Mark 1:12 And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness.

13 And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.

Jesus was victorious through all temptations by prayer.

Mark gives a brief account of the temptation of Jesus compared to Matt. 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. The purpose of the temptation is to show Jesus would only use His Messianic powers to accomplish His redemptive task. Jesus defeated all evil (by the empowering of the Spirit) demonstrating to us our need to be empowered by the Spirit.

**“the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness”**

The Son’s temptation was by the agency of the evil one, but instigated by the Spirit ([Matt. 4:1-11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 4:1-13](javascript:%7b%7d)). It was God’s will that Jesus be tested!

In the OT the wilderness was a time of testing for Israel, but also a time of intimate fellowship.

The wilderness for Israel was to be a learning experience to prepare them for the promise land but they refused to wholly follow the Lord in faith like Joshua and Caleb and wandered in unbelief.

Elijah and John the Baptist grew up in the wilderness. It was a place of seclusion for training, meditation, and preparation for active ministry.

Hebrews 5:7 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; 8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

Jesus overcomes far greater temptations than what Adam and Eve failed in.

Heb 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

**“with the wild beasts”** The wilderness was a place inhabited by wild beast but Jesus overcome in this place.

The wilderness foreshadows restored fellowship between mankind and animals (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25; Hos. 2:18). Also the restoration of the Garden Eden (Gen 2; Rev. 21-22). The original image of God in mankind (Gen. 1:26-27) is restored through Jesus’ sacrificial death. Full fellowship, which existed before the Fall (Genesis 3), is possible again through Jesus Christ the Lord.

This period was crucial for our learning of Jesus’ preparation A foreshadowing of the Passion Week, from Psalm 22:12

Luke 4:14 ¶ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. 18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

Acts 10:37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; 38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

Psalm 22:11 Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. 12 Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. 13 They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. 16 For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.

1. He was deserted by his friends: “Trouble is near; for there is none to help”, none to uphold. He trod the wine-press alone; for all his disciples forsook him and fled. It is God's honour to help when all other help fails.

2. He was insulted and surrounded by enemies of high rank, who for their strength and fury, are compared to bulls, strong bulls of Bashan, fat and fed to the full, haughty and proud; such were the chief priests and elders that persecuted Christ; and others of low rank, who are compared to dogs (Ps 22:16), filthy and greedy, and unwearied in running him down. There was an assembly of the wicked plotting against him; for the chief priests sat in council, to consult of ways and means to take Christ. These enemies were numerous and unanimous:

He marks the crowd as wicked dogs less strong than their brutal leaders marked as ravening and roaring lios, the dogs were not less ferocious, for they were howling and barking like unclean and hungry dogs.

With many different and clashing interests among themselves, many are as Herod and Pilate, agreed to compass me. They have carried their plot far, and seem to have gained their point, for they have beset me round, Ps 22:12. They have enclosed me, Ps 22:16. They are formidable and threatening (Ps 22:13): They gaped upon me with their mouths, to show me that they would swallow me up; and this with as much strength and fierceness as a roaring ravening lion leaps upon his prey.

Isa 56:9 All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, yea, all ye beasts in the forest. 10 His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. 11 Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.

Civil and religious authority are addressed here

While the (world around us) the assembly of the wicked have so much to say against Christ, Will we be silent? Will we be quiet? Will we be Busy? Will we be Uninterested? Will we be Distracted?

A plane turned and hit a helicopter and they both crashed all because an air traffic controller took a personal phone call and got distracted.

It takes growth and maturity to be able to bark.

Isa 48:22 There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked.

Isa 57:21 There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

Ro 3:17 And the way of peace have they not known:

**Condemnation or God’s Comfort**

**Ps 104:10 ¶ He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. 11 They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst.**

**Ps 104:20 Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. 21 The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God.**

In Isaiah 56-57 Sinfulness is denounced in vivid detail and faith is commended as the only solution for the deep spiritual needs of life.

Isa 56:9 All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, yea, all ye beasts in the forest.

The condemnation, begins with an accusation of the wicked leaders (56:9-12), but moves quickly to a description of the nation’s evil idolatrous practices in spite of the presence of the righteous remnant (57:1-13).

God’s comfort is held out for the contrite and the lowly (57:13-19).

The first part is about the evil and the second part the comfort.

**I. Condemnation: God condemns leaders for their wicked practices (56:9—57:13).**

***A. He denounces corrupt leaders (56:9-12).***

The prophet summons the “beasts” to invade, meaning foreign armies; the call is a warningl, making the point that there is nothing to stop them because they have not done their job to prevent it from happening.

The “watchmen” are the prophets, priests and ministers who were to warn and prepare the people with the knowledge of truth. But, the prophet says, they are all blind, ignorant, dumb sleeping, greedy dogs.

Isa 56:10 His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. 11 Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds **that cannot understand**: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.

Blind, ignorant, dumb sleeping, greedy dogs that cannot bark. Dogs that don’t bark at danger are not good watch dogs.

More than that, they are Blind, Ignorant, dumb, sleeping, (lazy-lukewarm) greedy, looking out for themselves first but **cannot understand**.

Eze 34:1 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

2 Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! **should not the shepherds feed the flocks**?

3 Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but **ye feed not the flock**.

4 The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.

5 And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered.

6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and **none did search or seek after them**. Micah 3:11; 7:3

Mic 3:11 The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us.

Mic 7:3 That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up.

WATCHMEN WITH VISION

True Prophets are watchmen that carry their burden from a vision True Prophets are watchmen that deliver their message with a burden

Isa 21:1 **The burden of the desert of the sea**. As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land. 2 A grievous vision is declared unto me; the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth. Go up, O Elam: besiege, O Media; all the sighing thereof have I made to cease. 3 Therefore are my loins filled with pain: pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth: I was bowed down at the hearing of it; I was dismayed at the **seeing of it**.

4 My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me.

Isa 21:11 ¶ **The burden of Dumah**. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? 12 The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come.

Ac 16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

Isa 21:13 ¶ **The burden upon Arabia**. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye travelling companies of Dedanim.

Isa 52:8 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.

Isa 62:6 I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, {make...: or, are the LORD's remembrancers}

Jer 6:17 Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.

Eze 3:17 Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. 33:7 So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.

In Isaiah 21 the watchmen are awake and reporting; they are calling the people to action, speaking only the truth; faithful; watching day and night

Isa 21:12 The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come.

Isa 56:10 His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. 11 Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.

Now in Isaiah 56, some have fallen asleep; they are lying down like a bunch of lazy dogs. They refuse to blow the trumpet! They have left off warnings! Some are asleep on the wall! They have become spiritually blind, ignorant -- with no discernment left.

What happened?

Isaiah said they were blind, they became self-centered! Greedy! Filled with lust and sensuality! "They are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.... Come, say thus, 'I will fetch wine and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant...' " (Isaiah 56:11,12). Isaiah lamented, "The righteous man perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart" (Isaiah 57:1).

Instead, some became greedy, looking out for themselves, their own dreams and plans -- having fallen into lust and love for pleasure. They have opted for comfort, acceptance and respect among men. They have been corrupted by a lust for power and position. Jesus described the condition of those in hell: Where the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched ! It is the worm of lust! If that worm of lust is not destroyed in this life, it will eat away in the mind through all eternity.

Look about today as many ministers fall into adultery! The worm of lust is eating like a cancer, destroying the love of many. So few now weep for the lost! Fewer yet are taking to heart the backsliding of God's people! There is greed, self-promotion, self-seeking!

Mr 9:44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Mr 9:46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Mr 9:48 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

2Co 2:4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.

1Ti 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Mt 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

2Pe 1:9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

**What grief God must carry over the backslidden, blind watchmen!**

His grief goes beyond their spiritual blindness! Beyond the pride and greed! Beyond sensuality and self-centeredness!

It is a two-fold grief!

1. Grief because God can never delight in the fall of a single created being.
   1. He laments the loss of their love!
   2. The loss of their communion!
   3. The loss of one so important to His work on earth.
      1. Saul falls and the prophet Samuel weeps for Him.
      2. Absalom rebels, is killed in rebellion -- yet David laments, "Absalom, my son -- my son!"

Will not God lament over the loss of His rebellious, fallen watchmen becoming as blind dogs?

1. Grief of having to turn corrupted watchmen over to their sins!
   1. God’s dreaded release.
      1. To their sin

Ro 1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

Ro 1:26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:

Ro 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

* + 1. God never removes His offer of grace and mercy!
       1. His mercy is ever-lasting!
       2. But when men who once knew the truth, preached it, embraced it -- then became bound and enslaved to creature lusts -- and they refuse to let it go -- refuse to walk in holiness before a holy God -- then God must release them to their sins!

You see this dread release in Ezekiel 20:39, "As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord God... Go, serve everyone his idols...."

God is also releasing this Christian nation to her idols.

He is saying,

Go to your TV idol!

Go to your secret lover!

Go to your pornographic cassettes! Go to your filthy magazines! Go to your hidden sin!

If you will have your idols rather than walk wholly separated in holiness, then go to the object of your desires.

It is the fault of greedy backslidden watchmen who are tearing at the bride's veil! It was prophesied that the blind watchmen would wound the bride and try to take away her veil.

**The blind watchmen become candidates as rulers of darkness and angels of light.**

They end up preaching another Jesus, another gospel! Listen to these very clear warnings,

2Co 11:2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

2Co 11:13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

Heb 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. 26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

Thank God - The true and faithful watchmen on the wall will never compromise! They will not stop warning the righteous about the seductions and infiltrations of the wicked one among God's people. No sincere Christian need be in doubt about who to listen to in these days of many voices.

There are two very clear and unmistakable tests of all prophetic warnings:

1. True prophecy seeks to turn Christians away from sin.

Jer 23:22 But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.

Heed the voice of those who seek to turn you away from wickedness. Avoid those who speak soothing words with no reference to sin.

1. Prophetic warnings, from the beginning, spoke of judgments upon the wicked.

Jer 28:7 Nevertheless hear thou now this word that I speak in thine ears, and in the ears of all the people; 8 The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence.

Those who warn of coming judgment are in good company. They speak the same word of all the prophets "from the beginning."

The warnings now going forth from God's holy watchmen are the greatest evidences of His love to this generation. He loves His people enough to prepare them; to give them time to repent and prepare the way of the Lord in holiness! Those who love the Lord will be thankful. Those who are at ease in Zion will be repelled and rebell. There is nothing worse than to have the false prophets out doing the true prophets.

**BLIND DOGS**

**Php 3:2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. Mt 7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.**

False prophets without a vision Don’t see what to do False prophets without a vision and without a burden Don’t see or care. False prophets with a burden but without a vision Doesn’t know how to do anything False prophets with a vision but without a burden Doesn’t want to do anything

False Prophets with a vision to deceive and destroy and a burden to deceive and destroy. **AND DOING IT**

Ezekiel is in exile, but writes about the idolatry in Jerusalem in order to explain why they went into captivity. It was not for bad political choices as they had explained. This chapter in Isaiah would have had the same effect on the exiles—this is why you are here, so do not even think about lapsing into this now or in the future, for there is no peace for the wicked. But, of course, the chapter would have also been an important indictment on the people prior to the exile, Isaiah’s actual audience, especially in the reigns of Ahaz and later Manasseh (who tradition says had the prophet sawn asunder). The sinfulness of these practices is self-evident. But the people doing them convinced themselves that such practices met their spiritual needs.

The wicked would have no chance of resting in peace when they died. The following catalogue explains why. Verse 3 begins the description with “seed” or “offspring” to show that they shared the nature of adulterers and prostitutes. Metonymy (probably adjunct) will figure in these verses because while they describe idolatry false religion was also fornication, literally. This is the point of verse 5 which says, “you burn with lust among the oaks.” The groves of trees were signs of fertility of a local “baal”; that then became a place to worship—to practice the fertility cult. Verse 7 continues this motif: where they made their bed they sacrificed to pagan deities, meaning, the practice of the bed was the sacrifice, at least in part. The pagan symbols of verse 8 probably refer to what Ezekiel 16:17 refers to; looking on the “nakedness” is literally looking on the “hand” (*yad*), a euphemism for the male organ,the sign of fertility. Their idolatry in Canaan was with all kinds of symbols and implements that were designed to induce fertility. Where they were to have placed the Law—the doorposts—they had these grotesque images. They forsook the LORD and made a covenant with the leaders and devotees of the ritual, on whose nakedness they looked.

According to verse 9 they sought information from pagan shrines—everywhere but the LORD. They sent ambassadors to Molech and to Sheol. They were trying to induce false gods to reveal things; theirs was a cult of the dead, so they consulted with the dead by this mysterious seance. The gods of the underworld figured prominently in pagan ritual. One thinks of King Saul in his greatest need going to the Witch of Endor for truth—only to have the LORD bring up Samuel to announce his death. The point is that they feared non-entities, and ignored the Omnipotent One.

It is interesting to note in verse 10 that they believed this all met their needs. They were worn out by these pursuits, but somehow found strength in them rather than see how hopeless it all was. People wrapped up in pagan religion, whether Canaanite or modern, do so for some reason. Satan is able to meet some of their needs, and they then believe the lie.

***D. He rebukes their idolatry (11-13a).***

In a series of questions the LORD through the prophet wonders whom they feared more than the LORD. The rebuke is that the people misunderstood the silence of God, and so did not fear Him but followed after false gods. Consequently, God will call them to task, display their works, and see if their false deities can save them. No, the wind will blow them away!

**II. Comfort: God promises comfort and revival for those who are contrite and humble (13b-21).**

***A. He promises restoration (13b).***

In verse 13b we have a transition to the second half of the passage. “The one who makes me his refuge (hypocatastasis for “trust”) will inherit the land and possess my holy mountain.” The hope here is the restoration to the land and to worship in Zion.

***B. He explains the restoration (14-19).***

Verse 14 begins with a call for preparation. It repeats the theme of Isaiah 40, to remove the obstacles from the way of the LORD. There it was a message of spiritual preparation, repenting and reforming; here it would include that, but perhaps is more general for removing any obstacles that would slow down the fulfillment of the promise of restoration.

Verse 15 is the actual explanation for the comfort, and will, therefore, occupy more of your exegetical interest in this passage. The descriptions of God are the same as we have seen before, beginning in chapter 6 with the “High and Lofty One.” The theme of “live forever” lets the audience know that life and death and time are no problem for God. The point of all this exaltation is to say that the One who dwells on High dwells also with/in the lowly. And the New Testament will expand the theme to say that He will take the lowly on High with Him. Here we have the themes of God’s greatness and God’s grace.

So you should spend some time on “contrite” (*daka’*) and “lowly” (*shaphal*). One who is lowly in spirit is one who is humble, surrendered, depending on God. One who is contrite is one who has had his spirit or attitude crushed by a divine act. There can be no service to God apart from these attitudes. God resists the proud, but dwells with the repentant, surrendered, obedient, grateful, sinner. Both words are probably implied comparisons (hypocatastases).

Once you have defined the terms and illustrated them you need to make the point that God does not leave them crushed and low—He revives them. The Hebrew term means “renew, restore, cause life.” As soon as they are crushed and lowly, He comes to dwell in/with them, and they are no longer crushed. God has no desire to keep people abased and crushed—He wants life. They may be still humbled over it all, but that is different.

Verse 16 explains how this happens: God will end His anger, or the human spirit would be devastated. Rather, those days are shortened (God knows what people can take); and verse 18 tells how He revives his spirit: “I will heal … I will guide … restore … comfort.” These are words that have appeared many times in the book, and need to be developed again here.

In the exile God poured out His wrath and punished sinful, rebellious unbelieving Israelites. He destroyed many; He brought many to their knees. Those who were contrite and repentant He would forgive and restore to their land, so that they could praise Him. Most of these had never gone into wicked idolatry like their reprobate countrymen had. To such who are righteous, including idolaters who now repented, God gave peace (compare verses 2 and 19). It would be “peace” in this life (v. 19) and “peace” in the life to come (v. 2).

***C. He restricts the comfort (20, 21).***

These two verses show that there is no peace whatsoever for the wicked. They thought they were finding it in their evil works, but they cannot. All that is held out to the righteous—life, health, prosperity, comfort—goes to make up the idea of “peace.”

**Conclusion**

This passage should be pretty straightforward for exposition, especially in view of modern pagan trends, inside and outside the Church. The whole culture worships false gods in the most profane and debased ways. Thus, God brings judgment and destruction. People who belong to the faith, however, humbly submit to His will, and He will heal, guide, and comfort them with peace.

As for applications, we can work in several areas. For the wicked, the pagan unbeliever, whether in personal trouble (divine judgment) or not (deceived in his prosperity), the message is clear: repent or perish (as Jesus preached). For the believer the message is one of comfort—God heals, comforts, guides, and grants peace, now and in the life to come. This would call for a greater commitment to the faith. Another way to apply the passage to the believer is to say believers ought to pick up the message the prophet was giving; that is, we ought to warn the wicked, and hold out the clear promise of fellowship with the LORD.

So there are several levels of application here, from the pre-exilic community, to different periods of oppression, to the eschaton. But one aspect is timeless and basic to each level: God dwells with the humble and the contrite. If people want to show that they are true believers and faithful to the LORD, they must show evidence of repenting, surrender to His will, and walk humbly before Him; then, He will dwell with them, heal them, restore them to life, and bring them peace, comfort, and joy—so that they might turn from mourning to praise. So we might begin by asking people where they find comfort, joy, peace, and fulfillment.

### The Message of Isaiah

The Book of Isaiah is one of the most important books of the Old Testament. While little is known of the personal life of the prophet, he is considered to be one of the greatest of them all.

The book is a collection of oracles, prophecies, and reports; but the common theme is the message of salvation. There was, according to these writings, no hope in anything that was made by people. The northern kingdom of Israel had been carried into captivity (722 B.C.), and the kingdom of Judah was in the middle of idolatry and evil. The kingdom of Assyria had dominated the Fertile Crescent and posed a major threat to both kingdoms; and the kingdom of Babylon was gaining power and would replace Assyria as the dominant threat. In view of the fast-changing international scene, the people of Israel would be concerned about their lot in life—what would become of the promises of God? How could the chosen people survive, let alone be a theocracy again? And must the remnant of the righteous also suffer with the nation that for all purposes was pagan?

To these and many other questions the book addresses itself.

There would be a purging of the nation because God is holy. Before the nation could inherit the promises made to the fathers, it would have to be made holy. So God would use the pagan nations to chasten Israel for its sins and cleanse it from iniquity. And even though the judgment of the captivity would punish sin and destroy the wicked unbelievers, the removal of iniquity would ultimately be the work of the Servant of the LORD, the promised Messiah. On the basis of such cleansing and purification, God would then establish the golden age, a time of peace and prosperity that the world has never known. When the holy God would make the remnant holy, then He would use them to rule over the nations rather than allow the nations again to discipline them.

The messenger of the message of salvation is the prophet Isaiah, whose name means “salvation of Yahweh,” or “Yah saves.” He was the son of Amoz; he may also have been related to the royal family, perhaps King Manasseh, by whom he was believed to have been sawn asunder (see the Apocryphal literature; Heb. 11:37). He prophesied in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, and also may have lived past Hezekiah into the reign of Manasseh. Assuming that he was a young man at the death of Uzziah in 742 B.C.when his official ministry began, he might have been 70 or 80 at the time of his death (ca. 680 B.C.). Therefore, the prophet would have ministered for at least 60 years in an effort to bring the nation back to God.

The collection of Isaianic oracles fits the progression of Israel’s history over this time. The prophet began preaching during the Assyrian crisis, about the time Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom and was threatening the southern kingdom. Although Hezekiah was able to survive that invasion through the help of the prophet, he foolishly allowed the ambassadors from Babylon to see all the treasures of the kingdom, a sin that brought Isaiah’s announcement of the Babylonian captivity in the future. The book includes this historical interlude before the second half which focuses on that captivity in Babylon. The prophet has no idea when that captivity would come; for him it could have come right after the death of Hezekiah, and that would mean his audience might be the people to go into the exile. And so he began to prepare them—but it would not be that generation, for the exile began about 100 years after the death of Isaiah. But the second portion of the book looks in a general way to that future time and writes his message of comfort and hope for the exiles of Judah, as well as descriptions of the restoration to Jerusalem. The hope of such a salvation issues into the glorious vision of the new heavens and the new earth in the age to come.

So the setting of the first half of the book is Judah in the days of the Assyrians, and the setting of the second half of the book is Babylon, then Jerusalem again, and then beyond in the age to come. The “target audience” in the first half of the book is pre-exilic Israel; the “target audience” in the second half of the book is Israel during the exile and at the return (we know they are different; Isaiah did not). In both parts the oracles often look to the distant future for their main meaning and application. The fact that each section includes vivid descriptions as well as general and poetic descriptions has fueled controversy about the unity of the book and the prophet himself.

#### The Assyrian Period

On the one hand we have the historical background of the book during the Assyrian crisis. Here are some of the most crucial events in this period:

**1. “The Young Lion Roars.”** In 743 B.C. there was a coalition under Azariah against Tiglathpileser III (743, 738, 735). The important comparative material can be read in *ANET*, p. 282, lines 103ff.[1](http://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-study-book-isaiah" \l "P18_5088) The record in 2 Kings 15:19-20 (compare *ANET*, p. 283, lines 150ff.) tells how Rezin, Menahem, and Hiram were put under tribute to Assyria. This may have taken place in 738 (although Young in his commentary says 735).

**2. “The Smoking Firebrand and the Trembling Heart.”** The Syro-Ephraimite war took place in 735-733 B.C. According to 2 Kings 15, 16, there was an attempt to set up Ben Tabil on the throne when Ahaz of the Davidic dynasty did not go along with the treaty. Ahaz appealed to Tiglathpileser of Assyria for help, but this was a mistake (see *ANET*, pp. 283,4). Pekah was removed and Hoshea put in power in Israel; Ahaz became a “son of Pul,” a political vassal of Tiglathpileser.

**3. “Silly Dove without Understanding.”** Hoshea’s revolt and call to Egypt took place in 722 B.C. The accounts can be read in 2 Chronicles 28:21 and *ANET*, p. 284, lines 23ff. It was in 722 that Samaria finally fell to Sargon II, the general under and successor to Shalmaneser (the first king started the siege of Samaria and died during the time; his successor finished off the kingdom of Israel).

**4. “The Bird in the Cage.”** There were rebellions during the reign of Hezekiah in Judah in 713, 705, and 701. In 713 Ashdod rebelled against Sargon (Isa. 20). In 705 Hezekiah rebelled against Sennacherib (Isa. 30, 31). And in 701 Assyria invaded the land in what has become one of the most frequently described invasions of Israel’s history—Sennacherib’s own account says, “I shut up Hezekiah the Jew (or Judean) like a bird in a cage.” Isaiah 10 describes the invasion of the army from the north; Micah, a contemporary, describes the invasion of another part of the army from the lowlands (Micah 1), and the Book of Kings describes the historical event, as do sections of Isaiah. Since Tirhaqah of Ethiopia was involved, the literature also includes the Ethiopian records. Of course, only the Bible tells of the destruction of the Assyrian army by the Angel of Yahweh.

So there is a major section of the book written against the backdrop of the Assyrian crisis.

#### The Babylonian Period

On the other hand we have the apparent setting of the circumstances of the Babylonian captivity, 586-536 B.C. Actually, the passages do not include very specific details and descriptions of Babylon or the exile in the oracles—not anything like the Assyrian background—there are not the firsthand, eye-witness accounts of life and circumstances in Babylon one would expect if the author had lived thee. The most specific reference comes with the mentioning of the name of the king of Persia, Cyrus, who would conquer Babylon (Isa. 44, 45). The presence of this name in the book has prompted many to see the second part of the collection as the work of another prophet, one who lived closer to the events and could reasonably be expected to use a name like Cyrus since he would be more of an eye-witness. In other words, this other prophet saw Cyrus coming against Babylon, and so “predicted” that he would destroy Babylon and free Israel.

#### The Persian Deliverance

What can we make of the use of the name of Cyrus in the oracles? Critical scholarship finds it too difficult to accept that a prophet could predict the name of a king some 175 years before he came on the scene. But was the Persian empire or such a name that obscure? It is helpful to have the history clear in our minds before discussing the critical issues.

The royal line of which Cyrus was a part was founded by Achaemenes, who ruled from 700-675 (contemporary with Isaiah). It was he whose name was taken for the empire, the Achaemenid Empire. His son was Teispes (675-640); he expanded the boundaries of Parsa (Persia) as far south as Pasargadae. Because his empire was so great, he divided it between his two sons, Ariaramnes in the south and Cyrus I in the north. This division meant that there was a ruler known as Cyrus around 70 years before Israel went into captivity. Teispes also regained independence from the Medes, who had made Parsa a vassal in 670. The line of Cyrus I produced Cambyses I (600-559) and Cyrus II (559-530). Cambyses was placed over the empire when Persia became a Median province again; he married the daughter of Astyages. Cyrus II, being the offspring of that marriage, thereby uniting in himself the royal houses of the Medes and the Persians. Cyrus’ grandfather on his mother’s side was the great Cyaxares who overthrew the Scythians and the Assyrians, establishing control over all northern Mesopotamia and Iran. Cyrus was in fact a vassal of his grandfather in the State of Persia. He organized the Persian states and made a pact with Nabonidus of Babylon—against the law of Astyages. When he was summoned to Ecbatana to answer for this, he refused to go. Astyges then attacked his willful grandson, but was defeated and taken prisoner. Cyrus took Ecbatana and made Media a province of Persia. Thus began his great empire. When it came time to take Babylon, the people were eager for Cyrus the Great to do it, for they were bitter against their king Nabonidus who rejected their worship of Marduk and kept them exploited as slaves. Cyrus’ general Gubaru (“Darius” in the account of Daniel) took the city without a battle; a few days later Cyrus could march in triumphantly.

We shall return to this issue later. But it is important to realize that the movements of these world powers were well-known in the various courts, including Jerusalem. And the Book of Isaiah gives sufficient evidence that the prophet knew international affairs. The growth and influence of the Persian empire was not hidden from the rest of the world; this state and its kings were not non-existent until 536 B.C. And a name “Cyrus” was associated with this rising power as early as 670, 660 B.C. or thereabouts.

For the prophet, Persia seems to be the next major power after Assyria. Babylon has a brief interlude when she destroys Nineveh, but the rising power is beyond Babylon. The prophet Isaiah was certainly inspired by God; but he probably knew a great deal too. God revealed to him that Babylon would take Judea into captivity, and that a Persian king would allow them to come back.

### The Outline of the Book

The following outline of the contents of the book will enable us to gain a quick overview and see how the different parts fit together.

I. The Book Of Judgment (1:1—35:10)

**The Message of Rebuke and Promise (1:1—6:13)**

Israel’s ungrateful rebellion and the LORD’s gracious invitation (1:1-31).

Israel’s prospect of glory through Messiah after the chastening for sin that will make them holy (2:1—4:6).

Israel’s swift and complete judgment in exile (5:1-30).

Isaiah’s cleansing of unholiness and calling to the ministry to the unholy nation that faces desolation (6:1-13).

**The Message of Immanuel (7:1—12:6)**

The sign of the birth of Immanuel and the judgment to come by Assyria (7:1-25).

The judgment on the nation and the deliverance by the birth and reign of the Son (8:1—9:7).

The doom of Samaria for its perversion of justice (9:8—10:4).

The destruction of the pride of Assyria to Israel’s satisfaction and the ushering in of Messiah’s great kingdom of peace through the Branch of the root of Jesse (10:5—12:6).

**The Burden upon the Nations (13:l—23:18)**

Babylon will be made desolate (13:l—14:27).

Philistia will howl over its calamity (14:28-32).

Moab is lamented for her doom (15:l—16:14).

Damascus and Samaria will be plagued (17:1-14).

Ethiopia will be destroyed but left an access to God (18:1-7).

Egypt will be confounded but in the future will be part of the covenant with access (19:1—20:6).

Babylon’s fall is reiterated (21:1-10).

Edom is threatened (21:11,12).

Arabia has a set time for calamity (21:13-17).

Jerusalem will be invaded (22:1-25).

Tyre will be overthrown (23:1-18).

**The Message of Judgment and Promise, the “Little Apocalypse” (24:1—27:13)**

Judgment for sin will fall on the land, but a remnant shall rejoice at the advancement of the kingdom (24:1-23).

Praise is offered to the LORD for His judgments and His deliverance of the believing remnant (25:1-12).

A song of rejoicing in the consolation of Judah in the time of trouble, and an exhortation to faith (26:1-21).

As with a vineyard, the LORD cares for His own and so His discipline on them differs from His judgment on the pagans: they will be preserved to worship in Jerusalem (27:1-13).

**Woes upon Unbelievers in Israel (28:1—33:24)**

The self-indulgent and scoffing Israel will be judged, but the remnant will advance the kingdom as it will be securely founded in the laying in Zion of the stone (28:1-29).

The blind souls of Jerusalem who deceive will be turned over to the insatiable enemies so that the nation may be sanctified for a blessing (29:1-24).

The rebuke is given for trusting in allies rather than in the LORD in the time of chastening, which is designed to bring about faith (30:1-22).

The people should turn from allies and trust in God who alone can bring down Assyria (31:1—32:20).

Judgment will fall on the enemies of Israel but there will be great privileges for the believers in Israel (33:1-24).

Further Messages of Judgment and Promise (34:1—35:10)

The destruction of Gentile power will certainly come to pass (34:1-17).

The blessing of the redeemed is to see the kingdom of peace and prosperity, physically and spiritually (35:1-10).

The Book Of Hezekiah (36:l—39:8)

**The Deliverance of Judah (36:1—37:38)**

The invasion of Assyria and the blasphemy of Rabshekah challenges their faith (36:1-22).

The encouragement of Isaiah in the time of mourning at the reception of the letter from Sennacherib prompts a prayer that leads to victory (37:1-38).

**The Deliverance of Judah’s King (38:1-22)**

The king’s life is extended through prayer.

The king offers a song of praise for his deliverance.

**The Deliverance of Judah into Babylon’s Hands (39:1-8)**

The pride of Hezekiah displays the treasures to the king of Babylon.

The prophet announces the Babylonian captivity.

**The Book Of Comfort (40:1—66:24)**

**The Promise and Purpose of Peace (40:1—48:22)**

The prologue of the Book of Comfort announces the coming of God to Zion and the encouragement that that brings to the people (40:1-31).

The exhortation of God over the raising of the Persian deliverer, over His promises, and over the folly of idols (41:1-29).

The Servant of the LORD is raised up by the incomparable God, causing praise to Him (42:1-25).

The Servant of the LORD will be regathered because they are His people and all will see His sovereign acts (43:1—44:5).

The ability of God over idols to control history because He is the living God: the establishment of Cyrus as His shepherd and anointed servant, bringing the Gentiles into submission (44:6—45:25).

Because of the weakness of the gods of Babylon, that power will be destroyed (46:1—47:15).

Based on these prophecies, the LORD exhorts Israel to note the oracles, remember His love, and prepare to flee from the captivity (48:1-21).

**The Prince of Peace (49:1—57:21)**

Messiah brings light and restoration: light to the Gentiles when Israel rejects; restoration to Israel at the appointed time (49:1-26).

Israel is put away over her sins, but the Servant of the LORD is obedient and by His suffering can comfort the weary (50:1-11).

Chosen Israel, the promised nation, should look in faith to the LORD for another return to the land (51:1-16).

Israel should awake because dominion will replace slavery since God has come to rule in Zion (51:17—52:12).

The Suffering Servant: blessings of redemption come to the nation and grace for the Gentiles (the next two sections) because (in this section) the Servant will be exalted from the lowly place by His death on behalf of the sins of the people as a reparation offering (52:13—53:12).

The people of God, therefore, will be blessed with redemption and dominion (54:1-17).

Grace will be extended to all (Gentile) sinners who trust in the LORD (55:1—56:8).

Among the redeemed in the kingdom, wicked leaders and corrupt idolaters will not be found (56:9—57:21).

**The Program of Peace (58:1—66:24)**

In view of the false and ritualistic worship in his day, the prophet looks to the coming of Messiah in light and the turning of people to Him (58:1-14).

Israel, condemned for her depravity and sinfulness, will be converted by the Redeemer in Zion with the covenant through the Spirit (59:1-21).

There will be blessings of glory for Israel and access for the Gentiles—following a short period of affliction (60:1-22).

Messiah will be filled with the Spirit of the LORD to fulfill the work of redemption and deliverance in the Messianic age (61:1-11).

The prophet, wishing to see the promises of glory fulfilled, prepares and calls the people to God, who will defeat all enemies (62—63).

In response to the mercies of God for His people Israel, the nation will confess its sin, calling for a demonstration of God’s power (64).

In response to the prayer of Israel, judgments will purge the rebels from Israel and prepare the remnant for the consummation of the ages with a new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem, in all its peace and prosperity (65:1-25).

The LORD God will be worshipped in sincerity and shall comfort the remnant in the great day of redemption (66:1-24).

### The Text of the Book of Isaiah

#### The Hebrew Text

The Masoretic Text of the book is by far the superior text type, even though it retains the difficulties and archaisms of the language. The major concern has been the relationship of the Qumran material to the MT.

There are about twelve fragments of Isaiah in the Qumran scrolls, the main one being 1QIsaa (Qumran, cave 1, Isaiah scroll A). This scroll is dated about 200-175 (early second century B.C.) by Birnbaum, which is supported by the study of other Isaiah scripts and from paleography. Since the Masoretic Text was finalized around 900 A.D.,[2](http://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-study-book-isaiah" \l "P110_19019) one can see the importance of these early scrolls. In studying the material, Orlinsky concluded that the Qumran scroll of Isaiah was closer to the MT of Isaiah than to its contemporary Greek version of the book (the so-called Septuagint, abbreviated LXX). Millar Burroughs notes that there are thirteen major variants from MT in 1QIsaA, but many of them are wrong and should be rejected in favor of the MT readings.[4](http://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-study-book-isaiah" \l "P112_19962)

The scroll 1QIsab is the Hebrew University manuscript of Isaiah. It covers from chapter 38 to the end of the book, with a few gaps, and other fragments. This manuscript is even closer to the MT. It dates from before 70 A.D. at least. It appears also to have been corrected to bring it into conformity to the MT.

#### The Greek Text

The Greek translation of the Isaianic material was not done all that well, probably not because the translator(s) did not know the language, but because there was a preference for smoother readings. Ziegler tried to produce an eclectic text, which is readily available to students in the standard edition of the LXX edited by Rahlfs (the Goettingen edition). The Cambridge Septuagint on the other hand (eds. Brooke and McClain) used Codex Vaticanus (B) throughout, and then offered variants to the readings.

#### English Translations

Translations are the shortest forms of commentaries; they range from tight, literal translations to free paraphrases. It is often helpful to consult translations to see the way the text has been interpreted. To do this well, however, would require some facility with the Hebrew text; but if you are not able to do that, then the better commentaries will have to be used.

The Authorized Version is still superior to many that are out today. It was a remarkable piece of work given the manuscripts that they had. You might wish to look at the New King James Version which modernized and corrected the AV but retained its essential nature. It is very good for public reading.

The Douay Version has undergone many changes like the AV. This is almost like the Vulgate of Jerome.

The Old Revised Version (1883-1885) is good for the original text as well as textual criticism and philology.

The Emphasized Bible can be helpful as a good window to the Hebrew; it marks the commentary work of Delitzsch.

Moffett, Old Testament in 1926, and the complete work in 1933, is written in everyday English. It was influenced by Deissmann, using the common language of the people. It is old line liberal, offering emendations without notice, but fresh and literal.

The Revised Standard Version of 1952 was a very conservative translation with regard to text, grammar, and philology, especially in comparison to other translations. It does resort to higher critical ideas, but usually puts the changes in footnotes. The big change was that they tried to put the Semitic view forward; they thought that the text was not always Messianic where it had been so interpreted, that the AV had read much of the NT back into the text. They simply tried to see what the original writers saw; but they have little emphasis on one mind, the unity of revelation leading to Christ. It ended up with somewhat of a skeptical American viewpoint. But in grammar and syntax and philology, good.

The Berkeley Version is very good.

The Confraternity Version is a revision of the Douay, but very good. The Phillips Version is a reworking of the Moffett edition, with little in it that is fresh. The Amplified seems awfully confusing; it is not always clear which words are being added to the text, and there is a wide range of meanings in some of the variations. The Living Bible is rather “liberal” in its free renderings, and inconsistent in that at times it almost preserves the AV; however, this should change since it is in the process of complete rewriting by a large number of scholars.

Most students are familiar with the ASV of 1901, the NASV, the NIV, and the NRSV, all of which are useful in studying the text. Hebrew students have liked the NASV because it provides a very literal translation, using the standard definitions in the lexica. It is, though, too literal and stilted. The NIV provides the balance for it; it is frequently free and interpretive.

The Jewish Publication Society’s TaNaCH Bible is also helpful. “T” stands for the Law (Torah), “N” stands for the Prophets (Nebi’im), and “Ch” stands for the Writings (Chetubim).

The modern exegete must look at a few of the most recent or the best translations to get a feel for the way scholarship has understood the text and rendered it into English. The people who have worked on these are the people who teach in the Seminaries and Universities within the areas. Also, if you make a great deal of use of the Book of Common Prayer, you will have to check the translations of the Psalms and the bits of Isaiah.

### Higher Criticism of Isaiah

Higher criticism deals with the date, authorship, and integrity of the book, as opposed to lower criticism which focuses on textual variations in the manuscripts.

#### The Title (Isaiah 1:1)

Is the title in Isaiah 1:1 the title of chapter 1, or chapters 1-12, or chapters 1-66? This, of course, will be the involved discussion on the next several pages. But several considerations here lead to the conclusion that the title was meant to be the heading for the entire collection:

1. The title verse mentions all the kings under whom Isaiah prophesied. It is similar to Micah 1:1, Hosea 1:1, and other superscriptions of prophetic collections. They all name the kings in full—apparently for the whole book. The contemporary Micah was addressed to Judah and Samaria; but Isaiah was addressed only to Judah. Hosea, another contemporary, was addressed to the reign of Jeroboam II (Hosea 13:8 would not recognize usurpers).

2. The heading is parallel to the way that other prophetic books are written.

3. Ezekiel 1:1 is a contrast to the pattern; Isaiah 2:1 is written for a small section of the prophecy.

4. A major objection is that parts of the book are not written to or about Judah or Jerusalem (e.g., chapter 13 for Babylon and Edom). But these other oracles are recorded as they pertain to Jerusalem and Judah. Otherwise they would not be there.

5. Chapter 1 is a prologue for the whole book, and not the chronological beginning of the oracles. It sets forth the major themes that will be heard throughout the collection. Ewald called it “the grand arraignment.”

#### The Description of Isaiah as Revelation

Isaiah is immediately described as a “vision” or “revelation.” The Hebrew *hazon* (pronounced *khah-zone;* from *hazah*) is a synonym for the ordinary word *ra’ah*, “to see,” in passages like Psalm 58:9, Psalm 11:7, and Canticles 7:1. But it can mean “see” in a super-sensory way, in a visionary trance or ecstatic state, such as in Numbers 24:4. As a noun the word describes divine communication. The Hebrew word *dabar* (pronounced *dah-var*), meaning “word, event,” is the thing that the prophets usually saw (see 1 Chron. 17:15 where the subject is “words” without implying actual sight). Thus, the book is “The Revelation of Isaiah”—a divine communication through the prophet Isaiah.

The prophets occupied a unique position in God’s program. They had inter-communication between heaven and earth. At times the prophets entered into the heavenly court in their spirits, saw the heavenly scene, observed the future plan, had the mind of God, breathed the Spirit of God, or spoke the message of God. They may have been caught up consciously in the spirit to such visions, or they may have simply preached a sermon based on the Law, and their words were inspired by God to reveal not only the current needs but also the future. Consequently, through all this they were recognized as speaking for God; they had authority to appoint kings or depose kings, priests, and even other prophets. For our interest, however, they wrote Scripture, the revelation of God that was binding for all people of all times—their immediate audience, and future generations as well—including us! They interpreted history (past, present, and future); they called people to repentance through moral prophecies; and they often lived out their messages through their life circumstances. When they foretold the future, even though their audiences might not have lived to see it all fulfilled they took courage in their faith to endure what they were facing. Their messages were powerful and precise, both for their moral preaching and their future predictions. Only in certain respects does the New Testament spiritual gift of “prophecy” compare with the office and function of the classical prophet in Israel.

When the prophets spoke, they spoke the Word of the LORD. But they had to pass the two tests laid down in the Law (Deut. 13 and 18). First, their pronouncements had to harmonize with the Torah. Deuteronomy 13 says even if they came with signs and wonders, if their words did not harmonize with Torah, they were to be removed. Deuteronomy 18 says that what they predicted had to come to pass. This is the second test. Even if some of their predictions lay off in the future, there were enough predictions from them that were current and therefore authenticating. We must also keep in mind that some of the non-writing prophets, an Elijah or an Elishah, did not predict much, but did give the word that certain things were about to happen—according to their words. If a prophet was proven false, no one need fear that prophet, even if employed by a king who had defected from the faith.

It should be stated, though, that the true prophets often declared the Word of the LORD in peril of their lives. Jesus Himself lamented that Jerusalem had slain the prophets. And, of course, He would be numbered among them.

#### The Authorship of the Book of Isaiah

The issue of the unity and the authorship of the Book of Isaiah is a very complicated issue; many modern scholars have accepted the view that there is multiple authorship for the book, although most people trained by them probably have very little idea of the complicated ideas involved because they never studied them, never read the literature on the other side. And, this is true of those trained in the traditional view; they probably cannot defend their position because they never studied it thoroughly nor read material on the other side either. And, I suspect that this will be true of you too; you will formulate some conclusion without having studied in great detail the arguments on both sides, or without reading the literature—which is voluminous.

In the following outline of the issue I have listed the basic arguments. I myself remain unconvinced that multiple authorship is the only or the best solution to the difficulties in the book. The acceptance of one Isaiah is not a view that I consider a major tenet of my faith, but it is what I find still the most compelling for all the data.

The use of the Old Greek is one of the most difficult tasks in exegesis, for it requires a working knowledge of Old Testament Greek as well as Hebrew. Rahlfs Septuagint gives the text, but almost no apparatus. For that one has to turn to Ziegler’s work. The Cambridge Septuagint is available in both the technical critical edition, as well as in the edition that offers the Greek and an English translation beside it. If one wants to start working with this material, then both of these texts should be used: the column OT Greek at least gives a translation, but since it is simply codex B, Rahlfs would have to be checked to see if the critical text agreed with B. Fields’ work on the Hexapla may also prove helpful since it will list the Hebrew, the Latin, the Old Greek, and any Greek recensions that change the Old Greek. It is a complicated work, but has a wealth of information in it that would be otherwise unavailable to most students.

This, in itself, does not necessarily mean that the whole book was written by the same person, but that the title was meant to reflect that view. When the title was added to the collection is unknown; but in general prophetic works could not be admitted to the canonical collection if anonymous.

## How the Sovereign LORD God Prepares His Servants Isaiah 6:1-13

Isaiah 6 records the “call” of the young prophet to the difficult task of preaching a message of judgment to the nation. This incident focused his ministry and prepared him for it. It may be best to say that the elaborate material recorded here actually looks at how the sovereign LORD inspired the young prophet for service. The revelation of the glory of the LORD was the foundation; it led to a response of confession, which brought cleansing, which in turn enabled him to hear the Word of God, which carried a commission to preach the message.

A few notes of caution are in order, because this passage is so widely used today. First, Isaiah already was a prophet, so this is not actually a “call” to become a prophet, but a call to a new direction in service. We shall have to be careful how we use that word, or how we define it. It is a call to a new and more difficult task that had to be performed.

Second, your exposition will have to be very careful in its correlation and application. Very few people have seen in this life what Isaiah saw—the pre-incarnate Christ (cf. John 12:41) in glory. We work with passages in God’s revelation that describe this heavenly scene with now the risen Christ in glory. That will be the foundation and inspiration of ministry and service today. Passages like 2 Corinthians 3 and 4, and Revelation 1, then, become rather significant in our correlation with the New Testament. Many basic themes that we find here will surface there. There must be a supernatural basis for ministry, or we shall not endure the suffering, opposition, discouragement, and hardship that follows. Paul says that he kept his focus on eternal things, things heavenly and spiritual—the eternal weight of glory. But if you try to apply this passage to say we must see this exact vision, even if you use the words figuratively and rhetorically without defining them, you will make an impossible barrier.

Third, the substance of the message is the negative or dark side of the good news. Perhaps this is why speakers usually leave it out, and simply stop with “Here am I, send me.” It was a message of judgment, of warning; they were not going to believe. And Isaiah really did not want to deliver it. So we shall have to consider why this is in the passage.

The setting of Isaiah 6 is the year 742 B.C., if our chronology of the death of Uzziah is accurate (and seems to be, given a year or so variance). Uzziah had been a good king (and there were so few of them). But in his latter years he became proud and usurped the role of priest, and God struck him down. With his death the hopes of many probably seemed dashed. Good King Uzziah was dead—and his wicked son would now take over! But on that occasion God broke through and revealed Himself to Isaiah. The young prophet may have been closing down things in the temple, and as the shadows crept across the temple precincts the flash of glory broke through and the prophet entered into the vision of the heavenlies—he could look past the curtain, past the holy of holies and into the sanctuary in heaven.[8](http://bible.org/seriespage/how-sovereign-lord-god-prepares-his-servants-isaiah-61-13" \l "P156_35958) The king was dead; but Isaiah saw the King! Kings come and go; but in a theocracy the LORD reigns eternally from heaven. He is the One whom we must please. He is the One who cleanses from sin, or strikes with judicial blindness those who persist in rebellion. He is the Holy One of Israel, and those who believe in Him will be the remnant, the holy seed, the future of the promise. The impact of this vision was overwhelming! In seeing the LORD of glory, the prophet saw himself, and the nation. As with Moses on Mount Sinai, Job hearing God from the whirlwind, Paul on the road to Damascus, or John on the Isle of Patmos, the young seer was changed forever with this vision.

### Introduction: Exegetical Expositional Process

I shall use this passage to work through the exegetical expositional method, at least in survey form. You will get a better idea of how some of the steps fit together. For more explanation of the method, and examples, see my commentary on Genesis, *Creation and Blessing*, published by Baker Book House. Also the same method is used throughout the Book of Leviticus in my forthcoming commentary *Holiness to the LORD* (due out by June, 2002)..

#### A Close Reading of the Text

The first thing to do is verify the exact wording of the text that you think is the best rendering into English. Without Hebrew you are at a decided disadvantage—you have to trust the work of others more than you might wish to do. Select one good modern translation as your working base and then choose two more to work through line by line to compare translations. Where they are merely switching synonyms or stylistic arrangements you need not pause; but where the ideas are different, note them. Then, as you study the passage, decide which is the best (not which you like best) and change this base text accordingly. Observe:

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 seraphim, each with six wings:

with two 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 of Hosts,

the whole earth is full of His glory.”

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholdsshook,

and the temple was filled with smoke.

“Woe to me,” I cried. “I am ruined.”

“I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips,

for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts.”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand

he had taken off the altar with tongs;

with it he touched my mouth and said,

“See, this has touched your lips,

your guilt is taken away, your sin atoned for.”

Then I heard the voice of the LORD, saying,

“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

Then 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?”

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.”

#### A Preliminary Analysis of the Structure

As you go through the passage several times, watch for structural markers and subject matter changes. Begin by jotting a word or two description in the margin and bracketing off the sections. In narrative you will have to watch for clauses that advance the narrative as opposed to subordinate and descriptive clauses. In poetry you have to label each line of poetry and then group the similar ideas. Some of the commentaries may help you, but be sure to be ready to challenge their arrangements.

I have already done some of this in the above translation layout. Already the development of the passage begins to come clear. The first four verses describe the revelation of the LORD in glory. Verses 5-7 describe the response of the prophet to the vision and the remedy for that response. Then, beginning with verse 8 we have the dedication of the prophet to ministry with the instruction about what he should say. As more and more exegesis is done in the passage, the wording of the points in the exegetical outline can be refined. But at the outset this preliminary wording can help express the contents of the sections. Now, as I study through the passage for the meanings of words and for the figures of speech, I will be able to sharpen the focus of my rough divisions and write an exegetical outline.

#### A Determination of the Meanings of the Words

As you work through passages you will begin to discover that there are key theological words that must be explained, or difficult and problematic words that need solving, or basic words along the way that are unclear but not that crucial to your exposition. List the words in these groups, prioritize them, and then do as much research on them as time permits. The more word studies that you do, the less you will have to do because they keep repeating; and the more that you do the easier they become.

In Isaiah 6 there are several words that need to be clearly understood by the expositor. Of primary interest will be the words *qadosh*, “holy” (both in the trisagion and in “holy seed”); *kabod*, “glory”; *tame’*, “unclean”; *`awon*, “iniquity/guilt”; and *kipper*, “atone, expiate.” Of additional interest for rhetorical purposes would be the words *mille’*, “fill”; *shama`*, “hear”; and *shalakh*, “send.” In the process of studying you will also have to define the words such as “Lord,” “king,” “seraphim,” “temple,” and the like. But, as already stated, since the revelation of the **glory** and **holiness** of the LORD are basic to the **cleansing** and the **call**, I would make these my focus.

You will have to make use of whatever resources are available to you; a good word study book or two would be most helpful, provided you can use them and find the discussions of the critical Hebrew terms.

#### An Analysis of the Poetics of the Passage

Now you must determine which words are figures of speech, what the figures are, and what the meanings of those figurative uses of those words should be. With practice you will do this rather quickly—off the top of your head. But here at the beginning you will have to think them through carefully. It will be like trying to get your car dug out of a snow drift—sooner or later you either get your car dug out or the snow melts! That was an extended simile by the way.

You should even classify idioms in a passage, because people do not know what they mean—they were originally figures of speech that became common expressions. To say something is “idiomatic” does not help clarify the meaning.

One of the values of going through this process—even if you do not get the correct figure of speech—is that you are forcing yourself to think more about the words and their meanings. For Isaiah 6, which does not have as many figures of speech as other Isaianic oracles, the following words would have to be explained. See how you can do with this list (interpreting in the context, of course):

“I saw the LORD seated upon a throne”

“and the train of his robe filled the temple”

“and with two [wings] they covered their feet”

“Yahweh of armies”

“the whole earth is full of His glory”

“Woe to me”

“I am a man of unclean lips”

“with it he touched my mouth”

“Whom shall I send?”

“Be ever hearing but never understanding”

“Make the heart of this people calloused”

“see with their eyes and hear with their ears”

“But as the terebinth and the oak leave stumps”

“the holy seed”

“will be the stump in the land”

#### Writing the Exegetical Outline and Summary

Now we probably have enough information to refine the wording of an exegetical outline. It will be written in full sentences that are descriptive of the content of the passage. Do not spend an inordinate amount of time here; you are simply trying to write clear sentences in which you express your understanding of the verses. But do not whip (figure!) over it too fast or write things that are too general. And do not leave the figures of speech in the outline, unless they are easily and readily understood. And for you perfectionists, do not make the outline twice as long as the passage.

**I.** Revelation: When the king died Isaiah saw the LORD reigning in glory, being attended by the angelic praise of His sublime presence, and filling the temple with the evidence of His majesty (1-4).

**A.** Historical reference: The revelation occurred when the king died (1a).

**B.** The prophet was allowed to see into the heavenly sanctuary (1b-4):

1 He saw the LORD reigning from on high with all His glory.

3 The angels attending Him covered themselves while flying and crying out their message:

4 They proclaimed that the LORD was incomparable.

4 They announced that His presence and His importance filled the whole earth.

4 The temple was shaken to its doorposts and filled with smoke at their voices.

**II.** Sanctification: When Isaiah acknowledged his sinful condition in the presence of the LORD he was forgiven immediately (5-7).

**A.** Isaiah confessed his unworthy condition before the LORD and bewailed his lamentable state (5).

**1.** He lamented his ruin because what he said was common and base.

**2.** He only realized his sinful condition when he saw the King, the LORD who has all powers at His disposal.

**B.** One of the seraphim intervened directly to take away his guilt and to remove his sin (7).

**III.** Dedication: When Isaiah heard the call of the LORD to go, he immediately obeyed and was commissioned to deliver a message of judgment (8-13).

**A.** Isaiah heard the voice of the LORD prodding him to take the message to the nation (8a).

**B.** Isaiah immediately obeyed the call (8b).

**C.** Isaiah was given a message of judgment (8c-13).

**1.** God told him to declare a message that people would not believe because they were spiritually blind.

**2.** God told him to do this until judgment was complete, until nothing was left in the land.

**3.** God encouraged him that there would be a remnant of righteous believers that would remain.

As you write the summary statement you will have to decide which part of the passage is to receive the primary focus—and become the independent clause of your statement. This is critical, for your exposition and application will center on this. It could differ depending on the audience and occasion of the message; but usually it will be what the author intended. Messages could take different views on this and still be exegetically sound, as long as the context governs the interpretation.

Start by writing the main points together:

(I) When the king died Isaiah saw the LORD reigning in glory, being attended by the angelic praise of His sublime presence, and filling the temple with the evidence of His majesty. (II) When Isaiah acknowledged his sinful condition in the presence of the LORD, he was forgiven immediately. (III) When Isaiah heard the call of the LORD to go, he immediately obeyed and was commissioned to deliver a message of judgment.

Now we need to work on this. Start by editing the sentences so that they are concise. Then, decide what the independent clause will be, and how the others relate to it.

Now the summary of the passage might look like this:

*When Isaiah saw the LORD reigning in glory, being attended by angelic praise of His majesty and shaking the temple with His presence, he acknowledged his sinful condition, received the forgiveness of sins, and obeyed the call of the LORD to deliver a message of judgment.*

At this point in my approach I madeIsaiahthe subject of the sentence because it is often easier to make the transition to the exposition and application with the focus on the human. That is not to say that the revelation section is less important. It is most important, since it begins the chain reaction: revelation leads to awareness of sin, awareness leads to confession, confession brings cleansing, cleansing enables hearing, and the hearing leads to the commission. There would be no response of Isaiah if there had been no revelation. But in summarizing the contents of the passage I chose to subordinate the first section and focus more on what resulted from it. I might reword this in the expositional section, but that would depend on my purpose in the sermon.

#### Formulating the Theological Idea

Working with the summary statement just written, and with a knowledge of the passage in mind, I now condense the ideas and edit the sentence to produce a propositional theological statement that is biblically sound and true from age to age. This step will be easier in the Psalms and the Prophets than in Narrative, Law, or Wisdom literature, because the material is obviously devotional or sermonic, and the points made pretty much universal in their scope. The setting might be different, but the ideas standard—faith, prayer, obedience, confession, and the like. This theological summary should capture the main motifs of the passage; and it must be worded in a way that is true to the original setting and true to the current audience. To do this it is helpful to substitute more general words for the specific (that is, moving up the ladder of abstraction but staying in the categories): “believers” or “covenant people” instead of “Israel”; “pagans” or “unbelievers” instead of “Assyrians”; “worship” in place of “festivals in Jerusalem” or “making sacrifices,” and so on.

There may be other theological points that surface for individual verses or sections along the way, incidental to the main point; these can be brought in too. But the theology you are trying to state should cover the whole passage.

It may be that the theological statement may be the same as the homiletic or expository statement. That is fine, because it is the timeless truth, the theology, that must be preached. But I have found that a sermon idea that is more condensed and worded rhetorically, in a memorable way, is far more affective. Of course, understand that we are not reducing the sermon to one sentence. We still expound the whole passage. But the sermon idea enables us to keep our focus on the unity of the passage and the purpose of the message—how it all fits together and where it is going.

As is clear by now, the main theological motifs of this passage are the revelation of the sovereign majesty of the holy Lord with all the attending circumstances, the confession and cleansing of the prophet’s sinful condition, and the inspiring and commissioning of the prophet to proclaim the LORD’s message. If I word these in the form a theological statement, it might read something like this: When people perceive the revelation of the LORD’s sovereign majesty in glory they become convicted over their sinful condition; when they acknowledge their sin, they find cleansing; and when they are sanctified, they respond obediently to the call of God. I could use this as a sermon idea because it is a sentence that captures the movement of the passage. But if I do not, at least I have expressed theologically the teaching of the passage.

#### Developing the Expository Idea and Outline

The procedure to be followed now for the sermon idea and the main points of the exposition (and sub-points if possible) is simply a continuation of the editing and shortening. For the main idea I can keep the theological statement, unless it is too long and cumbersome. Here I would find it rhetorically better to make it more concise and direct: **The revelation of the Lord in glory transforms the lives of God’s servants and inspires them for service.** The exposition will “flesh” this out so that each section of the passage reflected here will be fully explained and related. Having written the summary and the theology, it is easy for me to explain the text. But this point keeps me focused.

Now I take the main points of the exegetical outline and go through the same process of editing, condensing, and abstracting, to get expository wording. My fuller exegetical and theological statements will come in handy as I get into the exposition and wish to explain the sections. Here again I want to make the points positive, powerful, and precise; but I also want to stay tied to the text—it is the message of the text, not my message loosely connected to the text, that is the substance of what I must say. This is exegetical exposition.

You probably will have New Testament correlations, or systematic theology correlations, already in mind by now. You can keep them close at hand while working on the wording of the message, but be careful not to read that material into the text, or make your outline a New Testament outline (“Jesus died for our sins” is not the best way to express the sermon point that Isaiah is making when he is cleansed with coals from the altar, even though ultimately, theologically, that would be true).

For the exposition of Isaiah 6 these points are workable for exposition—short, easy to understand and remember, and theologically accurate. Others are also workable, but these will illustrate the difference between the exegetical outline (above) and an expositional outline. They are:

**I. The revelation of the glory of the Lord uncovers sinfulness.**

**II. The acknowledgment of sinfulness brings forgiveness.**

**III. The removal of sin inspires obedience to God’s call.**

However the points are worded, they must be expressed clearly in the oral presentation. People need to know where you are in the exposition, and what you are saying about those particular verses. The points and the transitions must be clear.

