APOCALYPTIC

COMMENTARY OF

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

AVRAHAM GILEADI



Hebraeus Press

verse-by-verse analysis

of Isaiah’s End-time Prophecy

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COMMENTARY OF

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Renowned Hebrew scholar and literary analyst Avraham Gileadi presents an informed and enlightening interpretation of the most important prophecy in the Bible.

He shows how the writings of the prophet Isaiah, though grounded in the history of the ancient Near East, make use of literary devices to predict the end of the world.

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Dr. Avraham Gileadi’s publications include *The Apocalyptic Book of Isaiah* (Hebraeus Press, 1982); *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison* (Baker Book House, 1988); *The Literary Message of Isaiah* (Hebraeus Press, 1994; 2012); *The End from the Beginning* (Hebraeus Press, 1997; 2012); the 30-hour audio series *Analytical Commentary of Isaiah* (Hebraeus Press, 2001); *Isaiah Decoded: Ascending the Ladder to Heaven* (Hebraeus Press, 2002; 2013); and *Apocalyptic Commentary of the Book of Isaiah* (Hebraeus Press, 2013).

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To the youth of Zion who will abide Jehovah’s Day of Judgment,

to whom these things are made known and explained.

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INTRODUCTION

As you delve into the *Apocalyptic Commentary of the Book of Isaiah*, preconceived ideas you may have about Isaiah’s prophecy may require a second look. Written in a cryptic code from a primordial age, the Book of Isaiah will most likely be different from anything you have studied before. To comprehend this enigmatic prophecy, moreover, will require you to devote as much time to it as if you were learning a new language. The understanding of all sacred texts that you will gain, on the other hand, will more than compensate you for your efforts.

To that end, a foremost principle you will need to apply when searching Isaiah’s words for meaning is to diligently analyze what *Isaiah* says on a particular subject, not what others say he says. While Isaiah provides ample check and balances by which to verify any interpretation, he also warns against the teachings of the learned of the day who have perverted his words. The fact that many occupy the highest echelon of society may make disregarding their explications a challenge, particularly as you may already have internalized them as the truth.

Without seeing the need to apply the Jewish methodology of eliciting from a sacred text what *God* is telling his people—taking into account the many interconnections Isaiah has layered into his book such as literary structures, typologies, and words links—many who speak in God’s name fall into the trap of using Isaiah’s words as just a proof text for what *they* believe. Isaiah’s prophecy far transcends such a self-serving and manipulative approach. Its spiritual riches can’t reveal themselves except to those who draw near to its message with humility.

While the many layered literary structures that govern the Book of Isaiah entirely change the rules for interpreting it—transforming it from a historical prophecy to an apocalyptic or end-time prophecy—care needs to be taken in determining *how* what is historical prefigures the end-time. Without diminishing the significance what happened in Isaiah’s day, for example, Isaiah’s use of historical *types* and *codenames* requires that we match up the ancient nations and persons he mentions with their modern counterparts if we want to know who is who.

For the end-time look-alikes, however, former names lose their use. Ancient Assyria, for example—a militaristic world power from the North that conquered the ancient world—and its rival superpower, Egypt, don’t compare with any nations in the Middle East today. When read as an *end-time* prophecy, the Book of Isaiah is about events that aren’t confined to the Middle East. To match up the ancient nations and persons in his prophecy with their end-time counterparts, in fact, we must be guided by how Isaiah *characterizes* them, not by their names.

In cases where historical types of nations and persons don’t adequately portray what takes place in the end-time, moreover, Isaiah develops *composites* of types or resorts to imagery from life or nature to round out the end-time scene. Having seen the end from the beginning, he thus manages to capture both the past and the future in a single prophecy. Still, not all that happened historically interests him, only what foreshadows the end-time. Isaiah’s worldview is *typological*, not always logical. In his writings, the old is also new and the new is also old.

If Isaiah uses types from the past to prophesy the end-time, therefore, then which ancient nation do we suppose matches up with modern America? And what will happen to this nation in the end, especially as until now America has been such a major world player? Using Isaiah’s key of matching up his *characterization* of a world superpower that resembles America, we find that ancient Egypt matches modern America almost precisely, allowing only for several major events to develop. Of course, Isaiah speaks also of the Jews and other tribes of Israel.

Although scriptural concepts that are familiar to us appear in the Book of Isaiah—such as God’s destruction of the wicked and his deliverance of the righteous at the end of the world—we shouldn’t simply take for granted what these mean. Isaiah tells us precisely what he means in the context of his end-time scenario. His literary structures that stretch from one end of his book to the other, for example, systematically develop a Hebrew gospel that not only preempts the New Testament gospel of Jesus but sustains and elucidates it as an ancient theology.

Here too we must set aside sectarian ideas—that if our religion doesn’t teach something, or if we haven’t heard it before, then it can’t be true. Going back to Isaiah, the idea of ascending spiritual levels that he develops, which are grounded in the terms of covenants God makes with his people and with individuals, completely modifies creed-bound concepts of heaven and hell that stem from misinterpretations of the scriptures. If some things you read thus seem controversial, wasn’t God’s word always so? If not, why did God’s people kill the prophets?

As typified by the many layered literary structures and patterns on which Isaiah builds his prophecy—each of which carries its own message over and above what we read on the surface—the Book of Isaiah contains many layers of divine truth that don’t reveal themselves all at once. His linear structure of Trouble at Home, Exile Abroad, and Happy Homecoming, for example, is layered over that of Apostasy, Judgment, Restoration, and Salvation, which overlays Three Tests of Loyalty and others, including Isaiah’s synchronous Seven-Part Structure.

Although this book barely touches on these underpinnings of the Book of Isaiah, the fact that they deeply impact Isaiah’s prophetic message demands respect for his words, showing that there is far more to his writings than meets the eye. Isaiah’s covenant theology of proxy salvation that functions on higher and lower spiritual levels on which people operate similarly permeates his writings. Differences between spiritual and temporal salvation, including God’s protection in an end-time setting, make perceiving Isaiah’s message an inviting prospect.

As the inner workings of the Book of Isaiah disclose their secrets, therefore, you may be tempted to feel offended at your religion for not correctly informing you. Or for not telling you that, according to the prophet Isaiah, your end-time religion has become degraded and that its adherents are the very catalyst of God’s judgments coming upon the world. Consider, however, that a loving God foresaw these things and that in his divine wisdom he made provision for that eventuality by giving us the Book of Isaiah and also keys for understanding it.

To participate in events ushering in a glorious age of peace could under no circumstances come cheaply. Those who are willing to pay the price of learning Isaiah’s message will thus have so much more the advantage over those who attempt to glean such knowledge from superficial sources. As God operates solely within the covenant relationships he establishes with his people and with individuals, their knowledge of those covenants, which Isaiah teaches, empowers them to align their lives with God through the end-time events that Isaiah predicts.

Even so, the *Apocalyptic Commentary of the Book of Isaiah* provides but basic insights into Isaiah’s prophecy that introduce the novice to his awe-inspiring vision. Those who wish to deeply investigate Isaiah’s message or acquaint themselves with the research that supports this commentary I refer to my book *The Literary Message of Isaiah* and its synopsis *Isaiah Decoded*. Although God grants his elect remarkable visions, I know of no one besides Isaiah who captures the entire end-time scene and interweaves it with the “good news” of Messiah.

How to Use the English Translation

Passages of Isaiah translated from Hebrew prose extend from margin to margin. Passages translated from poetic verse are indented.

Words inserted in the text to clarify incomplete or difficult phrasing appear in [parentheses].

A superscript letter after a problematic word or phrase in the text,*a* or two identical superscript letters, *b*one before and one after,*b* indicate a footnote.

Footnotes are marked alphabetically within each chapter and identify a verse by its number.

Abbreviations in footnotes include:

MT—The Hebrew Masoretic Text from which the English translation was made.

1QIsaa—The complete Dead Sea scroll of Isaiah of St. Mark’s Monastery.

LXX—The Greek Septuagint Version of the Old Testament.

Words or phrases relocated in the text are offset by brackets [....] and indicated by footnotes.*a*

Verses relocated in the text are indicated by footnotes.*a*

Metaphorical key words that function as pseudonyms of Jehovah, his servant, or the king of Assyria/Babylon appear in **bold**.

ISAIAH 1

Israel’s ancient apostasy typifies an end-time

apostasy, with salvation reserved for some who repent

1:1 *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz which he beheld concerning Judea and Jerusalem during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah:*

Isaiah mentions four successive kings during whose reigns he prophesies, of whom Ahaz and Hezekiah feature most prominently in the Book of Isaiah, one for evil, the other for good. A fifth goes unmentioned—Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, who slays Isaiah by sawing him in half (*Ascension of Isaiah*,11:41). On account of the sins of Manasseh, the people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah are ultimately exiled and taken captive by the Babylonians (2 Kings 24:3–4). Manasseh’s reign becomes a point of no return for the Jewish nation because of the king’s corrupting influence on the people.

As the preface of the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 1 dates from about 701 B.C., the fourteenth year of the reign of King Hezekiah. At that time, Assyria invaded the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Israel’s God Jehovah, however, thwarted Assyria’s designs because of the righteousness of the king and his people. Earlier, in 722 B.C., Assyria had conquered the ten-tribed Northern Kingdom of Israel and taken its people captive into Mesopotamia. The first chapter of the Book of Isaiah chronologically is chapter 6, which describes Isaiah’s calling as a prophet in the year of King Uzziah’s death in 742 B.C.

*The vision.* Although Isaiah’s prophetic ministry may have spanned fifty years, the singular term “vision” (*hazon*) defines Isaiah’s writings as *one* conceptually from beginning to end. That is evident in the Book of Isaiah’s multi-layered structuring, through which Isaiah integrates his early oracles and later written discourses into a single prophecy that spells out an end-time scenario. Without taking away from the historical origins of Isaiah’s writings, historical events now serve as an allegory of the end-time, in which “Judea” and “Jerusalem” are codenames that designate Jehovah’s end-time people.

1:2 *Hear, O heavens! Give heed, O earth! Jehovah has spoken: I have reared sons, brought them up, but they have revolted against me.*

Isaiah begins his prophecy by calling on the heavens and the earth, which were witnesses of the Sinai Covenant (Deuteronomy 4:26; 30:19). That is the covenant Jehovah made with Israel *as a nation*, through which the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob became a people of God (Exodus 6:7). The “heavens” and the “earth,” however, don’t refer simply to the physical heavens and earth but to those who reside in them. Heavenly witnesses to Jehovah’s covenant no doubt include Israel’s ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others who would retain the utmost interest in their descendants’ welfare.

Additionally, when Jehovah made the covenant with his people Israel, it included both those present and those not present (Deuteronomy 29:14–15). That alludes to the idea that there existed others yet unborn who were parties to the covenant as much as the people who stood with Moses at Mount Sinai. In fact, even though Jehovah’s people Israel may at different times have broken the Sinai Covenant, that never caused the covenant itself to be annulled. According to Isaiah, even the new covenant Jehovah makes at the dawning of the millennial age is a compound of all former covenants he made.

*Jehovah has spoken.* When Israel’s God speaks formally, as he does here, it signifies an official decree or promulgation. This suggests that at that point in time there has arisen a need for a reassessment or stocktaking. Let’s say his people’s affairs continue for a time but then noticeably deteriorate. At that juncture, Jehovah issues a pronouncement condemning his people or warning them of the inevitable consequences that must follow. Those consequences take the form of curses or misfortunes that pertain to Jehovah’s covenant with his people, which, after repeated admonitions, become irreversible.

*I have reared sons, brought them up, but they have revolted against me.* The word “sons” (Hebrew *banim*) is a legal term common to covenants of the ancient Near East that denotes vassalship to an emperor. As the prophets from Moses to Malachi adopt the ancient Near Eastern emperor–vassal model to define Jehovah’s covenant relationship with Israel collectively and with persons individually, the word “sons,” as used in the present context, implies the breaking of covenant relationships by those with whom Jehovah has covenanted. The term “sons” may secondarily denote God’s “children.”

*Brought them up.* The Hebrew verb *romamti* additionallyalludes to being “elevated” to an exalted position—to possessing special duties or privileges compared to others of God’s children. Jehovah’s covenants with Israel as a nation as well as with individuals among them lend them special status. When they keep the law or terms of the covenant that the prophets have taught them, Jehovah blesses them more than other nations. Now, however, not only are they taking their blessings and privileges for granted, they are “revolting” or “transgressing” (*pas‘u*) against their source—Israel’s God.

1:3 *The ox knows its owner, the ass its master’s stall, but Israel does not know; my people are insensible.*

*Israel . . . my people.* We learn from Isaiah’s multi-layered literary structures that Isaiah speaks on two distinct levels simultaneously, and that the “Israel” he addresses, therefore, is primarily two: (1) those who were Jehovah’s covenant people anciently; and (2) those who are Jehovah’s covenant people in the end-time. Accordingly, Isaiah’s linear structures enable us to read his prophecy as relating to Israel’s past, while his synchronous structures enable us to read it as relating to the end-time. In that end-time context, names such as “Israel” designate those who have covenanted with Israel’s God.

*The ox . . . the ass.* Whereas the ox is a ritually clean animal—because it divides the hoof and chews the cud (Leviticus 11:3)—the ass is not. Such dual imagery of beasts at times appears in Isaiah’s writings to represent (1) Israel’s natural or ethnic lineages; and (2) the nations of the Gentiles, or those lineages of Israel that assimilated into the Gentiles after its exile from the Promised Land. In an allegorical but not a contextual sense, therefore, this implies that Jehovah acknowledges a covenant relationship with both Israel’s ethnic lineages and those lineages that assimilated into the Gentiles.

*The* *ox knows . . . Israel does not know.* The verb “to know” (*yada‘*)is a theological term that expresses an intact covenant relationship—as when Adam “knew”his wife Eve and she conceived and bore a son (Genesis 4:1). Israel’s “not knowing,” on the other hand, implies that Jehovah’s people have broken the covenant with their God or voided their relationship with him (cf. Matthew 7:23). Although righteous individuals among them may come to know Jehovah personally—as he manifests himself to those who love him—in this case most appear unwilling to do what it takes (cf. Matthew 25:12).

*My people are insensible*. As the negative reflexive verb “insensible” (*lo’ hitbonan*) (also “undiscerning” or “uncomprehending”) parallels “not knowing” Jehovah—his people’s owner and master—and “not knowing” the stall or institution he provides to feed his people, it connotes a disintegration of their covenant relationship with him and ignorance of spiritual truths. Says Paul, “The things of God no man knows but the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:11). Unless one obtains the Spirit of God that comes with keeping the law of his covenant, it is impossible to know God or to comprehend his truth.

1:4 *Alas, a nation astray, a people weighed down by sin, the offspring of wrongdoers, perverse children: they have forsaken Jehovah, they have spurned the Holy One of Israel, they have lapsed into apostasy.*

From addressing his people personally as “Israel . . . my people” (v 3), Jehovah now addresses them impersonally as “a nation,” signifying their alienated state. Additionally, a regression occurs from his people’s simply going “astray” to their burdening themselves with “sin,” which, over time, ends in outright “wrongdoing.” That occurs collectively and generationally. The “offspring of wrongdoers” turn into “perverse children,” meaning that the rising generation has by now become thoroughly corrupt. “Forsaking” Jehovah and “spurning” him finally become conscious and deliberate acts.

*The Holy One of Israel.* The title of “Holy One,” together with “Valiant One” (v 24) designates Israel’s God more than thirty times in the Book of Isaiah. In this case, it contrasts Jehovah’s holiness with his people’s unholiness. Still, it points to what Jehovah’s people should become—“holy” or “sanctified,” like their God. Both titles—“Holy One” and “Valiant One”—characterize Israel’s God as his people’s exemplar. We observe this in an instance in which Jehovah exempts a righteous remnant of his people called his “holy ones” and “valiant ones” from a worldwide destruction (Isaiah 13:3).

*They have lapsed into apostasy.* Hebrew *nazoru ahor* signifies that Jehovah’s people have become entirely “estranged” from him. They have “gone backwards” to what they used to be before they became Jehovah’s covenant people, when they didn’t know their God. In effect, they have become godless again like the world’s heathen nations, but now more so because they have rejected the light they once had. The apostasy into which they began to backslide a generation ago is now complete. As a consequence, instead of enjoying the blessings of the covenant, they must suffer its curses.

1:5 *Why be smitten further by adding to your waywardness? The whole head is sick, the whole heart diseased.*

To be “smitten” of God—through plagues, misfortunes, natural disasters, and enemies—constitutes Jehovah’s final attempt to bring his people back to a state of blessedness by influencing or inducing them to repent of evil. Instead, their persistent waywardness compounds their plight (Isaiah 42:18–25; 59:8–10). Illness and disease become rampant, reflecting a society sick in mind and body. Allegorically, the people’s “head” or leadership, and their “heart” or core institutions—in short, their entire establishment, political and religious (Isaiah 7:8–9; 9:14–16)—has degenerated to a pathological state.

1:6 *From the soles of the feet even to the head there is nothing sound, only wounds and bruises and festering sores; they have not been pressed out or bound up, nor soothed with ointment.*

Like the wounds, bruises, and sores of an enemy slave—one who receives no chance of being ministered to—Jehovah’s alienated people find themselves in pitiful circumstances. When someone in a gulag becomes ill, that is his problem; he is dispensable. That is the condition to which Jehovah’s people are reduced in his Day of Judgment. Like the Prodigal Son, they have rebelled against Jehovah and squandered their inheritance. Then, when their entire society breaks down, their curse becomes irrevocable. Nevertheless, although a majority suffers misery, there remains hope for some who repent.

*Nor soothed with ointment.* The idea of being “soothed with ointment,” which is denied the wicked, Jehovah doesn’t deny the righteous. We observe his healing and anointing his repentant people later in the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 30:26; 57:18–19; 58:8; 61:3). It is for the reader to discover such antitheses by searching Isaiah’s terms and concepts. In other words, although Isaiah has us wade through the judgmental parts of his prophecy before he presents Jehovah’s glorious promises, all doesn’t end in gloom and doom. If Jehovah’s people repent in time, they may yet qualify for his divine blessings.

1:7 *Your land is ruined, your cities burned with* ***fire****; Your native soil is devoured by aliens in your presence, laid waste at its takeover by foreigners.*

While the “land” refers to the Promised Land—which Jehovah grants as a covenant blessing to his people who keep his law and word—the land’s invasion and destruction by enemies signifies covenant curses directed at a generation of Jehovah’s people that has turned to wickedness. In a historical context, the “land” is the Land of Canaan, which ancient Israel conquered under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. In an end-time context, the “land” is the one occupied by those who profess to be Jehovah’s covenant people in that day, which their forebears obtained from Jehovah as a covenant blessing.

As determined by Isaiah’s network of synonymous parallels, the terms “fire” (v 7) and “sword” (v 20) possess dual meanings. Besides their literal meaning, these terms designate persons who personify Jehovah’s *fire* and *sword*, who serve as his instruments in punishing the wicked. In a historical context, one such person is the “king of Assyria”—who also appears under his idolatrous title “king of Babylon”—whom Isaiah represents as conquering the world (Isaiah; 10:5–14; 13:4–5; 14:4, 6; 37:18). In an end-time context, a similar archtyrant—a modern-day Antichrist—likewise conquers the world.

*Aliens . . . foreigners.* Conceptually, in the Book of Isaiah, invasive aliens and foreigners identify the Assyrian alliance that conquers the world (Isaiah 5:26–29; 10:5–7, 28–32; 13:4–5; 28:11, 22; 33:19; 62:8). From the way the Hebrew prophets portray world affairs, we learn that the rise of Assyria as a superpower occurs in direct proportion to the apostasy of Jehovah’s covenant people, in the end-time as anciently. Without that precondition foreign nations could not dominate the world stage nor invade the lands of Jehovah’s people. Still, one place Assyria is unable to conquer is Zion, as we see next.

1:8 *The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, a hut in a melon field, a city under siege.*

*The Daughter of Zion.* When defining Israel’s relationship to its God, the Hebrew prophets commonly characterize Israel as a woman and Jehovah as her husband within the marriage covenant. Because Jehovah’s people as a whole have apostatized, however, persons among them who survive Assyria’s destruction comprise but a small remnant of Jehovah’s people. Called “Zion” or the “Daughter of Zion” (Isaiah 37:22; 52:2; 62:11), these survivors represent a higher spiritual category of Jehovah’s people than the “Israel” category because of their faithfulness to his covenant through many trials.

*The Daughter of Zion is left.* The idea of being “left” signifies the survival of a remnant of Jehovah’s people at the time the rest perish. It underscores the dire conditions under which some survive. Word links in the Book of Isaiah identify those who are “left” as persons who return from exile in a new exodus to Zion (Isaiah 11:11, 16), who survive Assyria’s siege of Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:4), who remain “as a flagstaffon a mountaintop, an ensignon a hill” (Isaiah 30:17), whose names are “inscribed among the living at Jerusalem” (Isaiah 4:3), and who are called “the holy offspring” (Isaiah 6:13).

*A shelter in a vineyard.* While Jehovah’s “vineyard” denotes the Promised Land (Isaiah 5:1–7), in the millennial age it extends to the entire earth (Isaiah 27:2–6). The “shelter” refers to Jehovah’s cloud of glory that protects a remnant of his people as it did ancient Israel (Exodus 14:19–20, 24): “Over the whole site of Mount Zion, and over its solemn assembly, Jehovah will form a cloud by day and a mist glowing with fireby night: above all that is glorious shall be a canopy. It shall be a shelter and shade from the heatof the day, a secret refuge from the downpourand from rain” (Isaiah 4:5–6; cf. 25:4–5).

*A hut in a melon field.* The idea of a “hut” suggests the presence of a watchman who guards the field against thieves and wild animals. A synonym of the term “shelter”—which appears in parallel with it—the “hut” further connotes protection from the elements, such as a rainstorm or the heat of the sun, whose imagery alludes to Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 17:13; 18:4–6; 25:4–5; 28:2, 14–19; 32:19; 40:24; 49:10). As a watchman’s role includes sounding the alarm when danger approaches (Isaiah 21:6–10), so those who heed the watchman’s warning are persons most likely to survive.

*A city under siege.* The “city” motif—which here appears in parallel with the “shelter” and “hut”—provides another metaphor of Jehovah’s people. Ultimately there emerge *two* cities in the Book of Isaiah that represent Jehovah’s covenant people: one wicked, the other righteous; one destroyed, the other delivered (v 21; Isaiah 24:10–12; 26:1–6; 33:20; 52:1–2; 66:6). The expression “under siege” (*nesurah*), moreover, possesses a double meaning in Hebrew: (1) “under siege”; and (2) “preserved.” In other words, although the righteous city may come under siege by enemies, Jehovah preserves it.

1:9 *Had not Jehovah of Hosts left us a few survivors, we should have been as Sodom, or become like Gomorrah.*

A type or precedent of the “few survivors” of Jehovah’s people who are “left” after the destruction are Lot and his two daughters who escaped God’s ancient destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24–30). Representing a pattern of what happens in the end-time, when Jehovah sends his angels to escort Lot and his family out of Sodom, his sons-in-law consider it foolish while Lot’s wife looks back and perishes (Genesis 19:12–23; cf. Matthew 24:31). The full authoritative title “Jehovah of Hosts” underscores the gravity of these events and the fact that Israel’s God is in charge of world affairs.

*Sodom . . . Gomorrah.* The names Sodom and Gomorrah remind us of those ancient cities and their inhabitants and what they came to symbolize. In their perverse lifestyle their residents grew so aggressive that they attempted to violate the angels of God who were Lot’s guests (Genesis 19:1–11). Isaiah’s drawing on this type when predicting the end-time lets us know that once they lose God’s light his people start to resemble those ancient inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. When his people’s devotion to Jehovah becomes but a shallow version of his law and word, it lacks the power to withstand evil.

The names Sodom and Gomorrah additionally function as word links to Babylon: “And Babylon, the most splendid of kingdoms, the glory and pride of Chaldeans, shall be [thrown down] as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” (Isaiah 13:19). Isaiah’s structurally developed concept of a Greater Babylon—resembling John’s “Babylon the Great”—identifies it as an evil world conglomerate on the eve of its destruction (Isaiah 13–23, 47; Revelation 17–18). That a wicked majority of Jehovah’s people suffers the same fate Babylon does implies that it too has become identified with Babylon.

The idea of “cities burned with fire” that describes the destruction of Jehovah’s people (v 7) alludes to the desolation of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and their residents by a hail of fire and brimstone (Genesis 19:24–25; cf. Isaiah 32:19). While the end-time version of that event may involve a similar cosmic cataclysm, Isaiah attributes the destruction of the world’s cities to the king of Assyria/Babylon (Isaiah 37:26). In view of modern weaponry’s ability to destroy entire cities in seconds, such technology in the hands of an archtyrant may thus account for Isaiah’s end-time scenario (Isaiah 9:18–19).

1:10 *Hear the word of Jehovah, you leaders of Sodom; give heed to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!*

To call Jehovah’s people and their leaders by the names Sodom and Gomorrah is to compare their moral degeneracy to that of those cities’ ancient inhabitants. As the leaders of a people generally reflect the people themselves, and as the political and ecclesiastical leaders of Jehovah’s people parallel each other in the Book of Isaiah, their spiritual condition holds little hope for the rising generation. When things reach that point, Jehovah’s people are fortunate indeed if Jehovah offers them a last warning. For those who accept it, there may yet be a chance of deliverance; otherwise, their destruction is assured.

*Hear the word of Jehovah . . . give heed to the law of our God.* Knowing that Jehovah does nothing unless he reveals his secret to his servants the prophets (Amos 3:7), he sends a warning voice before destroying his people. In the Book of Isaiah, that warning voice is Jehovah’s servant, of whom Isaiah is a type. Pointing them to Jehovah’s “law” and “word—to the terms of his covenant—the servant directs them to the one thing that has the power to reverse their circumstances. Replacing current aberrant religious practices with keeping Jehovah’s law and word remains his people’s only hope.

1:11 *For what purposes are your abundant sacrifices to me? says Jehovah. I have had my fill of offerings of rams and fat of fatted beasts; the blood of bulls and sheep and he-goats I do not want.*

While the worship of Jehovah goes on as if nothing has changed, its rituals have become a substitute for spirituality. As when Samuel rebukes Saul: “Does Jehovah delight in burnt sacrifices and offerings as much as in heeding the voice of Jehovah? Listen up! To obey is better than sacrifice and to comply than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22). The purpose of temple worship—and the measure of one’s devotion to God—isn’t to multiply ordinances. It is to keep the terms of his covenant that assures Jehovah’s people the same privileges enjoyed by ancestors who walked and talked with him.

*Offerings of rams and fat of fatted beasts; the blood of bulls and sheep and he-goats.* The literalness of the animals—reflecting their ancient use as temple sacrifices—may seem to preclude their relevance to the end-time. Isaiah, however, uses ritually clean beasts as a metaphor of Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 34:1–7; 40:11; 53:7; 60:3–9). In other words, just as sacrificial animals anciently served as proxies for Jehovah’s people who transgressed—thereby forestalling God’s justice—so their end-time relevance applies to the temple-goers themselves: *their* proxy rituals are no longer acceptable.

1:12 *When you come to see me, who requires you to trample my courts so?*

The question asked at the beginning of verse 11 is answered at the beginning of verse 12: Jehovah’s people attend the temple to see Jehovah. If they aren’t there for that purpose, then all else doesn’t count for much. That reveals an appalling paradox: instead of going to see Jehovah, his people resemble the dumb animals that were anciently brought for sacrifice, which were unaware of their reason for being there. Instead of making an offering of their whole souls to God—as symbolized by the burnt offerings and shedding of the animals’ blood—his people trudge about the temple’s courts defiling it.

1:13 *Bring no more worthless offerings; they are as a loathsome incense to me. As for convening meetings at the New Month and on the Sabbath, wickedness with the solemn gathering I cannot approve.*

Although Jehovah had commanded the offering of incense (Exodus 30:1–8; 40:26–27)—symbolic of the prayers of the righteous ascending to his presence (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 8:3–4)—the idea of a “loathsome incense” likens it to a nauseating odor. Their sacrifices have become “worthless” because they aren’t backed up by personal righteousness (Isaiah 61:8). Even their religious meetings and assemblies Jehovah can’t approve because those who attend them are encumbered with offenses. Their wickedness—their unrepented sins and iniquities—turns their services into solemn mockery.

1:14 *Your monthly and regular meetings my soul detests. They have become a burden on me; I am weary of putting up with them.*

As Jehovah attaches importance to Sabbath and monthly meetings elsewhere (Isaiah 56:2, 6; 58:13; 66:23), it isn’t that they of themselves are unacceptable. It is that his people measure their righteousness before God in terms of their attendance at them, not by their personal integrity. Word links show what kinds of things burden and weary Jehovah, but also that by repenting of evil his people may become clean: “You have burdened me with your sins, wearied me with your iniquities. But it is I myself, and for my own sake, who blot out your offenses, remembering your sins no more” (Isaiah 43:24–25).

1:15 *When you spread forth your hands, I will conceal my eyes from you; though you pray at length, I will not hear—your hands are filled with blood.*

While spreading forth the hands and praying at length are two legitimate forms of prayer, they can’t benefit an unrepentant people guilty of gross crimes. The word “blood” not only implies extreme injustice (Isaiah 26:21; 59:3, 7), it encapsulates injustices in general. Although “hands filled with blood” alludes to murder and abortion, it further epitomizes societal failings and abuses whose ripple effects include suicides to which an unrighteous people contribute. In short, the worship of Jehovah by those whose hearts aren’t broken, whose spirits aren’t contrite (Psalm 51:16–17), Jehovah can’t countenance.

1:16 *Wash yourselves clean: remove your wicked deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil.*

Instead of simply telling his people to repent, Israel’s God explains *how* to repent. His definition involves ridding their lives of their evil actions, neither excusing nor repeating them. Of course, that includes his people’s admitting their guilt, taking ownership of aberrant behavior. While becoming “clean” signifies Jehovah’s remission of their sins, it follows only upon their living righteously. The words “before my eyes” signify that Jehovah sees all things, precluding the idea that his people can escape the curses of his covenant that will inevitably follow unless they speedily “cease to do evil.”

1:17 *Learn to do good: demand justice, stand up for the oppressed; plead the cause of the fatherless, appeal on behalf of the widow.*

Doing “good” implies keeping the terms of Jehovah’s covenant. Jehovah’s definition of doing good includes seeking justice for the oppressed—persons unable to aid themselves. While the widows and fatherless represent those most in need, others aren’t excluded. By citing extreme examples of persons and behaviors, Isaiah doesn’t mean to limit things to them. The fact that Jehovah’s people must “learn” to do good suggests that they no longer know. The words “demand,” “stand up for,” “plead,” and “appeal” go beyond passively noticing others’ needs to actively intervening on their behalf.

1:18 *Come now, let us put it to the test, says Jehovah: though your sins are as scarlet, they can be made [white] as snow; though they have reddened as crimson, they may become white as wool.*

Two possibilities exist for interpreting this verse. First—as Hebrew has no question marks—Jehovah is asking, “With blood on your hands, do you still imagine you can become clean? Do you assume I will readily pardon you though you are guilty of the unpardonable sin?” Do Jehovah’s people pretend that the God who said, “Whoever sheds a man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6), will simply overlook their crimes so long as they go to church and put on a good appearance? That kind of hypocrisy is indeed characteristic of a Sodom-and-Gomorrah type of society (vv 9–10).

Second, in this verse’s larger context of Jehovah’s people’s repenting of transgression and purifying their lives, they may even now become clean of gross crimes. They shouldn’t assume, though burdened with guilt, that they are too far gone, that there exists no further hope of recovery. The “test” Jehovah presents is whether or not they will repent of doing evil. While “scarlet” and “crimson”—the color of “blood”—allude to murder, abortion, etc. (v 15), they also signify the stain of wickedness in general. Jehovah is willing to forgive those who “cease to do evil” and “learn to do good” (vv 16–17).

1:19 *If you are willing and obey, you shall eat the good of the land.*

As noted, the essence of Jehovah’s “test” (v 18) is whether his people will repent. How? By their willingness to obey the law or terms of his covenant. The doubling of the Hebrew verbs “willing” and “obey” causes the first to modify the second. An alternative translation, therefore, is “If you willingly obey, you shall eat the good of the land.” Both the “good” or increase of the land and the land itself constitute covenant blessings (Deuteronomy 19:8; 28:3–5, 11–12). The context of this verse is Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, when he preserves alive those who repent of transgression (vv 7–9).

1:20 *But if you are unwilling and disobey, you shall be eaten by the* ***sword****. By his* ***mouth*** *Jehovah has spoken it.*

A negative response to Jehovah’s warning leads to his people’s destruction in his Day of Judgment. Their refusal to repent results in Jehovah’s empowering their enemies against them. Like the term *fire* (v 7), the term *sword* has a dual meaning. In its present context, it identifies the king of Assyria/Babylon, who personifies Jehovah’s *fire* and *sword*. As Jehovah’s instrument for destroying the wicked, he cleanses the earth before Jehovah comes to reign: “With *fire*and with his *sword*will Jehovah execute judgment on all flesh, and those slain by Jehovah shall be many” (Isaiah 66:16; emphasis added).

*By his* ***mouth*** *Jehovah has spoken it.* Israel’s God makes his warning an official declaration—what their divine Judge decrees will indeed come to pass. As chapter 1 shows, however, Jehovah’s people as a whole don’t heed his warning. Many are beyond responding positively to a call to repent. Because Jehovah’s servant who prepares the way before Jehovah’s coming to reign on the earth serves as his *mouth* or mouthpiece, it is he who delivers Jehovah’s final warning. Still, most ignore their peril and few survive the archtyrant’s destruction of the world (Isaiah 10:5–7; 42:24–25; 48:18–19; 65:12).

1:21 *How the faithful city has become a harlot! She was filled with justice;* ***righteousness*** *made its abode in her, but now murderers.*

Foreseeing his people’s imminent calamity because they choose not to repent, the prophet grieves for them, the word “How” characterizing a lament (Lamentations 1:1; 2:1; 4:1). In other words, the prophet is asking, “How could this tragedy have happened? How is it that this people didn’t repent in time? How could those who were once righteous become so wicked?” The term “harlot” attests to their broken covenant relationship with Jehovah their husband (Isaiah 57:3–13). Besides identifying a specific place, the term “city” represents Jehovah’s covenant people in general (Isaiah 45:13; 60:14).

*She was filled with justice. Righteousness made her abode in her, but now murderers.* “Justice” (*mispat*) and “righteousness” (*sedeq*)—the basis of all covenant blessings and the underpinnings of a law-abiding society—have given way to injustice and unrighteousness. The term “murderers” reiterates the level of wickedness to which Jehovah’s people have sunk. The term *righteousness* additionally identifies Jehovah’s end-time servant who acts as an exemplar of righteousness to Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 41:2, 25; 46:11–13) and whom Jehovah appoints to restore justice in the earth (Isaiah 42:1–4).

1:22 *Your silver has become dross, your wine diluted with water.*

As the Hebrew term “silver” (*kesep*) additionally means “money,” its meaning here points to a worthless or devalued currency. Products such as wine, too, lack the quality they once had. Isaiah, however, intends more than a literal meaning of these terms. His imagery of common, semi-precious, and precious metals and stones, for example, denotes three ascending spiritual categories of people (Isaiah 60:17). In other words, some people who were in an elect category (“silver”) have become “dross,” which isn’t a metal at all. Having fallen from grace, they have joined Isaiah’s Perdition category.

*Your wine diluted with water.* Besides its literal meaning, the idea of “wine” metaphorically signifies spiritual nourishment: “You who have no money, come, buy wine and milk with no money and at no cost” (Isaiah 55:1). Those who teach God’s word, in effect, have watered it down until it no longer nourishes his people: “Their heart ponders impiety—how to practice hypocrisy and preach perverse things concerning Jehovah, leaving the hungry soul empty, depriving the thirsty [soul]of drink” (Isaiah 32:6). What passes for God’s word has become but a diminished version of his gospel in its fulness.

1:23 *Your rulers are renegades, accomplices of robbers: with one accord they love bribes and run after rewards; they do not dispense justice to the fatherless, nor does the widow’s case come before them.*

On a par with the ecclesiastical leaders of Jehovah’s people (v 10; Isaiah 9:14–16), political leaders similarly come under condemnation. Persons in government, whose task is to protect society from predators, have turned into predators themselves. The would-be administrators of justice perpetrate injustice. The most needy elements of society—the fatherless and widows, whose cause Jehovah advocates (v 17)—are neglected. People in leadership positions have degenerated into “renegades” and “robbers,” officials who violate others’ rights in order to gain their own ends (Isaiah 3:14–15; 5:23; 29:21).

1:24 *Therefore the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, the Valiant One of Israel, declares, Woe to them! I will relieve me of my adversaries, avenge me of my enemies.*

Jehovah’s bringing to bear his titles again renders his statement an official declaration (cf. v 20). The name “Jehovah of Hosts” or “Jehovah of Armies” (*yhwh seba’ot*) alludes to the legions, heavenly and earthly, he has at his disposal to implement his decrees. The title “Valiant One of Israel” expresses his divine attribute of valor. His pronunciation of a “woe” or covenant curse makes this a formal condemnation of his people. The “adversaries” and “enemies” of whom Jehovah avenges himself are their apostate ecclesiastical leaders (v 10) and corrupt politicians (v 23; cf. Isaiah 5:7, 24–25; 10:1–6).

1:25 *I will restore my* ***hand*** *over you and smelt away your dross as in a crucible, and remove all your alloy.*

To counter the wickedness of his people’s leaders, Jehovah “restores” (*’asiba*) all things pertaining to his people. This he does through the agency of his servant who prepares the way before his coming to reign on the earth (cf. Matthew 17:11; Acts 3:21). As Jehovah’s *hand* or *right hand* (Isaiah 11:10–12, 14–15; 41:2, 10, 13; 49:1–3), the servant restores Jehovah’s people and their lands (Isaiah 49:5–6, 8) and deals with his people’s enemies (Isaiah 50:10–11). The “dross” and “alloy”—the lowest spiritual categories of his people—Jehovah purges away in his Day of Judgment (cf. Malachi 3:1–5).

1:26 *I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as in the beginning. After this you shall be called the City of* ***Righteousness****, a faithful city.*

The two parallel statements—“I will restore” (*’asibah*) (vv 25–26)—signify not only that both restorations form a part of the same event but that one flows out of the other. In other words, the refinement “as in a crucible” (v 25) that results in pure silver or gold leads to the appointment of righteous leaders “as at the first” and “as in the beginning” (v 26). That leadership of Jehovah’s people follows the pattern of Moses and Israel’s judges (Exodus 18:13–26), who established a theocratic government: “A king shall reign in righteousnessand rulers rule with justice” (Isaiah 32:1; cf. Jeremiah 23:1–5).

*After this you shall be called the City of* ***Righteousness****, a faithful city***.** While the once-faithful “city” becomes a “harlot”—a place in which “righteousness” no longer abides (v 21)—Jehovah’s cleansing results in a city of righteousness grounded in principles of righteousness and founded by *righteousness*—Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13). That city, called “Zion” (v 27), Jehovah preserves from a Sodom-and-Gomorrah type of destruction (vv 8–9). Two “cities” thus emerge in the Book of Isaiah: one wicked, the other righteous; one destroyed, the other delivered (Isaiah 25:2; 26:1–6; 33:20).

1:27 *For Zion shall be ransomed by justice, those of her who repent by* ***righteousness****.*

Parallel phrases define Zion as “those of her who repent.” That is, those of Jehovah’s people—his wife within the marriage covenant—who repent. As we observe in a repeat definition, Zion represents that category of his people to whom Jehovah comes to reign: “He will come as Redeemer to Zion, to those of Jacob who repent of transgression” (Isaiah 59:20). While those whom Isaiah identifies as Jacob or Israel represent a category of believers in God, those whom he identifies as Zion or Jerusalem represent a higher spiritual category, namely persons who repent of transgression—not all Israel.

*Justice . . .* ***righteousness****.* The reestablishment of justice and righteousness qualifies Jehovah’s people for deliverance from destruction in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. To that end, Jehovah sends his servant, who personifies *righteousness*, to restore justice in the earth and to serve as an exemplar of righteousness (Isaiah 41:2; 42:1–4; 46:11–13). While the verb “ransomed” (*pdh*) applies largely to the physical deliverance of Jehovah’s people, its synonym “redeemed” (*g’l*) applies to their spiritual salvation (Isaiah 44:22). In effect, he who “redeems” is Jehovah, while he who “ransoms” is his servant.

1:28 *But criminals and sinners shall be altogether shattered when those who forsake Jehovah are annihilated.*

Paralleling (1) “criminals and sinners” who are “shattered” with (2) “those who forsake Jehovah” who are “annihilated” identifies both as Jehovah’s people. These, in turn, parallel “adversaries” and enemies” (v 24)—also his people—in an **a**1–**b**1–**c**–**b**2–**a**2 mini-chiasm: adversaries and enemies are avenged (v 24)—**a**1; Jehovah’s *hand* is restored (v 25)—**b**1; a righteous city is born (v 26)—**c**; Zion is ransomed by *righteousness* (v 27)—**b**2; and criminals and sinners are annihilated (v 28)—**a**2. In short, when Jehovah’s *hand* of *righteousness* intervenes, some are delivered while others perish.

1:29 *And you will be ashamed of the oaks you cherished and blush for the parks you were fond of.*

Isaiah portrays a kind of nature worship centered around “oaks” and “parks.” The parallel verbs “cherish” or “lust after” (*hamadtem*) and “fond of” or “prefer” (*behartem*) allude to the idolatrous nature of the practice (cf. Isaiah 57:5; 65:3). Because the word “oaks” (*’elim*) is a metaphor for elite persons in society, moreover (Isaiah 61:3), additional meanings of these terms suggest that those whom Jehovah’s people fancy include persons of wealth, power, or position who are popular with the masses, persons whom they idolize as “gods” (*’elim*) or toward whom they “express fawning adulation” (*hamadtem*).

1:30 *You shall become like an oak whose leaves wither, and as a garden that has no water.*

In his Day of Judgment, Jehovah humbles the elite of the earth (Isaiah 23:9; 26:5), while those who were humbled he exalts (Isaiah 49:7; 52:1–2). The covenant curses of drought, searing winds, and dying vegetation overtake the wicked (Isaiah 17:13; 27:8; 33:9), causing lakes and rivers to evaporate and dry up (Isaiah 19:5–7; 42:15). While the pronoun “you” addresses Jehovah’s people, desolate conditions also overspread the earth (Isaiah 24:4–12). Indeed, it is his people’s apostasy that precipitates Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. Although the whole earth suffers, they are the catalyst (Isaiah 10:5–7).

1:31 *The mighty shall be as refuse, their works, a spark; both shall burn up alike, and there shall be none to extinguish.*

The “mighty”—the icons of society—become but burnt refuse as Jehovah cleanses the earth of wickedness. Their “works” or institutions are the spark that sets off the conflagration. “Refuse,” a chaos motif, signifies the disintegration of the old society before the new—the community of Zion or Jerusalem—takes its place (Isaiah 2:2–4). Jehovah appoints the king of Assyria/Babylon as his instrument for burning up the wicked of his people and the nations (v 7; Isaiah 9:18–19; 10:5–7; 33:1, 12–14; 47:14). Jehovah ordained this archtyrant’s cleansing of the earth “long ago . . . in days of old” (Isaiah 37:26).

ISAIAH 2

The end-time restoration of Zion/Jerusalem contrasts Jehovah’s judgment of the world at his coming

2:1 *A prophecy concerning Judea and Jerusalem which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw in vision:*

Beyond chapter 1—the preface of his book—Isaiah again represents the chapters that follow as a single “prophecy” or “word” (*dabar*), not simply as revelations strung together that are unrelated to each other. The full meaning of the Hebrew verb *haza*, for which the English language has no equivalent, is to “see in vision.” The passage in verses 2–4 that follows chapter 2’s introductory verse appears also in the Book of Micah (Micah 4:1–3), Isaiah’s disciple and friend. In an end-time context, the names “Judea” and “Jerusalem” function as codenames of Jehovah’s people who live in that day (cf. Isaiah 1:1).

2:2 *In the latter days the mountain of Jehovah’s house shall become established as the head of the mountains; it shall be preeminent among the hills, and all nations will flow to it.*

Isaiah’s locating the fulfillment of his prophecy in “the latter days” or “end-time” (*’aharit hayyamim*) ties his entire “vision” of events (Isaiah 1:1) to that time frame. One way Isaiah does this is to predict the same event several times in different combinations with other events, domino fashion, throughout his book. By that means, he establishes a single scenario of events, all of which connect to the present passage’s context of the “end-time.” Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure—a synchronous literary structure that establishes a single scenario for his entire book—connects to the same end-time time frame.

*The mountain of Jehovah’s house.* While the word “mountain” may refer to a literal mountain, Isaiah additionally establishes a metaphorical meaning for this term by means of synonymous parallels that identify a “mountain” as a “nation” or “kingdom” (Isaiah 13:4; 64:1–2; cf. 52:7; and Babylon as a “destroying mountain,” Jeremiah 51:24–25). The “mountain of Jehovah’s house” thus signifies the nation of Jehovah’s house, in which the term “house” refers to his temple (Isaiah 66:1, 20). From that holy place, Jehovah directs the affairs of his people and of all nations (cf. Isaiah 6:1, 9–13; 56:6–8).

*As the head of the mountains.* When we apply the metaphorical meaning of this passage, we are reminded of Jehovah’s promise to his people Israel that if they would keep the terms of the Sinai Covenant they would become the head of the nations as a covenant blessing (Deuteronomy 28:13). A secondary meaning of the word “head” (*ro’s*)—also “chief” or “top”—on the other hand, alludes to a physical location. (While the Masoretic Text uses the preposition “in” [*be*], the older, Dead Sea scroll of Isaiah reads “as” [*ke*].) In the end-time context of this passage, therefore, both meanings may apply.

*All nations will flow to it.* To this prominent end-time nation, other nations and peoples are drawn. The verb “flow” or “stream” (*nhr*)—as in “nations” or “Gentiles” (*goyim*) “flowing” or “streaming”—is a word link that connects this passage to two others that predict “nations” or “Gentiles” (*goyim*) “flowing” or “streaming” (*nhr*). Both deal with the return of Jehovah’s people from among the nations in a new exodus to Zion (Isaiah 60:3–5; 66:12). Those passages thus suggest that verses 2–3 portray the new exodus to Zion, while that event is here given a time frame—the “end-time” (*’aharit hayyamim*).

2:3 *Many people shall go, saying, Come, let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, that we may follow in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and from Jerusalem the word of Jehovah.*

While verse 2 speaks of “all nations,” verse 3 mentions “many peoples.” Because the return of Jehovah’s people in the new exodus to Zion occurs from among “all nations” (Isaiah 52:10–12), “many peoples” more definitively identifies remnants of all nations (Isaiah 11:11–12, 15–16; 49:22). The verb “go up” or “ascend” (*‘lh*) denotes the ascent of Jehovah’s people to a higher spiritual level (cf. Isaiah 40:31) and compares their return from exile to Israel’s ancient pilgrimage to the temple (Psalm 122:1–4; Isaiah 30:29) where the Levites taught Jehovah’s law and word (2 Chronicles 30:1, 22; 35:2–3).

The restoration of Jehovah’s law and word—the terms of his covenant—forms an integral part of “the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21) that existed in ancient Israel. Together with temple ordinances and blessings pertaining to Jehovah’s covenant, the way is thus prepared for the long-awaited millennium of peace to begin (v 4). While the names Zion and Jerusalem identify a category of Jehovah’s people who repent (Isaiah 1:27; 40:1–2; 55:6–7; 59:20), they additionally allude to two millennial centers from which Jehovah’s law and word go forth to all nations (Isaiah 4:3; 12:4–6; 33:20; 51:4–5).

2:4 *He will judge between the nations and arbitrate for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks: nation will not lift the* ***sword*** *against nation, nor will they learn warfare any more.*

The millennial peace Jehovah establishes follows a war to end all wars (Isaiah 14:4–7). The nations who comprise the earth’s millennial inhabitants engage in agriculture rather than warfare (Isaiah 30:23–24; 61:5; 65:10, 21–22). Never again do they “lift up,” “sustain,” or “elevate” (*yissa’*) tyrants such as the king of Assyria/Babylon—Jehovah’s *sword* of destruction. By Isaiah’s definition, those who “judge” are principally Jehovah and his servant (Isaiah 5:16; 11:3–4; 16:5; 33:22; 51:5), although certain “judges” additionally judge in Jehovah’s theocratic millennial government (Isaiah 1:26; 28:6).

2:5 *O house of Jacob, come, let us follow the* ***light*** *of Jehovah.*

A transitional verse between the previous passage and what follows, it addresses the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people. If they repent and follow Jehovah’s light, they may qualify for the new exodus of his people to Zion and escape the destruction that engulfs the world. Jehovah’s “light” has three applications, which follow each other consecutively. First are Jehovah’s law and precepts: “The law shall go forth from me; my precepts shall be a light to the peoples. Then, suddenly, I will act: My *righteousness*shall be at hand and my *salvation*proceed” (Isaiah 51:4–5; emphasis added).

Jehovah’s servant and forerunner—his *righteousness* (Isaiah 41:2)—follows next: “I have created you and appointed you to be a *covenant*for the people, a *light*to the nations” (Isaiah 42:6; emphasis added; cf. 62:1); “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore those preserved of Israel. I will also appoint you to be a *light*to the nations, that my *salvation*may be to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6; emphasis added). Lastly, in the millennial age, “Jehovah will be an endless *Light* when your days of mourning are fulfilled” (Isaiah 60:20; emphasis added).

2:6 *For you, [O Jehovah,] have forsaken your people, the house of Jacob, because, like the Philistines, they provide themselves with mystics from the East and are content with the infantile heathen.*

Jehovah “forsakes” those of the Jacob/Israel category who, instead of repenting and ascending to the Zion/Jerusalem category, choose alternative oracles to his. Those who were “your people”—expressing the covenant formula (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12)—now follow the customs of the peoples round about against which Moses had warned (Deuteronomy 12:29–31; 31:16–18). Jehovah’s covenants with his people comprehend all the divine knowledge a people can possibly attain. To turn to pagan sources for spiritual enlightenment is to cut oneself off from the light that Jehovah personifies (v 5).

2:7–8 *Their land is full of silver and gold and there is no end to their wealth; their land is full of horses and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is full of idols: they adore the works of their hands, things their own fingers have made.*

The expressions “their land is full of” and “there is no end to” repeat themselves in parallel as if to dramatize a surfeit of worldly possessions. Isaiah sums up the “silver,” “gold,” “wealth,” “horses,” and “chariots” of Jehovah’s people as mere “idols” (*’elilim*). Enamored with “the works of their hands,” his people have become steeped in materialism—a pernicious form of idolatry. It is at the height of this overabundance of “things” or their modern equivalents, moreover, that Jehovah’s Day of Judgment approaches for his people, hastening the time of his coming to reign on the earth (vv 10, 12, 19, 21).

2:9 *Mankind is brought low when men thus debase themselves. Forbear them not!*

Because a society consists of the sum total of those who make it up, people’s cumulative unrepented transgressions eventually lead to their demise. Aggrandizing man and his works debases a society. Those who tolerate or promote wickedness drag others down with them. The things of man’s own making, in which people take pride, thus become their downfall. When self-sufficiency replaces gratitude to God, their Creator, and when the blessings of his covenants their righteous ancestors attained are taken for granted or attributed to themselves, that is the time Jehovah intervenes to humble his people.

2:10 *Go into the rocks; hide in the dust from the awesome presence of Jehovah and from the brightness of his glory.*

While to the righteous Jehovah’s coming is a relief and comfort from the oppression of the wicked, to the wicked it is a terrifying ordeal (v 19; Isaiah 25:9; 35:3–4; 66:13–16). Two conditions thus lead up to Jehovah coming: (1) the wickedness of the wicked reaching a point that justifies their destruction; and (2) the righteousness of the righteous—those who prove faithful to Jehovah under all conditions—reaching a point that requires their deliverance. “Dust,” a chaos motif, describes the final, de-created state of the wicked who both “hide” and end up there (Isaiah 26:5; 29:5; 41:2; 47:1–2).

2:11 *The haughty eyes of men shall be lowered and man’s pride abased; Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day.*

Man’s abasement and Jehovah’s exaltation characterize this and the following verses (vv 12–22). What is high and mighty, Jehovah lays low, and by so doing gains glory (Isaiah 5:16; 13:11, 19; 26:4–6; 47:1–5). What is of him—including his people who keep the terms of his covenant—is exalted together with him (Isaiah 46:13; 52:1–3; 60:1–2; 62:1–3). The words “in that day” denote Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, also called the “Day of Jehovah” and “day of vengeance” (Isaiah 13:6, 9; 30:25; 34:8; 61:2). Then takes place a reversal of circumstances between the righteous and the wicked.

2:12 *Jehovah of Hosts has a day in store for all the proud and arrogant and for all who are exalted, that they may be brought low.*

Just as the world’s righteous inhabitants have looked forward to a time when the earth assumes a paradisiacal glory and they can at last live in peace, so its prerequisite is the removal from the earth of those who are preventing it from coming to pass at the time wickedness reaches its apogee: “The Day of Jehovah will come as a cruel outburst of angerand wrath to make the earth a desolation, that sinners may be annihilated from it. . . . I have decreed calamity for the world, punishment for the wicked; I will put an end to the arrogance of insolent men and humble the pride of tyrants” (Isaiah 13:9, 11).

2:13–16 *[It shall come] against all the lofty cedars of Lebanon that lift themselves up high, and against all the oaks of Bashan, against all high mountains and elevated hills, against every tall tower and reinforced wall, against all vessels at sea, both merchant ships and pleasure craft.*

While the preceding passage depicts the idolatry and pride of Jehovah’s people (vv 6–12), this passage portrays Jehovah’s Day of Judgment coming on a series of geo-physical objects. That disparity is resolved when we discern the objects’ metaphorical meaning: they, too, represent peoples and their transitory human establishment: “Mountains” and “hills” represent large and small nations (cf. vv 2–3); “cedars” and “oaks” designate people (Isaiah 14:8; 61:3; Psalm 92:12); “towers” and “walls” signify human institutions (Isaiah 5:5; 30:13, 25); “ships” denote the shipping industry (Isaiah 23:1, 14).

In a real sense Jehovah’s Day of Judgment is also the day of the king of Assyria/Babylon (Isaiah 7:17; 14:16–17). Like a mythical Mesopotamian god, the archtyrant goes a-conquering and cuts down the cedars of Lebanon: “On account of my vast chariotry I have conquered the highest mountains, the farthest reaches of Lebanon. I have felled its tallest cedars, its choicest cypresses. I have reached its loftiest summit, its finest forest” (Isaiah 37:24; cf. 10:5, 15). The Hebrew prophets thus use the name “Lebanon” to figuratively represent Jehovah’s people Israel (Isaiah 60:13; Jeremiah 22:23; Ezekiel 17:3).

2:17 *The haughtiness of men shall be abased, and man’s pride brought low; Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day.*

The virtual repetition of verse 11 reiterates that it is principally *people* and the things in which they take pride that Jehovah lays low; while, on the other hand, he says, “My angeris not upon those who take pride in me” (Isaiah 13:3). A reversal of parts of verses 11 and 17 shows that these and many concepts Isaiah presents in parallel are synonymous and interchangeable. Consistent with Isaiah’s pattern of humiliation before exaltation and exaltation before humiliation, moreover, even the righteous are first humbled before being exalted, whereas the wicked who exalt themselves are humbled in the end.

2:18 *He will utterly supplant the false gods.*

The “false gods” (*’elilim*) people worship aren’t just their wealth and the works of their hands as listed in verses 7–8. They include also man and his institutions as listed in verses 13–16. Isaiah makes a connection between pride and false gods (vv 17–18) to show that people have become their own gods. Instead of acknowledging their Creator as the source of their prosperity, they assume it is their own doing. By supplanting the false gods, Jehovah cuts through the spiritual blindness his people’s idolatry has caused and reinstates a standard of values based on eternal realities—on things as they really are.

2:19, 21 *Men will go into caves in the rocks and holes in the ground, from the awesome presence of Jehovah and from the brightness of his glory, when he arises and strikes terror on earth. . . . Men will go into crevices in the rocks and fissures in the cliffs, from the awesome presence of Jehovah and from the brightness of his glory, when he arises and strikes terror on earth.*

The virtual repetition in these verses of verse 10, and the addition of Jehovah’s “arising and striking terror on earth,” drives home the dreadful consequences of idol worship as Jehovah’s coming in glory draws near. While his “arising” (*qumo*) spells doom for the wicked, Jehovah makes provision for the righteous (Isaiah 33:10–17; cf. 31:2–5). To those who trust in him, Jehovah’s “awesome presence” and the “brightness of his glory” signify imminent deliverance (Isaiah 4:5–6; 60:1–2, 19–20). But to those who fear, who lack trust in him, hiding in the earth appears their only recourse.

2:20 *In that day men will throw away to the moles and to the bats their idols of silver and gods of gold which they have made for themselves to adore.*

Relying on gods that cannot save, the wicked carry with them their inventions into their subterranean dens only to realize that in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment they are of no use at all: “All who manufacture idols are deranged; the things they cherish profit nothing. Those who promote them are themselves sightless and mindless, to their own dismay. Who would fashion a god or cast an idol that cannot benefit them? Their whole society is confused; their fabricators are mere mortals. Were they all to assemble and take their stand [before me], they would at once cringe in fear” (Isaiah 44:9–11).

2:22 *Desist from [the things of] man, in whose nostrils is but breath! For of what consideration is he?*

Of himself, man is nothing: “What is man that you are mindful of him, a human being that you should pay attention to him?” (Psalm 8:4); “All flesh is grass, and at its best like a blossom of the field. Though the spirit of Jehovah breathe within it, the people themselves are but grass—grass that withers, flowers that fade. Only the word of our God endures forever” (Isaiah 40:6–7). As Jehovah is no respecter of persons, man should not be either (Deuteronomy 1:17; Acts 10:34–35). The things of this world are but a shadow of his. Preoccupation with what is of man robs a person of what is of God.

ISAIAH 3

Wickedness in society leads to anarchy, internal collapse, destitution, and invasion by enemies

3:1 *Even now, the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, deprives Judea and Jerusalem of both staff and crutch—all food supply and water supply,*

Besides reflecting the historical origins of Isaiah’s prophecy, the names “Judea” and “Jerusalem” function as codenames of Jehovah’s end-time people, as noted (cf. Isaiah 1:1; 2:1). The title “Jehovah of Hosts” connotes Jehovah’s power and authority in implementing covenant curses now coming upon his people. The basic necessities they have so long taken for granted peter out as their circumstances change for the worse. The people’s “staff and crutch”—their livelihood, communal structure, and civic leadership (vv 1–3)—crumble away as their society spirals into anarchy and chaos (vv 4–7).

3:2–3 *the valiant man and soldier, the magistrate and prophet, the augur and elder, the officer and dignitary, advisers, skilled craftsmen, and orators.*

Wisdom and knowledge, the backbone of a society, disappear as moral degeneracy supplants moral integrity. Accomplished individuals decrease and principled persons are marginalized as people turn selfish and hedonistic. In the end, law and order break down, commerce declines, and people fall prey to society’s lowest elements. When those who hold communities together, whose duty is to safeguard against corruption, become corrupt themselves, a nation disintegrates from within. A common denominator in such cases is Jehovah’s people forgetting their God (Isaiah 17:10–11).

3:4 *I, [Jehovah,] will make adolescents their rulers; delinquents will lord it over them.*

Although God gave humanity the freedom to choose good or evil in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16–17), once a person chooses he isn’t free to decide the consequences. Likewise, when Jehovah’s people choose evil, evil aftereffects unavoidably follow. So it is with their leadership. As the people do, so do their leaders; and vice versa. Spiritually immature and profligate persons—“adolescents” and “delinquents”—end up governing their affairs, bringing the nation to ruin. Relying on their own wisdom instead of on Jehovah’s, their darkened minds can’t foresee the end result of their nefarious handiwork.

3:5 *People will oppress one another, every man his neighbor. The young will be insolent to the elderly, the vile to the honorable.*

When people no longer have confidence in their leaders—when things go awry because no one seeks guidance from God—they turn on each other out of exasperation (cf. Isaiah 9:21; 19:2; 54:15). As Jehovah withdraws his Spirit, the spirits of demons overcome them. A mood of contention takes over and society fragments into disparate elements. Isaiah’s paralleling “the young” and “the vile” implies that the rising generation has turned base. As the latter assume they are every bit as wise and intelligent as the older generation, the practice of showing deference or respect becomes unknown.

3:6 *Then will a man apprehend a kinsman of his father’s house, [and say,] You have a tunic: be our leader and take charge of this ruination!*

The ultimate phase of a discordant society is a state of “ruination” or “total breakdown” (*maksela*). At that point, as law and order and its enforcement become nonexistent, people band together into clans for self-protection. Where even a semblance of leadership once existed, now there is anarchy. Where structure and civilization were the rule, now there is chaos. Under those circumstances, out of desperation people take hold of a person who formerly held office—a government official, a judge, a police officer, a soldier, a clerk, or even a mailman—and pressure him to deliver them from their plight.

3:7 *But he will raise [his hand] in that day and swear, I am no physician. There is neither food nor clothing in my house; you cannot make me a leader of the people.*

Instead of raising his hand and swearing allegiance to accept his oath of office, the person now raises his hand to disavow it. In fact, by omitting the word “hand”—although the verb “raise” implies it—Isaiah makes the person’s renunciation of his office a parody of his former acceptance of it. That he is no “physician” or “healer” (*hobes*) alludes to the pathological state of people who have no access to remedial resources. Such deprivation—including the lack of food and clothing—suggests that a prolonged covenant curse has taken effect, rendering the collapsed society incapable of recovery.

3:8 *Jerusalem will falter and Judea fall because their* ***tongue*** *and their actions are contrary to Jehovah, an affront to his glory before his very eyes.*

Those who “falter” or “stumble” (*kasla*) and “fall” (*napal*) are the wicked (Isaiah 8:14–15; 10:4; 28:13; 54:15; 59:10), not the righteous. These terms associate the reprobate of Jehovah’s people with Isaiah’s Babylon category, as it is they who stumble and fall, not Zion (Isaiah 13:15, 19; 14:4, 12; 21:9). Isaiah’s paralleling his people’s “tongue” and “actions” shows their interrelationship: when one is evil, so is the other. The word *tongue* additionally serves as a pseudonym of the king of Assyria/Babylon, whom the wicked emulate in speaking evil before God (Isaiah 9:17; 32:6–7; 37:23; 57:4; 59:3).

3:9 *The look on their faces betrays them: they flaunt their sin like Sodom; they cannot hide it. Woe to their souls; they have brought disaster upon themselves!*

The further mention of Sodom (cf. Isaiah 1:9–10) implies that sodomy has become widespread among Jehovah’s people. So much that it is flaunted openly and shows in his people’s faces and demeanor. Jehovah’s response is to pronounce a covenant curse: “Woe to their souls”—that is, to both body and spirit. The word “disaster” or “calamity” (*ra‘a*) alludes to Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, when he commissions the king of Assyria/Babylon to wreak a Sodom-and-Gomorrah type of destruction on the wicked of his people—on all who belong to Isaiah’s Babylon category (Isaiah 10:5–6; 13:1–19; 47:11).

3:10 *Tell the righteous it shall be well with them; they shall eat the fruits of their own labors.*

To indicate that all isn’t gloom and doom—while at the same time inferring how few righteous people remain when compared to the wicked—Isaiah inserts a single, hopeful line. Elsewhere, he predicts that the righteous who keep faith with Jehovah through troubled times (Isaiah 26:1–3; 33:6) are gathered to safety before calamity strikes (Isaiah 13:3; 57:1). The term “well” or “good” (*tob*) connotes covenant blessings, suggesting that those who keep the terms of Jehovah’s covenant, who have laid up “the fruits of their own labors” for the evil day, enjoy sufficiency even as others starve (cf. v 7).

3:11 *But woe to the wicked when calamity [overtakes them]: they shall be paid back for the deeds they have done!*

This verse completes a chiasm, consisting of covenant curse (v 9)—**a**1; covenant blessing (v 10)—**b**; and covenant curse (v 11)—**a**2. The antithetical nature of this mini-structure adds perspective to the relationship between good and evil, contrasting the consequences of righteousness and wickedness. Besides synonymously identifying the subject of verse 9 with “the wicked” of verse 11, it defines “disaster” and “calamity” as “the fruits of their own labors”—this time of the wicked, not of the righteous. Once the righteous are gathered out from among the wicked, the wicked suffer calamity (Isaiah 57:1).

3:12 *As for my people, babes subject them; women wield authority over them. O my people, your leaders mislead you, abolishing your traditional ways.*

By using the covenant formula “my people . . . my people” (cf. Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Isaiah 51:16), Jehovah shows that he seeks to reclaim his people to the very last from their corrupt condition. While the parallel terms “babes” and “women” may be intended literally, they undoubtedly convey a caricature of men who are spiritually immature or less than men in their personal lives. Their oppressive leadership in “misleading” Jehovah’s people—“abolishing” well-proven principles and established guidelines—causes their society to disintegrate, leaving them vulnerable to disaster (Isaiah 9:16–19).

3:13 *Jehovah will take a stand and contend [with them]; he has arisen to judge the nations.*

This verse forms the centerpiece of another chiastic mini-structure: the “leaders” of “my people” (v 12)**—a**1; the “nations” (v 13)**—b**; the “elders” and “rulers” of “his people” (v 14)—**a**2. This tells us that Jehovah’s people, together with their leaders, elders, and rulers whom Jehovah is addressing, are now—in an end-time context—dispersed among all nations. Like a judge who takes the stand, Jehovah is coming to put them on trial, to condemn those who, instead of serving his people by equitably managing their affairs, despicably serve themselves (Isaiah 1:23–24; 10:1–4; 28:14–18; 32:5–7).

3:14 *He will bring to trial the elders of his people and their rulers, [and say to them,] It is you who have devoured the vineyard; you fill your houses by depriving the needy.*

By again using the covenant formula “his people,” Jehovah shows his intent to care for his people in spite of their leaders’ lack of care. The term’s parallel occurrence with the “needy” denotes Jehovah’s regard for the oppressed. They, above all others—not the elite who wield authority over them—are “his people” (cf. v 15). Whereas the wealthy and powerful fall prey to pride, the needy’s lowly circumstances keep them humble. The “vineyard” their leaders devour—by feeding on their taxes and tithes—represents Jehovah’s covenant people, those whom Jehovah chooses as his own (Isaiah 5:7).

3:15 *What do you mean by oppressing my people, humbling the faces of the poor? says Jehovah of Hosts.*

By again paralleling “my people” with the “poor” or “needy” (*‘aniyyim*) (cf. v 14), Jehovah claims them in a special sense as his own. They constitute a major portion of his covenant people whom he delivers from destruction in his Day of Judgment: “You were a refuge for the poor, a shelter for the needy in distress, a covert from the downpour and shade from the heat. When the blasts of tyrants beat down like torrents against a wall, or like scorching heatin the desert, you quelled the onslaughts of the heathen: as burning heatby the shade of a cloud, you subdued the power of tyrants” (Isaiah 25:4–5).

3:16 *Jehovah says, moreover, because the women of Zion are haughty and put on airs, painting their eyes, ever flirting when they walk and clacking with their feet,*

After admonishing the men for their crimes of injustice and idolatry (vv 12–15; Isaiah 1:17, 23; 2:6–22), Jehovah addresses the women. Sacrificing their feminine virtue and natural dignity, they obsess on the physical at the expense of the spiritual. In their attempts to please men, they contrive ways to attract their attention instead of placing their confidence in God. That these are “women of Zion” signifies that they—like the faithful city that becomes a harlot (Isaiah 1:21)—may once have belonged to Isaiah’s Zion/Jerusalem category, but instead of ascending further spiritually they have descended.

3:17 *My Lord will afflict the scalps of the women of Zion with baldness; Jehovah will expose their private parts.*

Inasmuch as the women of Zion seek to woo the men by using a façade of beauty—exposing intimate body parts in order to appeal to men’s baser instincts—in his Day of Judgment Jehovah exposes their intimate parts *ad nauseam*, entirely stripping away their exterior of glamour to reveal their debased interior. Covenant curses, such as baldness and a lack of clothing (vv 7, 24), show that Zion’s profligate women incur Jehovah’s judgments as do the men: “Be alarmed, you complacent women; be perturbed, O careless daughters! Strip yourselves bare; put sackcloth around your waists” (Isaiah 32:11).

3:18–24 *In that day my Lord will strip away their finery—the anklets, head ornaments and crescents, the pendants, chains and scarves, tiaras, bracelets and ribbons, zodiac signs and charm amulets, the rings, the noselets, the elegant dress,* *the shawl, the kerchief and the purse, hosiery, sheer linen, millinery, and cloaks. And instead of perfume there shall be a stench, instead of the girdle, a piece of twine, instead of the coiffure, baldness, instead of the festive dress, a loincloth of burlap; for in place of beauty there shall be ignominy.*

To press home the extremes to which Zion’s women go to beautify themselves, Isaiah presents an entire inventory of garnishments well-to-do women bring to bear—twenty-one, or three times seven. “In that day”—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—the adornments they displayed are conspicuously absent as female excesses turn into utter deprivation and these women are confronted with relying solely on Jehovah. In a great reversal of circumstances, he humbles those who exalt themselves and exalts those who humble themselves (Isaiah 47:1–3; 52:1–3), whose lives the rich might have blessed.

3:25 *Your men shall be felled by the* ***sword****, your might [overthrown] in war.*

Besides anarchy and internal collapse (vv 5–7), enemy invasion afflicts Jehovah’s people. Zion’s women lose their men, their providers and protectors. Didn’t Jehovah warn his people beforehand that if they didn’t repent they would “be eaten by the *sword*” (Isaiah 1:20; emphasis added)—the king of Assyria/Babylon? But they ignored him: “I will destine you to the *sword*; all of you shall succumb to the slaughter. For when I called, you did not respond; when I spoke, you would not give heed. You did what was evil in my eyes; you chose to do what was not my will” (Isaiah 65:12; emphasis added).

3:26 *Her gateways shall lie bereaved and forlorn; she shall sit on the ground destitute.*

Jehovah’s wife who has played the harlot finds herself bereft of her divine provider and protector. Like a widow in mourning, she sits on the ground grieving at the loss of her sons (v 25). Commerce ceases as her ports of call lack traffic: “Havoc remains in the city; the gates lie battered to ruin” (Isaiah 24:12). Self-centered instead of God-centered, she suffers the fate of Isaiah’s Babylon category: “Bereavement and widowhood shall suddenly overtake you, both in one day” (Isaiah 47:9). Left destitute—a covenant curse—Jehovah’s people must learn the hard way from whence their blessings come.

ISAIAH 4

In his Day of Judgment Jehovah preserves alive

those whose names are inscribed in the Book of Life

4:1 *Seven women will take hold of one man in that day, and say, We will eat our own food, wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name—take away our reproach!*

Because so many men are killed in the great war (Isaiah 3:25–26), a disproportionate number of women survives “in that day”—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. Another reason may be that in general women are more righteous than men, perhaps even by a ratio of seven to one. In contrast to the flirting women we saw previously (Isaiah 3:16–24), these women are under no covenant curse, having prepared a sufficiency of food and clothing in anticipation of the evil time (cf. Isaiah 3:10). They consider it a “reproach” not to raise their own families, and they appeal to the men who remain to marry them.

4:2 *In that day the* ***plant*** *of Jehovah shall be beautiful and glorious, and the earth’s fruit the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel.*

Those whom Jehovah exalts—who live into his millennial age of peace—compare to a “plant” (*semah*)—a messianic term denoting Jehovah’s servant—and to the earth’s “fruit” (*peri*), signifying the “firstfruits” of Jehovah’s people (cf. Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 23:10). It is in large part for the sake of Jehovah’s servant and his fellowservants—the earth’s “firstfruits”—that Jehovah spares the “survivors of Israel” (Isaiah 55:3–5; 63:17; 65:8–9). As saviors of his people under the terms of the Davidic Covenant in the pattern of Israel’s kings, they seek and obtain Jehovah’s protection in his Day of Judgment.

4:3 *Then shall they who are left in Zion and they who remain in Jerusalem be called holy—all who were inscribed to be among the living at Jerusalem.*

While those who are “left” and “remain” in Zion and Jerusalem consist of ascending categories of Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 30:19; 37:22; 40:9; 51:16–17; 52:1–2), the names Zion and Jerusalem additionally designate places of safety in his Day of Judgment (vv 5–6; Isaiah 1:8; 27:13; 31:5; 35:10; 37:32). Called “holy” or “sanctified” (*qados*), those who are left are “inscribed among the living”—that is, their names are written in the Book of Life as Jehovah’s elect. It is these holy men, not the unrighteous and idolaters, whom the surviving women seek to marry (v 1; cf. Isaiah 6:13; 13:3; 34:16; 35:8).

4:4 *[This shall be] when my Lord has washed away the excrement of the women of Zion and cleansed Jerusalem of its bloodshed, in the spirit of justice, by a burning* ***wind****.*

Jehovah’s washing away the excesses of Zion’s women as so much “excrement” (Isaiah 3:16–24), and his cleansing of the men’s crimes of “bloodshed” and injustices (Isaiah 1:15–17), manifests his divine “justice” (*mispat*). Unlike his people who repent—whom he judges under the law of mercy (Isaiah 30:18–20; 55:7; 60:10)—those who don’t repent he judges under the law of justice (Isaiah 3:11; 28:17–20; 59:15–19). The burning *wind* forms a part of Isaiah’s storm imagery that denotes Jehovah’s Day of Judgment and the king of Assyria/Babylon’s destructive role in it (v 6; Isaiah 27:8; 40:23–24; 57:13).

4:5 *Over the whole site of Mount Zion, and over its solemn assembly, Jehovah will form a cloud by day and a mist glowing with* ***fire*** *by night: above all that is glorious shall be a canopy.*

Those who sanctify themselves, who participate in Zion’s “solemn assembly,” enjoy Jehovah’s divine protection in the place Zion, also called “Mount Zion” (Isaiah 8:13–14, 18; 24:23). Jehovah’s cloud of glory—signifying his presence (Exodus 24:15–18; 33:8–11)—makes glorious his holy people and the place where they abide. By its means, Jehovah protected ancient Israel when he appeared among his people during their wilderness travels (Exodus 13:20–22; 14:19–20). Jehovah’s “canopy”—as in a traditional marriage canopy—denotes his people’s renewal of their covenant with him at that time.

4:6 *It shall be a shelter and shade from the* ***heat*** *of the day, a secret refuge from the* ***downpour*** *and from rain.*

Jehovah’s cloud of glory (v 5) acts as a shelter, shade, and secret refuge from the *heat* and *downpour*—that is, from the elements and from the king of Assyria/Babylon in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 25:4–5). As Pharaoh’s armies were unable to penetrate the cloud when they pursued after Jehovah’s people (Exodus 14:19–20), so in that day will no enemies molest those who participate in Zion’s solemn assemblies. According to the terms of his covenant, Jehovah is obligated to protect his people when they keep his law and word. His divine intervention attests to their utmost compliance.

ISAIAH 5

Jehovah’s vineyard yields bad fruit, leading to Assyria’s invasion and covenant curses on offenders

5:1 *Let me sing for my Beloved a love song about his vineyard: My Beloved had a vineyard on the fertile brow of a hill.*

Much of Isaiah’s prophetic imagery comes from the agricultural environment of ancient Israel. At certain seasons of the year, such as harvest time, minstrels traveled the rounds of farms to help lighten labor. As servants trod grapes to extract their juice, musicians played instruments and sang ballads in which the workers participated, turning drudgery into a dance. In that way, the latest love song was popularized throughout the land and was soon on everyone’s lips. “My Beloved”—the subject of Isaiah’s song—represents Israel’s God in his quintessential aspect (Isaiah 43:4; 49:15–16; 54:7–8; 63:7–9).

5:2 *He cultivated it, clearing it of stones, and planted it with choice vines. He built a watchtower in its midst and hewed for it a winepress as well. Then he expected it to yield grapes, but it produced wild grapes.*

Jehovah plants the vineyard that represents his people (v 7) in a choice land—“on the fertile brow of a hill” (v 1). With the aid of his servants the prophets, he cultivates it and clears it of “stones,” removing its former wicked occupants and preparing the ground for planting the new. He builds a watchtower so that his prophets—their watchmen—may keep vigil. He hews a winepress, an ecclesiastical or communal framework in which his people can bring forth the fruits of their labors. But instead of producing good fruit, they produce “wild fruit” (*be’usim*)—fruit that rots before it ripens (cf. Isaiah 3:14–15).

5:3–4 *Now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and you men of Judea, please judge between me and my vineyard! What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it produce wild grapes?*

When Jehovah exposes his people’s actions for what they are, not for what they assume they are, his people are compelled to judge themselves. Although what Jehovah does for them lacks nothing, they fall far short of his rightful expectations. They may indeed be bringing forth fruit, even much fruit, but none of it any good: “Their watchmen are altogether blind and unaware” (Isaiah 56:10); “Their works are worthless” and “amount to nothing” (Isaiah 41:24, 29). Sinking into apostasy, they “have not wrought salvation in the earth” in order that its inhabitants “might not abort” (Isaiah 26:18).

5:5 *Let me now inform you what I will do to my vineyard: I will have its hedge removed and let it be burned; I will have its wall broken through and let it be trampled.*

Because Jehovah has done for his vineyard all he can possibly do, his people are left without excuse. His response to their permitting the vineyard to become derelict is to remove its “hedge”—his divine protection—and “let it be burned”; to “have its wall broken through”—its defenses violated—and “let it be trampled.” Word links identify the king of Assyria/Babylon, Jehovah’s *fire* and *sword*, as the one who burns and tramples Jehovah’s reprobate people: “I will commission him against a godless nation . . . to tread[them] underfoot like mud in the streets” (Isaiah 10:6; cf. 26:10–11; 34:5–8).

5:6 *I will make it a desolation: it shall neither be pruned nor hoed, but briars and thorns shall overgrow it. Moreover, I will forbid the rainclouds to rain on it.*

The idea of the land and institutions of Jehovah’s people’s becoming a desolation as a result of their apostasy permeates Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 6:11–12; 33:8–9; 64:10–11). Additional covenant curses include a lack of rain and the proliferation of “briars and thorns”—the wicked’s overrunning the land (Isaiah 7:23–25; 9:18–19; 32:12–13). Once the vineyard is no longer “pruned or hoed”—as Jehovah withdraws his spiritual ministry—his people are left to themselves. Although these evils happen to his people as a whole, not all come under this condemnation (v 17; Isaiah 3:10; 5:16–17; 8:13–14).

5:7 *The vineyard of Jehovah of Hosts is the house of Israel and the people of Judah his cherished grove. He expected justice, but there was injustice; [he expected] righteousness, but there was an outcry.*

In an end-time context, “Israel” and “Judah” serve as codenames of those who are Jehovah’s covenant people in that day. Their depiction as “his cherished grove” infers that in the beginning Jehovah doted over them. As the vines reach fruit-bearing age, however, they deeply disappoint him. The words “He expected justice, but there was injustice; [he expected] righteousness, but there was an outcry” (*wayeqaw lemispat wehinneh mispah lisdaqa wehinneh se‘aqa*) use assonance and alliteration to dramatize this disenchantment. The parallel terms “injustice” and “outcry” express grave ethical violations.

5:8 *Woe to those who join house to house and link field to field until no place is left, and you are restricted to dwell in the centers of the land!*

A series of seven “woes” or covenant curses follows Isaiah’s vineyard allegory, detailing a cross-section of hedonistic behaviors that underscores the unjust and unprincipled standards by which Jehovah’s end-time people live. A spirit of speculation overcomes them—as manifested by oppressive zoning laws, for-profit property developments, corporate mergers, and other questionable entrepreneurial ventures—forcing the poor of his people out of rural, self-sustaining lifestyles into the cities or centers of the land. Only his people who are thus disenfranchised Jehovah acknowledges as “you.”

5:9–10 *Jehovah of Hosts [spoke this] in my hearing: Surely many buildings shall lie desolate, large and fine [houses] unoccupied. A ten-acre vineyard shall yield but one bath, a homer of seed but an ephah.*

Whether through bankruptcy and foreclosure, anarchy and civil war, or enemy invasion, Jehovah’s people’s homes and workplaces lie “desolate,” “deserted,” or “laid waste” (*lesamma*) as a consequence of their predatory enterprises. Where agriculture still exists, the land fails to yield its increase for lack of rain (v 6). A ten-acre vineyard yields just one “bath” of wine, or five gallons. A “homer” of seed, or six bushels, yields only an “ephah”—less than a bushel. Just as Jehovah’s people have produced inferior fruit spiritually (vv 2–4), so their land does physically (Isaiah 7:23–25; 17:4–6; 33:9).

5:11–12 *Woe to those who go after liquor as soon as they arise in the morning, who linger at night parties, inflamed by wine! There are harps and lyres, drums, flutes, and wine at their banquets, but they regard not what Jehovah does, nor perceive his* ***hands*** *at work.*

Drunkards, alcoholics, and persons addicted to substances; partygoers, socialites, and persons feted at banquets; the self-indulgent, pleasure-seekers, and those given to debauch—all who disregard what Jehovah is doing—bring upon themselves his covenant curse. Even as they pursue their godless lifestyles, Jehovah’s *hands* are at work preparing their destinies. At the very time his right *hand*—his servant—delivers Jehovah’s final warning (Isaiah 41:25–27; 48:12–16; 50:2–11), his left *hand*—the king of Assyria/Babylon—is devising ways to destroy them (vv 25–30; Isaiah 10:5–7; 54:16).

5:13 *Therefore my people are taken captive for want of knowledge; their best men die of famine, their masses perish with thirst.*

Without divine revelation—without direct knowledge communicated from Israel’s God—his people remain vulnerable to the tide of world events that determines their fate. Instead, they could have determined their own fate (Isaiah 8:13–15; 28:7–13). The word “knowledge” (*da‘at*)—a covenant term—further signifies that his people no longer know their God. They may know *about* him; but they don’t know him in the way that he manifests himself personally to his elect (Isaiah 19:21; 52:6). If they did, they would not now perish nor be taken captive by their enemies (Isaiah 10:3–4; 14:16–17).

5:14 *Sheol becomes ravenous, opening its* ***mouth*** *insatiably; into it descend their elite with the masses, their boisterous ones and revelers.*

Isaiah likens Jehovah’s people going to their death to Sheol (*se’ol*)—the “underworld,” “Hell,” or “spirit prison”—devouring them like a gluttonous woman. The word *mouth* additionally serves as a pseudonym of the archtyrant. Daniel and John depict him as “a *mouth* speaking great things” (Daniel 7:8, 20; Revelation 13:5; emphasis added). Isaiah portrays him as a beast “bellowing” and “snorting” against Jehovah (Isaiah 37:29): “Whom have you mocked and ridiculed? Against whom have you raised your voice, lifting your eyes to high heaven? Against the Holy One of Israel!” (Isaiah 37:23).

5:15–16 *Mankind is brought low when men debase themselves, causing the eyes of the high-minded to be downcast. But Jehovah of Hosts will be exalted by a just judgment, the holy God show himself holy by [his]* ***righteousness****.*

Jehovah’s answer to his people’s debasing themselves (Isaiah 2:9) is to restore justice and righteousness among them (Isaiah 1:26–27). For that purpose, he sends *righteousness* the person—his end-time servant (Isaiah 41:2, 25–27; 42:1–4; 46:11–13). Only when his alienated people reject his servant (Isaiah 49:7; 50:4–11) does Jehovah’s holiness compel him to execute a “just judgment” and punish them. At the same time, those whose thoughts are pure, whose eyes are downcast because of the depravity of the wicked, he liberates from the vile who oppress them. In so doing Jehovah is “exalted.”

5:17 *Then shall [his] sheep feed in their pasture, and proselytes eat in the ruins of the affluent.*

Amidst the gloomy prospect that faces the reprobates of Jehovah’s people, Isaiah reminds Jehovah’s “sheep” and “proselytes”—his covenant people—that when his Day of Judgment is over they will inherit the wealthy estates of the wicked who perish (cf. v 9): “Jehovah will have compassion on Jacob and once again choose Israel; he will settle them in their own land, and proselytes will adhere to them and join the house of Jacob” (Isaiah 14:1; cf. 58:12; 61:4–5). The imagery of sheep feeding in their pasture additionally portrays an agrarian millennial economy (Isaiah 30:23–24; 32:15–20; 65:10).

5:18–19 *Woe to those drawn to sin by vain attachments, hitched to transgression like a trailer, who think, Let him quickly speed up his work so we may see it! Let the plan of the Holy One of Israel soon come to pass, and we will know!*

Jehovah pronounces a third “woe” or covenant curse on his people who are obsessed with worldly pastimes that they cannot or will not give up. They compulsively haul their baggage—their beloved idols—with them wherever they go. Robbing them of Jehovah’s Spirit, their preoccupations and distractions from reality add to their sins and transgressions, diverting them away from Jehovah’s “work” and “plan” instead of participating in them (cf. v 12). They mock his people who anticipate the impending fulfillment of Jehovah’s purposes by glibly asking for signs to satisfy their curiosity (Isaiah 66:5).

5:20 *Woe to those who suppose what is evil to be good and what is good, evil! They put* ***darkness*** *for* ***light*** *and* ***light*** *for* ***darkness****; they make bitterness sweet and the sweet bitter.*

Besides their literal meaning, good and evil denote covenant keeping and covenant breaking, covenant blessing and covenant curse. In one manifestation of covenant breaking, Jehovah’s people choose what is bitter—the darkness of spiritual blindness (Isaiah 59:9–10)—over what is sweet; that is, Jehovah’s light or the terms of his covenant (Isaiah 51:4). They further reject Jehovah’s servant, whom Jehovah appoints as “a *light* to the nations” (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; emphasis added) and fall prey to the king of Assyria/Babylon (Isaiah 10:3–6), who typifies the *darkness* of Jehovah’s Day of Judgment.

5:21 *Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own view!*

Conceited persons—those who assume they are “wise” (*hakamim*) and “clever” or “knowledgeable” (*nebonim*)—Jehovah condemns. Instead of their human knowledge teaching them that next to him they know nothing, they use it to gain acclaim or convert others to their opinion (Isaiah 32:6; 41:22–24; 50:11). In response, Jehovah “turns wise men about and makes nonsense of their knowledge” (Isaiah 44:25). As his Day of Judgment approaches, he performs “wonder upon wonder, rendering void the knowledge of their sages and the intelligence of their wise men insignificant” (Isaiah 29:14).

5:22 *Woe to those who are valiant at drinking wine and champions at mixing liquor!*

Those of Jehovah’s people who ought to be valiant and champions in matters of the spirit and intellect or in the defense of their land instead suffer from addictions. The terms “wine” and “liquor” form word link to the opulent of Jehovah’s people being overcome with “wine” (Isaiah 28:1) and to their prophets laboring under a “wine” of delusion: “These too have indulged in wine and are giddy with strong drink: priests and prophets have gone astray through liquor. They are intoxicated with wine and stagger because of strong drink; they err as seers, they blunder in their decisions” (Isaiah 28:7).

5:23 *[Woe to those] who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent!*

Crimes of injustice, typified by the administration of wrongful judgments, weigh heavily with Jehovah against his people. Giving or taking “bribes” or “gifts” (*sohad*) as personal favors for unjust decisions constitutes a betrayal of oneself and of the innocent victims it creates: “When integrity is lacking, they who shun evil become a prey. Jehovah saw that there was no justice, and it displeased him. When he saw it, he wondered why there was no man, no one who would intervene” (Isaiah 59:15–15); “He expected justice, but there was injustice; [he expected]righteousness, but there was an outcry” (v 7).

5:24 *As a blazing* ***fire*** *consumes stubble, and as dry weeds wane before the* ***flame****, so shall their roots decay away and their blossoms fly up like dust. For they have despised the law of Jehovah of Hosts and reviled the words of the Holy One of Israel.*

Covenant curses in chapter 5 culminate with the reprobates of Jehovah’s people perishing like “stubble” and “weeds” in his Day of Judgment. Together with the parallel terms “decay” and “dust,” these chaos motifs contrast the wicked of Jehovah’s people with the righteous who represent the grain and portray the wicked’s final state. As “roots” and “blossoms” signify ancestors and descendants, evildoers are cut off from all familial ties. Because they despised and reviled Jehovah’s law and words that are the terms of his covenant, the king of Assyria/Babylon—his *fire* and *flame*—will burn them up.

5:25 *Therefore the* ***anger*** *of Jehovah is kindled against his people: he draws back his* ***hand*** *against them and strikes them; the mountains quake, and their corpses lie like litter about the streets. Yet for all this his* ***anger*** *is not abated; his* ***hand*** *is upraised still.*

Although Isaiah uses the imagery of an angry parental God, the truth is that Jehovah is a loving and long-suffering God toward his people (Isaiah 43:4; 54:7–10; 63:7–9). But because he is also a just and a righteous God, he must enforce upon them the consequences of their actions. In this instance, the king of Assyria/Babylon, who personifies Jehovah’s *anger*, acts as his *hand* of punishment (Isaiah 10:5). Aside from literal earthquakes, it is *he* who is stirred to anger, who causes the “mountains” (nations) to “quake” and who reduces the wicked to “litter” or chaos (cf. v 30; Isaiah 14:16–17; 37:26–28).

5:26 *He raises an* ***ensign*** *to distant nations and summons them from beyond the horizon. Forthwith they come, swiftly and speedily.*

The raising of the “ensign,” which appears in parallel with the “hand” that is upraised or extended (v 25), designates the king of Assyria/Babylon (Isaiah 13:2) who rallies an alliance of hostile nations from beyond the horizon to attack Jehovah’s people and the nations of the world: “Hark! A tumult on the mountains, as of a vast multitude. Hark! An uproar among kingdoms, as of nations assembling: Jehovah of Hosts is marshaling an army for war. They come from a distant land beyond the horizon—Jehovah and the instruments of his wrath—to cause destruction throughout the earth” (Isaiah 13:4–5).

5:27 *Not one of them grows weary, nor does any stumble; they do not drowse or fall asleep. Their waist-belts come not loose nor their sandal thongs undone.*

Unlike Jehovah’s reprobate people, the alien alliance is highly disciplined and launches its attack at a time when his people are undisciplined and caught off guard. Contrasting ideas in the Book of Isaiah show that it isn’t the invading army but Jehovah’s people who have grown weary (Isaiah 43:22; 50:4); who stumble (Isaiah 8:14–15; 59:10); who are drowsing and falling asleep (Isaiah 29:10; 56:10); and who dress slovenly and have loose morals (Isaiah 3:6–7, 9, 16–17; 57:12). In their corrupt spiritual and political state, his people have become easy prey to foreign invaders (Isaiah 10:3–4; 22:12–14).

5:28–29 *Their arrows are sharp; all their bows are strung. The tread of their warhorses resembles flint; their chariot wheels revolve like a whirlwind. They have the roar of a* ***lion****; they are aroused like young lions: growling, they seize the prey, and escape, and none comes to the rescue.*

Invasion by enemies (v 26–28), being devoured by wild beasts (v 29), and the darkening of the land (v 30) represent ancient Near Eastern and biblical covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28:23–26). Parallel depictions of the alien army’s formidable weaponry and their arousal like lions seizing the prey nuances the maledictory connotation of the passage (vv 25–30; Isaiah 15:9). That Jehovah’s alienated people suffer essentially the same fate as Babylon (Isaiah 13:1–19) again signifies that their wickedness identifies them with Isaiah’s Babylon category that falls prey to the *lion*—king of Assyria/Babylon.

