

*Studies in
Isaiah.*

Mike Viccary.

Dedication & acknowledgements.

I dedicate this work to the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is worthy of praise for He alone has done all things well.

I would like to acknowledge a number of very key people who have helped me in my efforts over the years. First I want to say a huge “thank you” to my lovely wife Helen. Without her love and great friendship none of my writing and study would have been possible. Then, I would like to thank all my five children, their spouses and their children who have been the most wonderful delight and joy for which I thank and praise God. Finally my thanks go out to all who have challenged me and who have made me think, and then think again.

All of this work is the product of my thought but it owes much to that which I have read and interacted with. I have sought to acknowledge those who I have considered throughout this work. All errors and faults are entirely mine. I hope and pray that none would be lead astray but that all would indeed come to see the great goodness of the Saviour and having seen it would embrace him for all they are worth.

All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise stated.

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Foreword.

It is perhaps presumptuous to take up a pen and write about one of the most blessed pieces of revelation in all the Bible, but then again our Saviour asks us to seek Him and to devour all that He has to offer. It is with this motive and aim that I bring this effort to your attention. I certainly have no qualifications by which to present what I have gleaned as worthy of anyone's attention. I am not a scholar nor am I an academic with years of scholarly work to my credit. I am a believer who loves the Lord Jesus, although I do that poorly to say the least. I have this one intention in proffering this work – to glorify and worship the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour. If I miss this mark then the fault is entirely my own and I pray that no harm will be done in the reading and perusal of what I have written. At heart my aim for you the reader is that you will get into God's wonderful word more eagerly. I am sure you are aware of the Berean Christians in Acts 17:11 who looked into the Scriptures for themselves to see if what Paul was preaching was true. May I thus encourage you to look into the word eagerly to seek Christ and His love.

I want also to affirm that whilst I have sought to be true to the text, my efforts are not in any way definitive! Many people have written on this great work and the reader will do well to consult others who have made comments on this book too. Whomever we may care to read we must always remember that the word of God is perfect and pure, but the words of men are, at best, helps and pointers – no more. However it is always necessary for the believer to come afresh to the Scriptures. The moment we consider a particular writer or commentator to have *nailed* a book in understanding, is the moment when we are in greatest danger. I hope and pray that the younger generation of believers will be equally moved to grapple with Scripture to seek to hear what the Lord is saying in their day and age. The message of God never alters, and so reading older commentators is always worthwhile, but there are issues and features of every current age which past writers never imagined possible.

As a final plea I urge believers of every age and walk of life to get more serious about their study and engagement with the Lord's word. To those who rely on one message from the pulpit every week and a five minute reading of a favourite passage each day I say: dig deeper, eat of the rich fare that God has provided for you! To those who claim that digging deeper into God's word leads to intellectual snobbery and deadness I say: the *“blessed”* man is the one who delights *“in the law of the Lord”* and who not content with a mere reading, *“meditates”* on it *“day and night,”* (Psalm 1:2).

A note on Scripture use and references.

All Scripture quotations are from the NKJV unless otherwise stated. I have put quoted Scriptures in **red** and quotes from other writers in **blue**, to make it easy to identify what is God's word and what is man's! Where I have translated text or shown text with highlights and have interacted with the text for various reasons, these are left as black.

It will be observed that I have quoted some texts several times throughout the course of this devotional commentary. I make no apologies for this. Sometimes different aspects of a text are relevant, but then often the same ideas are repeated throughout. The Lord speaks to us often on the same or similar theme because we are so hard of hearing!

A note on “analysis.”

It will be observed that at the start of each chapter I have provided the relevant text of Isaiah in an ***analysed*** form. So, for example, some lines have been indented and some words have been highlighted. The purpose of this is to help in understanding. By selecting repeated or significant words or phrases, and then by moving subsequent text along on tab step, the structure of a passage can be shown more clearly.

Introduction.

Themes and overview of Isaiah.

The book of Isaiah has often been called the fifth gospel in view of the frequent reference to the person and work of the promised and soon coming Messiah. Although this is not an undeserved title, it may give a mistaken impression because in actual fact the whole Bible has as its focus the Lord Jesus and His work of redemption.¹

Isaiah's work has been sub-divided by many into two or three distinct "works." In the current author's view the book of Isaiah is a complete unit. One evidence for this unity is the frequent use of the title "*Holy One of Israel*" which is found throughout.² However there are identifiable sections and groups of material which we shall outline as we proceed. For convenience sake this work has been split into two parts. The first deals with the first 39 chapters, and the second considers the last 27 chapters. However this division, whilst recognizable in terms of a difference in the arrangement of subject matter and delivery, should not be taken to imply that the book of Isaiah ever existed in separate works as some modern scholars hold.

In this brief introduction we shall look at some of the special features (including frequently occurring words), a question of how to interpret the work, and some theological themes. We shall consider the historical background information when we come to the opening statement in the book. However our studies will be guided solely by what God has to say, so that our understanding of the history will be drawn solely from Scripture. This work does not follow the current trends in applying modern scholarship to the interpretation of Isaiah's book. It is sad to find so often that modern scholars use extra-Biblical information to aid in interpretation. Whilst we have nothing whatsoever to fear concerning any extra-Biblical sources, and whilst these may corroborate the text in some ways, a reliance on these will tend towards a misguided critical approach to the study of Scripture. Let me hasten to add that it is important to take a *critical attitude*, however this is not a critical attitude with regard to the text. Rather we must adopt a critical attitude towards our understanding and interpretation of the text. We must never be critical of God's word, but we must

1 See, for example: Luke 24:25-27,44-46.

2 We shall document these places a bit later.

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ever be critical of what we or any other human interpreter says or writes. Consequently it is imperative that the reader take a critical view of this work, whilst holding a proper reverential respect for the authority of the text.

Special features.

Isaiah's name means “salvation of the Lord” or “the Lord is salvation.” As with the other prophets, the book of Isaiah contains the formulae “*thus says the Lord*,” “*says the Lord*,” and the “*word of the Lord*” which all serve to indicate a divine origin for the book. The details for these phrases are shown in table I.1 below.

Table I.1: Three important phrases showing a divine origin for Scripture.

Phrase.	Frequency.	References.
<i>“Thus says the Lord”</i>	35	Isaiah 7:7; 10:24; 22:15; 28:16; 29:22; 30:15; 37:6,21,33; 38:1,5; 43:1,14,16; 44:2,6,24; 45:1,11,14,18; 48:17; 49:7,8,22,25; 50:1; 52:3,4; 56:1,4; 65:8,13; 66:1,12.
<i>“Says the Lord”</i>	78	Isaiah 1:11,18; 3:15; 7:7; 10:24; 14:22(x2),23; 17:3,6; 19:4; 22:14,15,25; 28:16; 29:22; 30:1,15; 31:9; 33:10; 37:6,21,33,34; 38:1,5; 39:6; 41:14,21; 43:1,10,12,14,16; 44:2,6,24; 45:1,11,13,14,18; 48:17,22; 49:7,8,18,22,25; 50:1; 52:3,4,5(x2); 54:1,8,10,17; 55:8; 56:1,4; 57:19; 59:20,21(x2); 65:7,8,13,25; 66:1,2,9,12,17,20,21,22,23.
<i>“Word of the Lord”</i>	8	Isaiah 1:10; 2:3; 28:13,14; 38:4; 39:5,8; 66:5.

The book of Isaiah, taking into account both its vocabulary and its structure, comes from the pen of one man under God's inspiration. New Testament writers attribute both main sections of the book (Isaiah 1-39 and 40-66) to Isaiah.³ Isaiah uses the widest vocabulary of any other Biblical writer. The longest book of Scripture (Psalms) uses 2,170 different words, the second longest (Jeremiah) employs 1,653 different words, but Isaiah (the fifth longest book) has the greatest variety of all, as it uses 2,186 different words.

The book of Isaiah has often be called a “mini Bible.” Its main sections mirror the Bible as a whole. Thus whilst the Old Testament has 39 books detailing the history of Israel and its sin, the first section of Isaiah, which records the messages against Israel and the world's sin, has 39

3 John. 12:37-41; Matthew 3:3; 4:14- 16; Romans 9:27-29; 10:16.

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chapters. Similarly the New Testament, which unfolds the Lord Jesus and His great work, has 27 books, and the second section of Isaiah has 27 chapters, whose main focus is the person and work of the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Noteworthy is the fact that whilst the New Testament opens with the ministry of John the Baptist, the second part of Isaiah announces the coming of this prophet.⁴ Further, whilst the Bible ends with a description of the new heavens and the new earth, so also does the second section of Isaiah.⁵

Frequently occurring words.

By considering the words most often used we can get some idea of the important themes that God wanted to bring in His word through the prophet Isaiah. This approach helps us understand the book as a whole, but what is presented below is by no means exhaustive. The reader should not assume that it is a complete analysis. Some words, like those used to represent sin, are found throughout Scripture, so their absence in what follows should not be taken as an indication of lesser importance.

Titles for the Lord.

First we should consider the way in which the Lord Himself is represented. As may be expected, the two main titles “*Lord*” and “*God*” are found with high frequency throughout the text.

The title “*Holy One*,” whilst not exclusive to Isaiah, seems to have been a favourite. It occurs forty four times in the entire Old Testament and six times in the New Testament. These details are shown in table I.2. Thirty of the Old Testament occurrences are found in Isaiah, twenty-five of which have the full title, “*the Holy One of Israel*.” Of the other fourteen found elsewhere in the Old Testament, seven identify the “*Holy One*” with either “*God*” or the “*Lord*.” Another concerns the prophecy of the Messiah's resurrection by David. The remaining six have the title the “*Holy One of Israel*.” Thus nearly 81% of **all** the references to “*Holy One of Israel*” come in the book of Isaiah. Of the New Testament references, one was used by the angel announcing the Lord Jesus' birth.⁶ A second comes from a demon who was about to be removed from a man.⁷ Two others are quotes from Psalm 16:10 used by the apostles to prove that the Lord Jesus was the Messiah.⁸

4 Matthew 3:1-3; Isaiah 40:3-5.

5 Revelation 21:1-3; Isaiah 66:22.

6 Luke 1:35.

7 Luke 4:34.

8 Acts 2:27; 13:35.

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The Lord Jesus is referred to once as the *“Holy One and the Just”* in Acts.⁹ Finally we read that the apostle John states that Christians have an anointing from the *“Holy One.”*¹⁰

Table I.2: The Holy One of Israel.

Phrase.	Frequency.	References NKJV.
<i>“Holy One”</i>	7	Identify title with either <i>“God”</i> or <i>“the Lord”</i> : Job 6:10; Proverbs 9:10; Ezekiel 39:7; Hosea 11:9,12; Habakkuk 1:12; 3:3.
	1	Messiah's resurrection: Psalm 16:10.
	5	Isaiah 10:17; 29:23; 40:25; 43:15; 49:7.
<i>“Holy One of Israel”</i>	25	Isaiah 1:4; 5:19,24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11,12,15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14,16,20; 43:3,14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9,14.
	6	2Kings 19:22; Psalm 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Jeremiah 50:29; 51:5. Note that 2Kings 19:22 is also found at Isaiah 37:23.
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Isaiah has the most references of any book in the Old Testament to the Holy Spirit (see table I.3). Out of a total of 94 references to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, 19 come in Isaiah. The next highest in frequency is the book of Ezekiel which has 14, whilst Numbers, Judges and 1 Samuel each have 7 places where the Holy Spirit is mentioned.

In the second part of the book of Isaiah, in a large number of places, we find the vitally important phrase *“I am”* and the equally important phrase *“I am He”* both used to refer to the unique self-existence of God.¹¹ The use of such a referent for God clearly derives from its use by the Lord in His meeting with Moses.¹²

One other title used often in the Old Testament is *“Lord of hosts.”* This title occurs about 235 times in the Old Testament but by far the majority (nearly 88%) can be found in Isaiah (53), Jeremiah (71), and the minor prophets Haggai (12), Zechariah (46) and Malachi (24).

⁹ Acts 3:14.

¹⁰ 1John 2:20.

¹¹ Isaiah 41:4,10(x2); 42:8; 43:3,5,10,11,12,13,15,25; 44:6,24; 45:5,6,18,22; 46:4,9(x2); 47:8,10,12(x3),17; 49:23; 51:12,15; 52:6; 58:9; 65:1(x2)

¹² Exodus 3:14.

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Table I.3: References to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.

Book.	Frequency.	References.
Genesis	3	1:2; 6:3; 41:38.
Exodus	2	31:3; 35:31.
Numbers	7	11:17,25(x2),26,29; 24:2; 27:18.
Judges	7	3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14.
1Samuel	7	10:6,10; 11:6; 16:13,14; 19:20,23.
2Samuel	1	23:2.
1Kings	1	18:12.
2Kings	1	2:16.
1Chronicles	2	12:18; 28:12.
2Chronicles	3	15:1; 20:14; 24:20.
Nehemiah	2	9:20,30.
Job	3	26:13; 33:4; 34:14.
Psalms	6	51:11,12; 104:30; 106:33; 139:7; 143:10.
Proverbs	1	1:23. ¹³
Isaiah	19	4:4¹⁴(x2); 11:2(x4); 30:1; 32:15; 34:16; 40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 48:16; 59:19,21; 61:1; 63:10,11,14.
Ezekiel	14	2:2; 3:12,14,24; 8:3; 11:1,5,24(x2); 36:27; 37:1,14; 39:29; 43:5.
Daniel	5	4:8,9,18; 5:11,14.
Joel	2	2:28,29
Micah	2	2:7; 3:8.
Haggai	1	2:5.
Zechariah	4	4:6; 6:8; 7:12; 12:10
Malachi	1	2:15
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¹³ The word “*spirit*” at Proverbs 1:23 is not capitalised in the NKJV, but attention to the context will show that the Holy Spirit is clearly intended.

¹⁴ The word “*spirit*” at Isaiah 4:4 is not capitalised in the NKJV, but attention to the context will show that the Holy Spirit is clearly intended.

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Other important words and themes.

The following is but a small selection of the most important ideas and words found in Isaiah. They are by no means exhaustive and the arrangement in alphabetical order does not indicate any hierarchy of thought on my part.

The banner.

The “*banner*” is an extremely precious theme in Isaiah which draws our attention to the cross of Christ. Of the 17 occurrences of this word in the Old Testament, 8 are from Isaiah.¹⁵ Second in use are the Psalms and Song of Solomon with 3 in each. The word “*standard*” which only occurs twice in Isaiah is also a significant word, which is found most often in the book of Numbers (13 times).¹⁶ These two words speak, in the first instance, of a rallying point for an army in battle.

Creation.

Creation, and God as Creator, are major themes in the book of Isaiah.¹⁷ The Hebrew word בָּרָא (*bārā'*) which is translated as “*create,*” “*created,*” or “*Creator,*” is found most frequently in Isaiah, occurring 19 times, and thus accounting for nearly 50 % of all usage in Scripture. It is only found 10 times in Genesis of which 7 of these are in the first section (Genesis 1:1-2:4a).¹⁸

Idols & idolatry.

A major theme in the book of Isaiah is the challenge to idols and idolatry. Although Ezekiel has the word “*idol*” with the highest frequency (it occurs 40 times in the NKJV), Isaiah is the next most frequent with 15 occurrences.¹⁹ However there are large portions in the second half of Isaiah where the subject of idolatry gets sharp analysis. A few examples are shown in table I.4.

15 Isaiah 5:26; 11:10,12; 13:2; 18:3; 30:17; 31:9; 62:10.

16 Isaiah 49:22; 59:19.

17 We shall have cause to comment on these in the text but consider, for example the following places: Isaiah 40:26; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1,7; 45:7,8,12,18; 48:7; 54:16; 57:19; 65:17,18.

18 It is found in the following places in Scripture translated as “*create,*” “*created,*” “*creator*”: Genesis 1:1,21,27(x3); 2:3,4; 5:1,2; 6:7; Deuteronomy 4:32; Psalm 51:10; 89:12; 102:18; 104:30; 148:5; Ecclesiastes 12:1; Isaiah 4:5 40:26,28; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1,7,15; 45:7,8,12,18; 48:7; 54:16; 57:19; 65:17,18; Jeremiah 31:22; Ezekiel 21:30; 28:13,15; Amos 4:13; Malachi 2:10.

19 The word “*idol*” can be found in the NKJV at: 2:8,18,20; 10:10,11; 19:1,3; 31:7(x2); 45:16; 46:1; 48:5; 57:13; 66:3,17.

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Table I.4: The theme of idols and idolatry in Isaiah.

Text.	Theme.
Isaiah 40:21-24	The Lord asks those who follow idols to “ <i>present their case.</i> ” How will they stand up to scrutiny?
Isaiah 44:9-20	Those who make idols are described as being “ <i>useless</i> ” because they do not recognise that with the same piece of wood they make an elaborately decorated “ <i>god</i> ” but also use some to burn in the fire to make a meal!
Isaiah 46	Two idols “ <i>Bel,</i> ” and “ <i>Nebo</i> ” are given particular attention. These are objects that need to be carried by their worshippers!

Salvation.

Among other important words are those which come under the heading of salvation and redemption. As we noted earlier, words for sin are found all through Scripture so we have not made any attempt to analyse these in detail here. However, the word “*holy*” is found more frequently in Isaiah, (with 59 uses), than in any other book with the exception of Leviticus.²⁰ Furthermore, the word “*justice*” is found more often in Isaiah than in any other book of the Bible.²¹ The word “*righteousness*” is found 55 times in Isaiah, which is more than five times more frequent than in either Jeremiah or Ezekiel. It is beaten for frequency only by Leviticus and the Psalms.²² The word “*salvation*” is found 28 times in Isaiah making 23% of the total of 122 in the whole Old Testament.²³ Only the Psalms have this word more frequently (70), and no other book has more than 5 examples. The words “*redeem,*” “*redeemer,*” and “*redeemed*” can be found 27 times in Isaiah which is 24% of the total number of uses in the Old Testament.²⁴ Only the Psalms (22) and Leviticus (20) have any significant number of occurrences of this word. The idea of trusting is also a theme in Isaiah. For example, we are exhorted to trust in the Lord and not in Egypt or man.²⁵

20 Isaiah 1:4; 4:3; 5:16,19,24; 6:3(x3),13; 10:17,20; 11:9; 12:6; 17:7; 27:13; 29:19,23; 30:11,12,15,29; 31:1; 37:23; 40:25; 41:14,16,20; 43:3,14,15; 45:11; 47:4; 48:2,17; 49:7(x2); 52:1,10; 54:5; 55:5; 56:7; 57:13,15(x2); 58:13(x2); 60:9,14; 62:9,12; 63:10,11,15,18; 64:10,11; 65:11,25; 66:20. Even though the divine titles “*Holy One*” or “*Holy One of Israel*” account for 30 of these occurrences, holiness is still a running theme throughout the book.

21 The word “*justice*” is found 29 times in the NKJV at: Isaiah 1:17,21,27; 5:7,23; 9:7; 10:2; 16:5; 28:6,17; 30:18; 32:1,7,16; 33:5; 40:14; 42:1,3,4; 51:4; 56:1; 58:2; 59:4,8,9,11,14,15; 61:8. The next most frequent is the Psalms with 22 occurrences, and then comes Proverbs with 16.

22 There are 55 occurrences at Isaiah 1:21,26,27; 5:7,16; 10:22; 11:4,5; 16:5; 26:9,10; 28:17; 32:1,16,17(x2); 33:5; 41:2; 42:6,21; 45:8(x2),13,19,23,24; 46:12,13; 48:1,18; 51:1,5,6,7,8; 54:14,17; 56:1(x2); 57:12; 58:2,8,9,14,16,17; 60:17; 61:3,10,11; 62:1,2; 63:1; 64:5,6. Leviticus has 78, Psalms has 74, whilst Exodus has 46 uses of this word.

23 Isaiah 12:2,3; 17:10; 25:9; 26:1; 33:2,6; 45:8,17; 46:13; 49:6,8; 51:5,6,8; 52:7,10; 56:1; 59:11,16,17; 60:18; 61:1,10; 62:1,11; 63:1,5.

24 “*Redeemed*” at Isaiah 1:27; 29:23; 35:9; 43:1; 44:22,23; 48:20; 51:10; 52:3,9; 62:12; 63:4,9. “*Redeem*” at Isaiah 50:2. “*Redeemer*” at Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 44:6,24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7,26; 54:5,8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16.

25 The idea of putting trust in the Lord can be found at Isaiah 12:2; 26:3,4; 36:4,5,7; 37:10; 50:10; 51:5; 57:13.

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Apart from the various terms associated with salvation we also have specific terms used for how God saves and redeems His people. Thus the concept of the remnant is a frequently occurring theme and only Jeremiah has the word more frequently. In Isaiah the word “*remnant*” occurs 17 times, but the idea of a small number who will return finds expression in a variety of other ways.²⁶ For example, we read that “*the ransomed of the Lord shall return*” with singing in two places as follows:²⁷

Isaiah 35:10:

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

וּפְדוּיֵי יְהוָה יָשׁוּבוּן וּבָאוּ צִיּוֹן בְּרִנָּה וּשְׂמֵחַת עוֹלָם עַל-
רֵאשִׁים שְׂשׂוֹן וּשְׂמֵחָה יִשְׂיִגּוּ וְנֹסוּ יָגוֹן וְאַנְחָה

Isaiah 51:11:

So the ransomed of the Lord shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

וּפְדוּיֵי יְהוָה יָשׁוּבוּן וּבָאוּ צִיּוֹן בְּרִנָּה וּשְׂמֵחַת עוֹלָם עַל-
רֵאשִׁים שְׂשׂוֹן וּשְׂמֵחָה יִשְׂיִגּוּן נֹסוּ יָגוֹן וְאַנְחָה

The way.

The concept of a highway or path/road on which the redeemed can travel is another theme of Isaiah. The word “*highway*” is found 10 times in Isaiah whilst other books have this word once or twice, and only Judges has it as many as 5 times.²⁸ The word “*way*” finds frequent use in the Old Testament and Isaiah is no exception to this. There are 45 occurrences of this word in Isaiah and only Psalms and Proverbs have the word more frequently.²⁹ One other word to express the journey

The idea of trust in Egypt or others can be found at Isaiah 30:2,3,12; 31:1; 36:6(x2),9,15; 42:17; 47:10; 59:4.

26 Isaiah 1:9; 10:20,21(x2),22; 11:11,16; 14:22,30; 15:9; 16:14; 17:3; 28:5; 37:4,31,32; 46:3.

27 It is to be noted that the Hebrew text is identical in both places (Isaiah 35:10 & 51:11).

28 Isaiah 7:3; 11:16; 19:23; 33:8; 35:8(x2); 36:2; 40:3; 49:11; 62:10.

29 Isaiah 2:3,6; 3:12; 8:11; 9:1; 15:5; 26:7,8; 28:7; 30:11,21; 37:29; 40:3,14,27; 41:3; 42:16,24; 43:16; 45:13;

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of life, namely, “*path*,” occurs more in Isaiah than any other prophet, again being only bettered in frequency by Psalms and Proverbs.³⁰

Word.

Moving on from titles we must consider the term “*word*.” This expression is used both to speak of God's words, and also of man's words.³¹ In connection with God, the word is described as being “*of the Lord*” and is synonymous with “*the law of our God*.”³² The phrase: “*the word of the Lord*” only occurs 8 times in Isaiah, compared with 57 times in Jeremiah, and 60 in Ezekiel.³³ As we noted in table I.1 the phrase: “*says the Lord*” comes 78 times in Isaiah, but in Jeremiah it appears 313 times, whilst in Ezekiel it is found 205 times. These differences do not suggest any difference in authority, for all three prophets spoke the very words of God. However at the close of Israel as a nation during the ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel it may have been necessary to emphasise extremely clearly that God was in fact speaking.

The phrase: “*says God*” only occurs at Isaiah 42:5 and 2Chronicles 24:20 in the Old Testament. The word of God is described once as being eternal (it “*stands forever*”).³⁴ Twice we read that the people had rejected the word of the Holy One.³⁵ Twice we note that the word was something which Isaiah “*saw*” concerning Judah and Jerusalem.³⁶ On only one occasion we discover that the word was something that “*came*” to Isaiah.³⁷ This is to be contrasted with the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel where the phrase “*the word of the Lord came*” is much more frequent.³⁸ Again, this may have been because of the dire situation faced at that time with the imminent destruction of Jerusalem. In three passages we learn something of the interconnection between God's word revealed, and His servants' message, so that the word of the Lord becomes the word of God's servants.³⁹ The word of the Lord was something “*sent*” with a particular task in mind

48:15,17; 53:6; 55:7,8(x2),9(x2); 56:11; 57:10,14(x2),17,18; 58:2,13; 59:8(x3); 62:10; 63:17; 64:5(x2); 65:2; 66:3.

30 Isaiah 2:3; 3:12; 26:7; 30:11; 40:14; 42:16; 43:16; 59:7,8.

31 God's word at Isaiah 1:10; 2:1,3; 5:24; 8:10,20; 9:8; 16:13; 24:3; 28:13,14; 29:11,18,21(x2); 30:21; 37:22; 38:4; 39:5; 40:8; 44:26; 45:23; 50:4; 51:16; 55:11; 59:21; 66:2,5(x2). Man's word at Isaiah 31:2; 32:7; 36:5,12,13,21,22; 37:4(x2),6; 37:17; 41:26,28; 58:13; 59:4,13.

32 Isaiah 1:10; 2:3; 5:24; 8:20; 28:13; 39:8.

33 Occurs at Isaiah 1:10; 2:3; 28:13,14; 38:4; 39:5,8; 66:5.

34 Isaiah 40:8.

35 Isaiah 5:24; 30:12.

36 Isaiah 2:1; 29:11.

37 Isaiah 38:4.

38 See, for example: Jeremiah 1:2,4,11,13; 2:1; 13:3,8; 18:5; 24:4; 28:12; 29:30; 32:6,26; 33:1,19,23; 34:12; 36:27; 37:6; 42:7; 43:8. See also: Ezekiel 1:3; 3:16; 6:1; 7:1; 11:14; 12:1,8,17,21,26; 13:1; 14:2,12; 15:1; 16:1; 17:1,11; 18:1; 20:2,45; 21:1,8,18; 22:1,17,23; 23:1; 24:1,15,20; 25:1; 26:1; 27:1; 28:1,11,20; 29:1,17; 30:1,20; 31:1; 32:1,17; 33:1,23; 34:1; 35:1; 36:16; 37:15; 38:1.

39 Isaiah 44:26; 51:16; 59:21.

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which would not fail.⁴⁰ It was also something that the Lord once “*spoke*” to Isaiah, and on four other occasions is described as being “*spoken*.”⁴¹ It must therefore be “*heard*.”⁴²

Miscellaneous themes.

The word “*water*” is found 57 times in Isaiah and this is only surpassed by Genesis which has 66 occurrences.⁴³ When it is noted that the word “*desert*” occurs more in Isaiah than anywhere else, (it is found 12 times in Isaiah with the next most frequent being Jeremiah with 6 occurrences), this regular mention of water is eminently understandable.⁴⁴ The words “*sing*,” “*singing*,” and “*song*” which are fruits of salvation are found more often in Isaiah than any other book except the Psalms.⁴⁵ Other frequently occurring words include “*mountain*,” “*hill*,” and “*tree*.”⁴⁶ These are often used metaphorically to represent people or a place of sacrifice.

A question of interpretation.

Before we can consider the details of Isaiah's prophecy we must attend to a matter of interpretation. It is not my intention at this point to outline the main details of hermeneutics, but there are some features of that discipline which are nevertheless necessary to highlight in order to avoid any confusion.⁴⁷ Let it be said at once that we assume that the prophecy of Isaiah is a complete work inspired (God-breathed) by the Lord. All the very words, phrases, sentences, themes

40 Isaiah 9:8; 31:2; 45:23; 55:11.

41 Isaiah 8:3; 16:13; 24:3; 37:22; 50:4.

42 Isaiah 1:10; 28:14; 29:18; 30:21; 39:5; 66:5.

43 Isaiah 1:22,30; 3:1; 8:6,7; 11:9; 12:3; 14:23; 15:6,9; 17:12,13; 18:12; 19:5,8; 21:14; 22:9,11; 23:3; 27:3; 28:2,17; 30:14,20,25; 32:2,20; 33:16; 35:6,7; 36:16; 37:25; 40:12; 41:17,18(x2); 43:2,16,20; 44:3,4,12; 48:21(x2); 49:10; 50:2; 51:10; 54:9(x2); 55:1,10; 57:20; 58:11(x3); 63:12; 64:2.

44 Isaiah 13:21; 21:1; 23:13; 34:14; 35:1,6; 40:3; 41:19; 43:19,20; 48:21; 51:3.

45 The word “*sing*” (or singing) can be found 26 times in the NKJV at: 5:1; 12:5; 14:7; 16:10; 23:16; 24:14; 26:19; 27:2; 35:2,6,10; 38:20; 42:10,11; 44:23(x2); 48:20; 49:13(x2); 51:11; 52:8,9; 54:1; 54:1(x2); 55:12; 65:14. This word is found 71 times in the Psalms but the next most frequent apart from Isaiah is 2Chronicles with 8 occurrences. The word “*song*” can be found 11 times in the NKJV at: 5:1 12:2; 23:15,16; 24:9,16; 25:5; 26:1; 30:29; 38:20; 42:10. Psalm has 50 occurrences of the word “song,” but the next most frequent after Isaiah is Deuteronomy with 6 occurrences.

46 The word “*mountain*” occurs more frequently in Isaiah than any other book. It is found 42 times in the NKJV at: Isaiah 2:2(x2),3,14; 11:9; 13:2,4; 14:25; 17:13; 18:3,6; 22:5; 25:6,7,10; 30:17,25,29; 34:3; 37:24; 40:4,9,12; 41:15; 42:11,15; 44:23; 49:11,13; 52:7; 54:10; 55:12; 56:7; 57:7,13; 64:1,3; 65:7,9,11,25; 66:20. The word “*hill*” occurs 17 times in the NKJV in the following places in Isaiah: Isaiah 2:2 ,14; 5:1,25; 7:25; 10:32; 30:17,25; 31:4; 40:4,12; 41:15; 42:15; 54:10; 55:12; 58:14; 65:7. Only the Psalms has more uses of this word (22). The word “*tree*” is found 25 times in the NKJV in the following places in Isaiah: Isaiah 1:29; 6:13; 7:2; 10:19; 14:8; 17:6; 24:13; 34:4; 36:16; 37:24; 40:20; 41:19(x4); 44:14,23; 55:12,13(x2); 56:3; 57:5; 60:13; 61:3; 65:22. Only Ezekiel (x42), and Genesis (x31) have this word with more frequency.

47 For a fuller discussion of interpretation the reader is directed to another work: **Mike Viccary**. “*Hearing what God has spoken*.” A PDF version is available free on request – contact: thedoc.mike@gmail.com.

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and ideas written for us are those which God has chosen, and which God wants us to hear, understand and obey. This does not mean that the personality of the prophet is in any way bypassed, or that Isaiah acted merely as a mouthpiece speaking unwillingly. What we mean to emphasise by holding to the verbal and plenary inspiration view of Scripture is to ensure that we understand that man does *“not live by bread alone”* but *“by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”*⁴⁸

The first point to bring to the reader's attention is that it is essential that we interpret all of Isaiah's work with a view to the New Testament and the gospel. This statement highlights the essential unity of Scripture, in that whatever is revealed brings one central and main message, namely the gospel (the good news) which is in Christ Jesus. Given this truth, derived from our Lord's teaching after His resurrection, it will be important to consider how the New Testament writers understood the Old Testament.⁴⁹ We may not mention and reflect on all the New Testament references to Isaiah, but if we work against how the New Testament writers under inspiration viewed Isaiah's work, we shall be sailing in rough and dangerous waters.

A second essential point to establish is that whatever Isaiah wrote, he wrote for our instruction. We establish this truth both from comments that Paul made to the Romans and to the Corinthians, and from the general truth that revelation is something given for all people, and not just for certain groups at certain times.⁵⁰ This means that what Isaiah was writing, was, in point of fact, written *with us in mind*. This is not to disregard the fact that his message was first and foremost for his contemporaries, but it is to say that we can fully appreciate that the Holy Spirit had so inspired Isaiah's pen that what he wrote was for our benefit. We must take this thought a little further because there is a group of preachers and believers who would have us believe that certain parts of Isaiah (or of the Old Testament in general) are not *directly* for us, but relate solely to the Jews. For example, Isaiah 2:1-4 is a passage which predicts what life would be like in the *“latter days.”* Some may interpret this passage as predicting a future return of the Jewish peoples. However this line of reasoning is flawed because the New Testament takes all of the Old Testament types and shadows and applies them to Christ and to the church. Israel in the Old Testament becomes the Church in the New Testament. Of course there are occasions where the old Israel is being spoken of, but where the

48 Deuteronomy 8:3.

49 See, for example, Luke 24.

50 Romans 15:4; 1Corinthians 10:6. The point our Lord makes in Matthew 22:31 is pertinent here too. Speaking to the leaders of that time concerning the passage in Exodus where Moses met God at the burning bush, the Lord asked this question: *“have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying ...”* What the leaders could read in Exodus was that which God was speaking directly to them. In the same way, when we read the Scriptures today the Lord God is speaking directly to us.

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prophecy indicates “Israel” and its future, then we can rest assured that Christ and the Church is meant in the New Testament.

I am keenly aware that this view is not one held by everyone, and that many are convinced of the resurgence of the nation Israel in the modern era as a fulfilment of prophecy. The big trouble with this idea is that it undoes the whole notion of complete fulfilment in Christ. When Christ came, He ended the Old Testament dispensation so that, the sacrificial system, the temple, the priesthood, the earthly rule, and so on, were all finished and superseded by the reign of Christ. These things are plain and certain as can be seen from an examination of the books of Galatians and Hebrews (for example). In the opening verses of Hebrews we are taught that Christ is the supreme and better revelation of God which cannot be superseded.⁵¹ Furthermore, if Christ is the *“end of the law,”* as Paul declared, and if the temple and sacrifices are ended, why should we accept the continuation of Israel as an earthly nation ruled by the risen Lord?⁵² Why not rather accept that the Church is the fulfilment of Israel prophetically speaking? I suspect many may respond that Revelation 20, which in their eyes should only be interpreted literally, teaches a thousand year reign. I do not want to digress into discussing the book of Revelation, but it is surely plainly evident that Revelation ought to be interpreted symbolically since it is a symbolic book.⁵³ Given that Revelation 20 is the only place where a thousand year reign is mentioned, surely we ought to consider this in light of the rest of Scripture's teaching on the latter days?⁵⁴

The pre-millennial view of Scripture, that Christ returns and reigns for a thousand years in Jerusalem over Israel, leads to much confusion concerning the gospel. If what pre-millennial believers hold to is true, then we are brought into a hopeless confusion. If the temple is rebuilt and sacrifices are reinstated, then why did Christ come and die on the cross? Was His once-for-all sacrifice not sufficient?⁵⁵ Was His death not the end of the old order, the sacrifices, and the temple? Surely Paul's arguments in Galatians that those who return to the old Jewish ways are actually denouncing Christ and the gospel applies here too? Considering the temple as but one example, we can be clear that Christ's view was that it would be done away with, because His body is the new and living temple. It is well worth considering the gospel of John chapter 2 which speaks on this subject. The event centres around Christ's dissatisfaction with how the temple was being treated by

51 Hebrews 1:1f.

52 Romans 10:4.

53 Revelation 1;1 – it is *“signified”* or symbolic. Couple this with the fantastical elements in Revelation which are similar in style to those found in Daniel where we are taught how to interpret the various dreams and so on.

54 The principle of the analogy of faith is being expressed here whereby Scripture as a whole interprets Scripture in part.

55 Hebrews 7:27; 9:26,28; 10:10.

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the Jews.⁵⁶ As a result, Christ drove out the unscrupulous people who had made the temple a place of merchandise:

13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14** And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. **15** When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. **16** And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" **17** Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."⁵⁷

Indignant, the Jews request a sign of authority from Christ to verify His action. Christ's response is one of those key moments in the New Testament which teaches us that some prophecies of the Old Testament receive a spiritual rather than literal fulfilment:

18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" **19** Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." **20** Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" **21** But He was speaking of the temple of His body. **22** Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.⁵⁸

The temple, about which all the Jews were focused, would be destroyed about AD 70. Christ takes this opportunity to transfer the type (the temple in Jerusalem) to the substance (His own body). Peter in his first epistle continues this spiritual application by considering the believers to whom he was writing, as the spiritual counterpart to the physical temple:

4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, **5** you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. **6** Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." **7** Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious; but to those who are disobedient, "the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief

⁵⁶ Incidentally the Lord Jesus cleansed the temple on two occasions. Once at the beginning of His ministry as recorded in John 2:14-16, and once at the end of His ministry as recorded in Matthew 21:12,13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45,46.

⁵⁷ John 2:13-17.

⁵⁸ John 2:18-22.

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cornerstone,” 8 and “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.⁵⁹

It is hard to miss Peter's wholesale application of all that was significant about the temple exclusively to the Church here.

Then also we should take note of James's use of the Old Testament in his statement regarding whether the Gentile converts should be circumcised:

13 And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, “Men *and* brethren, listen to me: 14 Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. 15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 16 ‘After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; 17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things.’ 18 “Known to God from eternity are all His works. 19 Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, 20 but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and from blood. 21 For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”⁶⁰

Note how James, in speaking of the Gentile converts, states that what was happening to the Gentiles in his time was a direct fulfilment of the prophecy of Amos 9:11. The Lord had prophesied through Amos that He would rebuild “*the tabernacle of David.*”⁶¹ It is clearly apparent that in coming to Israel, Christ did not rebuild the earthly tabernacle, but He did establish the spiritual and true reality for which the tabernacle stood as a picture and type. In this connection it is worth recalling the Lord's conversation with the woman of Samaria in John chapter 4. In this event the Lord pointedly taught the woman that it would no longer be the case that worshippers would need to travel to Jerusalem, for “*true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,*” and not in any special location.⁶²

There are many other reasons why it is important to view the New Testament, and supremely Christ Jesus, as a complete fulfilment of the Old Testament types, but I will leave that for the interested reader to investigate further. Suffice to say that in this devotional commentary I will be assuming that Isaiah's prophecies apply to Christians, and that we must interpret the literalistic

59 1Peter 2:4-8.

60 Acts 15:13-21.

61 Amos 9:11.

62 John 4:23.

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elements relating to Israel, the temple, the sacrifices and so on as fulfilled in Christ and the Church, His body.

I shall leave other matters of interpretation for the reader to pursue. However, to conclude, I ask the reader to remember that we are not engaged merely in an intellectual exercise but are keen to seek the Lord, to know Him and to do all He requires.⁶³ The goal of our instruction, as Paul taught Timothy, *“is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.”*⁶⁴ If we come to Scripture with any other motive we will fail. Our intention must be to meet with the Lord Himself and to so love Him that we will obey Him by the faith He gives.

A little theology.

Matters of theology, by which I mean Biblical doctrines, will be discussed as we progress through the book. We note here simply that whatever is true of God and His work elsewhere in Scripture is also true here in Isaiah. I do not intend to elaborate at length on theological issues here suffice to say that Isaiah presents to us the true God and His wonderful work. There is much in Isaiah which teaches us about the nature of God and of His works, and there is much also which prophesies the Lord Jesus' ministry. For example we learn of the eternal nature of the Lord and of His faithfulness.⁶⁵ We learn of the Lord's holiness, His gentleness and of His great grace.⁶⁶ We are instructed also about the Lord's incommunicable attributes such as His sovereignty, His omnipotence and His omniscience.⁶⁷ We learn further of His glorious being, His justice, His mercy and His uniqueness.⁶⁸ Finally we could mention His goodness, His patience, His tri-unity and His wrath.⁶⁹ With regard to the prophecies about the Lord Jesus Christ we learn of His incarnation and virgin birth, that He was to be both man and God, that He was descended from David, and that He was to suffer on behalf of sinners.⁷⁰ In the great “Servant songs” we learn of His relationship with other members of the Trinity and of His ministry and purpose.⁷¹ Then finally we have a variety of titles given to the Lord Jesus.⁷²

63 Micah 6:8.

64 1 Timothy 1:5.

65 Isaiah 25:1; 40:28; 49:7; 63:16.

66 Isaiah 6:3; 40:11; 43:22-28; 48:17-22; 49:14-18; 55:1-9; 57:15,16-21; 63:7-8.

67 Isaiah 28:23-29; 31:4-5,8-9; 40:9-10-17,21-27; 41:1-4,21-24; 42:5,9; 44:6-20,24-27; 45:7-12,14-15; 46:1-4,6-8; 64:1-4; 66:1,2.

68 Isaiah 40:1-5,18-20; 42:8; 46:5,9-12; 48:12,13; 56:1-8; 59:19.

69 Isaiah 30:27,28; 33:14-16; 42:14; 48:16; 58:8-14; 63:9,10; 65:2.

70 Isaiah 7:14; 9:6,7; 11:1; 52:13-53:12.

71 Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12.

72 Isaiah 1:4,9,24; 2:3; 4:2; 6:5; 7:14; 9:2,6; 10:17; 11:1; 32:1; 37:17,36; 42:1; 43:25; 44:6; 53:3,11; 54:5.

Chapter 1.

Isaiah 1:1.

The vision which Isaiah saw.

Textual analysis.

1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw
concerning Judah and Jerusalem
in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Isaiah 1:1 acts as a title which informs us of three things we need to consider at the outset. To begin with, we have the nature of how the book of Isaiah has been revealed and given to us. It is, “*the vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz which he saw.*” Second, we are directed to the main focus and recipients of the book, since it is a work “*concerning Judah and Jerusalem.*” Finally, we are told about the time of its composition, or the historical context of the book. This vision was given to Isaiah, “*in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.*” We shall look at these three themes in turn, and then consider the structure of the rest of Isaiah 1.

[1] The vision.

[2] Judah and Jerusalem.

[3] Historical background.

[4] Analysis.

[1] The vision.

The word “*vision*,” (חֲזוֹן *hăzôn*), is used frequently in Scripture to indicate a divinely inspired message. The underlying meaning of the word is a “mental perception,” or, the “seeing of something,” that is, “to behold.” The first time we come upon the word in Scripture occurs with the prophet-judge Samuel, where the word is rendered “*revelation*” in the NKJV:

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Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; *there was no widespread revelation.*⁷³

In this statement from 1Samuel 3:1 we can see that the word *“revelation”* (*ḥāzôn*) is used synonymously with the phrase *“the word of the Lord.”* In Psalm 89:19 we read that the Lord, *“spoke in a vision.”* In Proverbs 29:18 the word *“revelation”* (*ḥāzôn*) is set alongside the word *“law.”* Thus it would seem that the word *“vision”* in Isaiah 1:1 indicates a divinely given message brought directly to a person's mind or mental perception, which has the force and importance of law. The frequently occurring phrase *“thus says the Lord”* is a more graphic and immediate statement which would define this term *“vision.”*

Consequently we have here in the book of Isaiah a revelation from God. This is something we need to ponder a while. Everything else we come across (apart from Scripture) is not of this character, for, whatever it is, it stems from the heart and thoughts of man. We must always see things in this way. We thus have two separate and distinct things. We have that which **God** has said (and which is recorded for us in Scripture), and, that which **man** has said (every philosophy, religion, world view, idea, theory, viewpoint and system). I know that many will protest and seek to muddy the waters by claiming that elements of philosophy or religion or theories and so on, are a part of the general revelation of God. You may hear some people chant the following phrase: “all truth is God's truth.” By this is often meant that the (so-called) *truths* contained within a certain philosophy, or which are part of science, or a part of a religion (and so on), must be that which God has enabled man to come up with. Such reasoning is flawed because the assumed idea is that the thoughts of man (whether it be a philosophy or science etc.), do reveal truth. This is an assumption which cannot be demonstrated. To counter this we note that the Scriptures repeatedly warn us against the thoughts and philosophies of mankind.⁷⁴

[2] Judah and Jerusalem.

The nation of Israel under Solomon suffered a split during the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam. Judah in the south retained the temple and the line of promise through the kings descended from David. Although the northern kingdom retained the national name “Israel,” taking ten tribes under its wings, it was nevertheless hampered by not having direct access to the priesthood, nor the temple. We will consider the historical background in the next section. Here we

73 1Samuel 3:1.

74 Psalm 94:11; 146:3; Romans 1:21; Ephesians 4:18; Colossians 2:8.

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note simply that the four kings mentioned were all kings of Judah. Israel (the northern kingdom) will feature in the book, but the main focus is the nation of Judah, the capital of which was Jerusalem. Isaiah's prophecies, therefore, are concerning the southern nation within which God had preserved all of the promises.

Apart from these historical details there is a spiritual significance to the mention of Judah and Jerusalem. Judah was the fourth son of Jacob born to Leah. Judah's name actually means "praised," and this was given to him as a name because Leah had praised the Lord for his arrival.

And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now I will praise the Lord."
Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing.⁷⁵

Later, it was prophesied by Jacob that the kings and rulers of the nation God was building out of the patriarchs, would come from the tribe of Judah until the promised Messiah finally arrived:

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until
Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.⁷⁶

When the Messiah ("*Shiloh*") arrived He would receive obedience from all peoples, not just from the nation of Israel. Hence we learn from this that Israel as a nation was *temporal* and had a finite existence. Thus Judah must be a focal point, only because the Messiah, (the one to be praised), could come from this tribe and no other.

The capital city of Judah was Jerusalem, which name means "the city of peace."⁷⁷ This location comes to our attention first in the book of Genesis. Melchizedek, who met with Abraham after he had rescued Lot, was "*priest of God Most High,*" and also the king of "*Salem,*" which name means "peace." The writer of the letter to the Hebrews notes that Melchizedek's name means "*king of righteousness.*" Thus by name and occupation, Melchizedek was thus "*king of righteousness*" and "*king of peace.*"⁷⁸ Later on Abraham is instructed to sacrifice Isaac, his "*only son,*" on mount Moriah.⁷⁹ We learn in 2Chronicles that this site was located in Jerusalem and would be the site of Solomon's temple:

75 Genesis 29:35.

76 Genesis 49:10.

77 The name Jerusalem is a compound in Hebrew: "Jeru" (city) and "Salem" (peace).

78 Hebrews 7:2. See also Genesis 14.

79 Genesis 22:2.

Studies in Isaiah.

Now Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where *the Lord* had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.⁸⁰

Thus Jerusalem's great importance lies in the fact that it would be the site of the great sacrifice of the Messiah, as signified by the name "*Melchizedek*" and his office as priest, and by the sacrifice of Isaac.

Consequently, in these two terms, (Judah and Jerusalem), our thoughts are directed to the coming Messiah as being both The King (of all peoples) who is to be praised and obeyed, and also to the great sacrifice for sin at Calvary.

[3] Historical background.

Isaiah ministered to the southern kingdom of Judah with Jerusalem as the capital, and right at the beginning of his book he tells us when he ministered. It was during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. The details of the reigns of these kings can be found in 2Kings and 2Chronicles, and a synopsis of these is given in the Appendix at the end of this work, however their dates are given in table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: Dates of reigns for kings mentioned in Isaiah.

King	Dates (BC)
Amaziah co-regent with Uzziah	791-767
Uzziah as sole-regent	767-750
Uzziah co-regent with Jotham	750-739
Jotham as sole-regent	739-735
Jotham co-regent with Ahaz	735-731
Ahaz as sole-rebent	731-729
Ahaz co-regent with Hezekiah	729-715
Hezekiah as sole-regent	715-695
Hezekiah co-regent with Manasseh	695-686
Manasseh as sole-regent	686-642

We cannot be sure of the exact date when Isaiah began his ministry. One definite time marker is given in Isaiah 6 where we are informed that the prophet saw the Lord Jesus in the temple

⁸⁰ 2Chronicles 3:1.

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in the year of Uzziah's death.⁸¹ This means that the chapters before this must have been delivered and written during Uzziah's reign, perhaps when he was co-regent with Jotham his son. However exactly when Isaiah started is unclear. We are also not entirely sure when Isaiah's ministry came to an end. There is no mention of Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, in the book. However we do have a reference to a time during Manasseh's reign in Isaiah 37:38 where the Assyrian king is named as *"Esarhaddon."* This Assyrian king reigned from 681-669 BC. So it would seem that the book covers the years from about 740 until about 670 BC.

Assyria to the north was in the ascendancy. The various kings ruling Assyria sought to subjugate the smaller states to the south including Syria, Israel and Judah. Three significant dates and events form the backdrop of the prophecy of Isaiah. First the defeat of the Syria-Israel confederacy some time around 732 BC which bedevilled Ahaz king in Judah. Pekah, the son of Remaliah, king in Israel was deposed and Hoshea put in his place by the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser. Second, when Hoshea king in Israel began to revolt by seeking help from Egypt, the Assyrian king Shalmaneser captured Samaria the capital in 722 BC and this marks the essential end of the northern kingdom (Israel). Third, when Hezekiah was king in Judah, the Assyrian king Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 BC and attempted to attack Jerusalem but was repelled marvellously by the Lord. The details of this last event are recorded in Isaiah 36 and 2 Kings 18.

[4] Analysis.

To conclude this chapter we shall make a brief start on analysing the rest of Isaiah 1. Thus from verse 2 to the end of the chapter the text can be divided into three parts. The first part running from verse 2 to verse 9 describes the charge the Lord brings against Judah that they are ignorant of Him, and then shows how this is proven or worked out. This will form the subject of chapter 2. The second part running from verse 10 to verse 20 works out in detail what was wrong with Judah. It shows both the heart and the actions of a nation that had no knowledge of the living God, despite having many God-given privileges, and the reputation of being God's people. This forms the basis for chapter 3. The third and final part runs from verse 21 to verse 31 and will be the focus of chapter 4. In this we are brought to consider the consequences as signified by the word *"therefore"* in verse 24. There are two great consequences but these are intermingled, for whilst there will be redemption, nevertheless there will also be judgement, for the Lord will remove all His rebellious and sinful adversaries.

81 John 12:41.

Chapter 2.

Isaiah 1:2-9.

When we do not know God.

Textual analysis.

We begin our study by suggesting an arrangement for the text to help in our understanding. It will be seen from the presentation below that I have indented text to show the breakdown in the thought processes going on here. The opening statement announces that the Lord “*has spoken*” and what He states is then indented (shifted to the right) to show this. Verse 3 is pushed a bit further to the right because it shows a pictorial representation of the statement made in the second half of verse 2. This type of arrangement helps to organise the text into themes and ideas. It is not always an exact means of looking at the text grammatically, but it does help to show the flow of thought. We will provide and suggest this type of “textual analysis” as we go along throughout the book of Isaiah.

2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken:

“I have nourished and brought up children,
and they have rebelled against Me;

3 The ox knows its owner and
the donkey its master’s crib;
but Israel does not know,
My people do not consider.”

4 Alas,

sinful nation,
a people laden with iniquity,
a brood of evildoers,
children who are corrupters!

They have forsaken the Lord,
they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel,
they have turned away backward.

5 Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more.

The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. 6 From the sole of the foot even to the head, *there is* no soundness in it, *but* wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.

7 Your country *is* desolate, your cities *are* burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; and *it is* desolate, as overthrown by strangers.

8 So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.

9 Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah.

Studies in Isaiah.

It will also be noted from the text shown, that certain key phrases (such as titles of the Lord) have been highlighted. It will not always be necessary to show these every time, but it does help to organise our thinking along the intention of the Holy Spirit in the passage under consideration. On some occasions we shall look a little more in depth at the Hebrew text to make things apparent.

Our first introduction to the message of God in Isaiah is striking, forceful, and astonishing, for the Lord makes a very serious and prolonged charge against His people in the opening two verses (verses 2 and 3), and then He continues with an explanation of how this came to be (verse 4). Next we see the fruit of their condition (verses 5 to 8), and the passage ends up in verse 9 showing the terrible depths to which the people had sunk by reference to the two cities destroyed by God for their great and continual wickedness, namely, Sodom and Gomorrah.⁸²

[1] Ignorance is never bliss! (Isaiah 1:2,3).

[2] Ignorance is caused by sin. (Isaiah 1:4).

[3] Pain and heartache are sin's offspring. (Isaiah 1:5-8).

[4] The great grace of God. (Isaiah 1:9).

[1] Ignorance is never bliss! (Isaiah 1:2,3).

The book of Isaiah is not just a wonderful insight into the true nature of human beings, it is also a remarkable opening and highway to the way of rescue and deliverance. This good news for man is where we naturally want to focus, but before we can get to this we must first consider how the Lord views humanity. No one will consider that they need rescuing if they do not see the essential problem of man, or the desperate state they are in.

1:2.

In the opening verses of Isaiah chapter one, we are brought into the courtroom where God is Judge and prosecuting counsel, and the witnesses and jury are the heavens and the earth.⁸³ The Lord's opening words in verse 2 are a clear reminder to the people of what He had said to them a long time before this when the law was given after the Exodus. Thus in Deuteronomy we find that God had prepared the people by offering them the choice to follow: life and good, or: evil and

82 Genesis 19:24.

83. The reference to heavens and earth is meant to encompass the whole of creation. We might use the term "universe" today. Isaiah 1:2.

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death, with blessings and curses following on as the fruit.⁸⁴ Three times in the book of Deuteronomy we read these words: *"I call heaven and earth to witness."*⁸⁵ And now the Lord makes His accusation against Judah through Isaiah appealing to heaven and earth as witnesses, and when we hear it we are meant to be astonished. Bear in mind that Isaiah is prophesying in the eighth and seventh centuries BC, some three centuries after David and Solomon, and seven centuries after the Exodus and the giving of the law. The speech is for the entire creation to hear, which means that Isaiah was recording the Lord's words not just for the people of his day, but for you and me today, and also for our descendants many years hence. We must listen carefully to this accusation and charge! What does it say?

*I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me.*⁸⁶

Astonishing! You may not be aware of the way in which the Lord had chosen Israel, had rescued the people from slavery in Egypt, had given them wise and wonderful laws, had provided miraculously in the desert for their welfare, and then had given them the land promised centuries before to Abraham.⁸⁷ You may not realise how the Lord had raised up many deliverers for the people when they were assailed by enemies, or of how the Lord had promised them the Messiah to come and had provided a temporary means by which they could approach the Lord, first through the tabernacle, and then later through the temple with the sacrifices.⁸⁸ But even if you were ignorant of all these things, you cannot be unaware of the Lord's complaint here, for He cries out that He had nourished and brought up children, but these had now rebelled. We would be heartily sympathetic to parents who had lavished love, affection, and good provision to children who then went off and acted badly wouldn't we? But how about if these rebellious children declared that they did not even know their true parents? Or if they acted like the parents did not even exist? How would that come across? Well astonishingly that is the situation here.

1:3.

The Lord continues in His complaint in verse 3 by using two analogies. He speaks of an ox that knew its owner, and of a donkey that knew where to find its food. The ox was a beast used to

84 Deuteronomy 30:15.

85 Deuteronomy 4:26; 30:19; 31:28.

86 Isaiah 1:2.

87 Genesis 12:1f; Exodus 3:7; 12:40-42; 16:1f; 17:6; 20:1f

88 Exodus 25:9; 26:1f; Judges 2:16,18; 2Samuel 7:1f.

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draw a plough, whilst the donkey was a beast that bore burdens. Whilst the ox was used to prepare the earth on the land for receiving seed, the donkey was used to carry the harvest once it was reaped. In these two figures we have a picture of the work that God's people were to do. Elsewhere in Scripture we find that the ox ploughing is used to signify the great task of preaching and teaching, whilst bearing a burden is the job of all Christians as they love God, one another, and the people of the world.⁸⁹ Not all are called to preach in pulpits, but all Christians can share what they know. We all have a testimony. All of us have a duty to love. Paul declared that we ought to owe nothing to anyone except love.⁹⁰

The nation of Judah were God's created servants. They were people made in the very image of God, and so stood above the rest of creation. But the Lord turns their attention to brute beasts that the people themselves regularly commanded and made use of, to drive home His point. The ox and the donkey know very little, of course, but the one thing they did know was who their master was and who fed them! In shocking contrast the Lord thunders home the point:

but Israel does not know, My people do not consider.⁹¹

The people that God was happy to call *"My people,"* do not know, and neither do they consider, or even take one thought to the fact that the Lord was their owner and provider.⁹² Astonishing! Brute beasts recognise and respect their owners, but men made in the image of God who could think and rationalise are utterly ignorant! How remarkable!

I hope that you think that this is astonishing, that a nation brought into being and constituted by the Lord has forgotten and rejected their founder. But what relevance does this have for us today? It is all well and good us being brought to consider that Judah rejected God and were held to account for this, but so what? you may ask. Well I wonder if you realise just what God has done for you? After all, did you construct yourself in your mother's womb? Are you responsible for providing a world in which human life can thrive? Did you make the rivers and seas which irrigate the land? Did you cause the crops and the fruit to grow that people may eat? Are you responsible for the air and wind and sun which encourages life? Or are you one of those who believe (unbelievably) that all of this just came about on its own by chance? If so, I fear there may be little hope for you!

Or what of the amazing truth that God has made Himself known to you in Jesus Christ?

89 1Corinthians 9:9; 1Timothy 5:18; Galatians 6:2; 2Corinthians 11:28; 1Timothy 3:5; Titus 1:9.

90 Romans 13:8.

91 Isaiah 1:3.

92 Isaiah 1:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

Further, what of the astonishing things that He did whilst on earth, and, not least, in departing this earth? You see, dear reader, each and every one of us is just like Judah depicted here. God has created you. You are made in the image of God. God has provided all things for you. Much more, He has provided a way of rescue in Christ Jesus. And do you *know* Him? Do you give honour to Him as your Lord and Creator? Do you give thanks to Him for all that He has provided? There are degrees of knowing, of course. We begin by becoming aware of something or someone. We do not know what we have been made aware of in a full or complete sense, but we have some knowledge. This is not the knowledge we are speaking of here in Isaiah. A person might be aware of whom their country's leader is but they do not really *know* them. Once we have been made aware we then move to becoming acquainted. We have some interaction and conversation with either the subject or a person. Again we cannot really say that we *know* them but our knowledge is beyond simply awareness. But then there comes an intimate knowledge where a true relationship is formed. Now that is the type of knowledge the Lord is speaking of.

It seems to me that it is both astonishing and preposterous in the extreme that we simply do not know God! How can this be? What prevents us from knowing Him? Well the verses that follow make it very clear, and it is not easy reading, but we must face up to the truth and consider how we may alter this torrid state of ignorance. None of us know God *naturally* speaking. Ignorance is not bliss! But there is tremendous hope.

[2] Ignorance is caused by sin. (Isaiah 1:4).

1:4.

The first thing that shows Israel's lack of knowledge of God is their rebellion and their turning away from God. There is a downward spiral of progression in this action. First they had "*forsaken*" Him, then they had "*provoked to anger,*" and finally they had "*turned away backward.*"⁹³ This is the kind of thing teenagers do in Western society. They begin to rebel against their parent's wishes by doing what their parents do not want them to do. They do this so much it causes anger. If things get out of hand they simply turn against their parents fully. Of course we cannot liken God to human parents because He is described for us as "*The Holy One of Israel.*"⁹⁴ He is pure and perfect, and whatever He does is right and good. Human parents cannot claim such

93 Isaiah 1:4.

94 Isaiah 1:4.

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perfection.⁹⁵ But the point is that it illustrates very clearly this inward state of turning away from authority and what may be good for us. We do not like to have another ruling us, we prefer to be self-ruled, or selfish.

This downward progression is introduced by a series of words which are very hard-hitting. Israel is described in four ways.⁹⁶ They are:

A sinful nation.

A people laden with iniquity.

A brood of evildoers.

Children who are corrupters.

Sinful, iniquity, evildoers, corrupters! These are not easy words, but they are true of you and me! You don't think so? Well let me assure you that they are true in your life. Have you always told the truth? Have you ever thought a wrong thought such as wanting someone killed, or lusting after someone? Do you enjoy the macabre and twisted? Are you one who has fallen and failed in certain ways so that you now feel dirty and guilty? These are not easy thoughts, but I think if we are honest with ourselves we will admit that yes, we have done things wrong. Further, we have not done what we really ought to have done. Have you ever walked by on the other side and ignored someone in need?⁹⁷ Have you ever neglected to do something you knew was right?

It is pertinent here to consider the parable of the prodigal son who spent all his share of the father's estate in reckless living ending up destitute.⁹⁸ Instead of remaining in comfort under his father's rule, where he had everything in peace and security, he chose the wastes of the world. In the same way the people of Isaiah's time chose to forsake God, and chose rather to worship like one of the nations under trees and in special gardens.⁹⁹ So how does this relate to you? Would you allow me to use a rather simple illustration? Now you might laugh at the suggestion that choosing a pub-lunch is better than a slap-up dinner at some fancy high society restaurant. However, to a simple man like me, the advantage of a pub-lunch is that you (usually) get a good and sufficient plate of food, and you haven't had to extend your overdraft to pay for it! But what if someone suggested that

95 Indeed the fact that we seem to have a teenage problem in the West may be due in large part to the fact that parents have forgotten how to be parents.

96 Isaiah 1:4.

97 Luke 10:25-37.

98 Luke 15:11-32.

99 Isaiah 1:29,30.

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it was far better for a person to spend all their effort and hard-earned cash to eat in a high flying restaurant rather than have the free food with love and support in their parents' home? Surely this is madness? But isn't this exactly what mankind does daily? They strive and fight to make a way in this world, vying for love, position, acceptance and wealth on this world's stage, when all along their Creator speaks loving words with open arms saying: "Come and eat freely at My table"!¹⁰⁰ And yet the world turns its back! Remarkable!

[3] Pain and heartache are sin's offspring. (Isaiah 1:5-8).

One of the great consequences of a sinful life is the pain and heartache it causes. We know that if one person is greedy, another will be in want. If one person lusts or even stalks and then hounds another, the object of their "affections" will suffer fear. If one person boasts in pride over achievements, it is often at the expense of someone else who has been down-trodden in the rise to power. If one has sought fame and fortune it will be in exchange for family life. Those in the ascendancy in these situations may appear to come off well, but the truth is they don't. Getting more than others, be it food, position or money, yields problems of its own. It may be obesity, diabetes or heart problems. It may be fear that another may steal your hoard. It may be paranoia or other mental anxieties. When sin abounds within society, society reaps ruinous rewards. Now these offences suffered within society are **nothing** compared to the offence to God and to His reputation. Think of the offence felt by the thrice holy and perfect God who has done all things well and has given to all from His bounteous store! If men and women chose to abuse themselves and each other, how do you think God who made us all ought to feel, given that He is perfect and does only good and knows what is best?

1:5,6.

At the outset we see here a picture of someone who is being punished by beating, but who does not respond in any positive way.¹⁰¹ Instead of repenting, the one being punished "*will revolt*" with increasing intensity. Thus we find that punishment by beating does not effect any change. The remainder of verse 5 and verse 6 describes the condition of the people. And so we find that Judah was stricken, and was also smitten by sin, its consequences, and by the judgement of God.¹⁰² It was

¹⁰⁰ Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:17. See also Isaiah 2:3. Please forgive my weak illustration. The things God has to offer outweigh all that the world proffers to an infinite degree, for God is good, holy, righteous, true, perfect, ...

¹⁰¹ Isaiah 1:5. See also Jeremiah 5:3.

¹⁰² Isaiah 1:5,6.

Studies in Isaiah.

not just a part that was affected but the whole; *“the whole head,” “the whole heart,”* and the whole body (*“from the sole of the foot even to the head”*). Their thoughts were screwed up and their thinking was wrong. Their actions and feelings were messed up too, and no one had any means to soothe or heal. Isn't this like the situation in the world today? If we were to analyse objectively the course of history would we not see this terrible failure and no solutions? Politicians promise, great thinkers expound, the moneyed elite declaim, but at the end nothing changes. Who would have thought that we would see Russia at war in Europe after the two world wars of the twentieth century?¹⁰³ But further, all of this picture is a graphic illustration of the failure of the law. Although it is holy, spiritual and good, it could not effect any change in the people for it was weak.¹⁰⁴ All it could do was condemn.

1:7,8.

Here in Isaiah chapter 1 we find that this woeful condition is applied to the nation Judah, whose country was desolate, burned up and overrun to such an extent that they were left as vulnerable as a makeshift hut in a field of cucumbers.¹⁰⁵ Nations may take the place of pride at different times but it is not long before they are overthrown and are no more. Take Assyria, for example. In the time of Jonah they were a wicked nation, but then they repented on hearing God's message through Jonah. They were the super-power of Isaiah's time, but then in 612 BC and finally in 609 BC (according to the prophecy of Nahum in the seventh century) during Jeremiah's time they were destroyed by Babylon. Now where are the Assyrians today? Look then also at the empires of Egypt, Greece and even Great Britain or the USSR! This is true (in the end) of all nations, empires or regimes. Isaiah 1:7 applies to all countries and it also speaks of individuals too.

The phrase *“daughters of Zion”* is a description of the nation Judah. The image portrayed is of Zion (Jerusalem) with all the satellite towns spread around it as Zion's daughters. Thus Judah was under siege from the enemy. How frightening! Isn't that the situation we face? We are so open to the ravages of all sorts of false ideas and rank behaviours. Today you are labelled “bigoted” if you claim that certain lifestyles are wrong. No longer are there just males and females made in the image of God, but now we have all sorts of perversions in-between and these are held up as legitimate!¹⁰⁶

103 Russia invaded Ukraine on 24th February 2022.

104 Romans 7:12,14; 8:3.

105 Isaiah 1:7,8.

106 Please do not misunderstand the point here. All sin is rebellion, whether it be lust and adultery, thinking someone harm, exercising jealousy, or misjudging people by some first impression. All of us are sinful. All of us are

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The nations are in fear over extremist terrorists. Economies are floundering. The gap between rich and poor gets wider and wider. Murder and mayhem occurs with a frequency that appals. Corruption amongst governments and other leaders who ought to know better is not just rife but has become the norm. Consequently there is no soundness in our world, but only putrefying sores, wounds, and bruises.¹⁰⁷ And no one knows what to do! To root out religious extremism we either bomb the headquarters of the perpetrators in their home country, or curtail freedoms in our own country making it difficult for ordinary citizens to operate. To satisfy the ridiculous notion that pluralism is a viable norm, we restrain and curtail freedom of speech so that no one is allowed to say that another idea or “faith” is wrong, and, furthermore, we are lectured by government on what ought to be taught to all people to keep them in line. Truly our country and this world is desolate! And truly all of mankind in its rebellion and sin is hopelessly lost and desperately sick.

[4] The great grace of God. (Isaiah 1:9).

1:9.

No one wants to hear bad news. Some try to dull the news and reality by various means, be it by indulging in the drugs of entertainment, alcohol and other pleasures, or by constructing a neat and safe cocoon or bubble within which to live. But we really must be brought to the truth of life before we can hear the good news of the gospel. Now that we have faced the fact that we do not know God, and that this is caused by our sinful rebellion and choice to “go it alone” and rule ourselves, and further, that we realise our painful and troublesome experiences have been caused by this lack of knowledge and rebellion, it is time for the first piece of restorative medicine! We are not given the complete and whole picture of the great gospel just yet. But we are given something to grasp which brings life and peace. God is an abundant giver of life and goodness, but He is also a very wise physician, and, restoration from the dreadful condition we are in takes care, time and patience. The patient cannot yet stomach the wonderful truths of the gospel in their full glory!

So what do we have here at the end of this first passage? The mention of the two cities destroyed by the Lord is enough to make the hairs stand up on the back of the neck (i.e. Sodom and Gomorrah). It is a cautionary reminder of the Lord's dealings with sinful people, but here Judah was

sinners. Your itinerary of sinful actions and behaviours will not be the same as mine but we both have to stand before the Holy One of Israel and face up to our stench. If we turn and repent the Lord is faithful to wash away our sins – but more of this later.