#### Correlation of Scripture

If you have not done so before, you now need to find other passages that teach the same theology, whether in the Old Testament or New. But you always want to include a New Testament text to show that the theology is timeless. You may not find one that does all that this passage does; you may need to join a couple to cover the different sections. But do not use a large number of passages, unless you are correlating them step by step along the way. By bringing New Testament texts from the epistles to bear on your passage, you are safe-guarding that your theology is correct. It may also be wise to make sure that your theological ideas are correct and correctly stated—you may need to check good systematic theologies.

With Isaiah 6 we shall not find many passages that are on the same level. This is a rather dramatic event—not a normal vision (if we may speak of visions as normal). This parallels Moses on Mt. Sinai speaking to God face to face, Paul being caught up into the third heaven, and John seeing the risen Christ on the Isle of Patmos. So it will be important to say that while it is possible God could let one of us see this heavenly scene, it is not very likely—it never was normative. So we shall have to look for “lesser” parallels—but even saying that is risky, because I do not want to minimize any revelation. One of the best passages, however, is 2 Corinthians 3 and 4. It is about Paul’s ministry, how he was able to endure a difficult ministry with all kinds of troubles and persecutions. At the heart of it is his statement that when we see Christ in the Word of God, as in a mirror, we are transformed into that same glory, by the power of the Spirit. Therefore we will be inspired to obey the call to minister, keeping our eyes on eternal things, the weight of glory, and not on temporal things. That works well for most of it, but does not express much of the forgiveness of sin. For that I would relate other passages where the response to revelation is conviction of sin, whether Moses, Job, the disciples, or others. I am using revelation in a specific sense here. I could broaden it to mean Scripture, but it seems better in correlation to talk about those portions of Scripture that reveal the risen Christ, or the Lord in glory.

If you are following a lectionary for Scriptures for a service there will be several passages grouped together for that particular day. Since Prayer Books do this, it is helpful to show the congregation how they relate, **if they do**. I personally do not try to construct a sermon using all the passages as if they were a unit. To me that runs contrary to the basics of exegesis. Nor do I try to deliver three short homilies in sequence to cover the passages. There is not the time to prepare or deliver three. What I will do is preach on one of them—a contextual, exegetical exposition. Where the other passages have clear links, I will allude to them or incorporate them incidentally and significantly.

#### Writing an Effective Conclusion

Two errors exist with regard to conclusions: they are ignored, or they go on forever (that was a hyperbole by the way). The conclusion may have a brief summary of the passage and a rehearsal of where you have been. This may not be necessary if it was all very clear and interesting. Keep it short and powerful.

But it must have precise applications. This step is sometimes very difficult, and often is the undoing of an otherwise good message. Be able to say what you want people to know and to believe as a result of this message; and be able to state what they should do. Do not make long lists—just a couple of things in each area. Do not simply apply the material mentally; words for “thinking, recalling, realizing, remembering” and the like are not as good as using words for “doing” in the applications, even though a good number of messages leave it there. For Isaiah 6 I could certainly include instructions to spend time in studying the Scriptures that portray the glorious Christ, to respond with conviction and humility to the revelation of God (never suppress the proper response to God’s revelation) to confess sinfulness and maintain an ongoing sanctification, and then to obey the commands of God to proclaim Him, whether the message is popular or not.

#### Writing an Effective Introduction

Now I am ready to write the introduction, because I know where I am going. The introduction must capture the attention of the audience, create or uncover a need in them that this passage will address, and make them want to listen. Do not, I repeat, do not start out with the historical background or a description of the events of the passage. That is one of the most ineffective ways to begin. And do not take up two or three minutes explaining that if you had more time you could do a better job.

Once again, introductions like conclusions do not need to be long; shorter ones are most effective—if they are powerful and clear. Of course, if they are not powerful or clear, long ones are merely painful.

#### Drafting the Exposition

I would think writing a draft of the sermon will be most helpful for you to gauge where you are and how much time you can devote to the different things that need to be said. Working through wording on paper also helps you be able to say things more readily when speaking.

But I do not think you should write a draft in order to read it from the pulpit. That is one of the worst things you could do in preaching or teaching—unless you have had lots of training in script writing and public reading (which means you will have memorized most of it anyway). Personally, I would much rather hear direct speaking than reading, even if it means some of the things that were intended did not get said. The direct approach of speaking will mean that what you do say is easier to understand and retain.

### Exposition

After you have spent some time working through the passage you should have plenty of ideas in mind—more than can fit in one Bible class or sermon! The following notes are meant to supplement the discussion and reinforce the main ideas. I have inserted my expository outline here, using topical headings before each main point for an easy overview: Revelation, Sanctification, Dedication, and Inspiration. You will notice that I decided to make a fourth point to cover the subject matter of message. It could have been left under the third point, but this seems also to work well.

#### I. Revelation: The revelation of the glory of the LORD uncovers sinfulness (6:1-5)

##### *A. The LORD reveals His glory (1-4).*

Verse 1 begins the report of the heavenly vision in the year that King Uzziah died. Several points from the Hebrew text need to be noted here. The first would be the use of the verb “saw” (*wa’er’eh* from *ra’ah*); this is not the word for the “seer” of visions, but the ordinary word “to see” or look at something. This suggests Isaiah is very much awake and physically observing this sight.

The object of the sight is “the Lord”—*’adonay*, and not the personal name Yahweh (which would be rendered “LORD”). The term signifies lord or master, the sovereign. The term “sitting” (*yoshev*from *yashav*) when used of God is an anthropomorphism; it means “rule,” that is, sit enthroned above. The word “throne” is actually used here; in other passages it must be understood.

The exalted nature of the Lord is presented to us with “high” (*ram* from *rum*) and “lifted up” (*wenissa’* from *nasa’*). The physical description of His location, part of the anthropomorphic vision, is also symbolic of His nature as the “Highest”—an expression often used in the Bible for absolute sovereignty. The symbol of sovereignty, “his train,” completely fills the temple. Such is the dominance of the Lord of Glory.

Verse 2 introduces the angels. The term for angels in this order is *seraphim* (from *saraph*, “to burn”—”are they not all flames of fire?”). These are attending (literally, “standing about/over him”) the LORD as ministering servants. Their description focuses on their wings (Hebrew uses a distributive construction: “six wings, six wings to [each] one); each angel had six wings. Two covered the angel’s face—such is the nature of God that even angels blush to look at Him—two covered their bodily parts (probably a euphemism, feet meaning their central body), and with two they flew. The vision is similar to Ezekiel’s

Verse 3 reports what they cried continually to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of Armies; the whole earth is full of His glory!” This line needs a lot of attention. It is the central and turning point of the passage (as well as a prominent part in liturgy).

The word for “holy” is *qadosh* (s.v. *qadash*). A study of this word shows that it means “distinct, unique, set apart.” It does not mean “righteous”; but we use the word “righteous as well as all the other attributes to explain what holy means (i.e., in what way is God distinct from us, from angels, from pagan gods?). The description of God as holy is a major theme in the Book of Isaiah. If I may simplify it, it means there is no one like the LORD in the universe. The threefold use of the term is a Hebrew way of expressing the superlative degree—He is incomparably holy. This *trisagion* (as it is called, Greek for thrice holy) may harmonize with the later and full revelation of the tri-unity of the Godhead (Isa. 48:12); but it does not in itself teach the trinity.

The expression “Yahweh of Armies” must be understood. The armies are all armies—earthly or heavenly. They are all at His disposal. The use of this epithet usually introduces a judgment theme.

The other key word in here is “glory” (*kavod* from *kavad*). The basic idea of this word has to do with “weight, being heavy”; metaphorically this becomes “be important.” To describe God as glorious, if I may run the risk of oversimplification again, means that He is the most important person in the universe. The physical manifestation of His presence, the “glory of the LORD,” is metonymical for Him Himself. The words of the angels assert that the whole earth is filled with the evidence that Yahweh is the sovereign God of the universe. Isaiah’s vision concludes with the note in verse 4 of the effects of the Presence—the place shook, and was filled with smoke. This imagery is drawn from Mount Sinai and the Sanctuary.

##### *B. The vision convicts God’s servant of sin (5).*

Verse 5 gives the typical response of one who sees such a scene—struck with the knowledge of one’s own sinfulness. “Woe is me.” Hebrew “woe” (‘*oy*) is a wail of lamentation. It is an expression that cries out of distress, that all is lost, that grief will overtake; there is nothing that can be done.

The key word in here is “unclean” (*tame’*). The better that you know the Book of Leviticus the better you will understand this. It comes from the temple liturgy and ritual. To be “unclean” need not mean “sinful”; but it does mean off limits, out of bounds, unacceptable in the presence of God because of physical, earthy nature and contaminations. The focus is on the lips (here a metonymy of cause)—what he talks about is perhaps good, clean, and normal; but it is not as holy as the angels’ speech was. Question: What will we talk about in the presence of the LORD? How will our conversations change? The Bible has so much to say about speech, how it is a window to the heart. Isaiah, and the nation, are not fit to enter the Presence of the LORD—their speech betrays greater problems.

This is a critical section. Isaiah is probably the finest in the land. People often compare themselves with others and come out looking fine. The standard, however, is the glory of the LORD. There is an old saying: If you have never caught sight (literally or figuratively) of the Sublime, you have never really seen yourself.

#### II. Sanctification: The acknowledgment of sinfulness brings complete forgiveness (6:6,7).

The next stage in the preparation of God’s servant is sanctification, sanctification that was inspired by the vision of the glory of the LORD. What is described in verses 6 and 7 is a symbolic act; it signifies that the sin was removed. We know this is symbolic because never in the sanctuary was sin removed by searing the lips with a coal from the altar. What reality there was to this we may only surmise—it is unlikely that an angel actually took a coal and touched his lips. This is a heavenly scene and the heavenly correspondent to the coals is meant; the coals were the instrument of consuming the sacrifices that became the sin offering. The point is that the prophet was cleansed by direct divine intervention. The focus is on the lips because they represented the sinfulness of the prophet. The prophet was cleansed; the people, however, had yet to hear the word, confess, and be cleansed.

The meaning of this act is clear from the end of verse 7: “your iniquity has been removed, your sin atoned.” The term “iniquity” here probably includes all three of the categories of meaning it has—sin, guilt, and the punishment for the sin. The critical word to define here is “atoned” (*t*e*kuppar* from *kipper*). A careful study of this word and its usage will reveal the meanings of “expiate, pacify, atone.” There is a homonym—exactly the same spelling of the root—that means “cover over.” Unfortunately, in many studies and many sermons the two have not been kept as separate words, and the idea that atonement only covers over and does not expiate has become popular. No. The sins were removed; the person was forgiven. The point here is that Isaiah’s sins were forgiven; God will not bring them up again. (The only thing that Old Testament believers did not know, and could not know, was who would ultimately pay for these sins, since they repeated sacrifices. But God knew, and on the basis of that perfect sacrifice [which, by the way, was from before the foundation of the world] He could guarantee forgiveness. They had His word on it).

#### III. Dedication: The removal of sin enables obedience to the call of God (6:8).

Verse 8 records the commission of the prophet in response to the Word of God. The first verb is fraught with significance: “Then I heard” (*wa’eshma`* from *shama`*). The conjunction is a “*waw* consecutive” that expresses the sequence: this hearing follows the preceding sanctification almost with a “so that” or “and then.” A valid point can be made that one cannot “hear” the call of God until there is sanctification. Once one is forgiven and walking with Him, one can hear His voice through His word. One has to be on speaking terms with God.

The parallelism of the word of the Lord (not LORD) is forceful: “Whom shall I send, and who shall go for us?” The call passages in the Bible all use the verb “send”; it expresses divine authentication and enablement for the mission, usually accompanied by the divine Presence. Unless the Lord sends, one cannot go with any authority.

For discussions of “for us” you can go back to the several treatments in the commentaries, and back to Genesis. It has been interpreted to mean the Lord and the angels, which is possible; it has also been taken as a plural of majesty for the Godhead that allows for the later full revelation of the nature of God.

Isaiah’s response? “Here am I, send me.” You probably will not have the time to do much with this, since the other parts are so important. And that is fine since this is easily understood. But “here am I” is a bold break-through response: “Look—me!” And then the verb is repeated, “send me.” Not “I will go.” That would be presumptuous. But “send me,” an imperative, is a request for the divine authority that goes with the mission.

#### IV. Inspiration: Obedience to God’s call will proclaim the Word of God (6:9-13).

The message in these last few verses is a message of judgment. You will have to take a little time to show that God warns sinners of judgment. He does this in order that they will repent and become part of the “remnant”—the holy seed (rather than the “seed of evil-doers” of 1:4). This generation had persisted in sin for so long that God was going to judge them. And he will begin to do this by hardening their hearts at the hearing of the Word of the LORD, just as He did Pharaoh of old. The theology of this is heavy: if people live under the influence of the Scriptures and continue to reject its message, Paul says that God gives them up. There is a point of judicial rejection. We do not know when that is, so we can not say; we keep on preaching. Isaiah was told in his case. And then it was the actual preaching of the Word of God that hardened them even more. We can see that even today when the Word offends even the ones who appear “religious.”

Lancelot Andrewes said it very well: “It is not our task to tell people what they want to hear; we must tell them what in some sad future time they would wish they had heard.”

Isaiah is not happy about this; it is much nicer to have a positive message. But the positive message is meaningless if there are no “teeth” in it. Both in the prophets and in the ministry of Jesus there is the same refrain, “repent or perish.” The denial of judgment, the rejection of the idea of Jesus’ death being atonement, begins with the denial of sin and evil. Modern theologies cannot explain evil, let alone resolve it.

Isaiah had to preach this until all the cities were laid waste and the judgment complete. The preaching of it was a call for repentance. Join the message of chapter 1 with this call and you can see that Isaiah 1:18 is a big part of the warning oracle. Jonah knew this; he knew that the LORD was compassionate and merciful, whereas he—Jonah—wanted the sinners wiped out.

The end of this passage refers to the “holy seed” (*zera’ qodesh*); the term “seed” is a hypocatastasis for people, here characterized by holiness. Terms like “seed” and “generation” are used this way to describe a segment of the population. This “seed” is distinct (holy) from the rest of the population. It is only a remnant.

The Bible often uses the (implied) metaphor of the tree for the nation or the kingdom of God. Israel was the tree; but because it bore no fruit, it was cut down (exiled). There was only a stump left—the righteous believers who kept the covenant alive. Isaiah will develop this image further by showing that a small branch, a tender shoot, will grow out of the stump, and become a great king, and restore the nation to its glorious heritage.

### Conclusion

Isaiah was thus commissioned to go and preach the Word of the LORD to the nation, a complete message that would not overlook sin, hardness of heart, judgment and sorrow, but a message that would hold out the hope of glory. And before the prophet could preach this, he had to experience it. So I have worded my main expository idea of the passage: ***The* *revelation* *of* *the* *Lord* *in* *glory* *transforms* *the* *lives* *of* *God’s* *servants* *and* *inspires* *them* *for* *service*.**

Of course the applications now have to be made. Naturally, we want to say people need to be sanctified and hear the Word of the LORD for He might be calling them to service. But we have to go back to the revelation to begin the applications. One cannot go and have a look at the LORD in glory; instead today we have the revelation of it in Scripture, many times over. My first application would be that one should meditate on those passage frequently, and that vision of the glory of the LORD, the risen Christ, will convict and inspire. The correlation in 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 helps us here. In chapter 3 Paul says that we (believers) look into the Scriptures as in a mirror and behold the glory of the Lord. But since it is a mirror it reflects and so we are changed into that glory (this idea could cover the point of sanctification in Isaiah 6). Then, in chapter 4 he lists all the hardships of the ministry, but concludes that focusing on the eternal weight of glory enables him (and us) to endure.

Growing out of this is the second application: when the Word of the LORD convicts us, we must not cloak our sin but confess it so that we may be open to His will. Sanctification must be the response of meditation in Christ, otherwise we harden out hearts.

A third application might be that we are His servants. We must be willing to go where He sends, and to speak what He wants us to speak. It may not be popular; it may not be what we would like to say. But we are to proclaim the Word of the LORD.

It helps to remember that the earthly sanctuary where the glory of the LORD dwelt on earth was the one spot on earth where heaven and earth touched, where the Lord could be enthroned in the earthly and the heavenly spheres as the same time.

You will have to decide at the outset if you are going to stay with the traditional translation “the LORD” instead of using what is really in the text, “Yahweh.” It does not matter, but which ever you use you will have to explain frequently.

Lancelot Andrewes preached to the courts of Elizabeth I and James I; he was personally responsible for the translation of Genesis through Samuel in the Authorized Version. I have modernized his words here for easier understanding.

## Israel’s Ungrateful Rebellion and Yahweh’s Gracious Invitation Isaiah 1:1-31

The first chapter of the book serves as a general introduction to all the writings in the collection, including it in most of the themes of the book. The chapter falls into four sections: the indictment of Israel’s sin, the rejection of their hypocritical attempt at reconciliation, the gracious invitation of Yahweh, and a lament over the state of the nation. The first three sections form a natural unit with a culminating invitation; I would use them as the substance of the message. The fourth section could be a fourth point, or an epilogue, or it could be alluded to and drawn in while discussing the first point (this works pretty well homiletically).

Several things in general need to be made clear about this passage. First, the literary form and vocabulary of the passage is that of a legal context. God is bringing a formal indictment against the nation. The passage invites comparison with other legal texts (especially the so-called *rib* passages, Hebrew *rib* [pronounced *reev*] is a legal dispute or lawsuit). Second, the setting of the passage appears to be a festal gathering when all the people assembled in the area of the Sanctuary to pray to God to protect them from their invading enemies who are closing in on them. We may go so far as to suggest that this gathering was the Feast of Tabernacles, for the passage mentions “booths” (*sukkot*), the oil of the fall harvest, and begins with a reflection on the way that the Book of Deuteronomy ends—a book that was to be read at the Feast of Tabernacles. At such an assembly the people would look for words of comfort from a prophet near the end of the services, but this was not what they got—rather, a stern rebuke and call for repentance. Third, the historical setting seems to be the invasion of Sennacherib of Assyria. The events take place in the last part of the eighth century, B.C. Samaria was destroyed in 722 by Sargon and Shalmaneser.[12](http://bible.org/seriespage/israel%E2%80%99s-ungrateful-rebellion-and-yahweh%E2%80%99s-gracious-invitation-isaiah-11-31" \l "P337_78072) Sennacherib invaded the land several times, and according to his account of the third campaign he destroyed 46 cities, carried off 200,000 people from Judah, imposed a heavy tribute on the land, and locked up Hezekiah in the city of Jerusalem like a bird in the cage. This passage certainly offers a picture of such devastation in the land of Judah. So the event may have been the invasion of 701 B.C., or thereabouts, by Sennacherib of Assyria. Isaiah will preach that the nation deserved this catastrophe because of its sin.

Whenever we study this kind of material we must keep in mind the spiritual situation, otherwise our applications will be off. Israel was a theocracy, the “people of God” as they were called; the whole nation, whether believers or unbelievers, were under the Law of Moses and accountable to it. In the Law there were sections of blessings and cursings that were held out to the people. If there was sufficient sin in the nation, sin persisted in collectively, then the nation would be destroyed and sent off into exile; if there was continued obedience by a sufficient number, then the blessing of God would be poured out on them. We may use the analogy of Sodom and Gomorrah (for Isaiah does). If there had been ten righteous men—sufficient to have a congregation or at least a religious community with a witness—then the cities would have been spared. As it was, there were only a few believers and they were hardly an influence over anyone. So the cities were destroyed. As long as a faithful remnant existed, Isaiah would see hope for the blessing of God.

Please note, the audience of Isaiah would be made up of true believers who walked with God (and who would then have to suffer because of the sins of others), true believers who were not walking with God (and therefore God’s actions to them would be disciplinary), unbelievers who pretended to be righteous and looked pious on the surface (God’s actions to them would be judgment if they did not repent), and unbelievers who left no doubt about their idolatry and sin and had no intention of repenting (if they did not repent, God would purge them from the nation). I suggest that often you will have all four types in most congregations or groups when you speak; so how should the message be directed? We cannot treat them all the same. So we make separate applications: the Babylonian captivity was a catastrophe: to the unbeliever it was divine judgment that purged them from the earth and began their eternal fate; to the sinful believer it was divine discipline meant to bring them to their knees (if they remained alive); to the believers who had not done anything to warrant this, it was a call to suffer on behalf of others.

This chapter is a call for repentance to all who needed to repent. That would include the last three groups, but probably be focused on the last two mostly, for it is speaking of the reprobate and the hypocrite. Now if you are teaching this passage to a modern congregation made up of fairly devout evangelical Christians, you will have to adjust your application, for they are not reprobates that God is going to purge from the nation. Your message may simply be that we should be proclaiming to the world what Isaiah has proclaimed in this chapter. Or, if you like, you might focus on obedience (at the end of the chapter) as evidence of repentance and as condition for further blessing. But if you still wished to call for repentance, you would probably say that this passage warns even us as to the results of sins persisted in or cumulatively held, and of the worthless nature of hypocritical worship. It can be a call for repentance, but if the audience is a group of covenant members, true believers, the “or else” part of your call for repentance will be different than if they are not believers at all. Their salvation may not be in jeopardy, but their service to and fellowship with God will be. A believer who repents of sin restores a relationship with his or her God; an unbeliever who repents and avails himself or herself of the grace of God finds forgiveness and passes from death to life.

In other words, we must harmonize our exegetical ideas with general theology—the covenant is an eternal covenant, but participation in it requires faith and obedience. Once a person enters covenant with God, that relationship is secure. The problem of sin takes a different approach than with the non-covenant member. So when you read Isaiah and he addresses the nation or the people of God, do not assume he means by that they are all true believers. Most were not. And when you make your applications from such a passage, you will have to specify how the text is to be applied to different types today. In fact, this kind of precision with exegesis and theology and application is just what this experience in Isaiah will require.

In the following discussion of Isaiah 1 I have included my **exegetical** outline. Note that it is written in historically descriptive sentences that summarize the contents of the verses. In the expositional section I shall demonstrate how I would turn them into expository points. Writing the exegetical outline is important for two reasons: (1) it forces you to stay tied to the text, so that in forming your expository points you will reflect these very ideas; and (2) when you are preaching or teaching a passage, as you turn to the text after introducing your expository point you can use a summary statement like this to begin your comments or analysis of the section. If you do develop exegetical syntheses, no matter how rough, the development of expository points is much easier. Most teachers and study leaders skip this step as unnecessary, and that is a pity because of all the steps it helps you to put in your own words what the section is saying, and that brings clarity to any Bible study.

Here is the exegetical outline of Isaiah 1:2-20 (the first three sections only since they are the critical part of the theology of the chapter).

**I.** The Indictment: The prophet announces that Israel’s ungrateful rebellion against the LORD has pervaded the nation and brought painful ruin to the land (2-9).

**A.** God summons the nation to answer for its sins (2a).

**B.** God charges the nation with complete sinfulness (2b-4).

**1.** They have ungratefully rebelled against the LORD who brought them into existence (2b,3).

**2.** They are completely sinful (4).

**C.** God pleads with the nation to end the devastation in the land (5-8).

**1**. The prophet portrays Israel as a sick man who is completely ruined by sin (5,6).

**2.** The entire land has been devastated by an invasion (7,8).

**3.** Only God’s grace kept the nation from complete annihilation (9).

**II.** The Wrong Remedy: The Sin of Israel has rendered their frantic attempts to worship and pray to God unacceptable and detestable to God (10-15).

**A.** God calls Israel to attention again (10).

**B.** God denounces Israel’s frantic attempts to approach Him for help (11-15).

**1.** Their sacrifices are purposeless and therefore displeasing to God (11).

**2.** Their assemblies and celebrations are vain and therefore repugnant to God (12-14).

**3.** Their hypocritical prayers remain unanswered (15).

**III.** The Divine Solution: Those who turn from their wicked ways to learn to do what is right will find complete forgiveness and blessing from God (16-20).

**A.** God calls the nation to turn away from evil and begin doing what is right, i.e., to show true repentance (16,17).

**1.** They must change their minds and their actions about evil (16).

**2.** They must learn to do what is right in society (17).

**B.** God promises complete forgiveness for sin for those who will accept His offer to settle the dispute (18).

**C.** God promises blessing for obedience and punishment for disobedience (19-20).

Now that we have a workable exegetical outline, the next thing to do is to write a summary of the whole passage in one good sentence. This forces us to condense the ideas in a way that can be easily summarized, but it also forces us to decide where the center of the message will be. Here I will take the third section as the main focus; therefore, the wording of the other two parts will be as subordinate clauses. I simply take the three Roman numeral points, write them together as a sentence, and condense. My exegetical summary of 1:2-20 is as follows:

*Having announced the painful ruin that Israel’s sinfulness has brought, and having rejected the hypocritical worship they frantically tried to offer, the LORD offers to all who will truly repent complete forgiveness for sins and blessing for obedience.*

Now, it is a fairly simple step to take the summary and the exegetical points and transfer them into more useful expository points. This means they will be worded as timeless truths, and not historically descriptive statements. But the wording must be true to the original context as well as to our situation. So in the following discussion of the verses I have inserted a workable expository outline. I say workable because it can always be improved, or it may be worded differently depending on the situation—but it always must fit the original setting as well.

### Exposition

#### I. Corrupting sinfulness leads to painful ruin (1:2-9).

So you see, this kind of a point is not talking about people back there, but about a principle that still applies. And by wording it this way I have brought the modern audience in to hear what the prophet said to the ancient audience. I could leave in the catch-word “Indictment” but that will come out in the exposition anyway, since this is a legal dispute. My exposition will explain what their sinfulness and their ruin was, and then show in other times, including ours, the kind of sin and the kind of pain that must be remedied.

##### *A. Rebellion against God is ignorant and arrogant (2-4).*

The passage begins with God’s summons of the nation to judgment with an indictment against them for their ignorant and ungrateful rebellion against Him. In these verses there are a few things that need comment.

Verse 2 is the call to judgment. Israel is accused, God is the Judge and the Plaintiff, and “heaven and earth” is witness. This last expression is a merism for the whole universe. Everything in creation will witness this. Compare Deuteronomy 32:1 as well as Psalm 50.

The general statement at the outset is that they have “rebelled.” *Pasa`* is the critical word here; it warrants a word study because it seems to summarize the charge against them. It often describes a political or military rebellion. So it describes sin that is open aggression, wilful rebellion. It is, by the way, the same word David uses in his great confession of sin in Psalm 51.

The contrast is with the beneficence of God who reared and nourished them as children (the figure of hypocatastasis is being used); the verbs *gadal* and *romam* could also convey “made great” and “exalted.” They were dependent; God had brought them up. But they rebelled. In addition to their sins we may add the sin of ingratitude as well.

Verse 3 shows that their sin was ignorant. The parallelism of this quatrain is beautifully balanced: the two halves are antithetical, but the two parts in each half are loosely synonymous. The ox and the ass contrast with the people of God who do not “know” (*yada’*) or “consider” (*bin*). It is significant that the words “owner/creator” (*qoneh*)and “master” (*ba’al*) are juxtaposed with the animals, not the people, as if to say they have rejected their creator and lord (a fact to which all creation will witness).

Verse 4 is the full catalog of the “rebellion” of Israel. I would note that there are here seven expressions for their sin, signifying how complete or all-consuming it was. The main words for sin are used here. “Sinful nation” uses *hata’*, missing the mark; “people laden with iniquity” uses *‘awon*, the term for departing from the standard or turning aside (and including the other metonymically derived ideas of guilt and deserved punishment); “seed of evil-doers” makes use of the word *ra’*, the word that portrays the pain that sin causes; and then there is the expression “children who are corrupters,” the key word being *shakhat*, corrupting, ruining, destroying—a term used for God’s destruction of Sodom. The other three expressions are clear enough: they forsook Yahweh, they provoked the Holy One (*qadosh*, a critical term in Isaiah), and they have gone back, spiritually as well as politically and economically.

Their sin was all-consuming and corrupting. Their various acts fit all the biblical descriptions of what sin involves. But in your exposition you will have to specify. The way to do that in this chapter is to look at the last part and see what Isaiah is telling them to do (such as, take care of the widow and the orphan); those will indicate what these general terms are getting at that they had not been doing.

##### *B. Rebellion against God brings complete ruin (5-8).*

Verses 5 and 6 give us a personification of the land as a beaten and bruised man. The reality of this description will be the devastation described in verses 7 and 8. I would not spend a great deal of time here, other than to explain what the verses mean. I would note, though, that there are again seven descriptions—an introductory clause and then wounds, bruises, sores, and then three negative descriptions of not being pressed, not being bound, and not mollified. It is a complete ruin. It is also worth pointing out that a word like “sick” (*holi*) again shows up in Isaiah 53 where the LORD removes infirmities vicariously.

Verses 7 and 8 stress the theme of devastation (*shamam* used twice) at the hands of foreigners (*zarim* used twice). The effect of the invasion is expressed in three similes that describe the ruin left over: the villages[17](http://bible.org/seriespage/israel%E2%80%99s-ungrateful-rebellion-and-yahweh%E2%80%99s-gracious-invitation-isaiah-11-31" \l "P386_92732) are like a booth, a lodge, and a besieged city.

##### *C. Divine interventions prevents complete judgment (9).*

Verse 9 introduces the image of “Sodom and Gomorrah” into the oracle. The figure is simile; the effect of the simile is an allusion to Genesis 19 in which the cities of the plain were wiped off the face of the earth. God did not permit that for Jerusalem. See the historical books to understand why.

#### II. Hypocritical worship compounds sinfulness (10-15).

This section describes the frantic worship of people in crisis, but they are unrepentant people and so their efforts are hypocritical and therefore totally loathsome to God. In this section we learn that the sinners Isaiah has just described are actually present in the sanctuary trying to call on God for help.

##### *A. The address condemns the “worshipers” (10).*

In verse 10 Isaiah calls the leaders of the people of Israel “rulers of Sodom and Gomorrah.” The figure is hypocatastasis, making an implied comparison between the two. The Hebrews are no different. This chapter does not limit the sin of Sodom to social injustice, although that was part of their sin. All the terms in this chapter describe the people of Israel and the people of Sodom alike—they were corrupt and corrupting, self-indulgent and indifferent, perverting and perverse. Genesis 19 focuses on what manifestation such an attitude takes: if one’s quest is self-gratification, then the responsibility of righteousness is jettisoned for self-gratification.

##### *B. Hypocritical worship is completely rejected by God (11-15).*

Verse 11 affirms that their offerings are unprofitable. The threefold description is that they are useless (“What to me?”), have no purpose (“vain,” a term used in the Decalogue), and give God no pleasure. The rejection is cast in the form of a rhetorical question to begin with, an erotesis, the name for rhetorical questions.

Verse 12 states that their very attendance in the service was not welcome. The verb “trample” (*ramam*) is literally “stampede”; “Who required you to stampede my courts?”—like a bunch of wild animals. “Stampede” is an implied comparison again; and the question is another erotesis.

Verse 13 details the rituals they perform as hypocritical and therefore detested by God. Their *minkhah* is vain (*shaw’*, worthless, vain, to a false purpose); their incense (a metonymy of adjunct for prayer) is an abomination (*to’ebah*, off limits, a tabu); about their assemblies the text quotes the LORD as saying, “I cannot - “ and gives no completion for the sentence. Cannot what? The figure is aposiopesis, the sudden silence, sudden breaking off of the sentence because of intense emotions and frustrations. He concludes by saying it is all iniquity; here the word is *‘awen*. But note that hypocritical worship is not merely worthless—it is iniquity.

Verse 14 describes their feasts as wearying to God and hated by Him. The verb “hate” (*sane’*) includes both the ideas of rejecting and feeling dislike for something. To say “my soul” hates is to say this feeling and decision comes from deep down inside. It enhances the hatred.

Verse 15 completes this section with a note that their prayers will not be answered. The four cola include two that are figurative and two that are literal. “Spread out your palms frantically” is the metonymy of adjunct; the reality is prayer. “Hide my eyes” is the anthropomorphic expression; will not answer is the reality. The reason? Their hands (metonymy of cause) are full of blood (metonymy of effect or adjunct). Their activities have destroyed other people and so their prayers and presence are unacceptable. Violent sin cannot be overlooked by fervent acts of ritual and worship; God will not tolerate hypocritical acts of ritual.

#### III. Only genuine repentance brings complete forgiveness (16-20).

These verses need less work in the exegetical studies than most of the preceding ones did, for they are rather clear, painfully clear to most readers. They make the offer of full forgiveness, but the offer is based on genuine repentance, that is, a change of attitude and action, turning from sin and learning to do good. Positive acts of righteousness are called for because they will indicate whether or not there is true repentance.

Verses 16 and 17 give nine admonitions to the people. But they use parallelism and they include figurative and literal expressions, so the nine can be condensed: “wash you, make you clean” are taken together as the general summary for the repentance and forgiveness (“wash” is the hypocatastasis, and “make clean” is the metonymy drawing on Temple ritual from Leviticus); “put away the evil of your doings, cease doing evil, learn doing good” is the threefold call for the change of life that follows forgiveness (“good” is that which enhances, protects, and promotes life; it is the opposite of “evil” which brings pain and ruin to life); and the last four admonitions are specific calls for how to promote and protect life: “seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge [vindicate] the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow.” Such instructions of championing justice in society were common in the ancient world, for they depicted both justice and mercy. These would be examples of a change toward righteousness. One thinks of various biblical examples, such as Zachaeus, who restored far more than he defrauded—that was evidence of true repentance. So these commands are clear; but you need to correlate other passages where they are mentioned, or where such acts of righteousness are also meant to display a change of heart.

Verse 18 tells how this life-changing forgiveness will take place. God will change their lives if they truly repent and confess to Him. The verse is one of the most beautiful in all Scripture. We need to look at it closely:

“Come now and let’s settle this dispute, says Yahweh,

*l*e*ku-na’ w*e*niwwak*e*hah yo’mer YHWH*

Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be white as snow

*‘im yihyu khata’ekem kasshanim kassheleg yalbinu*

“though they be red like crimson, they shall be like wool.”

‘*im ya’dimu kattola’ katstsemer yihyu.*

The order of the verse reads literally like this:

“though / they be / your sins / like scarlet /

like snow / they shall be white;

though / they be red / like crimson /

like wool / they shall be.

Here we have the repetition of two similes to stress the point being made. In addition, the word order makes the contrasts within these lines more glaring: the two nouns which form the contrasts meet in the middle, and the first and last cola use “they will be” while the second and third use the Hiphil forms of the verbs of color.

The emotional and intellectual connotations of the words used are striking. The “scarlet” (*shani*) refers to the highly prized brilliant red color produced from the *Kermococcus vermillio Planch* to produce the famous red dye (Sanskrit *krmi*; Persian *Kerema, kirm*; Pahlevi *kalmir*; Hebrew *karmil*; and our “carmine” and “crimson.” See also Persian *sakirlat* and Latin *scarlatum*). There is great symbolism in the Bible for colors. In the Book of Revelation, for example, the Great Whore is in purple and scarlet while the Saints are in white. Why does Isaiah use red for sin? Dreschler suggested it meant bloodshed—a blood stained garment enwrapping the sinner. Delitzsch interpreted it as a fiery life that was selfish and passionate, a life characterized by wild tempestuous violence. These ideas may well have been in Isaiah’s mind. At least we may say that red signifies that which is most conspicuous and glaring.

In contrast to the scarlet and crimson is the whiteness of wool and snow. Not only do these terms represent purity from the cleansing from sin, but they convey the sensations of softness and freshness. The emotional overtones of peace and tranquility offset those of violence and passion.

Verses 19 and 20 conclude the call for change with the alternatives for their responses—blessings and curses. If they turn and obey they will “eat” the good of the land; if they refuse and rebel they will be “eaten” by the sword. The idea of eating is first literal, although it would be metonymical for eating and dwelling with the best that God gives; it is then figurative for death by the sword, a hypocatastasis.

### Conclusion

Now that we have a good idea of the meaning of the message in the original setting, and have worked out the wording of the expository points, we must develop the entire exposition, determining what needs to be discussed and how much discussion on the important points is necessary. In adapting it to our modern situation, we do not want to leave the original context behind. The main theological ideas always must fit the original situation as well as our modern setting. So exact exegesis must be properly explained and correlated with the New Testament.

It is important that you be able to state your theological idea in an effective expository affirmation—in one good sentence. This sentence will be drawn from your summary statement of the passage (joining the major points into a paragraph and condensing them to one sentence), but in the process must be turned into a clear statement. Why do this? It forces you to be focused in your message. It forces you to be contextual in your message. It forces you to be clear in your message. It forces you to decide what the main point (of the three) is and how the others are to be subordinated to it. For this passage something like this will work: ***Genuine******repentance****,* ***and******not******hypocritical******worship****,* ***brings******God’s******complete******forgiveness******for******any******and******all******sin****.* Now, as you speak you can keep the central point of the passage in sight and make sure everything contributes to that end.

Note, even if you do not teach, you should be able after a Bible study to express what the passage is teaching in a clear and direct way. This skill will help you to become an articulate Christian.

Correlation with other Scriptures and specific applications will now be more easily developed because you know what your passage is teaching. Now you can write a conclusion and an introduction to it, because you know what the chapter is all about, and how you want to use it.

It will be fairly easy to correlate the New Testament with this passage, because it presents the basic doctrines. I could use a few clear teachings of Jesus here. For the first part on sin, I could use, “Unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.” For the second part on worthless worship, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (—straight out of Isaiah anyway). And for the third point, with a little definition I could use, “Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

My application would then specify what they should believe about sin, about the provision of grace, and about the futility of works of righteousness without forgiveness. What should they do? Repent (defined as turning away from evil and toward good) and seek God’s forgiveness.

If I am speaking to a predominantly Christian group, I might have a different application, focusing on the good works that will bring blessing to those who have been forgiven. Titus 3:1-8 works very well here, for it explains that we were sinful as they, but we have been washed, we have been sanctified, and now must demonstrate our faith by good works of righteousness. All the major motifs of Isaiah 1 can be found in that passage.

Of course, most modern critical scholarship does not believe that Deuteronomy was written or available until 621 B.C.; some might say its contents were being preached earlier.

Sargon was the king of Assyria who invaded the land. He died while the siege of Samaria was in full force in 723/722 B.C., and Shalmaneser succeeded him and finished the job.

Subsequent oracles will be from earlier times in Isaiah's ministry, even when the northern kingdom is still in existence. So this oracle was selected as the introductory one because it hit all the major themes of the collection.

See the work by Gerhard Hasel, *The Remnant*. This is a doctrine we shall have to look at seriously in these prophetic oracles.

This word is difficult for there are two homonyms in the language, one means possess and the other create. Since they are spelled exactly alike, the context must determine which it is.

Jerusalem is the Queen City; the daughters of Zion are the villages all around. So there is an implied comparison between daughters and villages.

By "clear" I mean passages that I could quote in conjunction with Isaiah and not have to spend time explaining them.

‹ How the Sovereign LORD God Prepares His

## A Call for Faith and the Sign of Immanuel Isaiah 7:1-25

### Introduction

The oracle given to King Ahaz in this chapter has occasioned so many discussions and views that one hardly knows where to begin. But if we stay with the major ideas and probable interpretations we shall find a straightforward interpretation and a powerful message. It is a message that challenges our faith. Is our faith strong enough to see us through crises? Are we secure in our faith? If not, perhaps we do not fully understand the Word of the LORD or the confirming sign He has given.

The historical setting is critical to the account since the prophet supplies it and the oracle draws on its timing. With a close study of the events referred to we may date the oracle in this chapter to 734 B.C. On the throne in Nineveh is Tiglathpileser III, a ruthless and powerful king. Syria, the ancient Aramaea, with its main city in Damascus, and Ephraim, the northern Israelite state, with its main city Samaria, united to form a coalition against the kingdom of Judah with its capital in Jerusalem. Ahaz, Uzziah’s unbelieving grandson, was on the throne in Jerusalem. When he heard of this coalition that was made to replace him with one Tabeel, he sought support from Tiglathpileser (Pul in the historical account) against them. The Book of Kings actually says that Ahaz was a “son” of Pul, that is, a political dependent. The alliance and its costly tribute was foolish, because the Assyrian king was going to destroy the northern coalition anyway. Isaiah came to warn Ahaz that only Yahweh could guarantee safety.

The prophecy of the chapter is amazingly accurate. The sign that a boy was about to be born is the pivotal point. Before he would be old enough to tell right from wrong, that is, about 12 years old, the enemies would not only be defeated but cease to exist. According to history, Shalmaneser V (the successor to Tiglathpileser) campaigned against the land and besieged Samaria. He died in the duration and was succeeded by Sargon II who completed the destruction of the northern state in 722 or 721 B.C. So the oracle in Isaiah 7 could be dated about twelve years before that destruction in 722 B.C.

Then, in line with Isaiah 7:18 the Egyptians and the Assyrians filled the land in their war with each other. Devastation from this war severely tested the people, so that nothing grew in the fields, and the survivors had to rely on curds and honey. This led up to and included the invasion of 701 B.C. under Sennacherib, the next Assyrian king, when Hezekiah was on the throne in Jerusalem, and 200,000 people from Judah were carried off into captivity. As we shall see, the details of the Assyrian crisis are very accurately prophesied in these oracles. You may find it helpful to read Brevard Childs’ little book on *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis,* or as a general work, Eugene Merrill, *A Kingdom of Priests.* The details of Isaiah’s prophecies as well as the images he uses are very precise.

The chapter can be divided into three sections, as most commentators and translations indicate. The first nine verses record the words of encouragement offered by the prophet; verses 10-16 introduce and elaborate on the sign of Immanuel; and verse 17-25 go on to predict the invasion of Assyria. The sequence is clear: God was able to prevent the northern coalition from invading if Ahaz would believe, and God was willing to give a sign to guarantee it; but since Ahaz did not believe, God announced that there would be a glorious future for the Davidic family, although the immediate generation would not share in it, and the present land would be devastated by the Assyrians and Egyptians.

#### Outline

The following is a workable exegetical outline—it is still rough (I chose to leave it that way to show that it need not be polished to be workable) but it will at least enable us to describe the contents of the passage. This kind of an outline helps us to put in our words what the lines and sections are saying.

**I.** When the northern alliance terrified Judah with plans to invade, Isaiah assured the king of Judah that he would be completely safe and secure—if he would believe (1-9).

**A.** The king and the people of Judah were terrified when they heard of the impending invasion (1,2).

**1.** Syria and Israel warred against Judah but could not take it (1).

**2.** At the news of their alliance the people of Judah were terrified (2).

**B.** God sent Isaiah to encourage Ahaz that the plot would not succeed and that he would be secure—if he believed (3-9).

**1.** God sent Isaiah and his son (named “A Remnant Will Return”) to meet Ahaz when he was checking the water (3).

**2.** God assured the king that their plan to replace him and divide his land would not succeed and that they would be destroyed (4-9a).

**a.** Nothing would come of the plan to replace him.

**b.** Israel would not even exist in 65 years.

**3.** The prophet warned the king that he would not survive if he did not believe (9b).

**II.** Although Ahaz would not respond with faith for a sign, Yahweh announced the sign of the birth of Immanuel to show that the threat would end (10-16).

**A.** When God offered Ahaz the opportunity to respond in faith and ask for a sign, he cleverly avoided the commitment (10-12).

**B.** With righteous indignation the prophet announced the sign of Immanuel to show that the threat from the enemies would end (13-16).

**1.** The prophet in anger condemned the way the king tried the patience of God (13).

**2.** The prophet announced the sign and its effects:

**a.** A virgin would give birth to a son known as Immanuel (14).

**b.** Before this child reached the age of accountability the danger from the north would end but the land would be ravaged (15,16).

**III.** The prophet announced that God was about to bring an invasion from Assyria and Egypt that would devastate the land (17-25).

**A.** Summary: God will bring in the Assyrians to overwhelm the land (17).

**B.** Details: God will bring in the Assyrians and Egyptians who will occupy the land and carry off people into captivity (18-20).

**C.** Devastation: The land will be so ruined that people will live among briers and thorns and have to rely on natural and uncultivated products (21-25).

#### Summary Message:

When a northern alliance terrified King Ahaz and his people, the LORD promised deliverance if they would believe; but when Ahaz failed to respond correctly, the LORD announced the sign of the birth of Immanuel in the royal family to show that Judah would survive the invasion, and to encourage the people for the greater invasion to come from Assyria.

### Exposition

#### I. Only God can provide security amidst the terrifying circumstances of life (7:1-9).[19](http://bible.org/seriespage/call-faith-and-sign-immanuel-isaiah-71-25" \l "P468_111742)

##### *A. The great crises in life terrify people (1-2).*

The first two verses lay out the historical setting. In the exposition it is here that I would bring in the international scene that I surveyed above. That would leave room, then, in the introduction to the exposition to develop a more immediate bit that would reveal or create a need for trust in the modern audience. Certainly, there are enough international crises and domestic crises that would cause fear in people. And today especially, the fear of attack by enemies has a very familiar ring to it. The point to stress here is the fear this alliance in ancient Israel caused Ahaz (and note the simile of the trees in the wind).

##### *B. The Word of the LORD ensures security if faith is present (3-9).*

Verse 3 records how Yahweh instructed Isaiah to take his son and go meet the king at the end of the conduit at the upper pool, the place where the king would be preparing for the attack. The main point here is not simply the meeting to give the king the word from God, but to stress the situation b taking the son, Shear-jashub. I would here note that in Isaiah 8:18 Isaiah and his sons are called signs; that is, like the families of other prophets, they are “incarnate words” living out the messages of the prophets. Shear-jashub (*s*e*’ar-yasub* [pronounced *sheh-ar yah-shoov*]) means “a remnant will return.” This is a loaded name to deliver to the king, for it confirms that war is inevitable, destruction will follow, but a remnant will return. The question was who would be a part of this remnant.

The doctrine of the remnant (a small part left over) was introduced in chapter 1 and confirmed as the holy seed (a group of righteous believers) in chapter 6. The point through the Scriptures is that while the covenant promises are unconditional, individual participation in them is conditioned on faith and obedience. Verse 9 will be the explanation of this theme, for without faith there will be no participation in the remnant. The boy’s name will be the focus of the message in Isaiah 10:21.

Verses 4-8 record the details of the words of comfort. God clearly says that Ahaz and the people need not fear this invasion, for it shall not happen. In fact, he refers to these two kings as “two tails of smoking firebrands” (hypocatastasis, implied metaphors)—smoldering out.

Here we have another solid prophetic connection. Within 65 years Ephraim will cease to exist as a people. Sixty-five years from 734 puts us down in the time of domination by the Assyrian kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. It was their foreign policy to mix up the nations of the lands that they conquered; they carried the Israelites off and brought in a variety of peoples from all over, so that the land of Ephraim was a land peopled with all nationalities other than the Israelites. The ones who remained intermarried with them, creating a half-breed race of people known later as the Samaritans.

Verse 9 gives us the theological lesson at the heart of the passage. We have had the circumstances, we have had the sure word from God, we will have the sign to confirm it—here is the instruction: have faith in the LORD. It is worded in a marvelous little word play put in the negative form:

*‘im lo’ ta’aminu, ki lo’ te’amenu*

“If you do not believe, you will not be confirmed.”

The Hebrew verb is *‘aman*, from which derives our “amen” (meaning “truly, so be it”). The meaning of the verb changes between the verbal systems (called stems) to enable the word play. The basic stem meaning is “to be reliable, to support”; in the *Niphal* (passive) stem (the second verb here) it means “be confirmed, faithful, sure, or trustworthy.” But in the causative stem, the *Hiphil*, the first verb here, it means “to believe,” that is, to consider something reliable, to count on it. By using the two formations of the verb Isaiah can make a powerful play on the words: “If you do not believe, you will not be confirmed.” The point is that if Ahaz did not believe this sure word from God, he would not survive the invasion and be a part of God’s program. But conditional sentences can be read the opposite way too: if he would believe, he would find security and safety in the LORD. It is put in the negative because Isaiah does not expect the king to believe.

Here in teaching this passage I would stop to bring in New Testament correlations to keep the message related to the current Christian audience. Find New Testament passages in the epistles, or perhaps words of Jesus if they are self-explanatory, that promise security in spite of the circumstances all around. “This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith”—this type of passage (there are many). This will show the current audience that we too in the New Testament age have a sure word from the Lord that in this life and into the life to come we have security in Christ—if we believe. We need not fear what mankind can do, for we trust in the eternal LORD.

If you have time you can relate this word play to the Davidic Covenant which uses the same verb to guarantee a **sure** dynasty to David and his descendants. To participate in that sure promise, however, required faith and faithfulness (“your house and your kingdom will be **made sure** for ever” … [2 Sam. 7:16]).

#### II. The sign of the birth of Immanuel confirms the Word of the LORD (7:10-16).

To encourage the king to believe, God offers to let him ask for a sign that it will happen. But the king will not even do that. So God gives a sign that tells of the future of the Davidic kingdom—without this corrupt king in it.

Verse 11 tells of the offer to the king for a sign. Observe closely that according to verse 10 Yahweh spoke to the king (we would say through the prophet); observe also the change to the plural of the verb and the pronoun. The invitation is for a sign. A good article to read on this word “sign” (here as well as for other passages) is by Stefan Porubcan, “The Word ‘*OT* in Isaiah 7:14,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22 (1960):144ff. He surveys all the uses of the word and concludes that a sign is a symbolic saying, fact, or action (also a name), wonderful or not, introducing or accompanying and illustrating, or signifying, the contents of a prophetic prediction. Here the king could name the sign, anything at all that he could think of, and God would do it.

But the king refuses to put God to the test. Verse 12 must be carefully explained. The king sounds pious; but we know from the Book of Kings that he was a wicked unbeliever. He was trapped here. If he asked for the sign, he would be submitting to the prophet; if he did not ask, everyone would know that he did not believe. So he said, “I will not tempt Yahweh.” The verb “tempt, test” is *nasah*; it is used in a number of ways, as a close study of it will reveal. If a human tempted God, it usually meant in rebellion, tempting as a challenge, coming without fear and wanting proof. Ahaz pretended piety and said he would not so test God. But God would give a sign anyway, not now to Ahaz, but to the whole House of David (note the plural “you” in the Hebrew text).

Verses 13 and 14 record the sign with a stinging rebuke that the king had wearied Yahweh with his unbelief. The sign concerns an unexpected birth through a “young woman” or “virgin.”

The Hebrew word is *‘almah* (from a root *‘alam*) with an article, “the young woman.” A careful study of this term would, I believe, yield the conclusion that it describes a young woman who is ripe for marriage; and that the term in and of itself does not mean “virgin”—the context would decide that. In this context, in the royal court, the most polite society, and certainly as a heavenly sign of God’s presence, this young woman would certainly be presumed to be a virgin. Such a woman was to have a child, and that child was to be the proof of the presence of God among His people, signified by the name *‘Immanu-’el*, Immanuel, “with us-God.” The sign would be proof that the royal Davidic household and thereby the nation of Judah would indeed survive and have a glorious future.

There are many interpretations offered for this verse, and you will have to be careful to deal with the context, the meaning of the words, and the theology of the Bible all together. I think one has to see from this prophecy two “fulfillments” (as is often the case with prophecy)—a near, partial fulfillment and a far or ultimate and complete fulfillment—because of the time references in the passage for the age of the child and the invasion. Moreover, the way Matthew uses Scripture supports this idea: he saw these old prophetic passages as partially typological, meaning that the historical fulfillment became a type of the final, full (and literal) meaning. But this opens several possible interpretations that cannot be decided altogether satisfactorily. One view takes the “wonder child” to be born as Hezekiah, the good and righteous king to follow. But he would have been born a good number of years earlier than this oracle, probably. Another view is to take the child as Isaiah’s son Maher mentioned in chapter 8. This has a certain appeal because the wording of Isaiah 8:1-4 is similar to that of 7:14, that child is called a sign in 8:18, Immanuel is repeated twice in chapter 8, and the view would give us closure, an identity in the Old Testament passage. The weakness is that the view would require the “young woman” or “virgin” ripe for marriage to be the prophet’s wife, who already had a son. Some who hold this view argue then that Isaiah may have married again—but surely this sounds contrived to fit the view. Another view is that some young princess (a virgin at the time of the oracle) who is unknown to us but known in the court suddenly married and had a child as a sign that the dynasty would continue. This fits the oracle well enough, but the weakness is that there is no closure. But of course, there is no closure anyway, for the prophet never tells who it is.

Another approach is to say that in this case there was no immediate fulfillment, only the ultimate fulfillment in Christ. But that would create all kinds of difficulties for the time limits in the context. So, you need to do some reading on the matter and decide which you prefer. I find the anonymous princess view the most plausible, and the Maher a close second.

But of course what really matters is that ultimately the fulfillment is Jesus Christ. It was also during a time of warfare and political crisis that the virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus the Messiah, as a sign that the line of David would continue, that God’s promises would be fulfilled. And there was a corrupt king on the throne at that time as well, Herod. The New Testament affirms clearly that Jesus’ supernatural birth literally fulfills the meanings of these words, meaning, they find their fullest meaning in Him.

But note carefully, the Christian doctrine of the virgin birth does not depend on the etymology of Hebrew *‘almah* as some have contended, but on the plain, propositional statement of the New Testament that Mary was a virgin and the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. That it fulfilled Isaiah 7:14 indicates that this was God’s revealed plan, and that Jesus is the Immanuel of Isaiah. His supernatural birth is one major sign that signifies that Jesus is Immanuel—in the real and true sense and not just that God is in some way with His people. The doctrine of the Incarnation is that God came into this world and became flesh; Jesus is not a mere mortal; His words are the words of God and to be believed.

At the end of His life is the other confirming sign, the resurrection. His birth is a sign of His supernatural origin; His resurrection is a sign of His supernatural nature. He is Immanuel indeed—God with us. But if we do not believe, we shall not be confirmed. Since we have believed in Him, we stand firm in all the difficulties of this life and are assured of His salvation into the life to come.

The prediction that the child will eat butter and honey (verse 15) calls for some clarification. Here we shall see that these figures could indicate something pleasant or something bad, depending on context. If you are coming out of a wilderness, eating this would be a blessing. If you had been used to all the finest foods of the land, being reduced to this would not be so good. To understand these metonymies we have to look down to verse 22 to see that eating these is a sign that the land would be devastated and nothing would be growing. So the message was that Judah would survive the northern coalition’s attempts to destroy her, but that the land was soon to be devastated. In other words, the name Shear-jashub would be literally worked out: a remnant would return means that there would be devastation, but there would be a returning remnant.

#### III. The coming judgment makes belief in the Word of the LORD absolutely essential (7:17-25).

Whether you include this section in your lesson/sermon/exposition depends entirely on how much time you have and how detailed you want to get with the text. It may be that its essential substance can be covered in part in your introduction; that means you can finish on the second point and make an easier transition into the New Testament. To go back from that high point of “Immanuel” theology and discuss the Assyrian invasion might be anticlimactic, and certainly not the best homiletical style. It is also possible that you can jump ahead and discuss this in the warning of “if you do not believe” if not in the discussion of “Shear-jashub”; the main thing is that it may be better expositionally to end up on the call for faith and the sign from God. So there are several ways to re-arrange the material in a lesson.

But it also works well to leave it in the present order—if you do not miss your explanatory transitions. Ahaz’ unbelief is the critical problem. God had offered complete security if he would believe. And he could have had a confirming sign. But he did not believe. And so God announced a sign that the Davidic House would continue by divine intervention. This sign, coupled with the faith it was meant to signify, would be necessary for the greater judgment that was coming. Doing the homily this way would require that in discussing the third section you explain that the greater judgment was coming for unbelief and that faith in the supernatural provision of God would see people through it. So we read the idea of faith and judgment on two levels—the context’s, and the end of the age.

Verses 17 and 18 introduce the invasion. The fly is Egypt and the bee is Assyria. The figurative expressions are hypocatastases (implied metaphors) to match the cultural ideas of the lands. God will “hiss” for them—an anthropomorphic way of saying He will summon them. They will come and fill every place in the land according to verse 19. The armies will fill the land.

And the invading armies will not only destroy the land, they will humiliate the survivors. Verse 20 introduces the idea of shaving. This may well be a metonymy of adjunct or of effect. The invading armies often did shave their captives and carry them off into slavery without clothing and without dignity.

And the land will be left desolate (see Isaiah 6). Verses 21-25 predict how life in the land will be after the invasion. Nothing will be able to grow or be harvested, and so briers and brambles will overtake the land where vineyards once were. People will have their animals and have to rely on them for staple products. These expressions would all be metonymies of adjunct or effect for the conditions.

### Conclusion

The message of the chapter for the time of Ahaz corresponds nicely with the timeless truth the passage teaches, and se we can word it in a general principle: ***True******security******from******all******danger******(even judgment)******comes******by******faith******in******God’s******supernatural******provision******of******Immanuel****.* There is a glorious future promised by God through the Davidic Covenant; that future is guaranteed and confirmed through a divinely appointed birth that is completely unexpected and that is proof of God’s presence. Thus, God calls people to believe His word and find security in troubling times, in this life, and in the life to come. In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son to be born of the Virgin Mary; this One is Immanuel in the true sense of the word. His birth confirmed that His word was trustworthy. Faith in Him guarantees participation in the glorious future of peace and righteousness.

The application for unbelievers is certainly the warning to believe or they will not be confirmed. The application for believers would be twofold: to gain confidence through this sign that their destiny is sure, and to share the work of the prophet in calling for others to become part of the remnant of the LORD and put away fears of the circumstances of life.

