heart.

The way Judah was living was unacceptable to God. He wanted them to **repent and correct** their sinful lives.

“Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” For the mouth of the LORD has spoken (Isaiah 1:16–20).

God was telling His people they needed to repent. Repentance has two sides: one is ceasing to do evil; the other is learning to do good. God is a reasonable God and repentance means coming and reasoning with God. He wants His children to think logically about Him. He says, “If you repent I will not only wash you clean from all your sin, I will bring upon you great physical blessings. But if you rebel, refuse to repent and put away evil, if you refuse to do good and reason with Me from My word, then I will bring total and absolute national destruction upon you.”

God's Description of Jerusalem

Notice God's description of Jerusalem. They had a degenerate character. They had sunk far below the kind of people they were supposed to be.

See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her — but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them (Isaiah 1:21–23).

Their character totally changed as a city. In the past, they had been a faithful city that was once full of justice where righteousness dwelt. They had been materially blessed because of the kind of city they once were. Now, the city had become a harlot! It was a city full of murderers and people that hated the widows and orphans. They were materially cursed. Their silver and gold had become dross. Dross is the scum or rubbish taken from molten metal. It is worthless. Their purity had become diluted, so their power had degenerated. Rather than having godly rulers and godly people, they had rebellious rulers and rebellious people. They were greedy and unjust. God judged them because of that.

There are two major thoughts mingled together in the Book of Isaiah that deal with God's judgment on Zion. There would be punishment for the wicked and reward for the righteous.

Therefore, [Every time you see “therefore” from a prophet, it means judgment has come.] the LORD, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: “Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all

your impurities. I will restore your judges as in the days of old, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called The City of Righteousness, The Faithful City. Zion will be redeemed with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness. But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the way of the LORD will perish. You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen. You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water. The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together with no one to quench the fire” (Isaiah 1:24–31).

The punishment for the wicked that God was talking about included personal ruin for the people. They would be shamefully disgraced as a people. Their glory would fade like the colors fade on the leaves of an oak tree. Their punishment was going to bring total, complete, continual, and irrevocable destruction. God said He would burn there among them as a fire, and no one would be able to quench it. At the same time, there would be purification and reward for the righteous. The impurities would be burned away by fire. Godly leadership would be restored and justice would be recovered.

The Mountain of the Lord

When all the punishment and purification was over, what would it be like for God's people? God talked about the days after punishment in Isaiah 2. It is the future that Isaiah was speaking about, but it is the present for God's children today. It speaks of God's goal and His intent for Zion. He speaks of what Zion will be one day.

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream into it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us of his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD (Isaiah 2:1–5).

Isaiah saw God's goal for Zion. He spoke of its **exaltation**. Zion would be established as chief among all the nations. It would be above all the hills. It would be the preeminent kingdom in all the world. Notice its extent. He said many nations, many peoples would stream into it. They would come to it and say, "Let's go up to the mountain of the Lord." It would be universal.

Notice the **standards**. Isaiah said: "*He will teach us of his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.*" Its standard will not be Israel's ways. It will be "*his ways.*" They will walk in His paths. Notice His commission. It is to send out the law from Zion. It is to see that the word of the Lord is to go forth from Jerusalem. That is the great commission as Jesus would state it in the New Testament (cf. Matthew 28:16–20).

Notice that the **power of the nation** is found in its king. The King will judge between nations. He will settle disputes for many people. Notice its plan. It is a plan of peace. All the war instruments will be beaten into farm tools. No longer will they destroy the nations. They will not fear the nations. Notice its

path. It is a path of the light of the Lord. *"They will walk in the light of the LORD."* Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12).

The Day of the Lord: God's Judgment Upon Judah and Jerusalem

The picture of glory for Zion is followed by *"the day of the Lord"* as God's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. When the phrase *"the day of the Lord"* or *"the day of Jehovah"* is used in the Bible it is speaking of a day of final judgment. In Isaiah this would be God's judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (cf. Isaiah 2:6–4:6). He gave two specific reasons Judah would be destroyed and a summary that involved many reasons.

The first reason the nation of Judah would be destroyed was because they were religiously and morally corrupt:

You have abandoned your people, the house of Jacob. [Why?] They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and clasp hands with pagans. Their land is full of silver and gold; there is no end to their treasures. Their land is full of horses; there is no end to their chariots. Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their fingers have made. So men will be brought low and mankind humbled — do not forgive them. Go into the rocks, hide in the ground from dread of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty! The eyes of the arrogant man will be humbled and the pride of men brought low; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day (Isaiah 2:6–11).

Judah was controlled by eastern superstition. They were cultic and immoral in their nature. They made their religious

decisions like the Philistines, which was probably by tossing coins or by the divining of animals. This would have also included consulting witches and fortune tellers. They were involved in foreign alliances with pagans which God had expressly forbidden (cf. Joshua 23). God had promised judgment if they forsook Him for an alliance with other nations. They had become exceedingly materialistic so that there was no end to their treasures. They were filling the land with horses, which was something that God commanded them not to do (cf. Deuteronomy 17:16). They trusted in their military might and in war so that there was no end to their chariots. They had given themselves over to idolatry. God had no choice but to judge them because of their gods. They had become proud and arrogant. Solomon had already announced the judgment of the proud in Proverbs. He said, "*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall*" (Proverbs 16:18). They would pass away never to be seen again. Man's pride puts him in the place of God who alone will be exalted in that day.

The second reason for the destruction of Judah was because their pride was in the nation. They were proud of themselves rather than being proud of God who was the one who should have been exalted. They are described as proud, lofty, and arrogant. Isaiah reminded them that only the Lord was to be exalted.

The LORD Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled). . . The arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day, and the idols will totally disappear. Men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth. . . . Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he? (Isaiah 2:12, 17–19, 22)

Isaiah spoke about the fear people ought to have when they are judged. They should flee before the LORD, throw their idols away, and realize that all of their efforts were futile. Their trust in man rather than in God was the reason for their fall.

Summary Conclusion

Among the many reasons for God's judgment upon Judah were the areas of political and social corruption (cf. Isaiah 3:1–4:1). He told them they would have no supply or support when judgment came upon them. He was going to take away their food, water, and heroes. God took His word from them and they had no wise men to guide them. There were no soldiers to protect them and no craftsmen to bring joy and good things into their lives. God said their rulers would be weak and foolish like boys and women.

He described their civil disorder as the oppression of their neighbors, who were the very people they should have helped. They had no leaders in the family, because the father was not taking a leadership role and the mother was not raising the children. There was open sin in Jerusalem. They were parading their sin, as Sodom and Gomorrah did, in broad daylight. They were not even trying to cover it up with the darkness. They were not hiding the evil they were doing.

Not only was there civil disorder; there was also social corruption:

Tell the righteous that it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds. Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done. Youths oppress my people, women rule over them. O my people, your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path. The LORD takes his place in court; he rises to judge the people. The LORD enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people: It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in

your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?’ declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty (Isaiah 3:10–15).

In the midst of all the social corruption, God said to tell the righteous that He would reward them. Even though the people were corrupt and ruled by women and boys, God, as the Judge, would bring judgment upon those who had afflicted them. He would take care of the mistreatment of His people.

The deepest sin within Judah was their worldly women:

The LORD says, “The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, tripping along with mincing steps, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. Therefore the LORD will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the LORD will make their scalps bald.” In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery: the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, the earrings and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes, the perfume bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses and mirrors and the linen garments and tiaras and the shawls. Instead of fragrance there will be a stench; instead of a sash, a rope; instead of well-dressed hair, baldness; instead of fine clothing, sackcloth; instead of beauty, branding. Your men will fall by the sword, your warriors in battle. The gates of Zion will lament and mourn; destitute, she will sit on the ground. In that day, seven women will take hold of one man and say, “We will eat our own food and provide our own clothes; only let us be called by your name. Take away our disgrace!” (Isaiah 3:16–4:1)

Notice the pride of these worldly women! They were haughty and walked with outstretched necks. Notice their lasciviousness. They had flirting eyes and mincing feet. They dressed and acted in such a way to call attention to themselves and to bring about lust. Notice their fine luxury. There are twenty-one items of luxurious living listed. The judgment that God was going to place upon them was very appropriate to their sins. There would be a bad smell instead of a good one, a rope instead of a pretty sash, and baldness instead of a well-set hairdo. There would be sackcloth instead of fancy clothes, branding instead of beauty, defeat instead of victory, mourning instead of joy, and destitution instead of riches. These women would cry, "We will support ourselves! Just let us have your name. Take away our reproach!"

God's Blessing of the Remnant

In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. The LORD will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of fire. Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day [no sun to make you hot] and a glow of flaming fire by night [warmth in the coldness of the night]; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain (Isaiah 4:2–6).

God will protect His children. His children will be the people who have remained faithful to Him and did not trust in their riches. They will be the ones who did not worship idols

and did not form alliances with foreign nations (Ed. These alliances were wrong because they were against the express command of God and they expressed a lack of trust and faith in God's protection). God will bring them peace and joy. He will give them bounty and glorious beauty. There will be holiness and divine presence. There will be divine protection for those who walk in the simple way of the Lord. The Apostle John said, *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7). God gives His children peace in their humble walk with Him.

God's Song of Condemnation and Isaiah's Call

Isaiah 5:1–6:13

Introduction

Chapter 8 is a continuation of chapter 7 covering God's reason for condemning Judah and Jerusalem. He condemned them for their religious and social corruption. They turned away from God and the Law of God. This involved the rulers, the priests, the preachers, and the women. The nation was corrupt within the families and the church. After condemning the people, God gave the remnant a great blessing. When judgment came there would still be a small group that survived. These would be the people who sought the Lord in the midst of all the wickedness. It did not matter how wicked the nation of Judah became, there would still be a righteous remnant. There would still be people who were listening and taking to heart what Isaiah preached. They would fulfill the Word they had heard from God in their lives. They would turn back to the Law and remember all the commandments that God had given Moses. They would remember the relationship that God had established with the people during the days of Moses. This would be a relationship that the righteous remnant would never break.

The nation of Judah had become wicked from the top to the bottom. In Isaiah 5, God sang a song of condemnation to His unfruitful and weed-filled "*vineyard*." After that sad note, Isaiah recorded his call from God to be the spokesman for God.

The call itself is beautiful, but he was told that his ministry would be to a blind, deaf, unhearing, and rebellious people.

The Song of the Vineyard

The “song of the vineyard” is in Isaiah 5:1–30. God said He was receiving an evil yield from Judah in spite of all His goodness. Notice the charges that God made against His vineyard:

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad [literally, this translates as only sour fruit] fruit. “Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.” The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress” (Isaiah 5:1–7).

God charged His children with producing **evil from good**. Notice the description of the vineyard. This was not a worldly vineyard, it belonged to the Lord. He found a favorite spot up

on a hillside to put His vineyard so that it would have the morning and evening sun. He prepared the vineyard and took away all the rocks, stumps, and anything that would have caused the vineyard to be ill-prepared for the grapes. Then God planted the vineyard with the choicest vines. He put a wall around it to keep the animals out. He put a watchtower in the middle of the vineyard so that thieves could not steal the grapes.

God said, "I did everything to be a good vineyard owner. What else could I have done?" When it was time for the grapes to be ripe, God came to pick the grapes and eat the sweet fruit. He wanted to be able to press the grapes and drink the sweet juice. But when He picked the first grape and tasted it, it was bitter and sour in His mouth. After He had tasted a second and third grape and each one was sour and bitter, He concluded that His vineyard was only producing bad grapes. God had done everything He could to take care of the vineyard. There was no explanation for a bad crop. God declared Himself to be innocent.

God called for the men of Judah and Jerusalem to "*judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?*" (Isaiah 5:3). Even though the jury was made up of the wicked men of Judah, there could still be no question of the outcome of this trial. Even a dishonest court of law would have to find that God was innocent of any wrong in the case.

God gave His vineyard sufficient care by choosing and preparing the place to plant. He planted the choicest vines and protected them with a wall and a watchtower. He had every reason to expect a good crop of grapes from a vineyard that He had taken such good care. What did He get? He got sour grapes. God does not want to judge people. He would rather reward people. He wants to protect His people, but the people that He planted and cared for had done evil in His sight. He had to bring judgment upon them. The explanation for this picture of the vineyard is given in Isaiah 5:7. The vineyard is the nation of

Israel and the men of Judah. God planted them in a very fertile place. He protected them in that place from all their enemies. He came to them looking for justice and He found only bloodshed. He came looking for righteousness and He found only distress. When God comes to judge the lives of His people today, He will be looking for justice between men and righteousness between man and God. If He does not find it, then the verdict will be exactly what it was for Judah and Jerusalem — guilty.

The Verdict: Guilty of Six Charges

The nation of Judah was found guilty of six charges against God. The first charge was materialism:

Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land. The LORD Almighty has declared in my hearing: "Surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants. A ten-acre vineyard will produce only a bath of wine, a homer of seed only an ephah of grain" (Isaiah 5:8–10).

Judah had sinned in their greedy accumulation of goods. They had accumulated so many things until there was no more room for collecting. God's judgment for this kind of sin dealt with what they were involved in. Their houses would become desolate and empty. Their fields would not produce. Someone who had a "*ten-yoke vineyard*" (This is the literal translation for Isaiah 5:10 — this would be a vineyard that was so large that it took ten oxen every day to plow it.) would only produce six gallons of wine. The fellow who planted six bushels of seed would only receive three-fifths of a bushel of grain. The judgment of God was very severe. **Materialism** was the first sour grape from Judah to God.

The second charge that God made against Judah was reveling:

Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of his hands. Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding; their men of rank will die of hunger and their masses will be parched with thirst. Therefore the grave enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit; into it will descend their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers. So man will be brought low and mankind humbled, and the eyes of the arrogant humbled. But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself righteous by his righteousness. Then sheep will graze as in their own pasture; lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich. (Isaiah 5:11–17).

The people of Judah were drunken from morning until night. They caroused and partied with no thought of God at all. This charge does not condemn having a good time. It just condemns taking God out of having a good time. Because of their actions, God would bring them low by exile and death. And God would be glorified, both by judging the revelers and delivering the humble. **Reveling** was the second sour grape against Judah.

A third sour grape against Judah was **scornful depravity**:

Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, to those who say, "Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it" (Isaiah 5:18–19).

Sin is portrayed as something that gradually gains a terrible power over people. It pulls them like a silk thread at first, but before long it becomes a strong cord that turns into a heavy rope that is impossible to break. It is like a rope put around the animal to pull the cart. Sin is a heavy load. Sin has a fearful culmination when it reaches its summit and it stands in direct defiance to the living God. Sin puts forth a challenge to the work of God.

A fourth sour grape was their **corrupted value system**:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter” (Isaiah 5:20).

Judah could not tell right from wrong, because they had become so corrupted. And that which ought to sicken them made them joyful. And that which they ought to have seen as corrupt they saw as right and good.

A fifth sour grape was **conceit**:

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight” (Isaiah 5:21).

Judah was a legend in their own mind. They had decided they were right and could not be wrong. They considered themselves to be first and could not be second; they were exalted and could not be humbled. They did not believe judgment could happen to them.

A sixth sour grape was the fact that they had **drunken and corrupt judges** in their courts:

Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe and deny justice to the innocent” (Isaiah 5:22–23).

Drunken and corrupt judges was a character problem in Judah. The judges could be bought, so they were the best judges money could buy. They were friends to the guilty rich and enemies to the righteous poor.

The Sentence: Judgment to Come

Notice the judgment that came upon this vineyard that had yielded only sour grapes. God sentenced them as a judge sentences a criminal:

Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers will blow away like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore the LORD's anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like refuse in the streets. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. He lifts up a banner for the distant nations, he whistles for those at the ends of the earth. Here they come, swiftly and speedily! Not one of them grows tired or stumbles. Not one slumbers or sleeps; not a belt is loosened at the waist, not a sandal thong is broken. Their arrows are sharp, all their bows are strung; their horses' hoofs seem like flint, their chariot wheels like a whirlwind. Their roar is like that of the lion, they roar like young lions; they growl as they seize their prey and carry it off with no one to rescue. In that day they will roar over it like the roaring of the sea. And if one looks at the land, he will see darkness and distress; even the light will be darkened by the clouds (Isaiah 5:24–30).

Isaiah portrayed a terrible judgment in this passage. Judah was going to be totally devoured by fire. The reason is clearly

stated. They had spurned and rejected the Word of the Lord; therefore, they would be burned and utterly destroyed by God. His past judgment did not satisfy His justice. All that He did, and He did some severe things to them, all of these judgments did not answer for their sins. He would return in total wrath. So they were going to be unmercifully devastated by foreign nations.

God's judgment was portrayed as an approaching army by Isaiah. There are certain words and phrases that describe the coming of God as an army. He raised a banner to get people together. He whistled to call them and they came swiftly and speedily. This army did not get tired. They marched all day and all night. They never had to sit down and loosen the belt that carried their sword and armor. They were so severe and so powerful. Their shoes never wore out. Their arrows sharply pierced the hearts of their enemies. As their horses ran, their hooves seemed to strike sparks behind them. When they roared, it was as the roar of a lion. When they grabbed and devoured they did not just kill. They drove away and devoured until there was absolutely nothing left. The worst judgment of all was that there would be no life left. Of all the things that are precious to mankind, life is one of the most precious things. Love and light and life — these are the three things that really are significant eternally. God removed Himself from Israel and that was why their life was gone.

The Prophet's Call

The first five chapters of Isaiah tell why the book itself was written. Chapter 6 looks at the call of Isaiah to preach this message. It is one of the finest chapters in all of the Bible.

The Vision of God

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the **Lord** seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of*

*his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two wings they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the **LORD** Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorstops and thresholds shook and **the temple was filled with smoke** (Isaiah 6:1–4).*

The phrase "*the temple was filled with smoke*" means that God was in the temple and no one could go in. There are two words in the original language which are translated Lord in the Bible. One word is *Adonai*. This is the Hebrew word which is spelled "*Lord*." *Adonai* is "the master." The other word is Jehovah or *Yahweh*. When this word is seen in the Bible it is always spelled as "*LORD*" with all capital letters. This is God, the eternal one.

Isaiah saw the "master" (cf. Isaiah 6:1). He saw the one who had the right to tell him anything and everything that he needed to do. He saw the throne and God, high and exalted and lifted up. Isaiah saw the Lord — the glorious One. The Lord had such a fabulous robe that the train of his robe filled the temple. It was a beautiful and glorious sight — like seeing a bride come down the aisle. And as she comes down the aisle in that beautiful, white garment, the train of her gown is trailing behind her. And the more expensive the robe, the longer the train. God has a train that fills the temple. His robe is fabulous.

Around God were the seraphs. They were high orders of creatures, who in an earlier appearance guarded the Garden of Eden so that no one could go in. In other cases they will come and bring judgment upon nations. At this time they were singing. Notice the characteristics of their wings. They have speed, endurance, humility, obedience, and readiness. They can fly with one set of wings. With the wings that cover their faces they show their humility. There are also wings that cover their feet which will show the endurance they have. They are ready

and willing to do God's bidding. They will go wherever God tells them to go. They will do whatever God tells them to do. Their song is a simple one — "The Lord is holy! The Lord is glorious! Praise the Lord! Hallelujah!" The result of their song was the temple shook and was filled with the smoke of the glory of God. He alone was exalted in this vision.

The Response and Mission of the Prophet

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD [This is Yahweh, the eternal one.] Almighty." Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for" (Isaiah 6:5–7).

Notice Isaiah's cry — "Woe to me!" That means he believed terrible things were going to happen to him. "Woe to me! I am ruined! I am unclean, because I have seen the Lord! How can a man see the Lord and live?" A sinful man had seen the Lord, and he was still alive. God wanted him to know that he counted him as clean. So God had His angel take a hot, fiery coal from the altar, and he touched it to Isaiah's lips. His lips were not burned, they were cleansed. He had been touched! He was forgiven! He was reconciled! He was atoned to God!

The Mission of the Prophet

Then I heard the voice of the LORD saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" He said, "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close

their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts. and turn and be healed.” Then I said, “For how long, O Lord?” And he answered: “Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitants, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tenth remain in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be a stump in the land” (Isaiah 6:8–13).

God said, “Whom shall I send?” And Isaiah said, “Send me! I will go! Here I am! Let me go!” He was anxious and ready to go because his lips had been cleansed. He no longer saw himself as the woeful sinner. He saw himself saved and ready to go. His commission was simple. “Go tell whatever I (God) tell you to tell! But — know that the people will not understand your message!” God told Isaiah that the people would be hardened by his message. The message would judge them. This was a hard job especially since Isaiah already knew that they were not going to listen. He knew they were going to look at him as a failure. This was why Isaiah asked the Lord, “How long?” When he volunteered for the job he did not know it was going to be like this. God told him this was going to be his job until there were no more people to tell, until there was no longer a nation in the land.”

God did not tell Isaiah there would be absolutely nobody to listen. No matter how wicked the nation became, there would be survivors. Sin would go on working, and it would make the nation a wasteland, but there would be a remnant. There would be that righteous few who had not bowed the knee to any idol and still followed the Lord. The remnant was evidence of God's mercy in Judah:

“And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land” (Isaiah 6:13).

From that stump there arose a branch — the Lord, the Messiah (cf. Isaiah 11:1). And from that branch an entire world would be led to Christ.

What a glorious thing to be the remnant in an ungodly life. There is glory in being the seed in an ungodly field, a stump in a cut-down forest. There is glory in being the stump from which the branch can arise. The remnant that helps to evangelize the entire world brings glory to that world. What a message! “Isaiah, go tell them. Go tell them until there is no one to tell. For a few will hear you, and that few will become a great nation that will possess all the earth.” *“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”* (Matthew 5:5). Be the humble, holy seed of the Lord.

The Assyrian Crisis (1)

Isaiah 7:1–10:24

Introduction

This chapter covers a group of messages that were tied to the Assyrian crisis, which begins in Isaiah 7. Assyria was rising to threaten the people of God. They destroyed the northern nation of Israel and brought Judah to its knees. This section will end in a triumphant assurance to the righteous remnant of Judah telling them that they would be victorious.

This would be a good time to go back and re-read the historical section on **Ahaz** and **Pekah**, the king of Judah and the king of Israel during this period of time (cf. Chapter 4 of this book). Both of these kings were wicked men with no faith in God. Therefore, it is no wonder God was going to bring judgment upon the people.

The World's Wisdom and the Messiah

This chapter discusses the wisdom of man versus the wisdom of God. There was an impending crisis full of peril coming for the people of God. Assyria was the nation selected by God to carry out His judgment:

When Ahaz son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, Rezin, king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up against Israel to fight but could not overpower it. Now the house of

David was told, “Aram has allied itself with Ephraim”; so the hearts of Ahaz and all his people were shaken as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind (Isaiah 7:1–2).

Confronted by this possible danger, Ahaz could not lead his people to steadfastness before Jehovah because he himself had no faith. Ahaz and all his people trembled at the coming of the king of Syria (Aram) and the king of Israel. The political outlook was one of no faith because the rule of Ahaz had caused Judah to sink lower and lower. The king of Damascus and the king of Israel saw this as a favorable opportunity to take over the kingdom of Judah. This alliance caused the royal house of Ahaz to tremble.

At this point, Ahaz was confronted by the prophet Isaiah (cf. Isaiah 7:3–9). There was actually a sign of deliverance given in the name of the son born to Isaiah.

Then the LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman’s Field” (Isaiah 7:3).

The name “*Shear-Jashub*” simply means, “a remnant shall return.” So, when Isaiah went to meet Ahaz, he took a son with him whose name meant, “a remnant shall return.” God was telling Ahaz that he was going into captivity, but the word of comfort was that some would return.

God had four things that He wanted to tell the people and Ahaz through Isaiah:

“. . . Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood — because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah” (Isaiah 7:4).

God's message was be careful! Be calm! Do not be afraid! Do not lose heart! Every one of these instructions could be summed up in one phrase — trust in God — He was saying trust Me!

The “**Immanuel Sign**” was the sign of One to come who would be God in their midst (cf. Isaiah 7:10–11). God made a faithful offer here that he would make over and over again in the book of Isaiah. He would bestow grace; He would be merciful, even to the ungodly Ahaz if he would simply ask God for a sign. God said, “Trust me. Ask me any sign you want to ask of me and I will give it to you.” Notice Ahaz's response (cf. Isaiah 7:12). At first, it sounded very humble, but it was really the height of unbelief. God said, “Ask me a sign.” Ahaz responded, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.” That sounds like Ahaz was saying, “I don't want to test God. I trust Him already.” That sounds humble and faithful. When God said, “Ask for a sign,” then in faith, Ahaz should have asked for a sign. Isaiah gave Ahaz a severe and fearless rebuke. He said, “Because you have not asked for this sign and you have not expressed faith in God, judgment will come upon you.” The worst sin is not in violating God's righteousness. The worst sin is despising God's mercy. Paul asked the Romans, “. . . do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?” (Romans 2:4). So God said because you have not asked for a sign, I Myself will give you a sign:

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin shall be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste (Isaiah 7:14–16).

God said there would be a miraculous conception. Scholars do not know all that this verse means. It is a prophecy that was fulfilled in Matthew 1:18–23 in the birth of Christ. But that by itself could not have been a sign to Ahaz, so it is possible that there was a two-fold fulfillment. It is possible that Isaiah pointed to a virgin going down the street and said, “Before that virgin will be old enough to marry and have a child, and before that child is weaned and knows right from wrong, these two kings will not be bothering you any more.” He spoke primarily of the virgin birth of Christ. But he also spoke of a sign to Ahaz that in the length of the amount of time that it would take a woman to get married, have a child, wean the child, and teach the child the difference between right and wrong, these people would be destroyed. One day He would bring about an imminent confrontation between God and these two kings of whom Ahaz was afraid.

The Assyrian Danger

Isaiah told Ahaz that he was going to have worse dangers confronting him than these “*two smoldering stubs of firewood*” represented by the kings of Israel and Syria. The nation of Assyria was going to be a much greater danger than Ahaz ever imagined:

“The LORD will bring upon you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah — he will bring the king of Assyria. In that day the LORD will whistle for flies from the distant streams of Egypt and for bees from the land of Assyria.” They will all come and settle in the steep ravines and in the crevices in the rocks, on all the thorn bushes and at all the water holes. In that day the LORD will use a razor hired from beyond the River — the king of Assyria — to shave your head and the hair of your legs and to take off your beards also. In that day a man will keep alive a

young cow and two goats. And because of the abundance of the milk they give, he will have curds to eat. All who remain in the land will eat curds and honey. In that day, in every place where there were a thousand vines worth a thousand silver shekels, there will be only briers and thorns. Men will go there with bow and arrow, for the land will be covered with briers and thorns. As for all the hills once cultivated by the hoe, you will no longer go there for fear of the briers and thorns; they will become places where cattle are turned loose and where sheep run (Isaiah 7:17–25).

Isaiah said Ahaz and Judah would be destroyed by strange tools. He said the Lord's helpers would be flies and bees that tormented and made them wish for death. The Lord's hireling would be a razor that shaved off all their glory, all the hair on their heads, and all their beards. They would be so devastated by this strong judgment that they would return to the simple life: a little milk, a little bread, a little honey, and a house. This was not altogether bad, because a return to the simple life can cause people to look toward God rather than toward their money. All the cultivated things would be destroyed.

Messianic Deliverance

Isaiah and his wife conceived and bore a son whose name was a sign for Judah. They called him ***“Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.”*** The name means “quick to plunder, swift to the spoil.” Destruction was coming to these people, and it would be soon. God was saying to Isaiah, “Write this down in a scroll to show its sureness. Show it to all these witnesses to certify its accuracy, its existence and the fact that it will soon come. The boy is born. Destruction is coming. And before the boy knows his mother or his father by name, Samaria will be gone to Assyria.” Isaiah said:

The LORD spoke to me again: “Because this people has rejected the gentle flowing waters of Shiloah [peace] and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty flood waters of the River — the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck. Its outstretched wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!” (Isaiah 8:5–8).