107 Isaiah 1:6.

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not going to end up like these two cities. It would be because the Lord intervened that they would **not** “*become like Sodom,*” **nor** be “*made like Gomorrah.*”¹⁰⁸ How we must rejoice that the Lord is ready to intervene! Judah will not end up utterly destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah who, even though they had the witness of truth within them (through Abraham's nephew Lot), and even though Abraham had interceded for them through the Lord's prompting, nevertheless continued in their ways and sins.¹⁰⁹

Now the “*Lord of hosts,*” that is, the sovereign ruler of all armies and powers, had allowed a few to remain, so that there would be a “*remnant.*” It is important to realise the base origin of the word rendered “*remnant*” in Isaiah 1:9, for this means “a survivor,” or “one escaped from a great slaughter.” This word is used once only in Isaiah but immediately we are brought to the nub of the matter.¹¹⁰ The Lord's judgement falls on wicked Judah but it will not be a complete destruction, for there will be a survivor or one who escapes such a great (and righteous) slaughter. We cannot but be reminded of the judgement upon Christ here. We are the survivors who have escaped whilst the Lord suffered and died in our place. But notice further, that this remnant is described in the singular and is referred to as being “*very small.*” If we personalise this and apply it to ourselves, we can think of the Lord removing all that is wicked and evil about us, bringing us back to the bare essentials as-it-were, and rendering us naked before God, so that He can re-clothe us with His righteousness. If we apply it to the church we note that whilst there may be many who claim to be part of the Christian church, in reality there is only a small flock.¹¹¹ The theme of the remnant is one repeated in the book of Isaiah using a different Hebrew word which has the meaning, “rest, residue or remainder.”¹¹²

And so we learn that mankind does not know God because of their rebellion, sin and iniquity, and it is this which has caused all the problems we encounter in the world. And yet the Lord in His great and magnificent mercy has intervened and, although this world is destined to destruction by fire, nevertheless there will be some who escape destruction.¹¹³ We are not yet taught how this remnant will be saved, but Isaiah will come to that soon enough. For now we must remember that the rescue and deliverance has come through Christ Jesus and His death on the cross and resurrection to life. In Him, and in Him alone, the believer is rescued from sin.

108 Isaiah 1:9.

109 Genesis 18:16f.

110 The word is used in Joshua, Job, and Jeremiah more frequently.

111 Luke 12:32.

112 It is found 9 times at: Isaiah 10:20,21(2),22; 11:11,16; 14:22; 16:14; 17:3.

113 2Peter 3:10; 1Corinthians 3:15.

Chapter 3.

Isaiah 1:10-20.

Wash! Formal ritualism is not enough.

Textual analysis.

10 Hear the word of the **Lord**, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our **God**, you people of Gomorrah:

11 “To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?”

Says the **Lord**.

“I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle.

I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats.

12 “When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?

13 Bring no more futile sacrifices;

incense is an abomination to Me.

The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.

14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing *them*.

15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear.

Your hands are full of blood.

16 “Wash yourselves,

make yourselves clean;

put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.

Cease to do evil,

17 Learn to do good;

seek justice,

rebuke the oppressor;

defend the fatherless,

plead for the widow.

18 “Come now, and let us reason together,”

says the **Lord**,

“though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;

though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

19 If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land;

20 but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword”;

for the mouth of the **Lord** has spoken.

And thus we come to a word from the Lord to the people. Verse 10 begins with the phrase: *“hear the word of the Lord.”* Then next we have the concluding statement *“says the Lord”* twice in verses 11 and 18. The section ends with the phrase: *“for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”* Such emphasis on this being a word from the Lord is worth bearing in mind. When God speaks His word

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is sure. God never needs to alter what He says.

The passage forms a single unit as can be seen from the outline above. However, in verses 10 to 15 we have a word to those who are likened to Sodom and Gomorrah. The last five verses offer the great gospel which we shall consider under three separate headings. First we have the command to wash and be clean (verses 16 and 17). Then we have the call to listen to reason in verse 18, Finally we have the consequences of obedience or failure in verses 19 and 20. Thus we have:

[1] Sodom and Gomorrah. (Isaiah 1:10-15).

[a] A look to home.

[b] Review: True knowledge.

[2] The command to wash! (Isaiah 1:16,17).

[3] The God of reason (Isaiah 1:18).

[4] If you are willing ... refuse ... (Isaiah 1:19,20).

[1] Sodom and Gomorrah. (Isaiah 1:10-15).

1:10.

One of the lowest points in Bible-history must surely be the account of Sodom and Gomorrah found in the book of Genesis where the wickedness of those cities was so incredibly bad, with no hope of recovery or change, that God destroyed them with fire and brimstone.¹¹⁴ And here in Isaiah's day the people of Judah are likened to Sodom and Gomorrah!¹¹⁵ The main problem with Sodom in particular was its practice of perverse sexual (chiefly homosexual) practices. Are we any less disgusting in our rank baseness and grotesque behaviours today? Promiscuity and free choice of sexual expression are the norm in our society. At first, throughout the twentieth century, there was a drift towards promiscuity and adultery.¹¹⁶ But now the floodgates have been opened. The pornographic industry was once sidelined and on the fringe of society, but now it is freely available and rife. The call for any behaviour to be legitimised is loud. The clamour to accept all and various expressions of sexuality and being is persistent. How have we come to this?

114 Genesis 19.

115 Isaiah 1:10.

116 There is no real beginning to our slide into the moral mess we see all around us but perhaps the licence and excess started in the 1960s. Or maybe we could look back to the intellectual decline brought in by evolutionary thinking in the nineteenth century. However you chart it, it is clear that in the twenty-first century the process of slipping away from God is reaching break-neck speed.

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With regard to the Israelites in Judah we are not told any details at this point in the book of Isaiah, for the designation that they are “*Sodom*” and “*Gomorra*h” is enough to strike home the point. But what makes their sin so much worse is that Judah, whilst expressing their liberal lifestyle, were still carrying out religious rites and ceremonies as though they were in favour with God!¹¹⁷

1:11-15.

The statements in verses 10 to 15 are startling. The Lord begins by asking for the “*purpose*” of the multitude of sacrifices brought in Judah. What was their aim? The whole reason for sacrifice seems to have been lost, so that the Lord now **refers** to these offerings as ones the people themselves had devised (“*your sacrifices*”).¹¹⁸ It was not that the Lord had suddenly turned against the sacrificial system as though it were not His idea in the first place.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, the Lord's expression of disgust and hatred is clear. He has “*had enough*” of **their** sacrifices, He does “*not delight*” in them, and He “*cannot endure*” **their** meetings. He commands that they stop offering **their** “*futile sacrifices,*” and He will not listen to **their** prayers.¹²⁰ It is hard to sugar-coat these exasperated expressions. The Lord God is never petulant, nor prone to outbursts of anger, but the expressions used here serve to indicate a level of unreasonableness in the actions He opposes. It is surely monstrous that the people of God were acting in such ways. They were disgusting and reprehensible.

What we have here, then, is a censure against formalism or ritualism. It would seem that the people were performing the stated sacrifices and offerings found in the law, and were convening the meetings and assemblies as required. What they were **not** doing, was carrying them out from the heart. They were doing a “*multitude*” of sacrifices which perhaps signifies that they were doing them in a superstitious way, as though they may be accepted on the basis of excess and exuberance.¹²¹ It would be like a class student who hovers around the teacher trying to please them by doing all the chores they could think of, but without any love for the teacher. The people did not come with joy and expectation, but came to “*trample*” (or to oppress and tread down) in the sanctuary.¹²² Consequently we read at the end of this list of hated things, that the people had hands

117 Isaiah 1:11-15.

118 Isaiah 1:11.

119 The sacrificial system began in Genesis shortly after the first human pair (Adam and Woman) sinned – see Genesis 3:21. But it has its origins in eternity – see Revelation 13:8.

120 Isaiah 1:11-15.

121 Isaiah 1:11.

122 Isaiah 1:12.

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that were “*full of blood.*”¹²³ There were so many sacrifices and all that could be observed was the blood. There was no true worship and honouring of God. Their sacrifices were “*futile,*” that is, they were empty, vacuous and wicked to boot.¹²⁴ In describing His hatred for their meetings and assemblies, the Lord calls them “*a trouble*” for He has become “*weary of bearing*” them.¹²⁵ The reason is expressed in verse 13 where there appears to be a break in thought as the Lord points out that their “*sacred meeting*” is mixed and muddled by “*iniquity.*”¹²⁶ How these words sting! We are reminded of the woes that our Lord and Saviour brought against the Pharisees who were champions at ritual observance, but who brought no heart nor soul to their observance.¹²⁷ This danger of doing without feeling, or of holding to fact without emotion or heart, is one we in our theoretical and intellectual world are very prone to. It is the sin of hypocrisy.

[a] A look to home.

Is our nation any less hypocritical? The Church of England presides in ceremony for the nation, and yet their acquiescing in truth to the pressure of society's drift is not just self-evident, rather they seem to be delighting in their capitulation. The free church is no less at fault. There hardly seems anyone who wants to stand up for the truth! And whilst the leaders run to accept the various aberrations so prevalent in society, the Church of England and other leading Christians are giving their blessing. Will the Lord God overlook these things? Surely not! If we simply reap the fruit of such sin that would be bad enough, but what if God were to add some form of temporal punishment on our nation such as that experienced by Sodom? We are treated far better than our sins deserve at the best of times, but with the rapid fall into gross sin why should we expect to escape condemnation?¹²⁸

Our society today is a curious mixture of the ideals and values of secular humanism blended with traditional Christian practices. I have chosen these words carefully because the essence of how we behave in our twenty-first century Western culture is determined by humanism brought about by a long history of change in thought and attitude that stems from the Renaissance (with its focus on man rather than God), promoted by the Enlightenment, (with its rejection of the supernatural), and then energised by the so-called science of evolution, (with its insistence on atheism). This slide

123 Isaiah 1:15.

124 Isaiah 1:13.

125 Isaiah 1:14.

126 Isaiah 1:13.

127 Matthew 23:1f.

128 These words were written before the Covid-19 (so-called) pandemic and before the Russian invasion of Ukraine precipitating the rapid rise in inflation of 2022. Are these the judgements of God on our nation at this time?

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from having God at the centre of life, to having matter rule over all (the essence of evolution) mirrors the downward spiral we noted in verse 4. Despite this secular humanistic core at the centre of our society, the choice of ceremony we express is still that left over from our Christian heritage.¹²⁹ Now that other faiths are on the rise in our society, the situation is ripe for a rapid change. How long will it be before the nation jettisons its Christian heritage? Can we seriously hold that all “religions” or “faiths” are equal? Is it possible for Prince Charles as the next Monarch to be designated as “The Defender of Faiths” as though all faiths must be given a hearing? I am not at all saying that any should be banned, or should not be allowed to air their views, but surely we cannot come to the conclusion that all the various belief-systems are equal? Tragically the blindness of man has led him to believe that the common values held by modern society are neutral, and are therefore a firm basis for judging what is acceptable. Usually some form of secular humanism is promoted with its centre in the ingenuity and enterprise of man, its tolerance for all-comers (except those who hold to any belief exclusively), which leads to an eclectic and vague form of pluralism, and its trust in scientific advancement. All other faiths and ideas must be held in a comparative sense and are judged at the bar of the current version of secular humanism. If the Christian faith were to be offered as the basis for modern life in our country, there would be a hue and cry! “What right has the Christian faith to be our standard?” This is the question that has been asked repeatedly in our society for many years. Mankind hates God and does everything in his power to throw off all restraints.¹³⁰ Meanwhile all sorts of ideas both religious and secular vie for position and status. All of these claims might be heard in society to some degree, but no one seems to be challenging the accepted secular humanism except to offer another form of humanism in its place. We end up with an amalgam of ideas that are used in society and especially in public life. Where ceremony and ritual are concerned, tradition dictates that at least some portion has a Christian flavour, but the life and intention of these ancient ways has all but disappeared. When we come to celebrate as a nation, or when we engage in public state affairs, we offer up a form of worship which is syncretistic, or, at least, eclectic and pick-n-mix. There is no truth in these rituals we engage in. They have become mere tradition, and the meaning has long been forgotten. This is hypocrisy! In Isaiah's day the Israelites of Judah continued the ceremonies that had been handed down by their fathers, but they had no heart in it, and had long since drifted and departed from affirming the essence of what they

129 I refer to the way parliament is still opened by the sovereign who is the head of the Anglican church and the fact that the house of Lords is filled with bishops and so on.

130 Psalm 2:1-3; Romans 8:7; James 4:4.

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were doing. God detests this!¹³¹ The description in verses 11 to 15 is graphic. All the legitimate ceremonies are of absolutely no value whatsoever unless they are carried out in truth and with a true heart. How about us? Do we claim to be Christian and do we engage in Christian ceremony and ritual? If we are doing this with anything other than a true heart we are in the same boat as the Israelites of Judah.

[b] Review: True knowledge.

It is necessary at this point to look back and ask ourselves seriously the following question in light of what we have looked at thus far in Isaiah chapter 1: What then do we know?

In an age of astounding knowledge available at our fingertips via the internet, it would seem that for everything we think we *know*, it has not lead us to the knowledge of God. I know many will argue strongly that our age is unsurpassed in both the breadth and depth of knowledge. What civilization in times gone by can challenge our supremacy? However this immense knowledge base hides copious amounts of 'fake news' and false, or illegitimate knowledge. Consider, for example, the vast amounts of knowledge generated from a false premise or starting point. Evolution is more than just a false idea, it is a heinous and evil one to boot. But consider how much '*knowledge*' has been built on this edifice! Consider the numbers of PhDs, books, courses, TV programmes and so on that have been generated. These are all false!

Thus we are not just oxen who do not know their owners, and donkeys who do not know who provides their food, we are dumb beasts who make up stories and invent excuses! Solomon in Ecclesiastes came to the recognition that after all is said and done "*under the sun*," (i.e. without reference or acknowledgement to God), much of it is mere invention in opposition to the Lord God:

Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.¹³²

How tragic and how modern! Here is my call for change. Christian reader make it your aim to get **true** knowledge of God. Do you pray and are you part of a Christian fellowship? If so then that is good! Do you know the Lord in and through the Scriptures? Unless we seek the Lord in truth through the Scriptures we will fall in the same way as did the people of Judah of Isaiah's day. Oh I know that there are dangers. How the Pharisees failed! How many subsequent to this have done

131 Isaiah 1:13,14.

132 Ecclesiastes 7:29, AKJV.

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worse. But unless we follow the call by the Lord to forsake all and to walk in mercy and in justice humbly with the Lord, we will do no better.¹³³ There is, therefore, an urgent need to get to grips with the doctrines of Scripture. It is through these truths that we see God in action, and we hear what God has to say. The reliance by many charismatics on dreams and impressions of the spirit are no substitute for getting into the Scriptures.¹³⁴ We need to meditate deeply on the Bible and all it has to say. I believe that the Holy Spirit will guide us as we seek the Lord in Scripture. The emphasis by those of a different camp on following particular lines of historic Christian witness is equally at fault. For example, the “reformed” groups have failed terribly too. Their fault is not that they have neglected Scripture, but rather that they have coloured it in and adorned it with far too many accretions. How often I have heard amongst those termed “reformed” appeals to Augustine, to Calvin, to anyone or anything but Scripture. I feel that these great folk of history would be horrified at the parroting of their views in our day. That is not to say that we cannot be blessed by the writings of former believers, but the study of the Scriptures must far exceed the reading of the works of former believers.

Now I am keenly aware that a call to serious Biblical study is unfashionable today. I am constantly being told that people do not read, and they are too busy to do any serious study. But this is what the Lord calls us to do! How can we know the Lord? In and through His word – exclusively. You may object and say that it is by the Holy Spirit alone that we come into fellowship with God. I grant that that is true. It is the Holy Spirit who *applies* what Christ has done to us, and it is by the Spirit's work in us that we know the Lord. But that is all a work of God! What should **we** do? This was the question many asked Christ on the day after the occasion after He had fed five thousand:

28 Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”
29 Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”¹³⁵

How should we “*believe in Him whom He sent*”? Well we should be doing by faith what God commands us! The Lord calls us and speaks to us through His word. He has left this wonderful book for us to pick up and meditate on so that we can truly know the Lord.¹³⁶ If we decide that we

133 Micah 6:8.

134 I know that the Lord is sovereign and can, if He so will, give people dreams and visions. It seems amongst the Muslim populations of the Middle East some are coming to faith through visions or dreams of the risen Lord. That is God's prerogative. We are called to study Scripture, to seek the Lord in truth and spirit, and if He sees our need of a dream or a vision then so be it.

135 John 6:28,29.

136 It is pertinent here that of all the things the Lord could do, what He has chosen to do is to provide us with His

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must know the Lord by the Spirit and try and do His work by looking into our heart for this and that impression, or by looking at providence for this and that sign, we will fail terribly. That is not what we are called to do. The Spirit of God will guide, and He will lead us, but only through what the Lord God has said to all people in His word. I cannot say this enough! It is by studying and meditating on the word of God (if we do this with a true heart) that we will meet with Him! Take a brief look at Psalm 119. In this Psalm we are taught that to know God we need to meditate and study His word!

1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord! **2** Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart! **3** They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways. **4** You have commanded *us* to keep Your precepts diligently. **5** Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes! **6** Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments. **7** I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgements. **8** I will keep Your statutes; Oh, do not forsake me utterly!¹³⁷

There is a lot more that can be said about this Psalm. First we need to note that it is the prayer of a truly righteous man, that is, a man of faith. This means, as people of faith, that it ought to be our experience too! The people of Judah knew the practices (the new moons and the Sabbaths and so on) but they did not know the Lord. If we say we know the Lord but fail to keep His word (both in deed and in thought) we are lying. How sad it is when people claim to be Christians but then deny and contradict what the Scriptures teach! There are those who deny creation and preach evolution. That is sinful. There are those who deny the truth that God made mankind male and female and prefer to talk about a gender spectrum and laud the variety and diversity of personal choice. This is wrong and should not be tolerated. I do not mean that such who choose this path should be shunned and spoken badly of. Not at all. I mean that such behaviour and choice should not be acceptable just as stealing and lying ought not to be accepted. All people, of whatever kind, type and situation are welcome to come and hear the good news of Christ. When we preach this we denounce sin in all its forms as this is the beginning of the good news. I wonder if you realise that Christ's first words as He preached were "*repent*"!¹³⁸

Dear Christian come to Christ! Come often! Come expectantly. Come to His word. Devour

revealed word. Think of the care and time that the Lord has taken in producing this great book! Each prophet or penman was selected before their births and were nurtured to that point when the Lord made use of them to bring us His word. Remarkable! Praise to His name!

137 Psalm 119:1-8.

138 Matthew 4:17; 9:13; Mark 1:15; 2:17; Luke 5:32.

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it. Seek Him. Ask Him to open it to you. He will not fail! He is more than willing to teach and guide the seeking heart. The Lord said to Jeremiah these wonderful words:

Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.¹³⁹

The same call is issued to all of us but the answer we receive will be through His word. If we imbibe it, and devour it, we will know the Lord's guidance and help even in difficult times. Furthermore we will be greatly blessed as a source of blessing to the world:

Oh, how I love Your law! It *is* my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies. For they *are* ever with me.¹⁴⁰

Wisdom is sadly lacking today. It is something that can only be found in Christ, who can only be known through Scripture.¹⁴¹

[2] The command to wash! (Isaiah 1:16,17).

We come, in the first few sentences of this section, to an even more amazing thing than that which we stumbled across in our the early verses of Isaiah chapter one. Surely it is truly more astounding and, quite frankly, preposterous (but only in a good sense) that God in His unbelievable mercy has sought fit to not only deal with rebels and sinners, but to restore them! For this is what we also find in this first chapter of Isaiah.

1:16,17.

We must begin with a warning. Our state of not knowing God, if perpetuated, cannot be a condition that secures any blessing from Him. If we do not know God, why then should we ever expect Him to hear our prayers or cries for help?¹⁴² Such a thing is preposterous. A person whose hands are *“full of blood”* (i.e. who are not innocent but guilty) cannot expect God to hear their cries if they persist in such a state of guilt.¹⁴³

And so the first thing that a person needs to hear is these wonderful words of command:

139 Jeremiah 33:3.
140 Psalm 119:97,98.
141 Colossians 2:2,3.
142 Isaiah 1:15.
143 Isaiah 1:15.

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Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil,
Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Rebuke the oppressor;
Defend the fatherless,
Plead for the widow.

There is something wholesome and *right* about these instructions isn't there? Instinctively we realise that being clean, ceasing from evil, doing good, and seeking justice are all much better than their polar opposites. Furthermore, isn't it just and fair to look after those in vulnerable positions such as the oppressed, the orphans and the widows? These were the disadvantaged in Isaiah's day. Those who had to sell themselves to others to make a living were sometimes oppressed by harsh task-masters. Orphans without a father's care of provision and his name and reputation were almost non-entities. Likewise, the widow without a husband had no easy means of support. In our day the disadvantaged take different forms, but we instinctively know that when they lose out and are treated badly, then something is wrong.

And yet there is a problem isn't there? When we read or hear such commands and we know by instinct that they are *right* and *good*, we also know something else don't we? If we are honest with ourselves, and we have heard the message of the earlier part of Isaiah chapter 1, we know that such commands are not what we are capable of. Try as we might, we can never remove the guilty stains of sin and rebellion from our lives. We are incapable of putting away evil, and our efforts at living justly in society are woeful to say the least. In fact the state of society today is a terrifying testimony to the truth that we are incapable of doing what we know to be right. Yes there are exceptions and a few great stories of self-sacrifice and so on, but when the sum of human life is tallied and reckoned, we would surely be described as a warring and vicious race. Think of how history is written! It is all about wars and the rise of so-called great men. Isn't this true generally? Isn't this true of you too? Why are there wars and fights in the world? Don't they come from one individual's selfishness or pride meeting another's?¹⁴⁴ Who amongst us has not had fall-outs and battles? What are the main story-lines of all those soap operas? No, we must admit that though these commands are ones we agree with, we have to admit we are not capable of holding to them.

¹⁴⁴ James 4:1,2.

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So what happens now? Are we to give up and shrug our shoulders and say that it doesn't matter? If we do that, things can only get worse surely? What man can help? What nation has success? Is there some example we can follow? Is there some way of correcting behaviour or of altering things so we can follow these commands? No! There is no example anywhere which we may emulate. The story of Israel is a grand testimony to this truth. God gave the Israelites *everything* they could possibly need to show forth a glorious nation of beauty and goodness. They had the oracles of God. They had the tabernacle and then the temple. They had the nation and its land, and they had the prophets of God, but they failed. Why? Because deep down in the heart of every individual (be they Israelite or Gentile) there is sin and rebellion. There simply isn't an example anywhere in any time that we could copy. We always muck things up. There is no means of tinkering or altering human behaviour that works. So what is the answer?

[2] The God of reason. (Isaiah 1:18).

1:18.

Now we come to the second most astonishing thing of all time! Despite the fact that we ought to comply with the commands of verses 16 and 17 which we agree are correct but cannot keep, we find that God Himself is going to do something! He begins with a loving appeal which is based not on mere whim nor fancy, but upon our intellect and reason!¹⁴⁵ This is something often misunderstood by the world at large today. People suggest that the Christian faith is in opposition to reason, or science, or an intellectual approach. Such thinking is hopelessly flawed. Whomever we are we use reason, and whomever we are, we have the capacity to believe. No scientist ever dispassionately follows reason wherever it may lead. The starting point is always belief, and the data gathered never leads inevitably to a single conclusion. A scientist starts from some accepted base and formulates his ideas within the context of his culture. So I repeat, faith – Christian faith – is never opposed to reason. That is not to say that it always agrees with what modern science says is true. Faith – Christian faith – is evidential and has substance.¹⁴⁶ The evidence and substance which forms the basis for the Christian faith is horribly overlooked and scorned by modern man today. Science is not mere rationalism, but based on certain accepted beliefs or assumptions.¹⁴⁷ A true

¹⁴⁵ Isaiah 1:18.

¹⁴⁶ Hebrews 11:1.

¹⁴⁷ For more discussion on these points please see: **M.W. Viccary**. *"Sin, Science and Salvation."* PDF version freely available on request – contact: thedoc.mike@gmail.com.

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scientist ought never to discount the evidence he finds. Indeed, modern science prides itself on believing that it deals with **all** the evidence. However man in his darkness omits the evidence from God! What God has said (either in the Old Testament through the prophets inspired by the Holy Spirit, or through the revelation of God's Son in the New Testament), is all put to one side and neglected.¹⁴⁸ This is what we learned from the first half of Isaiah chapter 1. People do not know God and have forsaken Him and His word.

So what is the Lord God, the Creator of all things about to do? Remarkably we find that sins and their stains are going to be removed!¹⁴⁹ We read in Isaiah 1:18 a set of two statements about our condition, but these are going to be changed dramatically:

Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.

I wonder if you really appreciate this series of statements? They are in effect the most wonderful and tremendous of promises. What was once filthy and stained will become pure and clean once again. But there is one problem. You see, for this to happen God cannot just overlook these sins as though they never happened. How can a holy and pure God simply wipe out sin as though it never existed? The modern idea that wrongdoings can be simply expunged is hopelessly wrong. Surely justice must prevail? If I murder another person, forgiving me this wrong is only half the story. What about the wrong suffered? How will that be dealt with? What about justice? What about, more importantly, the offence done to God in such a heinous crime? The Christian faith does not simply say that you can be forgiven and that's all there is to say. No! We have to uphold justice too. And this is where the greatest wonder of wonders comes in, because the only way that sinners can be forgiven whilst at the same time justice is done, is through the cross of Christ. At one and the same time the perfect and pure Son of God gave up His righteous life in the place of sinners and He died and paid the penalty for sin and exchanged the sin of the repentant sinners for His righteousness. In Isaiah chapter 1 we can see clearly that God has not abandoned justice, for He states that He will take vengeance on His enemies and He will turn His hand against them.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore we find that

148 Hebrews 1:1,2; Romans 1:18.

149 Isaiah 1:18.

150 Isaiah 1:24,25.

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redemption, (rescue and deliverance from sin), comes with justice.¹⁵¹ Sinners and those who break the law of God will be destroyed and consumed.¹⁵² We are not told yet how this will be, but we find from the New Testament that those who turn to Christ for forgiveness are united with Him in His death.¹⁵³ True faith in Christ means that a person has forsaken their sin and rebellion, for the body of death is crucified with Christ.¹⁵⁴ Justice has been done in Christ's death and now the life the believer leads is by faith in Christ, and by following Him we take up and put on the righteousness of Christ.¹⁵⁵ The death of Christ is the only place where justice and mercy meet.¹⁵⁶ For the sinner, their life of sin is crucified in Christ and now their new life is by faith in the Son of God.¹⁵⁷

[4] If you are willing ..., refuse ... (Isaiah 1:19,20).

1:19. If you are willing ...

And so the Lord has done all that is necessary, and it only remains for Him to appeal to us that if we are willing and obedient then blessing will result.¹⁵⁸ Whom has been willing and obedient? Such a call to obey was given to Israel before they entered the promised land, but Israel failed.¹⁵⁹ Whom can hear God and do what He asks? The answer, of course, is only He who has clean hands and clean heart.¹⁶⁰ There is only One who obeyed and did all that God commanded fully, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. So for us, this is not the willingness of self effort. Neither is it the obedience that comes from self determination. Only Christ has kept the law spotlessly. When fallen man attempts to do this he ends up being hypocritical. We are not to raise ourselves by the bootstraps and “make a better fist” of things. No! This is the willingness and obedience that comes from faith. The New Testament speaks of this in more readily apparent terms.¹⁶¹ We discern the same idea from what we read in verse 18 where the Lord offers the promise that even though their sins were as “*scarlet*” they shall be made as “*white as snow*.”¹⁶² But we need to see the Lord and come and turn to Him! We need to hear His voice and in true faith follow Him wherever He leads.

151 Isaiah 1:27.

152 Isaiah 1:28.

153 Romans 6:5.

154 Galatians 2:20; 5:24; 6:14.

155 Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10,12,14.

156 Psalm 85:10.

157 Galatians 2:20; 5:24; 6:14.

158 Isaiah 1:19.

159 Deuteronomy 28:1f.

160 Psalm 24:4.

161 Romans 1:5; 16:26.

162 Isaiah 1:18.

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If we are willing to listen to the Lord and follow Him, then be assured that blessing will come.

1:20. But if you refuse

However we do need to hear the warning. If we see the Lord, or hear His voice and we refuse to turn, if we refuse to forsake all our sin and failure and we refuse to follow Him, then we must be equally assured that destruction will result. The same sword of the Lord's mouth that brings healing for the repentant sinner, brings destruction and devouring to the rebellious.¹⁶³ This is ratified and made sure and certain by those final words in verse 20: *“for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”* When the Lord speaks we cannot assume He has made a mistake, or that He has said anything rashly, or that He might change His mind. When God speaks it is absolute truth, sure and certain in effect and outcome, and unalterable. The Holy One does not waste words, neither does He speak anything which He will not accomplish with complete perfection.

There is a consequence for those who have their sins removed and who have been redeemed. It is not just that justice will be done. No, for we find that they cannot continue in the old ways of bribery and corruption, of compromise, confusion and idolatry.¹⁶⁴ No, they are ones who will be obedient to what God offers.¹⁶⁵ Indeed faith, true faith, is a faith in Christ which works and brings fruit.¹⁶⁶ The removal of sin means the removal of the dross and alloy which confuses truth, and the penitent ones will be truly ashamed and embarrassed of their idolatry.¹⁶⁷

163 Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:16.

164 Isaiah 1:23,29.

165 Isaiah 1:19.

166 Galatians 5:6; 1Thessalonians 1:13; 2Thessalonians 1:11.

167 Isaiah 1:25,29.

Chapter 4.

Isaiah 1:21-31.

Judgement mixed with mercy.

Textual analysis.

21 How the faithful **city** has become a harlot!

It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers.

22 Your silver has become dross,
your wine mixed with water.

23 Your princes *are* rebellious, and companions of thieves;
everyone

loves bribes, and
follows after rewards.

They do not defend the fatherless,
nor does the cause of the widow come before them.

24 Therefore the **Lord** says, the **Lord of hosts**, the **Mighty One of Israel**,
“ah,

I will
rid Myself of My adversaries, and
take vengeance on My enemies.

25 I will
turn My hand against you, and
thoroughly purge away your dross, and
take away all your alloy.

26 I will
restore
your judges as at the first, and
your counsellors as at the beginning.

Afterwards you shall be called the **city** of righteousness, the faithful **city**.”

27 Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and her penitents with righteousness.

28 The destruction of transgressors and of sinners *shall be* together, and those who forsake the **Lord** shall be consumed.

29 For they shall be ashamed of the terebinth trees which you have desired; and
you shall be embarrassed because of the gardens which you have chosen.

30 For you shall be
as a terebinth whose leaf fades, and
as a garden that has no water.

31 The strong shall be as tinder, and the work of it as a spark; both will burn together, and no
one shall quench *them*.

Isaiah chapter one ends with a declaration from the Lord of Hosts that He will finally deal with the sin and rebellion of mankind. This is exemplified by Jerusalem with its rebellious princes

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who are described as being no more than the corrupt companions of thieves. However, remarkably, interwoven within these just judgements we find promise of redemption and salvation.

This last section falls into two unequal parts. First we are given a description of the faithful city that has now become a harlot covering verses 21 to 23. Then second, we have the twin themes of judgement and mercy interwoven from verses 24 to 31. Wonderfully we note that there will be a dramatic change from the faithless harlot to the “*city of righteousness.*”¹⁶⁸

[1] The faithful fallen to harlotry. (Isaiah 1:21-23).

[2] Redemption mingled with justice! (Isaiah 1:24-31).

Personal choice is not all that!

[1] The faithful fallen to harlotry. (Isaiah 1:21-23).

1:21,22.

The Lord brings yet another astonishing thing to our attention. Jerusalem had been given such privilege and honour. It was once a “*faithful city*” but now it is no more than a mere “*harlot.*”¹⁶⁹ Where righteousness once dwelt there is now nothing but murder.¹⁷⁰ We have already mentioned the fact that in the earliest days of the city of Salem (the name “Jerusalem” means city of Salem) the priest of God and king of the city was Melchizedek. This priest and king blessed Abraham after he had rescued Lot.¹⁷¹ His name means “king of righteousness,” and the city was the city of “peace.” But now after many centuries the city could only be described as a “*harlot.*” What was once pure silver – the metal of redemption – has now become dross.¹⁷² Note that it is not merely an alloy and so impure, it has become the dross which is the waste skimmed from the surface of the molten mass. The second figure used to bring home the point of their corruption is “*wine mixed with water.*”¹⁷³ This rather points at their impotency. The strength of the wine is much reduced by dilution with water. Thus what was once a righteous city was now merely dross and waste and as a result it had no strength, no flavour, no potency.

168 Isaiah 1:21,26.

169 Isaiah 1:21.

170 Isaiah 1:21.

171 Genesis 14:18f.

172 Genesis 1:22; Numbers 18:16.

173 Isaiah 1:22.

1:23.

From the leaders to the ordinary citizen, corruption, bribery, and a lack of justice had become the norm. This is the way of sinful human beings. The leaders were “*rebellious*” and this was evidenced by their company, for they were “*companions of thieves.*” When leadership joins with those who steal and there is little hope. What company do we keep? I do not mean whom do we avoid? It is necessary for us to be amongst the people. Jerusalem was after all meant to be a beacon to the world. But whom do we interact and co-mingle with? Whom do we form friendships and alliances with? If it is with those who steal and thieve then we are simply endorsing their behaviours and so we also must be termed rebellious. There are further descriptions given to elucidate the situation and these apply to “*everyone.*” These were those who loved receiving “*bribes*” and who sought out “*rewards.*” What do we seek? What are we after? Is it rewards, a quiet life, money, friendship and belonging? What we must seek (exclusively) is the Lord.¹⁷⁴

On the one hand we ought not to be surprised by this turn of events. Do we not see the same in our modern society? Where there is power, there will be corruption – ‘jobs for the boys,’ privilege for the rich, and a lack of concern for the plight of the ordinary man. And yet on the other hand, with regard to Jerusalem, we ought to be astonished. The Lord had given them such wonderful blessings. The highlight or pinnacle came with Solomon's reign where every man sat at peace under his fig tree – a sign and symbol of prosperity.¹⁷⁵ And so to see all the corruption and lack of justice that now pervaded the city was indeed an astonishing thing. It all goes to show that even given the opportunities, the privileges, the blessings, the tools for the job, we still fail. What is needed is not just a better society, or a more organised leadership, or a better system of government, or more education, or In the hands and minds of fallen men and women the best is always brought to rack and ruin – eventually. No! What is required is a radical change. A new heart and a new creation. We do not see such a theme just yet, but it is one that will surface before long.

At the end of this verse we find that corrupt and rebellious behaviour always leads to injustice as the weak and poor of society lose out. The tragedy of modern life is no different. The rich and the powerful can protect their interests and secure their lives (or at least they think they can), but in doing so they often ignore or walk over those who are reliant and dependant. The “fatherless” in ancient societies had no protector nor provider. We read of this in Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist*. The vulnerable orphans swept up amongst the thieves and robbers in this novel are a

174 1Chronicles 16:11; 22:19; 2Chronicles 20:3; Ezra 7:10; Psalm 27:4; 105:4; Matthew 6:33.

175 1Kings 4:25.

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graphic illustration of what we read here in Isaiah. Then further we find that the “*widow*” was also oppressed as she had no husband to stand in the gate and make representation. It is the same in modern society. Those who have no voice nor access to justice are oppressed. But whenever I see these references to orphans and widows (and sometimes to strangers and aliens) I cannot help but think of the lost, (sinners), in need of salvation. All of us in our sinful state may be described as orphans, widows and strangers. We have no heavenly Father, we are not part of the Bride of Christ, and we are aliens and strangers to the kingdom of God. What hope is there for the lost when the leaders and the culture is one of grabbing, greed, bribery, corruption, and the seeking of rewards? What type of leaders are there in the church? If the true church is meant then there must be godly leaders who serve and do not dominate. But then there are undoubtedly those who appear in the church who act very differently. They domineer. They lord it over the flock. They demand. They condemn and keep in bondage. We can see this in the days of Jesus. He castigated the lawyers on one occasion who were a stumbling block to faith:

*Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.*¹⁷⁶

Those who have the Scriptures and the authority within the church have a tremendous responsibility. If they preach their own message and agenda, then they will cause many to stumble. By doing this they are not setting the captives free, nor loosing the bonds that tie people down. They are not defending the orphan – the lost waifs of this world who stumble with no heavenly Father. They do not help those who have no heavenly husband and master. Oh how wicked these things are! God forbid that any of us should prevent others from coming to a true knowledge of God.

[2] Redemption mingled with justice! (Isaiah 1:24-31).

As a result of the continual decline and slip into deeper and deeper rebellion and injustice (for that is what is recorded in verses 21 to 23), the Lord must come to the point of judgement. The “*therefore*” of verse 24 signals a judicial verdict. As a result of sin and the continual slide into sin, judgement is inevitable. There has been an appeal to reason and to receive the change of heart in verse 18, but for those who refuse, there remains only the final judgement. Remarkably we also read that the Lord will restore Jerusalem! How patient and long suffering is the Lord! See how the Lord in judgement also brings in mercy!

¹⁷⁶ Luke 11:52.

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1:24a.

We begin our discussions by noting the titles of the Lord used here to bring this judgement. There are three in total. Thus we have, the “*Lord,*” the “*Lord of hosts,*” and the “*Mighty One of Israel,*” who speaks. The first title (אֲדֹנָי *'adon*), signifies master or lord as an owner or possessor. The second title uses the covenant name (YHWH) highlighting the self-existent One, but is also connected with the word translated “*hosts,*” which signifies armies. Thus the self-existent One (I AM), is He who commands all the armies of heaven and earth. The last title uses the Hebrew word: אֲבִיר *'abiyir* which is translated as “*mighty,*” and is used only here and in Genesis 49:24. The essential meaning is “strength,” but the word derives from a word which means “to mount up,” or, “to soar.” This root word is rendered as: “*fly*” in its only use in Scripture where it refers to a hawk rising up on the wing.¹⁷⁷ And so we have the owner and sovereign ruler, who is equally the covenant Lord of all forces and strengths, and who also rises up like a hawk in mighty power. Who can withstand such an One?

1:24b-26.

From the middle of verse 24 through to verse 26 we have the three-fold purpose of God concerning Zion described, as indicated by the three “*I will*” statements, some of which are composite in nature. The first concerns the Lord's “*adversaries,*” that is, those who work against Him and His “*enemies,*” that is, those who hate and oppose Him.¹⁷⁸ The Lord who is more than able, will “*rid*” Himself of these and will “*take vengeance*” upon them.¹⁷⁹ The first idea suggests that He will be comforted and eased from their opposition, whilst the second suggests that they will be punished for their enmity.

The second and third “*I will*” statements focus on the people of God. The second has three elements.¹⁸⁰ The Lord will begin by operating against the people. His hand which was on them for good, will now turn and be on them for chastisement. The next element involves a process of refining as the Lord removes the dross. The work is a complete one (“*thoroughly*”) and will admit of no failure. This is the great task of fitting the people of God for heaven where no sin and no rebellion can be found. To refine a metal meant to heat it up to liquefy it and remove anything which remained in the solid state and which may float to the surface. This operation was done

177 Job 29:36.

178 Isaiah 1:24.

179 Isaiah 1:24.

180 Isaiah 1:25.

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several times so that there would be a cycle of heating, drawing off the dross, cooling and solidifying, then reheating and so on. The final element follows naturally from the previous two and serves to indicate the state they would come to, namely, purity. The dross was purged by scraping from the liquid surface, but the “*alloy,*” or admixture was to be totally removed and taken out of view.

The third “*I will*” statement concerns how they would exist and live following their refining.¹⁸¹ Clearly we have the return from exile signified, or equally, the church gospel age in which we now live. Here we find the work of restoration. The Lord will bring back two groups of people, namely “*judges,*” or ones who bring right judgement and decision, and then also “*counsellors,*” who offer advice and wisdom for the day-to-day things of life. Judges were instituted in the days of Moses at the advice of Jethro his father-in-law. Here is Jethro's advice to Moses:

17 So Moses' father-in-law said to him, “The thing that you do *is* not good. **18** Both you and these people who *are* with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing *is* too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. **19** Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. **20** And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. **21** Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them *to be* rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. **22** And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be *that* every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear *the burden* with you. **23** If you do this thing, and God *so* commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace.”¹⁸²

The judges were men who were instructed by Moses and were selected on the basis of their character. That is, they had to fear God, be men of truth, and should hate covetousness. These qualities are similar to those Paul listed for elders.¹⁸³ They were suggested in order to relieve the burden on Moses and to encourage peace within the camp. This was not just a piece of worldly advice, for Jethro states that it should only be done if “*God so commands you.*”¹⁸⁴

Counsellors were those who offered advice to kings. The first time we read of such a person

181 Isaiah 1:26.

182 Exodus 18:17-23.

183 1Timothy 3:1f; Titus 1:5f.

184 Exodus 18:23.

Studies in Isaiah.

occurs in the life of David who had Ahithophel as counsellor.¹⁸⁵ These folk were wise men or elders who offered advice in matters of war and national defence.¹⁸⁶ These two groups of leaders would be brought back *“as at the first,”* and *“as at the beginning.”*¹⁸⁷ It would seem then, that these leaders were those whose wisdom and advice stemmed from a love of the truth and of God. It is not so much an office that is being restored, but rather the heart and spirit of what true leadership should be like. In other words, there would be godly people who knew what was the best advice from God's perspective. The end result of this is that the city would no longer be called a harlot, but would be *“the city of righteousness, the faithful city.”*¹⁸⁸

We can apply the above train of thought to ourselves. The Lord will restore to us wise counsel and advice as we come back to Scripture, and to those believers who live out the Scriptures, and thence our spiritual idolatry will be rooted out, and we will be made right once again. It is pertinent to note here that in our day there is much scurrilous advice and counsel often dressed up in Biblical garb. Be very wary of those who present themselves as Biblical counsellors today. Ask the question: from where does your counselling stem? Often you will find that the ground and basis of the counselling offered is secular psychology often presented simply as truth. What true counsellors ought to provide is godly Biblical advice – that is the teaching of Scripture expounded and explained. This is what the Puritans of old were like. Their sermons were not for the likes of modern man with his attention span of a banana! Their sermons probed the depths of understanding and were balm and comfort to the seeking soul. Many a Puritan sermon acted to dispel the darkness of anxiety and show forth the true fruits of the gospel. The modern counsellors are nothing but vacuous promoters of self-help and nonsense.

1:27.

Verse 27 focuses on the ones who would be brought through such a refining process. It is the *“penitents”* who are to be redeemed. These are they who have “turned back” or repented. Others will be dealt with severely, but although Zion will be judged, the penitents will be *“redeemed,”* that is, they will be bought back. Notice how such redemption will come about. It is with *“justice”* and it is with *“righteousness.”* So the work of God always deals with sin and rebellion. Since all sin and rebellion can only be met with judgement and the wrath of God, how then do the penitents get to be

185 2Samuel 15:12; 1Chronicles 27:13.

186 1Kings 6:12-14; 2Chronicles 22:5; 2Samuel 15:34; 16:15,20,21.

187 Isaiah 1:26.

188 Isaiah 1:26.

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redeemed? Again we are not told here, but Isaiah will show us in no uncertain terms, as the book unfolds, about the great suffering Servant in later chapters.

1:28.

But there will be those who do not turn back, and who are unrepentant. What of these? Verse 28 gives us the answer. These unrepentant ones are described in three ways. They are *“transgressors,” “sinners,”* and *“those who forsake the Lord.”* These are those folk who, when confronted with the truth and the gospel, respond by continuing to break God's law, who delight in sin, and so are those who utterly reject the Lord and all He has to offer. There is no half-way house here. People either repent and turn to the Lord. Such people are converted and brought into the kingdom of God. They still struggle with sin but their world view is different. They do not want to sin and fail the Lord. Then there are those who cannot and will not turn from transgression, sinfulness and rebellion, and so have decided that God and all His ways are not the basis upon which they will govern and build their lives. There is no middle ground. These folk will suffer *“destruction ... together”* and will be *“consumed.”* By the former phrase we are to understand that there will be a breaking down and a fracture. The basis upon which the transgressors, sinners, and those who forsake God, build their confederacies and their ways will be broken up and ruined. The second word (*“consumed”*) indicates an end, as when a meal is finished it is said to be consumed so that nothing is left. Here, then we find that the transgressors, sinners, and those that forsake God will have no part in Zion and their operations will be removed and there will be no trace of them left.

1:29. Be careful of what you desire!

In verse 29 we have a change of subject from *“they”* to *“you.”* The transgressors, sinners, and those who forsake God will become *“ashamed.”* There will be a sudden realisation amongst this judged grouping that their worship under the *“terebinth trees,”* and in the *“gardens,”* was shameful. But then also, whoever had desired such a form of worship would also become *“embarrassed,”* as well. Now these people of Judah had desired the pagan practices and worship under trees and in gardens. We are not told about the details, but it is certain that the types of things going on were not just unsavoury, they were downright deplorable.

1:30,31.

Verses 30 and 31 show us the fruit of such a way of life. Those who did not repent or become ashamed of these things when confronted by the Lord would end up in a dreadful state. It is this which should warn us. If ever we think that we are right about the way we are pursuing what is outside of the orbit and compass of God's revealed will, we ought to stop and rethink. In this case the ones who desired the terebinth trees would end up like a terebinth tree which would fade and wither.¹⁸⁹ The person who desired the gardens of the Gentiles would end up being a parched and dry barren wasteland.¹⁹⁰ By these words we learn two clear things from false or idolatrous worship. First, we become like that which we worship. They worshipped under terebinth trees and in gardens, and are now described by these things. Second, we lose life and health. Our leaves fade and fall so we bear no fruit, and we become dry for lack of water.

The consequences of such a condition are tragic. The dryness would be such that a simple spark would ignite them.¹⁹¹ It is like the situation that occurs in those countries where forest fires can run rampant. The wood gets so dry that a single spark will set off a fire that runs wildly and is almost impossible to extinguish. Thus we have a reference to the last day when all will be judged by fire. Both Peter and Paul remind us that when the Lord returns there will be destruction by fire:

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. **11** Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **12** looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? **13** Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.¹⁹²

... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, **8** in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁹³

Now the aim of one who sought terebinth trees and gardens for their own experience seemed like a good idea. Imagine the beauty of such places! It appeared to be lush and life affirming. And yet it ended disastrously because it was dry and barren and ripe for conflagration. Such is the same today.

189 Isaiah 1:30.

190 Isaiah 1:30.

191 Isaiah 1:31.

192 2Peter 3:10-13.

193 2Thessalonians 1:7b,8.

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If we choose those things which appeal and which seem to be life affirming, such as our own choice about identity and sexual expression, it may seem to be liberating and offering freedom, but it is nothing of the kind. In denying what God has provided and given to us, we will be creating a barren wasteland and desert of our lives. Make no mistake, a rejection of the thrice holy and most gloriously wonderful God (in all His ways) will result not just in dire straits, but in a death which surpasses mere physical death.

Personal choice is not all that!

It is needful that we rehearse some of God's intentions in the passage we have just considered. He makes His purposes and the reasons for these very clear. He states: “*I will rid Myself of My adversaries,*” and further that “*the destruction of transgressors and of sinners*” will be certain, and finally that “*those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed.*”¹⁹⁴ The people had become impure. Their precious silver was now dross. Their purity was compromised with alloy. Their potency was diluted. The Lord needed to punish and refine. All the dross and alloy that had been mixed in was to be removed. The purity would be restored and then the city would be restored to health and righteousness. Those who repented would be blessed with restoration, but those who continued to rebel would be consumed.

In the midst of these words we find the Lord highlighting the need for shame. This aspect of human existence is sadly lacking in our day. The description of penitence and repentance is one of being ashamed. They will be “*ashamed*” of, and “*embarrassed*” for what they had chosen.¹⁹⁵ This is the essence of true repentance. We come to realise that our sinful ways are truly embarrassing and shameful. The fact that modern man is unashamed and even promoting sinful behaviour shows us how far away he is from the Lord. But when a person realises what sin is, and recognises the effect it has on the Lord, and then comes to see that this is shameful, then this is the beginning of good news. The Lord offers reconciliation! First we must come to recognise our sorry state and be embarrassed about it. Did we really think that our behaviour was alright? Did we really think that God would overlook such rebellion and corruption? Do people today really think that the Lord will accept a person who continues in their sinful state? Is it OK to continue lying and cheating on people all the while claiming the Lord's grace? Is it fine for you to continue trampling on the feelings of others in the pursuit of your dreams and desires? Is it acceptable to continue in a

194 Isaiah 1:24,28.

195 Isaiah 1:29.

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perverse sexual relationship or in a perverted form of self-identity and expect the Lord to ignore it? Can the Lord of glory who made mankind perfect simply overlook the perversions and aberrations we enjoy? Preposterous! It is only as we come to be embarrassed for the errors and thoughtless nonsense we have followed that there will be any hope of restoration.

The people of God would become embarrassed of trees and gardens! This seems rather odd to our ears today but it signals the choices they had made. Instead of being heart and soul united to God in the worship that He had established, these people were worshipping as they saw fit. They had delightful gardens and trees on hills, where they engaged in practices partly of their own devising and partly copied from the nations round them. How about us today? What type of choices do we make? We live in an age where self-determination is the idol of choice. "This is my life!" "I can be what I want to be!" "I will follow my dream!" It is not least exemplified in the current rush to explore variety in gender. Unthinkable! People are choosing to be not just a different sex to the one they were born with, but of no sex or of non sex! We are being asked to consider sexuality and identity as being a spectrum of choice! The Bible opens with a declaration that God made man(kind) male and female, but today we are debunking this by choosing to identify in whatever way we want! Where will such madness end? I have heard stories of some older folk choosing to self-identify as babies and demanding to be fed and looked after as a baby. Monstrous! What choice do we really have? Did we choose to be born in the time we were born? Did we choose to be born in the place we were born? Obviously not! Do we have a choice of career? Well maybe you think so. Maybe you believe that you could have chosen anything from being a cook to being a carpenter, from being a driver to being a dancer, from being a scientist to being a singer. Well, reflecting personally, I must say that despite my youthful wish I was never going to be a musician or singer! I just don't have the voice and my grasp of music notation is woeful! But then again, I haven't turned out to be a good scientist even though I have the qualifications. I could never be a true dancer even after many lessons with my patient and lovely wife. We are duped into thinking that the world is our oyster, and that whatever we turn our hands to we may achieve good success.

The fact of the matter is that we have been created and we have been *given* certain talents and abilities. This includes not just our dexterity of mind or hand, but our personality and environment. These are gifts given of God. We do not own our lives, but have been lent them and one day we must give an account. Sadly we are all clumsy with life. We break things far too easily. Think of the relationships which are broken all around you through sinful and selfish ways, through simple misunderstanding or prejudice. Think of the slips and errors you have made in the effort to

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carry out your work, your duty as a parent, or in any other experiences you have engaged in. If what I say may sound all doom and gloom, remember that our culture is bent on denying failure and sin, and is hopelessly focused on glorifying success. The situation must be faced. We cannot rule our destiny, and we cannot change our heart. We must come to the realisation that we are sinful, rebellious, and have failed. And we must come to reckon that what we have done is not only sinful, but something to be embarrassed about so that we have a sense of shame. Such shame and embarrassment is not left as such for long by the Lord for those who truly repent. Once the prodigal son came to his senses and reckoned his life as ruined and hopeless, he determined to come back to his father, and at that moment the father rushed to accept him!¹⁹⁶ This is the same with the Lord. Once a person realises their sinful ways and becomes ashamed of them (“did I really do that?”) and seeks forgiveness of God in turning from their old ways and to the Lord, then they will experience the love of God in a moment!

¹⁹⁶ Luke 15:11-32.

Chapter 5.

Isaiah 2:1-9.

When the Messiah comes there is gospel peace!

Textual analysis.

1 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established on the top of the mountains,
and shall be exalted above the hills;
and all nations shall flow to it.

3 Many people shall come and say,
"come, and let us go up
to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
and we shall walk in His paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 He shall
judge between the nations,
and rebuke many people;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

5 O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the Lord.

6 For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob,
because
they are filled with eastern ways;
they are soothsayers like the Philistines,
and they are pleased with the children of foreigners.
7 Their land is also full of silver and gold,
and there is no end to their treasures;
their land is also full of horses,
and there is no end to their chariots.
8 Their land is also full of idols;
they worship the work of their own hands,
that which their own fingers have made.
9 People bow down,
and each man humbles himself;
therefore do not forgive them.

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2:1.

The second chapter of Isaiah marks a new division of the book as shown by the opening words where we find that the prophet “*saw*” a new word for Judah and Jerusalem.¹⁹⁷ Remember that “*Judah and Jerusalem*” signify, in a spiritual sense, the church of the present age. The book of Isaiah has opened with a twin set of knock-out punches, delivering both the problem we face as human beings living today – we do not know God – and the solution to this dilemma – God must deal with us. It will be no surprise then to find next that the Lord will shift the focus of attention to how this work in human beings must be carried out.

The greatest day.

I wonder, have you ever thought about what the greatest day in history was? Sadly modern thinking has a very skewed view of history. Evolution has muddled our thinking on this, stretching out time to unimaginable lengths, and this has the effect of smearing out our understanding of particular events. Because of the (assumed) vast amounts of time of earth history, the more recent epochs telling us of human history almost seem insignificant and of no real weight. However the fault is all in man here. Evolution has no power and strength over the Lord and His word which tells us the true story of life on earth. Evolution is a bankrupt faith, and although it has much following, it has no real basis in either reality or thought. Think of what it claims for a moment and you will see what I mean. The doctrine of evolution only works throughout vast spans of time which makes it impossible to test. The so-called evidence for evolution is nothing of the sort. For example, the fossil record is a witness to the global flood described in Genesis 6-9. Fossils do not appear in sequence telling the story of life on earth, they are a jumbled mass of bones that speak of a cataclysm of death. Then, more importantly, the doctrine of evolution is vacuous and vain. It is perhaps the most empty-headed and nonsensical idea that man has ever come up with! It doesn't “explain” anything. At best it may be a futile attempt at description, but even then it is seriously at fault. So what is its main teaching? It is that everything has come about through the random (and meaningless) operation of the laws of the universe through gradual change over long ages from simple to more complex. There is no purpose in life according to evolution, and the main engine driver governing its “success” is the death of each succeeding population! Well I am at a loss as to why anyone would want to believe in such things! Furthermore, I am convinced, by the word of God, that the idea of evolution is false and must be withstood. What kind of an explanation for life

¹⁹⁷ Isaiah 2:1.

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does it offer? You were nothing, then you are something, then you get weaker and older, then you die and become nothing. That is, life has no real meaning at all! What hope does it offer for lost mankind? Well given that life has a brief burst of joy and experience and then it ends in decline and nothingness, none whatsoever!¹⁹⁸

In stark contrast to all of the above, surely the greatest day in history must be the coming of the long-awaited Redeemer, Jesus Christ. The First Advent, which we celebrate at Christmas time, is one of the most startling and stupendous events of all time. Can you grasp this? Really? And the second most monumental event in history must surely be His long-awaited return. It is these two events which we find to be the focus of the second chapter of Isaiah. In the opening verses the spotlight is thrown onto a time when the law will go forth from Zion for many nations not just Israel. Then in the latter half of the chapter we have a time which is truly terrible, when the Lord God will descend in judgement against pride. We shall examine each of these in turn. First in this chapter we will look at the gospel going forth, and then in the next chapter we shall examine the second coming of our Saviour. For the moment it is important to establish the fact that Isaiah is prophesying about Christ Jesus' first and second comings, and using these prophecies to exhort his hearers to walking in the light of the Lord.

In this chapter our text falls into two parts. First we read of the law going forth in verses 2 to 4. Then we read in verses 5 to 9 of Isaiah's exhortation to the people of his time to walk in the light of the Lord.

[1] The law will go forth to all. (Isaiah 2:2-4).

[2] O come and walk in the Lord's light! (Isaiah 2:5-9).

[1] The law will go forth to all. (Isaiah 2:2-4).

From verse two we read about a period of time referred to as "*the last days*." This phrase is picked up in the New Testament and applied to the period between the first coming and the second coming of Christ.¹⁹⁹

198 I have not the time here to discuss the faults of evolution but would recommend the reader to look at the many resources found on the Answers in Genesis or Creation Ministries International websites. The reader could also request the following book: **Mike Viccary**. "*Evolution: A house of cards*." A PDF version of this work is available free by sending an email to: thedoc.mike@gmail.com

199 Peter's sermon at Pentecost, based on Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32), suggests that those "*last days*" had now begun with the coming of the Holy Spirit, (see Acts 2:17). see also Hebrews 1:2 for a more explicit statement.

2:2,3.

One of the first things we need to establish when we come to prophecies like the one we have here in Isaiah 2, is that they are always given in terms that apply first and foremost to the people of the time when they were first issued. That is why we have a prophecy cast in terms that speak of *“the mountain of the Lord's house”* and of *“Zion”* and so on. We are given further indications that this prophecy is not to be taken in a literal way by the expressions used. For example we are taught that the mountain of the Lord's house will be *“established on the top of the mountains,”* as though somehow the mountain on which the Lord is worshipped would be raised up. Then also we read that the nations will *“flow”* up to the *“mountain of the Lord's house,”* as though there is a river and the nations are ships that ride towards the now elevated mountain of the Lord. These things are not to be taken as though there would be a physical raising of mount Zion, but that the place where God dwells and is to be worshipped will be the highest or most important of all, and that many nations will be so attracted to it that they will run with eagerness towards this great outpouring of God's goodness.

It is very interesting that the Gospel writers seem to make the point that the gospel was for all nations even though the main emphasis of Christ's ministry was towards the Israelites. For example we have in Matthew the coming of the Magi to worship the babe in Bethlehem, and we note also that Christ visited Tyre and Sidon and even the Decapolis which were places outside of Israel proper.²⁰⁰ Then further, we read of Greeks coming to inquire of Jesus, and also people from many regions beyond the Jordan.²⁰¹ But then when we come to Pentecost, the idea of the gospel for the nations is difficult to deny. When Peter preached that first sermon he was preaching to *“every nation under heaven,”* and of course, as they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they spoke in a variety of tongues declaring the wonders of God.²⁰² And so the period of time that Isaiah prophesied about in Isaiah 2:2f had finally come some ten days after Christ's ascension. Of course the verses in Isaiah 2 do not reflect a day or just a short period of time, but rather point to how things would be in the last days – a period that began with Pentecost and is still going on today. People of all nations are still flowing to the mountain of the Lord's house which is elevated above all others because of what the Lord did in Christ at Calvary. It is still the day of salvation, and still many people will issue this general gospel call to all around, asking them to come and hear about the ways of God,

200 Matthew 2:1f; 15:21; Mark 7:31.

201 Matthew 3:5; 4:25; Mark 3:8; Luke 6:17

202 Acts 2:4,5.

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described as the “*law*” and “*the word of the Lord.*”²⁰³ It gives us great confidence to continue issuing the great call to come and hear what the Lord Jesus has done. Isaiah characterises the church age of the last days by this *outgoing* emphasis. And notice that the key point of interest is to *hear* the law from Zion – which is God's word and His ways. It isn't just a message of doing good. Neither is it a call to an intellectualism which ends with the scholars. No! It is the “*law,*” or what the sovereign God commands His people, and it is His “*word*” which accomplishes all that He intends, and, furthermore, it is “*His ways*” which indicate that the word is effectual and brings forth fruit – the good works that result from true saving faith.²⁰⁴

2:4.

We can see how this new era works from the figures used to express the type of experience the people will face. Thus weapons of warfare will be made into agricultural implements.²⁰⁵ It may be thought that this prophecy has yet to be fulfilled as we live in a twenty-first century world in which (sadly and horribly) war and terrorism seems to be part and parcel of life.²⁰⁶ Surely this picture of peace is not that which we experience in our day? Well of course we cannot claim that the modern world is far less warlike than the ancient! But then we are not really talking about the *world* in this passage are we? What is being described is the place where God is to be worshipped.

It is pertinent, I feel, to recall the revelation of God given through King Nebuchadnezzar and interpreted by Daniel. The king saw a great image of a man whose head was of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet of iron mixed with clay.²⁰⁷ Then the king saw a stone cut out without hands, which then struck the image reducing it to something “*like chaff,*” all the while the stone grew and grew to become a great mountain that filled the whole earth.²⁰⁸ In the interpretation we find that each part of the image represented a different empire. First the Babylonian (gold), then the Persian (silver), then the Greek (bronze), and finally the Roman (iron). The stone which grew to become a great mountain is the kingdom of God.²⁰⁹ With this prophecy we can understand the meaning of what we read in Isaiah 2. The mountain of the Lord's house – His dwelling place – is exalted because it is the most successful in terms of size and extent. Isn't this true of the Kingdom of God? The Kingdom of God extends back through time and

203 Isaiah 2:3.

204 Isaiah 2:3; Genesis 1; Psalm 33:6,9; Isaiah 55:10,11; Ephesians 2:8-10.

205 Isaiah 2:4.

206 Currently Russia is at war with the Ukraine but there are many conflicts the world over.

207 Daniel 2:1f.

208 Daniel 2:31-35.

209 Daniel 2:36f. See also Daniel 7:14.

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reaches every continent, if not every country, on earth. No other kingdom has that reach. That this kingdom is characterised by turning implements of warfare into agricultural tools is surely also a truth we can see. It may not be true of many organisations which own the name “Christian,” or which have the designation “Church,” but it is certainly true of the Kingdom of God. The Roman Catholic church, for example, has a very chequered history and cannot say with any truth that it has not meddled in this world's affairs even concerning war.²¹⁰ However the Roman Catholic church is not truly a “Christian” church – it is not the Kingdom of God.²¹¹ Then of course there are other groups of Protestant churches who leave much to be desired too. Amongst these there have been court cases and disagreements bordering on the insane. These too are not the Kingdom of God. However where the Kingdom of God is operating, the changing of weapons into tools is something very much in evidence. The situation, to be fair, is rather complex, for the Kingdom of God has representatives in every age. At times the Kingdom of God might be identified with a new denomination that has seen the truth and gone back to what God declares in His word. They hear the law from Zion and want to walk in the ways of the King. But then in time such a new denomination becomes lethargic and worldly. It takes onboard the ways of the world and loses its original lustre. What was once a blooming group of true believers degenerates into a burgeoning institutional monster. We could describe how this has happened in many different cases. The labels we give to these groups do not really matter now, except for the student of history. Methodists, to cite just one example, were scorned for their methods of following Christ, but these were ones who sought earnestly to renounce sin – especially the sin of alcoholism – and exchanged that craving for true desire for Christ. But what has become of the Methodist denomination now?

James writes about the danger of Christians reverting back to take up arms.²¹² This is caused by lusts which war against the soul. But when a person turns from the world and their sin to Christ, they have effectively given up their weapons of war and have now been provided with tools for use and service. Prior to conversion we were at war with God.²¹³ It is only through God's intervention that we are now reconciled.²¹⁴ Before this we held weapons of warfare which we used against God.

210 The Roman Catholic church's involvement with Nazi Germany, the military junta of Argentina, and its ambiguous treatment of clergy who colluded in the massacres in Rwanda are just three examples we could mention.

211 The Roman Catholic church is against the doctrine of justification by faith, goes against the doctrine of the inerrancy and infallibility of the word of God, and adds spurious doctrines such as purgatory, the immaculate conception, and the sacrifice of the mass. None of these are Christian for they cannot be demonstrated from that which God has spoken (i.e. they are not in the Scriptures).

212 James 4:1f.

213 Romans 8:7; James 4:4

214 Romans 5:10; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20; 2Corinthians 5:18.

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Think, for example, of how Paul describes those who reject the gospel as he wrote to the Romans. They suppressed the truth, rejected God's revelation, exchanged the truth for a lie, and did not like to retain the knowledge of God.²¹⁵ Conversion and new birth ushers in this dramatic change of heart, from one of warfare to one of use and service. Think, for example, of how Paul encourages Timothy to be a useful vessel.²¹⁶ Or think of the many ways that Christ disarmed the multitude and leaders of Israel, and offered life and health in its place.

[2] O come and walk in the Lord's light! (Isaiah 2:5-9).

The great illustration of exchanging warfare for industry that we have just been considering, is perfect for representing our conversion. And it is this prophetic view which Isaiah uses to call his contemporaries to walk in the Lord's light – His revelation. In other words, since God has revealed the future of peace in place of war, then why not act on this now? The argument is inescapable. If this is what God intends for the future then why not for now?

We need to understand that the work of God in choosing and building a nation for Himself (Israel) was twofold. First, it was a demonstration to the whole world that a kingdom *of this world*, no matter what advantages and privileges they may have been given of God, was never going to succeed. The problem of sin is far too ingrained for any human or worldly system to work. Thus Israel rose to a pinnacle at the reigns of David and Solomon, but then fell rapidly over the next five centuries to the point of decimation and exile. The plain teaching is that whatever man does – even if it is commissioned by God – is doomed to failure.²¹⁷ What is required is someone who is perfect and without sin. So the second purpose of the calling of Israel, was to fulfil the promises concerning the Messiah. In order for the Messiah to come, the nation, the law, the tabernacle and all the prophets needed to be in place so that the coming of Christ was not without warning. Think of this! God spent much of earth history (the first promise came shortly after the fall) preparing the world for the coming of Christ.²¹⁸ Now all the while that the nation of Israel was being called and built, the gospel of salvation was being offered. I hope that you realise that from Genesis to Revelation there is only one gospel.²¹⁹ It is salvation by grace through faith in the work of Christ. For those who came before Christ it was necessary for them to look forward, seeing the Messiah in shadow form in

215 Romans 1:18,22,25,28.

216 2Timothy 2:21.

217 Note that this does not imply that God had failed, for His purpose was to show that given every advantage and opportunity man would always fail.

218 Genesis 3:15.

219 Ephesians 4:5; Romans 4:12,16.

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the tabernacle, the temple, the sacrifices, the prophets and all of the history of the nation. But for us who follow after and have therefore received the greater light we look back and can see clearly the many fulfilments.²²⁰ But all who are “saved” and delivered from sin, from this world and from Satan are in that condition because of what Christ did at Calvary. This was promised in Genesis 3:15 and declared from then until today.

2:5,6.

And so Isaiah encourages his readers and hearers to “*walk in the light of the Lord*” – to walk in the revelation they had already received.²²¹ Isaiah's call for the house of Jacob to walk in the Lord's light comes against a backdrop of considerable departure and sin.

And then we find that the Lord had actually “*forsaken*” His people.²²² This is remarkable, but it shows us clearly that there is a limit to the expression of sin. For example, we see this idea in the time before the flood, where the Lord told the whole world:

My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he *is* indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.²²³

Or, as a second example, when the Lord met with Abraham in the course of conversation He mentioned to Abraham that “*the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.*” This statement indicates the idea that sin is allowed only a certain length of time before it must be punished.

We note also that the people are referred to here as “*the house of Jacob*” reminding us of the patriarch's deceitful and conniving ways. The people are described as being “*filled with eastern ways,*” so that their life was not based upon the Lord and His ways, but rather on those customs from the east. Their interest and bent towards the east lead them to become “*soothsayers like the Philistines.*” To be a soothsayer was to be a conjurer, a spiritist, a witch, an enchanter, a sorcerer or a diviner. It was to seek information and revelation apart from God and was expressly forbidden.²²⁴ The statement “*they are pleased with the children of foreigners*” suggests that they were happy about the fruit and outcome of the east and its ways. This is quite startling, because they ought to have been delighted in the children of the Lord. So this statement indicates a massive departure.

220 1Peter 1:10.

221 Isaiah 2:5.

222 Isaiah 2:6.

223 Genesis 6:3.

224 Deuteronomy 18:10-14.

Studies in Isaiah.