The first chapter of Luke records the visit of Gabriel to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus in fulfillment of this chapter. In that visitation three names or titles are used of the Messiah. First, the child was to be called **“Jesus”** (because He would save His people from their sins, the parallel passages add). In addition to other passages in the Old Testament, this seems to refer to the first part of the oracle of Isaiah 7, for that is a promise of salvation for the nation from the prophet Isaiah. And the name Isaiah (*yesa’yahu* [pronounced *yeh-sha-yah-hoo*])is a close approximation of Jesus (in Hebrew *yesua’* [pronounced *yeh-shoo-a*]), for it means “Yahweh saves.” And Isaiah says in chapter 8 that he and his sons are signs. The second name given is “**Son** **of** **the** **Most** **High.”** “Son” was primarily a title for the Davidic king, coming from the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7. The “Most High” draws further attention to the royal Jerusalem liturgy, for Melchizedek was the King-priest of the Most High God, reigning in Salem (=Jerusalem). So this title fits the second part of the chapter, which addresses the House of David, promising a glorious future in the birth of the king. The third title harmonizes with the identification of this child to be born as Immanuel, for Gabriel says that the one born of the woman, the virgin Mary, by the Holy Spirit, will be known as the **“Son of God.”** So Gabriel’s message draws all the themes of Isaiah 7:1-14 together in a series of names.

### References

Israel’s Ungrateful Rebellion and Yahweh’s

## The Announcement of Judgment Isaiah 8:1-22

This chapter is actually part of the whole unit that runs through Isaiah 9:7, for the end of chapter 8 is a transition into chapter 9—the gloom and despair of those walking in darkness in the north of Israel who will see a great light, the Messianic age. This passage forms the judgment part of it, the judgment leading up to the coming of the deliverer. Clearly the focus is on the destruction that took place in Samaria in 722 B.C., but includes the invasion of even Judah at that time. However, the message centers on the positive note that God will be with them if they trust in His word and hold their integrity. So even in a passage about judgment there is the direction for positive application.

Naturally, though, since this is about the Assyrian invasion of ancient Israel, some abstracting[23](http://bible.org/seriespage/announcement-judgment-isaiah-81-22" \l "P529_133424) will have to be done to make the application for today. That it was an oracle announcing a judgment for their sin makes it somewhat easier to bring across to New Testament teachings. In the final correspondence between this passage and the New Testament application, the New Testament announces an impending eschatological judgment on sinners throughout the world, beginning with wars in the latter days before Christ comes. But it is also possible to say that God uses such means as personal, national and international crises to judge sinful peoples even today, before the end of time. In either case, the only hope people have is the hope that Isaiah had to offer—to make the LORD our fear and to believe in His word and to hope for Him. The two alternatives are here in this chapter—the LORD is either our sanctuary or our stumbling stone—He is Savior or Judge. Paul rightly says that the Gospel was first revealed in the prophets, for this is basic to all subsequent revelation.

The expositor will have to determine how much of the chapter should be treated to get the message fully across. I would think that even if all the chapter is not included in the outlined exposition, it will all have to be brought in somewhere as part of the contextual discussion. It may be necessary not to deal with the last section about spiritism—and the point of the chapter can still be made—but that section does portray the wrong source of security, the antithesis of fearing, trusting and waiting on the LORD. Verse 18 makes a logical stopping point for the second major section, because it affirms the faith that is sealed by the signs. In this set of notes I shall outline and discuss the whole chapter. I believe I would deal with all three sections in a homily, but my major emphasis (and more time) would be on the second section. It is also possible to do some rearranging for rhetorical purposes: the first section lays out the crisis, then the last section shows the wrong approach, and then the middle section shows the right approach and the danger of missing it.

Here is a rough arrangement of the outline that could be developed to describe the contents:

**I.** Through the symbolism of the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the prophet announces the swift invasion of Assyria that would exile the northern kingdom, but only besiege Judah because it was protected by God (1-10).

**A.** By writing the oracle and by naming his son as a sign, Isaiah prophesied that Assyria’s invasion would be swift and complete (1-4).

**1.** God instructed the prophet to write in a public place the description of the swift plunder that was coming (1).

**2.** The prophet had a son and named him for the oracle of the swift plunder that was coming shortly on the land (2-4).

**B.** The prophet announced that because the people had defected in their allegiance, God was about to bring the Assyrian army to judge the land (5-8).

**1.** The people had rejected the peace of Jerusalem for military alliances outside the land (5-6).

**2.** God was about to bring the Assyrians to exile the northern kingdom and cover the land of Judah (7-8).

**C.** By challenging the invading army to do all they might, the prophet affirms the triumph of Judah because God is with them (9,10).

**1.** He challenges Assyria to invade and fight (9).

**2.** It will not work because God is with them (10).

**II.** The prophet warns the people that if they panic in the crisis and do not follow his example and fear and trust the LORD, then they will fall in the war (11-18).

**A.** The prophet warns the people that if they do not fear the LORD they will be lost (11-15).

**1.** The prophet himself was warned not to panic like the people were doing (11-12).

**2.** The prophet learned and proclaimed that the LORD was to be feared and sought for security (13-14a).

**3.** The prophet warned that those who refused would be quickly destroyed in the invasion (14b).

**B.** The prophet demonstrated by his faith and affirmed by the signs that security was in the LORD alone (16-18).

**1.** He had his words sealed and testified to among his disciples (16).

**2.** He affirmed that he was waiting in faith on the LORD who was his security (17).

**3.** He and his children were signs (18).

**III.** The prophet warned the people that if they were foolish enough to seek help from the spiritists they would be utterly lost (19-22).

**A.** It is foolish to consult the dead for advice when the only hope is in the living God (19).

**B.** It is necessary to test the spirits to know who is telling the truth (20).

**C.** Those who turn aside to idolatry and spiritism will be lost in utter despair and devastation (21-22).

Now, with this general outline in mind we may transfer the individual points and sub-points (where possible) to a more expository style—shorter, timeless, theological statements. But remember, they must be true to the passage as well as true today.

### Exposition

#### I. Although judgment for infidelity is certain, there is protection through Immanuel (8:1-10).

##### *A. God’s judgment will be swift (1-4).*

Verse 1 introduces the theme that judgment will be swift on Syria and the northern state of Israel. The prophet was to take a great tablet and write the message on it for everyone to see. He wanted his message attested—it was prophecy. So here we have the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz introduced, another of the sons of the prophet who served as a sign, an incarnate word. This is a war cry comparable to such given in Egypt and Canaan of the time. It means something like “Spoil—speed, prey—hasten.” The name is unique; it uses a combination of imperatives and nominal forms to cry out for a sudden plundering of the land. The name also uses repetition to stress the point: spoil//prey, and speed//hasten.

This is the first symbolic act of the section—the writing of the words for all to see in advance. It was a witness to the fact that the people had rejected the prophets’ warnings and now only swift judgment lay ahead.

Verses 2-4 record the second of Isaiah’s symbolic acts, the naming of the child with this name. Isaiah took faithful witnesses to record the writing of the name; and then he and his wife had a child and called him by the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz. The terminology in here has led many to conclude that this birth is what 7:14 prophesied, for it has “the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son; then said Yahweh to me, ‘Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz, for before the child shall know to …’.” There is certainly a familiar ring to these elements from the last chapter. But as noted earlier, such a view would require that Isaiah have married again, or that the term *‘almah* be given a rather different meaning.

If this prophecy was given in 733 B.C., then the focus of verse 4 would be about 11 or 12 years later, 722, when Sargon took Samaria. Judgment was certain because they had rejected the LORD.

##### *B. Judgment will be irresistible (5-8).*

Verses 5-8 can be called the tale of two rivers, Shiloah and Euphrates. Shiloah was the flowing stream or canal in the city of Jerusalem. The prophet was using it as a figure of speech (hypocatastasis) for the legitimate Davidic empire, the theocratic administration of Israel. The people had rejected that and had turned to rejoice in Rezin and the northern coalition. So because they rebelled against the house of David, God would bring in the judgment, the River Euphrates. This river represents the king of Assyria and his armies, who will “flood” the land including Judah.

The section ends with a cry to the land, “O Immanuel.” The point of the expression is a reminder that the warning of 7:14 extends beyond this invasion. The expression ‘*immanu-’el* itself became a war cry for Israel; it declared the presence and protection of the LORD in battle, it described the land that was being protected, and it named the future Coming One who would signify the presence of God with His people.

##### *C. Judgment will only be averted by God (9-10).*

Verses 9 and 10 could be taken two ways, that Israel’s plans to defend herself will fail, or that Assyria’s plans will not be totally successful. I take the latter view because the verses seem to be addressed to the nations. The Assyrians may try their hardest to break and to dash in pieces the land of Israel, but their counsel will come to nought, and their declaration shall not stand, for “God is with us” (*‘immanu-’el*). If the former view is taken, then this cry of “God is with us” would be the thing that Israel trusted in that would not come to pass.

On this section Wildberger has some good comments, especially about the point of the strange name. He concludes by saying that to be confronted so clearly with God’s will to save and then still choose the way of unbelief could only result in a disastrous future, the seeds of which had been sown already.

#### II. Comfort is only for those who fear the LORD (8:11-18).

##### *A. The LORD is a stone of stumbling if not feared (11-15).*

The passage begins with the prophet receiving a warning in verses 11 and 12 not to take the view that the people took (that this was all a conspiracy and nothing more—it was indeed divine judgment), nor to fear just what they feared.

Verse 13 calls for the fear of the LORD of hosts (*YHWH S*e*ba’ot*). If Israel were to panic it should not be because of foes, but because of the LORD (who has power over the body and the soul). Israel was to learn from this that the LORD was not like other tribal gods or friendly spirits who would protect His people without question.

There is a major textual decision you will have to make in here. Some of the commentators want to change “sanctify” in verse 13 and “sanctuary” in verse 15 to “conspiracy,” making the LORD the conspirator as well as the stumbling block and the spreading net. This would involve a change in the Hebrew letters of *q-d-s* to *q-s-r*. Any change in similar letters or order of letters is certainly possible; but if the MT makes good sense, and there is no sufficient manuscript evidence for the change, the suggestion should be rejected, even though it may be an interesting proposal. The verse says, “Yahweh of armies—Him shall you sanctify, let Him be your fear, let Him be your dread.”

In this verse we have the first section of our application. In view of the coming judgment one must sanctify and fear the LORD. The main word for “sanctify” is *qaddesh*, related to the word for “holy” we saw in Isaiah 1 and Isaiah 6. The word “fear” is *yare’* (pronounced *yah-ray*); this word needs study. The term is a worship word, speaking of one’s devotion and adoration—reverence—for the LORD. But it also speaks of a shrinking back in respect and terror. The result of fearing the LORD, among other things, is the avoiding of sin. If the people were to be true worshipers, they would shave to sanctify and fear the LORD.

Verse 14 could be translated a little differently. Traditionally it has been rendered, “He shall be for a sanctuary, and for a stone of stumbling … .” “Sanctuary” does not fit very well—hence the attempt to change it. The term could simply state that the LORD is set apart, distinct; unlike other national gods, the LORD will be the one causing the distress on His own nation.

This section gives a different view of God. He is a stumbling stone, a slipping stone, a trapping net, and a throwing stick (the last two referring to catching birds). These are not essentially His nature that Israel had come to know. But if people rejected the LORD, then He would become these avenues to judgment for them. The metaphors all show that God will bring the people down.

Verse 15 gives the conclusion of the section, affirming that many will fall and be taken. The New Testament picks up the section and uses it to stress the point Isaiah is making clearly. If the LORD is not your salvation, He is your stumblingstone. Immanuel is not with us, if Immanuel is rejected. God has to be believed in before His name becomes real in our experience. Romans 9:32 and 1 Peter 2:8 pick up the use of the metaphor of a rock that cannot be rejected or it will be a stumbling stone.

##### *B. Those whom fear the LORD will hope in Him (16-18).*

Verse 16 is the second time in the chapter that the Word of the LORD is to have witnesses. “Law” here probably means the clear teaching of the prophet Isaiah. It will be bound up and sealed by his disciples and kept as proof that he predicted the destruction ahead of time (Dt. 18).

Verse 17 tells of the prophet’s expectation: “I will wait for the LORD.” He can only expect the judgment now, for his teachings have been set aside. The Hebrew words for “waiting, hoping, and looking” all signify eager faith in the Word of the LORD that fully expects it to come to pass, but agonizes in the waiting. The words imply some anxious tension as part of the waiting and hoping; they are elsewhere used of twisting ropes and knots. But those who fear the LORD will wait for His Word to be fulfilled—having done all that they can do to warn others.

Verse 18 is Isaiah’s confirmation of the truth of what he has said. He and his sons are signs. Their names mean what his message said; and he wrote the name and the message with witnesses ahead of time as proof when it should come. Isaiah can say that he and his sons are proof that judgment was coming (*Maher-shalal-hash-baz*), but a remnant would return (*She’ar-yashub*) because salvation was of the LORD (“Isaiah,” *Yeshayahu*).

This verse is cited in the Book of Hebrews with a greater meaning. Christ in glory will say, “Here I am and the sons that You have given Me.” This is a different meaning—it is a midrash, an analogical application of the text. In heaven all the company of the redeemed will be evidence of a great judgment that was avoided by those who feared the LORD and put their trust in Him to find salvation.

#### III. Great despair and devastation comes to idolaters (8:19-22).

Not only is God not like friendly spirits who ignore the sins of the people, neither can He be manipulated into delivering them. This section is a warning against superstition; the last section was a warning against false fear and supposed conspiracy.

Verse 19 gives the third leg of the application (first: fear the LORD; second: hope in Him; third: pray to the living God). Isaiah is amazed that the people would turn to spiritism in the day of crisis (see the example of Saul going to the witch of Endor). The question is powerful: Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?[24](http://bible.org/seriespage/announcement-judgment-isaiah-81-22" \l "P587_148508) To pray to the dead, departed spirits instead of to the living God is utter folly.

Verse 20 gives the test. If they do not speak according to the truth of the teaching of Isaiah, the truth of Scripture, they are to be avoided. This is how the people can know whether these “wizards” and “necromancers” tell the truth or not. If they lie, they have no morning. This idea picks up the biblical theme of the wicked being in the darkness of Sheol.

Verses 21 and 22 form the transition to the next section. The imagery used here predicts a time of despair (faces turn upwards) and gloom and darkness. The images of darkness and light are implied comparisons; darkness would represent the effects of sin—oppression, pain, evil, gloom, hopelessness—and light would reflect the effect of righteousness through the Messiah—joy, freedom, hope, knowledge, and righteousness. But the prophet declares that the people will be filled with the gloom of judgment.

Note how this transition works: the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light! Of course, between the end of chapter 8 and the beginning of chapter 9 are 700 years. That is the way prophecy works.

### Conclusion

Drawing on the summary of the exegetical points, the three Roman numeral points written as one sentence, we move towards a theological point by the same process that we changed the exegetical outline into an expository outline. An exegetical summary of the passage might read something like this:

Using the symbolism of a name the prophet announces the swift and certain destruction from the invasion of Assyria, and warns that genuine faith in the LORD is the means of escape and not foreign alliances or idolatry which will inevitably lead to doom and despair.

We may now try to write the theological idea in a more useful form for exposition. This will be more of a principle, and will lead smoothly into the application. It will not elaborate on all the details, but it will make the point of the passage in a positive way. Here is one way to do it: *Those who wish to escape the imminent judgment of God must fear the LORD, trust in His Word, and pray to Him alone.*

This instruction of **REVERENTIAL FEAR, PATIENT HOPE** and **SINCERE** **PRAYER** (or as Isaiah puts them, “Make Yahweh your fear,” “Wait for the LORD,” and “Should not a people seek their God?”) is applicable for us in the Christian era who know that judgment will yet fall on the earth and only the devout believers will be spared.

In terms of application, the easiest part will be if the message is addressed to people who have not put their faith in the LORD, or who may be delving into new age or spiritist things for hope and comfort. Their fear is wrong—they are afraid of the threats in life, and they fear spirit powers. The truth of Scripture is that if you fear the LORD (=trust and obey Him) you will not have to live in fear of life. For believers, the application is a little different. Of course, they may be living like the unbelievers—so God’s warning to Isaiah is the warning to them, not to fear what they fear. But it can be a tremendous message of comfort and assurance. The judgment, whatever kind, however severe, cannot harm them because the LORD is with them—**Immanuel**. They may rejoice in the safety and security that they have in the LORD, their sanctuary, and hope in Him for final deliverance. In the meantime, like the prophet Isaiah, they can warn others about false trust, and show their faith to a world that is lost. Any number of New Testament passages that promise escape from judgment for faith in the LORD are at the heart of this message. They may be brought in along the way or at the end. But the exposition must show how this passage, as other temporal judgment passages do as well, forms a picture of divine judgment for sin that can only be escaped through the promise of Immanuel.[25](http://bible.org/seriespage/announcement-judgment-isaiah-81-22" \l "P597_152500)

These words are reflected in the Garden after the resurrection of Jesus: Why do you seek the living among the dead?

Andrewes has a marvelous sermon on the name Immanuel; in it he plays on the words to show that if it is not Immanuel, it must be Immanu-hell.

A Call for Faith and the Sign of Immanuel

## The Glorious Messiah and the Messianic Age Isaiah 9:1-7

For this section of the notes I shall provide a fully written exposition of the text to demonstrate how the exegetical details can be incorporated into an expository style. The length of the time allowed for the exposition will determine if parts must be shortened or cut. But having already determined in the exegetical process what the central theological ideas are, I will be able to condense around them rather easily.

In spite of all the advances of civilization, the world today is still consumed with a desire for peace and a fear of war. When people observe the conflicts and the rumors of wars, gloom and despair often engulf them like a thick darkness. Not the least of the trouble spots is the Middle East. Peace there has been the pursuit for centuries. While there have been scores of efforts to bring about peace between Israel and Syria and the Palestinians, no one would be surprised if war broke out tomorrow.

Peace movements and peace negotiations proceed all over the world. Stronger countries believe that peace must be negotiated from a position of power; radical groups believe that terror will force the issue. But we are left with a more dangerous and more frightening world than ever before. And we are left wondering if anyone is really interested in peace and righteousness and justice for all, or just in securing their own interests?

The problem is still the presence of evil. It sets brother against brother, and nation against nation. Ultimately, the world’s gloom and despair is linked to spiritual darkness.

The Bible comforts and reminds those of us who have come to trust in Jesus Christ not to despair as if there was no hope. We have the revelation of our Lord that not only announces His sovereign reign but also charts the course of world events. One of the most significant revelations is found in Isaiah 9.

Against the background of the prophecy of war and destruction, darkness and gloom (chapter 8) Isaiah gave this prophecy about the Messiah—the glorious coming king. “Messiah” is a Hebrew term that means “anointed one,” that is, the anointed king. In a sense, every king who was anointed in Jerusalem as a descendant of David would be called a “*mashiah”* (pronounced *mah-she-ack*), a messiah. But the Bible tells how ultimately a son of David would come who would be known as “the Messiah.” We believe that Jesus Christ is that Messiah. The New Testament word “Christ” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” This Messianic Prophecy, then, holds out hope for peace and righteousness through the reign of Jesus the Messiah.

The text can be divided into two sections: the Dawn of the Messianic Age (verses 1-5) and the Righteous Reign of the Messiah (verses 6 and 7). While the entire passage is instructive for the message, the verses that focus on the nature of the Messiah are critical, for therein lies our hope for everlasting peace. So most of our attention will be given to the meanings of the name of the Son, showing how these description fit perfectly the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Exposition

#### I. Peace will come with the dawn of the Messianic Age (9:1-5).

Isaiah declares that in contrast to his present age of war, gloom, and despair, there is coming an age when peace will reign universally. It will begin with the coming of the Messiah, the promised future king. So we call that period the Messianic Age. The prophet here shows how it will unfold.

##### *A. The change in circumstances will end the despair (1,2).*

The passage begins with the announcement of the change: there will be no more gloom for those in anguish; in the past the LORD humbled the northern lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee. Why? That is where the Messiah will first appear—Galilee of the Gentiles, a place looked down on for so long as less spiritual, less pure than Judea.

The explanation of this exaltation is found in verse 2. Those who walk in darkness have seen a great light, on those in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. The language is poetic: darkness signifies adversity, despair, gloom and evil, and the light signifies prosperity, peace, and joy. The language is used elsewhere of the Messianic Age—Malachi says that the “sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings” (4:2). So the people in the north who have suffered so much have the prospect of a wonderful new beginning.

We should note in passing that Isaiah’s verbs are in the past tense—he writes as if it has already happened. That is prophetic language. The prophet was a “seer” or visionary. He received divine revelation and recorded what he saw. As far as he was concerned, if it had been shown to him from God, it was as good as done. It was certain, even though it had not yet worked out in history.

So “light” will shine on people who were walking in “darkness.” The initial fulfillment of this prophecy is beyond doubt. Matthew quotes this text in conjunction with the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. He is the true light of the world that lights every person. He brings to a darkened world grace and truth, and the sure promise of peace. When He began to minister in Galilee with His teachings and His miracles, He demonstrated that He was indeed this Messiah. His proclamation of the kingdom through salvation is what ends the despair, for believers in Him are not lost in gloom and despair, for they know that what He promised will come to pass at His second coming.

##### *B. The Messiah brings joy and prosperity (3).*

The prophet turns to address the LORD directly. His words explain what it means that light will dispel the darkness—joy and prosperity will follow. The prophet gives no clue as to how soon this would happen. But we who have the full revelation of God know that Jesus made it clear that he was the Messiah, and that the age of peace and righteousness was yet future.

The joy described here is extravagant. It is the kind of joy that comes at the harvest, or at the dividing of the plunder. Harvest was a regular time of joy in Israel; after a long time of labor in the fields the people would gather to eat and drink and celebrate. The Bible often uses the analogy of the harvest to describe the coming of the LORD (see Matthew 3:12 for the harvest and winnowing imagery). It is a thanksgiving celebration for the completion of the harvest.

Dividing the plunder, the other image here, is a bit more poignant since wars will lead up to the end of the age. The image is about the victors after the battle is over, dividing up the booty. Such would be an almost delirious celebration of triumph that would usher in an age of peace.

##### *C. Joy comes through the cessation of war (4, 5).*

The imagery of joy at the division of the plunder leads directly into the explanation: the prophet foresees the time when the LORD will break the oppression of the enemies. He draws the analogy with the time of Israel’s victory over Midian through Gideon by the power of the LORD. So shall it again be.

But this victory will be greater. Verse 5 says that the implements of war will be burnt up. This will be no lull in the action, no temporary peace treaty. War will end. Elsewhere Isaiah has says, “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares,” that is, military weapons will not be needed in a time of lasting peace.

How can these things be, given the world situation as we know it? The answer to this question is found in the second half of the oracle which describes the nature of the Messiah who will bring in the reign of peace and righteousness. If such peace is to come, someone must have the ability to produce and maintain it.

#### II. Peace will finally come with the righteous reign of the Messiah (9:6,7).

Isaiah now turns to introduce the One who will transform the gloom and despair of war into the joy and peace of a time of righteousness—the Messiah.

##### *A. The LORD will bring about the advent of the Messiah (6a).*

The first part of the prophecy is very familiar to Christians: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders.” Isaiah is very precise here, as we now know. A child will be born into the family of David, and that there was a birth in Bethlehem is beyond question; but the Messiah will also be a Son that is given, and that Jesus did not come into existence in Bethlehem is clear from the Bible.

According to the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:14), the term “son” is a title for the king. The same is true in the vision of Daniel where the expression “Son of Man” is used (7:9-14). Daniel’s vision shows this glorious king in the presence of the Almighty, the Ancient of Days, and that he would be given the kingdom of peace. Isaiah announces that the child to be born will be this Son given. This idea is then clarified by Paul: “In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman … .” (Gal. 4:4).

The New Testament bears witness that Jesus is this Son who came into the world. In fact, Jesus Himself set about to prove His origin was in heaven, not in Bethlehem. When He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, he prayed and included these words in His prayer: “that they might know that You sent Me” (John 11:42). By this He meant that He was from above, and they were from below. Or, in debating with the religious leaders Jesus asked how David could call his descendant his “Lord,” clearly showing that the “Son of David,” the Messiah, was greater than David (Mark 12:35,36, regarding Psalm 110). And of course, to the woman at the well Jesus clearly revealed Himself: she said, “When the Messiah comes, He will declare all things to us.” Jesus said, “I that speak to you am He” (John 4:25,26).

It is clear, then, that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, the Christ, the child born into the house of David, the Son given by God to be the long expected King. The first advent of Jesus established His identity; it did not begin His reign, however, for He has yet to put down all enemies.

The prophecy that “the government will be upon His shoulder” will come to complete reality at His second coming—an aspect of the Messianic prophecies that the prophets did not see (see 1 Peter 1:10,11). The reference to the shoulder is probably a reference to the wearing of an insignia of office on the shoulder (see Isa. 22:22). There will be a time when this Son will rule as king.

We may say that Jesus now reigns above, and that is certainly true. But Isaiah envisions a time of universal peace and righteousness in this world. That has not happened yet. Hebrews 1 states that this exaltation will be complete when the Father again brings His firstborn into the world. So Isaiah does not know when all these things will take place; only that they will happen because the Word of the LORD has declared it.

##### *B. The Messiah will be a Wonder King (6b).*

The nature of the Messiah is now portrayed in the listing of His throne names. It must be noted that these are not names in the sense that we have names. These are character descriptions. They are intended to give the nature or the significance of the person named. We use the word “name” at times in this way. We may say, “She made a name for herself,” that is, a reputation. The names in this section describe the nature of the glorious king.

Moreover, in the ancient Near East kings were in the habit of taking throne names when they ascended the throne. They took titles and added epithets to their names. Usually the epithets they chose were too generous for mere mortals. For example, in the Middle Kingdom of Egypt the rulers took *five* titles when crowned—each name referring to some god, some land, some aspiration they had for their administration. One king who was crowned heard the priest say, “Let the great names of the good god and his titles be made like those of [the god] Re: *Mighty Bull, One Capable of Planning, Great in Wonders, Filled with Truth, Son of Re to whom life is given.”* So in these epithets the King would be extolled as the repository of might, wisdom, wonders, truth, and all life. These are, to be sure, rather ambitious.

There is evidence of such titling in Israel, especially in cases where God bestowed names on new kings. Psalm 2, the coronation psalm, says, “You are my Son, this day I have begotten you.” So on the day the king ascended the throne he was declared to be the Son, that is, God’s anointed King. So too in 2 Samuel 23:1 do we find a proliferation of names for David: “David, the son of Jesse, the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel’s singer of songs.” And then we have the LORD’s sending prophets to rename kings, such as calling Solomon Jedidiah (2 Sam. 12:25).

But there is nothing to compare with the type of names found in Isaiah 9. The only names comparable are those honorific titles of Egyptian kings. They all had grandiose, ambitious throne names. Each name had a permanent title and then a variable description. So too in Isaiah: Counsellor, God, Father, and Prince are the permanent titles; wonderful, mighty, everlasting, and peace are the variables. But Isaiah is affirming that the one who is coming will not merely have great titles, but will in reality be what those titles claim. What had been a hope, a wild dream, or monarchs for ages will surely become a reality some day. With a king such as this, peace is assured. There is no hope in some pagan Egyptian king who made great claims; the only hope is in the Word of the LORD that promised Immanuel.

*1. Wonderful Counselor.* The first words used to describe this Son have usually been separated in the English Bibles to form two epithets. But Isaiah himself joins these two terms together in Isaiah 28:29. So probably, as with the other titles, the one word serves to qualify the other—he is a wonder of a counselor.

“Wonderful” is a word that primarily describes the LORD or extraordinary or supernatural things in the Scriptures; it means “extraordinary, surpassing, marvelous, wonderful.” It was not used in a trivial sense, as we often use the English word “wonderful.” For example, in Genesis 18 the LORD announced the birth of Isaac to the aging Abraham and Sarah. When Sarah laughed in her heart, the LORD, knowing she laughed, said, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” “Hard” is our word—Is anything too marvelous, wonderful, extraordinary, for the LORD? Or again, David, meditating on the knowledge of the LORD, came to realize that the LORD knows everything about him, his thoughts, his intentions, even the words he is trying to say, all of it (Ps. 139:1-6). He marvels, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me!” Or again, when the Angel of the LORD appeared to Manoah, Manoah inquired, “What is your name?” To this the visitor responded, “Why do you ask my name, seeing that it is Wonderful?” Then, when the flame on the altar blazed up, the Wonderful Angel ascended to heaven.

To describe the king with this Hebrew word “wonderful” is to ascribe to him extraordinary, normally supernatural abilities. Jesus, by His mighty words, showed Himself to be wonderful in this sense. In John 11:25 he said, “I am the resurrection and the Life; whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies.” Then, to authenticate His claims He raised Lazarus from the dead. That is extraordinary. It is marvelously surpassing. It is wonderful. We would have to say with Nicodemus that no man can do these thing apart from God. Jesus has the words of life because He has power over life and death. What a King He shall be!

The second word in the title is “Counselor.” The word means “one who plans.” It means he has the wisdom to rule. Isaiah 11:2 will explain that this king, this Immanuel, has the Spirit of Counsel, that is, his wisdom to rule is God-given (compare Solomon’s wisdom). The word “king” as well as other related terms are related to the idea of decision-making. Kings make decisions; they give counsel. At times they must surround themselves with counselors to make the right decisions. But this king will be a wonder of a counselor.

Jesus’ teachings and judgments showed that He was a great counsellor. His insight was supernatural—He knew what was in people. In John 1:48-51 He rightly analyzed Nathanael; He said, “I saw you while you were under the fig tree before Philip called you.” To which Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel.” He recognized the Wonderful Counselor when He appeared. So too did the woman at the well in John 4. She said, “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Is not this the Christ?” Or again, when the Jews sent men to bring Jesus bound hand and foot to them, they returned empty-handed. Their reason? “No man ever spoke like this man” (John 7:26). This work of our Lord continues today, for when He went away He promised to send another counselor (John 14:16), the Holy Spirit, who would continue to counsel by His Word, to convict, to teach, and to transform people.

What made Jesus such a wonderful counselor? He knew what was in man (John 2:25). He had that wonderful knowledge of which David spoke. And it continues. What is it in the seven letters to the churches in Revelation that is His constant theme? Jesus says, “I know your works.” That needs very little explanation; it is painfully clear.

*2. The Mighty God.* Not only was Messiah to be wonderful in counsel, he was to be the image of God as no other was. The term “God” can be used of kings and judges in the Old Testament. But Isaiah does not use it that way, unless that is the sole meaning here. Every other time Isaiah uses the term “God” (*‘el*) he means deity. In fact, he has just announced in chapters 7 and 8 that this king would be known as *‘Immanu-’el*, “God with us.” To say “a king is with us” would be of little effect. But to say that a king is coming whose power will display that God is with the people—that is a sign.

There is another passage that uses “mighty” and “God” together to describe Messiah. Psalm 45:3 says, “Gird your sword, *O Mighty One* … Your throne, *O God*, is forever and ever.” So the King would be known as the powerful one, the mighty God.

This epithet, no matter how translated, would be too generous for a mere mortal. It actually brings the ideology of divine kingship into Jerusalem and applies it to some future king. But Jesus claimed such for Himself as well. He claimed to be divine. According to John 8:58 He identified Himself as the great I AM of the Old Testament, the sovereign Lord God of Israel. In Matthew 24:30 he announced, “All power is given to me.” “I AM”—”all power.” In sum, Jesus is the Mighty God.

The apostles bear witness to this. John declares He is God in the flesh, the agent of creation (John 1:1-3). And Paul reminds us of His deity and His power in Ephesians 1:18-21. What might have seemed to Isaiah’s audience to be an honorific title, or a description of one who would rule as God’s vice-regent, became historically true and literal in Jesus Christ, for the mighty God came in the flesh.

*3. The Everlasting Father.* The third title in many ways is the most striking. It is literally “father of perpetuity,” that is, one who will be perpetually the father. In Canaanite religion the high god is called “father of years,” and this title in Hebrew seems to carry a similar force. It describes one who produces, directs, and is lord over the ages.

The title might be taken to mean that this wonder king has the durability to rule. But the use of the terms in the Old Testament suggests another view. The Messiah—the King—was to be known as the “Son,” not the Father, according to the Davidic Covenant. The covenant said that God would be to the king a father, and the king would be to Him a son (2 Sam. 7:14). But here in Isaiah the Son is called the Father. The point in Isaiah is that the sovereign LORD who had always enthroned the Davidic kings would come and rule as the Messiah.

This seeming confusion of “persons” shows up in a couple of other prophecies. In Isaiah 48:15-16 the LORD God Almighty is speaking and says, “I, even I, have spoken; Yes, I have called him, I have brought him, and his way will prosper. Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I was there. And now the LORD God and His Spirit have sent Me.” The same phenomenon of the LORD being both the sovereign who sends Messiah and Messiah who is sent is found in Malachi 3:1-5.

Now all this seems a bit confusing, but the statements of Jesus confirm the fact that the “Son” who is given is also known as the Father. Jesus said, “I am not of this world” (John 8:23), “I came in My Father’s name” (John 5:43), and finally, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). So Jesus is the expressed image of the Father, the Sovereign king-maker. By taking this title, Everlasting Father, the Messiah is to be known as the One who is the sovereign Lord over the ever changing years—he produces and directs eternity. Such a name belongs to a god, not just any divine creature or spiritual being, but to the God.

*4. The Prince of Peace*. This last title means that the Messiah will be one who ensures for his people the blessings of peace. He will be a prince who brings peace. The word “peace” is used as an epithet for the LORD as well as the King. In Judges 6:24 because of the greeting of “peace” from the Angel of the LORD the place was called “The LORD is peace.” Whenever the LORD visited his people, whether by the Angel of the LORD or by His promised Messiah, it was to announce or promise peace to the world (Isa. 11:6-9; Ps. 72:3,7).

But the Hebrew concept of “peace” is more than the absence of war. To Isaiah, *peace is a condition in which all things follow their destiny undisturbed.* Elsewhere the prophet will talk of the lion lying down with the lamb, and children playing at the viper’s nest. This can only occur, of course, when major changes in nature are made. Therefore Isaiah’s vision of the Messianic Age will culminate in the prophecy of a new heaven and a new earth—there will be a whole new creation!

It is at this point that we find a little difficulty in the New Testament. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, no doubt; but His teachings on peace seem to be contradictory. He said, “Come unto me all you who labor … and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). He also said, “Peace I give you”—not as the world gives (John 14:27; 16:33). The peace that Jesus brings is a peace that passes all understanding.

But Jesus also said, “I came not to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34); “In this life you shall have trouble and persecution” (John 16:33). So Jesus did not hold out the immediate prospect of Isaianic peace to His disciples. He said that He was sending them among wolves, that brother would rise against brother, and that people would hate them and drag them before magistrates.

The simple and obvious conclusion is that Jesus brought peace with God through redemption by His death and resurrection, and will eventually bring total peace through His exalted reign over all the earth. Jesus said that the kingdom was within us, and that it would also come with lightning flashes in the heavens (Luke 17:20-25). So we yet await the fulfillment of the Isaianic vision of peace in this trouble-torn world.

##### *C. Messiah will reign in righteousness (7).*

The prophet declares that peace and righteousness will characterize the reign of Messiah. Such is not the case now, but is to come. That is why Christians pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” That reign will then issue into the eternal state (1 Cor. 15:23-25).

All of this will be accomplished by the “zeal of the LORD.” On the one hand “zeal” here indicates the divine resentment for honor so long abused; and on the other hand it means that His love flares up to fulfill His promises to His own people.

### Conclusion

The central idea of Isaiah’s oracle is as follows: **Complete****and****lasting****peace****comes****with****the****righteous****reign****of****the****divine****Messiah***.*The prophet anticipates that the present gloom at the prospect of war will be replaced by the joy of peace. That peace can only be accomplished through a King who is a Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. Righteousness and peace is impossible without Him; nothing is impossible for Him.

The words of the prophet held out hope for his generation. God was not abandoning His people to invasion and disaster, but was promising that in spite of the prospect of war there was a glorious future ahead. And on the eve of the birth of Jesus the nation also felt the oppression of world conflict and the despair it brings. Into that world Jesus came, clearly claiming to be the Messiah of Israel, this Wonder King. But His first coming was to lay the foundation of the glory that would follow, that is, His death on the cross would reconcile people to God, bringing them into eternal peace with God through the forgiveness of sins. And so now as we look forward to His coming again, the words of Isaiah hold out hope for us too. Wars and conflicts abound; despair and depression accompany the fear of danger and aggression. But the Word of God is clear: there is coming a time of complete and lasting peace with the coming of Messiah. There is hope. We who know the LORD by faith need not despair as those without hope.

But what then are we to do while we wait for this King? First, it is our task to carry on the ministry that Isaiah had, to announce to the world the only hope, Jesus the Messiah. Our primary concern is that people find eternal peace with God. We are the ambassadors for this King, calling others to be reconciled with God. And what goes along with this? Our lives must be purified from sin so that we may present to others the hope of righteousness. Our efforts must be tireless to declare to the world that the hope of peace rests with Jesus Christ and none other. And our promotion of causes of peace and righteousness must be consistent with our message, in our families, our communities and our world.

But secondly, this passage also instructs us about the resources available to us even now from our King. We know that Jesus is the Wonderful Counsellor, so we may obtain instruction and guidance for our lives from Him and in His Word. He is the Mighty God, for all power is given to Him, so we may trust Him to accomplish great things in and through us. He is the Everlasting Father, so we may take comfort in the stability that knowing our sovereign Lord reigns brings. And, He is our Prince of Peace, so we may rest in Him, knowing that because of Jesus Christ all is well between us and God. In short, these descriptions of our Lord Jesus Christ are calls to greater prayer, greater confidence, and greater service.

**The Glorious Reign of the Messiah   
Isaiah 11:1-9**

Introduction

This chapter concludes the section of the book that we call the “Book of Immanuel.”The prophet has announced the supernatural birth if this one who will be known as “Immanuel,” has described his victory over evil and oppression, declared his provision of peace in the world, and described his nature through the throne names given in chapter nine. And because his message had relevance to the faith of his audience, he showed how these promises meant God would continue to deliver his people from their enemies. And so in chapter ten he spoke further of the judgment on rebellious people, as well as judgment on the Assyrians who would be oppressing the people of the land. Now, though, he turns his attention fully to the reign of the Messiah, and while emphasizing peace and righteousness again takes these themes to their greatest limit in the expected reign of the Messiah, what we call the Kingdom.

All the points that the prophet makes are God’s revelation and therefore will be fulfilled completely. The prophets, however, did not know the time sequence of the events. Isaiah expected the birth of a child in a matter of years, and the destruction of Israel in about a dozen years, and the judgment on Assyria not too long after that. But in chapter nine the fulfillment comes seven hundred years later when God sent the Son into the world. But the peaceful reign of this wonder king has not happened yet. And what chapter eleven promises will come later with the second coming, some 2700 years and counting after Isaiah declared it.

***Exposition***

The following comments on this portion of the chapter are not intended to exhaust the material that is here, but to direct you in your detail study and reflection on the passage. The subject matter discussed here is very rich, and will take some time to assimilate.

**I. The Messiah will reign in righteousness by the power of the Spirit of the LORD (11:1-5).**

**A. He will be a “Davidic” king (1).**

This first verse announces what the “Book of Immanuel” has been predicting all along, that there will be a future king in the line of David who will be known as Immanuel. The verses to follow explain exactly how God will be with us in this One.

The ancient writers used the imagery of a tree to symbolize a kingdom (see also Daniel’s description of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, chapter 4). Israel was a tree. And at the judgment of God at the exile, God cut down the tree, leaving only a stump—the holy remnant. But in time there would come forth from the stock a branch that would become a great king over the restored nation. This passage uses the image of “a shoot out of the stock of Jesse” and “a branch out of his roots”—both building on the comparison with the tree, and so serving as implied comparisons (or hypocatastases for he technical name of the figure).

The Hebrew for “shoot” (*hoter*) and “branch” (*neser* [pronounced *neh-tser*] ) invite comparison with the prophecies of the “Branch” (Hebrew *semakh*) in Zechariah 6:12 (and elsewhere). There the prophecy describes one who will be the Davidic king—and much more. He will be a priest as well. And Jeremiah 33 adds that He will be “Yahweh our Righteousness.”

The reference to Jesse is deliberate. Had it said from David, one would have concluded that he would be born into the royal family as a crown prince and grow up in the ruling class. But Jesse was never king; born to Jesse means He will not start out as royalty. He would inherit the kingdom some day, but not at first. The name “Jesse” focuses our attention on His humble origins.

**B. He will reign by God’s Spirit (2, 3).**

After the initial announcement that “the Spirit of Yahweh” (*ruah YHWH*) was resting (*nahah* [pronounced *nah-khah*] from *nuah* [*noo-ack*]) upon him, six appositional statements are made about what this involved. The constructions all use the grammatical construction known as “the construct,” meaning a noun is followed and explained by a following noun know as the genitive case. In “the Spirit of the LORD” we would say that “LORD” is a “possessive genitive” classification—it is the LORD’s Spirit. But in the combinations that follow we might use either a “genitive of attribute,” but probably would be better to use an “objective genitive.” This works better with picking up the apposition from the first mention of the Spirit, explaining that that Spirit produces wisdom. Thus, the six qualifications (or three pairs) explain how this one will reign—and the six clearly come from the Holy Spirit.

“A spirit of wisdom and discernment” (*ruah hokmah u-binah* [pronounced *roo-ack khok-mah oo-bee-nah*]) refers to his judicial abilities. One is reminded of the prayer of Solomon and the resulting wisdom by which he was able to rule. That wise rule, in all its best, is but a shadow of the coming reign. These two words need closer analysis. “Wisdom” (*hokmah*) is practical, ethical, and moral skillfulness, the ability to act within circumstances so that the results are productive and beneficial to the community. “Discernment” (*binah*) refers to the ability to distinguish or decide between things, such as different choices.

It is possible that these two words form a hendiadys. Then the Spirit would be said to produce “discerning wisdom.” It may be, however, that the two are meant to be retained with their separate but complementary meanings. Wisdom will include discernment, as Proverbs teaches, and discernment will include wisdom.

“A spirit of counsel and strength” (*ruah ‘esah u-g*e*burah* [pronounced *roo-ack ey-tsah oo-geh-voo-rah*]) assures that the king will need no advisors. He will make the right plans and have the power to carry them out. We have already seen in chapter nine that he will be a “wonder of a counselor” (that noun is etymologically related to this one—kings were to be counselors); and we also saw in that same passage that he would be “the mighty god” (*gibbor* and *g*e*burah* are etymologically related as well). This king, then, will make all the plans and fulfill them heroically as well. The fullness of the Spirit will empower him to do this.

“A spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD” (*ruah da’at w*e*yir’at YHWH* [*roo-ack da-at veh-year-at ‘a-doe-nay**[55](http://bible.org/seriespage/glorious-messiah-and-messianic-age-isaiah-91-7" \l "P736_194705)*]) describes the one who is rightly related to God. There can be no “knowledge of the LORD” without right action; and “the fear of the LORD” means no idolatry, no sin, no rebellious acts—only pure religion as it was divinely intended. The king will show in his every act that he is accountable to God—he will only do that which pleases the Father. Like none before him, this king will share in God’s ability through the Spirit. Thus, the prophecy of Immanuel begins to unfold here.

Verse 3 has been variously translated: “he shall be of quick understanding,” “he shall make him perceptive,” or “his delight.” The form *hariho* (pronounced *ha-ree-kho*) in the text is critical—it is also difficult. It is the *hiphil* denominative verb related to *ruah*, “spirit, breath,” and to *reah*, “scent, odor.” Does the verb then mean “smell, perceive an odor”? If so, then the idea would be an implied comparison for “delight in” the fear of the LORD. If it is to be connected more closely to “Spirit,” then the idea would be “make him perceptive” in the fear of the LORD. In the context the latter seems overwhelmingly the case, since “odor” and “scent” have not been used, but “Spirit” has. And this makes more sense of what follows: he will not judge by sight, and not reprove by hearing. He will have the ability to see and judge things as they really are. Otto Kaiser says, “All other human judgment is a premature leap in the dark, constantly threatened by emotions and by ignorance of the true situation.”

**C. He will reign in righteousness (4, 5).**

Three words need to be studied here for the theological description of the reign (as well as for connections with other passages). The most important word is “righteousness” (*sedeq* [*tseh-deck*] ) because it is used twice here. This word, and the others in its group, have the basic idea of conforming to the standard—his rule will conform completely to God’s Law (compare Psalm 45 and its citation in Hebrews). It is paralleled with “uprightness” (*mesor* [*may-shore*] from *yasar* [*yah-shar*]) and with “faithfulness” (*‘emunah* [*eh-moo-nah*] from *‘aman* [*ah-man*]). Righteousness, uprightness, and faithfulness will characterize His reign.

Once these words have been defined, then the focus of them in the context must be stressed. They will enable the Messiah to champion the rights of the poor and the needy, and to punish or destroy the wicked; they will enable the Messiah to bring justice to the earth and be faithful to His word and to His mission and to His people. He will rule by the “rod of his mouth” and “the breath (note: *ruah* again) of his lips” are figures, the first is an implied comparison (word = rod that rules) and the second is probably a metonymy (breath produces the word that condemns). Thus, with the proper virtues, he will do the work of God himself (of course because He is God).

**II. The Messiah’s reign will bring peace to the whole of creation (11:6-9).**

**A. The nature of the world will change (6-8).**

There follows then a series of examples of life under this king’s reign. What is portrayed here picks up the earlier prophecies of Isaiah 2:4 with the beating of the swords into farming instruments, and of Isaiah 9:7 with the promise of “peace.” Peace, to Isaiah, we have said, means a condition in the world in which all things can follow their divinely intended purposes or destiny uninterrupted. These three verses illustrate that condition.

I would take the animals and the people mentioned here both literally and figuratively, that is, with the figure of speech known as synecdoche. They represent the types of animals: predators and prey, violent and peaceful, cunning and innocent. But it will take a change in nature for the lion to feed on straw rather than meat, or for a child to lead animals out to graze and back them back again, or for a suckling child can play where once only danger lurked.

Some expositors argue that these are just expressions to say in the next life, heaven, there will be peace and harmony (although some would say “in the church”). But we have animals as well as people in mind here. Why include the animals if something was not intended for them as well, as other Scriptures confirm? The study of the text must explain why the figures are used as well as what they mean.

Isaiah clearly foresees that when the Messiah comes there will be a change of conditions in the world order—in the curse, if you will. Paul also observes that the whole earth groans, waiting for the day of redemption (Rom. 8). Obviously, such changes did not occur at Christ’s first advent, and no amount of exegetical juggling can get the words to say they did. The second advent, the Great Jubilee, will bring major changes (and you wold have to ignore or explain away scores of verses that describe the changes that will occur).

**B. There will be no more danger or destruction (9).**

This verse explains the point of the representative examples listed above. When righteousness will truly prevail, the world will be brought into the condition that God had first intended it to have.

Two verbs are used here that need clarification. “They shall not hurt” is *yare`u* (*yah-ey-oo,* from *ra’a’*); this word is related to the common word in the Old Testament for “evil, pain, calamity.” With the cessation of evil comes the cessation of harm that it brings. The other word is “destroy” (*yashitu* [*yash-khee-too*] from *sahat* [*shah-khat*); this word means “corrupt, ruin, spoil, destroy.” All this will end with the reign of the Messiah.

The reason is clear: the knowledge of the LORD will cover the earth. Thus, Isaiah is describing not merely a regional king honored and empowered by God, but a universal reign of righteousness through the Spirit of the LORD, in which nature is changed and all will know the LORD. This can only be possible with the divine reign of Christ when He comes in glory. I do not think that the wording of verse 9 can be watered down to say that knowledge about the LORD will be available to Judah. Isaiah focuses his attention on Zion, the holy mountain, because it is and has been the center of attack and affliction; but when it is safe and at peace it is due to Messiah’s presence and powerful dominion over the earth.

***Conclusion***

The passage was clearly laid out as the hope for the people troubled by wicked rulers and endless wars. As in Isaiah’s day, so now, the people of God can be encouraged that there is a glorious future, that the world will see the day of redemption, that the oppressed and the weak will be delivered, and that oppressors be either destroyed or changed. Such a hope helps believers to live above the curse, fixing their eyes on the hope of glory. It would have been in Isaiah’s day an evangelistic message as well: there is not a ghost of a chance for safety or salvation for this fallen world in any other except in the Messiah who is to come.

But besides being a message of comfort or warning that we too must declare, this passage can be applied to the spiritual life as well. In other words those who believe in Christ become subjects of the King; they share His ministry and receive benefits from him. They are to emulate the King. And so we can make some specific applications for Christians who are trying to be like their King.

The first point is based on the fact that the Messiah will have the Spirit of God working in and through Him. And we know that when Jesus returned to heaven, He sent that same Spirit continue what He began. Thus Christians have been given the same Spirit that governs and controls their King. And that Holy Spirit can produce wisdom, might, and fear of the LORD.

Second, once the subjects of the King are controlled by this Spirit (and how to be controlled by the Spirit is a full study itself), they will see that they are being moved toward righteousness. We who are in His kingdom, which is a kingdom of righteousness, ruled by the king or righteousness, must promote righteousness wherever we are.

Third, Spirit filled believers will also promote and extend peace in the world, insofar as they can. They must champion righteousness, and righteousness will enjoy peace. They will not usher in the age of righteousness, but they will bring others into the kingdom by emulating the telling of the glorious King .

The expression is a metonymy of either adjunct or effect; the reference is to the invasions that destroyed the northern kingdom.

This then would also be a metonymy of effect or adjunct, the blessing of the people with peace and prosperity will be His way of bringing them honor. The Hebrew verbs *qalal* (“light,” “treat lightly,” “curse”) and *kabad* (“heavy,” “treat as important,” “honor”) form a fine contrast.

The reference to “Gentiles” makes sense in light of the Assyrian policy of bringing in many people from different lands. Galilee had always been rather cosmopolitan because it was on the trade routes, but the wars filled it with foreigners. By the time of Jesus it had such a reputation that the very righteous and pious Jews would have little to do with it.

The figure is hypocatastasis. The Bible loves to use night and darkness to represent evil and destruction and despair, and light or day to signify righteousness, joy, and hope. It was a natural image to express the dawning of a new day--a new beginning after trouble.

This would be a metaphor--Jesus is compared to a light. The idea of shining on every person carries many connotations; at the heart of the expression is surely the idea of the conviction of sin, for the New Testament uses darkness for evil, and light for righteousness.

Isaiah, like the other prophets, just speak of what Messiah will do, not when he will do it. They did not know of two comings, one to die, and one to reign. But there can be no reign unless salvation for sin is first established.

Indeed, the transition from chapter 8 to chapter 9 reads as a direct continuity, but it covers over 700 years. Exact chronology is not possible in reading prophetic passages. The “light” appeared in Galilee some 2000 years ago, but the culmination of this prophetic word remains.

The figures are similes. The feeling of completion and relaxation and exuberation are greatest in these kinds of experience, so they offer a glimpse of the joy at the end of the age.

The allusion to Midian links the passage to Judges. The main implication is that God will end the oppression; but there is also the suggestion that Messiah will be a Gideon-like figure.

The figure used in here is synecdoche; the things mentioned represent the kinds of elements in war.

The language is metaphorical, both in Samuel and in Psalm 2. The king will be like a son, an adopted son, to God, heir of the kingdom. Of course, the metaphor “son” as it applies to Jesus also carries with it the meaning that He shares the nature of God--eternal and divine.

The figure would then be either metonymy of adjunct or hypocatastasis; it would be the former if he really was going to wear an insignia, and the latter if he is not. The latter is probably the better view, since the reign of the Messiah is not likely to have all the literal trappings of an earthly monarch. He is saying that the king bears the weight of office.

So there may be a polemical element here as well because the Israelites were wont to make treaties with Egypt for safety. The prophet would be alluding to Egypt’s titles but only to show that such titles would be true in Immanuel’s case.

The construction then has a genitive of specification. He is wonderful, specifically as a counsellor.

Moses in Exodus 7:1 is called a god; judges in Psalm 82 are called “gods.” So the term could be used for theocratic leaders who spoke for God.

This passage is quoted in Hebrews as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The language of the psalm could have been applied to a human king in a general way, but the writer of Hebrews, pulling many passages together in his treatise, saw how the language ultimately applied literally to Christ.

There are several ways to translate the phrase: “God of might,” “mighty God,” “mighty hero,” or “god-like hero.” The various commentaries will deal with the variations in the context of the chapter and in relation to prophecy.

The Ugaritic text has *‘abu sanimi*, “father of years.” The Canaanite expressions are often the same as Hebrew; they are simply applied to the wrong persons.

The genitive should be taken as genitive of the thing possessed, which is close to objective genitive--he produces and controls the ages. The English “everlasting Father” is the translation of an attributive genitive; while this is certainly possible it does not provide the clear meaning of rulership.

The individual statements of Scripture about Messiah (in the Old Testament) and that Jesus made (in the New Testament) are frequently capable of one or two interpretations. But when they are all put together, they clearly point in the same direction. And that the Jews understood this is clear, because they charged Jesus with blasphemy. One of the best evidences of the meaning of what Christ said is this response.

Micah 5:12 will also describe Messiah as one whose goings have been from everlasting.

An attributive genitive--peaceful prince--would mean little in the oracle. The genitive must express what is produced by the prince.

The Hebrew word “zeal” describes a passionate intensity to defend a threatened institution or possession. When it describes a passionate desire for the wrong thing, or with the wrong motivation, it means “jealousy, envy.” But when its motive is correct, it is zeal.

This is probably the word that the Gospel alludes to in saying Jesus was a Nazarene. "Nazarene" sounds like *netser* from Isaiah, and the point would be similar, namely, that He came from a common place, was a nobody, and to be looked down on.

There is also probably a deliberate word play on the name Zerubbabel, "branch" or "sprout" of Babylon. He was the political leader of the returning exiles, and could then have been a type of Messiah the Branch.

There are about twenty to twenty-five classifications that are attested in the biblical texts, some of which would be very rare. Those showing possession (“the house of the king” = the king’s house) are common.

In an objective genitive, the first of the two words either produces or acts upon the second word, the object. A good example is “the tree of live,” a tree that produces or enables life, because if Adam and Eve ate from it they would continue to live. The “spirit of wisdom” could be an attributive genitive, meaning “a wise spirit,” but it more likely is objective, meaning a “spirit of [who produces] wisdom.”

A word in “apposition” is a word that follows another word in the same case and modifies it. So the passage introduces “the *Spirit* of the LORD … a *Spirit* of wisdom … .”

A hendiadys (Greek for “one through two”) uses two words joined with a conjunction with refer to the same thing, and so one of the words should be a modifier. In English we would say “I am good and mad” to mean “I am very mad.”

The word is *Yahweh*, but in the Hebrew Bible the word was always read with the substitute word “LORD” and the vowels under YHWH are the vowels for the substitute word, *’adonay.* The English Bibles follow that custom with “LORD.”

This figure uses a part for the whole, or a whole for the part. The part that is used here, an individual animal, for example, refers to that animal for sure, but also to all in that class or group. So it is both literal and figurative--it is the kind of figure that says more that what is literally stated.

The Announcement of Judgment Isaiah 8:1-22

## The Burdens Upon The Nations Isaiah 13:1—23:18

This next major section of the Book of Isaiah contains judgments against the nations before the establishment of the reign of the Messiah. The time of the judgment certainly would be in the immediate future of the prophetic vision, perhaps with the Assyrian invasion; but at times they will reach down through time to anticipate later, even eschatological judgments. So these chapters have been taken by commentators to anticipate some of the judgments found in Revelation 4-19. The cursing here is an outworking of the oracle of Genesis 12:1-3 where the promises based on the covenant were first made.

We must remember that Isaiah is a prophet, and as such he was called upon to interpret history, past, present and future. How would he know that this invasion was part of God’s judgment? Was that just his opinion? Well, because he predicted things he was known as a prophet of the LORD. So these oracles were seen as divine revelation.

### Isaiah 14:3-23 Divine Judgment on the Evil Kingdom

#### Introduction

There is a good deal of critical debate about this chapter, which you may read at your pleasure. On the surface the passage is clearly a taunt of proud Babylon. That would put a Babylonian message in the first half of the book, a real problem for some critical scholars who strictly put Babylonian material into the second half of the book, and attribute it to a second Isaiah. So this section is often classified by them as a later insertion from Deutero-Isaiah of Babylon.

Other scholars see it as a taunt of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, and not Babylon at all, since Assyria is mentioned in verse 25. But Babylon is very clearly the focus of chapter 13; and whereas verses 24-27 may be about Assyria, the section in chapter 14 that we are addressing seems to follow clearly on the oracle against Babylon in chapter 13, and claims to be against Babylon. There is no reason why “Babylon” here should be replaced by “Assyria” in the text. It is possible that Babylon is mentioned but Assyria meant if at the time of the oracle Babylon was a subject state to the Assyrian Empire. Of course, all these kings of Assyria and Babylon were proud and ruthless, and so it would fit either setting. But in this context the passage is part of the oracle on the end of the Babylonian empire that would rise again and capture Judah.

#### Exposition

##### *Prologue (14:1, 2)*

The prophet begins this oracle with a word of comfort and hope for Israel—in line with his theme of “a remnant shall return.” He declares that God will have mercy on them and restore them to their land. More than that, they will rule over their oppressors.

##### *I. The righteous may confidently anticipate the LORD’s judgment on evil oppressors (14:3, 4)*

The passage begins with words of comfort and hope for the righteous who must endure suffering and oppression in this world at the hands of the wicked who rule and terrorize the world.

Verse 3 announces the promise of rest from oppression (the verse is the *prodasis* [“when”] of verse 4): “When Yahweh shall give you rest … .” The verb “rest” (*haniah* [pronounced *hah-nee-ack*] from *nuah* [*noo-ack*]) is a common theme in the prophetic literature about the future; it picks up the theme about the *sabbath* rest from the beginning of creation (Gen. 2:1-3) and the conquest of the land (Ps. 95), and anticipates a final restoration to it i the age to come (Heb. 3, 4). Of course, the agent who grants this rest is the Lord Jesus, the Messiah Himself: “I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

The rest promised here is from **sorrow** (*me’osb*e*ka* [pronounced *may-ots-beh-kah*] from *‘asab* [*ah-tsav*]), from **fear** (*mirogz*e*ka* [*mi-rog-zeh-ka*] from *ragaz*) and from **bondage** (*ha’abodah* [*hah-a-vo-dah*] from *‘abad* [*ah-vad*]). These three expressions describe the difficulty of the people of God in this fallen world, notably under the pagan—Babylonian—domination. The first word, “sorrow,” is right out of the curse narrative of Genesis 3—pain in childbirth for the woman, and pain in tilling the ground for the man. Fear and bondage are the other two agonies that Israel would have to experience, and only divine rest from such servitude would heal. The fear described here is the agitation, quivering, trembling—not the pious term for “fear” or reverence. So the writer anticipates a time when the people will be set free from their troubles and sing a victory song.