Samaria made a foolish choice. Ahaz made the choice of a human alliance rather than trusting in God. Assyria would totally and completely destroy Israel. They would flood Judah, reaching up to the neck, indicating the presence of the Lord. The day was going to come when Assyria would destroy Israel and surround the city of Jerusalem. Assyria had enough power to destroy this holy city. But, it did not happen that way. Hezekiah prayed, Isaiah preached, and God sent a destroying angel to strike 185,000 soldiers dead from Sennacherib’s army overnight. That was the final triumph:

“Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us.” The Lord spoke to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people. He said: “Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a

sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured” (Isaiah 8:9–15).

The powerlessness of the ungodly is stated here. The ungodly would be absolutely powerless because of Immanuel — God is with us. The power of God’s righteousness cannot be compared to the wickedness of the ungodly. God gave a warning: “Do not conspire with and do not fear the enemy.” God was the only one they were to fear and dread. Men of Judah and Israel would stumble, fall, be snared and broken, and then finally captured. He offered a promise of sanctuary to the righteous.

There was terrible judgment, but God was never far away from mercy. He made a promise to the faithful remnant. He said, “Those who trust and obey, God will bring blessing upon. He will bring them to victory and to triumph.” He described also the helplessness of superstition, the idea of trusting in some idol, or trusting in something other than the Word of God.

God sealed his oracle to Isaiah when He said, “This will surely be the prophet representing the righteous among God’s people.” Isaiah stated his trust in God, and said, “I will put my hope, I will put my reason for having a future in God.” Because of that, his future was pledged. It was pledged in the signs found in the names of the his two sons (cf. Isaiah 8:18). The first son born was named Shear-Jashub, which told him that a remnant would return. The second son was Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, which told Isaiah that very soon judgment would come. He already had hope because of the first boy’s name before he was given any statement of judgment in the second boy’s name.

God told His people to have nothing to do with magic. When people get desperate they start depending on anything: reading horoscope magazines and turning to fortune tellers.

Israel and Judah were acting like this because of the coming judgment of God. God told them they needed to return to Him. When they finally became desperate enough that they repented, it was too late for the nation. Individuals repented and were saved, but the nation of Judah was destroyed. They put their trust totally in the power of man, and it was impossible for the repentance of a few to bring about a national salvation. God cursed them because they had cursed Him (cf. Isaiah 8:18–22).

Deliverance Is in the Messiah

Isaiah 9 begins with a messianic passage which is referred to as “Deliverance is in the Messiah” (cf. Isaiah 9:1–7). As a result of the man coming from “*Galilee of the Gentiles*” there would be no more gloom. This passage is quoted in Matthew 4:13–15. It talks about the fact that Jesus was raised in Nazareth of Galilee and came from there to bring blessings upon the people of God. Good was bestowed on the people, a new day dawned, and there would be rejoicing in the land. They would overcome the judgment of God and there would be a glorious place to live (cf. Isaiah 9:1–5):

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:6–7).

By recording the names that the Messiah would be called Isaiah also gives the details of His life. The phrase “*a child is born*” speaks of the virgin birth of Christ. The phrase “*a son is given*” speaks of the effective death of Jesus upon the cross.

This passage also tells about His reign on David's throne forever. These names give details about the future Messiah. "*Wonderful Counselor*" indicates that He will be a man of wisdom. "*Mighty God*" speaks of His deity. "*Everlasting Father*" tells of His eternal power and that He is Jehovah / **Yahweh**. "*Prince of Peace*" means that He not only gives victory as a prince, but He will bring peace unto His people.

Boastful Samaria's Fall

Contrary to all the glorious future promised in the first part of Isaiah 9, Isaiah 9:8–10:34 gives the description of the destruction of Samaria. They had rejected the Holy One of Israel. God made three very important statements to Samaria about their fall. **First**, they had suffered a lot of past loss, but it did not make an impression upon their minds (cf. Isaiah 9:8–12). The arrogant fools of Israel had not only ignored God's past judgment, but they had boasted that they could recover without any help from God.

Any time a nation suffers great economic, political, and religious loss they need to stop and think. Any time they suffer a defeat in battle, they need to stop and think. An impression needed to be put upon their minds that the wrath of God was being revealed from heaven against all their ungodliness and unrighteousness. Paul told the Romans, "*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness*" (Romans 1:18). Samaria had suffered loss from the Philistines, Syria, and Assyria, but these losses did not make an impression upon their minds.

Second, there was judgment in the past that was intended to bring them to their knees in repentance, but it did not:

But the people have not returned to him who struck them, nor have they sought the LORD Almighty. So the

LORD will cut off from Israel both head and tail, both palm branch and reed in a single day; the elders and prominent men are the head, the prophets who teach lies are the tail. Those who guide this people mislead them, and those who are guided are led astray. Therefore the Lord will take no pleasure in the young men, nor will he pity the fatherless and widows, for everyone is ungodly and wicked, every mouth speaks vileness. Yet for all of this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised (Isaiah 9:13–17).

God had done all that He knew to do. That was all that could be done. The people refused to acknowledge God as their judge and as their God. Paul spoke of people like this in Romans who refused to have God as part of their knowledge. And because they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to vile thinking and to vile men (cf. Romans 1:18–32). Isaiah made the statement that God would bring more severe judgment upon them because of this. God intended for them to have the opportunity to repent. But since they had not repented at the smaller judgments, then more severe judgment would come. It would mean total destruction of their land. There would be a total departure from God by their rulers and their spiritual guides. And God would bring total judgment upon them without mercy, even on the widows and the orphans. Since pure religion is to visit the widows and the orphans (cf. James 1:27), it is hard to imagine a nation so evil that God had to bring His judgment even upon them.

Third, the real problem was their lack of authority. Anarchy was consuming them (cf. Isaiah 9:18–21). There are four valuable lessons to learn about sin from this text. **Number one**, sin is a wasting power: “*Surely wickedness burns like a fire; it consumes briers and thorns, it sets the forest thickets ablaze, so that it rolls upward in a column of smoke*” (Isaiah 9:18). Where sin abounds, desolation abounds. The longer anyone — a man, a woman, or a nation — has lived under sin’s

dominion the more is lost. Power withers, possessions decrease, heritage is wasted and lost. Sin, first of all, destroys the less valuable things represented by *“the brier and the thorn.”* Sin destroys the visible, the temporal, the financial, the material, and the fleshly. But then sin also destroys the more valuable represented by *“the forest thickets.”* The reputation of a land, especially in ancient days, was in its forests. After the less valuable, then there is the loss of honor, the loss of intelligence, the loss of character, the loss of influence for good of the nation of Israel and the loss of its reputation. Sin is a wasting power.

Number two, sin is also a suicidal thing: *“By the wrath of the LORD Almighty the land will be scorched and the people will be fuel for the fire; no one will spare his brother”* (Isaiah 9:19). The fuel for the fire of human sin is humanity itself. This is obviously and painfully true. It is true of the individual: *“For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the LORD. But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death”* (Proverbs 8:35–36). He who sins against God will destroy his own soul. It is not only the obvious sinners who injure themselves by their iniquities. Look far enough or look deep enough and one will find that every transgressor is putting his own precious interest as fuel into the devouring flame of God’s judgment. This is also true of the community. It is the departure from God’s divine will that brings about all the evils, and as a result, human society is destroyed. Sin destroys a nation. Strife within the state, contention in the church, and discord in the family all destroy the body that is involved.

Number three, the waste of sin is the divinely appointed penalty from God upon sin:

On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of his own offspring: Manasseh will feed on Ephraim, and Ephraim on Manasseh; together they will turn against Judah. Yet for all this, his anger

is not turned away, his hand is still upraised (Isaiah 9:20–21).

The sinner is never satisfied with devouring his enemies. He always wants more. Sinners end up devouring each other.

God's judgment should cause men to look inward and then look upward, and to stop looking outward at enemies or heroes of their day. It does not always work that way. Every judgment of God simply drives those who are determined to be wicked deeper into their wickedness. In the New Testament era, Jesus healed a blind man and made this tremendous statement about why He had done that and why He had come into the world: *"Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind'"* (John 9:39) Israel thought they knew and Israel thought they saw. Not all of these judgments produced their intent.

When evil times come and judgments come upon God's children, they need to take time for introspection. They need to look at their lives and do an investigation. Look into God's word and take time for repentance. What happened to Israel? They had all these losses, all this judgment, and all this help from God, but for all of this they did not turn from their wickedness. And so God still had more to say and more to do. The fourth lesson concerning sin will be studied in Chapter 10.

The Assyrian Crisis (2)

Isaiah 10:1–12:6

Review

This chapter is a continuation of the outline concerning Samaria from chapter 9. God spoke to Samaria about the past and the losses they had suffered. They suffered great losses of political power, finances, moral strength, and fiber, but it made no impression upon them. They did not reflect on why this was happening to them. In the past, God sent great judgment upon them as nation after nation came and took people and things away. There was no repentance in the past because of those great judgments. At this time they were suffering anarchy. Their kings were weak. They had no real powerful authority in the land and no courts that could dispense honest judgment. Through all of this, they still did not turn from their evil ways.

Boastful Samaria's Fall (continued)

There are four valuable lessons to learn about sin. Number one, sin is a wasting power. Number two, sin is a suicidal thing. Number three, the waste of sin is the divinely appointed penalty from God upon sinfulness. Number four, continuing in sin brings about judgment. Samaria's captivity was coming because the people had continued in their sinful ways. Through Isaiah God said:

*Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who
issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their*

rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised (Isaiah 10:1-4).

This passage is a description of those that were to be judged. They made unjust laws. They deprived the poor and the oppressed of their rights. They devoured the substance of widows and orphans. They were wicked to the core. They were not religious at all. They were not visiting the fatherless and the widows. They were not keeping themselves unspotted from the world. Isaiah described the destiny of those that were to be judged for they would not be able to escape. They would leave their riches to others. They would be absolutely and totally destroyed. This still did not turn the anger of God away from these wicked people.

God used Assyria as His weapon against the godless nations. He called them “*the rod of my anger.*” God used Assyria as a tool or instrument against the people to bring about their own destruction.

Woe, to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets. But this is not what he intends, this is not what he has in mind; his purpose is to destroy, to put an end to many nations. “Are not my commanders all kings?” he says. “Has not Calno fared like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad, and Samaria like Damascus?

[(He says “Is not one city like any other to me?”] *As my hand seized the kingdoms of the idols, kingdoms whose images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria — shall I not deal with Jerusalem and her images, shall I not deal with Samaria and her idols?”* (Isaiah 10:5–11).

Even though God was using the wicked nation of Assyria, they were not justified by their actions. God has some strange tools in His box. He uses whatever He wants, whenever He wants. Notice the description of the Assyrians. This nation was but a tool in God’s hands. Assyria was the “rod” and the “club” in the hand of God. The wicked nations of this world boast of their power. They boast of what they are doing, when in actuality all they are doing is being used by God.

Notice that God also gave a commission to the Assyrians. He said, “I have appointed him. I have chosen him to seize, loot, plunder, and trample Israel like the mud in the streets.” God sent Assyria to oppress Israel because He wanted Israel to repent. He wanted them to see His anger so they would turn from their evil ways and turn back to His love.

The disposition (temperament) of the Assyrians was not that they wanted to be a tool for God. They had no desire at all to obey or be used by God. Their desire was to destroy as many nations as they could with the power they had. They actually believed their power was greater than any god, even the Lord God of Israel. That was where they made their mistake. When they stopped and shook their fist at Jehovah, they were shaking their fist at their Master.

God was not only going to judge Israel. He was also going to judge Assyria (notice how many times the King of Assyria used “I”):

When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, "I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and for the haughty look in his eyes. For he says: 'By the strength of my hand I have done this, and by my wisdom, because I have understanding. I removed the boundaries of nations. I plundered their treasures; like a mighty one I subdued their kings. As one reaches into a nest, so my hand reached for the wealth of the nations; as men gather abandoned eggs, so I gathered all the eggs of all the countries; not one flapped a wing, or opened its mouth to chirp.'" Does the ax raise itself above him who swings it, or the saw boast against him who uses it? As if a rod were to wield him who lifts it up, or a club brandish him who is not wood! Therefore, the Lord, the LORD Almighty, will send a wasting disease upon his sturdy warriors; under his pomp a fire will be kindled like a blazing fire. The Light of Israel will become a fire, their Holy One a flame; in a single day it will burn and consume his thorns and his briers. The splendor of his forests and fertile fields it will completely destroy, as when a sick man wastes away. And the remaining trees of his forests will be so few that a child could write them down (Isaiah 10:12–19).

The Lord's will for Assyria and His reason for destroying them was that Assyria had to be judged for her prideful heart and her haughty eyes. Isaiah gave a description of their fall. It was based upon God's creation of Assyria. God had raised up a nation and He took down that nation. Assyria was not prepared for that to happen to them. Assyria's power was wasted and all of their resources were consumed.

God is never far away from mercy. God cannot speak of judgment for very long before He also speaks of mercy.

After His judgment, God was concerned for the remnant (cf. Isaiah 10:20–27). Character was demanded of the remnant. They had to forsake their trust in men. They had to totally trust in God. That was all God had ever required of His people. God promised that there would be a return to the land, but only a remnant would return. This return would happen after the whole land had been judged.

A remnant is a small part of something that was originally a big thing. When my mother was alive she sewed for the public. In order to save money she would send me to the “remnant shop” to look for a certain kind of cloth. I would ask to see the small bolts of cloth that had only three to five yards left on the bolt that once contained yards and yards of material. This was just a remnant of the amount of cloth that was once on the bolt. God’s promise was that there would be only a small remnant remaining of the large nation that was once Israel. He would bring the remnant to salvation. Assurance was given that the remnant did not need to fear judgment. God would judge their oppressors as soon as He was finished with the chastisement that Israel needed by the Assyrian army.

Isaiah described Assyria as they marched from the north part of the land to the south:

They enter Aiath; they pass through Migron, they store supplies at Micmash. They go over the pass and say, “We will camp overnight at Geba.” Ramah trembles; Gibeah of Saul flees. Cry out, daughter of Gallim! Listen, O Laishah! Poor Anathoth! Madmenah is in flight; the people of Gebim take cover. This day they will halt at Nob; they will shake their fist at the mount of the Daughter of Zion, at the hill of Jerusalem (Isaiah 10:28–32).

Assyria strutted through the Promised Land as if they owned it, traveling from the north to the south. They made

a mistake at Nob which was Jeremiah's home town. They shook their fists in defiance to the Lord. Israel was no match for them, but because they stopped at Nob and shook their fists in God's face, God would deal with them:

See, the Lord, the LORD Almighty, will lop off the boughs with great power. The lofty trees will be felled, the tall ones will be brought low. He will cut down the forest thickets with an ax; Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One (Isaiah 10:33–34).

God was going to chop down their forests. Anybody who tried to oppose God would find himself in immediate and irreversible trouble. This ended with judgment on the wicked Samaria.

The Branch and the Praise

God does not speak for very long in the dark and black passages of judgment. He comes over and over again to express a word of comfort. Through Isaiah, God expressed His love for the righteous remnant that was among this ungodly mass (cf. Isaiah 11:1–12:6). He spoke of the Branch, the tree that was to come from David's stock. He spoke of the praise the Branch would bring to God. He spoke of the righteous King:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD — and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for

the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist (Isaiah 11:1–5).

These words are about the Lord Jesus Christ. They speak of the One the Jews called the Messiah, the Anointed One. They speak of the One that would come to reign again in righteousness from David's throne over all of David's house. Paul told the Romans that Jesus "*was a descendant of David*" (cf. Romans 1:4). This passage speaks of the lineage of this branch. He would be from David's house — from David's trunk. From David's root a branch would spring forth that would be the son of David. The source of His power was that He would be anointed with the Holy Spirit. Notice again that because of the Spirit of God there is a seven-fold result upon the Messiah:

He will have wisdom.
He will have understanding.
He will have counsel.
He will have power.
He will have knowledge.
He will have reverence.
He will be the judge.

Jesus said, "*But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you*" (Matthew 12:28). He also said:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the

oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"
(Luke 4:18–19).

These passages speak about His power through the Spirit. He is the Branch that came from David's root.

One of the seven-fold powers that the Messiah would have would be as a judge. He would be a just and thorough judge. He would not judge simply what he saw. He would not judge simply what he heard. He could not be bribed. He could not be intimidated. He would be true to the Law. His judgment would be true and pure, just and thorough (cf. Isaiah 11:3–4). This judge would also be righteous and faithful in character. He would wear the belt of righteousness and the sash of faithfulness. He would be faithful to the power of His father (cf. Isaiah 11:5). He would be a forever judge.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:6–9).

This passage describes things more beautiful than can be imagined. It describes **the peaceful kingdom**. The Messiah would also be the King of Peace. The destructive animal nature of man would be changed to that of harmlessness. The lion, the cow, the bear, and the yearling would all feed together. The war-like nature of man would be changed to that of peaceful evangelism. All of this would be true. All of

the war-like nature of man would be changed because the Word of Jehovah would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. This prophecy has already happened time and time again. The gospel of Christ has entered a man's heart, and that man has been changed from a man who was once a wicked, ungodly wretch, who cursed, lied, beat his wife, harmed his children, and robbed his fellow man. When he accepted the gospel of Christ, it was as if a miracle had occurred. There was a transformation causing this man to change and no longer seek his own way but the way of God.

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea (Isaiah 11:10–11).

These verses tell the story of the **two-fold remnant** that is promised to both Gentile and Jew. First, there is a promise to the Gentiles. He says the nations will hope upon Him. Paul alluded to this passage in Romans 15:7–13 (especially verse 12) when he said this happened when the Gentiles found salvation with the Jews in the church of Jesus Christ. The first time God reached out His hand to gather in the Gentiles. The second time He reached out to reclaim the remnant of His people. Paul told the Romans, “*So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace*” (Romans 11:5–6).

It is interesting to notice that all of the places that were named in Isaiah 11:11 are also found in Acts 2:5–11. When the Jews at Pentecost gathered from all over the world, those very places were mentioned: “. . . *from Assyria, from Lower*

Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea." God fulfilled this passage as He brought the Jews into the church in Acts 2 and the Gentiles into the church in Acts 10.

After God had gathered in His people, a **glorious victory** followed which was prophesied by Isaiah:

He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth. Ephraim's jealousy will vanish and Judah's enemies will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, nor Judah hostile toward Ephraim. They will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west; together they will plunder the people to the east. They will lay hands on Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites will be subject to them. The LORD will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian Sea; with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that men can cross over in sandals. There will be a highway for the remnant of his people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt (Isaiah 11:12–16).

God waved a victory banner with the intent of gathering the remnant of God from wherever they had been scattered by the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities and by all the troubles that they would have had before the Messiah came. Isaiah spoke of the unity of God's people against a common foe when they came together, one in purpose. They would have one mind and one spirit. They would have one activity as they fought in one battle against all those who had defeated them in the past. God said, "As in the past I have intervened, I will take an active part in this battle." He said the result would be their return from Assyria just as they had

returned from Egypt in the past. That return would be a journey down the Lord's highway for His glorious people.

In that day you will say: "I will praise you, O LORD. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you" (Isaiah 12:1–6).

When the remnant came back, they praised God because His anger had been turned away and He had given them comfort. Praise is a missing ingredient in the life of many people. God does not give His people what they deserve; instead, He gives them mercy and grace. He shows His love toward His children in this way. Praise the Lord!

When the remnant came back, they trusted God's act of salvation, because it brought strength and joy to them. God's children today need to learn to trust the Lord. They can lean upon Him because He has saved them. He has brought salvation to His house.

The remnant will share in God's work. They will let the nations know of God's greatness in their lives. They will give thanks to the Lord and tell the world what God has done. The nations of the world today need to hear God's children express thankfulness for what He has done in their

lives. When others see that thankfulness, they will seek it. They will be attracted to a grateful people. Part of thankfulness can be seen when they *“Sing praises to the LORD.”* God tells His people to do that over and over again in scripture. Isaiah said, *“Sing to the LORD . . . Shout aloud and sing for joy . . .”* (Isaiah 12:5–6).

In one of the psalms, David said, *“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say this . . .”* (Psalm 107:1–2). The world needs to know that God’s children are redeemed and they are thankful to Him for that redemption. They need to shout for joy to Him. The world needs to hear about that joy, not just because He is God, but because He is **their God**. God’s children accept Jesus Christ, they accept God’s grace, and they live in and exalt His power. He is the Lord of all the earth. He is the Lord of heaven and of hell. Above all else, He is the Lord of the saved. On the mountaintop, let all the redeemed of the Lord shout unto God. They are not destroyed as wicked Samaria was! They are saved! They are glorified! They are justified! They are sanctified! Fill the earth with the joyful singing of the redeemed.

The next section of this study of the Book of Isaiah will look at the terrible and great judgment to come upon all nations of the earth, but none of that judgment belongs to the redeemed. The redeemed are those who have the right to praise, sing, and be joyful. The Lord came to have a party and a feast, not a funeral and a fast. May God bless and give His children peace.

Prophecies Against Nations

Isaiah 13:1–23:18

Introduction

Chapters 11 and 12 in this study of the Book of Isaiah will be a two-part discussion of Isaiah 13–27. This chapter will cover Isaiah 13–23 and chapter 12 will cover chapters 24–27. In the previous sections of this book on Isaiah, much has been said regarding the eventual proclamation of God’s saving grace to the nations. This chapter will include lessons about the Lord holding all the world powers responsible for their national righteousness. In fact, Solomon said, “*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people*” (Proverbs 14:34). In this chapter, there are a series of visions concerning the final fall of several world powers. These proclamations from Isaiah 13–23 are each introduced by one of two words. Some versions of the Bible say this is the “*oracle*” concerning a nation. Other versions say this is the “*burden*” concerning a certain nation. Which ever of these words is used, both “*oracle*” or “*burden*,” both are used to declare God’s proclamations against the nations.

Preview

Jim McGuiggan, in his book on Isaiah, lists several lessons to be learned from this section. **Number one**, if God will not tolerate iniquity in His own people (cf. Isaiah 1–12), certainly He will not tolerate it in these foreigners. If judgment is beginning at the house of God, what shall be the end of them that do not obey the gospel? **Number two**, since God is able to

pronounce and execute judgment on all these nations, it is clear that He is not some local deity with restricted territorial powers. He is the Lord God of the whole earth. Jonah learned this in the belly of the fish (cf. Jonah 1:17–2:10). **Number three**, since many of the nations were being punished because they have hindered or hurt Israel, their judgment was, at least in part, an expression of God’s love for Israel (cf. Psalm 135–136). Many times, judgment is not simply the result of God’s anger against a wicked nation, but it is also an expression of His love for the righteous. **Number four**, since all that Isaiah saw was directed toward Judah and Jerusalem, although he saw things concerning others nations, these oracles surely were going to affect Judah and Jerusalem as well. God was not going to judge Babylon just as Babylon; He was also going to talk about how the judgment of Babylon affected Judah and Jerusalem. **Number five**, the fact that God chastised the nations means that He cared for them also. Many times the judgments of God are seen as His anger. If He did not love, He would not judge. If He was not concerned with these nations, He would not chastised them as He did (cf. Isaiah 13–23).

There is no way this book can cover every verse that is found in the Book of Isaiah. The purpose of chapters 11 and 12 is to show what Isaiah said concerning Judah and Jerusalem, and then to reveal what these chapters say to the people of God today. It is important to see the flow of Isaiah’s writings, so rather than simply reading the complete text, there will be sections alluded to just to see what Isaiah was trying to say and why he saying it.

Prophecies of Judgment Against the Nations

There is a phrase that is mentioned again and again in the Book of Isaiah. The phrase “*the day of the LORD*” is found 25–30 times. This day was coming soon, and it was described as destruction from the Lord: a fearful day, a painful day, a cruel day, the wrath from God, desolation, total in its effect,

punishment for the wicked, humbling for the proud and arrogant, leaving only a small remnant, earth-shaking, inescapable, and without mercy (cf. Isaiah 13:6–16). (For more details concerning the “*day of the LORD*” be sure to read Richard’s book entitled “The Minor Prophets” in the Sunset Study Library Series. Also read and study Joel 1:15, 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14 along with Amos 5:18, 20; Zechariah 1:7, 14; and Malachi 4:5.) This day was going to be a black, wicked day full of darkness and destruction. It would be a day of distress for all the people who would hear God finally say, “At last! I am through with this nation!”

The first nation that Isaiah presented God’s judgment against was **Babylon** (cf. Isaiah 13:1–22). In the Lord’s preparation to judge Babylon, He told His army to get ready to fight by raising a banner. God was going to send out His warriors to carry out His wrath. The approach of this army is even described. The instrument God used in His judgment on Babylon was the Medes (cf. Isaiah 13:17–22). They were not interested in material bribes, they had no compassion on their enemies, and they completely and totally overthrew the city of Babylon. The only inhabitants left in the city were wild beasts and birds of the wilderness.

Because God is never all judgment, Zion would be delivered, and they would sing a song of triumph (cf. Isaiah 14:1–23). The song of deliverance from the king of Babylon told about their rest from tyranny, how far the king had fallen, and that the grave was ready for him. The world was amazed that the king had fallen. He would not even be welcomed in hell. This king was to have no surviving seed. His offspring will never be mentioned again. Zion also sang a song about deliverance from the Assyrian king (cf. Isaiah 14:24–27).

Then Isaiah spoke of the judgment against **Philistia** (cf. Isaiah 14:28–32). The historical occasion for this judgment was in the year Ahaz died. The broken rod of David would be restored. Wailing would occur at the gate and calm would appear in the midst of the storm. Go tell the world, “The Lord

has established Zion.” Tell the world, “Zion has found refuge in the Lord! Philistia has been destroyed.”

The judgment against **Moab** is recorded next (cf. Isaiah 15:1–16:14). They were another one of God’s enemies. Their fall would come when all their chief cities were destroyed. The people mourned and her military leaders were faint. Isaiah expressed sympathy for Moab because they were kinsmen from the nation that came from one of Lot’s sons. God offered mercy to Moab if they would bring God offerings, seek God’s counsel, and accept God’s loving kindness. Moab rejected the offer because of their pride. The result of their rejection was destruction, wailing, and lamentations. All their crops would be gone, there would be no help from their gods, and God’s final word to Moab was that they would have three more weary years. Moab’s survivors would be few and feeble.

The judgment against **Damascus**, the capital of Syria, would be a judgment against the nation of Syria located to the north and the east of the nation of Israel (cf. Isaiah 17:1–14). Her fate is described as becoming a heap of ruins. As a sheepfold left to the fox, their glory would vanish. The effect on Israel was that they would be threshed as if they were heads of grain in the judgment on Syria, but they would not be totally destroyed. A remnant would forsake all their idols, look to God, and be saved. The majority of the people would forget God, and because of that there would be desolate cities and desolate harvests. Then a cry would ring forth through all the nations. They would mourn Damascus’ fall, but they knew if they offered help, the same judgment would befall them, so they stood afar off and wept over Damascus’ destruction.

Ethiopia is the next nation to be judged. This was the nation located south of Egypt. They were judged because they had misdirected their human intelligence (cf. Isaiah 18:1–7). They had based their intelligence on worldly things and idols and not on God. The completeness of the destruction of this human power would be absolute and total. Because of that,

Ethiopia paid homage to the Lord. The Lord gave them mercy and did not destroy them totally.

The next judgment that Isaiah wrote about was against **Egypt**. Isaiah recorded the coming judgment and the coming judge as the Lord riding upon a cloud, when He pitted Egyptian against Egyptian (cf. Isaiah 19:1–25). They lost heart in the battle and became subject to a cruel master. Then they were given the worst of all judgments in Egypt — the Nile would dry up so that the riverbed would become parched and dry. The effect this event would have on peaceful industry was immense. Farmers would have no water for their crops; fisherman would have no fish to catch; weavers would have no place to wash their nets. All the wage-earners in Egypt depended upon the Nile.