5:30 *He shall be stirred up against them in that day, even as the* ***Sea*** *is stirred up. And should one look to the land, there [too] shall be a distressing* ***gloom****, for the daylight shall be darkened by an overhanging mist.*

He who is “stirred up” or “roars” (*yinhom*) “in that day”—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—is the king of Assyria/Babylon (Isaiah 37:28–29). Isaiah likens him to the *Sea* in commotion or a *River* in flood, sweeping all before it (Isaiah 8:7–8; 51:15). Paralleling the Ugaritic myth of Baal and Anath, the names *Sea* and *River* designate a god who causes chaos in the world, whom Baal, the hero god, must conquer to restore peace. Even when the wicked seek refuge in the countryside to escape the archtyrant’s devastation in the cities (Isaiah 6:11–12), there too the *gloom* he typifies confronts them (Isaiah 8:22).

ISAIAH 6

Jehovah appears to Isaiah in the temple and sends

him as a prophet to warn of imminent judgments

6:1 *In the year of King Uzziah’s death, I saw my Lord seated on a throne, highly exalted, the skirt of his robe filling the sanctuary.*

Although Isaiah locates chapter 6 within the first parallel unit of biographical material that comprises Part II of his Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 6–8; 36–40), chronologically it is first in the Book of Isaiah, describing Isaiah’s calling as a prophet of God “in the year of King Uzziah’s death” in 742 B.C. As Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem contained no throne, Jehovah’s throne was not in the temple itself, though it may have appeared to Isaiah above the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. In his inaugural vision as a prophet, Isaiah sees Jehovah “highly exalted”—a divine attribute (Isaiah 57:15).

6:2 *Seraphs stood by him overhead, each having six wings—with two they could veil their presence, with two conceal their location, and with two fly about.*

The spiritual level of “seraphs” (*serapim*) in the Book of Isaiah appears directly below that of Jehovah, as it does here. The fact that Isaiah sees Jehovah, on the other hand, identifies him with Isaiah’s son/servant category, immediately below that of seraphs. Together, these three spiritual levels constitute the highest in the Book of Isaiah’s hierarchy of seven. Later, after ministering as a prophet for more than forty years, Isaiah himself assumes the role of a seraph. The seraphs’ “wings” or “veils” (*kenapayim*) perhaps consist of energy fields that enable them to move or conceal themselves at will.

6:3 *They called out to one another, and said, Most holy is Jehovah of Hosts; the consummation of all the earth is his glory!*

The Hebrew superlative “most holy” or “thrice holy” (*qados, qados, qados*) reflects the highest of Isaiah’s spiritual levels—Jehovah’s. Emulating Jehovah are those in Isaiah’s seraph and son/servant categories, who are also called “holy” (*qados*) (Isaiah 13:3; 52:10). The seraphs’ anthem—“The consummation of all the earth is his glory!” (*melo’ kol-ha’ares kebodo*)—identifies the purpose of the earth’s creation as Jehovah’s “glory.” In other words, Jehovah is glorified by bringing the earth to its “consummation,” its purpose being fulfilled when it begets “holy ones” like him (Isaiah 4:3; 62:12).

6:4 *The threshold shook to its foundation at the sound of those who called and a mist filled the temple.*

The threshold of the Holy of Holies’ shaking to its foundation at the seraphs’ cosmic hymn reflects the power of persons in the seraph category over the elements. Moses demonstrated that power when he smote the land of Egypt with plagues, divided the Red Sea, and brought forth water out of the earth (Exodus 9:22–25; 10:12–15; 14:16–28; 17:6). Similarly, Elijah multiplied the widow’s flour and oil, raised her child from the dead, and withheld the rain or returned it again (1 Kings 17:1–24; 18:42–45). The “mist” or cloud of glory that fills the temple attests to Jehovah’s manifesting his presence.

6:5 *Then I thought, Woe is me: I have been struck dumb, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips: I have seen the King, Jehovah of Hosts, with my own eyes!*

Confronted with the reality of Jehovah’s presence, Isaiah feels a sense of unworthiness. As often occurs when a person sees God with his physical eyes, he is physically impaired—in this case “struck dumb” (*nidmeti*). Believing he is smitten with a covenant curse, Isaiah is afraid not only for himself but for his people—as we observe in the common imagery of “unclean lips” or “unclean speech” (*teme’ sepatayim*)—leaving him with a desire to help his people. The title of “King” reflects Jehovah’s kingship over all the earth and its inhabitants (Isaiah 24:21–23; 33:17, 22; 37:16; 43:15; 44:6; 52:7).

6:6–7 *Then one of the seraphs flew to me carrying an ember which he had taken with tongs from the altar. Touching it to my mouth, he said, See, this has touched your lips: your sins are taken away, your transgressions atoned for.*

There follows a classic opening-of-the mouth rite, such as also appears in Egyptian temple ordinances. The seraph’s taking an ember from the Altar of Atonement and declaring Isaiah clean implies that atonement has been made, or will be made, for his sins and transgressions. The burning ember signifies that Isaiah—by virtue of that atonement, and through his own repentance process—has attained a purified and sanctified state and is now deemed holy. The opening-of-the-mouth rite implies the proper functioning of all the senses, physical and spiritual, as becomes evident when Isaiah is healed.

6:8 *Then I heard the voice of my Lord saying, Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? And I replied, Here am I; send me!*

Isaiah’s “seeing” Jehovah (v 5) and “hearing” his voice follows the pattern of a prophet seeing and hearing what God reveals to him in a vision (Isaiah 21:6–10). As Isaiah is healed of covenant curses through the atonement symbolized by the Altar of Atonement, moreover, so Jehovah himself is the author of that atonement: “Yet he bore our sufferings, endured our griefs, though we thought him stricken, smitten of God, and humbled. But he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; the price of our peace he incurred, and with his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4–5).

*Here am I; send me!* Now that Isaiah can again speak—and desiring to do for his people as has been done for him—he gladly accepts Jehovah’s prophetic commission to minister to his people. The verb “send” (*salah*) has the same Hebrew root as the noun “apostle” (*saliah*), signifying one who is “sent” to bear witness of what he has seen and heard. Although Jehovah personally commissions Isaiah, others have a vested interest in Isaiah’s fulfilling his prophetic ministry: the words “Who will go for *us*?” signifies that heaven will minister to Isaiah even as Isaiah ministers to Jehovah’s people.

6:9–10 *And he said, Go, and say to these people, Go on hearing, but not understanding; Go on seeing, but not perceiving. Make the heart of these people grow fat; dull their ears and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand in their heart, and repent, and be healed.*

The verb “go” denotes Jehovah’s actual commission of Isaiah as his prophet. The terms “these people” or “this people” (*ha‘am hazzeh*), however, reflect the people’s repudiation of their covenant relationship with Jehovah that is commonly expressed by the possessive “*my* people” (*‘ammi*). When they grow alienated, they see things their way, not his (Isaiah 55:8–9). Hence the words, “Go on hearing, but not understanding; Go on seeing, but not perceiving.” As Jehovah forewarns, a wayward people’s typical response when a prophet appeals to them to repent is to harden their hearts and dull their senses.

Although Isaiah’s role as a hardener of his people’s hearts seals upon them Jehovah’s condemnation, there exists a redeeming side to his prophetic ministry. “Seeing” with the eyes, “hearing” with the ears, “understanding” in the heart, and “repenting” at the same time constitutes Jehovah’s formula for “healing” or salvation. A remnant of Jehovah’s people—a “holy offspring” comprised of those who repent (v 13)—thus survives destruction in his Day of Judgment. Typifying them are Isaiah’s disciples, for whom Jehovah provides sanctuary at the time others suffer covenant curses (Isaiah 8:13–17).

6:11 *And I replied, For how long, my Lord? And he said, Until the cities lie desolate and without inhabitant, the houses without a man, and the land ravaged to ruin.*

Taken aback by the pessimistic prospect of his prophetic commission, Isaiah reveals his human side by asking how long his ministry will last. Jehovah’s response illustrates the utter desolation his unrepentant people will experience when a full measure of covenant curses overtakes them. Considering this scenario from an end-time perspective, we observe that Isaiah’s prophetic ministry serves as a type of the ministry of Jehovah’s servant. When given a similar prophetic commission to warn Jehovah’s people, the servant meets with a similar response (Isaiah 49:1–7; 50:1–11; 52:13–15; 61:1–7).

6:12–13 *For Jehovah will drive men away, and great shall be the exodus from the centers of the land. And while yet a tenth [of the people] remain in it, or return, they shall be burned. But like the terebinth or the oak when it is felled, whose stump remains alive, so shall the holy offspring be what is left standing.*

Although people may flee the cities en mass in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, they find scant refuge in the countryside (Isaiah 5:30; 8:22). Using the imagery of tithing—in which the Israelites pay a tenth of the land’s yield to the Levites and the Levites pay a tenth of that tenth to the priests (Numbers 18:24–28)—Isaiah contrasts the many who perish with the few who survive. The “holy offspring” left standing—a tenth of the tenth—compares to a terebinth or oak that can renew itself when cut down. The one who fells the tree/s is the king of Assyria/Babylon, Jehovah’s *axe* and *saw* (Isaiah 10:15; 37:24).

ISAIAH 7

King Ahaz’ transgression of the terms of his covenant leads to a hostile world power gaining supremacy

7:1 *When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it but could not overpower it.*

Two generations of kings from the time Isaiah receives his prophetic commission, an expansionist Assyria threatens to invade the kingdom of Aram (Syria), the ten-tribed Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah and to annex them into its empire. When King Ahaz of Judah refuses to join Aram and Israel in an alliance to resist Assyria, they invade the Southern Kingdom to overthrow Ahaz and put a puppet ruler on his throne who will join their coalition. Ahaz, moreover, becomes an important type in the Book of Isaiah of an end-time ruler who proves disloyal to Israel’s God.

7:2 *And when the house of David was informed that Aram was leading Ephraim on, the king’s mind and the minds of his people were shaken, as trees in a forest are shaken by a gale.*

As descendants of King David, Ahaz and his cabinet of princes are known as the “house of David.” The ten-tribed Northern Kingdom of Israel, often led by a ruler of the tribe of Ephraim, is known simply as “Ephraim” (Isaiah 11:13; Hosea 5:3–14). Besides implying a time of judgment, storm imagery identifies the king’s fear with that of his people, denoting a single reprobate category. Jehovah’s people and the nations who yield to fear aren’t the righteous but the wicked (Isaiah 8:12–15; 12:2; 33:14; 41:5). As here, Isaiah uses the metaphor of “trees” to represent people (Isaiah 14:8; 37:24; 61:3).

7:3 *Then Jehovah said to Isaiah, Go out and meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-Jashub, at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Reservoir, on the road to the Laundry Plaza.*

During Ahaz’ reign, when Isaiah couldn’t prophesy directly, he did so indirectly by giving his sons portending names such as Shear-Jashub (*se’ar yasub*), “A Remnant Shall Repent” or “A Remnant Shall Return.” Symbolic of the Davidic dynasty, the perpetual Gihon Spring—the “Upper Reservoir”—was the place where Davidic kings were anointed (1 Kings 1:33–39). Jehovah’s message to Ahaz was thus to remind him of the Davidic Covenant. If he kept its terms, Jehovah would protect him and his people. If he didn’t, only a repentant remnant of his people would survive a future calamity.

7:4 *Say to him, See to it that you remain calm and unafraid. Be not intimidated by these two smoking tail ends of kindling, by the burning anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah,*

The exhortation to remain “calm and unafraid” implies trust in Jehovah and in the protection clause of the Davidic Covenant. Divine protection never fails so long as the terms of the covenant are met when the people keep the king’s law and the king keeps God’s law. The rulers of Aram and the Northern Kingdom are but “smoking tail ends of kindling”—their fires are almost out. Jehovah will make sure they won’t accomplish their goal. Instead of Pekah king of Israel appearing by his full name, he appears only under his surname—“the son of Remaliah”—an intentional derogatory deficiency.

7:5–6 *even though Aram has conceived an evil plot against you, as has Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, who say, Let us invade Judah and stir up trouble there. We will take it for ourselves by force and set a ruler over it—the son of Tabeal.*

The two northern rulers’ scheme to invade the Kingdom of Judah and replace Ahaz with one of their own—the son of Tabeal—is an “evil” plot (*ra‘a*) because it contravenes Jehovah’s unconditional promise to King David of an everlasting dynasty of kings to rule on David’s throne (Psalm 89:3–4; Jeremiah 33:17–21). The name Tabeal—a compound of the words “not” (*’al*) and “good” (*tab/tob*)—implies that the proposed puppet ruler is not a descendant of David. Because the word “good” signifies covenant keeping and covenant blessing, a name that means “No Good” implies the opposite.

7:7–9 *Thus says my Lord Jehovah: It shall not occur or transpire. For as surely as Damascus is the capital of Aram and Rezin the head of Damascus, within sixty-five years shall Ephraim be shattered as a nation. But as surely as Samaria is the capital of Ephraim and the son of Remaliah the head of Samaria, you will not believe it, because you are not loyal.*

A scribal error very likely accounts for the figure “sixty-five years.” Historically, Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled within just a few years. Assyria conquered Aram and Israel during Ahaz’ reign, so perhaps “six or five” is closer to Isaiah’s prediction. The words “capital” and “head” (*ro’s*) are identical in Hebrew. A play on words—“You will not believe it, because you are not loyal” (*’im lo’ ta’aminu ki lo’ te’amenu*)—reflects Ahaz’ disloyalty to Jehovah. Jehovah’s unconditional covenant with David nonetheless ensures that the northern kings’ infringing on Ahaz’ rights will suffer covenant curses.

7:10–12 *Again Jehovah addressed Ahaz, and said, Ask a sign for yourself from Jehovah your God, whether in the depths below or in the heights above. But Ahaz said, I will not. I will not put Jehovah to the test.*

Isaiah’s word to Ahaz—“from Jehovah your God”—is twofold: (1) it is a symbolic reminder of Jehovah’s covenant with King David, Ahaz’ ancestor, including the idea that the scheme to overthrow Ahaz will bring covenant curses on those who attempt it (vv 1–9); and (2) it constitutes a “sign” or “confirmation” (*’ot*) that Jehovah will fulfill his promise (vv 10–17). Ahaz, however, responds with pious hypocrisy, quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 about not putting Jehovah to the test. In his disloyalty and inability to believe Jehovah’s word, Ahaz refuses confirmation and thus puts himself above Isaiah.

7:13 *Then [Isaiah] said, Take heed, O house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Must you also try the patience of my God?*

By addressing Ahaz as “the house of David,” Isaiah reminds Ahaz verbally, not just symbolically, of his duty toward his people under the terms of the Davidic Covenant. At the same time, he rebukes Ahaz for his people’s suffering under his oppressive rule. In addition, Isaiah alters the covenant formula “your God” (v 11) to “my God,” inferring that by rejecting Jehovah’s word Ahaz has rejected his God, breaking the terms of the Davidic Covenant. Meanwhile, the presence of Isaiah’s son Shear-Jashub (“A Remnant Shall Return”) symbolically predicts the consequences of Ahaz’ recalcitrance.

7:14 *Therefore will my Lord of himself give you a sign: the young woman with child shall give birth to a son and name him Immanuel.*

Ahaz’ disloyalty provides the context of Jehovah’s response to Ahaz. Although Matthew applies Isaiah’s prophecy of the son Immanuel to Jesus (Matthew 1:22–23), that interpretation doesn’t qualify as a personal “sign” or “confirmation” (*’ot*) to Ahaz. As the name Immanuel (*‘immanu ’el*)—“God Is with Us”—appears three times (Isaiah 7:14, 8:8, 10), its full meaning is determined within its fuller context. That includes the king of Assyria/Babylon’s invasion of the land of Immanuel in the days of Immanuel (vv 16–20), as happened a generation later in the days of King Hezekiah, Ahaz’ own son:

“My Lord will cause to come up over them the great and mighty waters of the River—the king of Assyria in all his glory. He will rise up over all his channels and overflow all his banks. He will sweep into Judea [like]a flood and, passing through, reach the very neck; his outspread wings will span the breadth of your land, O Immanuel. . . . You may take courage in one another, but shall be in fear; you may arm yourselves, but shall be terrorized. Though you hold consultations, they shall come to nought; though you make proposals, they shall not prove firm: God is with us!” (Isaiah 8:7–10).

*Immanuel.* Within the larger context of Isaiah’s prophecy, moreover, the son Immanuel is one of three who represent three spiritual categories of people in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment: (1) Immanuel—“God Is with Us”—an elect category whom Jehovah is *with*, for whose sake he delivers his people; (2) Shear-Jashub—“A Remnant Shall Repent/Return”—those who “repent” (*swb*) of transgression and “return” (*swb*) in an end-time exodus to Zion; and (3) Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz—“Hasten the Plunder, Hurry the Spoil”—those whom the archtyrant destroys on account of their wickedness (Isaiah 8:1–4).

*The young woman with child.* As the term Isaiah uses—“young woman” (*‘alma*)—isn’t the Hebrew word for “virgin” (*betula*), and as the tense of the Hebrew verb “to be with child” or “to be pregnant” (*hara*) is present, not future, a “sign” or “confirmation” (*’ot*) to Ahaz such as this would be most meaningful if the woman was known to him under the immediate circumstances—if she were present, for example, at the Laundry Plaza (v 3). The historical context of Isaiah’s Immanuel prophecy, in other words, and its particular choice of terms, helps determine the full meaning of this verse.

*Shall give birth to a son.* While Jehovah’s sign to Ahaz doesn’t exclude Matthew’s interpretation—that in this instance Isaiah was prophesying of Jesus—that interpretation doesn’t accord with the prophecy’s primary intent in Isaiah’s prophecy as a whole. Indeed, it is in the nature of Hebrew prophecy to contain several levels of meaning. On the other hand, Hezekiah—Ahaz’ son—in all respects qualifies as the prophesied Immanuel, whose people Israel’s God is *with* when he delivers them from the Assyrian army that takes up a position at the very same Laundry Plaza (v 3; Isaiah 36:1–2; 37:33–36).

7:15–16 *Cream and honey will he eat by the time he has learned to reject what is evil and choose what is good. But before the child learns to reject the evil and choose the good, the land whose two rulers you loathe shall lie forsaken.*

Continuing Jehovah’s personal sign to Ahaz, Isaiah predicts a time of distress in the son’s early years as he learns to “reject the evil and choose the good”—that is, to keep the terms of Jehovah’s covenant and repudiate all else. The son’s dietary fare of “cream and honey” implies a sufficiency—a covenant blessing—but not an abundance. At times of national crisis, Jehovah’s people resorted to the nomadic lifestyle of their ancestors, saying, “To your tents, O Israel!” (1 Kings 12:16; 2 Kings 13:5). Meanwhile, the lands of those threatening Ahaz would “lie forsaken,” subjected to covenant curses.

7:17 *Jehovah will bring upon you and your people and your father’s house a day unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—[the day of] the king of Assyria.*

A time of national tragedy is to ensue—as when “Ephraim broke away from Judah” and Jehovah’s people became a house divided against itself (1 Kings 11:29–32; 12:19–21). Jehovah appoints the king of Assyria as his instrument to afflict his people who reject him (Isaiah 10:5–6). As his people’s king and protector—as their proxy representative—Ahaz, by his disloyalty to Israel’s God, directly impacts what happens to his people. It is just a matter of time, too, before Isaiah’s pronouncement is fulfilled and a righteous “son” or vassal (*ben*)—Immanuel—replaces the unrighteous Ahaz (vv 14–16).

7:18–20 *In that day Jehovah will signal for the flies from the far rivers of Egypt and for the bees in the land of Assyria. And they will come and settle with one accord in the river beds of the prairie and in rocky ravines, and by all ditches and water holes. In that day my Lord will use a* ***razor*** *hired at the* ***River****—the king of Assyria—to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to cut off even your beard.*

Foreign armies, represented by swarms of flies and bees, invade the land in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, implementing his covenant curse. The king of Assyria—Jehovah’s *razor*—takes captive the wicked of Jehovah’s people, shaving their hair in the manner of slaves. Historically referring to the Euphrates, the “River” (*nahar*) here characterizes the archtyrant as Lord Nahar—Lord *River*—a god of chaos in the Baal myth. The words “head” and “beard” allude to the people’s leaders (Isaiah 3:14; 9:15) whom the Assyrians exile first, as they did anciently, leaving the people leaderless.

7:21–22 *In that day a man will keep alive a young cow and a pair of sheep. And because of their plentiful milk, men will eat the cream. All who remain in the land will feed on cream and honey.*

Isaiah links the land’s survivors inseparably to the son Immanuel through the common imagery of “cream and honey” (vv 14–15). Both comprise affiliates of Zion whom Jehovah saves alive through his direct intervention. Not under a covenant curse as are the wicked of his people, this group prepared for hard times by keeping alive a “young cow” or “heifer” (*‘eglat baqar*) and a pair of “sheep” or “goats” (*se’on*). The word “man” that characterizes those who are left in the land indicates the individuality of those who survive—only a man here and a man there—not Jehovah’s people as a whole.

7:23–25 *In that day every plot of ground with a thousand vines worth a thousand pieces of currency shall be briars and thorns. Men will go there with bows and arrows, for the whole land shall revert to wilderness. And on all hillsides cultivated by the hoe you will no longer go for fear of the briars and thorns, but they shall serve as a cattle range, a terrain for sheep to tread down.*

Lands currently cultivated and providing high yields—a covenant blessing—revert to wilderness in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 1:7; 24:1; 33:9). Briars and thorns—a covenant curse—additionally represent the wicked who overrun the land (Isaiah 5:5–6; 9:18; 33:12), who attempt to subsist armed with weapons. People who seek domesticated animals, which then roam free, must likewise go armed, not only against bands of marauders and invading enemies but also wild beasts. The entire scene is one of covenant curse, which only a remnant of Jehovah’s people survives by wading through it.

ISAIAH 8

A new Flood in the form of Assyria’s world conquest awaits all but those who find refuge in Jehovah

8:1–2 *Jehovah said to me, Take a large scroll and write on it in common script: Hasten the plunder, hurry the spoil. And I called in reliable witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, to witness for me.*

Such a brief prophetic message on a “large scroll” is but the heading to a more expansive prophecy, especially as it is written “in common script” and thus intended for the common man. Word links to subsequent predictions confirm that it is the king of Assyria who “plunders” and “spoils” Jehovah’s people (cf. v 4): “I will commission him against a godless nation . . . to pillage for plunder, to spoliate for spoil” (Isaiah 10:6; cf. 33:1–4; 42:21–22; 49:24–26). Truthful witnesses will testify that Isaiah predicted these things before they happened, so that people can’t claim he said it after the fact.

8:3–4 *And when I had been with the prophetess, she conceived and gave birth to a son. And Jehovah said to me, Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. For before the child knows how to say, Father, or Mother, the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be brought before the king of Assyria.*

Isaiah’s newborn son receives the name of the same portending words Isaiah writes on the scroll (v 1): Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz—“Hasten the Plunder, Hurry the Spoil.” The king of Assyria fulfills Isaiah’s prediction to Ahaz concerning Ephraim’s shattering as a nation (Isaiah 7:8–9) even during this child’s infancy. In his writings, Isaiah depicts Assyria as a hostile superpower from the North that sets a precedent for conquering the world by military force (Isaiah 10:13–14; 20:3–6; 37:18, 24–25). In that sense, ancient Assyria serves as a type of end-time superpower that repeats this scenario.

8:5–7 *Jehovah addressed me again, and said, Because these people have rejected the waters of Shiloah, which flow gently, and rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore will my Lord cause to come up over them the great and mighty waters of the* ***River****—the king of Assyria in all his glory. He will rise up over all his channels and overflow all his banks.*

As Jehovah had warned Ahaz, so he warns Ahaz’ people. By calling them “these people” or “this people” (*ha‘am hazzeh*), Jehovah disavows their covenantal status (cf. Isaiah 6:9–10). As Ahaz proved disloyal to Jehovah, so Ahaz’ people prove disloyal to Ahaz. They favor the coalition of northern kings over the “waters of Shiloah which flow gently”—that is, over the Davidic dynasty Jehovah has appointed to rule over them. For conspiring to replace Ahaz, they will suffer worse than his rule—the rampaging *River* flooding beyond its borders—the king of Assyria at the height of his military power.

8:8 *He will sweep into Judea [like] a flood and, passing through, reach the very neck; his outspread wings will span the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.*

Isaiah portrays Assyria’s invasion of the land of Immanuel as a new Flood. His prophecy is fulfilled in the days of King Hezekiah—the prophesied Immanuel—when an army of a hundred-and-eighty-five thousand Assyrians besieges Jerusalem after Assyria has “destroyed all peoples and their lands” (Isaiah 36:1–2; 37:18). The “neck” leaves the head—Zion/Jerusalem—where a remnant of Jehovah’s people awaits deliverance (Isaiah 37:22–36; cf. 1:7–9). In an end-time context, Hezekiah serves as a type of Jehovah’s servant, while the archtyrant’s “outspread wings” may allude to modern warfare.

8:9–10 *Though nations form pacts, they shall be routed. Give heed, all you distant lands! You may take courage in one another, but shall be in fear; you may arm yourselves, but shall be terrorized. Though you hold consultations, they shall come to nought; though you make proposals, they shall not prove firm: God is with us!*

Forming alliances against Assyria’s aggression—as do Aram and Ephraim (Isaiah 7:1–6)—is to rely on an arm of flesh (Isaiah 20:5–6; 30:1–5), not on Jehovah or on the protection clause of his covenant. Keeping his law and word—the terms of his covenant—provides the only assurance against calamity in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. All who fail to do so succumb to fear when the consequences of their evil actions stare them in the face. As God is *with* Immanuel and his righteous people to deliver them, so he is *with* the Assyrians to destroy the wicked of his people (v 4; Isaiah 10:3–6; cf. 36:10).

8:11–13 *Jehovah spoke to me, clasping my hand, and admonished me not to follow the ways of these people. For he said, Do not call a conspiracy all that these people call a conspiracy; be not afraid or awed by the thing they fear. But sanctify Jehovah of Hosts, making him your fear, him your awe.*

It is apparent from chapters 6–8 how alone Isaiah must have felt in his prophetic ministry in the face of his people’s estrangement from their God. Jehovah’s “clasping my hand” suggests both comfort and empowerment and denotes royal investiture in ancient Near Eastern emperor–vassal covenants. While many of “these people”—Jehovah’s alienated people—live in fear of conspiracies, the existence of conspiracies shouldn’t frighten them but cause them to turn back to their God. A righteous or reverential fear and awe of Jehovah serve as a safeguard against transgressing against his law and word.

8:14–15 *And [to you] he will be a sanctuary, but to the two houses of Israel a stumbling block or obstructing* ***rock****, and a snare, catching unawares the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Many will stumble into them, and when they fall shall be broken, and when they become ensnared shall be taken captive.*

A word chain in verses 12–14—“conspiracy/conspiracy,” “fear and awe/fear and awe,” “sanctify/sanctuary”—shows that trusting in Jehovah and exercising faith in him in times of wickedness aids the repentant soul to enter into his presence as Isaiah had entered into his presence (cf. Isaiah 6:1). Sanctifying Jehovah—honoring him by living a pure and consecrated life—leads to his sanctuary where he receives those who love him (vv 16–17; Isaiah 57:15). That sanctuary serves Jehovah’s holy ones as a place of protection in his Day of Judgment (Isaiah 4:3–6) while the unholy suffer perils and perish.

Instead of being a *Rock* of salvation to his unrepentant people (Isaiah 17:10; 26:4; 30:29; 44:8), Jehovah is a “stumbling block” and “obstructing rock,” letting them stumble over his word and fall prey to their enemies—to be broken, ensnared, and taken captive by the king of Assyria/Babylon in his Day of Judgment—the same as with the wicked of the world (Isaiah 10:3–6; 14:17; 24:17–18; 28:13). Because Jehovah is the same yesterday, today, and forever, what he does in ancient times—both for good and for evil—establishes a pattern for what he does in the end-time, when history repeats itself.

8:16–17 *[For Jehovah has said,] Bind up the testimony; seal the law among my disciples. I will wait for Jehovah, who hides his face from the house of Jacob, and expect him.*

As biblical history shows, even when his people in general apostatize and Jehovah hides his face or presence from them, certain “disciples” remain loyal, as did the disciples or “sons of the prophets” anciently (2 Kings 2:3–7; 4:38; 6:1). At such times, Jehovah withdraws the testimony of his truth and the law of his covenant from among his people and preserves them among those willing to live by them. The singular pronouns “*I* will wait” and “*I* will expect” highlight the idea that only loyal individuals endure through his people’s dark phase and thus experience his deliverance (Isaiah 25:9; 30:18; 33:2).

8:18 *As for me and the children Jehovah has given me, we shall be signs and portents in Israel from Jehovah of Hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion.*

In spite of an apparent prohibition that prevents Isaiah from prophesying directly among Jehovah’s people, he does so indirectly through the lives that he, his children, and protégé prince lead that testify of God’s Spirit with them. The very names they bear portend what Jehovah will do: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz—“Hasten the Plunder, Hurry the Spoil”; Shear-Jashub—“A Remnant Shall Repent/Return”; Immanuel—“God Is with Us”; and Isaiah—“Jehovah Will Save.” Jehovah may hide his face from his apostate people (v 17) but not from those among whom he dwells (Psalm 9:9–11; Isaiah 57:15).

8:19–21 *When men tell you to inquire of mediums and spiritists who huddle together and mutter, [say to them,] Should not a people inquire of their God? Should one inquire of the dead on behalf of the living for doctrine and for a testimony? Surely, while they utter such words devoid of light, they roam about embittered by hunger; and when they are hungry, they become enraged and, gazing upward, curse their king and their God.*

So low do Jehovah’s people sink when they deny him and he withdraws his Spirit that some resort to the occult for enlightenment—for “doctrine” and for a “testimony.” The spirits of the dead who respond to such unlawful communications are undoubtedly wicked spirits, who, rather than illuminating people, lead them further into realms of darkness. The people’s lack of food—a covenant curse—instead of causing them to turn back to Jehovah and to his covenant, impels them to curse him and their king and to enter the realm of the dead themselves (cf. Leviticus 24:13–16; Ecclesiastes 10:20).

8:22 *They will look to the land, but there shall be a depressing scene of anguish and gloom; and thus are they banished into outer darkness.*

To those on whose behalf Jehovah doesn’t intervene to deliver them in his Day of Judgment, the land that formerly supplied their needs now presents a bleak prospect (cf. Isaiah 5:30). To be banished into that darkness or unknown is condemnation indeed: “Redress remains far from us and righteousnessis unable to reach us. We look for light, but there prevails darkness; for a glimmer [of hope], but we walk amid gloom. We grope along the borders like the blind; we flounder like those without eyes. We stumble at noon as in the dark of night; in the prime of life we resemble the dead” (Isaiah 59:9–10).

ISAIAH 9

A fiery holocaust engulfs the land as leaders and

people apostatize and Jehovah empowers his servant

9:1 *But it shall not be gloomy to those who have been in anguish for her. In the past he humbled the lands of Zebulon and Naphtali, but at the last he will exalt the Sea**Route by the Jordan in Galilee of the nations.*

Even as Jehovah’s people increase in wickedness and suffer covenant curses, those who repent who rise above the tide of evil increase in righteousness and experience covenant curse reversals. As Jehovah’s people in the past were ignominiously driven from their lands because of transgression, so their righteous descendants return in a glorious exodus from among the nations (Isaiah 11:16). Those “who have been in anguish for her”—for the Woman Zion, Jehovah’s elect—are those who “mourn in Zion” (Isaiah 61:3), who “call upon Jehovah” day and night for his people’s restoration (Isaiah 62:6–7).

9:2 *The people walking in* ***darkness*** *have seen a bright* ***light****; on the inhabitants of the land of the shadow of* ***Death*** *has the* ***light*** *dawned.*

A reversal of covenant curses for Jehovah’s people extends to their release from bondage to the powers of darkness: (1) spiritually—when they convert to the truth and renew their covenant with Jehovah; and (2) temporally—when he delivers them from the king of Assyria/Babylon who epitomizes *darkness* and *Death*. Jehovah’s “light” signifies both the terms of his covenant—which go forth as a “light” to the nations (Isaiah 51:4)—and his end-time servant, whom Jehovah appoints as a *light* to the nations (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6) to prepare them for Jehovah’s coming to establish his kingdom on the earth.

9:3 *You have enlarged the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice at your presence as men rejoice at harvest time, or as men are joyous when they divide spoil.*

After their wandering in the dark and release from bondage (v 2), Jehovah’s elect return home and receive lands of inheritance. “Spoil” and “harvest time” respectively signify victory over enemies and a reinherited land. The nation of Jehovah’s people is “enlarged” when those who are abroad are welcomed by and unite with those at home (Isaiah 26:1–2; 49:12–22). Joy and rejoicing accompany their return and deliverance (Isaiah 24:14; 30:29; 51:3, 11; 55:12). Instead of cowering at Jehovah’s presence like the wicked (Isaiah 2:10, 19, 21; 64:1–3), his elect celebrate (Isaiah 12:1–6; 25:9; 35:3–6; 52:8).

9:4–5 *For you have smashed the* ***yoke*** *that burdened them, the* ***staff*** *of submission, the* ***rod*** *of those who subjected them, as in the day of Midian[’s defeat]. And all boots used in battle and tunics rolled in blood have become fuel for bonfires.*

A victory over the *yoke*, *staff*, and *rod* that subjected Jehovah’s people is a victory over the king of Assyria/Babylon, who personifies these symbols of oppressive rule (Isaiah 10:5, 15, 24, 27; 14:4–6). The “Day of Midian”—a type of end-time Armageddon—recalls Gideon’s victory over an army of a hundred-and-twenty thousand Midianites, Amalekites, and Ishmaelites (Judges 7–8). In that instance, Gideon serves as a type of Jehovah’s end-time servant, who leads the victory of Jehovah’s righteous people over an Assyrian alliance of nations (Isaiah 10:24–27; 41:2–3, 11–16, 25; 46:11; 49:24–26).

9:6 *For to us a child is born, a son appointed, who will shoulder the burden of government. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, One Mighty in Valor, a Father for Ever, a Prince of Peace—*

Word links identify the “son” whom Jehovah “appoints” as the “son” Immanuel and as the “servant” whom Jehovah “appoints” as a *light* to the nations (Isaiah 7:14; 42:6; 49:6). “Son” (*ben*) and “servant” (*‘ebed*) comprise legal terms in ancient Near Eastern and biblical covenants that define a vassal’s relationship to an emperor—as when Ahaz chooses the king of Assyria as his emperor instead of Jehovah, saying, “I am your servant and your son” (2 Kings 16:7). Part III of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 9–12; 41–46) synonymously parallels these “son” and “servant” aspects of Jehovah’s vassal.

While the “servant” phase of a vassal’s relationship to an emperor is conditional—depending on whether the vassal proves loyal to the emperor under all conditions—the “son” phase of their relationship is unconditional. In other words, after a vassal proves exceedingly loyal to the emperor by keeping the terms of his covenant, the emperor legally adopts him as his “son.” The covenant between them then becomes unconditional or “everlasting.” While chapters 41–46 reflect the conditional phase of Jehovah’s vassal, chapters 9–12 reflect its unconditional phase—his formal investiture as king.

*He will be called.* Historically, verses 6–7 serve as a Coronation Hymn for King Hezekiah, the prophesied Immanuel. The four Hebrew couplets that comprise the king’s titulary—“Wonderful Counselor, One Mighty in Valor, a Father for Ever, a Prince of Peace” (*pele’ yo‘es ’el gibbor ’abi-‘ad sar-salom*)—reflect four phases in the life of Abraham as recorded in successive narratives of the Genesis account: (1) when he counsels with Lot; (2) when he delivers Lot; (3) when he begets Isaac, his heir; and (4) when he intercedes with Jehovah on behalf of the righteous in Sodom (Genesis 13–18).

Although Handel’s *Messiah* cites this prophecy of Isaiah in reference to Jesus—perhaps based in part on its mistranslation in the King James Version of the Bible—no scriptural writers do so because that would entirely remove it from its literary-scriptural context in the Book of Isaiah. As the exemplar of his people, Jehovah nevertheless embodies the divine attributes of counsel (Isaiah 25:1; 28:29); valor (1:24; 49:26); fatherhood (45:10; 63:16); and kingship (Isaiah 33:22; 43:15). Jehovah’s servant and his associates, too, therefore, evidence these same attributes (Isaiah 11:2; 13:3; 22:21; 46:11; 49:23).

9:7 *that sovereignty may be extended and peace have no end; that, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, [his rule] may be established and upheld by justice and* ***righteousness*** *from this time forth and forever. The* ***zeal*** *of Jehovah of Hosts will accomplish it.*

The term “peace”—a synonym of “salvation” (Isaiah 52:7; 53:5)—alludes to the peace that ensues after a war to end all wars (vv 3–5; Isaiah 14:4–7; 33:19–20; 54:9–17). Its parallelism with “sovereignty” recalls the title “Prince of Peace” (*sar-salom*) (v 6). The attributes of “justice and righteousness,” which characterize the son’s reign, typify the ministry of Jehovah’s servant, the terms *righteousness* and *zeal* themselves designating the servant (Isaiah 26:11; 41:2; 42:1–4). Like King Hezekiah, he intercedes with Jehovah in seeking his people’s peace or temporal salvation (Isaiah 37:15–20, 32–35).

The servant’s Davidic identity has similar parallels and word links: “When oppressors are no more and violence has ceased, when tyrants are destroyed from the earth, then, in loving kindness, shall a throne be set up in the abode of David, and in faithfulnessa judge sit on it who will maintain justice and expedite righteousness” (Isaiah 16:4–5); “Give ear and come unto me; pay heed, that your souls may live! And I will make with you an everlasting covenant: [my]loving fidelity toward David. See, I have appointed him as a witness to the nations, a prince and lawgiver of the peoples” (Isaiah 55:3–4).

Other Hebrew prophets, too, predict the millennial rule of a descendant of David named David who is not identical with Jehovah, Israel’s divine King (Isaiah 33:17, 22; 43:15), but who prepares the way for Jehovah’s coming (cf. Isaiah 40:3–5; 52:7): “They shall serve Jehovah their God and David their king, whom I will raise up to them” (Jeremiah 30:9); “I Jehovah will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them” (Ezekiel 34:24); “David my servant shall be king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd. . . . and my servant David shall be their prince forever” (Ezekiel 37:24–25).

9:8–10 *This message my Lord sent to Jacob, and it shall befall Israel. And the entire people—Ephraim and those who dwell in Samaria—shall know of it, who say in pride and arrogance of heart, The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stone; the sycamores have been felled, but we will replace them with cedars!*

Addressing the Jacob/Israel category of his people—in this case, “Ephraim and those who dwell in Samaria”—Jehovah censures them for their conceitedness, for not acknowledging from whence their blessings come. National disasters, symbolized by the covenant curses of fallen buildings and destroyed trees, are taken in stride as if they are merely temporary setbacks, not signs of a protracted trend brought on by Jehovah’s judgments. Steeped in “pride and arrogance of heart,” Jehovah’s people assume that by their own wisdom and strength they will regroup and rebuild even bigger and better.

9:11–12 *But Jehovah will strengthen Rezin’s enemies against them when he stirs up their adversaries: Aramaeans from the east and Philistines from the west will devour Israel with open* ***mouth****. Yet for all this his* ***anger*** *is not abated; his* ***hand*** *is upraised still.*

Seeing the weakness of Jehovah’s people as their condition deteriorates, nations such as “Rezin’s enemies” (Isaiah 7:1–8) or the Assyrian alliance (Isaiah 13:4–5) use this chance to invade. The terms “mouth,” “anger,” and “hand” designate the king of Assyria/Babylon. As Jehovah’s *hand* of punishment, he personifies Jehovah’s *anger* and opens his *mouth* against Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 5:25; 10:5; 37:29; Daniel 7:8, 20; Revelation 13:5). The repeated phrase, “Yet for all this his *anger*is not abated; his *hand*is upraised still” (vv 12, 17, 21), denotes a long drawn-out period of Jehovah’s judgment.

9:13 *But the people do not turn back to him who smites them, nor will they inquire of Jehovah of Hosts.*

Covenant curses such as natural disasters, internal collapse, and enemy invasion aren’t just a consequence of transgression but acts of God. Designed to turn his people’s hearts back to him—to motivate them to repent—they demonstrate that Jehovah is in charge and that their only recourse in alleviating them is to align themselves with him and keep the terms of his covenant. The king of Assyria/Babylon may be “him who smites them” physically, but it is Jehovah who is doing the smiting and of whom they may “inquire” and get answers instead of from the dead (cf. Isaiah 8:19–20; 55:6; 65:1).

9:14–16 *Therefore Jehovah will cut off from Israel head and tail, palm top and reed, in a single day; the elders or notables are the head, the prophets who teach falsehoods, the tail. The leaders of these people have misled them, and those who are led are confused.*

As in ancient times, the political and ecclesiastical leaders of Jehovah’s end-time people resemble one another. Because of their wickedness, Jehovah “cuts off” both from his presence in “a single day”—his Day of Judgment (Isaiah 48:18–19). Because a people’s leaders reflect what the people are, the leaders’ misleading and confusing “these people”—Jehovah’s alienated people—constitutes an integral part of their punishment (cf. Isaiah 3:12). Most reprehensible in the prophets who represent Jehovah to his people are the “falsehoods” or “lies” (*seqer*) they teach (Isaiah 28:7; 29:10; 32:6–7).

9:17 *My Lord is not pleased with their young men, nor does he pity their fatherless and widows, because all alike are godless malefactors, and every mouth utters profanities. Yet for all this his* ***anger*** *is not abated; his* ***hand*** *is upraised still.*

A society’s most likeable category—its young men or young people; and those most deserving of compassion—its fatherless and widows—no longer warrant admiration or sympathy. All have degenerated into “godless malefactors” whose language is permeated with “profanities.” The repeated phrase, “Yet for all this his *anger*is not abated; his *hand*is upraised still” (vv 12, 17, 21; emphasis added), signifies that even after successive waves of punishment, Jehovah’s people remain unrepentant, perpetuating their alienated condition and covenant curse and their subjection to the Assyrian archtyrant.

9:18–19 *Wickedness shall be set ablaze like a* ***fire****, and briars and thorns shall it consume; it shall ignite the jungle forests, and they shall billow upward in mushrooming clouds of smoke. At the* ***wrath*** *of Jehovah of Hosts the earth is scorched, and people are but fuel for the* ***fire****. Men will have no compassion for one another.*

Resembling the briars and thorns that overrun Jehovah’s cherished vineyard (Isaiah 5:6; 27:4), the wicked themselves personify wickedness. A similar synonymous parallelism identifies “forests” as “cities”: “By a hailshall *forests* be felled, *cities* utterly leveled” (Isaiah 32:19; emphasis added). Although the fire that burns them up is the king of Assyria/Babylon—Jehovah’s *anger* and *wrath*, his *fire* and *sword* (cf. Isaiah 30:27; 66:15–16)—the people’s wickedness is the cause. Under the archtyrant’s scorched-earth policy, moreover, compassion for others gives way to every man fending for himself.

9:20–21 *They will snatch on the right, yet remain hungry; they will devour on the left, but not be satisfied: men will eat the flesh of their own offspring. Manasseh [will turn] against Ephraim and Ephraim against Manasseh, and both will combine against Judah. Yet for all this his* ***anger*** *is not abated; his* ***hand*** *is upraised still.*

When the wicked grow ravenous to the point of starvation, they not only “curse their God and their king” (Isaiah 8:21), they also resort to cannibalism—to eating their own offspring. As society breaks down, enmity between neighbors (Isaiah 3:5) spreads to contention between the different races and tribal groups of Jehovah’s people—Ephraim, Manasseh, and Judah. The Jews—humanity’s perennial scapegoats—inevitably suffer yet another outbreak of anti-Semitism as the wicked of the world attempt to pass off their own guilt onto others. Even so, Jehovah’s punishments continue unabated.

ISAIAH 10

Jehovah appoints the king of Assyria to despoil

and destroy the wicked of his people and the nations

10:1–2 *Woe to those who enact unjust laws, who draft oppressive legislation—denying justice to the needy, depriving the poor of my people of their right, making plunder of widows, mere spoil of the fatherless!*

Oppressive laws, symptomatic of a corrupt society, by their very nature lead to more corruption. People’s thinking turns devious as they seek ways of getting around the law. In an unequal community, the poor and needy, the widows and fatherless, are the first to suffer (Isaiah 1:23). Jehovah’s calling those who are unable on their own to lift themselves out of poverty “my people” implies that he acknowledges them, not their oppressors, as his covenant people. The terms “plunder” and “spoil,” which characterize the Assyrian archtyrant (v 6), show that he is the evil archetype that oppressors follow.

10:3 *What will you do in the day of reckoning when the holocaust overtakes you from afar? To whom will you flee for help? Where will you leave your wealth?*

The “day of reckoning”—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—hastens on even as the lawmakers of Jehovah’s people act as if no such thing will occur (vv 1–2). Their ill-gotten wealth won’t save them in that day, nor will others extend help (Isaiah 47:11). Jehovah will remove his righteous people from their midst, leaving them to suffer his judgments alone (Isaiah 57:1). The “holocaust” (*so’a*) from afar refers to Jehovah’s destruction by *fire* and by the *sword* that arrives from afar, from beyond the horizon, to desolate the earth (v 23; Isaiah 5:23–26; 13:4–19; 28:22; 30:27–28; 33:11–12; 34:2–8; 66:15–16).

10:4 *There shall nothing remain but to kneel among the captives or fall among the slain. Yet for all this his* ***anger*** *is not abated; his* ***hand*** *is upraised still.*

Those who perish or go captive in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment consist of Jehovah’s people who reject his word (Isaiah 28:9–14; 65:12) and Babylon’s idolaters (Isaiah 37:18–19; 46:1–2). As both suffer the same fate, Jehovah’s wicked people belong to Isaiah’s Babylon category: “Scoff not, lest your bonds grow severe, for I have heard utter destruction decreed by my Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, upon the whole earth” (Isaiah 28:22); “The Day of Jehovah shall come as a cruel outburst of *anger*and *wrath* to make the earth a desolation, that sinners may be annihilated from it” (Isaiah 13:9; emphasis added).

10:5–6 *Hail the Assyrian, the* ***rod*** *of my* ***anger****! He is a* ***staff****—my* ***wrath*** *in their* ***hand****. I will commission him against a godless nation, appoint him over the people [deserving] of my* ***vengeance****, to pillage for plunder, to spoliate for spoil, to tread underfoot like mud in the streets.*

Jehovah’s *rod*, *staff*, *anger*, *wrath*, *vengeance*, and (left) *hand* of punishment all designate the king of Assyria/Babylon (v 15; Isaiah 5:25; 13:9). Jehovah sends him against the “godless nation” of his own people in their unrepentant state and against the nations of the world (Isaiah 13:4–6; 37:24–27). The archtyrant fulfills Isaiah’s prediction inherent in the name of his son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (“Hasten the Plunder, Hurry the Spoil”) (Isaiah 8:1–4; cf. 10:13–14; 13:16; 28:2–4; 42:22, 24). He reduces the wicked to “mud,” a chaos motif, signifying their return to an elemental state—to nonentities.

10:7 *Nevertheless, it shall not seem so to him; this shall not be what he has in mind. His purpose shall be to annihilate and to exterminate nations not a few.*

Although the king of Assyria/Babylon serves Jehovah’s purpose of inflicting covenant curses on his alienated people (Isaiah 37:26), he seeks only his self-aggrandizement. He is that wicked one who destroys the wicked of the world in the course of conquering all lands (Isaiah 37:18). To that end, he commits global genocide (Isaiah 33:12). As a mass murderer, of whom the ancient kings of Assyria and Babylon provide types, he belongs to Isaiah’s Perdition category. Isaiah depicts him under his cultic or idolatrous title “king of Babylon” as ultimately descending to the Pit of Dissolution (Isaiah 14:15).

10:8–11 *He will say, Are not my commanders kings, one and all? Has not Calno fared like Carchemish? Is not Hamath as Arpad, Samaria no better than Damascus? As I could do this to the pagan states, whose statues exceeded those of Jerusalem and Samaria, shall I not do to Jerusalem and its images even as I did to Samaria and its idols?*

As he invades one land after another, the archtyrant imagines he is able to conquer Jehovah’s people just as well as them. He is aware of their covenant relationship with their Creator, but he assumes that their God is no more a threat to him than the gods of the nations he has already conquered (Isaiah 36:18–20; 37:11–13). His successes lead him to believe that nothing is impossible that he sets his mind to do. He imagines that his henchmen will rule under him as his empire spreads to the ends of the earth (cf. Isaiah 14:21). He fails to perceive, however, that his victories are but momentary (vv 12, 24–27).

10:12 *But when my Lord has fully accomplished his work in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, he will punish the king of Assyria for his notorious boasting and infamous conceit,*

Word links show that Jehovah’s “work” is twofold: (1) the destruction of the wicked; and (2) the deliverance of the righteous. On the one hand, it involves “utter destruction” upon the whole earth (v 23; Isaiah 13:4–5; 28:21–22). On the other, it entails the birth of a new nation of Jehovah’s people affiliated with Zion and Jerusalem at the time Jehovah’s servant prepares the way for Jehovah’s coming (Isaiah 40:3, 10; 66:7–9). The locations of Mount Zion and Jerusalem are significant as that is where the archtyrant is overthrown when he lays siege to them (Isaiah 31:4–5, 8–9; 37:32–36; Obadiah 1:17–21).

10:13–14 *because he has said, I have done it by my own ability and shrewdness, for I am ingenious. I have done away with the borders of nations, I have ravaged their reserves, I have vastly reduced the inhabitants. I have impounded the wealth of peoples like a nest, and I have gathered up the whole world as one gathers abandoned eggs; not one flapped its wings, or opened its mouth to utter a peep.*

Believing he has all power, the archtyrant boasts of his exploits—the pronoun “I” appears seven times, portraying him as an ultra-egotist. His claims show that in the course of committing global genocide he indeed conquers the world, establishing a one-world government or new world order. For him, Jehovah’s Day of Judgment is the great day of his power, when the earth’s inhabitants quail before him (Isaiah 13:4–8; 37:26–27). He is the “thief in the night” who gathers up the world’s wealth in the days just preceding Jehovah’s coming (cf. Matthew 24:42–44; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–6; 2 Peter 3:10).

10:15 *Shall an* ***axe*** *exalt itself above the one who hews with it, or a* ***saw*** *vaunt itself over him who handles it? As though the* ***rod*** *wielded him who lifts it up! As though the* ***staff*** *held up the one who is not made of wood!*

It is none other than Israel’s God Jehovah who empowers the archtyrant to hew down the wicked and to rule those who reject Him as their ruler. As Jehovah’s *axe* and *saw*, his *rod* and *staff*, the king of Assyria/Babylon has no capability of his own, only as the Maker of heaven and earth lends him his power (Isaiah 37:26–27; 54:16). The archtyrant isn’t a creative force in the world but merely a destructive one, reducing its wicked inhabitants and their institutions to chaos (Isaiah 14:16–17; 37:18). Because he exalts and vaunts himself above Israel’s God, he ends up abased (Isaiah 14:15; 37:23–25, 28–29).

10:16–17 *Therefore will the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, send a consumption into his fertile lands, and cause a* ***fire*** *to flare up like a burning hearth, to undermine his glory: the* ***Light*** *of Israel will be the* ***fire*** *and their Holy One the* ***flame****, and it shall burn up and devour his briars and thorns in a single day.*

Just as the archtyrant is a *fire* that burns up the wicked (Isaiah 9:18–19; 30:27–28), so what he does to others is done to him. Jehovah empowers another *fire*—his end-time servant—to subdue him (Isaiah 30:30–32; 31:8–9). Also called Jehovah’s *light* (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6), the servant is here named the “Light of Israel.” The Holy One of Israel’s identity as a *flame*, on the other hand (cf. Genesis 15:17; Exodus 3:2–4), reflects the close affinity between Jehovah and his servant. Together, they burn up the archtyrant’s “briars and thorns”—his evil alliance—in “a single day,” Jehovah’s Day of Judgment.

10:18–19 *His choice forests and productive fields it will consume, both life and substance, turning them into a rotting morass. And the trees left of his forest shall be so few, a child could record them.*

In the same way the king of Assyria/Babylon destroys “forests” or cities and lays lands waste (Isaiah 32:19; 33:1, 9), so it is done to him. The “rotting morass” his fields and forests end up as shows that as he reduced others to chaos so what is his suffers a similar fate. The “trees” or people that are “left” of his forest are but few. They are nevertheless recorded in the Book of Life with others who are “left” in that day (Isaiah 4:3). In effect, just as Israel’s northern tribes anciently went captive into Assyria, so those who return from end-time “Assyria” are their descendants (Isaiah 11:11, 16; 27:12–13).

10:20–21 *In that day those who survive of Israel and who escape of the house of Jacob will no longer rely on him who struck them, but will truly rely on Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel: of Jacob a remnant will return to the One Mighty in Valor.*

Whereas the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people is subject to the tyrannical king of Assyria/Babylon—suffering the curses of a broken covenant—in the day that they “repent” (*swb*) of evil Jehovah makes it possible for them to “return” (*swb*) in a new exodus to Zion (Isaiah 11:11–12, 15–16; 35:8–10; 51:11). Instead of relying on a power of chaos—on one who does little more than smite them—they now rely on Jehovah, their God, who seeks only to bless them. The One Mighty in Valor to whom they return is Jehovah’s servant, who leads their end-time exodus (Isaiah 9:6; 11:10; 55:3–7, 12–13).

10:22–23 *For though your people, O Israel, be as the sands of the sea, only a remnant will return; although annihilation is decreed, it shall overflow with* ***righteousness****. For my Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, will carry out the utter destruction decreed upon the whole earth.*

Those who survive the “annihilation” or “utter destruction” Jehovah has decreed in his Day of Judgment are but a tithing of his people (cf. Isaiah 6:13): “Had you but obeyed my commandments, your peace would have been as a river, your righteousnesslike the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been as the sands in number, your descendants as many as their grains. Their names would not have been cut off and obliterated from my presence” (Isaiah 48:18–19). For his people’s *righteousness*’ sake, however—literal and figurative—“a remnant will return” (cf. Shear-Jashub, Isaiah 7:3).

10:24–25 *Therefore, thus says my Lord, Jehovah of Hosts: O my people who inhabit Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrians, though they strike you with the* ***rod*** *or raise their* ***staff*** *over you, as did the Egyptians. For my* ***anger*** *will very soon come to an end; my* ***wrath*** *will become their undoing.*

Those of the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people “who inhabit Zion,” who suffer the curse of bondage to the king of Assyria/Babylon, Jehovah again acknowledges as “my people” when they repent and ascend to the Zion/Jerusalem category. The archtyrant—Jehovah’s *rod* of punishment and *staff* of submission, who personifies his *anger* and *wrath* (vv 5, 15)—has but temporary power over them. Jehovah’s purpose is to induce his people to ascend to higher spiritual levels. Because the archtyrant’s wrath exceeds all bounds as he seeks to destroy Jehovah’s elect, he must fall (Isaiah 31:4–9).

10:26 *Jehovah of Hosts will raise the* ***whip*** *against them, as when he struck the Midianites at the Rock of Oreb. His* ***staff*** *is over the* ***Sea****, and he will lift it over them as he did to the Egyptians.*

Led by Gideon, Israel anciently defeated a huge Midianite host at the Rock of Oreb (Judges 7:23–25). The term “whip” or “scourge” (*sot*) alludes to Gideon’s thrashing his enemies with a flagellum of briars and thorns (Judges 8:16). In an end-time version of these events, the *whip*—Jehovah’s servant—defeats an Assyrian army in a similar victory against overwhelming odds (Isaiah 9:4; 30:30–32). Drawing on a second such type, Jehovah’s *staff*—his servant—subdues the *Sea*—the Assyrian horde—following the model of Moses’ defeating the Egyptians (Exodus 14:15–31; Isaiah 11:15–16; 51:9–10).

10:27 *In that day their burdens shall be lifted from your shoulders, their* ***yoke*** *[removed] from your neck: the* ***yoke*** *[that wore away your fatness] shall by fatness wear away.*

As Jehovah released ancient Israel from the heavy burdens of their bondage in Egypt (Exodus 13:3), so he releases his end-time people from their curse of servitude after it has served his purpose of motivating them to repent and renew their commitment to serve him. Their indigent captive condition gives way to a bounteous abundance when Jehovah removes their *yoke*—the king of Assyria/Babylon: “I will break Assyria in my own land, trample them underfoot on my mountains; their *yoke*shall be taken from them, their burden removed from their shoulders” (Isaiah 14:25; emphasis added; cf. 9:4).

10:28–32 *He advances on Aiath, passes through Migron; at Micmash he marshals his weaponry. They cross over the pass, stopping overnight at Geba. Ramah is in a state of alarm, Gibeah of Saul is fleeing. Cry out, O Daughter of Gallim! Hear her, Laishah; answer her, Anathoth! Madmenah has moved out of the way, the inhabitants of Gebim are in full flight. This same day he will but pause at Nob and signal the advance against the mountain of the Daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.*

As a world conqueror, the king of Assyria/Babylon and his disciplined armies take the world by storm. Assyria’s ancient invasion of the Promised Land serves as the type of an end-time invasion of promised lands. The archtyrant’s coveted prize is “the mountain of the Daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem”—the righteous nation or nations of Jehovah’s people. The world’s inhabitants flee before his rapid military advance as his forces sweep into countries like a river in flood (Isaiah 8:7–10; 37:18, 24–27). Those who don’t participate in the new exodus to escape destruction now suffer the consequences.

10:33–34 *Then will the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, shatter the towering [trees] with terrifying power; the high in stature shall be hewn down, the lofty ones leveled. The dense forests shall be battered down with [the force of] iron, and Lebanon fall spectacularly.*

The lofty trees—the elite peoples of the earth—fall to the king of Assyria/Babylon’s awesome military might (Isaiah 2:12–17; 37:24). The dense forests—the populous cities—are razed by his awesome power (Isaiah 14:8; 32:19). Like the ancient heroes of Mesopotamian myth, the archtyrant hews down the cedars of Lebanon—Jehovah’s elite people (Jeremiah 22:23; Ezekiel 17:3)—in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 33:9). Although it is the archtyrant who carries out this destruction, Israel’s God, “Jehovah of Hosts,” manifests his power through him (v 15; Isaiah 13:4–6; 28:22; 37:24–27; 54:16).

ISAIAH 11

As an ensign to the nations Jehovah’s servant

gathers a remnant of Israel and Judah in a new exodus

11:1 *A* ***shoot*** *will spring up from the* ***stock*** *of Jesse and a* ***branch*** *from its graft bear fruit.*

While chapter 10 ends with imagery depicting the archtyrant’s hewing down trees, chapter 11 begins with tree imagery infused with hope. The tree that represents Jehovah’s people, however—viably an olive tree (Jeremiah 11:16; Hosea 14:5–6)—doesn’t at first bear fruit, at least not good fruit (cf. Isaiah 5:1–2). The horticultural process Isaiah describes shows that its purpose is to cause the tree again to “bear fruit” (*yipreh*). While its “stock” or “trunk” (*geza‘*) is identified with Jesse, the father of King David, the “shoot,” “watersprout,” or “sucker” (*hoter*) that springs from it is wild by nature.

The third member of Isaiah’s olive tree allegory is the “branch” (*neser*) that “bears fruit,” representing the final stage of a threefold process. In effect, when an olive tree no longer bears good fruit it can (1) be cut down, or (2) kept growing if one or more limbs show signs of life. In this case, such a limb is the watersprout, the kind of shoot that grows straight up from a tree’s trunk but doesn’t itself bear fruit. For that reason, farmers lop them off in the spring. If the watersprout can keep the tree alive, however, then it may be permitted to grow until it becomes sufficiently strong to support a graft.

Isaiah provides a clue to the identity of the branch in the “sprig,” “root,” or “graft” (*sores*) of verse 10. When grafted into the shoot or watersprout, the sprig—a tame olive tree variety—may eventually grow into a fruit-bearing branch and become a newly regenerated tree. As does the *sprig* (v 10) that becomes the *branch* (v 1), the *stock* and *shoot* represent persons instrumental in empowering the tree—Jehovah’s covenant people—to again bear fruit. Because of the principle of “the one and the many,” each individual additionally represents the people associated with his particular phase of the process.

*A shoot will spring up from the stock of Jesse.* The wild nature of the shoot or watersprout suggests a connection with the Gentiles who interact with Israel’s ethnic lineages (cf. Romans 11). Certain kings and queens of the Gentiles, for example, play a key role in the end-time restoration of Jehovah’s people: “Thus says my Lord Jehovah: ‘I will lift up my *hand*to the Gentiles, raise my *ensign*to the peoples; and they will bring your sons in their bosoms and carry your daughters on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, queens your nursing mothers’” (Isaiah 49:22–23; emphasis added).

The assimilation of many Israelites into the Gentile nations following Israel’s ancient exile has led to two kinds of end-time lineages of Jehovah’s people: (1) ethnic; and (2) assimilated. The wild nature of the shoot suggests an identity with Israel’s assimilated lineages. While these keep the tree alive, in the end they bear no fruit and are mostly cut off so that the sprig may be grafted in. In that case, the assimilated lineages who are cut off represent Jehovah’s people who are destroyed in his Day of Judgment, while the assimilated lineages who sustain the graft are the kings and queens of the Gentiles.

The identity of the *shoot*, *stock*, and *branch* appears from clues in Isaiah’s olive tree allegory. The words “of Jesse” (vv 1, 10) yield a Davidic and messianic identity for all three individuals. The *sprig* that is grafted into the *shoot*—which becomes the fruit-bearing *branch*—is Jehovah’s end-time servant who represents Israel’s ethnic lineages (vv 10–12; Isaiah 4:2). The *shoot* into which the *sprig* is grafted—that does not, in the end, bear fruit—is a servant of Jehovah who represents Israel’s assimilated lineages. The *stock* is Jehovah, who represents his people Israel as a whole (cf. Isaiah 53:2).

11:2 *The Spirit of Jehovah will rest upon him—the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of valor, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah.*

Although all three messianic individuals in Isaiah’s olive tree allegory evidence the divine attributes here listed, grammatically they apply to the last one mentioned—the *branch*—Jehovah’s end-time servant. Word links confirm that identity: “My servant whom I sustain, my chosen one in whom I delight, him I have endowed with my Spirit; he will dispense justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1); “He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, One Mighty in Valor” (Isaiah 9:6); “Because of his knowledge, and by bearing their iniquities, shall my servant, the righteous one, vindicate many” (Isaiah 53:11).

Based on the principle of “the one and the many,” moreover, those to whom Jehovah’s servant ministers, who emulate him (cf. Isaiah 8:16), come to demonstrate the same divine attributes: “My Spirit which is upon you and my words which I have placed in your mouthshall not depart from your mouth” (Isaiah 59:21); “I have charged my holy ones, called out my valiant ones: my angeris not upon those who take pride in me” (Isaiah 13:3); “Your faithfulnessin time [of trial] shall prove to be a strength, your wisdom and knowledge your salvation; your fear of Jehovah shall be your riches” (Isaiah 33:6).

11:3–5 *His intuition will be [guided] by the fear of Jehovah; he will not judge by what his eyes see, nor establish proof by what his ears hear. He will judge the poor with* ***righteousness****, and with equity arbitrate for the lowly in the land; he will smite the earth with the* ***rod*** *of his* ***mouth*** *and with the* ***breath*** *of his* ***lips*** *slay the wicked.* ***Righteousness*** *will be as a band about his waist,* ***faithfulness*** *a girdle round his loins.*

Although Jehovah’s servant is still the subject of the passage, in the context of Jehovah’s millennial reign of peace (vv 2–9) several candidates exist for those who “judge.” First is Israel’s God: “Jehovah is our Judge, and Jehovah our Lawgiver” (Isaiah 33:22). Second is Jehovah’s servant: “In loving kindness shall a throne be set up in the abode of David, and in faithfulnessa judge sit on it who will maintain justice and expedite righteousness” (Isaiah 16:5). And third are Jehovah’s millennial judges: “I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as in the beginning” (Isaiah 1:26).

Because the servant is a forerunner to Jehovah’s coming to reign on the earth, the roles of Jehovah and his servant are closely intertwined. Their judging the nations is therefore likewise intertwined. Isaiah compares them to two *arms*—*righteousness* and *salvation*—who judge the peoples: “My *righteousness*shall be at hand and my *salvation*proceed; my *arms*shall judge the peoples” (Isaiah 51:5; emphasis added). In short, Jehovah’s *arm* of *righteousness*—his servant (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13)—prepares the way before the *arm* of *salvation*, who is Jehovah (Isaiah 33:2; 40:10–11; 46:13; 62:10–11).

*He will judge.* Because of many parallel roles of Jehovah and his servant, the subject of the above passage may switch back and forth between the two. On one level, for example, the servant—unlike the reprobate judges of Jehovah’s people—judges the people “with righteousness” or “righteously” (*besedeq*). On another level, Jehovah judges the people “with *righteousness*” (*besedeq*)—that is, through his servant who personifies “righteousness” (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13). As the servant emulates Jehovah in ministering justice, moreover (Isaiah 9:6–7; 42:1–4), so others who judge emulate the servant.

*He will smite.* Multiple applications of the above passage similarly apply to the terms “rod,” “mouth,” “breath,” and “lips.” On the one hand, Jehovah’s servant—his *rod*, *mouth*, *breath*, and *lips* (Isaiah 48:3; 49:2; 51:16; 57:18–19; 62:1–2)—is its subject. On the other, Jehovah is its subject in the sense that he appoints the servant as his instrument of punishment and deliverance. On a third, possible level, the king of Assyria/Babylon—Jehovah’s *rod*, *mouth*, *breath*, and *lips* (Isaiah 9:4, 12; 10:5, 15; 30:27–28; 33:11–12; 59:3)—is its subject when Jehovah appoints him as his instrument of punishment.

*His intuition will be [guided] by the fear of Jehovah.* Like Israel’s God, his exemplar, Jehovah’s servant knows intuitively the justice or injustice of the cases he judges. Imbued with Jehovah’s Spirit and the fear of Jehovah (v 2)—having followed his counsel to “sanctify Jehovah of Hosts, making him your fear, him your awe” (Isaiah 8:13)—he is equal to the task. As Moses judged Jehovah’s people, but also appointed additional judges to judge them (Exodus 18:19–26), so the servant and other judges arbitrate equitably for the poor and lowly in the land (Isaiah 16:4–5; 28:5–6; 32:1; 42:1–4; 60:17–18).

11:6–8 *Then shall the wolf dwell among lambs and the leopard lie down with young goats; calves and young lions will feed together, and a youngster will lead them [to pasture]. When a cow and bear browse, their young will rest together; the lion will eat straw like the ox. A suckling infant will play near the adder’s den, and the toddler reach his hand over the viper’s nest.*

In contrast to the trees (people) whom the archtyrant hews down (Isaiah 10:15, 33–34)—who identify with the part of the shoot or watersprout that is cut off (v 1)—those who are grafted in, or who remain with the olive tree to sustain the graft, enjoy the millennial peace that ensues when Jehovah commences his reign on the earth. Now bringing forth good fruit, Jehovah’s millennial people enjoy an abundance of covenant blessings that spread abroad and touch all creation. With justice and righteousness established throughout the earth, there exists no more cause for enmity among God’s creatures.

Ritually clean animals, ones that divide the hoof and chew the cud (Leviticus 11:3)—“lambs,” “goats,” “calves,” “cows,” and “oxen”—live in harmony with the unclean: “wolves,” “leopards,” “lions,” “bears,” “adders,” and “vipers” (Isaiah 65:25). Symbolizing the disharmony that existed on the earth between the natural and assimilated lineages of Jehovah’s people and the nations, enmity in the animal kingdom disappears as all creatures become tame. The “youngster” who “leads” them symbolizes Jehovah’s servant who leads his people in the new exodus (Isaiah 40:11; 42:16; 58:8; 63:11–14).

11:9 *There shall be no harm or injury done throughout my holy mountain, for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the oceans are overspread with waters.*

Where “harm and injury” were wrought—among Jehovah’s people themselves and by their enemies—now only peace prevails. The parallel incidence of Jehovah’s “holy mountain” and “the earth” signifies that the nation or kingdom of his sanctified people ultimately spreads throughout the earth. The “knowledge” of Jehovah implies a personal knowledge that results from covenant keeping, not just a knowledge of his attributes. As the sea once epitomized the destructive power that was the archtyrant (v 15; Isaiah 5:30; 10:24–26; 51:15; 57:20), so in the millennial age its waters are subdued.

11:10 *In that day the* ***sprig*** *of Jesse, who stands for an* ***ensign*** *to the peoples, shall be sought by the nations, and his rest shall be glorious.*

The appearance of the millennial passage (vv 2–9) between twin predictions of a descendant of Jesse (vv 1, 10) infers that he is instrumental in preparing the way for Jehovah’s millennial peace. The “sprig,” “root,” or “graft” (*sores*) of Jesse—which represents the early or grafting phase of the *branch* that bears fruit (v 1)—serves as Jehovah’s “ensign” (*nes*) to the “peoples” or “nations” (*‘ammim*) in rallying the “nations” or “Gentiles” (*goyim*) to Jehovah’s standard. For the *branch* to bear fruit and the millennial peace to begin, a righteous people of God must first be born (Isaiah 55:3–5; 66:7–12).

While the *sprig* of Jesse—Jehovah’s servant and son—inherits a “throne of David” on the model of King Hezekiah (Isaiah 9:6–7; 16:4–5), he does so only after restoring Jehovah’s people. The restorative events in which he is instrumental—their release from bondage, new exodus to Zion, wandering in the wilderness, and conquest, inheritance, and rebuilding of promised lands—typify all prophecies that deal with Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 7:14–15, 21–22; 9:1–7; 11:10–16; 41:2–20, 25–27; 42:1–7; 43:2–8; 44:26–28; 45:1–4, 13; 46:11–13; 48:13–16; 49:1–26; 50:4–11; 51:9–11; 52:7–15; 55:3–5, 12).

*His rest shall be glorious.* Upon fulfilling his mission as Jehovah’s *ensign* to the nations—rallying the scattered remnants of Jehovah’s people to repent of transgression and return from dispersion—the servant receives as an inheritance a glorious “rest.” That rest is Jehovah’s rest (Deuteronomy 12:9–11), the place where Jehovah dwells (Isaiah 66:1)—Mount Zion (Psalm 132:13–14; Isaiah 8:18; 24:23). While the wicked of Jehovah’s people refuse to enter into his rest (Isaiah 28:12; 57:20–21; Hebrews 3:11, 18), those whom the servant gathers to Zion do enter into his rest (Isaiah 12:6; 32:16–20).

11:11–12 *In that day my Lord will again raise his* ***hand*** *to reclaim the remnant of his people—those who shall be left out of Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the islands of the sea. He will raise the* ***ensign*** *to the nations and assemble the exiled of Israel; he will gather the scattered of Judah from the four directions of the earth.*

Parallel verses identify Jehovah’s “ensign” (*nes*) who rallies his people to return from exile (v 12) with Jehovah’s “hand” (*yad*) that reclaims them (v 11). The same synonymous parallelism occurs elsewhere: “I will lift up my *hand*to the nations, raise my *ensign*to the peoples” (Isaiah 49:22; emphasis added). A remnant of Jehovah’s people, of both Israel and Judah, returns from throughout the earth (Isaiah 43:5–6; 49:12) when Jehovah raises up his servant—his *hand* and *ensign*—to form a new nation of his people “in that day” (vv 10–11)—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 55:3–5; 66:7–8).

11:13–14 *Ephraim’s jealousy shall pass away and the hostile ones of Judah be cut off; Ephraim will not envy Judah, nor Judah resent Ephraim. But they will swoop on the Philistine flank toward the west, and together plunder those to the east; [they will take] Edom and Moab at* ***hand****’s reach, and the Ammonites will obey them.*

As a result of the end-time ministry of Jehovah’s servant, the long-standing enmity between Ephraim, the birthright tribe, and Judah, the ruling tribe (Genesis 48:11–19; 49:8–12; 1 Chronicles 5:2), dissipates. As David united the northern and southern tribes of Israel (2 Samuel 5:1–5), so does Jehovah’s servant. Growing into one nation in Jehovah’s *hand*, they exist no more as a divided people (Ezekiel 37:15–28). When empowered by Jehovah’s *hand* of deliverance, they conquer their enemies who surround them (Isaiah 41:10–16; 49:17) as Israel did anciently under David (2 Samuel 8:11–14).

11:15–16 *Jehovah will dry up the* ***tongue*** *of the Egyptian* ***Sea*** *by his mighty* ***wind****; he will extend his* ***hand*** *over the* ***River*** *and smite it into seven streams to provide a way on foot. And there shall be a pathway out of Assyria for the remnant of his people who shall be left, as there was for Israel when it came up from the land of Egypt.*

After the archtyrant—the *Sea* and *River* (Isaiah 5:30; 8:7)—has served Jehovah’s purpose of punishing the wicked, Jehovah empowers his *hand* (vv 11, 14)—his mighty *wind*—over him. As Moses had power over Pharaoh to lead Israel out of Egypt (Isaiah 63:11–14), so the servant leads a remnant of Jehovah’s people in an exodus out of Assyria and out of all countries where they were scattered (vv 11–12; Isaiah 10:21–22; 43:16–17; Ezekiel 34:11–24). As Jehovah dried up the tongue of the Red Sea to let Israel pass over (Exodus 14:21–22; Isaiah 51:9–11), so he dries up the Assyrian *tongue* (Isaiah 54:16–17).

ISAIAH 12

Songs of Salvation and exultation follow Jehovah’s deliverance of a remnant of his people in Zion

12:1 *In that day you will say, I praise you, O Jehovah. Although you have been angry with me, your* ***anger*** *is turned away and you have consoled me.*

In the act of destroying the wicked in his Day of Judgment, Jehovah delivers the righteous. Like the Songs of Salvation Moses and the Israelites sang after their exodus out of Egypt (Exodus 15:1–21), two Songs of Salvation—one individual (vv 1–3), the other collective (vv 4–6)—follow the exodus of Jehovah’s people to Zion. At such times, spontaneous praise erupts from the hearts of those whom Jehovah saves. Though they may feel his *anger* for a season because of their transgressions—as he allows the king of Assyria/Babylon to subject them—when they repent Jehovah turns his *anger* away.

12:2–3 *In the God of my* ***salvation*** *I will trust without fear; for Jehovah was my strength and my song when he became my* ***salvation****. Then shall you rejoice in drawing water from the fountains of* ***salvation****.*

To trust in Jehovah “without fear” even when the odds of deliverance appear hopeless (Isaiah 35:3–4) forms a divine principle that separates those saved from those destroyed: “In that day youwill say, ‘This is our God, whom we expected would save us. This is Jehovah for whom we have waited; let us joyfully celebrate his *salvation*!’” (Isaiah 25:9; emphasis added). As Jehovah personifies his people’s *salvation*, and as he embodies the living waters that regenerate them (Jeremiah 17:13–14; John 4:10–14), his people’s songs of faith when times are hard turn into songs of joy when *salvation* happens.

12:4–5 *In that day you will say, Give thanks to Jehovah; invoke his name. Make known his deeds among the nations; commemorate his exalted name. Sing in praise of Jehovah, who has performed wonders; let it be acknowledged throughout the earth!*

In a twin Song of Salvation, the remnant of Jehovah’s people that returns from exile (Isaiah 11:10–16) praises Jehovah at his marvelous deliverance. Just as the fame of Israel’s God spread among the nations when he delivered his people from bondage in Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land (Joshua 9:9), so his fame spreads among the peoples who didn’t participate in the exodus to Zion but who survive Jehovah’s Day of Judgment: “O Jehovah, you are my God; I will extol you by praising your name. For with perfect faithfulness you have performed wonders, things planned of old” (Isaiah 25:1).

12:6 *Shout and sing for joy, O inhabitants of Zion, for renowned among you is the Holy One of Israel.*

After the trial of their faith, Jehovah’s holy ones rejoice at the presence of Jehovah, Israel’s Holy One, when he dwells with them in Zion. For those who repent of transgression, who return to Zion in an exodus out of a world self-destructing, sorrow turns to joy: “Let the ransomed of Jehovah return! Let them come singing to Zion, their heads crowned with everlasting joy; let them obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing flee away” (Isaiah 51:11). Indeed, joy and rejoicing most characterize Jehovah’s millennial reign (Isaiah 9:3; 29:19; 30:29; 51:3; 60:15; 61:7, 10; 65:13, 18–19; 66:10–14).

ISAIAH 13

The Assyrian alliance destroys the wicked world that

is Babylon as God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah

13:1 *An oracle concerning Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw in vision:*

Isaiah’s “Babylon” historically encompassed not only the ancient city of Babylon but the entire idolatrous, materialistic empire under Babylon’s influence, including nations in league with Babylon against an ascendant Assyria. Isaiah’s oracles against these nations in chapters 13–23, together with chapter 47 which addresses the Woman Babylon, form Part IV of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure whose key themes are humiliation and exaltation. In an end-time context, this Greater Babylon represents a wicked world on the eve of its destruction and resembles John’s “Babylon the Great” (Revelation 17–18).

13:2 *Raise the* ***ensign*** *on a barren mountain; sound the* ***voice*** *among them! Beckon them with the* ***hand*** *to advance into the precincts of the elite.*

The “ensign” (*nes*), “voice” (*qol*), and “hand” (*yad*), which appear in parallel, here denote the king of Assyria/Babylon who rallies an alliance of nations to conquer the world. That these terms also designate Jehovah’s servant in the Book of Isaiah implies that the two are contemporaries and rivals. The “barren mountain” from which the archtyrant hails identifies a nation that, apart from its military strength, isn’t agriculturally productive. The elite peoples of the earth, who include the wicked of Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 2:12–17; 26:5), are his prime target, as these he plunders and despoils (Isaiah 10:5–6, 14; 33:1).

13:3 *I have charged my holy ones, called out my valiant ones: my* ***anger*** *is not upon those who take pride in me.*

Jehovah’s *anger*—the king of Assyria/Babylon (Isaiah 5:25; 10:5; 14:5–6)—can’t harm Jehovah’s elect, his “holy ones” and “valiant ones,” in his Day of Judgment. Amidst the destruction of all peoples and their lands (Isaiah 10:7; 33:12; 37:18), those who emulate the divine attributes of the “Holy One” and “Valiant One” of Israel (Isaiah 1:4, 24) are delivered. At the very time the archtyrant plans to attack them, they are “charged” or “appointed” (*siwweti*) to minister to one another and “called” or “summoned” (*qara’ti*) out of the destruction by Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 11:10–12; 41:8–10; 55:3–5).

13:4 *Hark! A tumult on the mountains, as of a vast multitude. Hark! An uproar among kingdoms, as of nations assembling: Jehovah of Hosts is marshaling an army for war.*

A synonymous parallelism identifies “mountains” as a metaphor for “kingdoms.” A similar synonymous parallelism elsewhere identifies “mountains” as a metaphor for “nations” (Isaiah 64:1–3). Jehovah sends the tempestuous Assyrian horde—the archtyrant and his military alliance—to make war on Jehovah’s people and on all nations. The tumult and uproar they cause in the world stems from their hatred toward Israel’s God and his people: “Woe to the many peoples in an uproar, who rage like the raging of the seas—tumultuous nations, in commotion like the turbulence of mighty waters!” (Isaiah 17:12).

13:5–6 *They come from a distant land beyond the horizon—Jehovah and the instruments of his* ***wrath****—to cause destruction throughout the earth. Lament, for the Day of Jehovah is near; it shall come as a violent blow from the Almighty.*

The coming of the “Day of Jehovah”—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—parallels the coming of the Assyrian alliance to wreak havoc throughout the earth. Jehovah’s *wrath*, like his *anger* (v 3), designates the archtyrant, who exemplifies these traits (Isaiah 10:5). His destruction of all nations, including the wicked of Jehovah’s people, is a consistent theme in the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 5:25–30; 10:23; 14:23; 28:22; 33:1; 37:18; 51:13; 54:16; 59:18–19; 63:3–6). Although he launches his attack “from a distant land beyond the horizon,” it comes as a “violent blow” from Jehovah himself (Isaiah 30:27; 42:13–15).

13:7–8 *Then shall every hand grow weak and the hearts of all men melt. They shall be terrified, in throes of agony, seized with trembling like a woman in labor. Men will look at one another aghast, their faces set aflame.*

Jehovah’s Day of Judgment will be unlike anything since the Flood in its destructiveness (Isaiah 54:8–10). While the righteous experience joy at their miraculous deliverance, the wicked yield to terror as they experience the world’s all-time worst-case scenario. In that day, all the earth’s inhabitants go into labor, some to perish, others to be delivered (Isaiah 21:1–3; 26:17–18; 66:7–11). Those who exercise perfect integrity live through the devouring fire to see Jehovah’s coming in glory (Isaiah 33:14–16; 43:2). Others, like Lot’s wife, disintegrate in its conflagration (cf. Genesis 19:24–26).

13:9 *The Day of Jehovah shall come as a cruel outburst of* ***anger*** *and* ***wrath*** *to make the earth a desolation, that sinners may be annihilated from it.*

The Day of Jehovah that comes as “a violent blow from the Almighty” (v 6) parallels the Day of Jehovah that comes as “a cruel outburst of angerand wrath” (v 9), again identifying the king of Assyria/Babylon—Jehovah’s *anger* and *wrath*—as the one who instigates it. As this is “An oracle concerning Babylon” (vv 1, 19), we begin to discern Isaiah’s definition of Babylon as both a people and a place—the “earth” and its “sinners” on the eve of their destruction (cf. v 11). In effect, as Zion is both a people and a place—those of Israel who repent and the place of their return (Isaiah 1:27; 35:10)—so is Babylon.

13:10 *The stars and constellations of the heavens will not shine. When the sun rises, it shall be obscured; nor will the moon give its light.*

Darkness—a covenant curse—typifies the archtyrant’s cataclysmic destruction of peoples and lands. In that day, Jehovah “clothes the heavens with the blackness of mourning” and “puts up sackcloth to cover them” (Isaiah 50:3). A “distressing gloom” pervades the land, “for the daylight will be darkened by an overhanging mist” (Isaiah 5:30). Men “will look to the land, but there will be a depressing scene of anguish and gloom; and thus are they banished into outer darkness” (Isaiah 8:22). Only for Jehovah’s elect does the “lightdawn amid darkness,” drawing them to Zion (Isaiah 9:2; 58:10; 60:1–4).

13:11 *I have decreed calamity for the world, punishment for the wicked; I will put an end to the arrogance of insolent men and humble the pride of tyrants.*

As noted, Babylon’s destruction is a worldwide event (v 9; Isaiah 10:23). “The world,” “the wicked,” “insolent men,” and “tyrants” add to the list of entities that comprise Isaiah’s Greater Babylon. Jehovah puts an end to pride in that day. Whether of his own people or the nations, it is the same: “What will you do in the day of reckoning when the holocaust overtakes you from afar?” (Isaiah 10:3); “Jehovah of Hosts has a day in store for all the proud and arrogant and for all who are exalted, that they may be brought low” (Isaiah 2:12); “Tyrants shall come to nought and scorners cease” (Isaiah 29:20).

13:12 *I will make mankind scarcer than fine gold, men [more rare] than gold of Ophir.*

A precious category of humanity—a tithe of the tithe of the earth’s inhabitants (Isaiah 6:13)—resembles “fine gold.” These pass through the refiner’s fire when Jehovah’s judgments come upon the wicked: “I will . . . smelt away your dross as in a crucible and remove all your alloy” (Isaiah 1:25). Those whom Jehovah delivers consists only of precious and semiprecious categories of humanity: “You shall adorn yourself with them all as with jewels” (Isaiah 49:18); “In place of copper I will bring gold, in place of iron, silver; in place of wood I will bring copper, in place of stones, iron” (Isaiah 60:17).

13:13 *I will cause disturbance in the heavens when the earth is jolted out of place by the* ***anger*** *of Jehovah of Hosts in the day of his blazing* ***wrath****.*

Destruction by the archtyrant—Jehovah’s *anger* and *wrath*—extends to cosmic cataclysm and the earth’s being jarred from its orbit because of wickedness: “The earth shall be crushed and rent; the earth shall break up and cave in; the earth shall convulse and lurch. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, sway back and forth like a shanty; its transgressions weigh it down, and when it collapses it shall rise no more” (Isaiah 24:19–20). After the earth’s dislocation serves his purpose, Jehovah “replants the heavens and sets the earth in place” in a new cosmic trajectory (Isaiah 51:16; cf. 65:17; 66:22).

13:14 *Then, like a deer that is chased, or a flock of sheep that no one rounds up, each will return to his own people and everyone flee to his homeland.*

Those who don’t repent in time to participate in the exodus of Jehovah’s elect to Zion must fend for themselves among the nations. As aliens are often suspect, people return to their own countries for safety. Still, as “deer” and “sheep” are ritually clean animals, those who flee represent a category of Jehovah’s people. Comprising neither the “holy” and “valiant” souls whom Jehovah gathers out of destruction in the new exodus (v 3), nor the wicked who perish (vv 9, 11), this middle category, too, learns by experience what Jehovah desires to teach his people and to whom they may turn for help.

13:15–16 *Whoever is found shall be thrust through; all who are caught shall fall by the* ***sword****. Their infants shall be dashed in pieces before their eyes, their homes plundered, their wives ravished.*

The king of Assyria/Babylon—Jehovah’s *sword*—pursues a strategy of genocide: “His purpose shall be to annihilate and to exterminate nations not a few” (Isaiah 10:7). In Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, the world’s wicked come under God’s justice. Although Jehovah had offered mercy, promising deliverance to those who repent, they refused: “I will destine you to the *sword*; all of you shall succumb to the *slaughter*. For when I called, you did not respond; when I spoke, you would not give heed. You did what was evil in my eyes; you chose to do what was not my will” (Isaiah 65:12; emphasis added).

13:17–18 *See, I stir up against them the Medes who do not value silver, nor covet gold. Their bows shall tear apart the young. They will show no mercy to the newborn; their eye will not look with compassion on children.*

Jehovah “stirs up” the enemies of the wicked to destroy them (Isaiah 5:30; 9:11; 51:15). Forming a part of the Assyrian alliance are a cruel people from the East who pursue a policy of exterminating instead of plundering their victims: “Like tornadoes sweeping through the South, they come from the steppes, a land of terror. A grim vision has been revealed to me. . . Attack, O Elamites! Lay siege, you Medes! All the sighing [Babylon]has caused I will bring to an end” (Isaiah 21:1–2). They distinguish between neither the righteous—the silver and gold—nor the wicked; between neither young nor old.

13:19 *And Babylon, the most splendid of kingdoms, the glory and pride of Chaldeans, shall be [thrown down] as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.*

Babylon, the world’s all-time elite civilization—magnificent, resplendent, awe-inspiring in its immensity and grandeur—meets the fate of the basest, most degenerate society the world has known, wiped off the face of the earth in a fiery conflagration rained down from the sky. Its citizens, the Chaldeans, once admired throughout the earth for creating this model of opulence, become synonymous with the curse of Sodom and Gomorrah. Babylon and all who are identified with it—the sinners and wicked of the earth and the world (vv 9, 11)—disappear forever (Isaiah 14:22–23; 21:9; 47:1–15).

13:20 *Never shall it be reinhabited; it shall not be resettled through all generations. Nomads will not pitch their tents there, nor will shepherds rest their flocks in it.*

Following the destruction of the wicked, certain parts of the earth remain as memorials, reminding its inhabitants of the consequences of transgressing against their Maker (Isaiah 66:24). Like ancient Sodom and Gomorrah, such places remain uninhabitable because of the kind of destruction that occurred there: “Her streams shall turn into lava and her earth into brimstone; her land shall become as burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall ascend forever. It shall remain a wasteland from generation to generation; through endless ages none shall traverse it” (Isaiah 34:9–10).

13:21–22 *But wild animals will infest it, and its buildings overflow with weasels; birds of prey will find lodging there and demonic creatures prance about in it. Jackals will cry out from its palaces, howling creatures from its amusement halls. Her time draws near; [Babylon’s] days shall not be prolonged.*

The only ones who live in Babylon’s abandoned ruins are unclean animals reminiscent of the wicked who used to live there. Residents who formerly “infested” its buildings and housing areas, who “lodged” in crowded, “overflowing” conditions, now have their counterparts in “wild animals,” “weasels,” “birds of prey,” and “demonic creatures.” The entertainers who formerly “pranced about” and “cried out” in its “palaces” and “amusement halls” are now represented by “jackals” and “howling creatures.” Like a pregnancy gone wrong, Babylon’s days are numbered and she doesn’t survive her ordeal.

ISAIAH 14

The king of Assyria/Babylon conquers the world

and ascends the heavens but his soul descends to Hell

14:1 *Jehovah will have compassion on Jacob and once again choose Israel; he will settle them in their own land, and proselytes will adhere to them and join the house of Jacob.*

Jehovah’s people of the Jacob/Israel category may yet inherit the blessing of a Promised Land if they repent and renew their covenant relationship with Jehovah their God. His promise gives them hope, no matter in what circumstances they find themselves. The verbs “have compassion” and “choose” denote the elect status of those who prove faithful in keeping the terms of Jehovah’s covenant. For them, its blessings ultimately become unconditional (Isaiah 51:6; 54:6–10; 60:21; 65:17–22). Many who observe how Jehovah blesses his people unite with them to become one nation in the end.

14:2 *The nations will take them and bring them to their own place. And the house of Israel will possess them as menservants and maidservants in the land of Jehovah: they will take captive their captors and rule over their oppressors.*

Those who inherit “the land of Jehovah”—which, in a millennial context, becomes “their own place”—are escorted home by Jehovah’s servants from among the nations. Just as Joseph ministered to his brothers in the land of Egypt and saved them from the curse of a famine, so certain spiritual kings and queens of the Gentiles minister to Jehovah’s people and escort them in a new exodus to Zion (Isaiah 49:22–23; 60:3–12). In a second exodus—after Jehovah has instituted his reign of peace on the earth—those who are thus gathered gather up the remaining remnants of his people (Isaiah 66:18–21).

*They will take captive their captors and rule over their oppressors.* Different spiritual categories—of both Jehovah’s people and the nations—exist side by side through the end-time and into Jehovah’s millennial reign of peace. The fact that all of the earth’s wicked perish in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment and only those who repent of transgression survive doesn’t preclude the survival of some former captors and oppressors of Jehovah’s people or their descendants. Many will convert to Israel’s God and serve him by serving his elect as they learn his ways (Isaiah 2:3; 5:16–17; 45:14; 60:12, 14; 61:5–6).

14:3–4 *In the day Jehovah gives you relief from grief and anguish and from the arduous servitude imposed on you, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon, and say, How the tyrant has met his end and tyranny ceased!*

Unlike Jehovah’s elect, who participate in an end-time exodus to Zion, and unlike the wicked who perish from the earth, a middle category of Jehovah’s people survives his Day of Judgment without his direct divine intervention. These suffer the curse of servitude to the Assyrian archtyrant, who here appears under his religious or cultic title “king of Babylon” in the pattern of ancient Assyrian conquerors of Babylon. In this parody of a lament—beginning with the word “How” (cf. Lamentations 1:1)—those who survive his servitude launch into a “taunt,” glad to see the end of him and his tyranny.

14:5–6 *Jehovah has broken the* ***staff*** *of the wicked, the* ***rod*** *of those who ruled—him, who with unerring blows struck down the nations in* ***anger****, who subdued peoples in his* ***wrath*** *by relentless oppression.*

The *staff* and *rod* whose power is now broken designate the king of Assyria (Isaiah 10:5, 15), alias the king of Babylon (v 4), who rules for a time when it serves Jehovah’s purpose to punish the wicked of the world (Isaiah 10:12). His personifying Jehovah’s *anger* and *wrath* toward a corrupt humanity accords with Jehovah’s design to convince the earth’s inhabitants to repent of evil. Jehovah thus uses the wicked to destroy the wicked and to induce those who might be persuaded to return to him. The archtyrant’s demise shatters the myth of his absolute power (vv 15–20; Isaiah 26:13–14; 30:30–33).