Verse 4 is the apodasis ( … then): when you have this rest, [then] you may take up this taunt against Babylon. The word for “taunt” is *masal* (*mah-shal*), a term normally used for a “proverb”—a wayside saying, observation, similitude, aphorism. The taunt here is: “How the oppressor has come to an end!”

The taunt that follows delights in the sudden collapse of the nation of Babylon. Two things are worth noting here. First, Assyria was the major threat in the early days of the prophet, from his call in 742 down to the invasion of Sennacherib in 701. But the prophet later turned his attention on Babylon when the King welcomed the emissary and showed him the treasury. As mentioned above, here we have the theme of Babylon in the first half of the book, although Babylon is not yet the power it was to become in a few decades. Here the prophet looks ahead to the enemy who, like Assyria, will oppress the people. The word is that all such oppressors will be destroyed before the great Messianic Age.

Second, the destruction of Babylon would lead to the restoration of Israel in 536 B.C., but the promise of the glorious appearance and reign of Messiah would not come about in that year, or shortly thereafter, as history shows. So “Babylon” would be the immediate fulfillment, the immediate reference point; but “Babylon” would also typify a greater “Babylon” of the future (whether actually Babylon rebuilt or a nation like Babylon was is too difficult to say; see Revelation 19). The reason the typology works is that the real power behind either empire—Babylon then or the Babylon to come—is the evil one. So this song celebrates both victory over the physical enemies of the people as well as the spiritual powers behind those enemies.

##### *II. When evil is judged, great joy and security will prevail on earth, and in hell great commotion will accompany those entering judgment (14:5-11).*

###### A. There will finally be great joy on earth (5-8).

Verses 5 and 6 declare that God will break the ruthless tyrant. The pride of Babylon is focused on her ruthless king, or her kingship in general that characterized the proud nation. The terms “rod” and “staff” refer to the dominion of the pagan rulers, and so they are metonymies—they are the symbols of authority. (If you argue that there was no rod or staff in their hand as a symbol, then you would have to classify these as hypocatastases, implied comparisons). The point is that the power of these oppressors is t be broken (*sabar* [*shah-bar*]). They ruled with a continuous stroke of anger, afflicting other nations; but soon they would be broken down. Here is another expression of talionic justice.

Verse 7 affirms that this judgment will bring great joy to the people. The key terms here are “rest and quiet” (*nahah saq*e*tah* [*nah-khah shah-keh-tah*]) and the joy, or ringing cry (*rinnah* from *ranan*) that will break out in all the earth. These are the joyful shouts that exclaim the cessation of oppression and the beginning of lasting peace.

Verse 8 speaks of security restored. The “trees” rejoice since no one has ever come up to cut them down. If these are implied comparisons, then they indicate Israel is the trees and the oppressor the cutter. But if the actual trees are meant, the figure would be personification; the forests would be delighted that the enemies no longer will come through cutting down trees to burn their fires and make their ramps. This seems to be what the verse is saying.

###### B. There will be great commotion in Hell (9-11).

Verses 9-11 give the other half of this section, describing the commotion in Hell when the oppressor has been cast down. Here a word study on “*sheol*” (*se’ol*[*sheh-ole*]) would be in order. The Babylonian world had such a common use of the themes of magic, demons, Shades, or Hell, that this approach in the taunt would be obviously appropriate to those who knew about them. Here *sheol* refers to the realm of the departed spirits, all those who died in unrighteousness, without God, without hope, without their pomp, and left to wander in darkness (see Ps. 49).

Verse 9 announces that *sheol* is in tumult (the same word for “rage” of the nations in Psalm 2:1). The meeting party is made up of the kings of the earth and others who are already there. “Shades” (often translated “spirits”) is a term for departed spirits (Hebrew: *r*e*pa’im* [*teh-fah-eem*); it needs a good bit of study in its usages to see its range of meanings and applications..

Verses 10 and 11 record their taunt of the descending oppressor. “Your pomp” has been brought down to *sheol*. The “maggots are spread over // the worms cover” is a graphic line of their physical destruction. The term “maggots,” *rimmah,* is actually a term for the destroying power of decay. In Ugaritic texts it was venerated as a god, the god Rimmon, if the link is correct. But that term could possibly be from another root since Rimmon was also a god of vegetation. Nevertheless, there could be a word play here, a paronomasia; it certainly would suggest to the Hebrew reader an allusion to the Canaanite material. The figures with the words “maggots” and “worms” are probably metonymies, referring to the starting of the decay in the grave that changes pomp into putrification, and bringing down the arrogant to *sheol*, the land of the shades.

##### *III. God will bring down the proud (14:12-23).*

The taunt now focuses on how far the brilliant king has fallen. The prophet makes the comparison between him and the morning star, and then writes the taunt out fully that the people will sing.

Verse 12 addresses the “shining one, the son of the morning.” The Hebrew term for “shining one” (NIV “morning star”) is *helel* (*hay-lale*); the root word means “shining, brilliant” (it is probably related to *halal,* the verb “to praise,” as in a glowing report). The classical translation was “Lucifer” (etymologically connect to “light”), although that has been replaced in modern renderings.

With this section we discover that we have a possible double meaning—not unusual for Hebrew poetry. The word *helel* describes the brilliance of the oppressing king, claiming to be the son of the morning star. But some scholars have seen a second reference in it to Satan, or a spirit force behind the throne. In the Old Testament “stars” may refer to angelic or demonic powers. And the pagan kings claimed to be divine, or at least the offspring of the gods. It is the view of the Hebrew writers that back of the major powers in the empires is a satanic or demonic spirit. The prince of Persia, for example, is both a king and the spirit force behind him in Daniel. In Ezekiel 28 we have a song to the King of Tyre. But the language seems to transcend the king of Tyre, for he is described as the anointed Cherub who was perfect in every way when he walked in the holy mountain (heaven) with God in Eden, until evil was found in him. So the language of the chapter goes way beyond the King of Tyre, although it is about the King of Tyre. As such, the chapter traces the beginning of evil to Satan when he was in heaven. But it will not explain to our satisfaction how evil began; it only uses the passive voice: “evil was found in you.” The Bible will trace it back no further than that; but the Bible will make it clear that God is not the author of sin.

Now if Isaiah 14 is the same kind of chapter, then it may be referring to that same evil—the pride that led to Satan’s being cast down from heaven. Lucifer, or *Helel* if you prefer, would then show the glory that Satan once had. Indeed, Paul says that he still can change himself into an angel of light to deceive people. But the primary meaning of the chapter is the human king who was filled with pomp and vainglory, who fell quickly from his exalted position. The hint to the spirit force behind him is not very strong, but rather subtle.

The passage is prophetic, looking to the future time of the destruction of this wicked king, and that is why it is written in the past tense.

Verse 13 portrays the great pride of this one who said he would exalt himself above God: “I will ascend to heaven, // I will raise my throne above the stars of God.” He arrogantly thought that he was suitable for heaven, higher than the angels, fit to join the assembly of the gods. In verse 14 he thought he could make himself like the Most High. Such was the ambition of these powerful despots who thought they were divine. But the contrast is: “But you are brought down to the grave // to the depths of the pit” (note *bor // sh*e*’ol*), according to verse 15.

So this section shows the age-old pattern in divine judgment—great human pride will be abased. Pride should not be trivialized to thinking more highly of oneself in mundane matters. It is religious pride that tries to usurp God’s throne and will in no way submit to the LORD.

Verse 16 records the amazement of those in hell of those who witness his fall; it is in the form of a question, an erotesis: “Is this the one who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble?” Here too it would refer primarily to the king of Babylon, the empire builder who kept puppet empires at bay and who would not let captives go home. When divine judgment has fallen, such kings are nothing. This evokes the amazement over them. Where is all their power now?

Verses 18-19 show that this one will not even have a state funeral. Kings normally lie in state when they die, but this one will be cast out of his tomb. To stress the indignity of this the prophet uses a couple of similes: “like a rejected branch” and “like a corpse trampled under foot.” The image of a branch is used here ironically; it often is used for a king who continues a dynasty. Here it is cut off and cast down. The other simile is of a trodden carcass. He will be like the rest of the carnage on the battle field. There will be no honor or dignity in his death.

The section ends with a brief summation (verse 20-23) that there would be no normal burial for this one, because he has ruined his land and his people. The idea of remaining nameless forever, which is the thrust of the last few lines, is an expression that signifies non-existence. His death will be ignominious. To be forgotten is to be utterly destroyed—even from memory.

But the death will also be for the land, the great land of Babylon. It will be turned into a place for owls, a swampland; God would sweep it with the broom of destruction (implied comparison). Babylon was destroyed by Persia in 538 B.C.; and after a while the city itself was ruined, and lay in ruins for 2500 years, until Sadam Hussein began rebuilding it as part of the cultural heritage of Iraq.

In the days of Isaiah, the people of Judah had no idea of the length of time between the oracle and its fulfillment. They might have expected it soon. But they did not know how the sequence of judgment with the exile, deliverance from Babylon, and judgment on Babylon would work out in Old Testament times, nor could they have known that there would be a glorious future destruction of “Babylon” at the end of the age when Messiah comes in glory (Rev. 19).

##### *Epilogue (14:24-27)*

In this little section Isaiah declares that this kind of destruction is what God had purposed for Assyria as well. So it looks like he has made an application of his prophetic taunt song to the immediate situation.

But this little addition, especially within the context of the Assyrian crisis, has led many scholars to conclude that Sennacherib was the one intended in chapter 14. Babylon would then have been referred to figuratively for the Mesopotamian region in a comparison of Assyria’s immense pride with that of Babylon. This avoids having to have the prophet look down the future for an oracle against Babylon; but it still retains the difficulty of the Babylonian motif so early. And besides, the straightforward use of the name Babylon would lead to the conclusion he meant Babylon. The other oracles are against the nations so named. And he certainly was not hesitant in using the name Assyria when that is what he meant.

#### Conclusion

The passage then has the tone of triumph for the people of God. Its primary application would be jubilation for the believers. They will have the rest, the release from fear, bondage, and oppression. Only faith in the LORD leads to this. Believers can anticipate that their oppressors—and the evil force behind them—will be completely and utterly destroyed, since God has no tolerance for pride and arrogant oppression. Many passages about divine judgment come to mind in connection to this. Among them the New Testament oracle about how Babylon has fallen, Babylon—that symbol of the present evil world system, the anti-kingdom.

Certainly on a much smaller level (by secondary application) we may say that there is a warning here for anyone not to live according to the standards of the evil empire. God will abase the proud.[59](http://bible.org/seriespage/burdens-upon-nations-isaiah-131%E2%80%942318" \l "P809_221666) But do not make this point in place of the main point about divine judgment on the greatest pride, rejection and replacement of God. The scope here is cosmic; the victory is spiritual and final; the time is eschatological. With all that in mind, it is worth noting that anyone choosing pride and oppression is heading for destruction, the same destruction as their god, the god of this world.

The Glorious Messiah and the Messianic Age

## The Defeat of the Forces of Evil and the Deliverance of the People of God Isaiah 27:1-13

This is the final part of the “Little Apocalypse” of Isaiah 24-27. It moves into eschatological events, spanning the time from Isaiah’s present days through the first return to the land all the way to the end of the age with the great return and the new creation. The fulfillment of the promises that bring blessing and peace will only be possible with the destruction of evil—the wicked on the earth and the evil spirit forces that are using them.

#### I. The LORD will destroy the forces of evil (1).

The final deliverance of God’s people must begin with the victory of the evil forces that sought to destroy her. Verse one announces this great victory over evil, but it does it using strange, mythological terms. Some argue that Isaiah is simply using pagan mythological ideas to express a victory for the LORD. But it is more likely that he is taking these views seriously, for behind pagan religious beliefs there were dark spirit forces at work.

The Babylonian religion had said that creation was accomplished by the cosmic victory of their god over *ti’amat*, the source of all the dragons or serpents of the deep. The sea monsters were the forces of chaos that *ti’amat*, the Deep, mustered to avenge the death of her husband; and so they had to be controlled. The ancient Babylonian creation myth (see Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*) has the god Marduk creating the universe after defeating Tiamat (lit. “salt water”), and then creating humans from the blood of the god Kingu. Some of these words are found in the literature of the Bible, albeit changed in meaning because the forces of nature are not deified. In fact, the Genesis account is a polemic against it. Yahweh God created the universe; and in the beginning the whole world was enveloped in darkness. At that time God’s Spirit hovered over the face of the “deep” (Hebrew *t*e*hom* is the masculine cognate of Babylonian feminine word *ti’amat*). God controlled the chaos and gathered the waters into their places; but the deep was not a goddess.

Accounts of the Exodus (Ps. 114) also use language that was familiar in the ancient world to reflect God’s victory over Sea, words such as the Deep, Rahab (serpent), and Leviathan, which are all forces of chaos to the pagans. To the writers of the Bible they are forces of chaos as well, but the chaos of nature, such as the ocean or rivers. They were never even considered to be gods by the Hebrews. And the writers chose to use the terms to make that point, that they may have been forces of nature but they were not gods, and that Yahweh, the God of Israel, could control them..

The prophet Isaiah, as indeed the rest of Scripture, sees the future events at the end of the age (the eschaton) as parallel to the accounts of the beginnings of the creation. At the beginning the LORD brought life out of the deep, as if to say what the pagans worship God manipulated. And accordingly, God will create again at the end of the age, a new heaven and a new earth, but only after he defeats all the evil forces that controlled the hearts and minds of the pagans. Isaiah has more to say about this than any other writer. Here, in chapter 27, that new creation will come about through a great victory over the forces of chaos once again; and while the Hebrews did not deify these forces of nature, they understood the pagans did, and in fact that the pagans worshiped them. Accordingly, these forces of nature were false gods, and that also indicated that evil spirits were in it all deceiving the world.

It makes good sense to see the two conflicts in their spiritual dimension, especially if the primary spiritual force behind pagan gods is the evil one himself, Satan. In the beginning, before Genesis, Satan was cast out of heaven to rule in darkness in this world. But at creation the LORD dispelled the darkness with light, corrected the waste and void, defeated and controlled the forces of chaos by limiting the oceans and fixing the dry land, and brought great blessing to His creation. And at the end of the age, Satan will be finally defeated once and for all before the new order of creation is established (Rev. 12).

This verse, then, announces victory over the kingdoms of this world, over the spirits behind them, underscoring the biblical polemic against pagan religion.

The verse begins with “in that day” which is an expression often used by the prophets for eschatological predictions, usually end-of-the-age predictions. Here the “sword of the LORD” is the means of the victory. Elsewhere in Scripture this is clarified as the decree that comes from His mouth, the Word of the LORD (so the figure would be implication [or hypocatastasis]).

The “weapon” is powerful: hard and great and strong. The threefold description of God’s powerful word underscores the certainty of His victory over evil.

Evil carries three descriptions here as well: Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the crooked serpent, and the monster that is in the sea.

Leviathan is an interesting motif in the Old Testament. It is used in Job with the meaning of the crocodile, although there are probably mythological allusions in that passage as well. In Ugaritic the term is *Lotan*; the pictures the Ugaritic texts provide are of a seven-headed dragon of the deep, viewed as the god of the underworld, the force of the ocean, or chaos. In this passage the term “monster” (*tannin*) is also used, and these two, *Leviathan/Lotan* and *tannin*, are paralleled in Ugaritic mythological texts. It is interesting that in the Genesis account of creation we are also told that God made also the great sea creatures (*tanninim*). The point is that they are just animals in the account; and the significance of this is that whatever the pagans worshiped—God made. In this sense, Genesis 1 becomes a polemic against pagan religion, and a theological explanation of “You shall have no other gods before me”—of course not, because none were before Him, He made them all.

The term “serpent” is also used here, with the adjectives of “crooked and twisting.” The serpent was venerated in Egypt (especially as the sacred cobra), Phoenicia (as the mother goddess of all living), and in Canaan (with snake worship). Of course, in the Bible the serpent is the representation of evil and death, or connected with death. The remarkable parallelism of these expressions in Isaiah 27:1 and in Ugaritic texts for the god of the deep cannot be overlooked; Isaiah is clearly alluding to the passages in his announcement of the great victory at the end of the age.

It may be that the imagery in Isaiah is meant to be used in its figurative sense of the Deep—that is, Sea Water. The fact that the pagans had deities who ruled the deep need not have been carried into the allusion. The repetition of “Leviathan” in the passage may represent the two largest rivers known to the Hebrews, the Tigris and the Euphrates, which are akin to the sea, and like the sea are symbolized as monsters and destined to be tamed. Leviathan the gliding or the swift would be the Tigris (meaning “swiftness”), and Leviathan the crooked would be the Euphrates. The punishment of these elemental forces seems to be regarded as a necessary preliminary to the establishment of a new order, especially if they figuratively describe Assyria and Babylon respectively, and the spirit/gods behind them.

So the reptiles, even though of mythic origin, signify for Isaiah the chaos of the sea, but opposition from world powers as well with the spirit forces behind them. The LORD will put down all enemies, including the evil or Satanic spirits who had become false gods that the pagans feared. These spirits used things that the people feared or revered to draw their devotion.

For Isaiah, God’s power over the nations could only be complete when the gods the nations worshiped were destroyed.

The imagery of the two Leviathans for the rivers, as well as the monster of the sea, would then fit what we see in Daniel 7and Revelation 12 The monster or dragon would be Egypt (19:5; Ezek. 29:3, 32:2), whereas the rivers would be the other two powers, Assyria and Babylon. If only one Leviathan were mentioned, it might represent the supra-terrestrial waters as the dragon would represent the sub-terrestrial waters. But the link to pagan mythology most certainly moves the whole interpretation into the world of spiritual darkness.

The key verb in here, translated “punish,” is the Hebrew verb *paqad*, normally translated with the meaning “visit.” All the detailed studies of this term show that it means a visit for blessing or for cursing; it means to change the destiny of someone or something. So in a passage on judgment it tells how the LORD intervenes to destroy.

#### II. The LORD will preserve His people (27:2-6).

This section also begins with “In that day,” announcing an eschatological message. Using the allegory of the vineyard, the prophet describes God’s care for His people Israel (2-6). The same figure was used in chapter 5, but there it led to judgment. Here the theme is hopeful throughout.

The text literally says, “Sing about a vineyard of wine.” The imagery of vines and branches is well known to students of the Bible. But the motif is a lot deeper when eschatology is considered. The theme was first introduced in Genesis 49 where God promised a king through the line of Judah (v. 10). But when the One comes “to whom [the scepter] belongs” (the translation of Hebrew “shiloh”), and the obedience of the nations will be his, “He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes; His eyes will be darker than wine; his teeth whiter than milk.” Without getting into the details of this prophecy in Genesis 49, it will be sufficient to say that this early prophecy about the “Messianic Age” uses language of paradisiacal splendor and abundance. Accordingly, Jesus’ first sign in John 2 was to turn water into wine, a harbinger of the coming Messianic Age and an announcement that “*Shiloh”* had come.

Isaiah says that God watches over His vineyard, i.e., Israel. He waters it continually. As part of the allegory we would have to conclude that watering the vineyard refers to the provision of the Word of the LORD through the prophets (see Jer. 7:25; and see the imagery in Psalm 1:1,2, where the water is identified as the word). How else could God nourish a holy nation?

The allegory continues with a mention that if only briers and thorns were confronting Him, He would burn them out easily. This is an internal problem, not a reference to invasion. It refers to paganizers within the nation of Israel. But burning them out is tempered with a desire for them to come to Him in faith. God judges, but He offers the opportunity of refuge in the covenant.

This alternative for peace is actually extended before the section on judgment to follow. It is the message throughout Scripture—God offers His enemies peace! This, in the context, could refer to both unbelieving Israel and the foreign oppressors.

Verse six also announces that “in the days to come” the people of God will flourish. Here is the climax to the little allegory. “Israel” is used because the prophet means both Israel and Judah will flourish. He now changes the image slightly to make Israel a plant rather than a vineyard (hypocatastasis). It starts off with normal growth—planted, takes root, and buds. Since the prophet is addressing the nation of Israel that already was in the land, a prophecy about coming days must be something in the future when Israel will be brought back to the land. But his imagery takes an unusual turn: “and fill all the world with fruit.” Restored Israel will lead to the blessing of the whole world (as Gen. 49 said). Daniel also saw the kingdom of Messiah as a tree, and as a stone, that filled the whole world. In John 15 Jesus, the true Israel, is the vine, and His disciples the branches. That, at the very least, was the beginning of the fruit that would spread throughout the world. Paul in Romans 11 makes it clear that the Gentiles are wild branches that have been grafted into the tree. And so we now can witness the expansion of the Gospel. But He adds that God still has a purpose for Israel after the fullness of the Gentiles comes in; and it is to that purpose that the prophets speak.

#### III. The LORD will purify His people (27:7-11).

In this section the prophet address the nation as a whole, as “Jacob”. All Israel, both kingdoms, would be exiled; and many of their main cities demolished. The language is general enough to be applied to both Samaria and Jerusalem, meaning, the two captivities of Israel by the Assyrians and Judah by the Babylonians. God would use exile to purge Israel and make her into the holy nation and kingdom of priests that she was supposed to be.

In verse 7 the LORD is the subject of the sentence. The questions asked (reminiscent of Paul in Romans) expect a “No” answer. God did not strike Israel down. Rather, punishment would be tempered by mercy, for in exile, cruel as it was, people would survive. There was a future for Israel.

By an implied comparison [hypocatastasis] (“with his fierce blast”) and simile (“as on a day the east wind blows”) the prophet refers to the invasion from the east, from Mesopotamia—Assyria and/or Babylon. The judgment will be like the swift east wind that scorches the land.

According to verse nine this will be the way that God will make Israel deal with her sins. As in Isaiah 40, the point is that through this the sins will be atoned for. He is not referring to the objective basis of atonement, but the practical side of the experience. In exile they would come to penitent awareness of guilt. In other words, the people were removed so that sins would be removed. They will have a new attitude to the will of God. The verse is like Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:24-31.

The penitent and purified nation will show the fruit of its “atonement” by the destruction of pagan influence. They will return to do what they were supposed to do from the beginning. Unfortunately, it would take the Babylonian captivity to purge them of idolatry and make them fiercely loyal to God.

Verses 10 and 11 seem to be rather literal. All that is described in here are the effects of war (so in general could be called metonymy of effect)—abandoned cities, animals moving freely throughout, people gathering dry twigs, and the like. Isaiah sees the effects of war as the reversal of civilization.

The reason for all of this is the lack of understanding in the people—they are for the most part spiritually blind (see Isaiah 6 again). Isaiah likes wisdom motifs. So because of inner blindness—which led to pagan corruption, God would withhold His compassion and favor—even though He made them (see Isaiah 1 again). Of course, as Hosea announced, when they turned to the LORD in faith, then He would show them pity (*Lo Ruhamah*, “no pity,” the name of Hosea’s daughter used as an oracle, becomes *Ruhamah,* “pity”).

#### IV. The LORD will restore His people (27:12, 13).

The passage closes with two complementary images drawn from the Feast of Tabernacles. The first deals with the great harvest to be threshed. From beyond the Euphrates and from beyond the Wadi of Egypt (these are the boundaries of the Land), Israelites would be regathered. Never did Israel have the Land of Promise according to the biblical dimensions; and certainly never did a pure Israel possess it. Here God will “thresh” (hypocatastasis) through the lands of oppression, the chaff will be discarded, but the good grain regathered into the barn. Paul in Romans 11 carries the theme to its clear statement: “All Israel will be saved.” Ezekiel will explain in his wonderful vision of the dry bones that Israel will be regathered at the end of the age in two steps, first physically regathered (the bones come together), meaning restored to the land as a nation but **in unbelief**; and then there will be the spiritual quickening (the Spirit breathes life into the bones) in which the surviving Jewish people will **come to faith** in massive numbers.

The second image here is of the trumpet blast. The image, quite possibly the Word of God like a trumpet blast, calls or summons the people to the holy mountain, which he says now, is in Jerusalem. The apostle Paul used the image of the trumpet for the end of the age **ingathering** (like Israel’s festival of Ingathering at Tabernacles) at the coming of the LORD.

When the LORD gave Israel victory over Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt when He restored them to their land in 536, that was a great deliverance. But this passage was not fulfilled at that time (although it could have been used to explain the victory); in fact, some of the oracles of these end times were written by the prophets after the return from the exile. Evil still existed, Israel was not pure, and their stay in the land would not last but a few centuries and they would be scattered again. The fulfillment still lies in the future.

### Conclusion

There is much that can be done with a passage like this, for it is a wonderful prophecy of God’s dealings with His chosen people. It serves as a comfort and a warning for us today as well as it did for ancient Israel.

As Paul said to the Romans, if God did not spare the natural branches, they should take heed lest he not spare them either. Believers are to learn from Israel’s mistakes. We have been grafted in; we are a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. We are the branches of the vine. And even though our participation in the New Covenant in no way nullifies a future blessing for believing Israel, our concern in applying this passage is with us today primarily.

So I would first be clear that this is a prophecy for Israel, and for the great future victory over evil forces in the world, human and demonic. When that victory comes God will fulfill all His promises, especially those He made to Israel.

But I would also work the message to be applicable also to us who are in Christ. We know the eschaton will begin with a great celebration of victory over Satan and all his forces; and we know that the people of God will be preserved through the judgment, and will emerge purified to serve in the heavenly city. Thus, we can speak about an application in terms of how this hope purifies us (the apostle said whoever has this hope purifies himself), or in terms of bearing fruit throughout the world to demonstrate we are in the kingdom (our LORD said the kingdom was taken from them and given to a people bearing fruit). But we also know that in the future that hope will become reality. There is great evil in the world, demonic evil; and it will be destroyed completely, and the people of God purified and glorified to serve Him in the new heavens and the new earth.

See a detailed discussion of the Ugaritic texts in Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill).

The Burdens Upon The Nations Isaiah 13:1—23:18

## The Deliverance of Judah’s King Isaiah 38:1-22

### 1. TheAccount (38:1-8)

This chapter records another lesson on faith for believers of all times. It is faith in the power of the LORD to do what seems to be the impossible. In the sickness of death, King Hezekiah prayed and had his life extended by fifteen years (1-7). For a sign of that promise, the sun went back ten degrees on the sun dial (8). In response to this gracious provision of extended life, Hezekiah recorded his song of thanksgiving for that answer to prayer (9-20). The last two verses record what Hezekiah had done for the healing, and what he had asked as a sign (21, 22). Any exposition of the song will have to provide the historic background for the situation.

### 2. The Song of Thanksgiving (38:9-20)

To capture the tone of the song and get the proper interpretation of the lines, the literary genre must be established. This is a classic declarative praise song, a *todah**[60](http://bible.org/seriespage/deliverance-judah%E2%80%99s-king-isaiahi-i381-22" \l "P824_223939)\_ftn1* song that would be offered in the Sanctuary, accompanied by the giving of the peace offering. So it is jubilation! It is a praise in celebration of life, thanks to divine intervention. The point can then be rather readily captured by anyone who has had health restored, especially if dramatically from an apparent life-threatening situation. Of course, people who have had health restored from lesser ailments can also appreciate the blessing of life. But this is the tone that must be caught in the exposition of the passage.

In a typical declarative praise psalm the first part will include a looking back to the problem and the prayer. Unfortunately, many translations and a number of expositions have chosen to use the English present tense, giving the impression he is still praying. But it is a praise psalm; this is simply reporting the need when he prayed. Therefore, it should not be the main part of the message, nor should it make a separate point. It lays the foundation for the praise.

The parts of the passage according to the declarative psalm structure are as follows: the report of the lament (10-12), the report of the prayer at that time (13-14), the report of the deliverance (15-16), and the didactic section with the praise proper (17-20). The first part is a review of what happened (10-16); the last part is the praise (17-20).

The expositional arrangement could group these in a number of ways, just so the point of each section is maintained. I would put the first two sections together as the report of the trouble (10-14), and then as sub-points have the lament and the prayer. My second section would be the report of the deliverance (15-16). The third section is the climax, the praise with the lesson (17-20).

The application from a praise psalm is pretty straightforward. People should do what he is doing, praising God publicly, individually, for the additional life given to them. But note that in a praise psalm there are always specific reasons for praise and certain lessons learned. Here there are two major things: God restores people to life to serve Him further, and God lets people go through anguish for their welfare—to improve. There is always the praise for the healing, but there will certainly also be the questions as to why God allowed this to happen. The welfare of the sufferer concerns spiritual benefits, to be sure; and that means that the faith of him and others will be strengthened through the entire process. It is sad that in order for people to grow spiritually God often has to put them in positions of desperate dependency on Him. Usually when they have things going their way the spiritual life becomes less urgent.

A secondary application would be to encourage others who are ill and suffering, or even at death’s door, to pray for life. That is the purpose of a testimony of praise.

### Exposition

***(Part One: The Report of the Deliverance)***

#### I. Faced with the prospect of possible death, believers can pray to God for help (38:10-14).

##### *A. Believers may face the treat of pre-mature death (10-12).*

10 I said, “In the prime of my life

must I go through the gates of death,

and be deprived of the rest of my years?”

Beginning with verse 10 the king is recalling what he thought when he learned that he might die pre-maturely. This is looking back—he is no longer in danger for this is a praise psalm!

There is no clear indication that these lines should be questions, but they certainly could be, and would make very good sense that way as he reasoned through what was happening, perhaps expressing his amazement that he might die. The point is that this is not the death of someone in a ripe old age—it was at the noon time of his life, before he lived out his whole course.

11 I said, “I will not again see the LORD,

the LORD, in the land of the living;

no longer will I look on mankind,

or be with those who now dwell in this world.

The Hebrews were convinced that they should live and worship God in this life as long as they could. For them to die and go to the next world was not a wonderful thought, nor a solution to anything. Death was an enemy that God could and should conquer. I take it that the expression “see the LORD” refers to worship in the Sanctuary where they would see evidence of the LORD’s favor through the praises of Israel, and so “LORD” would be a metonymy of cause (compare Psalm 63 as well as other passages on this). Certainly going to heaven would be perfection and glory; but edifying praise, prayers for intervention, and active participation in God’s spiritual program only work in this life while we have life. Hezekiah did not want this experience to end early.

12 My dwelling has been removed and carried away from me

like a shepherd’s tent.

Like a weaver I have rolled up my life,

and He has cut me off from the loom;

day and night you make an end of me.”

This verse uses two similes to make the point. The habitation or dwelling is probably his life, or more specifically his body (so possibly a metonymy itself); like a tent it was being folded up and taken away—you have to imagine here bedouin tents and how easily they are removed. The other image is that of the weaver; Hezekiah’s life, under this figure, was rolled up and about to be cut off—he had spun his last work. God was bringing him to an early and sudden death.

##### *B. Believers may pray for divine healing (13, 14).*

In these two verses Hezekiah recalls how he prayed for God to intervene and spare his life.

13 I waited patiently until morning

but like a lion He broke all my bones;

day and night You make an end of me.

This verse tells how Hezekiah waited for the LORD to restore him. “Waited patiently” could very well be a metonymy of adjunct since it accompanies his praying. The word “morning” is clearly a hypocatastasis, comparing the recovery to full health to the morning. But it did not come quickly because the LORD was apparently “destroying” him. “Bones” is a metonymy of subject, meaning the whole person encased in the boney framework. “Lion” is of course another simile. And the expression of breaking all the bones may be an extension of that simile, but it is certainly hyperbolic as well.

14 I cried like a swift or a thrush

I moaned like a morning dove;

My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens,

“I am troubled; O LORD, come to my aid.”

Here we have the praying and the prayer that occurred while he was waiting on the LORD. His cries and moans are compared to birds (similes), suggesting that he was losing his strength and resolve and could only moan softly like an injured dove. To “look on the heavens” probably is metonymical for his prayer. When he prayed he grew tired and exhausted because of his sickness. The “eyes” are singled out (synecdoche) for the whole body because they easily indicate failing health and vigor, both to himself (he cannot see, or cannot keep his eyes open) and to others (who see in his eyes that he is near death).

His prayer is for God to come to his aid. The Hebrew text here is *li ‘orbeni* ( *lee or-bay-nee*), “be my surety.” He wants God to pledge to him, or perhaps, to be his pledge, his assurance, his surety of life. The word then is also a metonymy (of cause) since he wants God to assure him of life and health.

#### II. God delights in answering the fervent prayers of the righteous (38:15, 16)

##### *A. The appeal must come from the righteous (15).*

Verse 15 tells of the answer to his prayer; it could easily go with the preceding section as part of the prayer, but I have put it here as part of the discussion of the answer to the prayer because it seems to be a transition and not part of the request. Moreover, verse 16, the report of the deliverance, is tied strongly to this verse.

15 What can I say? He has both spoken to me

and He Himself has done this.

I will walk humbly all my years

because of the anguish of my soul.

I have used the term “righteous” in my point to capture the spirit of this verse and make a link to the New Testament’s affirmation of the prayer of the righteous. God is the one who can deliver Hezekiah; but God is the one who has done this to him. How can that be explained? Probably not to our satisfaction. One can only conclude that God has a plan for our lives that can put us through all of this, so that we might cry to Him for healing. Therefore, faced with such power over our lives, and seeing no one else we can turn to for help, we like this king must “walk softly” before Him. This hypocatastasis would refer to a careful life of obedience—making sure that we do not make the wrong step. This idea includes faith in the LORD and obedience to His Word and living so as to be pleasing to Him. God is willing to restore to health someone who will be obedient to Him; someone who would return to a life of self-indulgence and unrighteousness has no appeal at all.

##### *B. God delights in saving life (16).*

16 O Lord, by such things men live,

and my spirit finds life in them too.

You restored me to life

and let me live.

Here is the clear report that the prayer was answered. This sixteenth verse develops a principle from what the LORD has done—by this men live. Those who believe in the LORD and pray to Him, living a life of cautious obedience—they are blessed by God with life. And this is why God blessed Hezekiah—his spirit revived when he knew what God was doing to him, and what God wanted to develop in him.

So from this comes the great proclamation of praise in 16b: “You restored me to health (*tahlimeni* [*takh-lee-may-nee*] from *halam* [*khah-lam*]), you let me live (*w*e*hahayeni* [*veh-ha-kha-yey-nee* ] from *hayah* [*khah-yah*]). I would spend some time on these words, defining them and illustrating them, because this is the first praise report. It means, of course, that God has power over our health, our life, and our death. Psalm 116 affirms, “Precious in the eyes of the LORD is the death of His saints”—or, nobody dies without God’s “say-so.”

***(Part Two: The Actual Praise for the Deliverance)***

#### III. God answers prayer and restores health in order that His people might praise Him forever (38:17-20).

##### *A. Praise is edifying (17).*

17 Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered anguish;

in Your love you kept me from the pit of destruction;

You have put all my sins behind your back.

All biblical praise is meant to teach something as a means of explaining a difficulty or encouraging faith. Here the king acknowledges that this bitter anguish was for his benefit (Hebrew *l*e*salom* [*leh-shah-loam*]), his welfare, or wholeness, or completeness—his health and well-being. There is simply no other way to develop this. Jesus Christ, even though he was a son, the Book of Hebrews tells us, learned obedience through the things that He suffered. To learn from suffering is critical; it is not sufficient merely to recover or be healed.

In the same verse the king explains that God kept him from destruction by His love and did not let his sins condemn him. Here is praise for the attribute of faithful love that was the cause of the deliverance, and that did not use his sins as reason to destroy him. Most praises will focus on one attribute of God—this is it.

So we learn from this and other Scripture that God loves His people and will preserve them from destruction; but in the process He may put them through bitter anguish so that they might have a stronger faith, greater obedience (tread softly) and better praise.

##### *B. Praise is the declaration of God’s faithfulness (18).*

18 For the grave cannot praise you,

death cannot sing your praise;

those who go down to the pit

cannot hope for your faithfulness.

Here we have a teaching that is common to the psalms. The grave cannot praise—he is no good to God if he dies and goes to the grave because he could not then tell how God saved him from the grave. Only the living can praise God’s faithfulness. Hezekiah’s experience of God’s faithfulness was that God mercifully restored to life His covenant believer. We will be able to praise God in heaven throughout eternity; but only in this life can we praise God by saying, “He kept me alive to serve more in this life.”

##### *C. Praise is to be unending (19, 20).*

19 The living, the living—they praise You, as I am doing today; fathers tell their children about your faithfulness.

20 The LORD saves me and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of the LORD.

The praise of Hezekiah will encourage others to pray when they are sick, so that the living will rejoice and praise in the way that God grants full life. The theme of this praise should be very clear by these last verses—God restored the king to life. Therefore, today and throughout all his life, he says, he will praise the LORD—not just once for the answer to the prayer. Every day that he has is a gift from God, and he will declare that truth.

### Conclusion

The basic lesson from the point of the psalm is rather clear: If God restores us to life—or even preserves our lives from danger—unending praise in the Sanctuary must come from us to Him. We know this; we simply do not do it. We are eager and diligent to pray, because we are in a panic and desperate. But how soon we forget the reason that God delivers us from illness and death. He expects our public praise.

And then there is a parallel in the spiritual world. By God’s love and grace we have been given new life in Christ—salvation. So with our whole lives all the time we should be praising God in public. After all, He redeemed us that we might be trophies of His grace in this world.

The Hebrew term *todah* is a noun from *yadah*, meaning "acknowledgment, praise." The verbal idea of "acknowledge" works best because the word can be used for praise or confess sin. Although translated "thanksgiving" in English versions, there is a great difference between our modern "thanks" and Hebrew praise.

"Prime" is literally "noontide"; this would be hypocatastasis. "Life" is literally "days"--a synecdoche.

“The verb is *puqqadti*, literally "robbed" of the rest of life. This too would be an implied comparison, hypocatastasis to stress the sudden loss he was anticipating.

The verb is *puqqadti*, literally "robbed" of the rest of life. This too would be an implied comparison, hypocatastasis to stress the sudden loss he was anticipating.

Hebrew is *Yah*, the abbreviated form, common in poetry.

The expression *b*e*'eres hahayyim* (*beh-e-rets ha-khay-yim*) is a common one for this world of living people. The genitive would be attributive--a land characterized by living people.

The Hebrew has *dori*, normally "my generation"; but it means his time on earth.

"Life" in Hebrew is usually in the plural, as here: *hayyay* (*khay-yay*), "my life[s]." But the plural indicates all the complexity of a lifetime, all the parts--it is a full expression of all that life is.

There is irony in the verb "you make an end of me." The Hebrew is *taslimeni* (*tash-lee-may-nee*), from *salam* (*shah-lam*), the verbal root of "peace, welfare, wholeness." To lie in peace is an expression for death; but the Hebrew idea of peace would normally be otherwise.

Literally the Hebrew form, *siwwiti* (from *siwwah* [*siv-vah*] ) means "I quieted myself." The verb suggests that the natural instinct was to cry out and complain, but he forced himself to wait patiently on the LORD.

The Hebrew is emphatic, *'asapsep*, literally "I chattered." The verb is suggested to be onomatopoeic.

Another onomatopoeic word, *hagah* (here: *'ehgeh*) means to mumble under the breath. It also can be used for "meditate."

The verb is *`asaq* (*ah-shak*), "to be oppressed, crushed." It is much stronger than "troubled."

The verb means "walk softly" ('*eddaddeh*).

"Anguish" is fine; *mar* (from *marar*) literally means "bitterness"--*‘al mar napsi* (*al mar naph-she*).

The verb *hayah* and its related forms is found in this one verse three times. Since the word occurs several other places in the psalm, this would be the major theological theme to look at. Besides, the lament is its whole antithesis--death. A word study of *hayah* or *hay* would not change the definition, but would discover that there is a quality of life involved, not merely surviving.

The text has *missahat b*e*li* (*mish-sha-khat beh-lee*), "from the pit of destruction." The expression indicates the place of destruction where one is reduced to nothing. Therefore, we have a metonymy of effect here for the grave or death.

"Putting sins behind the back" is a bold anthropomorphism to stress that they were kept out of sight--did not get in the way of God's love for him.

Here is the verb that is fitting for this type of psalm, *todekka*, from *yadah* in the imperfect with a pronominal suffix.

The parallel verb is the well-known *halal*, *y*e*hal*e*lekka* (*yeh-ha-leh-lek-kah*). The root word means to be shining, brilliant; and so the verb to praise has the idea of glowing with a report, enthusiastic and excited telling about what was enjoyed.

The figure is metonymy of subject--the dead in the grave.

The word is *’emet*, "truth"; but it means reliability as well. It is related to the verbal root *’aman*. The figure here would be metonymy of cause--the cause is His faithfulness, the effect is that He delivered Hezekiah.

The Hebrew form is the infinitive with the preposition: *l*e *hosi‘eni* (*leh-ho-she-ey-nee*), meaning "to save me." The construction implies something is left out. It may indicate: "The LORD [decided] to save me."

[The Defeat of the Forces of Evil and the Deliverance of the People of God Isaiah 27:1-](http://bible.org/seriespage/defeat-forces-evil-and-deliverance-people-god-isaiah-271-13)

## A Message of Comfort to God’s People Isaiah 40:1-31

With this chapter we begin the second portion of the Book of Isaiah, which has as its common theme the salvation and future blessing of God’s people. When you work in this section of the book, you have to work on several levels of significance or application, and you have to work on them in the proper order.

First, you must interpret the passage as the author intended it to be understood. This means that your first consideration would be to think about how the message would fit the exiled community as they were being encouraged to leave Babylon and return to the land. The prophet was giving them a message they would need later when they were in exile.

Recall that the Jews had been taken into captivity in three waves, in 605 B.C., 597 B.C. and 586 B.C. when Jerusalem was destroyed. They knew that they were to be there for 70 years, and so toward the end of that exile they were to be prepared to leave. They did leave in 536 when Persia ruled the land. But a lot of the Jews did not go back to the land, but stayed in the east. As we said before, Isaiah did not know these dates, because he is writing beforehand. He probably thought his audience would be in exile, and she he was giving them the message of comfort.

Of course, you will still word the theology of the passage in the form of timeless truths, but the arena of its primary application will be this community.

Second, and related to the first, you must consider the impact of the message on the immediate audience. This is true of all prophetic passages, in the Old or New Testament. They may predict something far off in the future, but the immediate audience will learn some basic principle under that discussion that will build faith, reprove, or instruct. The theological message of the passage will be the same; but the response to it will be different for different times, perhaps preventive as opposed to remedial. Even if Isaiah’s immediate audience never went into captivity, they would have learned from the sermons to repent (and hopefully stave off the exile), and to know that even if they went they were still the covenant people (if they believed) and would be coming back. That would have encouraged them.

Third, you must then consider how the passage would be understood in Gospel times. This step is usually important because the prophecy probably will have some Messianic import. Often the Messianic passage will have a meaning back in the Old Testament times that is but a type or a foreshadowing of the Christ event. Or, the Isaianic passage may be quoted in the New Testament, especially in some apostolic teaching on doctrine or practice, and this provides a good intermediate step to the present application. Isaiah 40 was applied to John and Jesus in their missions.

Fourth, you then may look for the significance or application for the modern audience. Here you are looking for similar conditions to the original setting so that you can apply the theology in a similar way. In many cases in these chapters we can think in terms of the anticipation of the second coming and the fulfillment of the promises, just as they were looking for divine intervention and the fulfillment. Many of these oracles have both the immediate and the ultimate applications in mind, and so that makes this approach a little easier to see. Based on Isaiah 40, for example, what John did as a voice announcing the coming of Messiah (the fulfillment of the prophecy) we too can do since there is now a second coming we anticipate (an application of the fulfillment).

The passages are all different, some more directly related than others. But if you have done the proper contextual exegesis and worked up the theology the passage teaches, the levels of application will unfold fairly easily because they will be similar. Isaiah 40, for example, announced the “coming” of the LORD to intervene and deliver the people from bondage; so that the people were to prepare for this and to comfort others and to wait on the LORD. That was true on the eve of the departure from Babylon (where they expected divine intervention but not an actual coming of God into their midst). It was true on the eve of the first coming when John came preaching repentance because the Messiah was coming (and that Messiah actually was God coming into the world, but as a shepherd). And it is true today as we look for the second coming (when He will come in glory); must wait for it, prepare for it, and announce the comfort it brings.

This chapter is the prologue to the whole series of oracles and songs that follow; it has the basic themes that are found throughout the following chapters. The passage begins with promise (1-11). It opens with an instruction to comfort the people of God (1,2), followed by the oracle of the one preparing the way (3-8), and the heralds announcing the coming of the LORD in accordance with the Word of God (9-11). Israel was in need of such good news because they were in captivity under Gentile domination. The heralds bring the good tidings not to Babylon, but to Zion where the glory of the LORD will reappear when He leads His people like a Shepherd.

The second part of the chapter is an encouragement that God is able to do all this (12-26). The message of comfort is based on the omnipotence of God (12-17) and the incomparable nature of God (18-26). Consequently, the people who know Him are instructed not to mistrust Him but to renew their faith as they wait for the promises (27-31).

So the first section is instruction about the coming intervention, the second section is the theological basis for it, and the third is application. A quick reading through the chapter will surface several imperatives, and these will give us an immediate focus on the direction of our exposition: “comfort” in verses 1 and 2; “prepare” in verse 4; “go up” and shout in verse 9 (and point out the coming of the LORD in verse 10). Then, in the last part of the passage there are principles and lessons but not in the form of imperatives: the people should renew their faith (26), stop mistrusting the LORD (27), build up their faith (29), and wait expectantly for the deliverance (31). I will come back to the application later, but it looks to me like the lessons in verses 1-11 are geared to the faithful remnant, the messengers, and the lessons in the end are for the general population who are weak in faith, or lacking in faith. The first are the heralds, the voices; the latter the nation in general.

If I am planning my exposition, and my study to get ready for that exposition, I will probably not do as much detailed analysis of the middle section for several reasons. First, it is one of the most magnificent sections in the book and if I try to simplify it I might diminish it. Second, it is pretty clear what God is saying. I might have to explain an expression or a question—but an excellent reading of it will do very well. Third, my main emphasis will focus on all the instructions that employ key theological words and unusual figures of speech. I would certainly not treat this material lightly or quickly, for it is the theological basis of the instructions; but there are not that many things I need to work on there for the exegesis.

### Exposition

#### I. The promise of the coming of the LORD brings comfort and instruction to God’s people (40:1-11).

I chose to use the expression “coming of the LORD” in my point rather than “divine intervention” (the way it would be understood by Isaiah’s audience) because the word is in the text and I shall have to explain it anyway, and because in the complete fulfillment it is an actual coming as well as real divine intervention (both first and second).

##### *A. ”Comfort my people” (1, 2).*

I have chosen in these subpoints to pick the key phrases out of each section because they capture the point nicely. This is not always possible, but here it is because of the different messengers. In the development of this section the text employs different heralds; the first two verses call for the remnant to announce a threefold comfort to the people. And this is all tied to the message of the first eleven verses, that God will now deliver His people.

Verse 1 calls for the word of comfort to go out. These imperatives, “comfort, comfort” are in the plural—*nahamu, nahamu* (pronounced *na-kha-moo*)—meaning that the prophet and the school of the prophets, or perhaps even the whole faithful remnant, are to announce comfort to the people in general. The verb *nakham* is crucial here. In the *niphal* verbal system the verb means “to repent”; but here in the *piel* system it means “to comfort, console.” I would do some reading on this word, but the meaning is pretty much the same as in English. It suggests that the people are discouraged, depressed, suffering—and the prophets will bring them hope, encouragement, good news, to ease and soothe their troubled hearts.

The expression “comfort” would be a metonymy of effect; the cause would be what the prophets would say to the people, and that is coming next.

Verse 2 literally says “speak to the heart.” This is a poetic expression (using a metonymy of subject, “heart”) that represents an intimate and loving speech, sincere and heartfelt. For example, Boaz, we read, “spoke to the heart” of Ruth—kind, loving, gracious, generous, and tender. In this context, the three reasons for this kind of speech were war had ended, iniquity had been pardoned, and judgment was over.

Note that it is “Jerusalem” that is to be spoken to in comforting words. This would probably be a metonymy of subject although adjunct could be argued for since Jerusalem being the main city would represent the nation—but we still mean the people in it. It is interesting to me that the name Jerusalem is used when the exiles in Babylon are ultimately intended. This suggests a Palestinian provenance for the writing.

This oracle would certainly be comforting to the exiles in Babylon. But it soon became clear to them that these words, and many of the other prophecies in the rest of the book, were not exhausted or completely fulfilled in the return from the Babylonian captivity. They knew there was another, greater fulfillment at the end of the age, when the Messiah would come. This is why at the Temple in Jerusalem Simeon rejoiced to see the baby Jesus—the “consolation” of Israel, a direct allusion to Isaiah 40.

##### *B. “Prepare the way of the LORD” (3-5).*

The second instruction is for the preparation for the coming of the LORD, so that the glory of the LORD would be revealed. In the immediate setting, the restoration would be evidence of God’s glorious intervention (so “glory” would be metonymy of cause or adjunct); but in the advent of the Messiah, the glory of the LORD would be present and revealed—in part at the first advent, for the flesh of Jesus was the tent that covered the glory except when He chose to reveal it; in full at the second coming when He comes in glory. At the first advent, many saw it (“we beheld His glory”); but at the second coming, “all flesh” will see it (a synecdoche for all human beings).

This section begins with the voice of one crying. We learn from the New Testament that this is ultimately a prophecy about John the Baptist—although others could have cried this message in the original period, and others in our age could also be such a voice. The speaker is a mystery—only a voice. His identity is not important; the message is. John represented this so well: “I am a voice” (Mark 1:3). He made it very clear, using Isaianic images, that he was not the light.

The imagery throughout this little section uses implied comparisons (hypocatastasis). The “desert” represents the wasteland and the barren places; and so it speaks of need in the human heart, or even obstacles and impediments to life. All the changes enjoined are then in the spiritual life: valleys, crooked places, ridges, and the like are all sinful things, problems in the life that need to be straightened out. The “straight highway” is the spiritual believer who through repentance and amendment of life leaves nothing in his spiritual condition that would hinder the appearance of the LORD, the apprehension of the coming of the LORD, or participation in the Messianic Age of the LORD.

##### *C. “Cry: The Word of our God shall stand forever” (40:8-8).*

The mortal messenger will bring the good news of comfort and forgiveness; but there is no comfort in mortal flesh. Flesh changes and dies like grass (simile); its beauty like that of flowers cannot last.[85](http://bible.org/seriespage/message-comfort-god%E2%80%99s-people-isaiah-401-31" \l "P960_254953) To see the vivid picture, you need to be familiar with what grows and what does not grow in the land. These comparisons show the fading and transitory nature of human lives. One cannot find comfort there. Humans fail; they cannot save themselves. But the contrast is with the eternal Word of God that cannot fail. So the message of hope comes from God’s word. That is truth. That can be trusted.

##### *D. “Say: Behold — your God” (9-11).*

Now the heralds are people who bring good tidings to Zion, possibly the returning remnant if not the faithful who live in the expectation of divine intervention. They can point to the reason for the restoration, the comfort, the hope—God will make Himself known to deliver them. These heralds are to announce to Jerusalem and to the cities of Judah—the people in the land (metonymies of subject): “Here is your God.” Any divine intervention could be described in this way; but ultimately the literal meaning would emerge. John would announce, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” And from his initial announcement through all subsequent prophets, apostles, preachers, and laity, the heralds of the kingdom hold out this promise of the coming. But when He comes again the words will be self evidently true—”Here is your God.” At the end of the age, then, Zechariah the prophet says that Israel will look on Him whom they have pierced, and realize this is their Messiah, this is their Savior, this is their God.

The sum of the message of comfort and the hope of the people of God is God’s presence. Two images are presented here of God’s presence. First, He is the sovereign LORD coming with power and His arm rules for Him. The idea of the powerful arm is anthropomorphic and idiomatic. Powerful majesty will be the pattern of His dominion as King. He will bring rewards to dispense to His faithful subjects.

The second image presented here is that of the shepherd. “He tends His flock” is hypocatastasis to go with the simile “like a shepherd.” This figure will be carried through the next three lines. Do not assume that the figure of the shepherd is limited to Christ’s first coming. The figure of a shepherd was commonly used in the ancient Near East for monarchs; it is the natural figure for any culture with much animal husbandry. And the New Testament will use the images of the Great Shepherd in heaven today (Heb. 13:20) and the Chief Shepherd who is coming again (1 Pet. 5:4) to go along with the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John. 10:11). The figure in each case does signify the care, leadership, and provisions that the LORD will bring to His people.

The great message of comfort—for us too at advent—hangs on this point. Look to God. He is coming to establish His kingdom. He will come in power. Without Him the “sheep” are weak and frail; with His presence they find everlasting peace and righteousness.

So in this section I should think that the application would run to the faithful remnant, especially the spiritual leaders, to announce that the sins have been paid for (and that brings comfort) and that God is coming (and that will mean deliverance and recompense), and to call for spiritual preparation.

#### II. God is fully able to bring deliverance to his people (40:12-16).

##### *A. He is the sovereign Lord of creation (12-14).*

What kind of God is He whose coming is so expected? After all, the hope of His coming and the promise of deliverance from bondage will only be as great as the God in whom we believe. So the prophet Isaiah begins to think about His greatness by thinking about His work of creation. Through a series of questions the prophet portrays God as the Mighty Creator. No mortal could even think to do this.

The argument develops in three stages. In verse 12 the questions show that only God could create. The language is anthropomorphic in that it shows the LORD to be like a workman working with His hands, baskets, and scales. Of course, Scripture makes it clear that He spoke and it came into being. In verse 13 we have the second stage in the thought—no one could even understand the Spirit of the LORD, for His thoughts are so much higher than ours. And then in 13b and 14 we have the next level—no one gave God any advice, ever! God created everything by His own design and counsel (see Rom. 11:34). And what He did is not only beyond our ability—it is far beyond our comprehension.

##### *B. He is sovereign over the nations (15-17)*

God needs the counsel of no one—certainly not the nations. They are all insignificant. Using obvious similes the prophet compares the nations (nations that terrorized the world) to a drop from the bucket, dust on the scales, fine dust if they are islands. They do not count; they do not tilt the balance of power one bit (see also Dan. 2:20).

Even in a religious sense God does not need the nations for sacrifice or worship. If a sacrifice were to make a difference with God, all the animals in Lebanon would not be sufficient. So mighty Assyria and Babylon are there merely to do God’s bidding. But none of them can influence Him or challenge Him.

It is an interesting link to trace some of these themes into the New Testament. Jesus at His temptations was offered all the kingdoms of the world—and Satan could have delivered them. But they are worthless, especially for such a price. And why should He want these many divided and warring kingdoms when what belongs to Him is the one everlasting kingdom of His Father, a kingdom of righteousness and peace. And at His trial Jesus told one of His judges, “You could have no power at all unless it was given to you from above.” “My kingdom is not of this world.” These kingdoms are all part of the *cosmos*, the present world system. God is not impressed.

##### *C. He is the incomparable One (18-20).*

A theme is now introduced that will run through this whole section of the Book of Isaiah. There is no one like God. He is the true and only God. To compare Him to idols is blasphemous. Even the materials for idols comes from God (see Isa. 44). Humans who are weak and frail have made the idols; they look for ways to make idols that will last. No one made God; rather, God created humans. The nature of the question in verse 18 then is rhetorical (erotesis) to express that there is no one to whom we may compare God.

##### *D. (Therefore) God alone is able to control creation (21-26).*

If God made everything, and if He is sovereign over all nations, and if He is incomparable, then all creation is under His power. Verse 21 begins this section with four rhetorical questions to remind the people of this that they already knew. The repetition is meant to be a rebuke, like hammering a point home: “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?” They had centuries of time to have these truths sink in, but their weak faith and stubborn hearts had not taken it all to heart.

Now in verses 22-26 he picks up themes he has already introduced—creation, nations, incomparability—but focused on how God controls. According to verse 22 God is the Lord of creation and rules with providence. The heavens are like a canopy with everything in His tent. According to verses 23 and 24 He is sovereign over kings—they are planted (hypocatastasis) by Him and then just as quickly as He lets them grow to full flower and power He blows them away like chaff. But His reign is eternal and constant.

Verses 25 and 26 reiterate the theme of His incomparable nature. There is no one like God—He is the “Holy One.” The people are called to look and contemplate the heavens and see God’s handiwork. It is by His power that the starry hosts were created and keep their order. Many Jews in Babylon had fallen into star-gazing and worship. Isaiah will address the issue of astrology and wizardry directly in these messages; but he will also deal with it indirectly by showing that creation witnesses to the sovereignty of God. The New Testament will confirm that this whole universe is borne along by His powerful word (*rhema*).

#### III. God’s people may renew their strength through hope (40:27-31).

##### A. *The prophet rebukes those who distrust God (27-28).*

The people who were in exile in Babylon were a strange mix of persuasions. There was the true remnant of course. But there was a large segment that probably believed in the LORD but had all but given up hope because they were overwhelmed by the captivity. God had apparently discarded them and was not concerned or aware of their plight. Isaiah will have to convince them through these chapters. Some needed to come to faith, period. Most needed to rekindle their faith with this truth.

Verse 27 is a rebuke for the people because they were convinced that God had written them off. That was their complaint. But Isaiah affirms that God is the Creator and the Preserver of all things. He will not forsake what He has made. His first point to prove this is that He does not grow tired like humans. No problems are hidden from God, or too much for Him to handle. And his second point is that God is incomprehensible. His ways are right, even though we do not know them. We will never understand Him, but He knows all about us. So how can anyone even suggest that our ways are hidden from Him? That reverses the whole matter.