The folly of the statesmen in Egypt was that they were full of boasting. They could not read the signs of the times. The administration had turned evil and ungodly. They were full of the spirit of delusion and frustration; they even believed lies. They did not know where to turn, so judgment was going to come. The effect of that judgment, which they brought upon themselves, was that instead of mercy they received judgment. God promised deliverance if Egypt would only turn and trust Him. He would give them deliverance from their enemies and bring prosperity to them. But they did not take the deliverance God offered, so they became one of the poorest nations in the world.

God spoke against **Egypt and Ethiopia** together, because at that time they were forming an alliance. That alliance would be broken by God (cf. Isaiah 20:1–6). They tried to escape judgment by combining their powers, so God said, “I will judge the combined power.”

Isaiah followed God’s instructions to give the people an object lesson. The prophet took off his outer robe and his sandals. All he had on was an inner garment that was normally worn only in the house. He walked through the streets in this household garment with no shoes on. The lesson was “Assyria

will lead both the nation of Egypt and the nation of Ethiopia away, stripped and bare footed.”

God issued a judgment upon **Babylon, Edom, and Arabia** (cf. Isaiah 21:1–10). In Babylon there was the sound of a tempest as the storm came down upon them. There was a vision of calamity that would bring terrible disarray. God told Isaiah to post a watchman to tell them what was happening to Babylon. Finally a man in a chariot came to tell Judah that Babylon the Great had fallen. This was good news because Babylon seduced all the world to do evil.

The nation of Edom was from Esau, Jacob’s brother, which made Edom a kinsman to Israel. There was a call from one of the major cities of Edom, Seir (cf. Isaiah 21:11–12). A watchman from the wall of Seir cried, “. . . *‘Watchman, what is left of the night?’* . . . *The watchman replies, ‘Morning is coming, but also the night. If you would ask, then ask; and come back yet again’*” (Isaiah 21:11b–12). He was saying that morning may come, but it would be temporary because there would finally be nothing but darkness, decay, and death.

Arabia (the powerful desert land where all of the great chieftains and sheiks of the world live) would be swept away with the desert wind. The prophet was sympathetic toward them and pleaded with God, but God returned to answer that their doom was certain.

Against Jerusalem: The Valley of Vision

The final word of the Lord was that these nations, particularly the nation of Edom, had to be destroyed. He had judged all the Gentile cities. Now it was time for the judgment against Jerusalem (cf. Isaiah 22:1–25). First, Isaiah gave a description of Jerusalem at that time. The city was full of commotion of all kinds. The people were running in the streets, playing their harps, and singing their songs as they enjoyed the parties that filled the land. People were injuring each other. They were cowards, so they were not harming each other openly as the nations did. There would be no consolation for

this city because of their wickedness. God would have a day for Babylon, Nineveh, and all the other cities, but now He would also have a day of judgment for Jerusalem. The “*day of the Lord*” for Jerusalem would be a day of battering down the wall, a day of ignoring God’s available help, a day of ignorant reveling when sorrow and a day of atoning for sin would be more fitting. It would be a day when they should have sorrowfully reflected and repented, but instead, they filled their lives with evil.

The Lord, the LORD Almighty, has a day of tumult and trampling and terror in the Valley of Vision, a day of battering down walls and of crying out to the mountains. Elam takes up the quiver, with her charioteers and horses; Kir uncovers the shield. Your choicest valleys are full of chariots, and horsemen are posted at the city gates; the defenses of Judah are stripped away. And you looked in that day to the weapons in the Palace of the Forest; you saw that the City of David had many breaches in its defenses; you stored up water in the Lower Pool (Isaiah 22:5–9).

The Lord, the LORD Almighty, called you on that day to weep and to wail, to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth. But see, there is joy and revelry, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine! “Let us eat and drink,” you say, “for tomorrow we die!” The LORD Almighty has revealed this in my hearing: “Till your dying day this sin will not be atoned for,” says the Lord, the LORD Almighty (Isaiah 22:12–14).

God not only denounced Judah and Jerusalem, He also spoke to Shebna, who was the steward in charge of the palace (cf. Isaiah 22:15–19). He was the one who would be held accountable for Jerusalem’s actions. Because of his pride, he

sought a place of honor among the chosen and would be evicted from office. Eliakim, a faithful man, would come to stand in his place. He was called a righteous man and a servant of the Lord (cf. Isaiah 22: 20–25).

“In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim, son of Hilkiah. I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I will drive him like a peg into a firm place; he will be a seat of honor for the house of his father. All the glory of his family will hang on him: its offspring and offshoots — all its lesser vessels, from the bowls to all the jars. In that day,” declares the LORD Almighty, “the peg driven into the firm place will give way; it will be sheared off and will fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut down.” The LORD has spoken (Isaiah 22:20–25).

Eliakim would be a father to those who lived in Jerusalem under the house of Judah. God would place the key to the house of David upon his shoulder. He would reign as a strong peg in a firm place until the peg gave way. He would reign in glory that flowed down to his family and its offshoots. This man was typical of Jesus. He would bring righteousness to the house of Judah, but because he was just a man, he would fall. God did not want Jerusalem to believe that having a righteous house steward over all the city of Jerusalem would spare them of the ultimate and inevitable fall that was to come. They would still fall because of their wickedness.

Judgment Against Tyre

Isaiah left the city of Tyre until the last to discuss its judgment, possibly because all the other cities of that area depended totally upon Tyre for their commerce. Tyre was the capitol city of Phoenicia, and they ruled the Mediterranean. Any ship that sailed the Mediterranean, whether it was a Phoenician ship or not, had a Phoenician captain, Phoenician steersman, and Phoenician crew. If Tyre fell, then commerce would fall. Tyre was the most important, worldly city that Isaiah talked about.

Isaiah said, “*An oracle concerning Tyre: ‘Wail, O ships of Tarshish! [Tarshish is in what is presently Portugal.] For Tyre is destroyed and left without house or harbor. From the land of Cyprus word has come to them’*” (Isaiah 23:1). All the nations of the world would cry out because of Tyre’s fall. They were told to be silent because God was coming in judgment. They might cry out over man’s judgment, but this was the judgment of God. They needed to be silent before His judgment. They needed to be ashamed because they were going to be judged as well. No matter how powerful or how necessary Tyre was, the people of the world resented having to rely on them. They resented having to trust them for all of these things.

The people of Tyre needed to consider what the Lord said:

Who planned this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traders are renowned in the earth? The LORD Almighty planned it, to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth (Isaiah 23:8–9).

Isaiah said the people needed to consider that their fall was planned by God, and they would find no rest. They would not rule the sea any more. Other people would take their ships and commerce. Other people would take their place of honor and praise among the nations. They needed to consider others. They

probably thought it could not happen to them, but it would. They should consider what happened to Babylon and all the other nations that were destroyed before them. God called them "*O Virgin Daughter of Sidon,*" and told them they would now be cursed. Last of all, He told them this judgment would be delayed perhaps, but they could be sure that it was still coming. First, God destroyed Tyre for the harlot she was, and then her ruins were scraped into the sea, a causeway was built, followed by the rebuilding of Tyre upon an island. Then the day came when Alexander the Great destroyed them with the wrath of God.

All the profits of Tyre's harlotry would go to those who lived for the Lord. The people of the Lord would inherit the riches of the wicked when God came in judgment upon His people. Be sure that even though the mill of God's judgment may grind slow, it grinds exceedingly small. The Lord will judge anyone who touches His people, the apple of His eye. As God's man, as God's woman, take great peace in believing that you are the apple of His eye.

The Apocalypse of Isaiah

Isaiah 24:1–27:13

Introduction

This chapter continues the discussion from the previous chapter of the prophecies against the nations addressed in Isaiah 13–27. Chapter 12 will cover the Apocalypse of Isaiah from Isaiah 24–27. “Apocalypse” literally means “the statements of coming judgment in symbolic language.” It is a transliteration of a Greek word that means “to uncover.” A transliteration is the process by which letters or words are spelled in the corresponding characters of another alphabet. The Book of Revelation is another example of apocalyptic writing in the Bible. Isaiah 24–27 contains an apocalypse — a picture of God’s judgment to come. It is important to read the scripture notations even though some of them are not quoted within this manuscript.

God’s Judgment on All Nations

Isaiah 24 begins with the prophecy of God’s charge against the people and the calamity and judgment that was to come upon them:

See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants — it will be the same for priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for

maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor. The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The LORD has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant (Isaiah 24:1–5).

God's charge against His people was three-fold. **First**, they had disobeyed the Law. **Second**, they had violated the statutes. **Third**, they had broken God's covenant with them.

The calamity or disaster that was going to come against the people was going to be the same for all. God is no respecter of persons and does not show favoritism (cf. Acts 10:34). The righteous will be saved. The wicked will be judged: no matter who they are, no matter where they are, no matter what nation they belong to, no matter how much they claim to be the people of God, and no matter how much they claim to follow the Law. God was interested in His children keeping His laws and statutes and not profaning His covenant.

Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left. The new wine dries up and the vine withers; all the merry-makers groan. The gaiety of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the revelers has stopped, the joyful harp is silent. No longer do they drink wine with a song; the beer is bitter to its drinkers. The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every house is barred. In the streets they cry out for wine; all joy turns to gloom, all gaiety is banished from the earth. The city is left in ruins, its gate is battered to pieces. So will it be on the earth and among the nations, as when an olive tree is

beaten, or as when gleanings are left after the grape harvest (Isaiah 24:6–13).

Isaiah described the calamity against God's enemies. Several things are woven together in this text. There will be desolation; he said "*the earth*" will be wasted, devastated, and the people scattered. It will be inaccessible to human beings and completely without any joy, hope, or love. The land will become desolated, weak, and feeble. The gates, which are the strongest part of a city, will be battered to pieces and scattered. There will be misery with no wine, no music, and no escape. The same judgment awaits all upon the earth, no matter what their state in society might be.

The phrase "*So it will be upon the earth and among the nations. . .*" is a transition phrase going from devastation to God's mercy once again (cf. Isaiah 24:13a). There will be mercy — some olives will be left on the trees and some grapes will be left to harvest. There will be a remnant because God will preserve a small group of people. From the lips of the chastened often comes sweet and triumphant strains of rejoicing: "*They raise their voices, they shout for joy; from the west they acclaim the LORD's majesty*" (Isaiah 24:14).

Some of the people will realize why God has come in judgment. These people will say, "Praise the Lord; the Lord is right in what He does." God will be glorified in the midst of His judgment. This recognition of God's righteousness will be the foundation of all life and all religious service (cf. Isaiah 24:15). From the east to the west and to the ends of the earth, their singing will be heard, "*Glory to the Righteous One*" (cf. Isaiah 24:16a).

Fruits of Transgression

Isaiah listed five fruits (results) of transgression in Isaiah 24:16b–23. What is the result of sin in someone's life? If transgression (sin and unrighteousness) is a welcome host

rather than an unwelcome intruder, then sin is the main characteristic in someone's life. It will cause the following results:

1. It impoverishes (24: 16).
2. It deludes (24:16, 17–18).
3. It agitates (24:18–20).
4. It oppresses and crushes (24:20).
5. It imprisons (24:21–22).

Isaiah said: “. . . *‘But I said, “I waste away, I waste away! Woe to me! The treacherous betray! With treachery the treacherous betray!”’*” (Isaiah 24:16b). **Sin will impoverish.** The violation of God's laws reduces bodily strength. It causes one to waste away, bringing pale cheeks and trembling nerves. It also cuts down on resources. It impoverishes the mind and causes the mind to starve on empty folly when it could be nourished on heavenly truth. Ultimately, it makes the soul barren of noble virtues and exquisite grace, which elevate and beautify the human character.

Sin deludes and the treacherous betray:

Terror and pit and snare await you, O people of the earth. Whoever flees at the sound of terror will fall into a pit; whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare (Isaiah 24:17–18a).

God was telling the people they could not escape. Those who looked for deliverance were deluding themselves with false hope.

Sin agitates the soul. It causes a shaking and unsettled feeling:

The floodgates of heaven are opened, the foundations of the earth shake. The earth is broken up, the earth is

split asunder, the earth is thoroughly shaken. The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls — never to rise again (Isaiah 24:18b–20).

Isaiah compared God's judgment for sin to the ground shaking beneath the people. Sin causes friends to leave and families to disown each other. People lose confidence and obligations are pressed against them. Last measures are taken. Liberty itself is threatened. Blackened clouds hang over all life. Behind there is only folly; ahead is ruin. Everything within the sinner's life becomes agitated and alarmed.

Sin oppresses and crushes. There is a sense of guilt that oppresses the spirit. There is no vitality, freshness, or vigor. Sometimes it crushes the soul to the point that there is no escape. Instead of vitality, there is a fatal despondence. Sin pursues the evil path to the bitter end. One of the very worst penalties of sin is the dead weight which it lays upon the spirit of the sinner, killing his hope and dooming him to despair and death.

Sin imprisons:

In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days (Isaiah 24:21–22).

This is not dark and strong dungeon in which the bodies of men are confined, but it is a dark and deplorable prison in which sin confines its victims. The children of iniquity (sin) are slaves. They wear bonds which are stronger than the strongest iron — they are bound up by sin.

Sin is behind all the judgment of God: *“The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before its elders, gloriously”*

(Isaiah 24:23). The Lord will reign forever and that is also part of the judgment of God — He is the forever King.

God's Redemption

The first five verses of Chapter 25 are a hymn of praise in which the Deliverer is discussed. Thank the Lord that in the midst of all evil, He will come in deliverance. There are three characteristics about the Deliverer that are emphasized in this song. **His abiding faithfulness** is emphasized. What He has purposed and promised is sure to be fulfilled. Heaven and earth are not as sure as His Word.

His perfect righteousness is also discussed. God cannot be judged with human limitations. His timing is righteous and just. When the cup of human guilt is full, the arm of divine retribution will deal its stroke. When God has had all He can take, then He will take revenge. After that, all will shout and all the shouting of impious arrogance will be silenced with shame.

His divine compassion is discussed in this hymn. In every age and in every land, He regards the poor, the needy, the suffering, and the downtrodden with particular kindness. He is always ready to shelter them under His loving kindness.

The blessings of the coming Messianic age are discussed in Isaiah 25:6–8. Christ Jesus the Messiah provides all that is needed both now and forever throughout all the ages. He offers spiritual revival, spiritual nourishment, spiritual strength, and spiritual honor. There will be the promised national deliverance for the Jews. The shroud of death will be removed forever when the Messiah comes.

At the end of Chapter 25 there is another hymn that is a song of rejoicing. It talks about the need to trust in God forever. His work in delivering this land of all His enemies is seen in *“the hand of the LORD”* as it rest on the mountain (cf. Isaiah 25:10).

God's Praise

After redemption there should always be praise (cf. Isaiah 26:1–21). Not only did God come in judgment upon the wicked, but He faithfully redeemed the righteous. For this reason God is worthy of praise. He is the creator and judge of all the world. God is worthy of praise for many reasons.

In that day, this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts. Open the gates that a righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith (Isaiah 26:1–2).

First, God loves His children and He protects and defends them. God will defend His children by what He does for them. Paul told the Romans, “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*” (Romans 8:28). Remember that God worked in the lives of men like David, Asa, and Jehoshaphat because they feared and trusted Him. God works in the lives of His children today when they fear and trust Him. In this day when man’s intellectual and scientific skills receive great honor, it is sometimes hard to remember that God is in active control of what happens to His world and His people. God will also defend His children by what He does within them. God loves and saves His people! Praise Him for that.

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal. He humbles those who dwell on high, he lays the lofty city low; he levels it to the ground and casts it down to the dust. Feet trample it down — the feet of the oppressed, the footsteps of the poor. The path of the righteous is level; O upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth (Isaiah 26:3–7)

Second, God gives His children confidence and peace through what He can do within them. His purpose is constant in the lives of His children (cf. Jeremiah 29:11; Psalm 112:6–7; Philippians 4:7). There is comfort in knowing that God is faithful and always true. The sacred covenant name of the *LORD* is used three times in this passage. God told Moses, “I am the timeless one” (cf. Exodus 3:14). God also called Himself the Rock. This title is used over forty times in scripture. The emphasis is on stability, security, and an unchangeable character. God’s dealing are just. God is eternal! He has irresistible power. No Babylon, no Rome, and not any empire built on force and fraud can terrorize the thankful. They live among falling thrones and rising powers, but one kingdom remains — the eternal kingdom of God. The kingdoms of earth pass away one by one, but the kingdom of heaven remains because it is built on the Rock. That kingdom will stand forever and ever. Amen!

Third, God should be praised because He judges our enemies (cf. Isaiah 26:8–15). This passage begins with a meditation on the ways of God and the relationship of the believing soul to Him. There are at least six characteristics that describe the relationship of God’s children to the Father. Number one, God’s children need to be waiting for God. Those who are redeemed are those who have walked in His ways as they watched the Lord’s judgment. They are those who have waited for the Messianic kingdom. Number two, there is a longing for the revelation of Him. There is a yearning ache to know Him and His memorial name. Read and reflect deeply on Exodus 3:13–15 where God spoke to Moses and told him “*This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM [the Eternal One] has sent me to you.’*” There are nearly a thousand passages in the Bible that use this name for God. This would be a good assignment to look up each time this particular name for God is used and see what God is saying in those passages. Number three, there is the messianic hope. The judgments of God in Isaiah’s time were preparing Israel for their Savior and King.

Number four, there is a necessity for judgment. Just as God used judgement to prepare Israel, He uses judgment in the same way today — to prepare the unbelieving world for the revelation of Him. Judgment is necessary. Righteousness is not learned, and the beauty of it cannot be experienced, except in the school of suffering in the midst of divine chastisement. The Book of Job emphasizes this. Number five, the effectiveness of judgment is seen in the jealousy of God for His people. All men, both wicked and righteous will see this (cf. Psalm 69). Remorse, shame, envy, and indignation reflect the judgment of God upon the earth. Resistance, rebellion, and impenitence make God's fires unquenchable. When God came to burn Judah and Israel, he burned them with an unquenchable fire. Number six, peace and deliverance are for the chosen. The past supplies arguments of hope for the future. They were enslaved by other nations and lords. These wicked Lords did as they pleased with Israel. Those enemies would soon be swept away by God's judgment in this apocalypse and forgotten forever.

Fourth, on the list of reasons God deserves praise, is that all the enemies of God and the enemies of His people past, present, and future will be destroyed. God protects the weak (cf. Isaiah 26:16–18). Israel was to God a disciplined child who had come back to his father. Israel was to God a pregnant wife bearing His children. Because of their sin, Israel could find no success with God, but God promised they would be delivered.

Fifth, God deserves praise because He gives life to the dead (cf. Isaiah 26:19–21). There are two conditions contrasted here: the condition of unrighteousness is death and the condition of righteousness is revival. Revival means coming back to **life** as God's child and standing righteous before Him. Paul said, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23). Man receives whatever he works for, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ His son. God's children are given something they could never have earned. If the center of a person's life is sin, he will receive what he has earned. If the

center of one's life is righteousness, then that person gets what he could never earn — salvation and eternal life with God.

Sometimes in life through righteousness, there is a time of reflection. The Israelites were given this time by God. God was going to put them into captivity so that they could reflect upon what they had done, and so they could seize the day and compel each day to yield its time of direct conversation to God. God's children today need to take up the attitude of reverent expectation. God is going to uncover those who have been slain. He will make known that innocent blood has not been shed in vain. He will never forget His people.

God's Chastisement

Finally, the last chapter of this apocalypse presents God's chastisement. He will be there for the fight with the "*Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent . . . the monster of the sea*" (cf. Isaiah 27:1). The New American Standard Version calls this monster a dragon. In ancient thought, the dragon was symbolic of the power of death in the underworld into which sinful humanity in its weakness is prone to fall. The Lord will overcome this fiendish power. The dragon will fall beneath His feet.

God was concerned for His vineyard (cf. Isaiah 27:2–6). The "*LORD*" is the keeper of the vineyard. He watches, waters, guards, and prunes the "*fruitful vineyard*" day and night. His feelings are those of pure love, and His wrath is reserved for those who would injure the grapes. God is the protecting force for His vineyard: "*The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe*" (Proverbs 18:10).

There is the tempering of divine chastisement (cf. Isaiah 27:7–9). God's punishment of His people has never been as severe as the judgment upon their enemies. God was angry with Israel, but His anger was not without love. He banished them, but not without mercy. When God's servants honestly set aside their sins and turn back to Him, He will not only forgive, He will forget their iniquities and bring them back to the land.

The fate of Jerusalem, “the world’s city,” is stressed in Isaiah 27:10–11. The reason assigned for its fall is willful and guilty ignorance. Such ignorance does not excuse men or lessen the guilt of their wickedness. This kind of ignorance heightens the sin for those who sin and are conscious of their sinfulness. Though they are blinded by their lust, they will have severe judgment come upon them. Therefore, wretched wickedness and ignorance are closely connected, but the connection is of such nature that ignorance proceeds from the sinful disposition of the mind. It is a very dark and dreadful ignorance which seems to shut out the favor and compassion of the all-compassionate God.

In that day the LORD will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem (Isaiah 27:12–13).

This portion of Isaiah closes with an oracle of comfort. The hand that smites and brings low is also the hand that raises up. It scatters in judgment, but it recalls and gathers together again in mercy. God’s mercy is shown — “*From the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt*” [the borders of the Promised Land] . . . *you, O Israelites, will be gathered one by one*” — the children of Israel will be gathered together and brought home. A trumpet will sound and the people of God will come to worship God.

What a great apocalypse this has been. It has shown the severity, the surety, and the thoroughness of the judgment of God. The people of God praised God for His judgment because in God’s judgment His righteousness is seen in stark contrast to the wickedness of the people and all the world. God will be praised because He saves, He gives peace, He secures, He

delivers, and **He is God**. The people of God will be comforted in the hand of Almighty God. No matter what happens, no matter what judgment comes, remember that behind the judgment is always the loving heart of God. He is doing this so that His righteousness may be seen. He is doing it so that His people may be delivered. He is doing it so that the wicked may see Him and turn from their wickedness, their degradation, their rebellion against God. God wants all men to turn to Him. Pray that the judgment of God is seen in His protective hand and in His love and mercy. God gives His children peace when they believe in His judgment.

Woes Upon Israel, Judah, Egypt and Assyria

Isaiah 28:1–33:24

Introduction

Chapter 13 will cover Isaiah 28–33. This material is connected by the word “*woe*,” which is found in the following verses:

Isaiah 28:1 — “*Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim’s drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley — to that city, the pride of those laid low by wine!*”

Isaiah 29:1 — “*Woe to you, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David settled! Add year to year and let your cycle of festivals go on.*”

Isaiah 29:15 — “*Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the LORD, who do their work in darkness and think, ‘Who sees us? Who will know?’”*

Isaiah 30:1 — “*“Woe to the obstinate children,’ declares the LORD, ‘to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin . . . ’”*

Isaiah 31:1 — “*Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do*

not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD.”

Isaiah 33:1 — *“Woe to you, O destroyer, you who have not been destroyed! Woe to you, O traitor, you who have not been betrayed! When you stop destroying, you will be destroyed; when you stop betraying, you will be betrayed.”*

The date of these prophecies seems to be during the period of Judah’s troubles with Assyria in the early reign of Hezekiah. There are **six woes** pronounced on Israel, Judah, Egypt, and Assyria. There is a lot of material to cover from these six chapters of Isaiah. The main focus of this chapter will be to see the connection of this section with the rest of the Book of Isaiah. Remember to read the scriptures that are being discussed even though they may not be quoted in this material.

God’s Woes

The **first woe** pronounced was upon the drunken politicians of Ephraim (cf. Isaiah 28:1). Ephraim is just another name for the northern nation of Israel. There is a warning to Samaria. This was a pronouncement of woe upon the drunken leaders of their lands. It was a pronouncement of their fading glory and a description of their prideful nature. Solomon said, *“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall”* (Proverbs 16:18). This pride-full nation was going to be destroyed and there is a description of God’s instrument of destruction, the Assyrian power, cruel and crude. God’s destruction was going to be absolute, total, and so complete that it could not be undone (cf. Isaiah 28:1–4).

God is always a God of mercy. So there is a promise to the remnant, that small part of Israel’s nation that will survive the Assyrian destruction (cf. Isaiah 28:5–6). Isaiah said the LORD Almighty would be Israel’s crown. God would be their glory, exultation, and authority. Isaiah told them that the LORD Almighty would give them strength. They had sought strength in the wooden gods that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, built. They

had sought strength in the pagan gods that Jezebel and Ahab brought into their land. They had sought help in their military might, their strength, their riches, and in all the worldly things. They did not find help in any of those areas. They needed to realize that God would be their strength.

The **second woe** was a pronouncement of judgment upon the formal worshipers of the southern nation of Judah (cf. Isaiah 28:7–29). Formal worship is just as disgusting and offensive to God as immorality. Isaiah discussed Judah's sinfulness (Isaiah 28:7–10) and then talked about the character of the priest and the prophet. They were like the drunken leaders of Israel. They were drunk so often that they stumbled with the Word of God, and they were filthy in their lives. They were a corrupt group of people. He talked about the spirit of the people and said they were mockers who in their childishness had rejected God. The leaders were corrupt; the people were childish. Therefore, they all would be judged (cf. Isaiah 28:11–13).

Judah was going to be punished — they would be judged by their foreign speaking enemies. Their judge would not be the northern nation of Israel or the nation of Syria as Hezekiah had feared. Their judge was going to be the Assyrian army that would force its way to the northern most part of Judah, to the very city of Jerusalem. The only way this army could be stopped was by the power of God. This judgment would be in spite of all the promises of rest that God had given them, because those promises based upon their continual faithfulness during a time of faithfulness. At this time they had become unfaithful and this judgment would be an agreement with their own words. Judah would be judged just as quickly as Israel had been. Judah was not judged because of idolatry, immorality, corrupt politics, and personal character but because of the fact that they worshiped God without involving their hearts.

Isaiah told the people of Judah to listen to the Word of the LORD as He rebuked Judah's nobles (cf. Isaiah 28:14–22). He had already rebuked Samaria's nobles. He talked about the earthly things they had relied upon that would fail them. They

relied on many things; they put their trust in their physical force, their armies, their police, their money, and their allies. They trusted in their intellectual power and their mental strength. They were trusting in their unyielding wills, keen intellects, fertile imaginations, and their great logical insights. All of these things were going to fail. Armies would revolt and disappear because of sickness and desertion. They would suffer defeat, become demoralized, and then surrender. The same things were going to happen to their police force. The treasury would become exhausted; allies would draw back in the times of danger just as the Egyptians had in the time of Israel's greatest needs. The mightiest ruler who had scorned God and His laws would find himself brought to shame, defeat, and ruin. There was no doubt that this would come true. It is the same today — any nobles, politicians, or rulers who turn against God doom their nation to destruction.

There was also the external danger of Assyria who was threatening Judah (cf. Isaiah 28:16–19a). The affect that Assyria had on Judah was in total agreement with the justice they were due. This justice would bring an end to all the places of refuge in their lives — “*. . . water will overflow your hiding place*” (Isaiah 28:17b). Calamity would come at last (cf. Isaiah 28:19–22) as Solomon said, “*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people*” (Isaiah 14:34). Righteousness makes a nation better. Sin makes the nation a disgrace. Knowing that this was coming brought sheer terror to the people. Nothing could save them — not even sending all of their possessions as a bribe to the Assyrians — nothing was going to help.

Judah's sin continued on and on. The LORD would come upon them as He had at Perazim and Gibeon and completely destroy them. His judgment would be complete upon all the mockers. There was a purpose and a reason for all that was happening. God was going to raise a remnant of the crop who would always be faithful to Him.