2:6-9.

The descriptions of verses 6 to 9 leave the reader with no illusion about the nature of Israel in Isaiah's time. They were *“filled”* with foreign ideas, and their land was *“full”* of material possessions, military might, and idols.²²⁵ So in verse 7 we find that their twin focus was on wealth (*“silver and gold”*) and military prowess (*“horses,”* and *“chariots”*). The two often go together. When a person amasses wealth they then have to see about protecting that wealth, and so they lean towards the use of force, (henchmen, security guards, vaults and the like). Since they were enamoured of eastern ways it is no surprise that they worshipped idols. Once again we discover that the land was *“full of idols,”* so that they were not doing things by half. This is ever the case when a person drifts and sins. It is never too long before their life is wholly given to that which they at first tried out a little. The character of idols is shown here for they are simply man made. They may be elaborately made (*“which their own fingers have made”*) but they are nonetheless man made. The folly of idolatry is also shown up here, for the people worshipped that which they had made (even if elaborately) and in doing so they humbled themselves, but not in any righteous way.²²⁶

We can see here in these verses that it wasn't as though Israel were tinkering or dipping their toes into different ideas, or that they were equivocal. No! They were *fully* immersed (we might say 'baptized') in foreign ideas and practices. Such sin, if not atoned for, must be punished. However this call by Isaiah brings into sharp focus the amazing fact that for the repentant sinner there is great hope. But here it is put in the form of a warning. If we remain in sin there is no hope. Israel were filled with foreign ideas and were more enamoured of their foreign offspring than the fruit of God's ways. They focused on this world's goods and status, and they had become so proud that they considered the work of their own hands to be worship-worthy. Isn't this like our current world? Aren't we as modern people so caught up both with this world's goods and status, and our own “wonderful” ideas that we have no time for what God would say? Isaiah calls for the house of Jacob to turn and walk in the light of the Lord, but the house of Jacob had become so filled with foreign ways and ideas that this was almost impossible for them. They had to recognise that if they did not repent then they would bear the brunt of their sin. It is this call which comes to everyone who hears *this* message. Listen to what God has said and is saying. If you will not, then know for certain you will bear the punishment you deserve for sin.

225 Isaiah 2:6-8.

226 Isaiah 2:9.

Chapter 6.

Isaiah 2:10-22.

Watch out! The terror of Messiah's return!

Textual analysis.

10 Enter into the rock,
and hide in the dust,

from the terror of the **Lord**
and the glory of His majesty.

11 The lofty looks of man shall be humbled,
the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down,
and the **Lord** alone shall be exalted in that day.

12 For the day of the **Lord of hosts** *shall come*

upon everything proud and lofty,
upon everything lifted up— and it shall be brought low—

13 Upon all the cedars of Lebanon *that are* high and lifted up,
and upon all the oaks of Bashan;

14 upon all the high mountains,
and upon all the hills *that are* lifted up;

15 upon every high tower,
and upon every fortified wall;

16 upon all the ships of Tarshish,
and upon all the beautiful sloops.

17 The loftiness of man shall be bowed down,
and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low;
the **Lord** alone will be exalted in that day,

18 but the idols He shall utterly abolish.

19 They shall go

into the holes of the rocks,

and into the caves of the earth,

from the **terror of the Lord**

and the glory of His majesty,

when He arises to shake the earth mightily.

20 In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made, *each* for himself to worship, to the moles and bats,

21 to go into the clefts of the rocks,

and into the crags of the rugged rocks,

from the **terror of the Lord**

and the glory of His majesty,

when He arises to shake the earth mightily.

22 Sever yourselves from such a man, whose breath *is* in his nostrils; for of what account is he?

Studies in Isaiah.

The second part of Isaiah chapter 2 concerns the end of the latter days and it is truly terrifying. From verse 10 (and again in verses 19 and 21) we are brought to consider the great terror of the Lord also referred to as the *“day of the Lord of hosts”* in verse 12. Never mind about the terror that is struck in the hearts of man and women when there are indiscriminate bombings or persecution by fanatics! What about the terror faced by men from God as Jesus Christ returns? It is unimaginable and unthinkable! We shudder when we hear of wicked events borne out of hatred and fuelled by jealousy. Such terrorism is wicked and heinous, but the terror to be inflicted upon rebellious mankind is one which is righteous and justified. It is the terror of knowing that the Lord who owns us is coming to ask what we have done with the tenancy of our lives. Just as the father, on returning home from work finds mayhem and chaos caused by children who have rebelled seeks to correct with punishment, so the Lord will make everything right and true on His coming again. When the sound of the footsteps of their father approaching the threshold is heard, there is fear in the hearts of the children who know they have erred. Will there not be greater fear struck in hearts who come to such a sudden realisation of their rebellion as the sovereign Lord returns?²²⁷

The text as we have analysed it above can be split into four unequal parts. We start in verse 10 with a promise from the Lord of safety for some. Verses 11 through to 17 serve to show the awful nature of pride and the terror it must face. Then in verses 18 to 21 we are brought to consider the day of the Lord which will be a day of great terror. Finally in the last verse of the chapter (verse 22) we are exhorted to stop relying on mankind.

[1] A promise of safety. (Isaiah 2:10).

[2] The terror of pride. (Isaiah 2:11-17).

[3] The day of terror of the Lord. (Isaiah 2:18-21).

[4] Stop regarding man! (Isaiah 2:22).

[1] A promise of safety. (Isaiah 2:10).

2:10.

This second section of Isaiah 2 starts with a command which many commentators miss. It is often thought that the command to *“enter into the rock”* is a mocking call to those who rebel to try

²²⁷ Please forgive the weakness of this illustration. Our rebellion against God is so much more wicked than the error and bad behaviour of children to their parents.

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and escape, but I am convinced it is really a call to those who have turned to God in faith to take advantage of the great grace of God in Christ. Verse 10 seems to suggest that there is safety in *“the rock”* an image which is found in many places throughout Scripture depicting the Lord.²²⁸ For believers this safety is assured. We have been spared the judgement because Christ has faced it in our place. This is a general call to all to consider the Lord Jesus – the rock – as a safe refuge from the terror of the Lord who will come in all His purity and light, and which will utterly consume all evil, error and sin. Following the call to enter the rock, we also read of the command to *“hide in the dust”* which I take to be a reference to death. Those who die before that great day are not disadvantaged. This is a reminder to us that we will all return to dust if we don't live to see Christ's return, but the word *“hide”* suggests protection rather than judgement.

In contrast to this command to enter the rock, we find that those who do not, will eventually flee to find refuge in *“the holes of the rocks ... the caves of this earth ... the clefts of the rocks and into the craggs of the rugged rocks”*.²²⁹ This imagery is repeated in Revelation chapter 6:

12 I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. **13** And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. **14** Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. **15** And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, **16** and said to the mountains and rocks, “fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! **17** For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”²³⁰

These words all depict holes, caverns, fissures or openings. It would seem that the people are running from the terror of the Lord to get anywhere they can away from His glorious majesty. There is no planning, no forethought, and no preparation. It is a terrible and desperate scene in which people are scurrying to find any hiding place in the depths of the earth.

[2] The terror of pride. (Isaiah 2:11-17).

There is no doubt but that pride is the chief of sins. Here in this last part of Isaiah chapter 2 we have a blistering tirade against this terrible disposition which we all naturally inherit. Think of

228 See, for example: Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:8f; Deuteronomy 8:15; 32:4,15,18,30,31; Psalm 18:2,31,46; 28:1; 31:3; 42:9; 62:2,6,7; 78:35; 89:26; 92:15; 94:22; 95:1; 144:1; 1Corinthians 10:4.

229 Isaiah 2:19,21.

230 Revelation 6:12-17.

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this carefully. Pride is the attitude that says “I do not need help.” It walks in independence and not in reliance on God who made us. Perhaps the most readily recognisable illustration of this sin is the song sung by Frank Sinatra, namely “I did it my way!”

2:11,17.

There is a symmetry to this tirade against pride. Verses 11 and 17 are similar but not identical although they both end with the words: *“the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day”* because He alone is worthy of being exalted, because He alone is good, pure, and true. In verse 11 we have a humbling of man's looks and his haughty appearance. Thus everything that appears proud and lofty will be brought low. In verse 17 we have the actual loftiness and haughtiness of men being humbled. So that every high and mighty person, everyone elevated and occupying a high position, will be brought down.

2:12-16.

Verses 12 to 16 describe in detail how this humbling and bowing down of mankind's pride and lofty appearance and state will be achieved. It will happen when the day of the Lord of hosts comes. We are told of ten things upon which the day of the Lord of hosts, that is, His judgement will come. It will be upon:

[i] everything proud and lofty,	(v12)
[ii] everything lifted up— and it shall be brought low—	(v12)
[iii] all the cedars of Lebanon <i>that are</i> high and lifted up, and	(v13)
[iv] all the oaks of Bashan;	(v13)
[v] all the high mountains, and	(v14)
[vi] all the hills <i>that are</i> lifted up;	(v14)
[vii] every high tower, and	(v15)
[viii] every fortified wall;	(v15)
[ix] all the ships of Tarshish, and	(v16)
[x] all the beautiful sloops.	(v16)

The number ten signifies a complete set, as in the ten commandments. So here we have a complete description of humanity in their pride. Nothing will escape. Nothing that is tainted with pride shall

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be omitted this judgement, as is clearly indicated by the repeated use of the words “*all*” and “*every*.” After a general statement in verse 12 that anything proud, lofty, or lifted up thing will be brought low, we are then told of four specific groups of things which will be brought low. The first two of these are naturally elevated features (trees and mountains), whilst the last two are things that man has made to be lifted up, (towers and ships). Isaiah is fond of using mountains and trees to represent people, and so these are used here figuratively for those who would see themselves as majestic as an oak or cedar, or who are considered so high and mighty they sit on top of the world. But then of course it is not just the people who might be high and elevated in stature, fame and fortune. It is also their many achievements. In the ancient world we might be drawn to consider the seven wonders of the world, but in these days we are brought to consider the great buildings and edifices scattered across the globe. In ancient days ships that sailed to foreign lands and which brought back riches and wonders undreamed of, were renowned, but today we may think of the adventures into space, of the moon walkers, and of the probes to the far reaches of the solar system. All of these are borne out of man's pride and arrogance. We are so often forced into an admiration of man's greatness but none of this really amounts to anything at all when we have the Lord in view. In fact it not only pales into insignificance, but also it looks horrible too. What would man's life and history have been like if we had walked with the Lord? Would there be the space race, the pyramids, the Hubble telescope, the Great Wall of China ...? Perhaps, you may say, we would be worse for the lack of these things. Maybe we might have done them in a very different way. Whatever the truth, what we do have littering human history is the pride and arrogance of man and his many schemes. As we mentioned earlier:

Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.²³¹

[3] The day of terror of the Lord. (Isaiah 2:18-21).

2:18-21.

There is a significant symmetry to verses 18 to 21 as shown by our earlier analysis, and this is further illustrated in table 6.1. In verse 19 we find that the Lord will cast the idols into the depths of the earth, but paralleling this in verse 21 we find that it is the people, who make and worship these idols, who themselves will rush into the bowels of the earth. God will abolish idolatry and any

²³¹ Ecclesiastes 7:29, AKJV.

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who cling to the idols which are cast down, will themselves rush headlong into the depths of the earth.

Table 6.1: Symmetry in Isaiah 2:18-21.

Subject.	What happens to the subject.
18 but the idols He shall utterly abolish.	19 They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily.
20 In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made, <i>each</i> for himself to worship, to the moles and bats,	21 to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the crags of the rugged rocks, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily.

Why wouldn't we want to elevate the Lord for the glory of His majesty? This is the surprising thing for, instead of worshipping Him who is altogether lovely and without comparison, we spend our time worshipping worthless idols. As a consequence, the Lord will have His day against these vain things, and it will be a day of terror. Three times we find the phrase: *"the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty."*²³² This three-fold reference points us to the Holy Trinity. God is depicted here in His great majesty and terror against all that is unholy and rebellious. But there is a difference between the first use and the last two. In the last two we have these words added: *"when He arises to shake the earth mightily."* This phrase clearly leads to the idea of judgement. When the Lord returns *"in that day"* there will be an awful recognition of the truth that all along God was true. Suddenly, the many idols that man made himself to worship will be seen for what they are – empty and vain. As a result these will be counted as refuse and will be tossed without thought to *"the moles and bats"* as men flee to the fissures and holes in the earth.²³³ Moles and bats are those creatures that inhabit the dark recesses of the earth. No longer are these idols to be seen in full view, for they are now to be cast back into the ground from whence the silver and gold originally came. The point is clear. If we cling to idols now, know for certain that there is a day coming when they will be shown for what they are. When the great, good, God who is true and

²³² Isaiah 2:10,19,21.

²³³ Isaiah 2:20.

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pure, holy and wonderful, shines in all His glory, those who cling to idols will realise their lost condition but without any hope at all. They will cast the things they put so much hope in, and which they held in such high esteem, to the rubbish piles as they run from the terror of God.

[4] Stop regarding man! (Isaiah 2:22).²³⁴

2:22.

The description of the day of the Lord's terror is given to Isaiah's contemporaries not to shock and inflame them but for a specific reason. They are brought to the reader's attention for exactly the same reason which is found in verse 22. This is one of the key lessons to be learnt. Why do we always look to mankind instead of to God? What benefit can any man (of whatever stature, gender, accomplishments or status) give us? The reference to "*breath*" in the nostrils serves to indicate our created origin.²³⁵ We did not make ourselves and every breath we take is dependent on God's grace. How we take such things for granted! Think carefully here. It is God who brings us to life and enables us to breathe! Why then do we not seek Him and rest on Him for all things? This text along with many others must be studied to show how futile and vacuous are the thoughts of man.²³⁶

234 Isaiah 2:22, NASB.

235 Genesis 2:7.

236 Psalm 94:11.

Chapter 7.

Isaiah 3:1-12.

When children rule judgement has begun!

Analysis.

- 1 For behold,
the **Lord**,
the **Lord of hosts**,
takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah
the stock and the store,
the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water;
2 the mighty man and the man of war,
the judge and the prophet, and the diviner and the elder;
3 the captain of fifty and the honourable man,
the counsellor and the skilful artisan, and the expert enchanter.
- 4 “I will give
children *to be* their princes,
and babes shall rule over them.
- 5 The people will be oppressed,
every one by another
and every one by his neighbour;
the child will be insolent toward the elder,
and the base toward the honourable.”
- 6 When a man takes hold of his brother in the house of his father, *saying*,
“you have clothing; you be our ruler, and *let* these ruins *be* under your power,”
- 7 In that day he will protest, saying,
“I cannot cure *your* ills, for in my house *is* neither food nor clothing; do not make me a ruler
of the people.”
- 8 For Jerusalem stumbled,
and Judah is fallen,
because
their tongue
and their doings
are against the **Lord**,
to provoke the eyes of His glory.
- 9 The look on their countenance witnesses against them,
and they declare their sin as Sodom;
they do not hide *it*.
Woe to their soul!
For they have brought evil upon themselves.
- 10 “Say to the righteous
that *it shall be* well with them,
for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.
- 11 Woe to the wicked!

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*It shall be ill with him,
for the reward of his hands shall be given him.*

12 *As for My people,
children are their oppressors,
and women rule over them.*

O My people!
Those who lead you cause *you* to err,
and destroy the way of your paths.”

We come now to a passage of Scripture which gives us the details of what the Lord does when people forsake Him. It is so ironic that when people cry “freedom!” and want to throw off what they perceive to be constraints, the Lord allows them space, but what they end up with is deeper bondage than ever. In the middle of the passage we are looking at, we find that people make very slap-dash choices concerning leadership, but this is still all under the great sovereignty of God.²³⁷ For where man decides, it is the Lord who “*gives*” or “*takes*” in each circumstance. There is a natural break at verse 8. In the first seven verses we have what the Lord of hosts is doing, whilst in the next five verses we have the reasons for this action all based upon the actions of the people.

[1] The Lord takes away, and the Lord gives. (Isaiah 3:1-7).

[2] We have brought evil upon ourselves. (Isaiah 3:8-12).

[1] The Lord takes away, and the Lord gives. (Isaiah 3:1-7).

3:1a.

This section opens with our attention being drawn to the Lord in a particular way. He is not just the sovereign God who exists eternally, the great “*I AM,*” but He is: “*the Lord, the Lord of hosts,*” or: **הָאֲדֹנָי הַצְבָּאוֹת** *hā’ādôn y’hwāh š’bā’ôt*, (Adon, Jehovah Tsbaot). This title signifies that the Lord is commander of all armies. He is the Almighty God who commands all armies both heavenly and earthly. Thus we find that the Lord is commander even of the armies that seem to defy the people of God and His purposes. This is not the first time that this title “*Lord of hosts*” has occurred in Isaiah. It occurred earlier in Isaiah 1:9,24; 2:12. In Isaiah 1:24 we are given the title “*the Mighty One of Israel*” as if to enhance the power aspect of the title “*Lord of hosts.*” In chapter 2 the title is used again to emphasise that when judgement comes, the Lord of hosts who commands all armies has power and enough to carry out the verdicts He brings. So here we are introduced to

237 Isaiah 3:6.

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this God who commands all armies. It is a title that Isaiah uses frequently.²³⁸

3:1b-3.

Now this Lord of hosts is going to remove from Jerusalem the main leaders of the people of God. We read of the general removal of supplies and provisions first, so that the judgement that falls will be close at hand.²³⁹ Then we find that a series of ten types of leaders will be removed.²⁴⁰ The text actually gives us eleven designations according to the NKJV ("*mighty man*," "*man of war*," "*judge*," "*prophet*," "*diviner*," "*elder*," "*captain of fifty*," "*honourable man*," "*counsellor*," "*skilful artisan*," and "*expert charmer*"). The first two may be conjoined so that the total comes down to ten. The first Hebrew word of verse 2: גִּבּוֹר *gibôr*, can be translated as the adjective "mighty," or it can be rendered as "mighty one," or "mighty man" as it is masculine in form. Most translations translate the opening phrase in Isaiah 3:2 as we have it in the NKJV suggesting two warrior types of leader. However it is possible to render the opening three words like this:

← Hebrew reads from the right

גִּבּוֹר וְאִישׁ מִלְחָמָה
and the mighty man of war

If this is the case, then we have ten types of leader:

1. Soldier (the mighty man of war)
2. Judge
3. Prophet
4. Diviner
5. Elder
6. Captain of fifty
7. Honourable man
8. Counsellor
9. Skilful artisan
10. Expert enchanter.

²³⁸ Isaiah 1:9,24; 2:12; 3:1; 5:7,9,16,24; 6:3,5; 8:13,18; 9:7,13,19; 10:16,26,33; 13:4,13; 14:22,23,24,27; 17:3; 18:7 (x2); 19:4,12,16,17,18,20,25; 21:10; 22:14,25; 23:9; 24:23; 25:6; 28:5,29; 29:6; 31:4,5; 37:16,32; 39:5; 44:6; 45:13; 47:4; 48:2; 51:15; 54:5. Only Jeremiah has this title more times - compared to 53x. Zechariah has the next most at 46x

²³⁹ Isaiah 3:1.

²⁴⁰ Isaiah 3:2,3.

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The number ten suggests completeness or comprehensiveness, indicating that all bases are covered and there are no exceptions. Alternatively, the way in which the text seems to be arranged with eleven different leaders, indicates that we have four groups of leaders which are ordered by the conjunction “*and*” in the following way:

1. The mighty man **and** the man of war,
2. The judge **and** the prophet **and** the diviner **and** the elder;
3. The captain of fifty **and** the honourable man,
4. The counsellor **and** the skilful artisan **and** the expert enchanter.

In this case the groups are made up of: those who are expert in war; those who govern within the nation in matters of the law; those who are leaders within the community; and the skilled and experts among the different professions. Seen in this way we might suggest that all walks of life (the number four speaking of the whole world as in the four points of the compass) are represented. Whatever way we view these leaders, what we are meant to understand is that all in any leadership position are to be included.

Thus first of all we have those who were soldiers and warriors. Then we have the judiciary and governing elite under four divisions (judge, prophet, diviner, elder). Then the lower rank of leaders (those who were captains over fifty and the honourable men). Finally we have the three types of gifted artisans (counsellor, skilful artisan, and expert enchanter). There is a progression from the top downwards so that no one amongst what may be called “leadership” is excused. The number ten signifies completeness so the entire leadership is referenced. This is what happened in the end to Judah and Jerusalem and you can read the history of this in the book of Kings. It is also what Jeremiah foretold nearer the time too. We learn why this was the case from verse 8 onwards, but for now we need to concentrate on the fact that God – the Lord of hosts – is in charge.

3:4,5.

In the place of these designated leaders, children and babes will be chosen as leaders. This is what the Lord ***gives***.²⁴¹ It is very much like the situation described by the apostle Paul in Romans. When the people reject God and do not like to retain knowledge of Him, then the Lord gives them over to a debased and wicked mind:

241 Isaiah 3:4.

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24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonour their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.²⁴²

The outcome of having children and babies as leaders will be great disaster. The people will suffer great oppression because these new leaders will have absolutely no regard for their former leaders. Instead there will be insolence *“toward the elder,”* and a *“base”* attitude *“toward the honourable.”*²⁴³ When such foolish leaders are in power, everyone will resort to such oppression and incivility for we note here that oppression occurs *“every one by another and every one by his neighbour.”*²⁴⁴

3:6,7.

This is a stark and horrifying judgement for there is no wisdom nor common sense any more. The choice of leader is based simply on whether a person has clothes!²⁴⁵ When the real qualifications for leadership are reduced to such a ridiculous level, then the end is certainly near. But isn't this our situation today? Those in leadership seem to have been chosen for any number of reasons except sense and ability. How else can we explain the poor turnout at elections and the lack of interest in politics generally? But what too of church leadership? It seems to me that the choices made in many circles are not merely laughable, they are scurrilous! Have the leaders of the church got the true knowledge of God? I doubt it for if they had then better decisions would be made for the church in our day. As it is we have churches falling away from the truth at an alarming rate. We have other churches tinkering with every compromise possible. And still others shaking with fear. Hardly will any church be likely to choose a godly Bible-believing man for their pastor. What is looked for often is a dynamic youngster who may know nothing much, but who has “vision” and ideas. Whatever happened to trust in the Word of God and the faithfulness of sticking to this? If you consider the “person profiles” of many churches seeking leaders today you would be hard-pressed to find any difference with those of secular institutions, and I would venture to suggest that none of

242 Romans 1:24-27.

243 Isaiah 3:5.

244 Isaiah 3:5.

245 Isaiah 3:6.

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the apostles would have succeeded in gaining a position. Tragic!

The certain outcome of such poor choice of leaders is oppression, for everyone is out for what they can get and grab. The removal of structured, God-given leaders has the effect of removing trust in authority. Isn't this also what we find in modern society – a lack of trust for authority? Sadly the “authorities” leave so much to be desired because they are inexperienced, young, and ineffectual. But the loss of credible and godly leaders brings in this mistrust for authority. The situation is like that faced when a city is besieged and the leaders are dead. Who will lead? Anyone who has a hat! In such situations some will grab the chance of being a leader for the status it conveys, even though in such dire circumstances it is a very poor status to have. But at these times, more often than not, people do not want to be the leaders. They will not want to be the leader of what ruins are left because they simply cannot provide any rescue or deliverance.

And so we see leaders who have authority but no real power. When they are asked to bring about some desired result by the people they end up protesting that it is not their job. They will say *“I cannot cure your ills,”* and they will add that they have not got the resources (*“in my house is neither food nor clothing”*) and so they abdicate their responsibilities (*“do not make me a ruler of the people”*).²⁴⁶

[2] We have brought evil upon ourselves. (Isaiah 3:8-12).

In the next five verses we find the reasons for this sorry situation.

3:8,9.

Jerusalem and Judah fell because the behaviour of the people was woeful. They were against the Lord.²⁴⁷ Their speech and their actions simply defied Him, and yet they ought to have represented Him. We may laugh, or be astonished, when representatives of a prestigious company show the company up by rejecting the products, and choosing a competitor's in preference, but this was far, far worse. These were people who openly defied the Lord. Their very faces were proudly set on the course of disobedience. Their sin, their actions, and their words, were open.²⁴⁸ They were like Sodom of old flaunting their ways, and yet they were the representatives of the Lord! No wonder we read the exclamation: *“woe to their soul!”*²⁴⁹ It is desperate because their souls, made in

²⁴⁶ Isaiah 3:7.

²⁴⁷ Isaiah 3:8.

²⁴⁸ Isaiah 3:9.

²⁴⁹ Isaiah 3:9.

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the image of God, were set for destruction in hell. The evil that they now suffer by virtue of walking against God, is something they bring upon themselves. I wonder if we realise this in our day? If we walk contrary to the Lord, we will reap all sorts of disastrous consequences. These will be things that at one and the same time come from the hand of God as a punishment, but equally they are the fruits that we bring upon ourselves.

3:10,11.

The Bible is very straightforward. Always it is a question of whether you are amongst the righteous or are in league with the wicked. There are only these two options. The world makes the terrible mistake of misconstruing the distinction between righteous and wicked, and includes a third group to complicate matters. It is often assumed by many in the world, that it is *self-righteousness* that is exalted. When it comes to a view of the wicked, the public perception is that these are those who have done terribly wicked things, like Adolf Hitler or Josef Stalin. The vast majority of people, it is assumed, are in a broad neutral group who are described as being 'good' in a relative or general sense. But in actual fact, as far as God and His revelation are concerned, the righteous are those who are so only because they trust God. Righteousness comes by faith in the Lord. The wicked are those who remain and continue in their sins because they reject the Lord's offer of rescue and deliverance. It has always been the case right from the very beginning. But then the judgement of God is always pictured against the doings or actions of people. If you do well it will be well with you. If you do wrong it will be bad with you. How does this sit with the righteousness that comes by faith? Well of course the point is that the righteous (by faith) are in fact righteous (godly) in action. They do not have a righteousness of their own. They have the righteousness of Christ and they have this by faith in Christ. But the righteous are acting righteously! They do not do this by virtue of their own inherent righteousness, for they have none. They act righteously *by faith*. They follow their leader, Christ. As He was perfect, the righteous follow Him, and in the Holy Spirit they continue in righteousness being sanctified by the word and the Spirit.²⁵⁰ The order of faith followed by works is shown in the classic passage from Ephesians chapter 2:

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God,* **9** not of works, lest anyone should boast. **10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared

²⁵⁰ John 17:17; Ephesians 5:26; Romans 15:16; 1 Peter 1:2.

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beforehand that we should walk in them.²⁵¹

Salvation is a gift of God's grace and it comes to us by the gift of faith in Christ. This is what Ephesians 2:8,9 tells us. But this is not the end of the story, for Ephesians 2:10 completes the picture by bringing in the idea of new creation (regeneration or rebirth) and the purpose of salvation, namely *“for good works”* which God had already *“prepared beforehand.”* Hence we are righteous by faith, and we live righteously by faith. The apostle John also talks about this. No one who loves God (by faith) practices (continues in) sin.²⁵² Whatever we do, that shall we also reap. If we do good, we shall reap the rewards of the good. If we do bad we shall end up with evil. In both cases it is the same. For the righteous: *“they shall eat the fruit of their doings”* and for the wicked: *“the reward of his hands shall be given him.”*²⁵³

3:12.

The section ends with an appeal for the people to consider their plight. They now have children and even *women* as rulers who oppress them. Women are introduced here for the first time. As an aside, this indicates clearly that leadership ought to be male. This is as a consequence of how we were created. Paul makes this point in writing to Timothy.²⁵⁴ But here the people are drawn to consider their situation. These leaders, the children and the women, are those who cause the people to *“err,”* and who destroy the way and the paths they ought to have traversed.²⁵⁵ Isn't this the case today? The paths of righteousness which come by faith are obscured and ripped up. The paths of holiness are dug up and trampled on. People are offered any number of “ways” which have the name “Christian” today, and these all cause people to go awry, or to err. This word *“err”* literally means “to wander” and it signifies the same idea that Paul wrote about when he said:

... that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.²⁵⁶

251 Ephesians 2:8-10.

252 1John 3:7-9.

253 Isaiah 3:10,11.

254 1Timothy 2:11f. Please remember that male and female are equal before God. Both are part of the “man” created by the Lord in His own image. Just as there is no person of the Trinity greater than any other, so man is not greater than woman. But just as each member of the Trinity is a separate person and their relations differ, so too does the relation and office of man and woman.

255 Isaiah 3:12.

256 Ephesians 4:14.

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Such leaders also cause confusion as they muddy and destroy not just the true paths, but even the paths they are in fact treading, for this is the import of the words written. Listen to those words of verse 12 again: *“those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths.”* They lead in a wandering way hither and thither, and as they do they destroy the way of the paths taken. This is so true of many health and wealth and charismatic churches. They try one way first and then another, and as they try the “new thing” they re-write the story of the path they have already trodden! You can see it in the story of the charismatic leader of the end of the twentieth century, John Wimber. He testified that his congregation moved from concentrating on worship, to a focus on healing, and then centred all their efforts on prophecy. Wimber confessed that the “healings” his movement were engaged in were not of the character of those found in the New Testament. Part of the reason he got carried along with the prophetic movements of the 1990s was this hope that it would bring miracles and healings like those found and experienced in the New Testament.²⁵⁷ But what happened to them all? They came and they went and no fruit was seen. In a similar way the health and wealth 'gospel' leaves a stream of confusion in its wake. Writers like Joyce Meyer, Joel Osteen, Bill Johnson, Kenneth Copeland, and many others come across with great appeal but underneath their doctrine is rotten. Denials of Christ's true nature, and denials of the gospel, are the bedrock of these people and yet they deceive many.²⁵⁸

And thus judgement begins with the church. We have chosen the inexperienced, and women as leaders instead of men who have walked the life of faith. We are reaping the whirlwind of destruction. There is such confusion amongst what may be called the “Christian church” (although this is not really the true body of Christ). This is what we find in the next chapter in greater detail.

257 Private writings and research on John Wimber through conference papers and tapes.

258 See: <http://churchismessy.com/2013/08/05/why-i-called-out-joel-osteen-and-joyce-meyer/> See also: “The American Gospel” – A documentary film about the prosperity gospel versus the true gospel. <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/gospel1> OR https://www.amazon.co.uk/American-Gospel-Christ-Russell-Berger/dp/B07MP1HB4V/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1549492301&sr=8-1&keywords=american+gospel

Chapter 8.

Isaiah 3:13-26.

Judgement begins with God's people.

Textual analysis.

13 The **Lord**

stands up to plead,
and stands to judge the people.

14 The **Lord**

will enter into judgement with
the elders of His people
and His princes:

“for you have eaten up the vineyard;
the plunder of the poor *is* in your houses.

15 What do you mean by
crushing My people
and grinding the faces of the poor?”

Says the **Lord God of hosts.**

16 Moreover the **Lord** says:

“Because the daughters of Zion
are haughty,
and walk with

outstretched necks
and wanton eyes,

walking and mincing *as* they go,
making a jingling with their feet,

17 Therefore the **Lord**

will strike with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion,
and the **Lord**

will uncover their secret parts.”

18 In that day the **Lord**

will take away

the finery:
the jingling anklets,
the scarves,
and the crescents;

19 The pendants,
the bracelets,
and the veils;

20 The headdresses,
the leg ornaments,
and the headbands;
the perfume boxes,
the charms,

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21 and the rings;
the nose jewels,
22 the festal apparel,
and the mantles;
the outer garments,
the purses,
23 and the mirrors;
the fine linen,
the turbans,
and the robes.

24 And so it shall be:
instead of a sweet smell there will be a stench;
instead of a sash, a rope;
instead of well-set hair, baldness;
instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth;
and branding instead of beauty.
25 Your men shall fall by the sword,
and your mighty in the war.
26 Her gates shall lament and mourn,
and she *being* desolate shall sit on the ground.

Coming to this next part of Isaiah, we find that the judgement of God falls squarely on His people. We have a twofold indictment. First against the original leaders (verses 13 to 15), and then against the new leaders who were women (in the main), (verses 16 to 23). Finally we have the judgement stated (verses 24 to 26).

[1] The Lord judges the leaders first. (Isaiah 3:13-15).

[2] False leaders will be punished. (Isaiah 3:16-23).

[3] Great expectations thwarted! (Isaiah 3:24-26).

[1] The Lord judges the leaders first. (Isaiah 3:13-15).

The judgement of the Lord starts with those who have the authority.

3:13

In verse 13 we read that when judgement comes the Lord “*stands*.” What does this signify?
In Amos we find a similar situation when the Lord comes in judgement:

I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said: “Strike the door posts, that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all. I will slay the last of them with the sword. He who flees from them shall not get away, and he who

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escapes from them shall not be delivered.²⁵⁹

We are reminded also that when the Lord returns in judgement He will stand on the earth.²⁶⁰ The standing indicates that God intends to act, and is about to carry out the sentence. In our text we find that the Lord is doing two things as He stands. First He stands to *“plead,”* and then He stands to *“judge.”* The first word is not in the sense of beseeching or appealing, but rather gives the idea of presenting a legal case. It is as though the Lord is the prosecuting council arguing against the actions of the people. The second word is one more appropriate to the judge. Here we have the Lord passing sentence.

3:14.

The details of the case and the judgement are given from verse 14. In verse 13 we are told that the Lord is about to *“judge the people”* but in the detail of verse 14 we see that the Lord is to enter into judgement with *“the elders of His people and His princes,”* so clearly the leaders come first in judgement. What is the indictment? Well clearly the leaders have not looked after the Lord's vineyard. Rather than cultivate it for the master's benefit, they have partaken of the fruits without restraint. Leaders who cultivate their own interests, who feed themselves and satiate their own desires are depicted here. They ought to have cultivated the vineyard so that the poor (those in need) would be benefited. How the church has fallen into this error in our day! How does the church help grow the vineyard of God? Does it give itself to seek out and search for those who are “poor” (in spirit – i.e. the lost), and who know not the Lord? Or has it sought out its own agenda and promoted its own welfare? I am afraid that it would appear that the church has done far more to promote its own welfare and status than to be the fellow gardeners of God.²⁶¹ The leaders are accused of eating up the vineyard. They had feathered their own nests and filled their own pockets.²⁶²

3:15.

Rather than act on behalf of the poor, they had plundered them. But further they had crushed the people and had ground their faces! If we recognise that the poor are really those who know not God, not the materially poor, we can see that the church, and in particular the leaders, have done the same in our day. Look at the way in which the church (of all denominations) have obscured the

259 Amos 9:1.

260 Job 19:25; Acts 7:55,56.

261 1Corinthians 3:6-19.

262 Isaiah 3:14.

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gospel, and have proffered other trinkets and false hopes in place. By doing this they rip the poor off from the things they need – the great riches of Christ! Instead they fatten themselves up on their own ideas and schemes. Look at the modern church. Where do you truly find the ministers and leaders holding forth the word of life to the poor who are seeking in vain? Remember that the Lord rebuked the lawyers of His day who had failed to enter in to the kingdom and by their teaching prevented others entering too.²⁶³

Notice that this section ends with the title of the Lord as the *“Lord God of hosts”* indicating His great power and ability.²⁶⁴

[2] False leaders will be punished. (Isaiah 3:16-23).

3:16.

Next we find that the Lord will judge and punish *“the daughters of Zion.”*²⁶⁵ This term *“daughters of Zion”* sometimes means the nation as a whole as it highlights the satellite towns of the capital Jerusalem. Here, however, the first intention is to speak of women who had taken command. These are the women who have become leaders because the men have been removed.²⁶⁶ Where are the men of today? Where are the leaders of God? Where there is a vacuum then there will be others ready to step up and take their place. The Lord has removed the great leaders of old, and in their place we have innocent and inexperienced leaders, and women who ought never to have been given such authority. These are false leaders and they are about to be judged.

Now these *“daughters of Zion”* are depicted as being *“haughty”* or proud and characterised as walking with an air of superiority. Their necks were stretched out and their eyes were desirous. This is the attitude of heart that lays claim to being lord in a situation. Watch out for I am coming! Their steps were *“mincing,”* or, in other words, precise and determined. They did not just stumble along but took short, measured, and precise steps. Think, for example, of those ladies in long and tightly fitting gowns at their ankles so that they are forced to take short and precise steps. That is the situation described here. They are also described as making a *“jingling with their feet,”* which would imply that they have some form of bell attached to their footwear to announce their arrival. These are not simply proud and wanton or desirous, but ostentatious and showy to boot. They want

263 Luke 11:52.

264 Isaiah 3:15.

265 Isaiah 3:16.

266 Isaiah 3:12.

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people to sit up and take notice of them. We are reminded of the hypocritical Pharisees who

love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.²⁶⁷

3:17.

Notice that the Lord will strike the most proud and haughty at the place where they are most proud and haughty, namely, *“the crown of the head,”* and will show up their shame by uncovering their hidden parts – a reference to their unholy behaviour.²⁶⁸ This also indicates a comprehensive judgement from top to bottom.

3:18-23.

There is a sense here that these women are acting in a priestly manner, but the dress is not like that of the priests of the tabernacle, for it has components of a pagan stamp. So we have such things as *“crescents”* and *“pendants”* which seem to have a (physical) heavenly character.²⁶⁹ One of the marks of true leadership is humility. Moses was said to be the meekest man on earth, and Christ was humble bar none.²⁷⁰ How then do we react to those who lead in such a manner as to parade their leadership? Those who have fought to be leaders such as women and then next (horror of horrors) the so-called “gay” contingent, hardly come to positions with humility do they? These walk in pride, never in humility. To them the words of Micah 6:8 are a joke. They walk with mincing steps and walk in pride. They show their dress openly but this affront to the Lord will be dealt a lethal blow. It applies not just to woman and those we may consider to be openly defying the Lord, but to all false leaders who wear garb and finery that is not given of the Lord. What should our “dress” be but the life of Christ? The Scriptures teach us some wonderful things concerning the believer's new clothing which is well worth a careful study.²⁷¹

And so we observe that the Lord will *“take away”* again, and the list of things to be so removed is at once both comprehensive and specific.²⁷² The list includes 22 items:

267 Matthew 6:5.

268 Isaiah 3:17.

269 Isaiah 3:18,19.

270 Numbers 12:3; Philippians 2:5f.

271 Isaiah 61:3; Romans 13:11-14; Ephesians 4:24,25; 6:11f; Colossians 3:9-14; 1Thessalonians 5:8.

272 Isaiah 3:18-23.

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the finery:
the jingling anklets,
the scarves, and
the crescents;
the pendants,
the bracelets, and
the veils;
the headdresses,
the leg ornaments, and
the headbands;
the perfume boxes,
the charms, and
the rings;
the nose jewels,
the festal apparel, and
the mantles;
the outer garments,
the purses, and
the mirrors;
the fine linen,
the turbans, and
the robes.

First the “*finery*” is removed. That is the appearance of beauty and honour. The finery stands as a title for all the items listed. So strictly there are only 21 items. These women are not really beautiful, of course, but the world sees them in that way. When the Lord comes, such deceit will be uncovered and people will see the truth, for the finery and the apparent beauty is gone. It will not be necessary to comment on all the items listed, but the long list of items is given to show how silly such leaders are. These are very detailed but they are mere outward apparel.

The first thing to note is that there is far more here than can be worn at any one time. For example, there are several headpieces (scarves, which were bands worn around women's heads, veils, headbands, and turbans) and numerous accessories. So the idea expressed here is of opulence

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and excess. Contrast this with the situation and circumstances experienced by the poor who may have to pledge their cloak for a loan which doubled up as their bed-clothes.²⁷³ Many existed with a basic set of clothes and household items that they used. Here we are confronted with those for whom no expense was spared. This is enhanced by the term “*festal apparel*” which can stand for a “robe of state” or “costly” or “splendid” clothing. We have already mentioned the religious nature of some of these items (“*crescents*” is literally “little moons” suggesting worship of the moon, and “*charms*” suggests some type of amulet), but there are also items for which there is no real practical use, (“*leg ornaments*” and “*nose jewels*”), and those which were used merely for vanity (“*headdresses*” is probably a tiara, and the plural “*mirrors*” suggest more than making sure they looked acceptable). Thus we have women who were taking the place of leadership and who were vaunting themselves in an opulent and expensive manner. Is this something we see today? Well I cannot help but think of the extensive array of garments used by the high Anglican and especially the Roman Catholic churches.²⁷⁴ Surely if ever there was a Scripture warning against such opulence and vanity it is this? Then also we have the telly-evangelists with their smart suits and expensive jets in which they travel the world. In stark contrast the apostle Paul warns that women (and indeed all who own the Lord) ought to show forth an inner beauty rather than the outward appearance of finery.²⁷⁵

[3] Great expectations thwarted! (Isaiah 3:24-26).

After detailing the excess of the women in leadership for the purpose of showing it all up for what it was truly worth – show and nothing else – we read next about what the Lord will do. He takes away these openly showy things and replaces them with what may never have been expected.

3:24.

The women were not only arrayed gorgeously, for they also had expensive perfumes and fragrances (“*sweet smell*”). Isn't all of this a lot like modern society with its focus on clothing and perfumes? Well in place of the great fragrances, distilled from the most expensive of plants, there

273 Deuteronomy 24:10-13.

274 Listed in alphabetical order we have 34 items: the Alb, The Amice, the Biretta, the Camauro, the Cappa, the Cappamagna, the Capello Romano, the Cassock, the Chasuble, the Chimere, the Cincture, the Crosier, the Dalmatic, the Douillette, the Episcopal ring, the Fanon, the Farraiolo, the Gauntlets, the Gloves, the Humeral veil, the Manipule, the Mantelletta, the Mitre, the Mozzetta, the Pallium, the Pastoral staff (pope), the Pectoral cross, the Rochet, the Simar, the Soprana, the Stole, the Surplice, the Triregno, and the Zucchetto.

See: <https://www.catholicdoors.com/courses/roman.htm>

275 1Timothy 2:9.

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will be a horrible smell – the smell of rottenness and death (*“a stench”*). Then also, instead of the beautiful clothes and accessories, there will be baldness and sackcloth as befits those going into captivity. We recognise, of course, the dual nature of these prophecies. At one and the same time we see the Israelites of Jeremiah's time being taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, and also we see the final plight of those judged for their wanton and reckless defiance of the Lord and His ways when Christ returns. But can't we also see the state and condition of man today? We are described as *“dead in trespasses and sins”* by Scripture (God's word), and so we are rotten to the core, and yet we dress up and paint our characters as oh so noble! What a rotten stench we are!²⁷⁶

3:25.26.

The passage ends with reference to *“men”* and the *“mighty”* who will fall by the sword and in war, and then concludes with reference to Zion.²⁷⁷ What we have here then, in Isaiah 3, is a graphic description of the women of the city and their disposition and behaviour, and these are taken as representatives of the city itself. Now in verses 25 and 26 our focus is upon the city as a whole rather than the major representatives that characterised it (i.e. the women or *“daughters of Zion”*). The city gates shall lament and mourn, and the city that was once full of righteousness shall be desolate sitting on the ground in lament and sorrow. What a pathetic sight! No more true judgement and justice to be had at the gates, the city is now desolate and empty with no hope. The first verse of chapter 4 could well be taken together with what we have just considered, for in it there is a graphic description of the lack of men (all fallen in battle).

276 Ephesians 2:1.

277 Isaiah 3:25,26.

Chapter 9.

Isaiah 4:1-6.

At the lowest point

the Branch of the Lord will be glorious.

Textual analysis.

- 1 And in that day
seven women shall take hold of one man, saying,
“we will eat our own food and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name, to take away
our reproach.”
- 2 In that day
the **Branch of the Lord** shall be beautiful and glorious;
and the fruit of the earth *shall be* excellent and appealing
for those of Israel who have escaped.
- 3 And it shall come to pass
that *he who is* left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem
will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.
- 4 When the **Lord** has washed away the filth of the **daughters of Zion**,
and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst,
by the spirit of judgement
and by the spirit of burning,
- 5 then the **Lord** will create
above every dwelling place of Mount Zion,
and above her assemblies,
a cloud and smoke by day
and the shining of a flaming fire by night.
For over all the glory there *will be* a covering.
- 6 And there will be a tabernacle
for shade in the daytime from the heat,
for a place of refuge,
and for a shelter from storm and rain.

Having described the effects of Christ's first and second comings in Isaiah chapter 2, and then how judgement comes to the people and especially their leaders, we move to a piece of revelation which gives us immense hope! Verse 1 of Isaiah chapter 4 may fit better with the last section for it indicates the outcome of judgement on the daughters of Zion, but is put here because it sets a great contrast to what the “*Branch of the Lord*” offers. From this we note that our divisions are not always seamless and perfect, and we do well to remember that the word of God is living and

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not something that is always easily grasped. This prophecy speaks first of the return from exile, after Jerusalem has been purged, and thence also of the glories to come in the church once the Lord, (the Branch), has done His great cleansing work in Pentecost.

The text can be considered under the following three headings:

[1] Seven women to one man! (Isaiah 4:1).

[2] The Branch of the Lord. (Isaiah 4:2).

[3] The dwelling of God with men. (Isaiah 4:3-6).

[1] Seven women to one man! (Isaiah 4:1).

4.1.

At the end of Isaiah chapter 3 we read that the haughty “*daughters of Zion*” would be humbled and brought low, to a disastrous ruin. This is further explained in terms of her men who will “*fall by the sword,*” and the gates of the city being brought to “*lament and mourn.*”²⁷⁸ Now in Isaiah 4 we see the aftermath. There is a dearth of men available, so we find that “*seven women*” implore a single man for position and a “*name.*” There is a dramatic realisation here that the futile usurpation of leadership by those not qualified (women and children) did not work. The women are desperate to have their “*reproach*” removed so that they could live once again. We do well to note the Lord's perfect order in creating mankind. Men ought to be in leadership. This is part of the creation order, but this most certainly does not mean that women are subordinate in status to men. We remind ourselves that mankind (male and female) were created in the image of the triune God. Just as the Father, the Son and the Spirit are co-eternal and co-equal in being, so also are men and women. And yet in the Trinity we see an order of leadership which does not destroy the unity of Being. A man ought to be head over his family, but this does not mean that he should “lord it over” his wife and children! By no means! The standard for men is that displayed by the Lord Jesus Christ and described for us by Paul:

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, **26** that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, **27** that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. **28** So

278 Isaiah 3:25,26.

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husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. **30** For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. **31** “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” **32** This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. **33** Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife *see* that she respects *her* husband.²⁷⁹

These are stirring words! Who is able to meet these requirements? Only those who have submitted to the Lord in faith and who are then empowered by the Holy Spirit to live the life of Christ.

[2] *The Branch of the Lord. (Isaiah 4:2).*

4.2.

Verse 2 of chapter 4 points to a figure which we will see repeated in Isaiah and in other prophets too. This is a Messianic title and is used here for the first time. Here the term is connected with the Lord, so we have “*the Branch of the Lord.*” Later we find that this Branch is termed a “*righteous Branch*” that comes from David's line.²⁸⁰ Isaiah prophesies this too in chapter 11:

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.²⁸¹

Then we find that this Branch is called “*My Servant the Branch*” which points us to the many 'Servant' songs in Isaiah, and finally we have “*the Man whose name is the Branch.*”²⁸² This four-fold nature of the Branch as, of 'the Lord', from 'the line of David', as the 'Servant' and as a 'Man' was pointed out by David Baron (1857-1926) who was a Jewish convert to Christianity.²⁸³ It points to the way in which the four gospel writers organised their thoughts in reflecting the Messiah.²⁸⁴ The details are outlined in table 9.1.

279 Ephesians 5:25-33.

280 Jeremiah 23:5,6. See also Jeremiah 33:15.

281 Isaiah 11:1.

282 Zechariah 3:8; 6:12,13.

283 http://vineofdauid.org/remnant-repository/david_baron/
<http://juchre.org/isaiah53/branch.htm>

284 Matthew presents the Lord as King (from the line of David), Mark presents the Lord as 'The Man', Luke presents the Lord as 'The Servant' and John presents the Lord as being divine.

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Table 9.1: The four main characteristics of the Branch and connection to the gospel accounts.

<i>Phrase found in Scripture.</i>	<i>Scripture reference.</i>	<i>Emphasis with respect to the Saviour.</i>	<i>Gospel account which represents this aspect in the main.</i>
A Branch of righteousness (from David).	Jeremiah 23:5,6; 33:15.	Born from David – hence the Son of David and thus the Messiah, or anointed One.	Matthew.
The Man whose name is the Branch.	Zechariah 6:12,13. (Isaiah 11:1,2).	Here we are pointed to the human aspect of the Saviour. He is the Second and Last Adam (1Corinthians 15:45,47).	Mark.
My Servant the Branch.	Zechariah 3:8.	The One willing to come and perform all the Father's will – a willing servant.	Luke.
The Branch of the Lord.	Isaiah 4:2.	As being “ <i>of the Lord</i> ” this highlights deity – The Son of God.	John.

The Old Testament uses at least nine different words which are rendered as “*branch*” in the AKJV. The word used here is: צֶמַח *semah*, which comes from a root meaning “to sprout,” and so indicates a sprout or a branch or something which sprouts forth. The word suggests that which produces fruit and signals a new small beginning. It is the word used in Jeremiah and Zechariah for the branch of the Lord as we have referenced above. Another word for “*branch*” is used at Isaiah 11:1. This is the word: נֹצֵר *nēzer*, which comes from a root that means “to guard,” “to watch,” or “to keep.” The word really means a shoot in the sense of being verdant or green. So the idea is of something that has been carefully tended so that it would bring forth fruit and foliage.

In this passage the Branch of the Lord is described “*in that day*” as being “*beautiful and glorious.*” This is a clear prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ as He entered His ministry. The people flocked to hear Him and considered Him as one whose lips were pure gold. No one ever spoke like Him in authority, and grace was poured out on His lips.²⁸⁵ Although He wasn't attractive in any physical sense, He was attractive in all that matters – the truth, wisdom, and grace.²⁸⁶ I often wonder what attracts people in the world. Is it fame, fortune or sexual attractiveness? What of the real beauty, the real glory? That alone is provided by the Lord. The phrase “*in that day*” refers to His first advent but what of His second? We have already been told that it will be a day of terror for many in Isaiah 2. So now is the time to consider that what the Lord has done in coming to this earth and in giving Himself fully, is the most beautiful and glorious thing that has ever, or will ever, be

²⁸⁵ Luke 4:22,36; Psalm 45:2.

²⁸⁶ Isaiah 53:2.

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seen. Only He can take away reproach and bring the excellent and appealing fruits. It is He alone who in rising from the dead brought fruits in abundance which are now bestowed by the Holy Spirit.²⁸⁷

Now whilst the *“Branch of the Lord”* appears and is *“beautiful and glorious,”* the outcome of this appearing will be such that *“the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing.”* In other words the fruits of this *“Branch”* will be wonderful. Thus *“the fruit of the earth”* points to those being saved from the earth. Those who are being born again and brought back into fellowship with God are the fruits of this earth born into the new Kingdom.

We have to keep in mind the dual aspect of these prophecies. At one time they depict what will happen in the near future, when the exiles will return and Jerusalem will be rebuilt. At another, we can see clearly the prophecy that applies to the current gospel or church age. The text speaks of a remnant of *“those of Israel who have escaped,”* speaking of those not carried away into captivity, but those who have been left behind.²⁸⁸ Jeremiah and Ezekiel both prophesied during the fall of Jerusalem and we find that there was a small remnant of the poor and weak left behind.²⁸⁹ Of course the promises recorded in Isaiah 2:3-6 did not come to pass during the time of the governance of Gedaliah, or really during the time of the return from exile. It could hardly be said of either of those times that each dwelling would be the sanctuary of God (as represented by the cloud and fire resting thereon). No, these prophecies are really only fulfilled in the church or gospel age.

[3] The dwelling of God with men. (Isaiah 4:3-6).

Although we have not yet come to the *“Immanuel”* prophecies, we have here a remarkable promise of how the *“remnant”* will be blessed by the Branch of the Lord.

4:3,4.

Look at how this remnant are described. First we note that the remnant who are left in Zion/Jerusalem will be *“holy.”*²⁹⁰ These are those who are referred to as being *“recorded among the living”* which speaks of the new birth.²⁹¹ The idea expressed here is that those born are registered or recorded in the records. Then next we find that the Lord has washed away the filth that was

287 Galatians 5:22.

288 Isaiah 4:2.

289 2Kings 25:22.

290 Isaiah 4:3.

291 Isaiah 4:3. See also Psalm 87:4,5,6.

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spawned by the daughters of Zion, which we read about in Isaiah 3.²⁹² This washing occurs “*by the spirit of judgement and by the spirit of burning*” which single action (given here in two ways as judgement and burning) describes both what happened at Calvary, and also that which will happen on the return of Christ.²⁹³ We must always come back to the cross of Christ for it is there that we see the judgement that ought to have fallen on us, fall on the Saviour instead. Those who are accounted with Christ will not face the judgement to come when He returns. But was that a judgement by the spirit of burning? I think we are meant to recall the times in the Old Testament when the Lord burnt up the sacrifices offered, and thence also to consider the whole point of the “*burnt offerings*” as revealed in Leviticus and elsewhere.²⁹⁴ Sometimes offerings given were burnt up directly by the Lord.²⁹⁵ At most times, however, burnt offerings were burnt up on the altar by the priest.²⁹⁶ These signified a devotion and offering which was completely consumed and given to God. It signified the consuming of the wrath of God against the sin of the offerer. The burnt offerings given in Leviticus were fulfilled in Christ's single offering for sin.

At other times we find that God brought judgement by fire.²⁹⁷ In all these instances we can see that our God is a consuming fire.²⁹⁸ Only that which is pure and holy can withstand His glorious burning presence. But then, curiously, we find other instances where the burning presence of God does not consume. Consider, for example, the time when Moses met the Lord at the burning bush, or when the mountain of Sinai was on fire during the giving of the commandments.²⁹⁹ In these cases the consuming fire of God's presence was stayed. In the case of Moses meeting with the Lord we are specifically told that the ground was holy ground, for Moses had to remove his sandals.³⁰⁰ Here we see a glimpse of the gospel because whilst the fire rages and burns, it does not consume! It is only at the cross where we can see the burning of God's wrath consume all sin and evil, and yet it does not consume those who are united with Christ.

But where, you may ask, do we read of the “*Spirit*” burning?³⁰¹ Well specifically we are told in the book of Revelation that the Spirit is to be identified with the seven lamps that burn before the throne:

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- 292 Isaiah 3:16f.
293 Isaiah 4:4; Romans 14:10; 2Corinthians 5:10; 2Thessalonians 1:7,8.
294 Leviticus 1:3f; Genesis 8:20; 22:2f.
295 Leviticus 9:24; Judges 13:19-21; 1Kings 18:38; 2Chronicles 7:1.
296 Leviticus 1:9;
297 Genesis 19:24; Numbers 11:1.
298 Deuteronomy 4:23; 9:3; Hebrews 12:29.
299 Exodus 3:1f; 19:18; 24:17; Deuteronomy 5:23; 9:15.
300 Exodus 3:5.
301 Isaiah 4:4.

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And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.³⁰²

Then also we cannot forget the wonderful picture of what happened at Pentecost:

1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. **2** And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.³⁰³

As the Spirit came upon the church it was a Spirit of burning, although (mercifully) it did not consume. We are reminded in this that the Lord Jesus brought a baptism of the Spirit and fire.³⁰⁴ This signifies the idea of cleansing and purifying. Such an idea finds its counterpart in the Old Testament where we read:

Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire.³⁰⁵

Those who serve the Lord are “on fire”!³⁰⁶ The purified church which has endured purification by virtue of the coming of the Holy Spirit, now partakes of this fire-like existence and acts to purify and consume all around. Isn't this what God is doing? If we find not, then perhaps we are damp squibs!

4:5,6.

Once cleansed and purified by fire to be made holy we next find a wonderful promise. The Lord indicates His presence to all that dwell in Zion using the same means as He did when the Israelites were in the wilderness.³⁰⁷ On each dwelling place on Mount Zion, and above all the assemblies there would stand the cloud and smoke by day and the flaming fire by night. What a tremendous wonder! Such a figure points us back to the time when the Israelites were in the wilderness and were lead by the Lord who went before them as a pillar of fire by night and a pillar

302 Revelation 4:5.

303 Acts 2:1-4.

304 Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16;

305 Psalm 104:4.

306 See also Hebrews 1:7.

307 Isaiah 4:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

of cloud by day.³⁰⁸ The Lord is present above each place where the living remnant can be found, or where these people assemble. The word *“create”* in verse 5 is the same word found in Genesis 1:1,21,27 and which stands uniquely for God's work of making from nothing. This points us to the fact that in this whole process, God is doing something *new*. It is all part of the new creation.

We are given more information to provide comfort to all who believe, for there is to be a *“covering”* as well, above all of this situation which is referred to as *“all the glory.”*³⁰⁹ This word, *“covering,”* is the same word used to signify the canopy that shields the couple at their wedding. It indicates divine protection. But as if this were not enough, we are given more details in verse 6, for we find that there will be a *“tabernacle,” “a place of refuge,”* and *“a shelter.”*³¹⁰ Now these are all small, temporary hiding places indicating the type of living experience that believers must endure. This is to signify that for the believer we are but pilgrims and strangers who have no continuing city on this earth.³¹¹ However we are to be protected from the heat, the storm and the rain. No believer is kept from common disasters and harm that this world must endure because of the curse. However the believer will be protected from the spiritual harms that are faced by the worldly.

308 Exodus 13:21,22; 14:24.

309 Isaiah 4:5.

310 Isaiah 4:6.

311 1Peter 1:1; 2:1; Hebrews 13:14.

Chapter 10.

Isaiah 5:1-7.

Israel the vineyard that failed.

Textual analysis.

1 Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard:
My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill.

2 He

dug it up
and cleared out its stones,
and planted it with the choicest vine.

He

built a tower in its midst,
and also made a wine-press in it;
so He expected *it* to bring forth *good* grapes,
but it brought forth wild grapes.

3 “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
judge, please, between Me and My vineyard.

4 What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?
Why then, when I expected *it* to bring forth *good* grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?

5 And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard:

I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned;
and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

6 I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns.
I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.”

7 For the vineyard of the **Lord of hosts** is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant.

He looked

for justice, but behold, oppression;
for righteousness, but behold, a cry *for help*.

Chapter 5 takes a new direction in this series of warnings and judgements against Israel. We are introduced to the idea of Israel being God's vineyard. The idea of Israel as the vineyard of God has already been, at least, hinted at in the earlier chapters of Isaiah.³¹² Here, however the idea is worked out in detail.

The whole forms a seamless unit but we shall look at it under three headings charting the development of the song. First we have the vineyard prepared in verses 1 and 2, then we see that the

312 Isaiah 1:8; 3:14.

Studies in Isaiah.

vineyard fails in verses 3 and 4, and finally we have the vineyard judged in verses 5 to 7.

[1] *The vineyard prepared. (Isaiah 5:1,2).*

[2] *The vineyard fails. (Isaiah 5:3,4).*

[3] *The vineyard judged. (Isaiah 5:5-7).*

[1] *The vineyard prepared. (Isaiah 5:1,2).*

5:1,2.

The song begins with a conversation – a kind of musical if you will – between the “*Well-beloved*” and the singer. The main point to note here is that there was no expense spared in making and building this vineyard. It was all of the Well-beloved's doing and was sited on a “*very fruitful hill,*” signifying a good ground with all the nutrients required. The Well-beloved prepared the site well. He removed stones, planted the best of vines, set up a tower for protection, and made a wine-press so that the grapes could be processed. Notice the terms used here. We have “*a very fruitful hill*” and “*the choicest vine,*” both indicating that this was no half-hearted and shoddily made vineyard.

We are told later that the vineyard was in fact Israel.³¹³ We can see that these images are reflections of the truths that were experienced by the people of God. They were chosen and selected from Abraham's stock, a man who was called, “*the friend of God,*” and who exhibited great faith in the Lord.³¹⁴ The story of the rescue of Israel from Egypt and their entry into Canaan, is illustrated by the removal of obstacles – stones. Perhaps the removal of the nations in Canaan may be the chief reference, but the removal of obstacles in the way preventing them from escape may also be intimated. The Lord then gave them everything required for them to flourish. He established them as the people of God, gave them the law and worked these out for them, provided a means by which they could approach the Lord in worship, organised the people into special groups for the purpose of training and so on, and then, to top it all, gave them great protection illustrated first in their wilderness experiences by the pillar of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night.

313 Isaiah 3:7.

314 Genesis 12:1f; James 2:23.

[2] The vineyard fails. (Isaiah 5:3,4).

5:3,4.

With all of this provision and preparation it is not without justification that the Lord expected it to bring forth good grapes. In the same manner, it was justified for the Lord, having provided everything necessary for Israel, to expect them to honour Him and show forth His praise. But instead of what was expected given the preparations made, it “*brought forth wild grapes.*”³¹⁵ The Lord asks the people of Judah and Jerusalem this searching question:

*What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?*³¹⁶

Consider this carefully. The clear implication is that there was nothing else that could be done. Everything possible was done to ensure that this choicest of vines produced good grapes but it didn't. So what went wrong? Did God fail? Never!

The whole point of this episode is to illustrate the great theme of the failure of man. The problem with Israel was that their heart had not been changed. They had all the *outward* help and provision God could give, but this was still not enough. They had every advantage and needed provision to be the nation that worshipped God, and which showed forth to the world the glory of God, but it was all to come crumbling down. This was a grand demonstration by the Lord that no earthly kingdom, however good, however backed by God and given every opportunity to succeed, could ever in fact succeed.

Nothing more could be done. They had it all and they failed. Whatever else man attempts to do, it could never come close to what God provided for Israel. There will never be another nation to come anywhere near the goodness that God achieved in Israel. The fact that it failed is down to man's inner sinful rebellious state, and it serves to show that with all of God's power, man cannot do good, and cannot redeem himself. The only thing that would ever succeed is if God Himself stepped down and became man – the Word becoming flesh!³¹⁷

315 Isaiah 5:2.

316 Isaiah 5:4.

317 John 1:14.

[3] The vineyard judged. (Isaiah 5:5-7).

And so there is nothing left to be done except judgement. This is inevitable. Given the best of opportunities, and given all the help to make a go of it, the failure is that much worse than any other nation who never had such advantages. All sin is rebellion and must be judged, but Israel's is heinous in the extreme because of what they were privileged to receive. This is a sobering point. Christians who have received much from the Lord and who have squandered what they have will be in great danger.

5:5,6.

Note that it is the Lord who takes the initiative and takes action. The vineyard was built perfectly but expectations (from the human perspective) never come to fruition, and so the Lord Himself *“will”* deal with the situation. The vineyard will not be left to its own devices. There are four statements made here in verses 5 and 6, and three of these are prefixed with the words *“I will”* signalling the divine Trinity in action.

I will
 take away its hedge,
 and it shall be burned;
 and break down its wall,
 and it shall be trampled down.
6 I will
 lay it waste;
 it shall not be pruned or dug,
 but there shall come up briars and thorns.
I will
 also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.”

First we find that the Lord will remove the hedge and wall of protection so that the vineyard will be overrun. The hedge will not simply be removed, for *“it shall be burned”* completely.³¹⁸ The wall that delineated the vineyard as a separate space was to *“be trampled down”* so that others could enter in.³¹⁹ With God's protection removed others may swarm in. This is what happens when churches leave the protection of God's word. If they fall from this sure footing it is never long before others who know not God overrun and trample in.

In the second *“I will”* statement we discover that the Lord will neglect the vineyard and will

318 Isaiah 5:5.

319 Isaiah 5:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

not attend to it to prune it or to dig it over so as to remove the weeds.³²⁰ Such neglect would inevitably result in overgrowth of *“briers and thorns”* the fruits of the curse upon the world for mankind's sin.³²¹ To be given over to the curse upon the world is a terrible state to be in. Finally the third *“I will”* statement informs us that there will be no more rain. The vineyard (like all plants) requires the rain for growth. Thus on the one hand the hedge of protection is removed and the vineyard allowed to suffer the effects of the curse with weeds and spurious growth, but then on the other hand the very thing required for growth (rain) is withheld. How should we view this spiritually? Well the lack of rain speaks of a lack of the Spirit of God's influence. Sometimes the rain is put for the word of God, and sometimes for the action of the Holy Spirit. What we find here then is a famine either of God's word or of the Spirit. We ought not to separate these two. The word of God is itself living and active and being that which the Spirit inspired is Spirit-given. Where the word of God is lacking, then the Spirit is lacking. But where the word of God is sidestepped or neglected or treated badly, then there too is the Spirit resisted by those of hard neck and harder hearts. Thus, there will come no more rain of blessing required to allow the sap of life to flow through. The Lord Jesus taught the disciples that the same thing is true today. If a branch of the Vine does not bear good fruit it will be cut off and thrown into the fire.³²² In Isaiah's day the fruits that were lacking included, justice and righteousness. Rather than these godly characteristics there was oppression and cries for help from the weak.

The great point for us Christians is that true faith in the Branch is an inner work of the Spirit, and this will yield fruit and a sanctified life. But where the rain of God's grace and goodness falls upon soil that is unprepared and so is rejected, there can only be judgement to come. We can also see in this parable the essential need to do all that the Lord requires – the perseverance of the saints. For example, we must ensure that we *“keep”* ourselves *“in the love of God,”* we must seek the Lord diligently, and we must *“work out our salvation”* with the Spirit's guide – amongst many other things all wrapped up in that word *“trust,”* of which we have exclusively in the Lord.³²³

320 Isaiah 5:6.

321 Isaiah 5:6.

322 John 15:6.

323 Psalm 37:3,5; Matthew 6:33; Philippians 2:12; Jude 1:21.

Chapter 11.

Isaiah 5:8-30.

Six woes for the people.

Textual analysis.

8 Woe to those who join house to house; they add field to field, till *there is* no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land! **9** In my hearing the **Lord of hosts** said, “Truly, many houses shall be desolate, great and beautiful ones, without inhabitant. **10** For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield one ephah.”

11 Woe to those who rise early in the morning, *that* they may follow intoxicating drink; who continue until night, till wine inflames them! **12** The harp and the strings, the tambourine and flute, and wine are in their feasts; but they do not regard the work of the **Lord**, nor consider the operation of His hands.

13 Therefore my people have gone into captivity, because *they have* no knowledge; their honourable men *are* famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst.

14 Therefore Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure; their glory and their multitude and their pomp, and he who is jubilant, shall descend into it. **15** People shall be brought down, each man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled.

16 But the **Lord of hosts** shall be exalted in judgement, and God who is holy shall be hallowed in righteousness. **17** Then the lambs shall feed in their pasture, and in the waste places of the fat ones strangers shall eat.

18 Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as if with a cart rope; **19** that say, “let Him make speed and hasten His work, that we may see *it*; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know *it*.”

20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

21 Woe to *those who are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

22 Woe to men mighty at drinking wine, Woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink, **23** who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away justice from the righteous man!

24 Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, *so* their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom will ascend like dust; because they have rejected the law of the **Lord of hosts**, and despised the word of the **Holy One of Israel**.

25 Therefore the anger of the **Lord** is aroused against His people; He has stretched out His hand against them and stricken them, and the hills trembled. Their carcasses *were* as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand *is* stretched out still.

26 He will lift up a **banner** to the nations from afar, and will whistle to them from the end of the earth; surely they shall come with speed, swiftly. **27** No one will be weary or stumble among them, no one will slumber or sleep; nor will the belt on their loins be loosed, nor the strap of their sandals be broken; **28** whose arrows *are* sharp, and all their bows bent; their horses' hooves will seem like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind. **29** Their roaring *will be* like a lion, they will roar like young lions; yes, they will roar and lay hold of the prey; they will carry *it* away safely, and no one will deliver. **30** In that day they will roar against them like the roaring of the sea. and if *one* looks to the land, behold, darkness *and* sorrow; and the light is darkened by the clouds.