##### *B. The prophet promises new strength for believers (29-31).*

According to verse 29 God will give strength to those who are exhausted and suffering under oppression. Even youths (v. 30) run out of energy and stumble. So human life is frail and transitory. Verse 31, however, brings the contrast, and the climax of this message on comfort: those who wait on the LORD shall change.

By waiting (Hebrew *qawah*pronounced *kah-vah*) the prophet means a longing for the fulfillment of the promise by faith, but it is a longing or looking for that is characterized by confident expectation. Waiting requires patience; but it is never indifferent. There is always a restlessness, an eagerness, a looking for something, an inner vigil. To hope for something is active; it is never out of mind. English Bibles alternate between translating with “hope” or “wait.” The two ideas are in the word. Here we would say the term describes the essence of confident, expectant faith. In the immediate context it describes the attitude and actions of those Israelites who believed the promises of the LORD and were ready to step out when God began to move. They believed the release was coming; they waited for it. They knew it would happen; they just did not know exactly when.

And when the release would come, they would escape with energy and quickness like eagles mounting up. But the road back to the land of promise would be long, and so it would be as if they would start quickly, slow to a run, and then to a walk. These expressions describe both the facts of embarking on a prolonged journey and the growing confidence that continued success would bring. They would never grow tired on their journey back; and they would not look back in fear. Rather, their confidence would grow as they went because their way back to Judah would be the fulfillment of the promised hope.

Likewise, believers living now at the end of the age in the expectation of the coming of the Lord have the same kind of confidence. To hope for the coming of the LORD does not imply that there is a chance it might not happen; rather, it implies an active faith in the truth of His coming. It will happen; they are expecting it soon. Those who wait for the LORD will not be entangled by this life, but will be focused on the spiritual preparation for His appearance. And as they live out their faith in the light of that hope, they will find their strength renewed for life’s difficulties along the way.

### Conclusion

In writing a summary expository idea of this whole chapter, I would try to capture all the main aspects of the material:

*Because of the incomparable knowledge and power of God, those who have found pardon for their sins and who believe in the sure promise of His Word will prepare for His coming, finding comfort in this life and gaining confidence through faith.*

This is but one way to do it, but a little long (even if I did underscore my main sentence to highlight it). I could have easily made the last ideas parallel—comfort, preparation, and strength. But I was thinking of the passage in terms of the focus of Peter that those who have this blessed hope purify themselves. A little shorter expository idea could be something like this:

*If we truly believe His word, and realize who He is, we will find comfort in this life, faith to endure, and hope for His coming.*

I would base the instructions on the solid doctrine this passage has about the nature of God, but focus on the instructions. As we today look forward to the coming day of deliverance, the appearance in glory of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, we should comfort one another, especially those of weaker faith, with the blessed hope, we should instruct one another in the spiritual preparation, we should build our faith on God’s Word, and we should see the fulfillment in the first advent as a sign of the second advent. But ultimately we must wait on the LORD—and I think all that is meant in the above instructions is meant to be a part of that waiting. That is what gives us the strength for the journey home.

When doing exegesis on a Messianic prophecy, it is generally better to wait for the step on correlation with the New Testament to sort out which parts are first coming and which second. The prophet never thought in those terms--he just knew the LORD was coming. And from all indications probably thought it was imminent, as did Paul of the second coming of Jesus.

The common idea seems to be one of sighing or breathing out, as the word books may suggest. In the idea of repenting it would therefore include both the change of will and the feeling of surrendering, giving in; in comforting it would be the sighing of relief in response to the news.

The reference to the breath of the LORD blowing on them is probably a comparison of the winds, even the cold winter winds, with the breath of the LORD.

At the first advent He began His reign in the hearts of people and established the foundation for His dominion. At His exaltation He was seated at the right Hand of the Majesty on High where He was to wait until the time for His second coming into this world, when in fact He will put down all enemies and establish His righteous reign.

Recall the word study of *qadosh*, "holy"; throughout these passages that word's meaning will be developed. He is truly unique, distinct, set apart--there is no one like Him!

The word is connected to the noun *qaw* (*kav*), a rope or a cord. The idea of hoping may have some overtones of anxious feelings, a tenseness or tightness. However, the primary meaning of the verb is eager and confident expectation. The verb is often used in contexts parallel to words and ideas of secure trust.

The Deliverance of Judah’s King Isaiah 38:1-

## The LORD is the Gracious Redeemer Isaiah 43:1-13

***The LORD is the Gracious Redeemer***

### Introduction

The next two oracles of the book (Isaiah 43:1-13 and 43:14—44:5) focus on redemption from captivity. It is here that the message focuses on the idea of the Servant as the nation.

In the first one the LORD promises to regather His undeserving nation (servant) and renew them. Israel is first exhorted not to fear (43:1-7) because God formed them and called them in the past; and because they are precious to Him they will be regathered from the whole earth. The LORD then brings the people forth as a witness that He is God alone (43:8-13). Both this witness and the nations in general will recognize that the LORD is sovereign, that He acts without any assistance, and that none can oppose Him.

The layout of this section reveals parallel structures in the pattern of the text:

1 Do not fear—you are mine, I created you

2 you will be protected

3 I will ransom you because I am your Savior

4 I will exchange you because I love you

5 Do not fear—I am with you, I will gather you

6 I will call for the regathering of my people

7 gather my people whom I created for my glory

8 Call for blind and deaf (=Israel) to be witnesses for me

9 Challenge for the nations to be witnesses against me,

who can say they foretold this; others say it is true.

10 You are my witnesses, my Servant whom I chose,

I am He

there is no god before or after me

11 I, even I, am the LORD

there is no Savior apart from me

12 I declared, saved, proclaimed

I, not a foreign god

You are my witnesses—I am God

13 I am He, from the ancient days

no one can deliver out of my hand

I act, and who can reverse it?

From this layout we can see that there are essentially two parts to the passage. Verses 1-7 promise the regathering from the captivity so that the people have no reason to fear. There are two cycles to this message, the jussive “do not fear” serving as the structural markers. The rest of the passage is a trial; first, witnesses are called for the LORD and then witnesses are called for the nations, and second, the LORD makes His claim that the witnesses will attest to that He alone is the sovereign Lord. The proof of His divine sovereignty is that He conducts His people through history in a way that they can follow with confidence; and His ability to predict the future, to chart it out, to show the direction He was going, is great evidence of His sovereignty. Acts without words are open to all kinds of interpretation, and words without acts are hollow promises; but words that predict the acts, and acts that confirm the predictions, attest to the truth of the claims of the LORD and build confidence in the yet unfulfilled promises that He has made. In this passage that promise concerns the regathering of the nation: God is able to create a future out of the ruins of the past. He alone can do this. And even if Israel had been blind and deaf (i.e., disobedient to and ignorant of God’s Word), they would make superb witnesses to what He was able to do when they saw the promises begin to unfold in spite of their sin. This passage, then, may be used to build confidence in the promises of God—Do not fear, God says, I will ransom you from the world; you are my witnesses that I alone am the sovereign God and am able to do this.

The immediate fulfillment for Israel would be their return from the captivity—which had been predicted as well as their captivity. But that fulfillment was merely a harbinger of the greater ingathering that would take place at the end of the age.

For the Christian, it will be necessary to assess the promises of the New Covenant that await fulfillment. These overlap with the promises here in the prophets of Israel, for we have been grafted in to the New Covenant. Paul then says that the whole world is groaning, waiting for the day of redemption (Rom. 8). We are to be filled with confidence that God will keep His Word and deliver us from the bondage of the world. Such hope casts out fear.

But our confidence in the promises is only as strong as our knowledge of the LORD. So this passage, and those to come, will have very strong theology on the sovereignty of God—stronger than many would like. We must be sure to teach that as the necessary basis of our faith. One of the reasons that churches are so weak in the faith and so heretical today is because sound doctrine has been lost—there just is no teaching or preaching to speak of that would feed the hungry soul. There are little homilies that lack biblical and theological substance, various classes on related issues other than Scripture, and literature and music that is often shallow, experiential, and too frequently unbiblical. How could anyone grow? Well, the next 23 chapters of this book will be filled with strong meat—truth that will change people’s lives.

### Exposition

#### I. “Do not fear” God will redeem His people from the world (43:1-7).

##### *A. Cycle One: God will ransom His people (1-4).*

Verse 1 lays the foundation of the Word of promise by affirming that this is the nation that God had formed. The language is covenantal: You are mine.

The epithets that the prophet uses for God refer to the historical act of the foundation of the nation at Sinai—but the terms are creational. The expression “he who created you” (*bora’aka*) uses the main word for creation (*bara’*), a term that means to fashion or refashion something into a new and perfect creation. It can have the idea of renewal or transformation. In the biblical texts only God is the subject of this verb. So the formation of the Israelites into a nation, the people of God, is being called a creation. Likewise, Paul uses creation terminology for our salvation in the New Testament.

The second epithet is “he who formed you” (*yotserka*). This word (*yatsar*) means to form or fashion something by design, a plan, a blueprint (Gen. 2:7). It is the word for an artist—the participle is the Hebrew word “potter.” So the expression says that God is the creator of the nation, and that His creation is by design.

The main reason for the call to cast away fear in this verse is the expression “for I have redeemed you” (*g*e*’altika* [pronounced *geh-al-tea-kah*], from *ga’al*). This verb is a little different from other words in the Bible that we translate “redeem”; this is the kinsman redeemer or avenger, the one who makes things right—pays debts, avenges death, judges the enemy, rescues the poor and needy, or marries the widow. The key idea seems to be “protect”—the family and various other institutions. When the verb describes the LORD’s activity, it usually always means judging the nations to deliver the people from bondage; in New Covenant passages it is eschatological. I would take the verb here to be prophetic perfect (or at least a perfect of resolve), for this is what He was about to do.

Finally, the idea of “called you by name” is a reference to both creation and election. God chose His people, and by calling them by name exercised His sovereignty over them (compare other “naming” passages). In fact, the idiom of naming in the Babylonian account of creation (*Enuma elish*) represents creating.

So the point of the first verse is clear: Israel belongs to God because He formed them into a nation in the first place and now will deliver them from bondage to Himself.

Verse 2 uses some bold figures to express divine protection. Water is used for invasions and exiles in the prophets (we saw it already in Isaiah 8 with the water flooding up to Jerusalem); and fire is used for purging persecutions that come upon the people. All the imagery here is implied comparison. But it all means that God will protect His people.

Verse 3 begins to spell out the promise of the rescue from captivity. Here the self-revelation of the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, adds the epithet “your savior” (*mosi’eka* [*mo-she-eh-ka*], from *yasa’* [*ya-sha*]). The verb “to save” is a common one in the Old Testament; John Sawyer has a discussion on it and the other words for salvation in the Old Testament in his book *Semantics in Biblical Research, New Methods of Defining Hebrew Words for Salvation* (SCM Press). The name “Jesus” (*Ye-shua*) is, of course, drawn from this verbal root, as is the name “Isaiah” (*Yeshayahu*) itself (“Yah saves”). Most of the words for salvation are military terms; this one basically means “deliver, save.” It can refer to an answer to prayer, a healing, rescue, deliverance from trouble, death, or disease—as well as from sin and its punishment (although “saved from sin” is not a very common usage). In this passage it refers to a deliverance from bondage, and so is essentially political, although this deliverance includes the fact that sin was the reason for the exile. So it is a physical-spiritual deliverance.

The word for “your ransom” (*kophr*e*ka*) is from the verbal root *kipper*, which means “atone, expiate, pacify, set free. The noun means to set free through some means of expiation. In this context the term is applied a little differently (as are the terms for salvation and redemption): God will set His people free from bondage—at the expense of the oppressors. So their destruction will be the ransom price—the exchange given to set Israel free.

Verse 4 continues this theme with two new words that call for attention. The deliverance is because Israel is precious (and honored) in God’s sight. They are highly valued because rare—the chosen people. And the main motive for the deliverance is “because I love you” (*‘ahabtika*, from *‘ahab*). The term for love conveys the idea of choosing spontaneously (as opposed to the idea of “hating” which means among other things “reject”—Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated). Other words for love will stress the covenant loyalty that God has for His people; but this one indicates that He chose them and His love for them remains constant. Of course, this does not mean that He overlooks idolatry, and unbelief—the captivity was intended to purge those who were not truly in the covenant.

##### *B. Cycle Two: God will gather His people (5-7).*

Verse 5 repeats the caution “Do not fear.” The promise of divine presence (meaning God will intervene for protection and provision) is the basis for the comfort. In this, and in the next couple of verses, in a number of ways God says that He will regather His people from all over the world. Not all of the exiled people went to Babylon—they were scattered. But as the Creator, God will speak to the north, south, east, and west, and the world will give up His people.

In verse 7 we discover that with the repetition of the creation theme that God’s purpose for Israel was “for my glory.” Likewise, in the New Testament do we read that Christ always did things that the Father might be glorified. We shall see later in the book, and in Ezekiel, that the regathering is not because Israel deserved it, but because God’s reputation (=name) was at stake. And He will not let the sins of the people rob Him of His name and steal His glory. At the risk of making it too simple, we could say that the verse means that God’s establishment of a covenant people has as its purpose that God might be seen throughout the world, for “glory” means an enhanced reputation for the LORD, honor to Him. Everything He does is for that purpose, for all glory given to Him will attract many more to the Kingdom. Likewise when we glorify the LORD, it is meant in part to draw people to His love.

#### II. “You are witnesses” The LORD is able to deliver His people because He alone is the sovereign LORD God (43:8-13).

##### *A. God calls witnesses for and against His claim (8, 9).*

The setting of this section is a court scene to determine the veracity of the claims of the LORD. Witnesses are called on both sides of the case to see what the evidence will be.

From the use of the terms for “blindness” and “deafness” used earlier and elsewhere for Israel, we would conclude that verse 8 is a call for the disobedient and sinful nation to witness God’s gracious provision. The figures would be hypocatastases, comparing blindness and deafness to disobedience and spiritual ignorance. But even in that condition Israel had had the opportunity to see and hear what God was doing, and so would qualify as witnesses to the power of God. In fact, their witness would be more effective, for they were surprised by what God had done.

Verse 9 is a challenge from God for the other nations to say anything if they or their gods were able to do what the LORD could do—foretell this deliverance as He had done. Powerful acts can be attributed to deities or kings; but predicting them is quite another matter. God is on one side; all other powers on the other. Who in truth is the sovereign Lord? These witnesses will have to step forward and give their credentials (a theme that will run through several chapters), or finally admit the truth of the LORD’s claims.

##### *B*. *God’s claim of absolute sovereignty stands (10;13).*

Verse 10 begins with the first cycle of “You are my witnesses.” Israel is here addressed as the chosen servant of the LORD. In view of what follows this makes great sense. But believers do not always like the idea of being chosen, nor do they like the idea of being servants. But if God is God, they must be both servants and chosen. If God was chosen by us (!), and He is our servant (!), then He is not much of a God.

The verse focuses on the purpose of this election—that they might know and believe that “I am He.” This construction is made up of two simple pronouns: *‘ani hu’* (pronounced *ah-nee who*), “I [am] He.” The statement is fraught with significance. I am the One. There is no one else. Who else matters? I am the sovereign Lord who has no rivals. This point is expanded with “there is no god before or after me.” The Law said, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” The call to Moses said,”I AM that I AM.”

It seems to me that this theme running through this section of the book needs to be recaptured for today when the view of God is weak, or when theologians are busying themselves trying to “re-image” God, and in the process making God a god and not the only God. The LORD God Himself lays down the challenge—where are the rivals?

I believe that a very strong case can be made in these and other “I Am” revelations that within the Godhead we have here speaking the second person, the pre-incarnate Christ in the glory that He had before the foundation of the world. He is the Savior.

Verse 11 repeats and adds to this: “I, even I, am the LORD, there is no Savior apart from me.” The Hebrew is wonderfully cryptic again—*’ani ‘ani YHWH*, literally “I - I - Yahweh.” Now the personal, covenantal name is put in place of the pronoun “He,” and the epithet “Savior” is added to the exclusive statement. No religion in the ancient or modern world made such claims to exclusivity and salvation. There is only one God; and there is only one Savior—Yahweh.

Verse 12 brings in the theme of prophecy. The LORD alone, not a foreign god, was able to proclaim and declare in addition to save (see above comments on works and acts).

This verse, as well as verse 13, will affirm that the LORD is the only true God, always has been, always will be. And He is completely sovereign. No one can deliver out of His hand, and no one can make Him change His plans. One can only trust the LORD, certainly not rebel against Him. Deliverance comes from Him; judgment also comes from Him. He alone can save; no one can save from Him. Such knowledge of God must lead to faith.

#### Conclusion

The message of this chapter is rather straightforward. It is a message for the people of God not to fear the circumstances of life because the LORD is about to redeem them in fulfillment of His promises. He is fully able to do this because He is the sovereign Lord of the universe, as everyone will attest. So in our age we can transfer this theme rather easily. First, Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord of creation, the great I AM, the only Savior. He has made promises to us, and those include ultimate redemption from the bondage of this world and transference to His Father’s House. As a result we should not fear, for He has overcome the world. So Christians should be strong in the faith, evaluate everything in line with eternal principles, and look forward in expectation to the great deliverance.

***Redemption by God’s Grace***

### Introduction

This section is the second oracle about the prophet’s message that God would deliver His people from bondage. The preceding section looked at God’s unchallenged ability to do it; this part stresses that Israel does not deserve it. The section falls into three main parts: the declaration that God will deliver them (14-21), the explanation that they do not deserve this (22-28), and the exhortation for them not to fear (44:1-5).

### Exposition

#### I. The LORD promises to deliver His people in a great exodus and prosper them in the way (43:14-21).

##### *A. The covenant God promises victory (14-15).*

Verse 14 declares that God has intervened to bring down Babylon on behalf of His people Israel. The verse begins with the double description of the LORD: the **Holy One of Israel** and their **Redeemer**.

Once again the text is probably using the Hebrew prophetic perfect tense, since the delivery lies in the future—the certain future. The content of the verse teaches that God will bring down their powerful adversaries (compare Daniel’s song in Daniel 2:20). In this verse are included the Chaldeans, a general name for the Babylonians, but technically the ruling class of royal priests. Nebuchadnezzar was a Chaldean.

Verse 15 reiterates the self-revelation of the LORD as the Holy One, Creator, and King. “I am the LORD” is the declaration, couched in terms of the covenant made at Sinai (Exodus 20). The epithet “your Holy One” stresses the uniqueness of the LORD as the covenant God. And “creator of Israel” recalls Sinai and underscores the fact that they owe their existence to Him. The expression “your King” makes the point that it is a theocracy and that they owe absolute allegiance to God.

##### *B. The LORD promises a safe exodus (16-21)*

First, in verses 16 and 17 the LORD reminds the people of the first exodus out of bondage in Egypt.[94](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord-gracious-redeemer-isaiah-431-13" \l "P1094_290679) The text does not mention the exodus by name, but by stating that the LORD makes a road through the Sea definitely alludes to that time, for they would not pass through the sea here. The allusion implies a comparison. Moreover, the usage of the verbs “form” and “create” in the context have already referred to that period of history. The prophet has also used “water” and “flood” as figures of this captivity. So the allusion to the escape from Egypt through the flood is a good one.

Verse 17 adds to the allusion: the LORD led out the armies of Egypt, horse and chariot in all their strength, and buried them in the sea (“they lie down together, without rising”). The LORD crushed them out of existence because they were chasing His people to enslave or destroy them. Now Israel should be reminded of that great deliverance that made them a nation in the first place. God is fully able to deliver His people from world powers.

Second, the LORD exhorts the people to forget the former exodus (verse 18). After recalling the exodus, the LORD tells Israel not to remember (*zakar*) nor consider (*hitbonan* from *bin*) it any more—they should not dwell on the past, because God is going to do something new and wonderful. Live for the future!

An application could easily be made along the way here: many Christians live only in the past with their focus on what Christ did back there—the passover/exodus, or on their own conversion experience; this is fine, but they are not looking for the next event, the culmination of the covenant program in the second coming! The events of Christ’s first coming laid the foundation for what He will do at the second.

Third, the LORD is going to bring a marvelous new deliverance through the desert (verses 19-20). The theme is announced in verse 19: “Behold, I am about to do a new thing.”[95](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord-gracious-redeemer-isaiah-431-13" \l "P1099_293028) What is coming is a new thing. “New” (*kha-dash*) can mean something completely new, or a renewal or transformation (it is often parallel with *bara’*, “create”).

The “new thing” will be a road through the wilderness (compare the road through the sea in the previous verses). The imagery compares this return to streams in the desert, probably the point of the comparison is that roads that might be empty or lightly traveled will be “flooded” with people returning to the land as wadis are flooded with water in the rainy season.

Verse 20 is a little more difficult to understand. It appears on the surface that the waters created to supply the needs of the returning Israelites would also refresh the animals, and this relief will lead to God’s glory.

Fourth, Israel will praise the LORD (verse 21). “This people I have formed for Myself—they shall declare My praise.” “Praise” is *t*e*hillah* (from *halal*), the spontaneous expression of what is enjoyed. Israel, when released to return to their homeland, will offer such expressions of joy.

#### II. The LORD declares that the people are undeserving of this deliverance (43:22-28).

##### *A. Indifference to sin shows unworthiness (22-24).*

Israel demonstrated her present weariness with the LORD by her continued sin and by her failure even to give an offering to Him.

Verse 22 puts the contrast boldly: negatively, Israel has not called upon the LORD—they did not pray for this great deliverance;[97](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord-gracious-redeemer-isaiah-431-13" \l "P1108_294757) positively, they have been weary or tired of the LORD. The idea of “weary” is connected with toilsome labor (as in “much studying is a wearying of the flesh”). Through all their troubles they got tired of trying.

Verse 23 clarifies that Israel had not brought the LORD whole burnt offerings or peace offering sacrifices. In the foreign land sacrifice was not possible. So God did not make them weary with much sacrificing and burning of incense; He did not make them serve and He did not make them wear out.

The explanation of all this is now given in verse 24. God was brought no sacrifices and no sweet cane as a gift. Rather, God was made to serve because of their sins. These words are meant to imitate the words of the last verse: you made Me serve with your sins (I did not make you serve with offerings); you wearied Me with your iniquities (I did not weary you with incense). These words express the LORD’s distress caused by Israel’s sins, and intensified by the fact that Israel offered no sacrifices, and made no prayers for deliverance from sin and bondage.

##### *B. God forgives sin for His own sake (25).*

This verse is the heart of the passage. “I, even I, blot out your sins for my own sake; your sins I will not remember.” The verb “blot out” (the participle *mo-kheh*, from *makhah*) is a hypocatastasis, portraying the complete removal of sin.As a participle the construction should read, “I am the One who blots out your transgressions.”

The two words for sin are “transgressions” or rebellions (*pesha’* [*peh-sha*]) and “sins” or failures (*hata’* [*khah-tah*]). God will remember these no more. God knows everything, and so the idea of His not remembering is obviously anthropomorphic to express to express complete removal of the sins from the judicial record, so to speak. The point is the charges will never be brought up again.

In this verse we see clearly that the deliverance from Babylon was connected with the forgiveness of sins—which was one of the threefold words of comfort in the beginning of chapter 40. Or, to put it another way, the restoration was a sign that sins were forgiven.

But since Israel simply wearied God with sins, and made no plea to Him, and offered no gifts or sacrifices, this deliverance was completely by grace. “For my own sake” I do this. Ezekiel also will explain that God’s name (=reputation) is at stake, His Word must be fulfilled or His character will be called into question. God remains faithful to His promises even when His people prove unfaithful, or weary Him. They may profane His name, but He will sanctify it. This is why we pray, “Hallowed be thy name.”

##### *C. God disciplines for unconfessed sins (26-28).*

Verse 26 is worded as a challenge. Using “remember” yet again, God tells Israel to remind Him of anything He may have overlooked that would render forgiveness unnecessary—list any service records that could cancel out the marks against you. If they did not think that their deliverance was connected to forgiveness, they should now make their case to justify themselves.

Verse 27 affirms that sin has been with the nation from the beginning. “First father” means from its origin the nation was a transgressing people; the “interpreters,” especially the priests and prophets, had failed and rebelled by leading the people astray.

Verse 28 speaks of the punishment: “profaned” and “given to the curse.” The verb “profane” is from *khalal*; it means to treat something as common. There is a word play here with its antonym *qadosh*, “holy”—”The princes of the Sanctuary (or “holy place” or “holiness” or even “holy princes”) I have made unholy or common.” Sending unbelieving Israelites into exile was a way of showing (as Hosea had said) that they were not His people (*Lo’ ‘Ammi*, “Not My people”). The unbelieving in Israel were not holy, not set apart—they were lost like the pagans. Unfortunately, the remnant of true believers in Israel (the Jeremiahs, the Ezekiels, the Daniels) had to go into captivity because the majority were unbelievers; but the meaning of the exile was different for them.

The verb “curse” is *kharam* (the noun is *kherem*). It means “devoted, put under the ban, set apart.” In short, something under the “ban” was off-limits; it was for God to either keep for His own use or destroy—here destroy. (Recall what happened to Achan when he took the “cursed” garment).

So the judgment on Israel with the exile was twofold: humiliation and destruction. They had not heeded the prophets to turn from their sin, and so God brought the destruction. Now God challenged the people to convince Him that the exile was not deserved.

If that was deserved, then the regathering was by grace.

#### III. The LORD encourages His people that He will revive them again (44:1-5).

##### *A. Introduction: God’s people should not fear (1,2).*

In the first two verses of this chapter the LORD uses several motivations for Israel not to fear: “my servant,” “Israel whom I have chosen,” “made you,” “formed you,” “will help you,” and “Jeshurun.” This list of descriptions and qualifications solidly reiterates the covenant ties between God and Israel.

The name “Jeshurun” is a synonym for “Israel,” used in Deuteronomy 32. It looks to the future of the nation, the blessing awaiting it for the reward of the righteous. It seems to be connected with “upright, straight,” an adjective connected with the nation of believers.

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Because the people belong to God, and because He is about to deliver them, they must respond to His Word or promise by faith and not with fear.

##### *B. The LORD will revive His people again (3-5).*

First, in verses 3 and 4 the LORD announces that He will revive them physically and spiritually. Verse 3 says that God is going to pour out three things—water on the one who is thirsty, His Spirit on the seed of Israel, and His blessing on the people. The whole verse seems to be talking about the basic spiritual need of Israel. It may be that the physical thirst is a comparison to spiritual thirst (Ps. 42:1 and 63:1). The restoration of Israel is like water to a plant in parched ground—they will grow and become healthy. Then, the Spirit would be the means of the deliverance, and the “blessing” the summary description of the restoration—so these are used metonymically. Westermann has a good little paperback book on “blessing” (which is the short title). He shows that the term means “enrichment” along with the enablement to obtain God’s good gifts. Here then the verse ties the (metonymies of) cause and the effect together. The divine Spirit is the source of the national revival and increase, which is the blessing (compare Ezekiel 37:9).

Verse 4 provides a comparison of how Israel will flourish—Israel’s offspring are to be as numerous as the blades of grass in well-irrigated meadows. Or, like poplars by the water courses.

Second, the text states that then the people will be attractive to the Gentiles (verse 5). The people represented as speaking here are Gentiles who became proselytes to the faith. They are attracted by the prosperity and the honor given to this ancient people by God’s blessing. So they wish to be numbered among them, to be called by their name. Gentiles coming to the faith and using Hebrew names in naming their children is good witness to the glorious prospect of such a prophecy.

### Conclusion

The message of promised deliverance from bondage in the world continues into this section; but the emphasis here is on the grace of it all. I would make as the main focus the way that God develops how He has acted toward His people in keeping the covenant promises in spite of their indifference and sin. Even though we are unfaithful, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. Moreover, a meticulous analysis of His titles and deeds toward His people will further underscore His grace. And, I would emphasize also how the demonstration of His sovereignty and grace attract Gentiles to the covenant of the LORD.

We today as believing Christians can look at any and all disciplines that God has brought into our lives, any of the effects of our sin, and know that we deserved them, and much more. We can look around the world and see suffering, pain, and even exile, and know that sin is the cause. But we Christians also have the sure promise of God that He will honor His covenant promises and complete the redemption He has begun. From beginning to end the plan of redemption is by grace; that we cannot deny. And so from this passage we are instructed not to fear, but to praise; not to remain in sin and indifference, but to respond to the Word of the LORD as faithful servants, and use the hope we have as a means of reaching out to the world.

There are three tenses of salvation or redemption: we have been redeemed/saved from the penalty of sin (regeneration); we are being saved from the power of sin (sanctification); and we will be saved/redeemed from the very presence of sin (glorification). You have to watch the passages in their contexts to be sure you have the right category.

So we today await the redemption from the bondage of this evil world. But this does not mean that we are not already believers, or members of the covenant.

Some of the older dictionaries still try to base the idea on Arabic and have the meaning to be "setting in wide open spaces" or the like. Sawyer shows that is not correct.

Many Bible students still rely too heavily on the old lexicon by Brown, Driver and Briggs, who tended to lump homonyms together as from the same root. While this is the standard dictionary, modern research must be taken into consideration. The evidence now points to two roots *k-p-r*, one meaning "expiate" and the other meaning "cover, smear" (as in caulking on a barge). When these were taken together, people concluded that sins were only covered over. But that runs against the clear teaching of the Old Testament, and erroneously joins two different roots together.

The terms and their related verbal forms are basic to this section of the book: *qadosh* is "holy," and *ga’al* is "redeem."

It is amazing how so many things in Scripture harmonize in the divine patterns of typology and symbolism. The exodus from Egypt by the blood of the passover lamb established Israel as the redeemed people of God; the sudden and easy deliverance from exile in Babylon corresponds to the exodus, but it is the deliverance of the people from the bondage of the world. The Church uses the first exodus as a picture of salvation; it may use the second as a picture of being rescued from this world at the end of the age.

The Hebrew construction with *hinneh* ("behold") and the participle announce an imminent action--it is a *futur instans* use of the participle. That is why I would translate it "I am **about** to… ."

Compare Psalm 126 with the prayer that God would restore the captivity like streams in the desert.

In the Book of Revelation John by his example shows Christians to pray, "Even so come quickly, Lord Jesus."

The idea of "blot" is traditional, although it is not accurate for ancient Israel (they had no blotters) and would not remove the writing on a page anyway. The idea in Hebrew was more of scraping off a palimpsest (of clay or wax) so there was "a clean slate").

In a similar way when Jesus healed the sick or cast out demons, forgiveness of and salvation from sin was usually also granted.

Peter in quoting Psalm 2 in his great Pentecost sermon makes the same point: "Why do the nations rage … against the LORD and His Messiah." In the psalm the nations were Gentiles. But since the Jews among others rejected Jesus, to Peter they are now the nations of Psalm 2.

The Arabic idea of the harem is related to this--off limits.

There is an interesting turnabout in Scripture. In this passage when the nations see how faithful God is in His grace they will want what they have. Paul says in Romans that today the Church is supposed to be making Israel jealous. One wonders what we display that would make anyone jealous.

A Message of Comfort to God’s People Isaiah 40:1-31

## Isa 43:10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.

## Isa 43:15 I am the LORD, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King.

## Isa 43:19 Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.

## Isa 43:21 This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.

#### The LORD encourages His people that He will revive them again (44:1-5)

#### Isa 44:1 ¶ Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: 2 Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. 3 For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: 4 And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. 5 One shall say, I am the LORD'S; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel.

#### “Yet now hear”

#### “Fear not”

#### Isa 43:1 ¶ But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

#### Isa 44:1 ¶ Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: 2 Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen.

##### *God’s people should not fear (1,2)*

##### 2 Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen.

In the first two verses of this chapter the LORD uses several motivations for Israel not to fear: “my servant,” “Israel whom I have chosen,” “made you,” “formed you,” “will help you,” and “Jeshurun.” This list of descriptions and qualifications solidly reiterates the covenant ties between God and Israel.

The name “Jeshurun” is a synonym for “Israel,” used in Deuteronomy 32. It looks to the future of the nation, the blessing awaiting it for the reward of the righteous. It seems to be connected with “upright, straight,” an adjective connected with the nation of believers.

The verb “will help” is from the root *‘azar* (the noun *‘ezer* is “helper” which is used for Eve but mostly for God). It means assistance, that is, doing for someone what that person cannot do for himself or herself.

Because the people belong to God, and because He is about to deliver them, they must respond to His Word through faith and not with fear.

##### *B. The LORD will revive His people again (3-5).*

First, in verses 3 and 4 the LORD announces that He will revive them physically and spiritually.

3 For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:

1. 3 For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground:
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Verse 3 says that God is going to pour out three things—water on the one who is thirsty, His Spirit on the seed of Israel, and His blessing on offspring of the people.

The whole verse seems to be talking about the basic spiritual need of Israel.

“blessing” (enrichment) enablement to obtain God’s good gifts.

The divine Spirit is the source of the national revival and increase, which is the blessing (compare Ezekiel 37:9).

Isa 44:4 And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.

Verse 4 provides a comparison of how Israel will flourish—Israel’s offspring are to be as numerous as the blades of grass in well-irrigated meadows. Or, like willows (poplars) by the water courses.

Isa 44:5 One shall say, I am the LORD'S; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel.

The People of God will be attractive to the Gentiles (verse 5). The people represented as speaking here are Gentiles who became proselytes to the faith. They are attracted by the prosperity and the honor given to this ancient people by God’s blessing. So they desire to be numbered among them, to be called by their name. Gentiles coming to the faith and using Hebrew names in naming their children is good witness to the glorious prospect of such a prophecy.

The message of promised deliverance from bondage in the world continues to this last day of End time deliverance.

## Isa 43:10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.

2Ti 2:13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

The Lord is faithful and gracious to His people in keeping the covenant promises in spite of their indifference and sin. Even though we are unfaithful, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

As witnesses we emphasize how the demonstration of His sovereignty and grace attract Gentiles to the covenant of the LORD.

We today as believing Christians can look at any and all disciplines that God has brought into our lives, any of the effects of our sin, and know that we deserved them, and much more. We can look around the world and see suffering, pain, and even exile, and know that sin is the cause. But we Christians also have the sure promise of God that He will honor His covenant promises and complete the redemption He has begun. From beginning to end the plan of redemption is by grace; that we cannot deny. And so from this passage we are instructed not to fear, but to praise; not to remain in sin and indifference, but to respond to the Word of the LORD as faithful servants, and use the hope we have as a means of reaching out to the world.

## There are three tenses of salvation or redemption: we have been redeemed/saved from the penalty of sin (regeneration); we are being saved from the power of sin (sanctification); and we will be saved/redeemed from the very presence of sin (glorification).

## Dead Idols or Witnesses of the Living God Isaiah 44:6-23

## Isa 44:6 Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. 7 And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them. 8 Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

The prophet contrasts the LORD’s ability to order history with the inability of false idols.

There are three general sections here:

1. The first part records the LORD’s claims of sovereignty on the basis of who He is and what He has done (6-8).
   1. “ye are even my witnesses”

Isa 43:10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen

1. The second part (9-20) is a lengthy parody on the foolishness of making idols because they are worthless.
   1. “they are their own witnesses’

Isa 44:9 They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed.

* 1. The folly of idolatry
     1. How absurd to imagine that something we can make could actually deliver us from problems we could not free ourselves from!
     2. To serve something man made instead of Worship God who has made us is spiritual blindness.
     3. It is foolish not to recognize the Lord as the only God

Isa 44:6 Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God

1. The oracle opens, continues and closes with a call for faith that He has chosen Israel to praise the living God who redeems us from sin (1-6; 21-23).

Isa 43:10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen

Isa 44:1 ¶ Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: 2 Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen.

Isa 44:8 Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

Isa 44:21 ¶ Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. 22 I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

Walk no more captive to sin and idols

Build the house of God

“Ye shall be built” 44:26

“Thou shalt be built” 44:28

“charged me to build” Ezra 1:2

#### I. The LORD alone is the Sovereign God (44:6-8).

##### *A. The LORD declares His absolute Sovereignty (6).*

The Lord is the absolute authority as the one true God. The prophet introduces Him with names and descriptions:

Isa 44:6 Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God

1. The Lord
   1. The personal name of the Covenant God
      1. The Covenant keeping God
2. Isa 44:6 Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel,
   1. The LORD The King of Israel
      1. Israel’s King is God
3. (Israel’s Redeemer)-his redeemer the LORD of hosts;
   1. The Lord The Redeemer of Israel
      1. The LORD delivered His people from the slavery of sin and bondage
4. The Lord of Host
   1. The Lord The Lord of Host
      1. The Lord of armies
      2. It is a military term used by the prophets to announce forceful warnings of judgment or displays of God’s power. It means that God has the resources to carry out anything He desires or decrees
5. I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God
   1. The Lord The only God

Isaiah The Prophet of the Lord ridicules and mocks idols and idol-makers, the prophet uses these to introduce Yahweh who will claim absolute sovereignty for Himself. But such a powerful lead-in is most effective.

44:1 Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel

44:2 Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb

44:21 Remember these, O Jacob and Israel

Now The Lord speaks to reveal Himself: “I am the first and I am the last, and beside Me there is no God.” This exclaims His exclusive sovereignty: He begins everything and He ends everything, He is the Creator and He will be the Judge. But He also is eternally present, the eternal I AM.

The New Testament will use similar words for our Lord Jesus Christ: “I am the alpha and the omega.” He is the beginning and the end, the full revelation, the final authority, the Living Word. Such expressions attest He is Eternal as well as He is sovereign over everything. Isaiah 6:4 describes how the whole world was full of His glory, This indicates that He is the most important person in the universe; and when He is described as holy, that indicates that there is no one like Him.

Besides The Lord (Yahweh) there is no god. This does not deny that people worshiped other gods, or that there were spiritual powers behind their idols. But it does deny that they are gods. There can be but one true God. Everything else is a created being. Every being has to be categorized, creator or created; and there is only one who is creator. No other religion in the ancient world held to such a dogmatic affirmation of exclusive monotheism. There is one Lord, There is one faith, There is nothing inclusive about true faith. The spirit of idolatry, whether in the ancient world or in modern Christendom (note I did not say in Christianity), is to rob God of His unique divinity and introduce rival gods into religion. But the Word of the LORD declares that they are not gods.

##### *B. The LORD confirms His claims with prophecy (7).*

In the form of a question The Lord (Yahweh) challenges the pagans to show what other god could predict the future. Here is proof of His exclusive right to divine majesty. The stronger the prediction, the more marvelous the power. God already affirmed in these passages that He predicted the Babylonian captivity as well as the return from exile, long before it happened. This, the prophet says, is proof that Yahweh is God, for prophecy is based on the sovereign control of history.

##### *C. The LORD appeals for faith (8).*

Yahweh’s appeal is for confidence based on the truth of His sovereignty: “Fear not, neither be afraid.” The repetition stresses the good news that they do not need to fear other gods or other people, for Yahweh is the only Rock. This word “Rock”is a common figure (hypocatastasis) for God; it signifies a solid foundation, strength, and security. The expression is couched in an ironic question and answer (almost tongue-in-cheek): “Is there a god beside me? No, there is no Rock; I know not any.” The parallel passage in Deuteronomy 32 is helpful here. That prophetic message tells of the Rock that formed Israel (v. 18), and how Israel forgot that Rock and went after other rocks that could not defend them (v. 30), for those rocks are not the Rock. (v. 31).

So all these solid affirmations about the LORD provide the backdrop for the next discussion—the folly of idolatry. How utterly foolish to try to make gods, when the sovereignty and divinity belongs to the one true God alone. And why would anyone want to replace Yahweh? Why would anyone think he could?

#### II. Idols are profitless and ridiculous (44:9-20).

##### *A. Idols cannot profit their devotees (9).*

The first part of the theme of the folly of idolatry is announced immediately: idols are profitless. The language used here to make the point is most significant, for it shows how idolatry reverses creation. In Genesis we read how God turned the chaos (“waste and void” [tohu wabohu]) into His marvelous creation, culminating in His forming (<yatsar) human life as His image. When people cast idols they were forming gods as images of themselves, of mankind. This was the reverse of creation, for we are the image of God. So Isaiah says it is “vanity” (tohu, picking up the “waste and void” language of Genesis) and changes creation back into chaos. When people reverse the order of creation in their faith and worship there can be no profit, only shame (a metonymy of effect or adjunct for destruction)

##### *B. Idols are subject to human frailty (10-13).*

How ridiculous to worship something made by people rather than a higher power! Those who “create gods” are merely mortals, and they make their images in the forms of “human beings”—after the beauty of mankind, to dwell in a house (v. 13). The absurdity of the entire process is thus underscored by these motifs. God is not a human, does not need a house, does not require food (see Ps. 50:7-14), and does not conform to the desires and limitations of mankind. To be the image of God means that we are His servants; to make God in our image means that He is our servant. Only shame can come from such a chaos, shame in the sense of devastation and ruin—certainly no salvation.

The exposition must capture the tone of the prophet here. He sees the absurdity of the idea of idols and draws it out in this polemic. It is ridiculous! It is laughable! But the humor of it all is tempered by the sad fact that people do worship idols.

##### *C. Idolatry is bound to the creation (14-20).*

With a poignant thrust the prophet now describes the lunacy of making an idol out of wood, from a tree that the idol maker could not create. The point is that idols and idol-makers can never rise above the status of being bound to, part of, or limited to the creation. God is above the creation; idols, even including Satanic spirits and powers behind them, are all part of God’s creation.

The prophet marvels that when the pagan makes an idol, half of the tree is used as fuel to keep one warm, or to bake food (so common human needs like food and warmth are important to the issue), but the other half becomes a god to be worshiped—he bows down to a stump of wood and proclaiming it as a god prays to it for salvation. This, to the prophet, is the epitome of spiritual blindness (see Isa. 6 and 38 for that theme). It will be of no value at all; “they feed on ashes” (v. 20). Here is another hypocatastasis: worshiping an idol is to the soul what feeding on ashes would be to the body. There is no nourishment or satisfaction. I think he has used “ashes” because he just mentioned that they burn up half of the log in the fire. An idol made of wood, even though beautifully carved and decorated, is of no greater substance than the ashes it could become in a fire. And to worship such a “god” is disastrous, because God will destroy both the idol and those who worship it.

It is worth noting that those who make idols are also dependent on God’s creation for their raw materials. They can never be free from depending on Him. They did not create the tree, water it, and cause it to grow—God did all that. All the idol-maker can do is rob God of the material as well as the glory. One finds this spirit of idolatry alive and well in modern trends as well today. People take articles and institutions of the Christian faith, things that God has established and revealed, and then recast them into different theological molds that are of their own making. The idolater can never come up with his own creation; he is always depending on what God has done, but perverting it.

In tracing through this passage the expositor can certainly make much of the vivid descriptions that are here. But the exposition must not miss the point that is timeless in idolatry, no matter what form it comes in: what you can produce by your own intelligence and your own power is no more powerful than you yourself; and, if you yourself could not deliver yourself from your difficulty, how do you expect that something that you have produced will be able to do it? This point applies to primitive, pagan idolatry, or modern idolatry, where money, power, and position have become the gods, not to mention addictions of a number of sorts. Whatever it is upon which people depend for meaning in life, or to which people look to find security and safety in life, in the place of God—these are the essential ingredients of idolatry. But how foolish to think that something we have created will meet all those needs; how ridiculous to think that we can write our own religion and make our own gods.

The point that the Bible makes over and over again is that you and I need a God that is greater than we are—a God who created us.

#### III. Only Yahweh is the saving God: He is worthy to be praised for His forgiveness and redemption (44:21-23).

##### *A. The LORD is faithful to His promise to redeem (21, 22).*

We have in these verses a call for the people to repent for their indifference to their covenant God and to build their faith and their hope in Him. The call is couched in the expression, “Remember these things,” and is strengthened by the guarantee “you shall not be forgotten by me.” The word “remember is important to study because it comes up so frequently in theological texts. (For a start, you could check Brevard Childs’ little book on Memory and Tradition, in which he offers a brief word study.) The verb actually means more than a mental recollection; it describes a vivid activation of the promises (“Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom”). To remember the LORD is to activate the faith, to live according to the covenant promises, to turn to Him in contrition for forgiveness, to renew the pilgrimage that was interrupted by the folly of idolatry. They are to recall and realize all the truths in this revelation, but they are also to act on them. God made them, they did not make Him. God is the master, and they are the servants. And God can forgive and redeem. Conversely, while they are to remember, God affirms they will not be forgotten. This is another way of saying that God will remember them—He will honor His promises and act on them to bring fulfillment. Here is another dramatic contrast with idolatry—God acts to meet their spiritual needs without their writing the script for Him to do so.

The affirmation that they are servants is significant to the whole conflict with idolatry. The idea of “servant” in the ancient world is one of being owned by the Master, not merely employed but free, as servants may be today. Idolatry makes God the servant and humans the master. That must now be reversed.

In conjunction with the theme of “servant” is the twofold explanation for it: You are my servants because (1) I formed you and (2) I redeemed you. In contrast to the theme of making idols, God reminds them that He formed them (both personally and physically, as well as nationally and collectively). And then He repeats the point that they are to serve Him. It was a common idea in the ancient world in creation accounts that God created people to serve.

The second explanation is that God had forgiven them. The imagery of blotting out (hypocatastasis) as a thick cloud (simile) their transgression is powerful. It is as if the darkness was swept away and clear blue sky appeared. The idea may be an allusion to Exodus 19 and 24 when God cut the covenant. In chapter 19 the top of the mountain is covered with clouds and fire and lightening, scaring the people off; but in chapter 24 after the sacrifices are made to make the covenant, there is crystal clear blue sky—they were at peace with God. Here the LORD declares that He has forgiven them, and He has redeemed them. The imagery of thick dark clouds being swept away should not be passed over too quickly. One gets the idea that sin and guilt is depressing and burdensome like heavy clouds and gray skies, but forgiveness is like blue skies and bright sunshine. The people need only to avail themselves of His provision of forgiveness to have the “clouds” lifted, to return to Him with contrite hearts and renewed allegiance.

##### *B. The LORD is worthy of universal praise (23).*

There is every reason to rejoice in the LORD, to sing and break into rejoicing, for the LORD has demonstrated His power over idols and idolaters by redeeming His people.

The primary reference in the idea of “redemption” in this passage is consistent with the context of Isaiah. It refers to the deliverance of the believing remnant from exile in Babylon. Of course, there would have been some who actually came to faith at that time, and so their redemption was both salvation (in the New Testament sense) as well as deliverance from bondage.

But this passage also adds the spiritual meaning of the deliverance: the “redemption” from exile also involved the forgiveness of sins. The prophet Zechariah would expand on this theme, showing that when God brought the people back from exile He also “cleaned them up” (Zech. 3) so that they might again be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Every saving act of God, every deliverance or redemption or healing, is in some way connected to divine forgiveness or spiritual cleansing. The forgiveness may be the basis of it, connected to it, or the result of it.

In this passage the prophet calls for creation as well as people to sing to God. The inclusion of the tree here is probably an allusion to the material used for the idol. All trees are part of God’s creation; when they flourish under His care and blessing, they sing praise to the Creator (personification). All creation will sing to the Creator (Ps. 65).

### Conclusion

So the prophet portrays the utter foolishness of making and worshiping an idol against the backdrop of the reality of the sovereign LORD God of the universe, the One who forgives our sins. The message would be vital for the Israelites in exile among the pagans and their gods; some might have been swayed into those beliefs, or perhaps led to doubt the sovereignty of God. This call for a renewed faith in the true LORD had as its practical outcome the imminent deliverance from exile.

The impact on the seventh century audience (following the early date and one Isaiah) would be even greater, for they clearly were into idolatry. By teaching how the nation was to be punished for idolatry before being redeemed out of exile, the prophet would be warning the nation to change so that judgment would be forestalled (as in the Book of Jonah). His ridiculing of idolatry would have had quite an impact.

From the very beginning of their existence through the exile idolatry was the great sin of Israel. They, like the pagan nations around them, wanted a god that they could control—one that they could see, that was like them. They did not want to be the only people on the earth to worship an invisible God.

But all that they were given was the revelation of the invisible God, the eternal Spirit. But this revelation was often made in terms that they could understand, in human language and human descriptions (anthropomorphisms). God was indeed revealing Himself to them in human forms and functions so that they could understand. But they did not understand; they assumed as with the pagans that these were literal descriptions, and so they made gods to fit.

In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son into the world to reveal the Godhead fully. Jesus had hands. Jesus had feet. Jesus had eyes, and ears, and a mouth—everything fully human. Wouldn’t you think that in the incarnation the human craving for a God in human form that people could identify with would be satisfied? Not so. They put a crown of thorns on that head. They whipped His body. They nailed those hands to the cross. And they drove the spike through those feet. They silenced those lips from speaking (so they thought). They thrust a spear into His side. They would have none of His claims or His demands.

Demands. There is the issue. Jesus had demanded that they conform to His will, that they find forgiveness for sins in Him, that they be His servants and learn of Him. This they would not do, for the essence of idolatry would not allow it. Idolaters seek to control the deity, not be controlled. And how did Jesus describe their unbelief and rejection of Him? “But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, calling to their playmates, and saying, `We piped for you, and you have not danced; we have mourned to you, and you have not lamented’.” (Mt. 11:16,17). If Christ is the sovereign God of creation, the great I AM, the Mighty King, and the Redeemer, then people must find salvation in Him. For them to imagine that salvation is possible in anything other than Him is utter folly.

And we who claim to believe in Jesus must strive continually to conform to Him as His servants, renewing our commitment in faith, worshiping Him with great rejoicing, and testifying to a pagan world that Jesus is Lord. And we must guard against the spirit of idolatry creeping into our faith, as John’s last words warned: “keep yourself from idols.” We must not think that anything we can produce, whether a good work, or a job, or an institution, or an empire, can produce spiritual security or meet our spiritual needs, or see us through the difficult times of life. No, we need someone who is above us to deliver us from the troubles we find ourselves in, that we have brought upon ourselves and cannot solve. It is the LORD alone who can deliver. It is this way because He is God; and it must be this way so that He, and He alone is, may be offered endless praise.

The personal name of Yahweh was first explained to Moses with ‘ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh, “I Am that I Am.” It was associated with the Sinaitic covenant: “I am Yahweh your God who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” But the name stresses the close, personal relationship that God has with His people. Here it is used to remind them of their covenant relationship.

\The Sinaitic Code, especially as renewed in Deuteronomy, was structured after the Hittite suzerain treaties in order to underscore the fact that Yahweh is Israel’s great king—he claims all their allegiance (see Meredith Kline, The Treaty of the Great King).

The idea of ga’al, “to redeem,” has been treated before; here it should be reiterated that this redemption is part of Yahweh’s covenant faithfulness for His own people—it is a family responsibility.

One is reminded of what the Angel did to the Assyrian army of Sennacherib; but one is also reminded how the LORD can use the Babylonians to accomplish His judgment.

If this section of the book is history written after the fact, then one of the prophet’s main arguments for Yahweh’s sovereignty and reliability—God’s ability to predict the future long in advance—evaporates, and with it God’s sovereignty and reliability.

Some versions have surprisingly replaced “Rock” with “God.”

The Hebrew catch-phrase (a paronomasia) of tohu wabohu means “waste and void,” or more specifically without form or structure and without substance. In general, “waste” fits if it can be defined (perhaps like our expressions “wasteland”).

Recall how Paul in Romans 1:18-31 explains that they refused to worship the Creator but instead worshiped the creatures. So God gave them up to their evil desires to self-destruct.

This is not the place to develop the point, but an interesting study can be made of the value of creation as a paradigm for worship unfold, both in the nature of God, approaching God, and the construction of the tabernacle.

It is this that gives Genesis 1 its polemical nature. The Law said, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” Genesis 1 traces through creation. And everything the pagans worship is part of God’s creation, whether angelic powers like Satan, or animals, or trees, or forces of nature. God is before all of them, because He made them. Idolatry can never free itself of the charge of worshiping the creation and not the creator.

See the excellent discussion in George E. Wright’s Israel Against Its Environment, in which he discusses astrology, voodoo, burning in effigy, spiritism, and magic.

The translation with the present perfect tenses is certainly workable. He could be saying I have forgiven and redeemed (as in chapter 40 where He said your sins have been paid for). They would still have to take advantage of the provision for it to be effectual. But it is also possible to take these as prophetic perfects—I will blot out, I will forgive, I will redeem—so return to me, repent.

The LORD is the Gracious Redeemer Isaiah 43:1-13

## The Knowledge of the LORD Isaiah 44:24—45:25

In this passage we have the report of the direct prediction that the LORD called Cyrus to be His servant to deliver His people Israel, in order that all might know that the LORD is God. Critical to this section is the knowledge of the LORD, both from the predictive side that He can prophesy, and from the effective side, that He does this that people might know that He is the LORD. The section draws out all the implications of this truth on several levels.

At the heart of this oracle is the mention of Cyrus by name. He is first introduced in Isaiah 44:28; but then in 45 the point is stressed that the LORD called him by name. Those who hold to the traditional view of the book point to this passage as a remarkable example of God’s ability to predict the future. Those who take the critical view argue that since prophets do not predict in such a specific way in the Old Testament, we have here evidence of a later author in the Babylonian exile, who knew about Cyrus and “predicted” that he should be the deliverer.

**Isaiah** **45:1-7**, the central core of this section, certainly stresses the sovereignty of God. Note the verbs as you read it through: I go before. I anoint. I hold the right hand. I level, break, cut. I give. I call by name. I call by name. I bestow honor. I strengthen. I create. I form. I make peace. I create evil (\*). Over fourteen times in this passage the LORD declares His acts. And the sum of it is the oft-repeated “I AM YAHWEH.”

There is a strong parallel to this particular focus on the sovereignty of God portrayed in the Book of Exodus with Moses and Pharaoh—a point that our prophet has already alluded to by indicating that this deliverance would be a second exodus. Note these motifs in Exodus: Pharaoh said, “I know not the LORD” (5:2); God said that He would deal with Pharaoh by a mighty hand (6:1), declaring “I AM YAHWEH” (6:2 and 6:6), and that when He redeemed (=delivered) His people they would “know” that He was the LORD (6:7); God promised to bring them to their land to possess it (6:8); and declared to Pharaoh that by this he too would know that “I AM YAHWEH” (7:17). Exodus 9:16 also announced, “I raised you up for this purpose, that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” This, of course, provided that basis of Paul’s discussion of God’s sovereignty in Romans 9:17; Paul also cited Exodus 33:19 to say that God would have mercy on whom He would have mercy. Paul also reasoned that God is like a potter; and the clay cannot say to the potter, “Why have you made me thus?” The idea of the potter and the clay is drawn from Isaiah 45:9, the context right after our passage. So the connection to Exodus and to Romans 9 are an important part of the discussion of the theology of this chapter.

In fact, a close reading of Romans 9—11, the passage where Paul explains how God controls nations with a view to His plan for Israel, draws heavily on the Book of Isaiah:

9:20 = Isaiah 29:16; 45:9 the potter and the clay

9:28 = Isaiah 10:22,23 carry out judgment with speed

9:29 = Isaiah 1:9 spared judgment like Sodom

9:33 = Isaiah 8:14; 28:16 stumbling stone for unbelievers

10:11 = Isaiah 28:16 believers not shamed

10:15 = Isaiah 52:7 beautiful are feet—good news

10:16 = Isaiah 53:1 who has believed our report?

10:20 = Isaiah 65:1 I revealed to those not asking

10:21 = Isaiah 65:2 all day long I hold out my hand

11:8 = Isaiah 29:10 God blinded Israel

11:27 = Isaiah 59:20,21,27 “All Israel will be saved when I take away her sins.”

11:34 = Isaiah 40:3 Who has been His counselor?

Clearly, the themes of the prophecies were most significant for Paul’s argument that God sent His people into exile for sin, that a remnant of believers was preserved,[115](http://bible.org/seriespage/knowledge-lord-isaiah-4424%E2%80%944525" \l "P1235_332917) that the nation received good news, that most of the people were hesitant to believe the good news, and that the restoration of the land was a sign of the ultimate salvation of Israel. It is difficult to sort out how many were true believers and what kind of redemption was intended. It would be safe to say that Isaiah has in mind deliverance from bondage in exile as the primary meaning; but that cannot be separated from spiritual deliverance—it was salvation because sins were forgiven, punishment completed, and God was delivering. But some rescued from exile were already believers; some came to faith at that time; and some came home without fully believing. But the fulfillment, the final restoration when all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11) will be both a physical deliverance and spiritual. Likewise, when the true Church is rescued from this world at the end of the age, only true believers will be included.

We are in the section of the book that portrays the sovereignty of the LORD as the basis for faith that the LORD will fulfill His promises. Isaiah 44:24-28 forms the first part of the study, but could serve as a prologue. The LORD is presented there as the Creator and Redeemer who makes liars and diviners frustrated by restoring Israel to her land. For this purpose God raised up Cyrus who would perform all the LORD’s pleasure in restoring Jerusalem and its temple. So with those claims the LORD reveals what He is about to do with Cyrus.

Isaiah 45:1-7 is the heart of this revelation of God’s sovereign power over the nations for His own purposes. I would think that the primary focus of the theology here would be as the passages points to, namely, **know the LORD** . We shall come back and develop this later; for now it is helpful to keep it in mind. “Knowing the LORD” involves both the realization and apprehension of facts about who He is and what He has and can do. It may also involve an act of the will by faith, an acknowledgment that Yahweh is God. I say “may” because we have samples where it does not. In Egypt God brought the plagues on Pharaoh that he might know that the LORD is God. Well, in his heart he would have had to admit that—but he never became a believer. Whereas the Israelites were told by Moses that when they were delivered they would know that He was God. For them the deliverance confirmed their faith. Likewise, at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, “every knee shall bow and tongue confess” that He is LORD—some as believes in joy, others in forced recognition at judgment.

In the rest of the chapter the prophet will describe the sovereign work of the LORD in bringing nations into submission to His plan. After an initial key summary statement of His plan for righteousness and salvation to fill the earth (45:8), the prophet announces woes on the critics who reject the Creator and His choice of Cyrus (9-13). This LORD will bring the Gentile powers to bow down to Israel in humiliation and to worship with them in Jerusalem (14-19). Consequently, the nations should pay attention to these oracles and be saved (20-25).