14:7–8 *Now the whole earth is at rest and at peace; there is jubilant celebration! The pine trees, too, rejoice over you, as do the cedars of Lebanon: Since you have been laid low, no hewer has risen against us!*

After years of warfare and relentless oppression have worn people down, those of humanity left alive when the archtyrant perishes burst into jubilant celebration. Now can the earth rest and Jehovah’s millennial reign of peace begin. Jehovah’s *axe* and *saw*, his *rod* and *staff* (v 5; Isaiah 9:4; 10:15), has finished his work of destruction; the “hewer” of Jehovah’s people and the nations (Isaiah 10:33–34; 37:24) has himself been hewn down. The “pine trees” and “cedars of Lebanon”—here signifying a surviving middle category of Jehovah’s people—may now flourish unhindered (Isaiah 41:19–20; 60:13).

14:9–10 *Sheol, below, was in commotion because of you, anticipating your arrival; on your account it roused all the spirits of the world’s leaders, causing all who had ruled nations to rise up from their thrones. All alike were moved to say to you, Even you have become powerless as we are! You have become like us!*

In Sheol—the underworld, Hell, or spirit prison—the spirits of dead rulers rise up from their thrones in anticipation of the arrival among them of the tyrannical king of Assyria/Babylon. These things imply (1) that the spirits of the departed in Hell maintain, or seek to maintain, a kind of anti-hierarchy; (2) that many leaders of nations end up in a lower world for having ruled their peoples unrighteously; (3) that the spirits of those who depart this world are apprised of the imminent arrival of people from this world who die; and (4) that, unlike the righteous, the wicked are rendered powerless in the end.

14:11 *Your glory has been cast down to Sheol, along with the music of your lyres. Beneath you is a bed of maggots; you are covered with worms.*

The archtyrant’s “glory”—his personality cult of ceremony, music, pageantry, and propaganda—comes to an end when he does. Like a common mortal, he who ruled the world, who inspired fear in men’s hearts, goes the way of all flesh, his body consumed by maggots and worms. With his passing, a millennial age of peace begins for surviving humanity: “Tyranny shall no more be heard of in your land, nor dispossession or disaster within your borders” (Isaiah 60:18); “The insolent people are not to be seen, a nation of incomprehensible speech, whose babbling tonguewas unintelligible” (Isaiah 33:19).

14:12 *How you have fallen from the heavens, O morning star, son of the dawn! You who commanded the nations have been hewn down to earth!*

Twin laments (vv 4–11, 12–20) create a single tyrannical figure who combines several ancient types: (1) a militaristic Assyrian world conqueror from the North; (2) a Babylonian idol ruler; and (3) a Mesopotamian mythological god. This composite figure combines allusions to a fallen angel with an earthbound despot who “commands the nations” but who—as a human demi-god—is “hewn down to earth.” The terms “morning star, son of the dawn” (*helel ben-sahar*) denote a category of “sons of God” who attained exalted status before the creation of the earth (Genesis 6:1–4; Job 38:4–7).

14:13–14 *You said in your heart, I will rise in the heavens and set up my throne above the stars of God; I will seat myself in the mount of assembly [of the gods], in the utmost heights of Zaphon. I will ascend above the altitude of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High!*

The king of Assyria/Babylon’s boundless ambition extends to being even as the Most High God. Resembling the gods of ancient Near Eastern myth, he seeks to “rise” or “ascend” (*’e‘eleh*) above the “stars of God”—that is, above those sons of God who have attained celestial glory or exaltation (Psalm 82:6; Isaiah 40:26, 31). The mythological “mount of assembly” of the gods is identified with “Zaphon,” the North or Pole Star. Of course, ascent “in the heavens . . . . above the altitude of the clouds”—as in a counterfeit of celestial exaltation—is possible to attain with today’s space technology.

14:15 *But you have been brought down to Sheol, to the utmost depths of the Pit.*

The king of Assyria/Babylon’s descent below all occurs in direct proportion to his preceding ascent above all, his gratuitous self-exaltation leading inevitably to his utter humiliation. As the exemplar of the wicked, he establishes a pattern of pride, ambition, oppression, injustice, and all things reprehensible. To the degree people emulate his character traits, to that degree they suffer a similar fate. Belonging to Isaiah’s Perdition category—a spiritual point of no return—the archtyrant’s spirit descends to the Pit of Dissolution (Isaiah 38:17–18; 51:14), there eventually to undergo extinction (Isaiah 26:13–14).

14:16–17 *Those who catch sight of you stare at you, wondering, Is this the man who made the earth shake and kingdoms quake, who turned the world into a wilderness, demolishing its cities, permitting not his captives to return home?*

In his humiliating downfall, the tyrannical “man” who lorded it over the nations is a sight to wonder at. Although he gained the whole world, it profited him nothing as he suffers the loss of his own soul (cf. Matthew 16:26). Instead of being a power of creation—a god who benefits humanity—he is a power of chaos who orchestrates horrific destruction of life and property. He who made the earth “shake” and kingdoms “quake” (Isaiah 5:25; 24:18; 54:10), who turned the world into a “wilderness” and demolished its “cities” (Isaiah 7:20–25; 32:19; 64:10–11), has become an object of derision.

14:18–20 *All rulers of nations lie in state, each among his own kindred. But you are cast away unburied like a repugnant fetus, exposed like the slain, disfigured by the* ***sword****, whose mangled remains are thrown in a gravel pit. You shall not share burial with them, for you have destroyed your land and murdered your people. May the brood of miscreants never more be mentioned!*

While the dead remains of the world’s dignitaries are honored in death by lying in state, the archtyrant’s corpse lies unburied like an abhorrent excretion exposed to the elements. As the one who served as Jehovah’s *sword* did to others, so it is done to him. Instead of being a protector of his people and their land, as befits a king, he engineered their destruction by taking them to war against Jehovah’s elect. As a mass murderer, he suffers the covenant curse of no burial for his carcass, becoming the poster child for a “brood of miscreants” whose memory is erased from the earth (Isaiah 26:13–14).

14:21 *Prepare for the massacre of their sons, in consequence of their fathers’ deeds, lest they rise up again and take possession of the world, and fill the face of the earth with cities.*

While on the one hand those who transgress the terms of Jehovah’s covenants suffer the curses of his covenants, on the other, persons who violate the rights of those who keep the terms of Jehovah’s covenants suffer the same covenant curses. By seeking to destroy Jehovah’s righteous people together with the wicked of the world, the king of Assyria/Babylon and his legions suffer the curses of Jehovah’s covenants. Because offspring and descendants constitute the foremost covenant blessing pertaining to Jehovah’s covenants, those who violate the rights of his elect inherit no offspring or descendants.

14:22–23 *I will rise up against them, says Jehovah of Hosts. I will cut off Babylon’s name and remnant, its offspring and descendants, says Jehovah. I will turn it into swamplands, a haunt for ravens; I will sweep it with the* ***broom*** *of destruction, says Jehovah of Hosts.*

Jehovah’s “rising up”—as in his “rising up” on Mount Perazim (Exodus 19:16–24; 2 Samuel 5:20)—spells doom for his enemies (Isaiah 2:19, 21; 28:21–22; 31:2). An appendage to chapter 13’s destruction of Babylon, verses 22–23 appear in the context of the archtyrant’s indirect murder of his own people (v 21). While Jehovah—the King of Zion—delivers his loyal people, the king of Assyria/Babylon slays his own kind. As a *broom* of destruction, he sweeps the earth clean of the wicked, leaving none of their offspring or descendants, so that the very name Babylon fades from people’s memory.

14:24–25 *Jehovah of Hosts made an oath, saying, As I foresaw it, so shall it happen; as I planned it, so shall it be: I will break Assyria in my own land, trample them underfoot on my mountains; their* ***yoke*** *shall be taken from them, their burden removed from their shoulders.*

As Jehovah “foresaw” and “planned” from the beginning, the destruction of the wicked would precede the earth’s transformation to a paradisiacal state (Isaiah 33:1–20; 37:26). Although an end-time Assyria—of whom ancient Assyria is a type—would carry out that destruction, Assyria itself would be destroyed “in my own land” and “on my mountains.” Only remnants of the Ten Tribes who went captive into ancient Assyria would be left (Isaiah 19:23–25). By invading the lands of Jehovah’s people, Assyria would seal its own fate, and its *yoke*—the archtyrant—would be broken (Isaiah 9:4; 10:27).

14:26–27 *These are things determined upon the whole earth; this is the* ***hand*** *upraised over all nations. For what Jehovah of Hosts has determined, who shall revoke? When his* ***hand*** *is upraised, who can turn it away?*

The things Jehovah has determined or decreed upon the whole earth are the destruction of the wicked and the deliverance of the righteous (Isaiah 10:23; 13:4–5; 35:3–4; 49:25–26), one being inseparable from the other. The *hand* that is upraised over all nations denotes the king of Assyria/Babylon at the height of his power: “Yet for all this his *anger*is not abated; his *hand*is upraised still” (Isaiah 5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; emphasis added; cf. 10:4–5; 13:2). In the end, he who puts down the archtyrant is Jehovah’s servant—his right *hand*—whom Jehovah likewise raises up (Isaiah 11:10–15; 41:10–13).

14:28–29 *In the year King Ahaz died, came this oracle: Rejoice not, all you Philistines, now that the* ***rod*** *which struck you is broken. From among the descendants of that* ***snake*** *shall spring up a* ***viper****, and his offspring shall be a* ***fiery flying serpent****.*

Within its historical context, the *rod* that smote the Philistines is King Ahaz (Isaiah 7:3, 10–12), who is here identified as a *snake* or serpent—a messianic symbol (Numbers 21:9). Ahaz’ death serves as the occasion for Isaiah to predict a three-part end-time scenario similar to Isaiah 11:1: from the descendants of David, represented by Ahaz, springs up a *viper*, a second messianic figure represented by King Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:4–6). Lastly, from the latter’s offspring comes a *fiery flying serpent* or “flying seraph”—a messianic figure pertaining to Isaiah’s seraph category—Jehovah’s servant.

14:30 *The elect poor shall have pasture, and the needy recline in safety. But your descendants I will kill with famine, and your survivors shall be slain.*

When Jehovah’s servant gathers Jehovah’s people as a flock to Zion (Isaiah 40:11; 63:11–14), Jehovah comes and the earth’s millennium of peace begins (Isaiah 11:10–12:6; 33:17–24; 49:1–26; 52:7–15). While on the one hand Jehovah’s elect poor and needy inherit the earth, on the other, the world’s wicked peoples—represented by the Philistines—die of famine and foreign invasion, which are covenant curses. All three components of Isaiah’s Zion ideology appear in verses 29–30: (1) the destruction of the wicked; (2) the deliverance of the righteous; and (3) the presence of Jehovah’s servant.

14:31 *Wail at the gates; howl in the city! Utterly melt away, you Philistines! From the North shall come [pillars of] smoke, and no place he has designated shall evade it.*

The enemies of Jehovah’s people have cause to “wail,” “howl,” and “melt away” when destruction comes “from the North”—from beyond the horizon (Isaiah 5:26; 13:5)—as conspired by the king of Assyria/Babylon (cf. Isaiah 54:16). The pillars of “smoke” form a word link to the “mushrooming clouds of smoke” that billow upward when “the earth is scorched and people are but fuel for the fire” in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 9:18–19). While the wicked of the world suffer the fire and smoke of destruction, Jehovah protects his repentant people beneath his cloud of glory (Isaiah 4:5–6; 25:4–5).

14:32 *What shall then be told the envoys of the nation? Jehovah has founded Zion; let his longsuffering people find refuge there.*

The “envoys” or messengers of Jehovah’s people who participate in the establishment of Zion go forth among the nations to invite them to ascend there (Isaiah 2:2–3; 52:7–12). As Israel was born as a nation following its exodus out of Egypt—when it covenanted with Jehovah in the Sinai wilderness—so those who return from exile are born as a new nation identified with Zion (Isaiah 55:5, 12; 66:8–10). Jehovah’s “founding” of Zion—as a people of God and a place of refuge (Isaiah 1:27; 35:10)—paves the way for him to reside there when Israel’s exiles repent and return (Isaiah 59:20; 62:10–12).

ISAIAH 15

Moab, a kindred people, suffers calamity in

Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, their prayers to no avail

15:1 *An oracle concerning Moab: When in one night Ar is devastated, Moab shall be silenced; when in one night Kir is razed, Moab shall be destroyed.*

Ten “oracles” or “burdens” (*massa’*) the prophet utters against foreign powers (Isaiah 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1) tie together chapters 13–23 of Part IV of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 13–23; 47). Creating a kind of Greater Babylon (cf. Revelation 17:5), these nations formed the ancient empire of Babylon or were in league with Babylon against Assyria’s hegemony. Among these entities, Moab represents a prideful kindred people. Its major cities of Ar and Kir suffer the same Sodom-and-Gomorrah type of destruction “in one night” the entire Greater Babylon entity does.

15:2–3 *They will go up to the sanctuaries, and in Dibon, to the hill shrines, to weep; they will wail in Moab over Nebo and Medeba. Every head shall be bald, every beard cut off. They will wear sackcloth openly; on the housetops and in the streets they will altogether wail and give way to weeping.*

When Assyria launches its overnight attack and destroys entire cities, the Moabites resort to praying and weeping in their places of worship; but too late. Although Jehovah sends prophets to warn of his Day of Judgment (Isaiah 16:14; 20:3–4), Greater Babylon’s inhabitants foolishly assume that Assyria will abide by the peace treaties it makes and not resort to treachery: “See, their stalwarts sob in public; the champions of peace weep bitterly. The highways are desolate, travel is at an end. The treaties have been violated, their signatories held in contempt; man is disregarded” (Isaiah 33:7–8; cf. 33:1).

15:4–5 *Heshbon will cry for help, as will Elealeh; their appeal shall be heard as far as Jahaz. They will sound the alarm to summon the armed men of Moab, but their spirit shall be broken. My heart will cry out for Moab; its fugitives will reach Zoar and as far as Eglath Shelishiah. In tears they will ascend the slopes of Luhith; on the road to Horonaim they will raise the cry of catastrophe.*

The cry of catastrophe sounds throughout the land as its inhabitants seek refuge and send out appeals for aid. Hoping to escape destruction, people evacuate danger zones. As among all nations and peoples who comprise Greater Babylon, the wicked are caught unawares: “Catastrophe shall overtake you, which you shall not know how to avert by bribes; disaster shall befall you from which you cannot ransom yourself: there shall come upon you sudden ruin such as you have not imagined” (Isaiah 47:11). So immense is the land’s desolation that even the military is disheartened—“their spirit shall be broken.”

15:6–7 *For the Waters of Nimrim shall be desolate; the grass shall dry up, vegetation disappear, and no green foliage shall remain. The surplus they have acquired, and their personal belongings, they will carry away over the Valley of the Willows.*

Greater Babylon—all peoples who choose not to repent—suffers the curses of drought and lost dwellings: “Until the cities lie desolate and without inhabitant, the houses without a man, and the land ravaged to ruin. For Jehovah will drive men away, and great shall be the exodus from the centers of the land” (Isaiah 6:11–12); “You wandering bands of Dedanites, who sojourn in the forests of Arabia, bring water to greet the thirsty; meet the fugitives with food, O inhabitants of the land of Tema. For they flee from destruction, from the bared sword, the drawn bow and the severity of war” (Isaiah 21:13–15).

15:8–9 *The cry of calamity shall encompass the land of Moab; the sound of it shall reach Eglaim and echo as far as Beer Elim. Although the Waters of Dibon shall flow with blood, yet will I impose more than this upon Dibon: [I will bring] lions upon the fugitives of Moab and on those who remain in the land.*

Curses extend to being pursued by enemies—the Assyrian alliance—and being devoured by wild beasts. These, however, are synonymous ideas: “Their arrows are sharp; all their bows are strung. The tread of their warhorses resembles flint; their chariot wheels revolve like a whirlwind. They have the roar of a *lion*; they are aroused like young lions: growling, they seize the prey, and escape, and none comes to the rescue” (Isaiah 5:28–29; emphasis added). Jehovah’s righteous people, on the other hand, are gathered out: “The ransomed of Jehovah shall return; they shall come singing to Zion” (Isaiah 35:10).

ISAIAH 16

Moab’s prideful people receive three years’

warning before Jehovah destroys them and their land

16:1–4 *Send couriers to those who rule in the earth, from Sela in the desert to the mountain of the Daughter of Zion. Like fluttering birds forced out of the nest, so are Moab’s women at the fords of Arnon. Provide a solution,[they say;] judge our case! Overshadow us at high noon as though it were night! Shelter those dispossessed; betray not the refugees! Let the exiles of Moab dwell with you; be a refuge to them from the aggressors!*

As the type of a kindred people with a sense of entitlement, the Moabites, who form a part of Isaiah’s Greater Babylon, look to others to alleviate the woes they have brought on themselves by their own actions or inactions. Reduced to refugee status, they want someone to cover their sins and care for them. Parallel lines—“to those who rule in the earth” and “to the mountain of the Daughter of Zion”—imply that the Moabites are appealing for help to Jehovah’s people in Zion who have now come into their own. The reference to Moab’s “women” may be both literal and figurative (cf. Isaiah 3:12; 19:16).

16:4–5 *When oppressors are no more and violence has ceased, when tyrants are destroyed from the earth, then, in loving kindness, shall a throne be set up in the abode of David, and in* ***faithfulness*** *a judge sit on it who will maintain justice and expedite* ***righteousness****.*

The answer to the Moabites’ plight isn’t a temporary refuge from Assyria’s aggression or relief from covenant curses. It is the establishment of a government that administers justice and righteousness. By bringing things to a head in his Day of Judgment, Jehovah puts an end to man’s tyranny of man and replaces it with a theocracy in which Israel’s God rules. Jehovah’s “loving kindness” signifies his millennial covenant with his end-time son and servant, ancient David’s heir (Isaiah 55:3). The term “judge” identifies both Jehovah and his servant—Jehovah’s *righteousness* (Isaiah 2:4; 11:3–4; 41:2; 51:5).

16:6–7 *We have heard of the glories of Moab, of its excessive pride and its boasting, of its outbursts of false propaganda. For this shall the Moabites [be made to] lament, and all [have cause to] bewail Moab: they shall groan at the ruin of Kir Hareseth in utter dejection.*

Moab’s self-exaltation—like that of Greater Babylon—inevitably leads to humiliation in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment: “The haughty eyes of men shall be lowered and man’s pride abased; Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day. Jehovah of Hosts has a day in store for all the proud and arrogant and for all who are exalted, that they may be brought low” (Isaiah 2:11–12). Rather than look down on the Moabites and glory at their fall, Jehovah’s people weep for them and deeply sorrow at their plight (vv 9, 11). They were a kindred people who lived alongside them, with whom Jehovah’s people interacted.

16:8 *For the vineyards of Heshbon shall wither; the ruling nations will smite Sibmah’s vines. Its runner vines reached Jazer, trailing through the desert; its branches spread abroad across the sea.*

When the Assyrian alliance of nations destroys Greater Babylon, agriculture undergoes a dearth as typified by withering “vines” and “vineyards” (Isaiah 24:7; 42:15). Jehovah’s people who return to Zion in a new wandering in the wilderness, on the other hand, experience the opposite: “Then shall a Spirit from on high be poured out on us; the desert shall become productive land and lands now productive be reckoned as brushwood” (Isaiah 32:15). The idea of vines that “spread abroad across the sea” alludes to the interdependence of all parts of Greater Babylon’s economic empire (Isaiah 23:7–8, 11; 47:5).

16:9–10 *Therefore I will mourn as Jazer mourns for the vines of Sibmah; I will water you with my tears, O Heshbon and Elealeh, when your shouts of cheer over the summer fruit and harvest are stilled. The joyful festivity will be gone from the orchards; no shouts of delight shall sound in the vineyards. The wine treaders will tread no wine in the presses; the vintage shout I will bring to an end.*

A reversal of circumstances between Zion and Greater Babylon marks Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. Although the “summer fruit and harvest” denotes the most joyous time of the year, that joy turns to gloom as Moab, which formerly enjoyed prosperity, now lies in ruins. Jehovah’s elect, on the other hand—who suffered gloom prior to Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—now experience joy: “Jehovah is comforting Zion, bringing solace to all her ruins; he is making her wilderness like Eden, her desert as the garden of Jehovah. Joyful rejoicing takes place there, thanksgiving with the voiceof song” (Isaiah 51:3).

16:11–12 *My breast will vibrate like a harp for Moab, my inmost being for Kir Hareseth. For when the Moabites weary themselves with petitioning on the hill shrines, and enter their sanctuaries to pray, it shall be to no avail.*

Repentance comes too late to avoid catastrophe for this fraternal people. Now they must endure the hardships of that evil time as a consequence of wickedness until their iniquities are purged. Still, those who love all of God’s children loathe to see others suffer and are profoundly moved at Moab’s belated penitence (Isaiah 15:2–3). They know that Jehovah readily hears those who love him, whose hearts are right with him: “O people of Zion, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, you shall have no cause to weep. He will graciously respond at the cry of your voice; he will answer you as soon as he hears it” (Isaiah 30:19).

16:13–14 *These things Jehovah spoke hitherto about Moab. But now Jehovah has said, Within three years, as the term of a lease, Moab’s glory shall become ignominy. For all its large populace there shall be very few left, and those of no account.*

Moab’s three-year lease of time in which to mend its ways applies to Greater Babylon in general. In his long-suffering, Jehovah sends the world three years of warning through his servant before his Day of Judgment commences (Isaiah 20:1–6). Then, in a long-awaited reversal of circumstances, Greater Babylon’s glory turns to ignominy while Zion’s ignominy turns to glory (Isaiah 47:1; 52:1–3). Although Greater Babylon comprises a majority of the world’s population, it boasts of no righteous surviving remnant (Isaiah 13:19; 14:22; 21:9). The few souls of Moab who remain alive aren’t noteworthy.

ISAIAH 17

Disaster overtakes the people of Ephraim and

their allies for forgetting Jehovah and loving idols

17:1–3 *An oracle concerning Damascus: Damascus shall cease to be a city and become a heap of ruins. The cities of Aroer shall lie forsaken and become places for herds to recline, where no one will disturb them. When Ephraim’s defense comes to an end, so shall the sovereignty of Damascus: as with the glory of the children of Israel, so shall it be with Aram’s remnant, says Jehovah of Hosts.*

Historically allied with the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Aram (Syria) with its capital Damascus was a mostly pastoral country north of Israel’s border. Often known simply as Ephraim (Isaiah 7:2), Israel’s Northern Kingdom formed a league with Aram against the threat of an invasion by Assyria (Isaiah 8:4, 9–10). As types of the end-time, Ephraim and its northern neighbor experience the same demise: when Ephraim’s defenses fail, both countries fail. Although Aram loses its sovereignty and remains a pastoral country, a remnant of its people—as with Ephraim (Isaiah 28:1–5)—survives.

17:4–6 *In that day Jacob’s glory shall wane, and his fatness of body become leanness. After being like a harvest of ripe grain, whose ears are reaped by the armful, he will become like ears plucked in the Valley of Rephaim when only the gleanings are left, or when an olive tree is beaten, having two or three berries in the topmost bough, or four or five in its most fruitful branch, says Jehovah, the God of Israel.*

Having been born into the covenant blessings of wealth and privilege, the rising generation of Jehovah’s people—here identified as a Jacob/Israel category—now faces poverty and scarcity. Although former harvests were plentiful, the earth’s “harvest” of Jehovah’s Day of Judgment sees the few elect who remain gathered out like mere “gleanings” from such an abundance before covenant curses become irrevocable (Isaiah 24:13; 27:12–13). The rest of Jehovah’s people—those of Jacob/Israel who don’t repent and return—seek to survive in what literally becomes a valley of “*rephaim*” or “ghosts.”

17:7–8 *In that day men will have regard to their Maker, and their eyes look to the Holy One of Israel, and regard not the altars, the works of their hands, nor look to things made by their fingers—the idols of prosperity and the shining images.*

In the time of leanness, the works of men’s hands that people idolize—by which they unknowingly beget calamities or covenant curses—are discerned for what they are: false gods that preoccupy them, that waste resources and divert their hearts from the true God (v 10; Isaiah 2:7–8, 20; 27:9–10; 30:22; 31:7; 42:17). While prosperity may be a blessing, it can also become a curse. When dire straits befall humanity, people instinctively turn back to their Maker, the Creator of all things, and look to the Holy One of Israel, their teacher and exemplar (Isaiah 10:20; 26:16–18; 48:17; 63:15–19; 64:1–12).

17:9 *In that day their mighty cities shall be like the deserted towns of the Hivites and Amorites, which they abandoned before the Israelites during the desolation.*

When the Israelites conquered the Land of Canaan under the leadership of Moses and Joshua, Jehovah commanded them to slay men, women, and children because the iniquity of the Hivites, Amorites, Amalekites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, and Jebusites who dwelt there was full (Genesis 15:16; Exodus 23:23; Deuteronomy 3:6; Numbers 21:35). Now that the iniquity of Jehovah’s people themselves is full, they meet the same fate (Isaiah 1:4, 7; 26:21; 59:12–19). Once Jehovah takes the righteous out from among them, the wicked left behind in the land fall prey to their enemies (Isaiah 57:1).

17:10 *For you have forgotten your God, your* ***salvation****, and not remembered the* ***Rock****, your fortress.*

If Jehovah’s people had remembered their ancestors’ beginnings—how Jehovah delivered them from their afflictions—they might have avoided yet another regrettable repetition of history. The parallel terms “salvation” and “Rock” show that Israel’s God personifies *salvation*, that he is their *rock* or refuge in the time of trouble (Isaiah 12:2; 62:11). His people’s relationship with him is personal: “I myself am Jehovah; apart from me there is no savior” (Isaiah 43:11); “Ever trust in Jehovah, for Jehovah, Yah, is an everlasting *Rock*” (Isaiah 26:4; emphasis added). To be saved, they must come to him.

17:10–11 *Therefore, though you plant choice crops and sow hybrid seed, and though you make them thrive the day you plant them, causing them to sprout the very morning you sow them, yet shall the harvest vanish in a day of diseases and incurable pain.*

No matter how hard people labor or how sophisticated their agricultural methods, they have no defense against adverse weather—a covenant curse (Isaiah 15:6; 42:15). Nor do they perceive that it is Jehovah who raises up their enemies against them, who empowers them to invade their land and lay it waste (Isaiah 9:11–12; 10:5–6; 21:1–2). The “day of diseases and incurable pain”—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—leaves the sick and ailing of humanity without medical resources or healing cures: “The curse devours the earth, for those who dwell on it have incurred guilt” (Isaiah 24:6; cf. 1:5–6).

17:12 *Woe to the many peoples in an uproar, who rage like the raging of the seas—tumultuous nations, in commotion like the turbulence of mighty waters!*

As a power of chaos that floods the earth (Isaiah 8:7–8; 28:2, 15, 18–19), the king of Assyria/Babylon’s alliance of nations echoes his “uproar,” “rage,” “tumult,” and “commotion” against Jehovah’s people: “Hark! A tumult on the mountains, as of a vast multitude. Hark! An uproar among kingdoms, as of nations assembling: Jehovah of Hosts is marshaling an army for war” (Isaiah 13:4). Although the wicked of the world perish at the hands of Assyria’s hosts—the wicked thus destroying the wicked—their evil alliance is itself destroyed, as signified by Jehovah’s “woe” or covenant curse (Isaiah 14:25).

17:13–14 *Nations may roar like the roaring of great waters, but when he rebukes them they will flee far away; they will be driven before the* ***wind*** *like chaff on the mountains, or as whirling [dust] in a* ***storm****. At evening time shall be the catastrophe, and before morning they shall be no more. This is the lot of those who plunder us, the fate of those who despoil us.*

Those who “plunder” and “despoil” Jehovah’s people and the nations are the archtyrant and his evil alliance (Isaiah 10:5–6, 13–14). They may get stirred up against his people as the *Sea* is stirred up (Isaiah 5:30), or burst their banks and overflow all lands like the great and mighty waters of the *River* (Isaiah 8:7), but Jehovah will turn them into flying dust and chaff. Not only does the archtyrant resemble a *wind* and *storm* that devastates the nations (Isaiah 40:24; 57:13), Jehovah’s servant, too, resembles these elements when he vanquishes him and delivers Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 11:15; 41:16; 45:8).

ISAIAH 18

People’s dread of Assyria’s world conquest is unfounded as Jehovah has prepared a way of escape

18:1–2 *Woe to the land of buzzing wings beyond the rivers of Cush, which sends emissaries by sea, in swift craft across the water. [They say,] Go speedily, you messengers! Go to a people perpetually on the move, a nation dreaded far and wide, a people continually infringing, whose rivers have annexed their lands.*

Jehovah pronounces a curse on the “land of buzzing wings”—on Egypt (Isaiah 7:18)—which lives in fear of the expansionist aims of Assyria, a land of rivers that overflow their banks and invade other lands (Isaiah 8:7–10). Egypt’s emissaries and messengers hastily attempt to forestall what portends to be an invasion of Egypt, the world’s great superpower. Aggressive and militant, Assyria is “dreaded far and wide” (Isaiah 8:9; 20:6; 51:13). As it has done to other nations—annexing their lands—so it threatens its rival world power that suffers from internal weakness and decline (Isaiah 19:13–15).

18:3 *All you who live in the world, you inhabitants of the earth, look to the* ***ensign*** *when it is lifted up in the mountains; heed the* ***trumpet*** *when sounded!*

At the very time Jehovah brings catastrophe on those who don’t repent, he prepares a way of deliverance for those who do repent. Indeed, the destruction of the wicked *is* the deliverance of the righteous because when the wicked are destroyed the righteous no longer suffer oppression at their hands. As Jehovah’s Day of Judgment involves “all you who live in the world,” Jehovah gives all a chance to repent. He raises up his servant—his *ensign* to the nations—to rally his exiled people (Isaiah 11:10–12; 49:22; 62:10–11), warning them as a *trumpet* and summoning them home (Isaiah 27:13; 55:4–5; 58:1).

18:4 *For thus said Jehovah to me: I will watch in silence over my dwelling place when the searing* ***heat*** *overtakes the reapers, and when the rainclouds [appear] amid the fever of reaping.*

In the same way a rainstorm spells disaster at a grain harvest, so Jehovah’s Day of Judgment arrives at the worst moment: (1) literally at harvest time, depriving Jehovah’s unrepentant people of food; and (2) figuratively at Jehovah’s harvest of the wicked when they are least expecting it. Jehovah’s informing his servant of the approaching calamity spells hope for those who heed his summons (v 3). Although Jehovah is a sanctuary for those who love him (Isaiah 8:14; 25:4–5), he doesn’t hinder the searing *heat*—the archtyrant’s destruction—from overtaking the wicked (Isaiah 9:18–19; 33:14–16).

18:5–6 *For before the harvest, when the [time of] flowering is past and the set blossoms are developing into young fruit, they will cut down the fruit-bearing twigs with knives and remove the new branches by slashing. All shall be left to the birds of prey of the mountains and to the beasts of the land: the birds of prey will feed on them all summer and the beasts of the land all winter.*

Before the fruit harvest—indicating the time of year—the enemy invades the land and despoils the orchards, leaving little that sustains life. While the land’s desolation by aliens and its overrunning by wildlife represent covenant curses, the birds of prey and beasts of the land additionally signify infestation by bands of marauders who seek subsistence wherever they can find it: “The whole land shall revert to wilderness” (Isaiah 7:24); “Hawks and falcons shall possess it, and owls and ravens inhabit it” (Isaiah 34:11); “All you wild beasts, you animals of the forest, come and devour!” (Isaiah 56:9).

18:7 *At that time shall tribute be brought to Jehovah of Hosts from a nation perpetually on the move, from a nation dreaded far and wide, a people continually infringing, whose rivers have annexed their lands, to the place of the name of Jehovah of Hosts: Mount Zion.*

In the end, Assyria, the nation that caused worldwide desolation, is subdued (Isaiah 14:25). Its survivors—“so few a child could record them” (Isaiah 10:19)—are the descendants of the lost Ten Tribes who went captive into Assyria in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 18:9–12). They escape destruction by coming in an exodus to Zion (Isaiah 11:11, 16; 19:23; 43:6). Brought by the spiritual kings and queens of the Gentiles, they bring their “tribute” or “gifts” (*say*) to the God of their fathers (Isaiah 49:22–23; 60:3–17). In the millennial age, they comprise one of three groups of Jehovah’s elect people (Isaiah 19:24–25).

ISAIAH 19

Although the world’s superpower Egypt suffers

internal collapse, Jehovah delivers his covenanters

19:1 *An oracle concerning Egypt: When Jehovah enters Egypt riding on swift clouds, the idols of Egypt will rock at his presence and the Egyptians’ hearts melt within them.*

Ancient Egypt, where Israel’s ancestors found refuge—birthplace of the birthright tribe of Ephraim, and of Moses, Israel’s deliverer—typifies a land with strong ties between Jehovah’s end-time people and end-time “Egypt.” In the Book of Isaiah’s apocalyptic context—when history repeats itself—the world’s superpower codenamed “Egypt” forms a part of Isaiah’s Greater Babylon and suffers covenant curses in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. So great is Egypt’s desolation on the heels of Jehovah’s “swift clouds” that its people’s hearts “melt within them” as in Isaiah’s vision of Babylon (Isaiah 13:6–8).

19:2–3 *I will stir up the Egyptians against the Egyptians; they will fight brother against brother and neighbor against neighbor, city against city and state against state. Egypt’s spirit shall be drained from within; I will frustrate their plans, and they will resort to the idols and to spiritists, to mediums and witchcraft.*

Anarchy and civil war in the great superpower of the world form the prelude to its desolation. As much of the land is destroyed from within, Egypt’s enemies see their chance to invade from without. When Jehovah withdraws his Spirit because of a people’s evildoing, they are left to their own devices. Their alienation causes Jehovah to close the heavens. They lose the light they once had, and a man’s adversaries become those of his own people. Desperate, they turn to false channels of information—idols, spiritists, mediums, and witchcraft—only to compound their plight (Isaiah 8:19–20; 42:17; 44:17; 45:20).

19:4 *Then will I deliver the Egyptians into the* ***hand*** *of a cruel master; a harsh ruler will subject them, says the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts.*

The nation of Egypt in Isaiah’s day was ruled by a non-native Afro-Egyptian (Cushite) pharaoh of Egypt’s 25th dynasty (760–656 B.C.) (cf. Isaiah 18:1; 20:3–5). This was a period of extensive government programs but of moral decline that set the stage for Assyria’s invasion and conquest of Egypt. Like ancient Egypt, end-time “Egypt” deteriorates politically (vv 11–15), experiences economic hardship (vv 8–10), and suffers severe drought conditions (vv 5–7). Egypt—the breadbasket of the world—is reduced to poverty. Only the God of Israel, who rules over all nations, is able to save Egypt (vv 20–24).

19:5–7 *The waters of the lakes shall ebb away as stream beds become desolate and dry. The rivers shall turn foul, and Egypt’s waterways recede and dry up. Reeds and rushes shall wither; vegetation adjoining canals and estuaries, and all things sown along irrigation channels, shall shrivel and blow away and be no more.*

The covenant curse of withering vegetation—synchronized with a plethora of other misfortunes—afflicts Egypt as its vibrant society wanes like the vegetation itself. Egypt’s flora epitomize the transitory nature of life for its corrupt inhabitants (cf. Isaiah 5:24; 37:27; 40:6–8, 24). Foliage that “shrivels and blows away and is no more” typifies the fate awaiting them and all who comprise Greater Babylon. Egypt’s bodies of water that dry up and rivers that turn foul, too, are a metaphor of its people (cf. Isaiah 18:2, 7; 37:25; 42:15), their pollution and evaporation signifying their descent into chaos.

19:8–10 *Fishermen will deplore [their lot] and anglers in canals bemoan themselves; those who cast nets on water will be in misery. Manufacturers of combed linen and weavers of fine fabrics will be dismayed. The textile workers will know despair, and all who work for wages suffer distress.*

A supremely industrialized and agricultural land, Egypt spirals into decay. Where once there existed plenty, now a dearth prevails. Where once Egyptians were gainfully employed, now they remain idle. Even traditionally staple livelihoods disappear. A spirit of “misery,” “dismay,” “despair,” and “distress” pervades Egypt’s society (v 3). A hitherto highly prosperous nation is imploding, leaving its large populace without seeming recourse (v 15). Like all who make up Greater Babylon, Egypt—the most elite of nations—is rendered wretched as Jehovah’s judgments come upon her (cf. Isaiah 24:4; 32:10).

19:11–13 *The ministers of Zoan are utter fools; the wisest of Pharaoh’s advisers give absurd counsel. How can you say to Pharaoh, We ourselves are as wise as the first rulers? Where are your wise men indeed? Let them please tell you, if they can discern it, what Jehovah of Hosts has in mind for Egypt! The ministers of Zoan have been foolish, the officials of Noph deluded; the heads of state have led Egypt astray.*

In Egypt’s political capital, Pharaoh and his advisers follow foolish policies in their attempts at economic recovery, further exacerbating Egypt’s problems. Considering themselves as wise as Egypt’s founding fathers, they act presumptuously, only to lead Egypt deeper into ruin. Deviating from well-proven principles—relying instead on their own wisdom—they and their remedial strategies cause a loss of confidence in the nation, leading to anarchy and civil war (vv 2–3). If Pharaoh and his advisers are indeed as wise as they regard themselves, then let them predict what Jehovah has in store for Egypt!

19:14–15 *Jehovah has permeated them with a spirit of confusion; they have misled Egypt in all that she does, causing her to stagger like a drunkard into his vomit. And there shall be nothing the Egyptians can do about it, neither head nor tail, palm top or reed.*

Egypt’s ruling elite resemble disoriented persons possessed by a spirit of confusion who lead an entire nation astray, politically and economically. The people’s cumulative guilt has reached its saturation point. Only Jehovah’s judgments can cleanse the nation of its wickedness and idolatry (v 3). The motifs of a “drunkard” who “staggers” into his “vomit” link the nation of Egypt to Jehovah’s people of the tribe of Ephraim and to Ephraim’s intoxicated prophets (Isaiah 28:1, 3, 7–8; 56:10–12). The “head” and “tail,” “palm top” and “reed” allude to the people’s leaders (Isaiah 7:8–9; 9:14–15; 36:6).

19:16–17 *In that day the Egyptians will be as women, fearful and afraid at the brandishing* ***hand*** *Jehovah of Hosts wields over them. The land of Judah shall become a source of terror to the Egyptians; all reminded of it shall dread what Jehovah of Hosts has in store for them*.

The Egyptians’ behaving as women in that “day”—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—implies not only fear in the face of danger but transgender issues. The *hand* Jehovah of Hosts wields over them identifies the king of Assyria/Babylon, who threatens to invade Egypt and all the lands that comprise Isaiah’s Greater Babylon. The “land of Judah” represents those parts of the world the archtyrant conquers first before invading Egypt, as Assyria did anciently. What Jehovah has “in store,” which causes “terror” and “dread,” is Egypt’s imminent day of reckoning (cf. Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; 22:5; 30:1–5; 31:1–3).

19:18 *In that day five Hebrew-speaking cities in the land of Egypt will swear loyalty to Jehovah of Hosts. One shall be known as the City of* ***Righteousness****.*

Five “cities” or city-states in the land of Egypt contain covenant communities of people who swear allegiance to Israel’s God in his Day of Judgment. Rather than trust in human measures to counter threats facing the nation, these inhabitants instead turn to their Maker. The existence of a “City of Righteousness” in the land of Egypt alludes to the affiliation of Jehovah’s end-time servant—Jehovah’s *righteousness* (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13)—with Egypt’s covenant communities (cf. Isaiah 1:26; 38:4–6). As Joseph in Egypt served as a savior to his brothers in a time of evil, so does Jehovah’s servant (v 20).

19:19–20 *In that day there shall be an altar [erected] to Jehovah in the midst of the land of Egypt and a monument to Jehovah at its border. They shall serve as a sign and testimony of Jehovah of Hosts in the land of Egypt: when they cry out to Jehovah because of the oppressors, he will send them a savior, who will take up their cause and deliver them.*

Just as a temple was built to Israel’s God in ancient Egypt by émigré Israelites, so one is built “in the midst” of end-time Egypt, its “altar” denoting both atonement for transgression and consecrated offerings. A “monument” at Egypt’s border suggests a memorial erected by Jehovah’s people who dwelt there. Their serving as a “sign” and “testimony” reflects these persons enduring loyalty in spite of their falling victim to injustices at the hands of oppressors. Just as Jehovah sent Moses in answer to his people’s cries in ancient Egypt (Exodus 3:1–9), so he sends them a “savior”—his end-time servant.

19:21 *Jehovah will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians shall know Jehovah in that day. They will worship by sacrifice and offerings, and make vows to Jehovah and fulfill them.*

The presence of Jehovah’s servant among Egypt’s covenanters has the effect of intensifying their devotions to the point that Jehovah personally manifests himself to them. Because the verb to “know” signifies a consummated covenant relationship, the Egyptians’ worship of Jehovah results in their literally coming to know him, not just know *about* him. Underscoring their experience with Israel’s God is their worship by “sacrifice and offerings” and “making vows” and “fulfilling them” (cf. Isaiah 56:6–7; 60:7; 66:20–21), inferring that others who have made such vows or covenants aren’t fulfilling them.

19:22 *Jehovah will smite Egypt, and by smiting heal it: they will turn back to Jehovah, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them.*

Although it is Jehovah who smites the wicked—both his own people and the nations (Isaiah 9:13; 27:7–8; 60:10)—he uses the king of Assyria/Babylon as his instrument (Isaiah 5:25; 10:20; 14:6). Jehovah’s intent, however, is to cause the wicked to “turn back” to him—to “repent” and “return”—so that he may heal them. He heals them when at last they “see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand in their heart, and repent, and are healed” (Isaiah 6:10; cf. 58:1–8). Too often, however, only when wickedness results in covenant curses, does such healing occur (Isaiah 26:16; 27:4–5; 54:7–8).

19:23 *In that day there shall be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. Assyrians shall come to Egypt and Egyptians go to Assyria, and the Egyptians shall labor with the Assyrians.*

A liaison between Egypt’s covenanters and remnants of Israel’s Ten Tribes who went captive into Assyria results in the latter’s renewal of their covenant with Israel’s God. Ultimately, the highway—called the “Way of Holiness” (Isaiah 35:8)—forms the way of return of the Ten Tribes and of all Israel’s tribes in their exodus to Zion (Isaiah 9:1; 11:15–16; 30:29; 49:9–12), preparing the way for Jehovah’s coming to reign on the earth (Isaiah 35:4–10; 40:3; 57:14; 62:10–11). In the end, the “Egyptians” and “Assyrians” who survive Jehovah’s Day of Judgment become one covenant people (vv 24–25).

19:24–25 *In that day Israel shall be the third party to Egypt and to Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth. Jehovah of Hosts will bless them, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria the work of my* ***hands****, and Israel my inheritance.*

At all times, those whom Jehovah “blesses” are his covenant people who keep the terms of his covenant. In the time of trouble leading up to millennial age of peace, three groups qualify for that privilege: (1) Jehovah’s covenanters who dwell in Egypt, whom he acknowledges by the covenant formula “my people”; (2) descendants of the Ten Tribes who went captive into Assyria, whom he names “the work of my hands”; and (3) the Jews, who were known as Judah from the time Jehovah’s people divided into two nations, but whom Jehovah recognizes as “Israel my inheritance” when his people reunite.

Jehovah first names the Egyptian covenanters because they minister to all of Israel’s tribes in the pattern of Joseph in Egypt. He calls Assyria “the work of my *hands*” because Israel’s Ten Tribes accept his servant—Jehovah’s right *hand*—and repudiate the archtyrant—Jehovah’s left *hand*—at the peril of their lives. Each group inherits the earth, including their former lands of exile: “Your entire people shall be righteous; they shall inherit the earth forever—they are the branch I have planted, the work of my hands, in which I am glorified” (Isaiah 60:21; cf. 49:18–22; 54:2–3; 65:9).

ISAIAH 20

Assyria subjugates the superpower Egypt after Jehovah’s prophet–servant gives three years’ warning

20:1–4 *In the year the general who was sent by Sargon king of Assyria came to Ashdod and took it by combat, Jehovah had spoken through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and ungird the sackcloth from your loins and remove the shoes from your feet. And he had done so, going naked and barefoot. Then Jehovah said, Just as my servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and portent against Egypt and Cush, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, both young and old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered—to Egypt’s shame.*

Although Isaiah is already in a state of mourning because of the wickedness of Jehovah’s people and Assyria’s aggressiveness, Jehovah now asks him to go naked and barefoot as a “sign and portent” against Egypt and Cush (cf. Isaiah 8:18). Exposing himself to the elements and to people’s mockery, Isaiah—“my servant”—obeys. As a type of Jehovah’s end-time servant, Isaiah gives warning of Assyria’s invasion of Egypt and Cush (Upper Egypt) and of the humiliation of their captives. They have three years in which to repent before three years of Jehovah’s Day of Judgment overtake them (cf. Isaiah 16:14).

20:5–6 *Men shall be appalled and perplexed at Cush, their hope, and at Egypt, their boast. In that day shall the inhabitants of this isle say, See what has become of those we looked up to, on whom we relied for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria! How shall we ourselves escape?*

The nations of the world who rely on Egypt’s military might to protect them see their hopes dashed when Assyria ravishes Egypt and Cush (Upper Egypt): “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, relying on horses, putting their trust in immense numbers of chariots and vast forces of horsemen, but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor inquire of Jehovah!” (Isaiah 31:1); “Pharaoh’s protection shall turn to your shame, shelter in Egypt’s shadow to embarrassment” (Isaiah 30:2). Without Jehovah’s divine intervention, the great superpower the world so admired proves no match for Assyria.

ISAIAH 21

Jehovah appoints a watchman to warn of Babylon’s imminent fall at the hands of the Assyrian alliance

21:1–2 *An oracle concerning the Wilderness of the West: Like tornadoes sweeping through the South, they come from the steppes, a land of terror. A grim vision has been revealed to me: the traitor in the act of treachery, the destroyer laying waste. Attack, O Elamites! Lay siege, you Medes! All the sighing that [Babylon] has caused I will bring to an end.*

The prophet sees Babylon’s imminent destruction at the hands of Assyria and its allies. The “traitor in the act of treachery” and the “destroyer laying waste” identify the king of Assyria/Babylon: “Woe to you, despoiler, who yourself was not despoiled; O treacherous one, with whom none have been treacherous” (Isaiah 33:1). Babylon’s demise comes suddenly and with devastating force—like the devastation of tornadoes that leave nothing standing. Jehovah’s Day of Judgment mercifully ends Babylon’s oppressive civilization so that a new, millennial civilization may replace it (Isaiah 65:19–25).

21:3–5 *Therefore my whole frame is racked with trembling; throes of agony have seized me like a woman in labor. I am tormented beyond giving heed; I am too distraught to see. My mind reels, I am paralyzed with fear; the nightfall I longed for has become a horror to me: They prepare tables; they deck them with candlesticks. They are eating and drinking . . . Mobilize, you commanders! Oil the armor!*

The prophet’s vision of Babylon’s desolation is so grievous it is almost too much to bear. He can’t rest peacefully at night as the horror of it recurs to his mind. The imagery of a woman in labor defines Jehovah’s Day of Judgment for all the earth’s inhabitants, some for good, others for evil (Isaiah 13:8; 26:17–18; 42:14; 66:7–9). The attack on Babylon catches the wicked unawares—when people are preparing tables, decking them with candlesticks, and eating and drinking—perhaps during a national holiday that coincides with early summer as predicted elsewhere (Isaiah 16:9–10; 18:4–6; 22:13; 28:1–4).

21:6–7 *Because of this my Lord said to me, Go and appoint a watchman who will report what he sees. Let him watch for chariots with teams of horses, riders on asses and riders on camels. He must be most vigilant, fully alert.*

The prophet’s appointing a “watchman” who reports what he sees implies that some watchmen don’t report what they see, or don’t see at all. Both kinds appear in Isaiah’s end-time scenario: (1) watchmen who see and hear and report it (v 10; Isaiah 52:8; 62:6); and (2) watchmen who are blind and unaware (Isaiah 29:10; 56:10). Because the term “watchman” designates a prophet (Jeremiah 31:6; Ezekiel 3:17), Jehovah’s appointing a prophet who warns of Babylon’s imminent destruction forms the type of his end-time servant who serves as a watchman to Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 41:27; 48:16; 55:4).

21:8–9 *Then the lookout cried, I have been standing on the watchtower day in and day out, my Lord; night after night I have stood guard. Now they come: cavalry and teams of horses! And he gave the reply, She has fallen; Babylon has fallen. All her idol gods he has razed to the ground.*

The watchman’s vigilance throughout the warning period pays off as he sees the approaching destruction and sounds the alarm. Babylon’s fall at the hands of the Assyrian power means the collapse of the entire socio-economic structure of Isaiah’s Greater Babylon that involves the manufacture, promotion, and sale of its “idol gods”—the works of men’s hands (Isaiah 2:8, 18, 20; 17:8; 19:1, 3; 27:9; 30:22; 36:18–20; 37:12, 18–19; 42:8, 17; 44:9–20; 45:20; 46:1–2; Jeremiah 51:8, 49; Revelation 14:8; 18:2). Razed to the ground, they prove useless because they save no one in the end (Isaiah 46:6–7).

21:10 *To you who know me, who are of my fold, I have reported what I heard from Jehovah of Hosts, the God of Israel.*

The prophet’s last warning is reserved for Jehovah’s elect, those “who know me, who are of my fold.” Because the prophet’s disciples are privy to his teachings—“Bind up the testimony; seal the law among my disciples” (Isaiah 8:16)—he informs them of what he sees and hears. They exit Babylon at the time of its destruction in a new exodus to Zion: “Turn away, depart; touch nothing defiled as you leave [Babylon]. Come out of her and be pure, you who bear Jehovah’s vessels. But you shall not leave in haste or go in flight: Jehovah will go before you, the God of Israel behind you” (Isaiah 52:11–12).

21:11–12 *An oracle concerning Dumah: Men call to me from Seir, Watchman, what remains of the night? Watchman, how much of the night is left? The watchman replies, Morning comes, though it is still night. If you would ascertain it, do so by repenting and coming back.*

Some who don’t exit Greater Babylon in the new exodus to Zion, but who nevertheless attempt to survive through that dark time, appeal to Jehovah’s servant how long the “night”—the Day of Judgment—will yet last. Rather than telling what he knows, the servant responds by turning their hearts from him toward their God, suggesting they should spend the current duration of time for what Jehovah intended: “by repenting and coming back.” Then they would know for themselves that the “morning”—the millennial age—is drawing near but that Jehovah’s Day of Judgment hasn’t yet served its purpose.

21:13–15 *An oracle concerning those in Arabia: You wandering bands of Dedanites, who sojourn in the forests of Arabia, bring water to greet the thirsty; meet the fugitives with food, O inhabitants of the land of Tema. For they flee from destruction, from the bared* ***sword****, the drawn* ***bow*** *and the severity of war.*

The prophet exhorts those who inhabit places of resort, who are acclimated to dwelling in the wilderness, to assist people escaping destruction in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment and not let them perish. Jehovah desires to provide for those fleeing from the bared *sword* and drawn *bow*—from the king of Assyria/Babylon’s invasion of their lands—through the charity of others more fortunate than themselves whom he tests thereby. Besides Jehovah’s elect, many honorable people among the earth’s inhabitants, who “look to the forest home as protection” (Isaiah 22:8), too, may yet survive (Isaiah 66:18–19).

21:16–17 *On account of this, my Lord said to me, Within a year, as the term of a lease, Kedar’s glory shall fully expire. And the number of valiant archers remaining of the sons of Kedar shall be few. Jehovah, the God of Israel, has spoken it.*

Consistent with the theme of Greater Babylon’s humiliation that runs like a thread through Part IV of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 13:11, 19; 14:10–20; 15:2–4; 16:7, 14; 17:3–6; 18:7; 19:13–14; 20:3–6; 21:9, 16; 22:3–4, 17–19, 25; 23:9, 16; 47:1–5, 9–11, 13–15), “Kedar’s glory shall fully expire.” As with all who don’t repent, by the end of the final year of the three years of Jehovah’s judgment (cf. Isaiah 20:3) few people who resist Assyria’s aggression—even those in wilderness areas—remain alive: “Your men shall be felled by the sword, your might [overthrown]in war” (Isaiah 3:25).

ISAIAH 22

Sports and amusement addicts suffer enemy invasion; Jehovah appoints his servant in place of another

22:1–2 *An oracle concerning the Arena of Spectacles: Whatever is the matter with you, causing you all at once to climb onto the housetops? You resounded with loud cheers—a tumultuous town, a city of revelry! But your slain were not killed by the sword; they did not die in battle!*

Like the ancient Roman games—which swept up the elite with the masses and led to the fall of an empire—Jehovah’s people are caught up in mass entertainments that appeal to humanity’s baser instincts and even result in deaths. The unruly “commotion and trampling and riot” (v 5) that have become the commonplace of the stadiums and arenas of his people now take a different turn as their enemies invade the land and former spectators flee in a mass stampede. The raucous screams that echoed from city stadiums change to shrieks of terror and people’s light-hearted revelry turns into mortal dread.

22:3–4 *Your chiefs, altogether in flight, are captured without using the bow; all of you left behind are caught easily before you can get away. Because of this I said, Turn your attention from me, though I weep bitterly; hasten not to comfort me at the ruin of the Daughter of my People.*

There remains nothing to cheer about when Jehovah’s people who are diverted from reality by their infatuating amusements grow so unaware of their imminent peril that their enemies catch them by surprise. From being blessed of God beyond all others, they now suffer utter ruin and calamity. The prophet laments, knowing that those of Jehovah’s alienated people who form a part of Greater Babylon must endure all that the world endures—whether to perish with the wicked in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 13:6, 9; 48:18–19) or somehow to survive with those who repent (Isaiah 10:22; 21:12).

22:5 *For my Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, has in store a day of commotion and trampling and riot in the Arena of Spectacles, [a day] of battering down walls, and of crying in distress, To the mountains!*

The “day” Jehovah has “in store” for the fans at entertainments consists of a bizarre version of the performances they used to watch. Reminiscent of devotees’ lack of restraint at events in the Arena of Spectacles, people abandon self-control in a headlong melee as they attempt to escape the enemy. With invaders breaking through their defenses, the mountains promise the only remaining refuge. Instead of evading capture by the enemy—by repenting in time and participating in the new exodus to Zion—they face fear, deprivation, and death: the full measure of covenant curses that is due the wicked.

22:6–8 *When Elam takes up the quiver, and horses are harnessed to the chariots of Aram, and Kir uncovers the armor, then shall your choice valleys fill with chariots, and cavalry take up positions at your gateways. And in the day Judea’s defensive screen is removed, you will look to the forest home as protection.*

Assyria’s alliance of nations, each with its military specialty, makes up a formidable force: “Their arrows are sharp; all their bows are strung. The tread of their warhorses resembles flint; their chariot wheels revolve like a whirlwind” (Isaiah 5:28). As in the allegory of the vineyard, the enemy penetrates and occupies Jehovah’s people’s land: “I will have its hedge removed and let it be burned; I will have its wall broken through and let it be trampled. I will make it a desolation” (Isaiah 5:5–6). Once defenses are breached, Jehovah’s unrepentant people seek places of resort in the woods (cf. Isaiah 8:22).

22:9–11 *When you saw the City of David increasingly breached, you conserved water in the Lower Reservoir. You took a census of the buildings in Jerusalem, tearing down buildings to fortify your wall. You built cisterns between the walls for the water from the Old Reservoir, but you did not look to its Maker, nor have regard for the One who designed it long ago.*

Employing last-ditch defensive measures against their enemies’ advance, Jehovah’s people ignore the fact that their protection comes from God in spite of whatever preparations they may make. When they keep the terms of his covenant, Jehovah defends them against all who attack them. Even as the enemy encroaches upon them, however, his unrepentant people fail to turn to him: “Have you forgotten Jehovah, your Maker, who suspends the heavens, who sets the earth in place, that you go all day in constant dread of the oppressor’s rageas he readies himself to wreak destruction?” (Isaiah 51:13).

22:12–14 *In such a day my Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, calls for weeping and lamentation, for austerity and wearing sackcloth. Instead, there is mirth and merrymaking, the killing of cattle and slaughter of sheep, eating meat and drinking wine: Let us dine and drink, for tomorrow we die! Jehovah of Hosts revealed this to my ears: Such wickedness cannot be forgiven you till you die, says my Lord, Jehovah of Hosts.*

With the lives of so many people in jeopardy—men, women, and children—the appropriate response at such a national tragedy would be to lament and show remorse by fasting and wearing sackcloth (Isaiah 15:3; 20:2; 32:11–12; 37:1–2). Instead, by blatantly pursuing hedonistic pleasures, Jehovah’s apostate people repudiate all decency and their covenantal obligation to defend themselves. Instead of appealing to Jehovah for help and preparing to engage the enemy, they throw parties. Tantamount to murder, their crime deserves the death penalty from “Jehovah of Hosts”—Israel’s God in his executive role.

22:15–16 *Thus said my Lord, Jehovah of Hosts: Go and see that steward, Shebna, overseer of the palace. [Say to him,] What are you up to? Who do you think you are, that you have hewn yourself a tomb here, [like] those who hew their sepulchers up high, carving out graves for themselves in the rock?*

Using the imagery of a negligent steward as a prophetic allegory, Isaiah predicts his replacement by Jehovah’s “servant” (vv 20–24). Jehovah rebukes Shebna—calling him “that steward”—for assuming he will receive a lavish burial when he passes away. As a part of the reversal of circumstances between Greater Babylon and Zion, this passage reiterates how that which exalts itself ends up humiliated and that which humbles itself Jehovah exalts. Jesus predicts this very scenario prior to his second coming, when “a faithful and wise servant” succeeds “an evil servant” (Matthew 24:44–51).

22:17–19 *Jehovah will hurl you away as an athlete hurls a missile; he will make you soar like a dart. He will bind you tightly about and send you spinning like a top into an open country. There shall you die, and your [in]glorious conveyance there shall be a disgrace to your master’s house. I will thrust you out of office; you will be expelled from your post.*

As an allegory that prefigures an end-time fulfillment, this dramatization of a presumptuous servant’s demise paints a painful picture of how one who rises to a position of privilege among Jehovah’s people falls and becomes a disgrace. The higher the authority Jehovah bestows on an individual—for the purpose of fulfilling an honorable stewardship in his house—the greater the paradox when that person forgets he is called for others’ sake, not his own. When he considers himself entitled and offends God, Jehovah’s justice requires him to release that person from office and to appoint another in his stead.

22:20–22 *In that day I will commission my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: I will clothe him with your robe and bind your girdle on him; I will appoint him your jurisdiction. And he will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will invest him with the keys of the house of David: when he opens none shall shut, when he shuts none shall open.*

As prefigured by Eliakim’s succession of Shebna, Jehovah appoints his end-time servant as an integral part of the reversal of circumstances that occurs in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. The verbs “commission” or “call” (*qara’*) and “appoint” (*natan*) form word links to Jehovah’s “calling” and “appointing” his servant (Isaiah 41:27; 42:6; 48:15; 49:1, 6, 8; 55:4). While the word “servant” denotes a vassal relationship to Jehovah under the terms of the Davidic Covenant, the word “father” signifies the servant’s role as a proxy savior. That role here involves sealing keys that pertain to Isaiah’s seraph category.

22:23–24 *I will fasten him as a* ***nail*** *in a sure place, and he will be a throne of glory to the house of his father. Upon him shall be hung all the glory of his father’s house: his descendants and posterity, including all the lesser vessels, from ordinary bowls to the most common containers.*

The servant’s function as *nail* expresses his role as a proxy savior under the terms of the Davidic Covenant. The burden that “hangs” or “depends” (*talu*) on him consists of the children of *his* “father”—his Savior—who are identified as “vessels” great and small, a term that serves as a metaphor for Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 52:11; 66:20). The imagery of a *nail* “in a sure place” signifies the burden of suffering a proxy savior endures in answering for his people’s disloyalties to Jehovah, as when the servant obtains Jehovah’s people’s temporal salvation or deliverance from a mortal threat (Isaiah 52:14; 53:11).

22:25 *In that day, says Jehovah of Hosts, the* ***nail*** *that was fastened in a sure place shall be removed. It shall be dislodged and fall, and the burden hanging on it cut off. Jehovah has spoken it.*

At the very time Jehovah appoints his end-time servant, Jehovah’s current, reprobate steward—of whom Shebna is a type (vv 15–19)—is “thrust out office” and “expelled from his post” (v 19). Remiss in his role as a proxy savior, he is “dislodged” or “hewn down” (*nigde‘a*) and “falls” (*napla*), word links that identify him with the wicked of Jehovah’s people and with Babylon and its king (Isaiah 8:15; 10:33–34; 14:12; 21:9). Those who hang or depend on him are “cut off,” a word link to the wicked leaders of Jehovah’s people and to Isaiah’s Greater Babylon category (Isaiah 9:14–15; 14:22; 29:20; 48:19).

ISAIAH 23

Tyre, the world shipping empire with its magnates, comes to a sudden end in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment

23:1 *An oracle concerning Tyre: Sound your sirens, O merchant ships! For [Tyre] is laid waste, stripped of warehouse and wharf. [On their way] from the land of Kittim they shall be informed of it.*

Forming an intrinsic part of Babylon’s socio-economic structure, Tyre—like its sister city Sidon (vv 2, 12)—typifies Babylon’s shipping and mercantile establishment. Tyre’s merchants anciently founded trading colonies throughout the entire known world. Isaiah’s concept of a Greater Babylon—a composite entity that includes a worldwide shipping empire—informs John’s Babylon the Great and its fall, including the demise of Babylon’s seafaring enterprise (Revelation 18:11–24). The sirens of Tyre’s ships, which sounded joyfully at their departure, now wail at the prospect of having no ports of call.

23:2–3 *Be dumbfounded, you inhabitants of the isles, who were amply replenished by the traders of Sidon crossing the seas. The grain of Shihor, the harvest of the Nile, was her source of revenue upon the high seas when she became the merchant of nations.*

Tyre’s and Sidon’s overnight destruction leaves people worldwide astonished and appalled. When Egypt’s grain, which enriched world traders, suddenly becomes unavailable, those who depend on it suffer its loss: “Up, and listen to my voice, O complacent women; you careless daughters, hear my words! In little more than a year you shall be in anguish, O carefree ones, for when the harvest is over, the produce shall fail to arrive” (Isaiah 32:9–10). Jehovah’s elect, on the other hand, prepare for that day: “Tell the righteous it shall be well with them; they shall eat the fruits of their own labors” (Isaiah 3:10).

23:4–7 *Be dismayed, O Sidon, because the* ***Sea****, the mighty haven of the* ***Sea****, has declared, I no longer labor and bear children! I no longer rear young men or raise virgins! When the news of Tyre reaches Egypt, men will be in anguish at the report. Move on to Tarshish lamenting, you inhabitants of the isles. Is this your festive [city] of ancient origin, whose feet led her to settle far-off [lands]?*

As the mercantile arm of Isaiah’s Greater Babylon, Tyre is identified with the sea itself. Elsewhere portrayed as a power of chaos personified by the king of Assyria/Babylon, the *Sea* also characterizes the wicked in general (Isaiah 5:30; 11:15; 17:12; 51:10, 15; 57:20). Tyre’s ports of call in far-off lands (v 11), which once welcomed ocean freighters, perish together with she who gave them birth. The great seaports of the world—Tyre’s “children”—where sailors enjoyed leisure and amusements, are now unrecognizable and unapproachable. News of their decease causes worldwide lamentation.

23:8–9 *Who devised this stratagem against Tyre, the imperial [city], whose traders were princes, whose merchants the world’s celebrities? Jehovah of Hosts devised it, to make all glorying in excellence a profanity, and the world’s celebrities an utter execration.*

While the world may question the wisdom of destroying an entire shipping industry, Israel’s God has another object in mind—to put down pride and commence a new civilization based on justice. Those who gained immense wealth by trading on the high seas, who lived like kings among the nations of the world, Jehovah humiliates for their godless conceit. Those who considered themselves above others, who took pride in their prestige and preeminence, he renders profane: “The haughty eyes of men shall be lowered and man’s pride abased; Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day” (Isaiah 2:11).

23:10–12 *Overflow your land like the Nile, O Daughter of Tarshish: the harbor is no more. Jehovah will stretch out his* ***hand*** *over the* ***Sea*** *and distress kingdoms; he will give orders concerning the merchant city that her ports of haven be destroyed. He will say, You will frolic no more, O ravished virgin, Daughter of Sidon. Get up and cross over to Kittim, though even there you will find no rest.*

Once seaport facilities are destroyed, people must rely on the land. But there, too, they “find no rest” (Isaiah 5:30; 8:22; 57:20–21). Jehovah’s stretching his *hand* over the Sea betokens the king of Assyria/Babylon’s destruction of Tyre, or that aspect of Greater Babylon which Tyre represents. Secondarily, drawing on the type of Moses’ stretching his hand over the Sea (Exodus 14:15–31), it alludes to the power of Jehovah’s servant to ultimately put down the archtyrant—the *Sea* (Isaiah 11:15). Common harlot imagery identifies Tyre with Babylon, who rules as “Mistress of Kingdoms” (Isaiah 47:1–15).

23:13–14 *So too with the land of the Chaldeans, the people who founded Tyre for shipping. Was it not the Assyrians who set up observatories, exposed its fortifications, and caused her downfall? Sound your sirens, O merchant ships; your haven is desolate!*

It was the residents of Babylon—“the land of the Chaldeans”—who established the world’s seaports that Tyre symbolizes. As Jehovah’s Day of Judgment approaches, the Assyrians install surveillance devices to spy out Tyre’s strengths and weaknesses. When Assyria launches its destructive assault, Tyre—like all of Greater Babylon—experiences “downfall” or “ruin” (*mappela*) (Isaiah 47:11). With no place to dock, Tyre’s merchantmen flounder at sea, their calls for help going unheeded: “Jehovah of Hosts has a day in store . . . . against [all vessels at sea,] both merchant ships and pleasure craft” (Isaiah 2:12, 16).

23:15–18 *In that day Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, the lifetime of a king. And at the end of seventy years, Tyre shall be as the harlot in the song: Take a lyre and go about the town, O forgotten harlot. Play skillfully; sing song after song, that you may be remembered. For after seventy years, Jehovah will revisit Tyre. And she will return to her trade and hire herself out to all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth. Her merchandise and hire shall be consecrated to Jehovah; it shall not be hoarded or stored up. Her commerce shall provide for those who dwell in the presence of Jehovah, that they may eat their fill and be elegantly clothed.*

Only after many years have elapsed during the millennial age does world trade make a comeback. This time, however, disbursements of products are based not on greed but on merit, such as providing for servants of Jehovah who dwell in his presence: “You shall be called the priests of Jehovah and referred to as the ministers of our God. You shall feed on the wealth of the nations and be gratified with their choicest provision” (Isaiah 61:6). Using the imagery of a former harlot whom people make the subject of derisive folksongs, Isaiah predicts Tyre’s return but also recalls her to mind as a warning.

ISAIAH 24

Wickedness by the earth’s inhabitants leads to a cataclysmic destruction and collapse into chaos

24:1–3 *Lo! Jehovah will lay waste the earth and empty it; he will disfigure its surface and scatter its inhabitants. And it shall be with priest as with people, with master as with servant, with mistress as with maid, with seller as with buyer, with borrower as with lender, with debtor as with creditor—when the earth is sacked, it shall be utterly ravaged. Jehovah has given word concerning it.*

Chapters 24–27 comprise what scholars call the Isaiah Apocalypse—a prophecy dealing with the end of the world. In all respects, however, these chapters, together with their parallel counterpart, form a continuum of Isaiah’s development of prophetic concepts in Part V of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 24–27; 48–54). Five Songs of Salvation (Isaiah 24:13–16; 25:1–5, 9; 26:1–6; 27:2–6) interject predictions of doom for the world. Nuancing Isaiah’s vision of Greater Babylon, particularly its cosmic destruction (Isaiah 13:9–10), chapter 24 portrays a tragic desolation of the earth and its inhabitants.

24:4–6 *The earth shall pine away, the world miserably perish; the elite of the earth shall be made wretched. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants: they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances, set at nought the ancient* ***covenant****. The curse devours the earth, for those who dwell on it have incurred guilt; because of it the population of the earth shall be diminished and little of mankind remain.*

The destruction of the “earth” and the “world” parallels that of Greater Babylon, which also consists of the “earth” and the “world” (Isaiah 13:5, 9, 11, 13; 14:16–17, 21, 26; 16:4; 23:9). The decimation of “mankind” continues that theme (Isaiah 13:12; 33:8). Causing these curses is the wickedness of Jehovah’s people, who have altered his “ordinances” or “ritual” (*hoq*) and perverted his “laws” or “doctrine” (*torot*), thereby violating Jehovah’s covenant and rendering it void. Jehovah’s servant, who personifies Jehovah’s *covenant* (Isaiah 42:6; 49:8), they likewise set at nought (Isaiah 49:7; 50:5–11; 52:14).

24:7–9 *The new wine withers on languishing vines, making all the lighthearted lament. The rhythm of drums ceases, the revelers’ din stops; the pulsating of lyres comes to an end. Men no longer drink wine amid song; liquor has turned bitter to drinkers.*

Whether through lawlessness by citizens or invasion by enemies, the land’s desolation dries up supplies of beverages, putting an end to revelry. Entertainments cease and the indolent lifestyle of pleasure lovers becomes a thing of the past. The curse the prophet had pronounced as a warning to Jehovah’s people turns into reality: “Woe to those who go after liquor as soon as they arise in the morning, who linger at night parties, inflamed by wine! There are harps and lyres, drums, flutes, and wine at their banquets, but they regard not what Jehovah does, nor perceive his handsat work” (Isaiah 5:11–12).

24:10–12 *The towns of disorder are broken up; all houses are shuttered, that none may enter. Outside is [heard] the clamor for wine, though all joy has become gloom: the earth’s vitality is gone. Havoc remains in the city; the gates lie battered to ruin.*

The “city” and “town/s”—in this case a representation of Jehovah’s wicked people and the nations—suffer destruction in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment prior to and on the heels of Assyria’s aggression (Isaiah 14:31; 19:2; 22:2; 23:7–9; 25:2; 26:5–6; 32:13–14; 37:26–27; 64:10–11). Addicts can no longer satisfy their cravings. Excesses turn into privation and joy into gloom even as Jehovah’s righteous people experience the opposite (vv 14–16). At the very time the wicked “city” perishes, the righteous “city” regenerates (Isaiah 1:26; 19:18; 26:1–3; 33:20–21; 45:13; 52:1–3; 60:13–15; 62:12; 65:18).

24:13–15 *Then shall it happen in the earth among the nations as when an olive tree is beaten, or as grapes are gleaned when the vintage is ended. Then will these lift up their* ***voice*** *and shout for joy, and [those] from across the sea exult at Jehovah’s ingenuity. Because of it they will give glory to Jehovah in the regions of sunrise, and in the isles of the sea to the name of Jehovah, the God of Israel.*

While the “vintage” or “harvest” (*basir*) of the earth denotes the destruction of the wicked in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, those who are “gleaned” out of it comprise a righteous remnant of Jehovah’s people: “In that day Jehovah will thresh out [his harvest]from the torrent of the Riverto the streams of Egypt. But you shall be gleaned one by one, O children of Israel. In that day a loud trumpetshall sound, and they who were lost in the land of Assyria and they who were outcasts in the land of Egypt shall come and bow down to Jehovah in the holy mountain at Jerusalem” (Isaiah 27:12–13; cf. 63:2–4).

Songs of Salvation erupt from Jehovah’s elect people in two chief places where Jehovah delivers them: (1) where “these” take refuge—that is, in the land of Israel; and (2) where “[those] from across the sea . . . in the regions of sunrise . . . in the isles of the sea” await Israel’s God. Those in the land of Israel lift up their voice and rejoice in Jehovah’s salvation, while those abroad exult at Jehovah’s ingenuity in orchestrating events in such a way as to deliver them (Isaiah 12:1–6; 42:1–12). Secondarily, those who “lift up” or “sustain” (*yis’u*) their *voice* uphold or sustain Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 50:10; 52:8).

24:16 *From a sector of the earth we hear singing: Glorious are the righteous! Whereas I thought, I am wasting away; I am weakening: woe is me; the traitors have been treacherous, the turncoats have deceitfully betrayed!*

The remnants of Jehovah’s people who survive Jehovah’s Day of Judgment rejoice as they learn of each other’s deliverance. Joy and singing characterize the dawning of the earth’s millennial age of peace. Although the righteous are mistreated and betrayed even by former friends—wondering whether they can endure their afflictions much longer—those who remain faithful to the end inherit glory (Isaiah 4:2–3; 46:13; 52:1; 60:1–3; 62:1–3). The words “Glorious are the righteous” (*sebi lassaddiq*) additionally mean “Glorious is the righteous one,” a reference to Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 41:2, 26; 53:11).

24:17–18 *Terrors and pitfalls and traps await you, O inhabitants of the earth: those who flee at the sound of terror shall fall into a pit, and those who get up from the pit shall be caught in a trap. For when the windows on high are opened, the earth shall shake to its foundations.*

Worldwide calamity ensues after “the windows on high are opened,” signifying a Sodom-and-Gomorrah type of destruction. Cosmic cataclysm—when “the earth shall shake to its foundation”—signals the start of an onslaught of covenant curses that befall the wicked and from which there appears no escape (Isaiah 13:13–15). Isaiah uses assonance and alliteration to depict the “terrors” (*pahad*), “pitfalls” (*pahat*), and “traps” (*pah*) that spread pervasively throughout the earth, reflecting a point of no return for its inhabitants until the entire cycle of deliverance and destruction has fulfilled its purpose.

24:19–20 *The earth shall be crushed and rent; the earth shall break up and cave in; the earth shall convulse and lurch. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, sway back and forth like a shanty; its transgressions weigh it down, and when it collapses it shall rise no more.*

Deep convulsions of Mother Earth—earthquakes, mega-volcanoes, and collisions with cosmic debris (Isaiah 5:25; 29:6; 32:19; 34:4, 9)—characterize Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. Jarred out of its current secure orbit (Isaiah 13:13), the earth reels and sways “like a drunkard,” reflecting the intoxicated spiritual state of its inhabitants. The people’s “transgressions” or “crimes” (*pis‘ah*) cause them to self-destruct. The earth with its inhabitants “collapses” or “falls” (*napla*) even as Greater Babylon “falls” (*napla*) (Isaiah 21:9), awaiting Jehovah’s new creation out of utter chaos (Isaiah 51:16; 65:17).

24:21–22 *In that day will Jehovah deal on high with the hosts on high and on earth with the rulers of the earth. They shall be herded together like prisoners to a dungeon and shut in confinement many days, as punishment.*

As with the king of Assyria/Babylon—who rises high in the heavens, then falls to the depths of the Pit (Isaiah 14:9–15)—Jehovah puts down the “rulers of the earth” and certain “hosts on high.” Rulers who misrule (Isaiah 3:12–15; 9:14–16) and alien angels who abet evil in the world (Isaiah 34:4), who had the chance to enjoy the earth’s paradisiacal glory, instead spend that time confined in a “dungeon” or “pit” (*bor*). After wicked leaders are supplanted by the King of Zion and by his servants whom he appoints as rulers, the earth at last enjoys an enduring peace (Isaiah 32:1; 60:17–21; 65:13–25).

24:23 *The moon will blush and the sun be put to shame, when Jehovah of Hosts manifests his reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory in the presence of his elders.*

As anciently Jehovah manifested himself to Moses and the seventy elders on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:9–11), and as Moses witnessed his glory (Exodus 24:15–18), so when he comes to reign on the earth Jehovah manifests himself to his end-time elders in the two spiritual and political centers of Mount Zion and Jerusalem. During the earth’s millennial age of peace, Jehovah sends emissaries to those who survive his Day of Judgment so that they may likewise receive the chance to see his glory: “I will come to gather all nations and tongues, that they may approach and behold my glory” (Isaiah 66:18).

ISAIAH 25

Survivors of the earth’s catastrophic destruction

sing praises when Jehovah does away with death

25:1 *[In that day you will say,] O Jehovah, you are my God; I will extol you by praising your name. For with perfect* ***faithfulness*** *you have performed wonders, things planned of old.*

After the calamities of Jehovah’s Day of Judgment are over, the righteous survivors of his people sing Songs of Salvation. In this instance using the personal pronouns “I” and “my,” their psalm is individualized, signifying that through the coming times of trial only *individuals* remain loyal to Jehovah. The “wonder/s” Jehovah planned of old (Isaiah 12:5; 29:14) consist of his purpose to exalt the earth and its inhabitants (Isaiah 4:2; 62:1–3), meaning that at some point its wicked inhabitants—after being given the chance to participate in Jehovah’s plan—must depart this sphere (Isaiah 13:9; 37:26–27).

25:2–3 *You have made the city a heap of rubble, fortified towns a ruin—heathen mansions shall no more form cities, nor ever be rebuilt! For this will powerful peoples revere you, a community of tyrannous nations fear you.*

The “city” and “town/s” (Isaiah 24:10, 12; 26:5–6; 27:10) that nuance Isaiah’s concept of a Greater Babylon here again epitomize the wicked of the world, who are identified as “heathen” or “aliens” (*zarim*). After being reduced to rubble and ruin—to chaos—their cities can’t be rebuilt as their operation and architecture were out of harmony with Jehovah’s heavenly design. The Assyrian alliance—the “powerful peoples” and “tyrannous nations” who destroyed others—will “revere” and “fear” Jehovah when they see their mighty power dwarfed by his and their evil institutions utterly razed (Isaiah 17:12–14).

25:4–5 *You were a refuge for the poor, a shelter for the needy in distress, a covert from the* ***downpour*** *and shade from the* ***heat****. When the blasts of tyrants beat down like torrents against a wall, or like scorching* ***heat*** *in the desert, you quelled the onslaughts of the heathen: as burning* ***heat*** *by the shade of a cloud, you subdued the power of tyrants.*

The terms “refuge,” “shelter,” “covert,” and “shade” typify Jehovah’s deliverance of his people (Isaiah 1:8; 32:2; 51:16), who here again appear as the “poor” and “needy” (Isaiah 10:2; 14:30; 41:17). In his Day of Judgment, Jehovah shelters them from enemy assaults “by the shade of a cloud”—his cloud of glory—which protects them from the fiery “downpour” and burning “heat” (Isaiah 4:3–6; 49:10). Secondarily, the *downpour* and *heat* designate the king of Assyria/Babylon, that tyrant of tyrants who launches the fiery holocaust upon a corrupt and wicked world (Isaiah 28:2, 17–19; 33:11–14; 42:25).

25:6–8 *In this mountain will Jehovah of Hosts prepare a sumptuous feast for all peoples, a feast of leavened cakes, succulent and delectable, of matured wines well refined. In this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the shroud that shrouds all nations, by abolishing* ***Death*** *forever. My Lord Jehovah will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the reproach of his people from throughout the earth. Jehovah has spoken it.*

Jehovah’s sumptuous feast for all peoples or nations alludes to the confirmation of Jehovah’s covenant with those who prove faithful through the evil time—as when an emperor formally adopts a vassal and the vassal’s conditional covenant becomes unconditional. New Testament parallels consist of the king who prepares a marriage feast for his son, of which those who are invited prove unworthy (Matthew 22:2–14); of the marriage to which ten virgins are invited but for which only five are prepared (Matthew 25:1–13); and of the millennial “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7–9).

The repeated terms “in this mountain” infer that “death” or “mortality” (*mawet*) is done away starting at the feast itself. Also called a “veil” (*lot*) or “shroud” (*masseka*), mortality acts as a mask that hides people’s righteousness or wickedness so that physically people may appear similar. Once the veil is removed, the righteousness of the righteous shines brightly in the sight of all, while the wickedness of the wicked appears plainly evident. The term “mountain” identifies the location of the feast as Mount Zion, the place and nation in which Jehovah dwells (Isaiah 2:2–3; 4:5; 8:18; 24:23; 30:29).

Secondarily, Jehovah’s “abolishing *Death* forever” alludes to his vanquishing the king of Assyria/Babylon, the angel of death who stalked the earth committing genocide of entire nations (Isaiah 10:7; 28:18–22; 33:12; 34:2): “When my Lord has fully accomplished his work in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, he will punish the king of Assyria for his notorious boasting and infamous conceit” (Isaiah 10:12); “I will break Assyria in my own land, trample them underfoot on my mountains” (Isaiah 14:25; “Assyria shall fall by a swordnot of man; a swordnot of mortals shall devour them” (Isaiah 31:8).

25:9 *In that day you will say, This is our God, whom we expected would save us. This is Jehovah for whom we have waited; let us joyfully celebrate his* ***salvation****!*

A Song of Salvation marks Jehovah’s deliverance of his people who acknowledge him as “our God”—their covenant Lord. The motif of “expecting” or “waiting” (*qiwweh*) for Jehovah’s coming to deliver them defines the time of trial of his people’s faith that precedes his millennial reign (Isaiah 8:17; 26:2–4; 30:18; 33:2, 6; 35:3–4; 49:23; 64:4). Jehovah’s coming as *salvation* constitutes salvation itself: “Jehovah has made proclamation to the end of the earth: ‘Tell the Daughter of Zion, “See, your *Salvation*comes, his reward with him, his work preceding him”’” (Isaiah 62:11; emphasis added).

25:10–12 *For in this mountain rests the* ***hand*** *of Jehovah, and under him Moab shall be trampled down as straw is trampled in a dung pit. For when he stretches his hands into the midst of it, as a swimmer spreads his hands to swim, he will pull down his pride in the attempt. Your highly walled fortifications he will lay low by razing them to the ground, even with the dust.*

Two “hands” of Jehovah qualify to fulfill this prediction: (1) Jehovah’s right *hand*—his servant—who “rests” (*tanuah*) in this mountain or nation upon receiving his inheritance of rest (Isaiah 11:10); and (2) Jehovah’s left *hand*—the king of Assyria/Babylon—who “alights” (*tanuah*) in this mountain or nation to trample Moab (cf. Isaiah 10:5–6). As a prideful kindred people (Isaiah 15–16), Moab is trodden as “straw” and its institutions are razed to the “dust.” Moab thus meets the same fate as the wicked “city”—Greater Babylon—that is razed to the dust and trodden underfoot (Isaiah 26:5–6; 47:1).

ISAIAH 26

Unlike their oppressive rulers, the righteous

survive the earth’s desolation while others resurrect

26:1 *In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: Our city is strong;* ***salvation*** *he has set up as walls and barricades!*

The “land of Judah”—a codename of the Promised Land—is where Jehovah’s people at home find safety in the righteous “city,” counterpart of the wicked “city”that descends into the dust (vv 5–6; Isaiah 25:12; 47:1). Respectively representing Zion and Greater Babylon, these “cities” coexist briefly until Jehovah delivers the one and destroys the other. Those comprising the righteous city sing a Song of Salvation, knowing that Jehovah—their *salvation*—now dwells with them and protects them better than the “walls and barricades” that failed to keep their enemies at bay (Isaiah 2:12–15; 5:5–6; 22:8).

26:2–4 *Open the gates to let in the nation righteous because it keeps faith. Those whose minds are steadfast, [O Jehovah,] you preserve in perfect peace, for in you they are secure. Ever trust in Jehovah, for Jehovah, Yah, is an everlasting* ***Rock****.*

Continuing their Song of Salvation (v 1), those at home welcome from abroad those of Jehovah’s people who “keep faith,” whose “minds are steadfast”—inferring that those who didn’t keep faith, whose minds weren’t steadfast, aren’t with them. Jehovah preserves his faithful people in perfect “peace”—a synonym of healing and salvation (Isaiah 52:7; 53:5; 57:19)—while for the wicked “there is no peace” (Isaiah 48:18, 22; 57:21). Although to his elect Jehovah is a “Rock” of salvation (Isaiah 17:10; 30:29; 44:8), to the unrepentant he is a “stumbling block or obstructing *rock*” (Isaiah 8:14; emphasis added).

26:5–6 *He has put down the elite inhabitants of the exalted city by casting it to the ground, laying it even with the dust. It is trodden underfoot by the feet of the poor, by the footsteps of those impoverished.*

The exalted “city” that epitomizes Greater Babylon Jehovah casts “to the ground . . . even with the dust,” signifying its being reduced to chaos or to a nonentity. In Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, its “elite inhabitants” are “put down” together with all in the world who exalt themselves (Isaiah 2:12–17; 3:16–24; 13:11; 14:11–20; 47:1–15). The poor and impoverished—for whom Jehovah constitutes a refuge (Isaiah 25:4; cf. 11:4; 14:30; 41:17)—tread underfoot those who oppressed them: “You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet” (Malachi 4:3; cf. Isaiah 41:25).

26:7–8 *The path of the righteous is straight; you pave an undeviating course for the upright. In the very passage of your ordinances we anticipate you, O Jehovah; the soul’s desire is to contemplate your name.*

The path to salvation—to deliverance from all evil, spiritual and temporal—is straight or without deviation; and singular, or only one (Isaiah 40:14). It defines the course or moral compass of the “righteous” or “righteous one” (*saddiq*), signifying the role of Jehovah’s servant as an exemplar of righteousness to Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13). The righteous “anticipate” or “wait for” (*qiwweh*) Jehovah to manifest himself to them, as symbolically enacted through temple ordinances or rites of passage. Their soul’s desire is to contemplate his “name,” alluding to his presence (cf. Isaiah 38:11).

26:9 *My soul yearns for you in the night; at daybreak my spirit within me seeks after you. For when your ordinances are on the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn* ***righteousness****.*

The lives of Jehovah’s righteous people are oriented around Jehovah and the terms of his covenants. The personal pronouns “me” and “my” show that it is a person’s individual choice, not a collective psyche, that leads into Jehovah’s presence—that righteousness is learned through one’s own volition. Jehovah’s ordinances serve as a channel to that soul or spirit who yearns for him and seeks after him night and day. Jehovah’sraising up his end-time servant—his *righteousness*—accelerates his people’s preparation throughout the earth for Jehovah’s anticipated coming (Isaiah 46:11–13; 51:1, 4–8; 56:1).

26:10–11 *Though favor be shown the wicked, they will not learn* ***righteousness****; in a land of uprightness they remain perverse and see not the glory of Jehovah. O Jehovah, your* ***hand*** *is lifted up, but they perceive it not. Let them perceive with dismay your* ***zeal*** *for your people when the* ***fire*** *prepared for your enemies consumes them.*

Although prior to Jehovah’s Day of Judgment the righteous and wicked live side by side, only those who “learn righteousness” by Jehovah’s standard perceive or discern (1) Jehovah’s *zeal* for his people as typified by his servant; and (2) the *fire* Jehovah prepares for their enemies as typified by the king of Assyria/Babylon. Although Jehovah shows them favor the same as the righteous, the wicked remain perverse or unrighteous and reject Jehovah’s *righteousness*—his servant. Spiritually blind, they recognize neither Jehovah’s *hand* of deliverance nor his *hand* of destruction (Isaiah 14:26–27; 41:10, 13).

26:12 *O Jehovah, you bring about our peace; even all that we have accomplished you have done for us.*

The polarization of people prior to Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—in which the righteous increase in righteousness and the wicked increase in wickedness—ultimately leads to the one qualifying for deliverance under the terms of Jehovah’s covenants and the other sealing their own damnation. Still, the righteous take no credit for their righteousness, knowing that by the grace of God they are saved after all they can do. The peace that Jehovah wrought for them—“the price of our peace he incurred” (Isaiah 53:5)—they now inherit in the millennial age (v 3; Isaiah 32:17; 33:20; 54:13–14; 57:2; 66:12).

26:13–14 *O Jehovah, our God, lords other than you have ruled over us, but you alone we recall by name. They are dead, to live no more, spirits who will not rise up; you appoint them to destruction, wiping out all recollection of them.*

Jehovah’s elect celebrate his lordship as the millennial age begins, acknowledging him alone as “our God”—their covenant Lord. From his manifesting himself to them in response to their invoking his name (vv 7–9; Isaiah 41:25; 52:6; 56:6), they know him personally. The oppressive “lords” who had hitherto ruled them, on the other hand, are dead, powerless to “live” or “regenerate” (*yihiyu*); “spirits” or “ghosts” (*repa’im*) unable to “rise up” or “resurrect” (*yaqumu*) from the dead. Appointed to destruction, they and the memory of them are wiped out as if they had never existed (Isaiah 14:20).

26:15 *You have enlarged the nation, O Jehovah, and by enlarging it gained glory for yourself; you have withdrawn all borders in the earth.*

When the Assyrian alliance is at last overthrown, the world it conquered becomes Jehovah’s. Although the archtyrant boasted that he had “done away with the borders of nations” (Isaiah 10:13; cf. 14:6, 12, 16–17, 21; 37:18), after Jehovah’s servant vanquishes him, the whole earth is restored to its Maker (Isaiah 12:4–6; 27:2–3; 52:7–10; 54:5; 60:21; 62:11; 66:1). Jehovah “enlarges” (*yasapta*) the nation of his people by restoring the descendants of Joseph (*yosep*) and Judah, reuniting them through the instrumentality of his servant (Isaiah 9:3–7; 11:10–14; 49:5–6; 55:4–5; 56:8; cf. Ezekiel 37:15–22).

26:16–18 *O Jehovah, in their distress they remembered you; they poured out silent prayers when your chastisements were upon them. As a woman about to give birth cries out from her pangs during labor, so were we at your presence, O Jehovah. We were with child; we have been in labor, but have brought forth only* ***wind****. We have not wrought* ***salvation*** *in the earth, that the inhabitants of the world might not fall.*

Those of Jehovah’s people who didn’t prove valiant but who still survived into the millennial age recount their times of distress when Jehovah’s chastisements impelled them to turn back to him. At the time of Jehovah’s coming, the whole earth goes into labor (Isaiah 13:8; 21:3; 42:14; 66:7–9). But instead of bringing forth a deliverer, or preparing the world for Jehovah’s coming as *salvation*, his people bring forth but *wind*, an allusion to the archtyrant who oppresses them. Only Jehovah’s elect bring forth a deliverer (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6–7; 11:10–12; 19:20; 41:2–3; 45:13; 48:14–15; 49:1, 5; 55:3–5; 66:7).

26:19 *Yet shall your dead live when their bodies arise. [You will say to them,] Awake, and sing for joy, you who abide in the dust: your dew is the dew of sunrise! For the earth shall cast up its dead.*

As the millennial age dawns, Jehovah’s dead—the righteous departed—“live” or “regenerate” (*yihiyu*) when their bodies “arise” or resurrect” (*yequmun*) (cf. Isaiah 25:7–8). Unlike persons in the Perdition category—who don’t “regenerate” or “resurrect” (v 14)—Jehovah’s holy ones, who are affiliated with Zion, awake and arise from the dust: “Awake, arise; clothe yourself with power, O Zion! . . . Shake yourself free, rise from the dust; sit enthroned, O Jerusalem” (Isaiah 52:1–2; cf. 51:9). Like the dew of sunrise that revives plant life, Jehovah’s coming to his elect regenerates them (Isaiah 35:4–6; 66:14).

26:20–21 *Come, O my people, enter your chambers and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves a little while until the* ***wrath*** *is past. For now will Jehovah come out of his dwelling place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquities; the earth will uncover the blood shed upon it and no more conceal its slain.*

As at Israel’s ancient Passover (Exodus 12), Jehovah’s covenant people are to “hide” in their habitations until his *wrath* is past—until the king of Assyria/Babylon’s work of punishing the wicked blows over and he is punished himself. While Jehovah intervenes to protect his elect who participate in a new exodus to Zion (Isaiah 43:2, 5–6, 16–17; 48:20–21; 52:11–12), he protects only indirectly those who don’t prove loyal under all conditions and thus don’t qualify for the new exodus. On resurrection morning—at Jehovah’s coming to reign—the earth’s slain, too, awake to a glorious new age (v 19).