Studies in Isaiah.

For the textual analysis above I have merely separated out the several woes. Further analysis will be provided as we come to each woe. In the first part of chapter 5 we are only give the broadest of brush-strokes that paint the sin and evil that characterised the nation of Israel. In this next section we are given clear details about what had gone so horribly wrong. Of course we recognise instantly that mankind has always been like this since Adam fell, but these attitudes and behaviours ought not to have been observed in the nation that had so many privileges.

Here we are given six “*woes*” which lament the sorry state that not only depicts Israel, but also (very sadly) shows forth modern man in all his sinfulness. These six woes are worked out to different degrees, with some being given greater attention than others. In some the consequences are worked out in some detail, whilst others are just left as bald statements. The section ends with what the Lord intended to do to Israel, and this section prefigures the great judgement to come on the entire world.

The details of what these “*woes*” entail are shown below.

	“Woe”	Verses
[1]	Greed	v8-10
[2]	Earthly distraction	v11-17
[3]	Open sin	v18-19
[4]	Atheism	v20
[5]	Pride	v21
[6]	Fame & Corruption	v22-25

The New King James Version has the word “*woes*” seven times, but the two of verse 22 constitute a single “*woe*” as there is only one “*woe*” in the Hebrew. The chapter ends with a warning of the coming judgement in verses 26 to 30 “*in that day.*”

Studies in Isaiah.

[1] WOE 1: Greed. (Isaiah 5:8-10).

8 **Woe** to those
 who join house to house;
 they add field to field,
 till *there is* no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land!
9 In my hearing the **Lord of hosts** said,
 “Truly, many houses shall be desolate, great and beautiful ones, without inhabitant.
 10 For
 ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath,
 and a homer of seed shall yield one ephah.”

Covetousness and greed are the engine that powers many lives. They are the stuff of crime fiction and soap operas. Sadly they are the basis for modern marketing and sales. The pressure on people to have, and to get, is immense. Some have more and it simply isn't fair! In Israel the Lord had already seen to it that each tribe would get its fair share of the land by lot.³²⁴ This was to ensure that all had the same opportunity and blessing. Even in the wilderness we learn that each person had exactly the same amount of manna to live off.³²⁵ But it would not be long before greed and covetousness ensured that some had more than others.

Greed is a form of idolatry. The focus on something other than God leads to a devotion and a consuming passion. If your desire is for property or money or trinkets, you will not be satisfied until you have more and more of them, until in the end you have them all. It is a terrible sin to be greedy. It comes from assuming that you haven't got your fill, or that others have more than you. This is a great shame but is utterly tragic if found within the church, for the Lord has taught us that we should seek His Kingdom and righteousness first, and what we need will be given to us.³²⁶

How will the modern age fare when the Lord returns? How have we done in this world? Are we any better than Israel of old? Are there those who have heaped to themselves houses and fields without number? It is well known that the population of the world is steadily drifting towards the cities and urban sprawls where poverty and all its ills can be found. Is there enough food and space for all in the world? Of course there is! But the division between the rich and the poor is a gulf unbridgeable this side of glory. The truth of the matter is that the modern world is far more evil when it comes to covetousness and greed.

324 Numbers 33:54; Joshua 18:10.

325 Exodus 16:16-19.

326 Matthew 6:33.

Studies in Isaiah.

5:8.

This woe commences with those who “*join house to house.*” The point here is that nobody can live in two different houses at one and the same time. We need somewhere to dwell and lay our heads, but nobody needs two houses. It continues with a statement about them adding “*field to field.*” Here the emphasis is on growth and acquisition. Not content with growing enough to live off, the greedy man wants more and more. Now these two greedy attitudes are expressed until the person who acquires so much is left all alone. The NKJV text is not the best translation. The AKJV and the NASB are better:

Woe unto them that join house to house, *that* lay field to field, till *there be* no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth! [Isaiah 5:8, AKJV].

Woe to those who attach house to house *and* join field to field, until there is no more room, and you alone are a landowner in the midst of the land! [Isaiah 5:8, NASB].

The man who buys and acquires properties around his first house will soon find that there is no more to buy and all he is left with is himself!

5:9,10.

Such a sorry state of affairs where greed is allowed to run rampant will be judged. The prophet states that in his “*hearing*” he heard the Lord say that many of these purchased houses would be “*desolate*” and “*without inhabitant.*”³²⁷ These are not tautological statements, (for no one can dwell in many houses), but a statement that such extra dwelling places will be devastated.

In verse 10 we get a description of the lack, or low yield, that will come about through judgement upon such greed. A “*bath*” contained only about 5 to 7 gallons. So ten acres of vineyard producing only this amount in gallons is a very low yield, perhaps a tenth of what it would give normally (perhaps 500 baths might be expected). A “*homer*” was equivalent in volume to about 50 gallons. This amount would only yield “*one ephah*” which amounted to only 5 gallons in volume, since an “*ephah*” was one tenth of a “*homer.*” Thus, once again, the yield was only a tenth of what might be expected. Greed yields low!

327 Isaiah 5:9.

Studies in Isaiah.

[2] WOE 2: Earthly distractions. (Isaiah 5:11-17).

- 11 **Woe** to those
 who rise early in the morning,
 that they may follow intoxicating drink;
 who continue until night,
 till wine inflames them!
- 12 The harp and the strings, the tambourine and flute, and wine are in their feasts;
but they do not regard the work of the **Lord**, nor consider the operation of His hands.
- 13 **Therefore** my people have gone into captivity,
 because
 they have no knowledge;
 their honourable men *are* famished,
 and their multitude dried up with thirst.
- 14 **Therefore** Sheol has
 enlarged itself
 and opened its mouth beyond measure;
 their glory
 and their multitude
 and their pomp,
 and he who is jubilant,
 shall descend into it.
- 15 People shall be brought down,
each man shall be humbled,
and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled.
- 16 But the **Lord of hosts**
 shall be exalted in judgement,
and God who is holy
 shall be hallowed in righteousness.
- 17 Then the lambs
 shall feed
 in their pasture,
 and in the waste places of the fat ones strangers shall eat.

5:11,12.

A recurring theme through these six woes is the dependence and reliance on alcohol.³²⁸ It seems that in ancient times (as well as in modern), alcohol consumption is the backdrop or assumed 'norm' for any social encounter. The emphasis here though is not just alcohol, and a reliance on its suppressing effects, but distractions. The Israelites loved to party. They had their feasts but these were not centred on what the Lord had revealed – the three feasts instituted by Him. Rather they were merely excuses for prolonged indulgence with songs and wine to pass the time. Notice that these feasts and parties were all-consuming as they were from morning till night.³²⁹ In other words they may have been all-night parties, but if not they were all the people thought about. Their life seemed to be governed by which party or feast was up next. Are we in this modern age any different to these Israelites of Isaiah's day? Not at all! You only have to consider the way in which the TV

328 Isaiah 5:11,22.

329 Isaiah 5:11.

Studies in Isaiah.

companies operate their schedules and how the drama writers 'ape' the experience of modern lives to notice that people seem to live for the weekend when they can get 'wasted' and blot out their troubles. Sad isn't the word. It is woeful. But when we consider what the Lord had done for Israel it is doubly tragic. They were given everything they needed, including feasts in which they could not only delight and rejoice, but also contemplate and mourn. God had provided everything good for them, but they had taken this good and forgotten the Giver.³³⁰

The Israelites (like us modern people) spent a lot of time with their music as they feasted, (*"The harp and the strings, the tambourine and flute"*), but they had forgotten the Lord and they did not *"regard the work of the Lord,"* and they failed to *"consider the operation of His hands."*³³¹ The words of this verse are very similar to words penned by David who was speaking centuries earlier of the wicked in Psalm 28:

*Because they do not regard the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands,
He shall destroy them and not build them up.*³³²

These phrases are worth pondering on for a few moments. We read in Psalm 111 that:

*The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them.*³³³

This verse stood at the entrance way to Henry Cavendish's original laboratory in Cambridge. It speaks of how men have studied God's creation, but the Psalm goes deeper as it details all the works of God from creation, through miracle, and includes the great work of redemption. How sad it is today to find that although men do enjoy studying this world, they have no regard for the Author and Creator, ascribing it all to other gods such as 'chance' or 'nothing.' But how more tragic that the church of Jesus Christ should fail here too! Do we study and consider and contemplate the works of God? Really? If we did wouldn't we be at the forefront of understanding and knowledge? Since it is only within Christ that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge can be found, surely ours is the privilege of openly declaring the great works of God in creation, in His wonders, and in redemption?³³⁴

The second phrase, *"consider the operation of His hands,"* leads us to the idea of

330 Exodus 23:14; Deuteronomy 16:14-16.

331 Isaiah 5:12.

332 Psalm 28:5.

333 Psalm 111:2.

334 Colossians 2:2,3; 1Kings 4:33.

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undertaking detailed and careful examination of God's works. That is, all of His works. His great and terrible works of judgement. His marvellous wonders and miracles. And, His great and beautiful work of redemption. These should not just be things the Christian vaguely knows of, but they ought to be the passion and delight of the Christian as he/she wrestles with, and delights in what God has done. Why should they do this? Well isn't this truly knowing God? Isn't thinking clearly and deeply about what God has done, knowing Him? If we want to get to know our spouse surely we would consider their words and actions with a depth of feeling and love? We would think about how we delight in the way they think or laugh at certain jokes, or prepare a meal or? Wouldn't we? Well why not the same for the Lord? He has done marvellous things and we ought to delight greatly in searching these out, studying them, meditating on them, and rejoicing at the beauty and greatness of the Lord. The fact that modern Christians seem happy with merely accepting what the Lord has done in saving them without any depth of understanding so they can carry life on in this world unimpeded is a woeful state of affairs. Our lives ought to be turned upside down. Instead of life being the things we do and want, it ought to be what the Lord wants and does. It surely is essential that the Christian determines to seek the Lord and to seek His face and will first and foremost. How should I live? What does God say about this situation? What is He like? How has He dealt with people in this state before? How has He operated and worked in times past? Will He do the same today? These are the kinds of questions that should tumble out of the believer.

And this isn't just for the purpose of self-gratification. Sometimes you hear people bemoaning certain past Christians who argued about how many angels could sit on the head of a pin. What a waste of effort, the modern Christian may exclaim. But the boot is on the other foot. It may not be worthwhile trying to answer the question of how the spirit beings connect with the material world, but at least they were thinking about something other than physical life. But seriously, are we so weak and dull that we do not get excited about God and His being and how He operates? Think of how it was that He came into this world, doesn't that make you want to think deeply and carefully, and examine Scripture to see what it all means? I sincerely hope it does!

Sadly in our day people do not consider, nor do they regard the works of God, neither with respect to creation nor in connection with redemption. If they did then there would not be so much confusion in the Christian world. The likes of Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen who preach the health and wealth idea would never be heard! The nonsense espoused by Steve Chalke against Christ's substitutionary atonement, or the rubbish spouted by Rob Bell that God is *only* a God of love would be sidelined and ignored. The ridiculous state of affairs we face with the vast majority of Christian

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leaders falling for some compromise with evolution rather than a Biblical creation would never see the light of day, if Christians truly regarded and considered the works of the Lord. Sadly there are a plethora of other false teachers whose only aim is to “feather their nests,” or to gain fame and reputation. This sorry state of affairs means that the modern Christian world must be characterised as equally in danger of God's judgement faced by the Israelites of Isaiah's day.

5:13.

The tragic result of ignorance and of not thinking deeply about God and what He had done, was that the Israelites were to be taken into captivity. This is the first consequence signalled by the word “*therefore*” of verse 13. Of course this would not happen until the future days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Nevertheless this state of being held captive is exactly what happens whenever people reject the true and searching knowledge of God. This knowledge is not something secret, or to be found in a devious or special way. It is not difficult to see where to look, but it is not easy to gain, for the Lord wants us to seek and to search. Why else would the Lord Jesus say these words?

*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*³³⁵

However if we reject the path of seeking the Lord as for hidden treasure (the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are *hid* in Christ) what we shall undoubtedly find is a captivity.³³⁶ The reason for this is very clear. If we do not know what the Lord is like and how He acts, we will invent ideas and paths for ourselves. The simplest way of doing this is to copy what the world does. Isn't this the plight and scourge of the modern church today, that it 'apes' the world? It desperately seeks to be 'relevant' and wants to be recognised. So it copies the ways and methods of the secular world. Instead of trusting that God through His word, (the preaching of this, and the experience of this in the lives of the believer), will be the means by which God's glory is declared and people are saved, we try gimmicks aplenty and methods revered by the world. Great names spout new methods, and the would-be leaders flock to hear what to do in the latest conferences and so on. It should not be! Of course we need to congregate and encourage one another. Of course we need to gather for the purpose of prayer and seeking the Lord. But what I see far too often is the seeking for new ideas and new methods rather than trusting that God truly knows what He is doing. We ought to be

335 Matthew 7:7.

336 Colossians 2:2,3.

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spending time getting to *really* know God. We ought to be spending our efforts in seeking His ways and paths. I do not see this much today. Speaking from personal experience I find that churches prefer younger and inexperienced men who have a combination of “street-cred” and a smattering of Biblical jargon. Being a Bible-teacher is no good, (especially an older one), for the people won't listen for more than twenty minutes! What sheer rubbish! The Lord has given the church the most impossible task and we have reduced it to listening to what the people want, making friends with the world, and putting in a good word for God when the opportunity arises! Whatever happened to the “Great Commission” we were issued? Whatever happened to teaching the world *all* that Christ has given us, and of discipling the nations?³³⁷ Whatever happened to declaring the whole counsel of God, and of declaring the Lord's great goodness and graciousness?³³⁸ The church should be at the forefront of making the great, goodness, and glory of God known. We should be producing television programmes and films that show the glory of God in creation. We ought to be demonstrating that faith in God produces the fruit of goodness and of righteousness and of justice. Ours should be the example that declares that God is indeed good and great, and that His glory is truly glorious. In our workplaces we should not just be setting examples of good ethical behaviour. We should also be showing how God wants us to do the very jobs we engage in. This may mean that we will have to give up a job if it cannot be done the way God would want. How is the Christian church declaring to this world that God is not to be mocked? Things must be done righteously.

Sadly in not seeking the Lord in depth, we have opted for a pragmatic approach to the Christian life. We take the attitude that since we need to make a living, it is inevitable that we must compromise. Really? In such ways we are held captive. Instead of declaring the truth of the gospel in our situations, we keep quiet because otherwise we would lose our job. I am not thinking here of the bore who spouts Bible verses in an inappropriate way, and by doing so neglects his job. Rather I am thinking of the person who cannot even speak of their faith in Christ, nor can they even pray for fear of being reprimanded. And so we become subservient to the masters who dictate our pay. What does the Lord say to this? Well I believe He would say that we need deliverance. We need to be delivered from being held captive to godless rulers. The people have gone into captivity, the *“honourable men are famished,”* and the multitude are thirsty all because they did not consider the Lord and His works. Oh how this speaks of our day! People are so thirsty! They have no idea of

337 Matthew 28:18-20.

338 Acts 20:27; Psalm 9:11; 22:22,31; 40:10; 66:16; 71:17,18; 73:28; 75:9; 78:6; 92:2,15; 96:3; 102:21; 106:2; 107:22; 118:17; 119:13 145:4,6,19.

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what life is all about. And because we are held captive and cannot speak, they will become more and more famished and thirsty!

5:14,15.

What then is the end result of all this ignorance and captivity? A second consequence of their rejection of the Lord (again signalled by the word *“therefore”*) is final judgement.³³⁹ We read that *“Sheol has enlarged itself”* to accommodate those bent on running from the Lord and His ways. To do so it must open its *“mouth beyond measure”* as though the ground has split apart and a massive cavern sucks in all around.³⁴⁰ Sheol is the place of the dead. It speaks of the final judgement because there is no return for mortal man from such a place.³⁴¹ This is not to say that the Old Testament had no theology of resurrection because it certainly does.³⁴² For example, the apostles saw the resurrection of Christ prophesied throughout the Old Testament.³⁴³ What it does tell us is that when a person dies, judgement must follow. The same idea is taught clearly in the New Testament.³⁴⁴ The purpose of this warning is to bring humility now. If rejection of God continues, know for certain that you will be humbled. However there is a contrast (*“but”*) given in verse 16 signalling hope! The sentiments of Isaiah 2:11 are repeated here in verse 15, for only the Lord – the Lord of hosts indicating great power – will be exalted on that day.³⁴⁵

5:16,17.

It is noteworthy here how the Lord is spoken of. First, He is the *“Lord of hosts”* to signal His great power and ability to carry out these works of judgement.³⁴⁶ All will be right and just, and when the Lord judges those who reject Him and His ways, the judgement upon them will be seen to be right and true. Second, He is referred to as the *“God who is holy,”* and in whom no unrighteousness and no impurity can be found.³⁴⁷ Thus His decisions will be righteous and will be seen to be righteous. Is this all there is? The people neglect the knowledge of God and do not consider His works so they are judged in death, and He alone is exalted and vindicated? No! There

339 Isaiah 5:14.

340 Isaiah 5:14.

341 Psalm 88:10; 115:17.

342 Genesis 22:1-19 & Hebrews 11:17-19; 2Kings 8:1,5.

343 Isaiah 5:16.

344 Hebrews 9:27.

345 Isaiah 2:11,17.

346 Isaiah 5:16.

347 Isaiah 5:16.

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is more for we read these wonderful words:

Then the lambs shall feed in their pasture, and in the waste places of the fat ones
strangers shall eat.³⁴⁸

Can you see the great graciousness of the Lord here in these words? Notice that the lambs will be enabled to feed. That is, all those who have sought out the voice of the Shepherd.³⁴⁹ These will feed and be fed. Wonder of wonders for those who do seek the Lord, even though they be weak and their efforts small, they will be fed and satisfied. The truths of Psalm 23 may be inserted here in those simple words, *“the lambs shall feed in their pasture”* for it is the great, good Shepherd who leads them.³⁵⁰ But there is more, for we find that even *“strangers”* shall be fed too! The Lord Jesus in speaking to Israel said also that there would be *“other sheep”* which were not of Israel and these would hear His voice too.³⁵¹ This points us to the great work of salvation which will be for all the world as the Lord promised both Adam and Abraham.³⁵² It gives us great heart to believe that there are still “others” who will hear the message and will seek and continue to seek to know the Lord and His ways.

[3] WOE 3: Open sin. (Isaiah 5:18,19).

18 Woe to those who
draw iniquity with cords of vanity,
and sin as if with a cart rope;
19 that say,
“let Him make speed *and* hasten His work,
that we may see *it*;
and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come,
that we may know *it*.”

5:18,19.

The third *“woe”* may be considered consequential from the first two. If all we are concerned about is physical and worldly possessions and pursuits, and as a result we neglect the Lord and His works, it will not be long before open sin is the 'norm.' The opening words of verse 18 are a picture of people sinning and doing it without any thought or shame. Imagine a cart rope dangling from the back of the cart ploughing a furrow in its wake as the cart horses draw the cart along. That is the

348 Isaiah 5:17.

349 John 10:4,14.

350 Isaiah 5:17; Jeremiah 23:3f; Ezekiel 34:11f.

351 John 10:16.

352 Genesis 3:15; 12:3.

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picture. You can see the rope dragging along and making marks in the dirt road. In the same way open sin is displayed and even promoted. That is the picture here. It is made more explicit by the kind of statements these “open sinners” make as expressed in verse 19. The people have not bothered to investigate and seek God's works. Rather they taunt the Lord by saying that if His work is so good why doesn't He come and show it to us? It reminds me of those who mocked Jesus as He hung on the cross:

39 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads **40** and saying, “You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” **41** Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, **42** “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. **43** He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”³⁵³

They did not believe Him of course, despite all the wonders He did, and the great teaching He offered. Again, isn't this the situation we face today? People do not believe the Lord. They taunt Him by saying, 'why hasn't He done this or that?' They accuse God of wrongdoing openly when they say they cannot believe in a God who would allow tragedies to occur. As though we, in our great ignorance, know what is right! In saying things like this they forget the situation the world is in. Once created good and very good, it is now under the curse because of Adam's sin.³⁵⁴ Consequently the death, disease, decay and disaster that we see all around is due to our own woeful sinful behaviour.³⁵⁵ But notice the horrible way in which these people speak. They talk as though the “*counsel*” of God is of no value or import at all. The reference to the “*Holy One*” is mocking. They have no thought of holiness and consider any who speak of morality as though they were intolerant and therefore are beneath contempt.

Then, of course, we have the openly defiant who parade sin as though it were good. Things once thought shameful in my lifetime are now considered not just normal, but if you dare challenge them you are considered obnoxious! Chief amongst the open sins of today is aberrant sexual behaviour and lifestyles.³⁵⁶ Greed in the form of gambling is considered to be normal, as is lust

353 Matthew 27:39-43.

354 Genesis 1:1-2:4; 3:17-19.

355 Isaiah 24:1f.

356 Homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, transgenderism, transvestism and other categories. I must state again here that I do not want to give any impression that certain sins are more heinous than others. Certainly some have graver consequences, but all sin, from those enumerated here to other sins like lying, being greedy, or pride, is against God and must be repented of. It is not the case that those who practice sexually deviant sins are to be abhorred and

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fuelled by the widely available pornography. These are no longer hidden vices but parts of normal life. I can remember when the National Lottery started, there was some outcry by the church but now we have numerous ways to lose money on sports and games. Betting shops and casinos were once hidden away. Pornography was considered abnormal. Now these are vaunted and explicit. In all these things we are just as bad if not worse than the Israelites of Isaiah's day.

[4] WOE 4: Atheism. (Isaiah 5:20).

20 **Woe** to those
 who call evil good, and good evil;
 who put darkness for light, and light for darkness;
 who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

5:20.

Hard on the heels of being openly sinful as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were, comes a denial of God's very existence.³⁵⁷ In an atheistic world everything is turned on its heels. There may not be any open declaration of atheism here in Isaiah 5, but the fruits of atheism are certainly evident. We have in these words of verse 20 three reversals. These are ones who:

 call evil good, and good evil;
 put darkness for light, and light for darkness;
 put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Calvin suggested that the expressions here amount to saying “they who say of evil, it is good” and so on. People who can suggest that that which is really and truly good, is in fact evil and abhorrent, are those who have no thoughts whatsoever of God. They have no fear of God, and no conscience which pricks their hearts. In other words, they do not believe that God has any stake in what they do at all, and so they are atheists. The three phrases detailing reversals are not saying the same thing. The first phrase (“*who call evil good, and good evil*”) tells us that what is considered good, such as the gospel of Jesus, the Bible, the ten commandments, and so on, is now to be thought of as outmoded, childish and even evil. This is what atheism displays doesn't it? Take, for example, the likes of Richard Dawkins who considers Christians who teach the Bible to children to be child-

shuned, for the Christian gospel extends an open invitation to all sinners to repent, whatever their particular cocktail of transgression happens to be.

³⁵⁷ Genesis 18:20; 19:4-9.

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abusers.³⁵⁸ He believes that the whole doctrine of heaven and hell is monstrous and must be removed from our eyes. There are others like this, and these are well known in our society today. Maybe they are not followed by many but they have a voice in society.

The second phrase (*“who put darkness for light, and light for darkness”*) indicates understanding. Light is that which illumines and makes clear.³⁵⁹ Atheism turns everything around. What was once considered explanatory and satisfactory for understanding, is now ripped apart and thrown away. In its place *“darkness”* is put as being the true light and the true understanding. Isn't this what modern science offers us? The Scriptures tell us that God made the world and they tell us (in a limited way) how He did this.³⁶⁰ It was by His word, the Son of God, and it was in six days some 6,000 years ago.³⁶¹ That was always the position taken by the church until evolution got a foothold amongst first the intelligentsia, and then the public. Now we are told that belief in creation and the flood as an explanation for the world and its surface features today, is all wrong and hopelessly misguided. Science (apparently) has revealed that “nothing” created us and that this took billions of years, and it all happened by the inexorable and inviolable laws of nature which science declares.³⁶² Thus our old understanding has been usurped by a tale that amounts to nothing whatsoever, and may be likened to the tale of the emperor's new clothes!

The third expression (*“who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter”*) informs us of what is desirable or to be enjoyed. Atheists would find it impossible to *“taste and see that the Lord is good,”* for his tastes are contrary to those of the Lord.³⁶³ For the atheist, the things he would enjoy seem to be all those things that the Lord prohibits simply because they are bad for us. The enjoyment of the Lord is the greatest delight because we were created to be in good relation and fellowship with Him. When we are out of this fellowship then we are disjointed, 'out of kilter,' and awry. But for the atheist, his delight is all the tasty morsels which cause harm. The wicked delights in harsh sayings, the lust of the flesh, and those things he can boast of. He applauds the perverse practices of sexual deviancy, and honours those who defy righteousness.³⁶⁴

358 The Root of all Evil. TV film aired by channel 4. See, for example, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVy-0Elx620&list=PL9XOe_ifz7lqCCqZwKQ-EtyKnGS0hpdC9&index=5

359 Psalm 119:105.

360 Genesis 1; Exodus 20:8-11.

361 John 1:1f; Hebrews 1:1-3; Genesis 5; 11; Exodus 6 etc.

362 There are many variations of this but the general outline is as I have depicted here.

363 Psalm 34:8.

364 Romans 1:32; Proverbs 2:11.

[5] WOE 5: Pride. (Isaiah 5:21).

21 **Woe** to those who are
wise in their own eyes,
and prudent in their own sight!

5:21.

Next we have the exaltation of man and his thoughts. Mankind believes today that he is ever so wise. He believes this because of modern science and because of the spread of communication. Perhaps it is pushing things a bit far that man today believes he can act according to his wisdom, but perhaps not. What is true is that man sees himself as the only possible solution to the problems of the world. How this saddens us when we see it in the world. There is surely no hope for a world that trusts only to itself. The rank humanism of our society is clear and evident, for we do not honour the Lord and His word, rather we seek to establish “human rights” to govern ourselves. Please do not get me wrong here. I believe strongly that we should esteem our fellow man for what he truly is, but we deny our humanity if we deny God. How can I say this? Well think of Christ Jesus. He is the only example we have that shows us what it is to be *truly* human. In the world's eyes such a statement is laughable. To be human in the world's view is to be manly, or sexy, or full of vim and vigour, or whatever the current ideal is. However in reality the greatest human who ever lived, the Lord Jesus Christ, is ignored. So much for a true humanism! But surely the church must understand that being human requires a right relationship with God? Sadly this too is ignored. Instead we have a church that thinks for itself! Rather than hold onto every word of God, and seeking to honour the Creator who made us, we run to the world, to science, to “think tanks,” and to “reviews” and what-have-you. What folly! Why does the church insist on trusting the world, modern science, secular psychology and so on for prudence? Because of these terrible dependencies the modern church exercises, we are in danger of the judgement of God. It is necessary for us to reconsider the whole doctrine of man again because we have made some terrible mistakes not only in understanding who we are, but also in how we should deal with ourselves. The church has tripped up here terribly. Because of the fear of man the church accepts evolution, and because of this it must then appeal to the modern methods used in understanding the human “psyche”! Pertinent to this discussion is the whole concept of relationships. See how our recent history has decimated the concept of godly relations, (man with woman, parents with children and so on). Why is this? Well I am sure it is because the central relationship – that with God – has been removed from the discussion.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁵ Any discussion about God is utterly rejected by modern society, government and so on. Faith in God is only

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[6] WOE 6: Fame & corruption. (Isaiah 5:22-25).

22 **Woe** to men mighty at drinking wine,
Woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink,
23 who
 justify the wicked for a bribe,
 and take away justice from the righteous man!
24 **Therefore**,
 as the fire devours the stubble,
 and the flame consumes the chaff,
 so their root will be as rottenness,
 and their blossom will ascend like dust;
 because they have
 rejected the law of the **Lord of hosts**,
 and despised the word of the **Holy One of Israel**.
25 **Therefore**
 the anger of the **Lord** is aroused against His people;
 He has
 stretched out His hand against them
 and stricken them,
 and the hills trembled.
 Their carcasses *were* as refuse in the midst of the streets.
For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand *is* stretched out still.

5:22,23.

The last woe is a composite one. The New King James Version has the word “*woe*” twice in verse 22 suggesting that we might split this one woe into two separate ideas. However the Hebrew has the word for “*woe*” only once. Again we have the idea of wine and drunkenness indicating an abandoned and unreasoned attitude. The key words in verse 22 are “*mighty*” and “*valiant*” which serve to show fame and reputation. These are men who can mix strong drinks and who can take it. These are given to this world's pleasures and delights so much that they have become famous. It is well known that many of the older so-called “great” actors were notorious drinkers. In the modern world perhaps drug-taking has supplanted alcohol, but be-that-as-it-may the famous and noteworthy people are those who love being famous and known. For what purpose? Well our text indicates that it is all to enhance their own status and situation. Bribes are offered to allow these wicked people to carry on as if nothing has occurred. In allowing this state of affairs to continue, the righteous suffer.³⁶⁶ Now isn't this like our modern society? Corruption used to be thought of as only occurring overseas in despotic regimes. But now we know that corruption is rife. It is found in the world of sport, in politics, in the Roman Catholic church, and even amongst most authorities!

considered to be a matter of personal, private choice and cannot be allowed to rule or influence society.
366 Isaiah 5:23.

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5:24,25.

The last part of this woe with its consequential statements in verses 24 and 25 might be considered to be a part of the end of this section rather than as a part of this woe. However the structure of this part resembles the structure of the second woe in Isaiah 5:11-17, and so it is considered here.

There are consequences to being corrupt and of wanting fame in this world. You see such a life leaves one very dry. If we reject the Lord, whom Jeremiah describes as the “*fountain of living waters,*” we will be thirsty to the point of being utterly dry.³⁶⁷ A branch of the vine that doesn't bear fruit is a branch that has not been allowing the sap to flow freely through it, and is therefore fit only for the fire and will burn with rapidity.³⁶⁸ In like manner those who reject “*the law of the Lord*” and who despise “*the word of the Holy One of Israel,*” will be fuel for the burning because they have no life in themselves.³⁶⁹ Such people become “*stubble*” and “*chaff*” signifying both that they have no life, and are vain or empty. How vital is a good relationship with the Lord. If we do not have the life of God in us then we are but stubble and chaff! This is not mere name-calling. It is factual. If we do not know God, we are not truly human. If we do not know the Lord we are empty and lifeless. We are dead in trespasses and sins and fit only for destruction.³⁷⁰

The anger of the Lord is aroused upon all that is wrong and ungodly. Here the anger of God rests upon “*His people*” because they have neglected and even rejected both the law of God and His word, and they have not considered or regarded His works.³⁷¹ Now His work is to judge them by stretching His hand out against them to strike them. Israel faces the terrors of exile, of carcasses left strewn in the streets as an invading army comes. This too is the fate of those who continue to reject and neglect God and His word.

The section ends with a phrase which will be repeated as a refrain in chapter 10. It strikes a warning note, but also there is a hint of hope hidden there too. In stating:

*For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.*³⁷²

We are being informed that the righteous and Holy One is not satisfied with the judgement meted

367 Jeremiah 2:13.

368 John 15:5,6.

369 Isaiah 5:24.

370 Ephesians 2:1f.

371 Isaiah 5:25.

372 Isaiah 5:25.

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out to Israel. For all their punishment there is still punishment that ought to come. Such a statement strikes terror into the heart, but it also gives us a glimmer of hope. Could it be that there will be a time when the anger of God will be turned away? The answer we know is yes – a thousand times yes! For Christ is the propitiation for sin.³⁷³ In Him the wrath of God was fully satisfied. Justice was fully met. Graciously, mercy too abounded unto us! However we must note here how important the death of Christ on Calvary's hill was. For it satisfied all the demands of the thrice holy God.

[7] The coming threat of judgement. (Isaiah 5:26-30).

26 He

will lift up a banner to the nations from afar,
and will whistle to them from the end of the earth;
surely they shall come with speed, swiftly.
27 No one will be weary or stumble among them,
no one will slumber or sleep;
nor will the belt on their loins be loosed,
nor the strap of their sandals be broken;

28 whose arrows are sharp,
and all their bows bent;
their horses' hooves will seem like flint,
and their wheels like a whirlwind.

29 Their roaring will be like a lion,
they will roar like young lions;
yes, they will roar and lay hold of the prey;
they will carry it away safely, and no one will deliver.

30 In that day
they will roar against them like the roaring of the sea.
and if one looks to the land,
behold, darkness and sorrow;
and the light is darkened by the clouds.

Chapter five ends with the call for the nations to rally against Israel. This will be the judgement they will face for all their sin. It is not one in which the Lord is fully satisfied as we have noted but it is one which is certainly coming. Once again in this temporal prophecy for Israel, we can see elements and details of the final judgement on the world.

5:26.

This is the first time we have mention of the word “*banner*” and this is a significant word in Isaiah which we shall consider more fully when we come upon it for the second time in chapter 11. For now we must be content with saying that the Lord has some conspicuous sign by which He will execute His judgement. In this text the means of executing His judgement is “*the nations*”

³⁷³ Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1John 2:2; 4:10.

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signifying the Gentile world. We must stop to consider that our Lord and Saviour was executed at the hands of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Here, however, we must consider first the judgement on Israel. It is depicted as being swift and speedy, and of being complete in the same way as a lion gets its prey and carries it off.

5:27-30.

We can see in the words of verses 27 to 30 a prophecy of the judgement by Nebuchadnezzar in the days of Jeremiah. The text of these 4 verses comes in four sections, although it forms a seamless unit.

27 No one will be weary or stumble among them,
no one will slumber or sleep;
nor will the belt on their loins be loosed,
nor the strap of their sandals be broken;

28 whose arrows *are* sharp,
and all their bows bent;
their horses' hooves will seem like flint,
and their wheels like a whirlwind.

29 Their roaring *will be* like a lion,
they will roar like young lions;
yes, they will roar and lay hold of the prey;
they will carry it away safely, and no one will deliver.

30 In that day they will roar against them like the roaring of the sea.
and if *one* looks to the land, behold, darkness *and* sorrow;
and the light is darkened by the clouds.

In verse 27 we see the approaching army as one which has no soldier out of place, and all in a state of battle-readiness. Their equipment is gleaming and perfectly worn, and their progress is relentless. Verse 28 speaks of their weapons and their equipment (the horses and chariots). As the horses gallop their iron shod hooves strike the rocks sending out sparks and the chariots are as fast as the whirlwind. In verse 29 the noise they make is awesome. They appear as lions with their majestic and frightening roar. Finally in verse 30 we see this approaching army like the sea in full swell. I love to stand by the sea and when the wind is up the noise is breath-taking. Such is the picture here. The description ends with a kind of reversal of creation. Where light invaded the darkness of the newly created world (this was not the darkness of judgement but just the darkness of the not-yet

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formed and filled earth), now *“darkness and sorrow”* come with the invading army so that what light that may be present *“is darkened by the clouds”* above.

And so the land is darkened by virtue of the coming armies and the covering clouds – it is a graphic picture of impending doom. But we make a huge mistake if we leave our thoughts with the removal of Judah from the land and their captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. These words are awesome. They paint a picture of the judgement to be meted out on the entire globe when Christ returns. Are we ready for this? More importantly have we warned others of this sure and certain fact?

Chapter 12.

Isaiah 6:1-13.

Whom shall the Holy One send?

Textual analysis.

1 In the year that King Uzziah died,

I saw the **Lord**

sitting on a throne, high and lifted up,
and the train of His *robe* filled the temple.

2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

3 And one cried to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy *is* the **Lord of hosts**; the whole earth *is* full of His glory!”

4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

5 So I said:

“woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the **Lord of hosts**.”

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar.

7 And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said:

“behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.”

8 Also I heard the voice of the **Lord**, saying:

“whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?”

Then I said,

“Here *am* I! Send me.”

9 And He said,

“Go, and tell this people:

‘keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

10 “Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.”

11 Then I said,

“**Lord**, how long?”

and He answered:

“until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate,

12 The **Lord** has removed men far away, and the forsaken places *are* many in the midst of the land. 13 But yet a tenth *will be* in it, and will return and be for consuming, as a terebinth tree or as an oak, whose stump *remains* when it is cut down. So the holy seed *shall be* its stump.”

So far in the book of Isaiah we have been introduced to the sorry situation that sin and rebellion brings, namely, that Israel doesn't know God (chapter 1)! We have been pointed to what

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will happen when the Messiah comes both for salvation and in judgement (chapter 2). We have been told of the particular sins of the leadership of that time (chapter 3), and we have been promised that the Branch of the Lord will bring in a new day foreshadowing the Immanuel prophecy (chapter 4). In Isaiah chapter 5 we have been taught that Israel, the vine, were given all they needed to do what God asked of them, but they failed. But now at a very significant time in Israel's history in Isaiah chapter 6 we find the commissioning of the prophet.

Many commentators suggest that this chapter pre-dates chapters 1 to 5 but this is unnecessary. Here in Isaiah 6 we have a positive dating: *“in the year that king Uzziah died”* which was the year 739 BC. Isaiah 1:1 on the other hand records that the book of Isaiah covers the period designated by the phrase: *“in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah”* which probably means that Isaiah 1 to 5, at least, were given during Uzziah's reign. Chapter 7 has another marker: *“in the days of Ahaz”* (731-715 BC) who was the grandson of Uzziah.

Now Uzziah was a godly king to begin with, but he made a terrible mistake. He became proud and *“his heart was lifted up”* so that he presumed to enter the temple and burned incense on the altar of incense.³⁷⁴ The priests went in and challenged the king, but instead of repenting, he *“became furious,”* and as his anger continued *“leprosy broke out on his forehead”* in full view of the priests. In much haste he hurried out of the temple, being propelled along by the priests as well.³⁷⁵ And so Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death.³⁷⁶ Largely Uzziah's reign was a good one with the exception that the high places had not been removed.³⁷⁷ At the end of Uzziah's reign the book of 2Chronicles records an interesting note which seems to confirm the fact that Isaiah 1-5 were written during his reign:

*Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, from first to last, the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz wrote.*³⁷⁸

The only place we find Uzziah's name mentioned apart from the opening verse of the book, is in Isaiah 6:1 recording his death, and then finally in Isaiah 7:1 in reference to being father to Jotham. So it is logical to conclude that the first five chapters were written within Uzziah's reign, most probably with him acting as co-regent with Jotham whilst he was confined because of his leprosy.

374 2Chronicles 26:16.

375 2Chronicles 26:17-20.

376 2Chronicles 26:21.

377 2Kings 15:3.

378 2Chronicles 26:22.

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The term “*acts of Uzziah*” does not necessarily mean the acts carried out by the king, but could equally refer to the acts occurring within the kingdom at that time, which is what Isaiah's prophecy focuses on.

Jotham, Uzziah's son, was a good king, but his successor Ahaz was not good at all.³⁷⁹ We read of Ahaz that:

2... he did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God, as his father David had done.³ But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel. ⁴ And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.³⁸⁰

After Uzziah's death in 739 BC, Jotham reigned as sole regent for just 4 years, and then his son Ahaz acted with him as co-regent becoming sole regent in 731 BC. Thus there was only a period of some 8 years after the death of Uzziah when the good influence of Jotham prevailed over Ahaz's wickedness. Isaiah chapter 7 details events during the evil king Ahaz's reign.

Here in Isaiah 6 we have the commissioning of Isaiah at a time when the outlook was not promising. So it is greatly encouraging that as the godly king Uzziah dies, Isaiah sees the real King of whom each king in Israel was supposed to be a type. We shall look at Isaiah 6 under the following two headings:

[1] The vision. (Isaiah 6:1-7).

[2] The commission. (Isaiah 6:8-12).

[1] The vision. (Isaiah 6:1-7).

6:1.

Isaiah records his prophecies using the following words:

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw ... (Isaiah 1:1).

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw ... (Isaiah 2:1).

Thus we have the “*vision*” which he “*saw*” and the “*word*” which he “*saw*” indicating that he

379 2Chronicles 27:2.

380 2Kings 16:2-4.

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received from the Lord who is *"The Word"* the very words God wanted the people to know. Here in chapter 6 we have a graphic vision which is very similar both to the visions that Ezekiel received, and the one that the apostle John received and recorded in Revelation.³⁸¹ It is to be noted here that the apostle John comments that when Isaiah had this experience he was seeing the pre-incarnate Christ.³⁸²

Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne. The Lord is ruling and no other. This will be a theme repeated in the latter sections of Isaiah's prophecies, and this was a vitally important lesson to learn here. The Lord is still in charge. But there is more, for the Lord is King *in the temple*. Where Uzziah had usurped the priestly function and suffered for his misdemeanour, the pre-incarnate Messiah (the Lord Jesus Christ) rightly sits within the temple. In his description, Isaiah notes that the Lord is *"high and lifted up."* This phrase has already been used in Isaiah 2, but in that instance it is used in the description of the lofty proud *"cedars of Lebanon"* who will face the *"day of the Lord."*³⁸³ Such a statement is really only applicable to the Lord, for He alone is the one who can be highly exalted in truth. He alone is pure and holy, so He alone is to be exalted whether it be in the temple or on the coming *"day of the Lord."* Recall from Psalm 27 that David *"desired"* only one thing of the Lord, and that was: *"to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple."*³⁸⁴ We shall find that this description of exaltation will also be used in a later chapter to describe the Servant of the Lord.³⁸⁵

The train of the Lord's robe filled the temple. The word *"train"* is only translated like this here in Isaiah 6. Elsewhere the same Hebrew word is rendered four times as *"skirt,"* and six times as *"hem."*³⁸⁶ The idea is that what Isaiah is seeing is the lower parts of the robe because of the high elevation of the Lord. It is the hem, or bottom, of the robe that He is wearing which fills the temple, so that consequently we get the idea of the Lord overspilling the temple. Of course the idea that God would be fitted within a man-made construction was never one that the Israelites really held to. Solomon, the constructor of the first temple, recognised that no temple could hold the Lord.³⁸⁷ This idea is repeated throughout Scripture.³⁸⁸ Here in Isaiah we find the same truth. It all goes to indicate

381 Ezekiel 1:1f; 8:1f; Revelation 4 & 5.

382 John 12:41.

383 Isaiah 2:13.

384 Psalm 27:4.

385 Isaiah 52:13.

386 As *"skirt"*: Jeremiah 13:22,26 ; Lamentations 1:9; Nahum 3:5. As *"hem"*: Exodus 28:33(x2); 28:34; 39:24,25,26.

387 1Kings 8:27.

388 Isaiah 66:1; Jeremiah 23:23; Acts 17:24.

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that the purpose of the temple was representative and prophetic for the true and real temple is Christ.³⁸⁹

The robes that the Lord wears are not really in view here because the main point is that the temple cannot contain Him. However we read elsewhere of the robes of Christ. In Psalm 93:1 we find that the Lord is clothed with majesty and strength. In Psalm 104:1,2 we find that the Lord is also covered with light. In Isaiah 59:17 we find the Lord wears the armour for battle including righteousness as a breastplate and salvation for a helmet. Along with these He wears garments of vengeance and a cloak of zeal. Then in Isaiah 63:1 we read about the Lord with dyed garments who is *“glorious in His apparel.”* When asked why His robes were red like one who treads a wine press, the answer suggests one of vengeance:

2 Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the wine press?
3 “I have trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. **4** For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come. **5** I looked, but there was no one to help, and I wondered that there was no one to uphold; therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me; and My own fury, it sustained Me. **6** I have trodden down the peoples in My anger, made them drunk in My fury, and brought down their strength to the earth.”³⁹⁰

Why so? Well here He is pictured as securing salvation because there was no one else who could procure it. Then in Revelation we find that the Lord comes as judge. He is described as riding a white horse and is called *“Faithful and True”* and *“The Word of God,”* and is described as wearing *“a robe dipped in blood.”*³⁹¹ We need to remember that when the Lord Jesus died on the cross two things were happening. First there was judgement. The Saviour bore the wrath and indignation against sin, and so it is like a person who treads down the grapes in the wine press and who in the process gets their robes stained by the wine. However the second thing to note is that it was in fact the Lord Himself who bore this wrath. He was judging the sin of the people, but **He** was suffering the judgement. We understand this from Paul's words in Romans where he teaches about our union in Christ:

389 John 2:21.

390 Isaiah 63:2-6.

391 Revelation 19:11-13.

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5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, **6** knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. **7** For he who has died has been freed from sin. **8** Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, **9** knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. **10** For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.³⁹²

6:2-4.

Having described the Lord, we next find a description of the angelic beings. Strangely these beings are sited “*above*,” but the signification of the Hebrew is not so much in elevation but in attendance.³⁹³ That is, they are standing in attendance, or in an attitude of service, to the King seated on the throne. The word order is also important. Literally the verse reads as: “Seraphim stood above or in attendance.”

The word “*Seraphim*” means literally the “burning ones.” Curiously the word “*seraph*” (singular for Seraphim) is used elsewhere in Scripture. In Numbers we read of “*fiery serpents*” which bit the Israelites.³⁹⁴ The Lord then instructed Moses to make a “*fiery serpent*” and to put it upon a pole to which the Israelites must look to be healed.³⁹⁵ In Deuteronomy we find reference to these “*fiery serpents*” in the great and terrible wilderness.³⁹⁶ There are two other references to these creatures and both are in Isaiah. In Isaiah 14:29 and 30:6 we read not just of “*fiery serpents*” but of “*fiery flying serpents*.” Could it be that the term “*seraph*” indicates not a snake but some creature that resembles these angelic beings with wings? The term “*seraph*” is usually taken to mean a venomous snake, the burning indicating the effect of the poison. However, this explanation for the meaning is very forced, as snake bites do not result in a burning effect. The more usual Hebrew word for a snake is *nachash*, which comes from a root which has the following meaning: “to practice divination, divine, observe signs, learn by experience, diligently observe, practice fortune telling, take as an omen.” Such a meaning helps us understand the first occurrence in Genesis 3 where the “*serpent*” deceived Eve. This word *nachash*, tells us more about the way in which Eve is deceived than about the type of animal that Satan used. It is usually assumed to be a snake but we cannot really be sure about this. Coming back to the Seraphim, we find that these angelic beings are

392 Romans 6:5-10.

393 Isaiah 6:2.

394 Numbers 21:6.

395 Numbers 21:8.

396 Deuteronomy 8:15.

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so described not because they are snake-like but because of their appearance, which here is given in connection to their being able to fly. In common English usage the word “*Seraph*” is taken to mean the angelic being and not a snake.

Now these Seraphim each had six wings.³⁹⁷ In Ezekiel these are termed “*Cherubim*” which reminds us of the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant.³⁹⁸ Here in Isaiah the burning appearance is uppermost. With reference to the wings, these were used for flying and for covering both the face and the feet. This is undoubtedly because the Lord is presented to us in Isaiah as the “*Holy One*.”³⁹⁹ These angelic beings are so enamoured of the Lord that one cries out to another that the Lord of hosts is holy and that the “*whole earth is full of His glory*.”⁴⁰⁰ If such is the topic of conversation of the angels, what, I wonder, does our conversation sound like to them? The threefold use of the word “*holy*” indicates that the Trinity is in view, and this same phrase is also to be found on the lips of the angels in the vision that John had in Revelation.⁴⁰¹ The Seraphim declare not only that the Lord is holy, but that He is everywhere to be observed in His great glory. These Seraphim are of such a powerful nature that as each cry out, the door posts shake and smoke obscures the view.⁴⁰² This speaks of great power, for if even the angels' voices cause disruption in the temporal world, think what the very voice of the Lord may do! It also speaks of grace, for the smoke shielded the eyes of the prophet so that he would not be seared by the awesome view.⁴⁰³

6:5-7.

Finally in this great vision of the Lord, we find the prophet in a humbled state. Such a vision of holiness, purity, light, and glory immediately makes the sinful man aware of his own sin. In Isaiah's case uppermost is his conversation, the fruit of his lips.⁴⁰⁴ He has received the word of the Lord already, and its focus is on the terrible condition of Israel at that time. Here he recognises that he is a man with filthy conversation amongst men who speak calumny and vanity too, and so he is “*undone*,” or at an end, having come to silence, even becoming speechless. At this point we read

397 Isaiah 6:2.

398 Although it appears that the “*living creatures*” of Ezekiel chapter 1 only have four wings, a careful reading of the text, and especially Ezekiel 1:23, indicates that they had two covering the body in front, two stretched out to fly, and two covering the body on the back part. Exodus 25:18; Ezekiel 10:1.

399 Isaiah 1:9; 5:19,24; 10:17,20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19,23; 30:11,12,15; 31:1; 37:23; 40:25; 41:14,16,20; 43:3,14,15; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5,5; 60:9,14.

400 Isaiah 6:3.

401 Revelation 4:8.

402 Isaiah 6:4.

403 Isaiah 6:4.

404 Isaiah 6:5.

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that one of the Seraphim comes and purges his sin with a burning coal.⁴⁰⁵ Although we do not hear any word from the Lord, this action must have been done at His command, and it shows that the Holy One is full of grace towards the humble and repentant sinner.⁴⁰⁶

For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”⁴⁰⁷

It is right and good to recognise that even though the world around us may be steeped in sin, we too are nothing more nor less than sinners in need of a Saviour. How the world detests (and rightly so) the self-righteous, or the one so keen to point out the errors around without being of such a humble and contrite frame themselves.⁴⁰⁸ Some times we need a sharp rebuke like this reminding us of what the Saviour did for us on Calvary. The application to us comes by the Spirit, but here we see the angelic host involved in such ministry. These great beings are truly “*ministers ... of fire*”!⁴⁰⁹

[2] The commission. (Isaiah 6:8-12).

The next thing that happens is that Isaiah hears the voice of the Lord and there follows a conversation between the prophet and the King. This at once shows that the Lord has indeed atoned for Isaiah's sin, his unclean lips, otherwise how could such a conversation occur for the Lord cannot look upon sin?

6:8.

It is the Lord who takes the initiative, and notice that once Isaiah's sin has been dealt with we find the Lord asking the question about commissioning, “*whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?*”⁴¹⁰ What a wonderful illustration of the great grace and mercy of the Lord. He could have commanded, but here He involves Isaiah in his own call! Isaiah evidences the fact that he is now right with God because he willingly responds (“*Here am I! Send me!*”). This is very important. How many have responded to a call in their own strength for all sorts of reasons? On the other hand, how many have shown that they are not the Lord's through ignoring the call of the Lord? The sinner

405 Isaiah 6:6.

406 Psalm 104:4.

407 Isaiah 57:5.

408 Psalm 34:18; 51:17; Isaiah 66:2.

409 Psalm 104:4.

410 Isaiah 6:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

saved by grace responds because they now have faith in the One calling. Isaiah does not know the extent of this call or how it will all work out just yet. He responds immediately to the question saying that he is willing and ready.⁴¹¹

6:9,10.

Once Isaiah has settled the issue, the Lord brings out the details of His calling.⁴¹² He is instructed first to “*go*” and then to “*tell*” the people certain things.⁴¹³ I wonder if we sometimes make far too little of the words that the Holy Spirit has put in Scripture? We, the church, are under obligation, or perhaps better, under command, to go! After establishing that Jesus had all authority in the universe, this is what His Great Commission to us is:

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.⁴¹⁴

It is not our lot merely to engage in organising the church and its meetings and hope that people come along. No! We are commanded to **go** and that means to seek out. Listen to what the Lord says in the parable about the wedding ceremony of a king's son:

8 Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. **9** Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ **10** So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.⁴¹⁵

This is nothing more nor less than what the Lord Himself was doing, as can be seen by a reading of the gospels and which can also be seen from the prophecy in Ezekiel 34:

11 ‘For thus says the Lord God: “Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. **12** As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. **13** And I will bring them out from the

411 Isaiah 6:8.

412 Isaiah 6:9,10.

413 Isaiah 6:9.

414 Matthew 28:19,20.

415 Matthew 22:8-10.

Studies in Isaiah.

peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country.⁴¹⁶

We must seek out the sheep! We must go out and find the Lord's people! We need to get to where the people are, and stop relying on them coming to us when we put on an event.

Isaiah was told to go but he was also told to tell *"this people."* Hence he was given a specific charge to a certain people, Judah and Jerusalem, and he was to tell them certain things. We too have been placed amongst a people to whom we owe the debt of displaying God's great glory. This is our task, to tell out the gospel, and we must do so not in any vindictive or nasty way, but with grace and mercy, like the Samaritan woman whose testimony convinced the rest of the town to seek out the Lord.⁴¹⁷ May we have such grace and glory about us that we can take the gospel out to all and sundry so that no one will be able to say they never heard!

But what the Lord seems to be telling Isaiah to speak is something we may not have expected. He was told to speak out with little hope that he would be heard or understood!⁴¹⁸ These words of Isaiah's are applied directly by the gospel writers to the Lord Jesus' use of parables in teaching the crowds. It is very interesting to note that the Lord openly explains all the parables to His disciples (the inner crowd) when they ask, but to the crowd He spoke only in parables.⁴¹⁹ Any who may be stirred by these parables and who had questions arising from them could approach the Lord for help, but many may just be satisfied with the parable as a homely story. There is hearing and seeing, and then there is really hearing and seeing – understanding and perception which yields purpose and fruit. The continual reception of the gospel without really apprehending the gospel will render the heart dull and force a person into a sleep. Have you ever been in a situation where you have heard the gospel preached and your eyes glaze over and you become dull of hearing? I am not talking about those who are so tired and weary that they cannot keep their eyes open like the young man Eutychus who fell asleep under Paul's preaching!⁴²⁰ I know someone very close to me who used to doze off as soon as the preacher rose to speak! Some turn their ears off at that moment when they should be bending their ears and straining their hearts to perceive what the Lord is saying! How this teaches us to be those who are eager to hear, and who want desperately to know what the Lord is saying. We are naturally dull of hearing and we must seek the Lord to dig out the wax of

416 Ezekiel 34:11-13.

417 John 4:39.

418 Isaiah 6:9.

419 Matthew 13:11-15; Mark 4:10-13; Luke 8:10.

420 Acts 20:9.

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death from our stopped up ears.⁴²¹

At the end of verse 10 we see in a negative way what we ought to be like. It is *“lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.”*⁴²² Thus the purpose of the message is that we should truly hear and perceive so that we have full comprehension, and as a result we would turn around from the way of sin and destruction and receive the open healing hand of the Lord. The reason this is put in such a negative way is because the reality is that rebellious man will not listen and hear and turn and be saved!

6:11,12.

Isaiah responds to this information by asking how long should this approach continue? Perhaps he was thinking it would be just for a while, but he was to get a shock because the Lord answers that it would continue until the land would be *“utterly desolate,”* and the Lord had removed people from there leaving many *“forsaken places”* behind.⁴²³ Thus ultimately it would be the case that this message and approach would prevail, until the people had been judged and removed from it to go into exile. How are we meant to receive this today? Is it just a piece of recorded history that relates to Isaiah's day and subsequent years reaching down to when Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC? I think not. It would seem that this same approach is to be used today until one day all the cities are finally overthrown and no houses are left inhabited. This speaks clearly of the final end for it has the same finality about it (cities *“laid waste and without inhabitant”* and so on), that we find in Isaiah 2:19-21.⁴²⁴ Thus we are brought to consider that our task of bringing the gospel to a dying world is not merely telling people to jump ship and be rescued. We have people who although they are lounging on the Titanic, as-it-were, are not only unaware of its final fate, they actively dispute it! The truth is often suppressed.⁴²⁵ Thus it is essential for us to be very careful and intelligent about how we vigorously, and with great zeal, proclaim the truths of Christ.

6:13.

It is not all doom and gloom however, for verse 13 gives us a glimmer of hope in mentioning the remnant. This is a difficult verse to render but the sense is that even though there be a remnant

421 Hebrews 5:11-14.

422 Isaiah 6:10.

423 Isaiah 6:11,12.

424 Isaiah 6:11.

425 Romans 1:18.

Studies in Isaiah.

(a tenth portion) this will again go through a consuming judgement with the implication of yet more to come, but eventually there will be an holy seed as the stump of a felled tree. The idea is that whilst the judgement on Israel (Jerusalem) will fall, there will be other times after this (for example the episode with Antiochus Epiphanes and then the Roman occupation), but then the holy seed will come forth out of this greatly reduced number. The mention of a “*stump*” here and its connection with the “*holy seed*” foreshadows the reference of the root and branch in chapter 11. The first reference to “*seed*” in Isaiah (as the AKJV renders the word) points to the “*seed of evildoers.*”⁴²⁶ Other references to “*seed*” in Isaiah (as the AKJV renders the word) speak of the descendants of Israel, or Jacob, or of the Servant.⁴²⁷ A few speak of seed for growing.⁴²⁸ Thus we have a clear reference to the promise of Genesis 3:15 where the seed of the serpent will be at war with the Seed of promise:

14 So the Lord God said to the serpent: “because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. **15** And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”⁴²⁹

The mention of “*holy seed*” here in Isaiah 6:13 probably has reference to the descendants of promise, but there is enough here also to indicate a Messianic reference.

426 Isaiah 1:4; 14:20, AKJV. For the same idea, see also Isaiah 57:3,4.

427 Isaiah 41:8; 43:5; 44:3; 45:19,25; 48:19; 53:10; 54:3; 59:21; 61:9; 65:9,23; 66:22.

428 Isaiah 17:11; 23:3; 30:23; 55:10.

429 Genesis 3:14,15.

Chapter 13.

Isaiah 7:1-9.

When the Lord speaks listen and believe.

Textual analysis.

1 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, *that* Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to *make* war against it, but could not prevail against it.

2 And it was told to the house of David, saying,

“Syria’s forces are deployed in Ephraim.”

So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.

3 Then the **Lord** said to Isaiah,

“go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jashub your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller’s Field, 4 and say to him:

‘take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and the son of Remaliah. 5 Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying,

6 “let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabel”—

7 thus says the **Lord God**:

“it shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass. 8 For the head of Syria *is* Damascus, and the head of Damascus *is* Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, *so that it will not be* a people. 9 The head of Ephraim *is* Samaria, and the head of Samaria *is* Remaliah’s son. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established.””

Our passage can be divided into two parts. The first two verses set the scene within which the message Isaiah has to bring to Ahaz king of Judah is to be found. Verses 3 to 9 detail the message and how it was to be brought.

[1] Historical notes. (Isaiah 7:1,2).

[2] Grace for a faithless king. (Isaiah 7:3-9).

[1] Historical notes. (Isaiah 7:1,2).

It is important that we begin this chapter with some history. In chapter six we learn that Uzziah has died and this was the year 739 BC. Jotham his son takes over as sole ruler but only until

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735 BC when Ahaz becomes co-regent. Ahaz reigns as sole ruler from 731 BC until 729 BC when his son Hezekiah acts as co-regent. Hezekiah becomes sole ruler in 715 BC. Both 2Kings and 2Chronicles give us information concerning Ahaz who is the king of Isaiah chapter seven. Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king and reigned for sixteen years.⁴³⁰ The sixteen years of his reign is covered by the period from 731 BC-715 BC. His summary record is not a good one at all, (to say the least), for he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, he made molten images of the Baals, he made his sons burn in the fire, and he offered sacrifices on the high places.⁴³¹ The central focus of the details of Ahaz's battles against the kings of the north are recorded slightly differently in the two records. In 2Kings we find that the emphasis is on the fact that the Syrian and Israelite kings could not overpower Ahaz in Jerusalem.⁴³² In 2Chronicles the focus is on what happened to the surrounding villages of Jerusalem in Judah, and how the Lord allowed Ahaz to be humbled in defeat, but then delivered the people from captivity in Samaria at the intervention of the prophet Oded.⁴³³ As a result of this Ahaz seeks help from the king of Assyria further to the north, one Tiglath-Pileser (also known as: Tiglath-pilneser). It may be that Ahaz made several requests to the king(s) of Assyria because the reasons given in the two accounts differ slightly. In 2Kings the focus is on the attacks from Syria and Israel, whilst in 2Chronicles the warring factions included the Edomites and the Philistines.⁴³⁴ At some later time Ahaz meets Tiglath-Pileser in Damascus of Syria, now defeated by the Assyrians, and it is there that the Judean king falls deeper into idolatry. It seems that Ahaz was rather taken with the Syrian gods and decided that he would like to make a copy of the altar at Damascus for the temple in Jerusalem on which he could make offerings.⁴³⁵ Ahaz made many other alterations to the temple in Jerusalem.⁴³⁶ The Chronicler makes some telling assessments of Ahaz's actions. He records that Ahaz had become *"yet more unfaithful to the Lord"* by sacrificing to the gods of Damascus which had beaten him, and that this was to *"become the downfall"* of Ahaz and all, because he had *"provoked the Lord God of his fathers to anger."*⁴³⁷

430 2Kings 16:2; 2Chronicles 27:9.

431 2Kings 16:2-4; 2Chronicles 27:1-4.

432 2Kings 16:5.

433 2Chronicles 27:5-15; cf. 2Kings 16:6.

434 2Kings 16:7; 2Chronicles 27:16-18.

435 2Kings 16:10-12.

436 2Kings 16:13-18.

437 2Chronicles 27:22-25.

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7:1,2.

The opening verse of chapter seven introduces us to Ahaz as “*the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah*” to make the point that Ahaz had good examples of kings of whom it could be said that they “*did right in the sight of the Lord.*”⁴³⁸ Isaiah next records the details of the Syrian-Israeli invasion with words similar to those found in 2Kings:

Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to make war; and they besieged Ahaz but could not overcome him.⁴³⁹

This northern confederacy had begun in Jotham's reign at the Lord's hand, but was now (in Ahaz's day) in full swing.⁴⁴⁰ So when Ahaz gets the news that the Syrian forces were mustered in Ephraim it is not surprising that he and the people were extremely afraid.⁴⁴¹ Note the double reference to the “*heart*” here, (i.e. both of Ahaz and thence of his people). Ahaz was so troubled in heart that they were “*moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.*” This description is graphic. Their minds and inner beings had no stability, but were rather swayed with this occurrence, and with that event that was happening, just as the trees sway hither and thither in the wind. Now since the king was troubled in this way his example spread to the people. The same thing is recorded of king Saul.⁴⁴² From this we learn that a people are often only as good and as faithful as their leader/ But it is at this point that Isaiah is instructed to bring Ahaz a message.

[2] Grace for a faithless king. (Isaiah 7:3-9).

Now it is at this point of fear and terror among the people that Isaiah is instructed to bring Ahaz a message.

7:3-5.

The first thing we must note here is that Isaiah is asked to take his son with him. Why was this? Well we begin by understanding that Isaiah's son's name was significant, since this is all the information we are given at this point. Isaiah shows us that with him this is no simple job, and no mere profession. His message is his life as evidenced by the name he gave to his son, for the name

438 2Kings 14:3; 15:34.

439 2Kings 16:5.

440 2Kings 15:37; 16:5,6.

441 Isaiah 7:2.

442 1Samuel 13:6,7.

Studies in Isaiah.

“Shear-Jashub” means “a remnant shall return.” The Lord instructs Isaiah to take his son to meet Ahaz who was *“at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller’s Field.”*⁴⁴³ Ahaz was probably at this site to check on the water supply for Jerusalem in case of a siege situation resulting from the soon coming Syrian-Israeli confederacy. That Ahaz was extremely afraid and agitated can be shown by how the Lord addresses him here. Rezin and the son of Remaliah had *“fierce anger”* and had *“plotted evil against”* Ahaz because they wanted to remove Ahaz and set up a puppet-king, the son of Tabel, whom they could control.⁴⁴⁴ With the backdrop of this great fear and trembling, the Lord, having told Isaiah to meet Ahaz at the aqueduct, now gives the prophet some precise instructions regarding what he was to say to the king of Judah.⁴⁴⁵

He first commands him to stop being afraid, and then He gives him the reasons for taking this stand. Ahaz is told three things. First he must *“take heed.”*⁴⁴⁶ Literally he is to be on guard and to watch. Now this may seem an obvious thing to say. Wasn't he here at the aqueduct preparing for the siege to come? Wasn't he taking precautions and getting himself ready? Well yes, of course, he was doing that in the *physical* sense, but was he taking heed, and was he being watchful over his own heart and spirit? Was he ready to listen to the Lord and hear what He had to say on the matter? This command is one that is often misunderstood. When the Lord says to *“watch”* and to *“take heed”* He isn't primarily concerned for our physical well-being (although this is not unimportant to Him) but rather He is concerned for our spiritual standing.⁴⁴⁷ How is your heart? How is your spirit? Are you keen to listen, and to listen well to what the Lord says?

Second, Ahaz is to *“be quiet.”*⁴⁴⁸ This literally means to be at peace, to rest and to lie still. His whole frame and heart had been trembling like trees blown by the wind.⁴⁴⁹ Because the king was so afraid, the people were too. How we are, affects all around us. So how vital it is to be the Lord's person acting the Lord's way! But now he is to be still. This reminds us of the Lord's commands to the wind and the waves when He was with the disciples on the raging sea of Galilee, and then also after His resurrection when they were astonished to see Him.⁴⁵⁰ The difference between this command and the one the Lord issued to the wind and the waves was that the latter obeyed immediately, it could do no otherwise. Here Ahaz has been told to *“take heed,”* to listen, to

443 Isaiah 7:3.

444 Isaiah 7:4,5.

445 Isaiah 7:3,4.

446 Isaiah 7:3.

447 Isaiah 7:4; Mark 13:37.

448 Isaiah 7:3.

449 Isaiah 7:2.

450 Mark 4:39; John 20:19,21.

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watch, and to follow what the Lord is saying, but will he do this?

Third, Ahaz is told not to be afraid nor to be *“faint-hearted,”* (i.e. soft or weak hearted).⁴⁵¹ The positive command of being strong and courageous is a frequent one in Scripture, as is the call not to be afraid. And then Ahaz is given some reasons for not being afraid of Rezin and the son of Remaliah. And so the Lord begins to encourage the king by calling these enemies of Judah *“these two stubs of smoking firebrands”* to indicate their weakness and short-lived nature.⁴⁵²

7:6-9.

The message also comes along with these encouraging words: *“thus says the Lord God.”*⁴⁵³ This phrase indicates certainty and definiteness. What the Lord says is what the Lord does. How we ought to be so encouraged by the word of the Lord! It might not appear this way to Ahaz, but the Lord knows that what his enemies purpose will not stand.⁴⁵⁴ Twice Ahaz is told that what these *“firebrands”* propose will not succeed and so this is a certainty.⁴⁵⁵ The Lord only need say it once, but it is given twice to encourage confidence in the Lord. Think how many times the Lord says the same thing! It is all of grace! Should we not at once hear the Lord and obey His good and perfect commands? In His great grace the Lord repeats His mercies for us. The explanation given is that Rezin is merely the head of Damascus, and Damascus is merely the head of Syria. In the same way Ephraim's head was Samaria whose head was the son of Remaliah. These rulers, these “heads” were mere men.⁴⁵⁶ At the end of Isaiah 2 we are encouraged to stop thinking about man for *“of what account is he?”*⁴⁵⁷ So here is Rezin, the king of Syria and Damascus its capital. Of what account is he? He may appear a great man with an army, but how does he compare to the Lord? In reality the comparison is an unfair one, for the Lord is the great God who commands all things, even His enemies. Furthermore in saying that Rezin remains head *in Syria* and the son of Remaliah the head *in Israel*, serves to emphasise the failure of their confederate plan to take Jerusalem. Ahaz will remain as head in the city of God.