I see three developments of ideas in this passage that unfold the message. First, there are the claims of the LORD, namely, that He controls history through His control of Cyrus; secondly, the purpose of this is that all might know Yahweh, the God of Israel, to be the sovereign Lord God; and third, the explanation of all this is that He alone is sovereign over all creation, and if He can control all creation He can surely control Cyrus for His purpose for Israel.

There are several words that you would want to study in this passage. Certainly the verb “to know” (*yada`*) would be a primary choice, not to find a new and improved translation, but to uncover its many refinements and ramifications. The term essentially describes personal, intimate, experiential knowledge. But since it is normally just translated “know,” you will want to focus on its various categories of use. It can be used for simply knowing about things, for integrating facts by experience in life (common use in Proverbs), for acknowledging something such as the sovereignty of God or personal sin or confessing faith, for God’s evaluative knowledge (Ps. 139), almost on a par with salvation (“The LORD knows the way of the righteous”), and it can even be used for sexual intercourse. So the information available certainly stress an experiential knowledge.

I should also think that verse 7 will demand some precise thinking since it uses some critical theological terms in a strong way. The terms translation “good and evil” (here *shalom* and *ra`*), which are parallel to the poetic “light and darkness,” will need definition. We have already discussed *shalom* earlier. *Ra`* is normally translated “evil”; but it is wider than acts of sin. *Ra`* describes the opposite of “good” (normally *tob*): the term depicts that which brings pain, that is, whatever harms, hinders, interrupts, afflicts of destroys life is “evil.”[116](http://bible.org/seriespage/knowledge-lord-isaiah-4424%E2%80%944525" \l "P1242_338990) So you will have to determine from usage (which gives the range of meanings) and from the context (which restricts the choice) if these terms in Isaiah mean “well-being and disaster,” or ethical “good and evil,” or if they refer to Persian dualism (or a combination of these possibilities).

### Exegesis

### Prologue: God fulfills His covenant promise by sovereignty raising up a deliverer (44:24-28).

In this short section the prophet declares the claim of the LORD to sovereignty, and the demonstration of that sovereignty by frustrating liars and diviners who said there would be no regathering of the people. Instead, God raised up a pagan king, Cyrus, who would be God’s “shepherd” to perform all God’s pleasure. This pagan king did not even know that his rise to power was God’s work with God’s intention in mind.

### I. God makes Himself known through history (45:1-7).

#### *A. He is the sovereign LORD of history (1-3).*

In these first few verses the prophet will stress that God ordains and empowers individuals to change history in order that they might acknowledge His sovereignty.

The first verse of the chapter introduces the call of Cyrus, using the Word of the LORD as the introduction. If the direct speech begins in verse 2, the phrases in verse 1 still record the LORD’s Word about this king. The striking point, though, is that Cyrus is called “His anointed” (*m*e*shikho* from *mashakh*), a term usually reserved for the believing and/or Israelite kings. Here it carries its widest meaning of being set apart for a task.

Moreover, the king is said to be strengthened by the LORD: “whose right hand I made strong” (*hekhezaqti* from *khazaq*), the “right hand” being the idiom for “power” (a metonymy of cause). Cyrus was strengthened by God because he had a task that God wanted him to perform.

The purpose of God’s calling Cyrus was to “subdue all nations”—as an empire builder Cyrus would put down all rebellious states and unify the Fertile Crescent. The language here says that the LORD will subdue the nations, strip the kings, and open the doors—all these then being metonymies of cause, for the LORD would enable Cyrus to do it. In addition, each of these activities as metonymies represents more than what they merely express. “Stripping kings of armor” would be the effect of defeating them. “Opening doors” would be the effect of surrendering army.

Thus, according to the message of the prophet, the LORD—Yahweh—of Israel did all this. Archaeology turned up the cylinder seal of Cyrus which gives a parallel account (see the additional page in this section). In that Cyrus claims Marduk called him by name and took him by the hand to subdue nations. Some critics claim that (Deutero-)Isaiah used this text and simply corrected the theology, that it was Yahweh who did it. Other scholars argue that Cyrus or members of his court changed the Hebrew oracle to read about Marduk. Marduk was the god of Babylon, not Cyrus’ god. But to use Marduk would have appealed to the conquered people, namely, that their god brought Cyrus. Josephus records that it was the reading of Isaiah that prompted Cyrus to favor the Jews. He had the policy of restoring people to their lands; this might have hastened it, and added the financial support for the rebuilding.

The point can be stressed all along the way that God raises up pagan kings and powers to serve His purpose. The hymn of Daniel (in Daniel 2) declares that God sets up kings and removes kings—they are at His beckon call. Deuteronomy 32 said that God arranged the boundaries of all the nations with the number of the tribes of Israel in mind. To Pharaoh the word was, “For this cause I raised you up.” So throughout the Bible God uses pagan nations for divine purposes. Believers need not fear when they hear the international news, for God is sovereign over them all.

Cyrus was empowered by Yahweh to do what was to be done. The language of verses 2 and 3a is figurative and needs explanation. I would take “mountains” to be an implied comparison (hypocatastasis) with obstacles or opposition. It will be military (I doubt that God was going to flatten the earth in his pathway; in fact, it was already pretty flat). “Breaking down the gates” and “cutting bars” would be metonymical, the cause being put for the effect (given in verse 1) or the adjunct being put for the thing. God would bring down any opposition that Cyrus might meet. The iron gates would be actual gates of iron—there were 100 such gates leading into Babylon; the LORD opened the way for Cyrus to parade into the city without even a fight.

The LORD would also give Cyrus the treasures. I think that this is fairly literal in that the treasures would be the wealth that Babylon stored up in the vaults and archives. “Darkness” and “secret places” would be metonymies of adjunct, though, for the vaults would be in dark and secret places.

The purpose statement here focuses our attention on the verb “to know.” There are three levels of meaning of this verb in theological contexts: (1) to know in the sense of intellectual assent, that is, to know or realize facts; (2) to know in the sense of belief, that is, saving knowledge, personal experiential saving knowledge; and (3) to know publicly, to acknowledge or admit, and even to praise. At least the first is meant in this verse (compare Pharaoh in Exodus, and compare Daniel 4). Beyond that we do not know what happened to Cyrus. Josephus record of the tradition that he was moved by Isaiah’s writing is interesting, but even if true (and Josephus has proved to be more reliable than many thought) would say nothing to help us here. God would at least make His point with this king, maybe more.

#### *B. He controls history for His own purpose (4-6).*

The next few verses clarify that God summons and enables such individuals for the good of His people Israel, to fulfill His plan for them, that all may know the LORD.

This passage explains that God chose Cyrus for the sake of Israel, even though Cyrus did not know the LORD. One is reminded of Pharaoh again—”Who is Yahweh? I know not Yahweh!” But if Cyrus did not know of the LORD before this, he came to know about Him, and did cooperate with the divine plan (as if he had a choice).

Here, though, we find the main purpose of this whole section (so I would focus attention here). God was doing all this for the sake of Israel. He had a plan for Israel, and that plan involved all nations, whether as the means of discipline or the means of restoration. Pharaoh had been raised for one purpose, that God might destroy him as the evil oppressor. God also had a plan for Cyrus.

So God could work through a pagan king who had not known the LORD nor acknowledged Him. Cyrus may well have remained a pagan after this was over, because he gave the credit to Marduk—unless that was merely to patronize the Babylonian people.

Israel here is called “my chosen” (*b*e*hiri* from *bahar*) and “my servant.” The focus of the divine plan is on Israel, not on Cyrus, although I am sure that he thought of himself more important than they. But God had chosen Israel as His people; the verb “choose” is the main Old Testament word for election, signifying a choice out of a number. They did not choose God, as He maintained regularly, but God chose them to be His servant nation in the world. And because of the covenant promises to Israel, God would arrange the history of the nations around Israel’s situation. That Israel was to be a servant reminds the reader that they were originally to be a kingdom of priests for the LORD, to be the channel of blessing for the families of the world.

Still focusing on the choice and the preparation of Cyrus, the prophet reiterates the sovereignty of the LORD in spite of the fact that Cyrus was ignorant of Him (verse 5). The Word of the LORD is, “I am Yahweh, and there is no other God besides Me.” This point will continue to be made throughout this section of the book. Yahweh claims absolute and exclusive authority. Marduk is nothing. Bel is a phantasy. Nebo is worthless. Only Yahweh is God.

So it is only Yahweh who could strengthen Cyrus—not even his own deities could do this. Salvation can only come to people when they realize that what they have believed in was not what has helped or benefitted them—it was the LORD and His common grace, moving towards efficacious grace.

Verse 6 is subordinated to the preceding verse as the purpose clause. It forms a parallel with verse 3, which also stresses this same purpose for Cyrus. That is why I have made the break here in my outline—to have each of the first two sections end with the purpose that people might know the LORD—even though one could do it differently as long as the context is not altered. I took verse 7 to be a moire universal proclamation, not limited to the Cyrus event, but certainly bringing it all to a culmination.

“From the rising of the sun” is a metonymy for either the east or the morning (adjunct); likewise, “setting” could be for either the west or the evening. I suspect a double meaning here is involved, for both ideas are true—all day and everywhere. So the two form a megrims.

They will all acknowledge that there is no God beside Yahweh. “There is no other.” God demands absolute allegiance; He claims exclusive rights to this by virtue of creation and redemption.

#### *C. God is sovereign over all creation (7).*

This verse “tops off” the discussion: Yahweh is the sovereign creator and powerful controller of all aspects of life. The key issue in this verse is the relationship between the pairs: light and darkness, peace and disaster. In the context of the book, having been exiled into Babylon was a disaster, but being restored to the land was peace. Here Yahweh is saying that He controls these kinds of prospects. But He may be saying a good deal more as well, for He uses the words for creation as well. So He might be saying that He is sovereign over all the forces of good and evil in this creation—and the Bible certainly teaches that. One need not, however, say that this passage teaches that God created the chaos of Genesis, let alone sin. This would all contrast with clear affirmations in the Bible.

With this statement the text may also be a polemic against Persian Zoroastrianism with its dualism. They may be polarized items (light and dark, for example) but they are all under the power and authority of Yahweh.

### II. God makes His sovereignty known among the nations (45:8-24).

It may be that there is sufficient material here for a separate message entirely. In that case the sub-points of the previous section would simply become Roman numerals, as would the sub-points in this section. But this material follows so closely on the preceding that it should be connected.

#### *A. Summary: Righteousness and Salvation will fill the earth (8).*

The prophet uses very poetic imagery to make this broad principle. It is as if the heavens were to open and pour out righteousness. This image shows the source of the salvation and the effect of it—it will produce salvation. Just as rain produces crops, so righteousness (i.e., divine intervention) will bring salvation.

#### *B. Warning: God will have dominion over the nations, in spite of unbelief (9-17).*

In this section the prophet pronounces woes on the critics who oppose or do not believe God’s plan to deliver Israel. The challenge is whether the clay can ask the potter why the program is as it is. The LORD, after all, is the sovereign Creator. He has made everything; He can predict what will happen. And here he predicts that Cyrus will build His city and set the exiles free.

In verse 14-17 the oracle announces that the Gentile powers will have to submit to God and His plan, to acknowledge that Israel’s God is the sovereign God. All of this will work to the salvation of Israel.

#### *C. Instruction: Nations should listen and be saved (18-24).*

The LORD once again reiterates His sovereignty. He is the LORD God. He has revealed His plan openly. He speaks righteousness. He again challenges the pagan idol worshiper to come and declare the future. No one else has from antiquity declared the future.

In view of this, the advice is given to the nations to **Look to me and be saved**. The word is given that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear to the LORD. Those who were incensed against the LORD will be put to shame; those who believe will join the remnant, the seed of Israel, that shall be justified.

### Conclusion

The point of the passage would bring great comfort to the believers as they saw how God could work all things together for the good. It would also be instructive for them, and for all worldlings, to learn that God expects acknowledgment that comes from faith.

There is another aspect of this whole section that needs to be probed somewhere. In the Old Testament (as well as the New) Babylon was the epitome of the “anti-kingdom.” In Genesis 11 the people settled in Babylon after the flood in rebellion against God; they came together to unite and to become famous. God judged them by confusing their language and then eventually scattered them across the face of the earth. Thus with the antagonism that would grow, God chose to use war as a means of holding nations in check—war and conflict was better than collective apostasy. So Cyrus’ coming would be seen as a part of God’s plan to overthrow the evil empire (see also the Book of Revelation).

God’s plan of redemption seeks to overthrow this work by various parts to the plan. One part was the confusing of their language. Zephaniah 3 prophesies that God will regather His people by giving them one pure language. And Acts 2, recording a partial fulfillment, serves as a harbinger of that coming day when the Spirit of the LORD will be poured out on all flesh. Babylon teaches us that unity of people is a disaster unless it is a unity with God. If unity, or community, is going to work at all, God has to do the uniting and the changing of people; for even in Christianity unless the participants are humble servants of the LORD, there will be difficulties.

We could thus summarize this passage’s point by saying: *Those who truly know the LORD (=believers) will acknowledge His sovereignty in word and deed, so that He can re-unite and restore and renew His people to their calling.* God was raising a pagan king to destroy the pagan empire of Babylon so that Israel could be set free and start again; all of this was done that the world might know that Yahweh is the true God, and that by recognizing that they might turn to Him and be saved.

In a secondary point we could say, *Those unbelievers who for one reason or another share part of God’s work must of necessity admit that Yahweh is the true God.* Every one must admit this, either now in faith for salvation, or later in humiliation when they realize He is the LORD of creation, the LORD of history, and the LORD of all nations.

It is important to understand that according to the biblical writers' theology, true believers believe the Word of the LORD, not only the Law of Moses, but new revelation from the prophets. If the prophets truly were sent by God, their messages were to be believed; and a true believer would do that. Thus, the prophetic oracles became Scripture in par with the Law. In the days of Jeremiah, "pious priests" rejected the prophet and claimed to hold to the Law--selectively interpreted. Likewise, when Jesus came into the world as the full revelation of God, the true remnant would gradually turn to Him by faith, because they were inclined to believe the Word of the LORD. It took a little time to convince them that He was from God, because it was so radically different from what the leaders were teaching. But the "remnant" will take that next step into the further revelation of God. Nowadays it is different, because no new Scripture is being written; the new programs of God that are yet to come have all been fully revealed to the prophets and the apostles.

For a discussion of the words "good" and "evil" as they work together in the Bible, seen my treatment in the introductory materials in *Creation and Blessing.*

It is interesting how literally this happened with Babylon. The general of Cyrus, one Ugbaru (whom Daniel calls by the title Darius) managed to take the city of Babylon in the same way that Babylon earlier had taken Nineveh, by diverting the river and breaking in. But when Cyrus came to Babylon a few weeks later the gates were opened to him and he was hailed as the great king.

The use of "servant" throughout these sections makes an interesting study. Cyrus is the LORD's servant; Israel is the LORD's servant; but ultimately the Messiah is the Servant of the LORD.

Recall Jesus' words to Pilate: "You could have no power against Me except it were given to you from above" (John 19:11).

Babylon was always known as a cosmopolitan center because of the number of people and variety of languages. So a judgment of God is eventually turned into a claim to fame by Babylon.

[‹ Dead Idols or the Living God Isaiah 44:6-23](http://bible.org/seriespage/dead-idols-or-living-god-isaiah-446-23)

**The LORD’s Superiority to the Gods of Babylon Isaiah 46:1-13**

Study By: [Allen Ross](http://bible.org/byauthor/57/Allen%20Ross)

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**Introduction**

In this section the prophet mocks the deities of Babylon who will not only fail to save their people, but have to be rescued themselves. By way of contrast, the LORD saves His people to the uttermost. The reason for this great disparity between those gods and the LORD is clearly the truth that Yahweh is the one true God, sovereign over all creation.

It is hard for modern believers to imagine how great the struggle with idolatry must have been. All nations made claims that their god or gods were the most powerful; and that was usually backed up by military conquests and enslavement of other people, thus showing superiority over their gods. Idolatrous people do not hesitate to add other deities to their collection, and so in a conquest might assimilate the gods of the defeated tribes, as if those deities were actually supporting the conquering armies. At the exile it was hard for the Israelites to protest that their God Yahweh was sovereign over the nations, when the temple was destroyed, the cities wiped out, and the people carried away.

But the true believers could look to the messages of the prophets to point out that God had predicted His people would be taken into captivity. That was unusual. No people had a deity who punished His own people. They were always nationalistic gods. But the words of the prophets came true; so the remnant knew God was in control, even though His people could claim no victory. And now, with the oracles about a return, they could also see God’s sovereignty. The nations of Assyria and Babylon may have held the power, but their gods did not accomplish that—Yahweh did. He did this only for His purposes; now that a new purpose was in line, Yahweh would overthrow Babylon. So when we consider the question of which God can save, we shall have to keep in mind how Israel’s God withheld His salvation until the right time, and then how He saved His people. Here, too, we can see His sovereignty, for He has His plan and His schedule.

In this section we have about four separate sections that make up the whole argument. The first two verses ridicule the impotence of idols. This is then contrasted with the affirmation of how the LORD saves to the end (3,4). Then, to make the point that the LORD is incomparable, there is a challenge put forth to the competition which shows that only the LORD can deliver (5-11). Finally, the LORD declares His power to save (12,13).

There are other ways to analyze this section. There seems to be a pattern in the part of the chapter that is instructional. The prophet speaks to Israel first with the command “Hearken”; then when he again exhorts them it is with “Remember”; and then the third time he returns to “Hear.” There is a bit of an inclusio to this arrangement. The first section calling them to hearken tells how He will bear them up and rescue them; and the last section telling them to hearken as well repeats the theme that He will deliver them. But the “remember” section in the middle focuses on the nature of Yahweh as the one true God. Here then is the basis for the deliverance; and here then would be the central emphasis of the theology of the passage—the nature of God. This arrangement is helpful to note, but it does not work as easily into an outline because the sections on idolatry cannot be worked in as well.

**Exposition**

**I. Idols cannot even save themselves (1, 2).**

In the first two verses we have a mockery of the pagan gods.These deities are carried around on animals and slaves as part of their normal ritual processions. They could become very heavy. And when the trouble comes, those who carry them will flee, not saving their gods! The announcement that Bel and Nebo will not be able to save themselves indicates that this oracle preceded the invasion by Cyrus.[121](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1313_360104) God was about to bring in Cyrus; and when He did, the Babylonian gods would be of no help. So, this little section is indirectly a prediction of the fall of Babylon.

“Bel” is *belu,* which is the equivalent of *ba’al* in Western Semitic. Bel is the Semitic title for the ancient Sumerian god Enlil, Lord of the Air. When the people of Babylon took over the Sumerian culture, they made Enlil part of their triad and named him Bel. Marduk was the eldest son of Ea, another ancient deity, god of Water. In the mythology Marduk fought Tiamat and was rewarded with fifty titles and supreme authority. Bel conferred upon him his own title of “Lord of the Land” and Ea declared, “Let him like me be called Ea.”Thus Marduk eventually absorbed the other gods and took over their functions—creator, healer, deliverer, and determiner of fate; he is in many ways the equivalent of Jupiter. So we find the title *Bel Merodach*; he became the king of the gods and the official deity of the city of Babylon in the Neo-Babylonian period (the name of the city was *bab-ili* in Babylonian, “the gate of god”[122](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1315_361349) ; it was a major center of worship). The theophoric element “bel” is in the name “Belshazzar.”

“Nebo” is *nabu*, the son and prophet of Bel (compare Hebrew *nabi’* [*nah-vee*], “prophet”). He was equal to Mercury (or better, Apollo). His city is Borsippa. When fate was being determined in the realm of heaven, Bel confided to his son what was decided, and Nabu wrote it on the Tablets of Fate. According to this, from Bel and Nabu the fate of the country was determined for another year. Isaiah has another view! The theophoric element “nabu” appears in names like Nabonaid, Nabopolasser, and Nabuchadnezzer.[123](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1317_362275)

The text alludes to beasts, elephants, and camels probably, that would carry the images of these deities in processions, or festival enthronements; they now must carry them to safety in flight. But as the people fled they would not be able to rescue them. Later, Cyrus restored some of these gods.

These verses have irony and sarcasm in them, which makes for a wonderful polemic. How absurd to trust in deities that cannot save themselves; how absurd for the Israelites to fear deities that have to be rescued when Yahweh judges the city.

**II. The LORD saves His people to the end (3, 4).**

Here now is the contrast—the LORD does not need to be saved, He saves His people. Note how the section begins with a call for the house of Jacob and the “remnant” of Israel to listen to the Word of the LORD. When a passage talks about the LORD’s **protection** of “His people” it will be referring to the faithful (as a whole), because those whom He declared “not my people” He did not sustain.

The contrast between the LORD and pagan gods is drawn out further: the deities that those animals bore or carried became a burden to the weary beasts; but the LORD bears up and carries His people. The idiom of “carry” is based on the implied comparison that supporting and sustaining people is like carrying them wherever they go.

The LORD supports and sustains His people throughout their lives, even to their old age, when they have the hoary head. The contrast is striking—you will grow old, but I AM. And, unlike pagan gods, the LORD is not only capable of movement, He is the prime Mover, the One who delivers. The benefits to God’s people can be summarized in the verbs used: “I have made … I will bear … I will carry … I will deliver.”

**III. Idols are not comparable to the LORD’s power (46:5-11).**

***A. The LORD challenges the competitions (5-7).***

These verses repeat the challenge that has appeared previously in the text, beginning in chapter 40. The LORD demands to know who is like Him. With whom can anyone compare the LORD? The words form a challenge, but they are also eroteses (rhetorical questions) for the implication is that there is no one comparable.

He picks up the theme again of pagans making gods (compare [Isa. 44](javascript:%7b%7d)), carrying them around in processions, and placing them in temples—where they did not move until carried somewhere. Not only are they immobile in their niches, when people cry to them for help, they cannot answer and cannot save (*yosi`ennu* from *yasa`*) anyone from trouble. The point is that if these gods are all that can be stood up to compete against the LORD, there is no competition.

***B. The LORD calls for commitment (8-11).***

Now the LORD turns to His people to call for them to act upon the spiritual heritage they have. The key introductory theme here is “remember this … bring it to mind … remember.” As mentioned earlier, the idea of remembering in Hebrew has to do with recalling the promises of God and putting them into practice by faith. Here the remnant—addressed as “transgressors” because of their refusal to step out in faith on the Word of the LORD and because of their sins that brought them to Babylon[124](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1330_365748)—is to remember the nature of their God. He is sovereign and powerful, calling things to happen before they do, declaring His will, and fulfilling His plan. The plan here is the restoration of Israel to her land and mission. So this is a call for the people to respond by faith to the Word.

The second verb in verse 8 is difficult. The form in question is *hit’os*e*su* (*hith-oh-sheh-shoo*).It is a Hithpael imperative; but the etymology is unclear. It has been translated “show yourselves men,” “be firm,” “be flush with shame”; the main conjectures apart from the standard translations include: “be ashamed,” and “own yourselves guilty” (these two conjectures would alter the text to connect with *bosh* and *‘asham* respectively. I suspect that the idea of “stand fast” or “be firm” fits the context the best. The prophet does address the audience as “transgressors” however, and that is one reason for an idea of “be ashamed.” One ought not be too dogmatic here.

After reiterating that He is God and that there is no one else, the LORD focuses the themes of His sovereignty and prophecy in the expression “My counsel shall stand” (*‘asati taqum* [*a-tsa-tee tah-koom*])—God will do His will. His pleasure. In that light, Cyrus is introduced here as “a ravenous bird” from the east. This hypocatastasis is then clarified for us with the parallel “the man of my counsel”—linking the image with the above emphasis on God’s counsel. Cyrus, then, was the focus of the predetermined plan of deliverance; and no one can tell God what He should or should not do. The sum of the matter is “I have spoken, I will bring it to pass; I have purposed (*yasarti* [*ya-tsar-tee*]), the word used earlier for “formed” with a plan or purpose or design), I will also do it.”

**IV. Only the LORD can save (46:12-13).**

Now the LORD declares His power to save. He addresses the “obstinate” (the stout or mighty of heart), those whose wills would be hard to break. First he addressed the remnant, the house of Jacob (perhaps suggesting the need of blessing and need of some further correction), then transgressors, and now stubborn. Like their ancestors in Egypt they were always resisting the new prophet. They had grown accustomed to their lives in exile, and were not ready for a whole new program.[125](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1335_368389) They are also described as “far from righteousness,” which in this context means that they were not yet delivered from exile (see the discussion of “righteousness” below). They were indeed slow to believe the words of the prophet, especially the words that this prophet had written.[126](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1336_369101) But until they responded they would be in spiritual and national difficulty. So they were to “hearken”—listen to the message and respond favorably.[127](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1337_369484)

The two key words in this section are “righteousness” (*tsidqati,* from *ts*e*daqah* [s.v. *tsadaq*]) and “salvation” (*t*e*shu’ati*, from *t*e*shu’ah* [s.v. *yasha’*]). The two are parallel and so must work together in the meaning of the line. The promise is clearly for “salvation”—the deliverance from exile and the restoration to Zion of the glorious work through God’s people. The idea of “righteousness” must then be a metonymy of either cause or of adjunct—that the deliverance or salvation is a fulfillment of the LORD’s righteousness or faithful justice. Compare [Psalm 98:2](javascript:%7b%7d), which says, “The LORD has made known His salvation // His righteousness has He openly shown in the sight of the nations.”

**Conclusion**

The whole passage is a practical application of the sovereignty of God. Because the LORD is the sovereign LORD God, He is fully able to do what He has planned to do—save His people. He will defeat and humiliate all false worshipers and their gods who can in no way save. Likewise, the New Testament makes it clear that the LORD is able to save to the uttermost.

The target audience of this oracle is the Jewish community in exile. They had all but given up on getting free; they may have concluded that the other side won, and that they now need only bide their time and live as well as they could under Gentile dominion. They were not keen on going back; Zerubbabel (in 536 B.C.), Ezra (in 455 B.C.), and Nehemiah (in 444 B.C.) had great difficulty getting people to return. This message would then serve to rekindle confidence among the people of God, who may have been wavering with words like “Where is the promise of His coming?” The prophet has compared this deliverance to the exodus of Egypt; well, the people here seem to be very much like the people back there—stiff-necked.

It is critical that such people remember (= recall and confirm by acting in faith on the promises) that the LORD has a plan that cannot be stopped or changed by anyone, and that the LORD has the power to fulfill His plan, and that the LORD will deliver His people to the shame and humiliation of all the pagans and their false worship. Isaiah’s audience could also build up their faith in the sovereignty of God over all pagans and their gods, so that they would not be overwhelmed by circumstances in which it might appear that the other side was winning. God would deliver His people from oppression in the world.

The primary application in preaching from this passage today would run along similar lines. We as the people of God live in a world dominated by paganism with its false gods and oppressive beliefs. It is easy to relinquish our confidence and courage, and just live quietly in our faith, not engaging in spiritual warfare. But the Word of the LORD mocks false beliefs, and calls for us to live in active faith in the promises of God, looking for the LORD’s great deliverance of His people, both now in spiritual victories and in the *eschaton* in redemption from the bondage of this world. This passage challenges us to hold fast the faith that we have received, our conviction of the sovereignty of God, and live out our assurance that there is no salvation apart from faith in Him. We might be in the world, but we are not of the world, for this world and its evil system is about to pass away.

If we make applications to problems of idolatry in Christians, we have to be careful how we do it. We must first explain the meaning of the text as it was intended, and then draw from it principles of idolatry—showing what idolatry is like. Then we may show that certain things we do line up with the spirit of idolatry and so must be avoided. We may not actually worship false gods; but we may dilute our faith with rival affections and devotions that must not remain. If the LORD is the absolute sovereign God who meets all our needs, then we owe Him our absolute allegiance.

**References**

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[121](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1313_360105) In fact, there is no oracle in Isaiah that clearly shows the invasion of Cyrus to be a completed event. It is always future, whether imminent or not.

[122](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1315_361350) Recall the passage in [Genesis 11:1-9](javascript:%7b%7d) which plays on the name of Babylon—”the gate of god” in their language, but “confusion” in Hebrew. Actually, “confusion” is not the actual meaning, only a popular etymology (word play) because *balal* sounds like *babel*. But the text is mocking the idea it was the gate of god.

[123](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1317_362276) There are many resources on ancient Near Eastern religions. Check works on the subject, such as Helmer Ringgren’s little book on Semitic Civilizations. Or consult the books on each civilization, such as Roux, *Ancient Iraq*. If you want a simple approach—with pictures, then use Larousse’s *Encyclopedia of Mythology.*

[124](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1330_365749) I think there is more to this than that. They knew that they were sinners; that is why they question whether or not God will take them back. But from the beginning God has said their sins are paid for. Here He may be addressing them as transgressors to underscore that in spite of what they have done His promises are sure. And they can be a part of it.

[125](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1335_368390) Probably a good many of them were able to comply with their pagan captors and thus live at peace. The stories in Daniel suggest there were captives who fell down before Nebuchadnezzar’s statute—just not Daniel and his friends. Jews could have done so, all the while knowing in their hearts it was mere compliance. It was a way to survive. Daniel showed them another way. And Isaiah’s word was shaking up their system.

[126](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1336_369102) Recall how Jesus rebuked his disciples in [Luke 24](javascript:%7b%7d) as “foolish and slow to believe” what the prophets had said about the Messiah. It was all there in the text, but they were too focused on their understanding of the Messianic Age.

[127](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13" \l "P1337_369485) The verb *shama’*, translated “hear, listen, hearken,” always has the idea of responding to the word—”hear my prayer,” “and he heard,” “listen to the Word of the LORD”—not just listen, but respond.

## Exhortations to Heed God’s Call Isaiah 48:1-22

### Introduction

There are all too many folks who claim to be the people of God but do not act in faith on the promises to fulfill His plan for their lives. They are comfortable just being numbered with the saints; but they do not want to leave their comfort zone. They hear the word of God, what it promises, what it calls for them to do, but they stubbornly resist, concluding it is for someone else. And sadly, they will live out their lives not fulfilling God’s plan for their lives; they will never realize what it is like to be actively involved in the work of God.

[Isaiah 48](javascript:%7b%7d) deals with just such a problem with stubborn Israel. The prophet foresees that the people of Israel in captivity in Babylon will be resigned to living out their lives there. They will put out of their mind the promises of a new covenant with a restoration to the land and a renewal of their service of God. And so he writes this oracle to rebuke them in that weak faith and to exhort them to heed God’s call.

Based on the messages of the previous chapters, the LORD here exhorts His unclean nation to take note of the prophecies carefully because they have been living in unbelief too long and need to renew their faith in and commitment to God’s word. Furthermore, He reminds them how He continues to be patient with them for their benefit, but calls them to contemplate His sovereign acts. Finally, the LORD encourages them to flee from Babylon through His great redemption when the opportunity arises. The future of God’s people is not in captivity.

### Exposition

#### I. The Rebuke: The LORD rebukes His people for their disbelief and idolatry which He has sought to overcome by His sovereign word (48:1-11).

##### *A. The LORD calls the unfaithful to respond (1, 2).*

The first two verses record God’s call for Israel to listen to His word. But the thrust of this section is that this divine command is couched with many epithets describing the nation. They are those (1) “who are called by the name of Israel,” which is an allusion to the naming motif in earlier prophecies, as well as to the renaming of Jacob “Israel”; (2) they are those “who have come forth from the waters of Judah,” a poetic reference to the ancestry (implied comparison of “fountain” with the source of the family)—although some folks change the text to read “loins” instead of “waters” (*mimm*e*’e* for *mimme*); (3) and they are those “who swear by the name of Yahweh and make mention of the God of Israel,” which refers to their covenant oaths, creeds, and praises as devotees of the LORD (this is clarified in verse 2 in that they associate themselves with the holy city and stand firm in the LORD).

But verse 1 explains that what all that these descriptions claim is just that, claims, for the people are hypocritical—they do not do it “in truth” or “righteousness.” Their participation in ritual acts, praise, taking oaths, confessing belief, is not done with sincerity (“truth” as we have seen before is reliability, dependability, as well as holding to true beliefs), nor with righteousness (their lives have not corresponded with the standard of the covenant). So the prophet observes that they are skeptical of the Word and hesitant to respond.

Verse 2 then explains further that they claim to be professing Israelites. They call themselves “citizens of the holy city” and claim to rely on the God of Israel. This is what they would protest in response to the charge of the prophet. But affiliation to the faith does not always translate into living by faith.

##### *B. The LORD appeals for them to listen to His word by reminding them of His predictive power (3-8).*

Verse 3 introduces the theme of this section: God had predicted the former things and they happened as He said they would. The “former things” refers to that which the LORD had already predicted correctly, including for the audience who ended up in Babylon, the captivity. He predicted many things in antiquity, and then He brought them to pass just as He said He would. The use of “mouth” is, of course, anthropomorphic, a more vivid way of expressing the decree of the LORD—He actually spoke.

Verses 4 and 5 explain that it was necessary to use prophecy because the people were stubborn. The previous chapter branded them as obstinate; but now their neck is iron and their brow brass. The implied comparisons are intended to show how hardened they were, how slow to believe. They would not bend or yield; they refused to be controlled by the LORD.

Verse 5 completes the explanation by explaining that their hesitancy to believe in the LORD had the danger of opening the way for them to idolatry, crediting an idol that they made with the acts of God. God had to convince them through such supernatural ways as predictive prophecy because they were wayward. When the prophet here records the Word of the LORD that claims the use of predictions, he probably has in mind the importance of prophecy throughout all the history of Israel rather than only one specific event. Israel’s history was foretold, from beginning to end, by the living God. But certainly the captivity in Babylon was uppermost in his mind, for God had foretold it, and no one believed it—until it happened.

Three things set Israel’s historiography apart from any other in the ancient Near East, and these are significant. **(1) Israel had a linear history**: it was moving from its beginning to its culmination in the eschaton—there was an eschatalogy. But the nations in the ancient world, even though they had historical events, had no concept of progression. To them, it was all the annual seasonal cycle, year after year. The deities all served to restore vegetation, crops, life, year after year. But there was no goal at the end of the age. **(2) Israel had a God who judged His own people**, often by using other nations to do it. The deities of the other nations were national deities, loyal to their people—servants of their people. But only in Israel do we find prophets telling how the LORD would destroy His own people. Here is a clear evidence of truth, and not propaganda; Yahweh is not simply the God of Israel, but rather the God of heaven. **(3) Israel had a God who predicted the future.** All nations could claim that their deities caused whatever happened to happen; but when what happened was foretold by the LORD, and what was foretold could not be changed by armies or deities, the truth rests with the LORD God of Israel.

Verse 6 forms the rebuke proper by appealing for the people to look at the facts and admit the truth. They had heard all this, all the prophecy that the LORD had given and all the claims to His sovereignty. Why would they not declare it? (Some wish to emend the line to read, “Will you not witness it?” changing *tagidu* to *ta’id*). No, they did nothing with it.

So now there was to be a “new thing.” It is recent, new, so at they cannot say they heard of it elsewhere, or did it themselves (verse 7). This new thing that they never imagined would probably refer to the bringing in of Cyrus as the deliverer to set them free. Who could have imagined that?. This was a new prophecy because if it had been made otherwise they might have claimed they knew it. God is always one step ahead of people. And these people took some convincing. It reminds us of the contrary audience of Malachi, who challenged everything the prophet said, demanding proof or explanation.

This idea of the “new thing” is developed further in verse 8; it will then be picked up in verse 14. Israel did not know this, nor had they heard it. These events are new and unprecedented. But God did not fully reveal them lest they should treat the prediction lightly and say that it corresponded to their own calculations. Familiarity with the expectation sometimes lessons the appreciation or the understanding of it. The first part of verse 8 probably means that Israel had not received notice of Cyrus in years past, even though punishment and downfall had been predicted for Babylon itself. The reason the agent was not predicted before now is that Israel would not have appreciated or accepted it, being in the state of disbelief and disobedience that they were in. They were “transgressors from the womb”—a clear description of the sin nature. Seldom do we realize how our sin nature necessitates how God must deal with us. It surely demands patience and compassion; but here it calls for convincing proof, because of slowness to believe. Rebellious people do not accept signs and predictions easily.

##### *C. The LORD remains patient so that His word and His works will accomplish their intended goals (9-11).*

Nevertheless, the LORD continues to be patient with these people, so that they might benefit from His intervention (if God was not patient, who would benefit?). It appears that verse 9 would make no sense to someone who had lived through the exile; but the point is that God cut that period short or they would have been cut off. And if they had been cut off completely, there would be no praise offered to God for the deliverance from bondage.

Note the parallel praise of the psalmist who returned from the captivity: “You severely disciplined me, but You did not give me over to death” ([Ps. 118](javascript:%7b%7d)—the speaker represents the nation).

Underscore in this verse that it is because of God’s reputation that Israel was not destroyed. [Ezekiel 36](javascript:%7b%7d) will say the same thing, that God would deliver them from exile because of His Word—He would keep His promises—and by doing that He would sanctify His name which they had profaned. And Malachi would reiterate, “Because I the LORD change not, therefore you are not consumed.”

The idea of “deferring anger” is rather anthropomorphic. It is similar to the LORD’s “repenting” over the evil that He said He was going to do. These expressions show His compassion. But His plan was formed, not only for the exile, but the number of years in the exile, the time and circumstances of the return—all of it.

Verse 10 uses the language of refining to describe the captivity in exile. “I have refined” is an implied comparison; and “in the furnace” is also an implied comparison of exile with a furnace (see [Deut. 4:20](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Kings 8:51](javascript:%7b%7d); and [Jer. 11:4](javascript:%7b%7d)). Note that the genitive helps interpret the figure: “furnace of **affliction**”; this could be classified as a genitive of apposition, the furnace, which is affliction.

Our hymn writer caught this image nicely: “In the furnace, God may prove me, hence to bring me forth more bright” (*Zion Stands*).

The expression “but not as silver” could be taken in two ways. It either means that the refining was not as severe as would be needed to refine silver, or it was not with silver as the product, that is, the desired result had not accrued from Israel’s affliction. Israel’s sin was not completely purged, for the LORD here was rebuking unbelief and disobedience.

Thus, the purpose of delivering Israel from bondage was for the LORD’s sake. He would prevent His reputation as the powerful Lord God from being disparaged among the nations. God will not let His name be profaned among the nations (see [Ezek. 36:22-36](javascript:%7b%7d)). And out of this we have the prayer, “Hallowed be thy name.” We too pray that God will fulfill His promises and thereby rescue His name, His reputation from the world.

#### II. The Renewed Claim: The LORD renews His claim of absolute sovereignty and His purpose to destroy Babylon through Cyrus (48:12-16).

##### *A. The LORD claims absolute sovereignty (12, 13).*

The claims that Yahweh makes now are familiar Isaianic expressions: “I am He. I am the first, I also am the last.” But this verse now includes a graphic description of the LORD as the **Creator** (“hand” // “right hand” are anthropomorphic). The terms “earth” and “heaven” are both literal and figurative (merism—the whole universe). The whole of creation and everything in it is here because God commanded it to come into existence, and now, as servants, they are at His command ([Ps. 33:9](javascript:%7b%7d)). The New Testament will affirm that the whole world is being borne along by His (Jesus’) powerful word (*rhema* [[Heb. 1:3](javascript:%7b%7d)]). Here is true sovereignty, that all creation obeys the LORD’s call.

##### *B. The LORD will destroy Babylon through Cyrus (14).*

The presentation of the hosts of creation assembling before the LORD is made to call Israel to listen—God is also summoning them. The challenge is simple: who ever foretold these things? The question is rhetorical; no one other than God foretold this. In this announcement the one that the LORD loves is Cyrus, for he will do God’s will by destroying the Chaldeans. The idea of “love” includes “choosing”; some versions simply translate it “choose.” Cyrus was chosen; but it is also true that if Cyrus will do this work of God he will be pleasing to God. The power is from God, though; the “arm” is probably the LORD’s (so anthropomorphic), indicating the power to chasten and punish (but some would change the word “arm” to “seed” to avoid the violent zeugma).

##### *C. The LORD is able to fulfill His eternal plan (15, 16).*

The force of predictive prophecy is again used to make the point. The LORD affirms that He Himself has called Cyrus and will make sure that his mission succeeds. Such promises were not made in secret, but (as we have seen) from antiquity. By the way, if this oracle was made by Isaiah of Jerusalem, then the words are very precise. If another prophet made it in the days of Cyrus, then the claims of prophecy from antiquity make little sense. It would be taking a well-known fact and trying to pass it off as prophecy that demands faith.

Verse 16 critical for the interpretation of theology. The LORD is the speaker throughout this section—”I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time it was, there am I.” Then the text says, “and now the Lord God has sent me, and His Spirit.” Most commentators suggest that 16b changes the scene to the earthly drama. Watts says, “Someone, ostensibly a leader, claims that *Yahweh has sent* him and *his spirit*.”[144](http://bible.org/seriespage/exhortations-heed-god%E2%80%99s-call-isaiah-481-22" \l "P2043_566718) This forces him to say that in verse 17 and following this leader quotes his commission from the LORD. That seems to me somewhat forced. Others say that the line is a parenthesis or insertion, perhaps coming from the interpolator who claims to have a divine commission to address the contemporaries. This is most unnatural and contrived. But they are trying to avoid having Yahweh be both God the One who is sending and the Servant who is sent. So one view, followed by a number of scholars, is to see an additional comment here by the writer or editor.

I would ask whether or not we have here intimations of the tri-unity (popularly but incorrectly called the trinity) of the Godhead, much as we do in other passages (see [Malachi 3](javascript:%7b%7d) which has Yahweh sending His Messenger of the Covenant, even the Lord whom they seek, and then saying “I will draw near to you”).[145](http://bible.org/seriespage/exhortations-heed-god%E2%80%99s-call-isaiah-481-22" \l "P2045_567670) There would have been passages in the Old Testament that were confusing for Israel to understand. It is not impossible that the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, about whom we have been reading throughout these many passages, is the pre-incarnate Christ; and here the affirmation that the LORD God sent Him, with the Spirit, would provide a glimpse into the eternal plan of God. Some would argue, of course, that this would be equally unnatural and reading too much into the text.

Well, you can take your pick of which view makes the most sense, both in this context, and in the synthesis with the rest of revelation. It is not a major point, but in this context it will determine who is speaking in verse 17—the LORD or an interpolator/prophet/leader.

#### III. Lament over Failure: The LORD laments the past indifference of His people and their resultant loss oif blessing (48:17-19).

In this section the prophet quotes the Word of the LORD directly. It begins with His self-disclosure and His claims for Israel’s allegiance—He shows what He does for them. “I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way that you should go.” The idea of Yahweh as “teacher” (*m*e*lammedka* from *lamad*) also appears in [Jeremiah 32:33](javascript:%7b%7d) and [Isaiah 30:20](javascript:%7b%7d). The idea of this verse, namely, to teach to profit, would be that God was instructing Israel in an entirely new way so that He could help her. The parallel line uses the *hiphil* of *derek*, “road, way,” meaning “causing you to go in the way you should go” (here an obligatory imperfect). This *hiphil* probably means “make solid by treading,” so the refined meaning would yield “make a way” for “causing one to go in a way.” [Isaiah 40:3](javascript:%7b%7d)f. had stated that such a way was to be prepared—here it is said to follow divine instruction.

The wish or lament is expressed in verse 18: “O that you had hearkened to My commandments.” The similes (“river” and “waves of the sea”) in the apodasis mean that if she had, then her welfare (*shalom*) would have been as full and constant as the waters of a wide and unfailing river, and her righteousness (parallel, so success or blessing—metonymy—for being right with God) as the sea.

The apodasis continues in verse 19 with more similes—”sand” and “gravel.” If they had obeyed, there would have been innumerable descendants, because there would have been no captivity, only divine blessing. The text indicates that the captivity almost annihilated the population, and with that the name of Israel came precariously close to extinction.

#### IV. Exhortation to Depart: The oracle exhorts the people to depart from their captivity with singing (48:20-22).

The prophet implores the people to go forth in the name of the LORD. The imperatives used in the beginning of this final section are meant to be rhetorical—they cannot go until Cyrus sets them free, but they can know that there is a divine imperative they will obey, and so God will make the way clear (as He has just said). So the imperative is saying two things: affirmation—you will be set free (so metonymies of effect), and call—when it happens you must go.[146](http://bible.org/seriespage/exhortations-heed-god%E2%80%99s-call-isaiah-481-22" \l "P2053_571030)

The language of their singing is thanksgiving to God for the deliverance from bondage. It includes allusions to the Israelites’ deliverance out of Egypt—they thirsted not when He led them through the desert, He caused water to flow from the rock for them—he split the rocks and water came out. Unless we were ready to say that the miracles of the wilderness wanderings were to be repeated here, we would have to say that an implied comparison is being made, that is, just as God miraculously provided water for the earlier Israelites, so were these Israelites to be miraculously refreshed in their journey.

Verse 22 is a problem because it does not seem to fit nicely here. Some scholars consider the verse to be a structural marker from the editing of the collection, especially since [Isaiah 49-55](javascript:%7b%7d) forms the second collection of the latter part of the book. But the verse **does** make sense in this context, though, for God was giving peace (welfare) to His people who would return in faith to their land. But to the Babylonians, the wicked, there would be no peace.

### Conclusion

It is again a remarkable point of theology that is taught in this passage, namely, that even though His people should prove unfaithful, God will remain faithful, for He cannot deny Himself—a truth that is clearly reiterated in the New Testament. The fulfillment of the covenant promises is based on the character of God, who by His mighty arm will do what His Word proclaimed He would do.

If you take the view that Isaiah prophesied this over a century before it happened, the application would be that his audience is being forewarned. It is a fuller development of his words to Ahaz—a war is coming, a remnant will return; if you believe you will not have to go through that. And even in the days of Hezekiah, after the fiasco with Evil-Merodach, the prophet said, there is a captivity coming, but because of obedience it will not be in your lifetime. And, these oracles were comparable to the event in chapter 8 where the prophet would write ahead of time so it would be witnessed when it happened. The point is that all the prophets prophesied things that were far off in the future—judgment, exile, restoration, the coming of the Messiah.[147](http://bible.org/seriespage/exhortations-heed-god%E2%80%99s-call-isaiah-481-22" \l "P2059_573536) It was all meant to call people to faith and obedience, so that they would escape the catastrophe, or if it should come that they might be on God’s side, and that when it came they would know that it was the LORD. So the application for the earlier audience would have been a general call to obedience because of the prophetic word.

The application for the exiled community comes from the precise words in the text: they must turn from their rebellion and unbelief so that they may be a part of the returned exiles, going forward to fulfill God’s covenant program. God reminds them of prophecy so that He can convince them of His sovereignty. They will be in captivity, so they will actually be called upon to believe and leave; whereas the earliest audience will see all this tragedy and try to avoid it in the first place.

Both messages fit the New Testament instructions for the Church. We are in need of the constant exhortations to stir up our faith and live obediently to avoid divine discipline, for if God did not preserve the natural branches, Paul says, He could also lop of the ones that were grafted in ([Rom. 11](javascript:%7b%7d)). Or as John says, He could remove the Lampstand (=ministry) from our midst ([Rev. 2](javascript:%7b%7d),3).

But also, we are looking forward to the Day of the LORD when He delivers us from the bondage of this world, and fulfills the promises He has made to us. Those are guaranteed, because His Word is dependable. But we are enjoined to believe His promises, to watch and pray and be ready, in a word, to prepare for it. We are not to get too enamored with this world (“love not the world”) because it is passing away. A great day of Judgment and Redemption is coming.[148](http://bible.org/seriespage/exhortations-heed-god%E2%80%99s-call-isaiah-481-22" \l "P2063_575438)

[144](http://bible.org/seriespage/exhortations-heed-god%E2%80%99s-call-isaiah-481-22" \l "P2043_566719) John D. W. Watts, [*Isaiah 34-66*](javascript:%7b%7d)*, Word Commentary* (Waco: Word Publishers), p. 178.

[145](http://bible.org/seriespage/exhortations-heed-god%E2%80%99s-call-isaiah-481-22" \l "P2045_567671) We also had in [Isaiah 6](javascript:%7b%7d) the significance "Who will go for us?" Of course, in isolation all these verses can be explained. But when the totality of Scripture is taken together, it is likely than something more natural is flowing from the Godhead.

[146](http://bible.org/seriespage/exhortations-heed-god%E2%80%99s-call-isaiah-481-22" \l "P2053_571031) It is hard to imagine why the people would not go, but that is the case. [Psalm 126](javascript:%7b%7d) has the prayer that God would bring more and more exiles back to the land--there was a trickle of them in the *wadi*--but the psalmist wanted the banks to overflow, "as streams in the desert."

[148](http://bible.org/seriespage/exhortations-heed-god%E2%80%99s-call-isaiah-481-22" \l "P2063_575439) The psalmist expressed it, "This is the day the LORD has made"--deliverance from Babylon! Our singing of that should be as witness to the expected fulfillment of the promises.

[‹ The LORD’s Superiority to the Gods of Babylon Isaiah 46:1-13](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-superiority-gods-babylon-isaiah-461-13)[up](http://bible.org/series/book-isaiah)[The LORD Can and Will Help Those Who Trust Him Isaiah 50:1-11 ›](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord-can-and-will-help-those-who-trust-him-isaiah-501-11)

## The LORD Can and Will Help Those Who Trust Him Isaiah 50:1-11

### Introduction

This chapter can easily be divided into three sections: verses 1-3 form the assurance of the LORD’s help, verses 4-9 are the third Servant Song, and verses 10-11 the final exhortation. The question raised by the commentaries is whether or not these sections belong together as a flowing argument. It seems to me that the unit does work; moreover, even if they were originally different pieces they have been placed together in this section because their themes go together. Some expositors prefer to work only with verses 4-9 because it is one of the Servant Songs. That is fine; but the context it is now in must contribute something to the argument of the Song, and so must be covered anyway.

### Exposition

#### I. The LORD’s Assurance to Israel: There is no valid obstacle to their redemption (50:1-3).

This short section is an address to the exiled Israelites who are slow to respond to the LORD’s calls because they have come to believe that the ties they had with the mother land had been irretrievably broken. The message assures them that they are redeemable (meaning that they still have a covenant relationship with the LORD[128](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord-can-and-will-help-those-who-trust-him-isaiah-501-11" \l "P1356_375088)).

Verse 1 asks a series of rhetorical questions, each one of them expecting a negative answer. There was no bill of divorcement—they still belonged to the LORD; there was no bill of sale—they were never given up. In Israel, if there was a bill of divorcement given, the person was free to remarry; but the LORD gave no such bill to Israel, or to the preceding generation. The nation—that generation—was temporarily put away; but there was no divorce. So the image is an implied comparison between the idea of a divorce and the LORD’s disowning Israel. He sent the nation into exile to purge those who were not His people; but Israel still belonged to Him.

Likewise, if a man sold (into employment) children to help pay off a debt, they would be permanently lost to him. But God had no such debt; neither was He forced to sell Israel into the hands of a creditor (cf. 52:3). The nation was His possession; but He would bless only that generation of the nation that was faithful.

Rather, that wicked generation of Israelites sold themselves because of sin; and such sin the LORD could cancel by His grace. But the “nation” was not cast off forever. There would always be a remnant of God’s people, and with revival there would be a faithful generation.

Verse 2 assured them that the LORD was fully able to redeem, although they were slow to respond. “When I came” may refer to the LORD’s intervention to deliver them through Cyrus, or when He announced that He was going to do it; when the LORD did this, there was no immediate response of faith. The verse suggests that they were not convinced that the LORD could or would do this, and so were slow to get their hopes up. They had interpreted the exile to mean that the LORD cast them off, or was not able to protect them.

Again, the LORD used rhetorical questions, expecting negative answers. “Is my hand shortened that it cannot redeem?” His hand was by no means shortened that it could not redeem. To make the point, the LORD alludes to past acts of deliverance. The references are to miracles beginning with the Exodus, the drying up of the sea, the provision of wilderness water, or unnatural droughts that brought death. The main idea of them all seems to focus on the crossing of the Sea on dry ground to deliver them from Egypt. The two key words for study in this claim of God’s ability to deliver are *nasal* (pronounced *nah-tsal*) and *padah* (*pah-dah*).

Verse 3 probably refers to the darkening of the skies with storm clouds (clothing and sackcloth being implied comparisons); but there may again be a reference to the plague of darkness in Egypt, or the darkness at Sinai. The LORD was claiming sovereignty over the elements of nature to show that all power in heaven and on earth belonged to Him.

So this first section is rather short but its point is clear enough. God was fully able to redeem His people with as great a deliverance as the Exodus. Moreover, God was fully willing to do this because He had not cast them off altogether, but had sent them into exile for their sins (purging the unbelievers for the land). God can both forgive sinners and deliver them from bondage.

#### II. The Song of the Servant: Although rejected, the Servant learned to comfort the weary because God was on his side (50:4-9).

##### *A. The LORD prepared the Servant to teach (4, 5).*

The song seems to be made up of three quatrains: it records the soliloquy of the Servant about his experiences in the past and his hopes for the future.

Verse 4 begins the words of the Servant: in order to teach God had equipped him with a trained faculty of speech. He says, “The LORD gave me the tongue (metonymy of cause) of them that are taught, in order that I might know how to sustain with words them that are weak.” The meaning of “sustain” is problematic here; some suggest “to answer,” “to revive,” or “to feed.” The Greek reads “how to speak a word in due season.”

The question of who the weary are depends in large measure on who the Servant is. If the Servant is the nation of Israel, or the remnant, then the weary would be the pagan nations (including unbelievers of Israel) who are weary of their darkened existence. If the Servant is typological for the Messiah, then in that case the weary would be any people who were tired of their bondage to sin. Jesus would welcome the weary to Himself, for He could give them rest ([Matt. 11:28](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The latter part of the verse says that the LORD wakens his ear (metonymy of cause, the instrument of hearing and obeying). The LORD gives revelation to him continuously, morning by morning. The simile is a comparison with those who are taught—the servant is made ready to receive the Word every day of his life.

Verse 5 is, according to some, a needless duplication with only the latter part of it belonging here. But their view misunderstands Hebrew rhetoric. The verse begins with a little different way of saying that the LORD has prepared him to obey—he opened my ear (see [Ps. 40](javascript:%7b%7d)). God prepared him to hear and respond. The conclusion is that the Servant was not disobedient to hear the message and to teach it (contra Jonah). “I was not rebellious” (*mariti* [pronounced *mah-ree-tee*]) and did not turn away “backward.”

##### *B. The LORD helped the Servant endure the sufferings (6, 7).*

Verse 6 introduces the second quatrain. The verses do not fit the suffering of the nation as well as one might expect because it presents suffering as an act of loyalty to God. If the immediate reference is to Israel, then the Servant might have to be considered to be the remnant of true believers who suffered on behalf of the whole nation, for the whole nation was far from loyal.

“I gave my back to the smiters” starts the report. The words are those of a martyr who willingly accepted the strokes and the abuse. The image of a man being beaten, his beard plucked out, of being spat upon, figuratively works for Israel or a remnant of Israelites (personification), and perhaps of the prophet, but becomes literally true in Jesus Christ.

Verse 7 introduces us to the major theme of this chapter: the LORD Yahweh will help me (*ya’azor*). This word “help” means that the LORD did for the Servant what he could not do for himself. The result of divine help was that he was not confounded, but set his face like a flint, the simile indicating his determination was unflinching. There would be no denial or suppression of the truth through the suffering, for God was enabling the Servant to endure triumphantly.

##### *C. The LORD’s help would vindicate the Servant (8, 9).*

Verses 8 and 9 again use rhetorical questions that require negative answers. Who is the adversary who contends with the Servant, or who condemns the Servant? Suffering was usually a sign of guilt, a condemnation. But the Servant is convinced that by the deliverance from exile the LORD would justify him (*masdiqi* [pronounced *mats-dee-kee*], from *sadaq* [*tsah-dak*]). So the wording: “He is near who justifies me; who then will contend with me?” The LORD who is near at hand (to deliver) will justify or vindicate those who are delivered. When God delivers the sinner, no one can condemn successfully, for the charges have been dismissed. Part of this verse was quoted by Paul in [Romans 8:33](javascript:%7b%7d).

The motif of the LORD helping the Servant is repeated in verse 9. If the LORD will help us, then who condemns us? This the grand theme of all of God’s acts of redemption, for redemption from bondage is accomplished through forgiveness.

The last part of verse 9 refers to Israel’s oppressors: they shall grow old and wear out like (simile) garments. The last line is an implied comparison, built off the simile—they will be old and moth-eaten.

#### III. Hortatory Address: The people should obey the Teacher-Servant rather than remain in their destructive ways (50:10, 11).

These two verses change abruptly the flow of the passage, for now the address is given to people to respond to the message that the Servant had to teach. Two groups are addressed, those who would walk by faith in the LORD and find deliverance eventually, and those who were faithless and doomed ([Isa. 66:5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

##### *A. Trust in the name of the LORD (10).*

The first group are those who fear the LORD and obey the voice of the Servant. The Servant is not now the speaker in the first person, but is referred to in the third person. In historic times the faithful remnant would call to those who walked in darkness (see the imagery in [Isa. 9](javascript:%7b%7d)) that if they feared the LORD they could trust in His Name. If they were living under oppression because of sin and had no other hope, they should trust the LORD.

Of course, as a type the passage works well with the fulfillment, Jesus Christ, the true Seed, whose message to those in darkness was to be believed.

The exhortation is that they trust the name of the LORD. The “name of the LORD” is a metonymy that refers to God’s attributes—what He is able to do. The idea of trusting (from *batah* [pronounced *bah=tack*]) here refers to total reliance on the LORD for safety and security (see the parallel clause “and stay upon his God”). The verb “trust” carries the idea of complete confidence and dependance. It comes with throwing oneself on the mercy of the court.