ISAIAH 27

At his harvest of the earth’s wicked, Jehovah

gleans out individually his people who bear good fruit

27:1 *In that day will Jehovah, with his great and powerful* ***sword****, punish severely Leviathan, the evasive maritime serpent, Leviathan, that devious sea monster, when he slays the dragons of the* ***Sea****.*

Among those whom Jehovah punishes in his Day of Judgment are the “dragons” (*tannin*) of the “Sea” (*yam*) or their modern equivalents that are named after Leviathan, the legendary sea monster of ancient Near Eastern myth. Jehovah’s *sword* is two, depending on how one reads it: (1) Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 31:8–9; 41:2; 49:2); or (2) the king of Assyria/Babylon (Isaiah 34:5–6; 65:12; 66:14–16). While the archtyrant destroys the wicked of the world, in the end Jehovah’s servant subdues the chaotic power of the *Sea* (Isaiah 10:26; 11:15; 51:9–10) by vanquishing him (Isaiah 9:4; 30:30–32; 41:2).

27:2–3 *In that day, sing [of the earth] as of a delightful vineyard of which I, Jehovah, am keeper. I water it constantly, watch over it night and day, lest anything be amiss.*

Jehovah’s vineyard—the Promised Land (Isaiah 1:8; 5:1–7)—which was once a national locale, in the millennial age encompasses the earth. Although the vineyard—also Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 3:14–15; 5:7)—once brought forth evil fruit (Isaiah 5:2, 4; 17:5–6), it now brings forth good fruit (v 6; Isaiah 4:2; 11:1; 37:31). As the keeper of his millennial vineyard, Jehovah himself watches over it. Those who broke into it, who burned and desolated it (Isaiah 5:5–6), are no more. The briars and thorns that overgrew it were burned (Isaiah 9:18–19) and now the vineyard is “delightful” or “desirable” (*hamed*).

27:4–5 *I have no more* ***anger*** *[toward her]. Should briars and thorns come up, I will ruthlessly attack them and altogether set them ablaze. But should they take hold of me for a refuge and make peace with me, they shall be reconciled to me.*

In the glorious age that follows his Day of Judgment, Jehovah won’t tolerate further evils that turn his people away from what is good. In a time when his holy Spirit prevails throughout the earth (Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; 59:21), when every system besides Jehovah’s has been tried and found wanting, those who don’t serve Jehovah must perish (Isaiah 60:12). Because briars and thorns—the world’s wicked—have no place in his kingdom, they will burn up as in his Day of Judgment. Alternatively, they may make peace with Jehovah and find refuge in him the same as his elect people have done (Isaiah 12:2; 25:4).

27:6 *For [in days] to come, when Jacob takes root and Israel bursts into blossom, the face of the earth shall fill with fruit.*

In the millennial age of peace, when Jehovah’s vineyard extends to the entire earth, all things flourish (Isaiah 51:3; 58:11; 61:11; 65:10, 21–22). Many of the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people who were persuaded to repent and return ascended spiritually and qualified to inherit the earth at Jehovah’s coming (Isaiah 10:20–22; 35:10; 59:20; 60:21). Just as Jacob—Israel’s progenitor—ascended spiritually and received the name Israel (Genesis 32:28), so his descendants “take root” as Jacob, “burst into blossom” as Israel, and bear fruit as Zion/Jerusalem (Isaiah 4:2–3; 37:31–32; 55:10–13).

27:7–8 *Was he smitten as were his smiters? Or was he slain as were they who slew him? You have dealt with them by utterly banishing them, [O Jehovah]. By his fierce blasts they were flung away in the day of the burning* ***east******wind****.*

Those who smote and slew Jehovah’s covenant people—before and during his Day of Judgment—end up worse off than those whom they persecuted. As according to the terms of Jehovah’s covenant the curses of the covenant come upon those who violate the rights of his people who keep the terms of his covenant, those who attempt to annihilate Jehovah’s people are themselves annihilated in his Day of Judgment. The “fierce blasts” and “east wind” apply initially to the archtyrant who destroys the wicked and lastly to Jehovah’s servant who delivers the righteous (Isaiah 17:12–14; 29:5–6; 57:13).

27:9–11 *But by this shall Jacob’s iniquity be expiated, as a result of this his sins removed: when he makes like crushed chalkstone all altar stones, leaving no idols of prosperity and shining images standing. Because [of them] the fortified cities lie forlorn, deserted habitations, forsaken like a wilderness; steers forage and recline there, stripping bare the young branches [of trees]. A harvest of twigs dries, broken off by women who come to light their fires with them. They are not a discerning people. Therefore their Maker shows them no mercy; he who formed them favors them not.*

In the same way the ancient Israelites expiated their sin of worshiping the Golden Calf by grinding it to powder (Exodus 32:17–20), so the sin of idolatry of Jehovah’s end-time people is “expiated” by their removing all vestiges of idols. Hurtful conditions such as the land’s takeover by animals and desiccation of its foliage are seldom perceived as Jehovah’s covenant curses by the wicked, who are interested only in filling their immediate needs. Because by their idolatry they have become “an undiscerning people,” they come under Jehovah’s law of justice, not of mercy (Isaiah 1:3; 42:17–25; 56:10).

27:12–13 *In that day Jehovah will thresh out [his harvest] from the torrent of the* ***River*** *to the streams of Egypt. But you shall be gleaned one by one, O children of Israel. In that day a loud* ***trumpet*** *shall sound, and they who were lost in the land of Assyria and they who were outcasts in the land of Egypt shall come and bow down to Jehovah in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.*

Harvest imagery—signifying the destruction of the wicked in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—extends to the deliverance of Jehovah’s elect who are “gleaned one by one” (Isaiah 17:5–6; 24:13). These individuals respond to the *trumpet*—the worldwide mission of Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 58:1)—by gathering in an exodus to Zion to escape annihilation by the king of Assyria/Babylon—the *River* (Isaiah 7:20; 8:7–8; 11:10–12): “All you who live in the world, you inhabitants of the earth, look to the *ensign* when it is lifted up in the mountains; heed the *trumpet*when sounded!” (Isaiah 18:3; emphasis added).

In the end, “they who were lost in the land of Assyria”—Israel’s Ten Tribes—and “they who were outcasts in the land of Egypt”—Egypt’s covenanters (Isaiah 19:20–21)—come to worship Jehovah in his holy mountain (Isaiah 2:3; 30:29; 56:7–8): “Jehovah will dry up the *tongue*of the Egyptian *Sea*by his mighty *wind*; he will extend his *hand*over the *River* and smite it into seven streams to provide a way on foot. And there shall be a pathway out of Assyria for the remnant of his people who shall be left, as there was for Israel when it came up from the land of Egypt” (Isaiah 11:15–16; emphasis added).

ISAIAH 28

Ephraim and its prophets reap disaster for being delusional and for rejecting divine revelation

28:1 *Woe to the garlands of glory of the drunkards of Ephraim! Their crowning splendor has become as fading wreaths on the heads of the opulent overcome with wine.*

Chapters 28–31, which form a didactic unit comprising Part VI of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 28–31; 55–59), each commence with a “woe” or covenant curse. Ephraim’s chief sins of pride and drunkenness catch up with Israel’s birthright tribe in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. Instead of acknowledging current inconvenient truths, the people of Ephraim look back on past glories earned in more righteous times as if they still apply today. Ephraim’s self-deception, stemming from intoxication with “wine” at the highest levels, compounds the hard times that lie ahead (v 7; Isaiah 56:10–12).

28:2 *My Lord has in store one mighty and strong: as a ravaging* ***hailstorm*** *sweeping down, or like an inundating* ***deluge*** *of mighty waters, he will hurl them to the ground by his* ***hand****.*

The imagery of “a ravaging hailstorm sweeping down” and of “an inundating deluge of mighty waters” identifies the king of Assyria/Babylon and his alliance of aggressor nations (Isaiah 8:7–8; 17:12; 18:2). A second “one mighty and strong” in the Book of Isaiah is Jehovah’s servant, who makes an end of him at the last. Although Jehovah provides a refuge for a repentant remnant of his people against the storms of their enemies (Isaiah 4:6; 25:4–5; 57:13), he empowers the archtyrant—Jehovah’s (left) *hand*—over “the drunkards of Ephraim” to cast their illustriousness to the ground (cf. vv 1, 3).

28:3–4 *The proud garlands of the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden underfoot. And the fading wreaths, the crowns of glory on the heads of the opulent, shall be like the first-ripe fruit before summer [harvest]: he who sees it devours it the moment he has hold of it.*

Ideas that link the king of Assyria/Babylon to these verses are Jehovah’s people being “trodden underfoot” (Isaiah 10:5–6; 63:6) and the timing of Assyria’s assault as early summer (Isaiah 16:9–10; 18:5). Ephraim’s former “crowns of glory”—now mere “fading wreaths” on the heads of a later generation—aren’t enough to prevent Assyria’s desolating invasion. The enemy alliance promptly “devours” or “swallows up” (*yibla‘enna*) Ephraim’s produce. Jehovah’s Day of Judgment humbles Ephraim’s “opulent” (*ge’e semanim*)—literally “fat proud ones”—both political and ecclesiastical (v 7; Isaiah 17:3–6).

28:5–6 *In that day shall Jehovah of Hosts be as a crown of beauty and wreath of glory to the remnant of his people: a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, a source of strength to those who repulse the attack at the gates.*

Whereas the main body of Ephraim suffers covenant curses (vv 2–4, 17–22), a remnant of “his people”—Jehovah’s covenant people—rallies to finally oust the Assyrian power. These take no praise to themselves for their heroic deeds but rather give Israel’s God the praise, acknowledging him as their “crown of beauty” and “wreath of glory” (Isaiah 26:12; 63:7).Those who sit in judgment and minister “justice” in that day—superseding his people’s leaders who wrought injustice—are Jehovah (Isaiah 33:22; 51:5), his servant (Isaiah 9:6–7; 16:5; 42:1–4), and certain righteous judges (Isaiah 1:26; 32:1).

28:7–8 *These too have indulged in wine and are giddy with strong drink: priests and prophets have gone astray through liquor. They are intoxicated with wine and stagger because of strong drink; they err as seers, they blunder in their decisions. For all tables are filled with vomit; no spot is without excrement.*

As the political and ecclesiastical leaderships of Jehovah’s people always appear on a par (Isaiah 3:2–4; 9:14–16; 24:2), so Ephraim’s “fat proud ones” (vv 1, 4) include its “priests,” “prophets,” and “seers” (Isaiah 56:10–12). Intoxicated with the wine of self-deception (v 15), they “stray,” “err,” and “blunder” in their policies. Instead of obtaining revelation from Jehovah (vv 9, 14, 16, 26, 29), they water down his word until it is ineffectual in empowering his people (vv 10–13; Isaiah 32:6). The best their spiritual feasts offer is “vomit”—partly digested food regurgitated for Jehovah’s people to consume.

28:9–10 *Whom shall he give instruction? Whom shall he enlighten with revelation? Weanlings weaned from milk, those just taken from the breast? For it is but line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little.*

Although Jehovah wants to give his people “instruction” and “revelation,” they are but babes and sucklings who haven’t developed far enough to digest more than milk: “Everyone who uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe” (Hebrews 5:13). Ephraim’s mode of learning is still “line upon line, line upon line,precept upon precept, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little” (*saw lasaw saw lasaw qaw laqaw qaw laqaw ze‘ir sam ze‘ir sam*). Assonance and alliteration parody their rote method of learning that consists of parroting back what their leaders teach.

28:11–12 *Therefore, by incomprehensible speech and a strange* ***tongue*** *must he speak to these people, to whom he said, This is rest; let the weary rest! This is a respite! But they would not listen.*

The lesser portion of Jehovah’s word proves fatefully insufficient to save “these people”—Jehovah’s alienated people—from being slain and taken captive by their enemies (vv 2–3, 13, 22). The only way that remains for Jehovah to speak to his people that may induce them to repent is through the “incomprehensible speech” and “strange tongue” of the alien Assyrian invaders (Isaiah 33:18–19; 54:16–17). Assuming that the lesser law they labor under is, in fact, the whole law, Jehovah’s people who have grown “weary” of it now reject Jehovah’s “rest” and “respite” that characterize his higher law.

28:13 *So to them the word of Jehovah remained: Line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little, that, persisting, they might lapse into stumbling and break themselves, become ensnared and be taken captive.*

Instead of receiving a greater portion of the “word of Jehovah” through divine revelation, the people of Ephraim remain ensconced in its lesser version as that is all they know. The end result is their ruination: “Sanctify Jehovah of Hosts, making him your fear, him your awe. And [to you] he will be a sanctuary, but to the two houses of Israel a stumbling block or obstructing rock, and a snare, catching unawares the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Many will stumble into them, and when they fall shall be broken, and when they become ensnared shall be taken captive” (Isaiah 8:13–15; cf. 5:13; 42:18–25).

28:14–15 *Therefore hear the word of Jehovah, you scoffers who preside over these people in Jerusalem. You have supposed, by taking refuge in deception and hiding behind falsehoods, to have covenanted with* ***Death****, or reached an understanding with Sheol, that, should a flooding* ***scourge*** *sweep through [the earth], it shall not reach you.*

By seeking “refuge in deception” instead of in Jehovah (Isaiah 4:6; 25:4), and by “hiding behind falsehoods” instead of acknowledging the truth (Isaiah 9:15; 32:6), Ephraim’s leaders rely on their own counsel as epitomized by a “Covenant with Death.” Such a policy leads to death at the hands of Jehovah’s agent of *death*, the king of Assyria/Babylon, in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. Having turned into scoffers of Jehovah’s word, they think to escape the “flooding *scourge*”—the power of the archtyrant (v 2). Rejecting Jehovah’s Covenant of Life (Isaiah 55:3), they end up in Sheol—Hell or the underworld.

28:16–17 *Therefore, thus says my Lord Jehovah: I lay in Zion a* ***stone****, a keystone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation. They who believe it will not do rashly. I will make justice the measure,* ***righteousness*** *the weight; a* ***hail*** *shall sweep away your false refuge and waters flood the hiding place.*

In spite of their repudiating Jehovah’s word, the leaders of his people “in Zion” are to hear it anyway (v 14). Although there are among them those who will not believe it, some do believe. Consequently, Jehovah empowers (1) his servant—a *stone* or seer who acts as antidote to the erring seers (v 7); and (2) the archtyrant and his alliance—the *hail* and “waters” that flood the hiding place (v 2; Isaiah 17:12; 32:19). This results in a reconstruction of Jehovah’s people based on justice—as carried out by Jehovah’s exemplar of *righteousness* (Isaiah 41:2; 42:1–4)—and in the demise of the mockers.

28:18–19 *Your covenant with* ***Death*** *shall prove void, your understanding with Sheol have no effect: when the flooding* ***scourge*** *sweeps through, you shall be overrun by it. As often as it sweeps through, you shall be seized by it: morning after morning it shall sweep through, by day and by night [it shall seize you]; it shall cause terror merely to hear word of it.*

The façade the leaders of Jehovah’s people maintain that hides their Covenant with Death (v 15) is swept away in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment when the king of Assyria/Babylon—the *scourge* of the wicked—overruns their Promised Land. Those unprepared to receive Jehovah’s new revelation (v 16; Isaiah 42:9; 48:6–8)—because they have mistaken the old or taken it lightly (Isaiah 41:26–29; 50:10–11)—face a protracted period of Jehovah’s justice. In the pattern of ancient Assyria’s and Babylon’s destructions of Jehovah’s people and their lands, his people’s apostasy triggers Jehovah’s Day of Judgment.

28:20–21 *[Then shall come to pass the proverb:] The couch is too short to stretch out on, the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in. For Jehovah will rise up as he did on Mount Perazim, and be stirred to anger, as in the Valley of Gibeon—to perform his act, his unwonted act, and do his work, his bizarre work.*

While “they who walk uprightly shall attain peace and rest in their beds” in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 57:2), the wicked suffer deprivation and other covenant curses (Isaiah 3:6–7). In that context, Jehovah’s “act” or “work” (Isaiah 5:19; 10:12; 40:10; 45:9; 62:11) is twofold: (1) the destruction of the wicked; and (2) the deliverance of the righteous. As in this instance, the work’s destructive aspect is “unwonted” or “strange” (*zar*). It is “bizarre” or “alien” (*nokriya*) because on this occasion Jehovah is “stirred to anger” and “rises up” against his own people instead of against their enemies.

Jehovah’s rising up as he did on “Mount Perazim”—literally the “Mount of Breakings Forth”—harks back to his breaking forth upon his people who transgressed their bounds at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:20–24) and to his breaking forth upon Israel’s enemies the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:18–20). Jehovah’s being stirred to anger “as in the Valley of Gibeon” refers to Joshua’s victory over an alliance of Amorites, when the sun stood still upon Gibeon for an entire day until the Israelites had slaughtered them and Jehovah had helped them by casting great hailstones upon their enemies (Joshua 10:10–14).

28:22 *Now therefore scoff not, lest your bonds grow severe, for I have heard utter destruction decreed by my Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, upon the whole earth.*

Still addressing his people’s leaders who scoff at his word as delivered by his servant (vv 14–16, 22–23), Jehovah reminds them that “utter destruction” is coming upon the entire earth: “Jehovah of Hosts is marshaling an army for war. They come from a distant land beyond the horizon—Jehovah and the instruments of his wrath—to cause destruction throughout the earth” (Isaiah 13:4–5; cf. 10:23; 37:18). Those who scoff only harden the bonds of their self-deception that hold them bound to unreality, thereby sealing upon themselves the very disaster they had hoped to evade (Isaiah 30:12–14).

28:23–26 *Give heed, and hear my* ***voice****! Be attentive, and listen to what I say! Will the plowman be forever plowing to sow seed, disking and harrowing the same ground? When he has smoothed its surface, does he not sprinkle fennel and scatter cumin? Does he not demarcate wheat from barley and [plant] buckwheat in its own plot? His God instructs him, directing him in the proper procedure.*

Two agents of Jehovah, consisting of two alternative exemplars, intervene among Jehovah’s end-time people of Ephraim: (1) Jehovah’s *voice*—his servant (v 23); and (2) the *tongue*—the king of Assyria/Babylon (v 11). Although few may “give heed,” “hear,” “be attentive,” or “listen” to his *voice* (Isaiah 50:10), those who do Jehovah personally “instructs” and “directs.” Like the plowman, who doesn’t plow the same ground over and over but moves on and plants crops so that the land may yield its abundance, so his discerning people use wisdom and discretion in implementing Jehovah’s word.

28:27–29 *Fennel is not threshed with a sharp-toothed sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cumin: fennel is beaten out with a stick and cumin with a rod. Domestic grain is ground; one does not go on endlessly threshing it. It cannot be ground by driving horse and threshing cart [over it]. These things originate with Jehovah of Hosts, whose counsel is wonderful, whose inspiration is surpassing.*

It is impossible for Ephraim’s prophets to provide proper spiritual nurture to Jehovah’s people by performing a mélange of improper procedures that yield confusion. When things reach that point—when a simple farmer’s inspiration (vv 26, 29) surpasses that of his people’s leaders (vv 7, 15)—Jehovah sets his house in order (Isaiah 1:25–26; 66:6). The terms “wonderful counsel” establish word links to Jehovah’s servant—“the man who performs my counsel” (Isaiah 46:11), upon whom rests the “spirit of counsel” (Isaiah 11:2), and who exemplifies the function of a “wonderful counselor” (Isaiah 9:6).

Each poetic allegory (vv 23–26, 27–29) reiterates chapter 28’s theme of the need for divine revelation and its lack among the people of Ephraim that leaves them unprepared for Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. Parallel ending verses—“His God instructs him, directing him in the proper procedure” (v 26) and “These things originate with Jehovah of Hosts, whose counsel is wonderful, whose inspiration is surpassing” (v 29)—hark back to verse 9: “Whom shall he give instruction? Whom shall he enlighten with revelation?” and to Jehovah’s taking steps to restore his revelation to “those who believe it” (v 16).

ISAIAH 29

Unsealing the sealed Book of Isaiah overturns the learning of academics and exposes spiritual error

29:1–2 *Woe to Ariel—Ariel, the city where David lodged! Though you add year to year, and the feastdays recur in succession, yet will I distress Ariel: there shall be mourning and sorrow when she becomes as my altar hearth.*

Dual meanings of the name Ariel—“Altar Hearth” and “Lion of God”—allude to the dual destinies of Jehovah’s people whom it symbolizes. The “city” that represents his people divides in two: one part turns to wickedness and suffers a Sodom-and-Gomorrah type of destruction; the other turns to righteousness and enjoys deliverance at the intercession of Jehovah’s servant David (Isaiah 1:21, 26–27; 25:1–2; 26:1–6; 37:20, 35; 55:3–4). In spite of his people’s observing annual feastdays and solemn occasions, and of his servant’s having dwelt among them, Jehovah’s curse on Ariel attests to their apostasy.

29:3–4 *I will encamp against you round about, and beleaguer you with assault posts, and erect siege installations against you. And when you have been laid low, you will speak from the ground, your words uttering out of the dust: your* ***voice*** *from the ground shall be like that of a medium; your sayings shall whisper out of the dust.*

As Jehovah’s alienated people were beleagueredand laid low in the dust anciently, so they are laid low in his end-time Day of Judgment. For all who pertain to Isaiah’s Babylon category, Assyria’s invasion ends in destruction as it did in the past (Isaiah 10:28–34; 21:1–2). Even the Zion/Jerusalem category undergoes Assyria’s siege until Jehovah has fully proven his people’s loyalty (Isaiah 1:7–8; 31:4–5). The history of Jehovah’s ancient people and their demise are told for the benefit of his end-time people. The *voice* designates Jehovah’s servant, a seer (Isaiah 28:16; 50:10) who tells their tale.

29:5–6 *Suddenly, in an instant, your crowds of evildoers shall become as fine dust, your violent mobs like flying chaff. She shall be chastened by Jehovah of Hosts with thunderous quakings, resounding booms, tempestuous blasts and conflagrations of devouring* ***flame****.*

When the archtyrant launches his worldwide holocaust, the “crowds of evildoers” and “violent mobs” among Jehovah’s people turn into “fine dust” and “flying chaff”—into chaotic matter or nonentities. The wicked’s rage against the righteous reaching fever pitch in those days signals that the end is near: “Those who gather into mobs are not of me; whoever masses against you shall fall because of you” (Isaiah 54:15). A fiery desolation awaits Ariel—the “Altar Hearth” (vv 1–2)—at the hands of Jehovah’s *flame*—the king of Assyria/Babylon (Isaiah 5:24; 9:18–19; 30:27; 42:25; 47:14; 66:15–16).

29:7–8 *And the nations amassed to fight against Ariel, all who congregate at her stronghold to distress her, shall be as a dream seen in the night: like a hungry man who dreams he eats, but awakens famished, or like a thirsty man who dreams he drinks, but wakes up faint and craving. So shall be all the nations that amass to fight against Mount Zion.*

The “nations” or “Gentiles” (*goyim*) who fight against Ariel—in this instance, the “Lion of God” (vv 1–2)—ultimately come away empty. Synonymously paralleled with Mount Zion, Ariel here denotes the righteous of Jehovah’s people or Jehovah’s valiant ones. In other words, the curses of his covenant, as represented by hunger and thirst, now come upon those who violate the rights of Jehovah’s elect. The nations who labor under the dream or delusion conjured up in the night—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—that they can destroy his righteous people are in the end themselves destroyed (Isaiah 17:12–14).

29:9–10 *Procrastinate, and become bewildered; preoccupy yourselves, until you cry for help. Be drunk, but not with wine; stagger, but not from strong drink. Jehovah has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep: he has shut your eyes, the prophets; he has covered your heads, the seers.*

Jehovah’s people who are here addressed are chronically delusional to the point of slumbering in a deep sleep. Having procrastinated the day of their salvation by buying into dreamlike deceptions and fantasies, they grow “bewildered” and “cry for help” when Jehovah’s judgments come upon them. As a people’s leaders generally reflect the people themselves, so all are spiritually “drunk” and “stagger” instead of walking straight. The prophets and seers—the people’s “eyes” and “heads”—can’t awaken them to spiritual realities because they themselves are intoxicated and asleep (Isaiah 28:7; 56:9–12).

29:11–12 *For you the sum of vision has become as the words of a sealed book that they give to one who is learned, saying, Please read this, and he answers, I cannot; it is sealed. Or if they give it to one who is unlearned, saying, Please read this, he answers, I am unlearned.*

The expression “sum of vision” or “comprehensive vision” (*hazut hakkol*) signifies all that Jehovah has revealed about the past, present, and future (Isaiah 48:6). It defines an apocalyptic or cosmic vision as seen by Isaiah and others (cf. Daniel 8:15–19; Revelation 1:10). Word links determine that “the sealed book” is the Book of Isaiah (v 18; Isaiah 30:8), besides whatever secondary meanings may apply. That book, which predicts “the end from the beginning” (Isaiah 46:10), neither the learned nor unlearned have understood (v 24; Isaiah 32:3–4; 41:28; 42:18–20; 44:25; 48:6–8; 52:15; 56:10).

29:13–14 *But my Lord says, Because these people approach me with the mouth and pay me homage with their lips, while their heart remains far from me—their piety toward me consisting of commandments of men learned by rote—therefore it is that I shall again astound these people with wonder upon wonder, rendering void the knowledge of their sages, and the intelligence of their wise men insignificant.*

The expression “these people”—which repudiates the covenant formula “my people”—reflects Jehovah’s people’s alienated state. Although they are religious, praying and giving lip service to Jehovah, their piety is superficial. Grounded in human teachings or precepts of men, their religion separates them from him instead bringing them into his presence. When Jehovah intervenes among them at the onset of his Day of Judgment, what their “sages” and “wise men” knew or thought they knew—what their scholars and professors had taught them—Jehovah wonderfully overturns (Isaiah 44:25; 52:15).

29:15–16 *Woe to those who contrive to hide their schemes from Jehovah! They work in the dark, thinking, Who will see us? Who will know? What a contradiction you are! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay? Shall what is made say of its maker, He did not make me, or a work of its designer, He doesn’t understand?*

Jehovah pronounces a curse on those who live a double standard. His people’s “schemes” or “plans” (*‘esa*), concocted in private, put them at odds with Jehovah and cause spiritual blindness. Instead of aligning their actions with his desire for his people (Isaiah 40:13; 46:11), they attempt to make Jehovah follow theirs: “Woe to those in conflict with their Maker, mere shards of earthenware pottery! As though the clay were to say to him who molds it, ‘What are you doing? Your handshave no skill for the work!’” (Isaiah 45:9). By pursuing their own agenda, they are their own gods (Isaiah 41:21–24).

29:17 *In a very little while, shall not Lebanon again become a fruitful land, and lands now fruitful be considered backwoods?*

When Jehovah intervenes in humanity’s affairs the entire situation of his people changes. A great reversal of circumstances occurs between the righteous and the wicked, including their places of habitation: “I will lay waste mountains and hills and make all their vegetation wither” (Isaiah 42:15); “Wilderness and arid land shall be jubilant; the desert shall rejoice when it blossoms like the crocus” (Isaiah 35:1). As symbolized by their lands, the “fruitfulness” of the wicked is then seen as unfruitful, and what some considered the unfruitfulness of the righteous then appears fruitful (Isaiah 60:13–15).

29:18–19 *In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book and the eyes of the blind see out of gross* ***darkness****. The lowly shall obtain an increase of joy in Jehovah, and the poorest of men rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.*

In Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—at the time Isaiah’s prophecies come to pass—many of Jehovah’s people understand them. Those who were “blind” and “deaf”—his covenant people (Isaiah 42:16–20; 43:8)—then “see” and “hear” (Isaiah 32:3–4; 35:5). Having formerly “put darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isaiah 5:20), they then “see with their eyes and hear with their ears” (Isaiah 6:10). When Jehovah appoints his servant as “a light to the nations”—“to open eyes that are blind” and to deliver “those in darkness” (Isaiah 42:7; 49:6, 9; cf. 9:2)—humanity’s poor and lowly rejoice in Israel’s Holy One.

29:20–21 *For tyrants shall come to nought and scorners cease; all who watch for iniquity shall be cut off—those who at a word adjudge a man to be guilty, who ensnare the defender at court, who for nothing turn away him who is in the right.*

At Jehovah’s intervention to restore justice among his people (Isaiah 1:27; 42:1–4), tyrants and scorners “come to nought” and “cease” (Isaiah 16:4–5; 28:22). Faultfinders on the lookout for flaws in others—who, on mere hearsay, judge them guilty—who trip others up in their words to prevent justice being served, are “cut off.” That is, severed from Jehovah, from his covenant blessings, and from being numbered among his people (Isaiah 9:14; 22:25; 48:18–19). While the wicked create opposition that tries the faith and loyalty of the righteous, Jehovah removes them from the earth in his Day of Judgment.

29:22–24 *Therefore thus says Jehovah, who redeemed Abraham, to the house of Jacob: No longer shall Jacob be dismayed; his face shall pale no more. For when he sees among him his children, the work of my* ***hands****, hallowing my name, devoted to the Holy One of Jacob, reverencing the God of Israel, then will the erring in spirit gain understanding and they who murmured accept instruction.*

When end-time events occur just as Isaiah had predicted them—as neither the wise nor rash-minded had supposed (v 14; Isaiah 32:4)—many who had “erred in spirit” and “murmured,” who had misjudged Isaiah’s prophecies for what they are, come to “understanding” and receive “instruction.” As Jehovah delivered Abraham from Babylon’s plagues, and as Jacob’s face grew pale no more when he saw his son Joseph alive (Genesis 12:1–13:4; 46:30), so Jehovah delivers Abraham’s descendants from Greater Babylon’s plagues and restores Jacob’s lost tribes from exile (Isaiah 19:25; 41:8–9; 49:5–6).

ISAIAH 30

At Jehovah’s coming the rebellious suffer destruction but those who prove loyal enjoy deliverance

30:1 *Woe to you, rebellious sons, says Jehovah, for drawing up plans, but not by me, for making alliances without my approval, only adding sin to sin!*

Chapters 30–31 continue the theme of Jehovah’s people relying on their own counsel and schemes (cf. Isaiah 28–29). Jehovah pronounces a “woe” or covenant curse on those who trust in an arm of flesh—that is, in man instead of in him. The terms “rebellious sons” designate those who renege on their covenant relationship with Jehovah (v 9; Isaiah 1:2; 63:8–10) by making human contingency “plans” or “schemes” (*‘esa*) and “alliances” or “agreements” (*masseka*), only adding sin to sin (Isaiah 28:15; 29:15–16). Their first sin is to backslide from Jehovah; their second is to supplant him with themselves.

30:2–3 *They are bent on going down to Egypt—but have not inquired at my* ***mouth****—on seeking protection in Pharaoh’s forces, on taking shelter in Egypt’s shadow. But Pharaoh’s protection shall turn to your shame, shelter in Egypt’s shadow to embarrassment.*

When Assyria threatens the world with destruction, the earth’s inhabitants—many of them Jehovah’s people—rely on Egypt, the world’s great superpower, to save them. Egypt’s military may be strong enough to withstand Assyria, but its protection is merely a human substitute. To show that he alone can deliver his people, Jehovah will permit Assyria to ravage Egypt. If they will inquire of Jehovah’s *mouth*—his servant—however, they will know that Jehovah protects those who rely on him: “I will put my words in your *mouth* and shelter you in the shadow of my *hand*” (Isaiah 51:16; emphasis added).

30:4–5 *For all their officials at Zoan, and their envoys’ travels to Hanes, they shall be utterly disgusted with a people who will avail them nothing; [they shall be] of no help or benefit, but a humiliation and disgrace.*

Sending delegations to Egypt’s political centers to enlist Egypt’s aid against Assyria’s aggression will come to nought: “Men shall be appalled and perplexed at Cush, their hope, and at Egypt, their boast. In that day shall the inhabitants of this isle say, ‘See what has become of those we looked up to, on whom we relied for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria! How shall we ourselves escape?’” (Isaiah 20:5–6; cf. 10:3–4; 31:1–3; 36:6). In his Day of Judgment, Jehovah provides all the help his people need: “‘I am your help,’ says Jehovah; ‘Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel’” (Isaiah 41:14).

30:6–7 *An oracle concerning the Beasts of Negeb: Through a land of hardship and vicissitude, of lions and the roaring king of beasts, of vipers and the* ***fiery flying serpent****, they carry their wealth on the backs of young asses, their riches on the humps of camels, to a people who cannot profit them. Egypt’s help shall be futile and vain; therefore I refer to her as an idle boast.*

People who seek refuge in Egypt, who expend their resources to get there, meet with disappointment: “The Egyptians are human, not divine; their horses are flesh, not spirit: when Jehovah stretches out his *hand*, those who help them will stumble and those helped will fall” (Isaiah 31:3; emphasis added). Not only is the great superpower of the world reduced to a debilitated state, travelers there must brave the hazards of falling prey to wild beasts, literal and figurative. On another level, the *fiery flying serpent* alludes to Jehovah’s seraph–servant present in the land of Egypt (cf. Isaiah 14:29; 19:18–21).

30:8 *Go now, write on tablets concerning them; record it in a book for the end-time, as a testimony forever.*

Jehovah commands prophets in every age to record the events of their day, both good and evil, for the benefit of posterity: (1) of evil, to illustrate the consequences of his people’s actions; and (2) of good, to show that Jehovah at all times delivers those who keep the terms of his covenant. The Book of Isaiah contains such a message—a “testimony” or “paradigm” (*huqqah*)—that stands the test of time. Because Isaiah’s day serves as a type of the “end-time” (*yom ’aharon*) (Isaiah 44:7; 46:10), his recording it in a “book” or “scroll” (*seper*) and on “tablets” or “plates” (*luah*) ensures its preservation until that day.

30:9–11 *They are a rebellious people, sons who break faith, children unwilling to obey the law of Jehovah, who say to the seers, See not! and to those with visions, Predict not what is right for us: flatter us; foresee a farce! Get out of the way; move aside, off the path! Cease confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!*

As his Day of Judgment nears, Jehovah sends seers who report what they see and hear to warn his people of coming calamities and to stir them up to repent (Isaiah 21:6, 10; 42:9; 48:14–16; 52:7–8). As a “people” collectively, and as “sons” individually—signifying their covenant relationships with Jehovah—they have drifted into apostasy to the point of willful rebellion. Subscribing to a delusional version of reality, they persecute visionaries whom Jehovah raises up to declare what he—Israel’s Holy One—reveals, fatefully determined to hold fast at all costs to their flawed perception of the truth.

30:12–14 *Therefore, thus says the Holy One of Israel: Because you have rejected this word, and rely on manipulation and double dealing, and on them are dependent, this iniquity will be to you as a perilous breach exposed in a high wall which suddenly and unexpectedly collapses. It shall shatter with a crash like an earthenware vessel ruthlessly smashed, among whose fragments shall not be found a shard with which to scoop lit embers from a fireplace, or dip water from a tank.*

Rejecting Jehovah’s word when called on to repent, Jehovah’s people who “rely” and “depend” on predatory entrepreneurial schemes become its victims overnight when human financial institutions—represented by a “high wall” (cf. Isaiah 2:15)—collapse around them, transforming their lives from plunder to destitution (Isaiah 3:7; 8:21; 9:20). Resembling an earthenware vessel containing life-giving provisions that is smashed to smithereens, their situation suddenly morphs from plenitude to poverty, from affluence to indigence. Having invested in what passes away, when it does so do they.

30:15–17 *For thus says my Lord Jehovah , the Holy One of Israel: By a calm response triumph; with quiet confidence gain the victory. But you would have none of it. For you thought, Not so; we will flee on horses! Therefore shall you flee indeed. We will ride on swift mounts! Therefore shall your pursuers be swifter. You will flee by the thousand at the threat of one, [by thousands] at the threat of five, till you are left as a* ***flagstaff*** *on a mountaintop, an* ***ensign*** *on a hill.*

On the heels of his people’s collapse from within, their enemies invade from without. Having habitually disregarded Jehovah’s counsel, his people flee from this new threat instead of facing it. Although Jehovah is “a source of strength to those who repulse the attack at the gates” (Isaiah 28:6), they reject his word. Whereas they formerly put their enemies to flight though they were outnumbered (Leviticus 26:8), now their enemies who are outnumbered put them to flight. Persons affiliated with Jehovah’s servant, on the other hand—Jehovah’s *flagstaff* and *ensign*—endure (Isaiah 11:10; 18:3; 62:10–12).

30:18 *Then will Jehovah delay [his coming], that he may favor you; out of mercy toward you he will remain aloof. For Jehovah is the God of justice; blessed are all who wait for him.*

In order to test his people’s loyalties, Jehovah “delays” his coming or waits to deliver them. To that end, he remains “aloof” or above the fray until they either prove faithful to him or yield to fear and panic. To those who pass his test and “wait” for him, Jehovah proves faithful by protecting them (Isaiah 8:17; 25:9; 26:3; 33:2; 64:4). While the wicked enjoy no covenant blessings stemming from Jehovah’s “favor” or “mercy” (Isaiah 13:11; 26:21; 27:11; 59:18; 65:13–15), his “favor” and “mercy” extend to all who repent and rely on him through the evil time (Isaiah 49:8, 10; 54:6–8; 55:7, 12; 60:10; 63:7).

30:19–20 *O people of Zion, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, you shall have no cause to weep. He will graciously respond at the cry of your* ***voice****; he will answer you as soon as he hears it. Though my Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet shall your Teacher remain hidden no longer, but your eyes shall see the Master.*

Jehovah assures the Zion/Jerusalem category of his people that the adversity they endure is but for a small moment. He hears their cries as he heard their ancestors who were in bondage in Egypt (Exodus 3:7–9). As Moses and Hezekiah interceded with Jehovah on behalf of their peoples, so does his servant—their *voice*. Soon they will see Jehovah who will personally teach them: “Strengthen the hands grown feeble, steady the failing knees. Say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Take courage, be unafraid! See, your God is coming to avenge and to reward; God himself will come and deliver you’” (Isaiah 35:3–4).

30:21–22 *Your ears shall hear words from behind you saying, This is the way; walk in it! should you turn left or right. You will discard as unclean your graven idols plated with silver, your cast idols gilded in gold; you will eject them as a menstruous woman [her impurity] and say, Away with you!*

When Jehovah’s people repent of idolatry and banish their idols, the spiritual blindness and deafness they caused likewise disappear: “In that day men will throw away to the moles and to the bats their idols of silver and gods of gold which they have made for themselves to adore” (Isaiah 2:20; cf. 17:8; 27:9; 31:6–7; 46:6–8); “Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped” (Isaiah 35:5; cf. 6:10; 29:18; 32:3; 42:6–7). Jehovah’s “way” is perfect: “I Jehovah your God instruct you to your good, guiding you in the way you should go” (Isaiah 48:17; cf. 29:24; 42:16; 54:13; 59:21).

30:23–24 *Then will he water with rain the seed you sow in the ground, that the land’s increase of food may be rich and abundant. In that day your cattle shall graze in ample pasturelands, and the oxen and asses that till the soil eat grain silage winnowed with shovel and fork.*

In Jehovah’s millennial age of peace, his people who keep the terms of his covenant inherit the blessings of land and fertility: “Then shall a Spirit from on high be poured out on us; the desert shall become productive land and lands now productive be reckoned as brushwood. So shall justice inhabit the desert, and righteousnessabide in the farmland” (Isaiah 32:15–16). Well cared-for oxen and asses are no longer slain but range free (Isaiah 32:20; 66:3). Zion’s economy, grounded in agriculture, prospers: “They will beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:4; cf. 44:3).

30:25–26 *On all mountain heights and prominent hills shall appear streams of running water, on the day of great slaughter, when the towers fall. The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun increase sevenfold; as the light of seven days shall it be, in the day Jehovah binds up the fracture of his people and heals their open wound.*

The day of the great “slaughter” or “massacre” (*hereg*) “when the towers fall” refers to Jehovah’s Day of Judgment but also to a specific day within that time frame of his cleansing of the earth (Isaiah 2:15; 10:3; 34:2). For the righteous, on the other hand, a different day dawns: Jehovah causes waters to break forth in diverse places (Isaiah 35:6–7; 41:18; 44:3–4), increases his people’s light sevenfold (Isaiah 42:16; 58:10; 60:1, 19–20), and heals their fracture and open wound—that is, both their literal ailments and their divisions into scattered branches and peoples (Isaiah 11:13; 58:8; cf. Ezekiel 37:21–22).

30:27–28 *Behold, Jehovah Omnipotent coming from afar! His* ***wrath*** *is kindled, heavy is his* ***grievance****; his* ***lips*** *flow with* ***indignation****, his* ***tongue*** *is like a devouring* ***fire****. His* ***breath*** *is like a raging* ***torrent*** *that severs at the neck. [He comes] to sift the nations in the* ***sieve*** *of falsehood; with an erring* ***bridle*** *on their jaws [he will try] the peoples.*

Because Jehovah’s coming “from afar” is preceded by the king of Assyria/Babylon’s coming “from afar” (Isaiah 5:26; 10:3; 13:5), one event is inextricably linked to the other, implementing Jehovah’s deliverance and destruction. While the righteous receive Jehovah their God, the wicked get a false god (Isaiah 10:12–14; 14:13–14; 37:23–35). Personifying Jehovah’s *wrath*, *grievance*, *lips*, *indignation*, *tongue*, *fire*, *breath*, etc., the archtyrant cleanses the earth before Jehovah comes. As a new Flood, he desolates all except Jehovah’s people affiliated with Zion and Jerusalem (Isaiah 8:7–8; 10:28–32; 36–37).

*[He comes] to sift the nations in the* ***sieve*** *of falsehood; with an erring* ***bridle*** *on their jaws [he will try] the peoples.* In the interim before he comes, Jehovah lets all kinds of untruths prevail among his people and the nations to test their loyalties. Persons who keep his law and word—the terms of his covenant—intuitively know and accept the truth, while those who wallow in sin can’t perceive it and stumble. People conditioned to deceiving themselves (Isaiah 28:15; 44:18–20; 59:3–4) fall prey to the deceptions of the archtyrant (Isaiah 10:7; 21:2; 33:1, 7–8)—the *sieve* of lies and *bridle* of error.

30:29 *But for you there shall be singing, as on the night when a festival commences, and rejoicing of heart, as when men march with flutes [and drums and lyres] on their way to the mountain of Jehovah, to the* ***Rock*** *of Israel.*

A great reversal of circumstances between the righteous and the wicked transforms both in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. Even as the wicked perish, his elect participate in a new exodus to Zion: “I will bring your offspring from the east and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, ‘Give up!’ to the south, ‘Withhold not! Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth—all who are called by my name, whom I have formed, molded and wrought for my own glory’” (Isaiah 43:5–7); “Many peoples shall go, saying, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah’” (Isaiah 2:3);

“I will lift up my handto the nations, raise my ensignto the peoples; and they will bring your sons in their bosoms and carry your daughters on their shoulders” (Isaiah 49:22); “Nations will come to your light, their kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you! They have all assembled to come to you: your sons shall arrive from afar; your daughters shall return to your side” (Isaiah 60:3–4). A joy-filled occasion for Jehovah’s elect, the new exodus resembles Israel’s ancient pilgrimage to Jerusalem to pay homage to Jehovah, the *Rock* of their salvation (Isaiah 26:4; 27:13).

30:30–32 *Jehovah will cause his* ***voice*** *to resound, and make visible his* ***arm*** *descending in furious* ***rage****, with flashes of devouring* ***fire****, explosive discharges and pounding* ***hail****. At the* ***voice*** *of Jehovah the Assyrians will be terror-stricken, they who used to strike with the* ***rod****. At every sweep of the* ***staff*** *of authority, when Jehovah lowers it upon them, they will be fought in mortal combat.*

One of two twin passages that depict Assyria’s demise (cf. Isaiah 31:8–9), this predicts that as Assyria did to others so in the end it is done to Assyria. While the *voice*, *rage*, *fire*, *hail*, *rod*, and *staff* all denote the king of Assyria/Babylon (Isaiah 10:5; 13:2; 33:11–14; *et al*.), these terms and the term *arm* additionally designate Jehovah’s servant whom Jehovah empowers over him (Isaiah 31:9; 48:14–15; 51:9; *et al*.). Even as the wicked—the Assyrians—destroy the wicked, so Jehovah’s servant destroys them when he leads Jehovah’s armies in reconquering the earth (Isaiah 41:2–3, 10–16, 25; 45:1, 13; 48:14).

30:33 *For Tophet has been prepared of old, [a hearth] indeed, made ready for rulers; broad and deep is its fire pit and ample its pyre; Jehovah’s breath burns within it like a river of lava.*

Jehovah’s condemnation of the world’s evil rulers far exceeds that of the world’s wicked in general. Foremost among these is the archtyrant, who descends into the Pit of Dissolution (Isaiah 14:15; 26:13–14; 51:13–14). The Hell the evil rulers inherit compares to a fire burning endlessly: “They shall go out and look upon the corpses of the people who transgressed against me, whose worms do not die and whose fire shall not be extinguished. They shall be a horror to all flesh” (Isaiah 66:24). Such a place was “prepared of old,” signifying its parallel creation with the earth itself (cf. Isaiah 25:1; 37:26).

ISAIAH 31

Those who trust in Egypt’s military might rely on

an arm of flesh as Jehovah alone is all-powerful

31:1–2 *Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, relying on horses, putting their trust in immense numbers of chariots and vast forces of horsemen, but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor inquire of Jehovah! Yet he too is shrewd and will bring disaster [upon them], and not retract his words. He will rise up against the brood of miscreants and allies of evildoers.*

A twin covenant curse to Isaiah 30:1–5, this repeats Jehovah’s condemnation of those who rely on Egypt’s military might—on an arm of flesh (v 3)—instead of on him. Were they to “look to” Jehovah or “inquire of” him, he would reveal his will to them. Now he is compelled to bring “disaster” or “evil” (*ra‘*) on them as a result of their ill-advised actions. In his Day of Judgment, Jehovah “rises up” against the “brood of miscreants”—the Egyptians—and against the “allies of evildoers”—the Egyptians’ confederates—as he rises up against all the wicked (Isaiah 2:19, 21; 3:13; 14:22; 28:21; 33:10; 42:13–15).

31:3 *The Egyptians are human, not divine; their horses are flesh, not spirit: when Jehovah stretches out his* ***hand****, those who help them will stumble and those helped will fall; both shall come to an end together.*

Because of Egypt’s reputation as an invincible world power, people look up to Egypt as more than human. Jehovah disabuses their minds when he stretches out his *hand* over them as did Moses when Pharaoh’s armies who pursued the Israelites drowned in the depths of the sea (Exodus 14:21–28). Jehovah’s *hand*—in this instance, the king of Assyria/Babylon—invades Egypt and takes captive many of its inhabitants (Isaiah 20:4–5; 37:25). Like all the wicked in that day, the Egyptians and their allies “stumble” and “fall” and “come to an end” (Isaiah 3:8; 8:14–15; 10:4; 13:15; 21:9; 28:13; 59:10).

31:4 *For thus said Jehovah to me: As a lion or a young lion growls over the prey when the shepherds muster in full force against him, and is not dismayed at the sound of their* ***voice*** *nor daunted by their numbers, so shall Jehovah of Hosts be when he descends to wage war upon Mount Zion and upon its heights.*

A verse similar to Isaiah 29:7–8—in which “the nations that amass to fight against Mount Zion” come away empty—this depicts Jehovah’s descent on the mount in a great display of power as he did anciently on Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 19:16–20). When enemy herders or shepherds think to deal the death blow to Jehovah’s people by destroying his elect, Jehovah descends to wage war upon them (Isaiah 30:30–32; 64:1–3). While many may be “dismayed” by the enemy’s *voice*—the king of Assyria/Babylon—or “daunted” by his formidable forces, none can withstand the divine power of Jehovah.

31:5 *As birds hover over [the nest], so will Jehovah of Hosts guard Jerusalem; by protecting it he will deliver it, by passing over it, preserve it.*

Jehovah “guards” or defends his elect against Assyria’s assault in a new Passover. The words “by protecting it he will deliver it, by passing over it, preserve it” create word links to other instances of Jehovah’s delivering his people: “I will protect this city and save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David” (Isaiah 37:35); “I will deliver you and this city out of the handof the king of Assyria; I will protect this city” (Isaiah 38:6); “Those whose minds are steadfast, [O Jehovah,]you preserve in perfect peace, for in you they are secure” (Isaiah 26:3; cf. 1:8; 41:11–12; 51:22–23; 54:15–17).

31:6–7 *Return to him from whom you have contrived to go far astray, O children of Israel. For in that day every one of you will despise your idolatrous silver and gold by which your hands have incurred guilt.*

Similar to Isaiah 30:22 in its censure of idolatry, this appeal to Jehovah’s people to abandon their culture of materialism ends the homiletic theme of chapters 28–31. What more proof do his people want of Jehovah’s desire to deliver them from destruction in his Day of Judgment? Or what additional evidence do they need that their idolatry brings covenant curses? Parallel verses show that his people’s giving up the things they covet that money can buy defines repentance itself. Repenting of worshiping idols, in other words, constitutes an integral part of returning to God (cf. Isaiah 42:17–23; 55:2, 7).

31:8–9 *And Assyria shall fall by a* ***sword*** *not of man; a* ***sword*** *not of mortals shall devour them: before that* ***sword*** *they shall waste away and their young men melt; their captain shall expire in terror and their officers shrink from the* ***ensign****, says the Lord, whose* ***fire*** *is in Zion, whose furnace is in Jerusalem.*

Assyria’s “fall”—like the fall of all entities comprising Greater Babylon—concludes Jehovah’s Day of Judgment on a wicked world. Besides being “fought in mortal combat” (Isaiah 30:32), Assyria perishes by a heavenly *sword*—Jehovah’s secret weapon (Isaiah 49:2). Unlike physical human weapons, this manifestation of Jehovah’s power is divine. As the king of Assyria/Babylon personifies Jehovah’s *sword*, *ensign*, and *fire* to destroy the wicked, so Jehovah’s servant, his divinely appointed opponent, personifies Jehovah’s *sword*, *ensign*, and *fire* to deliver Jehovah’s elect and to destroy Assyria.

ISAIAH 32

Jehovah guides and protects the just but he turns the

tables on perverse preachers and complacent women

32:1–2 *A king shall reign in* ***righteousness*** *and rulers rule with justice. And a man shall become as a shelter from the* ***wind*** *or refuge from the* ***storm****, like brooks of water in a desert place, or the shade of a large rock in arid country.*

Although Jehovah personally rules in the millennial age (Isaiah 33:17, 22; 52:7), he rules also through his *righteousness*—his servant (Isaiah 9:6–7; 11:1–5; 41:2; 46:11–13)—and through the kings of his people who exemplify justice and righteousness (Isaiah 1:26; 42:1–4; 49:23; 60:10–17). As denoted by the singular noun “man,” those who reign with Jehovah are persons who serve as proxy saviors to Jehovah’s people by qualifying them for his “shelter,” “refuge,” and “shade” from the *wind* and *storm*—from the king of Assyria/Babylon—in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 4:6; 25:4–5; 51:16).

32:3–4 *The eyes of those who see shall not be shut, and the ears of those who hear shall listen. The minds of the rash shall learn understanding, and the tongues of the stammerers master eloquence.*

Jehovah’s charge to his people to “Go on hearing, but not understanding; Go on seeing, but not perceiving” (Isaiah 6:9), is now reversed as those who were blind and deaf repent and are healed—“lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand in their heart, and repent, and be healed” (Isaiah 6:10). The biggest obstacle to Jehovah’s people seeing and hearing, in other words, is that they *assume* they see and hear when they don’t (Isaiah 42:18–20). In that state of mind, they can’t accept the new things Jehovah reveals because they haven’t correctly understood the old (Isaiah 29:18, 24; 48:6–8).

32:5–6 *The godless shall no longer be regarded as noble nor rogues considered respectable. For the godless utter blasphemy; their heart ponders impiety: how to practice hypocrisy and preach perverse things concerning Jehovah, leaving the hungry soul empty, depriving the thirsty [soul] of drink.*

Before the millennial age, many of Jehovah’s people “suppose what is evil to be good and what is good, evil” (Isaiah 5:20), enabling impostors among them to command their respect. Although these form the top echelon of society, in Jehovah’s eyes they are the lowest: “Jehovah will cut off from Israel head and tail, palm top and reed, in a single day; the elders or notables are the head, the prophets who teach falsehoods, the tail. The leaders of these people have misled them, and those who are led are confused” (Isaiah 9:14–16). The spiritual void they create leaves Jehovah’s people vulnerable to disaster.

Most damning are the “blasphemy,” “impiety,” “hypocrisy,” and “perverse things” they pass off as the word of God. “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:5), they offer Jehovah’s people who come to be fed words that leave them empty (Isaiah 41:28–29). Jehovah, therefore, holds them in derision: “Predict the future for us: Tell us of events to come hereafter, so that we may know you are gods. Perform something good or evil at which we will be dazzled and all stand in awe. It is clear you are of no account, that your works amount to nothing” (Isaiah 41:22–24).

32:7–8 *And rogues scheme by malevolent means and insidious devices to ruin the poor, and with false slogans and accusations to denounce the needy. But the noble are of noble intent, and stand up for what is virtuous.*

Coupled with wickedness in high places within the ecclesiastical circles of Jehovah’s people (vv 5–6) is the predatory mindset of these same or similar “rogues” or scoundrels who victimize and defraud the poor and needy among them whom Jehovah claims as his own (Isaiah 3:15; 10:2; 11:4; 25:4; 29:19). Those whom Jehovah regards as truly “noble,” on the other hand, are “they who conduct themselves righteously” (Isaiah 33:15). They “demand justice” for the poor and “stand up for the oppressed,” they “plead the cause of the fatherless” and “appeal on behalf of the widow” (Isaiah 1:17; cf. 58:6–10).

32:9–10 *Up, and listen to my* ***voice****, O complacent women; you careless daughters, hear my words! In little more than a year you shall be in anguish, O carefree ones, for when the harvest is over, the produce shall fail to arrive.*

Not only the men but also the women of Jehovah’s people come under Jehovah’s censure. Their being spiritually and physically “complacent” and “carefree” in the face of his impending judgments leaves them unprepared and exposed to the evil time. With another year left of Jehovah’s three-year warning before Assyria’s assault (cf. Isaiah 16:14; 20:3), Jehovah’s *voice*—his servant—alerts them to the coming time of scarcity. Like Lot’s wife, who couldn’t imagine sudden destruction falling upon her city that had been there for centuries (Genesis 19:26), they too stand to perish (Isaiah 3:16–26).

32:11–13 *Be alarmed, you complacent women; be perturbed, O careless daughters! Strip yourselves bare; put sackcloth around your waists. Beat your breasts for the choice fields and flourishing vines, for my people’s land shall be overgrown with briars and thorns.*

In their crime of complacency, the women of Jehovah’s people emulate the Woman Babylon, to whose spiritual category they belong. Babylon epitomizes a “pampered lady, securely enthroned, thinking to herself, ‘I exist, and other than me there is nothing’” (Isaiah 47:8). If they don’t strip off their excesses and repent, then, like her, they will be compelled to do because of destitution (Isaiah 3:6–7, 17, 24; 22:12–14; 47:2–3). As enemies invade and the wicked overrun the land, lands yielding ample produce will turn to “briars and thorns” literally and figuratively (Isaiah 5:5–6; 7:23–25; 34:13; 64:10).

32:13–14 *[Mourn] for all the amusement houses in the city of entertainment, for the palaces shall lie abandoned, the clamorous towns deserted. High rises and panoramic resorts shall become haunts for ever after, the playground of wild animals, a browsing place for flocks.*

Consistent with Jehovah’s covenant curse on the Babylon category of his people, feral beasts overflow entertainment venues as a spoof on those who used to perform there like feral beasts: “Wild animals will infest it, and its buildings overflow with weasels; birds of prey will find lodging there and demonic creatures prance about in it. Jackals will cry out from its palaces, howling creatures from its amusement halls” (Isaiah 13:21–22); “It shall become the haunt of howling creatures, a reserve for birds of prey. Prairie wolves shall greet jackals, and wild goats call to one another” (Isaiah 34:13–14).

32:19\* *For by a* ***hail*** *shall forests be felled, cities utterly leveled.*

The synonymous parallelism of forests and cities signifies that besides its literal meaning the term “forests” functions as a metaphor for “cities”—just as mountains functions as a metaphor for kingdoms or nations and trees for people (Isaiah 13:4; 61:3; 64:1–3). The one who fells the forests or levels the cities is the king of Assyria/Babylon, Jehovah’s *axe* and *saw* (Isaiah 10:15; 14:8; 37:24). Identified with storm imagery in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 8:7–8; 17:12–13; 28:15), he is the *hail* that flattens the habitations of the wicked in a Sodom-and-Gomorrah type of destruction (Isaiah 28:2, 17, 22).

32:15 *Then shall a Spirit from on high be poured out on us; the desert shall become productive land and lands now productive be reckoned as brushwood.*

At the very time Jehovah pours out a fiery destruction from on high upon the wicked, he pours out his Spirit from on high on the righteous. In a reversal of circumstances between fertile lands and wilderness, the “desert” or wilderness blossoms while fertile lands revert to wilderness. Reflective of the righteous who go into the wilderness at the onset of Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, and of the wicked who remain behind amidst ruination, the earth’s entire landscape changes to accommodate Jehovah’s blessing of the righteous and curse upon the wicked (Isaiah 7:21–24; 14:17; 35:1–7; 43:19–21).

32:16–17 *So shall justice inhabit the desert, and* ***righteousness*** *abide in the farmland. And the effect of justice shall be peace, and the result of* ***righteousness*** *an assured calm forever.*

Jehovah’s elect, those among whom his servant—Jehovah’s *righteousness* (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13)—restores justice and righteousness (Isaiah 1:25–27; 9:6–7; 42:1–4; 51:1), receive permanent lands of inheritance in the millennial age as a covenant blessing (Isaiah 49:8; 54:3; 58:12, 14; 60:21). The materialistic economy that enslaved them before Jehovah’s Day of Judgment is entirely replaced by an agrarian one. While “there is no peace for the wicked” (Isaiah 48:22; 57:21), those whose lives exemplify justice and righteousness Jehovah grants everlasting peace (Isaiah 33:20; 54:10; 57:2; 66:12).

32:18, 20 *My people shall dwell in peaceful settlements, in safe neighborhoods, in comfortable dwellings. Blessed are you, who shall then sow by all waters, letting oxen and asses range free.*

Jehovah’s people who live into the millennial age inherit peace and safety for themselves and their descendants: “All your children shall be taught by Jehovah, and great shall be the peace of your posterity. You shall be firmly established through righteousness; you will be far from oppression and have no cause to fear, far from ruin, for it shall not approach you” (Isaiah 54:13–14). For them, the land yields bounteously: “Then will he water with rain the seed you sow in the ground, that the land’s increase of food may be rich and abundant. In that day shall your cattle graze in ample pasturelands” (Isaiah 30:23).

ISAIAH 33

Jehovah preserves the righteous at his coming but

the wicked of his people and the nations burn up

33:1 *Woe to you, despoiler, who yourself was not despoiled; O treacherous one, with whom none have been treacherous: when you have done with devastating, you shall be devastated; when you are through betraying, they shall betray you!*

The king of Assyria/Babylon—the “despoiler” and “treacherous one” who devastates Jehovah’s people and the nations—receives the same treatment he meted out to others. As he cruelly attacked the nations after making peace treaties (vv 7–8; cf. Isaiah 18:1–2; 21:2; 36:16), spoiled the world of its wealth (v 4; cf. Isaiah 8:4; 10:5–6, 13–14; 49:24), decimated humanity until few people remained (v 12; cf. Isaiah 10:7; 13:4–5, 12; 14:17), imposed bondage on the earth’s survivors (v 18; cf. Isaiah 10:27; 14:3–6; 49:24–25), and desolated their lands (v 9; cf. Isaiah 1:7; 13:9, 19; 64:10), so now it is done to him.

33:2 *O Jehovah, be favorable toward us; we have waited for you. Be our [strength of]* ***arm*** *from morning to morning, our* ***salvation*** *in troubled times.*

Waiting for Jehovah amid troubled times distinguishes his elect from the remainder of his people: “I will wait for Jehovah, who hides his face from the house of Jacob, and expect him” (Isaiah 8:17). Although Jehovah’s judgments may appear to last forever, causing many of his people to grow weary (Isaiah 43:22; 49:14), all is worth the outcome (Isaiah 25:9; 64:4). Jehovah keeps his part of the terms of his covenant by showing favor or compassion toward those who endure to the end (Isaiah 30:18; 49:13). He becomes their *arm* of *salvation* when he intervenes wondrously to deliver them (Isaiah 51:5; 63:5).

33:3–4 *The peoples fled from the thunderous* ***voice****; at your uprising the nations scattered. Their spoil was harvested in the manner of caterpillars; like insatiable locusts they rushed upon it.*

Parallelism of the “thunderous *voice*”—the king of Assyria/Babylon—and “your uprising” demonstrates the inseparable connection between the archtyrant’s destroying the world’s wicked inhabitants and Jehovah’s coming out in judgment against them (Isaiah 2:19, 21; 3:13; 13:2, 4–5; 14:22; 28:21; 31:2). In either case, the peoples or nations flee and scatter, leaving their wealth behind as spoil for the archtyrant and his alliance (Isaiah 10:5–6; 13:16; 42:22, 24). Resembling voracious caterpillars and swarms of locusts, the enemies of Jehovah’s people defraud all who belong to Isaiah’s Babylon category.

33:5–6 *But Jehovah is supreme, for he dwells on high; with justice and* ***righteousness*** *he will replenish Zion. Your* ***faithfulness*** *in time [of trial] shall prove to be a strength, your wisdom and knowledge your* ***salvation****; your fear of Jehovah shall be your riches.*

As Jehovah is “supreme” or exalted over all, he orchestrates the events that lead to the destruction of the wicked and deliverance of the righteous. Those who emulate his justice and righteousness he “replenishes” or recompenses through his *righteousness*—through the ministry of his servant. Their “faithfulness” or loyalty to Jehovah through adverse times pays off at the last. Although deprived of worldly riches, they chose wisely, with the certain “knowledge” that Jehovah, their *salvation*, would help them. Their reverent awe or “fear” of him kept them on a righteous path and qualified them for it.

33:7–9 *See, their stalwarts sob in public; the champions of peace weep bitterly. The highways are desolate, travel is at an end. The treaties have been violated, their signatories held in contempt; man is disregarded. The Land lies withered and forlorn, Lebanon wilts shamefully; Sharon has been turned into a dry waste, Bashan and Carmel are denuded.*

Those who seek peace in human treaties end up being betrayed. Their willingness to believe others’ lies stems from a kind of self-deception. Justice and righteousness alone beget true and lasting peace: “The effect of justice shall be peace, and the result of righteousness an assured calm forever” (Isaiah 32:17). By making peaceable agreements, then deliberately breaking them, the archtyrant takes advantage of gullible enemies (v 1). In his treacherous attack on Jehovah’s people, he devastates their lands from the mountains of Lebanon to the great Sharon Plain, to the ranges of Bashan and Carmel.

33:10 *Now will I arise, says Jehovah; I will now become prominent, now gain preeminence.*

Although many of Jehovah’s people may lose hope and give up believing in him (Isaiah 40:27), at some point Jehovah intervenes to make a name for himself and his faithful people as he did of old when he delivered them and wasted their enemies (Exodus 9:16; Joshua 9:9–10). While he may appear absent from human affairs—“Is it because I have so long kept silent that you no longer fear me?” (Isaiah 57:11)—in the end, he plainly manifests himself: “Jehovah will come forth like a warrior, his passions aroused like a fighter; he will give the war cry, raise the shout of victory over his enemies” (Isaiah 42:13).

33:11–13 *You who conceived chaff and brought forth stubble, the* ***fire*** *of your own* ***breath*** *devours you! Whole nations have been burned like lime, mown down like thorns and set ablaze. Take heed to what I have done, you who are far off; you who are near, be apprised of my might!*

The “chaff” and “stubble” that typify the chaotic works of evildoers are consumed by the *fire* of their own *breath*—that is, by the archtyrant whom they emulate. The parallel incidence of “nations” and “thorns” connotes the wicked state of the nations after the righteous are withdrawn—as when the angels removed Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah and only their miscreants remained (Genesis 19:1–28; cf. Isaiah 57:1). The worldwide destruction of the wicked—at which the righteous are delivered from their power—is Jehovah’s doing, as his people at home and abroad come to realize (Isaiah 26:12–14).

33:14 *The sinners in Zion are struck with fear; the godless are in the grip of trembling: Who among us can live through the devouring* ***fire****? Who among us can abide eternal burning?*

When a Sodom-and-Gomorrah type of destruction materializes, the wicked who dwell with Jehovah’s people “in Zion” give way to fear and trembling. Spiritually and physically unprepared for calamity, they realize with trepidation that their end is near. Their disloyalty to Jehovah prevents them from believing that “whatever weapon is devised against you, it shall not succeed” (Isaiah 54:17), or that “whoever wars against you shall be reduced to nothing” (Isaiah 41:12). Physical *fire*—at the hands of the king of Assyria/Babylon—and “eternal burning” in the hereafter await them.

33:15–16 *They who conduct themselves righteously and are honest in word, who disdain extortion and stay their hand from taking bribes, who stop their ears at the mention of murder, who shut their eyes at the sight of wickedness. They shall dwell on high; the impregnable cliffs are their fortress. Bread is provided them, their water is sure.*

Those who survive the devouring fire are Jehovah’s elect, his holy and valiant ones (Isaiah 4:4; 13:3, 19; 14:30–32). Although they live in a wicked society—amidst “extortion,” “bribes,” “murder,” and “wickedness”—they exercise scrupulous integrity. They are a people apart, made up of individuals determined to maintain justice and righteousness at all costs (Isaiah 26:7; 57:2; 61:7–9). Even in their wilderness retreat, food and water remain covenant blessings (Isaiah 7:21–22; 41:17–18; 49:9–10): “Tell the righteous it shall be well with them; they shall eat the fruits of their own labors” (Isaiah 3:10).

33:17 *Your eyes shall behold the King in his glory and view the expanse of the earth.*

Those who qualify to see Jehovah their King (v 22; Isaiah 6:5; 43:15) “in his glory” additionally see “the expanse of the earth” as a parallel experience. The verb “behold” (*hazeh*) connotes “seeing in vision” as did Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1; 13:1). The view—like that of seraphs—isn’t from below but from above (Isaiah 6:3; 40:22). Only those who attain Isaiah’s seraph category, therefore, are privy to this vision: “The moon will blush and the sun be put to shame, when Jehovah of Hosts manifests his reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and [his]glory in the presence of his elders” (Isaiah 24:23; cf. 62:1–2).

33:18–19 *You shall recount in your mind the terror: Where are those who conducted the census? Where are those who levied the tax? Where are the ones who appraised the towers? The insolent people are not to be seen, a nation of incomprehensible speech, whose babbling* ***tongue*** *was unintelligible.*

Before Jehovah delivers others of his people besides his elect, Assyria—a “nation of incomprehensible speech and a strange tongue” (Isaiah 28:11)—slays and enslaves them (Isaiah 10:3–6). The archtyrant resembles a babbling *tongue* that “blasphemes” against Jehovah (Isaiah 37:23–24), that “rises to accuse you” (Isaiah 54:17), that “utters duplicity” (Isaiah 59:3), and that demands of them a predatory taxation. Even prior to Assyria’s invasion, however, his people’s leaders followed the same evil archetype: “My people are taken over without price; those who govern them act presumptuously” (Isaiah 52:5).

33:20, 24 *Behold Zion, the city of our solemn assemblies; let your eyes rest upon Jerusalem, the abode of peace—an immovable tent, whose stakes shall never be uprooted, nor any of its cords severed. None who reside there shall say, I am ill; the people who inhabit it shall be forgiven their iniquity.*

Although two spiritual and political capitals exist in the millennial age—Zion and Jerusalem—both share the attributes of a “city” of Jehovah (Isaiah 60:14) that rises from the dust (Isaiah 52:1–2), to which Israel’s exiles return (Isaiah 35:10), that Jehovah protects (Isaiah 37:35), where Jehovah grants deliverance (Isaiah 26:1), that Jehovah’s servant rebuilds (Isaiah 44:26, 28), on which Jehovah’s glory rests (Isaiah 4:5), where Jehovah’s holy ones reside (Isaiah 4:3), which is never uprooted (Isaiah 54:2–3), that is never deserted (Isaiah 62:12), and from which Jehovah’s law and word go forth (Isaiah 2:3).

In their millennial “abode of peace,” Jehovah’s people again convene “solemn assemblies” as did Moses and the Israelites who sojourned in the Sinai wilderness (Leviticus 23:36); as did King Solomon at his temple’s dedication in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 7:8); and as did the Jews who returned from exile in Babylon with Ezra and Nehemiah to restore the Promised Land (Nehemiah 8:18). Illness and covenant curses—a consequence of iniquity—will be a thing of the past: “Then shall your lightbreak through like the dawn and your healing speedily appear” (Isaiah 58:8; cf. 40:1–2; 65:20; 66:14).

33:21, 23 *May Jehovah cause us to dwell there, a country of rivers and broad streams, where no warships sail or majestic fleets pass by. Their riggings hang loose; they hold not the* ***mast*** *in place nor spread out the sail. Now shall spoil in abundance be divided, and even the lame take part in the plunder.*

Where fleets of warships once sailed in defense of the land, all is now peace. Rivers and streams attest to Jehovah’s renewed covenant blessings (Isaiah 35:6–7; 41:18; 43:19–20). Jehovah’s presence is now his people’s defense (Isaiah 12:6; 26:1–3; 60:18). As for enemy ships, their riggings no longer support the *mast*—the tyrannical king of Assyria/Babylon; the wind has been taken out of their sail. Spoil and plunder that the enemy seized in its conquest of the world now fall to those who inherit Zion—the poor and needy, the lame or disabled, whom Jehovah heals (vv 4–5; Isaiah 9:3; 35:5–6; 53:12).

33:22 *For Jehovah is our Judge, and Jehovah our Lawgiver. Jehovah is our King; he himself will save us.*

The only being who “saves” is Jehovah, the God of Israel and King of Zion (Isaiah 43:11; 45:17, 21; 63:1, 8–9). Other persons, such as his servant, only qualify themselves and others for salvation. In their righteous attributes, they emulate Jehovah, their exemplar. As he is the Judge, Lawgiver, and King who rules over all, so—by serving as proxy saviors of others and ascending to higher spiritual categories—they too grow into the roles of millennial judges (Isaiah 1:26; 11:3–4; 16:5; 28:6; 51:5), lawgivers (Isaiah 42:1–4; 55:4), and kings (Isaiah 9:7; 32:1; 49:7, 23; 52:15; 60:3, 10–11, 16–17; 62:2).

ISAIAH 34

The nations are slaughtered and their lands laid waste

in Jehovah’s day of vengeance on behalf of Zion

34:1–2 *Come near, you nations, and hear! Pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth give heed, and all who are upon it, the world, and all who spring from it. Jehovah’s* ***rage*** *is upon all nations, his* ***fury*** *upon all their hosts; he has doomed them, consigned them to the* ***slaughter****.*

The nations of the world receive warning that Jehovah’s Day of Judgment is at hand, that they have but a brief time in which to repent. Jehovah has “doomed” or “cursed” them (*hehrim*)—all who fail to attain the Zion/Jerusalem category of his people before time runs out. Jehovah will vent upon them his *rage* and *fury*—the king of Assyria/Babylon—“him who with unerring blows struck down the nations in anger, who subdued peoples in his wrath by relentless oppression” (Isaiah 14:6). As Jehovah’s instrument of destruction, he causes the nations’ *slaughter*—a term that he typifies (Isaiah 65:12).

34:3–4 *Their slain shall be flung out and their corpses emit a stench; their blood shall dissolve on the mountains, their fat decompose [on the hills]—when the heavens are rolled up as a scroll, and their starry hosts shed themselves with one accord, like withered leaves from a vine, or shriveled fruit from a fig tree.*

A cataclysmic genocide leaves unburied bodies littering the landscape. The lack of a burial—a covenant curse—attests to the exigency of those times. Apart from cosmic debris, space technology and nuclear weapons may account for a destruction of that magnitude: “I will make mankind scarcer than fine gold, men [more rare]than gold of Ophir. I will cause disturbance in the heavens when the earth is jolted out of place by the angerof Jehovah of Hosts in the day of his blazing wrath” (Isaiah 13:12–13); “For when the windows on high are opened, the earth shall shake to its foundations” (Isaiah 24:18).

34:5 *When my* ***sword*** *drinks its fill in the heavens, it shall come down on Edom in judgment, on the people I have sentenced to damnation.*

The name “Edom” or “red” (*’edom*) derives from the red pottage Jacob cooked with which he purchased his father’s birthright from his twin elder brother Esau (Genesis 25:29–34). Esau’s descendants—and all who sell their spiritual birthright for a “mess of pottage” or its equivalent—thus identify with Edom. Beginning with Esau’s intention to kill Jacob (Genesis 27:42), to his descendants’ betrayal of Judah to the Babylonians (Psalm 137:7; Obadiah 1:9–10), all who emulate Esau’s treachery incur Jehovah’s “damnation” (*herem*). The archtyrant—Jehovah’s *sword*—will slay them (Isaiah 66:15–16).

34:6–7 *Jehovah has a* ***sword*** *that shall engorge with blood and glut itself with fat—the blood of lambs and he-goats, the kidney fat of rams. For Jehovah will hold a slaughter in Bozrah, an immense massacre in the land of Edom; among them shall fall buffalo, bulls, and steers. Their land shall be saturated with blood, their soil enriched with fat.*

As anciently the land of Edom was cattle country, so the nations’ destruction compares to the bloody “slaughter” or “sacrifice” (*zebah*) and “massacre” or “slaughter” (*tebah*) of fattened beasts who turn into fertilizer. The ritually clean nature of the animals—lambs, he-goats, rams, buffalo, bulls, and steers—identifies them as Jehovah’s apostate people: “I will destine you to the sword; all of you shall succumb to the slaughter. For when I called, you did not respond; when I spoke, you would not give heed. You did what was evil in my eyes; you chose to do what was not my will” (Isaiah 65:12; cf. 63:1–6).

34:8 *For it is Jehovah’s day of* ***vengeance****, the year of* ***retribution*** *on behalf of Zion.*

Jehovah’s “day ofvengeance” and “year of retribution” on behalf of Zion—his Day of Judgment—occur as a covenant curse upon the wicked who violate the rights of his elect: “I had resolved on a day of vengeance, and the year of my redeemed had come” (Isaiah 63:4; cf. 47:3–4; 59:17–18; 61:2). That day of *vengeance* is also the day of the king of Assyria/Babylon, whom Jehovah empowers to destroy the wicked (Isaiah 2:12; 7:17; 10:3–7; 13:6–13). Those who persecute Jehovah’s righteous people suffer the curses of the covenants he made with his people at the time he reverses their circumstances.

34:9–11 *[Edom’s] streams shall turn into lava and her earth into brimstone; her land shall become as burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall ascend forever. It shall remain a wasteland from generation to generation; through endless ages none shall traverse it. But hawks and falcons shall possess it, and owls and ravens inhabit it. It shall be surveyed with muddled measure and chaotic weight.*

As an integral part of Greater Babylon, the covenant breakers among Jehovah’s people meet Babylon’s fate. When, like Esau, they want their birthright back and are willing to slay their brothers for it (Genesis 27:41), Jehovah intervenes to cut them off from his blessings and to lay waste their habitations (Isaiah 1:7; 21:2; 24:1; 42:15). Their now uninhabitable land becomes a memorial of the damned for future generations (Isaiah 13:20–21; 14:22–23; 32:14; 66:24). The hell on earth they leave behind that is a consequence of their wickedness foreshadows the foreboding world they inherit in the hereafter.

34:12 *Shall they summon its nobles when it is no kingdom, when all its lords no longer exist?*

Human political systems, having been tried and found wanting, are done away. Humanity’s lowest spiritual categories—Perdition, Babylon, and Jacob/Israel—cannot exist in the millennial age. The kingdom of God and its divine institutions—Zion/Jerusalem and categories higher—alone remain: “I will make peace your rulers and righteousnessyour oppressors; tyranny shall no more be heard of in your land” (Isaiah 60:17–18). Only the millennial “lords” and “nobles” of the earth—the proxy saviors of Jehovah’s people—are summoned on solemn occasions to pay tribute to Jehovah, the King of Zion.

34:13–15 *For thorns shall overgrow its palaces, thistles and briars its strongholds; it shall become the haunt of howling creatures, a reserve for birds of prey. Prairie wolves shall greet jackals, and wild goats call to one another. There too shall the night owl find repose and discover for herself a resting place. There shall the hawk owl nest and lay eggs, hatch them and brood over her young. There too shall kites come together, each one accompanying her mate.*

Lands the wicked occupied turn into habitations for wild animals and revert to “thorns,” “thistles,” and “briars,” reflective of those who lived there (Isaiah 5:5–6; 13:21–22; 18:6). Arid lands and wilderness, where wild animals used to live, on the other hand, regenerate and blossom into paradise (Isaiah 35:1–7; 41:18–19; 51:3). Because beasts and birds also represent people, Isaiah projects their imagery onto another level, showing how common animals typify life’s true values—finding a mate, building a nest, and raising young. In effect, Jehovah provides for those who follow his design for his creation.

34:16–17 *Search, and read it in the book of Jehovah: None is unaccounted for, not one lacks her mate. By his* ***mouth*** *he decreed it, by his Spirit he brings them together. It is he who allots them an inheritance, his* ***hand*** *that divides it by measure. They shall possess it forever, inhabit it from generation to generation.*

Carrying bird imagery a step further, Isaiah shows that Jehovah assigns each female a mate by an edict recorded in his “book”—the Book of Life. Jehovah’s *mouth*—his servant—“decrees” or “ordains” (*siwwa*) it, while Jehovah’s Spirit brings them together so that they find one another. Jehovah’s *hand*—his servant—assigns them permanent inheritances in the land, as did Joshua: “I have created you and appointed you to be a covenantof the people, to restore the Land and reapportion the desolate estates” (Isaiah 49:8; cf. Joshua 11:23). Unlike in modern times, divine inheritances are never sold.

ISAIAH 35

At the new exodus to Zion, the righteous regenerate

and the desert blooms, heralding Jehovah’s coming

35:1–2 *Wilderness and arid land shall be jubilant; the desert shall rejoice when it blossoms like the crocus. Joyously it shall break out in flower, singing with delight; it shall be endowed with the glory of Lebanon, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon. The glory of Jehovah and the splendor of our God they shall see [there].*

Covenant curse reversals for Jehovah’s righteous people include the regeneration of the land. Symbolic of the regeneration of his people, the desert blossoms overnight like the “crocus” (*bassalet*), the first flower of spring. Jehovah’s elect who abide there—who participate in the new exodus out of Babylon and new wandering in the wilderness—rejoice in their deliverance and sing Songs of Salvation (Isaiah 12:1–6; 25:1–5; 26:1–6; 30:29). Jehovah’s cloud of glory rests over them to protect them from enemies and from adverse elements in his Day of Judgment (Isaiah 4:5–6; 25:4–5; 58:8; 60:1–2).

35:3–4 *Strengthen the hands grown feeble, steady the failing knees. Say to those with fearful hearts, Take courage, be unafraid! See, your God is coming to avenge and to reward; God himself will come and deliver you.*

Those who minister to Jehovah’s people in the wilderness encourage them to hold fast and trust in Jehovah to deliver them: “Though my Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet shall your Teacher remain hidden no longer, but your eyes shall see the Master” (Isaiah 30:20; cf. 30:18). This is the time of testing before he comes on earth to reign: “Tell the Daughter of Zion, See, your Salvationcomes, his reward with him, his work preceding him” (Isaiah 62:11; cf. 40:10). Jehovah’s “day of vengeance” (Isaiah 34:8; 61:2) lasts only until the wicked are destroyed from the earth.

35:5–6 *Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame leap like deer, and the* ***tongue*** *of the dumb shout for joy.*

During their wilderness sojourn, many who were blind and deaf—Jehovah’s people and their prophets (Isaiah 29:10; 42:18–20; 56:10–12)—see and hear through understanding “the words of the book” and emerge from spiritual darkness (Isaiah 29:18, 24; 58:10–11; 60:1–2). Jehovah’s servant opens the eyes of the blind, unstops the ears of the deaf, and delivers them from darkness (Isaiah 42:7; 49:6, 9; 50:4, 10). Healing of physical functions forms an integral part of the reversal of covenant curses that accompanies the servant’s mission before Jehovah comes (Isaiah 19:20–22; 57:18–19; 58:8).

35:6–7 *Water shall break forth in the wilderness and streams [flow] in the desert. The land of mirages shall become one of lakes, the thirsty place springs of water; in the haunt of howling creatures [shall marshes break out], in the reserves shall come rushes and reeds.*

Abundant moisture—in places where none existed—typifies the desert experience of Jehovah’s people during their wilderness wandering and at the time they receive lands of inheritance: “They shall feed along the way and find pasture on all barren heights; they shall not hunger or thirst, nor be smitten by the heatwave or the sun: he who has mercy on them will guide them; he will lead them by springs of water” (Isaiah 49:9–10); “I will open up streams in barren hill country, springs in the midst of the plains; I will turn the desert into lakes, parched lands into fountains of water” (Isaiah 41:18).

35:8–9 *There shall be highways and roads which shall be called the Way of Holiness, for they shall be for such [as are holy]. The unclean shall not traverse them; on them shall no reprobates wander. No lions shall be encountered there, nor shall wild beasts intrude.*

The Way of Holiness—the return road to Jehovah’s holy mountain (Isaiah 27:13; 56:7; 57:13b)—now cleared of obstacles (Isaiah 40:3–4; 57:14; 62:10), is traveled by his holy and valiant ones who survive Jehovah’s destruction of the wicked in his Day of Judgment (Isaiah 4:3; 13:3; 62:10–12). These hail from the four directions of the earth and witness Jehovah’s coming to Zion (Isaiah 11:11–12; 43:5–7; 49:11–12). Those who remain unclean, on the other hand—the reprobates who wander the highways of Jehovah’s people—perish at the hands of wild animals or other miscreants (Isaiah 5:29; 15:9; 56:9).

35:9–10 *But the redeemed shall walk them, the ransomed of Jehovah shall return; they shall come singing to Zion, their heads crowned with everlasting joy. They shall have won joy and gladness when sorrow and sighing flee away.*

Persons spiritually “redeemed” by Jehovah (Isaiah 43:1; 44:22) and physically “ransomed” by *righteousness* (Isaiah 1:27; 51:1)—Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13)—return to Zion in the exodus of Jehovah’s elect from throughout the earth (Isaiah 11:10–12; 51:9–11). Where sorrow and sighing were once the lot of Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 21:3; 29:2), now everlasting joy and gladness take their place (Isaiah 55:12; 61:7). The covenant blessings that were conditional on his people’s faithfulness through trials (Isaiah 26:2–3; 33:6) now become eternal and unconditional (Isaiah 54:10; 61:8).

ISAIAH 36

The king of Assyria invades many lands and lays

siege to a remnant of Jehovah’s people in Jerusalem

36:1 *In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah[’s reign], Sennacherib king of Assyria marched against all the fortified cities of Judea and seized them.*

Historically, the Assyrian kings Tiglath Pileser III (747–727 B.C.), Shalmaneser V (726–722 B.C.), and Sargon II (721–705 B.C.) preceded Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.) in their conquests of Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine. Sennacherib’s invasion of Israel’s southern kingdom of Judah marked another wave of ancient Assyrian campaigns, which, under Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, Sennacherib’s son and grandson, ultimately swept into Egypt. The “fourteenth year of King Hezekiah” (701 B.C.) occurs forty-one years after Isaiah’s vision of Jehovah in the temple and Isaiah’s calling as a prophet (Isaiah 6).

Isaiah had predicted Judea’s invasion a generation earlier when King Ahaz and his people proved disloyal to Jehovah their God: “My Lord will cause to come up over them the great and mighty waters of the River—the king of Assyria in all his glory. He will rise up over all his channels and overflow all his banks. He will sweep into Judea [like]a flood and, passing through, reach the very neck; his outspread wings will span the breadth of your land, O Immanuel” (Isaiah 8:7–8; cf. 7:10–20). As the prophesied Immanuel from a historical standpoint, King Hezekiah inherits this generational covenant curse.

From an end-time perspective, the parallel units of Part II of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 6–8; 36–40) contrast the two Davidic kings Ahaz and Hezekiah and their peoples in how they respond to two similar tests—the threat of an Assyrian invasion of the Promised Land. Whereas Ahaz proves disloyal to Jehovah and Ahaz’ people prove disloyal to Ahaz when faced with their Assyrian threat (2 Kings 16:7–8; Isaiah 7:2, 10–13; 8:6), his son Hezekiah proves loyal to Jehovah and Hezekiah’s people prove loyal to Hezekiah when faced with theirs (2 Kings 18:1–7; Isaiah 36:21; 37:14–20; 38:1–3).

By creating a single, end-time context for the entire Book of Isaiah (without depreciating what happened historically), Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure transforms these events into an allegory of the end-time. The synchronous nature of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure, in other words, determines that two Davidic kings—contemporaries in an end-time setting—respond in opposite ways to an essentially similar Assyrian threat. Each king serves as the exemplar of his people, one of reneging on his loyalty to Jehovah and capitulating to the king of Assyria, the other of maintaining strict loyalty to Jehovah.

36:2 *And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. And he took up a position by the aqueduct of the Upper Reservoir, on the road to the Laundry Plaza.*

While Jerusalem isn’t among the cities of Judea that Sennacherib captures, he does send his commander Rabshakeh with 185,000 men to Jerusalem to demand the city’s surrender. Meanwhile, Sennacherib himself lays siege to the fortress city of Lachish and destroys it. The place where Rabshakeh takes up his position turns out to be where Isaiah had earlier predicted that very outcome to King Ahaz: “Then Jehovah said to Isaiah, ‘Go out and meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-Jashub, at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Reservoir, on the road to the Laundry Plaza’” (Isaiah 7:3; cf. 7:14–25).

36:3–4 *And Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, overseer of the palace, Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph, the record keeper, went out to him. And Rabshakeh said to them, Please tell Hezekiah, Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what grounds do you behave with such confidence?*

King Hezekiah’s delegation to Rabshakeh consists of the trusted inner circle of his court. Rabshakeh commences his communique from Sennacherib with the same introductory words the Hebrew prophets use when representing Jehovah according to ancient Near Eastern custom: “Thus says . . .” The title “great king” defines Sennacherib’s role as a king of kings and lord of lords—that is, as emperor over the local kings of his empire who serve as his vassals or subordinates. Rabshakeh’s overbearing attitude in his speech that follows (vv 4–10) reflects the arrogance of ancient Assyrian conquerors.

36:5–6 *Do you suppose that in war mere words are [sufficient] tactics or [show of] strength? In whom have you put your trust, that you have rebelled against me? It is clear you depend on the support of Egypt, that splintered reed which enters and pierces the palm of any man who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him!*

King Ahaz’ repudiation of his vassalship to Jehovah under the terms of the Davidic Covenant in favor of vassalship to the king of Assyria (2 Kings 16:7) his son Hezekiah now reverses (2 Kings 18:7). Although no evidence exists that Hezekiah calls for Egypt’s help against Assyria, the Cushite (Ethiopian) dynasty then in power in Egypt, apprised of Sennacherib’s plans to invade Egypt, meets Assyria’s threat to its territory (cf. Isaiah 37:9). Rabshakeh’s caricature of Egypt and its pharaoh as “that splintered reed” reflects Egypt’s history of reneging on its political commitments toward other nations.

36:7 *But if you tell me, We rely on Jehovah our God, is he not the one whose shrines and altars Hezekiah abolished, telling Judea and Jerusalem to worship [only] at this altar?*

To Rabshakeh, the more shrines and altars at which people worship, the more chances for the gods to come to their aid. He sees Hezekiah’s purifying the ecclesiastical establishment of his day as a bad thing for the people of Judah, whereas to Hezekiah his doing so eliminates the alien forms of idolatry that tainted his people’s worship of Jehovah (2 Kings 18:4). The words “this altar” refer to the Jerusalem temple, which contains the altar on which the priests offer sacrifice (Isaiah 1:11; 6:6). In an end-time context, “Judea” and “Jerusalem” function as codenames of Jehovah’s people living in that day.

36:8–9 *Come now, wager with my lord the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able to put riders on them. How then shall you repulse even one of the least of my lord’s servants, depending as you do on Egypt for chariots and horsemen?*

Attempting to wear down the will of Hezekiah’s people in Jerusalem so that they will surrender, Rabshakeh denigrates every means of support they may be trusting in to protect them. While some indeed relied on Egypt’s chariots and horsemen (Isaiah 30:2; 31:1), those who rely on Jehovah are never disappointed: “As a lion or a young lion growls over the prey when the shepherds muster in full force against him, and is not dismayed at the sound of their voicenor daunted by their numbers, so shall Jehovah of Hosts be when he descends to wage war upon Mount Zion and upon its heights” (Isaiah 31:4).

36:10 *Moreover, could I have marched against this land and destroyed it without Jehovah? For Jehovah told me to come against this land and destroy it.*

By presuming to speak on behalf of Jehovah, the God of Israel, and by claiming his authority, Rabshakeh indeed “scorns the living God” (Isaiah 37:4): “Whom have you mocked and ridiculed? Against who have you raised your voice, lifting your eyes to high heaven? Against the Holy One of Israel!” (Isaiah 37:23). While it is true that Assyria’s invasion of Judea is a consequence of his people’s transgressions, Jehovah is nevertheless able to bring good out of evil by delivering those who trust in him. Through such means he manifests his power in the eyes of his people and of his people’s enemies alike.

36:11–12 *Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah said to Rabshakeh, please speak to your servants in Aramaic, which we understand. Do not speak to us in Judean in the ears of the people who are on the wall. But Rabshakeh replied, Did my lord send me to say these things to you and to your lord and not to the men sitting on the wall, who with you are to eat their own dung and drink their own urine?*

By speaking to the king’s representatives in the local dialect, Rabshakeh attempts to put fear into the hearts of the people. His reference to their eating their own dung and drinking their own urine alludes to Assyria’s plan to lay siege to the city if its occupants don’t surrender. Starving them out would present an easy victory. King Hezekiah, however, has his own plan of dealing with the alien threat. He knows that—according to the terms of the Davidic Covenant—so long as he keeps Jehovah’s law and the people keep Hezekiah’s law, Jehovah is bound by the terms of his covenant to protect them.

36:13–15 *Then Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in Judean, Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! Thus says the king: Do not let Hezekiah delude you! He cannot deliver you. Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in Jehovah by saying, Jehovah will surely save us; this city shall not be given into the* ***hand*** *of the king of Assyria.*

By now addressing Hezekiah’s people directly, Rabshakeh insults the king’s delegation and repudiates the king’s authority. He additionally challenges Israel’s God Jehovah as being unable to deliver his people, portraying Hezekiah as a deceiver for affirming that he *can* deliver them. What distinguishes Jehovah’s covenant people from other nations, however, is their long history of divine deliverance even when outnumbered and outmatched by the enemy: “In the God of my salvationI will trust without fear; for Jehovah was my strength and my song when he became my salvation” (Isaiah 12:2).

36:16–17 *Do not listen to Hezekiah! Thus says the king of Assyria: Make peace with me by coming out to me. Then every one of you will eat from his own vine and his own fig tree and drink water from his own cistern, until I come back and take you to a land like your own, a land of grain and wine, a land of grain [fields] and vineyards.*

Rabshakeh reveals Assyria’s policy of removing captive peoples from their native soil and replacing them with others whom they conquer so as to destroy their patriotism and ties to the land. When the Assyrians took Israel’s ten northern tribes captive, for example, they relocated them “in Halah and in Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes” (2 Kings 17:6). They then brought peoples from other regions—“from Babylon and Cuthah, from Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim”—to occupy Samaria (2 Kings 17:24). These new peoples later became known as the “Samaritans” (cf. John 4:3–42).

36:18–20 *[Beware,] lest Hezekiah mislead you by saying, Jehovah will save us. Were any gods of the nations able to save their lands out of the* ***hand*** *of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Did they deliver Samaria out of my* ***hand****? Who of all the gods of those countries saved his land from my* ***hand****, that Jehovah should save Jerusalem from my* ***hand****?*

From Rabshakeh’s perspective, Jehovah is no different than the gods of the nations Assyria has already conquered that were unable to deliver their lands from Assyria’s *hand*—the king of Assyria. The ten-tribed Northern Kingdom of Israel, which spurned the worship of Jehovah in favor of idols, proved no exception to Assyria’s conquests and to its removal from Samaria, its homeland (2 Kings 17:7–17). From Hezekiah’s perspective, however, the gods of the nations “are no gods, but mere works of men’s hands,” whereas Israel’s God Jehovah “made the heavens and the earth” (Isaiah 37:16, 19).