God is a skillful farmer (cf. Isaiah 28:23–29). He prepared the ground by clearing all the rocks and trees. He plowed and sowed the seed abundantly. He had planned His harvest so He sowed selectively making sure He threw the seed where it was meant to go. God had instructed His farmers to sow wisely. They used the proper tools in the harvest so that it would fulfill its purpose. God is wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom. There is a purpose for the harvest and wisdom must be used so that there can be redemption, fulfillment, and satisfaction with man. There was a curse upon Judah, but at the same time there was also the promise of a later harvest.

The **third woe** recorded by Isaiah was pronounced upon the deceptive workers in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was called the City of God. It was the place where David dwelt, a place of divine judgment, and would become the object of divine deliverance. But God still had to tell this city of their spiritual incapacity. God's children need to remember and learn that there are various degrees of power and weaknesses among them. The most serious incapacities are those which are an internal rebellion against God. At the center of this problem is the spiritual helplessness of the people of Jerusalem. They would be stunned and amazed because the incapacity that they had in Jerusalem is that moral condition in which the soul has lost its native power. The soul is destitute of the ability which would enable it to stand side by side with the holiest of the heavenly worlds. The soul lacks the wisdom to defend itself against its adversary. Perhaps most tragically of all, the soul becomes the prey of the worst evils, and it forfeits its birthright and moves toward its doom. This is the terrible destiny they will have to suffer because they simply refused to listen to God's loving Word.

There are three physical manifestations: self-imposed blindness, self-imposed error, and sleeplessness. They refused to see God in His Word and His work of judgment upon them. They staggered around in error as if they were drunk, but it was not the drunkenness of wine. It was their own selfish desires.

Their indulgence in those selfish desires brought about sleeplessness imposed by God. There would be no prophets or seers to hear. They might as well be blind and deaf.

This judgment has been sealed. The LORD will publically fix them in this blind, drunk and sleepless state so that they can not escape it if they willfully deaden their spiritual abilities. The people who hear this proclamation stare in astonishment at this prophecy that seems to have no relation to facts. The ruling class is mainly addressed here. They are spiritually asleep, with their eyes closed and their heads wrapped up in their turbans. They are full of lip service and hypocrisy. They are practicing appearance without any reality. All hypocrisy in life is a testimony to the grandeur of which that hypocrisy copies or caricatures. The imitation of true religion can be carried out in speech, and the effect of “stained glass words” on the ear and on the heart is magical. For a time they create the illusion of great spirituality. God does not want a spiritual illusion.

God does not accept hypocrisy. He will destroy their intelligence, expose their secrets and judge their corruption. But all of this will bring about a time of great spiritual revival. They would be changed in their inward nature. There would be signs of the new life of God. Those that were deaf will hear God. Those that were blind will see God. And the humble and needy will rejoice in God. And all the ruthless and all the mockers will vanish. The evil would be cut down. The unjust rulers would be gone, and that will leave a holy and a happy union. The people who were ashamed will no longer be ashamed. The people will worship God and will no longer worship idols. The people will accept instruction from God. They would be His holy nation.

The **fourth woe** is against those who rely on Egypt (cf. Isaiah 30:1–26). The alliance with Egypt is openly rebuked (cf. Isaiah 30:1–7). Their sin in relying upon Egypt is three-fold. It is desertion of God. They take counsel, sanction, and guidance from others rather than from God. At one time they would not have ever taken any action without divine instruction from God

(the books of Joshua and Judges confirm this), but now they distrust God. They trusted in Pharaoh's strength and Egypt's shade. This is because they did not trust the shadow of God's wings. David spoke to his nation about the shadow of God's wings (cf. Psalms 17, 57, 63, 91). God's people need to be beneath the wings of our Lord. Their loss of faith made them look for another power to trust. Their deplorable distrust was due to the spirit of materialism. This was their number one sin. They preferred the visible nation rather than the invisible God. They preferred the fleshly power to divine power of the Spirit. They preferred the material, physical army of Egypt, whose forces they could not count on, to the invisible forces of God's heavenly angels, whose weapons were more powerful than any human forces. This is the sin of mankind — the desertion of God which involves departure from His side and from His service. Desertion springs from distrust, and distrust is rooted in a wretched and a pitiful materialism.

Their punishment would be the fruitless spending of money and resources. They will take the trouble to secure princely ambassadors, who travel through inhospitable and perilous regions laden with costly gifts, paying submissive attention to all the foreigners for absolutely nothing. This will result in bitter disappointment. The land, from which they hoped so much, would prove utterly useless to them. Their expectations ended in nothing but frustration and humiliation. And the result of all of this would be political reproach. The court and the nation would be ashamed of having taken the step that turned out so unfavorable. Waste, disappointment, and humiliation are all common penalties of sin. The penalty of wastefulness involves many things that are precious: time, money, strength, and reputation. There is a disappointment that comes to the soul when what it hoped for cannot be had. Those living in sin live in a position of shame, dishonored by men and reproached for folly into which they should not have fallen. The alternative to all of this can be to have God with them. One of the truest and the most faithful prophets was accessible to them at any time.

Why not trust in the Almighty? Why not trust in His prophet, Isaiah? Why not take counsel of the All-wise? The alternative to sin is always there — there will always be the preachers of the Word of the living God and the living Word of God they preach.

God renewed His condemnation upon Judah (cf. Isaiah 30:8–17). This severe denunciation of the sins of the Jews by the prophet gives some of the darker and sadder aspects of sin itself. This record is to be an everlasting witness and a record against them forever. There is also a permanent record recorded in God's book for all people (cf. Revelation 20:11–15).

Notice the stubbornness of this record. Stubbornness reaches its utmost length when it closes its ears against the Word of God. The heart becomes hardened by degrees. There is diminished pleasure, inattention, avoidance, and the closed ear of the soul. Men descend into the stubbornness which is rebuked here by different stages.

Notice the power of sin's deception. When sin is in full possession of the soul, it makes men believe that which is not true because that is how they wish it to be. Sin persuades them to regard rugged things which are the truth to be false. Sin leads men to find a voice that will speak a comfortable doctrine. They find preachers who will encourage them in wrong and be silent in the necessary rebukes. They find men who will speak of only the pleasant and profitable perversions and who would be silent if the truth is uncomfortable to hear.

The reason for sins's sudden and complete penalty is disbelief, oppression, and deceit (cf. Isaiah 30:12–14). The suddenness of the penalty comes like a breaking wall that has been cracked and bulging and suddenly collapses in an instant. Sin and judgment come upon those who have rejected God's offer of rest (cf. Isaiah 30:15–17). They trusted in horses and military might. Now, they would flee even before inferior forces because they have forsaken the Word of the living God. God still renews the promises to the remnant. God will wait for their return, longing to be gracious to them (cf. Isaiah

30:18–33). He wants to show compassion and give the blessings to those who wait for Him. God will hear the prayers of His righteous people. To the righteous, God’s ear is always open. God will give them faithful teachers again. He will direct their path again, because they have quit trying to follow their own (cf. Proverbs 3:5–6). The gods that had guided them in the past would be disposed of. God knows those who belong to Him (cf. 2 Timothy 2:11–13). He wants their bodies as a living sacrifice (cf. Romans 12:1–2). He wants them to put away all of their idols. He wants to bless those who are faithful to Him (cf. Ephesians 4:23). God is going to give them abounding joy and physical prosperity. There would be abundant fields and complete healing (cf. Isaiah 30:23–26).

God will also bless Judah when He judges their enemies (cf. Isaiah 30:27–33). He will breath upon Assyria and blow them away. He will consume them, and Judah will sing the song of Redemption. And the LORD will sing with them the song of His judgment. And the LORD’s judgment would be accompanied by music. The LORD will cast Assyria into the fire.

The **fifth woe** in this section was against those who trusted in Egypt’s power or in their own power (Isaiah 31:1–32:9). He told them there was no help at all in worldly power. He said their help could be found in Him and Him alone. The LORD would destroy both the helped, Israel, and the helper, Egypt. Those who had trusted in Egypt would be destroyed with Egypt when Assyria came to destroy them. There was a promise of protection to the remnant of Israel and a promise of destruction to the Assyrian (cf. Isaiah 31:4–9). Isaiah gave two beautiful similes of God, the Almighty judge (A simile is figure of speech consisting in the comparison on likening one thing to another). God is called “*a great lion*” — a fine image of undaunted power in the bold and steadfast warrior, Jehovah (cf. Isaiah 31:4). He was the invisible force against their foes. Toward the people of His choice and His love, He is “*birds hovering overhead*.” Here is infinite tenderness mingled with

irresistible might in the nature of God. The magnificent queen of the birds, the eagle, supplies in his action and habit a parable of eternal providence. The return of the LORD would bring to an end their infatuation with idols. The fire of the Almighty Judge would fall upon them by a sword that was not of man. They would flee before the sword and be terrorized by God's standard as fire came out of Zion (Isaiah 31:8–9).

There is a prophecy of the Messiah's kingdom that would be synonymous (compared or equal to) with righteousness (cf. Isaiah 32:1–8). Royalty would be His. Great changes would occur in the life of men. Ordinary men would be powerful in that day. The evil will continue to do evil. However, the noble and righteous one will stand forever. There is a condemnation of Israel intermingled with promises (cf. Isaiah 32:9–13). The women are rebuked because they are complacent and secure. They would be judged and called to mourn. There is a mingling of threats and promises. Strongholds will waste away. They are promised prosperity that is assured by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They will receive fertility, justice, peace and security.

God is a refuge to His people. The **sixth woe** was to Assyria. There would be a final judgment upon all of God's enemies (cf. Isaiah 33:1–6). The time was about 700 B.C., so He was alluding to Sennacherib and his army, who advanced in a plundering, destroying course. The tables were to be turned. The greedy conquerors became the object of God's anger and of His own greed. He would be gracious to Israel. This was the attitude of calm competence. Isaiah saw what was impossible to see through the eye of worldly calculation — he saw the downfall of the proudest power of the time. This may seem to be a weak attitude, but it is not. It takes an energetic powerful attitude to simply wait. The foe trembles when he sees God's children waiting in prayer. The spirit is straining as it waits for all of time to fall into the unity of God's divine purpose.

The arm of the LORD was the symbol of strength put forth in the times of trouble, not only in particular emergencies but

every morning. God's children need to respond with — Praise the LORD! The LORD is to be exalted because of His strength. He is to be exalted because of His abundant resources for good. He is to be exalted because of His justice and righteousness. The LORD will arise in judgment for the people of God. This is the lesson of this whole section. There are **woes** upon all the enemies of God. There are blessings upon the faithful remnant. In the future, He will destroy all the enemies. In the future, He will give His children glory. The life that is close to the LORD is the life that will triumph, not only against the Assyria, but against any power that comes against the awesomeness of God. God is an awesome being. He is able to withstand all enemies and give His children victory time and time again.

The lesson is a simple lesson. God can be trusted. He will redeem those who wait upon Him against the enemy within (this is Israel) and against the enemy without (this is Assyria). His children cannot trust in human abilities, human power or human intelligence. They must trust in the LORD. May God give great peace in trusting in Him.

The Destiny and Comfort of Israel

Introduction

This chapter is the climactic section of the first part of Isaiah, which covers chapters 34–39. God will do two things in this section. First, He will contrast the destiny of all the worldly powers represented by Edom, who is Israel’s primary enemy. Second, He will contrast that destiny with the future glory of the righteous remnant in Israel and speak of a glorious “way” He would make for them to walk in and be protected (this is chapters 34–35 of Isaiah). This chapter will also cover the historical section of Isaiah’s book. This section will look at two different episodes in Hezekiah’s life: the deliverance from Sennacherib’s threat when he surrounded the city of Jerusalem and the prediction of the nation’s fall because of Hezekiah’s pride when he showed his treasures to the emissaries of the Babylonian king.

Part One: Contrast In Destiny

Edom

God’s judgment on Edom is contrasted with God’s deliverance of Israel. Terror would strike the heart of all the people at the description of Edom’s fall:

Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the

world, and all that comes out of it! The LORD is angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter. Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree (Isaiah 34:1–4).

God wanted the whole world to hear what He was about to say concerning Edom's destruction. He was angry with all the nations, and His anger would not be turned away no matter what the nations did. His judgment is described as slain bodies being stacked in the valleys and remaining unburied. The world would be judged because of all of its wickedness.

God made very plain what He was talking about even though it is seen in pictures. God singled out Edom as the people He would totally destroy:

My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; See, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed. The sword of the LORD is bathed in blood, it is covered with fat — the blood of lambs and goats, fat from the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in Edom. And the wild oxen will fall with them, the bull calves and the great bulls. Their land will be drenched with blood, and the dust will be soaked with fat. For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion's cause. Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation

to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again (Isaiah 34:5–10).

Notice that the sword of the LORD is a bloody sword. It was filled with the blood of animals and men. He offered what had been slaughtered and killed as a sacrifice to the LORD. God declared this to be His day of judgment — “*For the LORD has a day of vengeance . . . to uphold Zion’s cause*” (Isaiah 34:8). Throughout the Bible, “*the day of the LORD*” is a day of total destruction upon cities and nations. There is no doubt about the judgment of God in these verses. It is described as a day of burning sulfur or pitch. The fire that burns would not be put out. It would burn day and night. The smoke would rise up forever. For all of the coming generations this land would lie barren. No one would pass through it to use the commerce of the land:

The desert owl and the screech owl will possess it; the great owl and the raven will nest there. God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of desolation. Her nobles will have nothing there to be called a kingdom, and all her princes will vanish away. Thorns will overrun her citadels, nettles and brambles her strongholds. She will become a haunt for jackals, a home for owls. Desert creatures will meet with hyenas, and wild goats will bleat to each other; there the night creatures will also repose and find for themselves places of rest. The owl will nest there and lay eggs, she will hatch them, and care for her young under the shadow of her wings; there also the falcons will gather, each with its mate (Isaiah 34:11–15).

The description of the desolation that was coming upon Edom is terrible. The nation that once was inhabited by great men would be inhabited by nothing but wild beasts and birds.

Edom, that once was decorated with gold and precious stones, would be decorated by nothing but thorns and nettles. The nation would be judged. Her rulers would have nothing to call a kingdom. They would no longer have a place to rule. All the princes would vanish away:

Look in the scroll of the LORD and read: None of these will be missing, not one will lack her mate. For it is his mouth that has given the order, and his Spirit will gather them together. He allots their portions; his hand distributes them by measure. They will possess it forever and dwell there from generation to generation (Isaiah 34:16–17).

This judgment has been written in the book of the LORD. Not one wicked person would escape. Their names are in God's Book. His spirit would gather them to be judged. Each of the wicked would receive the portion due him forever. There would be total, absolute, and complete destruction.

Israel

Immediately, there is a contrast easily seen between Edom's destiny and the fact that Israel was going to be blessed forever (cf. Isaiah 35:1–10). Edom would be totally destroyed with only the wild beasts and birds dwelling there. There would be an unquenchable fire and they would receive the full portion of judgment for their wickedness. They would never be seen again. There is no greater contrast than total destruction and the blessings that Israel would receive forever:

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away (Isaiah 35:1–10).

This is a marvelous way to end this first section! God has spoken so much of Israel's judgment and Judah's destined fall that God must give this glorious promise as a wonderful contrast. God is never far from mercy, so in the midst of all this description of judgment, God has to speak these words. He must tell them of the glorious future to come.

God's promise is going to provide a glorious "way" for His people. He talks about the desert blossoming like a flower and flourishing like a forest. A desert has nothing but sand and cactus. A person can drive for hours and hours and see nothing — there is no green grass, no flowers, and no running water. That is why it is called a desert. The day that God was talking about was going to come when He blessed Judah through Christ the Messiah. That which had never blossomed would blossom

and that which had never flourished would flourish like a forest.

This was not only going to be a prosperous and glorious “way,” it was going to be a courageous “way.” He would strengthen the weak and give courage to the fearful. He would avenge the oppressed. It would be a way — a time — in which the work of God on the erring would be in behalf of His people. God’s children would be given courage to stand for God by His work on their behalf.

There would be a glorious and courageous “way” which would also be a healing “way” for the people of God. The blind would see and the deaf hear. The lame would walk again and the mute speak. This promise surely dealt with the physical healing that happened during the time Jesus was with the people of Israel. He healed the blind, touched the leper to make him clean, and spoke the words to bring a man’s son back to life when He was fifteen miles away. He never attended a funeral that He did not send the pall bearers away empty handed with no one to bury because He had raised the dead. Jesus not only healed the people of Judah, He healed their land. Only a Jew can fully understand this concept, because the Jews have a feeling toward their land that no other people have. Away from the land, a Jew is unclean, and everything that he touched became unclean simply because there was no temple, no Holy of Holies, and no presence of God. When God said, “I will heal the land,” He meant, “I will come and dwell among my people again. They will be my people. They will be healed.”

This glorious, courageous, healing “way” would also be a safe “way.” God’s people would walk on it with no fear because it would be holy. It would be clean and safe because no fool or enemy would be able to walk upon it. There would not be any beasts at all, because only the redeemed would walk there. Not only are the people redeemed who are walking on that “way,” but the way itself is redeemed. In the book of Acts, Luke’s favorite words for describing the church are “*the way*” (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22).

Last and most important of all, this “way” is going to be a joyful “way.” If there was no joy in what the people of God were doing, then they would soon stop. There was going to be all kinds of joy: the joy of singing, the joy of privilege, the joy of comfort, and the joy of being in Christ. God’s children today need to sing, “I am privileged, I am comforted, therefore I praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Amen!” No matter what happens to God’s children, they can sing, “I’m in the way, the bright and shining way, I’m in the glory-land way: Telling the world that Jesus saves today, Yes, I’m in the glory-land way. . . . Heaven is nearer and the way groweth clearer, For I’m in the glory-land way.” (This is a verse from the song “The Glory-Land Way” by J.S. Torbett, page 535 in Songs of Faith and Praise.) This is how Isaiah closes the first section of his prophecy. He was telling Judah to find “the way” and to stay in it. They needed to stand in “the way,” love “the way,” and walk in “the way.” They needed to sing as they walked “the way.” God’s children today need to do these same things.

Part Two: Historical — During Hezekiah’s Reign

Scene One: God Challenged By Assyria

Between the first prophetic section and the next one, which begins in Isaiah 40, there is a historical section where God speaks of His work in Judah’s life. Chapters 36–37 have a description of the destruction of Judah averted. This section has two scenes.

Scene one, God was challenged by Assyria. Briefly, the story begins with a message from Sennacherib to King Hezekiah. Sennacherib’s field general, Rabshakeh, who is second in command to the king, came with a large part of the army to the outer edges of Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Sennacherib was still taking Lachish by force. Rabshakeh stopped just outside the city at the upper pool and told the rulers of the city

to come out to meet him because he had a message from Sennacherib. Hezekiah and Isaiah were not among the group of rulers who went to meet Rabshakeh. The message for them was that they must not take confidence in the following things:

One, the people should not put their confidence in strategy or military strength because these things are only empty words that they cannot rely upon. **Two**, the people should not take comfort in their alliance with Egypt because they were a splintered reed. Any alliance with Egypt would fall before the great king, Sennacherib.

Rabshakeh was preaching the very same lessons that Isaiah had been preaching: “Don’t trust in your power. Don’t trust in Egypt.” Sennacherib and his men were about to make a huge mistake, because they were going to shake their fists in God’s face.

Three, the people should not place any confidence in the God of Israel. The Assyrians had taken possession of all the hillside altars. They must have thought they were robbing God of His altars and His due rights to be worshiped. They did not realize that these altars were not pleasing to God in any way. Sennacherib and his army did not know that they were doing God’s will in destroying the hillside altars. Their conclusion was that by destroying the altars, they were taking away any hope of God’s help for Jerusalem in this war.

Sennacherib assumed there was nothing but weakness that would oppose his own brute force. He was strong in calvary and Judah was weak. Judah may have had 10,000 horses, but Sennacherib assumed they would not be able to find riders for all those horses. He believed Judah could not resist the attacks from a single Assyrian ruler with chariots. So, the Assyrian Rabshakeh shook his fist in the face of God and challenged Jerusalem (cf. Isaiah 36:1–10).

The officials (these men are named in Isaiah 36:3) who went out to meet Rabshakeh asked him to speak to them in Aramaic rather than in Hebrew because they did not want the people on the walls to understand what was being said.

Rabshakeh said that he had come to speak to everyone. He wanted everybody to hear what his king had sent him to say. He even repeated the message (cf. Isaiah 36:13–20). The entire speech was directed against Isaiah's preaching. It is interesting that Sennacherib not only knew what Isaiah was preaching, but he was worried about proving that it was false preaching. It would be wonderful if preachers today preached in such a way that wicked kings had to stay up at night worrying about their message and its affect on the people. This message caused the rulers of Judah to tear their clothes because they were so upset by it.

Scene Two: Assyria Answered And Judged

Scene two is the answer to Assyria and the judgment upon it (cf. Isaiah 37:1–38). Isaiah said, "Jerusalem will be delivered." Hezekiah made a contrite speech, tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and went to the temple. He called out to God, admitted his guilt, and called on God to judge his enemies. He sent his chief men to Isaiah:

Isaiah said to them, "Tell your master, 'This is what the LORD says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard — those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Listen! I am going to put a spirit in him so that when he hears a certain report, he will return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword'" (Isaiah 37:6–7).

Sennacherib left Lachish and his commander Rabshakeh joined him. Sennacherib's message was sent to Hezekiah again to tell Hezekiah to surrender. Sennacherib claimed he had defeated all the gods of the world and all the gods of Israel would be helpless before his Assyrian army. Hezekiah did the only thing a man can do in that situation. He fell on his knees and prayed for deliverance. He said:

“O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God” (Isaiah 37:16–17).

The Lord spoke against Sennacherib because he had spoken against God, the Holy One of Israel (cf. Isaiah 37:21–29). He had boasted of great victories and accomplishments. God said that He had ordained the destruction of all the nations that stood and fell before Sennacherib. Sennacherib was able to do all of those things only because God wanted them done. God said, *“I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came”* (Isaiah 37:29b).

Then the Lord spoke to Hezekiah concerning Israel. He said, “There will be survivors in Zion. The Lord will see to it. Sennacherib will go home without a fight” (cf. Isaiah 37:30–35). In one single night, God killed 185,000 of Sennacherib’s army — *“Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp”* (Isaiah 37:36a). Sennacherib went to sleep expecting to march his army into Jerusalem the next morning and take the city. Instead of capturing Jerusalem as planned, Sennacherib had to form a burial detail and send the Assyrians home. When Sennacherib returned home, his two sons killed him and fled to Ararat. One son, Esarhaddon, reigned in his stead (cf. Isaiah 37:38). It is interesting that one single angel, of all the multitude of millions of angels in heaven, was able to deliver the people of God in a single night from the most powerful physical army the world had ever seen.

The Death Of King Hezekiah Averted

Scene One: Hezekiah's Illness And Recovery

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: 'Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover'" (Isaiah 38:1).

Chapters 38 and 39 also contain two scenes. Scene one Hezekiah prayed to God and reminded Him that he had lived a faithful life. He wept bitterly. Hezekiah was not only praying for his life, he was also praying for God's covenant with Abraham and David. Hezekiah did not have any sons and if he were to die there would be no seed (heir) to bless all the nations of the earth. God was testing this man. Hezekiah's death warrant was canceled.

Isaiah came back to Hezekiah to tell him that God had heard his prayer and seen his tears. God would extend his life for fifteen years. When Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh was only thirteen years old. Isaiah said God would deliver the king and the city from the Assyrian threat, which is exactly what He did. This illness had apparently been going on even before the Assyrian destruction began. Hezekiah recovered and did what any forgiven and recovered person would do. He sang. He sang this song: "At first I thought I had no hope. I was robbed of my years. I was robbed of seeing the Lord. I was robbed of my tent — my physical body. I was robbed of any hope of recovery. But then, I heard the word of the Lord, and I was restored to health. I was forgiven. Now, I can praise God again. I will sing of God's salvation all of my life" (Isaiah 37:9–20). He was cured completely and quickly.

Scene Two: Hezekiah's Pride And Downfall

Scene two contains the details of Hezekiah's pride and downfall. Merodach-Baladan, the son of the king of Babylon, sent some emissaries (men sent on a specific mission) with a letter and a gift for Hezekiah. Hezekiah showed these men all of his storehouse — the silver, the gold, the spices, and everything found among his treasures. He was a rich king full of pride showing off all his wealth to his future enemies. How quickly he forgot what had happened to the Assyrians who trusted in those things. He was trusting in his own power (cf. Isaiah 39:1–2).

Isaiah came to Hezekiah and asked him what he had shown the men from Babylon. When Hezekiah told Isaiah that he had shown them everything, Isaiah rebuked him. Isaiah told the king that all of Jerusalem's treasures would be carried away by these very people. He also told Hezekiah that some of his descendants would become eunuchs in Babylon. Some of his own flesh and blood would be carried off to serve these people, and they would become slaves and household servants because of what he had done.

The last verse of chapter 39 gives the response of a righteous man when he is caught in sin. Hezekiah was a righteous man whose pride caused him to fall. He was told that judgment would fall upon him as well as his own family — *“‘The word of the LORD you have spoken is good,’ Hezekiah replied. For he thought, ‘There will be peace and security in my lifetime’”* (Isaiah 39:8). After Isaiah's rebuke, Hezekiah said, *“The Lord is right in His judgment. I have done wrong. My people have done wrong.”* He was at peace in the midst of all this wickedness and evil.

Restoration and Comfort (1)

Isaiah 40:1–42:25

Review

This is chapter 15 in the study of Isaiah. There have been three sections in Isaiah's book so far. There is the prophetic section that dealt with judgment on all the nations, including Israel and Judah (Isaiah 1–35); the historical section that has two parts: one dealt with God's deliverance of Hezekiah from Sennacherib's threat with the Assyrian army, and the other dealt with God's judgment of Hezekiah and the prediction of the fall of the nation of Judah, because of Hezekiah's pride. He trusted in his own riches and showed those riches to Babylon's emissaries. One day Babylon would come back to get those riches. Chapter 39 concludes with the fateful prediction of the Babylonian captivity.

Part Three: Prophecies of Consolation

Introduction

The next section in Isaiah is a prophetic section given to Israel to prepare them for the judgment of captivity and to tell them of their ultimate deliverance (Isaiah 40–66). This section was given to tell them that one day they would come back to their land even before they ever go away. This would be accomplished because of, and in accordance with, the covenant God had made with Abraham and the promise He made to David. Interwoven into the promise of deliverance from the Babylonian captivity due to their sins and the deliverance from the captivity of sin itself is the Gospel and the grace of God to

come in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Notice the following quote from Jim McGuiggan:

The redemption from Babylon which God engineers and carries out is intended to model that greater redemption wrought in Christ. When New Testament writers and characters make use of the material in chapters 40 through 66, it is more than simple application. It is, in my view, an exposition of the truths and prophesies and persons purposely placed within the Old Testament message. (Jim McGuiggan, Looking Into The Bible Series: The Book of Isaiah [Lubbock, TX: Montex Publishing Company, 1985], pg 202.)

Isaiah 40–66 will be studied under three main headings:

Restoration and Comfort (Isaiah 40–48).

Salvation Through the Messiah (Isaiah 49–55).

The Coming Glory of Zion (Isaiah 56–66).

These chapters will cover the promises of restoration, salvation through God's servant, and the coming glory of Zion.

Comforting Promises of Restoration

Consolation and the Promise of Restoration

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and

hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” A voice says, “Cry out.” And I said, “What shall I cry?” “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.” You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up to a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young (Isaiah 40:1–11).

This section begins with a prologue (cf. Isaiah 40:1–11), which begins and lays the foundation for what follows. First God’s people were comforted (cf. Isaiah 40:1) and then consoled with the fact that their judgment was complete (cf. Isaiah 40:2). They were prepared for comfort (cf. Isaiah 40:3–5) when He said, “Get the Lord’s way ready.” and “See the Lord’s glory.” God told His people that man is temporary and the Word is eternal, when He said, “Where have all the flowers gone? The Word outlasts all things.” He told them that He is faithful as the faithful, loving shepherd. He will give fearless and faithful witness and bring swift judgment. He will be their sweet Shepherd, if they will simply be His obedient lambs.