##### *B. Or, perish in sorrow (11).*

There are those who are faithless, who kindle fire and gird themselves with firebrands. The implied comparison concerns evil workings against other people they seek to destroy and their own devices for their false worship. One thinks of the firey darts in [Ephesians 6:16](javascript:%7b%7d). Fitting themselves with fire darts could refer to weapons, figuratively to words, or pagan forms of religion (so a choice between metonymy and hypocatastasis). But the people and their actions described here are obviously antagonistic to the LORD and the true faith, and therefore to His people.

The prophet calls for their destruction as they walk into their own evil. The verb used is an imperative; but it conveys the suddenness and certainty of the point—their devices will be for their own destruction (so “walk” is a metonymy). Talionic justice is a major theme throughout the Old Testament.

The words of the LORD conclude the verse: “This you shall have from my hand; you shall lie down in sorrow”—literally, a place of pain (see [Genesis 3](javascript:%7b%7d)). “Lie down” is metonymical, for it means in the grave—they will die. But they will not have a peaceful repose as the righteous. Their death will be in pain.

### Conclusion

So this passage, if taken as a unit, makes it clear that there is no reason whatsoever to hinder the LORD’s delivering His people from bondage. The people have suffered for their sins and are weary and discouraged. So the LORD sends a Servant to comfort them, one who was able to endure the suffering for the people because of the LORD’s sustaining power. This Servant would then be able to call the people to faith in the LORD, for therein was the only way to deliverance because the LORD would judge the wicked by their own devices. Moreover, the people would see that suffering did not necessarily mean rejection by the LORD, for He suffered in the service of the LORD.

In the Old Testament period the “Servant” role might well have been fulfilled by the prophet, or the schools of the prophets, if not the core of the believing remnant. The LORD sustained them through the suffering to encourage the whole nation to trust the LORD.

But more importantly, the passage is prophetic of the Messiah’s work, as indeed the Servant Songs are as a whole. Jesus declared that He was the Servant; He was the Son of Man who came to serve and not to be served, to give His life a ransom for many ([Matt. 20:28](javascript:%7b%7d)).[129](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord-can-and-will-help-those-who-trust-him-isaiah-501-11" \l "P1393_386923) The idea of “serve” and “ransom” and “many” are all from the servant songs (we shall see the latter two in [Isaiah 53](javascript:%7b%7d)). So on the physical-spiritual level of the New Testament, people who were in bondage to world powers as well as (and because of) their sins were burdened and discouraged and without hope. Jesus came and took all the sins and sorrows of the world on Himself, calling for people to trust in Him to find rest for their souls, to learn of Him. So in this passage the emphasis on the Servant’s learning and teaching of the weary, His obedience, His suffering at the hands of smiters who plucked His beard and spat on Him, His confidence in the God Almighty, and His setting His face like flint to do the will of the Father, not fearing human opposition—all are clearly prophetic of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the conclusion reverses the negative opinions expressed in the first section. If people who are walking in darkness (see [Isa. 9](javascript:%7b%7d)) fear God, then they should trust in the name of the LORD. This is the point that Paul makes in [Romans 10:9,10](javascript:%7b%7d): there is no difference, for today it is the same truth for Jews and Gentiles alike, that if they call on the name of the LORD they shall be saved. Of course, his treatise to the Romans has been arguing that by “Lord” he means “Yahweh” of the Old Testament—that Jesus is Yahweh God. So the logic is obvious—if you do not believe in Jesus, you are rejecting God—Yahweh—and cannot and will not escape judgment.

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[128](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord-can-and-will-help-those-who-trust-him-isaiah-501-11" \l "P1356_375089) We need to remind ourselves that the verb "redeem" in these oracles refers to deliverance from exile, even though for many participants is was probably also their spiritual redemption.

[129](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord-can-and-will-help-those-who-trust-him-isaiah-501-11" \l "P1393_386924) It is important to remember that Matthew presents Jesus as the true Israel. Many of the passages that he cites from the Old Testament had the nation in view in the original context, but Christ as the focus in the fulfillment.

[‹ Exhortations to Heed God’s Call Isaiah 48:1-22](http://bible.org/seriespage/exhortations-heed-god%E2%80%99s-call-isaiah-481-22)[up](http://bible.org/series/book-isaiah)[The Announcement of Comfort to the Redeemed Isaiah 52:1-12 ›](http://bible.org/seriespage/announcement-comfort-redeemed-isaiah-521-12)

**The Announcement of Comfort to the Redeemed Isaiah 52:1-12**

Study By: [Allen Ross](http://bible.org/byauthor/57/Allen%20Ross)

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**Introduction**

This section continues the theme of the last chapter, making the link with the repetition of the call “awake” (51:17 and 52:1). Now the LORD calls Zion to awake from her sleep because He will not allow His name to be blasphemed any longer (1-6); in fact, heralds announce to Zion that God has come to reign (7-8), prompting the call for Jerusalem to rejoice because God has brought salvation (9-10). The section closes when the righteous are exhorted to come home because the LORD will protect them (11-12).

There are a number of ways that this passage could be outlined. For ease in the arrangement, I shall break up the first part into two sections:

the call to exchange degradation for rightful dignity (1,2) and

the reason for the call (3-6); then I shall combine verses 7-10 for

the heralds and the rejoicing (7-10), and the finally,

the concluding call (11,12) will parallel the beginning call.

**Exposition**

**I. God calls His people to exchange their degraded condition for their position of rightful service (52:1,2).**

The prophet, speaking the Word of the LORD, calls for the people to respond to the call of God. The primary audience, of course, would be the exiles in Babylon who are called to step out in faith and return to their land and their service (and as we said before, Isaiah probably thought his immediate audience would go into exile and then need these words to encourage them and to call them home). Announcing such an oracle would have the impact of warning and encouragement on the immediate (eighth century) audience would be warning and encouragement—warning not to get themselves into the predicament of an exile and have to face all of this, and encouragement that if and when they did a remnant would return (as the message based on the name of the prophet’s child early declared). In other words, no matter how bad the invasion and exile might be, there was a future for Israel—they should expect to return to the land.

We know what the oracle meant in Old Testament times; but what does it mean for us today? For the modern application the message could be applied on several levels: (1) just as there would have been unbelievers in Babylon who would come to faith at this call, so too today people might respond to the message (this or any message about the future fulfillment of the promises) and leave their bondage and sin and find themselves in the service of the LORD; (2) Christians who have been living under the oppression of the world (largely due to sin) and being conformed to the world may need to separate themselves and be useful in God’s service; and (3) believers need to watch and be ready for the coming of the LORD, for the passage may be again a picture of the LORD’s calling His people out of the bondage of this world to service above in the final redemption.

Verse 1 employs several figures in the call for an appropriate response of faith by the people. The addressee here is “Zion”—hence the feminine forms of the verbs. “Zion” is the mountain on which the temple once stood; so here it is a metonymy of subject for the people of the land who center their attention on Jerusalem. It is possible the prophet is addressing the exiles still; but it is interesting that the provenance of his oracles now shifts to the focus in the land of Israel.

The first figure is “Awake”; this is an implied comparison, comparing the waking up from sleep with responding by faith to God’s Word. The idea of “awake” has been used previously in chapter 50 for responding to the Word of God, as well as in chapter 51 for the unfaithful to wake up. Here the word is repeated; the figure of repetition is used to urge the immediate response of the people.

“Put on” (*libsi* [*liv-she*], s.v. *labas* [*lah-vash*]) is another comparison, linking the ideas of putting on clothes with acting by faith (compare [Ephesians 6](javascript:%7b%7d) with its “put on the whole armor of God”). The idea means to make full use of something. Here that “something” is “strength” (*‘oz* [*oze*]), probably a metonymy of effect, the cause being the power of God that will give the believers the strength to do what needs to be done (recall the renewing of strength in [Isaiah 40](javascript:%7b%7d)). So the point is that by faith they must respond to the Word of God and trust God to enable them to return to the land.

They are called to put on their “beautiful garments.” The expression recalls the festive robes of the priests (cf. [Exod. 19:14](javascript:%7b%7d) and 28:40). Rather than be in the estate of the slave (47:1), the people will be restored to their dignified state of a holy nation and a kingdom of priests (see [Zech. 3](javascript:%7b%7d) which symbolizes this restoration by having the filthy garments removed from the priest (who signifies the nation) and clean robes and a new miter or turban given to him (which signifies the renewal to spiritual service after the exile).

The explanation given in the verse is that from this time on the un-circumcised and the unclean (probably referring to the Babylonian invading armies among others) will not plunder the temple and the state and desecrate them. Of course, this promise is contingent upon their putting on the strength by faith. Unfortunately, very soon after their return the people lapsed into sin, necessitating the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, and even Malachi. Consequently, the un-circumcised and unclean (Seleucids, Romans, and others) did again enter and plunder. Thus, the promise of the restoration to the land and to service must await the end of the age. All the prophets continued to hold out such glorious promises; and the people had the opportunity to fulfill it, to be that generation. But as each generation failed, the people knew that their time wasn’t it—they looked for another.

Further references: for the un-circumcised Babylonians, see [Ezek. 44:9](javascript:%7b%7d); for “put on” metaphor terminology, see [Isa. 11:5](javascript:%7b%7d) and 51:9; for the ultimate spiritual fulfillment of this promise that nothing unclean will enter the holy city, see [Rev. 21:2,10](javascript:%7b%7d).

Verse 2 calls for the people to depart from their bondage. “Shake yourself from the dust” is a call to end their mourning. It could be taken as an implied comparison; but if there actually were periods of mourning where real dust was applied, then metonymy of adjunct would work very well. Haggai, Zechariah, and Ezra all address the issue of whether or not the fasts from Babylon were still to be mourned when they were back in the land. So I would prefer the latter figure. The expression “Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck” would be hypocatastasis, comparing being in stocks and bondage with the general idea of exile. They were not actually in such neck-bonds.

Now the people are referred to as the “captive daughter of Zion” rather than merely “Zion.” Since cities and locations are usually feminine in Hebrew, the people from Zion could easily be referred to as a daughter (collectively). The implied comparison is meant to indicate that this is the nation from Zion/Judah, what Judah produced.

**II. The LORD will vindicate His name by delivering His people from bondage (52:3-6).**

In these verses we have the reason for the LORD’s call for the people to respond by faith—there is nothing to prevent the LORD from reclaiming His people.

Verse 3 introduces the idea that when Israel went into bondage she went because of her own sin, and not because the LORD sold her for a price. Because no price was paid as Israel sold herself for nothing, no price was required to redeem her. Israel was still God’s possession. Verse 3 introduces this theme in a soliloquy of the LORD: Israel was not sold to Babylon for compensation, and so she will be redeemed without money. The adverb *hinnam* ([*khin-nahm*], s.v. *hanan* [*khah-nan*]) means “free, without cost, for nothing, for nought, gratis”; it is etymologically related to the word for “grace” (*hen* [*khane*]) and so provides a nice illustration of the meaning of grace as “freely” or “gratuitously, without a cause.” But here the adverb simply means “for nothing, for no cost.”

Verse 4 provides two illustrations for the people. The nation had gone down into Egypt, and had been invaded by Assyria—in both cases they were in similar bondage, but in both cases the LORD had not been through with them.

The LORD’s reasoning continues in verse 5 as the subject comes back to Babylon—now “what am I about in Babylon?” is what the LORD says. The critical problem in this verse is the verb *y*e*helilu* (*yeh-hay-lee-loo*). The old translations took it as a causative idea: “make them shout,” meaning that the Babylonians made the Israelites praise their gods. All we know, though, is that they taunted them to sing the songs of Zion ([Ps. 137](javascript:%7b%7d)). The more recent translations take the verb as an intensive or plural use of the stem, referring to the wild shouts of exclamation with which the Babylonian rulers praised their gods for the victory over Israel. This makes better sense with the last part of the verse, that the name of the LORD was being blasphemed. This means then that the LORD’s character was being brought into contempt, and His works credited to someone else (compare the New Testament idea of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, meaning that the works of Jesus were credited to the power of the evil one).

Verse 6 repeats the main motivation for the reunion of Israel in her land—that they might **know my name**—the same idea expressed in [Exodus 3](javascript:%7b%7d) and 6 for the Exodus. By His great deliverance of Israel from bondage the LORD would make His people know His name. Here the meaning of the verb “know” must have the same idea it had in [Exodus 3](javascript:%7b%7d) and 6, “to **experience** the meaning” of the name. They will be convinced that Yahweh is the one and only God, and that He indeed does speak. He is not like false gods; He is actively at work to bring about His will. The fulfillment of the covenant promises of the LORD will vindicate His reputation and prove that He is completely trustworthy. All the blaspheming and mocking will be suddenly silenced.

**III. There will be great joy over the announcement of the glad tidings (52:7-10).**

***A. Good news will be welcomed by the people (7, 8).***

Verse 7 is one of the better known verses in this section of the book, thanks to its citation in [Romans 10:15](javascript:%7b%7d) (see also [Nah. 1:15](javascript:%7b%7d)). Paul in that section of Romans is talking about the nation of Israel, its ultimate salvation at the end of the age as a fulfillment of the promises, and the basis of that restoration in Christ’s death. So the ultimate meaning of this passage in Isaiah concerns the Gospel of Jesus Christ, even though the immediate context refers to news of Israel’s deliverance from exile. But the parallel ideas are obvious. Here is another example of how the “near view” of a prophecy is but a shadow or preview of the “far view” (compare [Psalm 118](javascript:%7b%7d) and the prophecy of the “stone which the builders rejected” which in the Old Testament refers to Israel overlooked by empires, but in the New Testament signifies Christ rejected by the leaders).

The exclamation in verse 7 (“How beautiful”) is a form of erotesis for exclaiming or declaring the prospect in the form of a question. The prophet transports himself to the future in thought[130](http://bible.org/seriespage/announcement-comfort-redeemed-isaiah-521-12" \l "P1434_400550)\_ftn1 and sees the people in Jerusalem (in ruins of course) joyfully welcoming the returning exiles with the exclamation that “God reigns.” The basic theological point of verse 7 is the announcement of the good news of **SALVATION** (i.e., deliverance from bondage in exile). The cause of that salvation is God’s power over the nations (“God reigns”); the effect of that deliverance is peace and prosperity (“peace” and “good news”). Those who come to Zion with the good news—the returning exiles—are the welcomed messengers. Their feet are beautiful, meaning their coming is wonderful. “Feet” could be taken as synecdoche or metonymy (there is often a thin line between the two figures); the latter would work better to represent the whole person who comes with the good news.

The point of the verse is that the people will welcome the approach of the messenger who can declare that God is about to fulfill His promise of redemption. The same point applies to today’s preaching of the Gospel that announces there is a day of redemption coming.

Verse 8 carries the same theme further with a description of the watchmen calling and singing to one another when they make eye contact to confirm the coming home of the exiles. There is no reason not to take the “watchmen” literally in this passage; there would have always been such watchers, whether to safeguard whatever domains were there, or whether the Levites waiting for the dawn in the eastern skies so that they could begin the early morning sacrifice.[131](http://bible.org/seriespage/announcement-comfort-redeemed-isaiah-521-12" \l "P1437_402346)

This verb *sapah* (*tsah-fah*)*,* from which we have “watchers,” is used figuratively for the prophets in [Hosea 9:8](javascript:%7b%7d); [Jeremiah 6:17](javascript:%7b%7d); [Ezekiel 3:17, 33](javascript:%7b%7d):7; and [Isaiah 56:10](javascript:%7b%7d). But I doubt that that is the best meaning for this context, for the verse talks about the watchmen seeing the return. Besides, Brown, Driver, and Briggs do not list this passage with that meaning for “watchers.”

***B. People should break forth into praise because of the LORD’s salvation (9, 10).***

Verse 9 is a call to praise the LORD for this great deliverance. People are called to praise because the “desolate places” are no longer such—in fact, waste or desolate places are being called to sing. I would take this as metonymy of subject, meaning that the people who live in the waste places (which are now no longer waste places) will sing for joy. The reason?—the LORD has “comforted” and “redeemed” His people (these two words being major themes for this section of the book). So in the future when the exile is over and the rebuilding begins, people will forget their desolation and rejoice in the power of the LORD.

Verse 10 uses a bold anthropomorphism to express the dominant power of God—”He has made bare His holy arm.” It is the idea of pushing back the mantel and exposing the arm for action. “Holy” arm means that His power is unique, incomparable. There is no “arm” like His, no power like His. It will be a mighty salvation.

**IV. God calls His people to respond to His deliverance with purity and confidence (52:11, 12).**

Now, in a slight inclusio with the initial “awake, awake” we have the final “depart, depart.” Verse 11 records an address to the exiles that comes from Jerusalem (“from thence” shows that the speaker is not in Babylon), suggesting again the transporting of the prophet in his vision. Since the LORD is present in the march to the holy land, the people must be pure. They must not be defiled by unclean things. After all, they are to be restored as the kingdom of priests. If they truly believe in the LORD, they will separate from the world and follow the LORD’s call to a renewed spiritual service. Thus it is with every kind of deliverance.

The prophet holds out for them the promise of divine protection. Unlike the exodus from Egypt, they will not have to go in haste, or by flight, because the LORD will lead them in the way and be their rearguard as well. Compare this text to the ending of [Isaiah 40](javascript:%7b%7d).

**Conclusion**

So there is in this passage the dominant theme of the joyful departure from bondage of the exiles to the holy city. Because the promise was about to be fulfilled, the people were to purify themselves and be confident in the sovereignty of their God. Their restoration and renewal was imminent; but that new beginning was but a foretaste of the great eschatological redemption at the end of the age. For this connection compare the use of “God reigns” in [Isaiah 52:7](javascript:%7b%7d) with the several enthronement psalms where “the LORD reigns” is the cry at the end of the age.

In general, one could use this passage to teach that the LORD sovereignly reigns over the world and so people can trust in His word and obey His commands. While this would be a legitimate use, the passage has a more specific point to make, and we must always be as specific as possible. The chapter is specifically about God’s people heading for home to renew their spiritual service of the LORD. And so one basic and crucial application today would be in line with the way that Paul uses the passage. The whole chapter can be seen as a type, a picture, of God’s plan of salvation that culminates at the end of the age. It portrays a call to people who are in bondage to sin to leave their bondage because the LORD offers them redemption, deliverance; and they can depart for the Holy City, the heavenly Jerusalem now, where no unclean thing will enter. The destination of Zion becomes a symbol of the ultimate fulfillment of the promises. The LORD will redeem His people from all evil and purify His name from blasphemy and mocking. The reason for the great salvation with all its good news and the basis for the praise of the saints is that God reigns. So the wonderful news of the Gospel announces salvation; it is entered by faith now and realized fully at the end of the age. Those who respond by faith to the call of God begin their pilgrimage to the holy city; they themselves become bearers of the good news.

**References**

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Melugin, R. F. “[Isaiah 52:7-10](javascript:%7b%7d).” Interpretation 36 (1982):176-181.

[130](http://bible.org/seriespage/announcement-comfort-redeemed-isaiah-521-12" \l "P1434_400551) It is interesting that one of the reasons for a deutero-Isaiah was that a prophet would not transport himself to the future exile and write to that audience. However, here even in the “deutero-Isaiah” section the prophet transports himself to the future in Palestine after the exile.

[131](http://bible.org/seriespage/announcement-comfort-redeemed-isaiah-521-12" \l "P1437_402347) [Psalm 130](javascript:%7b%7d) carries the same theme and may very well reflect such an experience. The psalmist (speaking on behalf of the nation) has been forgiven by the LORD because the LORD does not mark iniquities. So he waits eagerly for the Word of the LORD to be fulfilled, more than the watchmen wait for the morning. But his forgiveness is a sign that in the end of the age God will redeem Israel from all her iniquities.

[‹ The LORD Can and Will Help Those Who Trust Him Isaiah 50:1-11](http://bible.org/seriespage/lord-can-and-will-help-those-who-trust-him-isaiah-501-11)[up](http://bible.org/series/book-isaiah)[The Suffering Servant Isaiah 52:13—53:12 ›](http://bible.org/seriespage/suffering-servant-isaiah-5213%E2%80%945312)

**Related Topics:** [Comfort](http://bible.org/topics/424/Comfort), [Election](http://bible.org/topics/399/Election)

* 8479 reads

## The Suffering Servant Isaiah 52:13—53:12

### Introduction

For this important chapter it will be helpful to work through the passage first and observe the material to be interpreted. So the notes will first offer the findings of these observations and then draw them together into an exposition.

### Exegetical Notes

*13 Behold, my Servant shall prosper;*

*he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.*

The verb *yaskil* (pronounced *yas-keel;* s.v. *sakal*) calls for the most attention here; the word is from the wisdom vocabulary. Some versions translate it “prosper” and some “deal wisely”; it means both. The Servant will have been wise in life so that in the final analysis He prospers with God. I should think that the context of this verse would be looking at the final aspect—”prosper” or “be successful.” The word needs some study, but given the many words and ideas in this passage that need study, I would not spend a great amount of time on it.

*14 Like as many were astonished at you*

*(his visage was so marred more than any other man,*

*and his form more than the sons of man),*

The verse requires no special attention, which is good because the passage has much that does. The parenthesis offers a nice parallelism to underscore how the suffering disfigured him.

*15 so shall he startle many nations*

*kings shall shut their mouths at him;*

*for that which had not been told them shall they see,*

*and that which they had not heard shall they understand.*

Here the main difficulty is the first verb, translated “startle” here, but “sprinkle” in some Bibles. The latter is the reading in the Vulgate and in Aquila and Theodotian, carrying the sense of purify by his life—blood, that is. But there are several things problematic with that view. The verb *nazah* is used throughout the Law for “spread, splatter, sprinkle”; but as Delitzsch shows in his commentary it always has the liquid as the object, and never the object of the sprinkling (see [Lev. 16:19](javascript:%7b%7d) and [Num. 19:18](javascript:%7b%7d)). Moreover, that rendering is competing against the context which describes the amazement of leaders at the exaltation of the Lord. The reading “startle” is better (but note the Greek which has “many nations shall tremble”). With all due respect to Young’s commentary, I do not think that the Greek translation can be easily discarded. The Hebrew term is difficult. The idea of the word, supported by the cognate in Arabic, is to “leap up”; then in the causative, “cause to leap, spurt, splatter.” So here the idea may simply be “start (or startle) with astonishment.” To see a sprinkling here in order to suggest Gentile conversions and purifications is out of harmony with the stanza, and certainly not well founded with such a problematic verb.

The point of the passage is that kings will be absolutely amazed to discover that this one actually is the King of Glory. The idea of “shut their mouths” is a metonymy of effect (or adjunct) for the surprise that they will have.

Note that in this verse we have the second use of “many” (*rabbim*) in the passage. Keep track of this, starting with verse 14, for it will be important for Christology at the end of the song.

*1 Who has believed our report?*

*and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*

The question is rhetorical—who could have imagined such a thing, and who would have believed what we would say. The question (erotesis) expresses amazement over the matter, as if to say no one, or very few, believed it.

Note that Paul quotes this verse in [Romans 10](javascript:%7b%7d). His argument is wonderfully contextual. In the chapter he speaks of his desire that Israel might be saved. He then shows that the Gospel is in Deuteronomy. The message is that if anyone calls on the name of the LORD he will be saved. How can they hear? The messengers will bring good tidings—this was from [Isaiah 52](javascript:%7b%7d), our last study. But not many believed, Paul says, and so then quotes this verse to show that.

The “arm of the LORD” again is anthropomorphic for divine power. Who could have divined such a unique manifestation of God’s power as that which this song describes, that the Son of Man who was rejected and crucified would triumph in this as King of Glory!

*2 For he grew up before him as a tender plant,*

*and as a root out of a dry ground;*

*he has no form nor comeliness,*

*and when we see him, there is no beauty*

*that we should desire him.*

“Before him” means that the growth and the development of the Servant was with full awareness of and by the divine will of God.

The first half of the verse uses two similes to capture the idea of simplicity. The “tender plant” in the simile is actually a “sucker” from the stock. The “dry ground” could at first describe the troubled existence of the people under Gentile domination, or perhaps the effects of such devastation that left the land and the people unprofitable—not flourishing and rich and healthy. There was nothing appealing here if one were looking for a man who was “every inch a king.”

*3 He was despised and rejected of men,*

*a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;*

*and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised,*

*and we esteemed him not.*

The verb “despised” (*bazah*) occurs twice in this verse. It means to look down the nose with contempt; it means to consider something worthless and of no value, and then treat it accordingly.

The genitive “sorrows” needs to be classified—what is “a man of sorrows”? It probably is an attributive genitive, “sorrows” modifying the kind of man he was, a man filled with sorrows, a sorrowful man. “Acquainted” sounds like a polite understatement; but the Hebrew language uses the verb “to know” to say that he has the experiential knowledge of grief (*holi* [pronounced *khuh-lee*] is “sickness, grief”).

The last line of the verse uses the verb *hasab* [*khah-shav*], “to reckon, account, consider.” It is the main verb in [Psalm 32](javascript:%7b%7d) for God’s not reckoning sin to us; and in [Genesis 15:6](javascript:%7b%7d) it is used for reckoning righteousness to the believer Abram. Here the people confess, “we” did not consider him”—we wrote him off as a poor wretch, we did not give him a second thought, we made no note of him. Someone this ordinary (v. 2) and this despised (v. 3) could hardly be significant—they say. What an irony in the word in Scripture—we are worthless and God reckons us righteous; the suffering Servant appeared worthless, and they did not reckon him—they wrote him off.

*4 Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows;*

*yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God,*

*and afflicted.*

The lines are chronologically reversed: we did think that God was punishing him, and now we know he was—but for our sins.

“Griefs” and “sorrows” are repeated here now from the last verse; this means that they were our griefs and our sorrows that were transferred to him, with which he was acquainted. “Esteem” is repeated here as well; in the last verse “we did not esteem him” but in this verse “we esteemed him” punished by God. The three verbs of the penal nature of the suffering are “strike” (*naga’*), “smite” (*nakah*) and “afflict” (*‘anah* in the Piel/Pual).

*5 But he was wounded for our transgressions,*

*he was bruised for our iniquities;*

*the chastisement of our peace was upon him,*

*and with his stripes we are healed.*

This verse calls for a clear definition of each of the key words. For him are the “wounds” (*m*e*holal*) and also the “bruises” (*m*e*dukka’*), “chastisement” (*musar*) and “stripes” (*haburah*). These are all punishing blows.

On our side are the “transgressions” (*p*e*sha’im*) and “iniquities” (*‘awonot*) that caused his sufferings. And also on our side are the benefits of “peace” (*shalom*) and “healing” (*rape’* [*rah-fay*]). The word “peace” is an objective genitive—the chastening produced or brought the peace.

*6 All we like sheep have gone astray,*

*we have turned every one to his own way*;

*and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Here is the confession required of anyone seeking salvation; and it is required of Israel to find salvation in Christ today. The verses use the simile of sheep that go astray, meaning people who turn away from God and sin. “Go astray” means “to wander aimlessly.”

The verb “has laid” on him is the verb *paga’ (hipgia’)*; this verb will be an important one to study because it will be repeated at the end of the song as the summation—”he made intercession” for the transgressors. It is a word that means “to intercede, interpose.” In places in the Bible it is used to describe prayer, an intercession that is burdensome. But here it is substitutionary suffering that will divert the punishment—interposed.

The allusion of the verse is to the Day of Atonement in [Leviticus 16](javascript:%7b%7d). In that event the sins of the people were placed on the Scapegoat. In fact, many have seen this passage not only as a prophecy of the suffering of Jesus, but the national confession of sin by Israel on the Day of Atonement—to be fulfilled at the end of the age when all Israel will be saved.

*7 He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted*

*he opened not his mouth;*

*as a lamb that is led to the slaughter*

*and as a sheep that is dumb before its shearers,*

*so he opened not his mouth.*

The idea “opened not his mouth” is a metonymy of cause—he did not complain or protest; neither did he confess sin (which people often have to do when they suffer)! This idea is then developed by the simile of a lamb silently going to its death—he did not open his mouth. The suffering was willingly accepted.

*8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away*

*and as for his generation*

*who considered that he was cut off*

*from the land of the living*

*for the transgression of my people*

*to whom the stroke was due?*

The verse are now beginning to get longer as the song continues. The verse has some difficult Hebrew in it. But the general idea is that his death was unjust in the way that it was carried out (perhaps a hendiadys, “by oppressive judgment”), and that it was for the “rebellions” of other people.

*9 And they made his grave with the wicked*

*and with a rich man in his death;*

*although he had done no violence,*

*neither was any deceit in his mouth.*

The “wicked” (*r*e*sha’im*) are those who are not members of the covenant and who are guilty, deserving to die. To say “he made (literally, “he gave”) his grave with the wicked” is a metonymy of effect or adjunct—he died with wicked criminals. The “rich” would be seen here as the oppressors since the parallelism works with the “wicked.”

“Violence” is *hamas* (*khah-mas*), social injustices, oppression, general public evil. There was no crime by him that deserved death. Moreover, there was no “guile/deceit” (*mirmah*) in his mouth—he spoke the truth, concealing nothing that should be confessed or brought to light, and expressing no deception or revenge.

*10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him;*

*he has put him to grief;*

*when you shall make his soul an offering for sin,*

*he shall see his seed,*

*he shall prolong his days,*

*and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in the land.*

The word “pleased” is *hapes* (*khah-fates*); it does not signify that God received some morbid pleasure out of the afflicting of pain; rather, it simply means that this act of sacrifice was the will of God, it was what he desired to be done. The word is repeated at the end of the verse.

The word for “grief” is again repeated in this verse.

The key word that needs to be studied here is *‘asham*, the “offering for sin.” This is the reparation offering of [Leviticus 5](javascript:%7b%7d); it takes care of the sin and guilt and also makes reparation or restitution for what was wronged, lost, defrauded, or spoiled by sin. Here is the first place where one of Israel’s sacrifices is applied to a person, the Servant of the LORD. The word interprets all the previous intimations of vicarious, substitutionary, redemptive suffering. It opens the way for John the Baptist to say, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

*11 He shall see of the travail of his soul,*

*and shall be satisfied;*

*by the knowledge of him shall my righteous servant*

*justify many,*

*and he shall bear their iniquities.*

The teaching of justification through the personal knowledge of and belief in this Servant is now stated clearly. The term “justify” is a declarative use of the Hiphil of the verb *sadaq* (*tsah-dak*), meaning he will declare righteous (not make righteous), as he himself is righteous (Peter: He is just and the justifier).

Note the repetition of the word “many” here and in the next verse. Jesus in the Upper Room alludes to this passage in the eucharistic sayings about his blood being poured out for the remission of the sins of many. (For a discussion of what he meant by “many,” see Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Sayings of Jesus*).

*12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great,*

*and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;*

*because he poured out his soul unto death,*

*and he was numbered with the transgressors;*

*yet he bore the sin of many*

*and made intercession for the transgressors.*

In this passage I would stress the verb “made intercession” (discussed above). Theologians have correctly used the theme of interposing of the blood of Christ for salvation, his blood/wounds pleading for us. Here is one of Wesley’s solid hymns: “Five bleeding wounds he bears, for me to intercede; they pour effectual prayers, they strongly pleads for me; forgive him, O, forgive they cry, nor let that ransomed sinner die, nor let that ransomed sinner die.”

I think that the song ends where it began, with the exaltation of the suffering servant. There is the hint in here of the conquering hero who divides the spoil and gives gifts to his people. His honor comes because he bore the sins of many—the center of the Christian faith.

[‹ The Announcement of Comfort to the Redeemed Isaiah 52:1-12](http://bible.org/seriespage/announcement-comfort-redeemed-isaiah-521-12)[up](http://bible.org/series/book-isaiah)[“The Triumph of the Suffering Servant” An Exposition of Isaiah 52:13—53:12 ›](http://bible.org/seriespage/%E2%80%9C-triumph-suffering-servant%E2%80%9D-exposition-isaiah-5213%E2%80%945312)

**“The Triumph of the Suffering Servant” An Exposition of Isaiah 52:13—53:12**

**Introduction**

Down through history the sufferer has been the astonishment and the stumblingblock of humanity. The ancient barbarians simply got rid of sufferers in their societies. More civilized peoples have dealt more kindly with them; but sufferers remain a problem for philosophers and a severe test of the faith of religious people. It is not natural for people to see any profit in suffering; rather, mankind staggers over it, considering it a tragedy, a hindrance to progress, a fate to be avoided.

But for the Christian the Scripture presents a far different view of the sufferer, and of suffering. In summary, we may report from the Bible that it is the will of God that believers suffer. That is not a popular teaching; it is not a truth that we remember or hold dear to our hearts. We hate suffering and try to avoid it. Nevertheless, our LORD says that the world hated Him, and if it hated Him, it will hate us as well. The Bible says that all who live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution ([2 Tim. 3](javascript:%7b%7d)). Paul announces that it is given to us to believe and to suffer for Christ ([Phil. 1:29](javascript:%7b%7d)). Peter explains that Christ’s death is a sample for us, that Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we follow in His steps ([1 Pet. 2:19-23](javascript:%7b%7d)). In fact, our Lord learned obedience through the things that He suffered; if that is true of the Son of God, how much more is it true of us?

We do not seek suffering. Some in the history of the Church have done that, considering martyrdom, no matter how contrived, to be the highest good. Nevertheless, God declares that suffering will be a part of the experience of the faithful believers in this world. It is inevitable. It is part of God’s plan for the development of our faith.

Suffering may come to the people of God in many forms—actual persecution from the world, malicious slander and mental cruelty because of our chosen piety, trials and testings from the Lord, suffering with and for others in the body, or the natural cost of serving the Lord in this sinful world. In such cases suffering is a service to God, a self-sacrificing service. It is when we do this that we take up our cross, that we have fellowship with his sufferings.

The picture of the suffering of our Lord is nowhere more poignantly displayed than in the prophecy of Isaiah, Chapter 52:13-53:12. What is described here is the ideal Sufferer, the Suffering Servant. The prophet himself does not identify him—that identification must await the fullness of time when Christ came and suffered, the just for the unjust. For us who know Christ we can see this as the prediction of His sufferings. This is the primary meaning of the text.

But secondarily, it is also exemplary for all suffering that is accomplished for others. Indeed, as Peter says, Jesus suffered, leaving us an example of how we should suffer to the glory of God.

The passage is divided into five stanzas of three verses each. The first line of each of the sections gives a summary of that section. In fact, the first stanza, 52:13-15, gives a summary of the whole section.

**I. “My Servant shall prosper”—The suffering leads to glory. (**[**Isaiah 52:13-15**](javascript:%7b%7d)**)**

The first three verses give us an overview of the section: through the humiliation of suffering the Servant of the LORD will be exalted.

***A. The Servant will be exalted (13).***

This grand theme is announced in the first verse. The Servant will be exalted, be raised on high, will be very high. The significant means of this being accomplished is the fact that he will “deal wisely” or “prosper.” The verb used here describes prudent and practical wisdom. It means that he will live skillfully according to the plan of God so that he may be prosperous and have good success. Jeremiah associates this verb with the prophecy of the Messiah receiving the kingdom (23:5). This point then is that this Servant will prosper as God intends him to.

***B. The exaltation will contrast the humiliation (14, 15).***

The theme announced in the first verse is now developed: the exaltation follows humiliation. The humiliation is reported in v. 14: earlier, many were aghast at him. They were astonished because his form and his visage was so marred. “Marred” is mild. The term used describes a spoiling, a destruction, an appearance-changing affliction. The details of this will be discovered in 53:1-9.

The exaltation is reported in v. 15. Kings are astonished that he, of all people, should be so exalted. The contrast is staggering—he will startle kings (“startle” is preferable to the translation “sprinkle”). When they see God’s plan work out, when they look on him whom they pierced, they shall see what they had not been told, they shall understand what they had not heard. In that day, they shall realize what the wisdom of God teaches, that the suffering servant will be exalted.

The point we learn about suffering here is that the suffering Servant prospers with God because he deals wisely. He has insight. This is the point the prophecy makes about the Servant’s sufferings—they are practical. He endures them, not for his own sake, but for some practical end of which he is aware and to which they will bring him. The suffering, which seems to be misfortune, is here seen as the Servant’s wisdom which will issue in his glory. The first stanza, then, gives us the general theme. In contrast to human experience God reveals in his Servant that suffering is fruitful, that sacrifice is practical. Pain, in God’s service, shall lead to glory.

It is this that is at odds with the world. What is success with God is often failure in the eyes of the world. Success with God may not include fame and fortune, health and happiness—as the world knows them. What is success? Success is knowing the will of God an doing it. The Servant knows that suffering is in God’s plan the way to glory.

**II. “Who has believed”—The suffering is offensive. (**[**Isaiah 53:1-3**](javascript:%7b%7d)**)**

The second stanza begins to trace the development of the theme of suffering, first showing that it raises disbelief and thoughtfulness in the people who observe it.

***A. They did not believe the report (1).***

If we paraphrase the first verse we would say something like, “No one ever imagined this.” The verse is expressed in the form of questions. The penitent would reflect on the suffering Servant and eventually come to realize God was at work. But that realization would take belief and revelation. For ages Israel did not believe such suffering was at the heart of God’s redemptive plan.

***B. The suffering is observed (2, 3).***

The response to the suffering Servant is so true to life. On the one hand his beginnings were thought to be insignificant, and on the other hand his sufferings were offensive.

Verse two describes his beginnings: like a tender plant in a parched ground. His beginnings were unlikely. Who would have thought that a “carpenter’s son” out of Nazareth would figure prominently in the divine plan. There was nothing appealing or attractive in his appearance that would make Israel rally to him.

Verse three reports that he was despised, that is, looked down on, held in contempt, as well as rejected. His life was filled with grief and sorrows, so that men turned away their faces from him. In short, they did not “esteem him,” they didn’t think much of him, especially in his condition.

These words illustrate vividly a habit we all share, the habit of letting the eye cheat the conscience, of letting the sight of suffering blind us to the meaning. We dislike pain and suffering; we turn away from it, forgetting that it has a reason, a future, and a God. We look on things so superficially. We make snap judgments about suffering on the surface. Everyday we allow the dulness of poverty, the ugliness of disease, the futility of misfortune, the disappointment of failure, to prevent us for realizing that we share the responsibility for them. We allow suffering in others or ourselves to blind us to the fact of the reasons and purposes for sufferings. We consider the sufferer an unlucky person who is falling by the way. The truth is that suffering is part of God’s p[an to remind us of the human predicament we share, to bring up out of ourselves in sympathy and patience, and to eventually fit us for glory. So it is reasonable that the suffering Servant himself share the suffering of the world to redeem the world.

**III. “Surely our griefs”—The suffering is vicarious. (**[**Isaiah 53:4-6**](javascript:%7b%7d)**)**

If people at first make rash observations about the suffering of God’s Servant, they are soon led in their conscience to realize its purpose. In this section they realize that the suffering is vicarious.

***A. The Servant’s suffering is punishment (4).***

The earliest and most common moral judgment, which people pass on pain, is that which is implied in its name—that is penal. People suffer because God is angry with them. That is what Job’s visitors concluded about his suffering. Here, Israel says, “We esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” That is, they saw the suffering Servant and thought God was striking him.

But now they knew they were wrong. The hand of God was indeed upon the Servant, and the reason was sin, yet the sin was not his, but theirs. Verse 4 makes this clear, and verses 5 and 6 amplify it.

***B. The punishment of the Servant was redemptive (5, 6).***

Note the parallelism of this fifth verse: “he was wounded for our transgressions” and “he was crushed for our iniquities.” The contrast is between “he” and “our.” All his suffering was because of our rebellions and sins.

The second set of expressions clarify the purpose of this ***vicarious*** or substitutionary suffering as ***redemptive***: “The chastisement of our peace” and “by his stripes we are healed.” All interpreters of this verse agree that the peace, the healing, is ours in consequence of the chastisement and scourging. The pain was his in consequence of the sin that was ours—that is, the suffering was *vicarious*. And the pain brought spiritual healing and peace—that is, the suffering was *redemptive*.

That the suffering is vicarious and redemptive is confessed by Israel in verse 6: “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. The verse begins and ends with “all.” Substitutionary suffering of this Servant touches all who have sinned—and we know that that is all of us.

In every family, in every nation, the innocent suffer for the guilty. Vicarious suffering is not arbitrary or accidental; it comes with our growth, it is of the very nature of life. It is that part of the service of humankind, to which we are all born, and of the reality of which we daily grow more aware.

Vicarious suffering is not a curse. It is service—service to God. It proves to be a power where every other moral force has failed. This is very intelligible, because it is based on love. Any parents who have suffered and sacrificed for their children can understand the impulse.

But people argue that vicarious suffering is unjust. They forget, however, that there are two reasons people endure suffering in this world—justice and love. We often suffer because we ourselves are not innocent. We share the cause of pain in the world. This is justice. But to suffer in service to God is a demonstration of love. The epitome of this is the suffering Servant. Not only is his suffering vicarious—it is voluntary. Human experience feels it has found its highest and holiest form of love when the innocent is willing to take the blame for others. “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,” and greater spiritual service can no one do for others, than to suffer with them and for them that they might be healed spiritually.

But, of course, the suffering of this Servant far outdistanced human vicarious suffering (and it is here the nature of the Servant begins to unfold): his suffering removes sin. We may observe a Moses interceding for the sinful people, asking God to take his life so that wrath could be averted from those worshiping the golden calf. That is noble; it’s magnificent. But it cannot remove sin. God himself had to carry the sins of his people. What all vicarious suffering had failed to do in Israel’s experience, the suffering of our Lord accomplished. Centuries after this oracle was written our divine Lord came and fulfilled to the letter the words of this prophecy. His vicarious suffering would strike the heart into penitence and lift it to peace with God.

**IV. “Oppressed He humbled Himself”—The suffering is accepted. (**[**Isaiah 53:7-9**](javascript:%7b%7d)**)**

If the third stanza confessed that it was for the sins of the people the Servant suffered, the fourth stanza declares that he himself was sinless, and yet silently submitted to all which injustice laid on him.

***A. The suffering Servant is silent (7).***

What is so remarkable is that although he was afflicted and oppressed, he did not open his mouth. Such a thing is almost unheard of in the Old Testament. No one else could remain silent under pain. In the Old Testament sufferers broke out into one of two voices—the voice of guilt or the voice of doubt. The sufferer is either confessing his sin which the suffering has called to his attention or, when he feels no guilt, he is protesting his suffering, challenging God in argument. David, Jeremiah, Job, and countless others, including us we must confess, are not silent under pain. We confess that we deserve it, or complain that we do not.

Not so with the suffering Servant. He did not open his mouth, but was silent like a sheep led to the slaughter. Why was this Servant the unique sample of silence under suffering? Because he knew the truth. It had been said of him in 52:13: “My servant shall deal wisely.” He knew what he was about. He had no guilt of his own, and no doubts of God. He knew that is was not punishment he was enduring for himself, but that it was a service he was performing—a service laid on him by God, a service for man’s redemption, a service sure of results that were glorious. If anything will enable a person to accept silently his suffering it is this—the knowledge that the suffering was service to God.

***B. The suffering Servant is innocent (8, 9).***

The prophet reports that the Servant was innocent. He had done no violence; no guile was found in him. Yet he was taken to judgment by tyrannical powers. It was judicial murder. And when they considered that he was lawfully put to death, they consistently gave him a convict’s grave. On this note the stanza ends. He was innocent, but he willingly submitted to the oppression, an oppression that carried him to an ignominious burial. From all appearances, an innocent man’s life ended fruitlessly. But nothing could be further from the truth.

**V. “The LORD was pleased”—The suffering was efficacious. (**[**Isaiah 53:10-12**](javascript:%7b%7d)**)**

It appeared to many that the death of this Servant was an awful tragedy. It was utterly a perversion of justice. Surely here passed into oblivion the fairest life that ever lived. People might see and say, God forsakes his own. On the contrary, the fifth stanza begins, God’s will and pleasure was in it.

***A. The suffering was God’s will (10).***

“It pleased the LORD to bruise him” begins the theological explanation of the suffering. The verb “pleased” does not mean enjoyment. It basically means that God willed the suffering. It is that kind of pleasure. This is the one message which can render any pain tolerable—God willed it—it is his pleasure. Thus, any that God calls to suffer for his service should make it their purpose to do his will, to please him. Therein is success with God.

***B. The suffering was for our justification (10b, 11).***

This suffering was efficacious, that is, it was powerful to effect its intended results: the justification of sinners. God made this Servant a sin (guilt) offering for many, so that by their knowledge of him they might be justified. In the Upper Room Jesus alluded to this passage by saying that the cup was His blood of the New Covenant “poured out for many.” That brought the remission of sins. So the effect of the suffering of our Lord is full atonement. Paul says that he made him to be sin (here, “sin offering”) for us that we might become righteous (here, “justify”) ([2 Cor. 5](javascript:%7b%7d)). For those of us who have come to know him by faith this suffering will receive eternal praise. We, the guilty sinners, have been declared righteous before God.

***C. The suffering will lead to exaltation (11, 12).***

With this note the passage comes full circle. God was satisfied, yea, pleased with the obedient suffering of the Servant, whom we know to be our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Because he bore the sins of many, that is, because he made “intercession” for sinners in his self-sacrificing love, God appointed him to honor and glory. Using military terminology Isaiah declares that the Lord will divide the spoil.

And so it was at this point, according to the prophecy, that the Servant, though brought so low, was nearest his exaltation; though in death, yet nearest life, nearest the highest kind of life, the “seeing of a seed,” the finding himself in others; though despised, rejected, and forgotten of men, most certain of finding his place of exaltation with God. Before him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord.

**Conclusion**

Isaiah, then, presents us with a picture of the ideal suffering Servant. He does not identify the Servant in his prophecy, but we who know the Lord Jesus Christ can see that it is He. The suffering of our Lord corresponds to the letter with the picture Isaiah draws. Nothing else can. The suffering of Jesus was vicarious in a way that no other has or ever could be—he took our sins on himself and made full atonement for them. While we were yet sinners, he died for us. He himself knew no sin, but suffered, the just for the unjust, that we, sinners, might become righteous before God.

Jesus knew full well the purpose of his suffering, and willingly submitted to it as his service to God the Father in order to provide for us salvation. There is no peace with God apart from the chastisement that he, the sinless Son of God, bore. We have no healing for our souls, no removal of our sins, no justification before God, apart from the penal suffering of Christ, the substitutionary death in which he took our sins upon himself. That is why the church worships and serves him—he brought to us eternal life. This 53rd chapter of Isaiah prophesied it, and Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in the fullness of time.

But in addition to this truth, there is an additional application, a secondary application that flows from this. Once we trust Christ as our Savior, we are made members of his mystical body, and are therefore called to follow him. It is the will of God that we demonstrate the same type of sacrificial love that he had. If we are to love one another in Christ, we must realize that it will cost something. If we are to bear one another’s burdens, it will mean that we will have to put ourselves out for others, to suffer with them, to give of our time, our talents, and our finances. We are called to a life of self-sacrificing love for others. And Christ shows us what that should look like.

The Lord may call on us to suffer and even perhaps to die. If that should be his will, then we must seek to suffer and to die well. It is far more important for us to do his will, to please him, than to have a comfortable, carefree life.

If we Christians have learned to see in sufferings the purpose of God, and in vicarious suffering God’s most holy service; if patience and self-sacrifice have come to be part of our spiritual life—the power to make this change in our faith has been Christ’s example. To submit to God’s will and to sacrifice self are the hardest things for us to do; to accept suffering and death without complaint or doubt demands a living faith that sees suffering and death as a prelude to glory. But if we submit to God’s will and sacrifice self for others, or for the building up of the faith of others, we shall then be living out the love of Christ in this world, and please our heavenly Father.

## Future Blessings for the People of God Isaiah 54:1-17

### Introduction

In view of the great provision of vicarious atonement through the Suffering Servant ([Isa. 53](javascript:%7b%7d)), the prophet announces the consequent blessings: the expansion of Israel, the blessings of safety and peace, and the portion of righteousness. This chapter anticipates the salvation and restoration of Israel, begun in part at the restoration of the exiles from Babylon in 536 B.C. but for the most part yet in the future, for as this chapter unfolds it will become clearer and clearer that that return did not exhaust the promises. There yet remains the final culmination of all of God’s covenant promises at the end of the age. In fact, as these chapters progress to the end of the book, the vision gets more glorious, and so more eschatological in its scope.

We have here Isaiah’s glimpse at the promises of the “new” covenant. He does not provide the details of [Jeremiah 31](javascript:%7b%7d) or [Ezekiel 36](javascript:%7b%7d), but he complements what is there. The passages on the new covenant promised: a restoration to the land for Israel and to the pure worship ad spiritual service as priests, conversion of Israel to faith in the Messiah, the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh so that the Law was in their hearts, the end of war and oppression in the land and in the world, and the reign of the Messiah in righteousness. Beginning with the restoration from exile, some of this was fulfilled, but not all; with the coming of Christ, some more was fulfilled, but not all; with the sending of the Spirit, some of that promise was fulfilled, but not all. Only with the second coming will all these things be completely fulfilled. [Isaiah 54](javascript:%7b%7d) lays out some of the promised blessings, but does not say when they will be fulfilled in part or completely.

But this chapter is also immediately practical—for ancient Israel as well as for us today. We shall see that the prophet lays out the plans that God has for His holy people in this world; but the clues in the chapter, and the related contexts of the time, let us know that attaining these promises to the full called for **spiritual service**—which is why the chapter ends with the reminder that this is the heritage of the righteous servants of the LORD.

### Exposition

#### I. The LORD assures His people of restoration and renewal (54:1-10)

##### *A. The restoration will bring dominion (1-3).*

Jerusalem, addressed as a woman separated from her husband (the Lord) is assured that her children (the people) will be restored and will multiply and that she will be reunited with her husband.

Verse 1 makes the point that the present and future population of Jerusalem will exceed what she had before. The nation of people, addressed as “Jerusalem” by metonymy (subject or adjunct), is compared to a “barren woman” (by implied comparison, called hypocatastasis) who is bereaved of her children and separated from her husband. The image of marriage and the family has been used in these oracles before, and provides a good comparison for the covenant relationship between the LORD and His people. The “married wife” would have been Israel before the exile, in rebellion against God and bringing the judgment of God for sin; her children would have been those Hebrews living when Babylon attacked. The Israelites some seventy years later (children of the desolate) will outnumber them greatly.

The call is for these people to “sing” and to “sing aloud”, because of the restoration from exile. The commands to sing are metonymies of effect, showing the result or effect of the cause—God will restore them (cause), and they will sing (effect). Calling people to sing before the answer to prayer or before divine intervention is a significant call for faith.

Verse 2 anticipates the restoration of the nation by calling for an enlarging of the tents. I think all the images in this verse are related, so one classification and explanation will be adequate. I would think we have metonymy of adjunct or effect; the returning exiles probably actually had tents or similar structures for a while. The call to make the tents larger assumes that there will be an expanding population: the cause will be the restoration and multiplication, and the effect (stated in the text) is their expanding their tents.

Verse 3 explains this call to sing. The returning exiles will spread out to the right and to the left. In the Semitic world, one looks to the east, and so the right hand is south and the left hand north. But there will be more than a population increase—they will possess the nations and rebuild the desolate cities. Here the “nations” means the regional tribes occupying the land in the absence of the nation of Israel.

##### *B. The restoration will be in peace and safety (4-10).*

The prophet first invites confidence from the people of God, for they would no longer be subjected to Gentile oppression (verse 4). “Fear not” and “be not confounded” are the two imperatives; the promise is “you shall not be put to shame.” In fact, they would forget the shame of their youth and their widowhood. The “youth” (still using the imagery of the family relationships) would refer to the Egyptian bondage; and the reproach of “widowhood” in this chapter (and in 50:1) would represent the Babylonian exiles. So the figures are both hypocatastases, stating “youth” and “widowhood,” but implying by comparison bondage in Egypt and exile in Babylon respectively. These two catastrophes will be remembered no more, meaning that they will have no power over the people to cause fear.

In verses 5 and 6 we have the explanation that the promise of the prophet is based on the relationship that the nation has to God. The lines are beautifully balanced:

For your Maker is your husband,

the LORD of armies is His name;

and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,

the God of the whole earth shall He be called.

The theme of creation is brought forward here again in “your Maker,” that is, the one who brought Israel into existence, but now He is compared to a “husband” (carrying the implied comparison across from previous lines to form a metaphor here). The image of husband would be worthless if it were not for the fact that this husband is being described as the sovereign Creator, the LORD of armies, the Holy One of Israel, the Redeemer, and the God of the whole earth. Any people related by covenant (=image of husband) to such a One as all that need not fear anyone—except God Himself.

The condition of Israel is addressed as a wife that is bereaved, grieved in spirit, forsaken, and cast off (carrying the implied comparison further in the description). But will she be cast off forever? The following verses affirm that the exile was a temporary manifestation of God’s wrath to purge the rebels and faithless from the nation.

Verses 7-10 record the speech of the LORD to assure Israel of future peace. The poetry is exquisite:

For a small moment I have forsaken you,

but with great mercies will I gather you;

In overflowing wrath I hid my face from you for a moment,

but with everlasting love I will have mercy on you.

The whole Babylonian captivity is referred to as a “small moment” when God forsook Israel. It is another implied comparison, a hypocatastasis, to compare 70 years with a moment—but in the plan of the eternal God that is what it is (see also [Psalm 30](javascript:%7b%7d)). The regathering is with tender mercies (*rakham* should be studied fully for this passage). The time is then described as God’s wrath (metonymy of cause for the effect was the judgment of the exile) when He hid His face (anthropomorphism, a very human description to convey withholding mercy), but the restoration (“I will have mercy” is metonymy of cause, its effect being the return) is a display of His everlasting loyal love (a word study on *khesed* would be helpful). God is speaking to the nation as a whole; His anger was against sin, so that the exile would purge the rebels and draw contrition and faith from the remnant. Now the restoration would show that the judgment time had passed, that there would be a new beginning.

The announcement is similar to the Noachian Covenant; it is as if once again the LORD was hanging up His battle bow in the sky.[143](http://bible.org/seriespage/future-blessings-people-god-isaiah-541-17" \l "P1977_543062) So the simile is made with the “waters of Noah” (metonymy of effect since water was what God used to judge the world). So here too the LORD seals His promise with an oath, just as He did in the days of Noah.

Verse 10 gives the nature of the promise. God’s loyal love and God’s covenant of peace will remain with His people “though the mountains depart and the hills be removed.” It is an eternal covenant that will outlast the hills; it is based on the LORD God, whose character it is to show mercy. This “covenant of peace” is a reference to what Jeremiah will call the new covenant.

#### II. The LORD assures His people of prosperity and security (54:11-17).

##### *A. The restoration will be in splendor (11-14).*

The prophet now predicts the future splendor of the nation as it is to be restored to its original purpose. Verses 11 and 12 introduce to us the images of the precious stones.

There are several views offered here. (l) The gems refer to the people themselves. In support of this one would emphasize that the address is to the people of Israel, the context is the restoration to Jerusalem, and the interpretation of verse 14 suggests that the passage refers to the restoration of Israel to the righteous service of the LORD. Other post-exilic passages use precious stones to represent people, or the leader of the nation (see [Psalm 118](javascript:%7b%7d) for the stone as the nation, [Zechariah 3](javascript:%7b%7d) for Messiah). And since there was no building of the city with these precious gems it seems more likely that the redeemed, the people themselves, are meant. Besides, [1 Peter 2](javascript:%7b%7d) indicates that the righteous are stones (although not gems). If this is the correct interpretation, then we have hypocatastasis throughout, a comparison of the holy city made of gems with the people. One reading of [Revelation 21](javascript:%7b%7d) and the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem “as a bride” with all the gems also seems to support this interpretation.

(2) A second interpretation is that the gems represent spiritual qualities in the restoration. There will be righteousness and truth, and upon these will God rebuild His nation (see [Psalm 97:2](javascript:%7b%7d) and [Isaiah 11:4,5](javascript:%7b%7d)). People who take this view can get carried away with symbolic meanings of all the different gems, since there are not many controls in the context.

(3) A third view takes the building and the gems literally—but with a spiritual meaning. This would be metonymy. That is, when the great restoration comes, the people will be gathered to the LORD, to the Messianic sanctuary. In the new creation the setting and the circumstances of that place will be with spectacular elements that actually exist—there is a reality to the surroundings. A glorious new city made with all the precious gems would be in the age to come. But the gems would still signify the purity and the righteousness and the perfection of the LORD and His eternal holy place.

In support of this view is the fact that in both [Isaiah 54](javascript:%7b%7d) and in [Revelation 21](javascript:%7b%7d) so much detail is put into the description of the city, as well as the fact that both passages seem to distinguish the people from the city, for the people will enter the city. This view would harmonize well with the interpretation in Revelation of a physical-spiritual reign of Christ with the new holy city in a new heaven and a new earth.

One could argue that the gems in some way represent the wealth of the nation as it is returned to its land to be a state again; but the language is rather elaborate. It seems to have a future view like so many of the Messianic passages. How it will all work out exactly is hard to say with confidence, until we see it all fulfilled. Even in [Revelation 21](javascript:%7b%7d) there is no small disagreement over whether there is a physical reality to the vision or only a spiritual reality. We know at least that the redeemed will be glorified in His presence, in the place He is preparing—wherever and whatever that might be. I prefer the third view about, an actual new heaven and new earth and new Jerusalem, but unlike anything limited to this physical world.

So the LORD says to Jerusalem, “O you afflicted, tossed with tempest and not comforted, I will set your stones in antinomy, and lay your foundations with sapphires.”

The context must be considered in the full interpretation here. Verse 13 stresses the spiritual significance of this valuable restoration to be the kingdom of priests. “Your children will be taught by the LORD.” In other words, the divine influence on future generations of Israelites will be responsible not only for their being in the land and growing under God’s blessings, but also for the peace that they shall enjoy. So immediately after a description of how God will rebuild the city, there is the announcement of the spiritual influence on the people.