Then next Ahaz is given a piece of precise prophetic information concerning Ephraim. For within 65 years Ephraim (the co-confederate with Syria) will be broken and will not be a people.⁴⁵⁸

451 Isaiah 7:4.

452 Isaiah 7:4.

453 Isaiah 7:7.

454 Isaiah 7:6,7.

455 Isaiah 7:4,7.

456 Isaiah 7:8,9.

457 Isaiah 2:22.

458 Isaiah 7:8.

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Now we are informed of a series of attacks and deportations of the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) in the books of Kings and Chronicles. First we read that Tiglath-Pileser took away a large portion of the people of Israel when Pekah (son of Remaliah) was king.⁴⁵⁹ Years later, in the twelfth year of Ahaz, when Hoshea reigned in Israel, Shalmaneser king of Assyria defeated Samaria and again carried Israelites captive into Assyria.⁴⁶⁰ This was the year 722 BC and was effectively the end of the northern kingdom. However there were still people around in Israel right up until the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who repopulated the northern kingdom with people from outside.⁴⁶¹ Thus at that time Israel was truly no longer a nation and Ephraim was no more. This would be 65 years after the prophecy given to Ahaz.

The section ends with a call to Ahaz not just to pay heed to what he is being told, but to take warning.⁴⁶² If Ahaz will “*not believe,*” then he will “*not be established.*” The same Hebrew word is used for “*believe*” and “*established,*” and it has the basic meaning of support or trust. If Ahaz does not lean on what the Lord has said then he will have no support at all. He will be just like Rezin and the son of Remaliah. How about us? Have we heard the Lord's call not to fear men and to trust Him? If we will not believe the Lord when He offers such salvation what is left?

459 2Kings 15:29.

460 2Kings 17:1-6.

461 2 Chronicles 34:6-7,33; 35:18; 2 Kings 23:19-20; Ezra 4:2,3,10.

462 Isaiah 7:9.

Chapter 14.

Isaiah 7:10-25.

God gives a sign where faith has flown.

Textual analysis.

10 Moreover the **Lord** spoke again to Ahaz, saying,

11 “Ask a sign for yourself from the **Lord** your **God**;
ask it either in the depth or in the height above.”

12 But Ahaz said,

“I will not ask, nor will I test the **Lord**!”

13 Then he said,

“Hear now, O house of David! *Is it* a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my **God** also?

14 Therefore the **Lord** Himself will give you a sign:

behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

15 Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.

17 The **Lord** will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father’s house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.”

18 And it shall come to pass in **that day** that the **Lord**
will whistle for

the fly that *is* in the farthest part of the rivers of Egypt,
and for the bee that *is* in the land of Assyria.

19 They will come, and all of them will rest In the desolate valleys and in the clefts of the rocks, and
on all thorns and in all pastures.

20 In the **same day** the **Lord**

will shave with a hired razor,

with those from beyond the River,

with the king of Assyria,

the head and the hair of the legs,

and will also remove the beard.

21 It shall be in **that day** that a man

will keep alive a young cow and two sheep;

22 so it shall be, from the abundance of milk they give, that he

will eat curds; for curds and honey everyone will eat who is left in the land.

23 It shall happen in **that day**,

that wherever there could be a thousand vines worth a thousand *shekels* of silver, it will be for briers and thorns. 24 With arrows and bows *men* will come there, because all the land will become briers and thorns. 25 And to any hill which could be dug with the hoe, you will not go there for fear of briers and thorns; but it will become a range for oxen and a place for sheep to roam.

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This section of Isaiah 7 comprises a conversation between the Lord and Ahaz in which the Lord issues an amazing sign, (verses 10-17), and then gives a fourfold statement of what will happen in “*that day*,” (verses 18-25). Because the central theme is so important (the sign of the virgin having a child) I want the reader to grasp the arrangement of ideas outlined in this section before reading. The following headings show the breakdown of how we shall study this text.

[1] The sign of Immanuel! (Isaiah 7:10-17).

[a] God's grace to Ahaz rejected. (Isaiah 7:10-13).

[b] The sign! (Isaiah 7:14-17).

[i] Translation issues.

The translation of Isaiah 7:16.

The translation of Isaiah 7:14-16.

[ii] The sign God gave. (Isaiah 7:14).

[iii] The conversation with Ahaz resumes. (Isaiah 7:15-17).

[2] Assyria is coming! (Isaiah 7:18-25).

We shall discover that the key to understanding the great sign that the Lord gives to Israel of the virgin bringing forth a child, is the unfolding and changing nature of the Lord's speech to and with Ahaz. It is for this reason that we will spend some time examining the Hebrew and attending to the translation of Isaiah 7:14-16.

[1] The sign of Immanuel! (Isaiah 7:10-17).

Our first section (Isaiah 7:10-17) demands some initial considerations, for although it forms a definite unit, it also contains one of the most remarkable prophecies found in all of Scripture. So to deal with this in the best way possible, we shall divide it into two parts. In the first, which covers verses 10 to 13, we shall see how God's grace is rejected by Ahaz. Then, second, we shall consider the sign that the Lord God will give to the house of David, which covers verses 14 to 17.

Before we embark on this it is important to note that verses 10 to 17 do form a coherent piece, as it records the conversation between the Lord and Ahaz, which ends with a stirring declaration by the Lord.⁴⁶³ That being said, it is equally important to note the change in whom is being addressed by the Lord. The text has been further highlighted to show this change, with yellow

463 Isaiah 7:13-17.

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highlights to show that a singular reference indicating Ahaz is meant, and blue highlights showing that the house of David, or the nation as a whole is being addressed. This analysis is shown below:

- 10 Moreover the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying,
11 “Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God;
ask it either in the depth or in the height above.”
12 But Ahaz said,
“I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!”
13 Then he said,
“Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?
14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign:
behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.
15 Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the
Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her
kings.
17 The Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father’s house—days that have
not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.”

From this it is easy to see that verses 10 – 12 are addressed to Ahaz personally, verses 13 – 14 are addressed to the nation as a whole (the house of David), whilst verses 15 to 17 are addressed to Ahaz once again. We shall look a little more closely at the textual details when we consider the sign of the virgin conception. At this stage it is necessary to comment that verse 15 is inseparably linked to verse 16 since the phrase “*refuse the evil and choose the good*” appears in both.

[a] God's grace to Ahaz rejected. (Isaiah 7:10-13).

The relevant text is shown below highlighted as above to indicate the change in person. Remember that yellow highlights indicate a singular reference (i.e. Ahaz), and blue highlights show that the house of David, or the nation as a whole is being addressed.

- 10 Moreover the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying,
11 “Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God;
ask it either in the depth or in the height above.”
12 But Ahaz said,
“I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!”
13 Then he said,
“Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?”

7:10.

Having issued a warning call in verse 9 for Ahaz to believe, the Lord continues to be gracious to the faithless king by giving him the chance to cement in his mind and heart clearly that

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which God has said with a sign. We pause to note the great graciousness of the Lord here. He has come to speak to Ahaz, and having begun with a call to be still, to listen carefully, and to believe, the Lord speaks to Ahaz *“again.”* Such patience and grace must never be presumed upon.

7:11.

And so we reach the pinnacle here (concerning the Lord's interaction with Ahaz) with the incredible offer of the king being able to request a sign. Now the word employed for *“sign”* is used in a number of ways. The word can be used of something predicted in the near future which happens in the normal course of events:

This shall be a sign to you: you shall eat this year such as grows of itself, and in the second year what springs from the same; also in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them.⁴⁶⁴

It can also stand for something miraculous:

8 And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “What is the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord the third day?” **9** Then Isaiah said, “This is the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing which He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees or go backward ten degrees?” **10** And Hezekiah answered, “It is an easy thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; no, but let the shadow go backward ten degrees.”⁴⁶⁵

It can stand as a marker, or, in other words, as something which distinguishes or sets someone or something apart, such as the Sabbaths that Israel were to observe, or the phylacteries containing portions of the word of God the people were to wear, or a mark as in the mark on Cain.⁴⁶⁶ Ahaz was given the option of choosing any sign that fit these descriptions. He could ask it in the *“depth”* (i.e. in the grave), or in the *“height above”* (i.e. heaven), for verse 11 suggests that there was to be no limit imposed on the king. It could be a natural event or it could be miraculous. What grace! How incredibly kind and gracious is the Lord! I wonder how we treat the Lord with His gracious offers to us?

464 2Kings 19:29.

465 2Kings 20:8-10.

466 Genesis 4:15; Exodus 31:13-17; Deuteronomy 6:8.

7:12.

Now the Lord was dealing with Ahaz as the king of Judah, but Ahaz responds in sheer rebellion. The response of verse 12 may not seem like rebellion at first sight because what the king actually says may sound to our ears like that which a pious person might reply with. However, it is false modesty. It is hypocrisy. It is also a display of self-reliance. Such is indicated by the two *“I will”* statements (*“I will not,” “nor will I”*). It is to be noted that whilst Ahaz's statement, (that he did not want to *“test the Lord”*), may sound righteous to the untrained ear, we are to remember that the Lord has just told the king that he is free to choose a sign! Thus Ahaz's response is, in point of fact, rank, for the Lord God had called upon Ahaz to ask for a sign, and now we find Ahaz replying that he will not test the Lord! Ahaz has not only questioned God here, but he has put Him to the test by refusing to comply with what God has graciously proffered! How deceptive are flattering words. What Ahaz says may appeal to the religious mind – it sounds ever so “godly” – but it is wholly rebellious given what the Lord has already offered.

7:13.

We can see the awfulness of Ahaz's response by looking at the Lord's reply in verse 13, which begins with the introductory statement, *“then he said.”* The person speaking here I take to be the Lord, for in verse 10 we are told that it was the Lord speaking for the second time to Ahaz. The NIV is alone in suggesting that it is the prophet speaking. Such a translation may have been chosen because of the statement at the end of verse 13 where the speaker refers to *“my God.”* However we understand that where verse 10 suggests the presence of the *“Lord,”* by virtue of the fact that He is speaking, we must take this as a pre-incarnate appearance of the second person of the Trinity. If so then there can be no objection to the Lord speaking of another member of the Trinity as *“my God.”* It is natural, therefore, especially in view of verse 10, to assume that it is still the Lord speaking.⁴⁶⁷ Now Ahaz represented the house of David and so had a very responsible position, not just to rule the kingdom as king, but to pass on the baton, as-it-were, to successive kings. He was also supposed to order things in the nation in obedience to the Lord, and by so doing would keep all in readiness for the coming Messiah, great David's greater Son.

So what did the Lord say? Well the opening words are addressed to king Ahaz as the representative of the nation (the *“house of David”*), and they are rousing: *“Hear now!”* The Lord

⁴⁶⁷ If it was Isaiah speaking it would be as the mouthpiece of God, and so it would still be the Lord speaking!

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had already told Ahaz in a gracious way to listen carefully and to *“take heed.”*⁴⁶⁸ But now this is a declaration or proclamation. The Lord continues by saying that Ahaz had wearied men and was now attempting to weary God (which, of course, is impossible)! Ahaz was the king, and through his fear and fretting he had lead the nation in fear and fretting. Such is the import of the words in Isaiah 7:2. How could he possibly think that he could get away with disobeying such a gracious offer from the Lord? Ahaz was a *“troubler of Israel.”*⁴⁶⁹ He was a wearier. But does he think he can treat God in the same way as he does other people? This incident pierces the soul. How we display to people is also how we show ourselves to the Lord. People may be trampled upon but never think that of God!

This text also highlights the fact that God's plans can never be thwarted. Ahaz's rejection and refusal to choose a sign would not stop a sign being given. God had every intention of giving a sign, but He permitted the godless king Ahaz to show his true godless unbelieving colours during the process. The refusal to choose a sign by Ahaz was known unto the Lord beforehand, of course, but by such means the Lord declared both the sign, and the sinful nature of the king. He was a sinful, fearful, wearier of souls. The Lord was not going to let the house of David miss out on His plans. The sign would come. Ahaz was given the immense privilege which he rejected, but his rejection could have meant the nation's loss. How leaders need to beware! A similar situation occurred in the time of the Lord Jesus. The Pharisees and other leaders of that time rejected the Lord Jesus. Would that mean people would lose out? Never!

[b] The sign! (Isaiah 7:14-17).

We begin our discussion by reiterating that there is a marked change as to whom is being addressed. Verse 14 is spoken to the *“house of David,”* whereas verses 15 to 17 are spoken directly to Ahaz. As we have noted, the Lord's great grace shines forth here. Despite Ahaz rejecting the Lord's offer, the Lord will still bring a sign. The Lord is gracious! He speaks to us and calls to us, but if we reject Him and ignore what He says, we ought not be surprised if the Lord stops speaking to us and issues a reprimand addressed so that all could hear. The Lord speaks to Ahaz as the representative of the nation, but His words are for all to hear.

468 Isaiah 7:4.

469 1Kings 18:17,18; 1Chronicles 2:7.

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[i] Translation issues.

Now before we consider the wonderful teaching and lessons in this passage, we must address the issue of how Isaiah 7:14 ought to be considered. To help in this I have provided my own translation of Isaiah 7:10-17 as follows:

10 And the Lord spoke again to Ahaz saying: 11 “ask for **yourself** a sign from the Lord God be it deep or high.” 12 Now Ahaz said: “I will not ask nor will I tempt the Lord.” 13 And He said: “Hear now house of David is it inconsequential for **you** to cause weariness to men that **you** will also weary my God too? 14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give **you** a sign. Behold the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a SON and His name shall be called: “God with us” (Immanuel). 15 Butter and honey will he eat *until* he shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the lad shall know to refuse the evil and to choose the good, forsaken [will be] the ground which **you** – he [Ahaz] has cut off so as to loathe – from the face of her two kings. 17 The Lord will bring upon **you**, and upon **your** people, and upon the house of **your** father, days which have not come since the days Ephraim departed from Judah (namely) the king of Assyria.

These are second person plurals. These are second person singulars.

The main sticking points in this passage of Isaiah 7:10-17 for commentators are twofold. First, how should we translate verse 16? Second how are we to understand verses 15 and 16? Are they to be inseparably connected with verse 14? Or should we have the “*Behold*” statement of verse 14 as a stand alone, with verses 15 and 16 relating to something other than the One promised in verse 14?

The translation of Isaiah 7:16.

The first part of this verse is generally translated as we have it in the NKJV as can be seen by looking at a selection of other versions:

For before the **Child** shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good. (NKJV)
For before the **boy** knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. (ESV)
For before the **boy** knows *enough* to refuse evil and choose good. (NASB)
For before the **youth** doth know to refuse evil, and to fix on good. (YLT)
For before the **lad** shall know to refuse the evil and to choose the good. (My trans.)

However there is a problem when it comes to translation of the second half of Isaiah 7:16, as shown

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below:

... the **land** that **you dread** will be **forsaken** by **both her kings**. (NKJV)

... the **land** whose **two kings you dread** will be **deserted**. (ESV).

... the **land** whose **two kings you dread** will be **abandoned**. (NASB)

... **Forsaken** is the **land** thou art **vexed with**, because of **her two kings**. (YLT).

... **forsaken** [will be] the **ground** which **you** – he [Ahaz] has **cut off so as to loathe** from the face of **her two kings**. (My trans.)

It will be observed that the second half of Isaiah 7:16, whilst rendered pretty uniformly by the modern translations (NKJV, ESV and NASB), is rendered very differently by the YLT and by my offering. The main difficulty centres around the translation of one Hebrew word which modern versions give as “*dread*,” and also how to position the word given as “*forsaken*,” “*deserted*,” or “*abandoned*.” A literal translation is shown below:

← Hebrew reads from the right

יַעֲזֹב הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה קָץ מִפְּנֵי שְׁנֵי מְלָכֶיהָ

forsaken the ground which you – he has cut off to loathe from the face of the two of her kings

The opening word strikes the note of judgement (“*forsaken*”) but many dull this by placing this concept latter in the sentence.

Another interesting thing about this sentence is that we have the second person masculine singular pronoun “*you*” (אַתָּה) followed immediately by the verb in question קָץ *qāṣ* which is rendered by most translations as a single word “*dread*.” Now this Hebrew word has actually already been used in Isaiah 7:6 where it is rendered as “*trouble*” in the NKJV, as “*vex*” in the AKJV, and as “*terrorize*” in the NASB. Davidson's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon suggests that קָץ *qāṣ* is a Qal third person masculine singular which derives from the root קוּץ *qûṣ*.⁴⁷⁰ There are three entries for this root in Davidson's lexicon.⁴⁷¹ The first identifies two meanings as follows:

470 Benjamin Davidson. *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*. Hendrickson Pub. 1981. [Originally published by Samuel Bagster & Sons. London. 1850]. P663. Hereafter as: Davidson. *The Analytical Hebrew*.

471 Davidson. *The Analytical Hebrew*. P657.

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I. to loathe, abhor ... – II. to fear. ...⁴⁷²

The second entry for this root is only found in the Hiphal form of the verb so does not concern us here, but the third entry suggests that the root meaning is: “to cut, to cut off” and so is used of cutting fruit at harvest time.⁴⁷³ Essentially, then, the word means to cut oneself off from something and hence to loathe it, or be weary of it, and so cast it away. Our word (קָץ *qāṣ*) thus must be translated as “*he despised and cut himself off from.*” Putting these two words together (קָץ אָתָּה) appears to be problematic, for the Lord begins by referring to Ahaz as “*you*” (אָתָּה) but then speaks of him in the third person singular “*he despised and cut himself off from*” (קָץ). However this suggests a sense of anger and frustration. The change in person referent is something we find when people are speaking with animation and force. Imagine someone speaking directly to another and naturally using the pronoun “you” but then turns to others and refers to the person in the third person (“he”). That seems to be what is happening here.

The next word in the Hebrew (מִפְּנֵי) is literally “*from the face of*” as it has the prefixed preposition most often given as “*from.*” The penultimate Hebrew word (מִלְּכֶיהָ) is a masculine plural noun with third person feminine suffixes and so must be given as “*of her kings.*” Putting these thoughts together we get the idea that the land (literally “*ground*”) will be forsaken by the two kings because Ahaz had loathed and despised it. Now the translation I have opted for, although clearly not shown by most versions, is supported by A. Harman in his commentary on Isaiah which reads as follows:

“For before the boy will refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you [Ahaz] are tearing apart [by your unbelieving policies] will be forsaken of her two kings.”⁴⁷⁴

Harman takes the meaning of the Hebrew word קָץ further by suggesting that in his cutting himself off from the land and despising it, Ahaz was actually “*tearing*” it apart. Thus the land will be forsaken of the two kings because of Ahaz's attitude to the land.

Incidentally it is worth looking at the Wycliff translation for Isaiah 7:16 for this early attempt shows some of the difficulties encountered in rendering the Hebrew:

472 Davidson. *The Analytical Hebrew*. P657.

473 Davidson. *The Analytical Hebrew*. P663. See Isaiah 16:9; 28:4.

474 Allan Hartman. *Isaiah. (A covenant to be kept for the sake of the church)*. Christian Focus. 2005. P98. Hereafter as: Hartman. *Isaiah*.

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For why before the child know how to reprove evil, and choose good, the land, which thou loathest, shall be forsaken of the face of their two kings. (And before that the child know how to rebuke, *or to reject*, evil, and to choose good, the lands of these two kings, whom thou fearest, shall be deserted.)⁴⁷⁵

The translation of Isaiah 7:14-16.

The second issue in translation is the most crucial and requires some consideration. The main problem is that if we link verses 15 and 16 with verse 14, we are left with the problem of whom might be the fulfilment of verse 14 in the days of Ahaz and Isaiah? Here is the relevant part of the text using my translation:

14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give **you** a sign.

Behold the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a SON and His name shall be called: "God with us" (Immanuel). **15** Butter and honey will he eat *until* he shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good. **16** For before the lad shall know to refuse the evil and to choose the good, forsaken [will be] the ground which **you** – he [Ahaz] has cut off so as to loathe – from the face of her two kings.

These are second person plurals. These are second person singulars.

If we hold that these three verses (v14b,15,16) contain the entire "*Behold*" statement, we are left with the very clear impression that the One born of "*the virgin*" in verse 14 (which is clearly Immanuel), will exist in a state of infancy (not yet able to know to choose good and reject evil) when the land is finally rid of the two kings (from Syria and Israel). This is wholly untenable. There are two reasons I make such an assertion. In the first place Matthew interprets Isaiah 7:14 as being fulfilled in Christ.⁴⁷⁶ But that would be impossible if verses 15 and 16 must be linked inseparably with verse 14. If that were so, we are then forced to look for a fulfilment contemporary with Ahaz and Isaiah. The second reason is that our text does not actually demand such a connection between these three verses.

To begin with we can clearly see and readily understand that verses 15 and 16 must go together. On its own verse 15 is simply a statement of the infancy of *a person*. Infants start with mother's milk and only eat simple, easily digestible foods as they grow a little more. At such stages the individual is not yet able to discern between good and evil. Now verse 16 repeats the phrase:

⁴⁷⁵ Isaiah 7:16, Wycliff Translation.

⁴⁷⁶ Matthew 1:23.

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“refuse the evil and choose the good,” and applies this to a *“lad”* and then links this to what will happen in the land concerning Rezin and Pekah (kings of Syria and Israel). Consequently we must hold verses 15 and 16 together. They are inseparably connected.

However it is my contention that there are signals in the text which lead to us separating verse 14 from verses 15 and 16. Looking at the whole passage (my translation) we could arrange it as follows:

10 And the Lord spoke again to Ahaz saying:

11 “Ask for **yourself** a sign from the Lord God be it deep or high.”

12 Now Ahaz said:

“I will not ask nor will I tempt the Lord.”

13 And he said:

“Hear now house of David

is it inconsequential for **you** to cause weariness to men that **you** will also weary God too?

14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give **you** a sign.

Behold the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a SON and His name shall be called: “God with us” (Immanuel).

15 Butter and honey will he eat *until* he shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good.

16 For before the lad shall know to refuse the evil and to choose the good, forsaken [will be] the ground which **you** – he [Ahaz] has cut off so as to loathe – from the face of her two kings.

17 The Lord will bring upon **you**, and upon **your** people, and upon **your** father's house, days which have not come from the days of Ephraim's departure from out of Judah, namely the king of Assyria.”

These are second person plurals. These are second person singulars.

Looked at in this way, we can see that the *“Behold”* prophecy of verse 14 (highlighted in bold) becomes the central, and therefore, the most important feature of the passage. The New Testament reference to Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23 clearly identifies the Lord Jesus as the fulfilment of the prophecy. Thus Isaiah 7:14 can only be understood as a prophetic statement which has a *singular* fulfilment. To continue, the only person who meets the requirements of this prophecy is the Lord Jesus Christ. No other virgin has ever conceived in this way.⁴⁷⁷ Since verse 14 refers exclusively to

⁴⁷⁷ I am well aware of the concept of parthenogenesis discussed by scientists and others. Theoretically a female cell may undergo mitosis but genetically the only result will be an identical clone, i.e. a girl. However according to a recent study on parthenogenesis, the two authors state: “However, despite ... two ambiguous and inconclusive reports on specialized journals ... a non-chimeric, clinically normal, human parthenote (i.e., a healthy individual entirely derived from a single parthenogenetic-activated oocyte), has never been reported in the scientific literature.”

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the Lord Jesus Christ, what are we to make of the verses that follow which state that the land that Ahaz had ruined by his idolatry and sin would actually be divested of the two kings who had caused such trouble? This part of the Lord's statement clearly has a *contemporary* fulfilment. If we connect verses 15 and 16 with verse 14 as referring to the same person, we thus limit the prophecy of verse 14 to a setting within Isaiah's day. There is no escaping such a conclusion.

Thus, by making Isaiah 7:14 stand alone we are not caught up with any immediate fulfilment, contemporary with Isaiah and Ahaz, which would be the focus if we connected verses 15 and 16 to verse 14. Notice the changes from the singular references to Ahaz in verses 11, 16 and 17 compared to the plural references to the house of David in verses 13 and 14.

So how do we understand verses 15 and 16? Whereas many naturally link these with verse 14, I am compelled by the statement of verse 14 to suggest that *another person* is meant. But whom? Well for this we need to track back to the first part of Isaiah 7. We have noted when considering the first nine verses, that when the Lord called Isaiah to meet Ahaz at the aqueduct, he was expressly told to take his son Shear-Jashub.⁴⁷⁸ Thus, as the Lord speaks first to Ahaz to suggest a sign, and then to the house of David as a whole because Ahaz has refused, Shear-Jashub is there among them. Would it not make perfect sense to suggest that verses 15 and 16 refer to this young lad, Shear-Jashub? Having supplied a great prophecy for the house of David for encouragement that the Messiah would be born of a virgin and that He could be known as "God with us," the Lord then turns to Ahaz and, pointing to Shear-Jashub, declares that the land would be rid of the two enemy kings when Isaiah's son came to discern good from evil.

The idea we have expressed above is also supported by two parts of Isaiah 8. First, a very similar prophecy is found in Isaiah 8:1-4. The development of Isaiah's second son is linked to further prophecy about the demise of Syria and Israel. Second, Isaiah himself makes the statement in Isaiah 8:18 that his own sons were "*for signs*" in Israel. Since Isaiah's second son was a sign for the prophecy in Isaiah 8:1-4, we are left to conclude that Shear-Jashub must be the sign for the prophecy of Isaiah 7:15,16.⁴⁷⁹

Gabriel Jose de Carli and Tiago Campos Pereira. Medical Hypothesis. 106. 2017. PP57-60. Published by Elsevier (<http://www.elsevier.com/locate/mehy>). See: <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0306987717302694?token=6244C536665EB6BF91ABDD53B98C5D125E7876BCC2D0B280FCA597BFC329B1D3BD61AA7FCA578505736E05DD7B0AAF29>

⁴⁷⁸ Isaiah 7:3.

⁴⁷⁹ For an interesting review of the problems and a different solution which holds Isaiah 7:14 as exclusively pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ, see: R. Bruce Compton. The Immanuel Prophecy in Isaiah 7:14-16 and its use in Matthew 1:23: Harmonizing Historical Context and Single Meaning. Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal. 12 (12007): 3-15. Online at: http://www.dbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/compton_immanuel.pdf.

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Having resolved the textual issues concerning Isaiah 7:14-16 it is now time to consider the message to us from these verses. We shall consider this under two separate headings. To begin we shall look at verse 14, the sign God gave. Given the huge significance of this sign it is vital that we look at it separately. Then we shall consider verses 15 to 17, the Lord's continued conversation with Ahaz. In what follows we shall use the translation I have provided and analysed thus:

14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give **you** a sign.

Behold the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a SON and His name shall be called: "God with us" (Immanuel).

15 Butter and honey will he eat *until* he shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good.

16 For before the lad shall know to refuse the evil and to choose the good, forsaken [will be] the ground which **you** – he [Ahaz] has cut off so as to loathe – from the face of her two kings.

17 The Lord will bring upon **you**, and upon **your** people, and upon **your** father's house, days which have not come from the days of Ephraim's departure from out of Judah, namely the king of Assyria."

These are second person plurals. These are second person singulars.

[ii] The sign God gave. (Isaiah 7:14).

The great sign that the Lord God has declared is found as a separate statement declared to the "*house of David*" in verse 14. Controversy surrounds it but for the believer it is all very clear and something of a great delight!

The first thing we must start with is the first word of the prophecy, namely "*Behold.*" This word indicates that something special is meant for the sign. It isn't just an ordinary happening.⁴⁸⁰ This means we cannot explain it as being that either Isaiah's wife should have a child, or that the king's wife should have a son, or that any other person of that time might produce a son, for all of these would be *natural* events. What God is announcing is a *supernatural* event!

Next we must consider the Hebrew word translated "*virgin.*" Much has been made of the fact that the Hebrew word *`almah*, can mean a virgin *or* a young woman of marriageable age, whilst another word in Hebrew, *bēthuwlah*, *only* means virgin. Why wasn't the second one used by Isaiah? Of course to the modern mind the meaning "a young woman of marriageable age" almost signifies someone who is sexually active and therefore not a virgin. However to the Hebrew mind of those days the term did not imply the idea of sexual activity. In fact in all places where *`almah* is

⁴⁸⁰ Similar word constructions announcing births are to be found at Genesis 16:11; 17:19; Judges 13:5,7.

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used in the Old Testament the implication is of virginal purity.⁴⁸¹ Moreover, the choice of the word *`almah*, is a perfect one when we consider to whom it points as we shall see in a moment. It is pertinent to add here that the Septuagint, a Jewish translation into Greek made in pre-Christian Alexandria, renders the Hebrew *`almah*, as 'virgin' in Isaiah 7:14. The New Testament use of Isaiah 7:14 also indicates that the idea of a virgin is meant.⁴⁸² Then further, we note that this *`almah* is one who "conceives" (i.e. gets pregnant). If the word *`almah* merely stands for a sexually active young woman, we must ask then what is there to *"behold"*? The clear implication is that a virgin, (one who has never had sexual intercourse), and, more importantly, one who is of marriageable age and therefore not a young girl, will conceive. This would be a miracle, and it fits precisely the young woman betrothed to Joseph, namely Mary who was a virgin but was also of marriageable age.

This virgin of marriageable age would conceive and bear a son who would be called *"Immanuel."* Here we see another incredible thing to behold. It is remarkable that a woman who had no husband and who "knew" no man would conceive, but still yet more astonishing is the fact that the child she would bear would be a male child who could also be called *"God with us."* Here we can see the miracle of the incarnation. This Son would also be God! There is thus no doubt at all that Isaiah 7:14 prophesies the events recorded in Matthew and Luke concerning the entrance of the Saviour into this world. In no case, either in Isaiah's day, nor in the days subsequent but before Mary, are the details of this prophecy fulfilled.

Such a prophecy requires us to dig a little deeper and to seek to understand its real meaning. We are so used to thinking of the incarnation from our reading of Matthew and Luke, but what has the Lord revealed here to Ahaz, Isaiah, and the entire *"house of David"*? A number of questions come to the fore. Why should a virgin be the means of entrance for the promised Messiah? Whom is this virgin? What type of person would be born as a result of this virgin conceiving? Perhaps there are other questions too, but we start by noting that whilst the Lord does introduce some startling things, He never does so without pointing us back to other things He had previously revealed. Later in Isaiah we will come across these words:

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?⁴⁸³

481 Genesis 24:43; Exodus 2:8; Song 1:3; 6:8; Proverbs 30:19; Psalm 68:25.

482 Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:27.

483 Isaiah 40:21.

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Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I *was* there. And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me.⁴⁸⁴

The Lord, who has come to various people throughout the Old Testament era and then came to earth in incarnate form, has told us all things from the very beginning. It is imperative then, that we turn back to the start of God's revelation.

Genesis 3 tells the sorry story of the Woman and Adam's disobedience. In His immense grace the Lord (a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus) comes to the pair in the garden with a question for Adam: "*where are you?*"⁴⁸⁵ The Lord knew the answer, of course, but He asks to stir up Adam to get him to consider what he had done. After answering the Lord's first question, Adam proffers excuses and shifts the blame to the Woman when he is asked a second question by the Lord.⁴⁸⁶ The Lord then questions the Woman who does what Adam did and shifts the blame to the serpent.⁴⁸⁷ Following this, the Lord curses the serpent, speaks to the Woman, and finally to Adam.⁴⁸⁸ Now it is whilst the Lord is cursing the serpent that we find the very first statement concerning the promised Messiah (Christ):

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.⁴⁸⁹

There was to be "*enmity*" (war) between the serpent and the Woman, and between the serpent's offspring and the Woman's. What is particularly interesting about this statement, which the Lord Himself spoke, is that we have reference to One particular offspring or "*Seed*" from the Woman, and we are told that this One will bruise the serpent's head, whilst, at the same time, Himself being bruised in the heel. To bruise the head means to deal a death blow. To be bruised in the heel signifies to be cheated on and to be stumbled. We could go on with this wonderful passage, but for our purposes the key points are as follows:

[] That Woman would bear One especial Seed.

[] This One especial Seed would bruise the serpent's head (and so destroy him).

484 Isaiah 48:16.

485 Genesis 3:9.

486 Genesis 3:12.

487 Genesis 3:13.

488 Genesis 3:14-19.

489 Genesis 3:15.

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[] *This One especial Seed would suffer in the process.*

It is obvious that when the Lord Himself spoke these words in the hearing of Adam and the Woman, He also had in view the words He would much later speak to the *"house of David"* (with Ahaz as chief representative) in Isaiah 7:14. Now the Genesis 3:15 text does not explicitly state that the woman spoken of should be a virgin. However what it does assert is that the One promised, *"the Seed,"* would be from *"her seed."* Such a reference (*"her seed"*) at the least signifies that a man's presence would be unnecessary. It is unusual to speak of a woman's 'seed,' and more usual to speak about man providing the seed. So to highlight that the *"Seed"* would come from the woman must indicate the idea of a virgin conception.

In Genesis 3:15 we are introduced to the *"Seed"* of *"the woman."* The definite article is used so that a very definite and specific woman was meant. Then in Isaiah 7:14 we also have the use of the definite article again, signifying that a specific person was in view, *"the virgin ..."* From all eternity the Lord had set aside one woman to be the means by which the second person of the Trinity would step down from heaven's glory. Does this make the woman divine or, in some way, to be venerated? Of course not! Is she blessed? Indeed. We are talking, of course, about the young girl Mary who was betrothed to Joseph and found to be pregnant of the Holy Ghost. She indeed would be known as *"blessed ... among women"* but to venerate and worship her as Roman Catholics do is sinful at the least and is, in reality, utterly blasphemous.⁴⁹⁰ It is so difficult to speak with balance and care on this subject because of the trail of wickedness and nonsense displayed by Roman Catholics. We ought to point out that quite a number of others were also spoken of as *"blessed."* The disciples, for instance, were called *"blessed"* because of what they saw and heard.⁴⁹¹ Simon is described as being *"blessed"* because of receiving revelation from God the Father concerning the true nature of Jesus.⁴⁹² The servant who is doing what the Lord requires on His return will be called *"blessed."*⁴⁹³ The one who knows what the Lord has said and does it is *"blessed."*⁴⁹⁴ Those who have not seen what Thomas saw and yet believed will be called *"blessed."*⁴⁹⁵ Now none of these belittle the blessedness of Mary, for there is none other who was so chosen for the task of bearing Immanuel. Yet she recognised her own need of a Saviour!

490 Luke 1:28,42,48.

491 Matthew 13:16; Luke 10:23.

492 Matthew 16:17.

493 Matthew 24:46; Luke 12:37,38,43.

494 John 13:17.

495 John 20:29.

46 And Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour.”⁴⁹⁶

This singular virgin woman “*will conceive*” (or become pregnant). To enquire into the process of how this happened would be futile. However, we have further information in Matthew and Luke. Matthew tells us that Mary (before her betrothal) was “*found with child of the Holy Spirit.*”⁴⁹⁷ He adds that Joseph was told that the child which was “*conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.*”⁴⁹⁸ Then Matthew points to the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 from which he states that “*the virgin shall be with child.*”⁴⁹⁹ In Luke we discover that the angel told Mary “*you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son.*”⁵⁰⁰ Puzzled by this, Mary asks how this was to happen because she is a virgin. The angel tells her: “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you.*”⁵⁰¹ From these data we learn that Mary would “*conceive*” and therefore produce a human offspring, and that this conception would come about through the sole agency of the Holy Spirit. On three separate occasions we find that the Son to be born would be conceived as a result of the Holy Spirit. Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit would “*come upon*” Mary with “*the power of the Highest*” and would “*overshadow*” her.⁵⁰² We hesitate to go any further. However we must remember that the Holy Spirit was present in creating power during creation week, “*hovering*” or brooding over the great deep of the raw creation. We note further that the Holy Spirit is the One through whom new birth is effected.⁵⁰³ These are not all identical but serve to show the great creative workings of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

The One conceived and to be born is described in Isaiah 7:14 as “*a SON,*” whose name is to be called “*God with us.*” I have capitalised SON because this is clearly a son of divine origin. Most translations simply give the name as “*Immanuel,*” but the text should be translated “*God with us*” (in my view), for there are two Hebrew words (עִמָּנוּ אֵל) one of which is the divine name (אֵל 'el). Literally rendered the words read: “with us [is] God.” We have then a divine person who is “*with us,*” but who is also one conceived and then born, and hence a human man. This human man is also the divine Lord! Such a wonderful thing! A true human being born of the virgin, and yet “*Immanuel,*” with us is God!

496 Luke 1:46,47.

497 Matthew 1:18

498 Matthew 1:20.

499 Matthew 1:23.

500 Luke 1:31.

501 Luke 1:35.

502 Luke 1:35.

503 Genesis 1:2; John 3:5,6,8; Galatians 4:29.

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Well many may yet say: of what use is this sign to Ahaz if its fulfilment is a long, long way off? Well given that Ahaz and the people were afraid of Syria and Israel and what they would do to Judah and Jerusalem, this promise of a Messiah some time in the future would serve to show that David's line, from which the Messiah, Immanuel, is to come, will survive for a long time to come. The kingdom, therefore would not perish in his day and the longer the promise took to be realised meant the stronger the promise of Judah's continuance.

[iii] The conversation with Ahaz resumes. (Isaiah 7:15-17).

7:15,16.

The NKJV assumes that verse 15 refers to the promised one, for the translators have capitalised the pronoun “*He*” to indicate a reference to the Messiah. The NKJV text reads thus:

15 Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. **16** For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings. **17** The Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father's house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.

Since we have argued that verse 14 should stand alone, and that verses 15 and 16 are spoken to Ahaz, I will discuss these verses using my translation.

Verses 15 and 16 seem to be addressed to Ahaz because of the singular “*you*” in verse 16, (which clearly indicates Ahaz). The reference to eating “*butter and honey,*” and to knowing good and refusing evil, signify a child who is weaned and who has come out of infancy. Now we are making the assumption that the Lord is directing attention to the young lad that He asked Isaiah to bring along, namely, Shear-Jashub. In other words we have a young baby here, and the Lord is pointing to him in Isaiah's arms and is saying that when he as a child is weaned and can discern right from wrong, then the confederacy will be over.

A word must be said about my translation of verse 16 as this is very different to the NKJV and other translations. Significant in the translation I have offered for Isaiah 7:16 is that Ahaz was the main problem. It was Ahaz who had despised the land and had cut himself off with regard to it, not that he had a fear and a dread of the land. Perhaps what has influenced the type of translation to be found in the modern versions is the statement we read in Isaiah 7:2 where Ahaz was so afraid

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that *“his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.”*⁵⁰⁴ But, Ahaz loathed the land and all it stood for. We see this in his policy as explained in 2Kings and 2Chronicles. Another way of rendering this second part of Isaiah 7:16 is as follows: *“forsaken shall be the land (which you have abhorred) from the face of the two kings.”* This sets well with the AKJV which has *“the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.”*

So we learn that Ahaz abhorred the land, so that effectively, he tore it in pieces.⁵⁰⁵ By either description his actions indicated his rebellious heart and his utter disdain for the things of God. Nevertheless he is being told that the two kings (Rezin and Pekah) will be removed from the land which he has so desecrated and ruined. Ahaz might have thought that all would be well after hearing verse 16, because Rezin and Pekah would be removed from the situation. However he was to be sorely mistaken because the Lord had a further message of which verse 17 forms an opening salvo.

7:17.

Having given Ahaz a prophecy about the imminent removal of Rezin and Pekah from the land linked to Shear-Jashub's development, the Lord continues to address Ahaz personally in verse 17, but this time there appears added force as suggested by the repeated use of the word *“upon.”* We cannot help but be reminded of the Lord's wrath and terror which would come *“upon”* all the proud and lofty things on that final day as depicted in Isaiah 2:12-21. The forcefulness and inevitability comes through in the use of second person singulars, *“you,”* and *“your”* (which comes twice). There would be a time, an extraordinary time, coming upon Ahaz, his people and his father's house, which had not be known since the division of the kingdom at the time of Rehoboam (Solomon's son). By such an expression we are to understand that it would be a terrible time! So what was this judgement to be? We are told that the Lord would bring the king of Assyria upon Ahaz! But it would not be just upon Ahaz, because Ahaz was the king, and so it would also come upon the people, namely, the entire nation. None of us acts alone. When we act, there are people around us who will be affected and those who will be influenced. How we need to be careful to keep close to the Lord so that what we do, does not inadvertently cause difficulty elsewhere!

504 Isaiah 7:2.

505 Following Harman's translation. **Hartman.** *Isaiah.* P98.

[2] Assyria is coming! (Isaiah 7:18-25).

In the last part of Isaiah chapter seven we have the prophecy of days and a day which will come upon the nation, and which will lead to their end. In a sense verse 17 acts as a bridge between the conversation the Lord had with Ahaz, and the series of statements we find from verses 18 to 25. A time would be coming on Ahaz and all his house which had never been known! As we have noted, this was to be a day (and days) of great disaster which had not happened since the split between the northern and southern kingdoms, when Ephraim left Judah in the time of Rehoboam, Solomon's son.

In chapter five we learnt of a distant nation for which the Lord would whistle to bring it against Judah.⁵⁰⁶ Now we learn that the instrument of God's judgement on Judah was to be Assyria.⁵⁰⁷ Ahaz was afraid of the threat from Syria and Israel, and sought help from Assyria, but now Assyria would be the means of God's punishment! First, it was to fall upon Ahaz which we find when Tiglath-Pilneser afflicted him.⁵⁰⁸ Then also, it was to be on his father's house, and so later we read that Hezekiah suffered invasion at the hands of Sennacherib king of Assyria.⁵⁰⁹ The final act of destruction would come in the days of Zedekiah when Jerusalem eventually fell at the hands of Assyria's successors Babylon.⁵¹⁰

We then read of four things that will come to pass *"in that day,"* and on *"the same day."*⁵¹¹ Clearly the time is a particular set day. We can see here the imminent judgement on the land via Assyria, but we should not forget that this prophesies of the final judgement too.

7:18,19.

The emphasis of this coming judgement seems to be that of a curse. First, the fly will come from distant Egypt and the bee from Assyria.⁵¹² These insects native to their original countries would now be found as native to Judah. These insects would rest in all the places where insects would normally be found so that the land no more felt like the land of promise, but more like its distant neighbours.⁵¹³ What characterised Egypt and Assyria in terms of its fauna would now be found in Judah. The Egyptian fly and the Assyrian bee would now rest all over the place but

506 Isaiah 5:26-30.

507 Isaiah 7:17.

508 2Chronicles 28:20.

509 2Kings 18:13.

510 2Kings 25:1.

511 Isaiah 7:18,20,21,23.

512 Isaiah 7:18.

513 Isaiah 7:19.

Studies in Isaiah.

particularly in valleys that had become “*desolate*” and would rest on “*thorns*.” Such descriptions speak of a land that has been overrun and has succumbed to the curse of the fall again. It speaks of a land that is no longer cultivated and cared for.

7:20-22.

Next we discover that on the “*same day*” the king of Assyria will shave the land just as a man who has been shaved entirely, removing all bodily hair, so that no hair remains at all.⁵¹⁴ This speaks of shame and lack of honour. Also, we find that there will be so few people left in the land that there will be an abundance of food for those left.⁵¹⁵ When the land is full of people it may strain to support the population, but if a large proportion of the people are removed, then that food which is left now appears as an abundance for the few left behind. Thus the animals kept alive by a man will supply the needs of many so that there will be an oversupply of milk.⁵¹⁶ As a result the man will be enabled to “*eat curds*” and people will also have “*honey*.” The first signifies milk that is processed, and so not simply milk as drunk. The second (“*honey*”) signifies the sweet and luxurious delicacies.⁵¹⁷

7:23-25.

Yet another thing we find will be that all the great vineyards (which were worth a great deal of money) will now be nothing more nor less than “*briers and thorns*.”⁵¹⁸ That is, they will be overrun and despoiled. The emphasis of this whole passage is on the curse. The word “*thorns*” occurs four times at verses 19, 23, 24, and 25. It is accompanied by the word “*briers*” (literally – a sharp point) three times at verses 23, 24, and 25. The significance of this is to indicate the sudden appearance and sharp wounding nature of these growths. No longer are there prosperous vineyards, instead there is a wasteland good only for making bows and arrows (sharp points).⁵¹⁹ No longer is it fit for cultivation, for now it is only a place where wild animals (“*oxen*” and “*sheep*”) may roam.⁵²⁰

What then can we learn from this as far as the final judgement is concerned? Verses 18 and 19 indicate an infestation of insects, verse 20 suggests shame and dishonour, verses 21 and 22 indicate a sparse population and so is devoid of life and vibrancy, whilst verses 23 to 25 depict a

514 Isaiah 7:20.

515 Isaiah 7:21,22.

516 Isaiah 7:22.

517 Isaiah 7:22.

518 Isaiah 7:23.

519 Isaiah 7:24.

520 Isaiah 7:25.

Studies in Isaiah.

land of harshness, cutting and violence. These descriptions of a desolate land despoiled of its population would be fulfilled eventually after Nebuchadnezzar's invasions. However they also depict a dim and partial picture of hell. To be harried by insects, cut by thorns and constantly facing danger, and with no prospect of life and abundance this is a dreadful place.

Chapter 15.

Isaiah 8:1-10.

Rejecting Shiloah yields the flood of judgement.

Textual analysis.

- 1 Moreover the **Lord** said to me,
“take a large scroll, and write on it with a man’s pen concerning Maher Shalal-Hash-Baz. 2 And I will take for
Myself faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.”
- 3 Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son.
Then the **Lord** said to me,
“call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz; 4 for before the child shall have knowledge to cry ‘my father’ and ‘my
mother,’ the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria.”
- 5 The **Lord** also spoke to me again, saying:
6 “inasmuch as these people
refused the waters of **Shiloah** that flow softly,
and rejoice in Rezin and in Remaliah’s son;
7 now therefore, behold, the **Lord** brings up over them
the waters of the River, strong and mighty—
the king of Assyria and all his glory;
he will go up over all his channels and go over all his banks.
8 He will pass through Judah,
he will overflow and pass over,
he will reach up to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of Your land, O
Immanuel.
- 9 “Be shattered, O you peoples,
and be broken in pieces!
Give ear, all you from far countries.
Gird yourselves,
but be broken in pieces;
gird yourselves,
but be broken in pieces.
10 Take counsel together,
but it will come to nothing;
speak the word,
but it will not stand,
for God *is* with us.”

This section describes a conversation between the Lord and the prophet. Twice we read that “*the Lord said*” to Isaiah, and then once we hear that the “*Lord also spoke*” to the prophet. and in the last part there is a declaration of doom for the people of Immanuel's land.

Studies in Isaiah.

With the words “*moreover*” in verse 1 we have moved into a new section but we are still in the days of Ahaz.⁵²¹ It is to be noted here, though, that the words of God are brought to Isaiah the prophet, and we see in this a gradual turning from the focus on the king, to a focus on those who truly believe (like Isaiah). The passage can be divided into two parts. First we have the Lord's instructions to publish the name of Isaiah's second son in verses 1 to 4, and what this means. Then second, we have the Lord telling Isaiah that the people had rejected the Lord and so the Assyria enemy would be approaching like a flood.

[1] Isaiah's second son was also to be a sign. (Isaiah 8:1-4).

[2] The rejection of Shiloah yields the flood of Assyria. (Isaiah 8:5-9).

[1] Isaiah's second son was also to be a sign. (Isaiah 8:1-4).

8:1,2.

We have in these opening words a prophecy which not only involves Isaiah and his family, but makes them a focus. They already have one son, (Shear-Jashub), but now they are about to have a second. But before even the conception, Isaiah is told to publish the boy's name.⁵²² The text is a little clearer in the NASB version:

1 Then the Lord said to me, “Take for yourself a large tablet and write on it in ordinary letters: Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey. **2** And I will take to Myself faithful witnesses for testimony, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.”⁵²³

The purpose was not simply to give the newborn son a name, but to speak of the certainty of the coming judgement upon the land. Isaiah is required to get a “*large*” tablet and he must write in “*ordinary*” letters. This is clearly to demonstrate the importance that everyone in the land could see and understand the message. Further, two witnesses are to be there to testify that the prophecy was true.⁵²⁴ Uriah was the one who helped Ahaz in his wicked schemes to make a copy of the pagan altar used in Damascus.⁵²⁵ Using such a witness gave greater authenticity in human terms to the

521 Isaiah 8:1.

522 Isaiah 8:1.

523 Isaiah 8:1, NASB.

524 Deuteronomy 19:15; Isaiah 8:2.

525 2Kings 16:10.

Studies in Isaiah.

prophecy. All of this is to signify both the certainty and the clarity so that no one, neither the simplest soul nor the shyest, would miss the fact that the Assyrian invasion will come. It is hardly necessary for us to add that we are equally bound to make plain and to declare loudly and with intelligence the gospel of Jesus Christ and rescue from the great wrath to come.

8:3,4.

In chapter 7 Ahaz had rejected the Lord's offer of setting a sign. The Lord gave His own sign – the virgin shall be with child – but here we have a sign given linked to Isaiah. His wife (the prophetess – so called because she was married to the prophet), gave birth normally to a child whose name was given of the Lord, and which was to be none other than the message written on the large tablet in verse 1, namely “*swift is the booty, speedy is the prey*” or in the Hebrew, “*Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.*”⁵²⁶ Before this child was able to recognise its own mother and father by name, Damascus (Syria) and Samaria (Israel) would be taken by the Assyrians.⁵²⁷ Damascus was taken captive in 732 BC and Samaria in 722 BC. But for our purposes the key teaching here is to recognise the intimately close connection between the message of judgement the Lord brings and the prophet's very own life. His child was to bear the name that was written as a placard for all to see clearly that God was going to deal with Judah's enemies (Syria and Israel), and that Ahaz ought not to fear them. How we ought to adorn the gospel! Our very lives, the things that we normally do and that occupy our time, ought to be characterised by the very flavour of God's great goodness, glory and grace.

[2] The rejection of Shiloah yields the flood of Assyria. (Isaiah 8:5-9).

8:5,6.

Ahaz had rejected the offer of grace and so we discover that the Lord no longer speaks to the king individually. Instead we have a public message of warning on a large tablet, and then the Lord speaks particularly to Isaiah. Notice how verses 5 and 6 are put. We have the Lord speaking expressly to Isaiah, and the Lord speaking about the people of God as “*these people*” as though they are not present. So what will transpire? Well the Lord tells Isaiah exactly how these people have responded, and what the consequence will be for them. In verse 6 we find that the people had

526 Isaiah 8:3.

527 Isaiah 8:4.

Studies in Isaiah.

*“refused the waters of Shiloah.”*⁵²⁸ The people despised the gentle flowing waters of Shiloah. But what does *“Shiloah”* represent? This word only occurs here and in a verse in Nehemiah where it is given as *“Shelah”*:

Shallun the son of Col-Hozeh, leader of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate; he built it, covered it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and repaired the wall of the Pool of Shelah by the King’s Garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David.⁵²⁹

The Hebrew word means “sent” and is probably to be closely connected with the spring of Gihon where Solomon was anointed as king, and the pool of Siloam mentioned in the gospel of John.⁵³⁰ These waters flowed *“softly,”* and this word is highly significant. It has the meaning of “a gentle sound, murmur, sigh” or “a gentle flow, a gentle mode of action.” The Lord had come to them in grace and gentility. He had offered Ahaz grace and a sign. But both he, and now the people as well, had rejected Him. And so instead of the gentle waters that flowed through to Jerusalem at the pool of Shiloah, they were going to reap the terrible floods of the soon coming Assyrian invasion. Can anyone miss the clear application here? If we reject the gentle coming of the Saviour who came in weakness and was taken and nailed to a cross on our behalf, what will we face but the flood of God's full wrath when He returns?

8:7,8.

The people rejected the Lord's gentle approach and favoured Rezin of Syria and Remaliah's son (Pekah) of Israel. They exulted and rejoiced in the two kings, whereas they ought to have delighted in the Lord (the real and true King). As a result they will face the Lord's judgement. This is not vindictive or capricious. It is because rejecting the wholesome best for which we were made, and choosing the rank nonsense this world offers, is an affront to the Lord who is pure and holy. The judgement is described in verses 7 and 8 and is one of those picturesque and graphic descriptions. Note first that Assyria is coming not of their own decision, but at the Lord's command. Assyria along with its king will come as the waters of the river of that land (Euphrates) in the form of a flood overspilling its banks. We read that the Assyrian king will *“pass through,” “overflow”* and will *“pass over.”* These expressions serve to indicate a swift gliding action like running water,

528 Isaiah 8:6.

529 Nehemiah 3:15.

530 John 9:7; 2Chronicles 32:30; 33:14; 1Kings 1:33,38,45.

Studies in Isaiah.

an inundation that sweeps away, and an overflowing action that swamps and causes perishing. This rapid flooding action of water that rises and rises will only reach to the neck however, indicating that some may be saved.⁵³¹ At the end of verse 8 we find that the Assyrian monarch will fly down and swamp and fill the whole land.⁵³² It is ironic that the land is called here by the name which means “*God with us*” (Immanuel), for God had offered them the gentle waters but they had rejected Him. If we too reject the Lord at any point we dare not bear the name “Christian” for we shall be just as hypocritical.

8:9,10.

The last two verses of this section (verses 9 and 10), are a quote of the invading Assyrians. These are the words of a conquering army that taunts the people for their misplaced (hypocritical) trust in God being with them. Notice how there is an emphasis on the outcome of ruin and destruction. It is not the land, but the peoples who are to be “*shattered*” and “*broken in pieces*” (mentioned three times).⁵³³ The people may plan, organise, and hold conference, but all their efforts will fail utterly, and then comes the taunt of the invading Assyrian army, for they claim that rather than the land being “*Immanuel,*” God was in fact with the invaders (“*for God is with us*”). This is in agreement with what the Lord had foretold in verse 7, for it was He who brought the Assyrians in to overflow the land.

531 Isaiah 8:8.

532 The Assyrian king is sometimes depicted as a lion with wings. These statues can be seen in the British Museum.

533 Isaiah 8:9.

Chapter 16.

Isaiah 8:11-22.

Establishing godliness in a dark world.

Textual analysis.

11 For the **Lord** spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying:

12 “do not say, ‘a conspiracy,’ concerning all that this people call a conspiracy,
nor be afraid of their threats,
nor be troubled.

13 The **Lord of hosts**,
Him you shall hallow;
let Him be your fear,
and *let Him be your dread.*

14 He will be
as a sanctuary,
but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel,
as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

15 And many among them shall stumble;
they shall fall and be broken, be snared and taken.”

16 Bind up the testimony,
seal the law among my disciples.

17 And I will wait on the **Lord**,
who hides His face from the house of Jacob;
and I will hope in Him.

18 Here am I and the children whom the **Lord** has given me!
We are for signs and wonders in Israel from the **Lord of hosts**, who dwells in Mount Zion.

19 And when they say to you,
“seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,”
should not a people seek their **God**?

Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?

20 To the law and to the testimony!
If they do not speak according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them.

21 They will pass through it hard-pressed and hungry;
and it shall happen, when they are hungry, that they will be enraged and curse their king and their **God**, and look upward.

22 Then they will look to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish;
and *they will be* driven into darkness.

Studies in Isaiah.

In this section we find the Lord giving Isaiah further encouraging instructions to separate from the people and to take courage.⁵³⁴ From verse 11 up to verse 15 we seem to have a word from the Lord given personally to Isaiah. The remaining verses, from 16 to 22, appear to be Isaiah's instructions based on His word from the Lord to those around him.

[1] A personal word. (Isaiah 8:11-15).

[2] A question of discipling. (Isaiah 8:16-22).

[1] A personal word. (Isaiah 8:11-15).

8:11-13.

There seems to be a strong rebuke for Isaiah here, for the words are not soft. The Lord had a “*strong*” hand on the prophet and the Hebrew word translated “*instructed*” signifies a chastening correction. Isaiah was not to do what these people were doing. He is told not to walk along the road or path that this people followed. His life should be different. Isn't this still the same today? We are so pressed to walk and live like everyone else, but we are called to walk a different path. Not the broad way to destruction, but the narrow path which leads towards heaven.⁵³⁵ The path or way this people took is spelt out for us in verse 12. It is further described in verse 19. But whereas verse 12 tells us clearly the overview that God was concerned about, verse 19 spells out the details that Isaiah relates to the faithful ones.

The people were saying in effect that any opposition to the nation, to the king, and to what they deemed as common sense was a “*conspiracy*.” Clearly Isaiah's messages were rocking the boat and disturbing the peace. The prophet is told not to be afraid of the people's threats. Instead he should have the Lord as his dread and fear. It is all a question of respect and honour. Will you honour the Lord fully, or will you be afraid of man? We have already seen this theme in Isaiah.⁵³⁶ It is one which we need to hear often because we are constantly being taunted that the way we have chosen is so irrational and doesn't make sense. It isn't, of course, for it is the most reasonable thing to honour and worship God.⁵³⁷ Here Isaiah is called to “*hallow*” the Lord, and let Him be his “*fear*” and “*dread*.” The people were afraid of Israel and Syria as their hearts were “*moved as the*

534 Isaiah 8:11.

535 Matthew 7:13.

536 Isaiah 2:22.

537 Romans 12:1,2.

Studies in Isaiah.

trees of the woods are moved with the wind,” but Isaiah was to demonstrate a true fear of God.⁵³⁸ Isaiah was not to be afraid as the people were. He was to be separate and set apart. He was to have the Lord as his focus for reverence and his cause of trembling. Yes indeed the Lord truly does cause the knocking of knees and the trembling of teeth!

8:14,15.

But then we have great grace here as well, for the Lord is not just a cause for fear – He is this to be sure – but also He is *“a sanctuary,”* that is, a temple.⁵³⁹ Thus the temple in Jerusalem is not the place of singular importance but the Lord is. How many times do we read in Scripture that the Lord Himself is a place of refuge, a strong tower, and a defence?⁵⁴⁰ This is such a wonderful theme! It points ultimately to the doctrine of our union which Christ so wonderfully taught in the New Testament.⁵⁴¹ Christ is the one who shields us with His love. He has gone before us and is beneath us. He encompasses us and He holds us in His hands.⁵⁴² How we should bathe in His presence and consider all things with reference to Him! How we should run to Him often as a child does to their father! Let Him be our sum and substance!

For the people, however, He is no sanctuary for they have rejected His grace. Instead He is a stone and a rock that causes them to stumble and be repulsed.⁵⁴³ The imagery here suggests both a stone on the ground that you do not see and therefore trip over, and also a rocky outcrop that is absolutely impossible to climb over. There is difficulty at your feet and harshness above your head. This is how the Lord is to those who reject Him. Then also He is a bird trap and a baited prison house to those who reject the truth. Notice that it is *“both the houses of Israel”* and also *“to the inhabitants of Jerusalem,”* so that all of Israel encompassing both kingdoms is being referenced here.⁵⁴⁴ Once again we see the Lord's grace for not all will stumble and fall. It is only *“many among them”* who will do so.⁵⁴⁵ There is a remnant who will be saved. Those that reject the Lord will *“stumble,” “fall,” “be broken,” “be snared,”* and will be *“taken.”*⁵⁴⁶ There seems to be a progression here. They will totter first and then will succumb to a fall. This fall will render them

538 Isaiah 7:2.

539 Isaiah 8:14.

540 Psalm 9:9; 14:6; 28:8; 46:7; 91:2,9; 94:22; 141:8; 142:5; Proverbs 18:10; Jeremiah 16:19.

541 Romans 6; Ephesians 1.

542 Deuteronomy 33:27; John 10:28,29.

543 Isaiah 8:14.

544 Isaiah 8:14.

545 Isaiah 8:15.

546 Isaiah 8:15.

Studies in Isaiah.

crippled or broken. As a result they will be ensnared and trapped and then taken captive. This is what the world does to a sinner. It is what the Assyrians did here to Israel and Syria and (to a lesser extent) to Judah at this time. It is what Nebuchadnezzar will do to Judah in the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Any who fear man and fear what he will do will stumble, totter, be broken, and eventually become captives to worldliness.

[2] A question of discipling. (Isaiah 8:16-22).

There now follows a lesson in how to disciple those who believe. This section appears to be Isaiah's instructions to the faithful. I make this assessment because of verses 17 and 18, for there we find reference to the Lord. Isaiah is going to *“wait on the Lord”* and he then refers to the children *“whom the Lord”* had given to him. So it seems that we have a lesson to disciples.

8:16,17.

Isaiah is instructed by the Lord and so carries out the instructions given. He must *“bind up the testimony”* and *“seal the law”* only for his own disciples.⁵⁴⁷ Testimony implies the law expressed in the life of a person. How damning this is! No longer is the word to be spoken freely, but is now for the favoured ones – the disciples – who are eager to hear what the Lord has to say. How vital it is to give attention both in hearing and doing what the Lord has to say. If we neglect and vacillate, we too may lose the privilege of God's law and testimony!

So Isaiah issues instructions to ensure that teaching is prioritised to the disciples. The prophet now wants to *“wait on the Lord”* and *“hope in Him”* because God has hidden His face from the house of Jacob (the people of deceit). It is significant that Judah is now referred to by this old name as if to emphasise their dissembling and deceitful ways. Isaiah can only turn to the Lord and wait and hope in Him when things seem so bad for the nation. This is our situation too. And although we are not a theocracy, when things seem to be falling apart morally and spiritually all around, our only recourse is to wait and hope in the Lord.⁵⁴⁸ This sounds like a desperate thing but it isn't. Perhaps we have been brought to such a situation because we do not wait and hope on the Lord nearly as much as we ought! If we (true believers) had waited more on the Lord and hoped in Him more, then maybe we would have been more effective in representing Christ, and maybe things would not have got so bad? I do not want to lay any guilt trip on us at this point, but it is

547 Isaiah 8:16.

548 By the term “theocracy” we mean government of the people directly by God.

Studies in Isaiah.

interesting that when things got bad in Ezra and Nehemiah's days they confessed the sins of their nation as though they themselves were complicit.⁵⁴⁹

Waiting and hoping in the Lord is what we want to do isn't it? Doesn't the lover yearn for their beloved? Surely we want to hang on every word that the Lord issues? Surely we want to be about our Father's business?

8:18.

Isaiah then gives a series of stirring and rousing appeals to those who follow the Lord along with him. He begins by going back to his commissioning. When the Lord asked the question: *"Whom shall I send?"* Isaiah had responded: *"Here am I! Send me."*⁵⁵⁰ Here in this rousing speech he begins with the same words (*"Here am I ..."*). It reminds us of the Reformer Martin Luther who when all were opposed to his call for reform declared: "Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me."⁵⁵¹ There is a sense of a battle cry in Isaiah. A rallying to the banner. Isaiah has openly declared that he stands with God. What is more he has made it a part of his life and his family as evidenced by calling his sons by names which were messages to the nation. It really was the case that his own children were *"signs"* because their very names were part of the message from God. It is possible to take this word *"children"* in the sense of disciples. I see no reason why this cannot also be true. Isaiah was deeply concerned for the glory of God and his great, good news, and it would be natural for him to lead his own family in the ways of the Lord, and thence further, others who would be disciplined by him as part of his wider family.

8:19.

After making a clear and open stand for God, Isaiah next issues a note of warning. It would appear that the prevailing view of the people in his time concerning guidance and seeking truth, was that one ought to seek it from anything except the Lord. Thus mediums, wizards and other soothsayers were doing a roaring trade. It is remarkable that the people had come to this state given the Lord's warning to them before they entered the promised land.⁵⁵² But Isaiah warns his disciples (and children) that they ought not to do this. We can imagine some detailed study here of which we have the mere summary. The advice by everyone was to seek these alternative means of gaining

549 Ezra 9:6-15; Nehemiah 9.

550 Isaiah 6:8.

551 Although there is debate about what Luther actually said at the Diet of Worms in 1521 these words clearly sum up his intention and purpose.

552 Deuteronomy 18:9-14.

Studies in Isaiah.

knowledge rather than seeking the Lord. We still have such in operation today but I would like to remind the reader that modern science surely comes under this heading as well. I know that may be quite something to swallow, but think carefully about this. Anything which does not have the Lord as the source of knowledge is an alternative to truth. Modern science denies the existence of God. True science does not. I will not continue here on this theme.⁵⁵³ These mediums, soothsayers and wizards were those who muttered in half-open ideas and whispered in a secretive way. This is all opposite to what the Lord was doing in openly revealing Himself for all to hear. Why were the people seeking such dead options? Perhaps they were the acceptable and the norm. Perhaps they were so appealing to the senses or to the sins of the common people. Isaiah roundly implores his followers to seek the Lord at all costs, for seeking these mediums and wizards was merely seeking the dead for life which was a joke if not so desperately sad and wicked.

8:20.

It is not just that the disciples should not seek in such murky and dead places, but the fact of the matter was that they had the most wonderful place in which to seek. It is given here in these words: *“to the law and the testimony.”*⁵⁵⁴ That is where all should seek. This is a really lovely picture of the *living* word. It is not just to the law – the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) – but to the law *and* to the testimony. We have the revealed (hence objective) truth as revealed by the Lord. The ten commandments were written by the very finger of God, but the entire Bible (of which the “Law” or the Pentateuch is the first part) is given by inspiration of God, and so is His very word to us. But then also we have the *“testimony.”* In Exodus we find that this is another name for the law which was to be placed in the ark of the covenant.⁵⁵⁵ However I think we are justified in seeing in this word *“testimony”* something more concerning the word of God. Thus, testimony is the word of God expressed within and through the true believer. It never ceases to amaze me that the Bible – the word of God – is very similar in many ways to the Lord Jesus – the Word of God. When a person is born again they have the Word of God within them. Do we not know this intimately? When the Lord said to the disciples in the upper room that He would not leave them as orphans but would be with them and sup with them along with the Father, we get excited. However the Spirit of God has also put the word of God (the Bible) inside of us. James speaks of the

553 I have written on this elsewhere. See: **Mike Viccary**. *Sin, Science and Salvation*. Available free on request – contact the doc.mike@gmail.com

554 Isaiah 8:20.

555 Exodus 25:10,16.

Studies in Isaiah.

“implanted word,” and it is this which is able to save us.⁵⁵⁶ Peter too has a similar theme in his second letter.⁵⁵⁷ This word which is able to save, needs to be unpacked and worked out. The Holy Spirit takes the word of God and applies it to our hearts. As we learn and study and meditate on the word of God seeing the Word of God throughout, we become living epistles and we thereby have a true and living testimony. Notice how this phrase *“the law and the testimony”* is described in the next sentence as *“this word.”*

There is a stark warning here and one which is used as a device for discernment. We would do well to appreciate its teaching. If people do not speak according to the law, and according to the testimony it is because they are in darkness and have *“no light in them.”* We therefore have a twofold test. People must speak according to the teaching of Scripture. This is non-negotiable. But equally it must also be a *living, vital and experienced* understanding of this law (i.e. testimony) and not just an appeal to the dead letter. In short the people must *know* the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many who claim to know the Lord but who sidestep the Bible in all sorts of ways. Some do this claiming ecstatic experiences and prefer their prophecies to the serious study of Scripture. These folk use Scripture in a sort affirming way to give credence to their 'prophecies.' Others just outright deny aspects of the Bible. Maybe a doctrine is rejected, or perhaps a liberal view of aspects of truth are held. All of these types of people must be lovingly withstood. Then there are different folk whose orthodoxy you could not fault. These seem to explain and speak of the Bible in terms we may agree with, but they have no life in them. Their experience is dry and second-hand. They cannot speak as though the Lord were indeed their Master, Friend and Lord. These with equal force must in love be similarly admonished. What is vital is a true knowledge of God. This can only come about first through new birth and then secondly through a godly study of the Bible energised and directed by the Spirit of God.

8:21,22.

Those who do not have the light, and who therefore do not have fellowship with the apostles and with the Father, will be in darkness and will suffer as a consequence.⁵⁵⁸ These folk will become hard pressed and hungry. Light brings truth and sight! We can see our need and we can see the source of life and health. Those who continue in darkness will merely stumble and grope without hope. When a person continues in such a state of blindness it becomes difficult and then hard. Soon

556 James 1:21.

557 2Peter 1.

558 1John 1:1-4.