God’s might is contrasted with man’s weakness (cf. Isaiah 40:12–30). There is a discussion of the futility of idolatry emphasized by five questions (cf. Isaiah 40:12–13). **Who?** Who

has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand? Who marked out the breadth of the heaven with His hands? Who held the dust of the earth as in a bucket? Who weighed the mountains on the scales of the hills and the balance? Who understood the mind of the Lord or instructed Him as His counselor? These are five great questions. The last two are the most important ones. Who has ever taught God anything? Who has ever directed God's past.

Then Isaiah spoke of the insignificance of the nations (cf. Isaiah 40:15–17). The nations are like a small drop in a bucket full of water. They are like a speck of dust on a scale meaning that the nations are nothing. In reality, the nations are less than nothing because they are worthless.

Next Isaiah contrasted God with the best that man can do. He said God is unique. Since the nations were so inadequate and they were the most powerful things on earth, he asked another question:

To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple [It is stupid to worship something that was made by man.] Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers to him. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a

whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff (Isaiah 40:18–24).

In this passage, Isaiah discusses the sovereignty of God. They had known from the very beginning that God is sovereign. It is known in the heavens by the angels and it is known on the earth by all the creation of God.

Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God?” Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:27–31).

Those who wait for God will mount up on wings like eagles. Isaiah was speaking of the impiety of impatience. God said, “You have known this, but you act like you do not know. You are always anxious for something to happen. I am God. I am eternal. What you need to do is wait for my action.” He speaks of the failure of those who had turned to self. It does not matter how young they are, even young men fail and grow weary.

God speaks of the future of those who trust and patiently wait for Him. These people will soar and mount up with wings as an eagle. This is the **flush and rush** of faith. They will run and not grow weary. This is the **fervency** of faith. They will walk and not grow weary. This is the **perseverance** of faith.

Is that not the reverse order? Shouldn’t it be walking, then running, and then soaring, since walking is the easiest, running

is a little more difficult, and then flying would be the most difficult to accomplish? To us, it seems that it should be more glorious to fly than it is to walk. Think about to whom this was written. Israel was in captivity when they were reading these words. Cyrus finally came to them, and said, “You can go back to your city and build your temple.” When they heard this, they did soar just thinking about being able to return home. They flew so close to the sun their wings got scorched. When Cyrus opened the gates of Babylon, and told them to go home, they probably ran out the gates with that promise in their hearts — “. . . *run and not grow weary*. . .” (Isaiah 40:31). The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem was 800 miles. The sweetest promise of all would be to know that they could “. . . *walk and not faint*. . .” (Isaiah 40:31). They would take one step at a time. That is the way our Christian life is. A new Christian sees Jesus, and in the glory of that vision, they mount up with “. . . *wings like eagles* . . .” (Isaiah 40:31), maybe even close enough to Him to feel the heat of His presence. After the rush of their new conversion, they run, and they just cannot seem to do enough. They want to teach everybody! They want to love the Lord! They love to sing His praises! But, before they have gone the full journey, when they are over 50 years old, they become tired and weary, and the sweetest promise of all is that they will not have to cross Jordan alone. They can walk and just put one foot in front of the other. The Bible does not say, “Run in Christ, jump in Christ, fly in Christ.” But it does say, “. . . *Walk in the light, as he is in the light* . . .” (1 John 1:7). Isaiah has given comfort to people that are going to have to endure the trials and the pains of rebuilding a city and going back to rebuild from scratch their relationship with God.

Rise of Cyrus As Deliverer Of God’s Servant Israel

Isaiah 41 speaks of the helper of Israel and the rise of Cyrus, the king of the Medes and the Persians, as the deliverer of God’s servant, Israel:

“Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations renew their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment. Who has stirred up one from the east [This is where Cyrus came from], calling him in righteousness to his service? He hands nations over to him and subdues kings before him. He turned them to dust with his sword, to windblown chaff with his bow. He pursues them and moves on unscathed, by a path his feet have not traveled before. Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD — with the first of them and with the last — I am he.” The islands have seen it and fear; the ends of the earth tremble. They approach and come forward; each helps the others and says to his brother, “Be strong!” The craftsman encourages the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer spurs on him who strikes the anvil. He says of the welding, “It is good.” He nails down the idol so it will not topple (Isaiah 41: 1–7).

This is the summons. It is an invitation for all the nations to come and make war with God. And then, He gives Cyrus his assignment — “You will rule in righteousness. You will rule totally. You will pursue all your enemies victoriously. I will give you the power to do that.” God tells Cyrus that the effect of them working together is that the nations will try to find help in their gods, making them as secure as they can on their pedestals, so that Cyrus and God may knock them down and deliver a world from misplaced belief and idolatry.

God promises deliverance (cf. Isaiah 41:8–20). He tells Israel, “I am faithful. I made a covenant with Abraham, and I will keep that covenant. I am here to help you” (cf. Isaiah 41:8–9). God tells them they do not need to be afraid or dismayed because He will give them strength. He will help and uphold them. Fear and discouragement are equal to unbelief. He

is going to take care of their enemies. He will bring shame and destruction upon the enemies of Israel (cf. Isaiah 41:10–12).

“For I am the Lord your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I myself will help you,” declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 41:13–14).

God tells Israel that He is mighty. They already know He is a mighty God, but they have forgotten that His might is also for them.

God promised His children victory and refreshment (Isaiah 41:15–19). He said they would crush their enemies and praise God. They were going to thirst for water, but God would give them water and vegetation in the desert. He would give them the thirst, but He will also quench it: “. . . so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it” (Isaiah 41:20). God was telling them, that when they were victorious, others would see His victory. His power would be seen!

At the end of Isaiah 41, God held a debate with His people. First of all, He asked these questions:

“Can your idols tell the future?” The answer is, “No!”

“Have your idols won victories in the past?” “No!”

“Are your idols doing any great thing now?” “No!”

“Are your idols now worthless?” “Yes!”

And then, a judge was called for. This judge came from the North East, the same area as Cyrus. This judge was predicted by God and he was terrible in the way he appeared. The judge trusted in wind and confusion. He was not everything he ought to be, but God used Cyrus to judge Israel and Judah for all of their idolatry and their refusal to hear the word of God.

The Messiah's Effective Work Contrasted to Israel's Failure

In Isaiah 41, the picture is of a weak judge. Chapter 42 is one of the great chapters in the book of Isaiah, because it presents a picture of a powerful judge. That is the Messiah's effective work for God contrasted to Israel's failure. There is an announcement of the servant of the Lord and the work that He would perform. This servant is Jesus. He was selected by God, chosen by God, and empowered by the Spirit of God. He is judging the nations for God because that is the will of God. He is lowly among men. He is not like Cyrus, wearing great armor and riding white chargers. He comes dressed in ordinary clothes riding upon the foal of an ass. He is gentle, quiet, and spiritual. He speaks, not in the loud voice of passionate debate and contention, but with the still, small voice of reasonable persuasion. He does not come to crush life, He comes to develop life. He comes not to despise the weak, but to encourage the weak.

This Servant is the Messiah, who is faithful in His work. He will establish the divine ideal of justice in the world. He will do what He says. He will practice what He preaches. He is commissioned by the Lord. The Lord gives him a work to do to fulfill a particular purpose. That purpose is to establish the eternal covenant of God with the people of God. He comes to make covenant in the heart of all of God's people. He comes to bring knowledge and freedom to God's people. Knowledge and freedom go together because when He comes, He will say, "*. . . You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32). It is not the truth alone that will make them free, it is knowing the truth. For years, people did not know that the problem was not evil things in the blood but the germs in the body, so they bled people to let the evil out in the blood. Sometimes this cure actually killed them. What freed people from this stupidity? Freedom came when Lister and Pasteur learned the truth about the real problem.

There is an announcement of coming deliverance and a call for all the people to sing praise and jubilation to God (cf. Isaiah 42: 8–17). This talks about five glorious things: (1) God alone is God. He is the only God there is. (2) God alone knows the future. (3) God alone should be praised. (4) God alone should be pleased rather than trying to please men. Pleasing God will lead them to victory. (5) God alone will judge the idolaters. God stands alone, He is unique, and His activities are unique. He can do what no one else can!

Next, there is an address from God to captive Israel, calling upon them to turn from their deserved judgment. He said that Israel was blind and deaf in spite of clear revelation.

“Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD? You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing.” It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious. But this is a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made loot, with no one to say, “Send them back.” (Isaiah 42:18–22).

God judged Israel because they were wilfully blind and deaf. Israel was plundered and looted, all of them are trapped in pits. No one can bring them back. Israel still did not realize, however, that it was their God who had judged them. It was their Lord God who had brought this judgment upon them.

Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come? Who handed Jacob over to become loot, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned? For they would

not follow his ways; they did not obey his law. So he poured out on them his burning anger, the violence of war. It enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand; it consumed them, but they did not take it to heart (Isaiah 42:23–25).

What a tragedy! This is not a pretty section. It is not a “blue skies and rainbows” description of God’s people. This is the judgment of God that comes upon His people who willfully choose not to follow Him. This is something to which God’s people need to pay attention. It was the people of God who received the severest judgments. God said, “*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins*” (Amos 3:2). One would think that because “they” were the ones God had known, they would be blessed. This did not happen because Israel turned away from God. There is a blessing in being chosen by God, but there is a curse in not obeying the choice.

God intends for His people to see Him. God intends for His people to accept Him into their hearts. God intends for His people to serve Him with their life. God intends for His people to speak of Him with their lips. God intends to be obeyed and followed. If He is not followed by His people, then the severest judgement of all comes upon them.

Restoration and Comfort (2)

Introduction

This is chapter 16 in our study of Isaiah. This chapter will cover Isaiah 43–45, continuing the study of God’s comforting promises of restoration. God used Cyrus, the king of Persia, to deliver His people from Babylon and to empower them to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

Comforting Promises of Restoration

God’s Redemption of Israel and Her Deliverance Under Cyrus

Isaiah 43 covers God’s redemption of Israel and her deliverance under Cyrus. There was a renewed promise to Israel of protection and daily deliverance from their enemy.

But now, this is what the Lord says — he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life. Do not be

afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth — everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made” (Isaiah 43:1–7).

God created and formed Israel as a nation, and as a people. God redeemed them and called them out of Egypt. God protected them in captivity and delivered them back to their land. God was Israel’s Lord and Savior. God would bring back all of Israel that belonged to Him. The people of God need not fear, no matter where they are, and no matter what is happening to them at that moment, because God has created and formed everyone of His children. God has redeemed them and will protect them. God will bring them back. The writer of Hebrews says:

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:5).

In Isaiah 43:8–13 God gave a renewed challenge to the nations and spoke of judgment for them. He also spoke of salvation for His people:

“Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf. All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble. Which of them foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so

that others may hear and say, 'It is true.' 'You are my witnesses,' declares the LORD, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,' declares the LORD, "that I am God. Yes, and from ancient day I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?" (Isaiah 43:8–13).

God challenged the people of Israel to think about the fact that He had gathered the nations and Israel to be a witnesses for Him. The requirement of the witness is that he be chosen by God, that he knows and believes in the Lord, and that he understands the eternal character of the Lord. The testimony of that witness will be that there is no savior but the Lord and there is no god but their God. Then God challenged them to reverse His work. He said, "Once I have done something, I would like to see any among the nations, or any among the nations' gods reverse, what I have done." When God speaks, that is it. When God acts, that is it. When God judges, that is it. It will stay that way. No one can reverse it.

Next, God made a declaration against Babylon. This is interesting because this was written before Babylon even arose as a nation, yet it speaks of their destruction after they became a nation. Our God knows the future. This is a declaration against Babylon and a promise of Israel's restoration from their land.

This is what the LORD says — your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the

Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride. I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King." This is what the LORD says — he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise." (Isaiah 43:14–21).

Babylon would be totally judged by the Lord, Israel's Holy One and King. Israel would be delivered in a three-fold way: **Number one**, they would be delivered from the power of Egypt. **Number two**, they would be delivered from the oppression of Babylon. **Number three**, they would be delivered from the tyranny of sin. All of their deliverance would be so that they could praise the Lord: *"Let the redeemed of the LORD say this . . . Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men . . ."* (Psalm 107:2,15).

Isaiah 43:22–28 is a reproach addressed to captive Israel for their past mistakes: faithlessness to the Lord, not calling upon the Lord, not serving the Lord, and not sacrificing to the Lord. They have wearied the Lord with their words and with their sins. God tried them in the court of His justice and, in that trial, He challenged them to produce the proof of their innocence. He stated their guilt and said their first father, Abraham, was a sinner. Their spokesmen, the prophets, rebelled against Him. God has never had a servant who was sinless

except Christ. He sentenced the people to disgrace, destruction, and scorn. But God is never very far from mercy. They have not done what they should have, but He . . . “*remembers your sins no more*” (Isaiah 43:25).

In the midst of all this wickedness from Israel, God showed them mercy. He reproached them for their blindness, deafness, and refusal to listen, obey, and follow Him. But then He made a prophecy of their spiritual recovery and their regeneration under the Messiah. He assured them in Isaiah 44:1–5. Notice the beauty of the word “*but*” because it changes the subject from bad to good and from judgment to righteousness.

“But, now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen. This is what the Lord says — he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams. One will say, ‘I belong to the LORD’; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, ‘The LORD s,’ and will take the name Israel’” (Isaiah 44:1–5).

God told them He was going to bless them physically with water and streams. He was going to bless them spiritually with His blessings and by pouring out His spirit upon them. Because of these blessings they will have unparalleled prosperity, if and when they turn to God. There will be unchangeable position. God would seat them in their place and they would take the names of God’s great men to be their name. They would write on their hand, which was significant of their power and their action for the Lord. This hand, that was once used to worship

idols, will now be used to worship the Lord. They would be the holy ones of God and they would be called Israel.

Next God continued to compare and contrast Himself to idols (Isaiah 44:6–23). The beautiful phrase “*This is what the LORD says . . .*” is used over and over again in this section. God is speaking to His people!

This is what the Lord says — Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: “I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come — yes, let him foretell what will come. Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one” (Isaiah 44:6–8).

God said He was their king. He would tell them what to do. He was their redeemer and He would take away all their sins. He was their Almighty and they would not need any power but His. He would be their eternal help, He would help them when no one else could or would. He was their Covenant Brother, who labored, toiled, strived, protected, and died for His brother. He said that He would do all of this by Covenant. He would be their unshakable Rock. They might tremble, but the rock would never be shaken or changed.

God continue to talk to His children about the idolatry in their lives (cf. Isaiah 44:9–20). Both the idol and the idolater are worthless. Anyone who supports idolatry is blind and ignorant. Those who make idols will not have any profit from it. Their idols would have a better use if they were used for fuel to warm a man or to cook his food. The bottom line is that the

idolater will perish with the idol that he worships. If the Christian today counts anything physical in his life as his ultimate, then he will be destroyed just like whatever he worships. Man will last only as long as the god he worships. That is the bottom line.

God admonishes Israel for bowing down to all the foreign gods and idols.

“Remember these things, O Jacob, for you are my servant, O Israel. I have made you, you are my servant; O Israel, I will not forget you. I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.” Sing for joy, O heavens, for the LORD has done this; shout aloud, O earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, he displays his glory in Israel (Isaiah 44:21–23).

God told Israel to remember that they were His servants, because He had redeemed them. He said they needed to rejoice because He was glorious.

In the remainder of this chapter of Isaiah, there is another promise of deliverance and the deliverer is called by name. The LORD described Himself as He talked about His work and His power on their behalf. He told Israel about the civil servant, Cyrus, that He was going to use as their deliverer: “. . . *who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, “Let it be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Let its foundations be laid”’*” (Isaiah 44:28).

It should be easier to build one building (the temple) than to build an entire city (Jerusalem). However, God said that Cyrus would see the city rebuilt, but see only the foundation of the temple laid. History confirms that this is exactly what happened.

The chapter break between chapters 44–45 is a bad division, because chapter 45 continues with God speaking about His will concerning Cyrus.

This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that the gates will not be shut: “I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow upon you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things. You heavens above, rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I, the LORD, have created it” (Isaiah 45:1–8).

God speaks as though He is bestowing divine favor on Cyrus to show Israel, as well as Cyrus, that He is still the Lord. God was using Cyrus. He tells them again that He is unique in the heaven and the earth. There is no other like Him. God can sustain or destroy men. They can trust God because of His

character — He is God. God calls to all His creation: the heavens and the earth below.

“Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’ Does your work say, ‘He has no hands?’ Woe to him who says to his father, ‘What have you begotten?’ or to his mother, ‘What have you brought to the earth?’ ” This is what the LORD says—the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: “Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands? It is I who made the earth. It is I who created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled the starry hosts. I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his paths straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward,” says the LORD Almighty (Isaiah 45:9–13).

God warned Israel not to question His ways. He rebuked them for murmuring against providence. He said the clay does not question what the potter is doing. The child should not question the father’s part of the child’s beginning or the fact that the mother gave him birth. It is absurd to murmur against the Creator, the very One who rules the earth. Complaining and questioning are foolish in view of God and His creation. He is the Creator and the Redeemer.

The book of Isaiah is really a Jewish book, but it speaks of the conversion of the Gentiles; and in that way, it speaks to the Gentiles as well (cf. Isaiah 45:14–25). The conversion of the Gentiles was going to be a result of Israel’s restoration to glory. Israel’s enemies, pictured in this section as Egypt, would bow down and serve them. Israel’s God is praised for saving them

from all their enemies and from the destruction that would come. God, Israel, and the world are pictured in conflict and in contrast with each other.

For this is what the LORD says — he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited — he says: “I am the LORD, and there is no other. I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob’s descendants, ‘Seek me in vain.’ I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right. [This is the reality of the eternal. The next verses issue the call to be saved.] Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. Declare what is to be, present it — let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, ‘In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.’ All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. But in the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult” (Isaiah 45:18–25).

These verses present the Gospel, the call to be saved. God was telling mankind the way to be saved. Everyone must recognize who God is, that He is unique, that He is eternal, and

that He has a right to make demands of His children and to command them to do anything He wishes. He said, *"I am the LORD and there is no other"* five times in just three verses. Paul told the Ephesians the same thing: *"... one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all"* (Ephesians 4:6). He is the only One. No one knows His mind, unless He reveals it: *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children forever . . ."* (Deuteronomy 29:29). Christians are supposed to search the Word, which God has spoken and caused to be written.

In searching the Word, there are five things to be recognized. The **first** thing is that He alone is God. The **second** thing that needs to be recognized is that no one seeks Him in vain. Anyone who seeks the Lord with all his heart will find the Lord (cf. Jeremiah 29:23). The **third** thing is that all trust in self must be forsaken. Self can be expressed in idolatry, materialism, finances, position in the world, power, or politics. The **fourth** thing to recognize is that only God knows the future. Because He knows the future, He can work in our lives today in such a way that it will benefit us tomorrow and all of the days that will come. The **fifth** thing is that every knee must bow before God. Every tongue must confess that He is God. Every knee shall bow and everyone will know that righteousness is found in the Lord alone. In God there is righteousness, hope, and peace — *"But in the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult"* (Isaiah 45:25). The bottom line must be in and with the Lord. The Christian must believe in Him, confess Him, repent, and be immersed into Him. He must rise from that immersion to walk with Him because in the Lord, and the Lord alone, is salvation found. In the Lord, and the Lord alone, will the Christian be exulted. Praise the Lord for He is God. May there be peace in believing that great truth.

Restoration and Comfort (3)

Introduction

This is chapter 17 in the study of Isaiah. This is the concluding lesson on God's promises of restoration that are covered in Isaiah 40–48. This chapter will stress the great contrast between Israel's God and Babylon's gods, which were not able to save them from the judgment to come from God.

The Sovereignty Of Israel's God

Weakness of Babylon's Gods and the Statement of Babylon's Fall

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low; their idols are borne by beasts of burden. The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary. They stoop and bow down together; unable to rescue the burden, they themselves go off into captivity (Isaiah 46:1–2).

Bel is another name for Marduk who was the chief god of Babylon. Nebo, also known as Nabu, was the son of Merodach, the god of learning and of writing. The powerful chief god, Bel and the god of the intellect, Nebo would bow down and stoop low together. They could not rescue the people; they would become a burden the people would carry into captivity.

God admonished His people to trust in Him:

“Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all you who remain of the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared? Some pour out gold from their bags and weigh out silver on the scales; they hire a silversmith to make it into a god, and they bow down and worship it. They lift it up to their shoulders and carry it; they set it up in its place and there it stands. From that spot it cannot move. Though one cries out to it, it does not answer; it cannot save him from his troubles” (Isaiah 46:3–7).

God was telling His people they needed to listen to Him, and not to foreign gods. There was no reason to listen to idols that could not talk back. He said they should listen to Him, because He was the One who made them. He was the One who would carry them and sustain them. He had cared for them in their youth and would continue to care for them in their old age when they had gray hair. God asked, “To whom will you compare Me? I am not material in My substance as they are. I can hear you cry.”

There was a man who went to a foreign Asian city to try to proclaim Christ. He would proclaim Him in every way he knew, but very few people would listen. He noticed that there was an idol made of stone, silver, gold, and jewels in the market place. He noticed that people would gather around that idol to offer their candles and sacrifices to the idol. One day this man stood and pointed at the idol all day long. He stood there in total silence for six hours. He did that day after day, and the

days became weeks. The message got around that there was a crazy, white man pointing at their idol. Finally, one day he broke the silence, “This is your god. He has eyes, but he cannot see. He has ears, but he cannot hear. He has hands, but he cannot help. He has a mouth, but he cannot speak. He has no heart with which to feel, and no flesh with which to identify.” The people around him began to listen to what this man had to say about Christ. They heard about a God who had a heart to feel, hands to help, ears to hear, eyes to see, and flesh with which to identify. This man asked the Asian people, “Why are you honoring the thing that cannot move? You made it. You put it on its stand. You are more powerful than your god.” How terrible to have a god who is powerless as the Babylonian gods were.

Next, God admonished Israel to learn from their past. The key word in this section is **“Remember!”**

“Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose [this is Cyrus]. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do. Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, you who are far from righteousness. I am bringing my righteousness near; it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel” (Isaiah 46:8–13).

God told them to remember the past when He brought people upon them to destroy them. He was that same God, and He was going to bring a man named Cyrus, from the East, to

judge them for their rebellion. When God was talking to His people about all of this, Cyrus had not been born. It would be 100 years before Cyrus' birth. God was able to tell them He was going to use Cyrus to bring judgment upon the world and to deliver them from their adversaries. He called them rebels and stubborn-hearted because they refused to melt under His judgment. They did not heed His Word. In spite of their unrighteousness, rebellion, and stubbornness, God said, "I will still grant salvation to Zion." He was going to cure them of their idolatry in Babylon's land. They ought to heed God's Word and listen to Him. Christians today should do the same. They need to learn a lesson from Israel. They should not be stubborn and rebellious.

Isaiah 47 is a song of triumph over the fall of Babylon. This song has different parts. The first part is the triumph against luxury:

"Go down, sit in the dust, Virgin Daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, Daughter of the Babylonians. No more will you be called tender or delicate. Take millstones and grind flour; take off your veil. Lift up your skirts, bare your legs, and wade through the streams. Your nakedness will be exposed and your shame uncovered. I will take vengeance; I will spare no one" (Isaiah 47:1–3).

At this point, the prophet Isaiah said, "Our Redeemer — the Lord Almighty is his name — is the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 47:4). Then the Lord continued His message:

"Sit in silence, go into darkness, Daughter of the Babylonians; no more will you be called queen of kingdoms. I was angry with my people and desecrated my inheritance; I gave them into your hand, and you showed them no mercy, Even on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke" (Isaiah 47:5–6).

This passage deals with the problem of luxury in Babylon. It is generally agreed that luxury saps the vigor of the people. Luxury destroys courage, manliness, endurance and physical strength. When someone gives in to materialism and luxury, they become mentally hard, spiritually bereft, and physically weakened. Ease, idleness, and luxury lead to sin. This message is presented in Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Hosea, and Jeremiah. This is the same message that is presented by Jesus in the “Sermon on the Mount,” when He talked about not laying up for ourselves treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19). There is a problem in seeking physical pleasure and loving the things of this world. Christians need to sing a song of triumph over luxury. There is nothing wrong with “things,” but it is wrong to have things for the luxurious use of them.

There is also a problem when luxury causes cruelty. God wants His people to sing a song of triumph over cruelty. Giving in to the desire for luxurious possessions can cause people to act in cruel ways:

“I was angry with my people and I desecrated my inheritance. I gave them into your hands and you showed them no mercy. Even on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke. You said, ‘I will continue forever — the eternal queen!’ But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen” (Isaiah 47:6–7).

This text says that cruelty alienates the subject. It exaggerates foreign enemies and causes a people to be hated, even by those who have not suffered at their hands. This is the problem that Isaiah saw in Israel and Judah (cf. Isaiah 1:2–31). Zephaniah saw the same problem within Judah (cf. Zephaniah 3:1), Nahum saw the same problem within Assyria (cf. Nahum 3:1), and, Jeremiah saw the same problem in Babylon (cf. Jeremiah 51:24–36). God will stand to oppose any people who are cruel to each other. God does not defend the atrocious.

The next section of the song is for triumph over their pride (Isaiah 47:7). They had not considered the outcome. Babylon thought she could remain a queen forever. Her pride, like her luxury, seriously diminished her strength for resistance. It made her negligent. It made her a prodigal. It made her wasteful of the things God had given her. These same thoughts are presented in Proverbs 16:18 and Jeremiah 50:29–30.

The next three verses speak out against foolish superstition. This is something that is so evident and prevalent today:

“Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by. That is all they can do for you — those you have labored with and trafficked with since childhood. Each of them goes on in his error; there is not one that can save you”(Isaiah 47:12–15).

When religion is discredited, superstition speedily usurps its place. Such superstition certainly cannot save those who trust in it. It is more likely that it will destroy them. Other than pornographic material in the world, the number one selling kind of literature is horoscopes where men and women with their stupid and foolish predictions from the stars, the moon, and the planets are telling people about things that are going to occur. If you read these reports, as some people have, you will find they are right sometimes. If you stop a clock and it does not run anymore, it is right twice every day. Because these people say

so much when they are predicting the future, they have to be right occasionally.

For instance, I read a number of years ago the books by Nostradamus, who was supposed to be able to predict the future. I noticed that he was right in some of the things that he said. But, God says that if someone (a prophet) predicts something that is going to occur, and it does not occur, you are not to be afraid of that person, for he has spoken in his own wisdom and not in the wisdom of God (cf. Deuteronomy 18:22). Those who speak for God, the only One who truly knows the future, always speak truth concerning the future. There is no reason to be led into sin, apostasy, or idolatry by our own fear of not knowing what is going to occur in the future. God knows what is going to happen. The Christian does not know what the future holds, but he does know **Who** holds the future. God is the One who knows and controls all things; because of that, it is important to put our trust in Him.

Yahweh's Prediction of Israel's Deliverance

There has been a contrast between Israel's God and Babylon's gods. God said that since He knows the future and the gods of Babylon do not, He told them what was going to happen to them. The **first "address"** is really a complaint from God (cf. Isaiah 48:1–11). God has a right to start out with a complaint before He promises any victory or any deliverance:

"Listen to this, O house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel and come from the line of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of the LORD and invoke the God of Israel — but not in truth or righteousness — you who call yourselves citizens of the holy city and rely on the God of Israel—the LORD Almighty is his name: I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your

*neck were iron, your forehead was bronze. Therefore, I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, 'My idols did them; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.' You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them? From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you. They are created now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today. So you cannot say, 'Yes, I knew of them.' You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ear has not been open. Well do I know how treacherous you are; you were called a rebel from birth. For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off. See, I have refined you, though not as silver; **I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.** For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another" (Isaiah 48:1–11).*

God's complaint was "You have not called on Me." He talked about some things He had done that were worth heeding and some things that they had done that were not. He talked about man's criminal inconsistency with himself and the way that man hardens himself. Man acts cruelly and hardens his heart. God talked about the evidence concerning Himself (cf. Isaiah 48:3, 5–8). The evidence that God gave was that He has always known the future and He has always done what was right for His people. God said that He was doing all of this for His own sake, not for theirs.