36:21–22 *But they remained silent, replying nothing, for the king had commanded them not to answer him. Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, overseer of the palace, Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph, the record keeper, went to Hezekiah with their clothes rent and reported to him the things Rabshakeh had said.*

Unlike the people of King Ahaz, who proved disloyal to their king (Isaiah 8:6, 12), Hezekiah’s people—both the king’s representatives and the people listening on the walls—observe strictly the king’s command. Like their king, they too seem to understand Jehovah’s formula for obtaining divine protection under the terms of the Davidic Covenant—that if the people keep the king’s law and the king keeps Jehovah’s law, Jehovah will protect them. Hezekiah’s emissaries don’t just report back to the king, however. They also show their outrage at Rabshakeh’s blasphemy by rending their garments.

ISAIAH 37

As King Hezekiah intercedes on behalf of his people Jehovah delivers them from the besieging Assyrians

37:1–2 *When King Hezekiah heard it, he rent his clothes and put on sackcloth and entered the house of Jehovah. And he sent Eliakim the overseer of the palace, Shebna the secretary, and the elders of the priests in sackcloth to the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz.*

King Hezekiah’s devotion to Jehovah is evident from his first response to his delegation’s evil report: he ascends to the temple to pray wearing the penitent attire of sackcloth. His second response is to enlist the help of Jehovah’s prophet Isaiah who undoubtedly served as his long-time mentor. Of Hezekiah it is thus written: “He trusted in Jehovah the God of Israel, so that after him there was no one like him of all the kings of Judah, nor any before him. For he adhered to Jehovah and digressed not from following him, but he kept his commandments as Jehovah had commanded Moses” (2 Kings 18:5–6).

37:5, 3–4 *And when King Hezekiah’s servants came to Isaiah, they said to him, Thus says Hezekiah: This is a woeful day, a day of reproof and disgrace. Children have reached the point of birth, but there is no strength to deliver them. It may be that Jehovah your God has heard the words of Rabshakeh, whom his lord the king of Assyria has sent to scorn the living God, and will rebuke him for the things Jehovah your God has heard, were you to offer up prayer on behalf of the remnant that is left.*

As Hezekiah’s emissaries, the servants repeat verbatim his report to a higher authority. The “woeful day”—of suffering Jehovah’s collective curse on the nation for its cumulative transgressions (Isaiah 7:17–25)—is a type of Jehovah’s end-time Day of Judgment. Like that future event, however, it presents an opportunity for spiritual rebirth and regeneration, not only for “the remnant that is left” (Isaiah 10:20–23) but also for the king. Called “the Birthpangs of the Messiah,” Jehovah’s people collectively go into travail like a woman in labor until Jehovah sends them a deliverer such as Moses or David.

By asking Isaiah to intercede with Jehovah on behalf of the people, Hezekiah in no way shifts the burden of his responsibility for his people’s protection to Isaiah. The king himself intercedes with Jehovah on their behalf, even in the midst of grievous personal anguish (vv 14–20; Isaiah 38:1–20). Hezekiah simply recognizes that Isaiah is able to appeal to Jehovah on a higher spiritual level than his own and thus exercise greater power with God. He also acknowledges that under his people’s present unequal circumstances “there is no strength to deliver” them from Assyria’s siege without Jehovah’s help.

37:6–7 *And Isaiah said to them, Tell your lord, Thus says Jehovah: Be not afraid because of the words with which you have heard the king of Assyria’s subordinates ridicule me. See, I will give him a notion to return home upon hearing a rumor, and will cause him to fall by a* ***sword*** *in his own land.*

Jehovah’s initial words to Hezekiah through his prophet—“Be not afraid”—repeat the same message Jehovah gave Ahaz under similar dire circumstances a generation earlier (Isaiah 7:4). So long as the king keeps the terms of the Davidic Covenant, Jehovah will intervene to deliver his people. In other words, despite what appears, this is a chance for the king to serve as his people’s proxy savior and for the people to be reborn on a higher spiritual level by proving loyal to their king under duress. Jehovah can cause the king of Assyria to depart and also raise up a *sword* or enemy against him (v 38).

37:8–9 *And when Rabshakeh heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish, he withdrew and found him fighting against Libnah. Now [Sennacherib] received a report that Tirhakah king of Cush had set out to fight against him.*

Because Cushite or black pharaohs ruled Egypt during Isaiah prophetic ministry, Isaiah includes Cush or Upper Egypt in his prophecies about Egypt (Isaiah 11:11; 18:1; 20:3–5; 43:3; 45:14). By so doing, he posits the idea of a black pharaoh functioning as the type of an end-time counterpart. As with other historical names and persons, all prefigure an end-time repetition of history. Tirhakah king of Cush (Pharaoh Taharqa, the third and last ruler of Egypt’s 25th dynasty) was of Sudanese birth, not a native-born Egyptian. His reign ended with Assyria’s invasion of Egypt in 663 B.C. (cf. Isaiah 20:3–5; 31:3).

37:9–13 *And when he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, telling them, Speak thus to Hezekiah king of Judah: Let not your god in whom you trust delude you into thinking that Jerusalem shall not be given into the* ***hand*** *of the king of Assyria. You yourself have heard what the kings of Assyria have done, annexing all lands. Shall you then escape? Did the gods of the nations my fathers destroyed deliver them? [Did they deliver] Gozan and Haran, Rezeph and the Edenites in Tel Assar? Where are the kings of Hamath and Arpad and the kings of the cities of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?*

Sennacherib’s second attempt to cause Jerusalem to surrender—this time via a letter from the king himself (v 14)—repeats parts of the message Rabshakeh had delivered previously in the king’s name (Isaiah 36:13–15, 18–20). Just as Hezekiah’s people’s loyalties to their king were sorely tested, now Hezekiah’s loyalties to Jehovah are tested. He had accepted Jehovah’s revelation through the prophet Isaiah (vv 6–7), but time has elapsed and Isaiah’s prediction hasn’t as yet come to pass. The king of Assyria is still threatening him and Hezekiah’s fortress city of Lachish has just fallen. What should he do?

37:14–17 *And Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then Hezekiah went up to the house of Jehovah and unrolled it before Jehovah. And Hezekiah prayed to Jehovah and said, O Jehovah of Hosts, God of Israel, who sits enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. It is you who made the heavens and the earth . . . O Jehovah, give ear and hear; O Jehovah, open your eyes and see. Listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to mock the living God.*

Again entering the temple, Hezekiah addresses Jehovah as he who “sits enthroned between the cherubim”—that is, in the midst angelic beings who dwell in Jehovah’s presence (Genesis 3:24; Psalm 80:1; Ezekiel 10:1–22; cf. Isaiah 6:2). When Moses made the Ark of the Covenant from which Jehovah spoke with him, he thus constructed a “mercy seat” of pure gold on top of the ark featuring two cherubim, one on each side (Exodus 25:17–22; 37:6–9). As the God who “made the heavens and the earth,” who is “over all the kingdoms of the earth,” Jehovah can’t be compared to the gods of the nations.

37:18–20 *O Jehovah, the kings of Assyria have indeed destroyed all peoples and their lands, committing their gods to the* ***fire****. For they were no gods, but mere works of men’s hands, of wood and of stone, and so they could destroy them. But now, O Jehovah our God, deliver us out of his* ***hand****, that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone are Jehovah.*

On different occasions in the history of his people, Jehovah manifested himself in the eyes of “all kingdoms on earth.” He did so, for example, when he delivered his people from bondage in Egypt (Numbers 14:15; Deuteronomy 2:25; 4:6–8) and when he empowered David to deliver Israel from all its enemies (2 Samuel 3:18; 7:8–9). He will do so again at the end of the world when many events in Israel’s history repeat themselves (Isaiah 41:2; 42:13; 52:10; 59:17–20; 62:1–2; 64:1–4). In that day, an end-time king of Assyria—Jehovah’s *fire* and (left) *hand*—will repeat what occurred in Hezekiah’s day.

37:21–22 *Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent word to Hezekiah, saying, Thus says Jehovah, the God of Israel: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria, this is what Jehovah has spoken against him: The Virgin Daughter of Zion holds you in contempt; she laughs you to scorn. The Daughter of Jerusalem shakes her head at you.*

Hezekiah’s intercessory prayer on behalf of his people gets an immediate response from Jehovah through his prophet Isaiah. Using the imagery of a young woman who rejects the overtures of an unwanted suitor, Isaiah depicts Hezekiah’s people as the Virgin Daughter of Zion and the Daughter of Jerusalem. From formerly being identified with the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 1:3; 9:8; 10:20), they are now identified as Zion/Jerusalem. At the same time, Isaiah shows the character traits of people on that level. Having passed Jehovah’s test of their loyalties, they have spiritually ascended.

As the only instance of the name “Virgin Daughter of Zion” in the Book of Isaiah, that distinguishes it from the usual name “Daughter of Zion” (Isaiah 1:8; 16:1; 62:11). While the latter designates a “holy” or elect category of Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 4:3; 52:1; 62:11–12)—Jehovah’s wife whom he marries and who bears him children (Isaiah 54:5; 62:5; 66:8–9)—the name “Virgin Daughter of Zion” points Jehovah’s people who have just attained the Zion/Jerusalem category to that higher or elect category, to which some living among them may in fact already have ascended.

37:23–24 *Whom have you mocked and ridiculed? Against whom have you raised your* ***voice****, lifting your eyes to high heaven? Against the Holy One of Israel! By your servants you have blasphemed my Lord.*

By mocking Hezekiah and his people—with whom Jehovah has covenanted to be their God and they his people—and by comparing Jehovah with the lifeless gods of the nations, the king of Assyria has mocked the living God. The “Holy One of Israel,” who serves as a paradigm of holiness to his people (Isaiah 5:16; 6:3, 13; 13:3; 29:23; 35:8; 48:17; 62:12), stands in stark contrast to the Assyrian tyrant, the unholy paradigm and *voice* of the wicked. By violating the rights of Jehovah’s covenant people, the king of Assyria unwittingly brings upon himself the curses of the covenant Jehovah made with them.

37:24–25 *You thought, On account of my vast chariotry I have conquered the highest mountains, the farthest reaches of Lebanon. I have felled its tallest cedars, its choicest cypresses. I have reached its loftiest summit, its finest forest. I have dug wells and drunk of foreign waters. With the soles of my feet I have dried up all Egypt’s rivers!*

Like the conquering heroes of Mesopotamian mythology, the king of Assyria boasts of cutting down the cedars of Lebanon. As noted, while “Lebanon” represents Jehovah’s elite people in the writings of the prophets (Isaiah 37:24; Jeremiah 22:23; Ezekiel 17:3), synonymous parallels identify “mountains” as nations or kingdoms (Isaiah 13:4; 64:1–3), “forests” as cities (Isaiah 32:19), and “cedars” and other trees as people (Isaiah 14:8; 61:3). Isaiah further compares the king of Assyria/Babylon to an *axe* and *saw* that hews down the wicked (Isaiah 10:15; 14:3–8), signifying his primary function as a power of chaos.

These are things Isaiah had foretold: “Jehovah of Hosts has a day in store for all the proud and arrogant and for all who are exalted, that they may be brought low. [It shall come]against all the lofty cedars of Lebanon that lift themselves up high, and against all the oaks of Bashan, against all high mountains and elevated hills” (Isaiah 2:12–14); “Then will my Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, shatter the towering [trees]with terrifying power; the high in stature shall be hewn down, the lofty ones leveled. The dense forests will be battered down with [the force of]iron, and Lebanon fall spectacularly” (Isaiah 10:33–34).

37:26–27 *Have you not heard how I ordained this thing long ago, how in days of old I planned it? Now I have brought it to pass. You were destined to demolish fortified cities, [turning them] into heaps of rubble, while their timorous inhabitants shrank away in confusion, becoming as wild grass, transiently green, or like weeds on a roof that scorch before they grow up.*

Even before the creation of the earth, God had ordained that it would attain a paradisiacal glory (Isaiah 11:6–9; 35:1–2; 51:3; 65:25). This means that at some point the wicked who refuse to repent—the world’s “wild grass” and “weeds”—must perish (Isaiah 10:23; 16:4; 34:1–2; 54:16). Jehovah has appointed the king of Assyria and his alliance of nations to execute the wicked’s destruction (Isaiah 10:5–7; 13:4–12; 21:2; 28:22). As at the Flood in the days of Noah (Genesis 7:23; Isaiah 8:7–8; 54:9), only Jehovah’s righteous people survive into the millennial age (Isaiah 4:2–3; 10:22; 26:2–3; 33:12–24).

37:28–29 *But I know where you dwell, and your comings and goings, and how stirred up you are against me. And because of your snortings and bellowings against me, which have mounted up to my ears, I will put my ring in your* ***nose*** *and my bit in your* ***mouth*** *and turn you back by the way you came.*

Jehovah’s knowing where the king of Assyria dwells, and his comings and goings, alludes to king’s spiritual condition as much as to his physical presence. A state of being “stirred up [in anger]” against Israel’s God, for example, is typical of Perdition or antichrist types (Isaiah 51:13; Daniel 7:23–26; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–9; Revelation 13:3–8). The archtyrant’s comparison to a wild bull or animal whose nose snorts and whose mouth bellows marks him as less than human. In Isaiah’s theology, he is an example of de-creation, in which people who descend spiritually become less than they once were.

37:30 *But to you this shall be a sign: This year eat what grows wild, and the following year what springs up of itself. But in the third year sow and harvest, plant vineyards and eat their fruit:*

Just as Jehovah gives King Ahaz a “sign” under a similar circumstance of a threatening king of Assyria (Isaiah 7:14–20), so he gives Hezekiah a “sign.” In fact, Jehovah’s sign to Ahaz a generation earlier—of a son Immanuel (“God Is with Us”) who would eat cream and honey during a time of upheaval and invasion—was fulfilled in Hezekiah’s childhood when Tiglath Pileser III deported peoples of Israel’s ten-tribed Northern Kingdom into Mesopotamia (2 Kings 15:29). Like the son Immanuel, those who survived in the land would likewise eat cream and honey, the food of nomads (Isaiah 7:21–22).

Jehovah’s sign to King Hezekiah of just such a time of scarcity, however, has a happy ending. Because he and his people have passed Jehovah’s test of their loyalty, Jehovah is bound by the terms of his covenant to deliver them. In spite of their suffering covenant curses reaching back a generation, Hezekiah’s people can reverse the curse and again generate covenant blessings. In a future version of these events, an end-time son Immanuel—Jehovah’s son and servant—similarly eats nomadic fare and intercedes with Jehovah on behalf of his people when an end-time Assyrian archtyrant invades their land.

37:31–32 *the remnant of the house of Judah that survives shall once more take root below and bear fruit above. For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The* ***zeal*** *of Jehovah of Hosts will accomplish it.*

While people in Isaiah’s Babylon category are “cut off” and leave no remnant in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 14:22), of the Zion/Jerusalem category a “remnant” of Jehovah’s people bears good “fruit” (Isaiah 11:1, 11, 16): “In that day the plantof Jehovah shall be beautiful and glorious, and the earth’s fruit the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. Then shall they who are left in Zion and they who remain in Jerusalem be called holy—all who were inscribed to be among the living at Jerusalem” (Isaiah 4:2–3). Jehovah’s *zeal*—his end-time servant—brings it about (cf. Isaiah 9:6–7).

37:33–35 *Therefore, thus says Jehovah concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He shall not advance against it with armor, nor erect siegeworks against it. By the way he came he shall return; he shall not enter this city, says Jehovah. I will protect this city and save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.*

Jehovah’s deliverance of his people in the days of Hezekiah forms a classic model of the Davidic Covenant in action. All aspects of the covenant are operative: Jehovah protects his people “for my own sake” because he established his covenant with King David and his heirs (Psalm 89:3–4; Jeremiah 33:19–26); and he protects them “for the sake of my servant David” because Hezekiah, David’s heir and his people’s proxy savior, intercedes with Jehovah on their behalf (vv 17–20). In an end-time context, a literal “servant” or vassal named David fulfills that role (Isaiah 55:3–4; Ezekiel 34:23–31; 37:21–27).

37:36 *Then the angel of Jehovah went out and slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When men arose in the morning, there lay all their dead bodies!*

Proxy salvation may extend to divine intervention, as in this case, when a proxy savior intercedes with God on the seraph level. The person doing so here, however, is not Hezekiah but Isaiah (vv 3–5). While Hezekiah fulfills the role of a proxy savior of his people on the son/servant level (vv 15–20), Isaiah intercession on a higher level results in a greater deliverance. At Assyria’s siege of Jerusalem, loyalties to Jehovah are thus tested on three ascending levels—Zion/Jerusalem, sons/servants, and seraphs—establishing a pattern in Jehovah’s dealings with his covenant people that applies to the end of time.

37:37–38 *So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. And he returned to Nineveh, where he dwelt. And as he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch his god, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer slew him with a sword and fled to the land of Ararat. And his son Esarhaddon succeeded him as king.*

The curses of Jehovah’s covenant with Hezekiah and his people come upon the king of Assyria for violating their rights. Instead of serving as *his* people’s proxy savior, he engineers their demise and also his own. Although not all that occurred anciently serves as the type of an end-time scenario in every detail, the pattern of covenant blessings and curses is clear. While, historically, Sennacherib’s son Esarhaddon went on to invade Egypt in 671 B.C., in Isaiah’s end-time scenario the archtyrant’s invasion of “Egypt” forms an integral part of Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 19:16–17; 20:3–6).

ISAIAH 38

When interceding with Jehovah on behalf of his

people against Assyria, Hezekiah suffers nearly to death

38:1 *In those days Hezekiah became gravely ill. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him and said, Thus says Jehovah: Put your house in order. You will die; you will not recover.*

Directly related to Assyria’s invasion of the Promised Land “in those days,” and to the mortal threat Assyria posed to Hezekiah’s people, is the mortal threat of the king’s illness. Hezekiah’s role as his people’s proxy savior requires more than his vocal intercessory prayer on their behalf (Isaiah 37:15–20). It involves answering for their disloyalties to their God in the pattern of ancient Near Eastern emperor–vassal covenants. In other words, under the terms of the Davidic Covenant, Hezekiah takes upon himself his people’s transgressions and their covenant curses when seeking Jehovah’s physical protection.

38:2–3 *At this Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall and prayed to Jehovah: I beseech you to remember, O Jehovah, how I have walked before you faithfully and with full purpose of heart and have done what is good in your eyes . . . And Hezekiah wept disconsolately.*

On his deathbed, while facing the wall—symbolic of his life being cut short—Hezekiah reminds Jehovah of his enduring loyalty to him throughout his life, at the same time alluding to his people’s mortal threat by Assyria. As Jehovah’s son and servant—as his vassal (Isaiah 7:14; 37:35)—Hezekiah considers himself answerable for the terms of the Davidic Covenant by “walking faithfully” and “with full purpose of heart” before Jehovah—his emperor—and in doing “good,” a term synonymous with covenant keeping. Surely, the king’s offering his life will now ensure his people’s deliverance!

38:4–6 *Then the word of Jehovah came to Isaiah: Go and tell Hezekiah, Thus says Jehovah, the God of your father David: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city out of the* ***hand*** *of the king of Assyria; I will protect this city.*

In response to Hezekiah’s agonizing prayer—and following divine protocol as before—Jehovah again sends word to Hezekiah through his prophet–messenger, Isaiah (cf. Isaiah 37:6–7, 21–22). As in ancient Near Eastern emperor–vassal covenants, Jehovah is bound under the terms of the Davidic Covenant to deliver a vassal and his people from a mortal threat when the vassal proves loyal under all conditions. Hezekiah demonstrates this during Jehovah’s personalized test of the king’s loyalty at the height of his royal career. Now about age forty, Hezekiah is in his prime and at the apex of his power.

The words, “I will deliver you and this city out of the handof the king of Assyria; I will protect this city” (v 6), and “I will protect this city and save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David” (Isaiah 37:35), appear as one in 2 Kings 20:6. Isaiah’s dividing them links the king’s ordeal indissolubly to Jehovah’s response to Hezekiah. His suffering, in other words, directly impacts Jehovah’s deliverance of his people. God thus proves to be *with* this son Immanuel (“God Is with Us”)—a vassal who chooses the “good” (v 3; Isaiah 7:14, 16)—when the angel slays the Assyrian host (Isaiah 37:36).

38:21\* *And Isaiah gave instructions to take fig packs and apply them to the swelling so that he would recover.*

Having suffered the covenant curse of being mortally afflicted, yet faithfully submitting his life to God, Hezekiah passes the test and Jehovah heals him. According to this same pattern, Jehovah heals his end-time servant after he is “marred beyond human likeness” and passes *his* personalized test of loyalty (Isaiah 52:13–14; 57:18–19). Fig packs and other natural means remind us that Jehovah provides remedies on the earth whereby his people may be healed—even of mortal illnesses—and live to experience a reversal of covenant curses when their lives accord with his divine laws (Isaiah 6:10; 58:8).

Verses 21 and 22 appear out of sequence in the text. From their misplacement and that of others in the Book of Isaiah it is clear that at times the entire text or parts of it were written down from memory by assigned scribes. In times of national distress, when enemies burned Jewish scriptures, such scribes could thus reproduce entire books from memory. However, when a scribe recalled a verse beyond where it was originally located, it was simply written down on the scroll at the point where he remembered it. Later scribes, fearing to alter the scripture, then simply copied the text just as they had received it.

38:22\*, 7–8 *But Hezekiah said, What of a sign that I shall [again] go up to the house of Jehovah? [And Isaiah replied,] This shall be a sign to you from Jehovah, that Jehovah will do the thing he has promised: See, I make the shadow cast by the afternoon sun on the dial of Ahaz recede the ten degrees it has gone down. So the sun reversed its descent by ten degrees on the dial.*

As we learn from Hezekiah’s account of his illness, his desire was to see Jehovah during his lifetime (v 11). Inspired by his mentor Isaiah, who had seen Jehovah in the temple (Isaiah 6:1), Hezekiah wanted the same privilege. His inquiry, “What of a sign that I shall [again] go up to the house of Jehovah?” thus implies more than his physically being able to worship again at the temple. Hezekiah knows from Isaiah that the ultimate purpose of temple ordinances is to see Jehovah (Isaiah 1:11–12). It was therefore a great source of anguish that he was going to leave this world without fulfilling that desire.

An ancient apocryphal work, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, records how Hezekiah sees Jehovah during his illness (*Ascension of Isaiah*, 1:4). The “sign” Jehovah gives Hezekiah is the sun’s reversing its descent by ten degrees. That has meaning in its ancient Near Eastern context of the king’s role as the “sun of his people.” As in Egypt, the sun’s disc rising over the primeval hill signifies Pharaoh’s ascent to God and a new age dawning for his people. The extension of Hezekiah’s life thus betokens Jehovah’s renewed blessing when king and people pass their tests of loyalty and spiritually ascend.

38:9–11 *Hezekiah king of Judah’s account of his illness, [written] upon his recovery: I said, in the prime of life must I depart through Sheol’s gates, deprived of the balance of my years? I thought, I shall not see Jehovah in the land of the living; I shall not now behold Man among those dwelling in mortality.*

While at this point still unaware that he will recover from his illness, Hezekiah seeks to reconcile himself to the idea that “Sheol”—the world of departed spirits (sometimes but not always accurately translated as “Hell”)—now awaits him. The synonymous parallelism of Hezekiah’s not seeing “Jehovah” in the land of the living and his not beholding “Man” among those dwelling in mortality characterizes Jehovah as a man, albeit a divine Man. In spite of Judeo-Christianity’s Hellenistic concept of an amorphous God, therefore, the biblical God resembles an exalted man (Genesis 18; 32:24–30).

38:12–14 *My tabernacle is being uprooted, carried away from me like a shepherd’s tent. My life is cut off like woven fabric; he is severing me from the loom. Can I contain myself until morning, while like a lion he racks my whole frame? [Surely,] as night has followed day, you are bringing on my end! Like a mounting lark I twitter, like a dove I murmur. My eyes are drawn looking heavenward; [I am utterly sleepless from bitterness of soul . . .] O Jehovah, I am in straits; be my surety!*

Being brought to the point that he is looking up, not down, all that a person in such a plight as Hezekiah’s has left is his God. His pleading with Jehovah in the midst of his agony, and his yielding up his life to his God, lends substance to his intercessory prayer on behalf of his people (Isaiah 37:15–20). As a type of the suffering of Jehovah’s end-time servant, Hezekiah “pours out his soul unto death” and “bears the sins of many”—until Jehovah “sees the toil of his soul and is satisfied” (Isaiah 53:11–12). Hezekiah thus becomes a classic role model of a proxy savior under the terms of the Davidic Covenant.

38:15–17 *But what shall I say when he has [already] spoken for me, when he himself has brought it about? O my Lord, by means of such [trials] comes [a newness of] life, and throughout them all the renewal of my spirit. Surely, for my own good I am in such dire distress; [by its means] you draw my soul out of the Pit of Dissolution. For you have cast all my sins behind you, [restoring and reviving me].*

As his physical and mental torment progresses, Hezekiah realizes its purifying and sanctifying effect—that even his suffering and dying can have meaning. As he can’t gainsay Jehovah and wish his pain away, he submits to it and in so doing regenerates spiritually. Sensing the remission of sins that comes with making his life an offering to God, he perceives Jehovah’s comforting him with a sure knowledge of his forgiveness in his hour of anguish. He now sees things from God’s perspective, not only his own. Having passed his test, the deliverer is born—Jehovah can now save him and his people (v 6).

38:18–20 *For Sheol cannot praise you, nor* ***Death*** *glorify you; those who go down into the Pit have no [further] hope of your* ***faithfulness****. But the living, only they bring you praise, as I do this day; from father to sons they pass on the knowledge of your* ***faithfulness****. O Jehovah, [may it please you] to save me, and we will perform music all the days of our lives in the house of Jehovah.*

The synonymous parallelism of “Sheol” and “Death,” and the pairing of these terms with “the Pit,” likens all three to a state not just of physical death but of non-ascent as signified by the verb “go down.” What praises and glorifies God is his people’s experiencing spiritual rebirth and ascent in the land of the living after the pattern of King Hezekiah. Spiritual as well as physical “fathers”—proxy saviors under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (Isaiah 22:21; 49:22)—pass the knowledge of Jehovah’s “faithfulness” or “truth” (*’emet*) to their “sons”—their spiritual vassals—as did the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah.

Exemplifying *faithfulness* is Jehovah, the God of Israel (cf. Revelation 19:11), who at all times sustains and comforts those who wait for him and who trust in his deliverance (Isaiah 12:2; 25:9; 26:3–4; 30:18; 40:31; 49:23; 64:4). The antithesis of Israel’s God as the source of eternal life and regeneration to his people (v 16; Isaiah 42:5) is *Death*, as typified by the king of Assyria/Babylon. Leaving his followers comfortless in their hour of need (Isaiah 14:20–22), the archtyrant ends up in the “Pit of Dissolution” (v 17), there to endure spiritual as well as physical death, or de-creation (Isaiah 14:15).

ISAIAH 39

Upon his recovery from illness and Jehovah’s

victory over Assyria, Hezekiah gains notoriety

39:1–2 *At that time Merodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and gifts to Hezekiah, for he had heard of his illness and recovery. And Hezekiah was glad of them and showed the envoys his treasury—the silver and gold, the spices and fragrant oils, and his entire armory and all that was in his treasuries. There was nothing in his palace or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.*

Hezekiah’s recovery from a deathly illness was a wonderful portent for his people and it brought the king fame throughout the known world. It accorded with the ancient Near Eastern concept of the arrested sacrifice of the king—in which a king or his proxy was symbolically slain to appease his god and to generate blessings on behalf of his people. Still, Hezekiah appears to have yielded to a little foolish pride by gladly accepting gifts from foreigners and making them privy to his inner sanctum. Although the king was justly elated that he had passed Jehovah’s test of his loyalty, he still had things to learn.

39:3–4 *Then the prophet Isaiah came to King Hezekiah and said, What did those men say to you, and where did they come from? And Hezekiah replied, They came from a distant land; [they came] to me from Babylon. And [Isaiah] asked, What did they see in your palace? And Hezekiah said, They saw everything there is in my palace. There is nothing in my treasuries that I did not show them.*

Aware of Jehovah’s concern at Hezekiah’s imprudent act, Isaiah makes this a teaching moment for the king. Drawing on the ancient legal custom of viewing a piece of property that seals its purchase (Genesis 13:14–17; Numbers 27:12; Deuteronomy 34:1–4; Luke 14:18), Isaiah predicts the Southern Kingdom of Judah’s ultimate overthrow and dispossession by Babylon (vv 5–7) that occurred years later, in 587 B.C. Chapter 39 is thus a transitional chapter, a historical preface to the middle section of the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 40–54) in which Jehovah’s people are depicted as dwelling in exile in Babylon.

39:5–8 *Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, Hear the word of Jehovah of Hosts: The time shall come when everything in your palace, and all that your forefathers have treasured up until now, shall be carried away to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says Jehovah. And from among your own sons, your future offspring and descendants, they shall take [some] to serve as eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. But Hezekiah said to Isaiah, The word of Jehovah you have spoken is good. For he thought, Then there shall be peace and loyalty during my reign.*

In this encounter between Isaiah and Hezekiah, we observe the prophet’s far-reaching perspective when compared to the king’s. Isaiah is concerned with all aspects of Jehovah’s covenant people, even far into the future, while Hezekiah sees only the situation immediately at hand. He even calls Isaiah’s dire prediction “good,” implying that he and his people have passed Jehovah’s test of loyalty and others must answer for themselves. He has met his responsibility as king, establishing “peace” and “loyalty” in the land (Isaiah 9:4–7), while the cause of Judah’s exile rests with future generations.

ISAIAH 40

Having spiritually ascended, Zion/Jerusalem declares good tidings to those who have yet to ascend

40:1–2 *Comfort and give solace to my people, says your God; speak kindly to Jerusalem. Announce to her that she has served her term, that her guilt has been expiated. She has received from Jehovah’s* ***hand*** *double for all her sins.*

Chapter 40 begins the second part of Isaiah’s linear literary structure Trouble at Home (Isaiah 1–39), Exile Abroad (Isaiah 40–54), and Happy Homecoming (Isaiah 55–66), which has antecedents in early Egyptian narrative patterns. Chapter 40 additionally forms an integral part of Part II of Isaiah’s synchronous Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 6–8; 36–40) that transposes the entire Book of Isaiah into an allegory or series of historical types of an end-time scenario. A total of seven layered literary structures preclude the idea many scholars espouse that the Book of Isaiah was written by more than one author.

When a people’s “sins” or “transgressions” (*hatta’im*) beget covenant curses, especially over successive generations, they must endure Jehovah’s justice until they repent. But even when they repent, the evil effects of former transgressions—the curses of the covenant—aren’t immediately removed. We observe this in the land’s invasion by the king of Assyria (Isaiah 36–37)—Jehovah’s *hand* of punishment—a curse that accrued from the transgressions of King Ahaz and his people (Isaiah 7:17–20; 8:6–8). But there comes a time—when his people patiently endure the curses—that Jehovah reverses them.

As in the term of a pregnancy—after which comes deliverance—Jehovah commissions Isaiah to proclaim his people’s “guilt” or “iniquity” (*‘awon*) “expiated” (*nirsa*). That happy news coincides with their ascending from the Jacob/Israel to the Zion/Jerusalem category and levels higher upon passing his test of their loyalty (Isaiah 37:22). It also sequentially parallels the seraph’s declaring Isaiah’s iniquity removed at the time Jehovah appoints him as a prophet (Isaiah 6:7). Accordingly, Isaiah now assumes the role of a seraph who sits in Jehovah’s heavenly council (vv 3–6), implying that he too has ascended.

40:3–4 *A* ***voice*** *calls out, In the desert prepare the way for Jehovah; in the wilderness pave a straight highway for our God: every ravine must be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the uneven ground must become level and rough terrain a plain.*

After serving as Jehovah’s prophet for over forty years and ascending to the seraph category, Isaiah receives a second divine commission (vv 1–6). His name doesn’t appear because a new name accompanies every ascent to a higher spiritual level (v 26; Isaiah 43:1; 45:4; 49:1; 56:5; 62:2; 65:15) and on the seraph level Isaiah is not permitted to disclose it (cf. Genesis 32:29; Judges 13:17–18). Made privy to the same cosmic view as the seraphs who ministered to him at his prophetic appointment (vv 12–26; Isaiah 6:3), Isaiah now serves as the type of a forerunner to Jehovah’s coming to reign on the earth.

John the Baptist’s being “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as said the prophet Isaiah” (John 1:23), accords with this role of forerunner (Isaiah 62:10–11). The main thrust of Isaiah’s prophecy, however—as established by Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure and other synchronous literary structures—concerns an end-time scenario in which the *voice* identifies Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 50:10). That in his day Isaiah serves on the seraph level as a type of the servant alludes to the fact that Jehovah’s end-time servant, too, serves on the seraph level (Isaiah 14:29; 63:9).

The “way” or “highway” that the servant is to prepare consists of the road to Zion on which Jehovah’s people who repent of transgression return to meet Jehovah: “There shall be highways and roads which shall be called ‘the Way of Holiness,’ for they shall be for such [as are holy]. The unclean shall not traverse them; on them shall no reprobates wander. No lions shall be encountered there, nor shall wild beasts intrude. But the redeemed shall walk them, the ransomed of Jehovah shall return; they shall come singing to Zion, their heads crowned with everlasting joy” (Isaiah 35:8–10; cf. 49:8–12; 51:11).

*In the desert . . . in the wilderness.* As Jehovah’s people anciently spiritually apostatized before Jehovah physically exiled them, so now they must first spiritually repent before they can physically return from dispersion in a new exodus to Zion. That spiritual transformation of Jehovah’s people occurs not in the cities, which the king of Assyria/Babylon destroys (Isaiah 14:17; 32:19; 36:1; 37:26), but in the desert and wilderness, which have a way of leveling the playing field so that Jehovah’s people may become one and receive Jehovah at his coming (Isaiah 35:1–7; 41:17–20; 43:19–21; 62:10–12).

*The uneven ground must become level and rough terrain a plain.* The task of preparing the way for Jehovah’s coming (v 10) involves clearing away stumbling blocks such as precepts and teachings of men (Isaiah 9:15–16; 32:6) that prevent Jehovah’s people from entering into his presence: “Pass on, go through gates; prepare the way for the people! Excavate, pave a highway cleared of stones; raise the ensignto the nations! Jehovah has made proclamation to the end of the earth: Tell the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your Salvationcomes, his reward with him, his work preceding him!’” (Isaiah 62:10–11).

40:5 *For the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed and all flesh see it at once. By his* ***mouth*** *Jehovah has spoken it.*

Jehovah’s “glory” signifies his presence—literally but also in the “cloud of glory” (Isaiah 4:5–6; 6:1–4; 35:1–2) as in Moses’ tabernacle and Solomon’s temple (Exodus 16:10; 24:15–18; 40:34–38; 1 Kings 8:10–11). Jehovah’s servant—his mouth or mouthpiece (Isaiah 11:4; 49:2; 51:16)—heralds Jehovah’s coming: “Arise, shine, your lighthas dawned; the glory of Jehovah has risen upon you! Although darknesscovers the earth, and a thick mist the peoples, upon you Jehovah will shine; over you his glory shall be visible. Nations will come to your light, their kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isaiah 60:1–3).

40:6–8 *A* ***voice*** *said, Announce it. And I asked, How shall I announce it? All flesh is grass, and at its best like a blossom of the field. Though the Spirit of Jehovah breathe within it, the people themselves are but herbage—grass that withers, flowers that fade—only the word of our God endures forever.*

In the same way that Isaiah is Jehovah’s *voice* to his people—foreshadowing Jehovah’s end-time servant—so one higher than Isaiah serves as Jehovah’s *voice* to Isaiah. Having ascended to the seraph level, Isaiah’s perspective broadens. He perceives how fickle people are. Without Jehovah’s Spirit to animate them the best of them resemble but fading flowers (Isaiah 5:24; 19:6–7; 37:27). Hence, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). God’s word, as vested in his servant (Isaiah 50:4; 51:16; 59:21), endures forever because Jehovah stands by it (Isaiah 41:26–27; 44:26; 55:11).

40:9 *Scale the mountain heights, O Zion, herald of good tidings. Raise your* ***voice*** *mightily, O Jerusalem, messenger of good news. Make yourself heard, be not afraid; proclaim to the cities of Judah: Behold your God!*

Just as Jehovah appoints Isaiah as a herald of good tidings to his people on the model of a seraph (vv 1–2; cf. Isaiah 6:7), so Isaiah appoints those in the Zion/Jerusalem category as a herald of good tidings to the Jacob/Israel category, which is here represented by the “cities of Judah.” Persons who have passed Jehovah’s test of loyalty and ascended (Isaiah 37:22) thus minister to those who haven’t yet ascended, while they themselves are ministered to by someone above them. Besides a new name—in this instance, Zion/Jerusalem—a new commission to minister to lower categories of people marks each ascent.

In an end-time context, all persons who ascend to higher spiritual categories declare Jehovah’s coming and prepare the way before him, including Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 41:27; 52:7; 61:1), Zion’s watchmen (Isaiah 52:8; 62:6–7), and Zion/Jerusalem. In that context, the term “mountains” denotes the nations and kingdoms of the world (Isaiah 13:4; 64:1–3) to whom Jehovah sends his servant (Isaiah 11:10; 41:2; 42:1, 6; 45:1, 13; 49:6; 52:10, 15; 55:4). Apart from its literal meaning, the *voice* Jehovah’s people are to “raise” or uphold is his servant, through whom Jehovah speaks to his people (Isaiah 50:10):

“[Then shall they say,]‘How comely upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger announcing peace, who brings tidings of good, who heralds salvation, saying to Zion, “Your God reigns!” Hark! Your watchmen lift up their voice; as one they cry out for joy: for they shall see eye to eye when Jehovah returns [to]Zion. Jehovah has bared his holy armin the eyes of all nations, that all the ends of the earth may see our God’s salvation. Break out all together into song, you ruined places of Jerusalem: Jehovah has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem’” (Isaiah 52:7–10; cf. 62:11–12).

40:10 *See, my Lord Jehovah comes with power; his* ***arm*** *presides for him. His reward is with him; his work precedes him.*

Jehovah’s coming in a general sense—as distinct from his literal coming in person—refers to the entire scenario of his Day of Judgment that leads to his actual appearance. Called the “day of power” (Psalm 110:3) and “Day of Jehovah” (Isaiah 13:6, 9), there occurs a preparatory period entailing the earth’s cleansing of the wicked and deliverance of the righteous that precedes Jehovah’s millennial reign. Jehovah’s “work” that ushers in his coming (Isaiah 43:13; 45:9; 62:11), in effect, involves the labors of both the king of Assyria/Babylon and Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 10:12; 28:21–22; 42:3).

The metaphor of Jehovah’s *arm*—his end-time servant—signifies divine intervention. When Jehovah empowers his servant after he is ostracized (Isaiah 49:4, 7–9; 50:6–9; 52:13–15), the tables turn for him and Jehovah’s righteous people: “Awake, arise; clothe yourself with power, O *arm*of Jehovah! Bestir yourself, as in ancient times, as in generations of old. Was it not you who carved up Rahab, you who slew the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the Sea, the waters of the mighty deep, and made of ocean depths a way by which the redeemed might pass” (Isaiah 51:9–10; emphasis added; cf. 52:1–3).

40:11 *Like a shepherd he pastures his flock: the lambs he gathers up with his* ***arm*** *and carries in his bosom; the ewes that give milk he leads gently along.*

Both Jehovah and his servant qualify as good shepherds of Jehovah’s people: Jehovah, because the sheep are his (Isaiah 5:17; 53:6); his servant—Jehovah’s *arm*—because, as a new Moses, he gathers Jehovah’s people in an exodus to Zion from the four parts of the earth: “Then his people recalled the days of Moses of old: ‘Where is he who brought them up out of the Sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who put into him his holy Spirit, who made his glorious armproceed at the right handof Moses, who divided the waters before them?’” (Isaiah 63:11–12; cf. 43:5–8; 48:14–21; 51:9–11);

“I appoint you to be a covenantof the people, to restore the Land and reapportion the desolate estates, to say to the captives, ‘Come forth!’ and to those in darkness, ‘Show yourselves!’ They shall feed along the way and find pasture on all barren heights; they shall not hunger or thirst, nor be smitten by the heatwave or the sun: he who has mercy on them will guide them; he will lead them by springs of water. All my mountain ranges I will appoint as roads; my highways shall be on high. See these, coming from afar, these, from the northwest, and these, from the land of Sinim” (Isaiah 49:8–12).

Jehovah appoints his servant in response to the insensible shepherds who don’t feed the flock or lead it gently but who instead feed themselves (Isaiah 56:11–12; Jeremiah 23:1–8; Ezekiel 34:1–24). The tender “lambs”—those newly reborn as Jehovah’s covenant people—and the “ewes that give milk”—those who nurture them—Jehovah sends a new shepherd. His servant, however, doesn’t accomplish Israel’s restoration alone. The spiritual kings and queens of the Gentiles help to “bring your sons in their bosoms and carry your daughters on their shoulders” in the new exodus to Zion (Isaiah 49:22–23).

40:12 *Who measured out the waters with the hollow of his hand**and gauged the heavens by the span of his fingers? Who compiled the earth’s dust by measure, weighing mountains in scales, hills in a balance?*

Verses 12–26 comprise the most expansive cosmological prophecy in the Bible. As in the Genesis account, God’s creation of the heavens and the earth begins with the organization of chaotic matter—“waters” and “dust” (Genesis 1:2). A cyclical pattern of more than forty alternating motifs of chaos and creation commence in chapter 40 and stretch to the end of chapter 46, affirming that God’s creation occurs from preexisting matter, not *ex nihilo­* or out of nothing. Isaiah’s account of God’s creation proceeds sequentially from the formation of the “heavens” and the “earth” to “mountains” and “hills.”

40:13–14 *Who has comprehended the Spirit of Jehovah, that a man should let him know his plan? Of whom was he counseled that he might be enlightened, by whom instructed in the path of discretion, imparting to him knowledge, acquainting him with the way of understanding?*

As in the Genesis account—when “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2)—so the power of his Spirit is manifest in his creation at all times. That creation accords with a divine “plan” or “counsel” (*‘asato*) concerning God’s children, as becomes clear from chapter 40’s progressively narrowing concept of creation. While man often seeks to counsel God (cf. Isaiah 5:19; 45:9; 66:5), he should instead take counsel *from* God and learn his plan. Man’s “knowledge” is limited to his own experience, his “way of understanding” being vastly inferior to Jehovah’s (Isaiah 6:9; 29:14, 24; 55:8–9).

40:15–17 *The nations are but drops from a bucket, counting no more than dust on a balance; the isles he displaces as mere specks. Lebanon would not suffice to kindle a fire, nor [all] its beasts be adequate for sacrifice. Before him all nations are as nothing; as less than the ether they are reckoned by him.*

Jehovah’s creation here narrows from “nations” or “Gentiles” (*goyim*) to “isles” and “Lebanon,” which name denotes elite Israel (Isaiah 2:13; 10:34; Jeremiah 22:23; Ezekiel 17:3). Lebanon, moreover, forms the centerpiece of a mini-chiasm: the nations (v 15)—**a**; Lebanon (v 16)—**b**; and the nations (v 17)—**a**. In the intended end-time context of this passage, therefore, Jehovah’s people are seen to dwell among the nations, which accords with the exilic setting of this middle section of the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 40–54). Chaos motifs are “drops,” “dust,” “specks,” “nothing,” and “chaos” or “ether” (*tohu*).

40:18–19; 41:7\*; 40:20 *To whom then will you liken God? What does he resemble in your estimation? A figure cast by the artisan, overlaid by the smith with gold, fitted with a silver chain from the craftsman? The artisan encourages the smith, and he who beats with a hammer [urges] him who pounds the anvil. They say of the welding, It is good, though they fasten it with riveting that it may not come loose. Those too poor for this [type of] sacrifice select a wood that resists decay. They seek an expert sculptor to carve them an image that will not deteriorate.*

Almost the first thing the nations do on the earth is to corrupt themselves, diverting their attention from the true God to images and idols. Isaiah’s satire on idolaters in this passage shows the futility of creating substitutes for humanity’s Creator. As these false gods are the antithesis of the true God, they are the main reason people become spiritually blind and lose understanding of him (Isaiah 27:9–11; 44:9–20). Such gods can’t save them in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 45:20; 46:1–8). If the nations themselves are but chaos (vv 15–17), then how much more so the images and idols they invent?

40:21–22 *Are you so unaware, that you have not heard? Have you not been told before, that you do not understand [by whom] the earth was founded? By him who sits enthroned above the earth’s sphere, to whom its inhabitants are as grasshoppers, who suspends the heavens like a canopy, stretching them out as a tent to dwell in.*

A lack of understanding of the nature of God—which stems from adulation of God substitutes—has the pernicious effect of separating people from their Maker. Instead of seeing things from his perspective, they grow incapable of spiritual discernment. Even when they worship whom they assume is God, their estrangement from him prevents them from being saved by him. Isaiah’s view of the earth from above—as a “sphere,” not as flat—God grants to those who worship him in truth (Isaiah 33:17, 20). Created as a “tent” or habitation for his children, the heavens and the earth are his handiwork.

40:23–24 *By him who brings potentates to nought and makes the authorities of the world null and void. When scarcely they are planted, or scarcely they are sown, when hardly their* ***stock*** *has taken root in the earth, he puffs at them and they wither, and a* ***storm*** *sweeps them off as chaff.*

The “potentates” and “authorities” of the world wield power over men and oppress them. In the end, however, Jehovah makes them “null and void,” reducing them to “nought,” signifying their de-creation into chaos. Because God intends the earth to be a place where his children can grow to maturity by learning from their own experience to know good from evil (Genesis 3:22), the wicked who abuse their authority and tyrannize others provide the very opposition that enables the righteous to grow. While Jehovah affords all the same chance to ascend spiritually, some choose to descend and perish.

Storm imagery and withering vegetation denotes Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 15:6; 33:9; 42:15), the *stock* alluding to the king of Assyria/Babylon, the paragon of tyrants and oppressors (Isaiah 10:5–7; 14:4–6; 37:26–27). Resembling Baal—the storm god of Canaanite mythology—he typifies the *storm* that sweeps away the wicked. After barely coming to power, then betraying and tyrannizing the nations, he perishes from the earth (Isaiah 10:12, 16–18; 14:3–17; 33:1). In the end, Jehovah turns him and all tyrants into “chaff”—into chaos or nonentities (Isaiah 17:12–14; 29:5; 41:14–16).

40:25–26 *To whom then will you liken me, to whom can I be compared? says the Holy One. Lift your eyes heavenward and see: Who formed these? He who brings forth their hosts by number, calling each one by name. Because he is almighty and all powerful, not one is unaccounted for.*

Contrasting the evil ones of the world who perish are those whom Jehovah exalts, who typify all that he seeks to accomplish by creating the heavens and the earth. Having acquired his divine attributes, and resembling the celestial hosts on high, these souls have indeed become “like” him. Jehovah’s individually naming them or endowing them with a new name (Isaiah 45:4; 65:15)—as in the ancient Near Eastern pattern of an emperor naming his vassals when he formally adopts them—signifies royal accession: their elevation to royal status, and, in this case, their attaining divine stature as seraphs.

40:27–29 *Why then do you say, O Jacob, and speak thus, O Israel: Our path has become obscured from Jehovah; our cause is overlooked by our God? Is it not known to you; have you not heard? Jehovah is the God of eternity, Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not grow faint or weary; his intelligence cannot be fathomed. He supplies the weary with energy and increases in vigor those who lack strength.*

Those who belong to the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people, though they believe in God, must repent of idolatry (vv 18–21) and receive his forgiveness so as not to perish with the wicked (Isaiah 27:9; 42:17–25; 43:22–28; 44:18–22; 46:3–9). Those who grow weary of keeping Jehovah’s law and word, who murmur against him as if he were the source of their problems, should realize that their vexations are the result of their own poor choices. As the “God of eternity,” Jehovah is the same yesterday, today, and forever and is no respecter of persons (2 Samuel 14:14; Isaiah 55:7–9; Acts 10:34).

It isn’t Jehovah who has neglected his people but they who have neglected him: “You have forgotten your God, your salvation, and not remembered the Rock, your fortress” (Isaiah 17:10). Jehovah is a God who “defends the cause of his people” (Isaiah 51:22). But instead of walking the straight “path” that he has decreed (Isaiah 26:7–8), they have become “unacquainted with the way of perfection; integrity is not within their bounds. They have made crooked their paths; none who treads them knows peace. Therefore redress remains far from us and righteousnessis unable to reach us” (Isaiah 59:8–9).

40:30–31 *Youths grow faint and weary, and young men slump down [of exhaustion]. But they who hope in Jehovah shall be renewed in strength: they shall ascend as on eagles’ wings; they shall run without wearying, they shall walk and not faint.*

Unlike Jehovah their God, even those on whom his people depend for exertion—youths and young men—grow faint and weary. Nevertheless, Jehovah’s unweariness is attainable for his righteous people. A chiastic pattern parallels Jehovah’s unweariness with the unweariness of those who “ascend”: Jehovah’s unweariness (v 28)—**a**1; people’s weariness (v 29)—**b**1; youths’ weariness (v 30)—**b**2; the unweariness of those who ascend (v 31)—**a**2. Jehovah thus regenerates or re-creates those who “hope in” or “wait for” (*qiwweh*) him even to their ascending spiritually and physically to the seraph level.

ISAIAH 41

Jehovah’s righteous servant, who hails from the east, leads Jacob/Israel’s returnees in a new conquest

41:1 *Be silent before me, O isles; become still, you peoples! Let them come forward and state their case; let us stand trial together.*

Opposition against Jehovah and his people finally causes Israel’s God to intervene in humanity’s affairs by calling the nations of the world to “trial” or “justice” (*mispat*). That situation arises because of the nations’ idolatry that blinds their minds and hardens their hearts against the truth, to which condition even Jehovah’s people have succumbed (Isaiah 42:17–20; 44:9–21; 46:3–8). Jehovah intervenes by raising up his servant, who appears in Part III of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 9–12; 41–46) under different personas that express different ministering roles he fulfills, temporal and spiritual.

41:2–3 *Who has raised up* ***Righteousness*** *from the east, calling him to [the place of] his foot? Who has delivered nations to him, toppled their rulers, rendering them as dust to his* ***sword****, as driven stubble to his* ***bow****? He puts them to flight, passing on unhindered by paths his feet have never trod.*

Continuous with Jehovah’s re-creation of persons who attain Isaiah’s seraphs level—who “ascend as on eagles’ wings” (Isaiah 40:31)—appears Jehovah’s end-time servant. The servant’s attaining the seraph level (cf. Isaiah 14:29; 51:9–10; 63:9) thus forms a high point of Jehovah’s narrowing creations as outlined in chapter 40. Personifying *righteousness* because he keeps Jehovah’s law and word under all conditions, he serves as an exemplar of righteousness in a time of wickedness and self-righteousness, showing how all may ascend to the seraph level in accordance with Jehovah’s “plan” (Isaiah 40:13).

One persona under which the servant appears is that of a Righteous Warrior—Jehovah’s *sword* and *bow*. In that respect, he emulates Jehovah, who also appears as a Righteous Warrior: “Jehovah will come forth like a warrior, his passions aroused like a fighter; he will give the war cry, raise the shout of victory over his enemies (Isaiah 42:13). When Jehovah empowers him, the servant reduces the enemies of his people to “dust” and “stubble”—to chaos, or nonentities—as he reconquers the world from the Assyrian power when its work of punishing the wicked is done (vv 11–16; Isaiah 9:4; 10:24–27).

Jehovah’s “raising up” his servant “from the east” and calling him “to his foot”—to the Promised Land—possesses word links to his “raising up” the servant in verse 25 and to his “raising up” the servant under his Cyrus persona (Isaiah 45:13). It also synonymously parallels Jehovah’s calling his servant from the east within a chiastic structure of alternating chaos and creation motifs that spans chapters 41–46: “I summon a bird of preyfrom the east, from a distant land the man who performs my counsel” (Isaiah 46:11). Each of these depictions nuances the different tasks the servant performs.

*He puts them to flight, passing on unhindered by paths his feet have never trod.* When reconquering the earth from the Assyrian alliance, Jehovah’s servant and his seraph-associates exercise extraordinary divine powers over Jehovah’s enemies: “He will smite the earth with the *rod*of his *mouth* and with the *breath*of his *lips*slay the wicked. *Righteousness*will be as a band about his waist” (Isaiah 11:4; emphasis added); “Assyria shall fall by a *sword*not of man; a *sword*not of mortals shall devour them: before that *sword*they shall waste away and their young men melt” (Isaiah 31:8; emphasis added).

41:4 *Who is at work accomplishing [this], foreordaining dynasties? I, Jehovah, first and last, am he.*

The God who commenced the work of his creation—of the heavens and the earth, the nations of the world, and his people Israel—also sees it through to the finish: “I was at the first and I am at the last” (Isaiah 44:6); “I am he who was at the first, and I am he who is at the last” (Isaiah 48:12). The “last” or end consists of Jehovah’s appointing everlasting “dynasties” to those holy and valiant ones who ascend to the category of seraphs: “‘As the new heavens and the new earth which I make shall endure before me,’ says Jehovah, ‘so shall your offspring and name endure’” (Isaiah 66:22; cf. 59:21; 61:9).

41:5–6 *The isles look on in fear; the ends of the earth are in trembling. They flock together and come to one another’s aid, saying, each to his fellow, Courage!*

When Jehovah acts on behalf of his people, the world trembles in fear. So did the Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and every other nation against whom Jehovah empowered his servants. Relying on each other—on an arm of flesh instead of on Jehovah (cf. 2 Chronicles 32:7–8)—idolaters, including those of Jehovah’s people, repudiate his help: “Who would fashion a god or cast an idol that cannot benefit them? Their whole society is confused; their fabricators are mere mortals. Were they all to assemble and take their stand [before me], they would at once cringe in fear” (Isaiah 44:10–11; cf. 45:20–21).

41:8–9 *But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, offspring of Abraham my beloved friend, you whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, called from its farthest limits—to you I say, You are my servant; I have accepted you and not rejected you.*

Jehovah calls on the Jacob/Israel category of his people to repent and return from exile. Like Abraham, their progenitor, who left kindreds and friends behind and came from the end of the earth to the Promised Land (Genesis 12:1), they are now summoned to leave kindreds and friends and renew their covenant with Jehovah and become his collective “servant” or vassal. Jehovah assures them that although they may have felt abandoned by him on account of their idolatries (Isaiah 40:27; 43:22–24), as they return to him he will again accept them as his covenant people (Isaiah 43:1–7; 49:10–16).

The mention of a person by name—as with “Abraham my beloved friend”—alludes to a precedent that person set. Abraham’s coming from afar to the Promised Land, for example, became a type of his descendants’ doing so. If his people now pass this test of their faith as Abraham did, Jehovah will bless them as he blessed him. The alternative is to be destroyed in a Sodom-and-Gomorrah type of destruction (Isaiah 42:23–25). To be “beloved” of God, moreover, identifies the seraph category of Jehovah’s people that includes his servant (Isaiah 48:14), who also comes from afar (vv 2, 25; 46:11).

41:10–12 *Be not fearful, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will also succor you and uphold you with my righteous* ***right hand****. See, all who are enraged at you shall earn shame and disgrace; your adversaries shall come to nought, and perish. Should you look for those who contend with you, you shall not find them; whoever wars against you shall be reduced to nothing.*

The temptation to be “fearful” and “dismayed” comes with being a part of Jehovah’s covenant people, whose enemies inevitably become “enraged” at them under one pretext or another and finally even “contend” and “war” against them. When things reach that point, however—when Jehovah has sufficiently proven his people’s faithfulness—he intervenes on their behalf and reduces their enemies to “nothing.” That sequence of events forms the classic pattern of deliverance and destruction that underlies Jehovah’s dealings with his people and their enemies, who are also his enemies (Isaiah 43:14–17; 49:22–26).

Jehovah’s promise to be “with” his people harks back to the name Immanuel (“God Is with Us”) and the fulfillment of that name in Jehovah’s deliverance of King Hezekiah’s people at the time Assyria invades Judea (Isaiah 7:14–17; 8:7–10; 36:1–38:6). Jehovah’s end-time servant follows the pattern of King Hezekiah in serving as his people’s proxy savior under the terms of the Davidic Covenant. As Jehovah empowers his servant, so the servant empowers Jehovah’s people. The terms “my righteous right hand” (*yemin sidqi*) also translate as “righteousness, my right hand”—signifying Jehovah’s servant (v 2).

Jehovah is “with” his elect at their new exodus to Zion: “When you cross the waters, I will be with you; [when you traverse]the rivers, you shall not be overwhelmed. Though you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; its flameshall not consume you. . . . Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bring your offspring from the east and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, ‘Give up!’ to the south, ‘Withhold not!’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth—all who are called by my name, whom I have formed, molded and wrought for my own glory” (Isaiah 43:2, 5–7).

41:13–14 *For I, Jehovah your God, hold you by the* ***right hand*** *and say to you, Have no fear; I will help you. Be not afraid, you worms of Jacob; O men of Israel, [be not dismayed]: I am your help, says Jehovah; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.*

The possessive “your God” (vv 10, 13) expresses the covenant relationship Jehovah offers the Jacob/Israel category of his people so long as they rely on him to help them. Jehovah’s dual promise to uphold and sustain them by the *right hand*—his servant (*ibid*.)—reflects the exigency of the situation as they now face either deliverance or destruction. Just as a butterfly is first a “worm,” and just as “men” aren’t gods, so when they acknowledge their nothingness before God and trust in him to empower them, he can redeem them from evils he alone is capable of redeeming them from (Isaiah 43:1; 44:21–23; 48:20–21).

41:15–16 *I will make of you a sharp-toothed threshing sledge of new design, full of spikes: you shall thresh mountains to dust and make chaff of hills. As you winnow them, a* ***wind*** *shall take them away, a* ***tempest*** *dispel them. Then will you rejoice in Jehovah and glory in the Holy One of Israel.*

When held by Jehovah’s *right hand* (vv. 10, 13) the Jacob/Israel category of his people conquers its enemies just as Israel did under Moses, Joshua, and King David. They reduce “mountains” and “hills”—the nations (Isaiah 13:4; 64:1–3)—to chaos. Micah concurs: “The breaker has risen before them. They have broken through and passed through the gate and gone out by it. Their king will pass before them and Jehovah at their head” (Micah 2:13); “Arise and thresh, O Daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn iron and your hooves brass, and you will beat in pieces many peoples” (Micah 4:13).

At their great victory, Jehovah’s people who return from exile have cause to “rejoice” in their God and give him the “glory”: “You have enlarged the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice at your presence as men rejoice at harvest time, or as men are joyous when they divide spoil. For you have smashed the yokethat burdened them, the staffof submission, the rodof those who subjected them, as in the Day of Midian” (Isaiah 9:3–4). In the present instance, *wind* and *tempest* imagery—signifying Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—denotes Jehovah’s servant whom Jehovah empowers (Isaiah 11:15; 17:13).

41:17 *When the poor and needy require water, and there is none, and their* ***tongue*** *becomes parched with thirst, I Jehovah will answer their want; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.*

The theme of a new wandering in the wilderness (vv 17–20) combines with that of a new conquest (vv 11–16) when Jehovah’s people return from exile (vv 8–10). Under those circumstances, sources of water become an important consideration and another test—as when Moses led Israel through the wilderness following its exodus out of Egypt and the people came to a place with no water : “The people thirsted there for water. And the people murmured against Moses and said, ‘Why is it that you have brought us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?’” (Exodus 17:3).

Jehovah’s answer was to demonstrate his power through his servant Moses: “‘Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock in Horeb. And you will smite the rock and there shall come forth water out of it that the people may drink.’ And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel” (Exodus 17:6). Those who participate in the end-time wandering in the wilderness are the “poor and needy,” not the rich who don’t care for them (Isaiah 3:14–15; 10:2; 58:6–7). The *tongue* metaphor alludes to Jehovah’s servant who, like Moses, leads their wilderness journey (Isaiah 40:11; 43:19–20; 49:9–12).

41:18–20 *I will open up streams in barren hill country, springs in the midst of the plains; I will turn the desert into lakes, parched lands into fountains of water. I will bring cedars and acacias, myrtles and oleasters in the wilderness; I will place cypresses, elms and box trees in the steppes—that all may see it and know, consider it, and perceive that Jehovah’s* ***hand*** *did this, that the Holy One of Israel created it.*

When some of the Jacob/Israel category renew the covenant with Jehovah and prove loyal under all conditions, they experience regeneration and a reversal of circumstances. Fear turns to fortitude, weakness into strength, curses into blessings. Although Jehovah’s servant—his *hand* or *right hand* (vv 10, 13, 20)—helps qualify his people for this, Jehovah alone, the “creator of the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 40:28), “creates” it. What Jehovah’s *hand* does in the present context, however, is lead his people’s victory over their enemies (vv 2–3, 11–16) in a classic division of labors between *hand* and Holy One.

41:21–22 *Present your case, says Jehovah; submit your evidence, says the King of Jacob. Let them come forward and recount to us their prophecies of events heretofore. What were they? Tell us, that we may examine them and know whether they were fulfilled.*

Jehovah raises up his servant in response to his people’s prophets and seers who fail to prophesy or see (vv 25–29; Isaiah 9:15–16; 21:6; 28:7, 16; 29:10; 56:10–12). What legitimizes a prophet in Jehovah’s eyes is that he predicts things that come to pass: “If there is a prophet among you, I Jehovah will make myself known to him in a vision and speak to him in a dream” (Numbers 12:6); “When a prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah, if the thing doesn’t follow or come to pass Jehovah hasn’t said it, but the prophet has said it presumptuously. You shall not be afraid of him” (Deuteronomy 18:22).

Unlike the ecclesiastical leaders who profess to be prophets but aren’t, whom Jehovah now puts on trial, his servant predicts things that come to pass: “All of you, assemble and hear: Who among you foretold these things? It is him Jehovah loves, who shall perform his will in Babylon; his armshall be against the Chaldeans. I myself have spoken it, and also called him; I have brought him, and I will prosper his way. Come near me and hear this: I have not made predictions in secret; at their coming to pass, I have been present. Now my Lord Jehovah has sent me; his Spirit [is in me]” (Isaiah 48:14–16).

41:22–24 *Or predict the future for us: Tell us of events to come hereafter, so that we may know you are gods. Perform something good or evil at which we will be dazzled and all stand in awe. It is clear you are of no account, that your works amount to nothing; whoever accepts you is himself an abomination.*

Jehovah’s formal trial of the non-prophets (vv 21–22) gives way to informal satire as he ridicules them for their false pretenses, knowing they can’t actually prophesy. Whereas his people stand in awe of them, in reality they are “of no account” and their works amount to “nothing.” That recurring chaos motif in chapters 40–46 puts these prophets in the same category as idolaters and enemies who perish in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 40:17–24; 41:2–7, 11; 42:17–25; 44:9, 20). To Jehovah, they and all who accept them are an “abomination” (*to‘eba*)—a term that defines an idol (Isaiah 44:19).

41:25 *I have raised up one from the north who calls on my name, who shall come from the direction of sunrise. He shall come upon dignitaries as on mud, tread them as clay like a potter.*

Jehovah’s “raising up” (*ha‘iroti*) his servant in this verse synonymously parallels his “raising up” (*ha‘irotihu*) his servant under his Cyrus persona within the chiastic pattern of alternating chaos and creation motifs that spans chapters 41–46: “‘It is I who rightfully raise him up, who facilitate his every step; he will rebuild my city and set free my exiles without price or bribe,’ says Jehovah of Hosts” (Isaiah 45:13). Although the different roles the servant assumes before and after Jehovah empowers him compel Isaiah to depict him under different personas, his attributes identify him as a creative force.

Under his Righteous Warrior aspect, the servant combines both spiritual and physical traits. Like Abraham, he “calls on my name” and exemplifies *righteousness* (v 2; cf. Genesis 13:4; 15:6). Like Cyrus, he “comes upon dignitaries as on mud, treads them as clay like a potter,” ridding the earth of the forces of chaos (v 2; Isaiah 45:1–2). Still, the servant’s physical ministry begins only after he passes Jehovah’s test of his loyalty under his purely spiritual persona. As with King Hezekiah, a descent phase into suffering precedes his ascent phase to illustriousness (Isaiah 38:1–39:1; 49:4, 7–9; 52:13–15).

41:26–27 *Who announced this beforehand, so we would know, [declared it] ahead of time, that we might say, He was right? Indeed, not one could foretell it, not one make it known; no one has heard from you any [prophetic] utterance. But to Zion, he shall be its harbinger; I will appoint him as a herald of good tidings to Jerusalem.*

Jehovah questions the non-prophets about why they haven’t predicted the servant’s coming so that his people might anticipate it. A pun on the word “right” (*saddiq*) answers his question: his servant, the “righteous one” (*saddiq*) (v 2), predicts the future, thus distinguishing him from them (vv 21–24). Jehovah’s “appointing” (*ntn*) his servant forms a word link to his “appointing” (*ntn*) his servant throughout the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 9:6; 22:21; 42:6; 49:6, 8; 55:4). His people who receive him as a “herald of good tidings” are the Zion/Jerusalem category (Isaiah 52:7)—those of Jacob/Israel who repent and return.

41:28–29 *For when I looked there was no one, not one who could offer counsel, or when I questioned them, who could answer a word. Surely they are all iniquitous, their works worthless; their outpourings are but wind and emptiness.*

Jehovah’s “looking” to determine his people’s spiritual state and to question their ecclesiastical guides denotes an intentional act when events come to a head (Genesis 6:5; 11:5; Isaiah 59:15). Unlike his people’s iniquitous leaders—whose works are “worthless” or nothing, who pour out “wind and emptiness” or chaos, not one of whom offers true “counsel” but who instead follow their own counsel or schemes (Isaiah 28:15; 29:15; 32:6–7)—Jehovah’s servant is a wonderful counselor, possesses the spirit of counsel, and is the man who performs or is privy to Jehovah’s counsel (Isaiah 9:6; 11:2; 46:11).

ISAIAH 42

Jehovah’s appointing his servant as a light to

the nations leads to a new exodus or to captivity

42:1 *My servant whom I sustain, my chosen one in whom I delight, him I have endowed with my Spirit; he will dispense justice to the nations.*

Jehovah sustains and endows with his Spirit his servant (Isaiah 11:2; 48:16; 61:1), who here appears under his spiritual (and often suffering) persona (Isaiah 49:7; 50:7–10; 52:14; 53:11). Jehovah commissions him to restore justice to the “nations” or “Gentiles” (*goyim*), inferring that there is no justice or only a façade of justice among his people and the nations (Isaiah 5:7; 10:1–2; 59:11, 15). Types of Jehovah’s “servant” or vassal include Isaiah (Isaiah 20:3), Eliakim (Isaiah 22:20), Cyrus (Isaiah 44:26–28), Hezekiah (Isaiah 37:15–20; 38:2–6), Moses (Isaiah 63:11–14), and David (Isaiah 55:3–4).

Because no one type covers all the end-time roles Jehovah’s servant fulfills, Isaiah presents him under different personas. Consistent with persons in the seraph category, his mission, like those of Moses and Elijah, is international in scope (Exodus 3:16–22; 1 Kings 19:15–16). At first directed to the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people dispersed among the nations (Isaiah 11:10–12; 41:8–9; 43:1–8; 49:8–12), the servant’s task is to bring as many as will repent to renew the covenant with Jehovah and to ascend to higher spiritual categories (v 21; Isaiah 44:1–5, 21–22; 45:19–25; 46:12–13).

42:2–3 *He will not shout or raise his voice to make himself heard in public. Even a bruised reed he will not break; a dim wick he will not snuff out. He will perform the work of justice in the cause of truth.*

The servant’s mission is one of compassion for all, including those who typify a “bruised reed” and “dim wick.” Word links identify these terms with Egypt and Babylon (Isaiah 36:6; 43:14–17), signifying the scope of the servant’s mission from one end of the world to the other. The emphasis on “justice” (vv 1–4)—justice based on the “truth,” not on parodies of justice (Isaiah 1:17; 29:21; 48:1; 58:6, 9; 59:12–16)—accords with its twin term “righteousness” (*sedeq/saddiq/sedaqa*) (Isaiah 1:21, 27; 16:5; 28:17; 32:1; 56:1), which Jehovah’s servant exemplifies (Isaiah 11:5; 41:2, 26; 45:19; 46:11–13; 58:8).

42:4 *Neither shall he himself grow dim or be bruised until he has brought about justice in the earth. The isles await his law.*

The idea of a person who doesn’t grow dim or bruised alludes to the servant’s attaining seraph status, as did Moses, whose “his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated,” when, at the age of a hundred-and-twenty, he passed on from among his people (Deuteronomy 34:7). Like Moses, the servant is a lawgiver to Jehovah’s people among the nations: “Give ear and come unto me; pay heed, that your souls may live! And I will make with you an everlasting covenant: [my]loving fidelity toward David. See, I have appointed him as a witness to the nations, a prince and lawgiver of the peoples” (Isaiah 55:3–4).

42:5–7 *Thus says Jehovah, God, who frames and suspends the heavens, who gives form to the earth and its creatures, the breath of life to the people upon it, Spirit to those who walk on it: I Jehovah have rightfully called you and will grasp you by the hand; I have created you and appointed you to be a* ***covenant*** *for the people, a* ***light*** *to the nations, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from confinement and from prison those who sit in* ***darkness****.*

References to Jehovah as the creator of the heavens and the earth frequently accompany Isaiah’s predictions of Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 45:4–8, 12–13; 46:9–11; 48:13–15). The inference is that it is the God of heaven and earth, no purely human authority, who “appoints” his servant. In view of the opposition the servant receives from his own people and their leaders (Isaiah 49:7; 50:8–9; 52:14), Jehovah anticipates and thus preempts their opposing arguments. Additionally, Jehovah “creates” or “re-creates” his servant, implying that the servant experiences rebirth to a higher spiritual category.

Jehovah’s “rightfully calling” his servant and “grasping [him] by the hand” denote royal accession—an emperor’s investiture of a loyal vassal to royal status, signifying the servant’s ascent to a higher spiritual level. Jehovah’s appointing his servant as a *covenant* and *light* to the nations implies that he personifies and mediates those things (Isaiah 49:6, 8–9; 55:3–5). The servant delivers from spiritual blindness, from physical captivity, and from *darkness*—the king of Assyria/Babylon—those who renew their covenant relationship with Jehovah (vv 18–21; Isaiah 9:2; 43:8; 49:24–25; 50:10; 60:1–4; 61:1).

42:8 *I am Jehovah; that is my name. I will not relinquish my glory to another, nor my praise to wrought idols.*

The name Jehovah, which consists of a unique form of the Hebrew verb “to be” (cf. Exodus 3:14), contains the idea of a God who is self-existent and who therefore doesn’t resemble the false gods or material objects people adore (Isaiah 40:18; 46:9). By creating their “wrought idols,” his people may even attempt to simulate his likeness, but such efforts dishonor him who said, “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make yourself any graven image or any likeness of what is in heaven above or in the earth beneath or in the waters under the earth” (Exodus 20:3–4; cf. Deuteronomy 4:23).

Unless and until Jehovah’s people cease worshiping material things and instead “love Jehovah your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5), they can’t attain a true perception of God nor praise or glorify him. The very nature of spiritual blindness that comes from yielding to substitutes of God is such that, while people are unable to perceive the truth of God, they may nevertheless believe that what they have learned of God is sufficient, or that it is all that is possible to know about him, in that way sabotaging their own relationship with him.

42:9 *The prophecies of the former events indeed came to pass, but new things I yet foretell. Before they spring up I declare them to you.*

From a historical perspective, the events Isaiah predicted “indeed came to pass.” As determined by the synchronous literary structures that transform the events of Isaiah’s day into an allegory of the end-time, however, a second fulfillment is imminent. Not only does Jehovah “foretell” and “declare” this in the historical fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy itself—wherein Israel’s history serves as a series of types and foreshadowings of the end-time (Isaiah 44:7; 46:10)—but Jehovah’s servant additionally foretells “new things” before they occur as a proof that Jehovah is with him (Isaiah 44:26; 48:3–16).

42:10–12 *Sing to Jehovah a new song; [sing] his praise from the end of the earth. Let the sea roar,and all that lives in it, the isles and they who inhabit them. Let the desert and its cities raise [their voice], and the villages where Kedar dwells; let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy and cry out from the tops of the mountains. O let them give glory to Jehovah, and in the isles speak out in praise of him.*

As Israel sang a Song of Salvation when Jehovah delivered his people from bondage in Egypt, so do those whom he delivers in the end-time—“Then sang Moses and the people of Israel this song to Jehovah and said, ‘I will sing to Jehovah, for he hath triumphed gloriously. Horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. Jehovah is my strength and song. He has become my salvation’” (Exodus 15:1–2). Whereas Moses led Jehovah’s people out of Egypt, the servant leads them from the end of the earth, the isles of the sea, the desert and its towns, and the tops of the mountains (Isaiah 49:8–13; 60:3–9).

42:13–15 *Jehovah will come forth like a warrior, his passions aroused like a fighter; he will give the war cry, raise the shout of victory over his enemies. For a long time I have been silent, keeping still and restraining myself. But now I will scream like a woman in labor and breathe hard and fast all at once. I will lay waste mountains and hills and make all their vegetation wither; I will turn rivers into dry land and evaporate lakes.*

Although Jehovah may “go like a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7), when the need arises he is no pacifist. Should circumstances demand it when his covenants are honored—as when enemies threaten those who keep his law and word—Jehovah intervenes and comes to their aid. His role of divine emperor requires him to deliver a loyal vassal who faces a mortal threat. Those are the conditions Jehovah’s people face at the time his servant fulfills his mission. Anyone who assumes that Israel’s God won’t intervene on his people’s behalf because he hasn’t done so for a long time will be sadly mistaken.

Jehovah’s identifying himself with “a woman in labor” alludes to the rebirth of his people to higher spiritual categories, as when “Zion gives birth to her children” when world events come to a head (Isaiah 66:8–9). Because Israel’s deliverance from the Philistines wasn’t complete until David had subdued them (2 Samuel 3:18), so the end-time deliverance of Jehovah’s people isn’t complete until their enemies perish. While in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment both the archtyrant and natural disasters reduce much of the earth’s terrain to chaos, Jehovah’s “enemies” are represented metaphorically by that same terrain.

42:16 *Then will I lead the blind by a way they did not know, and guide them in paths unfamiliar; the* ***darkness*** *confronting them I will turn into* ***light****, and the uneven ground make level. These things I will not fail to perform.*

At the time Jehovah delivers his people from blindness and captivity, they again travel through the wilderness as Israel did anciently (Isaiah 35:1–10; 40:3–4; 43:19–20). Those who *were* blind but who renew their covenant relationship with him, return in the new exodus to Zion (Isaiah 43:5–8; 48:20–21; 52:11–12). In the same way Jehovah’s cloud of glory protected ancient Israel and additionally provided light, so it does again (Isaiah 4:5–6; 25:4–5; 60:1–4). When his people repent and return as a result of the servant’s mission, the *light* he typifies overpowers the *darkness* the archtyrant typifies.

42:17 *But those who trust in idols and esteem their images as gods shall retreat in utter confusion.*

Alternating motifs of chaos and creation here again proceed from creation—the “light” that lights up the darkness (v 16; cf. Genesis 1:3–4)—to chaos, namely the idolaters’ “retreat in utter confusion.” While those who repent of idolatry participate in the new exodus of Jehovah’s people (v 16), those who fail to repent—who remain spiritually blind—perish without ever experiencing Jehovah’s marvelous redemption. Oblivious to an entirely different scenario that happens for his elect, they encounter Jehovah solely in the pouring out of his wrath upon the wicked in his Day of Judgment (vv 17–25).

42:18–20 *O you deaf, listen; O you blind, look and see! Who is blind but my own servant, or so deaf as the messenger I have sent? Who is blind like those I have commissioned, as uncomprehending as the servant of Jehovah—seeing much but not giving heed, with open ears hearing nothing?*

Dual meanings assist in identifying Jehovah’s blind and deaf “servant” or vassal in this incriminating verse as (1) Jehovah’s collective servant Jacob/Israel, to whom Jehovah sends his end-time servant as a *light* to deliver them from spiritual blindness and to lead them in the new exodus to Zion (vv 6–7, 16; Isaiah 41:8–10; 43:1–8; 44:20–22); and (2) Jehovah’s current individual servant, a “messenger” whom he has “sent”—signifying his apostleship—but whom Jehovah’s end-time servant displaces in the pattern of Eliakim displacing Shebna (Isaiah 22:15–25; cf. 56:10–12; Matthew 24:44–51).

42:21 *It is the will of Jehovah, that, because of his* ***righteousness****, they magnify the law and become illustrious.*

Jehovah’s appointing his end-time servant as a lawgiver in the pattern of Moses (v 4; Isaiah 55:4) implies that the law his people are currently keeping has become corrupted (Isaiah 24:5; 48:1; 58:1–2)—so much so that a restoration is needed or they can never experience its fruits. That restoration occurs through Jehovah’s *righteousness*—his servant (Isaiah 11:4–5; 41:2; 46:11–13). As they “magnify the law,” they again see and hear (Isaiah 29:18, 24; 30:20–21; 51:4) and become “illustrious” as a people of God: “The nations shall behold your righteousness and all their rulers your glory” (Isaiah 62:2).

42:22 *Instead, they are a people plundered and sacked, all of them trapped in holes, hidden away in dungeons. They have become a prey, yet no one rescues them, a spoil, yet none demands restitution.*

Those who don’t meet Jehovah’s conditions for deliverance—by keeping the law of his covenant, replacing their self-righteousness with *his* standard of righteousness—fall prey to the archtyrant and those who emulate him. Commissioned by Jehovah to “pillage for plunder and spoliate for spoil” (Isaiah 10:6), he humbles Jehovah’s people until a remnant turns back to its God (Isaiah 10:20–22). Because his people didn’t “rescue” those who needed rescuing, nor “demanded restitution” for those who were wronged (Isaiah 1:17, 23; 58:6–10), they experience this same plight as a covenant curse.

42:23–24 *Who among you hearing this will take heed of it hereafter, and be mindful and obey? Who is it that hands Jacob over to plunder and Israel to despoilers, if not Jehovah, against whom we have sinned? For they have no desire to walk in his ways or obey his law.*

The two choices the Jacob/Israel category faces are deliverance through his servant—whom Jehovah appoints as lawgiver and restorer of justice (vv 1–4)—or destruction and servitude to the archtyrant and his cohorts, whom Jehovah appoints to punish the wicked (vv 24–25). Even when calamities come upon them, many don’t perceive that they themselves are the cause, that they brought covenant curses on their own heads. To “take heed” and “obey” doesn’t come easily to sinners who reject Jehovah’s law and repudiate his messenger, thereby setting limits on what Jehovah can do for them.

42:25 *So in the* ***heat*** *of his* ***anger*** *he pours out on them the violence of war, till it envelopes them in flames—yet they remain unaware—till it sets them on fire; yet they take it not to heart.*

As a realization of how Jehovah blesses his people is acquired only by their experientially keeping his law, those who abort doing so remain “unaware” of why they suffer calamities. While the *heat* of his *anger* identifies the archtyrant’s burning up the wicked in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 4:6; 10:5), the righteous live through it: “The sinners in Zion are struck with fear; the godless are in the grip of trembling: ‘Who among us can live through the devouring fire? Who among us can abide eternal burning?’ They who conduct themselves righteously and are honest in word” (Isaiah 33:14–15).

ISAIAH 43

Jehovah’s people who repent of idolatry return in

a new exodus from the four directions of the earth

43:1 *But now, thus says Jehovah—he who formed you, O Jacob, he who created you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.*

As in this instance, a chaos motif to end a chapter and a creation motif to begin a chapter characterizes Isaiah’s chiastic pattern of alternating chaos and creation motifs that spans chapters 41–46. Affirming Jehovah’s role as Creator of all things—as an unending source of creation, not only in the past but also in the future—this pattern by its very nature defines creation as re-creation, as deconstruction followed by reconstruction and degeneration followed by regeneration. He who created Jacob/Israel as his covenant people is able to re-create them on higher spiritual levels stretching into eternity.

Jehovah’s admonition, “Do not fear!” forms a word link to Isaiah 41:8–14, in which Jacob/Israel is invited to return from the end of the earth. That return occurs in an exodus to Zion from the four directions of the earth (vv 5–6; Isaiah 11:11–12; 49:11–12). Jacob/Israel qualifies for such physical deliverance upon being spiritually “redeemed” by Jehovah and by his people’s accepting his redemption (Isaiah 44:21–22; 48:20–21; 51:10–11). Jehovah’s calling them “by name” and claiming them as “mine” signifies ascent to a higher spiritual level, which the Jacob/Israel category is now invited to undertake.

43:2 *When you cross the waters, I will be with you; [when you traverse] the rivers, you shall not be overwhelmed. Though you walk through the* ***fire****, you shall not be burned; its* ***flame*** *shall not consume you.*

If Jehovah’s people of the Jacob/Israel category will trust in Jehovah in the face of mortal threats as did the people of Hezekiah—and by that means ascend to higher spiritual categories as they did (Isaiah 37:22)—the very elements that may stand in the way on their return from exile will yield to them. The same fire that destroys the wicked (Isaiah 42:25; 47:14; 66:15–16) will preserve them alive (Isaiah 33:14–16; cf. Daniel 3:19–29). As they pass Jehovah’s test of their loyalty, he will be “with” them as he was with Hezekiah and his people against the king of Assyria (v 5; Isaiah 37:35; 38:6; 41:10).

43:3–4 *For I Jehovah am your God, [I,] the Holy One of Israel, am your Savior; Egypt I have appointed as ransom for you, Cush and Seba [I give] in place of you. Because you are precious and revered in my eyes, and because I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.*

The expression “your God” reasserts the covenant bond that binds Jehovah to his people (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12). Its parallel, “your Savior,” affirms that Israel’s God, not some other, is their Savior (v 11; Isaiah 45:21; 49:26; 60:16; 63:8–9). Although other saviors exist, such as Jehovah’s servant and his associates, they only qualify Jehovah’s people for salvation; they don’t themselves save them (Isaiah 19:20; 37:35; 63:9, 17; 65:8). Other peoples become a “ransom” for them when the king of Assyria/Babylon slays the nations among whom they live, thinking he slays Jehovah’s people also.

43:5–6 *Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bring your offspring from the east and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, Give up! to the south, Withhold not!*

Even though the world may live in fear of the king of Assyria/Babylon and the nations yield to panic, Jehovah’s people need have no fear: “‘It is I who create the smithwho fans the flaming coals, forging weapons to suit his purpose; it is I who create the ravagerto destroy. Whatever weapon is devised against you, it shall not succeed; every tonguethat rises to accuse you, you shall refute. This is the heritage of the servants of Jehovah, and such is their vindication by me,’ says Jehovah” (Isaiah 54:16–17). No matter how bleak their prospects may appear, his people have only to trust in their God.

Unlike Israel’s exodus out of Egypt, the end-time exodus of Jehovah’s people is from all parts of the earth: “He will raise the ensignto the nations and assemble the exiled of Israel; he will gather the scattered of Judah from the four directions of the earth” (Isaiah 11:12). Like the exodus out of Egypt, however, the end-time exodus of Jehovah’s people is out of bondage, compelling the north—Assyria—to “give up”; and the south—Egypt—to “withhold not.” Jehovah’s servant follows the pattern of Moses, whom Jehovah chose as Israel’s deliverer (Exodus 3–13; Isaiah 10:24–27; 49:9, 24–25; 63:11–14).

43:6–8 *Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth—all who are called by my name, whom I have formed, molded and wrought for my own glory. Let go the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears.*

Those who ultimately participate in the new exodus from the four directions of the earth pertain to Isaiah’s son/servant category and are identified as Jehovah’s “sons” and “daughters” (Isaiah 49:22). That implies that from the time Jehovah’s servant commences his ministry to the Jacob/Israel category, those who were formerly blind and deaf have, in the interim, ascended not only to the Zion/Jerusalem category but beyond that (Isaiah 29:18–19; 35:5; 42:7, 18–21). In other words, they have been re-created—“formed, molded, and wrought”—to an elect category of Jehovah’s people (cf. Matthew 24:31).

Persons in Isaiah’s son/servant or elect category make individual covenants with Jehovah in the pattern of King David and his heirs. Under the terms of the Davidic Covenant, they become Jehovah’s vassals and saviors in their own right as was King Hezekiah. As noted, the servant’s role “to open eyes that are blind” (Isaiah 42:7) involves soliciting the release of Jehovah’s blind and deaf people from bondage in the pattern of Moses: “Let my people go!” (Exodus 5:1). On this occasion, however, the servant doesn’t petition Pharaoh for Jacob/Israel’s release but the nations who keep them captive.

43:9 *When all nations unitedly assembled, when the peoples were gathered together, who among them foretold these things, or predicted events that have come to pass? Let them bring their witnesses and justify themselves, that those within hearing may say, It is true.*

The servant’s mission to “all nations” (Isaiah 11:10–12; 41:2; 42:1, 6; 45:1, 13; 49:6, 22; 52:10, 15; 55:4) implies that his restoration of Jehovah’s people dispersed among the nations gains worldwide notoriety. Likewise, just as Moses won the attention of Israel’s tribes in Egypt when he petitioned Pharaoh for their release, so the servant gains the attention of the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people at the time he fulfills his mission. A key premise of the servant’s platform are the prophecies that foretell Jehovah’s restoration of his people, which no one among the nations has predicted or suspected.

43:10 *But you are my witnesses, says Jehovah, my servant whom I have chosen, to the end that you may recognize it and believe me, and perceive that I was the one [who foretold them]—before me no god was formed, nor shall one exist after me.*

The next step toward the restoration of Jehovah’s people is for them to gain an awareness of who they are—of their true identity as covenant people of the God of Israel. Once they “recognize,” “believe,” and “perceive” that their restoration was foretold by prophets, and that now is the time of its implementation, they may resume their role as Jehovah’s collective “servant” or vassal and become “witnesses” of his truth (Isaiah 44:6–8; 45:20–22). Their very restoration as his people serves as proof that Jehovah alone—not the nations, their leaders, or their gods—is their God (Isaiah 45:4–6; 60:10–16).

43:11–13 *I myself am Jehovah; apart from me there is no savior. It is I who foretold and wrought* ***salvation****, making it known when there was no strange god among you. You are my witnesses, says Jehovah, that I am divine, that from the first I have been present—from my* ***hand*** *none can deliver; when I work, who can thwart it?*

As Jehovah is humanity’s only Savior, his people needn’t look elsewhere for their salvation, no matter what constraints or threats they come under. Nations and rulers may concoct their own plans for their peoples but they will come to nought. From the first, Jehovah conceived and planned his people’s salvation and their enemies’ damnation. As a proof of his divinity, he foretold his work of deliverance at the *hand* of his servant and of destruction at the *hand* of the archtyrant from of old (Isaiah 25:1; 37:26; 44:7–8; 46:9–13). Of these things, his people may gain a testimony and bear witness.

*When there was no strange god among you.* If they would again become Jehovah’s covenant people, they must give up the strange gods and false traditions they have inherited from the nations among who they are scattered. Such gods prove utterly useless: “Who would fashion a god or cast an idol that cannot benefit them?” (Isaiah 44:10). Those who “who carried about their wooden idols and prayed to gods that could not save them” (Isaiah 45:20) must worship Jehovah, “apart from [whom] there is no savior” (v 11). Instead of the traditions of their fathers it is *his* ways they must learn (Isaiah 2:3; 48:17).

43:14–15 *Thus says Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, your Redeemer: For your sake I launch [an attack] on Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Chaldeans, they who sing the praises of shipping. I Jehovah, your Holy One, Creator of Israel, am your King.*

The destruction of Jehovah’s enemies and the deliverance of his elect in a new exodus (vv 14–17) form the centerpiece of the chiastic structure of thirty alternating chaos and creation motifs in chapters 41–46. Those who subscribe to Greater Babylon’s materialistic economy—the manufacture, promotion, and sale of idols, the works of men’s hands—ultimately turn into “fugitives”—a chaos motif (Isaiah 45:16, 20). Depending on Greater Babylon’s worldwide shipping empire for their livelihood, they put their trust in what is destined to pass away (Isaiah 2:16; 13:19; 21:2, 9; 23:1–14; 47:1, 11).

Jehovah’s depiction as his people’s “Redeemer” identifies how he redeems them—in this case, by vanquishing their enemies the Chaldeans or Babylonians. His depiction as his people’s “King” attests to his emperor–vassal type of relationship with them and with individuals under the terms of the Sinai and Davidic Covenants. His designation as Israel’s “Holy One” expresses his role as the exemplar of his people. His designation as “Creator” of Israel—a creation motif—reflects his people’s re-creation on a higher level (v 1; Isaiah 44:21; 65:18), qualifying them for the deliverance that follows.

43:16–17 *Thus says Jehovah—who provides a way in the* ***Sea****, a path through the mighty waters, who dispatches chariots and horses, armies of men in full strength; they lie down as one, to rise no more, they flicker and die, snuffed out like a wick—*

The creation motif of Jehovah as Creator–King (v 15) resumes with the exodus of Jehovah’s people out of Greater Babylon (v 16) at the center of the chaos–creation pattern. The forces of chaos—notably the archtyrant who personifies the *Sea* and “mighty waters” (Isaiah 8:7; 17:12–13; 28:2)—are subdued to let Jehovah’s elect pass through (Isaiah 11:15–16; 51:10–11; 63:11–13). Just as Israel’s deliverance from Egypt wasn’t complete until Pharaoh’s armies had drowned in the sea (Exodus 15:1–4), so the end-time deliverance of Jehovah’s people isn’t complete until their enemies are “snuffed out.”

The exodus of Jehovah’s elect out of Greater Babylon—out of all the world at the time of its desolation (Isaiah 13:1, 9, 11; 48:20–21; 52:11–12)—quintessentially expresses Jehovah’s redemption of his people. As ancient Israel was born as a nation following its exodus out of Egypt—covenanting with Jehovah in the wilderness to be his people and he their God (Exodus 19:5–8)—so, as a result of the servant’s mission, they are reborn as his covenant people following the new exodus. In that great reversal of circumstances those who didn’t respond to the servant’s mission, whose light remains dim, perish.

43:18–21 *Never mind the prophecies of bygone events; do not dwell on things of the past. See, I do a new thing; it is now springing up. Surely, you are aware of it: I am making roads through the desert, streams in the wasteland. The wild beasts do me honor, the jackals and birds of prey, for bringing water to the wilderness, streams to the dry land, that I may give drink to my chosen people, the people I formed for myself to speak out in praise of me.*

Because the prophecies that were fulfilled anciently relate to the end-time only as types, researching history isn’t as profitable as participating in the “new things” Jehovah is doing or is about to do. With the advent of his servant (Isaiah 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 52:7–15), new realities come into being until the time Jehovah comes in his glory (Isaiah 48:6–7; 52:7–10; 62:1–12). One such “new thing” is the regenerating wilderness, in which Jehovah’s elect people dwell—those whom he “forms” or re-creates, who praise him for reversing covenant curses for their sake (Isaiah 12:4–6; 24:15–16; 42:10–12; 63:7).

43:22–24 *But you do not call upon me, O Jacob; you have grown weary of me, O Israel. Yet [I required] not that you bring me offerings from your flocks or pay me homage by sacrificial slaughter; I have not burdened you with oblations or wearied you with burning incense. [Nor have I burdened you] to buy me the fragrant calamus or sate me with the fat of immolations.*

In spite of the prospect of the imminent restoration of Jehovah’s people and the reversal of their circumstances, the Jacob/Israel category has difficulty “recognizing,” “believing,” and “perceiving” Jehovah’s promises (v 10). As the regenerating wilderness (vv 19–21) is a creation motif, so “weariness” (v 22) is a chaos motif, taking the form of “not calling” upon Jehovah to thank him or petition for oneself and for others as Jehovah’s servant does (Isaiah 41:25). Even without the requirement to sacrifice animals and make oblations, such weariness characterizes the Jacob/Israel category (Isaiah 40:27–30).