Studies in Isaiah.

they become exasperated if they receive no guidance or help. If you do not know where the food is how could you find it if you were in darkness? Sadly these people who continue in such a state of ignorance then begin to curse the king and the Lord. How we excuse sin! How we like to lay the blame elsewhere! Didn't our first parents do this when they sinned? These folk have nothing good or helpful to say. When they look up they curse the king and the Lord. When they look down to earth all they can see is nothing but gloom and darkness. There is no hope! This is what the apostle Paul stated for those who were outside the people of God. They had no hope because they were without God in the world.⁵⁵⁹ In such a condition they will not only continue in darkness but will, in fact, be driven to it. Such is the lot of those who reject the only source of light and truth. The darkness they know will become more dark. Sadly this is the experience of many today who cannot find any help nor hope in the world. They turn to distractions. Be it drugs, sex, or entertainment they drift into deeper darkness. You only have to chart the development of the film industry. Look at the certification and how the standards of the certificates issued have loosened. What was once deemed as too offensive or too harsh is now commonplace. Our senses are dulled to the mayhem and mass murder that permeates the films. Our tastes have become more dulled and seared along with conscience to accept the formulaic Hollywood blockbusters. We ought to be ashamed. We ought to repent and consider the wonders of God's great salvation and we ought to be able to show this dying world how wonderfully good the Lord is. Oh for a testimony that reflects the law and the great character of our great God!

559 Ephesians 2:12.

Chapter 17.

Isaiah 9:1-7.

A Child is born!

Textual analysis.

1 Nevertheless the gloom *will not be* upon her who *is* distressed, as when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and after-ward more heavily oppressed *her*; *by* the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. **2** The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.

3 You have multiplied the nation *and* increased its joy; they rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest, as *men* rejoice when they divide the spoil. **4** For You have broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. **5** For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, and garments rolled in blood, will be used for burning *and* fuel of fire.

6 For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty **God**, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **7** Of the increase of *His* government and peace *there will be* no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgement and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the **Lord of hosts** will perform this.

In this next chapter we are given a wonderful insight into the Lord's great means of deliverance. In chapter 7 we learnt of the sign given to the house of David of the virgin who would give birth pointing us to the Messiah to come. In chapter 8 we learnt that the people had rejected the gentle "*waters of Shiloah*" and preferred to tremble with fear before their adversaries.⁵⁶⁰ Chapter 8 ends with a warning to flee from the common practices of seeking for the truth in strange places, and a statement that those who reject the Lord will be in a darkness that will get darker still. But here in Isaiah chapter 9 the opening words bring hope. It is noteworthy that in the Hebrew Bible chapter 8 ends with verse 1 of chapter 9, and chapter 9 begins at verse 2. However, although the connection is unmistakable, there is a new thought of hope. Chapter 8 ended with no hope for those who walk in darkness. Here there is hope! Our chapter 9 begins with a Hebrew word which is translated in a variety of ways. It opens the chapter (translated as "*nevertheless*" in the NKJV) and the same Hebrew word is also found at verses 4, 5 and 6 (translated as "*for*" in the NKJV) implying that the English arrangement of verses is to be preferred.

560 Isaiah 8:6.

Studies in Isaiah.

Although I have provided only a simple textual analysis above, I will expand on this as we progress. The text can be divided into two parts as follows:

[1] Seeing the light and receiving joy. (Isaiah 9:1-5).

[a] The light has come. (Isaiah 9:1,2).

[b] Joy for the Lord's rescue. (Isaiah 9:3,4).

[2] A Son is given. (Isaiah 9:6,7).

[1] Seeing the light and receiving joy. (Isaiah 9:1-5).

A more detailed analysis of these five verse is provided below:

1 Nevertheless

the gloom *will not be* upon her who *is* distressed,
as when at first He
lightly esteemed
the land of Zebulun
and the land of Naphtali,
and after-ward more heavily oppressed *her*,
by the way of the sea,
beyond the Jordan,
in Galilee of the Gentiles.

2 The people who walked in darkness

have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
upon them a light has shined.

3 You have multiplied the nation *and* increased its joy;
they rejoice before You

according to the joy of harvest,
as *men* rejoice when they divide the spoil.

4 For You have broken

the yoke of his burden
and the staff of his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
as in the day of Midian.

5 For

every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle,
and garments rolled in blood,
will be used for burning *and* fuel of fire.

Although there is a natural break at verse 3 where the subject moves to joy, the overall sense of these five verses is that light has come and it has brought great joy. We shall view the text under two sub-headings:

[a] The light has come. (Isaiah 9:1,2).

[b] Joy for the Lord's rescue. (Isaiah 9:3,4).

[a] The light has come. (Isaiah 9:1,2).

9:1,2.

The chapter opens with an expression of the harsh realities that the far northern tribes faced. They were separated by a significant distance from Jerusalem and this separation from the centre of things was made harder for them when the northern tribes split from Judah in the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam. This northern land was first *"lightly esteemed,"* and then later *"more heavily oppressed,"* as they bore the brunt of the invasion from the Assyrians and others who used their territory as a highway (*"way of the sea"*) to reach the sea ports.⁵⁶¹ This region of Israel (the northern part), was narrow in the sense of being straitened. In other words, their lot was a harsh one. They were never considered of great reputation, and then became oppressed or burdened with heavy loads. Sometimes we find ourselves in such circumstances where there is no way out but to keep going on the same path. No one considers us of any value and so we are overlooked, and then we face heavy burdens in life's journey. It is to such people that the Lord states clearly that the darkness will not come upon them.⁵⁶² They may have walked in such darkness, with oppression and hardship all around them, but the darkness would not be something that will overtake them. The way this light is described as coming in verse 2 is very interesting. Those who have been living in a state of darkness (*"who walked in darkness"*) are described as having *"seen a great light."* The use of the perfect tense here indicates a completed action and so is translated in the past tense (*"have seen"*). They were walking with no light, but then the light has come and they all-at-once saw the light. The second part of verse 2 repeats the idea but expresses it slightly differently. It is not so much that these darkened peoples *"have seen,"* (although that is still true), but that the light has come and *"has shined."* The emphasis is upon the light coming and shining. In other words the effect is dramatic. The light comes, the light shines, and those walking in darkness *"have seen"* it. There is an inevitability about the effect that this *"great light"* has. Such simply cannot be ignored. We read of a similar idea in John's gospel concerning the coming of Christ:

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*⁵⁶³

There will come this tremendous change and turn around for those who live in darkness. These are

561 Isaiah 9:1.

562 Isaiah 9:2.

563 John 1:5, ESV.

Studies in Isaiah.

described as those who lived *“in the land of the shadow of death.”* But now these folk would have the light of the Messiah upon them. Now longer living in the darkness under the shadow of death, in its grip and fear, such will see and be blessed by the great light that shines.

[b] Joy for the Lord's rescue. (Isaiah 9:3,4).

9:3.

The result of the coming of this *“great light”* is great blessing, including a large increase in the nation (*“multiplied”*) yielding a bumper harvest, and great joy into the bargain. Notice how this idea of joy is repeated. We have an increase in *“joy”* and then the idea of *“rejoicing before”* the Lord according to the *“joy of harvest”* which occurs when those who get the fruit *“rejoice.”* Also, when *“spoil”* from some conquest has been shared out there is a great rejoicing. So we have light and joy. These are the twin blessings for those who walk in darkness. The light of understanding which illuminates our condition and reveals the great goodness of God is brought first and, for those who run to it, there is exceeding joy. Isn't this what we experience on coming to Christ? Our eyes are opened and such new knowledge both of our condition revealed for all that it is, and the fact that the Lord has dealt wonderfully with us by coming, dying in our place and rising again, leads to wonderful joy.

9:4,5.

Why is there such joy? What is the explanation? We find the answers in verses 4 to 5 where we have two reasons given, each introduced by the word *“for.”*⁵⁶⁴ In verse 4 we find that the Lord has destroyed that which weighed them down. We are told of this three times each in a slightly different form. The Lord had broken:

the yoke of his burden and
the staff of his shoulder
the rod of his oppressor

A yoke was a beam of wood that lay across the shoulders, used typically to bind oxen together. The staff signified the whip in the hand of the farmer driving the oxen, and the rod was something used

⁵⁶⁴ Isaiah 9:4,5.

Studies in Isaiah.

to bring a punishing blow. Later we read that Assyria were the staff and rod.⁵⁶⁵ Here we are taught that the Lord would remove this entanglement which Ahaz had embroiled the nation in. This destruction of the burden and yoke would be just as that experienced *“in the day of Midian.”* The reference is to the deliverance under Gideon where we read these words:

So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads any more.⁵⁶⁶

These all speak of deliverance from oppression and domination.

Next in verse 5 we read that all the accoutrements of battle which had become soiled in blood from the terrors of warfare are used as fuel to make warm and to cook food. This is a graphic description of the end of hostilities, the end of the need for warriors, and the start of a new era.

[2] A Son is given. (Isaiah 9:6,7).

Further analysis for these two verses is shown below:

6 For

unto us a Child is born,
unto us a Son is given;
and the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counsellor,
Mighty **God**,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of His government and peace *there will be* no end,
upon the throne of David
and over His kingdom,
to order it
and establish it
with
judgement
and justice
from that time forward,
even forever.

The zeal of the **Lord of hosts** will perform this.

9:6.

Having seen the two introductory reasons for the joy that comes when the light shines in verses 4 and 5, we are now treated to the supreme reason. The word *“for”* here gives us our third

565 Isaiah 10:5,24.

566 Judges 8:28.

Studies in Isaiah.

and most important reason for rejoicing in the light. Supremely, the reason for such great joy is the very light itself. Here the light is depicted clearly in verse 6 as the child of promise. Not just the child of promise from chapter 7 (*“behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel”*)⁵⁶⁷ but the child of promise from immediately after the fall of our first parents:

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.*⁵⁶⁸

And then also every other promise of this One to come.⁵⁶⁹ We are given first the fact of the Messiah's coming: *“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.”* We might ask to whom is this addressed? Whom is the *“us”*? I think it clear that these are those who once walked in darkness and who now have had the light shine upon them. Notice the dual nature of this person. He is first described as a *“child”* who is *“born”* signifying the human nature of the Messiah. The virginal nature of the mother is overlooked here as that has already come in chapter 7. What is foremost at this point is the humanity of the One coming. The Hebrew word translated as *“Child”* is: *yeled*, and is derived from the word meaning “to bear” or “to be born” (*yalad*). But then we are also informed that *“unto us a Son is given,”* and here we focus on the divine nature of the *“Son”* (Hebrew: *ben*), and the fact that this one is *“given,”* that is, He is a *gift* to us. What a wonderful pointer to the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity who came as the Son of God and took upon Himself human flesh!

After introducing the dual nature and incarnation of the Messiah, we are then taught that this One will rule for *“the government will be upon his shoulders.”* Why *“shoulders”*? I wonder have you heard the expression that someone has “broad shoulders”? It signifies someone who is able to bear up under the weight of responsibility. They are able to take on a large range of tasks or be responsible for a large number of people and their work. Here we note that the Lord – the Child born and the Son given – is well able to rule and govern and to bear the weight of responsibility on his broad shoulders. There is much in this phrase. He is *able* to bear the weight of judgement and He is also *able* to bear the weight of responsibility. As individuals we fail on both counts. Now the High Priest was one who wore the very names of Israel on his shoulders:

567 Isaiah 7:14.

568 Genesis 3:15.

569 For example, Genesis 49:10; 2Samuel 7:8f.

Studies in Isaiah.

9 “Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: 10 six of their names on one stone and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth. 11 With the work of an engraver in stone, *like* the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. 12 And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod *as* memorial stones for the sons of Israel. So Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders as a memorial.⁵⁷⁰

Thus the Lord took upon Himself the burden of ruling a people.

What type of person is this? What is His character or “*name*”? It appears that we have four compound names using eight words in the Hebrew. We have:

Wonderful Counsellor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.

Sometimes commentators take the first compound name as two separate names (“*wonderful*” and “*counsellor*”). However this destroys the symmetry that seems to be found in the Hebrew. What is signified by these four names?

The first name “*Wonderful Counsellor*” indicates miraculous advice. This is not just astonishing and amazing as indicated by the idea of miracle, but something “from above” or “out of” this present order. The Lord alone can counsel and guide because He knows the end from the beginning and He alone can give us the heavenly perspective. Man is locked into a “this world” perspective which ignores the Lord's counsel. This is the burden of the message of Solomon in Ecclesiastes. Without reference to God (i.e. “*under the sun*”) everything is transitory and ephemeral – or meaningless. We all face problems. Chief amongst these is our sin nature. Only God – the Messiah – has the answer. The apostle John informs us that no one has seen God at any time but the “*only begotten God [Son]*” has “explained” or “declared” Him.⁵⁷¹ The Lord Jesus made the Father known. Isn't this what we read consistently throughout John's account? If you have seen Jesus Christ then you have seen the Father.⁵⁷² We who have not seen Christ in the flesh have nevertheless beheld Him in our hearts by faith and so our fellowship is with the Father and the Son.⁵⁷³

570 Exodus 28:9-12.

571 John 1:18 – See NKJV and NASB.

572 John 14:9.

573 1Peter 1:8; 1John 1:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

The second name “*Mighty God*” indicates the immense power and godhead of the Saviour! We are brought immediately to consider the Creator-ship of the Messiah, for He is truly mighty and all powerful. He is powerful not just in making all things from nothing, but equally in being able to save and provide redemption.

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.⁵⁷⁴

The Mighty One, God the Lord, Has spoken and called the earth from the rising of the sun to its going down.⁵⁷⁵

O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty like You, O Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You.⁵⁷⁶

The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.⁵⁷⁷

The third name is one which may surprise us. We are talking of the second person of the Holy Trinity (the Son) and so when we read of Him being the “*Everlasting Father*” we may be somewhat puzzled. However there should be no confusion for we are being taught that the Messiah is like a Father. He is also eternal or everlasting. What a beautiful thing! To have someone who acts as a leader and as a responsible guide for ever is surely something that yields immense security.

The last name is “*Prince of Peace.*” He is the *captain* or *leader* in peace. This concept is celebrated by the apostle Paul:

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.⁵⁷⁸

He was our pioneer and led the way bringing in peace from all hostilities. Peace is so important. But we perhaps do not recognise that it is the Lord who is the one wronged. We have wronged this Mighty One! In such a situation we may have expected that the one doing the wrong would seek peace, but it is the Lord who brings reconciliation and peace! What a name!

574 Deuteronomy 10:17.

575 Psalm 50:1.

576 Psalm 89:8.

577 Zephaniah 3:17.

578 Ephesians 2:14.

Studies in Isaiah.

These four names are essential ones to hold onto. The *“Wonderful Counsellor”* gives us truth and revelation which we could never know. Nothing on earth matches this. The *“Mighty God”* is able and there is nothing impossible for Him. The *“Everlasting Father”* speaks to us of family, adoption and permanence amongst a world of constant change and worry. The *“Prince of Peace”* brings us to the cross where Christ bought us peace that is true and lasting.⁵⁷⁹ May the Lord bless you as you feed on these thoughts.

9:7.

The section ends with further thoughts on the government of this wonderful person. This government is coupled with peace, for the reign of the King of David is no tyranny, nor is it coercive in any way. It will be a Kingdom where peace, joy and righteousness reign.⁵⁸⁰ We learn also that the rule of Christ will only increase (*“of the increase of His government ...”*). Every newborn of the Kingdom of God, every new Christian, adds to the number in the Kingdom of God, for even when these die, they are merely translated (or promoted) into heaven. This thought is wonderfully illustrated by the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had wherein *“a stone .. cut out without hands”* destroyed the kingdoms of this world and rose to become a *“mountain”* that *“filled the whole earth.”*⁵⁸¹ The whole subject of the kingdom of God is taken up by the Saviour in the gospel accounts in a variety of important ways, but here we learn simply that it will be both ordered and established on the basis of *“judgment and justice,”* and further, that it will be an eternal kingdom.⁵⁸² The terms “judgment and justice” speak of correct righteous or true decisions and verdicts. There will be no corruption nor dissembling, for all will be done in truth, holiness, purity and righteousness.

Such government will be established with the coming of this *“Child”* and *“Son,”* for we read that it will be *“from that time forward,”* and we note further from this statement that the word *“forward”* suggests that once it has come it will continue on (as the dream given to Nebuchadnezzar also clearly shows). Not only has it been established and will continue from the advent of the Messiah, but it will also be eternal (*“even forever”*). How will all of this take place and come about? By no other means than by the zeal and vigour of the Lord of hosts – the Lord of armies.

579 Only Christ can bring rest and peace – see Matthew 11:28-30.

580 Romans 14:17.

581 Daniel 2:34,35,45.

582 Matthew 13:24,31,33,44,45,47,52; 18:23; 20:1; 22:2; 25:1,14; Mark 4:30; Luke 13:18,20.

Chapter 18.

Isaiah 9:8-10:4.

**For all this His anger is not turned away,
but His hand is stretched out still.**

Textual analysis.

8 The **Lord** sent a word against Jacob,
and it has fallen on Israel.

9 All the people will know— Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria— who say in pride and arrogance of heart:

10 “the bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will replace *them* with cedars.”

11 Therefore the **Lord** shall
set up the adversaries of Rezin against him,
and spur his enemies on,

12 The Syrians before
and the Philistines behind;
and they shall devour Israel with an open mouth.

For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand *is* stretched out still.

13 For the people
do not turn to Him who strikes them,
nor do they seek the **Lord of hosts**.

14 Therefore the **Lord** will cut off
head and tail from Israel,
palm branch and bulrush in one day.

15 The elder and honourable, he *is* the head;
the prophet who teaches lies, he *is* the tail.

16 For the leaders of this people cause *them* to err,
and *those who are* led by them are destroyed.

17 Therefore the **Lord**
will have no joy in their young men,
nor have mercy on their fatherless and widows;
for everyone *is* a hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly.

For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand *is* stretched out still.

18 For wickedness burns as the fire;
it shall devour the briers and thorns,
and kindle in the thickets of the forest;
they shall mount up *like* rising smoke.

19 Through the wrath of the **Lord of hosts**
the land is burned up,
and the people shall be as fuel for the fire;
no man shall spare his brother.

Studies in Isaiah.

20 And he shall snatch on the right hand and be hungry;
he shall devour on the left hand and not be satisfied;
every man shall eat the flesh of his own arm.

21 Manasseh *shall devour* Ephraim,
and Ephraim Manasseh; together they *shall be* against Judah.

For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand *is* stretched out still.

#10 1 “Woe to those
who decree unrighteous decrees,
who write misfortune, *which* they have prescribed
2 to rob the needy of justice,
and to take what is right from the poor of My people,
that widows may be their prey,
and *that* they may rob the fatherless.

3 What will you do
in the day of punishment,
and in the desolation *which* will come from afar?

To whom will you flee for help?
And where will you leave your glory?

4 Without Me
they shall bow down among the prisoners,
and they shall fall among the slain.”

For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand *is* stretched out still.

In this passage we are brought a word concerning Israel, the northern kingdom. The reference to “*Jacob*” the patriarch could lead us to consider the whole of “Israel” (i.e. Judah and Israel), but then we find that this word has “*fallen on Israel*” and that it is specifically to “*Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria.*” Furthermore, we hear about the rivalry between Ephraim and Manasseh. This is a message not just to the king or leaders but to all the people, especially those who are proud and arrogant. It is a message in four parts each ending with the same “refrain” which indicates at once that whilst judgement is coming and will fall, it is one which will not be fully complete or satisfied. We have already come across this refrain in Isaiah chapter 5.⁵⁸³ The phrase “*for all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still*” strikes fear into the heart, because although judgement has been meted out in part, the hand is still raised ready to fall in punishment again. It is as though a father has his son over his lap and has spanked him once and then raises the hand again for a second blow. Here we have four occasions, and so four times when the hand of the Lord is raised in judgement. But then the last time we are still in suspense awaiting a fifth blow. We are brought back to the image of the wounded soldier in chapter 1 where the Lord says:

583 Isaiah 5:25.

Studies in Isaiah.

5 Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. **6** From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.⁵⁸⁴

This is our sad state. We deserve punishment again and again. But it is here that we see the wonder of the Saviour's death, for then the anger of God's righteous wrath was completely satisfied so that once His hand had fallen it was no longer raised ready to fall again! Wonder of wonders, praise His name! The divisions for this text are as follows:

[1] Defiance against the word of God. (Isaiah 9:8-12).

[2] Failure to seek the Lord. (Isaiah 9:13-17).

[a] Refusing to seek the Lord. (Isaiah 9:13).

[b] No seeking leads to bad leaders. (Isaiah 9:14-16).

[c] No seeking leads to no fruitfulness. (Isaiah 9:17).

[3] A burning wrath. (Isaiah 9:18-21).

[4] Woe to the unrighteous. (Isaiah 10:1-4).

[1] Defiance against the word of God. (Isaiah 9:8-12).

9:8,9.

We have already noted that this is a message specifically for Israel, the northern kingdom. And it is a message for all the people of that nation who seem to be characterised by pride.

9:10.

In the first part we find that the people of Samaria and Ephraim had not heeded the warnings and had not read the signs of the times. They had foolishly and proudly declared that even though the bricks and trees had fallen, they would rebuild and replant them once again. This is rather like the Frank Sinatra song “My Way” where the emphasis is on self, and self-reliance. It is the sort of teaching that is promoted in society today where people are exhorted to “follow their hearts” and to “pursue their dream,” and that you should never let “them get you down.” It is one thing to be determined and to keep going against the odds, (this is what the Saviour did didn't He?), but quite

⁵⁸⁴ Isaiah 1:5,6.

Studies in Isaiah.

another to act in *self*-determination and *self*-reliance. But what we need is a full dependence upon the Lord, such that we will never give up and will keep on going. Have you ever seen the old second world war derived slogan “keep calm and carry on”? You sometimes see parodies of this. It may be a very good proverb to hold onto, but what is really essential is the basis on which we can “keep calm.” It can never be self. It must be the Lord. We need to recognise daily, moment-by-moment, that we can fully rely on Christ and so therefore “keep calm” because of what He has done and of whom He is. Anything else, that is, reliance on anything else, will incur the righteous wrath of God, not because He is vindictive or capricious, but because reliance on anything else is disastrous in all events. God is good and only does good.⁵⁸⁵ When His wrath falls it is against all that is evil, bad, and wrong. When we rely on ourselves this is hideous and horrible, because the Lord is the best and we were made to be in close relation to Him, and to know Him. In the case of Israel their reliance on themselves was going to be a failure of great proportions.

9:11,12

In verse 11 we read what the Lord would do as a result of Israel's self-reliance. At first glance our text poses a problem. Verse 11 speaks of “*the adversaries of Rezin,*” or, in other words, the king of Syria's enemies, but verse 12 tells us that one of the attackers sent by the Lord will be “*the Syrians.*” It would appear from this that within Syria there was revolt so that the adversaries of Rezin, who formed a confederacy with Israel, were now against him and Israel. Thus, as verse 12, reveals, we have the “*Syrians*” on one side and the “*Philistines*” on the other, so that Israel would be ensnared by a kind of pincer movement from which there would be no escape.

The language of verse 11 is important. We read that it would be the Lord who “*set up the adversaries of Rezin*” to go against him, and that it would be the Lord who would “*spur his enemies on.*” Is the Lord guilty of stirring up trouble and making people fight against one another? By no means! First we recognise that the Lord is sovereign over all and so who are we to challenge Him when He organises nations and kings as He sees fit? But, second we must always remember that God is good and does good, and there is no evil in Him at all. So why then do we read that the Lord set up adversaries and spurred the enemies on? Well I think the sense is that of allowing the wicked to be snared in their own wickedness. In Genesis, we read of the time immediately before the flood that the Lord had striven with men but then there came a point when He would do so no

585 Psalm 119:68.

Studies in Isaiah.

more.⁵⁸⁶ When that point is reached we find that those who have opted for sin and its consequences and who doggedly refuse to repent, will be confirmed in such a course.

He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.⁵⁸⁷

The rebellious nature of men when they refuse to repent and are eager to get their own way will be allowed to take its course. Such will not thwart God's plans, but in His sovereign rule, will actually work out for the good. Such rebellion of men is not according to God's revealed will, but He permits it within bounds to work for the good. We struggle to see this because we have such earth-bound eyes and we are so limited.

And so Israel will be hemmed in by Syria and Philistia because of its stubborn self-reliance and insistence on doing things their way. Syria, who were once in league with Israel, would turn and become its enemy. It does not seem that these two neighbouring nations (Syria to the north and Philistia to the south) were working together. But together they will “*devour*” the northern kingdom of Israel “*with an open mouth.*”⁵⁸⁸ The sense is that there will be nothing left. The attackers would be ravenous and would consume all.

The final death blow would come from Assyria. It is possible that Syria and Philistia were pawns of Assyria, acting at their command, or that the initial attacks from these neighbouring nations were completed by the new super-power (Assyria). Either way, in 722 BC Samaria fell to the Assyrians and in the following years Israel as a nation was no more. Even after this devastating judgement the anger of God was still not satisfied.

[2] Failure to seek the Lord. (Isaiah 9:13-17).

The structure of this passage is straight forward. We have a statement about the general nature of “*the people*” in verse 13 (and also in part of verse 17), followed by two consequences of this state given in verses 14 to 16 and verse 17 as signified by the twice repeated word “*therefore.*” The people did not seek the Lord.⁵⁸⁹ This included the leaders, for these were prominent in leading people astray.⁵⁹⁰ The Lord “*strikes them*” but they refuse to turn.⁵⁹¹ The consequences are twofold

586 Genesis 6:3,7

587 Revelation 22:11.

588 Isaiah 9:12.

589 Isaiah 9:13.

590 Isaiah 9:16.

591 Isaiah 9:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

and they are tragic. When a people will not seek the Lord and turn in repentance to Him from their sin, He will, remove all the godly leaders, and will remove the joy that comes from being fruitful.

[a] Refusing to seek the Lord. (Isaiah 9:13).

9:13.

In verse 13 we are given further insight into how the people of Israel responded to God's judgement. We have to remember that the one who righteously inflicted the just judgement upon Israel for their wrong doing, was the only one who could offer deliverance. How often do we hear people complain against God when things go wrong? “Where was God when ?” is a taunt we hear when disaster happens. The tragedy is that even though this event may have been caused by the Lord, (with full righteous justification), the one suffering it fails to realise that all things are in the hands of God, and that He alone can offer salvation, deliverance, understanding, and reconciliation. We are so used to thinking that we have rights, and that we are autonomous and self-determining individuals, that we forget that we never caused ourselves to exist, and we have no control on how we are to end! We are owned. And we are utterly dependent. Why do we fight against these self-evident truths? I must state again that God is good and He does good. Even the disasters and the tragedies of life are in God's hands. Think of the experience that the Lord Jesus went through! He never harmed anyone but did only what was good and right. Yet still He was arrested, beaten, tried (falsely), and crucified. What a tragedy (it seems to earthly eyes)!⁵⁹² And yet even though it was mere men who took Jesus *“by lawless hands”* and had Him *“crucified and put to death”* we read that Christ was, in fact, *“delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God”*!⁵⁹³ Christ's death and resurrection brought about the most amazing turnaround ever in all history. And so what man intended to bring harm and to usher in ruin, God used to bring life. This is God's way. Often when we can only see tragedy – like the disciples saw when Christ was crucified – the Lord is about to bring life! Given these thoughts it is imperative that we turn to the one we have wronged. He has a righteous cause against us, but if we turn to Him then, like the return of the prodigal to the father, He will run to us with open arms. Seek the Lord! Seek Him who has all things in his hands. Seek the God who chastises, and who reprimands, and who looks to produce righteousness! Perhaps our churches are so desperately weak and all over the place precisely because so few truly seek the

592 Christ's death is no tragedy to the eyes of faith but a glorious truth to drink from.

593 Acts 2:23.

Studies in Isaiah.

Lord. The consequences of this lack of concern to know the Lord truly are plain and self-evident.

[b] No seeking leads to bad leaders. (Isaiah 9:14-16).

Verses 14 to 16 describe the first thing the Lord will do as a result of a refusal to seek Him.

9:14.

The passage begins by telling us that all will be *“cut off,”* for that is what is implied in mentioning the *“head”* and the *“tail,”* which are then illustrated by the terms: *“palm branch”* and *“bulrush.”* The palm branch was, of course, lofty and elevated, and symbolised the land in its richness and glory. The bulrush was found in the marshes and swamps and so signified the lower and less seemly parts. In other words, from the greatest to the lowliest, none will escape. We note also here that this destruction by removal was to occur *“in one day,”* or suddenly.

9:15.

Verse 15 particularises the general statement of verse 14. The head or palm branches were the *“elder and honourable”* which description does not signify their character but their title. We say this because it would appear from verse 17 that all were evil in one way or another. These were the leaders and rulers, the princes, prime ministers, judges and so forth. They are called such because their office was meant to be an honourable position. The tail or bulrushes are particularised as *“the prophet who teaches lies.”* This description suggests that there were good prophets around but generally those who claimed the title were engaged in false prophecy.

9:16.

Verse 16 is the climax to all of this. The leaders were causing people *“to err,”* or go astray. This word can mean “to wander,” or “to vacillate.” James writes of those lacking (true) faith who are *“like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind,”* and who become, *“double-minded”* and are therefore, *“unstable in all ... ways.”*⁵⁹⁴ Paul speaks about those who are being, *“tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine,”* which comes through *“the trickery of men”* who act in *“cunning craftiness”* and *“deceitful plotting.”*⁵⁹⁵ Then also, those led by these leaders are being *“destroyed.”* This word means “to be swallowed up,” or “to be consumed.” When

594 James 1:6,8.

595 Ephesians 4:14.

Studies in Isaiah.

powerful and 'charismatic' or forceful leaders gather a following, the sheep get lost in the crowds. Such leaders who promote their own empires and rule, swallow up the rank and file who suddenly lose their voice and individuality.

Israel's leaders were causing the people to go astray, and the end result of these errors was destruction. We may think of the countless sects, religions, and philosophies which have led people down by-ways and false paths, but what of the many errors that abound even within the 'Christian' church of today? What of the people who claim we should only talk about love and never about the wrath of God? Or what of those who claim that a Christian can never sin? Or how about those who suggest that following Christ leads to material wealth? I heard recently of a lovely believing woman in turmoil over her church leaders who demanded an increase in the weekly collection to pay for a first class air ticket and the top of the range car for the pastor! This is monstrous! What of those who, like the Pharisees, cling to tradition and the doctrines of favourite preachers? We have such error-prone leaders today. Well they may be leaders for a time, but be sure that if the Lord cut off the leaders of Israel, He will do the same today. We shall consider the consequence of a lack of good leadership which results from a refusal to seek the Lord in a moment, but it is pertinent to begin to think of this now. It is not only lies and dishonour, that blossom in such a state, but also the lack of true witness and fair justice.⁵⁹⁶ The Lord will remove the head (honourable) and the tail (prophet-teacher) because of disreputable behaviour including lies. And this in turn will lead to a lack of compassion for the fatherless and widows. When the leadership goes astray it becomes that more difficult to dispense justice and to reach out to the lost, those who have no father and those who have no husband. How essential it is to have good and just leaders! Those who truly know the Lord and who recognise their propensity to go astray, are those who, when the Lord afflicts them, will turn to the one who strikes them and repent.

Now we might ask, where did such awful leaders come from? The only response is to look back at verse 13. If people were not seeking the Lord who chastised them, what else would we expect? In any given situation there will be people who do seek the Lord, and those who do not. If there are more who do not, we should not be surprised to find the godless in positions of leadership. Now the fact that such a situation happens, not just in the nation but also in the church, should give us cause to wonder. Why are the godless allowed to rise to places of influence? Well it is because the people do not seek the Lord and do not challenge one another to be close to Him. It is that simple. If such were going on then this would be reflected in the condition and deportment of the

⁵⁹⁶ Isaiah 9:15,17.

Studies in Isaiah.

leaders. In other words, we have bad leaders who do not know God, because as a general rule we do not seek Him. The antidote to all this? Seek the Lord who chastises us.

[c] No seeking leads to no fruitfulness. (Isaiah 9:17).

9:17.

The second result of a failure to seek the Lord is that there will be no successful outreach or evangelism. This is put in two ways. First we note that the Lord will not have “*joy in their young men.*” This is to be understood in the sense that such young men will be lacking amongst them. Luke records three parables concerning that which was lost in order to teach the heart of God. On the parable of the lost sheep the Lord concluded:

I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.⁵⁹⁷

It is the Father's delight that sinners come to repentance, but those who do not seek the Lord will never come to repentance. It is significant that the Lord points to the “*young men*” in the first instance. Young men signify the vim and vigour of life, with all their aspirations and energy. When the church fails to bring in the young men you can be sure that it is failing to represent the Lord. We make a terrible mistake if we seek to draw the young men at any cost, using any means at our disposal, No! We must only use the gospel. But the question is: why are we not attracting the young men through the preaching and living of the gospel? Where have we gone astray? Well we have not sought the Lord!

The second outcome of not seeking the Lord is that He will not “*have mercy on their fatherless and widows.*” These last two terms are two of the three used in the Old Testament to portray the lost. We have the fatherless or orphans who, without a father, are left helpless without status, family, or business, and who are therefore bereft of all the benefits of a life. The widow leads an equally precarious existence. In those ancient cultures women were subordinate to men and could not own land, nor rise to positions of power and influence. Consequently when a woman's husband died they would be left bereft of life's benefits. The other term is the 'stranger,' or one who has no homeland. Being a foreigner meant that you had no rights. These three terms are found

⁵⁹⁷ Luke 15:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

together 15 times in the Old Testament.⁵⁹⁸ Thus a lack of seeking the Lord leads to a lack of outreach in which the lost are brought in. Note that it is not that the Lord stops having mercy, but that when the people of God refuse to seek Him and live for Him, then the Lord's mercy is not extended to the world. Now the Lord is never constrained and can bring His purposes about as He sees fit, but He does make use of His people. When the people of God are weak and do not seek Him in earnest, the work of evangelism and outreach falls and fails. Does this mean that people are lost through neglect. By no means! For none of those whom the Father has given to the Son will be lost.⁵⁹⁹ What it does mean, however, is that the church will lack and miss out. When the church rises and seeks the Lord fully and in earnest, then such things will change!

Verse 17 ends with a reason for the situation we have been discussing. It is because all of them were hypocrites, saying one thing and doing another. All of them were “*evildoers*” who continually demonstrated their natures because they had no true faith in God. All of them were given to speaking folly, again because their heads were filled with worldly nonsense instead of the goodness which comes from God and His word. How this speaks to our situation in the church today. Where are the young men? Where is the joy of salvation? Where are the widows and fatherless? Do we not have so many leaders who promote their own cause and who spout such nonsense that the people oscillate from one type of teaching to another? Where are the godly teachers whose lives demonstrate the truth and who speak only what God says clearly in His word? If you have the privilege of being under such a leader then rejoice and do everything you can to honour and support them. You are blessed. You are rare. How many struggle under leaders whose knowledge of God is derived from books, whose understanding is taught by the latest fad and fashion devised by men? It ought not to be! What is the solution? Seek the Lord. Seek Him in this day of chastisement. Seek Him to know Him. Out of such will flow love and mercy aplenty! David rejoiced over those who had God as their Lord for out of such true knowledge would flow great blessings:

12 That our sons *may be* as plants grown up in their youth; *that* our daughters *may be* as pillars, sculptured in palace style; **13** *That* our barns *may be* full, supplying all kinds of produce; *that* our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields; **14** *that* our oxen *may be* well laden; *that there be* no breaking in or going out; *that there be* no outcry in our streets. **15** Happy *are* the people who are in such a

⁵⁹⁸ Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29; 16:11,14; 24:17,19,20,21; 26:12,13; 27:19; Psalm 94:6; 146:9; Jeremiah 22:3; Ezekiel 22:7.

⁵⁹⁹ John 6:39; 17:12; 18:9.

Studies in Isaiah.

state; happy *are* the people whose God *is* the Lord!⁶⁰⁰

Let us never think to seek the Lord merely for the blessings, but to seek *Him* who is worthy and our greatest good and goal.

The people would have bemoaned the lack of youthful joy, and would have railed against the poverty brought about by widowhood and orphans. And yet even though the Lord will not have joy in the young men, and His mercy will not be poured out on the needy, all because the people refused to seek Him, nevertheless such a punishment will not satisfy His glory and His goodness. Are we any different? Do people bemoan the lack of youth in our congregations? Do people rail against the poor, the refugee, the homeless and those who struggle? Well it is more than likely because we have not sought the Lord truly. Oh we may hear a few good stirring sermons and we may dot the i's and cross the t's for our fellowship's statement of faith. We may read all the right books and we may be students of the word, but do we really seek the Lord?

Of course doing the very opposite will lead to the opposite effect. If we seek the Lord we will have godly leaders, and there will be fruit amongst the strangers, orphans and widows. Oh how we need to seek Him!

[3] A burning wrath. (Isaiah 9:18-21).

9:18.

In the third section we are given an image of the effects of wickedness and the need for God's anger as an antidote. The section begins in verse 18 by telling us that evil effectively operates as an uncontrollable fire which devours all the dry and tinder-like growth, (*"briers and thorns"*). Evil and wickedness is the focus rather than the people, but we recognise that it is, in fact, the godless people who spread it. We are thus reminded that without a right relationship to the Lord, life becomes arid and dry. As a consequence of a dry life like toast we will be easily burnt, becoming fuel for a fire. The people in the land where wickedness thrives are simply consumed by it.⁶⁰¹

9:19.

Even though it is wickedness that burns and the people who have become dry are arid through not seeking the Lord, we must recognise that all is *"through the wrath of the Lord of*

600 Psalm 144:12-15.

601 Isaiah 9:19.

Studies in Isaiah.

hosts.” It is significant that the Lord is so titled here. He commands all armies and all the “*hosts*” and powers. The apostle Paul teaches us that God's wrath: “*is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*”⁶⁰² And so, just as Pharaoh was responsible for his own rejection of the Lord's repeated offers and warnings in the plagues, we too are at fault if we reject the Lord. Nevertheless the progressive hardening of Pharaoh's heart was brought about by the Lord. The same idea is expressed right at the end of the Bible:

*He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.*⁶⁰³

All the while we offer the gospel and people turn, there are those who hear and turn away. The message of the gospel either brings life to those who hear, or it hardens them in their unbelief.⁶⁰⁴ Thus we should not be surprised when God acts to punish.

Sin and rebellion do, at the very least, two things. First they lower the honour and majesty of God in the eyes of people. God's honour and glory are currently veiled being displayed by creation and the church. In Himself God's honour, glory, and majesty remain perfect as they always were and always will be. But sinful actions are self-reliant and are selfish, and are not actions borne out of love and dependence on God who is love. For God to be rejected and side-lined is wholly demeaning to Him. Second sin destroys the one sinning. Sin is a self-inflicted wounding leading to death.⁶⁰⁵ So it is only fitting that God's wrath would rest on the unrepentant and the unbelieving.⁶⁰⁶ The situation is described for us in particular as rivalries between man and man. No one spares even his own brother in the fight for self-determination. It is truly a dog-eat-dog world.

9:20,21.

People aspire to rise up the ladder of success and in doing so they do not care upon whom they trample. There is a *snatching* and a *devouring* attitude prevalent in such a society. This grabbing attitude is one which is never satisfied. It is also self-destructive, for we read that “*every man shall eat the flesh of his own arm.*”⁶⁰⁷ Those who were once brothers are fighting and

602 Romans 1:18.

603 Revelation 22:11.

604 1Corinthians 1:18; Romans 1:16.

605 Genesis 2:17; Isaiah 1:5,6; Romans 6:23.

606 John 3:36; Ephesians 5:6.

607 Isaiah 9:20.

Studies in Isaiah.

devouring one another.⁶⁰⁸ Manasseh eats up his own brother Ephraim, and then these two turn and fight against Judah. We can see such a situation in the very arrest and trial of the Saviour. At such a time we learn that Pilate and Herod, who were bitter enemies, now become friends.⁶⁰⁹

We cannot progress and grow except it be in right relationship to the Lord. How like modern life! James describes this in graphic detail, and his description is the seed from which war is born:

*1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.*⁶¹⁰

But we ought to shudder because James is not writing about the world, but about the church! How we need to beat our swords and other weapons into ploughshares and implements of use!⁶¹¹ How we need to seek the Lord so that out of this we will display love and good works, the fruit of true faith.

Despite the burning and conflagration resulting from people fighting against people and consuming one another as an expression of God's wrath, His anger is still not spent.

[4] Woe to the unrighteous. (Isaiah 10:1-4).

10:1,2.

In the last section there is “*woe*” for those who oppress the fatherless and widows.⁶¹² Those without fathers or husbands represent spiritually those who have not been born again. Of course, we must not neglect the real physical injustice going on here, but we need to see the spiritual side as a matter of priority. Now it appears that the oppressors have arranged things, sometimes in written form, so that the needy (fatherless and widows) are unjustly treated. These unscrupulous ones “*decree unrighteous decrees*” and they “*write misfortune.*”⁶¹³ They prescribe in such a way that they steal what is right from the needy. It is tempting to consider how this happens within our society and how the rich and those in power make it difficult for the poor. We ought to defend all poor and needy from such terrible injustice. However the most important aspect of this is the

608 Isaiah 9:21.

609 Luke 23:12.

610 James 4:1-3.

611 Isaiah 2:4.

612 Isaiah 10:1,2.

613 Isaiah 10:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

spiritual application. Do we as churches in the modern age so construct our business, our way of doing things, and even our activities so as to write “*misfortune*” on the lost? Do we declare false and unrighteous rules or principles? On a positive note we ought to ask: where is our compassion? How wonderful the Saviour was when He touched the leper, which by law He should not have done.⁶¹⁴ How beautiful that He healed on the Sabbath when the Pharisees railed against Him. I wonder how we formulate rules, even unwritten ones, which allow us to duck the essence of our mission? Are there “evangelical” principles or traditions which prevent us from getting involved with those who know not Christ? Clearly the Lord Jesus preserved his integrity – He only did that which pleased the Father – all the while He went throughout Israel and beyond, bringing the good news really into the lives of the people.

10:3.

The woe that is pronounced is worked out in detail in verse 3 of chapter 10 in the form of a question. Those who make up unrighteous rules and who consign others to the rubbish heap of life are faced with the question: how will you fare “*in the day of punishment?*” This “*day*” signals not just a day of reckoning for Israel, but the *last* day on which judgement will finally fall on the whole world. It is also described as “*the desolation*” which comes “*from afar.*” By these phrases we understand that this day will be devastating and ruinous and that it comes to us from the returning King, Christ Jesus. For such on whom this woe will fall there will be nowhere to “*flee for help*” and there will be no memory of their pretended “*glory.*”⁶¹⁵

10:4.

In Isaiah 10:4 we have the crux of the problem that we have considered throughout these four passages, namely, that God is not with them. Verse 4 starts: “*without Me,*” and this has come about because they have refused to seek the Lord. In such a state of not having the presence of God, we find two results. First, the ones to suffer the woe will be humbled, so that they will “*bow down,*” and will be “*among the prisoners.*”⁶¹⁶ The Lord came to set free the prisoner and captive, but those who do not seek Him will end up as prisoners! Then second, these to be judged will “*fall among the slain.*” There is no hope for such but death! What a terrible situation. Considering the spiritual application, we are brought to the idea of the second or spiritual death that those who reject

614 Leviticus 5:2,3; 13:3; 22:4,6; Matthew 8:3.

615 Isaiah 10:3.

616 Isaiah 10:4.

Studies in Isaiah.

Christ will face. All must face physical death where the soul and body are separated from one another, but those who trust in the Lord Jesus will not suffer the second death.⁶¹⁷

And even though such who behave in these ways will suffer the woe and become prisoners and will lay among the slain, the Lord's anger is still not satisfied. Thus five times in Isaiah at Isaiah 5:25; 9:12,17,21; 10:4 we read these words:

For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand *is* stretched out still.

As we noted when looking at Isaiah 5:25 we are being informed that the temporal and partial judgements people face within time are not enough to satisfy the holy and perfect wrath of God against unrighteousness and sin. I think it imperative that we stop and consider the goodness and the great purity and holiness of God. He is so pure and so beautiful, so majestic and so glorious, that any sin or rebellion is such a terrible affront to the Lord, that He must deal justly and righteously with it. One offence against an infinitely beautiful and pure One can only be satisfied by an equally proportioned judgement. Consequently these statements are there to inform us that for all the punishment played out within time, there is still yet more righteous punishment that ought to come. Although this statement strikes terror into the heart, it does also gives us a glimmer of hope, for surely there will be a time when the anger of God will be fully turned away. We know this is true, of course, for Christ is the propitiation for sin.⁶¹⁸ In Christ the wrath of God was fully satisfied, for our Saviour could say:

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.⁶¹⁹

It is finished!⁶²⁰

And so justice was fully met because the infinite One dies!

617 Revelation 2:11; 20:6.

618 Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1John 2:2; 4:10.

619 John 17:4.

620 John 19:30.

Chapter 19.

Isaiah 10:5-19.

The instrument to be judged.

Analysis.

5 “Woe to Assyria,
the rod of My anger
and the staff in whose hand is My indignation.

6 I will send him
against an ungodly nation,
and against the people of My wrath

I will give him charge,
to seize the spoil,
to take the prey,
and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.

7 Yet he does not mean so,
nor does his heart think so;
but *it is* in his heart to destroy, and cut off not a few nations.

8 For he says,
‘*are* not my princes altogether kings?

9 *Is* not Calno like Carchemish?

Is not Hamath like Arpad?

Is not Samaria like Damascus?

10 As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols, whose carved images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria,

11 As I have done to Samaria and her idols, shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?’”

12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the **Lord** has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *that He will say,*

“I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks.”

13 For he says:

“by the strength of my hand I have done *it*,
and by my wisdom,
for

I am prudent;
also I have removed the boundaries of the people,
and have robbed their treasures;
so I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant *man*.

14 My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people,
and as one gathers eggs *that are* left, I have gathered all the earth;
and there was no one who moved *his* wing, nor opened *his* mouth with even a peep.”

Studies in Isaiah.

15 Shall the axe boast itself against him who chops with it?
Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it?
As if a rod could wield *itself* against those who lift it up,
or as if a staff could lift up, *as if it were* not wood!

16 Therefore the **Lord**, the **Lord of hosts**,
will send leanness among his fat ones;
and under his glory He will kindle a burning like the burning of a fire.

17 So the **Light of Israel** will be for a fire,
and his **Holy One** for a flame;
it will burn and devour His thorns and his briers in one day.

18 And it will consume
the glory of his forest
and of his fruitful field,
both soul and body;
and they will be as when a sick man wastes away.

19 Then the rest of the trees of his forest will be so few in number that a
child may write them.

This passage describes how the Lord uses nations to judge and bring judgement to those whom He is chastising. We may think that such a situation is unfair. How is it that one nation can inflict judgement on another? In our day we are so condemning of any who would judge, but here the Lord expressly uses a powerful nation to discipline the people whom He is leading. We have two parts to this section. First we have Assyria as the rod of God's wrath (verses 5 to 11). Then in the second part (verses 12 to 19), we have a message which speaks about how the Lord will judge the nation which He has used to judge His people. We can split these two parts further as follows:

[1] Assyria as the rod of God's wrath (Isaiah 10:5-11).

[a] The rod of God's anger (Isaiah 10:5,6).

[b] Pride oversteps the mark (Isaiah 10:7-11).

[2] God will judge Assyria (Isaiah 10:12-19).

[a] The patience of God (Isaiah 10:12-14).

[b] Can an axe complain against the axeman? (Isaiah 10:15).

[c] The judgement on the proud (Isaiah 10:16-19).

[1] Assyria as the rod of God's wrath (Isaiah 10:5-11).

[a] The rod of God's anger (Isaiah 10:5,6).

10:5,6.

The Assyrians were God's instrument at this time to bring judgement and punishment on an unruly people. They were sent by the Lord against an ungodly nation and were given a specific charge. Such a thing is certainly not an isolated event, for the means by which the Lord has judged and warned peoples throughout history has often involved the use of other nations.⁶²¹ In each case the instruments will have changed (according to the sovereignty of the Lord), for it is God who sets the boundaries of the nations.⁶²² God is good and only does good. His use of one nation to bring judgement on another is righteous and holy, for all his actions are holy. In verses 5 and 6 we have three words expressing God's 'anger,' (*“anger,” “indignation,” “wrath”*). The first two are expressions which describe an angry person. We might say that someone was “fuming” or that “steam was coming out of his ears,” or that “she was frothing at the mouth.” The last word suggests the venting, pouring out, or clear expression of anger. In human terms we find it difficult to be angry and yet not sin, but God's wrath is always expressed in purity, holiness and love.⁶²³

35 The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. 36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.⁶²⁴

But the intent and motive of the nation whom the Lord so uses are often far from holy, and so the Lord issues this warning (woe) to Assyria. We see a similar thing in the Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. God provided His own Son for our salvation, but the means by which the Lord was brought to do this work was through sinful and murderous men. Their motives and intentions were only evil, whilst God's were all wonderful and gracious:

Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.⁶²⁵

621 Disaster and disease are other means that God has employed.

622 Acts 17:26.

623 Ephesians 4:26.

624 John 3:35,36.

625 Acts 2:23.

Studies in Isaiah.

Now Assyria will be sent against “*an ungodly nation,*” who are also described as “*the people of My wrath.*” Such descriptions indicate that God's wrath rests on those who have not believed, who have acted in ungodly ways, and have not sought Him. Such was Israel. Assyria were given the responsibility of taking their possessions and of treading the people down and bringing them low.

With such thoughts it is essential for us to consider the circumstances of life in two ways. The Lord has meant these things that are currently occurring in our lives for good. There is no evil whatsoever in the Lord, for He is good and He does only good.⁶²⁶ Yes He allows evil to occur and to have its course, but the Lord's intentions and will are only ever good.⁶²⁷ What men and systems, or nations and peoples may intend for us is another matter. To this aspect of what is happening we should have a twofold response. First we ought to remember that the Lord is truly in charge and that what is happening is from his hand so that there is good in what is happening – even if we do not yet see it. Second we must live a life worthy of the calling with which the Lord has called us, and we must give an account for our trust in the Lord and our hope of heaven.⁶²⁸ This will need not our strength, but all the strength that the Lord supplies. How vital it is to seek Him and desire Him daily, even moment by moment. When we are so engaged in loving the Lord wholeheartedly we will have our eyes opened to the goodness of the Lord. Such a life devoted to Christ will appear to men as foolishness and simple. And yet such a life will also display the grace and mercy of Christ. When men revile and treat us harshly for no reason, it is our joy and delight to submit to the Lord and to glorify Him. In this our persecutors will puzzle. Why do they not fight back? What is it that motivates them to offer blessing for curse? In such circumstances some may be moved to repent as they see the Lord at work in our lives. Others may be hardened and will try to stamp out the love which they cannot receive. Now this is not to say at all that a Christian cannot reason nor protest when evil advances or when persecution takes place. Far from it. But there is a way of grace whereby we protest and remonstrate with our persecutors in love. For this we are in desperate need of the Spirit of grace.

626 Psalm 119:68.

627 The story of Job is one example of this.

628 Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10; 1Thessalonians 2:12.

[b] Pride oversteps the mark (Isaiah 10:7-11).

10:7.

Now Assyria was given charge to carry out the Lord's indignation. They were to seize spoil, take captives, and hold the people in subjection. The end of verse 6 recalls Isaiah's son's name given in 8:1. However their motives and intentions were to destroy and to cut off.⁶²⁹ Why so? Well it is clear that this murderous motive was fuelled by their pride and their aim to be *top dog*.

10:8-10.

The king of Assyria was buoyed by success. His "*princes*" were really to be considered "*kings*."⁶³⁰ After some straight forward successes in taking nations, it was a simple matter to assume that the power was wholly in their own hands. Thus just as the "*hand*" of the Assyrian king had "*found*" (come upon and taken) all the different kingdoms listed and had conquered them, so he would over-rule Jerusalem too.⁶³¹ It is not difficult to see the pride and tyranny here. The king, of course, simply gave orders. It was his armies which did the work.

One reason the Assyrian king believed that they had succeeded was that the idols of these places "*excelled*" the idols of Jerusalem and Samaria.⁶³² Here is a warning for us. Any success is wholly due to the Lord. Woe betide us if we get to the point of assuming success is ours because we have won a few victories in the past. Presumption is a terrible sin. The Assyrians thought that it was all due to their own strength and wisdom! Because no one seemed to offer much resistance, and because they could go where they pleased, they thought that they were all powerful. There was an attitude of being "*valiant*," as if they were heroes.⁶³³ Sometimes you see this type of reasoning in the modern world. Success and victory is lauded as heroic because of the scale of the victory. Strength is ascribed to the heroes, and there is no thought given to the Lord. How we need to constantly remind ourselves that we are the Lord's *servants*. We depend entirely on Him.

10:12.

The successes that the king of Assyria had achieved elsewhere were the fuel for his confidence over Jerusalem. He may have thought that since at one time Israel (the northern

629 Isaiah 10:7.

630 Isaiah 10:8.

631 Isaiah 10:8-10.

632 Isaiah 10:10.

633 Isaiah 10:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

kingdom) was once a part of Judah (in the south), so having defeated “*Samaria and her idols,*” surely it would stand to reason that he could do the same to “*Jerusalem and her idols*”? Presumptuous folly! We do the same, thinking that victory achieved in one place ought to secure victory in another, so that all we must do is simply walk in the same strength that we exercised formerly. This is folly. We need new and fresh strength for each victory over sin, Satan, and the world. Our lot is to constantly, and to totally rely on the Lord. We must never make the mistake of thinking that the victory the Lord has secured for us in our faith will be sufficient for each new venture. We must always trust to the Lord and never to our own understanding.⁶³⁴

[2] God will judge Assyria (Isaiah 10:12-19).

[a] The patience of God (Isaiah 10:12-14).

Verses 12 to 14 demonstrate the immense patience of God. He is truly long suffering.⁶³⁵

10:12.

Thus it will only be when the Lord has completed the work that He intended for Zion and Jerusalem, that He will then consider the instruments of His wrath, that is, Assyria. Zion and Jerusalem will receive all that the Lord intended for them by way of just chastisement. This is quite remarkable in view of what we have read in Isaiah 5:25 and Isaiah 9:12,17,21; 10:4 where God's wrath was not fully satisfied. This leads us to consider the statement of verse 12 in reference to His future work on Mount Zion and Jerusalem, where the Saviour endured the full wrath of God for our sakes, so that we might be delivered from the wrath to come:

... to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.⁶³⁶

10:13,14.

The king of Assyria had boasted that his conquering of the nations (including Judah) was by the strength of his own “*hand,*” and through his “*wisdom,*” by which he claimed that his own independent power, ability, and skill brought about success.⁶³⁷ This is ever the case with man

634 Proverbs 3:5.

635 Romans 9:22.

636 1Thessalonians 1:10. See also John 17:4; 19:30.

637 Isaiah 10:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

because he has bought the lie that he is an independent and self-reliant being. Notice the frequent use of the personal pronoun in verses 13 and 14. The king of Assyria claimed to be a “*valiant*,” man by which he intended us to imagine that he was as strong and mighty as a bull. The boastful arrogance of the king is shown further by use of the imagery found in verse 14. He gathered the riches of people as one might gather eggs from a nest! How simple, how easy! And all the while he was doing this, the forlorn chicks of the nations quivered without murmuring or fluttering their wings! Thus no one raised any objections to the advance of the Assyrians, not even a “*peep*” could be heard.⁶³⁸ Isn't this the case when bullies are on the rampage? Fear – craven fear – makes the knees knock and the mouth stay shut. Bullies are arrogant and proud, but these will face the full indignation of the Lord once their usefulness has passed.

We need to be aware that such arrogance and pride is hateful and wicked. How we all fall into this when we feel we may get the upper hand or when those we dislike come to the fore and we would want them crushed! We must come to a realisation that true humanity, as expressed purely and perfectly by the Lord Jesus Christ, is a life of humble dependence upon God. We were made to depend on God. When we flout this dependence – for that is the nature of pride – we become obnoxious and wicked.

[b] Can an axe complain against the axeman? (Isaiah 10:15).

10:15.

The illustrations given here in verse 15 all indicate the complete folly of thinking that men, nations, or any group of people have any ability, let alone right, to remonstrate with the Lord of glory. The first thing that a proud and arrogant person needs to hear is some home truths about their real position and status in life. The trouble with the proud is that they think they are so much more important than anyone else. They over-inflate themselves and puff themselves up. They declaim: “look what I have done! Who can compete with me?” So here we have a collection of images to show the truth about the king of Assyria's real status. There are two rhetorical questions and then two similes. Essentially these two questions amount to asking; can an instrument in the hands of a craftsman claim any credit for the craftsmanship? The idea is absurd. From this we understand that man is but an instrument in God's hands. The apostle Paul warned Timothy about being ready and prepared to be an honourable vessel for God's use:

638 Isaiah 10:14.

Studies in Isaiah.

20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honour and some for dishonour. **21** Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter*, he will be a vessel for honour, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.⁶³⁹

[* striving about words to no profit (v14) listening to profane and idle babblings (v16) straying from the truth (v18)].

We are but vessels in his hands. Yes indeed we have personality and creativity and insight, but are not all these things given to us? Did any of us ever have an original thought? No! A thousand times no! An axe and a saw cannot boast and cannot exalt themselves, for all they do is under the sovereign control and mastery of the Lord. If we do good (and we ought to) we cannot claim anything by it, for as Jesus said:

So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'⁶⁴⁰

The two similes provide us with a slightly different thought. The main idea is that a rod and a staff cannot do things above their nature. Neither have within themselves any power to act. The rod cannot "*wield itself*," and the staff cannot "*lift up*." In fact the second simile points out the fact that the staff being "*wood*" cannot go against its 'wood' nature. How vital it is for us to know our nature! This is one of the main things that sin does to us. It destroys our true nature. We were made in the image of God to reflect His beauty and truth, and we were made to be in permanent relationship with Him. Sin destroys this relationship and proffers lies concerning our nature. The proud vaunts and boasts where it has no right to do so. We are created in the image of God and therefore all we have comes from the hand of God. We ought to be in right relationship with Him because this is how we were made. Any who seek an independent and autonomous existence deny their true humanity and walk in rebellion. Their actions will be self-defeating! As vessels we must cleanse ourselves, and make ourselves ready for the use of our Creator-Redeemer. How do we do this? Well again we need to rely fully and totally upon the Lord. Only He can cleanse and make ready the heart! How does He do this? By the Holy Spirit, through his wonderful word, and by faith which is the gift of God.

639 2Timothy 2:20,21.

640 Luke 17:10.

[c] The judgement on the proud (Isaiah 10:16-19).

It is no surprise that we read next of the Lord's actions against the rod of his hand. What the Assyrians were meant to do was to inflict the punishment that God intended, but their motives pushed them harder. However when the Lord had completed the work of judgement intended for Zion, then He will deal with the Assyrians.

10:16,17.

An axe obviously cannot boast against the one who wields it. The consequence of such folly is spelt out in the last part of this passage from verse 16. If the Assyrians thought that they could continue unabated they would be in for a shock. They will suffer hunger and famine, and will face the *“Light of Israel”* and the burning fury of the *“Holy One.”*⁶⁴¹ These are two titles for the Lord. He is the radiant One in whom is not just the light of life, but also the burning of radiant glory. Where there is drought and dryness, and where there is only the fruit of a cursed world (as indicated by the briars and thorns), the fire of God's indignation will burn unabated.⁶⁴²

10:18,19.

Note how the body and the soul will suffer in this terrible fire. This mention of fire is significant for it brings us to the idea of God's final judgement. The body may be consumed as a physical thing but what of the soul? Well the New Testament indicates that the soul will suffer torment in the eternal fires of hell. This is a very sobering thought.⁶⁴³ However there is still some hope! Right at the end we read that this final judgement is so severe it will consume all, body and soul, and all the trees of the forest but, and this “but” is so important, there will be a *“few in number”* which could be counted by a child!⁶⁴⁴ Here we see that the idea of a remnant, a small group that is spared, is applied even to Assyria the rod of God's anger! What mercy! What grace!

641 Isaiah 10:17.

642 Isaiah 10:17.

643 Mark 9:45,46,48.

644 Isaiah 10:19.

Chapter 20.

Isaiah 10:20-34.

The remnant will return to the Mighty One!

Textual analysis.

- 20 And it shall come to pass in that day
that the remnant of Israel, and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob,
will never again depend on him who defeated them,
but will depend on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.
- 21 The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God.
- 22 For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them will return; the destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness.
- 23 For the Lord God of hosts will make a determined end in the midst of all the land.
- 24 Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts:
“O My people, who dwell in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrian. He shall strike you with a rod and lift up his staff against you, in the manner of Egypt. 25 For yet a very little while and the indignation will cease, as will My anger in their destruction.”
- 26 And the Lord of hosts will stir up a scourge for him like the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb; as His rod was on the sea, so will He lift it up in the manner of Egypt.
- 27 It shall come to pass in that day
that his burden will be taken away from your shoulder,
and his yoke from your neck,
and the yoke will be destroyed because of the anointing oil.
- 28 He has come to Aiath, he has passed Migron; at Michmash he has attended to his equipment. 29 They have gone along the ridge, they have taken up lodging at Geba. Ramah is afraid, Gibeah of Saul has fled. 30 Lift up your voice, O daughter of Gallim! Cause it to be heard as far as Laish— O poor Anathoth! 31 Madmenah has fled, the inhabitants of Gebim seek refuge. 32 As yet he will remain at Nob that day; he will shake his fist at the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.
- 33 Behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts,
will lop off the bough with terror;
those of high stature will be hewn down,
and the haughty will be humbled.
- 34 He will cut down the thickets of the forest with iron,
and Lebanon will fall by the Mighty One.

Having ended in the last part with a mention of the remnant, it is natural and fitting that this theme continues in the passage that follows. The purpose of the Lord in bringing the Assyrians against the people of God was to do two things. First it was to sort out the wheat from the chaff. Second it was to remove a pillar of trust the Israelites had built up for the wrong thing – in this case the Assyrians.

Studies in Isaiah.

Notice how the titles of the Lord in 10:5-34 are piled up for great emphasis upon the strength and power and glory of God. He is described in the following ways:

the Lord (adonay)	verses 12,16,23,24.
the Lord (yahweh)	verses 20,33.
the Lord of hosts (yahweh)	verses 16,26,33.
the Light of Israel	verse 17.
his Holy One	verse 17.
the Holy One of Israel	verse 20.
the Mighty God	verse 21.
the God of hosts	verses 23,24.
the Mighty One	verse 34.

Titles like *“Lord of hosts”* (Lord of armies) and *“Mighty God/One”* indicate the almighty power of God, whilst titles like *“Light of Israel”* and *“Holy One”* signify the holy purity and righteousness of the Lord.

The coming judgement was to be at the hands of the Assyrians as verse 24 makes plain, but they were to be in no doubt that in actual fact this was all at the Lord's doing. It was to be the Lord, the commander of armies, who would bring famine and a burning light. However the emphasis in this section is the calling of a remnant among the people of God. In the next section from verse 24 onwards, we will see judgement fall on the rod of God's anger. And so even though judgement will surely fall on the rod, nevertheless some of the house of Jacob will escape! The section can be split into two parts. First we see that a remnant will indeed return (verses 20 to 23). And then we find that the rod of God's anger will itself be judged (verses 24 to 34).

[1] A remnant will return. (Isaiah 10:20-23).

[2] The rod will be cut down! (Isaiah 10:24-34).

[1] A remnant will return. (Isaiah 10:20-23).

It is worth considering how the remnant are described in these verses. They are portrayed as *“the remnant of Israel,”* as those who *“have escaped of the house of Jacob,”* as *“the remnant of*

Studies in Isaiah.

Jacob,” and as “*a remnant*” of the nation who were likened to “*the sand of the sea*.”⁶⁴⁵ Hence it will not be the entire nation of Israel that will be saved but only the remnant. Here we see that there is something else which forms the basis of salvation. It is not good enough simply to belong to the nation of Israel good though that may be. Neither is it enough simply to be born an Israelite, for only certain ones of that nation will be rescued.

10:20.

And so the remnant who have have been rescued will return. There is a reminder here of their origins, for they are “*the house of Jacob*,” the one who cheated and supplanted others. The remnant will be only those who “*return*,” that is, they are ones who turn from their own ways in repentance. They will no longer trust in other powers such as the Assyrians, but will, instead, put their trust in the Lord. This remnant will return to the Mighty God. Thus there will be true repentance and true dependence.

And so we see that the indignation and wrath of God was intended to bring the people of God to a right dependence on the Lord. Dependence is upon the Lord who is described as “*the Holy One of Israel*,” and so indicates that there would be sanctification and holiness as part of their way of life.⁶⁴⁶ Then further we read that their new found dependence will be “*in truth*.”⁶⁴⁷ How vital this is! It flies in the face of much modern trends. The truth is disparaged and cast aside in preference for feeling, experience, and friendliness. I do not mean to say that such are not relevant. By no means! However it is so important that *truth* is central. This is what our Lord and Saviour demanded.⁶⁴⁸

10:21,22

In verse 21 we have an allusion to one of Isaiah's sons (Shear-Jashub).⁶⁴⁹ Hence we remember that although there may be many who claim to be the Lord's people, not all are the true Israel, as we have already noted from the term “*remnant*.” There are many who claim the title “Christian” but only few, (that is, the remnant), will enter into the joy of the Lord. Thus when we come to those who would return from exile at the decree of Cyrus king of Persia, (more than a century and a half in Isaiah's future), there would be far fewer in number compared to those who

645 Isaiah 10:20-22.

646 Isaiah 10:20.

647 Isaiah 10:20.

648 John 4:24; 8:32,44-46; 14:6,17; 15:26; 16:13; 17:17.

649 Isaiah 7:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

had been of Israel. Very few of the many returned.

At the end of verse 22 we have a statement which may be easily overlooked. After stating that only a small number would return to the *“Mighty God,”* we note that this judgement and destruction was in fact a righteous act (*“the destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness”*). All of God's actions are right. But it is good to hear that the judgement that was about to fall, and that there were to be only a few who will escape (the *“remnant”*), is all in accord with the righteous decree of God. None of us deserve life, and none of us deserve forgiveness, redemption and new life. The fact that the Lord offers such freely is a marvel. But do remember that God's justice and judgement are 100% right and that those whom He saves and includes among His *“remnant”* are there by grace for it is all His righteous work, praise to His name.

10:23.

Finally in this passage we have a remarkable concluding thought. The Lord intends a destruction which will not just be a righteous one, it will also be a complete destruction *“in the midst of the land.”* The ESV renders verse 23 with these words:

*For the Lord God of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth.*⁶⁵⁰

This destruction is final and full. It is also at the heart of the nation. These facts bring to remembrance the wonderful truth that when the Lord Jesus died on the cross outside Jerusalem, He took all that was necessary so that He could conclude *“it is finished.”*⁶⁵¹ This statement of verse 23 goes a long way in answer to the refrain we came across in Isaiah 5:25; 9:12,17,21; 10:4 where the temporal punishments were not enough to satisfy the righteous anger of the Lord.

[2] The rod will be cut down! (Isaiah 10:24-34).

10:24,25.

And so we find then, that the Lord will act against the Assyrians. The Lord encourages the dwellers in Zion, those who would be the remnant, that they are not to be afraid.⁶⁵² They will suffer,

650 Isaiah 10:23, ESV.

651 John 19:30.

652 Isaiah 10:24.

Studies in Isaiah.

but the indignation and God's anger "*will cease.*" These words of verse 25 are remarkable. We are reminded that the "*Judge of Israel*" (Christ Jesus) would be struck in a similar manner too:

Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; He has laid siege against us;
They will strike the Judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek.⁶⁵³

But the fact that the indignation will cease points us clearly to the cross, for it was only there that God's wrath was fully satisfied.

10:26.