There are things worth heeding, things worth remembering, and things worth hearing (cf. Isaiah 48:10–11). Those things worth hearing are the afflictions of the righteous that God was sending when He put the righteous in a furnace of affliction. Every time I read that phrase I think of Job.

Job was the most righteous man, God's number one person, and God put him in the furnace of affliction by giving him leprosy from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. God let his children be killed, his crops destroyed, his servants died, his wife turned against him, and his friends mocked him. Children, whose fathers were not worthy to eat with his dogs, spoke to him in derision. But, Job came out of all of those trials with a better understanding of God than he had ever had before. Job said, "*My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you*" (Job 42:5).

God may put us in a furnace of affliction so that we may see Him. We need to know that God's purpose and affliction is doubly beneficial. It strengthens our character and gives us a new knowledge of God. Our refinement and God's glory is the double benefit of the furnace of affliction.

The **second "address"** is an invitation. God began by saying "*Listen to me,*" and then repeats "*listen*" in this passage proving that they were not listening to Him. He also continued to remind them, "*I am He . . .*" in this section:

*"Listen to me. O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: **I am he**; I am the first and I am the last. My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summoned them, they all stand up together. Come together, all of you, and **listen**: Which of the idols has foretold these things? The LORD's chosen ally [Cyrus] will carry out his purpose against Babylon; his arm will be against the Babylonians. I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him. I will bring him, and he will succeed in his mission"* (Isaiah 48:12–15).

The invitation that God offered was that they reflect seriously on their relationship with God. The God who had called them is the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe. The God who had called them was now calling a chosen ally in

Cyrus to carry out His will against Babylon. There was comfort to be taken in this message. The Lord calls His people into His kingdom, and He calls His tools to be used to destroy that which is wicked. What happens ultimately is exactly what God willed to happen. Man may have his day temporarily. He may boast as Rabshakeh and Sennacherib did, and shake his fist against God for a moment (Isaiah 37:8–38). But in the final analysis, the bottom line is, God has His way. That was Abraham's failing, when God told him that He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham wanted to bargain and argue with God so that He would not destroy Sodom. He asked God to spare the city if he could find only ten righteous, but in the end God rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Genesis 18:16–19:29).

The **third “address”** is an admonition to God's people:

“Come near me and listen to this: ‘From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; all the time it happens, I am there.’ And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit. This is what the Lord says — your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea. Your descendants would have been like the sand, your children like its numberless grains; their name would never be cut off nor destroyed from before me’” (Isaiah 48:16–19).

God called Israel to “Come near to Me and listen to Me.” Isaiah told them that he had not spoken to them in secret. He said, *“And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit”* (Isaiah 48:16b). The message from God is the same over and over again, “I, alone, am your God! I would have blessed you if only you would have obeyed.”

The end of this section is a command:

“Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it out to the ends of the earth; say, ‘The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob.’ They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and water gushed out. ‘There is no peace,’ says the LORD, ‘for the wicked’” (Isaiah 48:20–22).

God told His people to leave Babylon. He wanted them to get out of the wicked world He was about to judge, because He wanted to redeem Israel. What can the Christian expect if he leaves the world? God will provide for him just as He provided for Israel when they left Egypt for the Promise Land. He provided water and manna. Today God provides Jesus, who is the Water of Life. He will cause a fountain of water flowing forth from within each Christian (cf. John 4:13). God will also provide, Jesus, as the Bread of Life. He will provide for Water and Bread.

What should Christians tell the world? Tell them the Lord reigns and the wicked will have absolutely no rest. If they want to find rest, they must find it in the God of Israel and not in the gods of this world. Christians find peace in heavenly places, not in earthly things. Christians need to flee from the world. They need to hate the world and the things of the world. They need to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. The only way to do that is to be totally out of the world and totally in love with God.

Salvation Through Messiah (1)

Review and Introduction

Chapter 18 in the study of Isaiah begins the second section of the last part of Isaiah's book. In the previous section, Isaiah 40–48, there was the court scene with the trial between the Lord and the heathen idols. Cyrus, who would act as the deliverer for Israel from captivity and the fall of Babylon, was in the forefront. Isaiah also expounded on the majesty of the Lord's and Israel's relationship to Him as the Servant and Witness in the midst of a heathen world. These subjects, as well as Cyrus, will still appear in the rest of the Book of Isaiah, but they will fade into the background. This present section, "Salvation Through God's Servant, the Messiah," (Isaiah 49–55) sets forth the character, the mission, and the achievement of the Divine Servant, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In these chapters of Isaiah his major themes come to the forefront: The Messiah, His kingdom, and its glory.

Salvation Through God's Servant

The Messiah's Commission And Work

This chapter deals with the Messiah's commission, His work, and confirmation of the Servant and His mission.

Listen to me, you islands; hear this you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow

and concealed me in his quiver. He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor." But I said, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God."

And now the LORD says — he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength — he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." This is what the LORD says — the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel — to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

This is what the LORD says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. See, they will come from afar —

some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan (Sinim)” (Isaiah 49:1–12).

These are powerful words, which begin with God’s call of Isaiah. Isaiah was not a self-made spokesman. He was chosen by God. Israel was not a self-made nation. It was chosen by God. Christ was not a self-made Messiah. He was sent by God. Notice God’s endowments under the figure of a sword and an arrow. The prophet saw himself as the powerful servant of the Lord, and that is the way Israel needed to see him.

These verses show how dear Isaiah, Israel, and the Messiah were to God. There is a sense of their dearness and their nearness. In their nearness, there was the sense of being related to God in His purposes as the source of the purest consolation. The prophet Isaiah knew he was the servant of God. Israel knew they were the servants of God. The Messiah knew He was the Servant of God. And that was why they could all find consolation in the midst of great adversity.

There was a reward for being the called, elected, chosen, and the unique servant of God. The prophet, the people, and the Messiah would be kept in God’s covenant. This is an important statement. God made a covenant with people who did not keep that covenant, but, in this situation, the prophet, the remnant of the nation, and the Messiah kept the covenant of God. And, because they kept the covenant, the people would be freed. Jesus said, “. . . *You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32). Later He said, “*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*” (John 8:36).

Man does not have to be imprisoned physically, he can be imprisoned in his mind and soul. And it is Jesus that can set man free — “*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free . . .*” (Gal. 5:1). The covenant will be kept, the people will be freed, and the people will be fed, led, and protected on the way home. That is what Isaiah 49:10–12 was saying: “I’m going to bring you home. I will feed you on the way. I will lead you on the way. I will protect you on the way.”

The Christian is not Home on this earth. He is moving toward Home. He is a stranger and sojourner who is just passing through. The Christian has the promise of God that while he is passing through, He (the Father) will lead them on the way. He will feed and protect His children, until they finally reach that heavenly home. What a day that will be!

The last passage in this section tells of the joyful compassion the people will receive. God does not reluctantly save. God does not need to be convinced to save. It is in His heart to save. It is in God's heart to bestow mercy. God delights in loving kindness. Anyone with grandchildren knows that when you hand them a piece of candy and their eyes light up, your eyes also light up because you delight in seeing their delight in the candy. Every time God gets to bestow mercy, His eyes light up because He delights in loving kindness. He delights in giving. Christians today need to believe this fact. God joyfully bestows mercy.

In the next passage, Zion was comforted in all its despondency with a word of joy, but then there was temptation:

Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the LORD has forgotten me" (Isaiah 49:13–14).

Israel was told to shout for joy, because God comforts His people and has compassion on the afflicted ones. But Israel was tempted to believe God was against them. They were being afflicted because Assyria was taking away many of their cities, and they were being told they were going to be in captivity. They were tempted to believe there was evil happening to them. They perceived all the affliction as God being against them. God had an answer for them. They said, "God is against us, but God answered:

*“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, **I have engraved you on the palms of my hands**; your walls are ever before me. Your sons hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart from you. Lift up your eyes and look around; all your sons gather and come to you. As surely as I live,” declares the LORD, “you will wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride” (Isaiah 49:15–18).*

God gave Israel a fabulous answer! When they said, “God is against us!” God said, “You are in my heart. You are not just in my mind, you are in my heart.” God was Israel’s mother and He said a mother will forget the baby sucking on her breast before I forget you. The mother will turn against the child she has reared before I will turn against you. God was Israel’s Mother and Father. He bore Israel in His womb. He suckled Israel on His breast. He taught Israel how to walk. He rebuked Israel when they sinned. God deeply loved Israel with a motherly kind of love. He said, “I have inscribed you in My hand.” God is Israel’s deliverer. Every time God looked at His hand, Israel was there (This is a figure of speech. God is not a man that He has a hand, but in figurative speech, it helps our humanness by placing a picture in our minds). This says “I am your deliverer. Not only can you trust My breast to sustain you, you can trust My hand to deliver you.” God said:

“Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people, and those who devoured you will be far away. The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, ‘This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in.’ Then you will say in your heart, ‘Who bore me these? I was

bereaved and barren; I was exiled and rejected. Who brought these up? I was left all alone, but these—where have they come from?’’ (Isaiah 49:19–21).

These verses gave unfailing hope of God. He made them a promise: “Although you don’t know you have borne children, when you get back to this land, you will find your land too small to hold all your children. You think you are bereaved. You think you are barren, but I’m still bearing children for you. I’m going to give you children. I’m going to give you the power to bring them up.” God’s unfailing promise would be fulfilled in their life.

The next verses cover the untold blessings of God. And, once again, here is the phrase:

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “See, I will beckon to the Gentiles. I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders. Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who hope in me will not be disappointed” (Isaiah 49:22–23).

The nations would carry home their children. Kings would serve them there. Queens would nurse them. The idea is simply that all the nations of the world would bless them. And then, the answer of the Lord to their fears was given: God said, “I will disarm the mighty and I will make them to eat their own flesh.” He was telling Israel that they did not have to worry about their enemies. He was going to take care of them (cf. Isaiah 49:24–26).

The Messiah's Humiliation And Steadfastness

The whole chapter of Isaiah 50 is a description of the Messiah's humiliation and His steadfastness. There is a rebuke of the exiles in their despair as they were saying, "Where is God?" God asked them the question, "Where is my wife? I married you, and I want to know where you are. You are lying down under every green tree. You are committing adultery with all the gods of the world. You want to know where I am. Where are your feet? Where are you living?" God was going to judge them. He said, "I will dry up the sea, and the rivers will become deserts. The fish will die from thirst, and the sky will be clothed in sackcloth." God painted a fabulous picture. He draped the whole universe of clouds with sackcloth to express His sorrow over His people's conditions (cf. Isaiah 50:1-3).

The servant of the Lord sang his song and spoke of his commission from God. He talked about his submission to God and his persecution for being in agreement with the will of God. He spoke of his dedication to God and his conviction that the Lord did love him and had called him to fulfill His will upon the earth (cf. Isaiah 50:4-9).

Who among you fears the LORD? Who among you obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment (Isaiah 50:10-11).

God addressed the righteous people to say that they must walk in the light that He has given. To the rebellious, He said they could walk in their own light, but because of that, they would face the judgment of God which would be torment in hell.

The Messiah's Promised Salvation For Zion

The next passage in Isaiah really ought to be one single chapter, but is covered by Isaiah 51:1–52:12. This is the Messiah's promise of salvation for Zion. It begins with comfort to the faithful Israel. This first passage begins with the word, "listen." They were not listening or God would not have to constantly remind them to "listen."

"Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one and I blessed him and made him many" (Isaiah 51:1–2).

The Lord did surely comfort Zion and looked with compassion on all her ruins. He made her desert like Eden, her waste-lands like the garden of the Lord. Joy, gladness, thanksgiving, and the sound of singing was finally found in her. He promised His children a future. Their origin guaranteed their future. They came from Abraham and Sarah, who were faithful to God. If Israel followed their ancestors, their future would be assured. God would bless them externally with all kinds of material possessions. He would bless them internally with spiritual blessings. There are three things that were comfort for their present situation: **Number one**, keep the law in their heart. **Number two**, do not fear men. **Number three**, accept God's righteous salvation (cf. Isaiah 51:1–8).

"Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab [Rahab is Egypt] to pieces, who pierced that monster through? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the depths of the sea so that the redeemed might cross

over? The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away (Isaiah 51:9–11).

The “*arm of the Lord*” is symbolic of God’s omnipotent power. God’s arm had cut Egypt into pieces. He had dried up the sea so that the redeemed could pass safely over. The future is seen in the light of that past event. God would do what God has always done. He will take care of those who do His will. Israel would return and there would be rejoicing for the redeemed.

God addressed His captive people in 51:12–16. He asked demanding questions of them: “Why do you still fear men when I have done all of this to show you have nothing to fear from man? Why do you forget Me? Why are you not paying attention to My word and to My way? I am speaking to you now. I have spoken to you in the past. I have brought you this far, and I will bring you further down the line. Where is your enemy? Look around you, and you will find you have no enemy standing.” This was like the woman who was taken in adultery and brought to Jesus. Jesus asked: “Who among you is without sin? Let him cast the first stone.” Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dirt, and when He looked up, there was no one there to accuse the woman (cf. John 8:1–11). Israel had no enemy that could overpower their God. The deciding power is always God — “I am the Lord Almighty (cf. Isaiah 51:14–16). The power is in God, not in His people. It is not in what they believe, it is in **whom** they believe. Paul told Timothy, “. . . *I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day*” (2 Timothy 1:12) — “I am the Lord Almighty, My words are in your mouth, and you are My people.”

Isaiah began to address Jerusalem in Isaiah 51:17–52:6. In this passage, he repeated the same word again and again:

“Awake!” This tells us that Israel had gone to sleep. Isaiah said they needed to wake up to the reason that judgment was going to overtake them. They needed to wake up to the judgment that awaited their enemies. They needed to wake up to the fact that the judgment was from God, and it had overtaken them because they rebelled against God. They needed to awaken to two things: to the freedom and honor that God had brought upon them and to the glory of God’s name (cf. Isaiah 52:1–4).

Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion. For this is what the LORD says: “You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed.” For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “At first my people went down to Egypt to live; lately, Assyria has oppressed them” (Isaiah 52:1–4).

Wake up to the fact that God has always brought His humble people back to Him. All day long He says, “My name is constantly being blasphemed, and I am going to cause that to be cease, so that My people will know that I am on their side, that I rule for them, and that I reign for them.”

Isaiah 52:7–12 is getting ready for the great suffering Servant passage found in Isaiah 52:13–53:12. Isaiah 52: 7–12 gives a vision of the day of deliverance. There is a beautiful message in these verses: “*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’*” (Isaiah 52:7). When a person is down in the valley, he is always looking at the mountain for deliverance. It is marvelous to see someone coming over that mountaintop proclaiming: “Good news! Peace! Salvation! God

rules! ” These are the same feet Paul told the Ephesians about, “. . . *your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace*” (Ephesians 6:15). Christians, who proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, bring good news to the world.

As Israel shouted for joy, they saw the ransomed of God returning to their city and their temple. There was a watchman on the wall shouting, “They are coming back! They are coming home!” and all the city came out to rejoice. If the people could not rejoice, then the rocks would. There was rejoicing rubble. The ruins of the city rejoiced and said, “God has finally come. His bare arm has been revealed. He has come to deliver His people.” Jesus spoke of this same kind of rejoicing when he came into the city of Jerusalem. He said, “If these people keep silent, even the rocks will cry out” (cf. Luke 19:40).

Depart, Depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the LORD. But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard (Isaiah 52:11–12).

This shows the obedience of the people. First, there was a cry from God. How fabulous! He said, “Come out and be clean.” God calls all Christians today to get out of the world which is full of wickedness. God calls them to come and stand in a deserted place with God. If they come, they can stand there with honor. They can come out of the world and be a pure people. They will come out carrying vessels of the Lord. They will not hurry on their way, because God will open the door and go before them. He will stay ahead of them and surround them with protection. They cannot be harmed when they are the people of God. He will be our guide and protector. What peace we can find in that.

Salvation Through Messiah (2)

Prelude

This is chapter 19 in this study of Isaiah. It is a continuation of the Salvation Through Messiah lesson. Most scholars agree that a better chapter division would have been to include Isaiah 52:13–53:12 all in one chapter, because these verses have one subject. It is a song about the Suffering Servant who is going to conquer, not as a warrior, but as a sufferer, the way the Messiah will on the cross. In this song, the Servant does not appear in person, nor does He speak, but He is the central figure in the messages from the Lord and the prophet. There is no time factor found in this song, so we do not know exactly when Isaiah saw this vision. The song deals with all time: past, present, and future. Isaiah talks about Israel's past including their problems and their sin. He talks about their present as they are going to be won back to God by the suffering in the future, which will be when the Messiah comes to bring them salvation. This song embraces the whole of time.

The Messiah's Suffering And Glory

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 tells of the Messiah's suffering and His glory. The first three verses of this passage are a prelude, which speaks of the exultation of the Servant of God:

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him — his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness — so will he sprinkle

many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand (Isaiah 52:13–15).

Isaiah says four things about the Lord's Servant. **Number one**, God's Servant will act wisely. He will do exactly what wisdom will dictate. And, because of that, and because of His power, **number two**, God's Servant will be raised up, lifted up, and highly exalted. This happens on the cross just as Jesus said, *"But, I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself"* (John 12:32). Jesus told the crowd this to show the kind of death that He was going to die. When the Jews lifted up the Son of Man, they would know who He was. **Number three**, God's Servant would be marred by men. His visage would be so marred that people would shake their heads at Him and scorn Him because of His disfigurement. But, in spite of that, **number four**, God's Servant would confound the nations by telling them things they had never heard. He would show them things they had never seen before.

The Prophecy of the Suffering Messiah

The best way to look at the prophecy of the Suffering Messiah is to cover it in sections. The first portion of this passage looks at the **amazement** the Messiah, as the Suffering Servant, will bring upon people as he is acquainted with grief.

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not (Isaiah 53:1–3).

God's children were amazed at the message of judgment that was to come. They were amazed at the unlikely Servant. There was nothing in His appearance, or in His nature, to make Him stand out. He did not stand out in appearance from His fellow man. He was an ordinary looking Jew. They were amazed, primarily, at the rejection of the Servant. This was the One that Israel had been waiting for, for all of these centuries, and they did not recognize Him. People did not recognize in Jesus the God of heaven. They did not see Him as their Savior, the Messiah. He amazed the people because He came as a Servant.

The second part of this passage looks at the **cursed Servant**. The Servant did not suffer for Himself, but as a substitute for others:

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:4–6).

These verses tell how Jesus suffered for others. He bore “. . . **our** infirmities (weaknesses) and carried **our** sorrows . . .” but **we** (all mankind is indicated in these verses) did not appreciate it. He was considered as if God had smitten and cursed Him for His own sins. Jesus cried out, “. . . *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). God left Him alone to die on the cross, but He died for **our** weakness and sorrow. It is important that **we** understand that.

There are three things the cursed Servant did: He died for **our** sins, He gave **us** peace, and He healed **our** wounds (cf. Isaiah 53:5). All of this was because of God's judgment. Someone had to be judged. It was either Him or **us**. He died for **our** sins. He brought peace between God and man. **We** had nothing to offer, but He offered His life. He healed **our** wounds that sin brought upon **us**. Then after all of that, He returned **us** to God (cf. Isaiah 53:6). **Our** sins separated **us** and God. He was the sacrifice that made **our** return to God possible. **We** had gone into the far country (like the prodigal son in Luke 15:11–32) and wasted all that the Father had given **us**. Because of the cursed Servant, **we** are able to be reconciled to God.

The third portion of this passage looks at the sinless Servant (cf. Isaiah 53:7–9). This passage shows the total submission of Jesus:

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth (Isaiah 53:7–9).

Notice the total submission. When men oppressed Him, He remained silent. When He was killed, He was unprotesting. When He was buried, He was not honored. He was nonviolent and genuine through all His suffering. He is **our** example. This is the Sinless Servant of God, who came in silence, in quietness, in non-oppression, and in nonviolence in order to turn the mind of God away from **our** sins to His righteousness.

The fourth portion of this passage covers the blessed effects of everything the Suffering Messiah has done.

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 53:10–12).

The blessed effects of this suffering Messiah as a sin offering are many: **Number one**, Jesus, the suffering Messiah, will make sure that God's will is completed, because He came as the sin offering that all the lambs of the Old Testament were the types of. **Number two**, on the cross, and in His resurrection, He will justify many. Paul told the Romans that Jesus “. . . was delivered over to death for **our** sins and was raised to life for **our** justification” (Romans 5:25). He was delivered up to the cross for **our** justification. And, He was raised from the dead for **our** justification. As long as that tomb in Judea is empty, then Jesus has done that which is necessary to justify many.

Number three, because of Jesus' death, He will reign over all in heaven, on earth, and in hell. Jesus came forth from the grave with a triumphant shout, “. . . All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). Jesus told a fearful John, when he saw Him and fell down at his feet, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Revelation 1:17–18). **Number**

four, because of Jesus' ascension to heaven, He is able to make intercession for sinners.

Isaiah 53:1–11 uses past tense verbs to describe the actions of this suffering Messiah. He grew up (cf. Isaiah 53:2). He was despised (cf. Isaiah 53:3). He took our infirmities (cf. Isaiah 53:4). He was pierced (cf. Isaiah 53:5). He was oppressed (cf. Isaiah 53:7). He was taken away (cf. Isaiah 53:8). He was assigned a grave (cf. Isaiah 53:9). Isaiah 53:11–12 says, “*After the suffering of his soul, . . . because he **poured** out his life unto death, . . . He **bore** the sins of many, and **made** intercession for the transgressors.*” There is one present action of Jesus mentioned in this chapter. He, continually, always, constantly, and, at every moment **after** His resurrection, **makes** intercession (cf. Romans 8:34).

Isaiah 53 is the chapter that the eunuch was reading that enabled Philip as he began “. . . with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). If recorded history is correct, the largest church at the close of the first century was in the country of Ethiopia. This chapter was the beginning place that brought the Gospel to the country which held the largest group of Christians in all the world at the close of the first seventy years of the church.

The Messiah's Coming Restoration of Israel

Isaiah 54:1–55:13 deals with the Messiah's coming. When He came, He came to restore the kingdom to Israel. Isaiah 54:1–10 is the promise of great increase and continuous protection from God:

“Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband,” says the LORD. “Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out

to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities. Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband — the LORD Almighty is his name — the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit — a wife who married young, only to be rejected,” says your God. “For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD your Redeemer. “To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you (Isaiah 54:1–10).

Notice what Isaiah said. He spoke of the fruitfulness that would come upon the children of God. They had not labored nor borne any children before. They had been called a “*barren woman*,” but this barren woman would bear more children than all of the pregnant women of the nations. He spoke of their expansion to the north and the south and the east and the west. They would become the largest of all the nations. He spoke of the intimacy they were to have with God. They would have a close intimate fellowship. This fellowship was illustrated in this passage by marriage just as it is in many places in the Old and New Testaments. All of this was because God had made a

covenant with His children. “Covenant” is a fabulous concept. Once a covenant member has sworn to do something, or to be something, or to provide something, if he does not do it, he dies because he swears by his life that he will fulfill this. The Almighty God swore by His life that He would fulfill this.

In Isaiah 54:11–17 Isaiah spoke of the glory of that New Jerusalem and its happy inhabitants:

“O afflicted city [this is Jerusalem], lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels and all your walls of precious stones [seen again in Revelation 21]. All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children’s peace. In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you. If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you. See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work. And it is I who have created the destroyer to work havoc; no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me,” declares the LORD (Isaiah 54:11–17).

The city of Jerusalem will be rebuilt into great glory and great security. All of its walls and gates and ramparts and foundations will be of precious stones. Of course, that is not literal, but this passage speaks of the coming, stupendous glory that will come upon the city. Isaiah speaks of the city’s peaceful inhabitants, who will be taught. Jesus said, *“It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who*

listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me” (John 6:45). They come to Him who is peace, because every person in the city is educated by God and made peaceful by God. The city is established, the city is unafraid, and the city is assured of victory over all future enemies. They will never be defeated again. The city has God’s Word for that. God says, “I will do this. It is by my covenant that I will do this.”

Next there is an exhortation toward repentance and spirituality (cf. Isaiah 55:1–7). He started out with a fabulous invitation:

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor. Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon” (Isaiah 55:1–7).

God uses the word “*come*” over and over again. “Come, eat and drink free of charge.” “Come, enjoy covenant relationship with me.” “Come and receive honor from me.” “Come and find God and pardon.” And the key to **coming** is

listening. This passages uses “Listen to me.” “Hear me.” “Hear what I say.” “Come. I will give you pardon and peace.”

Finally there is the assurance of deliverance from Babylon:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be the LORD’s renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed” (Isaiah 55:8–13).

It is possible that this passage expresses a need that God had to rebuke the children of Israel because their ways were not His ways, and their thoughts were not His thoughts. This is not the first time Isaiah talked to them about this, and Isaiah was not the only prophet to convey this thought. God had spoken to them for nearly a thousand years by the written word even before Isaiah came on the scene to speak. God was telling them that He had spoken to them again and again, and they did not hear Him. They had not changed their ways or their thoughts so that they were equal to God’s ways and His thoughts.

There is amazing power shown whenever God speaks. It is like the rain and the snow. When God speaks, things happen

that are greatly beneficial. He sends the rain and things grow. When God speaks, He intends for His people to hear His voice. He says, "If you will hear me speak, there will be results." If the people do not hear the Word of God, then it cannot bring results. They must recognize the power of God in His Word. If the people really hear God, then they will obey His Word. When they obey His Word, results will follow.

The **first result** is great joy. Not only do the people sing, but so do the hills, and the trees will clap their hands. If the people will hear the word of God, then the whole earth will be as God intends for it to be. The people will sing, and the earth will rejoice. Everyone will applaud, and the trees will join in. Everyone will agree with what is being done, because the will of God will be fulfilled.

There is not only great joy, but the **second result** of hearing and obeying God's word is that there will be great beauty. This thought is conveyed over and over again in Isaiah. He mentions pine and myrtle trees. He says that there will be a pine tree growing in Jerusalem where there was once a thorn bush. The briar bush will become a myrtle tree. The pine tree is an evergreen tree, which conveys the thought that the beauty will be continual. The beauty will be something that will not pass away. It will be eternal. The myrtle tree bears the most beautiful flowers. They are going to become a nation of beauty that is everlasting.

There will be joy and beauty, but the bottom line is seen in the **third result** of hearing and obeying God. There will be great glory. All of the joy, and all of the beauty is for the Lord's renown. The purpose of God's purpose is that He be glorified. Paul discussed the purpose of God when he wrote the letter to the Ephesians:

*"... to the **praise of his glorious** grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves" (Ephesians 1:6).*

*“ . . . in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be **for the praise of his glory**”* (Ephesians 1:12).

*“ . . . who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession — to the **praise of his glory**”* (Ephesians 1:14).

*“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, **to him be glory** in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen”* (Ephesians 3:20–21).

God has done everything that we might have great joy, that we might become the great beauty, but that **He** might receive the joy from the glory. This will be for an everlasting sign that will never be destroyed. **The glory of God is forever and ever.**

The Coming Glory For Zion

Introduction

This is chapter 20 in the continuing lessons on the Book of Isaiah. The topic of “The Coming Glory For Zion” will be covered in the next three chapters within this book and will include the study of the last chapters of Isaiah (Isaiah 56–66). These final chapters in Isaiah include many words of encouragement, as well as several stern reminders of sin and its consequences. Isaiah 56 contains consolation for the rejected nation as well as the rebuke of their blind watchmen. Isaiah 57 is a rebuke of the wickedness in Isaiah’s day. Judah’s worship, good and bad, is discussed in Isaiah 58. Sin is discussed as the separating wall between Israel and God in Isaiah 59. Isaiah 60–62 will depict Zion as the glorious city of God, saved by God’s marvelous grace. God’s vengeance and mercy calls forth a most earnest prayer by the prophet, representing the people in Isaiah 63–64. Isaiah 65–66 contains the Lord’s response to their prayer. A furnace of fire will come upon all their enemies and a new heaven and new earth will be built for the righteous remnant.