43:24–25 *Yet you have burdened me with your sins, wearied me with your iniquities. But it is I myself, and for my own sake, who blot out your offenses, remembering your sins no more.*

Although Jehovah hasn’t burdened or wearied his people, they have burdened and wearied him with their sins and iniquities. Nevertheless, as their Savior he takes their transgressions on himself in order to redeem them: “He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; the price of our peace he incurred, and with his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5; cf. 63:8–9). The expression “for my own sake” defines Jehovah’s role as a proxy savior under the terms of the Davidic Covenant. If his people will but repent, he will “blot out” their offenses and heal them (Isaiah 6:10; 44:22).

43:26–28 *Recount for me [the past]; let us plead each our case. Speak up and vindicate yourself. Your first father transgressed; your spokesmen sinned against me. Therefore I let the holy cities be profaned; I gave Jacob to be ostracized, Israel to execration.*

Unable to redeem themselves from the effects of their transgressions, Jehovah’s people have no recourse but to rely on Jehovah’s redemption. From Adam, their “first father,” to their present “spokesmen” or prophets, all have transgressed. If the Jacob/Israel category persists in sinning, covenant curses such as profanation, ostracism, and execration will continue to follow them (Isaiah 59:12–15; 64:6–11). But if they repent, Jehovah will redeem them, enabling them to ascend to higher spiritual categories: “He will come as Redeemer to Zion, to those of Jacob who repent of transgression” (Isaiah 59:20).

ISAIAH 44

Jehovah’s servant resembles Moses and Cyrus in

dissuading people from idols and rebuilding the temple

44:1–2 *Hear now, Jacob my servant, and Israel whom I have chosen. Thus says Jehovah, your Maker, who formed you from the womb and succored you: Be not afraid, O Jacob, my servant, and Jeshurun whom I have chosen.*

The alternating chaos/creation pattern in these chapters illustrates the ambivalence of the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people. Faced with two choices—one leading to rebirth, re-creation, and deliverance; the other to ruin, de-creation, and destruction—this spiritual category lacks the vision to see, hear, and understand fully what is at stake. Jehovah appeals to them that he—their Maker, who “formed” or created them initially—has chosen them to be his collective servant or vassal. Their proving loyal and living up to the name Jeshurun or “Upright One” will dispel their fears of the unknown.

44:3 *I will pour water on the thirsty [soil], showers upon the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, my blessing upon your posterity.*

Continuing the creation motif (vv 1–5) is the blossoming wilderness (cf. Isaiah 41:17–19; 43:19–20). Paralleled with it is the promise of Jehovah’s pouring out his Spirit and blessing on his people’s descendants, thus likening the lack of his Spirit to dry ground. In other words, once the Jacob/Israel category renews its covenant relationship with Jehovah, his people’s covenant curses reverse and his blessings flow. Comprising the two primary blessings of his covenant, land and offspring are here enhanced to a land Jehovah regenerates and offspring that he endows with his Spirit (cf. Isaiah 51:2–3; 59:21).

44:4–5 *They shall shoot up like grass among streams of water, like willows by running brooks. One will say, I am Jehovah’s, and another name himself Jacob. Yet others will inscribe on their arm, To Jehovah, and adopt the name Israel.*

Those of the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people who repent and renew their covenant with Jehovah, who ascend spiritually to higher levels and return to promised lands, acknowledge Jehovah as their God instead of their former gods that were no gods (vv 6–8; Isaiah 43:10–12; 45:20–22). As proselytes to Jehovah from among the nations, they assume Israelite names such as Jacob and Israel—ones they were evidently no longer accustomed to—affirming their renewed covenantal bond. Although their ancestors had assimilated into the nations and lost their identity as Israelites, they now reclaim it.

44:6 *Thus says Jehovah, the King of Israel, Jehovah of Hosts, their Redeemer: I was at the first and I am at the last; apart from me there is no God.*

The continuing need for Jehovah to assert his identity as defined by his titles (vv 2, 24; Isaiah 40:28; 41:14, 21; 43:3, 14–15; 45:9–11) infers that attempts to convince the Jacob/Israel category of his people that he alone is God is perhaps the most difficult task involved in their resuming their identity as his covenant people. Still, the same God who performed wonders on his people’s behalf “at the first” will do so “at the last.” Israel’s “King,” their divine emperor who chose them in the beginning, will fully prove to be their “Redeemer” at the end (vv 24–28; Isaiah 41:14; 43:14–15; 49:25–26; 54:4–8).

44:7 *Who predicts what happens as do I, and is the equal of me in appointing a people from of old as types, foretelling things to come?*

One way Jehovah shows that he is God first and last is to appoint his covenant people to prefigure in their ancient history the events that occur at the end. Only a true God can orchestrate humanity’s circumstances in that manner, it being a proof of his divinity (Isaiah 41:26; 43:11–13; 45:21; 46:9–10). In other words, whatever set a precedent in the past forms a type of what happens in the future, namely his people’s apostasy, Assyria’s invasion of their lands, Assyria’s world conquest, his people’s captivity, their exodus out of Egypt, wandering in the wilderness, building of the temple, and so forth.

44:8 *Be not perturbed or shaken. Have I not made it known to you from of old? Did I not foretell it, you being my witnesses? Is there a God, then, apart from me? There is no* ***Rock*** *unknown to me.*

Although idolaters may be “perturbed” and “shaken” at what Jehovah is doing or is about to do (Isaiah 41:5; 42:17; 45:16), his covenant people may feel secure at having him for their *Rock*. What Jehovah made known “of old” through the ancient Hebrew prophets is the end-time restoration of his people. If they didn’t know that, or forgot it, they had best remember it now if they want to participate in it. As they are “witnesses” of it, they should speak up and declare it so that others too may unite with Jehovah’s covenant people and live into the millennial age of peace (Isaiah 40:3–10; 52:7–8; 62:6–7).

44:9–11 *All who manufacture idols are deranged; the things they cherish profit nothing. Those who promote them are themselves sightless and mindless, to their own dismay. Who would fashion a god or cast an idol that cannot benefit them? Their whole society is confused; their fabricators are mere mortals. Were they all to assemble and take their stand [before me], they would at once cringe in fear.*

A protracted satire against idolaters, verses 9–20 poke fun at idol makers and worshipers of false gods. Transposed into modern times—but equally relevant to Judah’s ancient Babylonian exile—the worldly objects people covet, get fixated on, spend their energies and resources on, by their very nature displace Jehovah in their lives and thus deprive them of his covenant blessings. When Babylon’s socio-economic system that is based on the production, promotion, and sale of the works of men’s hands collapses in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, the material “things” people have left can’t help them.

If idolaters actually got a sense of Jehovah’s reality—“Were they all to assemble and take their stand [before me]”—they would at once realize their folly and “cringe in fear” (v 11). But when Jehovah’s people become so infatuated with the allures of the Harlot Babylon that nothing else interests them, they are ripe for destruction: “By your skill and science you were led astray, thinking to yourself, I exist, and there is none besides me! Catastrophe shall overtake you, which you shall not know how to avert by bribes; disaster shall befall you from which you cannot ransom yourself” (Isaiah 47:10–11).

44:12–13 *The smith with his tools works the iron over the coals and gives it shape by hammering; he forges his [god] by the strength of his arm: when he becomes hungry, he no longer has strength; if he fails to drink water, he begins to grow faint. The woodworker draws a diagram, sketching his [idol] with a marker. He creates it by chiseling to the outline of the dividers; he gives it a human likeness, resembling man’s beauty, fit to lodge in a house.*

The objects people invent that they adore come from earthly elements Jehovah has made. To create them requires human energy, which soon depletes, making the idols less than human. People may even superimpose human likenesses on them to make them more attractive but they, too, are God’s creation, not theirs. In short, the sum total of the things they cherish that distract them from the true God amounts to no more than an illusion. When such substitutes for God become his people’s obsession, then it is time for Jehovah to “utterly supplant the false gods” (Isaiah 2:18; cf. 2:20; 17:7–8; 42:8).

44:14–15 *He is required to cut down cedars; he must select holms and oaks and care for them among the trees of the forest. He plants firs, which the rain makes grow: that which serves men as fuel, which they use to warm themselves or light fire with to bake bread, of that they create gods which they adore, from it they make idols to which they stoop.*

Isaiah’s extended satire on the idols and their manufacturers dramatizes the total preoccupation of Babylon’s society with its production of idols. From harvesting raw materials to finishing the end product, its citizens are engrossed in physical not spiritual realities—whereas long ago Jehovah had said, “You shall not bow down to their gods or serve them, nor do after their works. But you will utterly overthrow them and entirely break down their images. And you will serve Jehovah your God, and he will bless your bread and water. And I will take away sickness from among you” (Exodus 23:24–25).

44:16–17 *Half of it they burn in the fire. Over it they broil a roast;they eat the meat and are satisfied. They also warm themselves and say, Ah, it is warm in front of the fire! From the rest they make a god, their idol, to which they bow in adoration and pray, Save us; you are our god!*

The abject futility of idol worship becomes clear as Isaiah’s parody proceeds to its deplorable conclusion. How often must Jehovah continue to remind his people to worship him, not the gods of the heathen: “‘Don’t go after other gods to serve them or worship them. Don’t provoke me to anger with the works of your hands and I will do you no harm. Yet you haven’t listened to me,’ says Jehovah, ‘so as not to provoke me to anger with the works of your hands’” (Jeremiah 25:6–7). In spite of Jehovah’s admonitions, his people’s addiction to idolatry enslaves them to a counterfeit of happiness.

44:18–19 *They have become unaware and insensible; their eyes are glazed so they cannot see, their minds are incapable of discernment. They reflect not, nor have the sense or comprehension to say, Part of this I burned in the fire; I also baked bread in its embers, roasted meat and ate it. Am I not making an abomination of what is left? Do I not stoop to a mere lump of wood?*

So immersed are idolaters in the virtual reality they create for themselves that is tied to material things that it spiritually blinds them. Losing the connection between heaven and earth, between what is of God and what is of man, they have become “unaware” and “insensible” to the glorious reality that exists beyond what they perceive in this mortal sphere through their physical senses. Still, because as children of God they intuitively sense that something higher exists, they paradoxically channel their awe or veneration of it to a lower reality—to an “abomination” or “execration” (*to‘eba*)—their idol.

44:20 *They are followers of ashes; their deluded minds have distracted them. They cannot liberate themselves [from them] or say, Surely this thing in my hand is a fraud.*

Being “followers of ashes” implies dependence on what is fated to disappear—on what Jehovah reduces to chaos in his Day of Judgment. And yet, so powerful a hold has idolatry on its adherents that they grow incapable of perceiving anything besides what their spiritually altered state limits them to. Instead of being reborn and re-created on ever higher spiritual levels, they are de-created and descend, losing even their reasoning powers as they enter into spiritual bondage to a “fraud” or “lie” (*seqer*). At that point, only Jehovah, their Redeemer, can liberate them, on condition they turn to him (vv 21–22).

44:21–22 *Ponder these things, O Jacob, and you, O Israel, for you are my servant. I have created you to be my servant, O Israel; do not disregard me. I have removed your offenses like a thick fog, your sins like a cloud of mist. Return to me; I have redeemed you.*

If the Jacob/Israel category will serve Jehovah instead of idols, and have regard for him instead of for material objects, the “fog” and “mist” of their spiritual confusion will lift and they will see clearly. Because Jehovah has already “redeemed” them—in this case by the parallel idea of his taking their “offenses” and “sins” upon himself (cf. Isaiah 43:25; 53:4–10; 63:7–9)—they have only to “repent” and “return” (*swb*) and he will accept them as his covenant people. As they do so, Jehovah will “create” or re-create them and they will be his “servant” or vassal in very deed (Isaiah 41:8**–**9; 43:1–4; 65:18).

44:23 *Sing, O heavens, for what Jehovah has done; cause it to resound, O earth beneath! Burst into song, O mountains, forests, and all trees therein: Jehovah has redeemed Jacob; he shall be glorified in Israel.*

Because Jacob/Israel is the category of Jehovah’s people that needs redeeming from sin (Isaiah 43:22–25; 58:1), it occasions a Song of Salvation when that occurs. The heavens and the earth, witnesses of the Sinai Covenant (Deuteronomy 4:26; 30:19)—which were earlier called on to testify of his people’s breaking the covenant (Isaiah 1:2)—are now witnesses of their renewing the covenant. As mountains, forests, and trees denote nations, cities, and peoples, respectively, Jacob/Israel’s redemption is a worldwide event. Jehovah is “glorified” when his people respond to his acts of love (Isaiah 60:21; 61:3).

Paradoxically, in spite of Jehovah’s redeeming humanity from its sins (v 22; Isaiah 43:25; 55:7; 63:8–9), of all God’s creations man most disappoints him in his thoughts, words, and acts (v 21; Isaiah 43:22–24; 55:8; 63:10). Whereas the natural world—the“mountains, forests, and all trees therein”—continually glorifies him by fulfilling the measure of its creation, only man, as a consequence of the agency God gave him in the Garden of Eden, chooses to offend God and his creations through his transgressions. Conversely, when man finally fulfills the measure of his creation nothing glorifies God more.

44:24–25 *Thus says Jehovah, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: I am Jehovah, the Maker of all things, who alone suspends the heavens, who himself gives form to the earth, who annuls the predictions of impostors and makes fools of diviners, who turns wise men about and makes nonsense of their knowledge,*

As we saw previously, representations of Jehovah as the creator of the heavens and the earth (v 24) that accompany his appointing his servant (vv 26–28) validate the servant’s mission (Isaiah 42:5–7; 48:12–15) and function as a polemic against those who might oppose him or consider him an impostor (Isaiah 49:7; 50:6–9). The real impostors, diviners, and wise men (v 25), meanwhile, are put in their place. Their “predictions” and “knowledge”—which stem from their own conjectures, not from God—prove utterly worthless when Jehovah intervenes to restore his people (Isaiah 29:13–14; 41:22–24).

44:26 *who fulfills the word of his servant, accomplishes the aims of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, It shall be reinhabited, and of the cities of Judah, They shall be rebuilt, their ruins I will restore,*

Unlike his people’s false servants and messengers (Isaiah 42:19)—whose word Jehovah doesn’t fulfill (Deuteronomy 18:22)—his end-time servant predicts the future and also sees it fulfilled: “Come near me and hear this: I have not made predictions in secret; at their coming to pass, I have been present. Now my Lord Jehovah has sent me; his Spirit [is in me]” (Isaiah 48:16; cf. 41:26–27). Jehovah’s appointing his servant to restore his people (Isaiah 49:5–6, 8–9) includes the rebuilding of ancient ruins (Isaiah 49:19; 58:12; 61:4), in particular Jerusalem and its temple (v 28; Isaiah 33:20; 62:7; 66:1).

44:27–28 *who says to the* ***deep****, Become dry; I am drying up your currents, who says of Cyrus, He is my shepherd; he will do whatever I will. He will say of Jerusalem that it must be rebuilt, its temple foundations relaid.*

The mention of a person by name—as with Cyrus, the Persian emperor—denotes that he set a historical precedent that serves as a type of the end-time. In Cyrus’ case, that precedent is the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple (Ezra 1:1–2). In this passage, however (vv 24–28), Isaiah creates a *composite* of types—of Cyrus and Moses—to portray Jehovah’s “servant” (v 26) who fulfills the roles of both. The idea of Jehovah’s “shepherd” in a context of the “deep” becoming dry represents a Moses typology (Isaiah 63:11–13; cf. 40:11) and alludes to Israel’s end-time exodus (Isaiah 11:15–16; 51:9–11).

ISAIAH 45

Jehovah’s servant resembles David and Cyrus in restoring Jehovah’s people and routing their enemies

45:1–2 *Thus says Jehovah to his anointed, to Cyrus, whom I grasp by the right hand, to subdue nations before him, to ungird the loins of rulers, opening doors ahead of him, letting no gates remain shut: I will go before you and level all obstacles; I will break in pieces brazen doors and cut through iron bars.*

While the preceding passage depicts Jehovah’s end-time servant as a composite of the types of Cyrus and Moses (Isaiah 44:26–28), the present passage depicts him as a composite of the types of Cyrus and David. Although Cyrus the Persian was never called Jehovah’s “anointed” or “Messiah”—his god being Marduk—that was the common title of Israelite kings (1 Samuel 16:12–13; 26:9, 11; 2 Samuel 23:1; cf. Isaiah 61:1). Linking ideas, such as Jehovah’s empowering him by grasping him by the hand, additionally identify the composite Cyrus and David figure as Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 42:6).

Like the roles of Moses and David, the servant’s roles are physical as well as spiritual. Chapters 41–46, however, depict these roles separately, some spiritual and some physical. Because no one historical figure Isaiah draws on fulfilled all the functions Jehovah’s servant does in restoring Jehovah’s people, Isaiah of necessity divides descriptions of the servant into different personas to show their incompleteness. The servant’s “anointed” status in the pattern of King David, for example (v 1), is incomplete without an accompanying endowment of Jehovah’s Spirit (Isaiah 42:1; 61:1; cf. 1 Samuel 16:13).

Thus, while the present passage deals with the physical aspects of the servant’s mission, Isaiah 42:1–7 deals with its spiritual aspects. However, just as Moses’ roles were both spiritual—when instructing Jehovah’s people in the Sinai wilderness, and physical—when leading their exodus out of Egypt, so the servant’s roles are both spiritual—when dispelling people’s blindness and bondage to sin (Isaiah 42:7), and physical—when releasing them from physical captivity (vv 1–2, 13), facilitating their new exodus out of Babylon and inheritance of promised lands (Isaiah 43:5–8; 48:20–21; 49:8–12).

In short, it is the spiritual conversion of Jehovah’s people that makes possible the physical deliverance and restoration that the composite Cyrus, Moses, and David types depict (vv 1–2, 13; Isaiah 44:26–28). As noted, Micah predicts a similar physical deliverance: “I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob. I will surely gather the remnant of Israel. . . . They will make a great sound because of their immense multitude. The breaker has risen before them. They have broken through and passed through the gate and gone out by it. Their king will pass before them and Jehovah at their head” (Micah 2:12–13).

45:3–4 *I will give you hidden treasures and secret hoards of wealth—that you may know that it is I Jehovah, the God of Israel, who calls you by name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by name—I named you when yet you knew me not.*

Enormous wealth, kept in reserve to support the restoration of Jehovah’s people, comes forth at the time Jehovah appoints his end-time servant. As with Jehovah’s grasping him by the hand (v 1), calling him by name signifies royal investiture—as when an emperor legally adopts a vassal or elevates him to higher status (cf. Isaiah 8:11; 40:26; 42:6). That appointment is “for the sake of” Jacob/Israel in order that Jehovah’s people may again become his collective “servant” or vassal. Jehovah’s naming his servant “when yet you knew me not” signifies his foreordination to his earthly mission (Isaiah 49:1).

45:5–6 *I am Jehovah, there is none other; apart from me there is no God. I girded you up when yet you knew me not—that men from where the sun rises to where it sets may know that without me there is nothing, that I am Jehovah, and that there is none other.*

Even as Jehovah “girds up” his servant, empowering him for his task, so he “ungirds” the loins of world rulers, stripping them of strength (v 1). As Moses wielded power over Egypt’s Pharaoh and the kings of the Canaanites, so does the servant when restoring Jehovah’s people and reestablishing justice in the earth (Isaiah 41:1–3, 25; 42:1–4; 46:11; 48:14–15). In that day it will become evident to all humanity—“from where the sun rises to where it sets”—that Jehovah alone is God. As in ancient times, Jehovah’s fame will spread among the nations (Numbers 14:15; Deuteronomy 2:25; Joshua 9:9).

45:7 *I fashion* ***light*** *and form* ***darkness****; I occasion peace and cause calamity. I, Jehovah, do all these things.*

When God created the heavens and the earth, “the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters, and God said, ‘Let there be light!’ And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good. And God divided the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:2–4). That division of the light from the darkness—representing a new creation out of chaotic matter—became an allegory of the spiritual light and darkness that serve as a test for humanity to see which of the two people will choose (Isaiah 5:20; 58:10; 60:1–2).

Secondarily, Jehovah appoints his servant as a *light* to the nations (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; cf. 50:10; 62:1), while the king of Assyria/Babylon typifies the *darkness* from which the servant delivers them (Isaiah 42:6–7; 49:9; cf. 9:2; 29:18). Similarly, “calamity,” “disaster,” or “evil” (*ra‘*) signifies the covenant curse most often associated with the archtyrant (Isaiah 3:9, 11; 13:11; 31:2), while he who begets “peace” is Israel’s God Jehovah (Isaiah 53:5; cf. 26:3, 12; 52:7). Although Jehovah “does all these things,” people nevertheless experience them as a consequence of their righteousness or wickedness.

45:8 *Rain down from above, O heavens; let the skies overflow with* ***righteousness****. Let the earth receive it and* ***salvation*** *blossom; let* ***righteousness*** *spring up forthwith. I, Jehovah, create it.*

Jehovah’s sending down righteousness out of heaven alludes to blessings flowing as a consequence of covenant keeping by his elect. That occurs when Jehovah’s servant—his *righteousness* (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13)—prepares the way for Jehovah’s coming to reign as *salvation* by raising as many as repent of the Jacob/Israel category to the Zion/Jerusalem category and levels higher (Isaiah 52:1–2, 7; 59:20; 62:11). As a pattern for his elect, Jehovah “creates” or re-creates *righteousness*, denoting his servant’s ascent to a higher spiritual level as he fulfills his earthly mission (Isaiah 42:6–7; 49:8–10).

45:9–11 *Woe to those in conflict with their Maker, mere shards of earthenware pottery! As though the clay were to say to him who molds it, What are you doing? Your* ***hands*** *have no skill for the work! Woe to those who say to their Father, What have you begotten? or to the Woman, What have you borne? Thus says Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, their Maker: Will you ask me for signs concerning my children, or dictate to me about the deeds of my* ***hands****?*

Parallel “woes” or pronunciations of covenant curses address the opposers of Jehovah’s “work” or “deeds” (*po‘al*) (vv 9, 11). An **a**–**b**–**a** chiasm identifies that work as “children” or “sons” (*banay*); that is, the rebirth on a higher spiritual level of proxy saviors—Jehovah’s elect—under the terms of the Davidic Covenant. But because that outcome doesn’t conform to what many believe, they oppose it. The chaos motifs of “shards” and “clay”—like those of “dust” and “stubble” (Isaiah 41:2)—identify the opposers as persons in authority whom Jehovah reduces to chaos in his Day of Judgment (Isaiah 41:25):

“My Lord says, ‘Because these people approach me with the mouth and pay me homage with their lips, while their heart remains far from me—their piety toward me consisting of commandments of men learned by rote—therefore it is that I shall again astound these people with wonder upon wonder, rendering void the knowledge of their sages and the intelligence of their wise men insignificant.’ . . . What a contradiction you are! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay? Shall what is made say of its maker, ‘He did not make me,’ or a work of its designer, ‘He doesn’t understand?’” (Isaiah 29:13–14, 16).

The “signs” that the adversaries of Jehovah’s work ask for—which, in the end, consist of their being reduced to broken shards—identify them with other sign seekers who are in authority who excommunicate Jehovah’s servants: “Hear the word of Jehovah, you who are vigilant for his word: Your brethren who abhor you, and exclude you because of my name, say, ‘Let Jehovah manifest his glory, that we may see cause for your joy!’ But it is they who shall suffer shame. Hark, a tumult from the city, a noise from the temple! It is the voiceof Jehovah paying his enemies what is due them” (Isaiah 66:5–6).

Jehovah’s *hands* are two: (1) the servant who restores Jehovah’s people; and (2) the archtyrant who destroys a wicked world. Persons in the Jacob/Israel category who ascend to Zion/Jerusalem, whose subjection to the archtyrant has helped to refine them, Jehovah’s servant delivers at the last. The **a**–**b**–**a** chiasm of Jehovah as “Maker” (v 9)—**a**; as “Father” (*’ab*) (v 10)—**b**; and as “Maker” (v 11)—**a** identifies Jehovah’s role as the divine emperor of “sons” or vassals under the terms of the Davidic Covenant and the “Woman” or “Wife” (*’issa*) as the Woman Zion who gives them birth (Isaiah 66:7–9).

45:12–13 *It is I who made the earth and created man upon it; I with my* ***hand*** *suspended the heavens, appointing all their host. It is I who rightfully raise him up, who facilitate his every step; he will rebuild my city and set free my exiles without price or bribe, says Jehovah of Hosts.*

Jehovah again appears as creator of the heavens and the earth before he validates his servant as one whom he “rightfully raises up” or “raises up in/as righteousness” (*ha‘irotihu* *besedeq*). Forming an integral part of the servant’s end-time mission are two things for which Cyrus set a precedent: (1) the rebuilding of “my city”—Jerusalem (Isaiah 44:26, 28); and (2) the release of Jehovah’s “exiles” or captives who are exiled among the nations (42:7; 49:9). Jehovah’s appointing the host of heaven with his *hand* identifies Jehovah and his servant as co-creators and empowerers (cf. Isaiah 40:12, 26; 41:20).

45:14 *Thus says Jehovah: The wealth of Egypt and merchandise of Cush shall pass on to you and become yours, as shall the Sabeans, a people tall in stature. They shall walk behind you in chains and bow down to you, entreating you, Surely God is in you; no other gods exist!*

As a result of the servant’s releasing Jehovah’s captives (v 13; Isaiah 42:6–7; 43:5–8; 49:8–9, 24–25) and conquering their enemies (vv 1–2; Isaiah 41:2–3, 11–16; 49:17), former foes convert to the God of Israel: “The sons of those who tormented you will come bowing before you; all who reviled you will prostrate themselves at your feet” (Isaiah 60:14); “Proselytes will adhere to them and join the house of Jacob. . . And the house of Israel will possess them as menservants and maidservants in the land of Jehovah: they will take captive their captors and rule over their oppressors” (Isaiah 14:1–2).

45:15 *Truly you are a God who dissembles himself, O Savior, God of Israel.*

While it is the servant who restores Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 11:10–12; 49:5–13; 55:4–5), it is Jehovah who delivers them and reverses their covenant curses: “O Jehovah, you bring about our peace; even all that we have accomplished you have done for us” (Isaiah 26:12). In the act of redeeming his people spiritually, he similarly evidences “no distinguished appearance, that we should notice him, no [pleasing]aspect that we should find him attractive” (Isaiah 53:2). Such modesty by the “Savior God of Israel” befits humanity’s exemplar: “Learn of me for I am meek and lowly of heart” (Matthew 11:29).

45:16–17 *As one, the makers of inventions retired in disgrace, utterly dismayed and embarrassed. But Israel is saved by Jehovah with an everlasting* ***salvation****; you shall not be dismayed or put to shame worlds without end.*

Although all nations and peoples have the chance to respond positively to the servant’s mission of restoring Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6), many continue to cling to their idols. Those who repent of idolatry in a hostile world, on the other hand, may suffer the temporary shame of claiming Jehovah as their God. But they will experience his “everlasting salvation” when Jehovah—their *salvation*—comes to dwell among them (Isaiah 12:6; 25:8–9; 26:1–6; 51:6–8; 62:11–12). The unrepentant, meanwhile—the idolaters who failed the test of their faith—suffer the shame of having chosen poorly.

45:18–19 *For thus says Jehovah who created the heavens, the God who formed the earth—who made it secure and organized it, not to remain a chaotic waste, but designed it to be inhabited: I am Jehovah, there is none other. I speak not in secret from somewhere in a land of* ***darkness****; I do not ask Jacob’s offspring to seek me amid chaos. I Jehovah tell* ***righteousness*** *and am forthright of speech.*

The idea that the God who created the heavens and the earth “tells righteousness” and is “forthright of speech” infers that others than his servant—Jehovah’s *righteousness* (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13)—who claim to speak in God’s name aren’t forthright of speech. The “land of darkness” alludes to the land of the king of Assyria/Babylon who typifies *darkness*, from whose power and oratory the servant delivers Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 42:6–7; 49:6–9, 24–25). While Israel’s God is the one who created the heavens and the earth as a habitation for his people (Isaiah 40:22), all that idolaters do is create “chaos.”

45:20–21 *Gather yourselves and come; draw near, all you fugitives of the nations. They who carried about their wooden idols and prayed to gods that could not save them were caught unawares. Speak up and present your case; go ahead and consult one another. Who foretold these things of old, predicted them long ago? [Did not I,] Jehovah, apart from whom there is no God? Did not I, the God of* ***righteousness****, except for whom there is no Savior?*

Those who continue to cleave to false gods even when Jehovah’s servant challenges them to repent are “caught unawares” as calamities come upon them. Unable to prove their legitimacy by predicting the future (Isaiah 41:21–29; 43:9–10; 44:25), they are confronted with the fact that Jehovah alone predicts it through Isaiah and through his servant—Jehovah’s *righteousness* (v 19)—precisely as it is coming to pass (Isaiah 44:26; 48:16). As a “righteous God” or the “God of righteousness” (*’el-saddiq*), Jehovah—unlike the false gods they rely on that can’t save them—still pleads with them to repent.

45:22–23 *Turn to me and save yourselves, all you ends of the earth; I am God, there is none other. By myself I swear it—****righteousness*** *has issued from my* ***mouth****, by a decree that cannot be revoked: To me every knee shall bow and every tongue swear [allegiance].*

By decreeing that to him “every knee shall bow and every tongue swear [allegiance],” Jehovah asserts his role as Savior of all humanity—of “the ends of the earth”—in the pattern of ancient Near Eastern emperor–vassal covenants. As under the collective Sinai Covenant, a people who demonstrate allegiance to the emperor bind him to deliver them from a mortal threat. Similarly, under the individual Davidic Covenant those who demonstrate allegiance to a loyal vassal of an emperor bind him to deliver them and his vassal. Those who fail to demonstrate such allegiance, the emperor isn’t required to deliver.

Transposed into Isaiah’s end-time scenario, that means Jehovah will ultimately save spiritually and temporally all who covenant to be his people and keep the terms of his covenants. An alternative savior to Jehovah may demand their allegiance, even on pain of death, but he can’t save them. Only through *righteousness*—Jehovah’s servant who personifies and mediates his *covenant* (Isaiah 41:2; 42:6; 49:8; 55:3–4)—may they gain deliverance. Although Jehovah’s *mouth*—his servant (Isaiah 49:2; 51:16; 62:1–2)—declares the only possible way they may be saved, Jehovah forces no one’s allegiance.

45:24–25 *It shall be said of me, By Jehovah alone come* ***vindication*** *and might. Before him must come in shame all who were incensed against him. In Jehovah shall all Israel’s offspring justify themselves and have cause to boast.*

Humanity’s two choices—to be saved or damned—are effectively realized in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment on a wicked world. Persons who don’t give Jehovah their allegiance when offered the chance may decide to do so when they face the shame of repudiating him. Those of Jacob/Israel who renew their covenant with Jehovah and keep its terms, on the other hand, are “vindicated” or “justified” in their choice and “have cause to boast.” To them, his “vindication” or *righteousness* (*sedaqot*)—his servant—is a saving power (Isaiah 46:11–13; 53:11; 54:17), a manifestation of Jehovah’s “might” (*‘oz*).

ISAIAH 46

Jehovah sends his servant as a bird of prey to turn

his errant people from idolatry to righteousness

46:1–2 *Bel slumps down, Nebo is stooped over: their idols are [loaded] upon beasts and cattle; [the images] you bore aloft are piled as burdens on weary animals. [Such gods] altogether sag and bow down, unable to rescue their burden; they themselves go into captivity.*

Historically, statues of the two chief Babylonian gods, “Bel” or “Lord,” alias Marduk or Merodach (Jeremiah 50:2)—the Babylonian equivalent of the Canaanite god Baal—and his son “Nebo” were carried in procession at the Babylonian New Year Festival. Isaiah depicts them satirically as going into captivity together with their devotees who appear quite unaware of the glaring paradox. Instead of saving their adherents from subjection to enemies, they too have become mere burdens hauled away into exile with other chattels. The idolaters’ displacement and captivity represent a variant chaos motif.

46:3–4 *Hear me, O house of Jacob, and all you remnant of the house of Israel, who have been a load on me since birth, borne up by me from the womb: Even to your old age, I am present; till you turn grey, it is I who sustain you. It is I who made you, and I who bear you up; it is I who carry and rescue you.*

Characterizing the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people is its ambivalence about who to worship, the gods of Babylon or Jehovah. Jacob/Israel’s end-time implication in idolatry thus resembles its idolatry in the past, requiring constant reminders: “Choose this day whom you will serve . . . but as for me and my house we will serve Jehovah” (Joshua 24:15); “How long will you waver between two opinions? If Jehovah is God, follow him, but if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). Unlike his aberrant people and their idols, who age with time, Jehovah is ageless, as they too may become (Isaiah 40:28–31).

Just as his people are burdened by their idols, so Jehovah is burdened by his people: “You have burdened me with your sins, wearied me with your iniquities. But it is I myself, and for my own sake, who blot out your offenses, remembering your sins no more” (Isaiah 43:24–25; cf. 44:22); “For he thought, ‘Surely they are my people, sons who will not play false.’ And so he became their Savior: with all their troubles he troubled himself, the angel of his presence delivering them. In his love and compassion he himself redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old” (Isaiah 63:8–9).

46:5–7 *To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me, that we should appear similar? They who squander gold from the purse and weigh out silver on the scales hire a smith to make them a god they bow down to and worship. They bear it aloft, carrying it on their shoulders; when they set it in place, there it stands, unable to budge from its spot. Though they cry to it for help, it does not answer; it cannot save them from trouble.*

Whether statues of wood and clay that ostensibly represent the true God, or sophisticated inventions fabricated of modern materials of which ancient idols are a type, none can be relied on to perform a saving role. The moment one entertains that idea he already repudiates the only Savior–God. Isn’t it solemn mockery and a desecration of Jehovah’s reality—which resembles nothing made by human hands—to fashion mere images of him or to supplant him in their lives with manmade objects so that even the prophets’ parodies of helpless idols seem unable to break their spell (Deuteronomy 4:23–25)?

46:8–9 *Put yourselves in mind of this and come to your senses; take it to heart, you offenders. Review the prophecies of the events of old! I am God, there is none other. I am divine; nothing resembles me.*

In innumerable past instances of his people’s idolatry Jehovah was compelled to punish them under the terms of his covenant by letting covenant curses take their course—so much, that accounts of his people’s recalcitrance comprise much of their ancient history with but few examples of covenant keeping to brighten the record. Must they now repeat that part of their past as they come to history’s finale? From the very first to the very last Jehovah cautions them to cease worshiping the works of men’s hands. Moses warned them in his day even as Jehovah’s servant does now (vv 11–13; Isaiah 50:4–11).

46:10 *I foretell the end from the beginning, from ancient times things not yet done. I speak, and my purposes take effect; I accomplish all my will.*

As a proof of his divinity, Jehovah planned his people’s history so that at the end they would experience things they experienced in the beginning, Israel’s past providing a type of the future (Isaiah 44:7). In other words, the “end” (*’aharit*) is foretold *by* the “beginning” (*re’sit*), end-time events resembling those of ancient times. Just so, as Jehovah “spoke” in the past so he does again; and as what he spoke was fulfilled in the past so it is again (Isaiah 42:9; 45:21; 48:4–8). As a case in point, Jehovah foretold the coming of his servant and the deliverance and destruction that would follow (vv 11–13).

46:11–13 *I summon a* ***bird of prey*** *from the east, from a distant land the man who performs my counsel. What I have spoken, I bring to pass; what I have planned, I do. Hear me, you stubborn-hearted, who are far from* ***righteousness****: I have brought near my* ***righteousness****; it is not now far off—my* ***salvation*** *shall no longer be delayed. I will grant deliverance in Zion, and to Israel my glory.*

Isaiah’s chiastic pattern of thirty alternating chaos and creation motifs in chapters 41–46 ends by synonymously paralleling the “bird of prey” who comes from the east with the person who exemplifies *righteousness* who comes from the east (Isaiah 41:2, 25), showing they are one and the same. A doubling of directionals, moreover, shows that when “the man who performs my counsel” arrives from a “distant land” or a “land far off” (v 11), Jehovah’s *righteousness* is no longer “far off” but is “brought near” (v 13), confirming the bird of prey’s identity as *righteousness*—Jehovah’s end-time servant.

Those who are far from personal righteousness must emulate one who personifies *righteousness* so that Jehovah—who personifies *salvation*—may come and dwell among them (Isaiah 62:10–12). As the time is short, however, for those “stubborn-hearted” who still cling to their idols (vv 1–9) there exists but one of two possibilities: “From the west men will fear Jehovah Omnipotent and from the rising of the sun his glory. For he will come [upon them]like a hostile torrentimpelled by the Spirit of Jehovah. But he will come as Redeemer to Zion, to those of Jacob who repent of transgression” (Isaiah 59:19–20).

ISAIAH 47

The Harlot Babylon, who rules as Mistress of Kingdoms, descends into the dust in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment

47:1 *Get down and sit in the dust, O Virgin Daughter of Babylon; squat on the ground, dethroned, O Daughter of the Chaldeans. You shall no more be spoken of as delicate and refined.*

By paralleling chapters 13–23 with chapter 47, Part IV of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 13–23; 47) establishes the concept of a *composite* entity identified as Babylon—a kind of Greater Babylon that resembles John’s “Babylon the Great” (Revelation 17:5). From being “Mistress of Kingdoms” (vv 5–8), who rules the nations of the world, her lot is now to be a slave girl. Her lording it over Jehovah’s people (v 6) has led to her descent into the dust. A chaos motif, “dust” signifies her final state as she is reduced to a nonentity in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 13:19; 14:22–23; 21:9; 23:12–13).

Although the world touts her as “delicate and refined”—as she typifies the height of culture and sophistication—the idolatrous and oppressive establishment Babylon represents is the opposite of Zion’s. Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure juxtaposes the two. This “Virgin Daughter of Babylon”—a new, end-time Babylon—is in reality a whore whose tyranny, like that of the evil stepmother of fairy tales, finally comes to an end: “And Babylon, the most splendid of kingdoms, the glory and pride of Chaldeans, shall be [thrown down] as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” (Isaiah 13:19; cf. Revelation 18:2).

47:2–4 *Take two grindstones and grind flour; unveil, disrobe, bare your legs, wade through streams: your nakedness shall be exposed and your shame uncovered. I will take* ***vengeance*** *and not be entreated of men, [says] our Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, whose name is Jehovah of Hosts.*

The Harlot Babylon’s humiliation—following her self-exaltation—is complete as she is stripped of her finery and assigned the lowest menial tasks. Zion’s humiliation at the hands of the Harlot Babylon, on the other hand, precedes Zion’s exaltation: Zion rises from the dust to sit on her throne clothed in beautiful robes at the time Jehovah—“our Redeemer”—redeems her (Isaiah 52:1–3). He who destroys Greater Babylon in Jehovah’s “day of vengeance” (Isaiah 34:8; 59:17–18; 61:2; 63:4) is the king of Assyria/Babylon (Isaiah 10:5–7, 23; 14:3–6, 20; 33:12; 37:18–19, 26), a murderer who kills his own kind.

47:5–7 *Sit speechless; retire into obscurity, O Daughter of the Chaldeans. No longer shall you be called, Mistress of Kingdoms. I was provoked by my people, so I let my inheritance be defiled. I gave them into your* ***hand****, and you showed them no mercy; even the aged you weighed down heavily with your* ***yoke****. You thought, I, the Eternal Mistress, exist forever! and did not consider these, or remember her final destiny.*

She who was never speechless when she ruled as “Mistress of Kingdoms” is silenced at last. The Harlot Babylon’s ceaseless din ends (Isaiah 22:2, 13; 24:8) when Jehovah reverses Babylon’s and Zion’s circumstances, blessing Zion but cursing Babylon. Although Jehovah permits the Harlot Babylon to oppress and humble his people—as a covenant curse for their breaking his covenant—when they repent, he redeems them and they become candidates for higher spiritual categories. In the end, the Harlot Babylon’s violation of Zion’s rights brings upon her the curses of Jehovah’s covenant with his people.

The terms *hand* and *yoke* designate the king of Assyria/Babylon, who punishes Jehovah’s people and takes them captive (Isaiah 5:25; 10:4–7; 51:17). From that captivity Jehovah releases those who repent after it has served its purpose (Isaiah 9:2–4; 10:24–27; 14:24–27). While the Harlot Babylon and her king assume they are invulnerable, they forget that Jehovah is in charge, that his purpose is to raise up an exalted people of God. The “Eternal Mistress” isn’t eternal. She should have considered “these” (*’elleh*)—Jehovah’s elect people—who inherit his everlasting salvation (Isaiah 45:17; 51:6–8; 60:14–21).

47:8–9 *Now therefore hear this, O pampered lady, securely enthroned, thinking to herself, I exist, and other than me there is nothing; I shall not be widowed or bereaved of children: Bereavement and widowhood shall suddenly overtake you, both in one day. They shall come upon you in full, notwithstanding your many magical feats and exceedingly strong combinations.*

So pervasive has the Harlot Babylon’s lifestyle become that she assumes her self-indulgent way of life will never end. Her narcissism extends to her displacing God in the world just as her exemplar the king of Assyria/Babylon does (Isaiah 14:13–14). By thinking “Iexist, and other than me there is nothing,” she blatantly seeks to appropriate Jehovah’s divinity (Isaiah 43:10–11; 45:5–6, 18, 22; 46:9). In the end, her anti-God attitude leads to a full measure of covenant curses coming upon her and her ilk “in one day”—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 2:12; 5:30; 7:17; 10:3; 13:6, 9; 34:8; 61:2; 63:4).

47:10 *Secure in your wickedness, you thought, No one discerns me. By your skill and science you were led astray, thinking to yourself, I exist, and there is none besides me!*

The Harlot Babylon’s “skill” or “wisdom” (*hokmatek*) and “science” or “knowledge” (*da‘attek*)—her sophisticated technology and human advancements—become “wickedness” or evil when used to promote her egocentric and self-serving agenda. So inured to her ways are people who grow up in her materialistic utopia that they fail to recognize its idolatrous nature. What characterizes the Harlot Babylon is that she and all who pertain to her are “led astray,” their preoccupation with the things of this world preventing them from discerning the fact that she embodies all that is destined to perish.

47:11 *Catastrophe shall overtake you, which you shall not know how to avert by bribes; disaster shall befall you from which you cannot ransom yourself: there shall come upon you sudden ruin such as you have not imagined.*

As Jehovah rewards evil for evil, so the “catastrophe” or “evil” (*ra‘a*) the Harlot Babylon causes in people’s lives comes back on herself. Although in her profligacy she could bribe her way out of trouble, she doesn’t succeed this time. Her flaws are incurable and her oppression of Zion has reached saturation point (Jeremiah 51:24–25). “Disaster” and “sudden ruin” beyond all imagining are the order of the day: “She has fallen; Babylon has fallen. All her idol gods he has razed to the ground” (Isaiah 21:9); “At evening time shall be the catastrophe, and before morning they shall be no more” (Isaiah 17:14).

47:12–13 *Persist, then, with your combinations and with your many magical feats, at which you have exerted yourself since your youth. It may still be of use to you; perhaps you can hinder it. But you are powerless, despite all your tactics. Now let those who unravel the heavens, who observe the stars and make predictions month by month, stand by you and save you!*

In Babylon’s mind, her “combinations” or “unions” (*habarayik*) and “magical feats” or technological “miracles” (*kesapayik*) may yet save her. As they are all she has ever known, and as she answers to no one but herself, she resorts to them even when disaster stares her in the face. Failing that, her statisticians, forecasters of trends, or astrologers may have the solution to her plight. Her tactics or schemes have paid off in the past. Why shouldn’t they now? As she has always been a law unto herself—supplanting the true God with herself—who or what is left that she can turn to that might save her?

47:14–15 *See, as stubble they are burnt up in the* ***fire****, unable themselves to escape the* ***hand*** *of the* ***flame****. These are no embers to warm anyone; such is no fire to sit by! This is what your procurers have profited you—those for whom you have exerted yourself since your youth—each deviates his own way; none is there to save you.*

The Harlot Babylon’s “procurers,” “salesmen,” or “pimps” (*soharaik*)—everyone who profits from her business—meets the same fate she does. The archtyrant—Jehovah’s *fire*, *hand*, and *flame*—burns up those in her spiritual category, Jehovah’s unrepentant people and the nations alike (Isaiah 13:19; 37:18–19; 66:15–16). Those who reject the God of Israel, who “deviate” or “err” (*ta‘u*) from his covenant, can’t save the Harlot Babylon even as she can’t save them. De-created spiritually from what they once were, they are now reduced to “stubble” that feeds the fire (Isaiah 5:24; 9:18–19; 33:11–14).

ISAIAH 48

Jehovah’s servant calls on Jacob/Israel to forsake

its idols and return in a new exodus out of Babylon

48:1–2 *Hear this, O house of Jacob, you who are named Israel—though you stem from the lineage of Judah—who take oaths in the name of Jehovah and invoke the God of Israel, though not in truth or in* ***righteousness****, who call yourselves of the holy city, upheld by the God of Israel, whose name is Jehovah of Hosts:*

Like the ancient Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people, its end-time counterpart acts presumptuously. Its religion consists of going through the motions of worship but “not in truth or in righteousness”—not by Jehovah’s standard of *righteousness* as exemplified by his servant (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13). Its sins include improperly “taking oaths” or covenanting in the name of Jehovah and inappropriately “invoking” or referring to him. Yet they assume they are upheld by the God of Israel whose heavenly “hosts” are holy (Isaiah 40:26) even as their hypocrisy renders them and their “city” unholy.

48:3–5 *The prophecies of the events of the past I made known long beforehand; no sooner did they issue from my* ***mouth****, than I caused them to be announced. Then, suddenly, I acted and they came about. For I knew how stubborn you were—your neck was an iron sinew, your brow brazen—therefore I told you them beforehand; I announced them to you before they transpired, lest you should say, My idols did it; my graven and wrought images caused it!*

Typical of Jehovah’s dealings with his people is his foretelling events before they occur. Where such prophecy is lacking (Isaiah 29:9–10; 41:22–24, 26), his Spirit has withdrawn because of wickedness. At that point people are prone to take matters into their own hands instead of turning to Jehovah (Isaiah 9:9–10; 17:8–11). Where ancient prophecies came to pass, it was a sign they were of God, not of man. Where prophecies apply to both the past and the end-time, as do Isaiah’s, their future fulfillment is assured based on past results. Jehovah’s servant—his *mouth*—conforms to that divine pattern.

48:6 *But you have heard the whole vision; how is it you do not proclaim it?*

The “whole vision” or “vision of everything” (*hazut kullah*) refers to the vision of the end from the beginning Isaiah received at his second prophetic commission (Isaiah 40:1–6; 46:10). That vision, Isaiah embedded in his book as a message for the end-time (Isaiah 30:8). At fault are Jehovah’s end-time people for not proclaiming or even understanding it (Isaiah 29:11): “Have I not made it known to you from of old? Did I not foretell it, you being my witnesses?” (Isaiah 44:8). Their failing to serve as Jehovah’s witnesses places them among the blind and deaf (Isaiah 29:18; 42:18–20; 43:10, 12; 44:7–8).

48:6–8 *Yet as of now, I announce to you new things, things withheld and unknown to you, things now coming into being, not hitherto, things you have not heard of before, lest you should say, Indeed I knew them! You have not heard them, nor have you known them; before this your ears have not been open to them. For I knew you would turn treacherous; you were called a transgressor from the womb.*

The “new things” Jehovah predicts through his end-time servant (Isaiah 41:27; 42:9; 52:15) establish proof of Jehovah’s divinity and of the legitimacy of his servant at the time the world observes them coming to pass (vv 14–16; Isaiah 43:9–12; 44:26–28; 46:8–11). As Jehovah withholds knowledge that might condemn his people should they not live up to it, so “a day of small things” has prevailed until now (cf. Zechariah 4:10). Typifying the end-time, on the other hand, is Jehovah’s performing “wonders”—earthshaking deeds that are acknowledged throughout the earth (Isaiah 12:4–5; 25:1; 29:14).

The “new things” Jehovah does, however, pose a hazard to persons unfamiliar with the old. When his people assume that his former works no longer relate to today, they stand to reject the new works Jehovah does as well (Isaiah 28:14–22; 45:9–11; 50:8–11; 66:4–9). Only persons who know his dealings in the past will thus likely comprehend his dealings in the future. As all of Jehovah’s acts follow the patterns of the past, the new things he performs resemble the old with the exception that all now happens on a world scale and that new things may consist of composite replays of former things.

48:9–11 *For my own name’s sake I have bridled my* ***wrath****; on account of my renown I have shown restraint toward you by not entirely destroying you. See, I am refining you, though not as silver; I am testing you in the crucible of affliction. For my own sake, on my own account, I do it, that my name be not dishonored, nor my glory, which I give to no other.*

As Jehovah’s Day of Judgment entails both deliverance and destruction, what is it that determines who lives and who dies? The answer is that Jehovah is bound by the terms of the covenants he has made. With Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for example, he covenanted that he would preserve their lineage on the earth—not all, but at least a remnant (Genesis 22:17–18; 26:4; 28:14; Exodus 2:24). With David and others he covenanted the same (Psalm 89:3–4; Jeremiah 33:17–22). Hence the expressions “for my own sake” and “on my own account” as Jehovah honors his covenants (Isaiah 37:35; 43:25).

Under the terms of the Davidic Covenant, Jehovah additionally delivers his people for the sake of his end-time servants: “As when there is juice in a cluster of grapes and someone says, ‘Don’t destroy it, it is still good,’ so I will do *for the sake of* my servants by not destroying everything: I will extract offspring out of Jacob, and out of Judah heirs of my mountains; my chosen ones shall inherit them, servants shall dwell there” (Isaiah 65:8–9; emphasis added; cf. 63:17). Jehovah’s delivering Hezekiah’s people “for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David” is a case in point (Isaiah 37:35).

A third covenant under whose terms Jehovah saves his people is the Sinai Covenant. It stipulates that if his people prove loyal *as a nation*, then Jehovah is bound to preserve them (Exodus 23:20–33; Leviticus 26:1–13; Numbers 14:41–45). Jehovah’s bridling his *wrath* or *anger*, therefore—his constraining the king of Assyria/Babylon from destroying all his people—serves a dual purpose: (1) it fulfills Jehovah’s covenants with his righteous people and with elect individuals; and (2) it preserves alive a remnant of his people that repents as a result of passing through the archtyrant’s refiner’s fire.

48:12–13 *Hear me, O Jacob, and Israel, my elect: I am he who was at the first, and I am he who is at the last. It was my* ***hand*** *that founded the earth, my* ***right hand*** *that stretched out the heavens; when I call them, they arise at once.*

Before testifying of his servant (vv 14–15), Jehovah again speaks of himself as creator of the heavens and the earth, this time with the added implication that his servant—his *hand* and *right hand*—assisted in their creation (Isaiah 45:12). The God who was “at the first,” moreover—at the creation of the heavens and the earth—will also be “at the last” (Isaiah 41:4), suggesting that with the coming of his servant the world’s end-time scenario begins. Jehovah’s “calling” the heavenly host signifies their divine enthronement (Isaiah 40:26), fulfilling his promise to Abraham of a celestial posterity (Genesis 22:17).

48:14–15 *All of you, assemble and hear: Who among you foretold these things? It is him Jehovah loves, who shall perform his will in Babylon; his* ***arm*** *shall be against the Chaldeans. I myself have spoken it, and also called him; I have brought him, and I will prosper his way.*

Although the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people doesn’t anticipate the coming of the king of Assyria/Babylon or Jehovah’s servant, all becomes evident when the servant appears. In case of doubt, the God who created the heavens and the earth (v 13) has “spoken it,” “called him,” “brought him,” “loves” him, and “prospers his way” (Isaiah 41:2; 42:6; 45:3–4; 46:11, 13; 49:1; 55:3–4). As Jehovah’s *arm*, the servant intervenes in Greater Babylon to lead Jehovah’s elect out of all nations, setting in motion their end-time restoration (Isaiah 40:10–11; 51:5, 9–11; 52:7–12; 59:16; 62:8–12; 63:11–12).

48:16 *Come near me and hear this: I have not made predictions in secret; at their coming to pass, I have been present. Now my Lord Jehovah has sent me; his Spirit [is in me].*

After Jehovah introduces him (vv 14–15), the servant speaks. As Jehovah testifies of him, so he testifies of Jehovah. Instead of turning people away as the archtyrant does, he invites them to hear him. Unlike the blind and deaf prophets of Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 41:21–24, 26; 56:10), he predicts the future; and what he predicts comes to pass. As the servant’s covenant Lord or emperor under the terms of the Davidic Covenant, Jehovah has “sent” him (*selahani*), a term signifying apostleship, and his “Spirit” is in him—word links confirming him as Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 11:2; 19:20; 42:1; 61:1).

48:17 *Thus says Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, your Redeemer: I Jehovah your God instruct you to your good, guiding you in the way you should go.*

Whether through his servant or through his holy Spirit, Jehovah instructs or teaches his people (Isaiah 30:21; 50:10; 59:21), guiding them in the way they should go. As there are essentially two ways—one good and one evil (Isaiah 1:16–17; 7:15–16; 65:2)—his people should choose the good and enjoy the blessings of his covenant. If not, covenant curses accrue. Jehovah’s titles—“Holy One of Israel,” “your Redeemer,” and “your God”—convey the idea of his unchanging fidelity that is grounded in his divine benevolence, inviting his errant people to return to a covenant relationship with him.

48:18–19 *Had you but obeyed my commandments, your peace would have been as a river, your* ***righteousness*** *like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been as the sands in number, your descendants as many as their grains. Their names would not have been cut off and obliterated from my presence.*

Keeping Jehovah’s commandments—the law of his covenant—defines righteousness by Jehovah’s standard (Isaiah 42:21; 51:4–5, 7) and begets peace (Isaiah 26:2–3; 57:2). Righteousness, moreover—as a spiritual attribute and as Jehovah’s servant personifies it (Isaiah 26:7–10; 41:2)—begets salvation (Isaiah 46:12–13; 56:1), which is itself synonymous with peace (Isaiah 26:1, 3; 52:7). Peace, in turn, implies an absence of the power of chaos *Sea* and *River*, which the archtyrant personifies (Isaiah 5:30; 8:7–8) but which Jehovah subdues when his people keep the terms of his covenant (Isaiah 60:5; 66:12).

As Abraham exemplified righteousness (Genesis 15:6), and as Jehovah promised him offspring as many as the sands of the sea (Genesis 22:17), so he promises the same to those whose righteousness compares with Abraham’s. The alternative to covenant blessings, however, are covenant curses. Instead of receiving “an everlasting name that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah 56:5; cf. 62:2; 66:22), the names of Jehovah’s unrepentant people and their offspring *are* “cut off”—that is, excluded from his covenant people and included in the Greater Babylon category that is damned (Isaiah 14:22; 63:19; 65:15).

48:20–21 *Go forth out of Babylon, flee from Chaldea! Make this announcement with resounding* ***voice****; broadcast it to the end of the earth. Say, Jehovah has redeemed his servant Jacob. They thirsted not when he led them through arid places: he caused water to flow for them from the* ***rock****; he cleaved the* ***rock*** *and water gushed out.*

To find peace, Jehovah’s people must exit Greater Babylon—the world at large (Isaiah 13:1, 9, 11, 19)—in a new exodus to Zion from the four directions of the earth (Isaiah 11:11–12, 15–16; 43:6–8). Jehovah’s servant or *voice* and Zion’s watchmen announce it (Isaiah 52:7–12). As Jehovah provided water for his people when Moses smote the rock at Israel’s former wandering in the wilderness (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:7–11), so he provides water when that event repeats itself (Isaiah 41:17–18; 43:20; 49:9–12). Jehovah—his people’s *rock*—is their source of living water (Isaiah 12:2–3; 26:4).

48:22 *But there is no peace, says Jehovah, for the wicked.*

He who begets peace is Jehovah: “O Jehovah, you bring about our peace” (Isaiah 26:12); “I occasion peace and cause calamity” (Isaiah 45:7; cf. 53:5; 66:12). While “they who walk uprightly shall attain peace and rest in their beds” (Isaiah 57:2), transgressors know no peace: “The wicked are like the raging Sea, unable to rest, whose waters heave up mire and mud. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked’” (Isaiah 57:20–21); “They are unacquainted with the way of perfection; integrity is not within their bounds. They have made crooked their paths; none who treads them knows peace” (Isaiah 59:8).

ISAIAH 49

Jehovah empowers his servant after he is rejected to restore his people and to implement their new exodus

49:1 *Hear me, O isles; listen, you distant peoples: Jehovah called me before I was in the belly; before I was in my mother’s womb, he mentioned me by name.*

Jehovah having spoken of his servant (cf. Isaiah 41:1–3, 25–27; 42:1–7; 44:26–28; 45:1–6, 13; 46:11–13; 48:14–15), the servant speaks of himself, asserting Jehovah foreordained him before his mother conceived him. Jehovah’s “naming” him and “calling” him to an international mission—to “the isles” and “distant people”—signify ascent to the seraph category. Jehovah had likewise called Jeremiah to an international mission before his birth: “Before I formed you in the belly, I knew you. Before you came out of the womb, I sanctified you. I ordained you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5, 10).

49:2 *He has made my* ***mouth*** *like a sharp* ***sword****—in the shadow of his* ***hand*** *he hid me. He has made me into a polished* ***arrow****—in his quiver he kept me secret.*

Jehovah’s “hiding” and “secreting” his servant suggests that the world knows nothing of his calling until the time Jehovah empowers him. Even Jehovah’s people don’t know him or are ignorant of him until he fulfills his mission: “You will summon a nation that you did not know; a nation that did not know you will hasten to you” (Isaiah 55:5). He himself, therefore, is one of the “new things” Jehovah does suddenly that test the loyalty of his people (Isaiah 42:9; 48:6–8; 51:4–11). The terms *mouth*, *sword*, *hand*, and *arrow* designate Jehovah’s servant metaphorically (Isaiah 31:8; 51:16; 62:2–3).

49:3–4 *He said to me, You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified. I had thought, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and to no purpose! Yet my cause rested with Jehovah, my recompense with my God.*

Jehovah’s calling his servant “Israel” parallels Jehovah’s calling his people’s ancestor Jacob by his new name Israel after Jacob had proven loyal to him (Genesis 32:28). The servant’s receiving a new name, in other words—which the name Israel here symbolizes—attests to his ascent to a higher spiritual level after he has proven loyal to Jehovah. It also implies that he—Jehovah’s individual servant—serves as a surrogate of and as an exemplar to Jehovah’s collective servant; that is, to Jehovah’s people in the Jacob/Israel category to whom Jehovah sends him (vv 5–9; Isaiah 41:27; 42:6–7; 48:16).

One way the servant proves loyal is to continue laboring in Jehovah’s cause even in the face of few positive results. By all appearances, he at first spends a great deal of energy “in vain” and “for nothing and to no purpose.” And yet, desiring to serve Jehovah even under the most adversarial conditions (v 7; Isaiah 50:6–9; 52:13–14), he submits to Jehovah’s will: “My Lord Jehovah has endowed me with a learned tongue, that I may know how to preach to those grown weary a word to wake them up” (Isaiah 50:4). Before ascending to Isaiah’s seraph level, he descends through trials that consume him.

49:5–6 *For now Jehovah has said—he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to restore Jacob to him, Israel having been gathered to him; for I won honor in the eyes of Jehovah when my God became my strength—he said: It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore those preserved of Israel. I will also appoint you to be a* ***light*** *to the nations, that my* ***salvation*** *may be to the end of the earth.*

A reversal of circumstances takes place for Jehovah’s servant when the trials he endures have served their purpose to purify, perfect, and sanctify him to a higher spiritual level, thereby qualifying him for a new commission. Jacob/Israel’s restoration, to which task he was foreordained (v 1), Jehovah augments with a mission to serve as a *light* to the “nations” or “Gentiles” (*goyim*) “to the end of the earth.” From there, Jehovah’s people are to return (Isaiah 41:8–9; 43:5–6), so that all who desire it might participate in Jehovah’s salvation and prepare for Jehovah’s coming as *salvation* (Isaiah 52:7; 62:11).

Jehovah “appoints” his servant when he “wins honor” in Jehovah’s eyes by proving faithful through trials (v 4), at which time his God becomes his “strength.” The servant’s physical exploits that follow—subduing nations, releasing captives, leading the new exodus, and rebuilding ruins (Isaiah 9:2–5; 11:10–16; 41:2–3, 25; 45:1–3, 13; 48:14; 61:1–4)—should thus be seen in the context of an ascent phase of divine empowerment that follows his descent phase through afflictions as he fulfills his role of proxy savior to the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people under the terms of the Davidic Covenant.

49:7 *Thus says Jehovah, the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel, to him who is despised as a person, who is abhorred by his nation, a servant to those in authority: Kings shall rise up when they see you, princes shall prostrate themselves, because Jehovah keeps faith with you, because the Holy One of Israel has chosen you.*

Although Jehovah’s servant is at first “despised as a person” and “abhorred by his nation” as his own reject him, Jehovah exalts him in the eyes of those who see him as a threat to their authority. Jehovah rewards his servant’s faithfulness toward him in the face of opposition with his own acts of faithfulness toward his servant. Henceforth, as the servant begins the temporal phase of Jacob/Israel’s restoration, he becomes prominent worldwide (Isaiah 11:10–12; 52:15; 55:5). Kings and princes now honor him who was dishonored and assist in the restoration of Jehovah’s people (vv 22–23; Isaiah 60:3–11).

49:8–9 *Thus says Jehovah: At a favorable time I have answered you; in the day of* ***salvation*** *I have come to your aid: I have created you and appointed you to be a* ***covenant*** *of the people, to restore the Land and reapportion the desolate estates, to say to the captives, Come forth! and to those in* ***darkness****, Show yourselves!*

The servant’s reversal of circumstances portends a reversal of circumstances for Jehovah’s elect. As Jehovah empowers his servant, so the servant empowers them (Isaiah 61:1–5). Both follow the same pattern of loyalty to Jehovah: “Your faithfulnessin time [of trial]shall prove to be a strength, your wisdom and knowledge your salvation” (Isaiah 33:6). The “favorable time” in which Jehovah answers his servant’s intercession on behalf of his people under the terms of the Davidic Covenant coincides with the “day of salvation”—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment that precedes his coming to the earth.

Jehovah’s “creating” or re-creating and “appointing” his servant as a *covenant* to his people (cf. Isaiah 42:6) denotes his ascent to the seraph level and his role as mediator of Jehovah’s covenant. After freeing the spiritual captives of Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 42:7)—those who were blind and deaf on account of their idolatries (Isaiah 42:17–20)—the servant frees them physically (vv 24–25; Isaiah 45:13). Those who were subject to physical *darkness*—to the king of Assyria/Babylon—the servant appoints lands of inheritance as Jehovah’s coming as *salvation* draws near (v 8; Isaiah 52:7; 58:8, 12).

49:9–10 *They shall feed along the way and find pasture on all barren heights; they shall not hunger or thirst, nor be smitten by oppressive heat or by the sun: he who has mercy on them will guide them; he will lead them by springs of water.*

Released from captivity, the exiles travel in the wilderness as did Israel’s ancestors who were released from captivity in Egypt (Isaiah 63:11–14). Jehovah guides them safely home: “Like a shepherd he pastures his flock: the lambs he gathers up with his arm and carries in his bosom; the ewes that give milk he leads gently along” (Isaiah 40:11). His cloud of glory protects them from the elements: “It shall be a shelter and shade from the heatof the day, a secret refuge from the downpourand from rain” (Isaiah 4:6). They neither hunger nor thirst: “Bread is provided them, their water is sure” (Isaiah 33:16).

49:11–12 *All my mountain ranges I will appoint as roads; my highways shall be on high. See these, coming from afar, these, from the northwest, and these, from the land of Sinim.*

The new exodus of Jehovah’s elect out of Babylon (Isaiah 48:20–21; 52:11–12) is from all parts of the earth: “From the isles they are gathering to me, the ships of Tarshish in the lead, to bring back your children from afar, and with them their silver and gold, to Jehovah Omnipotent, your God, to the Holy One of Israel, who has made you illustrious” (Isaiah 60:9; cf. 11:11–12; 43:5–6). “Taken from the ends of the earth, called from its farthest limits” (Isaiah 41:9; cf. 45:22), they return in a joyful pilgrimage to Zion (Isaiah 30:29; 60:3–11). Many return from as far as the “land of Sinim”—China or the Orient.

Not only do they traverse mountains but also deserts, seas, rivers, and fire (Isaiah 11:15; 35:6–7; 43:2, 16, 19–20). Those who return are Jehovah’s elect or holy ones: “There shall be highways and roads which shall be called the Way of Holiness, for they shall be for such [as are holy]. The unclean shall not traverse them; on them shall no reprobates wander. . . . But the redeemed shall walk them, the ransomed of Jehovah shall return; they shall come singing to Zion, their heads crowned with everlasting joy. They shall have won joy and gladness when sorrow and sighing flee away” (Isaiah 35:8–10).

49:13 *Shout for joy, O heavens; celebrate, O earth! Burst into song, O mountains! Jehovah is comforting his people, showing compassion for his afflicted.*

As Songs of Salvation followed Israel’s exodus out of Egypt (Exodus 15:1–21), so they follow the new exodus. Those who were afflicted—whom Jehovah tested “in the crucible of affliction” (Isaiah 48:10; cf. 30:20)—he now comforts and shows compassion (Isaiah 14:1; 51:3; 52:9; 54:7–10; 60:10; 61:2; 66:12–13). Having passed the test of their loyalty and expiated their iniquities (Isaiah 33:6; 40:1), they shout and sing for joy (Isaiah 12:6; 24:14–15; 35:6). His people’s rebirth on a higher spiritual level leads to their ecstatic praise and celebration and giving Jehovah the glory (Isaiah 65:18; 66:8–10).

49:14–16 *But Zion said, Jehovah has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me. Can a woman forget her suckling infant, or feel no compassion for the child of her womb? Although these shall forget, I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on my palms; I have sealed you to be continually before me.*

Because the higher a person ascends spiritually the greater the descent through trials that precedes it, so the Zion/Jerusalem category of Jehovah’s people—those of Jacob/Israel who repent of transgression (Isaiah 59:20)—endures greater afflictions than before. So much, that at times those who are in the midst of their descent phase feel that Jehovah has forsaken or forgotten them. Jehovah reminds them that he never forgets them, that *he* went through descent before ascent when they “pierced my hands and my feet” as he atoned for their sins (Psalm 22:16; cf. Isaiah 43:24–25; 53:4–5; 63:8–9).

Zion/Jerusalem’s travail resembles that of a woman when she gives birth, the whole purpose being Zion/Jerusalem’s rebirth or re-creation on a higher spiritual level: “Who has heard the like, or who has seen such things? Can the earth labor but a day and a nation be born at once? For as soon as she was in labor, Zion gave birth to her children. ‘Shall I bring to a crisis and not bring on birth?’ says Jehovah. ‘When it is I who cause the birth, shall I hinder it?’ says your God” (Isaiah 66:8–9; cf. vv 20–22; 45:11; 54:1). Jehovah’s covenant love and loyalty far exceed a mortal mother’s toward her child.

49:17–18 *Your sons shall hasten your ravagers away—those who ruined you shall depart from you. Lift up your eyes and look around you; with one accord they gather and come to you. As surely as I live, says Jehovah, you shall adorn yourself with them all as with jewels, bind them on you as does a bride.*

Reborn or re-created on the son/servant level, Zion/Jerusalem’s “sons” and “daughters” (v 22)—Jehovah’s elect—return to Zion to inherit permanent promised lands. Divine empowerment accompanies their ascent, enabling them to vanquish enemies who “ravaged” and “ruined” them. Comprising two chief blessings of Jehovah’s covenant, land and offspring (Isaiah 51:2–3; 54:3) become unconditional for Jehovah’s sons and daughters. Bridal imagery alludes to Jehovah’s individual covenants with his elect, their comparison with “jewels” signifying a precious spiritual category (Isaiah 61:10; 62:3–5).

49:19–20 *For your ruins and ravaged places, and your land laid waste, shall now be too small for your inhabitants, despite the departure of your devourers. The children born during the time of your bereavement shall yet say in your ears, This place is too cramped for us; give us space in which to settle!*

Those who return from exile to inherit the lands Jehovah promised their ancestors find them ravaged and laid waste by the Assyrian alliance and others (Isaiah 1:7; 9:12; 33:9). Even when they are rebuilt (Isaiah 44:26; 58:12; 61:4), the sheer numbers of Jehovah’s returning people necessitates that they spread out from there: “Expand the site of your tent; extend the canopies of your dwellings. Do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you shall spread abroad to the right and to the left; your offspring shall dispossess the nations and resettle the desolate cities” (Isaiah 54:2–3).

49:21 *And you will say to yourself, Who bore me these while I was bereaved and barren? I was exiled, banished; by whom were these reared? When I was left to myself, where were they?*

The “time of bereavement” of Jehovah’s people (v 20)—when they were “bereaved,” “barren,” “exiled,” and “banished”—ends with a huge influx of offspring as those at home welcome the returning exiles from abroad: “Open the gates to let in the nation righteous because it keeps faith” (Isaiah 26:2); “Nations will come to your light, their kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you! They have all assembled to come to you: your sons shall arrive from afar; your daughters shall return to your side” (Isaiah 60:3–4). Cut off from each other for many centuries, they now reunite.

49:22–23 *Thus says my Lord Jehovah: I will lift up my* ***hand*** *to the nations, raise my* ***ensign*** *to the peoples; and they will bring your sons in their bosoms and carry your daughters on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you, their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust of your feet. Then shall you know that I am Jehovah, and that they who hope in me are not disappointed.*

Jehovah’s raising his *hand* and *ensign*—his end-time servant—brings about his people’s return from exile: “In that day the sprigof Jesse, who stands for an *ensign*to the peoples, shall be sought by the nations, and his rest shall be glorious. In that day my Lord will again raise his *hand* to reclaim the remnant of his people—those who shall be left out of Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the islands of the sea. He will raise the *ensign*to the nations and assemble the exiled of Israel; he will gather the scattered of Judah from the four directions of the earth” (Isaiah 11:10–12; emphasis added).

The kings and queens of the “nations” or “Gentiles” (*goyim*) escort Jehovah’s “sons” and “daughters”—his elect who ascend to the son/servant category—in a new exodus out of all nations when Jehovah empowers his servant (Isaiah 11:15–16; 48:20–21; 51:9–11; 52:11–15; 55:3–5, 12). Having attained the seraph category, these spiritual kings and queens exercise power over enemies and obstacles in the pattern of Moses and Elijah, enabling Jehovah’s people to walk through deserts, mountains, seas, rivers, and fire in the new exodus to Zion (v 11; Isaiah 11:15; 35:6–10; 41:10–13, 17–18; 43:2; 51:10).

A disparity exists between these same spiritual kings and queens of the Gentiles and other Gentiles who, instead of repenting, oppose Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 29:7–8; 54:15–17; 66:5). While the Gentiles’ kings and queens fulfill their roles of proxy saviors under the terms of the Davidic Covenant on the seraph level, those Gentiles who turn into Jehovah’s enemies end up bowing down before his people and licking the dust of their feet (Isaiah 45:14; 60:14; 66:5). Those who “know” Jehovah in the end are those who “hope in” or “wait for” (*qiwweh*) him through a time of adversity (Isaiah 19:21; 25:9; 52:6).

49:24–25 *Can the warrior’s spoil be taken from him, or the tyrant’s captives escape free? Yet thus says Jehovah: The warrior’s spoil shall indeed be taken from him, and the tyrant’s captives escape free: I myself will contend with your contenders, and I will deliver your children.*

As the “warrior” and “tyrant” who takes “spoil” and “captives” (Isaiah 10:3–6; 14:16–17; 33:1, 4), the king of Assyria/Babylon (Isaiah 10:13–14; 14:4; 37:21–27) is deprived of his gains when Jehovah reverses his people’s circumstances. Upon Jehovah’s empowering his servant, the servant releases the captives (v 9; Isaiah 42:7; 43:6–8; 61:1) and recovers the spoil (Isaiah 9:3; 33:23; 53:12). Under his warrior aspect, Jehovah fights for his people (Isaiah 41:11–12; 42:13; 59:17–19) and delivers his “children” or “sons” (*banayik*)—those who ascend and become his elect (Isaiah 27:12; 29:20–24; 66:8).

49:26 *I will feed your oppressors with their own flesh; they shall become drunk with their own blood as with wine. And all flesh shall know that I Jehovah am your Savior, that your Redeemer is the Valiant One of Jacob.*

After his people have suffered at the hands of tyrants local and foreign—to try their faith and to expiate their iniquities (Isaiah 40:1–2)—Jehovah takes vengeance on their enemies: “Hear this, O wretched one, drunk, though not with wine. Thus says Jehovah, your Lord and God, who defends the cause of his people: ‘I am taking the cup of stupor from your hand; you shall drink no more from the bowl of my wrath. And I give it into the handof your tormentors’” (Isaiah 51:22–23). The Valiant One of Jacob demonstrates his valor in the eyes of “all flesh” when he redeems his elect from their oppressors.

ISAIAH 50

Jehovah’s servant meets hostility from those who sell themselves, who light their way with mere sparks

50:1 *Thus says Jehovah: Where is your mother’s bill of divorce with which I cast her out? Or to which of my creditors did I sell you? Surely, by sinning you have sold yourselves; because of your crimes is your mother cast off.*

Two women appear in the Book of Isaiah: (1) the current unfaithful wife, whom Jehovah divorces; and (2) a formerly divorced wife, now faithful, whom he remarries (Isaiah 54:1, 4–14). While the faithful woman—the Woman Zion, an elect category of Jehovah’s people—sees covenant curses turn into blessings, the unfaithful woman sees covenant blessings turn into curses. The fact that Jehovah’s people who are “cast off” suffer the identical curses as the Harlot Babylon (Isaiah 1:21–31; 5:24–25; 9:13–21; 42:18–25; 47:8–15; 57:7–13) implies that they become a part of Isaiah’s Babylon category.

50:2 *Why was no one there when I came; why did no one answer when I called? Was my* ***hand*** *too short to redeem you; have I no power to deliver?*

The current wife’s unfaithfulness is complete when she rejects Jehovah at the time he “comes” and “calls” (Isaiah 65:12; 66:4). That occurs when Jehovah appoints his servant to establish justice in the earth and restore his people (Isaiah 42:1, 4; 49:5–8). As Jehovah’s *hand*, the servant reclaims their remnant (Isaiah 11:11), smelts away their dross (Isaiah 1:25), empowers them (Isaiah 41:10), leads their new exodus (Isaiah 11:15–16), leads their new conquest (Isaiah 11:14), assigns them inheritances (Isaiah 34:17), and protects them (Isaiah 51:16). Many, however, pay no regard to him (Isaiah 59:1–2).

50:2–3 *By a mere rebuke I dry up the* ***Sea****; rivers I turn into desert—their fish become parched for lack of water and perish because of thirst*. *I clothe the heavens with the blackness of mourning; I put up sackcloth to cover them.*

As a transition to Jehovah’s servant speaking (vv 4–11), Jehovah again appears as the maker of heaven and earth—thereby lending the servant his authority—only this time asserting his destructive, not creative power. A return to chaos follows his people’s apostasy (vv 1–2): sea and rivers become desert (Isaiah 19:5–7; 42:15), drought conditions prevail (Isaiah 33:9; 64:10), and the heavens are darkened (Isaiah 8:22; 59:9–10). For the son/servant category, on the other hand, *Sea* and *River*—the king of Assyria/Babylon—dry up in order to facilitate its new exodus to Zion (Isaiah 11:15–16; 51:10–11).

50:4–5 *My Lord Jehovah has endowed me with a learned tongue, that I may know how to preach to those grown weary a word to wake them up. Morning by morning he wakens my ear to hear, as at study; my Lord Jehovah has opened my ear, and I rebel not, nor back away:*

Imbued with the knowledge of God, Jehovah’s servant seeks to wake up Jehovah’s people as he is awake (Isaiah 51:9). Those who need waking up include their prophets and seers: “Jehovah has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep: he has shut your eyes, the prophets; he has covered your heads, the seers” (Isaiah 29:10); “Their watchmen are altogether blind and unaware; all of them are but dumb watchdogs unable to bark, lolling seers fond of slumber” (Isaiah 56:10). With the servant’s coming, many of Jehovah’s people wake up and are reborn on higher spiritual levels (Isaiah 51:17; 52:1–2).

The “weary” to whom Jehovah’s servant preaches identifies the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 40:27–30; 43:22). A chaos motif, weariness implies failure to keep the law of Jehovah’s covenant, with covenant curses following (Isaiah 24:5–6; 42:21–25). Unlike the servant, who “rebels not” nor “backs away” from Jehovah, many do so: “They are a rebellious people, sons who break faith, children unwilling to obey the law of Jehovah” (Isaiah 30:9; cf. 63:10); “We perceive our iniquities: willfully denying Jehovah, backing away from following our God” (Isaiah 59:12–13; cf. 1:4).

50:6–7 *I offered my back to smiters, my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I hid not my face from insult and spitting. Because my Lord Jehovah helps me, I shall not be disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing I shall not be confounded.*

Jehovah’s servant receives opposition from the rebellious who feel threatened by his preaching things “not told them” or that “they had not heard” (Isaiah 52:15; cf. 48:6–8). The servant’s instruction of Jehovah’s people (v 4; Isaiah 28:9; 48:15–17) in the knowledge of God (Isaiah 11:2; 53:11) undermines the knowledge of their learned men and sages (Isaiah 29:14; 44:25). Part V of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 24–27; 48–54) identifies the servant’s ill treatment and disfigurement (Isaiah 49:7; 52:14) as an integral part of his descent into trials before his ascent to rebirth and re-creation.

The servant’s “knowing” he won’t be disgraced or confounded stems from his knowing the terms of the Davidic Covenant under which he serves as a proxy savior to Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 33:6; 38:19; 53:11). He may incur suffering and humiliation in the course of paying the price of his people’s temporal salvation, yet such afflictions are but for a small moment. After the trial of his faith comes the blessing, at which point Jehovah empowers him over his enemies (Isaiah 49:5–8; 52:13–15; 55:3–5). In the end, it is his enemies who are disgraced and confounded (Isaiah 45:24; 65:13–15; 66:5–6).

50:8–9 *He who vindicates me is near me. Who has a dispute with me? Let us face one another! Who will bring charges against me? Let him confront me with them! See, my Lord Jehovah sustains me. Who then will incriminate me? Surely all such shall wear out like a garment; the moth shall consume them.*

Although Jehovah’s servant personifies *righteousness* (Isaiah 41:2), he doesn’t attribute righteousness to himself but to Jehovah—his covenant Lord or emperor—who “vindicates” him or “makes [him] righteous” (*masdiqi*) and who “sustains” or “helps” (*ya‘azor*) him. The terms “dispute,” “bring charges,” and “incriminate” indicate that he doesn’t lack enemies. Rather than confront him, however, they collude behind his back: “They work in the dark, thinking, ‘Who will see us?’” (Isaiah 29:15). In the end, those who ostracize him are consumed by “moths”—a covenant curse (Isaiah 51:7–8).

50:10 *Who among you fears Jehovah and heeds the* ***voice*** *of his servant, who, though he walk in the dark and have no light, trusts in the name of Jehovah and relies on his God?*

Parallelism of those who “fear” Jehovah and “heed” his servant suggests that one idea is synonymous with the other. Those who reject the servant, in other words, are those who don’t fear Jehovah. Jehovah sends his servant as a *light* to those who live in darkness and to open the eyes of the blind (Isaiah 42:6–7, 16, 18–20; 49:6). As Jehovah’s *voice* to his people, he teaches them his law, the terms of his covenant (Isaiah 28:23; 42:4; 51:4–5; 55:4). Persons among them who “trust” in Jehovah and “rely” on him are also those who respond positively to his servant (Isaiah 11:10; 52:15; 55:5; 61:1–3).

50:11 *But you are lighters of fires, all of you, who illuminate with mere sparks. Walk then by the light of your fires and by the sparks you have kindled. This shall you have from my* ***hand****: you shall lie down in agony.*

Jehovah likens those who reject his end-time servant to arsonists or persons whose spiritual light is no brighter than sparks. Those who fail to heed Jehovah’s *voice* (v 10)—his servant—are doomed to feel the brunt of Jehovah’s *hand* of punishment—the king of Assyria/Babylon: “Therefore the *anger*of Jehovah is kindled against his people: he draws back his *hand*against them and strikes them; the mountains quake, and their corpses lie like litter about the streets. Yet for all this his *anger*is not abated; his *hand*is upraised still” (Isaiah 5:25; emphasis added; cf. 10:5–6; 26:10–11; 28:1–2).

ISAIAH 51

Jehovah empowers his servant as an arm of right-eousness to deliver his people in an exodus to Zion

51:1–2 *Hear me, you followers of* ***righteousness****, seekers of Jehovah: Look to the* ***rock*** *from which you were cut, to the* ***quarry*** *out of which you were hewn; Look to Abraham your father, to Sarah who bore you. He was but one when I called him, but I blessed him by making him many.*

Parallelism of the “followers of righteousness” and “seekers of Jehovah” resembles the parallelism of those who fear Jehovah and heed the voice of his servant (Isaiah 50:10). In effect, those who seek Jehovah are those live righteously and love Jehovah’s *righteousness*—his servant (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13). Contrasting the many who reject the servant, therefore (Isaiah 49:7; 50:6–9, 11), are those who accept him. Just as Abraham “was but one” when Jehovah called him, however—unlike the idolatrous society from which he came—so the followers of righteousness are but one here and one there.

Those who respond to Jehovah’s call to come out of Greater Babylon in the new exodus (Isaiah 41:8–9; 43:5–8, 14–17; 48:20–21; 49:9–12, 22; 52:11–12) resemble their progenitors Abraham and Sarah—the *rock* and *quarry*. Although Abraham and Sarah, too, were lone individuals, Jehovah multiplied them into “many nations” and “kings” as a covenant blessing (Genesis 17:1–9, 15–16; cf. Isaiah 49:22–23; 60:3–11, 22). On a primary level, moreover, the *rock* identifies Jehovah himself (Isaiah 17:10; 26:4; 30:29; 44:8) while the *quarry* is his bride (Isaiah 45:10–11; 54:1–14; 62:1–5; 66:7–11).

51:3 *For Jehovah is comforting Zion, bringing solace to all her ruins; he is making her wilderness like Eden, her desert as the garden of Jehovah. Joyful rejoicing takes place there, thanksgiving with the* ***voice*** *of song.*

In the millennial age of peace that follows the mission of Jehovah’s servant, promised lands—a second chief covenant blessing after offspring—transform into a new Paradise (Isaiah 11:1–9; 55:4–13; 65:17–25). Ruins are rebuilt by Jehovah’s elect in Zion who receive inheritances of land (Isaiah 44:26; 58:11–12; 61:4). To those who heed the *voice* of Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 28:23; 50:10; 58:1), whose righteousness resembles his *righteousness* (v 1), all attests to covenant curses—ruins, wilderness, and desert—joyously reversing into covenant blessings (Isaiah 32:15–20; 35:1–2, 6–7; 58:12).

51:4–5 *Listen to me, my people; give heed to me, O my nation: The law shall go forth from me; my precepts shall be a light to the peoples. Then, suddenly, I will act: My* ***righteousness*** *shall be at hand and my* ***salvation*** *proceed; my* ***arms*** *shall judge the peoples—the isles anticipate me, awaiting my* ***arm****.*

Jehovah appeals to “my people” or “my nation”—to his covenant people now scattered among the nations of the world—to pay attention to what he is doing. His “precepts” and “law” or teachings go forth as a light “from me.” That is, not from men or their religions but through his servant, who—like Moses (Exodus 24:12; Deuteronomy 4:44)—serves as Jehovah’s lawgiver (Isaiah 42:4, 21; 55:4) and who personifies Jehovah’s *righteousness* and *light* (Isaiah 41:2; 42:6; 45:19; 49:6). While the wicked may reject the servant, with his coming the fate of nations and peoples hangs in the balance.

As a forerunner to Jehovah’s coming, the servant is one of two “arms” of God—the *arm* of *righteousness* (Isaiah 30:30; 40:10–11; 48:14–15; 52:10)—the other being Jehovah, the *arm* of *salvation* (Isaiah 33:2; 59:16; 63:5). The *arms* metaphor denotes divine intervention. That takes place: (1) through his servant, who restores justice in the earth among all nations and isles to prepare them for Jehovah’s coming (Isaiah 32:16–17; 41:1–2; 42:1–4; 56:1; 62:8–9); and (2) through Jehovah’s himself, his judgment of the wicked and deliverance of the righteous (Isaiah 35:4; 59:16–20; 63:1–6; 66:10–16).

51:6 *Lift up your eyes to the heavens; look on the earth beneath: the heavens shall vanish as by smoke, the earth wear out like a garment—its inhabitants shall die in the manner of vermin. But my* ***salvation*** *shall be everlasting; my* ***righteousness*** *shall never fail.*

The heavens vanishing as by smoke, the earth’s wearing out like a garment, and its inhabitants perishing like vermin (cf. Isaiah 5:30; 14:31; 24:4–6) represent the earth’s return to chaos that ends its present cycle before it regenerates to a paradisiacal state. Because salvation follows righteousness (Isaiah 45:8; 46:13; 56:1), salvation—as typified by the earth’s regeneration (v 3)—depends on its inhabitants attaining a state of righteousness. On these principles of *salvation* preceded by *righteousness*—exemplified by Jehovah and his servant—rests all that doesn’t die (Isaiah 35:1–7; 58:8, 11; 60:17–22).

51:7–8 *Hear me, you who know* ***righteousness****, O people in whose heart is my law: Do not fear the reproach of men; be undaunted by their ridicule. For the moth shall consume them like a garment; moths shall devour them like wool. But my* ***righteousness*** *shall endure forever, my* ***salvation*** *through endless generations.*

A progression appears from Jehovah’s people “awaiting” his law (Isaiah 42:4), to the law “going forth” (v 4), and to their having his law “in [their] hearts” (v 7). That progression coincides with Jehovah’s *righteousness* being “brought near” (Isaiah 46:13), to some persons becoming “followers” of *righteousness* (v 1), and to their coming to “know” *righteousness* (v 7). Their knowing him signifies a covenant relationship with Jehovah’s servant who personifies Jehovah’s *covenant* (Isaiah 42:6; 49:8; 55:3). When people reach that spiritual stage, however, they inevitably incur ridicule and reproach.

Two choices thus face humanity: (1) to emulate the servant’s righteousness, which leads to persecution by enemies; or (2) to reject Jehovah’s standard of righteousness as exemplified by his servant and suffer covenant curses (Isaiah 26:10–11; 42:24–25). Being devoured by moths—a chaos motif—forms a word link to the servant’s enemies being devoured by moths (Isaiah 50:9). His enemies, in other words, are their enemies. When Jehovah reverses his people’s circumstances, however, their *righteousness* ensures their *salvation*, literally and figuratively, by an everlasting covenant (Isaiah 61:7–11).

51:9–10 *Awake, arise; clothe yourself with power, O* ***arm*** *of Jehovah! Bestir yourself, as in ancient times, as in generations of old. Was it not you who carved up Rahab, you who slew the* ***dragon****? Was it not you who dried up the* ***Sea****, the waters of the mighty* ***deep****, and made of ocean depths a way by which the redeemed might pass?*

Jehovah’s empowering his *arm*—his end-time servant—follows the type his empowering Moses, who led Israel’s ancient exodus out of Egypt: “Then his people recalled the days of Moses of old: ‘Where is he who brought them up out of the Sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who put into him his holy Spirit, who made his glorious armproceed at the right handof Moses, who divided the waters before them, making an everlasting name for himself when he led them through the deep?’” (Isaiah 63:11–13). Word links—*Sea*, *arm*, “waters,” and *deep*—connect these and other passages.

Jehovah’s empowering his *arm*—which resembles his rising from the dead (cf. Isaiah 26:19)—sets in motion the deliverance of his people: Jehovah’s *arm* heralds salvation to the nations of the world (Isaiah 52:10), performs Jehovah’s will in Babylon (Isaiah 48:14–15), gathers and leads Jehovah’s flock (Isaiah 40:10–11), and subdues Assyria (Isaiah 30:30–32). Inextricably linked to Jehovah’s empowerment of his *arm* is his people’s new exodus to Zion (v 11). Patterned after Israel’s ancient exodus, it requires power over the elements such as Moses exercised on the seraph level (Exodus 14:15–31).

Jehovah’s *arm* awakening, arising, and being clothed with power thus signifies the servant’s ascent to seraph status. His carving up Rahab and slaying the *dragon* recalls the role of Moses in subduing Egypt and its Pharaoh (cf. Ezekiel 29:3; Revelation 12:1–13:4) and of the angel who went before the camp of Israel (Exodus 14:19; Numbers 20:16; Isaiah 63:9). The servant’s drying up the *Sea*, the waters of the *deep*, denotes his victory over the archtyrant that makes possible the release of Jehovah’s captives from bondage (Isaiah 10:24–27; 50:2) and their exodus to Zion (Isaiah 11:15–16; 43:16–17).

51:11 *Let the ransomed of Jehovah return! Let them come singing to Zion, their heads crowned with everlasting joy; let them obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing flee away.*

Jehovah’s ransomed ones who return in the exodus to Zion are those who love justice and righteousness: “Zion shall be ransomed by justice, those of her who repent by righteousness” (Isaiah 1:27; cf. 59:20). After they have endured sorrow and sighing in Greater Babylon (Isaiah 47:6)—as Jehovah tests their loyalties (Isaiah 33:6; 35:3–4)—he reverses their circumstances: “For you there shall be singing, as on the night when a festival commences, and rejoicing of heart, as when men march with flutes [and drums and lyres] on their way to the mountain of Jehovah, to the Rockof Israel” (Isaiah 30:29).

The motif of “joy” characterizes all those of his people whom Jehovah delivers into the millennial age of peace (Isaiah 9:3; 12:1–6; 24:14–16; 25:9; 26:19; 29:19; 30:29; 35:1–10; 41:16; 42:10–12; 49:13; 51:3; 52:8–9; 55:12; 60:15; 61:7, 10; 65:13–14, 18; 66:10, 14). Jehovah renders the joy of his righteous people “everlasting” (Isaiah 61:7), which term is a word link to Jehovah’s “everlasting salvation” (v 6; Isaiah 45:17), “everlasting peace” (Isaiah 9:7; 32:17), “everlasting charity” (Isaiah 54:8), “everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 55:3; 61:8), and to his elect people’s “everlasting name” (Isaiah 56:5).

51:12 *I myself am your Comforter. Who are you that you fear mortal man, the children of men who shall be turned to grass?*

While God’s holy Spirit serves as a Comforter (John 14:26), so does Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 61:2) and Jehovah himself—each according to his people’s needs and circumstances. Divine comfort thus follows after trials that test a person’s loyalties when one keeps the terms of Jehovah’s covenant (Isaiah 40:1–2; 49:13–16; 66:5–13). Many such trials come at the hands of “mortal man” or “the children of men,” tempting Jehovah’s people to fear their enemies. But Jehovah reminds his people that before long their oppressors will perish when he turns them into grass—a chaos motif (Isaiah 37:27).