Although the Assyrians will come in judgement, this will end, and they themselves will be judged severely. Verse 26 points the reader back to two historical incidents designed to give the remnant hope. The first can be found in Judges 7 where we read of the slaughter of the Midianites by the Lord using Gideon and a much reduced (in size) army. The second points to the destruction of Egypt's army in the waters of the Red Sea. This destruction came outwardly through the agency of Moses' rod by which (in reality) the Lord parted the waters enabling Israel to travel through safely, and after this caused the waters to return drowning the Egyptians with their chariots. The implication from these two incidents is clear. The Assyrians will be thwarted and will not achieve their ends of fully conquering the Israelites. Instead the yoke and burden of Assyrian oppression will be removed. That which the people feared and had become subservient to, has now been removed and those who were left would depend on the Lord instead. The tall and proud Assyrian trees would be hewn down by the Mighty One.

10:27.

And then in verse 27 we find that deliverance would most definitely be provided. The "*burden*" will be removed from their shoulders and the "*yoke*" will be taken from their necks and will be "*destroyed.*" Such a deliverance reminds us of the Lord Jesus' call to sinners:

28 Come to Me, all *you* who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.⁶⁵⁴

653 Micah 5:1. See also Mark 15:19.

654 Matthew 11:28-30.

Studies in Isaiah.

Now the coming judgement at the hand of God, but carried out through the agency of the Assyrians, will not utterly succeed because the Lord will bring a halt to their proceedings.

10:28-32.

In verses 28 to 32 we have a record of the path the Assyrians will take. Looking at the map (figure 1) you can see a line of places described in the text which form a kind of path down towards Jerusalem with “*Nob*” at the end. Here they come to a halt and can merely look across at Jerusalem and wave their fist in anger.⁶⁵⁵ However the emphasis in all this is not so much on the sweeping path the Assyrians will take as they invade the land, so much as the state and deliverance of the remnant. We read that the Lord tells the people not to be afraid as they had been under Ahaz.



Figure 1: The Assyrian route towards “Nob.”

10:33,34.

Note the reference to “*terror*” which we saw in Isaiah chapter 2, along with the idea of the humiliation of the proud.⁶⁵⁶ The Lord is truly terrible and fearful – a consuming fire – so that we do ourselves no favours if we do not remember this fact. Remember that is “*the Lord, the Lord of hosts*” who will chop down the weapons which bring “*terror,*” and who will bring down low those who are “*of high stature*” or can be described as “*haughty.*” The Lord is not partial. Whomever displays haughty, proud, and arrogant ways will be brought low. So then the great mighty and proud forests of Lebanon “*will fall by the Mighty One.*”⁶⁵⁷

How difficult it is to leave old allies and old trusts! The experience of Israel of old is followed by every believer in Christ in some way or another. Who has not had the discipline of the Lord exercised to wean them off some trust or unholy reliance?

655 Isaiah 10:32.

656 Isaiah 10:33.

657 Isaiah 10:34.

Chapter 21.

Isaiah 11:1-16.

The root and the shoot of Jesse.

Textual analysis.

1 There shall come forth

a **Rod** from the stem of Jesse,
and a **Branch** shall grow out of his roots.

2 The **Spirit** of the **Lord** shall rest upon Him,
the **Spirit** of wisdom and understanding,
the **Spirit** of counsel and might,
the **Spirit** of knowledge and of the fear of the **Lord**.

3 His delight *is* in the fear of the **Lord**,
and He shall

not judge by the sight of His eyes,
nor decide by the hearing of His ears;

4 but with righteousness He shall
judge the poor,

and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;

He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.

5 Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,
and faithfulness the belt of His waist.

6 “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
the calf and the young lion and the fat-ling together;
and a little child shall lead them.

7 The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young ones shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole,
and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den.

9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the **Lord** as the waters cover the sea.

10 “And in that day there shall be a **Root** of Jesse,
who shall stand as a banner to the people;
for the Gentiles shall seek Him,
and His resting place shall be glorious.”

11 It shall come to pass in that day
that the **Lord** shall

set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left,
from Assyria and Egypt,
from Pathros and Cush,

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from Elam and Shinar,
from Hamath and the islands of the sea.

12 He will

set up a **banner** for the nations,
and will

assemble the outcasts of Israel,
and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

13 Also the envy of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off;
Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim.

14 But they shall fly down upon the shoulder of the Philistines toward the west; together they
shall plunder the people of the East;
they shall lay their hand on Edom and Moab; and the people of Ammon shall obey them.

15 The **Lord** will

utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt;
with His mighty wind He will
shake His fist over the River,
and strike it in the seven streams,
and make *men* cross over dry-shod.

16 There will be a highway for the remnant of His people who will be left from Assyria, as it was for
Israel in the day that he came up from the land of Egypt.

Have you ever tripped over yourself (verbally speaking) with excitement in recounting an event or journey you enjoyed? Well this next passage seems to tumble out truths and blessings in a flood! We have talk of the Messiah in no uncertain terms, along with the fruit of his ministry and the outcome for the remnant that believe. This passage may be split up into three separate parts. In the first we learn once again about the Messiah, termed here as the “*Rod*,” and as the “*Branch*,” (verses 1 to 5). Then we have a section which speaks of the incredible blessings that the gospel brings (verses 6 to 9). I have used the last sentence of verse 9 as my title here because it encapsulates the world-wide effect of God's gracious good news. The last part focuses our attention on what the Lord will do, beginning with the “*banner*” that the Lord will establish.

[1] The Rod and Branch. (Isaiah 11:1-5).

[2] For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord ... (Isaiah 11:6-9).

[3] The banner for all nations. (Isaiah 11:10-16).

[a] The Root of Jesse as the banner. (Isaiah 11:10).

[b] In that day He will ... (Isaiah 11:11-16).

[i] He will recover the remnant. (Isaiah 11:11).

[ii] He will set up the banner for all nations. (Isaiah 11:12a).

[iii] He will Gather and assemble His people. (Isaiah 11:12b-14).

[iv] He will utterly destroy all obstacles and make a highway ... (Isaiah 11:15-16).

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[1] The Rod and Branch. (Isaiah 11:1-5).

We start by noting that the first 5 verses of Isaiah 11 give us a beautiful insight not only into the identity of the Messiah, but also into the Holy Trinity as well. Note, therefore, that we have statements about the “*Rod*” and “*Branch*,” (Christ), statements about the “*Spirit*,” (the Holy Spirit), and information about the “*Lord*,” (the Father).

11:1.

In the first verse the opening statement is easily missed and may be simply dismissed as padding. However its significance is that it indicates the coming of the Messiah, namely, the incarnation, “*there shall come forth.*” We find that our Saviour Himself refers to His coming with this type of phrase:

... I proceeded forth and came from God ...⁶⁵⁸

I came forth from the Father and have come into the world.⁶⁵⁹

And then also we find that the apostle Paul uses a similar phrase too:

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.⁶⁶⁰

We are then given two images for this one who was to come forth. The first is the hopeful shoot that comes from a tree stump or fallen tree trunk. The term “*Rod*” signifies a twig or branch. Jesse, of course, was David's father. Out of that unlikely origin would come the eighth son, David, and from David would spring the hoped-for Messiah. We are thus pointed to the *human* origin of this great person. He would come from the line of David via Jesse. Now Jesse's name is rather interesting. According to one group of Hebrew scholars:

The name Jesse means **My Husband**, as well as **Yah/Yahweh Exists ...** As such the name Jesse contains the most profound notion that human marriage reflects divine revelation.⁶⁶¹

658 John 8:42.

659 John 16:28.

660 Galatians 4:4.

661 In Hebrew Jesse is given as: יֵשׁוּעַ and as: יֵשׁוּעַ, and may be derived from the word translated as “*man*” or “*husband*,” (אִישׁ), or from the word which signifies existence (יֵשׁ). See: <http://www.abarim->

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David's father, Jesse would thus bring forth one whom we could refer to as “God exists!” What a marvellous truth!

The second image is the *“Branch.”* This Hebrew word (נֶצֶר *nēṣer*) also occurs at: Isaiah 11:1; 14:19; 60:21; Daniel 11:7. It is a figurative expression for an offspring. In this text the *“Branch”* is bearing fruit, hence growing, from Jesse's *“roots.”* The mention of roots signifies a lowly origin, from the “bottom rung of society” we might say. At this point we should recall the story of David's being chosen by the Lord recorded in 1Samuel 16. You may remember that the Lord told Samuel to go to Jesse who lived in Bethlehem because He had provided for Himself a king from among Jesse's sons. When Samuel went to meet Jesse he thought the first or oldest son Eliab was the one chosen, but it wasn't him.⁶⁶² Then Jesse presented all the other sons in order, but each one was not God's chosen one.⁶⁶³ Samuel then asked Jesse: *“are all the young men here?”*⁶⁶⁴ Jesse replied rather off-handedly by saying: *“there remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep.”* Samuel insisted that this *“youngest”* be brought to them saying *“for we will not sit down till he comes here.”*⁶⁶⁵ When David arrived, the Lord prompted Samuel to anoint him for this was God's chosen man.⁶⁶⁶ In this story we see not only that the Lord chooses by looking at the heart and not by outward appearance, but also that God often chooses the weak, the outcast and the lowly.⁶⁶⁷ And so coming from Jesse's *“roots”* signifies a lowly origin. Eliab, in contrast, would have been from Jesse's strength.⁶⁶⁸

Now a different Hebrew word (צֶמַח *ṣemah*) which is also translated as *“Branch,”* can be found at: Isaiah 4:2; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12. The two terms seem to be synonymous, as the use of the Hebrew word (צֶמַח) in Isaiah 4:2 cannot be in opposition to the use of the different Hebrew word (נֶצֶר) found here in Isaiah 11:1. From these thoughts we learn about the *human* origin of the Messiah. This thought is shown by both Jeremiah and Zechariah in their prophecies:

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and

[publications.com/Meaning/Jesse.html#.XGRXS1z7RPY](https://www.biblepublications.com/Meaning/Jesse.html#.XGRXS1z7RPY). See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesse>.

662 1Samuel 16:6,7.

663 1Samuel 16:8-10.

664 1Samuel 16:11.

665 1Samuel 16:11.

666 1Samuel 16:12,13.

667 1Corinthians 1:26.

668 Genesis 49:3.

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righteousness in the earth.⁶⁶⁹

In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.⁶⁷⁰

Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH.⁶⁷¹

Then speak to him, saying, ‘thus says the Lord of hosts, saying: “behold, the Man whose name *is* the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the Lord.”⁶⁷²

And so we have an intimation of the human origin of the coming One in Isaiah 11:1. He shall be born from David's line, and would grow as an offspring or branch from lowly origins. And yet there is also a hint here of the divine nature of this promised One, for the name “*Jesse*,” as we have seen, indicates that God exists. Such a hint does not intimate the existence of God in any metaphysical sense, but suggests the idea of Immanuel, God amongst us.

11:2.

In verse 2 the focus of our attention is not drawn away from the “*Rod*,” and “*Branch*,” but we are introduced to another person whose existence commands our attention, namely, “*the Spirit of the Lord*.” Thus the “*Rod*,” and “*Branch*” will be endowed with the fullness of the Spirit who will rest upon Him. Now, we are given four descriptions of this Spirit as follows: He is the Spirit:

of the Lord
of wisdom and understanding
of counsel and might
of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

A similar type of description is given in Isaiah 61:1f. In the first statement we learn that the Spirit belongs to, or is in some way possessed, or owned by the Lord. The divine name “*Lord*” directs our thoughts to the Father. Thus we have the third person of the blessed Trinity spoken of here as being

669 Jeremiah 23:5.
670 Jeremiah 33:15.
671 Zechariah 3:8.
672 Zechariah 6:12.

Studies in Isaiah.

“of the Lord” in the sense of close communion and being. The Spirit proceeds from the Father. The *“Spirit of the Lord”* is described as One who possesses: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, the knowledge of the Lord, and the fear of the Lord. In these statements we learn that the Holy Spirit is One who has those qualities which humans sadly lack through their rebellion. If we think first of these descriptions in relation to the Father (since He is described as the *“Spirit of the Lord”*) we get a glimpse into the relations within the Trinity. The Holy Spirit knows the Father. The Holy Spirit fears, that is, respects, or reverences the Father. The Holy Spirit knows truly, is wise, can advise correctly, and has power to act from His knowledge, and to do what He so advises. But in this text of verse 2, the emphasis is really upon His ministry to enable the One from David's line to do all that the Father willed. This *“Spirit of the Lord”* will *“rest”* upon the Branch. The idea is one of permanent residence. Because the Branch has come forth, the Spirit can rest upon Him in fullness. Consequently this Branch is one who will have full understanding and wisdom and will be enabled to carry out whatever task is given to Him in full reverence of the Lord.

11:3.

In verses 3 to 5 we learn about four key features concerning this Branch. We learn about:

- *What pleases Him.*
- *How He will act and behave.*
- *His message.*
- *His disposition.*

In the first place, then, the Branch will have as His prime focus and aim to please the Lord, His Father, because *“His delight is in the fear of the Lord.”*⁶⁷³ Such an attitude is described elsewhere as the beginning of wisdom for us.⁶⁷⁴ A reverent respect for the Lord, (the Father), implies a recognition that such a person must be heard and is to be looked up to. What such an One says and does is worthy of praise, and, consequently, we must give such an august One great reverence and fear. Now our Saviour delighted in His Father. Consider these statements:

673 Isaiah 11:3.

674 Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10.

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Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.”⁶⁷⁵

... the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.⁶⁷⁶

... I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.⁶⁷⁷

... I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.⁶⁷⁸

... The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.⁶⁷⁹

But then secondly we note that the Branch will act and behave in such a way which shows His delight in the Lord. Consequently, the Branch will act as a lawgiver and judge who decides things by bringing them into the clear light of day so as to demonstrate the truth of His dealings.⁶⁸⁰ He will do all of this in “*righteousness,*” and “*equity,*” or, in other words, in what is true, right, and on a level grounding with no hidden or obscure parts to surprise us.⁶⁸¹ We are informed that He will not minister by sight, that is, by how things may appear. The Lord can see things perfectly looking into the heart of things. Neither will He be swayed by the populace, but will govern and judge in righteousness as the Lord leads. It is noteworthy that it is the “*poor*” and the “*meek*” who will receive justice and these will not be dealt with in any biased way as the nobles had done so.⁶⁸²

11:4.

In the third place we find that the Branch will deliver an irresistible message, and will speak in such purity and holiness that his words will “*strike the earth*” and will “*slay the wicked.*”⁶⁸³ By these two statements the emphasis is clearly on judgement. The words “*strike,*” and “*slay,*” suggest destruction and death. We find a similar description in the book of Revelation concerning the risen and ascended Lord. We read in the first chapter about “*One like the Son of Man,*” from whose mouth, “*went a sharp two-edged sword.*”⁶⁸⁴ Later in the same book we read of the “*Word of God*” from whose mouth “*goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself*

675 John 4:34.

676 John 5:19.

677 John 5:30.

678 John 8:28.

679 John 8:30.

680 Isaiah 11:3.

681 Isaiah 11:4.

682 Isaiah 11:4.

683 Isaiah 11:4.

684 Revelation 1:13,16.

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will rule them with a rod of iron."⁶⁸⁵ The judgement will come against the wicked and all of creation. This is interesting because the righteous are not mentioned. These will not be judged because they have been justly pardoned. The whole of creation will also be judged, as Peter tells us, by fire.⁶⁸⁶ The means of this judgement is also described in two ways. We have:

the rod of His mouth.

the breath of His lips.

The first indicates a kind of striking or punishment which comes from His mouth, that is, from what He says. The word of God always has some element of judgement within it because our major problem is sin and rebellion. When God speaks to anyone there has to be an element of judgement because we are, by nature, far from Him, and, consequently, far from what is good and right. The Bible talks of the word of God's cleansing and purifying power.⁶⁸⁷ But the second expression highlights the *spiritual* action of His great work, for the word "*breath*," can be translated as "*spirit*." The term "*lips*," signifies the language or words employed. Thus we have here a reference to the twofold nature of the Lord's message. It comes by means of words spoken from the mouth and language which man may comprehend, but it also comes as "*breath*," or as "*spirit*," by which we understand that the intellectual approach alone is not sufficient to hear the word of God. Unless we heed the word of God and draw from it by the Spirit in our innermost being, (our spirit), that is, allowing it to influence and guide our whole person, (mind, will, emotions), we cannot say that we have heard God speaking.

11:5.

The fourth and final characteristic of this Branch is described in verse 5. We see that around His waist and loins are to be found what may appear to be two belts, namely, "*righteousness*," and "*faithfulness*." By these we understand that this Branch is righteous and faithful. His very Being is surrounded by these characteristics. The words "*loins*" and "*waist*" are synonymous and suggest vigour and strength, or, possibly, being girded ready for action.⁶⁸⁸ Whenever this Branch acts, or exercises His strength and energy, He does so with these twin characteristics as central features. He

685 Revelation 19:15.

686 2Peter 3:10.

687 See, for example, Psalm 119:9; John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26; Psalm 12:6; 119:140.

688 See 1Peter 1:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

acts in righteousness and He acts with all faithfulness (i.e. in all truth). It is curious that the person described here has two belts. Although the text simply says that He has two belts, I think the idea is that the two concepts are entwined, as two pieces of cord may be wrapped around each other, or that the single belt is made from two pieces of material. In other words these two features are *closely* connected. If He acts in righteousness this will display faithfulness, or, be in accordance with truth, and vice versa.

[2] For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord ... (Isaiah 11:6-9).

The effects of this Branch coming will be remarkable and it will be wonderful. Similar statements to the ones we will discuss here can be found in Isaiah 65:20-25. Now whenever we look at these prophecies we must always remember that we often have a twofold perspective. Ultimately where the beauty of the Lord and what He does is in view, our eyes begin to see the glories of heaven and the new creation. But then also we can see these heavenly effects also having influence upon this world now in pockets here and there. So there are prophecies about the return from exile which also point to the coming of the Messiah. There are prophecies about coming judgement on Israel or Judah which also point to the coming final judgement on the entire world when Christ returns.

In these four verses we are given a graphic description of what life is like when the Branch comes. It is summed up by the last statement in verse 9 that I have used as a heading. We come across this same expression in Habakkuk but with a significant addition:

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.⁶⁸⁹

The idea of such a statement is that the fame and glory of the Lord will be known everywhere. This situation will not happen fully until the Lord returns, but in the mean time our commission is to take the gospel to every creature so that His glory will be known in the earth.⁶⁹⁰ Now before we look at the other verses that precede this, we must note that the intention of the Lord is for people to truly *know* Him. Not just knowing about Him, but truly knowing Him. The knowledge of God is essentially what the Christian message is all about. We cannot truly know God without coming via

689 Habakkuk 2:14.

690 Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:18-20.

Studies in Isaiah.

Christ, because He alone (exclusively so) is *“the way, the truth and the life.”*⁶⁹¹ We cannot come to truly know God if we ignore and refuse to hear what the Bible says, because it is by this means that we hear Him speak.⁶⁹² We cannot come to truly know God if our lives continue in a state of rebellion and sin, for fallen humanity walks in the opposite direction to God, and to know God is to walk with Him.⁶⁹³ Coming to know God through Christ who has declared Him to us, means more than simply having a good theology. We come to experience the living God and we partake of His very nature, as Peter explains:

2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, *3* as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, *4* by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is in the world through lust.*⁶⁹⁴

We are adopted as true sons and become a member of the family of God.

11:6.

So what do the verses before verse 9 tell us? Well in verse 6 we find that three vicious predators, (the wolf, the leopard and the lion) will *“dwell,”* and *“lie down”* with three docile and domesticated animals, (the lamb, the young goat and the calf or fatling). These statements are concluded with the phrase: *“a little child shall lead them.”* In all of this we can see a type of return to the life experienced by Adam in the garden of Eden. Animals preying on one another, contrary to modern thought, has come about as a result of the fall of man from Genesis 3. But this did not take place until after the flood where at the end of it all man was given permission to eat animals for they would now be in fear of man.⁶⁹⁵ The harmony that once existed in the *“good”* world that God initially created will be restored. Things will be such that even a *“little child”* will be able to *“lead”* these animals. Such a state reminds us of Adam's naming the animals in Eden.⁶⁹⁶

11:7,8.

691 John 14:6.

692 Luke 4:4; John 8:47; Romans 10:17; Hebrews 4:12; 1Peter 1:23; 1John 2:5,14.

693 Genesis 17:1; Leviticus 23:16; Psalm 84:11; 119:1; Micah 6:8; Ephesians 5:2; Colossians 1:10; 1Thessalonians 2:12.

694 2Peter 1:2-4.

695 Genesis 9:2f.

696 Genesis 2:19.

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Verse 7 continues this theme but the focus is on what is being eaten. No longer is “nature red in tooth and claw,” for all will be eating vegetation as originally intended, (i.e. they shall “*graze*,” and “*eat straw*”).⁶⁹⁷ On top of the animal world living in harmony, the relation between man and the animal kingdom is all good too. This is shown by the three stages of childhood illustrated here. We have the “*little child*,” or one who is small and of no significance.⁶⁹⁸ We have the “*nursing child*,” or one still on the mother's breast.⁶⁹⁹ Finally there is the “*weaned child*,” or one who is now on solid food.⁷⁰⁰ These will be able to “*lead*” the animals, and will be able to play so close to venomous and poisonous snakes to such an extent that they can reach into their very lairs.

11:9.

Verse 9 speaks about all the animal kingdom being unable to “*hurt*” or “*destroy*” within the Branch's “*holy mountain*.” Reference to the “*holy mountain*” brings us to thoughts of Jerusalem and Zion, and, spiritually, to the church of our day.⁷⁰¹ The term “*hurt*” signifies evil, whilst the term “*destroy*” indicates corruption or decay. These fruits of the cursed world will not be found in “*the kingdom of the Son of His love*.”⁷⁰²

Now much of what we have described in these verses speaks in the first instance of the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry whilst He was on the earth, namely, the bringing in of the new creation which is pictured in this idyllic Edenic form. Whilst we do not yet read of the animal kingdom being brought into harmony again when Christ Jesus walked this earth, we do see a restoration of harmony amongst peoples. The perfect fulfilment will come when Christ comes again. Then we will see the lamb and the lion together and people having dominion over creation once again.

[3] The banner for all nations. (Isaiah 11:10-16).

In this last part of Isaiah 11 we have, perhaps, the most wonderful theme of all, namely, the “*banner*,” which we shall discuss shortly. The passage can be divided by the phrase “*in that day*,” which is found in verses 10 and 11, and which points to the current age, the last days. Thus we have an introduction to the “*Root of Jesse*,” who will be the “*banner to the people*” in verse 10. Then

697 Quote from: “*In Memoriam A. H. H.*” 1849. A poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson in memory of Arthur Henry Hallam who died in 1833.

698 Isaiah 11:6.

699 Isaiah 11:8.

700 Isaiah 11:8.

701 See Isaiah 2:1f; 56:7; 66:20; Daniel 9:16; Zechariah 8:3.

702 Colossians 1:13.

from verse 11 through to verse 15 we are told what this “*Root of Jesse*” will do “*in that day.*”

[a] The Root of Jesse as the banner. (Isaiah 11:10).

11:10.

So far we have been introduced to the “*Rod*” and the “*Branch*” that will come from “*Jesse.*”⁷⁰³ By such terms we have understood that an offspring of Jesse according to the flesh will come forth and bring about all God's wonderful things. These terms speak of our Saviour (the Messiah) in His human nature, or, One born from the line of David. But now we have this title: the “*Root of Jesse.*” What are we to make of this? Well we must note carefully here that what we have is something very different to the idea expressed in verse 1 where we found that the Branch would propagate from the “*roots*” of Jesse. We took that to indicate a lowly birth. Now even though the word here is the same as that found in verse 1, it seems to indicate One that comes *before* Jesse. The “*Root of Jesse,*” may be taken as Jesse's roots as in verse 1, but I would suggest that it is being placed in contrast to the idea expressed earlier of the branch. Thus we have the “*Root*” and the “*Branch*” of Jesse. We often use the expression “root and branch” to signify two ends of something, or the origin and outcome of something, or the whole entirety of something. Thus we learn that the Branch is also the Root, and so is the “*Beginning*” and the “*End.*”⁷⁰⁴ In other words He is not just the offspring of Jesse in the line of David, but He also pre-existed Jesse.

Now this “*Root*” will also be a banner, or a conspicuous object raised for all to see. We learn first that He shall “*stand*” as such. This word indicates a solidity and a permanence, or of something established. Coupled with the thought of the “*banner,*” we have the idea of a command post where the banner is firmly planted in the ground. Now this “*banner*” is not an object but a person, namely, the “*Root.*” The term “*banner*” is employed to suggest something conspicuous or obvious, but in what way? Well, He is to be a “*banner to the people*” and one which will attract the “*Gentiles.*” Thus the whole world is in view here, not just Israel.

The “*banner*” theme is one which can be traced through Isaiah and other writers, and has as its starting point, the pole raised by Moses upon which the serpent was hung and to which all those who suffered bites from the “*fiery serpents*” were to look for healing.⁷⁰⁵ It is the historical reference that Christ picked up on, and used to describe his great mission on the cross at Calvary. Christ

703 Isaiah 11:1.

704 Isaiah 41:4,6; 48:12; Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13.

705 Numbers 21:6,8,9.

Studies in Isaiah.

crucified is the banner – the conspicuous standard to which all true believers rally.⁷⁰⁶ Verse 10 ends with the statement that *“His resting place shall be glorious.”* Such a sentence is pregnant with meaning. It indicates both the permanent and established nature of this banner, for it is a *“resting place,”* and it also describes the blessings and benefits it brings, for it will be *“glorious.”* We could also suggest that the ultimate resting place of the *“Root”* is *“glorious,”* that is, it is in glory, and so we are also lead to consider Christ's ascension and His being seated at the right hand of the Father.

[b] In that day He will ... (Isaiah 11:11-16).

Wonderfully we read that this banner will be the standard by which the armies of God will claim allegiance throughout the Gentile world. A remnant will be called not just from Israel, but *“from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea,”* in fact from all over the world including the outcasts from Judah and Israel.⁷⁰⁷

Now in this last part of Isaiah 11 we are given four things that the *“Root”* and *“Branch”* will do. Thus first of all He will *“recover the remnant”* (verse 11). Second, He will establish a *“banner”* for *“all nations”* (verse 12). Third, He will *“assemble”* and *“gather”* all His people (verses 12 to 14). Fourth, He will utterly destroy all obstacles and make a *“highway for the remnant”* to return (verse 15,16). We should look at each of these briefly in turn.

[i] He will recover the remnant. (Isaiah 11:11).

11:11.

In verse 11 we are informed that the Lord is going to do something *“again”* or for *“the second time.”* Thus the Lord's *“hand”* will act again. The first act of God's hand was the redemption of Israel from Egypt described in the book of Exodus. The second act of redemption points us to Christ as the passover lamb slain on Calvary. That these words were not fulfilled in the days of the return from exile is shown because the effect of this act will be universal, encompassing the whole world, whereas the return concerned a few from Babylon. The word *“recover”* of verse 1 actually means “to purchase” or “to buy.” Thus we have in these words the concept of the Lord's redemption. We are pointed to that great event of Christ's work on the cross!

But what of this reference to the *“hand”* of the Lord? It is clear from Scripture that God

706 John 3:14f; 1Corinthians 2:2; Galatians 6:14.

707 Isaiah 11:11,12.

Studies in Isaiah.

does not have hands or any bodily form because God is spirit.⁷⁰⁸ Is this reference in Isaiah 11:11 simply a metaphor showing us that God acts in this world? Although this idea is not alien to the text, the language seems to imply more. We read that “*the Lord shall set His hand.*” These words seem to convey more than simply the idea that He will act. This phrase would appear to be difficult to translate as shown by the various translations:

... the Lord shall **set his hand again** the second time to recover the remnant ... (KJV)

... that the Lord will **again** recover the second time with **His hand** the remnant ... (NASB)

... the Lord will **extend his hand yet** a second time to recover the remnant ... (ESV)

... the Lord will **reach out his hand** a second time to reclaim the ... remnant ... (NIV)

... the Lord **addeth** a second time **his power**, to get the remnant ... (YLT)

I have attempted to show the differences between the translations through highlighting. It can be seen that all the translations, start with the Lord's action or will, speak of recovering or reclaiming the remnant, use the phrase “*second time*,” and mention the Lord's “*hand*,” although (strangely) Young's Literal Translation changes “*hand*” to “*power*.” However there appears to be a stark difference when it comes to the first word in the Hebrew. The KJV opts for “*set ... again*,” the NASB suggests simply “*again*,” the ESV chooses “*extend*,” the NIV paraphrases with “*reach out*,” and the YLT goes for “*addeth*.” My attempt at translation is shown below. I have gone for the main meaning of the Hebrew word, namely, “to increase.”

... the Lord's hand will cause an increase *for a* second time (to recover/purchase the remnant).

The difficulty, then, comes with the first word in the Hebrew of this phrase. Literally it signifies an increase, and the verbal form suggests an active causal sense, (“He will cause an increase or an addition”). Towards the end of the phrase we also have the word rendered: “*His hand*,” which may suggest power but is a term we have in many places in Scripture. Thus the phrase reads, literally:

“He will cause an increase/addition – the Lord – second/again – His hand – the remnant.”

708 John 4:24.

Studies in Isaiah.

From this it seems vital to hold the idea that it is the Lord's *hand* that will bring about the proposed increase or addition. Now there is a sense in which the phrase “*the hand of the Lord*” can be taken as a title for the Messiah.⁷⁰⁹ It is significant that the Lord delivered Israel from Egypt by His “*outstretched arm*.”⁷¹⁰ We read, for example, that it was the hand of the Lord that “*laid the foundations of the earth*.”⁷¹¹ Now only Christ is set forth to us in Scripture as the agent by which all creation came into existence.⁷¹² In other words the actions and doings of God have come about through the work of Christ. He is the very “*Hand*” (or “*Arm*”) of God doing all the Father's will.⁷¹³ We read elsewhere in Scripture that the Messiah would be seated at the right hand of God the Father.

The Lord said to my Lord, “sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”⁷¹⁴

The Lord Jesus Himself pointed to this Scripture to affirm the very deity of the Messiah.⁷¹⁵ Now the right hand of God is a place of exaltation, a place of honour and privilege, a place of equality.⁷¹⁶

Thus we see in these verses that the incarnate God, the Lord Jesus, who is truly the “*Hand*” and the “*Arm*” of the Lord, will be active in recovering and purchasing His people from all over the world. But why these places? Well we have the main power of the day, Assyria, which occupied the north. Then we have Egypt which was the old enemy from which place the people were rescued towards the south. Pathros was located in the north or “upper” parts of Egypt whilst Elam was a province of Persia. Cush was Ethiopia, Hamath was a city in northern Syria, and Shinar was the ancient name for the region where Babylon was situated. The islands of the sea signify the coastlands, or the regions beyond and inhabited by distant and foreign peoples. It would appear that the references are meant to be all encompassing. From the small regions or cities (Hamath and Elam) to the great super-powers (Assyria and Egypt). From the ancient and long-gone places (Shinar) to the far distant lands (the islands of the sea and Cush). Such descriptions are given simply to suggest that wherever the remnant may find themselves, whether in nearby or ancient places, whether in far distant lands or in small and obscure sites, the Lord will, by His hand, bring recovery

709 See Isaiah 40:10,11; 51:5,9; 52:10; 53:1; 59:16; 63:5,12; 66:14.

710 Exodus 6:6. See also: Deuteronomy 5:15; 7:19; 11:2; 26:8; Psalm 44:3; Jeremiah 32:21; Ezekiel 20:33.

711 Isaiah 48:13.

712 Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16.

713 John 5:19,30.

714 Psalm 110:1.

715 Luke 20:42-44.

716 Acts 2:33; 5:31; Hebrews 1:13; 1Peter 3:22

Studies in Isaiah.

and return. How wonderful such thoughts are as we look over the world of the twenty first century. There are around 200 countries in the world today, and the Lord (the right hand of God) is still busy buying back His remnant! Praise to His wonderful name.

[ii] He will set up the banner for all nations. (Isaiah 11:12a).

11:12a.

The second thing the Lord does is equally wonderful, for He will “*set up a banner for the nations.*” Now we are not to be distracted by the indefinite article in English here. There is only one “*banner*” that the Lord is concerned about, and to which we referred when we looked at verse 10, namely, the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, supremely in connection with the cross, resurrection, and ascension.

The Lord will establish, or erect, and raise up (literally) a conspicuous rallying point to which all nations may resort. This banner is the banner of truth and love, because it points us to Christ.⁷¹⁷ Where Christ and all He has accomplished is honoured and raised as “the standard” there is the very work of God! How we weep and mourn to see this banner torn down and ridiculed in our land in this day. Oh that the Lord would be pleased to allow it to be raised again! We who love the Lord and seek to follow Him in faith working through love, need to raise the standard and banner that Christ has passed onto us, despite the ridicule and reproach we often face. Who but Christ can save? Who but Christ can deal with our sin and rebellion? Who but Christ can come and make things good and right and wholesome?

[iii] He will Gather and assemble His people. (Isaiah 11:12b-14).

11:12b.

It is not surprising that the Lord would first bring those who were part of the nation He had established. Thus we read that the Lord would bring both the “*outcasts of Israel,*” and the “*dispersed of Judah,*” from all over the world. Israel, in the north, which had split from the southern nation, were totally cast aside. We can see the remnants of this in our Lord's encounter with the woman at the well outside Samaria. The Lord made it plain to her that “*salvation is of the*

⁷¹⁷ Psalm 60:4; Song of Solomon 2:4.

Studies in Isaiah.

*Jews.*⁷¹⁸ The Lord warned Solomon that if Israel abandoned Him and the true way, then God would “*cut off Israel from the land,*” and would “*cast out*” of sight the house that He had given them.⁷¹⁹ But then also we note that those of Judah were “*dispersed,*” or scattered. Unlike Israel who would be not just removed from their land but would also be mixed up with other nations (resulting in the Samaritan nation), Judah would be taken captive and then would return. So in these two descriptions we are brought to consider God's work of gathering and assembling both those who were truly “outcast” and who had become intermingled with other nations, and those who were simply spread out, scattered like a flock of sheep across the fields. These descriptions are wonderful because they teach us that whomever we are, whether we are “outcasts” in the sense of all mixed up and in a hopeless condition as far as most are concerned, or if we are simply “dispersed,” so that we are confused and lost in some way, the Lord will gather us. The Lord Jesus seemed to have had a particular interest in the outcasts of His day, but He was also concerned for the scattered flock too.⁷²⁰

*And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.*⁷²¹

God is concerned for people! He gathers and He brings in to His care. This gathering of God is seen supremely in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ who came as a Shepherd, the Good Shepherd who brings life.⁷²² We should not limit our sights to the reconciliation between Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom), for these two are presented to us as examples of people in the world. If you like, you may consider the outcast Israel as the lost son, and the dispersed Judah as the older son as described for us in the parable of the two sons as recorded in Luke 15.⁷²³ All of us are either outcasts or dispersed. In some ways we may be both. But whomever we are the Lord will gather! The example set before us of Judah and Israel being reunited is to show the great grace and mercy of God. Do take note, though, that Israel and Judah were in fact never reunited after the exile. These truths are really pointing to the work of Christ!

718 John 4:22.

719 1Kings 9:7.

720 Jesus welcomed lepers (Luke 5:12-16), tax collectors (Luke 5:27-32), sinful women (Luke 7:36-50; John 4:7f; 8:1-11), and all kinds of people including the many who were sick and in need.

721 Mark 6:34.

722 John 10:10,11f; Ezekiel 34:11f.

723 Luke 15:11-32.

Studies in Isaiah.

11:13.

In verse 13 we find that such is the gathering work of God that envy and adversarial attitudes are removed. It is rather like the description of Isaiah 2 where nations would change implements of war for farm tools. The “*envy*” that Ephraim knew will “*depart,*” or be removed so that one would not be jealous of the other.⁷²⁴ Envy and jealousy are terrible things in a person. We ought always to remember that we have all things from the hand of God, and He is always good to all. Then also, Judah would no longer feel paranoid and insecure for her “*adversaries*” (real and imagined) would be “*cut off,*” and thus Judah would not be so embittered as to “*harass*” Ephraim. What a wonderful thing! Note that it is not that Christians no longer have adversaries, we do, and some poor brethren suffer terrible persecution which we do not discount. However the believer has had all his adversaries dealt with at the cross. The Lord has conquered sin, death, the world and the devil! Where envy and jealousy dwell, there will always be harassment and adversarial attitudes. When love comes and renews people, jealousy, envy and a bitter spirit depart!

11:14.

In the last verse of this section we learn a curious thing. The Philistines will be partners with both Judah and Israel (Ephraim), These together would then proceed west and east and will “*plunder*” those in the east. We are not to think in military terms here for the leading sin of that day (envy) and its fallout or fruit (enmity) are removed and dealt with. Consequently what is being described here is a capturing of people in their hearts and minds. They will be taken captive in such a way that they will yield obedience. We should also note that “*Edom*” and “*Moab*” were two nations with particular characteristics. Edom (Esau) was very worldly or carnal in nature. Their “father” (Jacob's twin brother Esau) was only interested in food, hunting, and the things of this world.⁷²⁵ The descendants of Edom at the time of Jesus were the Idumeans. Moab were the offspring of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter, and are described in Scripture as being “*very proud.*”⁷²⁶ The Ammonites were also descended from Lot via another daughter and were known for being a constant irritant to Israel, a kind of bully.⁷²⁷ Thus the worldly person whose appetites and energies are spent on all that this world has to offer, and the proud and the bully who think that they have all things sorted, will both be brought to obedience. This is a work of God!

724 Ephraim was the largest tribe in Israel so that often Israel was known by this name.

725 Genesis 25:27-34.

726 Genesis 19:31-38; Isaiah 16:6; Jeremiah 48:29.

727 Ezekiel 25:3,6.

Studies in Isaiah.

How beautiful it is to see one entrenched in all that this world has to offer suddenly throwing it all away for the Lord!⁷²⁸ How lovely too to see the self-satisfied, self-made men humble themselves under the mighty hand of God!

[iv] He will utterly destroy all obstacles and make a highway ... (Isaiah 11:15-16).

11:15,16.

Having recovered the remnant by purchase, provided the means by which they could muster (the standard or banner), and then actively sought and gathered the outcasts and the scattered, the Lord will finally make a *“highway,”* or a way for them to travel. To do this it would be necessary to remove obstacles, and two are mentioned here. First we have *“the tongue of the Sea of Egypt,”* by which is meant the Red Sea. Second we have *“the River”* which is often put to represent the river Euphrates.⁷²⁹ He will *“utterly destroy”* the first so that it will come under the ban and will thus be exterminated, and will *“shake His fist”* over and *“strike”* the second, so that it will be no more. The River (Euphrates) was to be struck by the *“mighty wind”* of God. We cannot fail to see the action of the Holy Spirit here. We know that the mighty rushing wind was brought to bear on those who were awaiting the promise of God at Pentecost. Such was a cleansing experience which did not consume the participants. Here however the mighty wind comes to blow the River to nought so that men can walk across without getting wet. We do not often consider the work of the Spirit in bringing down all lofty pretenders and obstacles, but such is His ministry.⁷³⁰

And so obstacles will be removed so that the remnant, no longer under the burden of oppressors, can walk freely. Such describes our path having been freed from sin and the curse of the law. We are now enabled to walk in newness of life, following the Saviour! The Lord has provided a *“highway,”* a major through road by which the remnant can return to God! There is a way back to God from the dark paths of sin, and it is this highway which will later be called the *“Highway of Holiness.”*⁷³¹ This is the high road, the visible road for all to walk, whether high born or low, whether Assyrian or Egyptian, whether Israeli or Judean, whether Gentile or Barbarian!

728 Matthew 13:46.

729 See Isaiah 7:20; 8:7.

730 Isaiah 4:4; John 16:7,8,11.

731 Isaiah 35:8.

*There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin;
There's a door that is open and you may go in.
At Calvary's cross is where you begin
When you come as a sinner to Jesus.*

Chapter 22.

Isaiah 12:1-6.

A hymn of praise for salvation.

Textual analysis.

1 And in that day you will say:

“O **Lord**, I will praise You; though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me. 2 Behold, **God** is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; ‘For **Yah**, the **Lord**, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.’”

3 Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

4 And in that day you will say:

“praise the **Lord**, call upon His name; declare His deeds among the peoples, make mention that His name is exalted. 5 Sing to the **Lord**, for He has done excellent things; this is known in all the earth. 6 Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, for great is the **Holy One of Israel** in your midst!”

This chapter is a beautiful hymn of praise given by the Lord for a person to sing. We have just considered whom this person is in the previous chapter. He is the Branch and the Root and He is the Banner. There are two parts to this song and it is one provided by the Lord. The two parts can be identified clearly by the repeated phrase “*in that day*” which comes in verses 1 and 3, with a statement of the result of this great salvation given in the middle (verse 3). The chapter promises that when “*that day*” comes then those who have put their trust in the Lord will offer these words in praise. They will want to offer *real* praise.

12:1.

Take note that this is a *personal* song. It is sung by individuals (“*I will praise*”). This is the gospel. None can come through by virtue of being within a family such as those born of Abraham, or by virtue of being in a nation such as Israel. These may be privileged positions, but they can never confer salvation on a person. Salvation is always individual and personal. Those who come to offer such praise will recognise that whilst the Lord was angry with their lost and sinful state, now His anger is “*turned away*.” This is remarkable! We recall that the statements found in chapter 5:25;

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9:12,17,21; 10:4 expressed the idea of the Lord's wrath not being fully satisfied by the temporal punishments delivered. Now, however, the wrath has been met in full. We are taught here of a full and complete atonement which is only realised in the one person prophesied of in Isaiah 11, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ (the Root, Branch, Banner). But what-is-more, there are further benefits. It is not just that the wrath of the Lord no longer abides on these folk, but that the Lord brings comfort (*"You comfort me"*). Here we have an intimation of the work of the Holy Spirit who is termed the *"Comforter"* in some versions.⁷³²

12:2.

Notice also that the offended one whose anger burned against the individual giving praise, is now averted because the Lord Himself is the saved one's *"strength and song"* and has become this one's *"salvation."* We have already been told that the rebellious were those who refused to turn to the Lord who was striking them down.⁷³³ Here we note the positive side. The saved are those who recognise that the one bringing judgement is also the one who provides rescue.

It will be worth considering the Hebrew sentence here:

← Hebrew reads from the right

הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָתִי אֶבְטַח וְלֹא אֶפְחָד
Behold God [is] my salvation I will trust and not be afraid
כִּי-עָזְרִי וְנִמְרָתִי יְהוָה יְהוָה-לִּי לִישׁוּעָה
for my strength and my song Yah the Lord and He has become unto me for salvation

The individual speaking praise here begins by noting that God is his salvation. This has consequences for his behaviour, for as a result he will *"trust"* and will *"not be afraid."* And then we get the reason for this trust and lack of fear (*"for"*). The last part is beautifully symmetrical. What we have is the Lord's name doubled and in the centre of the sentence. In other words, at the very centre and fulcrum of this person's life is *"Yah, the Lord."* Either side of this centre we have two descriptions which elucidate the opening statement that *"God is my salvation."* To begin with we learn that the Lord is this one's *"strength"* and *"song."* This *"Yah,"* this *"Lord"* is the basis for

732 For example, in the AKJV and the YLT at John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7.

733 Isaiah 9:13.

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life. Whenever strength is needed the Lord is the ground or foundation. This is wonderful and it serves to show that God is never simply to be added to a person's life. He must become all. All things require strength, and so all things require us to trust and lean on the Lord. Why do we do anything? It ought to be derived from the Lord. But then the Lord is not merely the engine and motivation for doing whatever it is we do, (all of life's experiences and needs), He is also our great delight, for He is our *"song."* God is incredibly gracious. He made a world in which there are wonderful things to behold, incredible things to experience, and many blessings to be had. But these all come from the hand of the Lord. These are His gifts to us. When we make these our basis for life (and so they become idols) things are all awry and spoilt. We must learn to enjoy the things God has freely bestowed upon us remembering from whom they have come. In this way we will give thanks for these blessings, and God will become our song and our delight. And then the sentence ends with a reaffirmation that the Lord has now become salvation.

To recap on what we have discussed, it is important to see that there are striking positive notes in this hymn. The emphasis is on the amazing blessings and benefits given to the individual saved. There is propitiation (the removal of anger) and comfort because the Lord is not just the deliverer but the deliverance. He is not merely the one who effects rescue but He is the salvation itself. Here we are drawn to the idea that the Lord takes it upon Himself to provide the means of propitiation and atonement. We are not told of a sacrifice here (that will come explicitly later), but we are given the strongest possible indication of this by the statement that the Lord God is salvation, and note that this idea is repeated with emphasis in verse 2 (*"For Yah, the Lord, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation"*). Thus praise will be spontaneous and will arise out of this amazing idea that although the Lord was angry because of sin, yet He Himself will become the very salvation and deliverance the people so desperately need.

12:3.

It is to be noted that the *"you"* here is plural so that a corporate perspective is in view. This contrasts with the singular references found in verses 1 and 2. Thus we have a strong sense of individuals working together to draw water from the wells for life. In other words walking the Christian life alone is much less than ideal.

And so, as a result of what the Lord has done in becoming salvation, the redeemed will be enabled to be at complete peace and will have great satisfaction.⁷³⁴ That is the implication of wells.

⁷³⁴ Isaiah 12:3.

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These were taps into deep reservoirs of freely flowing waters. The image is clear. What the Lord supplies is running (often called “*living*”) water, and the people will draw freely from these with joy completely unmolested and without fear.⁷³⁵

Elsewhere in Isaiah we read these wonderful words:

The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.⁷³⁶

Obviously this was a prophecy of the return from exile (in the future for Isaiah), but these words speak much more of the nature of true repentance and salvation. There is great emphasis on joy and gladness. Thus when believers dwell together and draw from the Lord the life and spiritual sustenance they need, there is always great joy.⁷³⁷

12:4.

In the second part of the song we have the outward aspect of what the Lord has done. This section reads like many of the Psalms. First the emphasis was on personal salvation, but now the focus is on the implications of such an amazing deliverance. The “*you*” of verse 4 is a plural so the corporate aspect is uppermost. In this verse we have four imperatives. We will have two more in subsequent verses but these are of a slightly different character.

Having drawn water with joy from the wells of salvation it is not difficult for the redeemed to move towards praise, or it shouldn't be. The fact we don't is often indicative of trouble. Wherever the Lord's goodness and life-sustaining provisions are on hand, there too is grateful thanks and praise. As I say, it is not always the case. When the Lord healed ten lepers only one returned to thank the Lord.⁷³⁸ Let us always stir our hearts to consider what we have received in order that we may give God His due. He is worthy of **great** praise. Although I do not endorse the medieval church they may have had something right in their continual worship in cathedrals and abbeys. How can we cultivate (by faith) a sense of continual praise and worship? We are exhorted to praise the Lord here for He is worthy. That ought to be enough to motivate us!

Then also we note in this corporate setting that there must be a calling “*upon His name.*”

735 Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13; Zechariah 14:8; John 4:10; 7:38; Revelation 7:17.

736 Isaiah 35:10; 51:11.

737 John 6:57; 7:37; 10:10; 11:28.

738 Luke 17:11-19.

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What is intended by this command? I think reliance and trust are uppermost here. Also implied is teaching. How can a person call upon the name of the Lord if they are not aware of that name? To call upon the name of the Lord requires a person to know the name at least, and what it stands for. For example, a person gets to know the reputation or “name” of helpful people in their neighbourhood. One man running a garage is known to be reliable and trustworthy. Another who sells goods is known for his seeking out good quality at reasonable prices. Well we who know the Lord dwell on His name and thence we are enabled to call upon Him for help in times of need.

Next we have a double command to make this glorious Lord known. We are to tell abroad the wonders of what He has done, and we are to make known His wonderful reputation. When a person comes to a region as a newcomer, they are informed by friendly people whom to trust (as we noted earlier by way of illustration). Our neighbours tell us of their experiences with different companies or workmen and whom to trust. Well here we are being commanded to speak out that the Lord is One who is much more than simply trustworthy! His “*deeds*” and His “*name*” are far, far above all others. He is much more than a reliable workman or a knowledgeable helper. The “*deeds*” and “*name*” of the Lord ought to be the talk of the believer. A believer's conversation ought to be all about the goodness of the Lord and what He has done. But notice further that these things ought to be *public* knowledge, for we see that such declaration is not just amongst the believing and the trusting, it is to be “*among the peoples*” (i.e. the Gentiles). Why then do we shrink from making Him known?

12:5.

Next there is the instruction to sing. How vital this is. Singing helps us greatly, for as well as having ideas expressed fluently and succinctly in the form of words which appeals to the intellect, the music that guides us is a perfect way to stir the emotions. However I wonder that in much of the modern church we run the risk of failing dreadfully here. On the one hand we can be deathly by singing obscure and outdated tunes with words and phrases requiring interpretation, whilst on the other hand we opt for childish words with mind-numbingly complex tunes. There must be a better way of using up-dated tunes that are easy to sing, and which stir us with modern ways of expressing the great truths in an exhilarating way. We need a way to express clearly the wonders of the Lord and his work so that the imagination, the heart, the will, and the intellect are all stimulated. Notice that we are given a reason to sing. It is because the Lord has “*done excellent things.*” Only He has done such! Our songs ought to reflect this. Nothing else compares (not even by a trillion miles) to

what He has done.

Then note further that the fact of the Lord's excellence is "*known*" everywhere! How can this be? We have this idea in our minds that hardly anyone knows, and that there are loads of places which are totally ignorant of the gospel. But the fact is that God's plans never fail. He will declare the gospel, even if we fail personally. This is no excuse for us – it ought to energise us. We ought to take heart that God will make known his wonders, and we ought thence to rise to help in his plan.

12:6.

The song finishes with a call to "*cry out and shout*" indicating a supreme effort at publishing and making people hear. It is as though everyone is hard of hearing! It is as though we are standing on one side of a river and the people are on the other side! Well of course these pictures are true. People are deaf and they are a long way off. So we are to make every effort to make the gospel known and understood. That is what the Great Commission is all about – teaching people the gospel and its implications for all of life. Again we find that a reason is given to help the "*inhabitant of Zion*" (true believers) to get on with the task. The reason is that the "*Holy One of Israel*" is "*great*" and is in the "*midst*" of his people. I wonder if you catch the remarkable nature of these words? We are brought back to the holiness and purity of the Lord. This One who cannot tolerate sin and who consumes as a burning fire, is described by two ideas which seem to be at odds with one another. Perhaps the word "*great*" in English usage is rather weakened by overuse. The idea is one of immenseness to the point of infinity. God is great doesn't mean that He is a cut above the rest or that He stands out head and shoulders above everyone else. The idea is much greater and we are entitled to be led towards the idea of God's infinite nature (omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence). But how can this "*great*" one be "*amongst*" His people? How can One so immense and so awesome (in the largest sense of this word) be with His people? Well we have already been told about the Child of the virgin, and the One who will come, and whose government and kingdom will have no end. And so we are brought face-to-face with the incarnation which is clearly described in the New Testament. The God-man comes with healing in his wings! How we ought to make Him known!

Chapter 23.

Interlude.

Pause for thought.

And so we conclude the first section of Isaiah which runs from chapter 1 through to chapter 12. In it we have been treated to many calls to put our trust in the Lord, and we have been introduced to the One in whom we should trust. He is the One who will bring another “*law*” from Zion (chapter 2), who is described as the beautiful “*Branch*” who provides secure resting places (chapter 4). He is the “*well-Beloved*” who has done everything possible for us but who will judge all wrongdoing (chapter 5). He is the Holy One who commissioned Isaiah (chapter 6), and the Unique One who would come from the virgin's womb (chapter 7). He is the gentle “*Shiloah*” who will not hesitate to judge with a flood those who refuse His offer of peace and well being (chapter 8). He is the Child of Promise who is “*God with us*” (chapter 9). Whilst temporal judgements issue warnings and bring some justice, they will not be the end of the matter (chapter 10), for the “*Root*” and the “*Branch*” of Jesse, the very eternal One to be made perfect flesh, will come and erect the glorious banner to which all may flee (chapter 11). He is the One alone worthy of our praise and trust (chapter 12). What a glorious start to Isaiah!

The gospel for all nations!

Before we embark on the second main section of Isaiah 1 to 39 we need to reflect on the fact that the messages we have been studying in Isaiah 1 to 12 were not exclusively for the nation of Judah. We can see this by reference to the “*nations*” and the “*Gentiles*” in various places.

In Isaiah 2:2 we discover that in the “*latter days*” “*all nations shall flow to*” the “*mountain of the Lord's house*” which was to be “*established on the top of the mountains.*” We took this to indicate the gospel age. Then in Isaiah 2:4 we discover that the Lord will “*judge between the nations*” and that the nations will not learn war any more. Again we related this prophecy to the gospel age where all nations will come into the kingdom and will give up their weapons of warfare for gifts of peace. In Isaiah 5:26 we learn that the Lord will “*lift up a banner to the nations from*

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afar” so that they will come to the rallying point established by God (i.e. the cross). The same theme is found in Isaiah 11:12 (*“He will set up a banner for the nations”*).

Apart from these references, we also have mention of the *“Gentiles”* in the NKJV at the following places. At the beginning of Isaiah 9 we read:

... By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. **2** The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. ...⁷³⁹

In Isaiah 11:10 we hear of the promised Messiah designated as the *“Root of Jesse”* and who will:

... stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious.⁷⁴⁰

Messages to the 'nations.'

In our next main section of Isaiah there is a distinct change in subject matter, but the same theme of the gospel and the Messiah can be seen clearly. This second section runs from chapter 13 through to chapter 27. Details are shown in table 23.1. We start with ten *“burdens”* or oracles against various 'nations' surrounding the promised land (Isaiah 13;1-23:18). Following this we have a message telling of judgement on the whole earth (Isaiah 24:1-23). Chapters 25 to 27 describe the story of two cities. In these we read first about what the Lord will do *“on this mountain”* including the destruction of death (Isaiah 25:1-12). Then we are taught about how the Lord will bring in peace prior to his final return (Isaiah 26:1-21). The section concludes with a judgement against Leviathan that twisted serpent and culminates in the final trumpet (Isaiah 27:1-13).

Now many Bible commentators argue that the messages to the ten 'nations' were not directed at the various nations mentioned, but were in fact *about* those nations but given only to Judah. I do not doubt that the Lord wanted Judah to know about the dangers of pagan beliefs and practices, but I am convinced that these messages were also for those nations to which these messages were addressed. We must remember that Elijah was called upon to anoint a foreign king, and Jonah, for example, was called to preach to Nineveh.⁷⁴¹ We are used to thinking about the gospel in the New Testament being spread across the world, but the gospel has been preached since the fall, and many in the ancient world heard these truths. We need only mention the likes of Ruth and Rahab to show

739 Isaiah 9:1b,2a.

740 Isaiah 11:10.

741 1Kings 19:15; Jonah 1:2.

Studies in Isaiah.

Table 23.1: The burdens and the messages of Isaiah 13 to 27.

No.	Nation.	Text.	Notes.	'City.'
1	Babylon	Isaiah 13:1-14:27.	This was the power to come which would overrule Assyria during the days of Josiah until the captivity some one and a half centuries in the future. The burden also includes Assyria in Isaiah 14:24-27.	14:4.
2	Philistia	Isaiah 14:28-32.	The Philistines were an ancient thorn in the flesh for Israel.	14:31.
3	Moab	Isaiah 15:1-16:14.	Moab was one of the incestuous offspring from Lot Abraham's nephew. These were a very proud nation.	
4	Damascus	Isaiah 17:1-18:7.	This was the capital of Syria and along with the northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria) formed a confederacy against Judah in the days of Jotham and Ahaz.	17:1.
5	Egypt	Isaiah 19:1-20:6.	The southern power which had been present as a type of the world since the says of Abraham.	19:2(x2),18.
6	The Wilderness of the Sea	Isaiah 21:1-10.	Probably reminding the people of Judah of the wilderness experiences, but also typifying the world as a whole which is sometimes put as the sea.	
7	Dumah	Isaiah 21:11,12.	This was a son of Ishmael and thence a tribe of Arabia.	
8	Arabia	Isaiah 21:13-17.	There were many tribes in Arabia and these were descended from Abraham via Hagar and Keturah (his second wife taken after Sarah died).	
9	The Valley of Vision	Isaiah 22:1-25.	This prophecy concerned Judah.	22:2(x2),9.
10	Tyre	Isaiah 23:1-18.	A centre of trade and part of the Phoenician kingdom along with Sidon.	23:7,8,16.
In the next four chapters we come across the theme of the “city” nine times.				
The earth (universal judgement)		Isaiah 24:1-23.	The city of confusion and desolation is destroyed.	24:10,12.
Praise for the Lord's great work on “this mountain.”		Isaiah 25:1-12.	The city of this world is ruined and is in fear of God.	25:2,3.
The song of the just and the fate of the wicked.		Isaiah 26:1-21.	The city of God is strong – a place of salvation but the lofty city is brought low.	26:1,5.
The end of Leviathan!		Isaiah 27:1-13.	The fortified city will be desolate.	27:10.

how the gospel had been heard of old. Or what of the Queen of Sheba and her questions answered

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by the Lord through Solomon?⁷⁴² One of the themes that is discernible throughout these four chapters from Isaiah 24 to 27 is the idea that there are two cities. One which depicts the fallen world, and another which is the city of God. The word “city” occurs some 43 times but the distribution is uneven throughout Isaiah. The word is only found four times in the first chapter of Isaiah, and then does not appear again until the section which runs from Isaiah 13 through to 27, where it comes twenty one times. The word comes twelve times in the last twelve chapters of the first section of Isaiah, and only six more times in the remainder of Isaiah (i.e. chapters 40 to 66).⁷⁴³

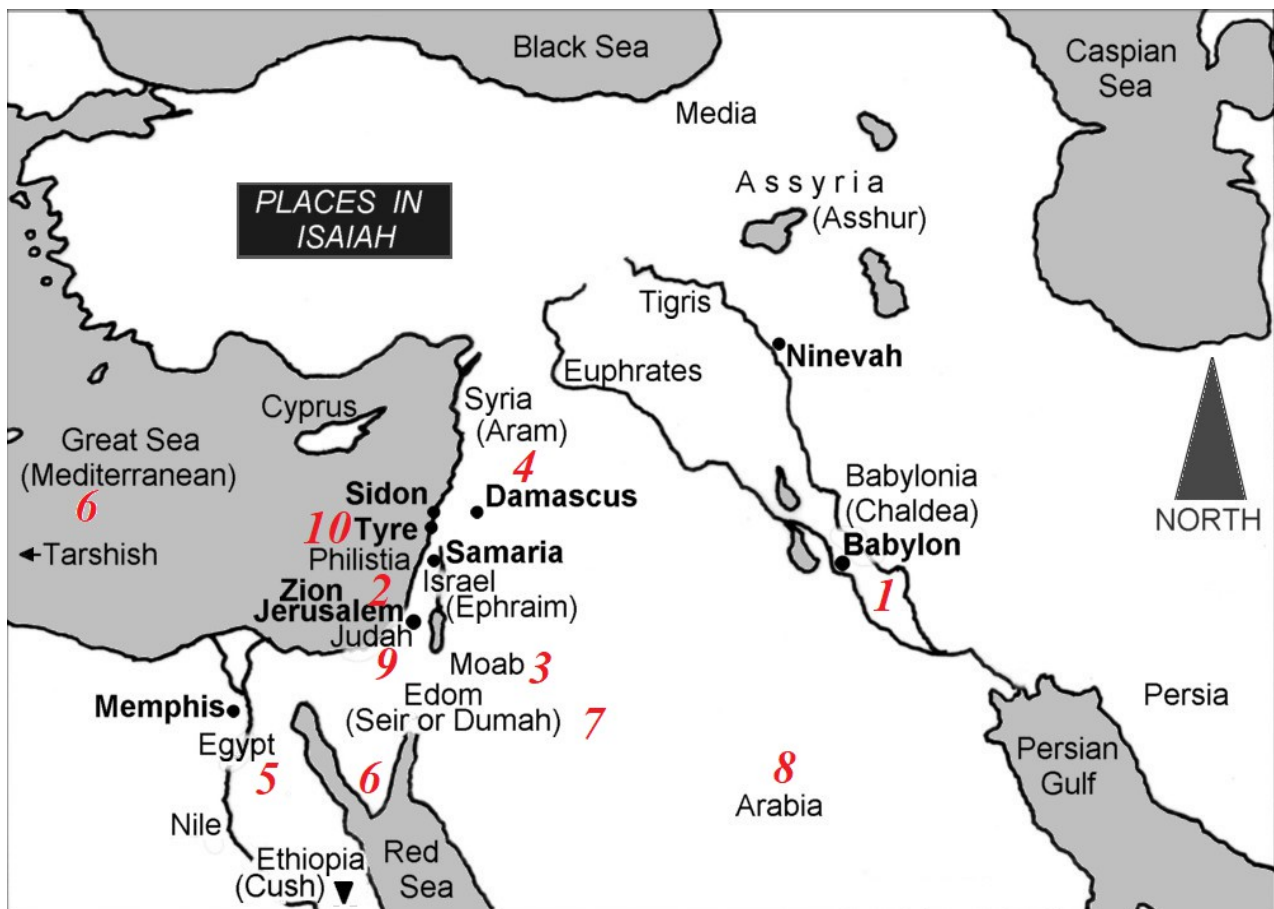


Figure 2: The nations receive the message of God.

742 Judges 2:8-13; Ruth 1:16; 1Kings 10:1-5.

743 The word “city” occurs

4 times in the first 12 chapters of Isaiah at: Isaiah 1:8,21,26(x2).

21 times in the second section from Isaiah 13 to 27 at: Isaiah 14:4,31; 17:1; 19:2(x2),18; 22:2(x2),9; 23:7,8,16; 24:10,12; 25:2(x3),3; 26:1,5; 27:10.

12 times in the last 12 chapters of the first part of Isaiah (chapters 28 to 39) at: Isaiah 29:1; 32:13,14,19; 33:20; 36:15; 37:13,33,34,35; 38:6(x2).

6 times in the second major section of Isaiah (chapters 40 to 66) at: Isaiah 45:13; 48:2; 52:1; 60:14; 62:12; 66:6.

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Looking at the map (figure 2) it seems as though the order of the burdens begins with the important enemy which would come from the north although was actually sited due east of the nation of Judah (i.e. Babylon). Then our gaze is focused west near the Mediterranean sea to Philistia, before turning east again to Moab south of the Dead Sea. Next we are brought south to Egypt and then into the wilderness regions at the south of the promised land traversed by the Israelites on their journey from slavery in Egypt. The phrase: *“the wilderness of the sea”* has a dual signification but it also takes us much further afield to the Gentile lands that Isaiah often refers to as *“the coastlands.”* Next we are taken much further east into the desert regions of Arabia where the descendants of Ishamel thrived (*“Dumah,”* and *“Arabia”*). Our attention is brought back to Judah and then finally to Tyre of the Phoenicians which was sited in the north. Our gaze has thus been cast north, (or far east), west, east, north, south, south (and far distant), far east, and then north once more. It would seem that all the nations surrounding Judah from the smallest like *“Dumah”* to the greatest like *“Egypt,”* and from the ancient like *“Philistia,”* to the up-coming like *“Babylon”* were considered. In other words this is a comprehensive sweep of the compass, which ends with a prophecy concerning the whole world in Isaiah chapter 24. This last prophecy which takes in the entire globe is not a surprise to the reader, for there have been clear intimations throughout the preceding which point to a universal reference. Egypt is frequently put to typify the world, and Babylon, for example, is a nation which is mentioned as representative of the entire globe in the book of Revelation.

Chapter 24.

Isaiah 13:1-14:27.

The burden against Babylon.

Analysis.

Our text for this chapter is rather long. Thus rather than give the entire grammatical analysis at the beginning, I have chosen to supply it only under each heading as we discuss the whole passage.

This first burden against Babylon includes a taunt specifically against the king of Babylon, and a message against Assyria.⁷⁴⁴ However the burden is couched in terms that make us understand clearly that Babylon sits as the chief example for all, for the references to a universal judgement of the whole earth continually peaks through. It is significant that at the time Isaiah was prophesying it was Assyria not Babylon which was in the ascendancy. Babylon would be the world power at the time when Jerusalem would finally fall during the prophetic witness of Jeremiah. Why does the Lord move Isaiah to pick up Babylon first and as a representative of the entire world? Well I think we must remember that after the flood the first return to rebellion centred around Nimrod and Babel, (i.e. Babylon). Furthermore, the beginning of Babylonian ascendancy would occur during the reign of Hezekiah, and in the interlude historical section of Isaiah 36 to 39 we are informed of the historical events surrounding a failed invasion by Assyria, and then the folly of Hezekiah is displayed as he unwisely makes friends with Merodach Baladan of Babylon. Merodach means “your rebellion,” and Baladan means “Bel is Lord.” In this we are brought back to the original rebellion at the tower of Babel. It is necessary to remind the reader at this point that Nimrod's name is very close (as far as the Hebrew is concerned) to Merodach. Although these names may not look the same in English, in Hebrew the two names have three very significant consonants which form the basis of the name and which signify the idea of rebellion, (for Merodach we have **M-R-D-CH** and for Nimrod we have **N-M-R-D**).

That we are brought to consider a burden of prophecy against Babylon in universal terms

⁷⁴⁴ Isaiah 14:4-23; 14:24-27.

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can be seen by looking at the frequency of terms referring to the whole earth or all the nations:

- [] the kingdoms of nations gathered together. (13:4).
- [] For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. (13:10).
- [] I will punish the world for *its* evil. (13:11).
- [] Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place. (13:13).
- [] The whole earth is at rest *and* quiet. (14:7).
- [] Who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities. (14:17).
- [] Lest they rise up and possess the land, and fill the face of the world with cities. (14:21).
- [] This *is* the purpose that is purposed against the whole earth, and this *is* the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. (14:26).

However that Babylon and its environs are meant is equally central to the passage:

- [] The burden against Babylon. (13:1).
- [] To destroy the whole land. (13:5).
- [] Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them. (13:17).
- [] And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited ... Her time *is* near to come, and her days will not be prolonged. (13:19-22)
- [] Against the king of Babylon. (14:4).
- [] Cut off from Babylon the name and remnant. (14:22).

Thus Babylon stands as representative for the whole world. Whilst we have a specific prophecy which concerns the destruction of the nation who ruled the world and who conquered Israel (a yet future event for Isaiah), we have this as a type of the destruction of the whole world (future for us now) which will end when Christ returns in glory.

Following the opening verse (“*The burden against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw*”), which acts both as a title to this whole section of Isaiah and the introduction for this burden against Babylon, we can divide this burden up into five parts as follows:

Studies in Isaiah.

[1] A banner lifted up. (Isaiah 13:2-5).

[2] The day of the Lord. (Isaiah 13:6-22).

[a] The final day of the Lord. (Isaiah 13:6-13).

[b] Babylon's final day. (Isaiah 13:14-22).

[3] A blessing for Jacob/Israel. (Isaiah 14:1-4a).

Some thoughts concerning church.

[4] A proverb against the king of Babylon. (Isaiah 14:4b-23).

General considerations.

[5] The Assyrian to be broken. (Isaiah 14:24-27).

[1] A banner lifted up. (Isaiah 13:2-5).

Textual analysis.

2 “Lift up a banner on the high mountain,
raise your voice to them;
wave your hand,
that they may enter the gates of the nobles.
3 I have commanded My sanctified ones;
I have also called My mighty ones for My anger— those who rejoice in My exaltation.”

4 The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like that of many people!
A tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together!
The Lord of hosts musters the army for battle.

5 They come
from a far country,
from the end of heaven—
the Lord and His weapons of indignation,
to destroy the whole land.

13:2.

We have already come across this term “*banner*” in Isaiah. It is tempting to settle with a mere linking this to a military insignia and flag raised as a rallying point. However the theme from a Biblical Theology point of view clearly signifies **The Rallying** point, namely, the death and resurrection of the Lord. To see this we must look back at the references in Isaiah and forward to the connection made by our Lord in John's gospel to an event in Numbers.