The Coming Glory For Zion

Chapter 56 begins with an exhortation to obedience:

This is what the LORD says: “Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed. Blessed is the

man who does this, the man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.” Let no foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.” And let not any eunuch complain, “I am only a dry tree.” For this is what the LORD says: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant — to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant — these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” The Sovereign LORD declares — he who gathers the exiles of Israel: “I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered” (Isaiah 56:1–8).

Isaiah began by talking about the duty of obedience. The people were called upon to maintain justice. They needed to do what was right, because His salvation was near at hand. God used the illustration of obedience as the man who holds fast to the Word, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps his hand from doing evil. This is a universal invitation to obedience. It is not just Israel and the Jews who are invited to this house of prayer, to this covenant, to keep this Sabbath, to walk in this way, and to keep the will of God. All the nations are invited particularly to the house of prayer. God said, *“For my house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations”*

(Isaiah 56:7). The beauty of that is all nations will be gathered to God.

The blind guides were rebuked because they had not been able to see this:

Come, all you beasts of the field, come and devour, all you beasts of the forest! Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs; they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain. "Come," each one cries, "let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better" (Isaiah 56:9–12).

The watchmen were blind. They could not see where to lead the people. They were mute dogs. They could not tell the people what they needed to hear. They were sluggish and greedy. They loved to sleep and dream all day long. They never got enough. They always wanted more. They lacked understanding in the will and the way of God. They pursued their own selfish desires. They were lustfully unmindful of their destiny. The leaders of Israel were bringing about the death of the nation.

The death of the righteous would be accounted for:

The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death" (Isaiah 57:1–2).

Mercy was shown in sparing the righteous from coming judgments by letting them die and go to the grave in peace. They found peace and rest in their death.

After speaking to the righteous, Isaiah turned to the bulk of the people who were idolatrous:

“But you — come here, you sons of a sorceress, you offspring of adulterers and prostitutes! Whom are you mocking? At whom do you sneer and stick out your tongue? Are you not a brood of rebels, the offspring of liars? You burn with lust among the oaks and under every spreading tree; you sacrifice your children in the ravines and under the overhanging crags. The idols among the smooth stones of the ravines are your portion; they, they are your lot. Yes, to them you have poured out drink offerings and offered grain offerings. In the light of these things, should I relent? You have made your bed on a high and lofty hill; there you went up to offer your sacrifices. Behind your doors and your doorposts [they hid them] you have put your pagan symbols. Forsaking me, you uncovered your bed, you climbed into it and opened it wide; you made a pact with those whose beds you love, and you looked on their nakedness. You went to Molech [this is the god of Babylon] with olive oil and increased your perfumes. You sent your ambassadors far away; you descended to the grave itself! You were wearied by all your ways, but you would not say, “It is hopeless.” You found renewal of your strength, and so you did not faint. Whom have you so dreaded and feared that you have been false to me, and have neither remembered me nor pondered this in your hearts? Is it not because I have long been silent that you do not fear me? I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you. When you cry out for help, let your collection of idols save you! The

wind will carry all of them off, a mere breath will blow them away. But the man who makes me his refuge will inherit the land and possess my holy mountain” (Isaiah 57:3–13).

This is a stern rebuke! There is a description of those that were being rebuked. They were the offspring of the sorceress, adulterers, prostitutes, liars, and mockers. They were lustful idolaters. They were not literally the offspring of such people, but that was their character. They were immoral, evil, mockers, lustful, idolaters. They deserved to be destroyed. Their idolatrous activity was discussed. They had offered great sacrifices to foreign gods. They had committed great abominations with those foreign gods. They had sought covenants among all the people. They were like rebellious children. All they had to do was turn to God, but instead they had turned to all the nations of the world, all the idols of all the nations, and all the evils of all the nations. They had become ungodly like all the other nations.

The only thing that God could do was to bring judgment upon them. The coming judgment was described. God said they should have feared and sought Him, but they did not. That was the cause of their judgment. God said, “I will expose your corruption. I will lay you open and naked before all the people of all the world. I will not hear your prayers” (cf. Isaiah 57:13). Of all the curses, this one would be the worst. If God was not hearing their prayers, that would say that God would be unheeding to their need. God will bless those who trust him: *“But the man who makes me his refuge will inherit the land and possess my holy mountain” (Isaiah 57:13b).*

Then, there is the promise of salvation to the humble, and there is a further warning to the wicked:

And it will be said [once the remnant has turned to Him]: “Build up, build up, prepare the road. Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people.” For this is

what the high and lofty One says — he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. I will not accuse forever, nor will I always be angry, for then the spirit of man would grow faint before me — the breath of man that I have created. I was enraged by his sinful greed; I punished him, and hid my face in anger, yet he kept on in his willful ways. I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him, creating praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel. Peace, peace, to those far and near,” says the LORD. “And I will heal them.” But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. “There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked” (Isaiah 57:14–21).

Here is a promise, not only of salvation to the humble, but of judgment to the wicked. Isaiah spoke first of the Lord’s exultation. The Lord is to be exalted, lifted up, and built up. Then, he spoke of the Lord’s acceptance of the lowly. This is a fabulous statement that deserves to be repeated:

For this is what the high and lofty One says — he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite” (Isaiah 57:15).

Those who know and believe in God, believe that He is the “high and lofty One.” For some that might make the Lord seem to be unapproachable, but in these verses He says that not only does He live in this high, exalted, and holy place, but He lives there with those who are lowly and contrite. God says that the reason He does this is to revive the spirit of the lowly and the

heart of the contrite. God not only accepts the lowly, He lives with them, so that He can revive them. God's concern for the lowly and the contrite will give them life.

God said, "I will not accuse forever. I'm coming in love." These verses show His love and faithfulness. He told Israel that when He came, He would come to heal. He would be their guide and He would restore them. God is loving and faithful; He will heal, guide, and restore. And He will lead His children to His high and holy place where there will be peace. He will give peace to every humble soul in all the world. In spite of all of this: in spite of the Lord's love, care, guidance, and providence, the wicked are going to be judged. They are still like the troubled sea that cannot be helped and they will have no peace.

Formalism, Fasting, and Observing the Sabbath

Isaiah 58 contains a rebuke on Israel's formalism, a teaching about true fasting, and a teaching about strict Sabbath observance:

"Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves and you have not noticed?'" (Isaiah 58:1–3a).

These verses need to be considered by all those who claim to worship God. Those who claim to be the people of God need to look deep within themselves to see if their hearts are involved in their worship, and not just their voice and their hands. Israel's formalism, hypocrisy, and spurious evil fasting

was rebuked. They thought that God was not watching when they were fasting. In reality, they did only what they desired to do. They did not change their evil ways. They were bowing their heads, but not their hearts.

“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old

foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings” (Isaiah 58:6–12).

True fasting involves humbling the inward man as well as the outward man. It is not enough to afflict the body by doing without food. It is not enough to drape sackcloth upon the body to express sorrow. True fasting brings justice to the world and provides for the poor. Fasting puts the heart in agreement with God’s justice and uses the money that is saved to feed the poor. Fasting helps man to realize how the poor feel, so that he will be more willing to help them. There is a blessing for those who fast correctly. If God’s children fast to get their hearts attuned to God, and if they fast to empathize with the poor and to be able to help them, then He says light will break forth on them. Fasting can help the child of God to know and see the will and the way of God. He says healing will come quickly. He will guide and protect, and He will hear and answer the prayers of His own. God will strengthen and satisfy the needs of those who love Him. The city of Jerusalem and its walls would be rebuilt.

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.” The mouth of the LORD has spoken (Isaiah 58:13–14).

These verses about the strict Sabbath observance contain a lesson for the Christian. God says that the holiness of the day was a day for pleasing the Lord. It was a day of delight to the soul, a day of honoring the Lord, and a day of denying self.

Christians today do not honor the Sabbath day, because they are no longer under the law of Moses. They can observe what the day was designed for: to delight the Lord, to honor the Lord, to deny self. If God's children today do that, then they will have the blessings from God mentioned for observing the Sabbath. There will be joy in the Lord, peace in the land, and prosperity in the covenant.

Sin, Confession, and Redemption

Isaiah 59:1–8 is a general rebuke for the manifold sins of Israel: *“Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear”* (Isaiah 59:1–2).

The real problem for Israel was that the channel of communication between them and God had been closed. This was not God's fault. His hand was not shortened; His ear was not heavy. The fault was with Israel because of their sin. Sin is always what separates people from people, and people from God. Sin builds a wall. Every sin is a brick, and as people continue to sin, the wall is built between them and God and between them and the godly. Isaiah even listed the sins of Israel. Their hands were stained with blood. Their mouths were full of lies. There was no justice in their courts. All of their deeds were evil. Their paths ran to blood, their minds were evil, and they pursued wickedness. Paul used some of these same sins, and quotes from these verses, to convict the Jews that they were sinners from head to foot (cf. Romans 3:9–20). Both of these passages give an anatomy of evil.

Isaiah 59:9–15 is an humble confession to God. Israel lived and groped in the darkness of their own wisdom. They were trying to follow their own mind. They were like the animals who can find no deliverance from the evil of their life. They confessed their sins of rebellion, treachery, oppression, revolt, lying, dishonesty, injustice, and fraud. They laid eight sins out before God. Because they humbled themselves and confessed

their sins, there was a promise of deliverance to these oppressed people. God observed their human affairs, “I see what you have done wrong.”

The Lord works on behalf of oppressed people by His own righteousness. He works with His own armor of vengeance and His own justice. He does all of that so that the world can see His glory. He has come to redeem the penitent, keep the covenant, and make covenant with His people throughout all the world.

God delivers Himself of any wrong:

*“The Redeemer will come to Zion, **to those in Jacob who repent of their sins**,” declares the LORD. “As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD. “My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouths of your children, nor from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever,” says the LORD (Isaiah 59:20–21).*

God does everything He does by covenant. God keeps covenant with His people. God makes covenant with His people. Who are God’s people? “**. . . those in Jacob who repent of their sins.**” God’s people need to recognize their sins and acknowledge them to God. They must repent by changing their minds from loving sin to hating sin. They must do so, so that they will find themselves in a covenant relationship with God. God will provide a covenant of peace to His children.

The Coming Glory of Zion (2)

Introduction

This is chapter 21 in the study of the Book of Isaiah. It will be a continuation of the lesson and the outline covered in chapter 20. This chapter will cover Isaiah 60–62. The great and eternal glory of Zion is the emphasis of the final chapters of Isaiah (60–66).

Zion's Coming Glory

Zion Made Glorious Through the Light of Jehovah's Presence

The first verses of Isaiah 60 talk about Zion's bright glory.

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm” (Isaiah 60:1–4).

The above passage from Isaiah says the nations will come to Zion and bring their glory into the glorious city of God. All of Zion's children will return. This figure seems to portray the material glory of the nations coming back with their children,

but this is really speaking spiritually. In the following verses, Zion's vast wealth is discussed.

“Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels from Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD. All Kedar's flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple. Who are these that fly along like clouds, like doves to their nests? Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your sons from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honor of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor” (Isaiah 60:5–9).

The wealth of Zion will be the riches of the nations. The wealth of all the nations will be brought into the city and offered to God. The nations will all turn to honor God. This will be a great day when Zion will possess all the nations. Zion will be reconstructed:

*“**Foreigners** will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favor I will show you compassion. Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night [This is seen again in Revelation 21], so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations — their kings led in triumphal procession. For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined. The glory of Lebanon will come to you, the pine, the fir and the cypress together, to adorn the place of my*

sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of my feet. The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet and will call you The City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 60:10–14).

The key word in this passage is “*foreigners*.” Isaiah says that the foreigners will be willing to serve them and to help build their cities. The foreigners will bring their wealth into the city. Those who do not serve them will be judged by the Lord. The foreigners will bring their tribute to God and worship Him. The day that Zion is rebuilt will be the day that the Gentiles will finally see the glory of God. God has chosen Israel (Zion) so that His house might be built in their city. The day has now come for that house to become the prayer house of all the people.

“Although you have been forsaken and hated, with no one traveling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations. You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. Instead of bronze I will bring you gold, and silver in place of iron. Instead of wood I will bring you bronze, and iron in place of stones. I will make peace your governor and righteousness your ruler. No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin nor destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise” (Isaiah 60:15–18).

This passage is yet another picture of the prosperity of Israel. They would be the pride and joy, not only of God, but of all the nations. They would be cared for and nourished by God, and by all the nations of the world. They would prosper physically and spiritually through the Lord. They would be

secure and safe in their city. This is a beautiful picture! All the nations, all the world, and all of heaven will bring them prosperity.

Zion's crowning glories are:

The sun will no more be your light by day [(This will also be seen in Revelation 21)], nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end. Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever. They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, for the display of my splendor. The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the LORD; in its time I will do this swiftly (Isaiah 60:19–22).

The Lord will be their **Light** and their Glory. He will shine upon them. Jesus said, “ . . . *I am the light of the world . . .*” (John 8:12). Isaiah told Israel that the Lord their God would not only be their light and their day, He would be their Savior and Sustainer. The Lord would swiftly make them a mighty nation. They would have light. They would have salvation. They would have sustenance, and they would have it quickly. There would be peace and security. They would be safe forever, and the Lord would do that immediately. The Lord would make them a mighty nation. The least among them would become a thousand.

Zion's Messiah

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from

darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor [this is the year of Jubilee — Grace given] and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor (Isaiah 61:1–3).

This is the story of Zion's Messiah, which is quoted in Luke 4:18–19. There would be a time when the preaching of good news went out to all the world. When that happened, the brokenhearted would be healed, the captives would be free, the oppressed would be released, and there would be the proclamation of God's favor. That day is the year of Jubilee. This was the year when all debts were paid, all the slaves were freed, and the land went back to its original owner (cf. Leviticus 25:8–55; 27:8–33; Numbers 36:4).

There would also be the proclamation of God's vengeance. God will come not only to bring salvation to the righteous, but He will come to bring judgment to the wicked. He will comfort those who mourn, crown those who grieve, and plant those who are faithful. They will be planted as oaks of the Lord. When God plants something, it is planted well. An oak is the kind of tree that once planted, it grows and prospers. Its roots go deep, and it stands against all the winds and the storms of time. It is like a tree planted by the rivers of water (cf. Psalm 1:3). It will stand and stay, and it will be fruitful.

Why does the Lord come to give sight to the blind, freedom to the imprisoned, and comfort to the distressed? Why does He come to give all those who grieve everlasting glory? Why does He come to plant His people in a firm and a secure place? It is for the manifestation of His splendor:

They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs. "For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed" (Isaiah 61:4–9).

This is the manifestation of God's splendor and His mercy. In God's mercy, Zion will rebuild all their ruined cities. They will rule over all their enemies. They will serve the Lord their God. They will possess the riches of all their enemies. They will possess a portion of the firstborn. The key word here is "possess." Israel had been promised this land by God. They are about to lose it, but they need to understand that the land is still theirs by covenant. Even though they went into Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C., they would come back to the land in 536 B.C. And, when they came back to this land, they would come back because that is what God had promised them.

Israel would come back to the land because they were the covenant people of God. They would be blessed, not simply because they were the righteous people, but because God had made covenants to bless the righteous people. And once a covenant is made, it cannot be broken without the penalty of death, and God cannot die. Therefore, His covenant cannot be

broken. They would come back to this land; until the Messiah came, this land will be theirs.

When Zion accepted the grace (favor) of God, it is shown as a wedding day:

I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness [Paul says that when we are baptized into Christ we put on Christ {cf. Galatians 3:27}], as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations” (Isaiah 61:10–11).

It is fabulous when God’s children receive the grace of God. Faith is the hand of the soul that reaches for the greatest prize and grasps the greatest treasure. God’s people have great blessings, if they will just accept the grace of God. Isaiah used the figures of the bride and bridegroom and a day of great joy and delight. God’s children ought to delight and find joy in God. This is a day of beautiful clothes. Salvation and righteousness are the beautiful clothes that Christians have in Christ. It is a day of glorious adornment. The man wears a miter (a tall ornamented cap worn by bishops and abbots, Ed.), and the lady wears jewels. It is a day of delight, joy, beauty, glory, and adornment. All of that comes to all those who accept the grace of God.

Next, there is the picture of fruitfulness in a garden. Paul used this same figure when he wrote to the Corinthians and said, “. . . you are God’s field. . .” (1 Corinthians 3:9). Isaiah changed from the picture of delight to the picture of fruitfulness in a beautiful garden. Christians are God’s garden, His vineyard, and His plowed field that will produce great

fruitfulness for God. When the nations see that fruitfulness, and the righteousness and praise of Israel, they will turn to God and glorify Him.

Isaiah 62:1–12 talks about Zion's newness.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your righteousness and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah [which means, my pride and my glory in her], and your land called Beulah [(which means married)]; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. [He is speaking of the city of Jerusalem.] I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest [keep calling on God] till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth. The LORD has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: "Never again will I give your grain as food for your enemies, and never again will foreigners drink the new wine for which you have toiled; but those who harvest it will eat and praise the LORD, and those who gather the grapes will drink it in the courts of my sanctuary. Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations. The LORD has made

proclamation to the ends of the earth: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See Your Savior Comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.'" They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD; and you will be called Sought After, The City No Longer Deserted (Isaiah 62:1–12).

This whole chapter talks about newness with God, and how He makes all things new. He does not renew, He does not retread, and He does not restore. He makes all things brand new. New things are good. In Zion everything was going to be new. **First**, there would be a **new** witness from God. That witness is "Zion **is** saved." The tense is present — **is**. Zion has not yet been lost. They have not been cast out into captivity. God wants them to know that even though things are bad and are going to get worse, they are saved!

Second, there was going to be a **new** situation. They were saved, and when they came back to the land, they were manifestly righteous. Everyone would be able to see their righteousness. They would be royally crowned, not as mankind crowns royalty, but as God puts a crown upon their head. They would no longer be called "deserted," even though God would desert them. They would no longer be called "desolate," even though for a while they would be desolate.

God was going to give them new names: Hepzibah refers to the people. It means "one in whom I have delight." They would make the eyes of God sparkle for they were His delight. There would also be a new name for the land. It would be called Beulah land, which means "married." The land had been divorced because of their wickedness, they had been cast away as a divorced wife because of the fornication with the idols of the land. God said, "I will give you a new name." They would no longer be called "divorced." They would no longer be called "cursed," because they would become the bride of God. There

is a song called “Beulah Land”¹ that talks about a time when that land will be home!

Third, there would be **new** protection that would be given by God. He said:

I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem. They will never be silent by day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourself no rest, and give him no rest [Keep calling on Him] till He establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of all the earth” (Isaiah 62:6–7).

God’s people need to call upon the name of the Lord. They need to trust Him. Leaders and spokesmen must continually cry out to God asking that He will bring new protection upon His children.

Fourth, there was a **new** promise. It is the power of God. These verses need to be read again:

*The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: “Never again will I give your grain as food for your enemies, and never again will foreigners drink the new wine; for which you have toiled; but those who harvest it will eat it and praise the LORD, and those who gather the grapes **will drink it in the courts of my sanctuary**” (Isaiah 62:8–9).*

What a wonderful promise God was making to them. Can you imagine what this must have meant to the Israelites?

God closes, as He always does, by rewarding the people. God loves to give gifts to His children. The **fifth** picture of newness was Zion’s **new reward**. It is in two parts. First, it

1. See Alton Howard, Ed., *Songs of Faith and Praise* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Company, 1994), 494.

speaks of the presence of God. He said, "Say this to the ends of the earth, and particularly to Zion, ". . . *'See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him'*" (Isaiah 62:11). God's children need to know that the Lord is here, and that He is also near. Then, it speaks of the testimony of their Lord as they were given brand **new names**. They would be called the Holy People. The word holy means separated. They would be separated from the world and all of its idolatry, its wickedness, and all of its evil, because they will be the Holy People of God. They would become a separated people. They would be redeemed! They would be called the Redeemed of God. The word "redeemed" has the idea of being purchased **and** purchased again. They were God's people once, but they sold themselves into the bondage of the power of idolatry and wickedness. Now, they would be a redeemed people.

They would be a sought for people, because they would be sought out by God. It is one thing to see God. That is great. It is another thing to be sought by God. That is greater. They had been separated from God by their own evil. They were redeemed by God from their wickedness. They were going to be sought by God. And, they would be primarily an inhabited city. They would no longer be a deserted people. What great blessings come from God.

Christians are the holy people of God. We are the redeemed people of God. We are the sought people of God. We are where God dwells. We are the people inhabited by God. May God give great peace in believing that.

The Coming Glory of Zion (3)

Introduction

This is chapter 22 in the study of the Book of Isaiah. This chapter will finish up the study of the text even though two chapters will follow to conclude this book. The closing chapters of Isaiah (63–66) record the prayer of the righteous people. Their prayer is in appreciation for the forgiveness of their sins, the promise of restoration, the rebuilding of their covenant kingdom, and the re-establishment of their covenant with God.

Israel's Future Glory

Israel's Gratitude Over the Destruction of Her Enemies

Israel's gratitude over the destruction of her enemies is particularly personified in the nation of Edom. There was judgment on Edom, but Edom also represented all of Israel's enemies.

Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah [one of the capital cities], with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? [There is the question; here is the answer.] "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? [There is the question; here is the answer.] "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and

I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground” (Isaiah 63:1–6).

This is a description of the Warrior of God. The Warrior of God wears blood-soaked garments, because He has been out making judgments before. He also wears royal garments, because He is a judging King. He marches in great strength. He speaks righteously. He saves mightily. He judges sufficiently. It causes great consternation when He says He is the Savior, because He does not look like one. The blood of His enemies is sprinkled upon His garments. His own right arm is powerful, His mouth is speaking great things, and His judgment is sufficient.

The Warrior of God does not look like a Savior. Only in Christianity is there one Man, one Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the powerful Warrior, sufficient Judge, strong Condemner, and, yet, mighty Savior.

After the description of the Warrior, there is a description of the war of God. This was a war fought unaided. No one came to the aid of God, not only because no one was needed, but also because no one agreed with the judgment of God. God was angry, and this war was an angry war. God was angry against Edom and all the nations of the world because they had touched the apple of His eye. They had come in fierce, cruel judgment upon His people.

God is vengeful and redeeming at heart. These sound like they are two opposites. The day of vengeance was in His heart. The year of His redeemed had come. Every time God comes in judgment, it has a two-fold purpose. It is to bring revenge upon the evil and their refusal to accept Him. And, it is to redeem

those who have trusted in Him. He is unaided; He is angry; He is vengeful; He is redeeming, and this war was totally reflective of His character. It would be a war from which Edom and all the nations of the earth would never recover.

I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us — yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. He said, “Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me”; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them. Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people — where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them, who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses’ right hand, who divided the waters before them, to gain for himself everlasting renown, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in open country, they did not stumble; like cattle that go down to the plain, they were given rest by the Spirit of the LORD. This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name” (Isaiah 63:7–14).

God is praised for all of His mercies. The prophet, Isaiah, praised the goodness of God to His people. He praised the expectation of God of His people. He praised the sympathy of God for His people. God did all of this for His people, but they rebelled against Him. So, Isaiah urged the people to remember

the mercy of God. They were led and empowered by Him, and they were given rest by the Holy Spirit of God.

Prayer For Redemption and Deliverance

Beginning in Isaiah 63:15 there is a prayer for Israel's redemption and deliverance from sin and suffering:

Look down from heaven and see from your lofty throne, holy and glorious. Where are your zeal and your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us. But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. Why, O LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance. For a little while your people possessed your holy place, but now our enemies have trampled down your sanctuary. We are yours from of old; but you have not ruled over them, they have not been called by your name (Isaiah 63:15–19).

Isaiah spoke of the majestic God. He looked at what seemed to be indifference from God. It appeared that God was no longer keeping covenant with them. Isaiah knew that was not true, so he expressed faith in the covenant Father. He said, "In spite of the fact You are not looking at us now, You are still our covenant God." He boldly called out to God for deliverance, "Please, Lord, come and deliver us." Isaiah continued this thought in Isaiah 64 when he called out to God for action:

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come

down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you (Isaiah 64:1–3).

Over and over again, Isaiah begged God to come. “Come and rend the heavens. Come and shake the mountains. Come and make your name known. Come do awesome things among the nations.” He wanted God to act so that the glory of God could be seen.

Then, Isaiah talked about the wisdom of God: “*Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him*” (Isaiah 64:4). This is a statement of praise for the wisdom of God, but it is also a statement of man’s ignorance. This passage was quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:9 to tell the Corinthians that God had come again to speak just as Isaiah called for Him to speak.

Isaiah talked about the fact that Israel just continued to sin (cf. Isaiah 64:5–7). He confessed their sins against God even though God was coming to help them. Their good deeds were for nothing. Their righteous acts were as bloody rags. Isaiah said, “*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away*” (Isaiah 64:6). They were not only worthless, but they were detestable in spite of all the good deeds they had done. No one consistently called on God’s name. They called to God, but they did not call on God, because they did not really trust God. They did not even bring Him to their minds.

Isaiah made a two-fold plea to God:

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father [This thought goes back to the covenant they had with God.] We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your

hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O LORD; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look upon us, we pray, for we are all your people. Your sacred cities have become a desert; even Zion is a desert, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and glorious temple, where our fathers praised you, has been burned with fire, and all that we treasured lies in ruins. After all this, O LORD, will you hold yourself back? Will you keep silent and punish us beyond measure? (Isaiah 64:8–12).

Isaiah reminded God of two great facts in this prayer. Number one, the intimacy and fullness of their relationship with Him. “Remember, O Lord, we are Your children. You are our Father.” Number two, he reminded God of the severity of their distress. They thought they had been judged beyond any measure. Because God was their Father, and because their judgment was severe, they believed God would not be able to hold back His love from them forever. And, they were absolutely right, because God was going to answer the exiles’ pleas (cf. Isaiah 65–66).

God’s Answer To The Exiles’ Pleas

God began by speaking of Israel’s suffering and His justice:

“I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’ All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations — a people who continually provoke me to my very face, offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on altars of brick; who sit among the graves and spend their nights keeping secret vigil; who eat the flesh of pigs,

and whose pots hold broth of unclean meat; who say, 'Keep away; don't come near me, for I am too sacred for you!' Such people are smoke in my nostrils, a fire that keeps burning all day. See, it stands written before me: I will not keep silent but will pay back in full; I will pay it back into their laps — both your sins and the sins of your fathers, says the Lord" (Isaiah 65:1–7).

Because God's people had burned sacrifices on the mountain and defiled Him on the hills, He was going to measure into their laps the full payment for their former deeds. God reminded Israel of His past dealings with them, and then He spoke of their present dealings with Him. He said, "I have dealt only righteously with you. And how have you dealt with me? Stubborn, evil doings, continual provocation, persistent idolatry, unclean food, rebellious, conceited behavior." The Lord's response was that they were smoke in His nostrils. Smoke up your nose causes a terrible, disgusting feeling. It makes you feel sick all day long. "You make me sick," was God's response to Israel's claim to be right with Him. His future dealings with them were "I will not keep silent! I will repay in full what you have done!" Judgment was coming upon the nation of Israel!

Then, there were promises of salvation to the remnant. They were the small group that would remain faithful to God:

This is what the LORD says: "As when juice is still found in a cluster of grapes and men say, 'Don't destroy it, there is yet some good in it,' so will I do on behalf of my servants; I will not destroy them all. I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah those who will possess my mountains; my chosen people will inherit them, and there will my servants live. Sharon will become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor [the Valley of Trouble] a

resting place for herds, for my people who seek me. But as for you who forsake the LORD and forget my holy mountain, who spread a table for Fortune and fill bowls of mixed wine for Destiny, I will destine you for the sword, and you will all bend down for the slaughter; for I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeased me” (Isaiah 65:8–16).