51:13–14 *Have you forgotten Jehovah, your Maker—who suspends the heavens, who sets the earth in place—that you go all day in constant dread of the oppressor’s* ***rage*** *as he readies himself to wreak destruction? What is there to the* ***wrath*** *of the oppressor? Soon now shall he who is bowed down be set free; he shall not die [as those destined] for the Pit, neither shall he want for food.*

People who live in dread of the *rage* or *wrath* of the oppressor—the tyrannical king of Assyria/Babylon—as he prepares to commit world genocide (Isaiah 10:7, 23; 13:5; 21:2; 54:16) are the wicked of Jehovah’s people and the nations (Isaiah 8:9; 19:16; 33:14; 41:5)—all who identify with Isaiah’s Babylon category. Didn’t Jehovah promise to release the captives of his people who repent of their idolatries (Isaiah 42:6–7; 49:8–9, 25; 52:1–3; 61:1)? Two actors thus dominate the end-time world stage—the tyrant and the servant—one of whom descends to the Pit of Dissolution (Isaiah 14:15).

The blessings of physical protection and sustenance follow those who keep the terms of Jehovah’s covenant: “See, all who are enraged at you shall earn shame and disgrace; your adversaries shall come to nought, and perish. Should you look for those who contend with you, you shall not find them; whoever wars against you shall be reduced to nothing” (Isaiah 41:11–12); “Tell the righteous it shall be well with them; they shall eat the fruits of their own labors” (Isaiah 3:10). Those who perish in the Pit of “Corruption” or “Dissolution” (*sahat*) (Isaiah 38:17–18) identify with Isaiah’s Perdition category.

51:15–16 *It is I Jehovah your God, whose name is Jehovah of Hosts, who stir up the* ***Sea*** *so that its waves roar. I will put my words in your* ***mouth*** *and shelter you in the shadow of my* ***hand****, while I replant the heavens and set the earth in place, that I may say to Zion, You are my people.*

Israel’s God Jehovah orchestrates humanity’s destiny. He raises up the archtyrant to destroy (Isaiah 10:5–6; 13:2; 54:16) and the servant to deliver (Isaiah 41:2; 45:13; 49:8–10). The *Sea*—the king of Assyria/Babylon—may be stirred up and its waves roar (Isaiah 5:30; 13:4; 17:12–13); but Jehovah’s servant—his *mouth* and *hand*—reveals Jehovah’s words to his people and protects them (Isaiah 41:10, 13; 49:2; 59:21). The earth may jolt out of orbit in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 13:13; 14:16; 24:19–20), but Jehovah counteracts it at the very time he confirms the covenant with his people Zion.

51:17–18 *Rouse yourself; awaken and rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from Jehovah’s* ***hand*** *the cup of his* ***wrath****, drinking to the dregs the bowl of stupor. There was none to guide her among all the children she bore, none to take her by the hand of all the sons she reared.*

Jehovah’s empowerment of his servant (v 9) signals a reversal of circumstances for Jehovah’s people who ascend to the Zion/Jerusalem category and levels higher. Although Jehovah may forgive his people their sins when they repent (Isaiah 43:25; 44:22), the effects of their transgressions—the curses of the covenant—remain with them until their iniquities are expiated (Isaiah 27:9; 40:2). Whether a person suffers for his own transgressions or for those of others—as do proxy saviors under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (Isaiah 52:14; 53:4–6)—all such afflictions originate with covenant curses.

Although the king of Assyria/Babylon and his proxies may oppress them, Jehovah’s people’s drinking from Jehovah’s *hand* the cup of his *wrath* in reality originates with their own iniquities that are the effects of their transgressions. It serves to purify and sanctify them when they prove loyal to Jehovah by keeping the law of his covenant. Both mother and children remain in this state of iniquity—suffering covenant curses—until they awaken to the realization that their curses may be reversed, that with the coming of Jehovah’s servant the day of their salvation has dawned (vv 9–11; Isaiah 49:8; 52:1–2, 7).

51:19–20 *Twofold [calamity] has befallen you: desolation, ruin—and who laments you? famine, the* ***sword****—and who consoles you? Your children lie in a faint at the corner of every street, taken in a net like buffalo. They have their fill of the* ***wrath*** *of Jehovah, of your God’s angry rebuke.*

Tribulation prevails for Jehovah’s people as they suffer (1) desolation and ruin, and (2) famine and the sword until Jehovah reverses the circumstances of those who repent (vv 21–23). Whether meted out through the king of Assyria/Babylon or his proxies—Jehovah’s *sword* and *wrath*—the descent phase of Jehovah’s people through trials and afflictions is proportional to their ascent phase as they are reborn or re-created on higher spiritual levels. The term “twofold,” therefore, suggests that for those of Jehovah’s people who didn’t repent in time, double trouble finally brings them to such rebirth.

51:21–23 *Now therefore hear this, O wretched one, drunk, though not with wine. Thus says Jehovah, your Lord and God, who defends the cause of his people: I am taking the cup of stupor from your* ***hand****; you shall drink no more from the bowl of my* ***wrath****. And I give it into the* ***hand*** *of your tormentors, those who said of your life, Lie prostrate that we may go over you—so that you made your back as the ground, a mere thoroughfare to passers-by.*

Jehovah dispenses their own toxic brew to his people’s enemies as he reverses the circumstances of those who repent: “I will feed your oppressors with their own flesh; they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine” (Isaiah 49:26); “Poor wretch, tempest-tossed and disconsolate! . . . You shall be firmly established through righteousness; you will be far from oppression and have no cause to fear, far from ruin, for it shall not approach you” (Isaiah 54:11, 14); “I will delight in Jerusalem, rejoice in my people; no more shall be heard there the sound of weeping or the cry of distress” (Isaiah 65:19).

In the same way that the servant—Jehovah’s right *hand*—initially suffers at the hands of wicked men (Isaiah 50:6; 52:14), so do those who follow and know him (vv 1, 7; Isaiah 61:7). But Jehovah turns the tables on his people’s tormentors when he doses the archtyrant—Jehovah’s (left) *hand*—with his own medicine. At all times, Jehovah is true to the terms of his covenant. When his people’s enemies violate the rights of those who keep the terms of the covenant, they incur the curses of the covenant: “I had resolved on a day of vengeance, and the year of my redeemed had come” (Isaiah 63:4).

ISAIAH 52

Jehovah’s servant and Zion’s watchmen accomplish Zion’s restoration beginning with a new exodus

52:1–3 *Awake, arise; clothe yourself with power, O Zion! Put on your robes of glory, O Jerusalem, holy city. No more shall the uncircumcised and defiled enter you. Shake yourself free, rise from the dust; sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Loose yourself from the bands around your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion. Thus says Jehovah: You were sold without price, and you shall be redeemed without money.*

The awakening and arising from the dust of Jehovah’s people who pass his tests of their loyalty on the Zion/Jerusalem level signifies their rebirth or re-creation on the son/servant level. Identified as the Daughter of Zion (the Woman Zion), they ascend to this elect level after experiencing a descent phase of personal trials. Comprising a “holy city,” these holy and valiant ones Jehovah protects by his direct intervention in his Day of Judgment (Isaiah 4:3–6; 6:13; 13:3; 35:8–10). They become the “holy people” to whom Jehovah comes after they have prepared the way before him (Isaiah 40:1–5; 62:10–12).

Like the term “holy,” the term “power” or “strength” (*‘oz*) forms a word link: “Your faithfulnessin time [of trial]shall prove to be a strength” (Isaiah 33:6). After they prove loyal to him by keeping the terms of the Davidic Covenant and become “holy” or sanctified, Jehovah empowers them when their enemies come against them. That empowerment occurs on the heels of his empowering his *arm*—his servant—to restore his people: “Awake, arise; clothe yourself with power, O armof Jehovah!” (Isaiah 51:9); “For I won honor in the eyes of Jehovah when my God became my strength” (Isaiah 49:5).

The rebirth and re-creation of Jehovah’s people thus means that the servant’s mission is succeeding. At the time the Woman Zion rises from the dust to sit on her throne, moreover, the Harlot Babylon descends from her throne into the dust (Isaiah 47:1) as an integral part of their reversal of circumstances. Belonging to the Babylon category are the “uncircumcised and defiled”—“sinners in Zion” and other reprobates (Isaiah 33:14; 59:2–4). These suffer the same fate as the Harlot Babylon (Isaiah 9:13–19; 26:10–11) whom Jehovah destroys as he did Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24; Isaiah 13:19).

The Woman Zion’s depiction as a “holy city” thus has a counterpart in an unholy city—also representing Jehovah’s people—that was once a “faithful city” but that has turned into a “harlot” (Isaiah 1:21; 57:7–12). It is a “city of revelry” (Isaiah 22:2; 32:13) that Jehovah makes a heap of rubble (Isaiah 25:2); an elite or “exalted city” that he casts to the ground, lays even with the dust (Isaiah 26:5). As the character traits of the wicked city and Jehovah’s alienated people typify a Babylon category—both exalting themselves over Jehovah’s holy ones—both end up in the dust (Isaiah 2:10; 29:4; 47:1).

The Woman Zion’s awakening and arising from the dust, moreover, signifies resurrection at the time Jehovah abolishes death: “Your dead shall live when their bodies arise. [You will say to them,] ‘Awake, and sing for joy, you who abide in the dust: your dew is the dew of sunrise!’ For the earth shall cast up its dead” (Isaiah 26:19; cf. 25:7–8). Resurrection from the dead thus takes place concurrently with Zion’s rebirth. The robes of glory that replace the bands around her neck allude to Zion’s release from captivity and her priestly endowment by Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 42:6–7; 49:8–9, 25; 61:1–3, 10).

Those who sell Jehovah’s elect “without price” are their political and ecclesiastical leaders: (1) political, because those who govern them emulate their exemplar, the king of Assyria/Babylon, in taking people captive (v 5; Isaiah 10:3–6; 14:16–17; 49:24); and (2) ecclesiastical, because their priests and prophets deprive them of the truths of God that empower them against being led captive and that lead them to know Jehovah personally (v 6; Isaiah 5:13; 8:14–17; 28:13). Accordingly, Jehovah in the end redeems his elect without price from their captive state (v 9; Isaiah 35:8–10; 54:5–8; 62:11–12).

52:4–5 *For thus says my Lord Jehovah: At first my people went down to Egypt to sojourn there. Then the Assyrians subjected them for nothing. And now, what have I here? says Jehovah. My people are taken over without price; those who govern them act presumptuously, says Jehovah, and my name is constantly abused all the day.*

Historically, two precedents of bondage became types for a third: (1) Israel’s bondage in Egypt (Deuteronomy 26:6; Isaiah 10:24); (2) Israel’s subjection to Assyria (2 Kings 15:29; Isaiah 10:24); and (3) Judah’s captivity in Babylon (2 Kings 24:10–16; Isaiah 47:6). All three are types of an end-time captivity of “my people”—Jehovah’s covenant people. Profane political leaders manage to subjugate them “without price” or bloodshed while ecclesiastical leaders dupe them (Isaiah 9:15–16; 32:5–7). Jehovah freely redeems them, however (v 3), at the time his servant fulfills his mission (Isaiah 45:13; 55:1–5).

52:6 *Therefore shall my people come to know my name; in that day [they shall know] that I, who speak, am at hand.*

Those of Jehovah’s people who become “my people”—by renewing his covenant and keeping its terms—ultimately come to know Jehovah (Isaiah 19:21, 25). While knowing *about* him—based on exercising faith and receiving a testimony of him through his holy Spirit—constitutes a first step toward knowing him in person, in the millennial age, the “knowledge of Jehovah” that overspreads the earth (Isaiah 11:9) implies much more than a belief in him. At his coming, Jehovah reveals himself personally to his elect as he did to Moses and Israel’s elders (Exodus 24:9–11; Isaiah 24:23; cf. 6:1–8).

52:7 *[Then shall they say,] How comely upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger announcing peace, who brings tidings of good, who heralds* ***salvation****, saying to Zion, Your God reigns!*

The “messenger” who announces good tidings primarily identifies Jehovah’s end-time servant (Isaiah 41:27; 44:26). It additionally identifies Zion’s watchmen (v 8) and Zion/Jerusalem (Isaiah 40:9)—all those to whom the servant ministers (Isaiah 61:1, 3). Parallelism of the terms “peace,” “good,” and “salvation” reveals them as synonyms. All three comprise covenant blessings that flow from covenant keeping: (1) “peace” is engendered by Jehovah (Isaiah 26:3, 12; 53:5); (2) “good” comes from proving loyal to him (Isaiah 38:3; 55:1–7); and (3) “salvation” is wrought by him (Isaiah 33:2; 43:12).

As the term “mountains” is a metaphor for nations (Isaiah 13:4; 64:1–3), the servant’s declaring good tidings “upon the mountains” extends to all nations to whom Jehovah sends him (Isaiah 42:1, 4, 6; 49:1, 6). His heralding *salvation*—which Jehovah personifies (Isaiah 12:2; 17:10)—means that he declares salvation both as a principle that comes of righteousness (Isaiah 26:1–2; 33:14–15) and as anticipating Jehovah at his coming (Isaiah 25:9; 62:11). As King of Zion, Jehovah comes to reign when persons affiliated with Zion become “my people” and he becomes “your God” (vv 6–7; Isaiah 40:1, 3).

52:8 *Hark! Your watchmen lift up their* ***voice****; as one they cry out for joy, for they shall see eye to eye when Jehovah returns [to] Zion.*

The appearance of Zion’s “watchmen” after the appearance of Jehovah’s servant in the Book of Isaiah implies that he occasions their emergence and ministry. Those who “follow” and “know” *righteousness* (Isaiah 51:1, 7)—Jehovah’s servant—in other words, ultimately ascend spiritually and assume restorative functions toward Jehovah’s people as the servant does: “I have appointed watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem, who shall not be silent day or night. You who call upon Jehovah, let not up nor give him respite till he reestablishes Jerusalem and makes it renowned in the earth” (Isaiah 62:6–7).

Those whom Jehovah’s servant endows in the holy priesthood are thus called “oaks of *righteousness*” and “priests of Jehovah” (Isaiah 61:3, 6). These righteous watchmen “lift up their voice,” signifying (1) that they herald Jehovah’s coming as the servant does; and (2) that they sustain the servant—Jehovah’s *voice* to his people (Isaiah 40:3; 50:10). Unlike Jehovah’s blind and unwary watchmen whom they replace—the “dumb watchdogs” and “lolling seers” who come under condemnation (Isaiah 56:10–12)—Zion’s watchmen “see eye to eye,” having seen the same vision of the end from the beginning.

52:10\* *Jehovah has bared his holy* ***arm*** *in the eyes of all nations, that all ends of the earth may see our God’s* ***salvation****.*

Jehovah’s “baring” or “revealing” (*hasap*) his holy *arm* to all nations (Isaiah 53:1) is on a parallel with Jehovah’s “revealing” his *righteousness*—his servant—to all nations (Isaiah 41:1–2; 51:4–5; 56:1). It implies that at first Jehovah’s *arm* is withheld or kept hidden from the world: “He has made my mouthlike a sharp sword—in the shadow of his handhe hid me. He has made me into a polished arrow—in his quiver he kept me secret” (Isaiah 49:2). As Jehovah’s coming to the earth draws near—as his people’s *salvation* approaches—Jehovah empowers his servant to intervene on their behalf.

52:9\* *Break out all together into song, you ruined places of Jerusalem: Jehovah has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem.*

A time of comfort and rejoicing arrives when Jehovah’s people who expiate their iniquities see covenant curses turn into blessings and their desolate circumstances transformed (Isaiah 40:1–2; 49:8–13; 51:3; 61:1–3). With the empowerment of Jehovah’s servant and his associates, a new day dawns for those who ascend to the Zion/Jerusalem level and levels higher. Jehovah “comforts” them in their distress when he “redeems” them—when he releases them from bondage and gathers them home in a new exodus to Zion (vv 3, 11–12; Isaiah 35:9–10; 43:1–2; 48:20–21; 51:9–12; 54:5–8; 66:12–13).

52:11–12 *Turn away, depart; touch nothing defiled as you leave [Babylon]. Come out of her and be pure, you who bear Jehovah’s vessels. But you shall not leave in haste or go in flight: Jehovah will go before you, the God of Israel behind you.*

The new exodus out of Greater Babylon—out of a wicked world at its destruction (Isaiah 13:1, 9, 11, 19; 21:9)—is the signal event that separates the righteous from the wicked and sets in motion their reversal of circumstances. As Israel was born as a nation following its exodus out of Egypt—the Red Sea representing the birth canal—so Zion is born at the new exodus. Those who bear Jehovah’s “vessels”—a metaphor that designates Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 22:24; 66:20)—are the spiritual kings and queens of the Gentiles who gather Jehovah’s sons and daughters to Zion (Isaiah 43:6; 49:22–23).

The new exodus to Zion consists of an orderly event accompanied by Jehovah’s presence and characterized by extraordinary divine intervention. While the wicked flee in terror from the destructions that come upon them (Isaiah 13:14; 21:15; 24:17–18; 30:17), the kings and queens of the Gentiles—those who are “pure,” who “touch nothing defiled”—lead home their charges in joyous processions from the four directions of the earth (Isaiah 11:12, 16; 30:29; 35:8–10; 43:5–6). Jehovah’s presence with them marks the latter as his elect, those who have ascended to the son/servant category of his people.

52:13–15 *My servant, being astute, shall be highly exalted; he shall become exceedingly eminent: just as he appalled many—his appearance was marred beyond human likeness, his semblance unlike that of men—So shall he yet astound many nations, kings shutting their mouths at him—what was not told them, they shall see; what they had not heard, they shall consider.*

In the course of serving as a proxy savior of Jehovah’s people—“bearing their iniquities” under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (Isaiah 53:11)—Jehovah’s “servant” or vassal suffers horrific physical “marring beyond human likeness” at the hands of enemies as an intrinsic part of his descent phase. Just as many people are appalled at his plight, however, so he astounds them when Jehovah heals him (Isaiah 57:18–19). In his ascent phase that follows—when Jehovah empowers him over his enemies (Isaiah 49:8; 51:9)—he becomes “highly exalted” and “exceedingly eminent” (cf. Isaiah 11:10; 55:5).

From the similar exalted language that describes Jehovah (Isaiah 6:1; 57:15), we learn that as his people ascend spiritually they may assume not only his righteous attributes but also inherit greater degrees of glory (v 1; Isaiah 24:16; 46:13; 62:2–3). Like Jehovah’s servant, in other words, all who covenant with Jehovah may ascend­ and attain higher spiritual categories (Isaiah 4:2; 11:2–5, 10; 55:3–5)—from Jacob/Israel to Zion/Jerusalem to sons/servants to seraphs/saviors. In the millennial age of peace that ensues, they may likewise inherit thrones of glory (v 2; Isaiah 9:6–7; 22:23–24; 32:1; 62:2).

Among those who ascend are the spiritual kings of the Gentiles who hush up when Jehovah’s servant ministers to them: “To you who know me, who are of my fold, I have reported what I heard from Jehovah of Hosts” (Isaiah 21:10). What hitherto “was not told them,” and which they “had not heard,” the servant thus teaches them, empowering them to perform their savior roles (Isaiah 49:22–23; 50:4; 61:1–3, 6). As the servant resembles Solomon—who was “astute” or “sapient” (*yaskil*)—so these kings and their queens resemble the monarchs who came to hear Solomon (1 Kings 4:29–34; cf. Isaiah 49:7).

ISAIAH 53

Jehovah’s descent phase as a sacrificial lamb (before

his ascent as King of Zion) atones for transgressors

53:1 *Who has believed our revelation? On whose account has the* ***arm*** *of Jehovah been revealed?*

Parallel statements infer that Jehovah’s *arm* (Isaiah 51:9; 52:10)—his end-time servant—is “revealed” for the sake of those who “believe” the revelation concerning the person who is the subject of verses 1–10. Believing in Jehovah’s revelation as his servant reveals it (Isaiah 21:10; 50:10; 52:15) thus constitutes a test of one’s faith in the God of Israel. Use of the possessive “*our* revelation” suggests that alternative versions exist that aren’t grounded in the truth. It also implies that a division occurs between those of Jehovah’s people who believe the revelation and those who don’t (Isaiah 28:16; 43:10).

While scholars lump Isaiah 52:13–53:12 together as a single messianic prophecy, a distinction exists between those verses in which Jehovah speaks of his servant (Isaiah 52:13–15; 53:11–12) and those in which a spokesman for Jehovah’s people, tenably the servant, speaks of the subject of Isaiah 53:1–10. Isaiah’s Servant–Tyrant Parallelism—a structure of twenty-one antithetical verses that contrast the king of Babylon in chapter 14 with the King of Zion in chapters 52–53—shows that the subject of Isaiah 53:1–10 is none other than Jehovah, the King of Zion, and that his servant resembles him.

As we have seen, a close affinity exists between Jehovah and his servant. They appear as two *arms* of God—*righteousness* and *salvation*—that intervene among humanity to restore and deliver Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 33:2; 40:10–11; 48:14–16; 51:5, 9–11; 52:10; 59:16). Jehovah’s empowering his *arm* (Isaiah 51:9) thus means that with the coming of the servant events take a new turn. Word links show that divine revelation comes forth that only those weaned from milk can digest, while those who are content with a lesser portion of Jehovah’s word are ensnared and taken captive (Isaiah 28:9–16).

53:2 *Like a* ***sapling*** *he grew up in his presence, a* ***stalk*** *out of arid ground. He had no distinguished appearance, that we should notice him; he had no [pleasing] aspect, that we should find him attractive.*

The terms *sapling* and *stalk* designate a messianic person and in that respect resemble the similar terms *shoot*, *stock*, and *branch* (Isaiah 11:1; cf. Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8). The paralleled antithetical ideas of his growing up “in his presence” and “out of arid ground” denote that although he “grows up” or “ascends” (*ya‘al*) spiritually in a time of his people’s apostasy and covenant curse, he himself enjoys direct access to his God. And yet, in spite of his being so highly favored, one wouldn’t conclude such a divine privilege from the common outward appearance that defines his humanity.

53:3–4 *He was despised and disdained by men, a man of grief, accustomed to suffering. As one from whom men hide their faces, he was shunned, deemed by us of no merit. Yet he bore our sufferings, endured our griefs, though we thought him stricken, smitten of God, and humbled.*

Two kinds of perception are evident toward the messianic person in question: (1) from a people astray or who believe their own version of God’s revelation and who thus feel threatened by one who embodies the truth; and (2) from righteous individuals who aren’t offended by God’s revelation (v 1) because they themselves live the truth as best they know how. The pronouns “us,” “our,” and “we”—used by a spokesman for Jehovah’s people such as his servant—show that those in the alienated category may in the end realize the true nature of the person they have erstwhile “despised” and “disdained.”

Although the subject of verses 1–10 is Israel’s God Jehovah, the King of Zion (Isaiah 52:7), he appears to his people as “a man” (cf. Genesis 18:1–16). In the pattern of descent before ascent that every proxy savior experiences under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (Isaiah 37:20, 33–35; 38:1–6), Jehovah too suffers as a man in the course of redeeming his people before he comes to reign on the earth as King of Zion (Isaiah 43:24–25; 44:22; 59:19–20; 62:11; 63:8–9). Considered a reprobate and under a curse, he bears the iniquities of reprobates by taking their curses on himself in order to reverse them.

The seven pairs of antithetical themes of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure—Ruin & Rebirth, Rebellion & Compliance, Punishment & Deliverance, Humiliation & Exaltation, Suffering & Salvation, Disloyalty & Loyalty, Disinheritance & Inheritance—are evident in Jehovah more than in any person. While he undergoes ruin, punishment, humiliation, suffering, and disinheritance, he does so on behalf of those who are rebellious and disloyal. But because he is compliant and loyal, he experiences rebirth, deliverance, exaltation, salvation, and inheritance in the end as an example to all who emulate him.

53:5 *But he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; the price of our peace he incurred, and with his wounds we are healed.*

As a proxy savior, Jehovah is “pierced” and “crushed” in the course of paying the price of his people’s peace. They are healed of covenant curses because of his “wounds,” fulfilling David’s and Zechariah’s prophecies: “They pierce my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look at me and stare. They part my garments between them and cast lots for my vesture” (Psalm 22:16–18); “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced. And they shall mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and be in bitterness for him as one who is in bitterness for his firstborn” (Zechariah 12:10).

The terms “peace” and “healing” form word links to covenant curse reversals Jehovah performs upon the debt of his people’s transgressions being paid: “O Jehovah, you bring about our peace” (Isaiah 26:12); “I occasion peace and cause calamity” (Isaiah 45:7); “I have seen his conduct and I will heal him; I will guide him and amply console him and those who mourn for him, who partake of the fruit of the lips: ‘Peace, wellbeing, to those far off and to those who are near,’ says Jehovah who heals him” (Isaiah 57:18–19); “Jehovah binds up the fracture of his people and heals their open wound” (Isaiah 30:26).

To satisfy the requirements of justice—so that his people might be recipients of his mercy—Jehovah answers for their disloyalties as a vassal to an emperor by taking upon himself their transgressions. Because “Jehovah is a God of justice” (Isaiah 30:18), only on the basis of justice being served can mercy operate or Jehovah could not be a just God. Rather, his saving his people by bearing their infirmities—“taking upon himself the form of a servant” or vassal (Philippians 2:7)—betrays an extraordinary act of love: “Truly you are a God who dissembles himself, O Savior, God of Israel” (Isaiah 45:15).

The Hebrew term “peace” (*salom*)—a synonym of “salvation” and “good” (Isaiah 52:7)—additionally possesses the connotation of “wholeness” or “completeness” that characterizes a person’s attaining the full stature of man or woman spiritually and physically. The “peace” for which Jehovah pays the price when serving as his people’s proxy savior, and the “healing” he generates on their behalf, therefore, lay the foundation upon which all salvation and covenant blessings rest, preparing the way for God to fulfill his divine purpose of exalting his children that underlies all his dealings with them.

53:6 *We all like sheep had gone astray, each of us headed his own way; Jehovah brought together upon him the iniquity of us all.*

The imagery of sheep wandering in all directions and Jehovah’s bringing together on him (or himself) everyone’s iniquities contrasts the character traits of Jehovah and his people. Word links identify the term “astray” or “erring” (*ta‘inu*) with Jehovah’s prophets, priests, and people (Isaiah 28:7; 29:24) and the term “sheep” or “flock” (*s’on*) as Jehovah’s people and the nations (Isaiah 13:14; 63:11). Consistent with the Servant–Tyrant Parallelism’s use of the name Jehovah to denote a divine office, its use in the present instance (vv 6, 10) may additionally refer to the Most High God (cf. Isaiah 14:14).

53:7 *He was harassed, yet submissive, and opened not his mouth—like a* ***lamb*** *led to slaughter, like a sheep, dumb before its shearers, he opened not his mouth.*

As animals are often mistreated, so is Jehovah during his earthly ministry. Though he is “harassed” or “oppressed” (*niggas*), he is “submissive” or “afflicted” (*na‘aneh*) and doesn’t resist evil. The imagery of a *lamb* led to slaughter alludes to the sacrifice of his life as “an offering for guilt” under the Law of Moses (v 10), in which a sacrificial animal substitutes for a person who has transgressed. Isaiah thus combines the role of a proxy savior under the terms of the Davidic Covenant with the proxy role of a sacrificial lamb under the Mosaic Code to show the composite nature of Jehovah’s saving roles.

53:8 *By arrest and trial he was taken away. Who can apprise his generation that he was cut off from the land of the living for the crime of my people, to whom the blow was due?*

The terms “arrest” and “trial” signify official prosecution at the hands of civil and/or ecclesiastical authorities. These terms additionally accord with the pattern of a vassal king’s prosecution by an emperor for his or his people’s disloyalties to the emperor. In Jehovah’s case, however, the disloyalties are not his own but those of his people for whom he is answerable to the emperor. His being “cut off” from the land of the living means that he is condemned to death, paradoxically by those for whose crimes and transgressions he fulfills the requirements of justice (Isaiah 43:24–25; 44:22; 63:7–10).

As only Israel’s God—not a man and not an animal—qualifies as an unblemished sacrifice for sin (cf. Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 1:3; 4:3), and as only he can answer to all eternity as a vassal to an emperor under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (cf. Isaiah 37:35; 55:5), the requirements of justice Jehovah discharges on behalf of his people are all-encompassing and infinite for those whom he saves (Isaiah 43:12; 45:17; 51:6, 8). But to apprise his generation—those whom he saves—of this demonstration of divine goodness is another matter, as few in this world comprehend or perceive its profound reality (v 1).

53:9 *He was appointed among the wicked in death, among the rich was his burial; yet he had done no violence, and deceit was not in his mouth.*

While the Masoretic Text says, “Among the wicked was his burial, and among the rich his death,” verse 9’s parallel features suggest the opposite. Because violence is typical of the wicked and deceit of the rich, not vice versa, and because a person dies before he is buried, not vice versa, the MT version appears corrupt. That the person is innocent, moreover, reaffirms that he dies on account of others’ guilt, not his own. And as ascent follows descent, Jehovah’s elect’s rising from the dust in Isaiah’s Servant–Tyrant Parallelism (Isaiah 52:1–2) establishes the pattern for Jehovah’s rising from the dust.

53:10 *But Jehovah willed to crush him, causing him suffering, that, if he made his life an offering for guilt, he might see his offspring and prolong his days, and that the purposes of Jehovah might prosper in his* ***hand****.*

Both the deliverance King Hezekiah obtains on a local level (Isaiah 37:35; 38:4–6) and the salvation the King of Zion obtains on a universal level follow the same pattern under the terms of the Davidic Covenant. As noted, under its terms a vassal king performs the spiritual function of a proxy savior on the model of ancient Near Eastern emperor–vassal covenants in which the emperor binds himself to deliver a vassal and his people from a mortal threat when the vassal keeps the law of the emperor and the people keep the law of the vassal. Where that formula breaks down, the emperor has no obligation.

While Hezekiah has such an emperor–vassal relationship with Jehovah, Jehovah has a parallel relationship with the Most High God. Under the terms of such a covenant, the vassal is answerable to the emperor for the disloyalties of his people. But because the emperor–vassal model only partially covers this scenario, Isaiah combines it with that of animal sacrifice. By making his life “an offering for guilt” (*’asam*)—that is, by suffering his people’s punishments not just on behalf of their temporal salvation but also their spiritual or eternal salvation—Jehovah personifies all salvation (Isaiah 33:2; 62:11).

Once justice is served, the emperor is under obligation to deliver the vassal king and his people from a mortal threat. However, if the vassal willingly goes to his death in order to serve justice, then the only way the emperor can deliver him is to raise him from the dead. By the same token, those who give the vassal king their allegiance (Isaiah 45:23), too, qualify for deliverance from death—the ultimate mortal threat—by being resurrected from the dead. Through his sacrifice, Jehovah, the King of Zion, thus accounts for all aspects of his people’s salvation, temporal and spiritual, past, present, and future.

That Jehovah has literal offspring on the earth fulfills a fundamental covenant blessing (Genesis 1:28; 22:17; Deuteronomy 28:4; Psalm 89:4). Together with a proper burial (v 9)—also a covenant blessing—it again attests that is he is innocent of the crimes for which he is put to death. In the antithetical verses of Isaiah’s Servant–Tyrant Parallelism, for example, the king of Babylon receives no burial and ends up with no offspring (Isaiah 14:20–21)—both covenant curses. A person’s days being “prolonged” or “extended” (*ya’arik*) (Deuteronomy 6:2) in part denotes his having continuing offspring.

That historically the only person whose life and sufferings match all aspects of Isaiah’s prophecy in verses 1–10 is Jesus of Nazareth makes him the only candidate of a “man” (v 3) who is also Jehovah the God of Israel. That agrees with Jehovah’s appearance to Abraham as one of three “men” (Genesis 18:1–33) and with Jacob’s encounter with a “man” who was also Israel’s God (Genesis 32:24–30). Jesus affirmed he was Jehovah when he answered a question by the Pharisees, stating, “Before Abraham was, *I am*” (John 8:58; emphasis added), which verb embodies the name Jehovah (cf. Exodus 3:13–14).

For supposedly blaspheming by claiming he was God or the Son of God, Jesus was put to death (Matthew 26:63–66; John 10:31–38). The fact that Isaiah’s synchronous literary structures transform the Book of Isaiah into an allegory of the end-time nevertheless doesn’t locate the historical context of verses 1–10 in the end-time. Twin servant passages that enclose verses 1–10, however (Isaiah 52:13–15; 53:11–12), relate them to the mission of Jehovah’s servant *in* the end-time, verse 1’s question being whether Jehovah’s people in that day “believe” the revelation of Jehovah’s earthly life and sufferings.

*That the purposes of Jehovah might prosper in his* ***hand****.* A transitional phrase to verses 11–12, this infers that on the foundation of justice and mercy that Jehovah establishes by fulfilling his proxy roles, his “purposes” or “desires” (*hepes*) may now “prosper” or “succeed” (*yislah*). Without his laying that spiritual groundwork, humanity would forever continue incurring covenant curses. For those who covenant with Jehovah, on the other hand, their overcoming covenant curses through the foundation of salvation Jehovah has laid enables them to ascend to higher spiritual levels not otherwise possible.

An exemplary instance of such ascent is Jehovah’s servant—his right *hand*. He follows closely Jehovah’s pattern of a proxy savior under the terms of the Davidic Covenant by his, too, suffering afflictions through a descent phase (Isaiah 49:7; 50:5–6; 52:14) and subsequently rising to glory in his ascent phase (Isaiah 49:7; 52:13; 55:5). The basis of that reversal from curse to blessing, however—for the servant and for all who emulate him—is Jehovah’s earthly mission as his people’s Savior (Isaiah 43:11–13; 45:21–25; 63:8–9), Jehovah’s ultimate purpose and desire being the exaltation of his people.

53:11 *He shall see the toil of his soul and be satisfied; because of his knowledge, and by bearing their iniquities, shall my servant, the righteous one, vindicate many.*

The positioning of verses 1–10 between the two servant passages (Isaiah 52:13–15; 53:11–12) suggests a close affinity between their subjects. Jehovah and his servant—both of whom serve as proxy saviors but on different spiritual levels—resemble one another in many aspects of their descent and ascent phases. What is said of one is thus typical also of the other. The spiritual salvation Jehovah obtains by paying the price of his people’s transgressions under God’s law of justice, however, is unique to him, whereas the temporal salvation the servant obtains is obtained by others of Jehovah’s servants as well.

King Hezekiah’s role as a proxy savior in obtaining his people’s temporal salvation under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (Isaiah 37:35–36; 38:4–6) nevertheless serves as a type of both Jehovah and his servant. Although verse 11—in which Jehovah speaks of his “servant” or vassal—specifically addresses the servant’s role of proxy savior, all three—Jehovah, his servant, and Hezekiah, each on his own level—“bear their [people’s] iniquities” when answering for their disloyalties. All three proxy saviors, in other words, take their peoples’ covenant curses upon themselves and suffer on their account.

The “toil of his soul” that characterizes a proxy savior’s descent phase as he bears his people’s iniquities is demonstrated in Hezekiah’s deathly agony at the time Assyria threatens Jerusalem: “My life is cut off like woven fabric; he is severing me from the loom. Can I contain myself until morning, while like a lion he racks my whole frame? [Surely,] as night has followed day, you are bringing on my end! Like a mounting lark I twitter, like a dove I murmur. My eyes are drawn looking heavenward; I am utterly sleepless from bitterness of soul. O Jehovah, I am in straits; be my surety!” (Isaiah 38:12–14).

The servant’s “knowledge”—which term defines an intact covenant relationship—thus consists of the terms of the Davidic Covenant under which he may “vindicate” or “justify” (*yasdiq*) Jehovah’s people before their God. As he takes upon himself their covenant curses that are a consequence of their iniquities, he knows he will suffer. But he also knows that by serving as their proxy savior Jehovah will spare his people when the end-time Assyrian power attempts to destroy them. Such unselfish acts define Jehovah’s *righteousness*, which the servant exemplifies (Isaiah 11:4–5; 32:1; 41:2, 10; 46:11–13).

53:12 *I will assign him an inheritance among the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the mighty, because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with criminals—he bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

Isaiah draws on many heroes in Israel’s history who serve as types of Jehovah’s end-time servant: Abraham, who came from the east and called on the name of Jehovah (Genesis 12:8; 13:4; Isaiah 41:2, 25); Moses, who led Israel out of bondage in Egypt (Exodus 14:1–31; Isaiah 49:8–12); David, whom Jehovah endowed with his holy Spirit (1 Samuel 16:13; Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 61:1); Solomon, who became renowned among the nations (1 Kings 10:1; Isaiah 52:13, 15); and Cyrus, who released Israel’s exiles and decreed the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple (Ezra 6:3–5; Isaiah 44:26, 28; 45:1, 13).

Verse 12 reveals other such ancient types: Caleb, who received “an inheritance among the great” for his integrity (Joshua 14:14); David, who “divide[d] the spoil with the mighty” when he vanquished the Amalekites (1 Samuel 30:26); Hezekiah, who “poured out his soul unto death” during his illness (Isaiah 38:1–20); David, who was “numbered with criminals” when Saul outlawed him (1 Samuel 22:1–2); Job, who “[bore] the sins of many” upon the lavish lifestyle of his children (Job 1:5); and Moses, who “made intercession for trans­gressors” when Israel worshiped an idol (Deuteronomy 9:16–29).

A clear distinction thus exists between Jehovah and his servant. While one makes his life “an offering for guilt” and dies like “a lamb” (vv 7–10), the other lives to “divide the spoil” and receive “an inheritance” in the land (v 12). In other words, although one does not experience a reversal of circumstances in his lifetime, the other does when Jehovah heals and empowers him (Isaiah 49:7–8; 51:9; 57:18). As no savior’s descent phase occurs without a corresponding ascent phase, however, Jehovah’s coming in glory to reign as King of Zion constitutes his ascent phase (Isaiah 52:7–8; 59:19–20; 62:11).

ISAIAH 54

Jehovah’s millennial covenant is a composite of all covenants he made with his people and with individuals

54:1 *Sing, O barren woman who did not give birth; break into jubilant song, you who were not in labor. The children of the deserted wife shall outnumber those of the espoused, says Jehovah.*

Isaiah’s depicting Jehovah’s people as two cities, one righteous, the other wicked, has a parallel in two women or wives, one faithful, the other unfaithful. The imagery of a woman who typifies Jehovah’s covenant relationship with his people thus divides into that of two women: (1) “a wife married in youth only to be rejected” for her unfaithfulness, but whom Jehovah now remarries (vv 5–6); and (2) the wife currently married, whom Jehovah now rejects for her unfaithfulness: “Surely by sinning you sold yourselves; because of your crimes is your mother cast off” (Isaiah 50:1; cf. 1:21; 57:3–13).

A reversal of circumstances takes place when the natural lineages of Jehovah’s people who anciently rejected their covenant Lord renew their relationship with him—while, at the same time, the assimilated lineages of his people who displaced them now reject him through their idolatries (Isaiah 42:17; 44:15; 45:20; 46:1–2). In the millennial age of peace, the “children” or “sons” (*banim*) who are born to the remarried spouse—a chief covenant blessing—far exceed those of the spouse who is cast off. She who was “barren” during the intervening centuries has cause to rejoice (Isaiah 49:20–22).

54:2–3 *Expand the site of your tent; extend the canopies of your dwellings. Do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you shall spread abroad to the right and to the left; your offspring shall dispossess the nations and resettle the desolate cities.*

In the millennial age of peace, promised lands—a second chief covenant blessing—consist not only of the ones Jehovah promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but also others of his people who lived as righteously as they did. As all promised lands are covenant blessings, and as Jehovah gave Abraham the land stretching from the Euphrates to the Nile (Genesis 15:18), additional promised lands follow the same pattern. When blessing his son Joseph, Jacob could thus declare, “The blessings of your father have exceeded the blessings of my progenitors to the utmost bounds of the primeval hills” (Genesis 49:26).

Although the Zion/Jerusalem category of Jehovah’s people inherits promised lands conditionally, as Israel did anciently—conditional on keeping the terms of the Sinai covenant—the son/servant category and levels higher inherit promised lands unconditionally. The Woman Zion, whom Jehovah marries, inherits the *place* Zion to which she returns (Isaiah 35:10; 51:11; 60:8–9), where Jehovah protects her in his Day of Judgment (Isaiah 4:5–6; 14:32; 46:13) and where he comes to reign (Isaiah 52:8; 59:20; 62:11). From there, however, she spreads abroad and inherits the lands of her oppressors.

54:4–5 *Be not fearful, for you shall not be confounded; be not ashamed, for you shall not be disgraced. You shall forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For he who espouses you is your Maker, whose name is Jehovah of Hosts; he who redeems you is the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth.*

Like Israel’s ethnic lineages that she represents, the Woman Zion was fearful, confounded, ashamed, and disgraced during the long centuries of covenant curses she endured while divorced from her husband. When she renews the covenant, however, her curses turn into blessings. Having decided that loyalty to her husband—her Maker, Jehovah of Hosts, the Holy One of Israel, the God of all the earth—is for her and her children’s best good, her afflictions vanish. Though in times past she made poor choices, suffering barrenness and reproach from neighbors, she happily reunites with her Redeemer.

54:6–8 *Jehovah calls you back as a spouse forsaken and forlorn, a wife married in youth only to be rejected, says your God. I forsook you, indeed, momentarily, but with loving compassion I will gather you up. In fleeting exasperation**I hid my face from you, but with everlasting charity I will have compassion on you, says Jehovah, who redeems you.*

Jehovah’s ancient covenant people, now received back, remarry their Redeemer whom they long repudiated. The account of his taking back his former spouse thus abounds in covenant language. Terms such as “loving compassion” and “everlasting charity” denote an unconditional and eternal covenant. The words “I forsook you, indeed, momentarily” and “in fleeting exasperation I hid my face from you” express justified actions, showing that consequences for transgression in the form of covenant curses are, in the end, designed to bring Jehovah’s people back into a blessed relationship with him.

54:9–10 *This is to me as in the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would no more flood the earth. So I swear to have no more* ***anger*** *toward you, never again to rebuke you. For the mountains shall be removed and the hills collapse with shaking, but my charity toward you shall never be removed, nor my* ***covenant*** *of peace be shaken, says Jehovah, who has compassion on you.*

Chapter 54 depicts many features of the new covenant Jehovah makes with his people at the inception of the millennial age, the term “charity” denoting its unconditional nature. As Jehovah made a “covenant of peace” with the Levites and with King David (Numbers 25:10–13; Jeremiah 33:20–22; Malachi 2:4–6), so he makes it in the days of his end-time servant named David (Isaiah 55:3–5; Ezekiel 34:23–25; 37:24–26). His servant’s personifying Jehovah’s *covenant*, moreover (Isaiah 42:6; 49:8), means that he serves as its mediator as Moses did anciently (Exodus 19:3–6; Deuteronomy 29:1).

The new covenant further resembles the covenant Jehovah made with Noah after the Flood (Genesis 9:8–17). Only this time a world cataclysm like the Flood involves the shaking of mountains or nations. He who “shakes” the nations is the king of Assyria/Babylon, who personifies Jehovah’s *anger* (Isaiah 10:5; 14:16). The peace that characterizes the millennial age—as manifested in Jehovah’s “covenant of peace”—stems directly from the “price of our peace” Jehovah pays in his descent phase (Isaiah 26:12; 45:7; 53:5). That peace, his people now enjoy everlastingly (Isaiah 26:3; 33:20; 52:7).

54:11–12 *Poor wretch, tempest-tossed and disconsolate! I will lay antimony for your building stones and sapphires for your foundations; I will make your skylights of jacinth, your gates of carbuncle, and your entire boundary of precious stones.*

Like the heroine of fairy tales, the Woman Zion goes through a refiner’s fire and inherits the equivalent of a glorious castle for her home. As precious stones signify higher spiritual categories of people (Isaiah 49:17–18; Malachi 3:16–17), the idea of promised lands adorned with gemstones additionally implies that those who live into the millennial age have ascended to higher spiritual levels. Prominent among these is Jehovah’s servant, whose task is to restore Jehovah’s people even beyond their former glory: “I lay in Zion a stone, a keystone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation” (Isaiah 28:16).

54:13–14 *All your children shall be taught by Jehovah, and great shall be the peace of your posterity. You shall be firmly established through* ***righteousness****; you will be far from oppression and have no cause to fear, far from ruin, for it shall not approach you.*

Just as Jehovah enhances the blessing of his people’s lands by regenerating and adorning them (vv 11–12; Isaiah 35:1–2; 51:3), so he enhances the blessing of their posterity by personally teaching them. The basis of these blessings is his people’s righteousness—the opposite of their former wickedness that caused their oppression and ruin. The peace they long sought but couldn’t find thus comes as a covenant blessing not from human agreements. Jehovah’s servant—his *righteousness* (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13)—establishes their peace (Isaiah 9:6–7; 11:4–9; 16:5; 32:1, 16–20; 33:20; 52:7; 55:4–5, 12).

54:15 *Those who gather into mobs are not of me; whoever masses against you shall fall because of you.*

Before Jehovah reverses his people’s circumstances, their enemies grow more agitated and oppressive. Forming an integral part of his people’s refiner’s fire, however, the opposition they receive serves as an opportunity for them to ascend to higher spiritual levels as they prove faithful to Jehovah through the midst of their trials. The descent phase of Jehovah’s people nevertheless doesn’t last forever, their enemies’ violation of their rights being the very thing that brings covenant curses upon *them*. As gathering into mobs is not of God, so the term “fall” identifies Isaiah’s Babylon category (Isaiah 21:9).

54:16–17 *It is I who create the* ***smith*** *who fans the flaming coals, forging weapons to suit his purpose; it is I who create the* ***ravager*** *to destroy. Whatever weapon is devised against you, it shall not succeed; every* ***tongue*** *that rises to accuse you, you shall refute. This is the heritage of the servants of Jehovah, and such is their* ***vindication****by me, says Jehovah.*

The terms “smith” and “ravager” identify the king of Assyria/Babylon, who ravages and desolates the earth: “His purpose shall be to annihilate and to exterminate nations not a few” (Isaiah 10:7; cf. 9:18–19; 13:9–13; 14:16–17; 33:1). Jehovah empowers him to destroy the wicked of his people and the nations in his Day of Judgment: “Have you not heard how I ordained this thing long ago, how in days of old I planned it? Now I have brought it to pass. You were destined to demolish fortified cities, [turning them]into heaps of rubble” (Isaiah 37:26; cf. 5:25–30; 10:5–6; 13:4–5; 28:2–3, 21–22).

A third chief covenant blessing (cf. vv 1–3)—divine protection—comes when Jehovah’s people and their proxy saviors keep the terms of his covenants (Isaiah 37:35; 41:10–13; 48:18; 63:17; 65:8–9). Even when “wickedness is set ablaze like a fire” and “forests” or cities “billow upward in mushrooming clouds of smoke” (Isaiah 9:18), when “whole nations have been burned like lime, mown down like thorns and set ablaze” (Isaiah 33:12), Jehovah provides a way for his people to “live through the devouring fire” on account of their justice and righteousness (Isaiah 33:14–15; cf. 1:27; 32:17; 43:2; 58:8).

Essential to his people’s end-time preservation is the role of Jehovah’s servant, their proxy savior who assures their “vindication” or “righteousness” (*sidqatam*) (Isaiah 53:11), and the role of other servants who similarly serve as proxy saviors under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (Isaiah 56:6; 63:17; 65:8–9, 13–14; 66:14). The empowerment of additional such servants—the “followers of righteousness” or those who “know righteousness” (Isaiah 51:1, 7)—derives from the mission of Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 61:3). All these refute the *tongue*—the king of Assyria/Babylon—and others like him.

ISAIAH 55

As a witness and lawgiver to the nations, Jehovah’s servant mediates the new covenant with his people

55:1–3 *Attention, all who thirst; come for water! You who have no money, come and buy food, that you may eat. Come, buy wine and milk with no money and at no cost. Why do you spend money on what is not bread, your labor on what does not satisfy? Hear me well: Eat what is good, and your souls shall enjoy abundance. Give ear and come unto me; pay heed, that your souls may live! And I will make with you an everlasting* ***covenant****: my loving fidelity toward David.*

Jehovah offers the covenant blessings of food and drink, physical and spiritual, to both the poor—“you who have no money”—and the rich, who “spend money on what is not bread.” The words “attention,” “hear well,” “give ear,” and “pay heed” imply that Jehovah’s people need waking up from their covenantal non-compliance to again observing the covenant’s terms (Isaiah 50:4). Except for their keeping Jehovah’s law and word, his covenant blessings are free—“at no cost.” As now is the “favorable time” and “day of salvation” in which Jehovah restores his people (Isaiah 49:8–13), they have but two choices.

Chapter 55 forms an integral part of Part VI of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 28–31; 55–59), which juxtaposes a Covenant of Life—“that your souls may live” (v 3)—modeled on the Davidic Covenant with a “Covenant with Death” (Isaiah 28:15, 18) that is grounded in human counsels and schemes. Unlike the Sinai Covenant, Jehovah’s “everlasting covenant” is unconditional to individuals who prove loyal to Jehovah under all conditions. His servant—the “David” of Hebrew prophecy (Jeremiah 33:15–16; Ezekiel 34:23–25; Hosea 3:5)—personifies and mediates it (Isaiah 42:6; 49:8).

55:4 *See, I have appointed him as a witness to the nations, a prince and lawgiver of the peoples.*

The mission of Jehovah’ servant is (1) national and (2) international because he restores Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 49:5–6, 8–12) and because they are scattered among all nations (Isaiah 42:1–7; 49:1, 22). The terms “witness,” (*‘ed*), “prince” or “spokesman” (*nagid*), and “lawgiver” (*mesawweh*) express functions relating to Jehovah’s covenant (Genesis 31:44; Deuteronomy 31:26; Isaiah 42:4; Ezekiel 34:24–25). The servant’s personifying the *covenant* (v 3; Isaiah 42:6; 49:8) entails his teaching the true points of Jehovah law and word that are the terms of the covenant (Isaiah 8:16; 48:1; 50:4, 10).

The verb “appoint” establishes a word link to other passages in which Jehovah “appoints” his servant. These reflect both the descent and ascent phases of his end-time mission of restoring Jehovah’s people: “I will appoint him as a herald of good tidings to Jerusalem” (Isaiah 41:27); “I will appoint him your jurisdiction. And he will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah” (Isaiah 22:21); “I have created you and appointed you to be a *covenant*for the people, a *light*to the nations” (Isaiah 42:6; emphasis added; cf. 49:6, 8); “To us a child is born, a son appointed” (Isaiah 9:6).

55:5 *You will summon a nation that you did not know; a nation that did not know you will hasten to you—because of Jehovah your God, the Holy One of Israel, who gloriously endows you.*

Now addressing his servant, Jehovah predicts his success in restoring his people. As the verb to “know” denotes an extant covenant relationship (Isaiah 19:21; 21:10; 33:6; Ezekiel 16:62), those who “do *not* know” one another, as in this instance, at first possess no covenant relationship (Isaiah 1:3; cf. Matthew 7:23; 25:12). When Jehovah empowers his servant, however (Isaiah 49:1–8; 51:9–11; 52:13)—when he “gloriously endows” him—Jehovah’s people who are dispersed among the nations renew the covenant and “hasten” to him, becoming a righteous “nation” or “people” (*goy*) of God.

The servant’s task is to gather them: “The sprigof Jesse, who stands for an *ensign*to the peoples, shall be sought by the nations, and his rest shall be glorious. . . . He will raise the *ensign*to the nations and assemble the exiled of Israel; he will gather the scattered of Judah from the four directions of the earth” (Isaiah 11:10, 12; emphasis added); “I will lift up my *hand*to the nations, raise my *ensign*to the peoples; and they will bring your sons in their bosoms and carry your daughters on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, queens your nursing mothers” (Isaiah 49:22–23; emphasis added).

55:6–7 *Inquire of Jehovah while he is present; call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and sinful men their thoughts. Let them return to Jehovah, and he will have mercy on them; to our God, who graciously pardons.*

With the servant’s appearance to prepare the way for Jehovah’s coming to reign on the earth, direct divine revelation resumes (Isaiah 28:9, 16; 40:1–3; 41:27; 42:9; 48:6–8, 16). Jehovah’s people have but to inquire of Jehovah and to call upon him—whether through his servant or in their effectual personal prayers—and he will graciously respond. As Jehovah’s spokesman (v 4)—his *mouth* and *voice* (Isaiah 11:4; 28:23; 40:3; 49:2; 50:10)—the servant appeals to them to repent of their transgressions. As they do so, they find Jehovah “present” and “near”—literally, in person (Isaiah 52:6).

Unfortunately, many of Jehovah’s people have grown weary of him (Isaiah 40:27–30; 50:4) and don’t inquire of him or call upon him (Isaiah 8:19; 9:13; 30:2; 43:22; 65:1). Because the verb “return” (*swb*) also means “repent” (*swb*) (Isaiah 6:10; 21:12; 31:6; 44:22; 59:20), repentance is here defined as calling upon Jehovah, forsaking sinful thoughts, and refraining from evil ways. Only on those conditions does Jehovah mercifully pardon their faults. Without mercy, his justice alone operates, implying a prolongation of covenant curses until such time as his people do their part (Isaiah 1:5; 27:9–11).

55:8–9 *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says Jehovah. But as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts [higher] than your thoughts.*

As thoughts lead to actions, and as actions create “ways” or patterns of behavior, so those of man and his Maker differ greatly in righteousness. While man’s thoughts and ways are marred by temptations and transgressions, Jehovah’s ways are at all times pure and holy. And while man’s perspective is limited mostly to his experience with earthly matters, Jehovah’s perspective transcends man’s by encompassing the heavenly and the earthly. But those differences aren’t enough simply to contemplate. The challenge of Jehovah’s people is to learn Jehovah’s thoughts and ways and make them their own.

Jehovah’s servant, who exemplifies *righteousness* (Isaiah 11:4–5; 41:2; 46:11–13), succeeds in this. When “righteousnessand praise spring up in the presence of all nations” (Isaiah 61:11); when Jehovah’s servant “has brought about justice in the earth” (Isaiah 42:4); when “the skies overflow with righteousness” and “the earth receives it and salvationblossoms” (Isaiah 45:8); when Jehovah’s “salvationextends to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6); when “the earth is filled with the knowledge of Jehovah” (Isaiah 11:9)—then are the heaven and the earth indeed one (Isaiah 44:22–23; 49:13; 65:17–18).

55:10–11 *And as the rains and snows descend from the sky and return not to it without watering the earth, to render it fertile and fruitful—providing seed for the sower and food for the eater—so is the word that leaves my* ***mouth****: it does not return to me empty; it accomplishes what I desire, achieves the purpose for which I sent it.*

Just as the covenant blessings of fertile and fruitful lands originate in the sky, so to speak, so all blessings originate with Jehovah who dwells in the heavens (Isaiah 63:15; 66:1). Parallel verses show that Jehovah’s desire and purpose are none other than to bless his people. His “word,” which issues from his *mouth*—his servant (Isaiah 50:4; 59:21)—is key to his sending forth blessings to achieve that end. When Jehovah’s people live by his word—pure and unadulterated by the precepts of men—it becomes “seed for the sower and food for the eater” and yields an abundance of blessings (vv 1–2).

55:12–13 *You shall depart in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and hills shall sing at your presence and the trees of the meadows all clap their hands. In place of the thornbush shall come up the cypress, in place of nettles, the myrtle. This shall serve as a testimony of Jehovah, an everlasting sign that shall not be done away.*

Characterizing the return journey of Jehovah’s people to Zion are the enduring blessings of joy and peace that both attest to Jehovah’s handiwork (Isaiah 9:3; 26:12, 19; 51:3, 11; 53:5) and typify the fruits of his people’s righteousness (Isaiah 26:2–3; 57:1–2; 61:7–11; 65:13–18). Like the rainbow after the Flood (Genesis 9:12–17), Jehovah’s everlasting “sign” and “testimony” are the regenerating wilderness that accompanies his people’s return (Isaiah 35:1–10; 41:17–20; 43:19–21; 51:1–3) as Jehovah and his servant personally lead them home (Isaiah 52:11–12; 58:8; cf. 48:20–21; 49:8–13).

ISAIAH 56

Jehovah curses the blind watchmen of his people

but exalts his servants who hold fast to his covenant

56:1 *Thus says Jehovah: Observe justice and perform righteousness, for my* ***salvation*** *will soon come when my* ***righteousness*** *is revealed.*

Jehovah’s appointing his servant to restore justice in the earth (Isaiah 9:7; 42:1–4) has a corollary in his sending him as a paradigm of righteousness that his people may live by that takes into account their current circumstances and the particular challenges they face (Isaiah 28:9–16; 58:6–14). Continuing Part VI of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure’s theme of covenantal loyalty, chapter 56 defines righteousness as keeping the terms of Jehovah’s covenant (vv 4, 6; cf. Isaiah 26:7–9; 42:21). Because all salvation in the form of covenant blessings stems from covenant keeping, “performing righteousness” is key.

Jehovah’s revealing his *righteousness*—his servant (Isaiah 41:2)—is a sign that Jehovah’s coming as *salvation* is imminent: “I have brought near my *righteousness*; it is not now far off—my *salvation*shall no longer be delayed” (Isaiah 46:13; emphasis added); “Jehovah saw that there was no justice, and it displeased him. When he saw it, he wondered why there was no man, no one who would intervene. So his *arm*brought about *salvation*for him; his *righteousness*rallied to his cause” (Isaiah 59:15–16; emphasis added). Jehovah’s coming as *salvation* transforms the earth forever (Isaiah 62:1–2, 11–12).

56:2 *Blessed is the man who does so—the person who holds fast to them—who keeps the Sabbath without profaning it, who stays his hand from doing any evil.*

Although Jehovah calls all peoples to covenantal righteousness (v 1), only “a man” here and “a person” there responds. A sure sign of covenant keeping is Sabbath observance (Exodus 20:8–11; 31:13), which involves desisting “from achieving your own ends on my holy day . . . considering the Sabbath a delight, the holy [day]of Jehovah venerable . . . refraining from your everyday pursuits—from occupying yourselves with your own affairs and speaking of [business] matters” (Isaiah 58:13). Still, covenant keeping consists not only of avoiding evil but of actively doing good (Isaiah 1:16–17; 48:17).

56:3–5 *Let not the foreigner who adheres to Jehovah say, Jehovah will surely exclude me from his people. And let not the eunuch say, I am but a barren tree. For thus says Jehovah: As for the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths and choose to do what I will—holding fast to my* ***covenant****—to them I will give a handclasp and a name within the walls of my house that is better than sons and daughters; I will endow them with an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.*

Because Israel’s God is no respecter of persons (2 Chronicles 19:7; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11), foreigners and eunuchs—who comprise the lowest rung of society—needn’t suppose that even if they keep the terms of Jehovah’s covenant he still won’t acknowledge them as his people. Their keeping the Sabbath Day holy and “choosing to do what I will” are the essence of covenant keeping and make them as acceptable to him as his people who are natural-born. Not only does he bless them with the blessings of his covenant as he does them (v 7), but they may ascend to the highest spiritual categories.

Jehovah’s giving the righteous aliens among his people “a handclasp and a name” in his temple “that is better than sons and daughters” betokens the assurance of an eternal posterity beyond this life. As the promise of a name is inseparable from that of offspring (Isaiah 14:22; 48:19), Jehovah makes this promise with all whom he clasps by the hand and gives a new name in the pattern of an emperor to a vassal who proves loyal to him (Isaiah 40:26; 45:1–4): “‘As the new heavens and the new earth which I make shall endure before me,’ says Jehovah, ‘so shall your offspring and name endure’” (Isaiah 66:22).

While types from the past possess real historical roots, for them to fully typify an end-time scenario requires linking up such types with others within their larger end-time context. Those who hold fast to Jehovah’s *covenant*—his servant (Isaiah 42:6)—for example, are also those who come to Jehovah’s *light* (Isaiah 60:3), who inquire at his *mouth* (Isaiah 30:2), who hear his *voice* (Isaiah 28:23), who rally to his *ensign* (Isaiah 11:10), who know *righteousness* (Isaiah 51:1, 7), who receive an inheritance from his *hand* (Isaiah 34:17)—all of which terms are metaphorical pseudonyms of Jehovah’s servant.

56:6–7 *And the foreigners who adhere to Jehovah to serve him, who love the name of Jehovah, that they may be his servants—all who keep the Sabbath without profaning it, holding fast to my* ***covenant****—these I will bring to my holy mountain and gladden in my house of prayer. Their offerings and sacrifices shall be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be known as a house of prayer for all nations.*

Word links clarify the interrelationship of terms and concepts. The foreigners or Gentiles who “hold fast” to Jehovah’s *covenant*, for example, are identical with those who “hold fast” to *righteousness* and *salvation* (vv 1–2)—the two *arms* of God (Isaiah 51:5, 9)—uniting them in a common cause. These adhere to Jehovah and love his name in order to serve him and to be his “servants” or vassals. In its fullest sense, to “serve” Jehovah is thus to serve as proxy saviors to his people. As King Hezekiah offered prayer and sacrificed himself for Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 37:14–20; 38:1–6), so do they.

Covenanting with Jehovah—including sanctifying the Sabbath (vv 2, 4, 6)—thus unites his servants whatever their origins. Coordinating such historical types to determine their *composite* end-time counterparts, we may thus conclude that Jehovah’s “servants” are identical with his “servants” or vassals who are his people’s proxy saviors (Isaiah 63:17; 65:8), with Zion’s watchmen who herald Jehovah’s coming (Isaiah 52:8; 62:6–7), with the kings and queens of the Gentiles who gather his sons and daughters (Isaiah 49:22–23), and with Egypt’s covenanters who “know Jehovah” (Isaiah 19:18–21).

The idea of “loving” or invoking Jehovah’s “name” alludes to temple rites and ordinances through which those who covenant with him come to know Jehovah in person: “In the very passage of your ordinances we anticipate you, O Jehovah; the soul’s desire is to contemplate your name. My soul yearns for you in the night; at daybreak my spirit within me seeks after you. For when your ordinances are on the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness” (Isaiah 26:8–9); “Therefore shall my people come to know my name; in that day [they shall know] that I, who speak, am here” (Isaiah 52:6).

56:8 *Thus says my Lord Jehovah, who gathers up the outcasts of Israel: I will gather others to those already gathered.*

Those whom Jehovah gathers from exile to his “holy mountain” and gladdens in his “house of prayer” (v 7) ultimately include peoples of all nations (Isaiah 2:3; 25:6; 27:13; 30:29; 66:20). Their offerings and sacrifices (v 7) are acceptable on Jehovah’s altar precisely because they are what he requires under the terms of his covenant, more especially the Davidic Covenant (Isaiah 19:21; 38:3; 53:11–12; 60:7; 66:20). Although they are outcasts or exiles among the nations of the world, Jehovah acknowledges them as his people and gathers them home (Isaiah 11:12; 27:12–13; 43:5–8; 45:13; 57:1).

56:9–10 *All you wild beasts, you animals of the forest, come and devour! Their watchmen are altogether blind and unaware; all of them are but dumb watchdogs unable to bark, lolling seers fond of slumber.*

Typifying the leaders of Jehovah’s people who make a Covenant with Death instead of a Covenant of Life (Isaiah 28:15, 18), or Jehovah’s wife who turns adulterous (Isaiah 1:21; 50:1), are certain “watchmen”—prophets and seers—who occupy the highest rung of society. Because they epitomize “dumb watchdogs” and “lolling seers,” Jehovah replaces them with a righteous watchman—his servant—and other watchmen: “Go and appoint a watchman who reports what he sees” (Isaiah 21:6); “I have appointed watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem, who shall not be silent day or night” (Isaiah 62:6).

As the job of Jehovah’s watchmen is to report to his people what they see and hear (Isaiah 21:10; 48:16), those who are blind and unaware see and hear little of consequence and fail to warn his people: “Who is blind but my own servant, or so deaf as the messenger I have sent? Who is blind like those I have commissioned, as uncomprehending as the servant of Jehovah—seeing much but not giving heed, with open ears hearing nothing?” (Isaiah 42:19–20. The final fate of the blind watchmen, literally and figuratively, is to be devoured by wild beasts—a covenant curse (Isaiah 5:29; 15:9; 51:8).

56:11–12 *Gluttonous dogs, and insatiable, such indeed are insensible shepherds. They are all diverted to their own way, every one after his own advantage. Come, [they say,] let us get wine and have our fill of liquor. For tomorrow will be like today, only far better!*

Instead of portraying these watchmen as ones who feed and protect the flock (Isaiah 5:17; 40:11; 63:11), the imagery of shepherds as dogs characterizes them as predators and unclean animals (Psalm 22:16; 1 Kings 14:11; Matthew 7:6). Instead of warning of trouble as Jehovah’s Day of Judgment approaches, they resemble wanton herdsmen who scatter the sheep and feed themselves off the fattest (Jeremiah 23:1–2; 50:6–7; Ezekiel 34:1–8). Instead of serving as proxy saviors to Jehovah’s people under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (Isaiah 37:35; 63:17; 65:8), they look out for themselves.

Word links round out the shepherds’ recriminatory state: “These too have indulged in wine and are giddy with strong drink: priests and prophets have gone astray through liquor. They are intoxicated with wine and stagger because of strong drink; they err as seers, they blunder in their decisions” (Isaiah 28:7); “Procrastinate, and become bewildered; preoccupy yourselves, until you cry for help. Be drunk, but not with wine; stagger, but not from strong drink. Jehovah has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep: he has shut your eyes, the prophets; he has covered your heads, the seers” (Isaiah 29:9–10).

**I**SAIAH 57

Jehovah gathers the righteous from among the

wicked whose practices turn cultic and perverse

57:1–2 *The righteous disappear, and no man gives it a thought; the godly are gathered out, but no one perceives that from impending calamity the righteous are withdrawn. They who walk uprightly shall attain peace, and rest in their beds.*

The term “righteous” or “righteous one” (*saddiq*) connotes individuals rather than a majority of Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 50:10; 56:3), in particular those who emulate his servant who exemplifies *righteousness* (Isaiah 41:2; 51:1, 7). The “godly” (*’anse-hesed*) defines those who have charity, who are true at all times toward others as the Hebrew term *hesed* implies. In the same way that angels delivered Lot from Sodom before its destruction (Genesis 19:15–17), so the kings and queens of the Gentiles—Jehovah’s seraphs/saviors—gather his elect out of destruction (Isaiah 49:22–23; cf. Matthew 24:31).

While the righteous of Jehovah’s people and the nations inherit peace and serenity (v 19; Isaiah 26:3, 12; 32:17–20; 33:20–24; 54:13–14; 55:12; 66:12), the unrighteous find no peace (v 21; Isaiah 47:11; 48:18–19, 22; 59:8). After the righteous are gathered out from destruction, those who remain suffer calamity as Jehovah’s Day of Judgment overtakes them: “I have charged my holy ones, called out my valiant ones: my angeris not upon those who take pride in me” (Isaiah 13:3). Instead of resting in their beds, the unrighteous find no rest (v 20; Isaiah 23:12; 50:11; 54:15; 59:9–10; 65:14–15).

57:3–4 *As for you, come here, you children of the sorceress, offspring of adulterer and harlot! At whose expense do you amuse yourselves? At whom do you open wide the* ***mouth*** *and stick out the* ***tongue****?*

As Jehovah’s Day of Judgment approaches, the wickedness of the wicked and the righteousness of the righteous increase exponentially, ultimately dividing not only Jehovah’s people but the entire world. The anonymous “you” refers to those who have become so alienated from Jehovah as to no longer qualify being identified as his people (v 11; Isaiah 63:16, 19). The term “sorceress” attest to the activities of a satanic cult within Jehovah’s people that is characterized by its devotees’ spiritual and physical adultery as their apostasy and perversity reach their zenith (Isaiah 1:29; 65:2–7; 66:17).

As evil speaking and persecution characterize the wicked not the righteous, so the wicked compulsively oppress the righteous. Using them as scapegoats (Isaiah 61:7; 66:5; cf. Matthew 5:10–12; 23:33–34; John 15:20–21; Revelation 12:13), they even justify themselves that by tyrannizing them they do God a service (John 15:18–21; 16:2). In all respects, the wicked emulate their exemplar—the king of Assyria/Babylon—the *mouth* that mouths off against Jehovah and his people and the *tongue* that accuses them (Isaiah 3:8–9; 37:23–24, 28–29; 54:16–17; cf. Daniel 7:8, 11, 20–26; Revelation 13:3–8).

57:4–6 *Surely you are born of sin, a spurious brood, who burn with lust among the oaks, under every burgeoning tree, slayers of children in the gullies under the crags of rocks. Among the slippery stones of the ravines shall be your fate; they indeed are your lot. To them you pour out libations and make offerings. How shall I be appeased of such things?*

Although different manifestations of apostasy characterize Jehovah’s alienated people, satanic rituals and their desecration of things sacred are most abominable before God. In the same way that these existed in ancient times and led to God’s intervening to destroy the wicked from the earth (Genesis 6:5–7; 18:20; 19:24–25), so they lead to his end-time destruction of the wicked (Isaiah 10:23; 13:4–19; 21:2, 9; 28:22; 54:9–10). Because what goes around comes around, when Jehovah reverses his people’s circumstances “they with their practices and ideas shall be made an end of” (Isaiah 66:17).

57:7–8 *On a lofty mountain you have made prominent your bed, and there you ascend to offer sacrifices. Behind doors and facades you have put up your emblems, and have exposed yourself to [others] than me: mounting your bed, you have laid it wide open. And you bargain with those with whom you love to lie, your hand**on their nakedness.*

Whether implicating Jehovah’s alienated people as a whole or individuals among them, their fornications, literal and figurative, identify them with those who have turned into the Harlot whom Jehovah divorces (Isaiah 1:21; 50:1). She is supplanted by the Daughter of Zion, the loyal wife whom he marries by an everlasting covenant (Isaiah 37:22; 54:5–10). Today’s pornographic imagery, lewd movies, and revealing posters easily qualify as the Harlot’s “emblems” of fornication. The “lofty mountain” alludes to the elite nation of Jehovah’s people from whence she sells her sex and porn to the world.

57:9 *You bathe with oils for the king and increase your perfumes; you send your solicitors far abroad and debase yourself to the depths.*

To whichever paradigm of life Jehovah’s people subscribe—the King of Zion’s or the king of Babylon’s—that paradigm, not their religious affiliation, determines whom they worship. The woman’s consorting with a king other than the King of Zion implies that she has transferred her loyalty to the archtyrant. While her oils and perfumes betray her covenantal allegiance, the woman’s sending her solicitors far abroad denotes her actively marketing her depravity. By so doing, the unfaithful wife—Jehovah’s apostate people—aligns herself, and thus identifies with, the Harlot Babylon (Isaiah 47:15).

57:10–11 *Though wearied by your excessive ways, you have not admitted despair; you have found livelihood, and therefore have not slackened. Yet on whose account are you uneasy and apprehensive, that you pretend and do not mention me, nor even give me a thought? Is it because I have so long kept silent that you no longer fear me?*

Even though the promotion of licentiousness has provided an ample living for her and her ilk, their conscience troubles them. Pretending Jehovah doesn’t exist has until now been a convenient ploy, but it hasn’t succeeded in making him go away—he still seeks after them. Their taking advantage of his longsuffering toward them doesn’t mean he has given up on them: “I held out my handsall the day to a defiant people, who walk in ways that are not good, following their own imagination” (Isaiah 65:2); “They did what was evil in my eyes; they chose to do what was not my will” (Isaiah 66:4).

57:12–13 *But I will expose your fornication and the wantonness of your exploits. When you cry out in distress, let those who flock to you save you! A* ***wind*** *shall carry all of them off; a* ***vapor*** *shall take them away.*

Parallels between the Harlot who typifies Jehovah’s alienated people and the Harlot Babylon include their debauched lifestyles and the fate that befalls them (vv 9, 12–13; Isaiah 47:3, 15). While Jehovah protects and provides for his loyal wife and children (Isaiah 54:13–17), the king of Assyria/Babylon—the chaotic *wind* and *vapor*—resembles an arch-abuser who slays his own (Isaiah 10:7; 14:20–23; 47:9–11). Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure, moreover, develops the idea that in the end, when all middle ground vanishes, all who don’t affiliate with the Woman Zion become a part of the Harlot Babylon.

57:13–14 *But they who seek refuge in me shall possess the earth and receive an inheritance in my holy mountain. It will be said: Excavate, pave a road! Prepare the way; remove the obstacles from the path of my people!*

Contrasting those who perish with the wicked are persons “who seek refuge in me,” who inherit the earth: “You were a refuge for the poor, a shelter for the needy in distress” (Isaiah 25:4; cf. 27:5–6); “Your entire people shall be righteous; they shall inherit the earth forever” (Isaiah 60:21; cf. 33:20). The “road,” “way,” or “path” to Jehovah’s holy mountain takes the form of a new exodus of his righteous people to Zion (Isaiah 27:12–13; 30:29; 35:8–10; 43:19–21; 49:11–12; 66:20). Jehovah’s servant—his *voice* and *mouth*—announces that the time has arrived to “prepare the way” for Jehovah’s coming:

“A voicecalls out, ‘In the desert prepare the way for Jehovah; in the wilderness pave a straight highway for our God: every ravine must be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the uneven ground must become level and rough terrain a plain. For the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed and all flesh see it at once.’ By his mouthJehovah has spoken it” (Isaiah 40:3–5). Certain “obstacles” or “stumbling-blocks (*miksol*) of a spiritual nature, however—including common “stones” or unrepentant sinners—still prevent Jehovah from coming. They now receive the chance to repent or be removed:

“Pass on, go through gates; prepare the way for the people! Excavate, pave a highway cleared of stones; raise the ensignto the nations! Jehovah has made proclamation to the end of the earth: Tell the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your Salvationcomes, his reward with him, his work preceding him’” (Isaiah 62:10–11). The servant’s preparing the way before Jehovah’s coming leads to the formation of a holy people called Zion who take refuge in a place called Zion: “He will come as Redeemer to Zion, to those of Jacob who repent of transgression” (Isaiah 59:20; cf. 4:2–6; 12:6; 14:32; 24:23; 46:11–13).

57:15 *Thus says he who is highly exalted, who abides forever, whose name is sacred: I dwell on high in the holy place, and with him who is humble and lowly in spirit—refreshing the spirits of the lowly, reviving the hearts of the humble.*

As his people’s exemplar, Jehovah typifies all that his people may become. Having undergone a descent phase below all others (Isaiah 53:2–10), Jehovah merits an ascent phase above all others. Nevertheless, those who emulate him and grow in holiness may acquire his divine attributes. As Jehovah is “highly exalted” (*ram wenissa’*), for example (cf. Isaiah 6:1), so his servant becomes “highly exalted” (*yarum wenissa’*) (Isaiah 52:13; cf. 55:5). As Jehovah’s name is “sacred” or “holy,” so he endows his holy ones “with an everlasting name that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah 56:5; cf. 4:3; 62:12; 66:22).

As Jehovah “abides forever,” so his righteous people “inherit the earth forever” (Isaiah 60:21). As he “dwells on high in the holy place,” so those whom Jehovah exalts dwell on high (Isaiah 40:26) and live in the holy city (Isaiah 33:20; 52:1–2; 62:12). Because Jehovah’s dwelling with the “humble and lowly in spirit” is no less literal than his dwelling on high (cf. Isaiah 66:1), his regenerating them empowers them to ultimately “ascend as on eagles’ wings” (Isaiah 40:31) to live in his presence forever (Isaiah 23:18; 24:23; 40:26, 29; 60:14) and to view the earth from above (Isaiah 33:17; cf. 58:14).

57:16 *I will not contend forever, nor always be angry; the spirits and souls I have made would faint before me.*

Although Jehovah does contend and get angry with his people when they transgress, he doesn’t do so “forever” or “always” as all are not on the same spiritual level (Isaiah 12:1; 10:25; 60:10; 64:9). Because he deals with people according to what they are empowered to endure, he expects more from those in higher categories than from those lower. And yet, when people’s wickedness reaches a surfeit, as it did before the Flood, his spirit ceases to strive with man and his judgments follow (Genesis 6:1–13; cf. Isaiah 54:9; 63:1–6). Jehovah suspends his mercy until his justice achieves the desired effect.

57:17–21 *By his sin of covetousness I was provoked; I struck him and hid [my face] in anger**when he strayed by following the ways of his heart. Yet I have seen his conduct and will heal him; I will guide him and amply console him and those who mourn for him, who partake of the fruit of the* ***lips****: Peace, well-being, to those far off and to those who are near, says Jehovah who heals him. But the wicked are like the raging* ***Sea****, unable to rest, whose waters heave up mire and mud: there is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.*

Because Jehovah’s servant, like Moses (Numbers 20:7–12), too, transgresses, Jehovah is initially displeased with him. Still, the servant’s role as a proxy savior of Jehovah’s people under the terms of the Davidic Covenant requires that he answers for their disloyalties, not just his own. Jehovah’s “striking” his servant—which forms a part of his descent phase before Jehovah empowers him—takes the form of the servant’s being “marred beyond human likeness” by his enemies (Isaiah 52:14). But Jehovah “heals him” when the price of his own and his people’s deliverance from destruction is paid.

Isaiah’s paralleling the servant’s “covetousness” with the phrase “when he strayed by following the ways of his heart” identifies one as synonymous with the other. God’s prohibition of covetousness is one of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house or your neighbor’s wife, his manservant or maidservant, neither his ox nor ass or anything of your neighbor” (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21). Because covetousness is a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5)—of wanting something that is contrary to God’s will—it is shortsighted, distrusting of God, and self-destructive.

A reversal of circumstances for Jehovah’s servant and his disciples occurs when the servant repents and fulfills his savior role (Isaiah 49:5–9; 55:3–5; 61:1–3). Those at home and those abroad who “partake of the fruit of the lips”—who receive Jehovah’s word as his servant reveals it (Isaiah 41:27; 48:16; 50:4, 10; 52:15; 55:4)—inherit “peace,” while the wicked, who reject Jehovah’s word (Isaiah 28:14, 22; 30:12; 42:18–24; 65:12; 66:4), inherit “no peace.” Emulating the archtyrant—the chaotic *Sea* that is stirred up against Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 5:30; 17:12; 37:23, 28)—they find no rest.

ISAIAH 58

Relieving the oppressed and observing the Sabbath sanctify fast days and beget covenant blessings

58:1 *Proclaim it aloud without restraint; raise your* ***voice*** *like a* ***trumpet****! Declare to my people their transgressions, to the house of Jacob their sins.*

As the task of Jehovah’s servant is to restore justice in the earth (Isaiah 42:1–4), he informs the Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people of its sins and transgressions (Isaiah 48:1). In that role, he acts as Jehovah’s *voice* to his people: “Who among you fears Jehovah and heeds the voiceof his servant” (Isaiah 50:10). He is likewise the *trumpet* that announces Jehovah’s coming and the *ensign* that rallies them: “All you who live in the world, you inhabitants of the earth, look to the *ensign* when it is lifted up in the mountains; heed the *trumpet*when sounded!” (Isaiah 18:3; emphasis added; cf. 62:10–11).

58:2–3 *Yet they importune me daily, eager to learn my ways, like a nation practicing* ***righteousness*** *and not forsaking the precepts of their God. They inquire of me concerning correct ordinances, desiring to draw nearer to God: Why, when we fast, do you not notice? We afflict our bodies and you remain indifferent!*

The Jacob/Israel category of Jehovah’s people practices an outward form of worship devoid of substance. Going through the motions of religious observance—as if that makes them righteous before God—they still lack true devotion. They fast from food and observe the Sabbath (v 13) but without it benefiting them. When they complain, he responds through his servant—their exemplar of *righteousness*—that the root of their problem is their transgressing his law and word: “It is your iniquities that separate you from your God; your sins hide his face, so that he does not hear you” (Isaiah 59:2; cf. 1:15).

58:3–5 *It is because on your fast day you pursue your own ends and constrain all who toil for you. You fast amid strife and contention, striking out savagely with the fist. Your present fasts are not such as to make your* ***voice*** *heard on high. Is this the manner of fasting I have required, just a time for men to torment themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and making one’s bed of sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, a day of Jehovah’s good graces?*

Those who don’t heed Jehovah’s *voice*—his servant (v 1)—who practice their own form of righteousness instead of emulating Jehovah’s *righteousness* (v 2), can’t benefit from the spiritual salvation wrought by Jehovah nor from the temporal salvation obtained by his servant. Jehovah doesn’t hear them (v 4) and his servant can’t intercede effectually with Jehovah on their behalf as did Hezekiah (Isaiah 37:15–20) so long as they don’t repent. Of itself, fasting is good—drawing a soul nearer to God—but not when it is ostentatious and isn’t backed up by love of God and neighbor, including employees.

58:6–7 *Is not this the fast I require: To release from wrongful bondage, to untie the harness of the* ***yoke****, to set the oppressed at liberty and abolish all forms of subjection? Is it not to share your food with the hungry, to bring home the wretchedly poor, and when you see men underclad to clothe them, and not to neglect your own kin?*

Instead of being a source of oppression to others (v 4), Jehovah’s people should release others from oppression: “Learn to do good; demand justice, stand up for the oppressed” (Isaiah 1:17; cf. 56:1–2). Instead of emulating the archtyrant and his kind—who are a *yoke* around people’s necks (Isaiah 10:27; 14:25)—they should emulate Jehovah’s servant, who releases them from bondage (Isaiah 42:7; 49:9). As Jehovah cares for the poor (Isaiah 14:30; 25:4), and as he frees his people from tyranny (Isaiah 49:24–25; 51:13–14), so should they if they would enjoy his salvation (vv 8–14; Isaiah 1:15–20).

58:8 *Then shall your* ***light*** *break through like the dawn and your healing speedily appear; your* ***righteousness*** *will go before you, and the glory of Jehovah will be your rearguard.*

Although they have sinned against Jehovah and oppressed his people, those who repent and live by his definition of righteousness may yet receive healing and participate in his deliverance. With the coming of Jehovah’s servant, those who repent experience a new dawn and a reversal of their circumstances from curse to blessing. Jehovah sends him as a *light* to enlighten them in his law and word (Isaiah 2:3–5; 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 60:1–2; 62:1). Those who follow righteousness as the servant exemplifies it (Isaiah 41:2; 46:11–13; 51:1, 7; 56:1–2; 61:1–3; 62:1), *righteousness* leads in the new exodus to Zion.

58:9–10 *Then, should you call, Jehovah will respond; should you cry, he will say, I am here. Indeed, if you will banish servitude from among you, and the pointing finger and offensive speech, if you will give of your own to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then shall your* ***light*** *dawn amid* ***darkness*** *and your twilight become as the noonday.*

In many ways, calling upon Jehovah divides the righteous from the wicked. Those who don’t call upon him are the Jacob/Israel category and levels lower: “I was available to those who did not inquire of me; I was accessible to those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here am I; I am here,’ to a nation that did not invoke my name” (Isaiah 65:1; cf. 43:22). Those who call upon Jehovah emulate his servant: “I have raised up one from the north who calls on my name” (Isaiah 41:25; cf. 55:4–6). As they do so, Jehovah assures them “he will graciously respond at the cry of your voice” (Isaiah 30:19; cf. 38:5).

The human virtues that define Jehovah’s righteousness involve an entire paradigm shift away from tolerating servitude, abusiveness, offensive language, and all such symptoms of wickedness to serving others who are in need. With the advent of the servant—Jehovah’s *light* (v 8)—those whose darkness turns to light live to see deliverance from *darkness*—the archtyrant: “Arise, shine, your lighthas dawned; the glory of Jehovah has risen upon you! Although darknesscovers the earth, and a thick mist the peoples, upon you Jehovah will shine; over you his glory shall be visible” (Isaiah 60:1–2; cf. 4:5–6).

58:11 *Jehovah will direct you continually; he will satisfy your needs in the dearth and bring vigor to your limbs. And you will become like a well-watered garden, like a spring of unfailing waters.*

Persons who walk by Jehovah’s *light* and emulate his *righteousness* (v 8) receive personal guidance from God. In the same way that his holy Spirit empowers his servant (Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 48:16; 61:1), so it empowers them: “Your ears shall hear words from behind you saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it!’ should you turn left or right” (Isaiah 30:21; cf. 32:15; 44:3; 59:21). Curse reversals may proceed all the way to physical regeneration and the elimination of death: “No more shall there be infants alive but a few days, or the aged who do not live out their years” (Isaiah 65:20; cf. 25:7–8; 26:19; 66:14).

58:12 *They who came out of you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will restore the foundations of generations ago. You shall be called a rebuilder of fallen walls, a restorer of streets for resettlement.*

Jehovah’s returnees to Zion rebuild the ancient ruins under the direction of his servant: “Who fulfills the word of his servant, accomplishes the aims of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, ‘It shall be reinhabited,’ and of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be rebuilt, their ruins I will restore’” (Isaiah 44:26); “They will rebuild the ancient ruins, raise up the old waste places; they will renew the desolate cities demolished generations ago” (Isaiah 61:4); “Jehovah is comforting Zion, bringing solace to all her ruins; he is making her wilderness like Eden, her desert as the garden of Jehovah.” (Isaiah 51:3).

58:13 *If you will keep your feet from [trampling] the Sabbath—from achieving your own ends on my holy day—and consider the Sabbath a delight, the holy [day] of Jehovah venerable, and if you will honor it by refraining from your everyday pursuits—from occupying yourselves with your own affairs and speaking of [business] matters—*

One of the gravest transgressions with which the servant confronts Jehovah’s people (v 1) is their desecration of the Sabbath. Even Sabbath meetings aren’t acceptable when they don’t spring from personal righteousness: “As for convening meetings at the New Month and on the Sabbath, wickedness with the solemn gathering I cannot approve” (Isaiah 1:13). What characterizes Jehovah’s servants is that they keep the Sabbath Day holy (Isaiah 56:6). As a “sign” between Jehovah and his people (Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12, 20), Sabbath observance is a sure indicator of their loyalty to his covenant.

58:14 *then shall you delight in Jehovah, and I will make you traverse the heights of the earth and nourish you with the heritage of Jacob your father. By his* ***mouth*** *Jehovah has spoken it.*

Individuals who attain higher spiritual categories spontaneously delight in Jehovah: “I rejoice exceedingly in Jehovah; my soul delights in my God. For he clothes me in garments of salvation, he arrays me in a robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10). As they become privileged to receive Jehovah’s highest covenant blessings, they attain his view of the world and their place in it: “Your eyes shall behold the King in his glory and view the expanse of the earth” (Isaiah 33:17). Jehovah’s servant—his *mouth*—expedites their spiritual ascent that ultimately leads to their physical regeneration (v 11; Isaiah 40:31).

ISAIAH 59

Jehovah’s coming spells retribution for predators

and deceivers but deliverance for those who repent

59:1–2 *Surely Jehovah’s* ***hand*** *has not become too short to save, nor his ear dull of hearing! It is your iniquities that separate you from your God; your sins hide his face, so that he does not hear you.*

Those who continue to worship Jehovah though “not in truth or in righteousness” (Isaiah 48:1); who persist in oppressing others and desecrating the Sabbath (Isaiah 58:3–4, 13); who reject Jehovah’s servant who confronts them with these things—his *hand* that he sends to deliver them (Isaiah 50:2; 58:1)—such persons increasingly harden their hearts and grow more alienated until they disqualify themselves from participating in Jehovah’s restoration of his people (Isaiah 6:9–10). Their unrepented sins and iniquities remain with them, cutting them off from Jehovah’s presence (Isaiah 48:18–19).

59:3–4 *For your palms are defiled with blood, your fingers with iniquity; your* ***lips*** *speak guile, your* ***tongue*** *utters duplicity. None calls for* ***righteousness****; no one sues for an honest cause. They rely on empty words, deceitfully spoken; they conceive misdeeds, they beget wickedness.*

Perhaps without realizing how far they have drifted into apostasy, Jehovah’s people pursue a pattern of wickedness until they become irredeemable: “Though you pray at length, I will not hear—your hands are filled with blood” (Isaiah 1:15). That pattern is of the archtyrant—the *lips* that speak guile and the *tongue* that utters duplicity. It is not of Jehovah’s servant, who exemplifies *righteousness* and is forthright of speech (Isaiah 45:19). By now, Jehovah’s alienated people have decided which exemplar they want to emulate, with inevitable consequences to follow (vv 9–11; Isaiah 63:18–19).

The “empty words deceitfully spoken” that Jehovah’s apostate people rely on, and the “misdeeds” or “oppression” (*‘amal*) they conceive in their hearts, have become so habitual that their entire lives are compromised by evil: “The godless utter blasphemy; their heart ponders impiety: how to practice hypocrisy and preach perverse things concerning Jehovah, leaving the hungry soul empty, depriving the thirsty [soul]of drink. And rogues scheme by malevolent means and insidious devices to ruin the poor, and with false slogans and accusations to denounce the needy” (Isaiah 32:6–7; cf. 29:15).

59:5–7 *They hatch vipers’ eggs and spin spiders’ webs; whoever eats of their eggs dies, and if any is smashed, there emerges a serpent. Their cobwebs are useless as clothing; their fabrications are worthless for covering themselves. Their works consist of wrongdoing; they manipulate injurious dealings. Their feet rush after evil; they hasten to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are preoccupied with mischief; havoc and disaster follow in their wake.*

The chaotic ways of the wicked entangle them and their associations in sin like spiders’ webs and breed a concoction toxic to consume. In the day of their deprivation, the schemes they hatched to benefit themselves by depriving others won’t serve to cover their crimes. As it was before the Flood, “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). In this repeat of history, however, Jehovah’s alienated people are the ringleaders of injustice and the catalyst of his Day of Judgment (Isaiah 9:13–19).

59:8 *They are unacquainted with the way of perfection; integrity is not within their bounds. They have made crooked their paths; none who treads them knows peace.*

The “way of perfection” is Jehovah’s way: “I Jehovah your God instruct you to your good, guiding you in the way you should go” (Isaiah 48:17); “The path of the righteous is straight; you pave an undeviating course for the upright” (Isaiah 26:7). Jehovah’s “way” leads into his presence and facilitates his coming to reign on the earth: “Prepare the way; remove the obstacles from the path of my people!” (Isaiah 57:14; cf. 40:3; 62:10). Like the “insensible shepherds” of Jehovah’s people, however, the wicked are “all diverted to their own way, every one after his own advantage” (Isaiah 56:11; cf. 65:2).

The “crooked paths” the wicked make for themselves lead into realms of darkness and destruction (vv 9–10): “They have no desire to walk in his ways or obey his law. So in the heatof his anger he pours out on them the violence of war, till it envelopes them in flames—yet they remain unaware—till it sets them on fire; yet they take it not to heart” (Isaiah 42:24–25; cf. 26:10–11). Their lack of “integrity” or “justice” (*mispat*) hastens Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (vv 15–19; Isaiah 5:23–24; 10:1–3). Those who “tread” or “march” (*dorek*) their own way can never enjoy peace (Isaiah 48:22; 57:20–21).

59:9–11 *Therefore redress remains far from us and* ***righteousness*** *is unable to reach us. We look for* ***light****, but there prevails* ***darkness****; for a glimmer [of hope], but we walk amid gloom. We grope along the borders, like the blind; we flounder like those without eyes. We stumble at noon as in the dark of night; in the prime of life we resemble the dead. We grumble like bears, all of us; we moan incessantly like doves. We expect justice when there is none; [we look] for* ***salvation****, but it eludes us.*

Instead of their *light* breaking through like the dawn, their healing taking effect, and their *righteousness* going before them in the new exodus (Isaiah 58:8), the wicked are left to their own devices. Once the righteous are withdrawn from impending calamity (Isaiah 57:1), the wicked are subjected to the powers of *darkness* (Isaiah 5:30). Those who worked in the dark, thinking to hide their schemes from Jehovah (Isaiah 29:15), are banished into outer darkness (Isaiah 8:22). Those who wrought injustices (Isaiah 5:7) experience Jehovah’s justice instead of his everlasting *salvation* (Isaiah 1:23–24; 51:6).

59:12–13 *For our transgressions before you have multiplied; our sins testify against us. Our offenses are evident; we perceive our iniquities: willfully denying Jehovah, backing away from following our God, perversely planning ways of extortion, conceiving in the mind and pondering illicit transactions.*

Covenant curses coming upon Jehovah’s people who didn’t repent when admonished to do so (Isaiah 55:6–7; 58:1) have their desired effect when they lead to repentance. The first step in that process is to acknowledge one’s transgressions, offenses, sins, and iniquities (Isaiah 6:10). But when backtracking in one’s relationship with Jehovah leads to hypocritical worship and the loss of spiritual light, predatory activities tend to supplant keeping Jehovah’s law and word that are the terms of his covenant. And when things reach that point the road back to Jehovah is long, hard, and painful (Isaiah 64:5–12).