Then, in verse 14 we read how the LORD will establish the city of Jerusalem—it will be with righteousness. The use of this term is metonymical; the context of the verse makes it clear that the victory over the captors and the nations is meant (this use of “righteousness” has been used before in the book and is used in Psalms as well), for they shall fear no more. But why call it “righteousness?” The reason is that righteousness is the cause of the victory—the righteousness of God who will judge the wicked oppressing nations, and the righteousness of the people who believe in the LORD and walk in His ways. Israel will be far from oppression and terror (again metonmyical ideas since they refer to the actions of the nations and the effects of those oppressing nations).

##### *B. The restoration will be with divine protection (15-17).*

Verse 14 could be taken with this section because it does speak of safety from the nations. But in these verses the prophet contrasts the way that God used the nations in the past to discipline Israel with the way He will now protect Israel from them. If nations gather against Israel, it will not be by the LORD, and so they cannot succeed in their mission (verse 15). God declares to Israel in verse 16 that both the one who makes the weapon and the one who uses it are under His sovereign control (“create” here in the sense of causing something to happen). No weapon brought against them will succeed, and no voice speaking against them will stand (verse 17a). The promise is for perfect peace.

Obviously, these promises were not completely realized by the returning exiles. The promises of God for the covenant people stand; but participation in them fully by individuals is based on faith and obedience. Moreover, God’s prophetic messages do not specify the time of the fulfillment. That generation, with the opportunity for the new beginning and the great fulfillment, did not merit the complete promise. Hebrews says that all of them died, not receiving the promise; consequently, the grand fulfillment is yet to come.

The summation of the passage in verse 17b provides us with a key to the exposition: “this is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness which is of me.” God promised peace, security, righteousness, and spiritual service for the believing remnant; but they had to take His promises by faith and return rejoicing to the land to do it.

To tie this together with the events of the post-exilic community would be most helpful as you prepare the theology of the passage. The promises were there for the taking; but the returning community in those days received only part of what God was fully intending to do. The rest remains yet unfulfilled.

### Conclusion

In direct correlation to the message of this chapter I would include Peter’s epistle in which he reminds us that we are an elect nation, a holy priesthood, living stones built on the foundation stone, a people that has obtained mercy and will not be put to shame; and that we are to show forth our praise of Him as we live in righteousness before all people who will see our good works and glorify the Father ([1 Peter 2:5-10](javascript:%7b%7d)). So the message for us today is the same as the message for the returning exiles in [Isaiah 54](javascript:%7b%7d). God has begun a new work in Christ and called us as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation displaying the mercy and righteousness of God. Great promises of the blessings of peace, safety, prosperity and victory are held out to those who obediently walk in God’s perfect will for their lives.

But this does not nullify the fulfillment of these verses at the end of this age and the dawn of the messianic age. God will regather His people, and He will build His holy city, and He will make his servants into spiritual servants. What the people of God do in the meantime will find its glorious culmination at the time of the coming of the Messiah.

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[143](http://bible.org/seriespage/future-blessings-people-god-isaiah-541-17" \l "P1977_543063) In [Genesis 9](javascript:%7b%7d) the word for the rainbow is the same as the battle bow; it gives the picture of hanging up the battle bow because peace was to follow.

[‹ “The Triumph of the Suffering Servant” An Exposition of Isaiah 52:13—53:12](http://bible.org/seriespage/%E2%80%9C-triumph-suffering-servant%E2%80%9D-exposition-isaiah-5213%E2%80%945312)[up](http://bible.org/series/book-isaiah)[God’s Exhortation to Receive His Grace Isaiah 55:1-13 ›](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-exhortation-receive-his-grace-isaiah-551-13)

## God’s Exhortation to Receive His Grace Isaiah 55:1-13

Study By: [Allen Ross](http://bible.org/byauthor/57/Allen%20Ross)

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### Introduction

Having detailed the promises of the LORD through His Messiah concerning His great redemption and renewal of the covenant, the prophet now calls all sinners to repentance and if need be to faith (depending on whether they are already believers or not). For those who turn to the LORD’s marvelous and incomparable thoughts and ways, there will be happy success based on the Word of truth; for those who do not, there will be only continuation in exile, away for the land ad away from God’s blessing.

This passage seems to fall into two parallel structures:

Verses 1,2 **CALL** The LORD invites people to take advantage of all His blessings (spiritual and physical).

Verses 3,4 **EXPLANATION** The LORD will confirm the eternal covenant made with David; David was evidence of God’s ability to fulfill promises.

Verse 5 **RESULT** Israel will see the nations drawn to them.

Verses 6,7 **CALL** The LORD calls for Israel to respond while they can; those who mistreat and misjudge God must change their ways and receive His pardon.

Verses 8-11 **EXPLANATION** God’s ways are higher than our ways; and God’s word is effectual, so that His plan will be fulfilled.

Verses 12,13 **RESULT** Life will be abundant in blessing; the LORD will do this for His own name’s sake.

In the first half the LORD enjoins the people to enjoy the blessings of returning to the land in fulfillment of the covenant promises; in the second half the LORD warns them not to delay or misjudge, for His ways are high, His word is effectual, and His blessings are sure.

Clifford divides the passage a little differently. He sees it as a unified poem in three strophes, vv. 1-5, 6-11, 12-13, summoning the exiles to end their separation from Yahweh’s presence by leaving Babylon and coming to Zion. The exiles are to come to the waters (cf. [Isa. 12:3](javascript:%7b%7d)), to enjoy without payment a rich feast, to seek Yahweh where he may be encountered, in a word, to live—by being in holy Zion associated with Yahweh. Like David, whom Yahweh chose at the time of the exodus-conquest ([2 Sam. 7:8-16](javascript:%7b%7d); [Pss. 78:43-72; 89:1-38](javascript:%7b%7d), esp. 20), those exiles who heed the invitation to make the new exodus-conquest, to come to the feast, will find themselves “found,” “chosen,” “loved,” “covenanted with.” In short, they will find themselves brought near, consecrated, so that the glory of the heavenly luster of Yahweh will shine forth to the nations.

The passage, then, is on the continuation and fulfillment of the promises because of the everlasting covenant, God’s ways, and God’s words. It is a call for the people—those who believe in the LORD, and those who will believe in the LORD when they hear this call—to take advantage of His offer to share in the blessings of the covenant.

The application of this passage today would have to begin by focusing in on what blessings based on the Davidic covenant have been channeled through the New Covenant. The theology that informs this answer will have to look at the nature of the Messiah as a Davidic king, the role the resurrection played in continuing and guaranteeing the full blessings, and the relationship of faith to full participation in the promises. We do not stop with the doctrine of salvation in this discussion, although that is surely the starting point, for unless one is in the covenant there can be no participation at all. But there are other blessings promised, spiritual and physical, here and now and yet in the world to come as well. So the exposition may need to think on how to call the saints to a deeper faith and commitment so that they might have a greater share in the promises of the Davidic Covenant as they come together in the New Covenant. The call should bring them to greater participation in God’s program, rather than leave them simply living out their days in bondage to the world system.

### Exposition

#### I. The LORD exhorts the people to receive His blessings which are freely provided and permanently satisfying (55:1-5).

##### *A. Call: The LORD calls everyone to take advantage of His blessings (1, 2).*

The first two verses use figures of speech to describe the blessings[133](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-exhortation-receive-his-grace-isaiah-551-13" \l "P1671_450566)\_ftn1 of God: thirsty, water, money, buy, wine, milk, without cost. There are two ways that these can be taken, as metonymies or as hypocatastases. If the first interpretation is taken, then there would be reality to the water, milk, wine, buying, and all, but it would represent more than physical prosperity—it would represent abundant life and prosperity now freely given to the people. The fact that these would be granted by God and obtained by faith adds the spiritual dimension. This view would be saying that God was actually offering fine food and water, which may have been symbolic of spiritual blessings too.

If the terms are classified as implied comparisons (or hypocatastases), then the meaning would be exclusively spiritual blessings. Buying would simply be acquiring, but it would be free, for the provision of blessing would be through free grace. No money would be changing hands—it would be a gift from God. That which is good, the richest fare representing spiritual values, would satisfy them. In exile they had to labor for material provisions; in freedom God would give them the greatest of spiritual treasures, life, peace, and joy.

There may be some allusion here to Paradise. They are invited to eat what is good and find satisfaction for their souls. What the passage is saying is that God will provide for all their needs, physical to be sure, but more importantly spiritual since it is redemption and restoration to service life in Zion, he holy city. And that provision will be freely given to those who respond by faith.

The main thrust is the call—the imperative. “Come, listen to me.” This is a call for them to respond by faith, a faith that will leave bondage and return to the land once again to be the people of God. There they will find spiritual blessings. Clifford argues that the life that is being offered here is proximity to the LORD in the shrine of the LORD. It is an invitation to a “feast”; as in [Proverbs 9](javascript:%7b%7d), the invitation moves from food and drink to higher life (see also [Psalm 36](javascript:%7b%7d) where the believer will drink from the rivers of pleasure [*‘eden*] and be satisfied with the fatness of the LORD’s house. To do this they must come to trust in the loyal love of the LORD, believing that God will not only deliver them from Babylon (where they were separated from their God’s shrine) but would truly supply all their needs.

##### *B. Explanation: The LORD will confirm the Davidic Covenant (3, 4).*

This passage was cited in [Acts 13:34](javascript:%7b%7d) to show that the Davidic covenant was confirmed by the resurrection. Thus, we see the basis in that link for the Christian application of this passage. God made an everlasting covenant with David, assuring that a son of David would rule forever, and bring peace and prosperity to the land. In the New Covenant today believers can trust the LORD to provide for them and to bless them, for the resurrection shows that He can do this. But they also look forward to the grand fulfillment of the promises.

Verse 3 stresses the call for a response by faith: give ear, come to me, and hear me—”that your soul may live.” The explanation that follows is that the covenant promise is based on God’s “unfailing covenant kindness” with David. Here we have both the words for “loyal love” (*hesed* [*kheh-sed*]) and the participle for dependable (from *‘aman*). No matter what the appearance of circumstances—exile, death of kings, oppression, delay—the covenant promises made to David would be fulfilled, especially in the direction God’s plan was now taking in the New Covenant.[134](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-exhortation-receive-his-grace-isaiah-551-13" \l "P1678_454336) Also, the death of Jesus posed no problem to this everlasting covenant with David; He simply said, destroy this temple (=body) and in three days I will raise it up. No one could have imagined these ways of God in fulfilling the promises that He made to the patriarchs and the kings. He is not bound by time and events.

The expression “I will make an everlasting covenant” probably should be interpreted to mean “I will **confirm** my covenant as everlasting.” The primary reference is the promises to David, and there was no other covenant for him. Those promises were: an eternal kingdom, an eternal king, universal peace and righteousness, abundant prosperity, justice and equity throughout the world. Of course, the prophets are beginning to make it clear that the whole nation needs a New Covenant (meaning inner spiritual life rather than an outward law code) in order to realize the promises made to Abraham and David.[135](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-exhortation-receive-his-grace-isaiah-551-13" \l "P1680_455710)

Verse 4 draws upon David as an example: as David was, so Israel will be evidence of the covenant being fulfilled. David was a witness to the covenant in that God began to fulfill His plan through him; Israel will also be a testimony to God’s promises as they return to Palestine and become a people again—the stone that the nations rejected has become the chief cornerstone (see [Psalm 118](javascript:%7b%7d) where the “king” [political leader of the returning exiles] leads the nation to Zion to begin the new program).

##### *C. Response: Nations will want to share in Israel’s portion as God’s people (5).*

Still addressing the nation, the prophet announces that they would summon people to them because of the work of the LORD. Here is another prophetic glimpse of the future incorporation of the nations into the covenant. “Nations” refers to people in the nations, not nations *en masse* entering the covenant (although there have been such forced conversions). So this would be synecdoche.

Because the LORD will endow with splendor, people will see God’s gracious dealings and run to Him. But note the emphasis of the passage: Israel will summon them. Israel always was to be a kingdom of priests, a light to the nations, a channel of blessings. But if people do not believe themselves, they will never do this. Or if they do believe but are caught up in affluence, or are worldly, or believe it is more important to remain separate, they will not do this either. Here, however, he is saying that this group will have a fresh appreciation for the grace of God and so will extend it to other nations.

There are obvious parallels to the New Testament teaching on the mission of the Church. Those who have responded by faith to God’s call have found rest in Christ, who is the Davidic King, and will be witnesses to the nations of the unfailing love of God.

#### II. People must quickly turn to the LORD in faith because His word is about to be fulfilled (55:6-13).

The people were in captivity; many of them had concluded that all was lost, that there was no future to the promise (as in “where is the promise of His coming?”), that perhaps the gods of Babylon were powerful enemies after all. They made the mistake (as we often do) of judging God’s plan and God’s word by the standard of their immediate circumstances. This section rebukes that tunnel vision and calls for them to believe the word, seize the moment, and thereby discover that the promises are true.

##### *A. Call: The LORD calls the people to repent and turn to follow His way while they can (6, 7).*

The imperatives of verse 6 stress the urgency of the moment, a window of opportunity—they must not delay in responding to God’s call to return to the land and be the people of God. The commands here are for prayer: seek and call on Him. The time was right for the deliverance, it might not come again or again be as clear; they should therefore pray for deliverance.[136](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-exhortation-receive-his-grace-isaiah-551-13" \l "P1690_458839) If they believed the Word of the LORD delivered through the prophet they would change their thinking and pray expectantly for the deliverance. The expression “while He is near” is meant to convey that God was about to act on their behalf.

Verse 7 could be taken in one of two ways. If the “wicked” refers to all unbelievers, then this is a general call for repentance and salvation. But that does not fit the context very well. Rather, the “wicked/evil” are those in Israel who judge the LORD by the standards of their experience and mistrust Him. It would then be a rebuke of very weak faith among those who professed to be part of the covenant people. Of course, the verse is general enough in its wording that it could embrace both—obviously if people were doing wicked things as well, they should abandon those. This is a clear teaching in the Bible.

The context favors this latter view, that is, it is a call for the people to change their weak faith to confidence, for the theme of God’s ways and thoughts are here introduced. People should abandon their thoughts (pessimism, skepticism, weak faith—which are evil) and their ways (resigned to exile, disobedience to covenant—which are wicked). Not only abandon, but repent! Such thoughts and ways are sinful—but God will forgive their foolish unbelief. But their repentance must issue into faith; they must **act in faith** on God’s thoughts and ways—put faith into action.

##### *B. Explanation: God’s plans are incomprehensible and His Word is effectual (8-11).*

The “thoughts” and the “ways” of the LORD in verse 8 refer primarily to the LORD’s plans for the restoration of Israel in fulfillment of the covenant. Of course, the words fit any of the LORD’s plans, because they are beyond what we could ever think to ask. Here the contrast is made clear by the simile: the heavens are higher than the earth; and since God is in heaven and we are on earth, His ways are higher. But by higher it means incomprehensible to us. There is an entire existence of which we have no knowledge; there is an eternal plan that we can hardly grasp, and there is a divine nature that our infinite minds cannot comprehend. We are always trying to limit God with our categories and our understanding. Just when we think we have figured God out or have determine how God should act, He does something far more marvelous. We are so slow to learn that the only thing we can do is trust what He says and praise what He does. The rest of this passage will anticipate such trust and praise.

The second part of the explanation draws on God’s thoughts and ways as they have been revealed, to say that the Word of the LORD is effectual (verses 10,11). At the center of this section is the affirmation that God’s Word does not return to Him empty or void. This means that what He says will be accomplished because His Word is the expression of His powerful will. No Word from God is vain, untrustworthy, or given to deceive; nothing God plans to do can be interrupted or set aside by humans. His Word will prosper (*salah*, “achieve its purpose”). Verse 10 provides an earthy simile using the rain that comes down, waters the earth to produce the fruit, and returns to heaven having fulfilled its purpose. So is the Word of God. Not a Word from God will be wasted or ineffective.

If Christians actually believed this, how different they would be living! Naturally, as with Israel, we would pray more earnestly for that which He has promised, and we would act more confidently, trusting in Him to do His work through us. Skepticism, pessimism, resignation, unbelief—these would be “taken captive” (in the words of Paul) and banished from our minds, as God’s ways and thoughts become our ways and thoughts. The bottom line is: Get into God’s Word and live it out by faith.

##### *C. Result: The LORD promises joyful abundance for His own name’s sake (12, 13).*

The themes of great rejoicing and peaceful fulfillment are found in this last section. This is what God has in store for His people. The imagery also speaks of paradisiacal splendor: things growing to such fullness that trees are hitting each other in the wind (personifications here, “burst into song” meaning grow luxuriantly, and “clap hands” be full in growth so that they hit each other). The hope also includes the prospects of the reversal of the curse, something that the book has mentioned before with the snake and the viper being rendered harmless. Here thorns and briers will be replaced. The figure would be synecdoche, the bushes and trees representing types of growth.

The point is that all this will be done for “the name of the LORD” (verse 13b). In other words, because God has spoken, His reputation is at stake. He will fulfill His Word to show that He is trustworthy and able to do what He has said. The evidence of that will be everlasting.

### Conclusion

So these are the motifs of the chapter: a call for people to receive freely God’s gracious provision of (spiritual and physical) blessing, the promise of the fulfillment of the covenant program, the attracting of nations to the faith, the explanation of the incomprehensible nature of God, and the affirmation of the efficacious nature of His Word of promise. I would word the expositional idea in this fashion: *Because God’s Word is sure, people can receive abundant blessings by trusting His marvelous plan to fulfill the covenant promises.*

For Israel it meant a call to faith to those professing believers who were unsure and hesitant—much like the call that Jesus made to the disciples who followed Him but were weak in faith, often unsure, somewhat skeptical. It took the resurrection to show that no matter what happens, God can do what He said He will do. The remnant of Israel must turn from such evil and respond to God’s call to return to the land and be part of the covenant program. The inspiration for this renewal of faith would be the awareness of the ways of God and the Word of God.

So the primary application would be to nominal believers today who have capitulated to their circumstances and have not stepped out by faith to become part of God’s work of fulfilling the promises of the New Covenant through the knowledge of Christ, the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. In the words of the New Testament, they must demonstrate their faith by their works. Repeated emphasis on God’s ways and God’s word will rekindle their faith, if there is any faith there at all. Even those who are mature in the LORD need to keep reminding themselves of the promises of God, so that they might trust **His** Word and discover **His** plan. I would correlate New Testament passages on the nature of God’s Word and the guarantee of the fulfillment of the promises.

Of course, the language of the passage is basic enough to apply to unbelievers who need to respond to the call for faith and become a part of the kingdom. They must turn from their wicked ways and trust in His Word to receive His marvelous blessings.

[134](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-exhortation-receive-his-grace-isaiah-551-13" \l "P1678_454337) In the prophets the Davidic Covenant and the New Covenant merge together with the Messianic vision. The New Covenant gives the full expression to the Abrahamic Covenant and essentially captures the spirit of the Sinaitic Covenant although it replaces it. But there can be no New Covenant without a righteous theocratic administrator. So the vision of the Messianic Age blends the eternal covenant with Israel and the eternal covenant with David.

[135](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-exhortation-receive-his-grace-isaiah-551-13" \l "P1680_455711) To understand this better, you need to correlate the passages (especially Psalms and Isaiah and Jeremiah), and read the literature on these texts--the covenants, royal liturgies, and the eschatology of Messianism.

[136](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-exhortation-receive-his-grace-isaiah-551-13" \l "P1690_458840) Note that God had determined the program for the deliverance; but his plan determined the means to the end as well--prayer. Prayer is the handmaiden of the eternal plan.

[‹ Future Blessings for the People of God Isaiah 54:1-17](http://bible.org/seriespage/future-blessings-people-god-isaiah-541-17)[up](http://bible.org/series/book-isaiah)[God’s Condemnation or God’s Comfort Isaiah 56:9—57:21 ›](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-condemnation-or-god%E2%80%99s-comfort-isaiah-569%E2%80%945721)

**God’s Condemnation or God’s Comfort Isaiah 56:9—57:21**

**Introduction**

This section is a long and complex oracle that denounces sinfulness in vivid detail and commends the faith as the only solution for the deep spiritual needs of life. The first part, the condemnation, begins with an accusation of the wicked leaders (56:9-12), but moves quickly to a description of the nation’s evil idolatrous practices in spite of the presence of the righteous remnant (57:1-13a). The comfort, the second part, is held out for the contrite and the lowly (57:13b-19). The last two verses return to the warning that there is no peace for the wicked (20,21).[137](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-condemnation-or-god%E2%80%99s-comfort-isaiah-569%E2%80%945721" \l "P1722_468091) There are other ways that this passage can be broken down (especially verses 1 and 2 seem to be a unit, and verses 20 and 21 separate); but essentially the first part is about the evil, and the second part the comfort.

**Exposition**

**I. Condemnation: God condemns people for their wicked practices (56:9—57:13a).**

***A. He denounces corrupt leaders (56:9-12).***

The prophet summons the “beasts” to invade, meaning foreign armies (hypocatastasis); the call is rhetorical, making the point that there is nothing to stop them. The “watchmen” have not done their job. These are the prophets and priests who were to warn the people. But, the prophet says, they are all dumb dogs (hypocatastasis). Dogs that don’t bark at danger are not good watch dogs. More than that, they are lazy and greedy, looking out for themselves first. As ignorant shepherds (another implied comparison) they turn to their own gain, and are looking for the good life, always a better experience. What a failure the “watchmen” and the “shepherds” were for Israel (see Jeremiah and Ezekiel especially on this).

This failure is the main reason for the idolatry that will be denounced later.

***B. He laments the apathy over the death of the righteous (1, 2).***

According to the first two verses, the prophet notes that no one cares that the righteous have died. The application of this point would fit any time; but the projected meaning here is about people who died in the exile. The righteous, the devout, are swept away with the wicked, and no one takes it seriously. Innocent people died. But the text makes it clear that they died to be spared the greater evil; and, in contrast to the wicked who die, they will enter peace, they will find rest as they lie down in death. The chapter will end by telling us there is no peace for the wicked.

In the Babylonian exile, as in all wars and catastrophes, good people died as well as the wicked. And while no one paid much attention to the distinction (unless, of course, some probably used it to point out that it did no good to be righteous, or that the wicked were no worse than the righteous), God made it clear that for the righteous death was an entrance into eternal peace. How much better to do in such a calamity knowing you were right with God, than to go out into a devastating eternity.

As I said above, this could be a separate section. But I think he is talking about the wicked who would perish in exile, and so begins with a distinction that not all who die there are wicked.

***C. He catalogs the indictment against the idolatrous nation (3-10).***

In this section we have a detailed description of evil, idolatrous acts. The important thing to note is that Israel did all of these when they were in their own land and not when they were in captivity. In captivity they may have wavered in their views of Yahweh versus Marduk in view of the war and the exile; but these practices listed here were distinctively Canaanite. The Babylonian captivity purged idolatry from Israel.

So the section needs to be treated as you would treat [Ezekiel 1-8](javascript:%7b%7d). Ezekiel is actually in the exile, but writes about the idolatry in Jerusalem in order to explain why they went into captivity. It was not for bad political choices as they had explained. This chapter in Isaiah would have had the same effect on the exiles—this is why you are here, so do not even think about lapsing into this now or in the future, for there is no peace for the wicked. But, of course, the chapter would have also been an important indictment on the people prior to the exile, Isaiah’s actual audience, especially in the reigns of Ahaz and later Manasseh (who tradition says had the prophet sawn asunder). The sinfulness of these practices is self-evident. But the people doing them convinced themselves that such practices met their spiritual needs.

The wicked would have no chance of resting in peace when they died. The following catalogue explains why. Verse 3 begins the description with “seed” or “offspring” to show that they shared the nature of adulterers and prostitutes. Metonymy (probably adjunct) will figure in these verses because while they describe idolatry false religion was also fornication, literally. This is the point of verse 5 which says, “you burn with lust among the oaks.” The groves of trees were signs of fertility of a local “baal”; that then became a place to worship—to practice the fertility cult. Verse 7 continues this motif: where they made their bed they sacrificed to pagan deities, meaning, the practice of the bed was the sacrifice, at least in part. The pagan symbols of verse 8 probably refer to what [Ezekiel 16:17](javascript:%7b%7d) refers to; looking on the “nakedness” is literally looking on the “hand” (*yad*), a euphemism for the male organ,[138](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-condemnation-or-god%E2%80%99s-comfort-isaiah-569%E2%80%945721" \l "P1736_473039) the sign of fertility. Their idolatry in Canaan was with all kinds of symbols and implements that were designed to induce fertility. Where they were to have placed the Law—the doorposts—they had these grotesque images. They forsook the LORD and made a covenant with the leaders and devotees of the ritual, on whose nakedness they looked.

According to verse 9 they sought information from pagan shrines—everywhere but the LORD. They sent ambassadors to Molech and to Sheol. They were trying to induce false gods to reveal things; theirs was a cult of the dead, so they consulted with the dead by this mysterious seance. The gods of the underworld figured prominently in pagan ritual. One thinks of King Saul in his greatest need going to the Witch of Endor for truth—only to have the LORD bring up Samuel to announce his death. The point is that they feared non-entities, and ignored the Omnipotent One.

It is interesting to note in verse 10 that they believed this all met their needs. They were worn out by these pursuits, but somehow found strength in them rather than see how hopeless it all was. People wrapped up in pagan religion, whether Canaanite or modern, do so for some reason. Satan is able to meet some of their needs, and they then believe the lie.

***D. He rebukes their idolatry (11-13a).***

In a series of questions the LORD through the prophet wonders whom they feared more than the LORD. The rebuke is that the people misunderstood the silence of God, and so did not fear Him but followed after false gods. Consequently, God will call them to task, display their works, and see if their false deities can save them. No, the wind will blow them away!

**II. Comfort: God promises comfort and revival for those who are contrite and humble (13b-21).**

***A. He promises restoration (13b).***

In verse 13b we have a transition to the second half of the passage. “The one who makes me his refuge (hypocatastasis for “trust”) will inherit the land and possess my holy mountain.” The hope here is the restoration to the land and to worship in Zion.

***B. He explains the restoration (14-19).***

Verse 14 begins with a call for preparation. It repeats the theme of [Isaiah 40](javascript:%7b%7d), to remove the obstacles from the way of the LORD. There it was a message of spiritual preparation, repenting and reforming; here it would include that, but perhaps is more general for removing any obstacles that would slow down the fulfillment of the promise of restoration.

Verse 15 is the actual explanation for the comfort, and will, therefore, occupy more of your exegetical interest in this passage. The descriptions of God are the same as we have seen before, beginning in chapter 6 with the “High and Lofty One.” The theme of “live forever” lets the audience know that life and death and time are no problem for God. The point of all this exaltation is to say that the One who dwells on High dwells also with/in the lowly. And the New Testament will expand the theme to say that He will take the lowly on High with Him. Here we have the themes of God’s greatness and God’s grace.

So you should spend some time on “contrite” (*daka’*) and “lowly” (*shaphal*). One who is lowly in spirit is one who is humble, surrendered, depending on God. One who is contrite is one who has had his spirit or attitude crushed by a divine act. There can be no service to God apart from these attitudes. God resists the proud, but dwells with the repentant, surrendered, obedient, grateful, sinner. Both words are probably implied comparisons (hypocatastases).

Once you have defined the terms and illustrated them you need to make the point that God does not leave them crushed and low—He revives them. The Hebrew term means “renew, restore, cause life.” As soon as they are crushed and lowly, He comes to dwell in/with them, and they are no longer crushed. God has no desire to keep people abased and crushed—He wants life. They may be still humbled over it all, but that is different.

Verse 16 explains how this happens: God will end His anger, or the human spirit would be devastated. Rather, those days are shortened (God knows what people can take); and verse 18 tells how He revives his spirit: “I will heal … I will guide … restore … comfort.” These are words that have appeared many times in the book, and need to be developed again here.

In the exile God poured out His wrath and punished sinful, rebellious unbelieving Israelites. He destroyed many; He brought many to their knees. Those who were contrite and repentant He would forgive and restore to their land, so that they could praise Him. Most of these had never gone into wicked idolatry like their reprobate countrymen had. To such who are righteous, including idolaters who now repented, God gave peace (compare verses 2 and 19). It would be “peace” in this life (v. 19) and “peace” in the life to come (v. 2).

***C. He restricts the comfort (20, 21).***

These two verses show that there is no peace whatsoever for the wicked. They thought they were finding it in their evil works, but they cannot. All that is held out to the righteous—life, health, prosperity, comfort—goes to make up the idea of “peace.”

**Conclusion**

This passage should be pretty straightforward for exposition, especially in view of modern pagan trends, inside and outside the Church. The whole culture worships false gods in the most profane and debased ways. Thus, God brings judgment and destruction. People who belong to the faith, however, humbly submit to His will, and He will heal, guide, and comfort them with peace.

As for applications, we can work in several areas. For the wicked, the pagan unbeliever, whether in personal trouble (divine judgment) or not (deceived in his prosperity), the message is clear: repent or perish (as Jesus preached). For the believer the message is one of comfort—God heals, comforts, guides, and grants peace, now and in the life to come. This would call for a greater commitment to the faith. Another way to apply the passage to the believer is to say believers ought to pick up the message the prophet was giving; that is, we ought to warn the wicked, and hold out the clear promise of fellowship with the LORD.

So there are several levels of application here, from the pre-exilic community, to different periods of oppression, to the eschaton. But one aspect is timeless and basic to each level: God dwells with the humble and the contrite. If people want to show that they are true believers and faithful to the LORD, they must show evidence of repenting, surrender to His will, and walk humbly before Him; then, He will dwell with them, heal them, restore them to life, and bring them peace, comfort, and joy—so that they might turn from mourning to praise. So we might begin by asking people where they find comfort, joy, peace, and fulfillment.

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[137](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-condemnation-or-god%E2%80%99s-comfort-isaiah-569%E2%80%945721" \l "P1722_468092) The last two verses, or at least the last verse, may have been an editorial colophon because it has been used before (48:22). It is at least a favorite idea of the prophet.

[138](http://bible.org/seriespage/god%E2%80%99s-condemnation-or-god%E2%80%99s-comfort-isaiah-569%E2%80%945721" \l "P1736_473040) Perhaps. It is also possible that *yad* simply meant something like an extremity that could be used for either hand or organ.

## The Spirit-filled Servant and the Kingdom of God Isaiah 61:1-11

Study By: [Allen Ross](http://bible.org/byauthor/57/Allen%20Ross)

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### Introduction

It was a portion of this passage that Jesus read in the Synagogue (in [Luke 4](javascript:%7b%7d)) and reported fulfilled in their hearing. Thus, no matter what the actual historical application might have been for the speaker (the prophet, or the remnant, or the compiler), the ultimate and fullest meaning is that the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus to declare the Good News.

But the theology of both the Old and New Testament settings corresponds. The Good News in the historical setting was release from the bondage of the exile to full and free service of the LORD once again, a jubilee-like experience; but in the New Testament that bondage is sin and death, and the deliverance is spiritual and eternal as well as physical. Once again the New Testament captures the spirit as well as the letter of the Old Testament passage; but it takes it to its divinely intended—and lofty—fulfillment.

### Exposition

#### I. The Announcement of the Good News: The servant declares how God will deliver and restore His people with glory (61:1-3).

Verse 1 bases the oracle on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit to be upon the speaker clearly meant in the Old Testament that the speaker was controlled (= filled) by the Spirit—his message was the message of God breathed out by the Holy Spirit through the person. Here it is the “Spirit of the Lord Yahweh” who is upon him. In the historical context the meaning is that the prophet, for the discharge of his function, is empowered and enabled by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The two verbs that express the significance of this are “He has anointed me” and “He has sent me.” The image of anointing (hypocatastasis or, implied metaphor) signifies that he was set apart for this mission and endorsed by God.[139](http://bible.org/seriespage/spirit-filled-servant-and-kingdom-god-isaiah-611-11" \l "P1772_482310)

The several purposes for declaring the Good News now are enumerated. First it will be Good News to the poor. This is a theme that has been introduced before in the book, the Good News being the message of deliverance from bondage. In the New Testament it is the Gospel. The “poor” are those who are destitute, in a distressed condition, poor in every way. One can think of other, current examples of refugees driven from their homes, hungry, destitute, and confused.

The theme of “bind up the broken hearted” picks up the theme of the earlier chapter on bringing revival to the contrite and the lowly. Those “crushed in spirit” (hypocatastasis) by the exile will be strengthened and encouraged.

“To proclaim liberty for the captives” is an idea drawn from the Year of Jubilee ([Lev. 25](javascript:%7b%7d)), as well as from the concern of the captivity. Of course that would also bring in the teaching on the High Priest, so in the New Testament there would be more correlations. “Freedom” or “liberty” is the word right out of [Leviticus 25:10,40](javascript:%7b%7d).

The last expression in the verse is “release for the prisoners.” The difficulty here is that the expression translated “release” is used most often for opening eyes and ears, hence the Greek has it “open eyes to the blind.” The idea of “recovery of sight” could have been used metonymically for people as if in a dark dungeon, and when released would see the light of day. Jesus made the blind to see—but that by His own explanation was also a symptom of release from the bondage of sin, for there were many who saw but were blind spiritually and still imprisoned by sin ([John 9](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Verse 2 begins with “to proclaim the acceptable year (“year of favor”) of the LORD.” It was up through this line that Jesus quoted, and said was fulfilled. The rest of the passage looks to the Second Coming. Here the “Year of Favor” would be in general referring to divine intervention; but it is also a Jubilee. The idea of “favor” or “grace” captures all the themes in the previous oracles that affirmed that God by grace was delivering people from bondage.

The “day of vengeance” is certainly divine judgment. To Israel it would have come with the deliverance, for Babylon was to be destroyed in the process; but in the New Testament it is eschatological, referring to when Jesus comes with the baptism of fire to judge the world and fulfill His promises to the believing remnant and believing Gentiles.

The theme of comfort ([Isa. 40:1](javascript:%7b%7d)) is reintroduced here with “those who mourn.” The language foreshadows the beatitudes of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who mourn and grieve do so under the bondage of exile; today it is both spiritual and physical, but there is a coming day when all manner of things will be well.

Verse 3 uses a good deal of imagery. “Ashes” is metonymy of adjunct, people having put ashes on their foreheads while mourning. The “turban of beauty” could be drawing upon some festive clothing that replaced the ashes (see [Zech. 3](javascript:%7b%7d)) and so another metonymy; or it could be a implied comparison with such action, signifying the change of estates. The “oil of gladness” would refer to oil used to welcome guests to festive occasions, and “festal clothing” would be the natural clothing worn to such affairs—not funeral clothing. Drawing on the image of such a banquet, God is saying that they will rejoice, praise, be comforted, and be glorious, in the place of mourning and despairing (giving up hope).

The verse closes with a metaphor of the branch joined with righteousness to be a symbol of endurance: “trees of righteousness” means that the people will be solidly and enduringly righteous. The image of the “trees” is paralleled with that of “planting.”

Jesus did not read the entire section. The aspect of vengeance or judgment was not part of the first advent, as we now know; neither was the complete renovation of all things, as this passage predicts. The part that Jesus read tells of making proclamation; the part that He did not read speaks to actually doing it, changing the estate of the afflicted. Jesus came and proclaimed the Good News; He did enough miracles to show He was the Messiah, and that when He returned He could indeed change all things.

#### II. The Announcement of the New Service: Israel will be restored to her spiritual service (61:4-6).

The background of this section is the original call of Israel as a kingdom of priests ([Exod. 19:6](javascript:%7b%7d); and add [1 Peter 2:9](javascript:%7b%7d) for us who have been grafted in ). Verse 4 predicts that they will rebuild the ruined and devastated places; verse 5 tells how foreigners will serve them in the ordinary work; but verse 6 focuses on their spiritual service.

They will be called “priests of God” and named “ministers of God.” [Zechariah 3](javascript:%7b%7d) portrays the restoration of the nation to its priestly function. God does not deliver and forgive for no purpose; God saves in order that the redeemed might serve. What Israel had, she lost by sin; but it would be restored after the exile to a generation that was bearing fruit. God will have a kingdom of priests on this earth; today it is the Church; at the end of the age it looks like the prophets anticipate and Paul confirms that God will yet save Israel (those who are alive prior to the second coming, of course) and use them again for this purpose.

#### III. The Announcement of the Blessings: The remnant will enjoy God’s blessings (61:7-11).

Verse 7 declares that everlasting joy will replace the shame; and this theme is elaborated upon in the following verses. On God’s part, He who loves justice and hates evil, promises to make an everlasting covenant, and to make the people of God famous in the world as the people the LORD has blessed.

Verse 10 interrupts the flow of the argument with an outbreak of praise. The prophet, speaking for Israel or Jerusalem, expresses gratitude for the promised felicity. The central point here captures the message of the whole chapter. He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, and arrayed me with the robe of righteousness. God has given believers righteousness and salvation. That is the reason for the restoration to service, the joy, and all the festivities. The image of the clothing is used here again by comparison: clothing signifies the nature of the person.

Verse 11 then continues the message of verses 8 and 9, not 10. God will make righteousness and praise spring up from the land. “Spring up” is literally flourish; it draws on the image of planting oak trees, but looks to the product that righteousness will cover the land, because righteous people will be there serving the LORD. This is more than the dream of a prophet; it is a vision of the future—yet to be fully realized, needless to say.

### Conclusion

The passage can be treated on two levels, one for historical Israel and the restoration from the exile for part of it, and the eschatological sense for the other part. Jesus in His first advent announces the fulfillment of it, but as with so many of the prophecies there is a partial fulfillment at the first advent, the rest awaiting the second advent.

But the passage can easily be used for today, for the NT applies it this way. The Messiah has done it—and is doing these things—for us: our response should be to live righteously, joyfully and hopefully as those who have been given sight, set free from bondage, received the LORD’s favor. But just as the Spirit anointed the messenger (the prophet first, and then Jesus) to announce this to those in sin, so the Spirit has anointed us as John tells us, making us a kingdom of priests as Peter reminds us, so that we too can proclaim good news to the world. This we do while waiting for the culmination of God’s program for the ages, which will see that great day of vengeance when He comes to set everything right and make all things new.

One expository arrangement that could be used in preaching from this passage is as follows (as in a message for people called to service):

***I.*** *God’s servants are appointed by God’s Spirit to proclaim God’s message (*[*Isa. 61:1*](javascript:%7b%7d)*a)*

***A.*** *They are anointed by God.*

***B.*** *They are anointed by God to proclaim good news.*

***II.*** *The proclamation of the Word of God transforms the lives of those who believe (*[*Isa. 61*](javascript:%7b%7d) *1b-3)*

***A.*** *The good news is that there is hope for the hopeless.*

***B.*** *The good news is that there is liberty from bondage.*

***C.*** *The good news is that there is grace for the debtor.*

***D.*** *The good news is that there is joy in place of sorrow.*

***III.*** *God’s program of redemption fits us for service (*[*Isa. 61:4-11*](javascript:%7b%7d)*).*

***A.*** *We have been blessed with reconciliation.*

***B.*** *We have been made a kingdom of priests.*

***C.*** *We have every reason to praise.*

[139](http://bible.org/seriespage/spirit-filled-servant-and-kingdom-god-isaiah-611-11" \l "P1772_482311) The idea of anointing with oil is hereby explained theologically: theocratic leaders so anointed would be receiving the enablement by God to rule--the Holy Spirit. [Zechariah 4](javascript:%7b%7d) explains that the olive oil to the lamps represented the Spirit. And John in his first epistle explains we have the Spirit, the anointing from God. A prayer for anointing by the Spirit today can only be used in the sense that we desire the manifestation of the anointing that we already have.

## Israel’s Plea for Deliverance Isaiah 64:1-12

### Introduction

[Isaiah 64](javascript:%7b%7d) is a confident prayer for deliverance by the believing remnant. It begins with a plea for the LORD to intervene to deliver His people in His characteristically powerful way (1-4). Their confidence is based on the LORD’s great demonstrations of power in the past. Their recalling the works of the LORD is followed by the acknowledgment of their complete sinfulness (5-8). And yet, in spite of their guilt, they could appeal to God because He was their Father and Creator (= potter); He would change their estate by His grace (9-12).

The prayer is similar to [Isaiah 53](javascript:%7b%7d) in that the exiled people confess their sin as a nation before God. Here they pray for the advent of the LORD to end their afflictions through some powerful intervention. Although the nation had rejected Him by their idolatry and wickedness and brought the exile on themselves, He had not finally rejected Israel. There would be a remnant that would return. Nevertheless, if the people were to be part of that remnant, they had to confess their sin and pray for deliverance before He would deliver them from the consequences of sin.

### Exposition

#### I. The Demonstration of God’s Power: The people of God desire the direct intervention by God (64:1-4).

##### *A. They long for a great deliverance (1, 2).*

The prayer recorded here is a national lament. It begins with the request for divine intervention—in a spectacular way. They are praying for divine intervention to deliver them from bondage in exile; but the language goes far beyond that. The people want a dramatic show of power as the LORD intervenes on their behalf. “Rend” the heavens in verse 1 would be a hypocatastasis, an implied comparison to tearing open a curtain. The epiphany language that follows is drawn from “Day of the LORD” prophecies (Joel, Amos) and the Sinai experience. The “mountains” would represent any obstacle that stood in the way of their deliverance (another implied comparison, or hypocatastasis); of course, in the actual eschaton (end of the age) something far more dramatic is in view according to the other prophets who see geological changes in the earth (Zechariah). When the LORD literally rends the heavens and comes down to the Mount of Olives, it will be split in two, and all sorts of geological changes will take place. The mountains “trembling” is a poetic description of an earthquake.

The purpose of such a great display of God’s power is that the name of the LORD might be known. This is a theme that began with the plagues of Egypt and continued throughout the Bible—that He might make Himself known. All acts of God are revelation; His great acts of redemption are likewise to be revelatory so that others might find salvation.

##### *B*. *They recall the way God intervenes (3, 4).*

The people recall how God did amazingly mighty things in the past (verse 3). And in it all they know that the work of the LORD was truly unique. No one ever heard of a God like this who makes a covenant with people and keeps it, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him (verse 4). God delights in doing the impossible, the unexpected, on behalf of His remnant. Here is our theme of waiting for the LORD again—faith, endurance, obedience, expectancy, all rolled into one (see [Isaiah 40](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The Church prays “Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” It also prays, “Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.” Verses 1-4 are essentially what we are calling for God to do. And when it happens, when the heavens open and the LORD descends, it will not be just to deliver people from the exile in Babylon, but will be to deliver the redeemed in the Lord, dead or alive, from all bondage, and to make all things new—things that we could never imagine.

Living in the expectation of the LORD’s coming to deliver His own, the people of God have the opportunity to reflect on God’s past interventions. Thus it was with Israel in exile; and so it is today on the eve of the Second Coming. And that reflection should inspire greater faith and obedience and devotion.

#### II. The Forgiveness of Sin: The people of God acknowledge their unworthiness (64:5-9).

##### *A. God blesses the righteous (5).*

Beginning in verse 5 the prophet acknowledges that God champions the cause of the righteous, but that the nation (for which he speaks) sinned against Him, and those who rebelled against God also sinned against the righteous in the nation. And, if God intercedes for those who choose righteousness (“meet” = intercedes, as in [Isaiah 53](javascript:%7b%7d)), then there is not much hope for sinners who oppose the righteous. “How then can we be saved?” he asks. God was angry for the sin of the nation, and the only hope the nation now had was to plead for forgiveness.

##### *B. They confess their unworthiness (6, 7).*

So verse 6 is the central part of the confession. Drawing upon Levitical terminology they confess that they are unclean. The terminology means that they would have been barred from fellowship in the Sanctuary. Moreover, any acts of righteousness that they had done were no better than polluted rags (the language comes from ritual uncleanness through bodily function). This recognition of sinfulness is the expression of a contrite heart. According to verse 6 they know that their own sins sweep them away like the wind sweeps the leaf away, for God does not come to their rescue. And because God has hidden Himself from them, no one calls on His name (verse 7). And so their confession of sin is a plea for divine grace so that they can be forgiven and delivered from bondage. There would be no deliverance from bondage without the forgiveness of sin (which is why Christ died at His first advent and will release us from bondage at His second).

##### *C. They build their confidence (8).*

Their only appeal is the relationship they have with God (verse 8). God is their Father (stressing the covenant relationship); God is their potter and maker (stressing their submission to Him).[140](http://bible.org/seriespage/israel%E2%80%99s-plea-deliverance-isaiah-641-12" \l "P1834_497985) So while acknowledging their sin, they appeal to the close relationship they have with the LORD, how much He has invested in them, and what plans He has for the nation. To call God Father and Potter is to express submission to the will of God—both refer to God’s creation and God’s sovereign will. They will accept His plan for their lives, and so they pray for forgiveness and intervention.

#### III. The Bestowal of Favor: The people of God appeal for divine favor (64:9-12).

This passage closes with an impassioned appeal for God to look favorably on them, forgetting their sins against Him, and remembering that they are His people.

The prayer is that God will not remember their sins. The word “remember” is anthropomorphic (here not remembering is equal to forgetting if we say it positively). God knows everything perfectly well; so the expression must mean to hold something against them. When God forgives, it means that He will never bring that issue up again. People may have troubling forgetting; other people may make it difficult for them to forget—but if they confess their sins to God, God will never mention them again or hold them against them.

The plea for God to “look upon” them is also anthropomorphic; it conveys the idea of turning with grace and compassion. The idea is reflected very well in the High Priestly benediction which is a prayer for the bestowal of grace, a prayer for God to lift up His face and look on them so they would have grace and peace ([Num. 6:22-27](javascript:%7b%7d)).

They motivate God to answer their prayer with the appeal that the Temple has been destroyed, the Temple in which praises were given to God. This holy and glorious Temple has been burned down. After all this, will God still hold back and punish them more. It is time for this divine discipline to end, and the restoration of all things to begin, so that Zion can once again be the center of worship and praise it used to be.

### Conclusion

This prayer follows the pattern of many Israelite prayers. It contains the introductory cry, the lament, expressions of confidence, and the prayer proper with its motivations for God to work. We need to study the structure and compare it with other lament psalms, for it does follow the pattern.[141](http://bible.org/seriespage/israel%E2%80%99s-plea-deliverance-isaiah-641-12" \l "P1842_500417) The prophet, speaking for the people, acknowledges both their humility and their confidence as he prays for swift intervention by God for the fulfillment of the covenant promises.

Likewise, people today eagerly anticipate and desire the Second Coming of the LORD in which He will deliver His people from bondage (even that which they have brought upon themselves) and make everything new by destroying oppressing nations. But that expectation should prompt people to confess their sin to the Lord and avail themselves of His mercy. Then their confident prayer will come from holy lips: “Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.” But the prayer will not be for purely selfish interests, but for the glory of the Lord. For indeed, His work today seems to be in ruins in so many places, and the Church has fallen in disrepute, thanks to the sin of people. God will never let that remain forever. That, then, is our appeal, when we pray for the heavens to be opened and the LORD to descend and bring all this to an end. In the meantime, we walk by faith in the blessed hope of the redeemed.

[140](http://bible.org/seriespage/israel%E2%80%99s-plea-deliverance-isaiah-641-12" \l "P1834_497986) Both of these figures, Father and Potter, are straight metaphors, as is the description of the people as "clay." They stress the personal and covenantal relationship the LORD has with Israel.

[141](http://bible.org/seriespage/israel%E2%80%99s-plea-deliverance-isaiah-641-12" \l "P1842_500418) Remember, though, that the pattern is never stereotyped. We should expect variations and rearrangements.

**The LORD’s Answer: Mercy for Israel Isaiah 65:1-25**

**Introduction**

The chapter provides the response of the LORD to the prayer that has just been offered. Its message unfolds in three main sections: the LORD’s complaint of the rejection of His overtures by a group of people who practice impure rites (1-7); a comparison of the destinies in store for the faithful and the disloyal (8-16); and a detailed description of the happiness that is to reward the righteous (17-25).

Most modern critics wish to place this section much later than even the time of the so-called “Deutero-Isaiah,” perhaps even in the first half of the fifth-century. But as before, there is ample evidence that the passage could fit the earlier time as well. Indeed, the text is written in such a way that there are several times of application that would work. Verse 11 is said to refer to the temple, and the conclusion is that it must be the temple rebuilt. But it only mentions the “holy mountain.” Thus, it would be hard to date this chapter without recourse to one’s presuppositions about the book itself.

**Exposition**

**I. The LORD will judge rebellious people who turn aside to false gods (65:1-5).**

The first section picks up the familiar theme: the abandonment of the LORD for pagan and superstitious practices and the retribution awaiting those guilty of it. It is the familiar theme of the sin of Israel in the Old Testament. Here is a final warning: if they continue to reject the appeals of the LORD they will be utterly destroyed.

***A. The LORD calls people to Himself (1, 2).***

The text begins with

“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.’”

So in verse 1 God explains how He extended the offer to the people to participate with Him in the covenant and in pure worship. The first verse as read in the MT indicates that Gentiles have been called by God and have found Him. Some commentaries suggest that the verse should follow the Greek to indicate that He is saying that He has submitted Himself to be inquired of (cf. [Ezek. 36:37](javascript:%7b%7d)) by them that have not asked, and that He has submitted Himself to be found by them that have not sought.

The holding out the hands (an anthropomorphism) in verse 2 is in the gesture of entreaty (cf. [Prov. 1:24](javascript:%7b%7d)). But the people have been obstinate (see also Paul in [Rom. 10:21](javascript:%7b%7d)). There has been no response by them to God’s overtures. Rather, they have followed a “way that is not good.” This is a litotes; it summarizes the entire section to come which describes the rites of worship of an idolatrous character.

Verses 1 and 2 are applied by Paul in [Romans 10:20,21](javascript:%7b%7d) to two distinct groups of people—the nations in verse 1, who while in a less privileged position have responded to the call; and the Jews in verse 2 who have stubbornly refused. Paul is clearly following the Hebrew tradition of the passage.

***B. The LORD condemns superstitious practices (3-5).***

The LORD accuses His people of provoking Him to anger before His very face. According to verse 3 the LORD is thought of as present in a peculiar degree in His own sanctuary near where the idolatrous acts were committed. If this is the point of “before Me” or “to My very face” in the verse, then the setting is the same as Ezekiel describes before the exile. The “gardens” where they make sacrifices refers to the places where tree-worship could be observed, among the groves and fertile places (see [Isa. 57:5](javascript:%7b%7d) and 66:17). The expression “altars of bricks” has received considerable attention since there is no real prohibition for the use of bricks. Some take it that the tiles of the houses are meant as the base for offering to the host of heaven ([Jer. 19:13](javascript:%7b%7d); [Zeph. 1:5](javascript:%7b%7d); and [2 Kings 23:12](javascript:%7b%7d)). Others would repoint (change the spelling of vowels of) the Hebrew to obtain the word “poplars” to refer to the cult object of white poplars that were associated with the underworld.

Verse 4 introduces their sitting among the graves for the purpose of necromancy. Oracles from the dead were supposed to have been conveyed to those who spent the night in the graves, because the souls of the dead were thought to have haunted the tombs.

The same verse tells of their eating unclean meat, such as the pig, probably at sacrificial meals (cf. 66:17). It was believed that to eat animals considered unclean would be not merely an act of rebellion but a means of communion with supernatural powers, the animals being totems, and the eating being a religious act allowing the consumer to receive the qualities of the ancestor which the totem animal represented. The pagan connections and ideas for the pig are some of the reasons why it was outlawed in Israel. It was not merely that it was meat that easily turned bad.

The words in verse 5 are the warnings of one who claims to be holier than others, one who was consecrated by communion with a divinity (perhaps through eating or by being in the tomb) to passers-by so that they will not contact him and be rendered unclean and incapable of normal duties for a time.

God says that such people are “smoke” in His nostrils. This may mean that they are the cause of fiery anger ([Jer. 17:4](javascript:%7b%7d)) which manifested itself in the nose according to Hebrew idiom ([Ps. 18:8](javascript:%7b%7d)), or that they are to be judged by God.

**II. The LORD will purge rebels and prepare the remnant for the consummation (65:6-16).**

***A. Judgment will fall on the wicked (6, 7).***

When in verse 6 the LORD says that “it stands written” He means that this evil will not be allowed to pass without judgment. He will not keep silent about this, but will pay back in full measure—into their laps. The expression uses the idea of a large fold in the garment to be a receptacle—here for God’s judgment. The sins of the people as well as the sins of their fathers (verse 7) will be paid back. Their worship on the mountaintops was simply blatant idolatry and profane apostasy.

***B. The remnant will be saved (8-10).***

In verse 8 the nation is compared to a cluster of grapes which is so rotten that only the presence of juice in a few grapes keeps the whole bunch from being destroyed. The juice in the few grapes (the remnant) is the new wine that should not be destroyed. There is some good—so God will not destroy them all.

When the LORD purges the rebels from the land, He will bring forth the faithful as the sole possessors of the blessings (verse 9). “Bring forth” here means cause to emerge. And the “mountains” would be a reference to Judah, the land which God’s servants will inherit. The use of “there” in the text may be temporal—in the future.

The boundaries of the land are given in verse 10. “Sharon” refers to the whole land, from the Mediterranean to the descent to the Jordan (and not Judah only). The Valley of Achor is apparently the deep valley known as the *Wady Kelt*, leading down to the Jordan near Jericho. These general descriptions give the breadth of the land that was to be the possession of the LORD’s faithful.

***C. The rebels will be destroyed (11, 12).***

The oracle now turns to address those who have abandoned the LORD and have spread a table for Fortune and prepared wine for Destiny (the actions are metonymies for false worship). The text has *Gad* and *Meni*. The Greek has *daimonio … tuche*, although the Vulgate uses *Fortuna* for *Gad.* *Gad* was venerated widely throughout Syria and Palestine; *Meni* has no similar evidence. But the ideas of fortune and luck were associated with the stars, and so there may be a connection with astrological worship. Whatever the deities were, the people spread food for them in their ritual of sympathetic magic.

Verse 12 announces that such who do these are destined for the sword. The verb “destine” is *manah*, a play on the name *Meni.*

***D. Different destinies await people (13-16).***

In verse 13 the LORD contrasts the lot of the righteous with that of the wicked. The wicked will go hungry and eventually be put to shame, meaning completely disappointed in their expectations. The contrast continues in verse 14 where the righteous will sing out of the joy of their hearts, but the wicked will be vexed in their spirits—literally, a shattering of their spirit.

Then, in verse 15 the motif of “name” is introduced. The name of the wicked will be left to curse. This means that a fate like theirs will be the most extreme malediction which the righteous can imprecate upon an enemy. On the other hand, the good estate of the righteous will necessitate different epithets to be used in describing them (see 62:2, 4, 12; and [Rev. 2:17; 3:12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Thus, in verse 16, the LORD’s faithful accomplishment of the threats and promises in these verses will lead people to appeal confidently to Him to fulfill a blessing prayed for, or to avenge a perjured oath. Thus, the “God of truth” will once again be revered in the land; and the troubles of the former times for the remnant will be gone.

**III. The LORD assures His people of a glorious future in the new world He will create (65:17-25).**

At the consummation of the ages the LORD will create a new heaven and a new earth and a new Jerusalem. It will be characterized by security, prosperity, safety, and close communion with the LORD. The glorious state described in this chapter is picked up by John in the Book of Revelation in his description of the world to come. In that place John portrays it after the Messianic Age and so it must issue into the eternal state, unless the events in Revelation are not to be taken so strictly chronologically.

It will have as its central focus the Messiah, Immanuel; and the righteous will have free access to Him. This glorious new creation will, as Paul says, begin the reign of Christ on earth, that will eventually be delivered up to the Father ([1 Cor. 15](javascript:%7b%7d)) and become what we call the eternal state. But Revelation says that the saints will reign with Christ in earth; but have access to Him in the heavenly sanctuary. It will all be far more wonderful, and complex, than we can even imagine.

All the expressions in these verses are very clear. The prophet in describing the restoration of human society to right conditions tells of a transformation of the physical universe, just as formerly the perfect creation was destroyed and changed by sin. The words are used of the Christian hope in [2 Peter 3:13](javascript:%7b%7d), and [Rev. 21:1](javascript:%7b%7d). Weeping and mourning will be removed (verse 19). And one of the causes of sorrow, death, or at least untimely death, will be removed so that there will be longevity once again (verse 20).

These descriptions have been taken in a couple of ways by commentaries. Some wish to take the expressions literally and see reference to a new period on this earth when all the transformations in it will be established; for in the eternal state there will be no death and no sinners at all. People who will be on earth will live, marry, have children, build, and be in harmony with nature. Jerusalem will be the center of God’s theocracy, and there will be peace and safety there. This view, a millennial reign of Christ and His saints, would see these conditions in Isaiah as a prelude to the eternal state. This view harmonizes well with some passages of the Bible, but doesn’t harmonize very well with [Isaiah 25](javascript:%7b%7d) and with the order of things in Revelation.

Others, noting that [Isaiah 25](javascript:%7b%7d) had announced there would be no death, and noting the sequence in the Book of Revelation (new heaven and new earth after the millennium), describe this picture as the new creation to come. The language then is figurative and representative—if there were death, one who dies at 100 would be considered a child. And if there were sinners, they would be quickly condemned. But the weakness with this view is that it really strains the meanings of the lines.

What is clear from the prophet’s message is that there is coming a marvelous new creation that will end the curse and its effects. A return from captivity to Israel could not have satisfied these prophecies, especially since the apostle picks them up and advances them. This, then, remains the glorious prospect of the righteous. But the sequence of the events, and how it will all be worked out, cannot be worked out with absolute certainty at this time.

The passage holds out the hope of a share in the world to come, the new creation of the LORD. God will renovate all things in this world to show what He had intended from the beginning. And that “season of refreshing,” that “world to come” as the Rabbis termed it, will see the removal of the curse and the fulfillment of all the promises. So those who respond to God’s call and serve Him faithfully are the heirs of that new creation. Those who stubbornly refuse His call and go after false gods instead will have everlasting shame. Faithfulness to God’s call, then, becomes the central point of the application. Believers must show their faith by their devotion; unbelievers must turn to the truth by faith, abandoning all false beliefs and wicked practices.

For the believers, if the new heaven and the new earth come about a little differently than expected, they will not be disappointed.