There is a beam of hope in the fact that a very small part will be saved, and that small part, the elect remnant of God who repent and call upon the name of the Lord, would inherit the land. After the beam of hope, there is a flash of anger against those who forget and forsake God. God’s anger is against those who believe in fortune and destiny, and do not have faith in Him. It is against those who do not hear the Lord’s call and those who choose to displease God. God’s children need to remember these things: do not forget Him, do not forsake Him, do not trust destiny or fate.

Trusting in the Lord brings compensation from the Almighty God:

Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “My servants will eat, but you will go hungry; my servants will drink, but you will go thirsty; my servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame. My servants will sing out of the joy of their hearts, but you will cry out from anguish of heart and wail in brokenness of spirit. You will leave your name to my chosen ones as a curse; the Sovereign LORD will put you to death, but to his servants he will give another name. Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so by the God of truth; he who takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of truth. For the past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes” (Isaiah 65:13–16).

Notice the contrast between the “servants” and “you.” The “servants” were the remnant and “you” was the rest of the nation. The “servants” would eat, drink, rejoice, and sing. “You,” the nation, would go hungry, be thirsty, be put to shame, be in anguish, and they would be broken. God never forgets willful rebellion against Him. He never forgives willful rebellion against Him. He never remembers the sin of those who love and serve Him — *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son purifies us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7).

God told them He was going to create a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness would dwell (cf. 2 Peter 3:13).

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered [the old things], nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. Never again will there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be

the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD (Isaiah 65:17–25).

The new creation is what awaits the remnant when they return to God and to His land (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:16–18). They will be in a new kingdom, and there will be new conditions. There will be long life, prosperity, peace, security, success, and blessings. He will answer their prayers even before they give them. There will be no violence there. What a blessed place, and what a blessing to be in that place!

The last chapter of Isaiah is a statement of judgment on the ungodly exiles.

This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. But whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man, and whoever offers a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig's blood, and whoever burns memorial incense, like one who worships an idol. They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations; so I also will choose harsh treatment for them and will bring upon them what they dread. For when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, no one listened. They did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me" (Isaiah 66:1–5).

God described Himself, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool." God gave His estimation of man and divided mankind into two groups: the humble, contrite, fearful

man is esteemed by God; the idolatrous evil-doer will be judged by Him. This is consistently what the Bible says from start to finish. God encouraged the godly exiles (cf. Isaiah 66:5–13). The Lord would repay His enemies, and bless Israel in one day. He would make Jerusalem a nursing mother to all of the people of the land. The Lord would bring Israel peace like a river. The Lord would make Zion flourish like grass. God was to going bring vengeance on His enemies (cf. Isaiah 66:15–18). The flaming chariot of God's terrible judgment is coming. The idolatrous and the unclean will meet the anger of God.

The coming condition of God's people will be as the redeemed on earth.

“As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the LORD, “so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the LORD. “And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind” (Isaiah 66:22–24).

God says that all His people who have been scattered to all the nations will be gathered back into His city. And there, they will be blessed. Their name and their descendants will endure. Their worship will be continual. Their enemies will be destroyed forever before them, and they will dwell, not in an old city that nations can come and surround and destroy, but they will dwell in the unshakable new kingdom. It will be a new heaven and new earth where righteousness will dwell.

So, the book of Isaiah ends, not as it began with words that described the corrupt nature of God's people, but with the people of God at home with Him. It ends with them in a new

city in a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. They are there because of the eternal covenant of the eternal God. God's children need to find peace in the fact that God is always with His people. He is always on the side of the humble, the contrite, and the broken. All that God has ever wanted from His people is a broken and contrite spirit. He wants all men to know just as Isaiah said, "I am an unclean man with unclean lips. Forgive my sins. I will serve you in humility and integrity all the days of my life. Lord, here I am! Send me!" (cf. Isaiah 6:5–8). May peace in His work bless us all.

The Greatness of God

Introduction

This is chapter 23 in the study of the Book of Isaiah. This chapter deals with the subject of the greatness of God. Isaiah wrote to contrast the greatness of God with the stupidity and the impotence of idolatry. His book contains some of the most magnificent passages about God found anywhere in God's Word.

God's Saving Character and Saving Actions

God Is Our Savior

Consider the passages on the salvation of God:

In that day you will say: "I will praise you, O LORD. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. In that day you will say, "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you" (Isaiah 12:1–6).

God is the Savior, so His children can trust Him and not be afraid. They will accept Him as their strength, their song, and they will give thanks to Him.

“He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation’” (Isaiah 25:8–9).

God will destroy death. He will handle their sorrow and take away their shame. They will praise His name because of that.

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:1–2)

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD (Isaiah 55:6–8).

God will provide all His children’s needs. He will have mercy on them in the midst of their sin. He will pardon them from all their sins.

God clothes His children with righteousness: “*I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels*” (Isaiah 61:10). He loves them as His bride. God is Savior. Salvation is a result of having a relationship with Him.

God Is a Righteous God

God is not only seen as the Savior, He is seen to be righteous:

. . . The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, and he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak (Isaiah 59:15–17).

God’s righteousness is seen in His dress. He has His own personal righteousness as His breastplate. The salvation that He intends to bring to the righteous is His helmet. His clothing is the vengeance that He intends to bestow upon the enemy. His mantle (outer robe) is His zeal. God is a God of righteous zeal. It is a zeal for His righteousness.

God Is a Graceful God

Isaiah emphasizes the grace of God. The book of Isaiah is the “Romans of the Old Testament” because it talks about God’s grace and salvation by grace:

“Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of

justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! O People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you” (Isaiah 30:18–19).

Isaiah said God will hear His children’s voices, and He will bestow grace upon them. He will hear their voices, and He will answer their needs.

God Is a Glorious God

The glory of God is also depicted over and over again in Isaiah. It is seen as the beautiful, holy, unique glory of God: *“I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you” (Isaiah 42:8–9).*

God is to be glorified, not simply because He is our Creator; but even more than that, He is unique! There is no other in all of the world, in all of the universe like him. He, alone, is God.

God Is a Universal God

God is universal. This brings Him glory, and it is something in which His children are to glory in. He is not simply unique, He is universal: *“From the west, men will fear the name of the LORD, and from the rising of the sun [that’s the east], they will revere his glory. For he will come like a pent-up flood that the breath of the LORD drives along” (Isaiah 59:19).*

He is unique. He is universal. He is unique in His creation. He is universal in His care and judgement of His creation. Praise the Lord! May He be glorified for His uniqueness, His unity, and His universality.

God Is a Holy God

The holiness of God is praised over and over in the Book of Isaiah. It is praised, first, in the very moment that Isaiah becomes a prophet. The holiness of God is seen in God's call to Isaiah:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:1–3).

God is exalted! He is alone! He is unique! He is served and praised by the seraph (the highest of beings) with their holy songs. They sing holy songs to praise the holiness of God:

For this is what the high and lofty One says — he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite" (Isaiah 57:15).

God is eternal, and enthroned above all the angels. God dwells among the lowly to bring them to redemption.

I sought to hear the voice of God
I climbed the top-most steeple.
And there God said to me, "Go down,
I dwell among the people."

Author Unknown

God Is a Merciful God Worthy of Praise

God is also praised in the book of Isaiah for His mercy. Mercy is not the same as grace. Grace is receiving something that was not earned or deserved. Mercy is not being given the punishment that was deserved. God is praised for not giving His children what they deserve. He does not judge them, but bestows mercy upon them: “*The LORD will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob*” (Isaiah 14:1). God is merciful to His sinful children. He is going to always bring them back to Him if they are repentant. He is going to unify them, not only with one another, but with all their enemies. He is going to be merciful to them and bring them to glory.

God is going to be merciful to the poor and needy:

You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat: For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall and like the heat of the desert (Isaiah 25:4).

He said He will give them refuge (a place to hide) and shade (a place of comfort). The poor and the needy primarily need a place of comfort to hide from the world.

Breathes there a man with soul so dead
Who never to himself has said,
“This is my home, my native land.”

Author Unknown

People of this world need a home, and that is what God provides. The homeless, the poor, and the needy need that home more inwardly and more severely than any people. God says, “If you will just come to me, you will find your refuge and shade in Me.”

God Is a Compassionate God Worthy to be Praised

Isaiah praises the compassion of God. Compassion is different from mercy, in that the person who receives mercy does not get what he deserves. Compassion is when God has a deep desire to help His children.

“I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us — yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. He said, ‘Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me’; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them” (Isaiah 63:7–10).

God’s judgment came after He had bestowed so many good things. Isaiah lists the kindnesses of the Lord: **First**, He has chosen them to be His people. He has given them a secure, happy, peaceful place to dwell. **Second**, He is distressed when His children are distressed. A father hurts in the hurt of his children. God, the Father, hurts when His children hurt. When His children are judged, the Father feels judged, and He will come to their aid. **Third**, God carries His children like a mother carries the children she bore in her womb. God becomes both the Mother and the Father in this passage. He begets His children in the gospel, and He carries them like a faithful Father. The Lord is compassionate. God’s children need His compassion, but they also need His wrath. When His children do not respond to His compassion, when they are not faithful to Him, then He must bring His wrath down upon them (cf. Isaiah 63:10).

God Is a Wrathful God, Ready to Judge the Wicked

God's wrath is described in Isaiah 30:27–28:

See, the Name of the LORD comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction; he places in the jaws of the peoples a bit that leads them astray.

His wrath comes from afar with burning anger. He will come speaking indignation against the people of His wrath. He will come seeking their destruction. Do not believe the lie that says that God's compassion will always overrule His judgment. He must bring wrath upon the wicked.

God Is a God of Wisdom Worthy of Praise

Isaiah praises the wisdom of God:

Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? (Isaiah 40:13–14).

These verses say that God's wisdom is unique. No one else has the wisdom that can compare to God's. Nothing is the cause of God's wisdom. God has possessed this wisdom from eternity. God was not created. God has always existed, and wisdom has always been one of His outstanding attributes. God is the only source for true wisdom:

"I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. See, the former

things have taken place [Whatever God said would happen has happened], and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you” (Isaiah 42:8–9).

God is so wise that He foreknows all that will occur, and most that occurs happens because He wills it. He is not only the foreknowing One, but He is the One who causes all the things that are necessary for salvation. God’s children can be confident that whatever happens in the future, God will take care of. He has taken care of all that has happened in the past. He took care of Sodom and Gomorrah. He took care of Egypt. He took care of Assyria. He took care of Babylon. He took care of Rome. He will take care of whatever enemy His children have in the future. Rest assured in the fact that God will bring into being whatever is needed for the glory and health of His children, because that is the kind of God He is.

God Is a Powerful God Worthy to be Praised

Isaiah also praises God’s power:

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? . . . Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing (Isaiah 40:12a, 15–17).

God created all the nations. God is in control of all that the nations intend to do.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in (Isaiah 40:21–22).

All the stars of the universe are the place of His inhabitation.

“To whom, therefore, will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens; Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing (Isaiah 40:25–26).

God brings the stars out each and every night.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like an eagle; they will run and not be weary, they will walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:29–30).

Our God is a powerful God. He is powerful in creation. He is powerful in providence. He is incomparable in all of His characteristics. He is a power-giving God.

God Is an Eternal God in Nature

God is eternal in His nature:

“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know

and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me” (Isaiah 43:10).

This is what the LORD says – Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: ‘I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6).

God Is a Long-Suffering God in His Character

“Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

God Is a Triune God — His Triune Character Is Discussed by Isaiah

God is a reasonable God with a triune (three in one; constituting a trinity in unity, Ed.) character:

“Come near me and listen to this: From the first announcement I [(this is the Son of God speaking, the Messiah)] have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens I am there. And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit” (Isaiah 48:16). The triune God is God, the Messiah; Jehovah God, and His Spirit.

God Is a Unique God

His uniqueness is seen easily in two verses: *“‘I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God’” (Isaiah 45:5). “‘. . . I am God and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me’” (Isaiah 46:9).*

God Is a God Of Love

Now, last of all, God is a God of love. The bottom line (the most crucial factor, Ed.) with God is His love.

“But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you.” I said, “You are my servant”; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:8–10).

This is God’s love for His people. He tells them, “You do not need to fear, for I have chosen you. You do not need to be dismayed, for I am your God. You do not need to worry, for I will strengthen you. I will help you, and I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

A voice says, “Cry out.” And I said, “What shall I cry?” “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, . . . but the word of our God stands forever.” You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power . . . (Isaiah 40:6–8).

God not only loves Israel, His people, in the book of Isaiah, He also loves the world. He loves His world. He does that because He is love. There are great teachings of judgment in the book of Isaiah. There are wonderful teachings about Jesus in this book, but there are also marvelous descriptions of God. God as the Father, who puts up with and gives His compassionate love to the unloving and the unlovable. God’s children need to be grateful for the book of Isaiah, and find great peace and joy in studying it.

Great Lessons From Isaiah

Introduction

This will be the last chapter in this study of the Book of Isaiah. This chapter is going to cover the great lessons from the book of Isaiah. Some of these lessons may have been touched upon already, but it is worth the time to go back and look at them in a different light.

Lessons For The Nation (The Church)

There is a history lesson from Israel that needs to be learned by all. It does not matter whether it is a group of people, a state, a province, a nation, or a church. There are some problems with “human kind” that Isaiah handles in the very beginning of his book. Each lesson in this area will involve a word beginning with the letter “r.”

Israel’s Rebellion

The first lesson is taken from Isaiah 1:2–31.

Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.” Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption. They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One

of Israel and turned their backs on him’ (Isaiah 1:2–4).

Israel refused to listen to the will of God, so He had no other choice but to say, “. . . *Ah, sinful nation . . .*” This is a nation that God had spoken to over and over again, but they had turned against Him. Notice the same idea of rebellion throughout Isaiah 1:

Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! “The multitude of your sacrifices — what are they to me?” says the LORD. “I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts?” (Isaiah 1:10–12).

See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her — but now murders! Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts (Isaiah 1:21).

Because of Israel’s rebellion, the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, will come. They had been taught by God. He had sent the prophets to them again and again, and they still rebelled.

God’s Retribution Following Israel’s Rebellion
Israel’s rebellion was followed by God’s retribution.

Why would you be beaten any more? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the

top of your head there is no soundness — only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire, your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege (Isaiah 1:5–8).

Israel was going to be devoured. If a group of people rebel against God, whether it is a city, province, nation, church, or whomever, they will be devoured by God. Isaiah told Israel: “*When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers; I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood*” (Isaiah 1:15). God will not hear the prayer of any one who rebels against Him. He will not hear their prayers if their hands are full of blood: “. . . ‘*But if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword*’ For the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 1:20). Notice again, Israel would be devoured, because they had rebelled against God. “*But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the LORD will perish*” (Isaiah 1:28). Rebellion leads inevitably to the retribution of God. God brings retribution upon His people to bring about a response of repentance from them.

Israel’s Repentance In Response To God’s Retribution

Israel’s rebellion led to retribution from God, because God wanted them to repent.

Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. “Come now,

let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (Isaiah 1:115b–18).

Isaiah said, “*Zion will be redeemed with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness*” (Isaiah 1:27). God says, “If you are willing and repent, if you seek righteousness, and if you come reason with me, then I will give you the blessings.”

Rebellion - Retribution - Repentance - Restoration

Repentance will bring blessings that will bring about restoration. Israel had rebelled against God. That brought retribution upon them. God’s retribution is a call to Israel for repentance. And now, if they repent, they will be restored: “*Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah*” (Isaiah 1:9) “‘*Come now, let us reason together,*’ says the LORD. ‘*Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool*’” (Isaiah 1:18). “*Therefore the LORD, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: “Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove your impurities” (Isaiah 1:24). “The mighty man will become a tinder and his work a spark . . .” (Isaiah 1:31).* God says, “I will redeem Zion now because they have repented.” This is a lesson to any, and everyone. If they rebel against God, retribution must come. That retribution comes to bring them to repentance, and if they are willing and repent, God will **restore** them back to their place of honor and glory again.

Israel's Restoration Back To Their Place of Honor and Glory Again

This lesson that can be applied to any group comes from Isaiah 5:1–30. Isaiah 5 is called the “Song of the Vineyard.” The reasons God judges His children are the “**sour grapes**” in the vineyard. This lesson concerning **sour grapes** might be entitled “What are the reasons for God’s judgment in time?” It will answer the question, “Why does God come to judge a people before eternity?” Eternity is when He is going to judge each individual as to their own standing before Him. That is the point in time when each one will learn whether they will enjoy an eternity of bliss or an eternity of destruction. What is the reason that God comes with judgments even before that time? Why did He judge Israel? Why did he judge Judah? Why does He judge nations who rebel against Him? What are the reasons God judges groups?

The **first reason/ sour grape** is found in Isaiah 5:8–10. The reason for God’s judgment is **materialism**. God said that if people “ . . . *add house to house . . .*” (Isaiah 5:8), if they are overcome with a desire to have material goods, then He would find them unfaithful to Him. Materialism is probably the number one problem in relationships to God, individually and collectively. Jesus said: “*No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money*” (Matthew 6:24). The materialistic things of this life come between man and God. They serve as a rival god. Man must either serve God and use his money for God, or he will serve Money and try to use God. Materialism is a tragic basis upon which God will judge mankind.

The **second sour grape** God will judge man by deals with **intemperate frivolity**. It is great to have a good time. God is a God of the good times. He came and instituted many feasts, and by His command only one day of fasting. God does not want sorrow, lamentation, and mourning to be the keynote in His Kingdom. But neither does He want intemperance to be a part

of His Kingdom. Isaiah was talking about the people who had given themselves to partying, sexuality, drunkenness, and the concept of having fun (cf. Isaiah 5:11–17). He said, *“Woe to those who . . .”* God wants His children to be a joyful people, but He wants them to be sober in their relationship to Him.

The **third sour grape** for which God judges all man is their **contempt for Him**: *“Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, to those who say, ‘Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it’”* (Isaiah 5:18–19). People, as they grow in their contempt for God, do not even believe that God can, or much less will, come in judgement upon them.

The **fourth sour grape** for which God will judge a people (a group, a nation, a church) is for their **hypocrisy**. Isaiah said: *“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter”* (Isaiah 5:20). The number one thing God wants from His people is for them to be honest. He wants them to be open and plain, not a complicated people. He wants their “yes” to be “yes,” and their “no” to be “no” (cf. Matthew 5:37). God wants His children to see good and love it, to see evil and hate it. God does not want mankind to live one way before their fellow man and another way before the people they want to be honored by.

A **fifth sour grape** for which God judges groups by is **conceit**: *“Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight”* (Isaiah 5:21). One fellow said of a friend of his, “He was a legend in his own mind.” That can be literally true. Some people do not believe they can be wrong. They think they are always right. They always have the wise answer to anything. When a group believes that, then they are going to be destroyed.

And finally, the **sixth sour grape** for which God judges people is **drunkenness**. This does not just mean people who are simply drunk on wine. It can be people who are drunk on

power. They can become intoxicated on anything: *“Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent”* (Isaiah 5:22–23). They are heroes at drinking wines and champions at mixing drink. So, what is going to happen? Judgment is going to come upon them by the Lord, and they will be judged by foreigners (cf. Isaiah 5:24–25). They will end up being judged by the people they thought that they were wiser and more powerful than.

These six **sour grapes** are common among nations, cities, provinces, and churches. Each one of these is a reasons for which God will judge them. The world must not ignore God and His Word. They must not ignore the character of God and how He wants His children to live.

Lessons For The Individual

Why Jesus Died

There are some lessons within Isaiah for the individual that need to be looked at. Isaiah 53 is a favorite chapter for many in the Bible. It is quoted again and again in the New Testament. These lessons directed toward each individual will try to answer the question, “Why Did Jesus Die?” There are verses that answer why Jesus died according to Isaiah 53. And there are also verses in the New Testament to show the way in which Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy.

Number one, He died to bear **our** grief and **our** sorrows: *“Surely he took up **our** infirmities and carried **our** sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted”* (Isaiah 53:4) He came to carry away **our** griefs and **our** sorrows. Jesus said: *“Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me”* (John 14:1). The New Testament confirmation of Jesus fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy can be seen in John 14. John 14:1–31 is a chapter of comfort given by Jesus as He spoke to His disciples. He wanted

them to understand that He came to carry their grief and their sorrows bearing them all away.

Number two, Jesus died to forgive **our** transgressions: *“But He was pierced for **our** transgressions; he was crushed for **our** iniquities . . .* (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus went to the tree, not only to take away the grief and the sorrow of **our** life, and to give **us** joy, but to take away **our** transgressions and **our** iniquities. Paul told the Ephesians: *“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace”* (Ephesians 1:7). We are forgiven by His blood. He brought death to naught on the cross (cf. Hebrews 9:15). Jesus died to deal with the real problem of life, not just **our** grief and **our** sorrow. The grief and sorrow are external, but He died to remove **our** sin.

Number three, He died to give **us** peace: *“. . . the punishment that brought **us** peace was upon him . . .”* (Isaiah 53:5). When He was crushed and bruised for **our** transgressions and iniquities, He received the punishment that brought **us** peace. It is hard to find a good definition for peace. Peace is the result of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus is the way to find peace. Peace is no longer having a spirit in turmoil. Peace is no longer feeling at war with God, or with anyone else. Paul told the Ephesians that in the past, they were alienated from God (cf. Ephesians 2:11–22). Being separated from God is not peace:

*. . . at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is **our** peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility . . .*
(Ephesians 2:12–14).

Jesus brought **us** to God and made **us** one together with Christ, thereby making peace. He came and preached peace to those who were far away and near. He did not preach peace, just by touching the lepers and healing the blind and deaf. He preached peace on the cross when He carried **our** sins with Him there.

Number four, Jesus died to return **us** to God: “*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of **us** has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of **us** all*” (Isaiah 53:6). God is always in the same place. He has not moved. **We** went away from God because **our** sin separated **us** from Him. When the Messiah came and went to the cross, His crucifixion returned **us** to God. Paul told the Corinthians:

*All this is from God, who reconciled **us** to himself through Christ and gave **us** the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to **us** the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through **us**. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin **to be sin for us**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:18–21).*

Christians are ambassadors of Christ. We are sent to proclaim a Gospel that God has established as a covenant by which He will not only forgive man, but He will remember their sins no more and will reconcile them to Himself. When Jesus died, He made a covenant that forgave **us** our sins. He took away the middle wall of partition between the Jew and the Gentile. He reconciled **us** to God by His promise and covenant.

Number five, Jesus died to satisfy the justice of God:

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7–9).

Jesus died to satisfy God’s need. He did not die just for our forgiveness or our reconciliation to God. He died because God’s character demanded that His righteousness be satisfied. Jesus died to satisfy the righteousness of God. Paul told the Romans that Jesus died to prove God is righteous in the forgiving of the sins done in the Old Testament, and to show that God is righteous in forgiving the sins today (cf. Romans 3:21–31). Paul said:

He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and he who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith” (Romans 3:26–27).

God told Abraham that his sins were forgiven. He told Moses and David that they were forgiven. But there was no sacrifice to their knowledge that made it righteous for God to do that. Jesus was the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world (cf. 1 Peter 1:19–20). God knew about the death of Christ, but no one else did. God forgave Abraham, Moses, and David based on the death of Christ that **was to come**. When Jesus died, all of the accusations about God being unrighteous were silenced, because Jesus died and satisfied the

righteousness of God. Any one who trusts God and turns to Him in faith is forgiven by the blood of Christ — anyone beginning with Adam until the last man on earth.

Number six, Jesus died to fulfill the purpose of God. He died to fulfill what God had planned from eternity: “*Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and to cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, . . .*” (Isaiah 53:10). Jesus died to fulfill the eternal purpose of God. Paul told the Ephesians that from eternity to eternity and everything in between has happened to fulfill His purpose in Jesus Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:3–14). Paul said:

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (Ephesians 1:9–10).

Number seven, Jesus died to glorify the Shepherd: “*After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities*” (Isaiah 53:11). He died that He, the Shepherd, might be glorified. Paul told the Philippians:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name, that at the

name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth” (Philippians 2:5–10).

Jesus died so that He himself would be glorified. He was given a name that is above all names and a name before which every knee will bow.

Number eight, Jesus died to make intercession for the saints: “ . . . *For he bore the sins of many, and **made intercession** for the saints*” (Isaiah 53:12). The writer of Hebrews said that Jesus: “ . . . *always lives to intercede for them*” (Hebrews 7:25). Paul told the Romans: “*And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will*” (Romans 8:27). All the verb forms used in Isaiah 53 have been in the past tense until this one — He **pleads** our case on a continuing basis.

Secret of Successful Living

Isaiah’s call gives some secrets for successful living (cf. Isaiah 6). **First**, he was convicted: “*Woe to me!*” *I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, . . .’*” (Isaiah 6:5). **Second**, he made the **confession** that he was unclean because of his conviction. **Third**, there was **cleansing**. God told Isaiah, “ . . . *See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for*” (Isaiah 6:7). **Fourth**, there was Isaiah’s **concentration**. He said, “*Here am I. Send me!*” (Isaiah 6:8). **Fifth**, there was God’s **commission** to Isaiah. God said, “*Go and tell this people: . . .*” (Isaiah 6:9). **Sixth**, there was **continuance**. God told Isaiah that he must speak until there was nothing left (cf. Isaiah 6:11–13). God said, “ . . . *Until the cities lie ruined . . . until the houses are left deserted . . . until the Lord has sent everyone away and the land is utterly forsaken*” (Isaiah 6:11b–12).

Details About Christ

The Book of Isaiah contains more details about Christ than any other prophet in the Old Testament.

- Isaiah 7:14 — His birth, born of a virgin, called “*Immanuel*.”
- Isaiah 9:6 — Called “*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*.”
- Isaiah 11:1 — Came from the family of David (Jesse).
- Isaiah 11:2 — “*The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him*.”
- Isaiah 61:1–3 — By the Spirit, He preaches and heals.
- Isaiah 11:3–4 — He judges with righteousness, wisdom, power, and mercy.
- Isaiah 42:1–4 — Gentleness.
- Isaiah 53:1–12 — His death predicted and described.
- Isaiah 25:1–12 — His resurrection.
- Isaiah 32:1–8 — His glorious reign.

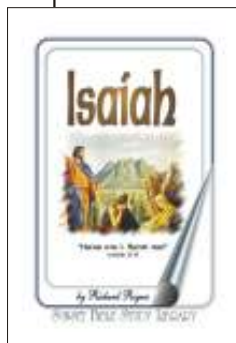
The whole theme of Isaiah’s book to all people is that they must repent. His message to the church is that they must rejoice in the salvation that God has given. His message about Jesus is that He is the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings. This is a wonderful book that is deserving of continual and constant study. It is a book of peace, hope, and comfort in believing in Jesus.

Richard Rogers



Richard Rogers was a great student of the Old Testament. He was able to give unique insights into the many books of the Old Testament and relate them to Christians today. His study on Isaiah has this same practical and useful approach. Richard gives fresh understanding into the mission of Isaiah and the many prophecies found in this book. The name Isaiah means “The Lord Is Salvation.” We are reminded of this abundant blessing throughout this study, because as Richard points out, Isaiah “prophesied from the mouth of the Almighty.” Richard gives special attention to the Messianic prophecies found in the book of Isaiah.

This is a wonderful, user-friendly study guide for Bible students who desire a deeper appreciation of the tremendous prophecies of Isaiah. This study is fundamental in understanding the eternal purpose of God sending His only Son on a death mission to redeem sinful mankind.



Richard was an instructor in the *Sunset International Bible Institute*, and continues to teach through audio and video tapes from *Sunset External Studies*. He also taught in many mission field training schools and assisted missionaries in most parts of the world. Richard went to be with the Lord in July 2000.



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