59:14 *And so redress is compelled to back away, and* ***righteousness*** *to stand at a distance; truth stumbles in the public place and uprightness cannot enter.*

As the consequences of transgression set in and those who oppressed others are now themselves oppressed, the full weight of their misdeeds hits home. Because there was no “redress” or ‘justice” (*mispat*) for those whom they wronged, there now exists none for them. Because their righteousness before God was self-righteousness, *righteousness*—Jehovah’s servant—led away the righteous from among them (Isaiah 58:8). As even those who now repent and stand up for the truth are themselves victimized, in such an adversarial climate integrity or uprightness stands little chance of being restored.

59:15–16 *When integrity is lacking, they who shun evil become a prey. Jehovah saw that there was no justice, and it displeased him. When he saw it, he wondered why there was no man, no one who would intercede. So his own* ***arm*** *brought about* ***salvation*** *for him; his* ***righteousness*** *rallied to his cause.*

Even as his people grow ripe for destruction, Jehovah intervenes to deliver those who repent. He appoints his servant—his *arm* of *righteousness*—to restore justice in the earth (Isaiah 42:1–4), to deliver the righteous (Isaiah 51:9–11), to put down the wicked (Isaiah 41:2), and to prepare the way for *salvation*—their Savior (Isaiah 62:11). As the synonymous parallelism of *arm* and *righteousness* identifies one with the other, so a “man,” in the fullest sense of the term, is one who “intercedes” or “intervenes” (*mapgiya‘*) on behalf of others, especially under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (Isaiah 32:1–2).

59:17–18 *He put on* ***righteousness*** *as a breastplate and made* ***salvation*** *the helmet on his head; he clothed himself with* ***vengeance*** *for a garment and wrapped himself in* ***fury*** *as in a robe. According to what they deserve, he will repay them:* ***wrath*** *upon his adversaries,* ***reprisals*** *upon his enemies; to the isles he will render* ***retribution****.*

Jehovah’s righteous warrior aspect grows prominent in his Day of Judgment: “Jehovah will come forth like a warrior, his passions aroused like a fighter; he will give the war cry, raise the shout of victory over his enemies” (Isaiah 42:13); “When my sworddrinks its fill in the heavens, it shall come down on Edom in judgment, on the people I have sentenced to damnation. . . . It is Jehovah’s day of vengeance, the year of retributionon behalf of Zion” (Isaiah 34:5, 8); “For with fireand with his swordshall Jehovah execute judgment on all flesh, and those slain by Jehovah shall be many” (Isaiah 66:16).

Executing Jehovah’s judgment upon a wicked world are (1) the king of Assyria/Babylon, who personifies Jehovah’s *vengeance*, *fury*, *wrath*, and *reprisals* or retribution (Isaiah 10:5–6; 34:2); (2) Jehovah’s servant, who personifies his *arm* of *righteousness* (vv 16–17; Isaiah 41:2; 51:9); and (3) Jehovah himself, who personifies his people’s *salvation* (vv 16–17; Isaiah 12:2; 62:11). Jehovah’s Day of Judgment thus portends his coming in person when the earth has been cleansed of wickedness: “See, your God is coming to avenge and to reward; God himself will come and deliver you” (Isaiah 35:4; cf. v 20).

59:19–20 *From the west men will fear Jehovah Omnipotent, and from the rising of the sun his glory. For he will come [upon them] like a hostile* ***torrent*** *impelled by the Spirit of Jehovah. But he will come as Redeemer to Zion, to those of Jacob who repent of transgression, says Jehovah.*

Deliverance and destruction characterize the time of Jehovah’s coming to reign on the earth. Destruction overtakes “enemies” and “adversaries” (v 18)—whether those of his own people (Isaiah 1:24; 26:11) or the nations (Isaiah 41:11; 42:13)—all who violate the rights of his elect. Upon them Jehovah sends a hostile “torrent” or “river” (*nahar*)—the king of Assyria/Babylon at the height of his power (Isaiah 7:20; 8:7). Redemption comes to the Zion/Jerusalem category of Jehovah’s people and levels higher, including persons in the Jacob/Israel category who repent of transgression (cf. Isaiah 1:27).

59:21 *As for me, this is my* ***covenant*** *with them, says Jehovah: My Spirit which is upon you and my words which I have placed in your* ***mouth*** *shall not depart from your* ***mouth****, nor from the* ***mouth*** *of your offspring, nor from the* ***mouth*** *of their offspring, says Jehovah, from now on and forever.*

The endowment of Jehovah’s people with his holy Spirit (Isaiah 32:15; 44:3) forms that part of Jehovah’s millennial covenant that resembles his covenant with the Levites (2 Chronicles 35:2–3; Nehemiah 8:9). As the priests and Levites served as teachers to Jehovah’s peoples, so his servants serve as priests and teachers to the nations (Isaiah 61:6; 66:19–21). Because the terms *covenant* and *mouth* additionally designate Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 42:6; 49:2, 8; 51:16; 55:3), the servant’s millennial ministry, as characterized by Jehovah’s Spirit (Isaiah 11:1–9; 42:1–4; 48:14–17; 61:1–6), continues generationally.

ISAIAH 60

At the return to Zion of kings and peoples, Jehovah transforms the land and the millennial age begins

60:1–2 *Arise, shine, your* ***light*** *has dawned; the glory of Jehovah has risen upon you! Although* ***darkness*** *covers the earth, and a thick mist the peoples, upon you Jehovah will shine; over you his glory shall be visible.*

An **a**1–**b**–**a**2 mini-chiasm in these verses contrasts the destinies of the righteous and the wicked: for those who repent and follow Jehovah’s paradigm of righteousness (cf. Isaiah 58:6–7), the *light* dawns as promised (cf. Isaiah 58:8, 10)—**a**1; those who choose not to repent, on the other hand, remain in *darkness* spiritually (cf. Isaiah 5:20; 26:10–11) and physically (cf. Isaiah 8:22; 59:9), subject to the power of the king of Assyria/Babylon—**b**; and Jehovah’s glory—the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night that signifies his presence (cf. Exodus 40:34–38; Isaiah 4:5)—rests on those drawn to his *light*—**a**2.

The term “light,” moreover, is a word link to Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6), to Jehovah’s law and word (Isaiah 50:10; 51:4), and to those drawn to his light (Isaiah 2:5; 9:2–3) who return in the new exodus to Zion (Isaiah 42:16; 58:8). Contrasting fates of the righteous and wicked in Part VII of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure (Isaiah 34–35; 60–66) reveal the polarization of peoples that occurs when the servant fulfills his mission. The term “arise”—a word link to those who “rise” from the dead (Isaiah 26:19)—alludes to the righteous dead participating with the living at the earth’s millennial dawn.

60:3–4 *Nations will come to your* ***light****, their kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you! They have all assembled to come to you: your sons shall arrive from afar; your daughters shall return to your side.*

As noted, those who return from exile in the new exodus are two categories of people: (1) spiritual kings and queens of the Gentiles—seraphs/saviors who minister to Jehovah’s people; and (2) persons who ascend to the son/servant level: “I will lift up my handto the nations, raise my ensignto the peoples; and they will bring your sons in their bosoms and carry your daughters on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, queens your nursing mothers” (Isaiah 49:22–23; cf. 11:10–12, 15–16); “Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth” (Isaiah 43:6; cf. 41:8–9; 49:12).

While the kings and queens of the Gentiles serve as saviors to Jehovah’s people under the terms of the Davidic Covenant, Jehovah acknowledges those whom they escort home as his “sons” and “daughters.” Other scriptures, moreover, identify those in the first category as “saviors,” “servants,” and “angels” and those in the second as Jehovah’s “elect” (Obadiah 1:21; Revelation 7:1–8; 14:1; Matthew 24:31). Although many in both categories may have lost their Israelite identity, all are Jehovah’s people, fulfilling his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that nations and kings would descend from them:

“I will make you into nations; kings shall come out of you” (Genesis 17:6); “A nation and a company of nations shall stem from you; kings shall come out of your loins” (Genesis 35:11); “Thus says Jehovah, ‘Perform justice and righteousness. Release those who are exploited from the power of their oppressors. Do no wrong; do no violence to the alien, fatherless, or widow. Shed no innocent blood in this place. If you do this indeed, then shall enter through the gates of this house kings who sit on David’s throne riding in chariots and on horses, he and his servants and his people’” (Jeremiah 22:3–4).

60:5 *Then, when you see it, your face will light up, your heart swell with awe: the multitude of the* ***Sea*** *shall resort to you; a host of nations shall enter you.*

Those at home welcome those who return from abroad in a great homecoming of Jehovah’s dispersed peoples including Israel’s lost Ten Tribes (Isaiah 11:11–12; 26:2; 41:8–9; 43:5–7; 49:21–22). The expression “multitude of the Sea” suggests that they have escaped the power of the king of Assyria/Babylon who held them captive (Isaiah 10:24–26; 11:15–16; 43:16–17; 49:8–12, 24–25; 51:9–11). Its parallel—“host of nations/Gentiles”—infers that remnants of many nations in the end comprise Jehovah’s elect people who return to Zion (Isaiah 2:2, 4; 11:10–12; 24:13–15; 42:1, 6; 49:6, 22).

60:6–7 *A myriad of camels shall cover your land, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and frankincense and heralding the praises of Jehovah. All Kedar’s flocks will gather to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they shall be accepted as offerings on my altar, and thus I will make glorious my house of glory.*

Codenames of nations and animal imagery depict the return and gathering of Jehovah’s elect to his millennial temple. The verb “serve” or “minister” (*srt*) forms a word link: (1) to the kings of the Gentiles who serve or “minister” to Jehovah’s people (v 10); (2) to the foreigners who desire to “serve” him (Isaiah 56:6); and (3) to those whom Jehovah’s servant ordains to the holy priesthood (Isaiah 61:3, 6–7)—inferring that all belong to the same spiritual category. Their self-sacrifice under the terms of the Davidic Covenant brings about the deliverance of those whom they serve (Isaiah 63:17; 65:8–9).

*They shall be accepted as offerings on my altar.* In the similitude of the Israelites who brought animal sacrifices to Jehovah’s temple anciently, these proxy saviors on Isaiah’s seraph level bring Jehovah’s elect safely in the new exodus to Zion. Having sacrificed themselves under the terms of the Davidic Covenant in answering to Jehovah for the disloyalties of those to whom they minister, they win their deliverance from destruction in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. Word links identify these seraphs–saviors as Jehovah’s “servants”: “Their offerings and sacrifices shall be accepted on my altar” (Isaiah 56:7).

60:8–9 *Who are these, aloft like clouds, flying as doves to their portals? From the isles they are gathering to me, the ships of Tarshish in the lead, to bring back your children from afar, and with them their silver and gold, to Jehovah Omnipotent, your God, to the Holy One of Israel, who has made you illustrious.*

Continuing the imagery of animals to depict those who return from exile, doves again represent the “children” or “sons” (*banim*) of Jehovah’s people of Isaiah’s son/servant category. By land, air, and sea they gather to Jehovah, now present in his temple (vv 3–9; Isaiah 2:2–3; 56:5, 8; 66:18–20). Similarly, although his people’s “silver and gold” are intended literally, precious metals (vv 6, 9, 17), too, symbolize persons in the son/servant category (Isaiah 1:25–26; 13:12; 48:10)—those whom Jehovah “makes illustrious” or gloriously endows after the pattern of his servant (Isaiah 4:2; 52:1; 55:5; 61:1–4).

60:10–11 *Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will minister to you. Though I struck you in anger, I will gladly show you mercy. Your gates shall always remain open; they shall not be shut day or night, that a host of nations may be brought to you and their kings escorted in.*

Parallelism of the “kings” who minister to Jehovah’s people with the “foreigners” who rebuild the walls and the “host of nations/Gentiles” who are brought confirms that many of Jehovah’s people who return in the new exodus lost their identity as Israelites during 2700 years of exile and dispersion. For them to attain Isaiah’s seraph and son/servant categories of Jehovah’s people nevertheless implies that they prove loyal to Jehovah through successive descent phases of trials before they ascend spiritually and reconstitute his millennial covenant people (Isaiah 30:18–20; 35:3–4; 48:10; 54:6–8).

60:12 *And the nation or kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; such nations shall be utterly ruined.*

When death is done away and “the veil that veils all peoples” is removed from humanity (Isaiah 25:7–8), all spiritual categories of people will appear as they are, some more glorious than others. Under those circumstances, the lesser pay tribute to the greater so that thereby the lesser too may ascend to higher states of being. Upon the kingdom of God on the earth being organized into a hierarchy of spirits according to the heavenly pattern, peoples in lower categories serve those in upper ones who minister to them (Isaiah 23:18; 61:6–7). To deviate from that pattern is to invite covenant curses.

60:13–14 *The splendor of Lebanon shall become yours—cypresses, pines, and firs together—to beautify the site of my sanctuary, to make glorious the place of my feet. The sons of those who tormented you will come bowing before you; all who reviled you will prostrate themselves at your feet. They will call you the City of Jehovah, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.*

As Jehovah reverses his people’s circumstances and implements his reign of peace on the earth, their lands assume a paradisiacal glory: “The desert shall rejoice when it blossoms like crocus. Joyously it shall break out in flower, singing with delight; it shall be endowed with the glory of Lebanon, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon. The glory of Jehovah and the splendor of our God they shall see [there]” (Isaiah 35:1–2). Jehovah’s “sanctuary” is not only the place to which his people return in the new exodus (v 7) but also where they continue to come on pilgrimages (Isaiah 2:2–3; 56:7–8; 66:18–23).

Persons who “come bowing” before Jehovah’s holy ones and “prostrate themselves” to them are among those who survive Jehovah’s Day of Judgment who didn’t return in the new exodus but who repented of wickedness on account of the curses they endured (Isaiah 59:12–13; 64:5–12). In the end, they or their offspring acknowledge their error and honor those whom they reviled. A dichotomy thus occurs among the assimilated Israelites—between the spiritual kings and queens of the Gentiles who attain seraph status and those who persecuted them (Isaiah 45:14; 49:23; 61:5–7; 65:13–15; 66:5).

Only persons who acquire Jehovah’s divine attributes may live in his city: “Awake, arise; clothe yourself with power, O Zion! Put on your robes of glory, O Jerusalem, holy city. No more shall the uncircumcised and defiled enter you” (Isaiah 52:1); “The nations shall behold your righteousness and all their rulers your glory; you shall be called by a new name conferred by the mouthof Jehovah. Then shall you be a crown of glory in the handof Jehovah. . . . They shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of Jehovah; and you shall be known as in demand, a city never deserted” (Isaiah 62:2–3, 12).

60:15–16 *Although you had been forsaken and abhorred, with none passing through [your land], yet I will make you an everlasting pride, the joy of generation after generation. You will suck the milk of the nations, suckling at the breasts of kings. Then shall you know that I, Jehovah, am your Savior, that your Redeemer is the Valiant One of Jacob.*

A millennial ascent phase “of generation after generation” follows a centuries-long descent phase for many of Jehovah’s people. The antithetical themes of Isaiah’s Seven-Part Structure now find resolution as ruin gives way to rebirth, punishment to deliverance, humiliation to exaltation, suffering to salvation, and disinheritance to inheritance—all contingent on rebellion yielding to compliance and disloyalty to loyalty. In the end, those who ascend “know” their Savior and Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel (v 14) and Valiant One of Jacob. Having become like him, they live in his glorious presence.

Word links show that the kings who reign with Jehovah in the millennial age of peace are those same spiritual kings and their queens on the seraph level who serve as proxy saviors to Jehovah’s people under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (vv 3, 10–11, 16–17; Isaiah 32:1; 49:7, 23; 52:15). Such come to “know” Jehovah through their sacrifice of all things in his cause (Isaiah 19:21–22). They fulfill Zechariah’s prophecy that “the house of David will be as God, as the angel of Jehovah before them” to defend his people (Zechariah 12:8; cf. Isaiah 51:9; 55:3; 58:8; Matthew 24:31; Revelation 20:6).

60:17–18 *In place of copper I will bring gold, in place of iron, silver; in place of wood I will bring copper, in place of stones, iron. I will make peace your rulers and* ***righteousness*** *your oppressors: tyranny shall no more be heard of in your land, nor dispossession or disaster within your borders; you will regard* ***salvation*** *as your walls and homage as your gates.*

Reflecting the ascent of many people to higher spiritual categories, and the disappearance from the earth of the lowest, is the upgrade of construction supplies and beautifying materials: “I will lay antimony for your building stones and sapphires for your foundations; I will make your skylights of jacinth, your gates of carbuncle, and your entire boundary of precious stones” (Isaiah 54:11–12). As Jehovah’s people “renew the desolate cities demolished generations ago” (Isaiah 61:4; cf. 44:26; 58:12), the rebuilding of ruins proceeds on an entirely new footing that parallels the earth’s paradisiacal glory.

Where world rulers had been people’s oppressors, peace and righteousness take their place: “The effect of justice shall be peace and the result of righteousness an assured calm forever” (Isaiah 32:17). Where there had been tyranny and dispossession, salvation reigns: “Let the skies overflow with righteousness. Let the earth receive it and salvationblossom; let righteousnessspring up forthwith” (Isaiah 45:8); “Our city is strong; salvationhe has set up as walls and barricades” (Isaiah 26:1). The reign of *salvation* and *righteousness*—Jehovah and his servant—characterizes the entire millennial age:

“When oppressors are no more and violence has ceased, when tyrants are destroyed from the earth, then, in loving kindness, shall a throne be set up in the abode of David, and in faithfulnessa judge sit on it who will maintain justice and expedite righteousness” (Isaiah 16:4–5); “That sovereignty may be extended and peace have no end; that, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, [his rule]may be established and upheld by justice and righteousness from this time forth and forever” (Isaiah 9:7); “My *salvation*shall be everlasting; my *righteousness*shall never fail” (Isaiah 51:6; emphasis added).

60:19–20 *No longer shall the sun be your light by day, nor the brightness of the moon your illumination at night: Jehovah will be your everlasting* ***light*** *and your God your radiant glory. Your sun shall set no more, nor your moon wane: to you Jehovah shall be an endless* ***light*** *when your days of mourning are fulfilled.*

Upon the earth’s attaining its paradisiacal splendor (Isaiah 35:1–2; 51:3)—reflecting its inhabitants’ ascent to higher spiritual levels (Isaiah 4:2–3; 40:31)—and upon its assuming a new orbit after being displaced (Isaiah 13:13; 51:16), the light illuminating the earth intensifies accordingly. As Jehovah’s establishes his millennial kingdom on the earth, his presence graces its inhabitants night and day, the brightness that radiates from him reflecting heaven itself. His people’s seemingly endless “days of mourning”—their erstwhile descent phase—give way to an ascent phase basked in his endless *Light*.

The lesser *light*—Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6) who prepared the way before Jehovah (vv 1–3; Isaiah 2:5; 9:2; 40:1–5; 42:16; 51:4–5; 58:8–10; 62:1)—thus yields to the greater *Light* when Israel’s God comes in his glory. Like the dawning of the morning before the sun rises above the horizon, the servant’s mission ushered in the earth’s millennial age. Among the world’s pure in heart a consciousness of a new epoch dawned within their souls as the servant revealed the “new things” that portended Jehovah’s imminent coming (Isaiah 41:27; 42:9; 43:19–20; 48:6–7, 16; 52:7; 61:1–2; 65:17–18).

60:21–22 *Your entire people shall be righteous; they shall inherit the earth forever—they are the branch I have planted, the work of my* ***hands****, in which I am glorified. The least of them shall become a clan, the youngest a mighty nation. I Jehovah will hasten it in its time.*

Those of Jehovah’s people who attain his standard of righteousness fulfill God’s plan for his children by inheriting the earth forever (Isaiah 57:13b; 58:14). Based on the principle of “the one and the many,” the “branch” (*neser*) that grows from the graft in Isaiah’s mini olive tree allegory (Isaiah 11:1)—Jehovah’s servant and those whom he represents—blossoms into the fruit-bearing “branch (*neser*) of Jehovah’s redeemed people (Isaiah 4:2–3; 27:6; 37:31). Released from Jehovah’s *hand* of punishment by his *hand* of deliverance, they grow into fathers of nations as was Abraham (cf. Genesis 17:4–5).

ISAIAH 61

For having endured shame those whom Jehovah’s servant endows receive a twofold millennial inheritance

61:1–2 *The Spirit of my Lord Jehovah is upon me, for Jehovah has anointed me to announce good tidings to the lowly; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the eyes to the bound, to herald the year of Jehovah’s* ***favor*** *and the day of* ***vengeance*** *of our God,*

Word links to Jehovah’s servant in Book of Isaiah tie this passage indissolubly to the servant’s end-time mission of restoring Jehovah’s people as does chapter 61 itself. Jehovah’s “anointing” his servant leads directly to his being filled with Jehovah’s Spirit, as with King David: “Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brethren. And the Spirit of Jehovah came upon David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 16:13). But when creating *composites* of types from the past to depict the servant’s restoration of Jehovah’s people, Isaiah may render their historical types incomplete.

Earlier, for example, Isaiah divides the above type in two: “Thus says Jehovah to his *anointed*, to Cyrus, whom I grasp by the right hand. . . . It is I who rightfully raise him up, who facilitate his every step; he will rebuild my city and set free my exiles without price or bribe” (Isaiah 45:1, 13; emphasis added); “My servant whom I sustain, my chosen one in whom I delight, him I have *endowed* *with my Spirit*; he will dispense justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1; emphasis added). Yet, these two incomplete types appear in parallel in chapters 41–46’s chiastic chaos/creation pattern to identify Jehovah’s servant.

Word links also connect the servant’s heralding good tidings, releasing captives, and opening of eyes: “How comely upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger announcing peace, who brings tidings of good, who heralds salvation, saying to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isaiah 52:7); “To Zion, he shall be its harbinger; I will appoint him as a herald of good tidings to Jerusalem” (Isaiah 41:27); “I have created you and appointed you to be a covenantfor the people, a lightto the nations, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from confinement and from prison those who sit in darkness” (Isaiah 42:6).

Jesus’ applying a part of these verses to himself, however (Luke 4:16–21), is appropriate, as Jehovah/Jesus acts as exemplar to his servant and to all who serve as proxy saviors under the terms of the Davidic Covenant. Jesus nevertheless stops short of applying all of verses 1–2 to himself. Like Isaiah’s prophecy as a whole, “the day of vengeanceof our God” is an *end-time* event (Isaiah 13:6–13; 59:17–20). Its conjunction with the “year of Jehovah’s favor” means that deliverance for Jehovah’s righteous people occurs at the very time the king of Assyria/Babylon destroys the wicked (Isaiah 34:8; 63:4).

61:2–3 *to comfort all who mourn: to endow those who mourn in Zion, bestowing upon them a priestly headpiece in place of ashes, the festal anointing in place of mourning, a resplendent robe in place of a downcast spirit. They shall be called oaks of* ***righteousness*** *planted by Jehovah for his glory.*

As Jehovah comforts and endows his servant, so the servant comforts and endows those who mourn in Zion: “At a favorable time I have answered you; in the day of salvationI have come to your aid: I have created you and appointed you to be a covenantof the people, to restore the Land and reapportion the desolate estates, to say to the captives, ‘Come forth!’ and to those in darkness, ‘Show yourselves!’” (Isaiah 49:8–9); “‘Comfort and give solace to my people,’ says your God; ‘speak kindly to Jerusalem. Announce to her that she has served her term, that her guilt has been expiated’” (Isaiah 40:1).

Mourners in Zion mourn not for themselves but (1) for the apostasy of Jehovah’s people and its aftermath: “Turn your attention from me, though I weep bitterly; hasten not to comfort me at the ruin of the Daughter of my People” (Isaiah 22:4); (2) for Jehovah’s servant and his ill-treatment by Jehovah’s alienated people: “I will heal him; I will guide him and amply console him and those who mourn for him” (Isaiah 57:18); and (3) for Jehovah’s wife who was anciently cast off: “Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all who love her; join in her celebration, all who mourn for her” (Isaiah 66:10).

A disparity thus exists between Jehovah’s elect, who constitute the Woman Zion, and Jehovah’s people “in Zion” who comprise the apostates of his people. That disparity is resolved by taking into account the existence of two end-time groups of Jehovah’s people: (1) the former wife who repents—the Woman Zion—whom Jehovah remarries (Isaiah 54:1, 5–6); and (2) the current adulterous wife whom he casts off (Isaiah 50:1), who becomes identified with the Harlot Babylon. Still, Jehovah’s end-time servants who restore Jehovah’s people of the first group themselves originate in the second group.

Jehovah’s servant anoints and clothes these servants in priestly garments as Moses anointed and clothed Aaron and his sons (cf. v 10; Leviticus 8:1–13, 30), empowering them to serve as Zion’s proxy saviors. Called “oaks of *righteousness*” (v 3; emphasis added), they typify the fruits of the servant’s labors in preparing the way for Jehovah’s coming as *salvation* (Isaiah 56:1; 62:1). John, in his depiction of such a divine empowerment prior to Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, speaks of an angel ascending from the east who ministers to 144,000 servants of God (Revelation 7:1–4; cf. 14:1–5; Isaiah 66:19).

61:4–5 *They will rebuild the ancient ruins, raise up the old waste places; they will renew the desolate cities demolished generations ago. Aliens will tend and pasture your flocks; foreigners will be your farmhands and vinedressers.*

An integral part of the mission of Jehovah’s servant is to reapportion lands and rebuild ruined cities that Jehovah’s people inhabit during the millennial age: “You shall spread abroad to the right and to the left; your offspring shall dispossess the nations and resettle the desolate cities” (Isaiah 54:3; cf. 44:26; 49:19). The servant thus follows the type of Joshua, who assigned Israel’s tribes their inheritances when they conquered the Land of Canaan (Joshua 11:23; Isaiah 49:8; 58:12). In that day, descendants of former captors and oppressors become servants to Jehovah’s servants (vv 6–9; Isaiah 14:2; 60:14).

61:6–7 *But you shall be called the priests of Jehovah and referred to as the ministers of our God. You shall feed on the wealth of the nations and be gratified with their choicest provision. Because their shame was twofold, and shouted insults were their lot, therefore in their land shall their inheritance be twofold and everlasting joy be theirs.*

Those who minister to Jehovah’s people as his priests are the spiritual kings of the Gentiles on the seraph level who function as proxy saviors to Jehovah’s people under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (Isaiah 49:23; 52:15; 60:3–11). Before Jehovah’s servant empowers them in the holy priesthood (v 3), they suffer “twofold shame” at the hands of Jehovah’s alienated people: (1) through no sin of theirs, though others accuse them; and (2) because they emulate the servant in bearing the iniquities of Jehovah’s repentant people when obtaining their temporal salvation (Isaiah 49:7–12; 53:11; 65:8–9).

As the servant follows the pattern of Jehovah’s descent phase by being “despised as a person” and “abhorred by his nation” before Jehovah reverses his circumstances (Isaiah 49:7; 53:3–4), so do Jehovah’s servants: “Hear the word of Jehovah, you who are vigilant for his word: Your brethren who abhor you, and exclude you because of my name, say, ‘Let Jehovah manifest his glory, that we may see cause for your joy!’ But it is they who shall suffer shame” (Isaiah 66:5). In the end, those who were shamed receive the “twofold inheritance” of birthright sons (Deuteronomy 21:15–17; Isaiah 65:13–14).

61:8–9 *For I Jehovah love just dealings—but I abhor extortion in [those who] sacrifice—and I will appoint them a sure reward; I will make with them an eternal* ***covenant****. Their offspring shall be renowned among the nations, their posterity in the midst of the peoples; all who see them will acknowledge that they are of the lineage Jehovah has blessed.*

Fundamental to whether the sacrifices of those who serve as proxy saviors to Jehovah’s people are acceptable is whether they are backed up by personal righteousness. Acts of extortion or exploitation by Jehovah’s alienated people mark them as hypocrites and render their sacrifices unacceptable (Isaiah 1:11–15). The “sure reward” Jehovah appoints his servants who live amidst their persecutors’ façade of righteousness consists of an “eternal covenant”—his “loving fidelity toward David” (Isaiah 55:3)—the unconditional covenant an emperor makes with his vassals who prove loyal under all conditions.

Not only those for whom Jehovah’s servants function as proxy saviors under the Davidic Covenant but also their own descendants are blessed of God because of their parents’ righteousness: “The lifetime of my people shall be as the lifetime of a tree; my chosen ones shall outlast the work of their hands. They shall not exert themselves in vain, or bear children doomed for calamity. For they are of the lineage of those Jehovah has blessed, and their posterity with them” (Isaiah 65:22–23). In them is Jehovah’s blessing of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob fulfilled (Genesis 17:1–8; 22:16–18; 26:1–4; 35:9–12).

61:10 *I rejoice exceedingly in Jehovah; my soul delights in my God. For he clothes me in garments of* ***salvation****, he arrays me in a robe of* ***righteousness****—like a bridegroom dressed in priestly attire, or a bride adorned with her jewels.*

As appears from the singular personal pronouns “I,” “me,” and “my,” only righteous individuals fulfill the terms of the Davidic Covenant and accomplish the restoration of Jehovah’s people. As kings and priests to God, they attain a similar degree of righteousness to that of Jehovah’s servant, becoming instruments of salvation to Jehovah’s people. The marriage covenant the kings and queens of the Gentiles exemplify, in which “jewels” signify posterity, is ultimately inherent in all ascent to higher spiritual levels (v 9; Isaiah 49:17–18, 23; 62:5; cf. Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:4–6; 1 Corinthians 11:11).

61:11 *For as the earth brings forth its vegetation, and as a garden causes what is sown to spring up in it, so will my Lord Jehovah cause* ***righteousness*** *and praise to spring up in the presence of all nations.*

The process of creating a bounteous garden—from planting to harvest—parallels the growth and maturation of righteousness and the fruits of *righteousness* among Jehovah’s elect: “As the rains and snows descend from the sky, and return not to it without watering the earth, to render it fertile and fruitful—providing seed for the sower and food for the eater—so is the word that leaves my mouth: it does not return to me empty; it accomplishes what I desire, achieves the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10–11; cf. 45:8). So, likewise, the mission of Jehovah’s servant to all nations finally attains its goal.

ISAIAH 62

Zion/Jerusalem’s watchmen cry to Jehovah day and night as they prepare the way for Jehovah’s coming

62:1 *For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent; for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain still till her* ***righteousness*** *shines like a* ***light****, her* ***salvation*** *like a flaming* ***torch***.

Fulfilling the role of intercessors with God in the pattern of proxy saviors under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (cf. Isaiah 37:15–20, 33–36; 38:2–6) are Jehovah’s watchmen who plead on behalf of his people until their restoration is accomplished (vv 6–7). Jehovah’s servant sets the standard by exemplifying Jehovah’s *righteousness* and serving as their *light* (Isaiah 41:2; 42:6; 46:11–13; 49:6), facilitating Jehovah coming as *salvation* like a “flaming torch” (v 11; Isaiah 10:17; 12:2; 43:11–12; cf. Genesis 15:17). In effect, as soon as his people proximate the servant’s righteousness, Jehovah comes.

In that sense, many things that describe the servant may apply also to Zion’s watchmen—those servants whom Jehovah raises up who unitedly accomplish his people’s restoration. These individuals—as inferred from the personal pronoun “I”—pass through many of the same or similar experiences the servant does, so that, based on the principle of “the one and the many,” even their identities come close to merging: as he calls on the name of Jehovah, so do they (vv 6–7; Isaiah 41:25); as he declares good tidings, so do they (v 11; Isaiah 52:7–8); as he suffers affronts, so do they (Isaiah 50:6–7; 61:7).

62:2 *The nations shall behold your* ***righteousness*** *and all their rulers your glory; you shall be called by a new name conferred by the* ***mouth*** *of Jehovah.*

Jehovah’s glory rests on his people at the time he comes to reign among them (Isaiah 4:5; 24:23; 60:1–2). His people, too, however, ascend to glory: “From a sector of the earth we hear singing: ‘Glorious are the righteous!” (Isaiah 24:16); “In that day the plantof Jehovah shall be beautiful and glorious, and the earth’s fruit the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel” (Isaiah 4:2). The servant’s establishing righteousness among Jehovah’s people leads to their attaining higher spiritual levels, as signified by the new name he gives them (Isaiah 56:5; 65:15; 66:22) with its accompanying new commission.

62:3–4 *Then shall you be a crown of glory in the* ***hand*** *of Jehovah, a royal diadem in the palm of your God. You shall no more be called the forsaken one, nor your land referred to as desolate; you shall be known as she in whom I delight and your land considered espoused. For Jehovah shall delight in you, and your land shall be espoused.*

Because God’s “glory” subsists in the consummation of his plan to glorify the earth and its inhabitants (Isaiah 6:3; 25:1; 40:13; 46:11), all culminates with a millennial people who glorify God by their righteousness. Representing the locations of Zion and Jerusalem and their peoples (v 1), they are a “crown of glory” and “royal diadem” wrought by Jehovah’s *hand*—his servant whom he appoints to restore his people (Isaiah 49:5–8). Espousal of land and people denotes an enduring covenant relationship and a reversal of circumstances for those so blessed (Isaiah 49:13–18; 54:4–10; 60:15; 65:17–19).

62:5 *As a young man weds a virgin, so shall your sons wed you; as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*

A great wedding feast marks the unconditional covenant Jehovah makes with his people and with individuals (cf. Isaiah 54:5–10; 55:3). Returnees from exile (Isaiah 43:6–7; 49:22; 60:4) marry those at home. Joy and rejoicing characterize all whom Jehovah redeems at his coming: “Rejoice, then, and be glad forever in what I create. See, I create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will delight in Jerusalem, rejoice in my people” (Isaiah 65:18–19); “This is our God, whom we expected would save us. This is Jehovah for whom we have waited; let us joyfully celebrate his salvation!” (Isaiah 25:9).

62:6–7 *I have appointed watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem, who shall not be silent day or night. You who call upon Jehovah, let not up nor give him respite till he reestablishes Jerusalem and makes it renowned in the earth.*

Persons whom Jehovah appoints as “watchmen on your walls” are those who serve as proxy saviors to his people under the terms of the Davidic Covenant—who obtain the temporal salvation of those to whom they minister. They labor incessantly for his people’s restoration and intercede with him for their divine protection (cf. v 1). Like Jehovah’s servant, they report what they see and hear (Isaiah 21:6–10) and proclaim Jehovah’s coming: “Hark! Your watchmen lift up their voice; as one they cry out for joy: for they shall see eye to eye when Jehovah returns [to]Zion” (Isaiah 52:8; cf. v 11; 27:13).

62:8–9 *Jehovah has sworn by his* ***right hand****, his mighty* ***arm****: I will no more let your grain be food for your enemies, nor shall foreigners drink the new wine you have toiled for. Those who harvest it shall eat it, giving praise to Jehovah; those who gather it shall drink it within the environs of my sanctuary.*

Covenant curse reversals abound during the earth’s millennial age when Jehovah reigns among his people. Coming out from under bondage to sin and from oppression by enemies, his people receive inheritances of land and enjoy their fruits. Believing Jehovah’s promise of better times, they make themselves eligible for it: “If you are willing and obey, you shall eat the good of the land” (Isaiah 1:19); “When men build houses, they will dwell in them; when they plant vineyards, they will eat their fruit. They shall not build so that others may dwell, or plant so that others may eat” (Isaiah 65:21–22).

The identity of Jehovah’s *right hand* as his mighty *arm* typifies many such synonymously paralleled metaphorical pseudonyms of Jehovah’s servant: *arm/righteousness* (Isaiah 51:5; 59:16); *righteousness/light* (Isaiah 58:8; 59:9; 62:1); *light/covenant* (Isaiah 42:6); *righteousness/mouth* (Isaiah 45:23); *mouth/hand* (Isaiah 51:16); *righteousness/right hand* (Isaiah 41:10); *right hand/hand* (Isaiah 48:13); *hand/ensign* (Isaiah 11:11–12; 49:22); *ensign/flagstaff* (Isaiah 30:17); *ensign/trumpet* (Isaiah 18:3); *trumpet/voice* (Isaiah 58:1); *voice/arm/fire* (Isaiah 30:30); *fire/sword/ensign* (Isaiah 31:8–9); and so forth.

62:10–11 *Pass on, go through gates; prepare the way for the people! Excavate, pave a highway cleared of stones; raise the* ***ensign*** *to the nations! Jehovah has made proclamation to the end of the earth: Tell the Daughter of Zion, See, your* ***Salvation*** *comes, his reward with him, his work preceding him.*

As Jehovah’s raising his *ensign* to the nations takes effect and those who repent return in the new exodus to Zion (Isaiah 11:10–12, 15–16; 18:3; 49:22), Jehovah comes to dwell there (Isaiah 12:1–6; 40:10–11; 59:20). The servant’s “work”—of preparing the way of holiness among them (Isaiah 35:8–10; 40:3–5; 49:11–12)—leads to Jehovah’s “rewarding” them at his coming (Isaiah 35:4; 40:10; 61:8). Those who fail to repent, on the other hand—common “stones” that clutter the ground (Isaiah 5:2; 45:9; 57:14)—are cut off from being Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 48:18–19; 50:10–11; 65:11–12).

Parallel depictions of “the Daughter of Zion” and “the end of the earth” signify that at the time Jehovah raises up his servant or “*ensign* to the nations” to announce his coming and to gather his people (Isaiah 11:10–12; 49:22; 52:7) many are scattered to the ends of the earth. Jehovah’s descent phase of atoning for humanity’s transgressions—(1) on the model of a vassal who answers for the disloyalties of his people to the emperor; and (2) in the pattern of an animal’s sacrifice for sin (Isaiah 43:12, 25; 44:22; 53:4–10)—now bears fruit as he comes as the personification of *salvation* in his ascent phase.

62:12 *They shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of Jehovah; and you shall be known as in demand, a city never deserted.*

Parallelism of “the redeemed of Jehovah” and “the holy people” shows that the redemption of Jehovah’s people isn’t complete until they emulate his holiness. Only then does the Holy One of Israel, their Redeemer (Isaiah 41:14; 47:4; 48:17; 54:5), bring to fruition his redemptive work among them. To that end, the covenants he made with them from the beginning—the Sinai, Davidic, and Abrahamic Covenants—provide successive vehicles through which his people and individuals may attain greater degrees of holiness and ascend to higher spiritual categories (Isaiah 4:2–3; 24:16; 52:1–2, 13; 60:14).

ISAIAH 63

At his coming, Jehovah takes vengeance on those whom he had redeemed but who yet rebelled against him

63:1 *Who is this coming from Edom in red-stained garments? Who is this from Bozrah, arrayed in majesty, pressing forward in the strength of his power? It is I, who am mighty to save, announcing* ***righteousness****!*

As Jehovah’s coming to the earth has the dual aspects of redemption for the righteous and vengeance upon the wicked (v 4), the outcome for all peoples depends on how they respond to his atonement for their transgressions. Although Jehovah pays “the price of our peace” or salvation, his people can’t be “healed by his wounds” until they repent (Isaiah 53:5; cf. 6:10; 44:21–22; 59:20). Because mercy can’t rob justice, there exist laws or conditions that govern their operation: while Jehovah’s people who repent receive his forgiveness, those who remain in their sins must suffer the justice of a just God.

Even so, Jehovah doesn’t inflict on them the consequences of their transgressions that he doesn’t himself suffer on their behalf when redeeming them: “He bore our sufferings, endured our griefs, though we thought him stricken, smitten of God, and humbled. But he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; the price of our peace he incurred, and with his wounds we are healed. . . . By arrest and trial he was taken away. Who can apprise his generation that he was cut off from the land of the living for the crime of my people, to whom the blow was due?” (Isaiah 53:4–5, 8).

Jehovah’s red-stained garments are thus first those stained by his own blood when he atones for his people’s transgressions by going like “a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7). That gives him the twofold prerogative as their God to impose justice on the wicked when he comes to the earth in power (Isaiah 40:10). To that end, he raises up two instruments of his power: (1) the king of Assyria/Babylon—his *anger*, *wrath*, *vengeance*, and *rage* (vv 3–6; Isaiah 10:5–6; 13:9; 34:2); and (2) the servant—his *arm* of *righteousness* (Isaiah 41:2; 48:14–15; 51:9) whom he “announces” (Isaiah 41:4; 45:19; 46:11–13).

The names Edom and Bozrah and the idea of “a day of vengeance” and “the year of my redeemed” (v 4) establish word links to another passage: “When my sworddrinks its fill in the heavens, it shall come down on Edom in judgment, on the people I have sentenced to damnation. Jehovah has a swordthat shall engorge with blood and glut itself with fat—the blood of lambs and he-goats, the kidney fat of rams. For Jehovah will hold a slaughter in Bozrah, an immense massacre in the land of Edom. . . . For it is Jehovah’s day of vengeance, the year of retributionon behalf of Zion” (Isaiah 34:5–6, 8).

Jehovah’s judgment on Edom, however, is a judgment on all nations or Gentiles: “Let the earth give heed, and all who are upon it, the world, and all who spring from it. Jehovah’s rageis upon all nations, his furyupon all their hosts; he has doomed them, consigned them to the slaughter” (Isaiah 34:1–2). The name Edom, which designates Esau, Jacob’s brother (Genesis 25:30), alludes to those who, like Esau, sell their birthright for a mess of pottage. These go “to the slaughter” as Jehovah himself goes “to the slaughter” when he atones for humanity’s transgressions and becomes its Savior (Isaiah 53:7).

63:2–3 *Why are you clothed in red, your garments like those who tread [grapes] in the winepress? Alone I have trodden out a vatful; of the nations no one was with me. I trod them down in my* ***anger****; in my* ***wrath*** *I trampled them. Their lifeblood spattered my garments, and I have stained my whole attire.*

The idea of a winepress likens the slaughter of the wicked of the nations to grapes being trodden underfoot as in ancient times. The antithetical parallelism of Jehovah “alone” treading out a vatful with no one of “the nations” with him, infers that he alone atones—or is capable of atoning—for the transgressions of all: “We all like sheep had gone astray, each of us headed his own way; Jehovah brought together upon him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). He, therefore, is uniquely eligible to consign them to being “trodden underfoot” by the king of Assyria/Babylon—his *anger* and *wrath* (Isaiah 10:5–6).

63:4 *For I had resolved on a day of* ***vengeance*** *and the year of my redeemed had come.*

Because the destruction of the wicked *is* the deliverance of the righteous, “the day of vengeance” and “the year of my redeemed” form one and the same scenario—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. While Jehovah redeems spiritually all who repent of transgression (vv 8–9; Isaiah 43:25; 44:22; 53:4–6; 54:5, 8; 59:20), his servant delivers them physically. Because the servant does so in part by empowering Jehovah’s servants who serve as proxy saviors under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (Isaiah 61:3, 6), their redemptive ministry, as noted, forms an integral part of Jehovah’s “day of vengeance” (Isaiah 61:2).

63:5–6 *I glanced around but none would lend help; I glared but no one would assist. So my own* ***arm*** *brought about* ***salvation*** *for me, and my* ***wrath****, it assisted me. I trod nations underfoot in my* ***anger****; I made them drunk by my* ***rage*** *when I cast their glory to the ground.*

Just as the righteous fall victim to the wicked, so does Jehovah during his descent phase: “When integrity is lacking, they who shun evil become a prey. Jehovah saw that there was no justice, and it displeased him. When he saw it, he wondered why there was no man, no one who would intercede” (Isaiah 59:15–16); “He was despised and disdained by men, a man of grief, accustomed to suffering. As one from whom men hide their faces he was shunned, deemed by us of no merit” (Isaiah 53:3). While paying the price of justice for all, Jehovah faces his oppressors alone (Psalm 22:1; Isaiah 43:11–12).

Jehovah’s suffering his enemies’ wrath, anger, and rage when he is “cut off from the land of the living for the crime of my people to whom the blow was due” (Isaiah 53:8) personally acquaints him with the *wrath*, *anger*, and *rage* of tyrants such as the king of Assyria/Babylon whom he appoints to destroy and subjugate the wicked (Isaiah 10:5–6; 37:26–27). The spiritual and temporal *salvation* that flows directly from Jehovah to all who repent he himself personifies by “making his life an offering for guilt” (Isaiah 53:10; cf. 43:12). His *arm*—his intervention—alone, therefore, is the hope of humanity.

63:7 *I will recount in praise of Jehovah Jehovah’s loving favors, according to all that Jehovah has done for us, according to the great kindness he has mercifully and most graciously rendered the house of Israel.*

Praise springs from the hearts of all who experience Jehovah’s salvation, who perceive the bigger picture of his operation in their lives as their troubles finally blow over: “O Jehovah, you are my God; I will extol you by praising your name. For with perfect faithfulness you have performed wonders, things planned of old” (Isaiah 25:1). Those who live by his law and word live to see his redemption that is founded on his atoning sacrifice for sin. Such acknowledge his merciful intervention: “O Jehovah, you bring about our peace; even all that we have accomplished you have done for us” (Isaiah 26:12).

63:8–9 *For he thought, Surely they are my people, sons who will not play false; and so he became their Savior: With all their troubles he troubled himself, the angel of his presence delivering them. In his love and compassion he himself redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*

True to the terms of the covenants he makes with his people and with individuals, Jehovah fulfills his part by laying the foundation upon which all salvation rests—his atonement for his people’s transgressions in which he “bears their sufferings” and “endures their griefs” (Isaiah 53:4): “Hear me, O house of Jacob, and all you remnant of the house of Israel, who have been a load on me since birth, borne up by me from the womb: Even to your old age, I am present; till you turn grey, it is I who sustain you. It is I who made you, and I who bear you up; it is I who carry and rescue you” (Isaiah 46:3–4).

The “angel of his presence”—Jehovah’s servant—emulates Jehovah by keeping the terms of the Davidic Covenant on the seraph level (Isaiah 14:29–30). Word links identify him with the savior who “delivers” Egypt’s covenanters (Isaiah 19:19–22); and—as a type of his end-time role—with the “angel of Jehovah” who slays 185,000 Assyrians besieging Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:36). The terms “days of old” further identify him with Jehovah’s *arm*—the angel who leads Israel’s exodus out of Egypt and thwarts the pursuing Egyptians (vv 11–12; Isaiah 51:9–10; cf. 11:15–16; 43:16–17; Exodus 14:19–20).

63:10 *Yet they rebelled and grieved his holy Spirit, till he became their enemy and himself fought against them.*

In the same way that Jehovah’s people seldom prove loyal to him anciently, so many prove disloyal in the end: “Hear, O heavens! Give heed, O earth! Jehovahhas spoken: I have reared sons, brought them up, but they have revolted against me” (Isaiah 1:2); “They are a rebellious people, sons who break faith, children unwilling to obey the law of Jehovah” (Isaiah 30:9). By their rebellions they not only “grieve his holy Spirit,” they make themselves Jehovah’s enemies, hastening his Day of Judgment: “Woe to them! I will relieve me of my adversaries, avenge me of my enemies” (Isaiah 1:24).

63:11–14 *Then his people recalled the days of Moses of old. Where is he who brought them up out of the* ***Sea****, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who put into him his holy Spirit? who made his glorious* ***arm*** *proceed at the* ***right hand*** *of Moses, who divided the waters before them, making an everlasting name for himself when he led them through the* ***deep****? Like the horse of the desert, they stumbled not; like cattle descending [the slopes of] ravines, it was the Spirit of Jehovah that guided them. So you led your people, [O Jehovah,] acquiring illustrious renown.*

For some of Jehovah’s people the impact of covenant curses that follow them as a result of unrepented sins have the desired effect—they turn back to their God (Isaiah 19:22; 31:6–7). They recall the wonderful acts Jehovah performed in times past, such as Israel’s exodus out of Egypt, and they wonder why, amidst so many calamities now overtaking them, he doesn’t do the same for them. Little do they know that for those who responded to his servant’s summons to repent of evil and return in the new exodus to Zion those very events are indeed in the process of happening, while for them it is too late.

Word links identify Jehovah’s servant as his “shepherd,” as endowed with his “Spirit,” as a new Moses who dries up “the deep,” and as his *arm* and *right hand*: “My servant whom I sustain, my chosen one in whom I delight, him I have endowed with my Spirit” (Isaiah 42:1); “Who says to the deep, ‘Become dry; I am drying up your currents,’ who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd’” (Isaiah 44:27–28); “Like a shepherd he pastures his flock: the lambs he gathers up with his *arm*” (Isaiah 40:11; emphasis added); “Jehovah has sworn by his *right hand*, his mighty *arm*” (Isaiah 62:8; emphasis added).

As Jehovah made an “everlasting name” for himself and acquired “illustrious renown” when he performed wonders for his people anciently (Exodus 9:16; Joshua 9:9), so he does when he delivers his end-time people: “In that day you will say, ‘Give thanks to Jehovah; invoke his name. Make known his deeds among the nations; commemorate his exalted name.’ Sing in praise of Jehovah, who has performed wonders; let it be acknowledged throughout the earth! Shout and sing for joy, O inhabitants of Zion, for renowned among you is the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 12:4–6; cf. Jeremiah 16:14–15).

63:15–16 *O look down from heaven, from your holy and glorious celestial abode, and behold! Where now are your* ***zeal*** *and your might? The yearnings of your bosom and your compassion are withheld from us! Surely you are our Father! Though Abraham does not know us or Israel recognize us, you, O Jehovah, are our Father; Our Redeemer from Eternity is your name.*

Unreality characterizes the petitions of those who suffer covenant curses as they portray Jehovah as an aloof God who dwells in glory high in the heavens while they—his children—live in despair here below. Although they know that Jehovah at times intervenes on behalf of his people to deliver them from perils, they overlook the covenantal conditions under which he does so. They want redemption, but on their own terms. Meanwhile, Jehovah’s *zeal*—as manifested in his servant—is absent, having left in the new exodus with God’s sons and daughters who emulated their righteous ancestors.

63:17 *Why, O Jehovah, have you made us stray from your ways, hardening our hearts so that we do not fear you? Relent, for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance.*

Even as they appeal to Jehovah for help, this category of his people wallows in self-deception, blaming him for their waywardness. They resemble people who practice a delusional form of religion, relying on what others have taught them, not on Jehovah’s law and word as he reveals it: “These people approach me with the mouth and pay me homage with their lips, while their heart remains far from me, their piety toward me consisting of commandments of men learned by rote” (Isaiah 29:13). Consequently, Jehovah’s Day of Judgment catches them unprepared and as yet unrepentant of their sins.

The expression “for the sake of” alludes to the role of proxy saviors under the terms of the Davidic Covenant who bear others’ transgressions and intercede on their behalf so that Jehovah may deliver them from harm or destruction (Isaiah 37:35; 53:11–12; 65:8). That principle of temporal salvation, however, operates only when its beneficiaries—though not yet righteous before God—are in a state of repentance. The parallelism of Jehovah’s “servants” with “the tribes that are your inheritance” identifies Jehovah’s servants with Israel’s twelve tribes (cf. Isaiah 49:6; 65:9, 13–15; Revelation 7:3–8).

63:18–19 *But a little while had your people possessed the holy place when our enemies trod down your sanctuary. We have become as those whom you have never ruled and who have not been known by your name.*

At the same time that Jehovah is a “sanctuary” (*miqdas*) to his repentant people—to those who revere him and hold him in awe (Isaiah 8:13–14)—his unrepentant people suffer foreign invasion and the treading down of his “sanctuary” (*miqdaseka*)—the temple—as a consequence of their wickedness (Isaiah 1:7; 9:11–12; 10:3–6). Now subject to covenant curses, those who were once blessed of Jehovah face a long road back to him (Isaiah 59:9–14; 64:5–12; 66:3–4). Rejecting him when he summoned them through his servant (Isaiah 49:1–2; 50:4, 10; 55:1–7), they rejected Jehovah’s divine intervention.

ISAIAH 64

As Jehovah’s coming draws near, transgressors

suffer for their misdeeds at the hands of their enemies

64:1–3 *O that you would rend the heavens and descend, the mountains melting at your presence—as when fire is lit for boiling water, which bubbles over from the heat—to make yourself known to your adversaries, the nations trembling at your presence—as when you performed awesome things unexpected by us: your descent [of old], when the mountains quaked before you!*

Some of Jehovah’s people who wade through end-time calamities continue to call on Jehovah (Isaiah 63:15–19), this time harking back to his descent on Mount Sinai anciently (Exodus 19:16–20). Instead of blaming him for their afflictions as before, however (Isaiah 63:17), they acknowledge their guilt (Isaiah 59:12–13) and appeal to him to deliver them (vv 5–9). This shows that the covenant curses they encounter are having the desired effect of inducing them to repent. Hope thus exists for some who fail to participate in the new exodus but who may nevertheless survive to see Jehovah’s coming.

The synonymous **a**–**b**–**a** mini-chiasm of “mountains melting at your presence” (v 1)—**a**, “nations/Gentiles trembling at your presence” (v 2)—**b**, and “mountains quaking before you/at your presence” (v 3)—**a**, identifies the term “mountains” as a metaphor for “nations” (cf. Isaiah 2:12–14; 5:25; 37:24; 41:15; 52:7). Because the Hebrew verbs are synonyms, and because all three instances of “at your presence/before you” are identical, the chiasm’s remaining components are thus also synonymous. Parallel component of Isaiah 13:4 similarly identify “mountains” as a metaphor for “kingdoms.”

64:4 *Never has it been heard or perceived by the ear, nor has any eye seen a God besides you, who acts thus on behalf of those who wait for him.*

Not only a new exodus (Isaiah 63:11–14), but also a new descent on the mount (vv 1–3) features among many end-time versions of ancient events. Separating those of Jehovah’s people who participate in his redemptive acts and those who don’t is whether or not they “wait” for him amid troubled times: “Then will Jehovah delay [his coming], that he may favor you; out of mercy toward you he will remain aloof. For Jehovah is the God of justice; blessed are all who wait for him” (Isaiah 30:18); “I will wait for Jehovah, who hides his face from the house of Jacob, and expect him” (Isaiah 8:17).

64:5–6 *But you wound those of us who joyfully perform* ***righteousness****, who remember you by [following] your ways—that in them we might ever be saved. Alas, you were roused to* ***anger*** *when we sinned, and now we have altogether become as those defiled, the sum of our righteousness as a menstruous rag. We are decaying like leaves, all of us; our sins, like a wind, sweep us away.*

Although in their newly repentant state this category of Jehovah’s people again “performs righteousness” and “remembers” Jehovah, for a long time they performed wickedness and forgot him. Not qualifying to participate in the new exodus to Zion, they continue to expiate their iniquities and to endure the curses that accrued. Didn’t Jehovah’s servant warn them that they had forgotten their God, their *salvation*, and not remembered the *Rock*, their fortress (Isaiah 17:10)? Didn’t he exhort them to forsake their corrupt ways and thoughts and return to Jehovah so he would pardon them (Isaiah 55:7)?

Realizing their error, however, they learned sufficiently from the servant’s example to emulate his *righteousness*. Although subject to Jehovah’s *anger*—the king of Assyria/Babylon (Isaiah 10:5)—they receive a second chance to overcome the chaotic consequences of their actions. Although still under a curse, Jehovah’s “ways” are becoming their ways (Isaiah 55:8) as they wade through their descent phase to recovery. Notwithstanding their transgressions weakened them almost irreversibly—their dysfunctional patterns being difficult to overcome—they are set on a return path (Isaiah 10:20–22).

64:7 *Yet none calls upon your name, or rouses himself to take hold of you. For you have hidden your face from us and enfeebled us at the* ***hand*** *of our iniquities.*

Without the help of proxy saviors, the belated repenters of Jehovah’s people yet suffer the aftermath of their former actions. Cut off from Jehovah’s presence, they are made to realize that without him there is no access to any other saving power (Isaiah 43:11). Their only recourse is to complete the entire repentance process until he revives and heals them (Isaiah 57:15–16; cf. 6:10). The *hand* of Jehovah that might have delivered them, they rejected, so that now they feel his *hand* of punishment (Isaiah 50:2, 10–11). Although he called them, they still mostly wallow in spiritual inertia (Isaiah 43:22).

64:8–9 *Nevertheless, you are our Father, O Jehovah; we are the clay and you are the potter, and we are all alike the work of your* ***hands****. Be not exceedingly angry, O Jehovah; remember not iniquity forever. See, consider that we are all your people!*

Desiring to reclaim their former privileged position as his covenant people, the repentant sinners who suffer through Jehovah’s Day of Judgment appeal to Jehovah to be numbered with those called “work of his hands”—that is, with Jehovah’s elect who participate in the new exodus to Zion (Isaiah 19:25; 29:23; 45:11; 60:21). Numbered among neither the righteous who were delivered nor the wicked who perish in Jehovah’s day of vengeance, this intermediate category must pass through an entirely new cycle of repentance and righteousness for Jehovah to acknowledge them again as his people.

64:10–12 *Your holy cities have become a wilderness; Zion is a desert, Jerusalem a desolation. Our glorious holy temple where our fathers praised you has been burned with* ***fire****, and all places dear to us lie in ruins. At all this, O Jehovah, will you restrain yourself, in silence letting us suffer so exceedingly?*

During the time the righteous who left in the new exodus dwell in the wilderness (Isaiah 35:7–10; 40:3; 41:17–20; 43:19–21) those left behind suffer the covenant curses of invasion by enemies and the desolation of their lands (Isaiah 1:7; 6:11; 17:9; 33:7–9). Jehovah’s *fire*—the archtyrant—burns up the evildoers of Jehovah’s people and their temple/s (Isaiah 5:24; 9:18–19; 30:27–28; 33:11–14). Because their wickedness ran its course, bringing on their condemnation, so the fruits of their wickedness must run their course until their repentance is complete (Isaiah 3:11; 26:10–11; 48:22; 59:7–11).

ISAIAH 65

As the millennial age approaches, blessings and curses separate Jehovah’s servants from their oppressors

65:1–2 *I was available to those who did not inquire of me; I was accessible to those who did not seek me. I said, Here am I; I am here, to a nation that did not invoke my name. I held out my* ***hands*** *all the day to a defiant people, who walk in ways that are not good, following their own imagination—*

A polarization of peoples takes place as Jehovah’s coming to the earth draws near. Although the number of wicked people increases and the number of righteous decreases, the degree of wickedness of the wicked is in part offset by the degree of righteousness of the righteous as there is more evil to overcome that serves as a test of their covenantal loyalty. Being the espoused wife that proves unfaithful, Jehovah’s “nation/people” who currently claim allegiance to him largely apostatize while Jehovah’s servants minister to the wife whom Jehovah remarries (vv 8–9; Isaiah 49:22–23; 54:1, 4–8; 62:1–7).

Although Jehovah makes himself “available” and “accessible” to all his people at the time his servant fulfills his mission (Isaiah 50:10; 52:7, 15; 55:4–7), most spurn the servant and by so doing spurn Jehovah. While the righteous among them “inquire” of him, “seek” him, and “invoke” his name (Isaiah 41:25; 51:1; 55:6), the wicked fail to do so (Isaiah 9:13; 42:24; 64:7). Instead of adopting Jehovah’s “way,” they assume they know of themselves. Defiant toward his *hand* of deliverance (Isaiah 45:9–11; 50:2, 9; 59:1–2), they become subject to his *hand* of punishment (Isaiah 5:25; 10:5; 26:11).

65:3–5 *a people who constantly provoke me to my face, sacrificing in parks, making smoke upon bricks, who sit in sepulchres, spend nights in hideouts, who eat swine’s flesh, their bowls full of polluted broth, who think, Keep your distance, don’t come near me; I am holier than you! Such are a smoke to my nostrils, a fire smoldering all day long.*

Cultic activities that deviate from Jehovah’s righteous practices mark the descent of Jehovah’s people into apostasy (Isaiah 1:29; 57:3–6). From innocent-seeming barbecues in the park to abhorrent satanic rituals, their degenerate performances simultaneously replicate and desecrate sacred ordinances. Ensnaring their devotees into regarding Jehovah’s righteous people as religious oddities, their cult breeds a dismissive “holier-than-thou” attitude. Their destiny is the Pit of Dissolution (Isaiah 14:15; 38:17–18; 51:14), where their spirits disintegrate amidst an odious stench (Isaiah 30:33; 34:10; 66:24).

65:6–7 *See, it is written before me that I will not be still till I have paid back into their bosom their own iniquities and their fathers’ alike, says Jehovah. To those who kindle sacrifice in the mountains, who affront me on the hills, I will measure out in their laps the payment that has accrued.*

Just as the names of Jehovah’s elect are written in the Book of Life (Isaiah 4:3; 34:16)—that is, of eternal life or lives—so it is “written” before God that those who descend to the Perdition category are destined for an entire extinction (Isaiah 26:14; 34:12). Generational “iniquities” or dysfunctional patterns, when not reversed through repentance, consummate in perverted acts of a sacrilegious nature that diametrically oppose and contradict all that is of God. Before Jehovah’s Day of Judgment is over, those who descend to depravity suffer correspondingly grievous punishments (Isaiah 57:3–6; 66:17).

65:8–9 *Thus says Jehovah: As when there is juice in a cluster of grapes and someone says, Don’t destroy it, it is still good, so I will do for the sake of my servants by not destroying everything: I will extract offspring out of Jacob, and out of Judah heirs of my mountains; my chosen ones shall inherit them, my servants shall dwell there.*

Contrasting the satanic practices of the Perdition category of Jehovah’s people at the extremity of wickedness (vv 3–7) is the redemptive ministry of those who serve as proxy saviors on the seraph level under the terms of the Davidic Covenant. Although Jehovah destroys his alienated people, others who repent he saves “for the sake of my servants”—his “chosen ones”—who answer for their disloyalties in the ancient Near Eastern pattern of vassals to an emperor. Those saved, Jehovah “extracts” and refines like the juice of the grapes and they inherit “mountains” or nations (Isaiah 54:3; 58:14; 60:21).

65:10 *Sharon shall become pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a resting place for the herds of my people who seek me.*

An agricultural economy characterizes Jehovah’s millennial reign of peace: “Then will he water with rain the seed you sow in the ground, that the land’s increase of food may be rich and abundant. In that day your cattle shall graze in ample pasturelands, and the oxen and asses that till the soil eat grain silage winnowed with shovel and fork” (Isaiah 30:23–24; cf. 32:20; 55:10: 62:8–9). Jehovah’s people who inherit promised lands are those who seek him: “They who seek refuge in me shall possess the earth and receive an inheritance in my holy mountain” (Isaiah 57:13b; cf. 26:8–9; 34:16–17; 51:1).

65:11–12 *As for you who forsake Jehovah and forget my holy mountain, who spread tables for Luck and pour mixed wines for Fortune, I will destine you to the* ***sword****; all of you shall succumb to the* ***slaughter****. For when I called, you did not respond; when I spoke, you would not give heed. You did what was evil in my eyes; you chose to do what was not my will.*

Continuing the contrast between the righteous and the wicked are the gamblers and imbibers among Jehovah’s people whose addictions sever their connection with their Maker. Although Jehovah “calls” and “speaks” to them through his servant (Isaiah 45:19; 50:2, 10; 52:6–7), their alienation renders them unreceptive to choosing what is needful in order for Jehovah to bless them. Even as the restoration of his people continues on apace, their “doing evil” begets evil—the *sword* and the *slaughter*—the king of Assyria/Babylon’s destruction of a wicked world (Isaiah 1:20; 34:2–8; 66:15–16).

65:13–14 *Therefore thus says my Lord Jehovah: My servants shall eat indeed, while you shall hunger; my servants shall drink indeed, while you shall thirst; my servants shall rejoice indeed, while you shall be dismayed. My servants shall shout indeed, for gladness of heart, while you shall cry out with heartbreak, howling from brokenness of spirit.*

Contrasting fates divide the righteous and the wicked of Jehovah’s people as seen in those whose righteousness and wickedness reach their apogee. In the culmination of events that engulf the world, eternal blessings and eternal curses distinguish between them (Isaiah 34:5; 55:3). Although the wicked could equally have inherited the blessings of the righteous, their intractable offenses disqualified them. While Jehovah’s servants experience a complete vindication of their ministry (Isaiah 50:7–9; 61:7; 66:14), those who persecuted them deeply agonize at their folly (cf. Isaiah 41:11; 66:5–6, 24).

65:15 *Your name shall be left to serve my chosen ones as a curse when my Lord Jehovah slays you. But his servants he will call by a different name.*

Just as the names Sodom and Gomorrah came to signify injustice, perversion, and damnation (Genesis 18:20; 19:24; Isaiah 1:9–10), so the names of the enemies of Jehovah’s servants are stained forever. Even as the names of persons in the Babylon category are cut off from the earth (Isaiah 14:22; 48:18–19), so the names of those in the Perdition category are cut off from the earth and from eternity (Isaiah 26:13–14; 38:18). Consistent with ascent to higher states of blessedness, on the other hand, Jehovah’s servants receive a new name and a higher spiritual commission (Isaiah 40:26; 56:4–7; 66:22).

65:16 *Those of them who invoke blessings on themselves in the earth shall do so by the true God, and those of them who swear oaths in the earth shall do so by the God of truth. The troubles of the past shall be forgotten and hidden from my eyes.*

The parallel incidence of “invoking blessings” and “swearing oaths” shows their interrelationship: covenant blessings come from swearing oaths to Jehovah—as when one makes covenants with him and keeps them (Isaiah 19:18–21; 56:1–5). Mention of the “true God” or “God of truth” infers that, while Jehovah’s people have corrupted their covenant oaths and ordinances (Isaiah 24:5; 48:1), he restores them in their purity (Isaiah 26:7–9; 51:4). In the millennial age of peace that ensues, the “troubles” or “calamities” (*sarot*) Jehovah’s people brought on themselves entirely fade from memory.

65:17–18 *See, I create new heavens and a new earth; former events shall not be remembered or recalled to mind. Rejoice, then, and be glad forever in what I create. See, I create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.*

The rebirth or re-creation of Jehovah’s people on higher spiritual levels—for which their descent phase through adversity prepared them—ultimately brings about the rebirth or re-creation of the earth itself. As the ascent of righteous individuals such as Jehovah’s seraphs–servants directly impacts the ascent of a new nation of Jehovah’s people to exalted spiritual categories, so the parallel ascent of the earth to a paradisiacal glory leads to its positioning in a new or higher heavens. The state of joy that characterizes this development so transforms its participants that it permeates their whole existence.

65:19–20 *I will delight in Jerusalem, rejoice in my people; no more shall be heard there the sound of weeping or the cry of distress. No more shall there be infants alive but a few days, or the aged who do not live out their years; those who die young shall be a hundred years old, and those who fail to reach a hundred shall be accursed.*

Having accomplished what he conceived from the beginning (Isaiah 25:1; 37:26; 40:13; 46:10–11), Jehovah delights and rejoices in the fruits of his labors. At last, his people have attained a glorious spiritual heritage: “Behold Zion, the city of our solemn assemblies; let your eyes rest upon Jerusalem, the abode of peace—an immovable tent, whose stakes shall never be uprooted, nor any of its cords severed. None who reside there shall say ‘I am ill’” (Isaiah 33:20, 24). As covenant curses become a thing of the past, his people live to an age resembling their ancient progenitors’ (Genesis 5:1–32).

65:21–24 *When men build houses, they will dwell in them; when they plant vineyards, they will eat their fruit. They shall not build so that others may dwell, or plant so that others may eat. The lifetime of my people shall be as the lifetime of a tree; my chosen ones shall outlast the work of their hands. They shall not exert themselves in vain, or bear children doomed for calamity. For they are of the lineage of those blessed by Jehovah, and their posterity with them. Before they call I will reply; while they are yet speaking I will respond.*

Zion’s socio-economic system replaces Babylon’s in the millennial age (Isaiah 30:23–24; 32:15–20). In the absence of transgression, only the results of righteousness appear—peace, productivity, fertility, and longevity. Instead of the iniquities of the parents passing down to their children (Exodus 34:7; Deuteronomy 5:9), only their blessings pass down. When his people petition him, Jehovah instantly answers: “O people of Zion, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, you shall have no cause to weep. He will graciously respond at the cry of your voice; he will answer you as soon as he hears it” (Isaiah 30:19).

65:25 *The wolf and the lamb will graze alike, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; as for the serpent, dust shall be its food: there shall be no harm or injury done throughout my holy mountain, says Jehovah.*

Characterizing Jehovah’s millennial reign is universal harmony among men and beasts (Isaiah 11:6–9; 32:16–20; 54:13–14). While injustices and oppression were the norm when Babylon ruled (Isaiah 14:5–6; 47:6; 51:21–23), now all predatory activity has an end. With the departure of those who “forget my holy mountain” (vv 11–12), Jehovah’s people who return to Zion inherit it and enjoy everlasting peace (Isaiah 27:13; 57:13b; 60:17–18). In Jehovah’s holy mountain the righteous of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people find a true and permanent home (Isaiah 11:11–12; 56:7–8; 60:3–11).

ISAIAH 66

Cultic practices and persecution by ecclesiastical leaders coincide with Zion’s rebirth before Jehovah comes

66:1–2 *Thus says Jehovah: The heavens are my throne and the earth is my footstool. What house would you build me? What would serve me as a place of residence? These are all things my* ***hand*** *has made, and thus all came into being, says Jehovah. And yet, I have regard for those who are of a humble and contrite spirit and who are vigilant for my word.*

The building of Jehovah’s temple (Isaiah 44:26–28) raises the question of where Jehovah dwells and under what circumstances. He tells us: “I dwell on high in the holy place, and with him who is humble and lowly in spirit—refreshing the spirits of the lowly, reviving the hearts of the humble” (Isaiah 57:15). Jehovah’s having “regard for those who are of a humble and contrite spirit and who are vigilant for my word” thus implies that, although he may appear in his earthly temple as needed to administer the affairs of his kingdom, his righteous people are also the temples of his holy Spirit (Isaiah 59:21).

The role of Jehovah’s *hand* accords with the major redemptive mission of Jehovah’s end-time servant. As Jehovah’s right *hand*, he assists in the creation of the heavens and the earth (v 2; Isaiah 45:12; 48:13), gathers Jehovah’s people (Isaiah 11:11–12; 49:22), empowers, delivers, and protects them (Isaiah 41:10, 13; 50:2; 51:16; 59:1), facilitates their new exodus (Isaiah 11:15–16), leads their new conquest (Isaiah 11:14), purifies their establishment (Isaiah 1:25), allots their inheritances (Isaiah 34:17), ministers to Jehovah’s servants (Isaiah 66:14), and prospers Jehovah’s purposes (Isaiah 53:10; 62:3).

66:3–4 *But whoever slaughters an ox is as one who kills a man, and whoever sacrifices a lamb, as one who breaks a dog’s neck; whoever presents a grain offering is as one who offers swine’s blood, and whoever burns incense, as one who venerates idols. Just as they have preferred to go their own ways, their souls delighting in their abominations, so will I prescribe intrigues for them and bring upon them the thing they dread. For when I called, no one responded; when I spoke, none gave heed. They did what was evil in my eyes; they chose to do what was not my will.*

Rituals performed under the Mosaic Code such as the slaughter of unblemished beasts and the offering of firstfruits (Exodus 12:5; 20:24; 30:1; Leviticus 2:12–16; 4:32; 27:16) become offensive once the Lamb of God is slaughtered that they foreshadowed (Isaiah 53:7, 10; 1 Corinthians 15:20–23). People who perpetuate such cultic practices come under Jehovah’s condemnation when he fulfills their worst fears. For not responding when Jehovah “called” and “spoke” to them through his servant—instead doing evil and what is contrary to his will—they themselves are slaughtered (Isaiah 65:12).

66:5 *Hear the word of Jehovah, you who are vigilant for his word; your brethren who abhor you, and exclude you because of my name, say, Let Jehovah manifest his glory, that we may see cause for your joy! But it is they who shall suffer shame.*

Jehovah’s servants—“who are of a humble and contrite spirit and who are vigilant for my word” (v 2)—come under censure by ecclesiastical authorities who feel threatened by their zeal for Jehovah. Such self-righteous “brethren” (*’ahekem*) “abhor” or “hate” (*son’ekem*) their zealous counterparts and “exclude” or “thrust [them] out” (*menaddekem*) from among them, humiliating them. In the end, however—after it has served Jehovah’s purpose of refining his servants and testing their loyalties—their momentary shame (Isaiah 61:7) turns into their persecutors’ everlasting shame (Isaiah 41:11; 65:15).

The descent phase of those who are ostracized by abusive authorities thus resembles that of Jehovah’s servant, whom they similarly “abhor” and accuse (Isaiah 49:7; 50:8–9). Both, moreover, follow the pattern of Jehovah himself, whose descent phase includes prosecution by unrighteous authorities (Isaiah 53:7–9). The latter mock Jehovah’s servants by asking them to produce some divine “manifestation” or sign that justifies their joy-filled zeal: “Let him quickly speed up his work so we may see it! Let the plan of the Holy One of Israel soon come to pass, and we will know!” (Isaiah 5:19; cf. 45:11).

66:6 *Hark, a tumult from the city, a noise from the temple! It is the* ***voice*** *of Jehovah paying his enemies what is due them.*

An incident in the temple of his people’s city results in Jehovah’s house being set in order as Jehovah turns the tables on his people’s ecclesiastical leaders (cf. Jeremiah 23:1–2; Ezekiel 34:10; Zechariah 11:15–17). Together with other reprobates among his people, they are numbered among Jehovah’s “enemies” and incur his wrath: “They rebelled and grieved his holy Spirit, till he became their enemy and himself fought against them” (Isaiah 63:10; cf. 1:24; 42:13; 59:18). Jehovah’s *voice*—his servant whom he empowers (Isaiah 30:30–31; 50:10; 58:1)—pays them their “due” or “just reward” (*gemul*).

66:7–9 *Before she is in labor, she gives birth; before her ordeal overtakes her, she delivers a son! Who has heard the like, or who has seen such things? Can the earth labor but a day and a nation be born at once? For as soon as she was in labor, Zion gave birth to her children. Shall I bring to a crisis and not bring on birth? says Jehovah. When it is I who cause the birth, shall I hinder it? says your God.*

A condition of wickedness among Jehovah’s people marked by cultic practices (vv 3–4, 17; Isaiah 65:2–7) and persecution by ecclesiastical authorities (v 5; Isaiah 61:7) that utterly contravenes Jehovah’s law and word in the end gives rise to a Zion people. Out of an evil milieu, paradoxically exemplified by Jehovah’s people who are of the covenant, emerges a new covenant people among whom Jehovah establishes Zion (cf. Isaiah 54:1, 5–6). Not only does “the restoration of all things” that existed in ancient Israel materialize from these spiritual ashes but a state of blessedness far exceeding the former.

Called the “Birthpangs of the Messiah,” the idea of a woman in labor who gives birth to a deliverer recurs cyclically in Israel’s history—as when Israel’s tribes endured hard bondage in Egypt and Jehovah heard their cries and raised up Moses to deliver them (Exodus 1–3); or when the Philistines were about to wipe Israel off the map and Jehovah raised up King David to deliver them (2 Samuel 3:18); or when Jehovah’s people in Jerusalem were surrounded by an invading Assyrian army and King Hezekiah interceded with Jehovah on their behalf (Isaiah 37:15–20). So he raises up an end-time deliverer.

Before the Woman Zion goes into labor, however—that is, before Jehovah’s Day of Judgment but when many mourn in Zion because wickedness (v 5; Isaiah 61:3, 7)—she gives birth to a “son” or “male child” (*zakar*). The Woman’s son or deliverer—Jehovah’s servant—thus experiences rebirth or ascent to a higher spiritual level (Isaiah 49:2, 8; 55:4–5) when Jehovah heals and empowers him (Isaiah 52:13; 57:18–19). That empowerment constitutes an inherent part of his ascent phase that follows his descent phase through suffering in which he is “marred beyond human likeness” (Isaiah 52:14).

Jehovah prospers his servant’s ministry (Isaiah 48:14–15; 53:10), and it bears good fruit (Isaiah 4:2; 11:1), when the servant empowers additional servants to labor with him in restoring Jehovah’s people and preparing them for Jehovah’s coming (Isaiah 52:7–10; 61:3–10). The nation that is born in a “day”—Jehovah’s Day of Judgment—thus comprises those of his people who are reborn at the time they are restored and ascend to higher spiritual categories (Isaiah 4:3; 52:1–2). With them, Jehovah covenants to be “your God” and they his people by an everlasting covenant (Isaiah 54:5–10; 55:3–5).

*As soon as she was in labor, Zion gave birth to her children.* The “children” or “sons” (*baneha*) to whom the Woman Zion gives birth comprise particularly that category of Jehovah’s people that is reborn or which ascends to the son/servant level. They return in the new exodus to Zion from among all nations: “Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth” (Isaiah 43:6); “Lift up your eyes and look about you! They have all assembled to come to you: your sons shall arrive from afar; your daughters shall return to your side” (Isaiah 60:4; cf. 11:10–12; 49:17–18, 22; 60:3).

*Who has heard the like, or who has seen such things?* Beginning with the mission of the servant, the restoration of Jehovah’s people causes quite a stir among the nations (Isaiah 52:10, 15; 62:1). Many oppose the work of restoring his people, repudiating the fact that it is of God: “Woe to those in conflict with their Maker, mere shards of earthenware pottery! As though the clay were to say to him who molds it, ‘What are you doing? Your handshave no skill for the work!’ Woe to those who say to their Father, ‘What have you begotten?’ or to the Woman, ‘What have you borne?’” (Isaiah 45:9–10).

*Can the earth labor but a day?* As at Israel’s birth as a nation when it came out of Egypt (Exodus 6:7), true deliverance entails victory over enemies (Exodus 14:27–28). When the entire earth goes into labor in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, Babylon’s children die: “Bereavement and widowhood shall suddenly overtake you, both in one day” (Isaiah 47:9); “They shall be terrified, in throes of agony, seized with trembling like a woman in labor” (Isaiah 13:8); “‘I will rise up against them,’ says Jehovah of Hosts. ‘I will cut off Babylon’s name and remnant, its offspring and descendants’” (Isaiah 14:22).

66:10–11 *Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all who love her; join in her celebration, all who mourn for her. From now on nurse contentedly at her consoling breasts; draw at your pleasure from the abundance of her bosom.*

The imagery of new birth or re-creation (cf. Isaiah 65:18) evokes the idea of an entire life cycle of Jehovah’s people and individuals, consisting of birth (vv 8–10), lactation (v 11), infancy (v 12), childhood (v 13), youth (v 14ab), and manhood as “servants” of God (v 14c). Ascending spiritual categories, in other words, parallel successive phases of physical development, identifying persons who attain the seraph level as those who reach spiritual maturity. The latter typify those who have care for Jehovah’s people and mourn for them, but who ultimately rejoice at their redemption (Isaiah 62:5–7).

Jehovah’s servants “mourn” as an intrinsic part of their descent phase while serving as proxy saviors of Jehovah’s people under the terms of the Davidic Covenant (Isaiah 61:2–3). Their doing so reflects their “love” for his people, a term that connotes a covenant relationship. In other words, they love his repentant people by answering for their disloyalties in the interim before they are reborn as his sons and daughters. At the latter’s restoration, those in lower spiritual categories suckle at the breasts of those higher: “Kings shall be your foster fathers, queens your nursing mothers” (Isaiah 49:23; cf. v 12; 60:16).

66:12–13 *For thus says Jehovah: See, I will extend peace to her like a river, the bounty of the nations like a stream in flood. Then shall you nurse and be carried upon the hip and dandled on the knees. As one who is comforted by his mother I will comfort you; for Jerusalem you shall be comforted.*

Following the tests of loyalty Jehovah orchestrates for his people and individuals that characterize their descent phase through trials and afflictions, the blessings of an unconditional *collective* covenant finally rest upon them: an unending “peace” (*salom*) and the “bounty” or “glory” (*kabod*) of the “nations” or “Gentiles” (*goyim*). While many in the Jacob/Israel category fail to attain “peace like a river” (Isaiah 48:18–19, 22), many who ascend and are reborn on higher spiritual levels attain it by an everlasting “covenant of peace” (Isaiah 54:10, 13–14; cf. 9:6–7; 26:3; 32:16–18; 33:20; 57:1–2, 18–19).

Jehovah’s comforting his people forms a consistent pattern in his dealings with them: “‘Comfort and give solace to my people,’ says your God; ‘speak kindly to Jerusalem’” (Isaiah 40:1–2); “Jehovah is comforting his people, showing compassion for his afflicted” (Isaiah 49:13). He purposefully brings them through the most difficult trials—through times when all supports seem to fail—leaving them one recourse: to turn to him for help. Their exercise of faith in him in the midst of their descent phase is the very thing that occasions their deliverance and personal experience of him (Isaiah 35:3–4).

66:14 *Your heart shall rejoice to see it, your limbs flourish like sprouting grass, when the* ***hand*** *of Jehovah shall be manifest among his servants and his* ***rage*** *among his enemies.*

The key role played by Jehovah’s *hand*—his servant—in the end-time redemption of Jehovah’s people ultimately brings about (1) the rebirth and ascent to the seraph level of additional servants of Jehovah—the spiritual kings and queens of the Gentiles or Zion’s watchmen (Isaiah 52:8; 61:3, 10; 62:6–7)—those who minister to Jehovah’s people who are scattered among the nations; and (2) the rebirth and ascent to the son/servant level of those to whom they minister, whom they gather from dispersion and prepare for Jehovah’s coming to reign on the earth (Isaiah 49:22–23; 60:3–4, 9–11; 62:10–12).

While all who thus participate in Jehovah’s redemption of his people regenerate physically and rejoice (Isaiah 61:10; 65:18), Jehovah’s *rage*—the king of Assyria/Babylon—metes out punishment on Jehovah’s enemies (Isaiah 34:2; 63:3–6). For the most part, therefore, it is the wicked who destroy the wicked (Isaiah 13:4–11; 14:5–6), and it is only toward the end of Jehovah’s Day of Judgment that the archtyrant and his alliance of nations perish (Isaiah 10:12–19; 14:4, 12, 24–27). The final absence of all wicked entities from the earth (Isaiah 41:11–12) brings rejoicing indeed (Isaiah 9:3–4; 14:7–8).

66:15–16 *See, Jehovah comes with* ***fire****, his chariots like a whirlwind, to retaliate in furious* ***anger****, to rebuke with conflagrations of* ***fire****. For with* ***fire*** *and with his* ***sword*** *shall Jehovah execute judgment on all flesh, and those slain by Jehovah shall be many.*

As Jehovah’s instrument of punishment, the king of Assyria/Babylon—Jehovah’s *anger*, *fire*, and *sword*—constitutes an essential part of Jehovah’s coming to the earth: “Behold, Jehovah Omnipotent coming from afar! His *wrath*is kindled, heavy is his *grievance*; his *lips*flow with *indignation*, his *tongue*is like a devouring *fire*” (Isaiah 30:27; emphasis added). The twofold nature of Jehovah’s Day of Judgment thus means that the righteous are being delivered even as the wicked are being destroyed from the earth. To the very *fire* and *sword* that destroy the wicked, moreover, the righteous are immune:

“Wickedness shall be set ablaze like a fire, and briars and thorns shall it consume; it shall ignite the jungle forests, and they shall billow upward in mushrooming clouds of smoke. At the wrathof Jehovah of Hosts the earth is scorched, and people are but fuel for the fire” (Isaiah 9:18–19; cf. 1:7; 5:24; 47:14); “Who among us can live through the devouring fire? Who among us can abide eternal burning? They who conduct themselves righteously and are honest in word” (Isaiah 33:14–15); “Though you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; its flameshall not consume you” (Isaiah 43:2);

“Your men shall be felled by the sword, your might [overthrown]in war” (Isaiah 3:25); “I will destine you to the sword; all of you shall succumb to the slaughter. For when I called, you did not respond; when I spoke, you would not give heed. You did what was evil in my eyes; you chose to do what was not my will” (Isaiah 65:12; cf. 1:20; 34:5); “Whatever weapon is devised against you, it shall not succeed; every tonguethat rises to accuse you, you shall refute. ‘This is the heritage of the servants of Jehovah, and such is their vindication by me,’ says Jehovah” (Isaiah 54:17; cf. 41:11–12).

66:17 *As for the cultists who fornicate in the parks, the devotees of one in the center, who eat the flesh of swine and prawn and rodents—they with [their practices and ideas] shall be made an end of, says Jehovah.*

At the apex on the scale of evil, the satanic cult with its perverse rituals seeks to desecrate all that is sacred. As “slayers of children” who “burn with lust” in a counterfeit paradise (Isaiah 1:29; 57:5), these Perdition types are not only made an end of physically in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment but also spiritually. In that day, their particular Covenant with Death—their sacrilegious contract with the powers of darkness—becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: “They are dead, to live no more, spirits who will not rise up; you appoint them to destruction, wiping out all recollection of them” (Isaiah 26:14; cf. v 24).

66:18 *For I will come to gather all nations and tongues, that they may approach and behold my glory.*

For many survivors of Jehovah’s Day of Judgment, “all nations and tongues” coming to behold his glory when Jehovah institutes his reign on the earth compensates for their former lack of knowledge of him (Isaiah 1:3; 5:13; 29:14, 24; 44:17–20). While the seraph and son/servant categories of Jehovah’s people come to know him personally through their experience of him in the course of serving him (Isaiah 19:18–21; 26:8–9; 52:6–10; 60:16), lower spiritual categories—who didn’t participate in his people’s end-time exodus to Zion but who ascended later—may yet receive a knowledge of him.

Jehovah’s gathering of all nations thus occurs in two stages: (1) that of his sons and daughters in the new exodus to Zion: “I will bring your offspring from the east and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, ‘Give up!’ to the south, ‘Withhold not!’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth” (Isaiah 43:5–6; cf. 11:11–12, 15–16); and (2) that of additional peoples that continues even after Jehovah has instituted his reign of peace on the earth: “Thus says my Lord Jehovah, who gathers up the outcasts of Israel: ‘I will gather others to those already gathered’” (Isaiah 56:8).

God’s purpose in gathering his children is to invite them into his covenant: “Gather yourselves and come; draw near, all you fugitives of the nations. . . . Turn to me and save yourselves, all you ends of the earth” (Isaiah 45:20, 22). Although the primary task of Jehovah’s servants is to gather the righteous descendants of his ancient covenant people scattered among all nations, non-Israelite lineages among them aren’t excluded (Isaiah 14:1). Jehovah’s “glory” over the assemblies of his people (Isaiah 4:5) attests to his presence among them: “Surely God is in you; no other gods exists!” (Isaiah 45:14).

66:19–20 *And I will set a mark upon them, sending those of them who survive to the nations that had not heard the news concerning me, nor seen my glory—to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud (the archers), to Tubal and Javan, and to the distant isles. And they shall declare my glory among the nations and shall bring back all your brethren from throughout the nations to Jerusalem my holy mountain, says Jehovah, as offerings to Jehovah—on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and dromedaries—just as the Israelites brought offerings in pure vessels to the house of Jehovah.*

The first and second gatherings of peoples to “my holy mountain” parallel each other in several respects. The first group—persons in the son/servant category or Jehovah’s elect (Isaiah 43:5–7; cf. Matthew 24:31)—gathers in a new exodus led by Jehovah’s servant and others on the seraph level when protected by Jehovah’s presence (Isaiah 27:13; 41:8–13; 48:20–21; 49:9–12, 22–23; 52:11–12; 58:8). The second group—those who “survive” Jehovah’s Day of Judgment without his direct divine intervention—gathers to Jehovah’s “house” or rebuilt temple after he has come to reign on the earth.

Both gatherings follow the same pattern. On those who gather their “brethren” from dispersion Jehovah sets a “mark” that empowers them to protect those whom they gather. The type of such a mark occurs in an earlier Day of Judgment, when Jehovah put a mark on the foreheads of those who mourned for the wickedness of his people, which mark protected them from the Babylonians who slew them (Ezekiel 9:4–6). The angel from the east in John’s vision of Jehovah’s Day of Judgment similarly seals 144,000 servants of God on their foreheads, assuring their divine protection (Revelation 7:3–8; 9:4; 14:1).

While John’s angel from the east appears identical with Jehovah’s servant from the east (Isaiah 41:2, 25; 46:11), John’s 144,000 servants appear identical with Jehovah’s servants or watchmen on Isaiah’s seraph level (v 14; Isaiah 61:3, 6–10; 63:17; 65:8). Those who gather the second group, on the other hand—after Jehovah has instituted his reign on the earth—appear to originate with the first group, the “survivors” or “escapees” (*peletim*) of Jehovah’s Day of Judgment. They go forth and gather those who remain. The people whom they bring are *their* “offerings” to Jehovah (Isaiah 56:7; 60:7).

66:21 *Of them likewise I will accept men to be priests and Levites, says Jehovah.*

Those who gather others and present them as offerings to Jehovah (v 20) are ordained his priests as were his servants (Isaiah 61:3, 6, 10). Under the terms of the Davidic Covenant, however, they additionally assume the role of kings who serve as proxy saviors of their peoples (cf. Isaiah 49:22–23; 55:3; 65:8–9). In the “consummation of the earth” that constitutes Jehovah’s “glory,” therefore (Isaiah 6:3), those who attain the highest spiritual levels serve as kings and priests, inheriting the blessings of both the Davidic and Levitical Covenants (Jeremiah 33:20–22; Revelation 20:6; cf. Genesis 14:18).

66:22 *And as the new heavens and the new earth which I make shall endure before me, says Jehovah, so shall your offspring and name endure.*

The new heavens and new earth Jehovah makes that characterize his millennial age of peace transform the earth’s surface that is reduced to chaos in Jehovah’s Day of Judgment (Isaiah 10:23; 24:1, 19–20; 28:22) and alter its configuration of stars (Isaiah 13:13; 34:4; 51:13, 16). Jehovah re-creates the heavens and the earth at the same time that he re-creates his elect: “See, I create new heavens and a new earth; former events shall not be remembered or recalled to mind. Rejoice, then, and be glad forever in what I create. See, I create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy” (Isaiah 65:17–18).

Under the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant, Jehovah blesses unconditionally with descendants as many as the stars in the heavens and sands of the sea all who ascend to the spiritual level of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (cf. Genesis 22:17; 26:4, 24; 32:12; Exodus 32:13; Isaiah 40:26; 48:19). Persons who attain their stature, Jehovah gives “a handclasp and a name,” endowing them with “an everlasting name that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah 56:5; cf. 8:11; 62:2; 65:15; Genesis 17:5–7, 15; 32:28). Jehovah’s covenants thus point to his people’s ultimately inheriting the blessings of their righteous progenitors.

66:23 *And New Moon after New Moon, Sabbath after Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says Jehovah.*

Appointed times to worship Jehovah continue into the millennial age. From the time he institutes his reign of peace on the earth, an endless stream of pilgrimages of the nations flows to Jehovah’s temple to honor him: “Your gates shall always remain open; they shall not be shut day or night, that a host of nations may be brought to you and their kings escorted in” (Isaiah 60:11); “These I will bring to my holy mountain and gladden in my house of prayer. Their offerings and sacrifices shall be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be known as a house of prayer for all nations” (Isaiah 56:7);

“In the latter days the mountain of Jehovah’s house shall become established as the head of the mountains; it shall be preeminent among the hills, and all nations will flow to it. Many peoples shall go, saying, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, that we may follow in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and from Jerusalem the word of Jehovah. He will judge between the nations and arbitrate for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:2–4).

66:24 *And they shall go out and look upon the corpses of the people who transgressed against me, whose worms do not die and whose fire shall not be extinguished. They shall be a horror to all flesh.*

When Jehovah removes the veil of mortality in the millennial age (Isaiah 25:7–8), people’s vision extends to things beyond their current experience. The spirits of persons in the Perdition category will be visible in the Pit of Dissolution: “Tophet has been prepared of old, [a hearth]indeed, made ready for rulers; broad and deep is its fire pit and ample its pyre; Jehovah’s breath burns within it like a river of lava” (Isaiah 30:33; cf. 14:15; 38:18). Their de-creation—as the “worms” and “fire” consume those who die this second death (Revelation 21:8)—remains a solemn warning to all humanity.

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