The banner is first introduced at Isaiah 5:26 in the context of judgement against Israel, and then next in Isaiah 11:10,12 where we find the banner identified with the “*root of Jesse*” and which acts as a gathering place for all the outcasts of Israel. The Hebrew word used in Isaiah 5:26; 11:10,12 and 13:2 and rendered as “*banner*” is: **נֵשׁ** *nes* translated as “pole,” “standard,” or “signal.”

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This same Hebrew word is translated as *“pole”* in Numbers 21:9 where we read of Moses lifting up the bronze serpent upon which anyone who looked would be healed from serpent bites. It was this event which the Lord referred to as signifying His own death on the cross:

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. **16** For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. **17** For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.⁷⁴⁵

Now here in Isaiah 13:2 the banner acts as a rallying point for judgement against Babylon (and the whole world). The banner is to be raised on *“the high mountain”* and this too is noteworthy, for we have already been informed that in the last days *“that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains.”*⁷⁴⁶ Thus we have a banner raised upon the highest mountain as an ensign and a rallying point. The Hebrew word translated *“high”* here in verse 2 actually means “bare,” or “wind swept,” signifying a place where nothing grows and so is very high. But this concept of barrenness is also deeply significant because Christ was crucified on Golgotha or Calvary, the place of the skull. In other words a barren place of death.⁷⁴⁷ The text goes on to teach us that this event concerns a judgement on Babylon. The call to raise a banner and to shout waving the hand is to enable an entrance into the gates of the nobles, i.e. Babylon.

13:3-5.

We next read about the ones called to this rallying point.⁷⁴⁸ They are described in three ways as follows:

My sanctified ones.

My mighty ones.

those who rejoice in My exaltation.

To whom is the Lord referring here? Are these angels? Or are they saints? The verses following lead

745 John 3:14-17.

746 Isaiah 2:2.

747 Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22; Luke 23:33; John 19:17.

748 Isaiah 13:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

us to believe that it is a people gathered from every nation, and it is also heavenly beings (angels). We can say this from the terms used here. In the first place we have *“a multitude in the mountains”* which may signify either those who have come to the mountain of the Lord as in Isaiah 2, or those who inhabit the heavenly realms.⁷⁴⁹ But then we read further of the *“Lord of hosts”* or Lord of armies which often refers to angelic beings.⁷⁵⁰ The description of the mustering of the army for battle suggests both people and angels for we read that they come *“from a far country”* and that they come *“from the end of heaven.”*⁷⁵¹ The characteristics of this great army of the Lord suggests both angels and saints. These are the ones who have been set apart or made holy. They are the ones who rejoice in the glory of God and they are mighty! We cannot but think here of the passage in Revelation where all the angels and the redeemed saints stand in wonder love and praise of the Lamb that was slain, or of that we find recorded in Hebrews which teaches that the church includes all the saints and the angels in heaven:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, **23** to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, **24** to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.⁷⁵²

However, in the context we are studying, verses from the epistle of Jude are equally relevant. Jude talks of a judgement prophesied by Enoch:

14 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, **15** to execute judgement on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”⁷⁵³

Notice how it is put here! This army of the Lord is mustered from all quarters of the globe and from heaven to execute judgement upon Babylon. It is these people along with the angels who are the Lord's *“weapons of indignation”* which are brought to bring destruction.⁷⁵⁴ Of course with reference

749 Isaiah 13:4.

750 Isaiah 13:4.

751 Isaiah 13:5.

752 Hebrews 12:22-24.

753 Jude 1:14,15.

754 Isaiah 13:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

to Babylon, the Lord uses angels (we cannot see these in action but they are there) and He uses men. Sometimes these are the godless nations, but at the end of all things it will be His saints, His set apart ones, who will come with the Lord in judgement as Jude tells us. And what is the basis for this judgement? Well clearly the rallying point and the point of focus is the “*banner*” or standard raised, i.e. Christ and His death and resurrection. The world (Babylon) will be held to account for their rejection of God's great gift! How vital and worth all the trouble to make this great indescribable gift known so that people can rejoice in it before it is too late!

[2] The day of the Lord. (Isaiah 13:6-22)

And now we come to the great “*day of the Lord*”! This is a theme found not just throughout Isaiah, but through the prophets in general. We have encountered the concept in chapters 2, 4, 7 and 11. Here in the burden against Babylon we find it to be a central theme with mentions at verses 6, 9 13 of chapter 13, and verse 3 of chapter 14. It resurfaces in chapters 19, 22, 24 and 27 of this section of Isaiah.

The central focus of the “*day of the Lord*” is always one of judgement. Sometimes we are directed to consider the first coming of Christ, and sometimes to the second, but the essential point is that God is bringing judgement to bear.⁷⁵⁵ There appear to be two senses in which the day of the Lord is applied in this passage. First we have a universal application in verses 6 to 13, and then a more focused application to Babylon in verses 14 to 22. However in both applications our focus is not the first coming of Christ but the second. We know this because the standard raised on the (bare) high mountain (representing Christ's work) is a rallying point for the sanctified ones to come in judgement on Babylon.

[a] The final day of the Lord. (Isaiah 13:6-13).

Textual analysis.

6 Wail, for the day of the **Lord** is at hand!
It will come as destruction from the Almighty.
7 Therefore
 all hands will be limp,
 every man's heart will melt,
8 And they will be afraid.
Pangs and sorrows will take hold of *them*;
they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth;
they will be amazed at one another;

⁷⁵⁵ Christ was judged in place of sinners at the cross, whilst the nations and individuals that reject Christ's free offer of salvation will be judged at Christ's return – and will be judged on the basis of the standard raised, (i.e. Christ).

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their faces *will be like* flames.

9 Behold, the day of the **Lord** comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger,
to lay the land desolate;
and He will destroy its sinners from it.

10 For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light;
the sun will be darkened in its going forth,
and the moon will not cause its light to shine.

11 "I will punish
the world for *its* evil,
and the wicked for their iniquity;

I
will halt the arrogance of the proud,
and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

12 I will make
a mortal more rare than fine gold,
a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir.

13 Therefore I will
shake the heavens,
and the earth will move out of her place,
in the wrath of the **Lord of hosts**
and in the day of His fierce anger.

It is fitting that the judgement against Babylon is delivered first from the perspective of the universal judgement that will come on all unrepentant ones when Christ returns. Thus, in this first section we are taught about the universal nature of judgement against the whole earth. Such a day is not to be rejoiced in because it is fearsome and terrifying. We have already been taught this in Isaiah chapter 2, but here the point is developed in detail. We are given two views of this terrible day. In verses 6 to 8 we are given an insight into the effects on a personal level. The day of the Lord is nearby, and at hand. This is a warning we take so lightly! We scoff and laugh at the man who says, "the end of the world is nigh!" but it is! How quickly life rushes on and we face eternity far sooner than we ever think, even if the Lord tarries to return.

13:6,7

The word "*wail*" is onomatopoeic and signals a deep wailing and howling from within.⁷⁵⁶ This day is a day of almighty ruin and destruction. There is no coming back from this day, and this is all because it comes from the Almighty One. How vital it is to heed the gracious offer of salvation now before it is too late, for at this day the Almighty-to-save is now the Almighty-to-destroy. What terrifying thoughts. Such a day is one no one who suffers it will be able to escape or rise from. All hands will be limp meaning that there is no action that can be done to save a person. Not only will people be unable to do anything, their very will and heart will be like jelly and utterly without

756 Isaiah 13:6.

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scheme or resource.⁷⁵⁷ I am reminded of the parable of the kingdom of heaven where one came to the banquet without wedding clothes and when questioned was speechless.⁷⁵⁸ No one will be able to answer a word. All, without exception whether rich or poor, high born or of low estate, will have weak and useless hands and failing hearts. In some disaster films we always find that there are those who have ingenuity or wealth, or those who can devise some clever scheme who manage to survive. But make no mistake there is no escape from this day.

13:8.

In verse 8 the description that fits all people at that time is of a woman in her labour pains. They will be in great pain and in great sorrow as a woman giving birth, so much so that they will be writhing in agony. This day of great terror and pain will make people utterly astonished and dumbfounded so that their faces are aflame with emotion. Notice that there will be recognition of the horrors of that day not simply on a personal level, but one to another (*“they will be amazed at one another”*).

13:9,10.

Verses 9 to 13 give a more panoramic viewpoint of this day as it affects the whole world. Once again we find that this day is no mere disaster such as the world has suffered throughout its history, but a day which *“comes”* and which is *“cruel,”* harsh, and one in which the righteous anger, wrath, and indignation of God is fully realised.⁷⁵⁹ We pause at this point to remind ourselves that this very anger of God, this harsh judgement which is fully right, was poured out on the Saviour at Calvary. He suffered in the place of sinners and so it is horrendous that people think that by rejecting that great offer of salvation they will escape it now. Sinners who have rejected Christ and His offer of salvation will be destroyed.⁷⁶⁰ The word *“land”* can be translated as *“earth,”* but it is perhaps best to consider that Babylon is meant but put as a type of the entire globe. This land will be made waste to such a degree that it brings astonishment. But not just the physical world, the world of men (sinners) will also be exterminated and destroyed in an equally final manner. It will not just be the earth, for the heavens that contain the sun, moon and stars will also be under God's judgement. These will all be darkened and extinguished no more to shine. This is a devastating day!

757 Isaiah 13:7.

758 Matthew 22:12.

759 Isaiah 13:9.

760 Isaiah 13:9.

13:11,12.

Next we are given the clear reasons for such a judgement. The world will be made to pay for the “*evil*” and sinful rebellion (“*iniquity*”) they have engaged in.⁷⁶¹ We do not realise the truth of the world's situation. It is evil and sinful. We do not like to hear these words. We laud and praise men but underneath we know in our own hearts that sin and evil lurks in the depths. We only really have to consider the fact that we have forgotten God in all our 'great' efforts and achievements to see the truth of these words as applied to the world. How can it be that the world ignores, rejects and even repudiates God in all His wisdom, beauty and glory? Paul points out that mankind actually “*suppress the truth*” in their pursuit of unrighteousness.⁷⁶² In our text, the particular problem is pride. It will be those who are self-satisfied and self-absorbed, such as we saw in Isaiah chapter 2, who will be brought low and will be brought to an abrupt end. Pride is essentially the problem because pride says 'I can do it my way' and 'nobody tells me what to do!' And yet we have been made in the image of God and we do not function correctly (not even partially) without a good relationship with our Maker and Redeemer. We are needy! We are dependent! And yet we fight against this so! The passage ends with an emphatic conclusion. Mortal man will be rare and the heavens and the earth will be shaken by the fierce anger and wrath of the thrice holy God.⁷⁶³

13:13.

The Lord will once again “*shake the heavens*” so that the “*earth will move out of her place.*”⁷⁶⁴ And all of this because of the “*wrath*” and “*fierce anger*” of the Lord which will come on that last day. These descriptions speak of a cataclysmic change in the order of creation.

In view of what we have just read and considered in a little detail, we must do two things. First we ought to give thanks to the Lord for His immense grace and mercy for in this we can see a glimpse of what the Lord Jesus faced in Gethsemane and on Calvary. He was judged and punished for the sins of those who trust in Him, and He endured this until the very last sin was paid for. What a Saviour! How we ought to trust Him more and more for such amazing grace and mercy. But there is a second thing we ought to do, and this I believe is equally important as the first. In view of this terrible day of the Lord that is to come when Christ returns, we ought to make every effort to warn people of the wrath to come and of the need for true repentance and faith in God. In short we are

761 Isaiah 13:11.

762 Romans 1:18.

763 Isaiah 13:12.

764 See: Isaiah 34:4; 51:6; Haggai 2:6.

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applying the two great commandments to this passage. We should love the Lord God in heart, mind, strength and soul, and then we should love our neighbours as we love ourselves. Give thanks for the Lord's indescribable gift and declare this great wonder to one and all.

[b] Babylon's final day. (Isaiah 13:14-22).

Textual analysis.

- 14 It shall be as the hunted gazelle, and as a sheep that no man takes up;
every man will turn to his own people,
and everyone will flee to his own land.
15 Everyone who is found will be thrust through,
and everyone who is captured will fall by the sword.
16 Their children also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes;
their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.
- 17 "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them,
who will not regard silver;
and *as for* gold, they will not delight in it.
18 Also *their* bows will dash the young men to pieces,
and they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb;
their eye will not spare children.
- 19 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride,
will be as when **God** overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.
20 It will never be inhabited,
nor will it be settled from generation to generation;
nor will the Arabian pitch tents there,
nor will the shepherds make their sheep folds there.
21 But wild beasts of the desert will lie there,
and their houses will be full of owls;
Ostriches will dwell there,
and wild goats will caper there.
22 The hyenas will howl in their citadels,
and jackals in their pleasant palaces.
- Her time *is* near to come,
and her days will not be prolonged."

In this next part (from verses 14 to 22), we are informed of how this day of the Lord comes to Babylon. The "*it*" of verse 14 refers back to the day of the Lord, depicted in verse 13 as "*the day of His fierce anger.*" This day is now considered from the perspective of Babylon, but the connection with the previous verses ought not to be forgotten as the whole passage from verse 6 to 22 forms a seamless unit.

13:14-16.

The imagery of verse 14 is not easy to understand but it seems as though what is being conveyed is utter confusion. People who hunt gazelle or who farm sheep are no longer doing this because they are too busy fleeing and running to be with loved ones or for other motives. Verse 15

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brings us down to the ground in no uncertain terms because we are in the midst of a war and battle. People running here and there, will end up skewered on swords and spears. The picture is terrible. These swords and spears do not discriminate. Any found, be they young or old, be they pregnant mothers or little children, will suffer the same fate. We shudder when we hear of such things happening in wars and attacks around the globe. But we must remember that whilst the Lord allows such to happen, the root cause of all this is the sin that lies within man, for God is always good.

13:17,18.

Now in verse 17 we read that the Medes will be coming, and they will not be put off by any offer of money. The death they inflict is indiscriminate reaching all the “*young men,*” the “*fruit of the womb,*” and the “*children.*”⁷⁶⁵ We tremble at these awful and harrowing images, but we note that it is all because of the pride and greed of man. One nation fights another for all sorts of varied reasons. But these basically come down to the sinful nature of man, from the “*desires for pleasure that war*” within as James makes clear.⁷⁶⁶

We return to the plain fact that God is good and He does good.⁷⁶⁷ Further, we affirm that all life is His for He is Creator and sovereign Lord. He determines the day of death and no one can argue with that appointment. The New Testament makes it clear that our death day has been “*appointed*” and following that we face judgement.⁷⁶⁸ Each person's exit from this world has been appointed by God. Some face the terror of death in wars, but these are not God's doing even though He sovereignly controls all things. Such thoughts always make us squirm, but we find peace and rest in the amazing truth that the Son of God was taken by wicked men and crucified. Such treatment stands as the worst that men do, but it was not without the Lord's very will involved positively:

*Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.*⁷⁶⁹

In this single stupendous event we see the horror of men's actions coincident with God's sovereign choice to bless and bring life. What men meant for harm, God devises for the good. Here Babylon

765 Isaiah 13:18.

766 James 4:1,2.

767 Psalm 119:68.

768 Hebrews 9:27.

769 Acts 2:23.

Studies in Isaiah.

has reached the limit of sinfulness and now the judgement on them has fallen. The Medes may be moved by God's sovereign hand, but the harsh treatment they deliver is by the will of men and these too will be punished. We remind ourselves that the anger of man never achieves the righteousness of God.⁷⁷⁰

13:19-22.

Babylon was “*the glory of kingdoms*” for everyone looked to its splendour, its earthly success and its riches.⁷⁷¹ The inhabitants are referred to as “*Chaldeans*” which highlights the apparent wisdom these folk were renown for. But all of this pride and intellectual reputation will be swept away as were the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁷⁷² Babylon will be overthrown in such a way as to never rise ever again. It will be fit only for wildlife.⁷⁷³ It will not be possible for nomads to pitch their tents nor for shepherds to “*make sheep-folds there.*”⁷⁷⁴ Her time is soon coming and we must draw from this that all nations which emulate Babylon in one way or another will suffer a similar fate, either in time through what we see as the shifting scenes of history, or at the end of time when Christ finally calls all to be reckoned. Only righteousness exalts a nation. Many places survive merely because of the godly influence provided by true believers found within them. When these are removed then judgement will fall, just as in the days when Lot was taken from Sodom.⁷⁷⁵

[3] A blessing for Jacob/Israel. (Isaiah 14:1-4a).

Textual analysis.

#14 1 For the Lord

will have mercy on Jacob,
and will

still choose Israel,
and settle them in their own land.

The strangers will be joined with them,
and they will cling to the house of Jacob.

2 Then people will take them and bring them to their place,
and the house of Israel will possess them for servants and maids in the land of the **Lord**;
they will take them captive whose captives they were, and rule over their oppressors.

3 It shall come to pass in the day the **Lord** gives you rest
from your sorrow,
and from

-
- 770 James 1:20.
771 Isaiah 13:19.
772 Isaiah 13:19.
773 Isaiah 13:20,21.
774 Isaiah 13:20.
775 Genesis 19:1f.

Studies in Isaiah.

your fear
and the hard bondage in which you were made to serve,
4 that you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say:

14:1.

So Babylon's fate is sealed. It stands as a picture for the entire world. But what of Israel? We read next that Israel will be preserved and provided for in the midst of such terrible events. We ought not skip over the names used by the Lord here. Israel is first referred to as “*Jacob*” as a reminder from whence they came. Why not Abraham? Well possibly because it was Jacob who went down into Egypt and Israel who came out signifying the whole experience of redemption and salvation. Jacob, of course, was a deceiver and he was only given the name *Israel* after he wrestled with the Lord for a blessing.⁷⁷⁶ We ought to remember from where we have come and how it is that we have entered into the kingdom of God's blessed Son. It is all His doing, and for this, coupled with the fact that He is God who is good, great, glorious and gracious, we worship Him with our lives.

Despite the terrors coming on the whole world, God will still choose Israel and provide all that they need. In this Old Testament book of Isaiah the blessings of provision are described in terms of the land. For us we look to the Lord Jesus exclusively for the blessings of redemption and salvation. The world will be re-made and renewed when Christ returns but in the meantime our inheritance is in the Lord.

We are then given quite a surprise, for “*strangers*” are going to be joined to Jacob. That is such a wonderful picture. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is made up of many *Jacobs* from all over the world. The new Israel is no longer just one nation, but all nations gathered under one banner. I think it very important to consider the words carefully in this passage because you may gain the impression that these strangers were to be mere chattels and servants in Israel. But that is not really the image or picture we should be receiving. Notice first that the strangers are joined to Jacob indicating that all are like Jacob, sinners. These “*cling*” to Jacob. They are desperate to be part of what the Lord has done and will do. They cling to Jacob because Jacob clung to God. Now that is the great thing here. Why is the church so unattractive today? Perhaps because we are not like Jacob who clung onto the Lord for the blessing!

776 Genesis 32:24f.

Studies in Isaiah.

14:2-4.

What will happen to these strangers as they cling to Jacob? We read first that they will be given a place.⁷⁷⁷ What a wonderful thing! Those who were strangers become citizens. Isn't this so powerful an illustration for our day with so many displaced people? As believers we become citizens of heaven. We have a place with God! Then second, we read that these strangers will be possessed by the house of Israel. This signifies that they are no longer their own but are now part of Israel, or in New Testament terms, they are part of the household of God, the church.⁷⁷⁸ At this point we must stop and pause. When we use a term like "church" it is so often misunderstood. Even godly people mistake the figure and illustration here. A believer becomes a member of those who have been called out of the world into the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is not of this world as it does not have the features and characteristics that worldly kingdoms possess. This is one reason why the Roman Catholic Church is not the church. The Roman Catholic Church is a visible kingdom very much in and of this world. It has visible possessions, a land, and a state with hierarchical structures including a head of state, and it makes its own laws. We must consider whether other Christian denominations are similarly organised on *worldly* principles. This is not always an easy thing to discern because even though believers are part of the invisible Kingdom of God, they are very visible in the world! Indeed we must be visible, much more so than we perhaps are. We ought to be seen and showing forth the goodness and gloriousness of the Saviour. The question arises as to how we should do this? What organisation should there be at the local church level? The first thing to say is that we should never use the world's ways of organising things simply because they seem to work. We need to examine the Scriptures and follow what the Lord says there. It may be that the world uses similar ways, but our emphasis must be on how God organises things and how the Lord tells us to behave rather than on the world's use of godly principles. What worries me so much amongst many churches, (even godly Bible-believing churches), is how often they defer to secular or worldly principles and ways as a matter of course. In this brief passage about the church we can learn seven important principles.

Some thoughts concerning church.

First and foremost the basis of the church ought to be mercy. That is how the passage starts. All believers, whomever they are, are on the same ground, the same rock. We do not have the right,

⁷⁷⁷ Isaiah 14:2.

⁷⁷⁸ Ephesians 2:19.

Studies in Isaiah.

and we have not earned our position. It is through mercy alone. To reinforce this gracious state we note that all believers are ones that the Lord has chosen. Election is not a popular doctrine but it is one which makes us realise fully that our salvation is in no way determined by anything we do. Yes we ought to trust the Lord, that is what we ought to do! It is what is expected and what is good. But we do not, we run away! And unless the Lord come and graciously turn us around we would never come to Him. Election is a precious doctrine and it leads us to worship God who rescues us despite ourselves. You get a glimpse of this in how Lot is rescued from Sodom. It was while he hesitated and lingered in his house that the angels literally grabbed him and took him out of the place that would be soon destroyed:

And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.⁷⁷⁹

Second, the church ought to be a place of rest. We read that they have a settled "*place*" and that the Lord gives "*rest*" to the people.⁷⁸⁰ People are by nature quarrelsome, but the place where believers are found should be a place of rest and peace. I wonder if we practice this at all? I do not at all mean that we have an enforced peace like that of a silent order of monks, for example, but I wonder if when we come together to discuss or debate a point of doctrine or a practice we are all aiming at seeking the Lord from our starting point of mercy and keen to progress in a peaceful manner?

Third, the church ought to be a place of belonging. The strangers are joined with Israel.⁷⁸¹ We are reminded of the whole idea of adoption here. These new folk are possessed by Israel.⁷⁸² In other words they belong there. It means that a church ought to be showing the love of the Father and should be a place where the family of God is recognised clearly. Those being added to the church are those who identify and cling to the house of Jacob. We are not in the business of coercing or simply making a club. What we are talking about is welcoming *true* family members, that is, those who have been born again. These have certain defined characteristics and even though new born babies are not yet mature, the fact is that they resemble the Father and the Son. So those who continually fight against things and argue this way and that, demonstrate that they are not truly born

779 Genesis 19:16.

780 Isaiah 14:2,3.

781 Isaiah 14:1.

782 Isaiah 14:2.

Studies in Isaiah.

of the Spirit even if they make protest and claim such privilege. There must be a repentant contrite heart.

Fourth, we find that people in this gathered community are now all servants and maids.⁷⁸³ We baulk at this don't we? In Mark chapter 9 the disciples had been debating whom should be the greatest in the kingdom, and the Lord had to upbraid them and remind them that they needed really to be servants of one another.⁷⁸⁴ The pattern of life is turned upside down. Christ Himself did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom.⁷⁸⁵ Are we not followers of Him? What an immense privilege to serve in the Lord's land!

Fifth, we read that the church is a place where captors will be taken captive.⁷⁸⁶ What once held a person in bondage and captivity is now itself taken captive. It is not just that a person is released or delivered from the bondage, but that which was holding them down and had incarcerated them in a terrible state, itself is now put into bondage and captivity. The church then ought to be a place of deliverance and a place where evil and those things that bring bondage are destroyed! In such a way the church now becomes ruler over the oppressors. We can apply this in a whole range of ways. Think for example of the whole teaching of evolution. The creation ministries have not only released people from this bondage (and it is a terrible bondage) but have demonstrated time and again the folly and futility of this notion. Sadly people prefer to remain in bondage. Shame on those who call themselves believers who meld and muddle the issue by accepting such a bondage as true! We could talk of the bondage of debt, consumerism, addiction (in many forms), false views of man, false views of sexuality, or of reputation and so on. All these things can lead to bondage and the church will deliver one and all who turn to Christ.

Sixth, the church ought to be a place of joy. This is expressed negatively here. We read that the Lord gives us rest from "*sorrow*," and this leads to the thought of happiness and joy.⁷⁸⁷ This, of course, does not mean that we do not sorrow. We do. Over sin, over the terrible things that happen in this world, over people we know who run from God. But we are those who rejoice and delight in the Lord for His great goodness and grace!

Seventh, the church ought to be a place where love is found. Again this is presented negatively for we read that the Lord gives rest from "*fear*" into a place of love.⁷⁸⁸

783 Isaiah 14:2.

784 Mark 9:33-37.

785 Mark 10:45.

786 Isaiah 14:2.

787 Isaiah 14:3.

788 Isaiah 14:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.⁷⁸⁹

Oh that our gatherings would reflect these ideals! In truth the Lord will make it so, but often we look on and consider some groups with perplexity which are not really churches at all, and we neglect other gatherings where the Lord is truly working even though they are not recognised by the ecclesiastical world.

Eighth, the church is a place opposed to Babylon and all that it represents. Our text ends with the first part of verse 4 which says that the people will take up a *“proverb against the king of Babylon.”* The church cannot have any fellowship with the world. The world is its mission field.

[4] A proverb against the king of Babylon. (Isaiah 14:4b-6).

Textual analysis.

“How

the oppressor has ceased,
the golden city ceased!

5 The Lord has broken

the staff of the wicked,
the sceptre of the rulers;

6 He who struck the people in wrath with a continual stroke,
He who ruled the nations in anger,
is persecuted *and* no one hinders.

7 The whole earth is at rest *and* quiet;
they break forth into singing.

8 Indeed the cypress trees rejoice over you, *and* the cedars of Lebanon, *saying*,
‘Since you were cut down, no woodsman has come up against us.’

9 “Hell from beneath is excited about you, to meet *you* at your coming;
it stirs up the dead for you, all the chief ones of the earth;
it has raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.

10 They all shall speak and say to you:

‘Have you also become as weak as we?
Have you become like us?’

11 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, *and* the sound of your stringed instruments; the
maggot is spread under you, and worms cover you.’

12 “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!

13 For you have said in your heart:

‘I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north;

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.’

15 Yet you shall be brought down
to Sheol,

to the lowest depths of the Pit.

16 “Those who see you will gaze at you, *and* consider you, *saying*:

789 1John 4:18.

Studies in Isaiah.

‘Is this the man
 who made the earth tremble,
 who shook kingdoms,
 17 who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities,
 who did not open the house of his prisoners?’
18 “All the kings of the nations, all of them,
 sleep in glory, everyone in his own house;
19 but you
 are cast out of your grave
 like an abominable branch,
 like the garment of those who are slain, thrust through with a sword, who go down to the stones of the
 pit,
 like a corpse trodden underfoot.
20 You
 will not be joined with them in burial,
 because you have
 destroyed your land
 and slain your people.
The brood of evildoers shall never be named.
21 Prepare slaughter for his children
 because of the iniquity of their fathers, lest they rise up and possess the land, and fill the face of the world with
 cities.”
22 “For I will rise up against them,” says the **Lord of hosts**,
“and cut off from Babylon the name and remnant, and offspring and posterity,” says the **Lord**.
23 “I will also make it a possession for the porcupine, and marshes of muddy water;
I will sweep it with the broom of destruction,” says the **Lord of hosts**.

General considerations.

We have seen the burden against Babylon as representative of the world and the great blessings of the church, but now we are focused upon the king of Babylon and his fate as is made clear by the frequent use of the second person singular “*you*” and “*your*” throughout verses 4b to 23. It is important that we begin this part of the study recognising that we have a proverb against a *real* king in Babylon. But we cannot leave our studies at that point, for whilst many commentators reject the idea that we have a message against the enemy of souls, the terminology used here forces us to consider a direct reference to Satan.

How then is this king described? He is called an “*oppressor*,” and is described as one who struck the people repeatedly beyond measure “*with a continual stroke*.” He is described as a persecutor and one who governed “*in anger*.”⁷⁹⁰ Thus he was an utter despot and a tyrannical dictator. He was one who cut down trees indiscriminately.⁷⁹¹ He was equally harsh with people it would seem, as this figure of trees often signifies people. In verses 12, 16, 17 and 20 we read some graphic details concerning this king's treatment of the kingdom. He was the man who:

790 Isaiah 14:5,6.

791 Isaiah 14:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

weakened the nations (v12)
made the earth tremble (v16)
shook kingdoms (v16)
made the world as a wilderness (v17)
destroyed its cities (v17)
did not open the house of his prisoners? (v17)
destroyed [his] land (v20)
[slew his] people (v20)

He was a man, it would seem, who if you wronged him, you would end up in prison forever. His actions were such that the world was utterly destroyed and all around were in fear and trembling. We have seen many examples through history of such characters but this king of Babylon was certainly one. These descriptions are equally applicable to the devil.

14:4b-6.

Thus far we have looked in general at the passage, but now it is needful to consider the details a bit further. Oppression always seems to usher in great contrasts amongst people. For there to be oppression, there must be an “*oppressor*,” and those oppressed. The oppressors dominate and hold down those in their charge and profit by them. In this case it seems that the fruits of such harm yielded the “*golden city*” with its pomp and splendour, but now such has “*ceased*.”⁷⁹² Society often speaks of the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots. Greed and pride are the engines of such divisiveness.

It is the Lord alone who can break the rule and governance of the “*wicked*.”⁷⁹³ The Babylonian king was truly wicked for he persecuted the people “*with a continual stroke*.” Such perpetual harm and evil is characteristic of wicked rulers in recent centuries, whose anger is to be avoided by all around them.⁷⁹⁴ The likes of Hitler who persecuted the Jews mercilessly, or the current Islamic militia who behead any who depart from their rules comes to mind. Now this king of Babylon himself is to be “*persecuted*” and no one will care.

792 Isaiah 14:4b.

793 Isaiah 14:5.

794 Isaiah 14:6.

14:7,8.

Notice again the universal nature of this message (*“the whole earth”*). As a result of this king's downfall we read that the entire world will be at peace and will break out in joyful celebration.⁷⁹⁵ We have seen such joy celebrated when despots are fallen, although sadly in many cases new tyrants come to power. The very creation, signified by the trees here, cries out in jubilation for the king's fall because he can no longer order the woodsman to cut them down.⁷⁹⁶

14:9,10.

From verse 9 onwards we are given a series of statements which describe the reception this king gets as he is brought down into the grave and awaits his judgement. *“Hell”* or Sheol has been expecting this king and is stirred up to excitement at his coming.⁷⁹⁷ The picture presented here is an ironic one. This king has always lived as though everyone ought to bow and scrape to him. Where he is, there ought to be plenty, splendour, and jubilation because of his presence. He is exalted above all, and is pompous and full of pride. And so we are given a stately welcome for a king as he enters his just deserts – the abode of the dead. He may have expected splendour and pomp and exaltation in life, but here he hears the astonishing words *“Have you also become as weak as we? Have you become like us?”*⁷⁹⁸ This king may have lorded it over a vast empire and exercised terror and harsh treatment in life with almost unequalled power in life, but now as he enters the grave he is just as weak as any human being – utterly powerless. This is all equally true of Satan too. He may wield power for a time, but when the Lord throws him into the abyss forever he will be seen to be what he is – a weak, helpless, and rebellious creature. The *“pomp”* and celebration attending such a king is now all gone. In its place *“the maggot is spread”* beneath the king and *“worms”* cover him on top.⁷⁹⁹ Thus, for this king the fall is catastrophic. From pomp to maggots in a single breath. No longer the sound of soothing music on stringed instruments. Instead the rustle and burrowing of the worm and the maggot. We as believers shudder at these thoughts but we must remember that though the body will decay in the ground, nevertheless the soul will be kept in paradise, for *“precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.”*⁸⁰⁰

795 Isaiah 14:7.

796 Isaiah 14:8.

797 Isaiah 14:9.

798 Isaiah 14:10.

799 Isaiah 14:11.

800 Psalm 116:15. See also Matthew 10:28; Luke 23:43.

14:12-14.

It is the next verse (verse 12) which leads us to believe that this passage speaks especially of Satan's demise, but we must not rush to consider this before looking again at the king's fall. It is to be remembered here that Nimrod, the king of the first Babylon, first initiated not just a military regime, but a new form of religion involving the stars. Babylon was famous for its star gazers and astrologers. We may laugh at their attempts at comprehending the night sky but we ought never to be so proud. Modern man's views of the cosmos are just as mythical and made up as were the Babylonians. Its just that they were very different. In Babylon the kings of old were celebrated in the constellations. Egypt had its star-based religion too, but in Babylon the heavens formed the basis for the pattern of life on earth. The king was considered to be a star, and thus had a seat in heaven itself.⁸⁰¹ The Babylonians also had their high mountain from where it was thought the gods came (*"the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north"*).⁸⁰² Hence in these words of verse 13 we see depicted some aspects of the Babylonian myths.

Back in verse 12 the king is referred to as *"Lucifer"* and *"son of the morning"* in our text. The terms signify "shining one" or "bright star" and are associated with Venus which can be seen in the early morning light. We hasten in our minds to see the devil in these words but we must consider first how they apply to the king of Babylon and many other despots through time down to this very day. The king is to be brought down because of his great pride, because he thought of himself as so exalted that he even challenged God for the supremacy! Well we are back in Genesis 3 territory here. It was there that the devil tricked Eve into thinking she could be *"like God,"* and here we find the same lie expressed by the king of Babylon in verse 14.⁸⁰³

Notice the *"I will"* statements here in verses 13 and 14, of which there are five in all, and they seem to be an expression of the action of deity. We read that this king said in his heart: *"I will"*

Ascend into heaven (v13)

Exalt my throne above the stars of God (v13)

Also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north (v13)

Ascend above the heights of the clouds (v14)

Be like the Most High (v14)

801 Of course the term "star" in ancient thought was merely a body that shone in the heavens. The planets as we know them were termed "wandering stars" in ancient times.

802 Isaiah 14:13.

803 Genesis 3:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

Who, for example, could *“ascend into heaven”*? It is only He who has clean hands and heart and that alone is the Lord of glory.⁸⁰⁴ The words and thoughts here also seem to reflect the rebel Nimrod's desire as found in the Tower of Babel account in Genesis 11:1f. But this king will be brought down because of such pride.

14:15-17.

This king is to be brought down not just to the grave, but to *“the lowest depths of the Pit.”*⁸⁰⁵ Such a designation surely indicates the abyss where the devil is bound. For the king of Babylon it is a dungeon or cistern with no escape. As this one descends, others are watching gazing at the once glorious king. They express astonishment at his coming (*“is this the man”*), and recall his cruel treatment of his kingdom and his subjects.⁸⁰⁶ There are four things noted here. He was the one who *“made the earth tremble,”* and *“shook kingdoms.”* In these first two things, are we to think of literal physical effects, or is this the shaking of the world of men? We do know that Satan was allowed to express power within creation.⁸⁰⁷ But presumably the king of Babylon was such who struck terror and fear within the world of men across the globe. Then we are told that this king destroyed cities and made what was good into a wilderness. Is this not the way of man? Uncaring for the planet God has provided, we tip our rubbish and scar the landscape at will. Finally this king is one who kept prisoners with no mercy.⁸⁰⁸

14:18,19.

The contrast between the king of Babylon and other kings is set here in remarkable terms. Other kings will *“sleep in glory”* with each *“in his own house.”*⁸⁰⁹ But the king of Babylon is cast out and treated as *“a corpse trodden underfoot.”*⁸¹⁰ This does not mean that all the other kings are to be redeemed, but that the treatment earned by the king of Babylon is far worse than anything we may imagine. He is not to be given a good burial, but simply to be discarded as rubbish. The descriptions are meant to evoke disgust (*“cast out,” “an abominable branch,” “like the garment of those who are slain,” “a corpse trodden underfoot”*).⁸¹¹ We can see here that the king of Babylon

804 Psalm 24:3,4.

805 Isaiah 14:15.

806 Isaiah 14:16.

807 Job 1:12f; Matthew 8:26.

808 Isaiah 14:17.

809 Isaiah 14:18.

810 Isaiah 14:19.

811 Isaiah 14:19.

Studies in Isaiah.

was to be judged harshly for his extreme and despicable treatment of the world under his government.

14:20,21.

In verse 20 we discover that the king will be separate from the others ("*not joined with them in burial*"), on account of his destructive behaviour and murderous heart. These descriptions we have been looking at from verse 16 to 20 are also a visible picture not only of what the devil has sought to do, but also of his fate. He who sought to rival God will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone never to rise again. He is one who weakened the nations and will one day be shown as weak and miserable before the Lord.

Then we read about those who follow the king of Babylon. They are first described as a "*brood of evildoers*" who "*shall never be named.*"⁸¹² Thus his posterity, his children, who have been raised in tyranny are to be slaughtered lest they raise up a multitude of despotic regimes.⁸¹³ It is unthinkable that any amongst this king's descendants would be raised up to "*fill the face of the world with cities.*"⁸¹⁴ Despotic behaviour spawns worse.

14:22,23.

The passage ends with a promise that God would rise against the posterity of the king of Babylon, and would cut Babylon off so that nothing would remain. The Lord is described here as "*the Lord of hosts*" to remind us of the fact that He is in charge of all armies. It is to be noted here that there is no remnant to be redeemed. Rather the Lord will enact a complete removal. We read that He will "*cut off from Babylon the name and remnant, and offspring and posterity.*"⁸¹⁵ This is comprehensive. There is nothing left. It will be such a devastation with all removed, that only "*the porcupine*" will be able to possess what is left, and there will remain only "*marches of muddy water.*" The Lord will sweep clean the whole with His "*broom of destruction.*" This is the fate of the wicked. There can be no escape, no remnant. Satan and all those who reject the Lord will be cast eternally into the fires that will never be quenched. So ends the consideration of Babylon and its king (and Satan),

812 Isaiah 14:20.

813 Isaiah 14:21.

814 Isaiah 14:21.

815 Isaiah 14:22.

Studies in Isaiah.

[5] The Assyrian to be broken. (Isaiah 14:24-27).

Textual analysis.

- 24 The **Lord** of hosts has sworn, saying,
“surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass,
and as I have purposed, *so* it shall stand:
25 That I will break the Assyrian in My land, and on My mountains tread him underfoot.
Then
his yoke shall be removed from them,
and his burden removed from their shoulders.
26 This *is* the purpose that is purposed against the whole earth,
and this *is* the hand that is stretched out over all the nations.
27 For the **Lord** of hosts has purposed, and who will annul *it*?
His hand *is* stretched out, and who will turn it back?”

What a wonderful couple of statements we have at the beginning and end of this passage for believers! I think it is a fitting end to the burden that is chiefly against Babylon and its king, but which has stood as representative of the world as a whole, and also of the devil who has deceived the nations. In these statements we have a sure and certain promise that what God plans to do will in fact get done.

14:24.

First we have the Lord of hosts taking an oath! In the New Testament this type of expression is interpreted as a double promise.⁸¹⁶ God cannot lie, so by taking an oath and swearing by Himself, He is declaring that this is certainly going to happen. The Lord who is “*The Truth*” has no need to do this, but so that we are under no misapprehensions He states that what He has purposed will come to pass.⁸¹⁷ For God, what He thinks is that which will come to pass, and what He purposes will be done. With God there is no plan B. He is always perfect in all He does. Then at the end of the passage we have this same thought reiterated and expanded upon. Let no one think there is any escape for Babylon, for the Assyrian, for the world, or for Satan. The purpose God intends will come to fruition. His hand is stretched out over every nation and who can turn it back? No one! Let us take note that what God intends – and this is spelled out very clearly in the Bible – will certainly come to pass. How else could God make things plainer?

816 Hebrews 6:13f.

817 John 14:6.

Studies in Isaiah.

14:25.

In this section we are brought to focus upon “*the Assyrian.*” The Lord will tread underfoot the Assyrian in the Lord's own land and on the Lord's mountain. Clearly the Assyrian is the current enemy and oppressor, unlike the Babylonian which looks back to Nimrod and Babel, and forward to the final enemy of Israel before the captivity. This promise came to fulfilment in the time of Hezekiah.⁸¹⁸ The Assyrian oppressor will not just be trodden down so that he can no longer oppress, but further we read that the “*yoke*” or “*burden*” he has imposed will be removed from the shoulders of those oppressed. Here is a great reminder that our enemies (our own sin, Satan, and this world) which bear down on us and make us bear heavy loads, will themselves be crushed under the foot of the Lord. All the heavy burdens will be removed and the yoke of Christ will be our delight.⁸¹⁹

Now the Assyrian threat that Hezekiah would face was to be a harsh and difficult one. We will come to see later that the Lord brought a great deliverance so that the Assyrians were not just defeated but soundly so. Here, then, is a prophecy which would be fulfilled within the lifetime and ministry of the prophet. We know that Assyria lost power in 612 BC when Nineveh was overrun, and then by 609 BC Assyria was no more. So these words speak first of what was to happen in the reign of Hezekiah in a few years from this point, and then further of the end of this nation during the ministry of Jeremiah.

14:27.

We have already commented on the essence of this verse in our introduction. But we note here once again that it is the “*Lord of hosts,*” the one who commands all armies who purposes so that no one can “*annul.*” His hand is raised and ready to deliver the judicial verdict of punishment for Assyria, and it is impossible for any to even think they may have a chance of turning it back. There is such comfort in knowing that when God purposes, and when He acts, none can alter nor resist His intentions. But this is true whether we are being blessed or punished. On the one hand the blessed redeemed who are adopted into the family of God draw comfort from knowing that none can work against God's plans. But on the other hand the one outside of God's care must know that the coming punishment will not be withheld if they continue in their rebellious and sinful ways.

818 Isaiah 37:36.

819 Matthew 11:28-30.

Chapter 25.

Isaiah 14:28-32.

The burden against Philistia.

Textual analysis.

28 This is the burden which came in the year that King Ahaz died.

29 “Do not rejoice, all you of Philistia, because the rod that struck you is broken;
for out of the serpent’s roots will come forth a viper, and its offspring *will be* a fiery flying serpent. **30**
The firstborn of the poor will feed, and the needy will lie down in safety; I will kill your roots with
famine, and it will slay your remnant.

31 Wail, O gate!

Cry, O city!

All you of Philistia *are* dissolved;
for

smoke will come from the north,
and no one *will be* alone in his appointed times.”

32 What will they answer the messengers of the nation? That the Lord has founded Zion, and the poor of His people
shall take refuge in it.

14:28.

The second burden in the list of ten is dated for us. Ahaz died in the year 715 BC and now Hezekiah is ruling. This time we are brought to consider the nation that was a constant sore in Israel's side, namely Philistia. The Philistines were sons of Egypt and grandsons of Ham.⁸²⁰ Trouble existed between the Philistines and the people of God from earliest times. We read of problems experienced at the hand of the Philistines by Abraham and his sons, although both Abraham and Isaac were not entirely without fault.⁸²¹

14:29.

It is important to establish whom the “*rod*” is in this passage. Ahaz has just died and as the king in the line of David it seemed to the Philistines that an end had come primarily because of Ahaz's policy of seeking aid from the Assyrians and thereby becoming a vassal state. The loose group of Philistines may have got the impression from Ahaz's death that the great nation of Israel

820 Genesis 10:6-14.

821 Genesis 21:22f; 26:1f.

Studies in Isaiah.

ruled by David and his successors was now “*broken*.” But there is a sting for the Philistines. The metaphor changes from the rod which breaks, to a serpent whose offspring is even more deadly. As an aside it is interesting to note here that from the serpent (*nachash*) will come a poisonous viper (*tsepha*), and from that will spring a fiery flying serpent (*saraph*). The intention in using these terms is to show an increasing ferocity and danger. The last term is curious because it may have indicated something akin to a Pteranodon or Pteradactyl with the ability to breathe fire. The term *saraph* is also used to depict the angelic beings of Isaiah 6.⁸²² Whatever the case may be, the implication is that from such a broken rod will come something so venomous and harmful to those of Philistia that they will not rejoice.

We pause a while at this point to realise that the real rod that was broken was, of course, our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. The world, the flesh of humanity, and all that is opposed to the Lord rejoices at the demise of the Saviour. However their rejoicing is short lived because the rod that was smitten and broken for us rises again and this time comes with judgement.

It is, perhaps, curious that the image of a snake, a viper and a serpent is used, as this is usually reserved to signify the work of the devil.⁸²³ However there is a clear allusion here to the Exodus where Moses' rod is cast down and becomes a serpent which devours all others!

1 Then Moses answered and said, “but suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘the Lord has not appeared to you.’” **2** So the Lord said to him, “what is that in your hand?” He said, “a rod.” **3** And He said, “cast it on the ground.” So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.”⁸²⁴

10 So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as the Lord commanded. And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. **11** But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. **12** For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods.”⁸²⁵

And such indeed has been the case! The kingdom of God began its great ascendancy from the moment that the Lord Jesus walked this earth, and proceeds in ever greater advance as year rolls on

822 The “*fiery serpents*” referred to in Numbers 21:6,8 & Deuteronomy 8:15, are termed “*fiery flying serpents*” in Isaiah 14:29 & 30:6. The location for both sets of references seems to be the same – i.e. the south region where the Israelites were led through by the Lord on their way to the promised land.

823 Genesis 3:1f.

824 Exodus 4:1-3.

825 Exodus 7:10-12.

Studies in Isaiah.

year.⁸²⁶ Of course this kingdom is not a visible one with pomp and splendour as seen by the world. It is not invisible either for it is seen wherever the truth of God flourishes, and wherever the love of God is truly displayed. Make no mistake, though, you cannot have one without the other. Truth without the expression of love is false. Love with no desire for the truth is mere sentimentality. What God requires is a deep love for Him out of which comes an expressed love for others. The Lord Jesus spoke of the two great summary commandments to love God wholeheartedly and to love your neighbour as yourself, as a simple expression of the whole law and the prophets.⁸²⁷ The kingdom of God is not a great church organisation, nor is it to be viewed in some formal way. You will find these, of course, but they are not the kingdom of God. Where you see a woman seeking the Lord with all her heart and showing love to her family and those she encounters such that people want to know what it is that gives her such peace, there is the kingdom of God. Where you see a man and a boy walking in hearty conversation about eternal life and the glories of Christ and you see that these folk are noted as good and lovely people, there is the kingdom of God. When you see a young girl and her grandmother being shamefully treated by evil men who enforce a national religion on them despite their love for Christ and you see these women gladly suffering for their faith, there is the kingdom of God. I am not, of course, saying we cannot do without some forms of organisation, but do not mistake the organisation for the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is where the rule of God is operating freely.

14:30.

The connection with the Exodus is continued by mention of the *“firstborn”* in the next verse.⁸²⁸ Notice that it is the *“poor”* who are to be secure and lie in safety. The Israelites in Egypt were indeed poor by any standards. They left Egypt and were furnished with possessions by the will of God from Egyptian hands. It is ever the case that all those who are in the kingdom of God are poor as far as this world is concerned. It is not easy for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. This does not mean that the rich cannot enter the kingdom of God, just that their riches are of no value at all as far as the kingdom is concerned. To enter you must be as a little child and you must throw off all this worlds goods and possessions. In contrast to those of the kingdom of God who are poor and needy as far as this world is concerned, (they are rich in heavenly things), the Philistines will be

826 Consider the image in Daniel 2:34f of a great *“stone”* which was *“cut out without hands”* and which becomes a great conquering *“mountain.”*

827 Matthew 22:37-40.

828 Isaiah 14:30.

Studies in Isaiah.

destitute and will be slain. Notice that verse 30 tells us about the “*roots*” of the Philistines who will suffer famine and all their remnant will be slain. This is final. There is no way back for those who choose this world and its ways. You cannot serve God and mammon.

14:31,32.

Consequently the “*gate*” (where rule is exercised) and the “*city*” (where life and work is displayed) in all of Philistia will be a place of wailing and crying.⁸²⁹ All that the Philistines have worked for and considered of value is of no account, for their end is wailing and crying. What, alone, is the message they will be given? The only answer to the coming judgement on Philistia, the only message that comes to the Philistines as they face the onslaught from God's judgement from the north, is “*that the Lord has founded Zion, and the poor of His people shall take refuge in it.*”⁸³⁰ How is that a comfort to them? Well it is no comfort whatsoever if they wish to continue as they are and seek to keep their goods, their wealth, their reputation, their religion and their comforts, because they face utter devastation. However it is a great comfort if they would humble themselves and realise that God is still favouring Zion! Surely they ought to recognise that God has set his seal and favour on Zion! If they realise this they could run there and plead for mercy. Who knows whether the Lord will have favour on a truly repentant one? Of course he will! He never rejects any who turn in repentance. The choice is stark. Philistia your end is soon and if you continue with your own and old ways you will be swept away. The ways and the works of the Philistines (the flesh and this world's systems) are folly and foolishness because they reject the one truth and the only way of goodness. Man was created to be in good and close relationship with God and anything that ruins that ruins all!

Dear reader you may not be a Philistine. But are you clinging to riches, to reputation, to money, to honour, to a false god, or to anything except God? If you see that these false things which really do not give you any satisfaction will one day be judged, because they are worthless, don't cling to them and suffer the loss of your soul. Flee to the Lord who founded Zion! Flee to the Saviour Jesus Christ, the broken rod who rose from the dead! Turn from all that is folly and failing in this world and rely wholly on Christ!

829 Isaiah 14:31.

830 Isaiah 14:32.

Chapter 26.

Isaiah 15:1-16:14.

The burden against Moab.

Textual analysis.

Although the burden against Moab is, like that to Babylon, a lengthy message, I have decided to give the analysis of the text in full below. Moab (like Amon) was descended from Lot via the incestuous relationship with one of his daughters. The Moabites engaged in repeated conflict with Israel and Judah over the centuries. We have a graphic description of the burden to open followed by a new perspective – the Lord cries! Then in chapter 16 we have the same situation described with a different emphasis, and we are given the reason for Moab's ultimate failure but not without definite hope.

#15 1 The burden against Moab.

Because in the night Ar of Moab is laid waste *and* destroyed,

because in the night Kir of Moab is laid waste *and* destroyed,

2 He has gone up to the temple and Dibon, to the high places to weep.

Moab will wail over Nebo and over Medeba;

on all their heads *will be* baldness, *and* every beard cut off.

3 In their streets they will clothe themselves with sackcloth;

on the tops of their houses and in their streets everyone will wail, weeping bitterly.

4 Heshbon and Elealeh will cry out,

their voice shall be heard as far as Jahaz;

therefore the armed soldiers of Moab will cry out;

his life will be burdensome to him.

5 “My heart will cry out for Moab; his fugitives *shall flee* to Zoar, *like* a three-year-old heifer.

For by the Ascent of Luhith they will go up with weeping;

for in the way of Horonaim they will raise up a cry of destruction,

6 For the waters of Nimrim will be desolate,

for the green grass has withered away; the grass fails, there is nothing green.

7 Therefore the abundance they have gained, and what they have laid up, they will carry away to the Brook of the Willows.

8 For the cry has gone all around the borders of Moab,

its wailing to Eglaim

and its wailing to Beer Elim.

9 For the waters of Dimon will be full of blood;

because I will bring more upon Dimon,

lions upon him who escapes from Moab, and on the remnant of the land.”

Studies in Isaiah.

#16 **1** Send the lamb to the ruler of the land, from Sela to the wilderness, to the mount of the daughter of Zion. **2** For it shall be as a wandering bird thrown out of the nest; so shall be the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon.

3 “Take counsel, execute judgement; make your shadow like the night in the middle of the day; hide the outcasts, do not betray him who escapes.

4 Let My outcasts dwell with you, O Moab; be a shelter to them from the face of the spoiler.

For the extortioner is at an end,

devastation ceases,

the oppressors are consumed out of the land.

5 In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness.”

6 We have heard of the pride of Moab— *he is* very proud— of his haughtiness and his pride and his wrath; *but* his lies *shall not be* so.

7 **Therefore** Moab shall wail for Moab; everyone shall wail.

For the foundations of Kir Hareseth you shall mourn; surely *they are* stricken.

8 For the fields of Heshbon languish, *and* the vine of Sibmah; the lords of the nations have broken down its choice plants, which have reached to Jazer and wandered through the wilderness. Her branches are stretched out, they are gone over the sea.

9 **Therefore**

I will bewail the vine of Sibmah, with the weeping of Jazer;

I will drench you with my tears, O Heshbon and Elealeh;

for battle cries have fallen over your summer fruits and your harvest. **10** Gladness is taken away, and joy from the plentiful field; in the vineyards there will be no singing, nor will there be shouting; no treaders will tread out wine in the presses;

I have made their shouting cease.

11 **Therefore**

my heart shall resound like a harp for Moab,

and my inner being for Kir Heres.

12 And it shall come to pass, when it is seen that Moab is weary on the high place, that he will come to his sanctuary to pray; but he will not prevail.

13 This *is* the word which the **Lord** has spoken concerning Moab since that time.

14 But now the **Lord** has spoken, saying,

“within three years, as the years of a hired man, the glory of Moab will be despised with all that great multitude, and the remnant *will be* very small *and* feeble.”

The structure of this burden is shown by the headings below which shall be considered each in turn:

[1] The burden described – a sudden blow. (Isaiah 15:1-4).

[2] Even though judgement falls, the Lord weeps. (Isaiah 15:5-9).

[3] Sacrifice and appeasement will fail. (Isaiah 16:1-2).

[4] In the midst of exile there is hope. (Isaiah 16:3-5).

[5] Moab is proud. (Isaiah 16:6-12).

[6] The word of the Lord for Moab. (Isaiah 16:13,14).

[1] The burden described – a sudden blow. (Isaiah 15:1-4).

15:1.

The burden opens with a Hebrew word which is translated “*because*” in the NKJV but which really has a range of meanings (if, when, but, for, rather, lest) and which must be translated by considering the context. The implication of the word leads us to think of the consequences or results of what this burden has brought. The same word is later translated as “*for*,” and so this helps us with the structure of this passage.⁸³¹

Thus we have a “*burden*” issued and there are consequences to this burden. What we are being given, in effect, is the outcome or results of the judgement that falls on the people of Moab. There are eight results. The first two focus on what may be the capital and centre of the Moabite kingdom, (Ar and Kir). Ar means “city” and Kir means “wall” indicating some form of defence (as in a city with walls). These two places are described in mirrored lament. Both are laid waste and destroyed in the night – i.e. all of a sudden.

15:2-4.

There then follows a description of the effect on the people in verses 2 to 4. Dibon was the place where the famous Moabite stone was found upon which the Moabite king Mesha records his exploits. It would appear that Dibon was a centre of worship for the Moabites. We start off with one person “*he*” which may have been the king who has gone to the high place in order to make supplication to Chemosh his god, but to no avail!⁸³² Nebo was a city probably near or on Mount Nebo where Moses was buried. The term is used of a Babylonian deity and means (from the Hebrew) “prophet.”⁸³³ Medeba (which name means: “waters of rest”) was situated about 8 miles south-west of Heshbon and 14 miles east of the Dead Sea.⁸³⁴ Amongst the ruins of this city have been found a large temple and three massive cisterns. These places indicate a considerably developed religious system. The worshippers have now been shaved and are bald and beardless indicating shame and humiliation. Verse 3 speaks of a turning in earnest to their religion, and so they don the sackcloth of prophetic humility and mourning. The people go to their rooftops to wail and weep. They are calling on what they know. It is ever the case with all of us. When faced with judgement and pain we revert to our religious heritage. But it is all a waste of effort! In Hesbon.

831 Isaiah 15:5,6,8,9.

832 Isaiah 15:2.

833 Isaiah 46:1.

834 Isaiah 15:2.

Studies in Isaiah.

Elealeh, and Jahaz the worshippers cry out loudly.⁸³⁵ Although these towns are all in the north of the country, Jahaz was some miles south of Heshbon so the crying and wailing was loud! Such devastation has reached to the soldiers who now have no courage and who have given up all thought of defending their homeland since their lives have become burdensome. This is judgement which goes beyond anything known. Soldiers and warriors are usually fearless, but here even the most valiant turn to quivering and flail in desperation.

[2] Even though judgement falls the Lord weeps. (Isaiah 15:5-9).

This opening description of the judgement on Moab is set to give the reader a shock. It happened all of a sudden (in the night) and worshippers tried desperately to call on their god but to no avail. But in verses 5 to 9 which describe six further outcomes (as indicated by the opening word “*for*”), the one who is Judge of all and who delivers the people to such a devastating judgement is the One who Himself cries out! Here we have a remarkable and an incredible truth which it is very well worth pausing to consider. Those who charge the Bible with hateful and horrible crimes are so wrong in their estimation. It is fashionable today to suggest that any judgement is by definition wide of the mark. This has drastic consequences on life. For example, it isn't fashionable to single out one person from amongst their peers for esteem and achievements, because everyone must be lauded. Equally the concept of judicial judgement is pilloried. We ought not to punish those who commit crimes. We ought to educate and rehabilitate them.

But here we find that judgement has not only come justly to Moab for their errors, but also we find the Lord Himself (the Judge) weeping and crying for them. Two things we must affirm. First, error, sin, wrong, fault, and mistake must be judged. No error can be allowed to go on eternally unpunished. Second, the Lord does not take delight in passing just sentence. This idea is also found in Ezekiel's prophecy:

Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord God, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?”⁸³⁶

Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’⁸³⁷

835 Isaiah 15:4.
836 Ezekiel 18:23.
837 Ezekiel 33:11.

Studies in Isaiah.

The appeal of these verses is well worth remembering. The Lord would like us to turn and repent. It is worth pausing here and asking whether we have in fact done this. But if we do not repent the Lord will execute His just judgement and yet not without compassion.⁸³⁸

15:5,6.

The descriptions of the Moabites fleeing and being in such desperate straits continues from verse 5 onwards to verse 9. Zoar is in the southern part of the country south of the Dead Sea, and was the town to which Lot escaped, and which escaped the destruction Sodom and Gomorrah faced. The name of this town means “insignificant,” and that is what the Moabites have been reduced to.⁸³⁹ The phrase *“like a three-year-old heifer”* is taken as a place name by most translators (Eglath-shelishiyah – possibly Eglath “the third heifer”). Together with Luhith, Horonaim and Nimrim, we are at the south end of the Dead Sea.⁸⁴⁰ So just as in the northern towns there was devastation, so here in the southern part we have *“weeping,” “a cry of destruction,”* and devastation so that no vegetation or anything green is left. The description of verse 6 is progressive and comprehensive. The *“grass”* withers so that it *“fails”* and thus eventually there is *“nothing green”* left.⁸⁴¹ Essentially “life” has departed from this region. Once richly fertile, now it is desolate and deathly.

We must also note that in verses 5 and 6 we have descriptions of motion. Thus we have *“by the ascent of,” “they will go up,”* and *“in the way of”* which all indicate a point to life's journey. Such descriptions are found frequently throughout Scripture to indicate the journey of life and in particular, that which motivates. It is what we aspire to. It indicates how we carry ourselves through the day-to-day activities that is loosely called life. Thus, rather than question their actions, they are simply carrying them out all the while weeping and lamenting the devastation all around. It is as though the phrase “keep calm and carry on” is operating not in the face of unjust opposition, but in the teeth of all that is wrong! They ought to be questioning things! But they were not. They continue in the ways they are used to. Isn't this like us? Are we not ones who stubbornly refuse to question the way things are and operate? We carry on in the same old routines, but lament and wail and bemoan the judgements we are enduring! Oh that we recognised that at heart and base we are fundamentally wrong. We need a 180 degree about turn. The harshness of life, the judgements we endure, are all designed to challenge our false notions.

838 Matthew 23:37; 24:1,2; Luke 13:34.

839 Isaiah 15:5.

840 Isaiah 15:5,6.

841 Isaiah 15:6.

15:7-9.

These fugitives are trudging their weary way into a captivity. The “*Brook of the Willows*” was a wadi or stream where willows were to be found.⁸⁴² The fugitives are to be found carrying their gain to this region as they escape the destruction sweeping the country. Willows signify weeping, of course, and it is a type of mirror to Psalm 137:1,2 where the exiles of Judah wept and lamented Jerusalem by the willows in Babylon. The fugitives continue south to reach Eglaim (two pools) and Beer Elim (well of heroes). They are parched and thirsty and they walk on in what they know to get water to quench their thirst. They reach the very extremity of Moab, as Eglain and Beer Elim seem to be at the southernmost point. They have fled south because of the waters of “*Dimon.*” The town mentioned here is actually one already referred to (Dibon) but its name has been changed to make a wordplay with “*blood*” (Hebrew: דִּבּוֹן *dām*). The waters of Dibon will be full of blood because of sacrifice, the sacrifice that comes in war, and for this reason the name is changed.⁸⁴³ The Lord will bring “*more*” on the town and upon those who escape, even the “*lions,*” so that there will be no one left.

[3] Sacrifice and appeasement will fail. (Isaiah 16:1,2).

16:1.

The mood changes in chapter 16 where we are brought to a description of an attempt at dealing with the devastation experienced. The place “*Sela*” is identified by some as Petra, but this is situated in Edom further south. It may simply be a place in Moab which was built like the fortress of Petra in a rocky place or stronghold (Sela means “rock”). A sacrifice is to be sent via the wilderness to Zion (Jerusalem). In 2Kings 3 we read that at one time the king of Moab (Mesha) sent a tribute to the king of Israel:

4 Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheepbreeder, and he regularly paid the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs and the wool of one hundred thousand rams. **5** But it happened, when Ahab died, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.⁸⁴⁴

And so now it seems as though someone has suggested re-instating the tribute, but this time to the

842 Isaiah 15:7.

843 Isaiah 15:9.

844 2Kings 3:4,5.

Studies in Isaiah.

recognised place of favour, namely, Zion. Hopefully, it was thought, the fugitives will be enabled to dwell in the land although not without fear.

16:2.

The picture of verse 2 suggests displacement, as the daughters of Moab are wandering and out of their nest, but they are still at the fords of Arnon in the very centre of Moab. Formerly this river marked the northern boundary of Moab but at this time it would seem that all the northern towns we have come across were Moabite territory.

[4] In the midst of exile there is hope. (Isaiah 16:3-5).

Next we have a word of hope from the Lord, for the three verses of this section indicate a **great** hope.

16:3.

In this verse we have a fourfold instruction:

Take counsel

Execute judgement

Make your shadow like the night in the middle of the day

Hide the outcasts, do not betray him who escapes.

The essential point here, then, is that the Moabites ought to proceed with great care ("*take counsel, execute judgement*"), for they must seek to look after, the "*outcasts*" and those who have escaped. The expression "*make your shadow like the night in the middle of the day*" indicates the idea of making a covering over the escapees to shield them from the heat of the midday sun.

16:4.

In the middle of verse 4 we find that the "*extortioner*" and "*oppressors*" are now gone and consumed. These would be the ones who devastate and cause mayhem and wickedness, but now they are removed completely "*out of the land.*"

At the beginning of this verse we read amazingly that the Lord requests that His "*outcasts*" may dwell with Moab of whom the Lord requests that they "*be a shelter ... from the face of the*

Studies in Isaiah.

spoiler.” And so the emphasis now is upon the care and protection of the outcasts and escapees. The term *“spoiler”* signifies a strong burly and violent person. The term *“extortioner”* signifies one who presses, and so indicates the idea of oppression or of cornering someone. The term *“oppressors”* is really suggestive of the idea of being trampled upon, or of being walked all over. So in these three descriptions we have a bully who hounds you into a corner and who cares nothing at all for you so that he walks all over your life. But this one who had faced them in his bullying ways is now *“at an end”* and is *“consumed out of the land.”* The result is that his violent and devastating ways have now ceased. Obviously we can see that those amongst the Moabites and elsewhere who have acted in the ways portrayed here have now been judged. But what lies behind these sinful people is, of course, the devil. He is the *“spoiler,”* the *“extortioner,”* and the *“oppressor.”* He is the violent bully who hounds and harasses and who cares not a jot for the ones he domineers. But he is *“at an end,”* his wicked violence *“ceases,”* and his oppressions are *“consumed.”* How can this be?

16:5.

The reason that the extortioner is at an end, devastation will cease, and the oppressors are to be consumed, is that mercy has come! The Lord's throne, that is, His rule, will be established and this on the basis of God's amazing mercy. Here we have a prophecy of the *“One”* – the Lord Jesus Christ. This wonderful person is to be seated in *“truth,”* in David's tabernacle. Further, He will judge, making decisions, seeking justice, and will bring in righteousness (His righteousness) with speed. It is not just that this promised One will sit upon the throne, (i.e. that this fact will become true or realised), but that He will sit upon it *“in truth.”* In other words, truth will be the basis and foundation of His rule. His judgements will be *“in truth,”* and so consequently His rule will seek both *“justice”* and speedy *“righteousness.”*

Thus the Moabite exiles are also pointed to the Messiah whose coming would be afar off. It is remarkable that the word of the Lord today is no different. In those ancient days the people were offered the same mercy and truth that we know of today, centred in the Messiah, the One who would rule in perfection. If Moabites (like Ruth) turned and sought the Lord they would have gone to Zion and sought refuge there, not in the stones and earth but in the truths and prophecies that the Israelites kept and taught.

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[5] Moab is proud. (Isaiah 16:6-12).

In many ways the message of Isaiah 16:3-5 forms the central highlight in the prophecy to (or concerning) Moab. The Lord will sit on His throne in David's line, and such a promise is not excluded even for Moab and those described as “*outcasts.*” But now we return to the nature of Moab and the reason for God's judgements.

16:6.

The essential problem with Moab was pride. The statement made in this verse is something which appears to have been spoken rather than written, for there is an interruption in the sequence of ideas where we are told of the extreme pride of Moab (“*he is very proud*”). We might arrange the text thus:

we have heard
of the pride of Moab
— *he is* very proud—
of
his haughtiness
and his pride
and his wrath
But his lies shall not be so

The last part (highlighted) is difficult to translate as shown by the variety of translations below:

Table 26.1: Translations of the last part of Isaiah 16:6.

<i>Version.</i>	<i>Translation.</i>	<i>Comments.</i>
ESV	his idle boasting he is not right.	Supplies extra pronouns and words (“right”).
HCSB	and his empty boasting.	Assumes the negative within the noun “empty boasting.”
NASB	His idle boasts are false.	Like HCSB but adds “are false.”
NET	But their boastful claims are empty.	The footnote states that the Hebrew is: “not so his boasting.”
NIV	but her boasts are empty.	The NIV is a paraphrase.
NKJV	<i>But his lies shall not be so.</i>	The words in italics are not in the Hebrew.
YLT	Not right [are] his devices.	This is supposed to be a literal version.

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A literal translation of the phrase would read thus: “not – so – his lies.” Many translations combine the negative particle within the noun making it something like “idle boasting,” or “empty boasting,” but the Hebrew word actually signifies “empty talk,” or “idle talk.”

Perhaps the translation that makes best sense in the context is that given by the HCSB: “*and his empty boasting.*” This is also indicated by the translation given by the Mechon Mamre website which has the Hebrew text and an English translation: “*his ill-founded boastings.*”⁸⁴⁵ We would then have the following:

we have heard
of the pride of Moab
— he *is* very proud—
of
his haughtiness
and his pride
and his wrath
and his empty boasting

Thus the pride of Moab was obvious because it was “*heard of.*” But then we get this interjection telling us that Moab was incredibly proud (“*he is very proud*”). And then the thought returns to this full description of Moab's pride. He is haughty, proud, wrathful, and boastful, or full of empty talk.

Note that pride is not a sin that lives alone. A proud person will very soon have to deal in lying and will be given to anger when challenged. It is hard to maintain a facade of strength without constructing an elaborate web of half-truths and lies. Think of Abraham whose pride and fear made him request that Sarah tell the Egyptians that she was his sister.

16:7,8.

Verse 7 introduces us to the first consequence upon Moab's pride as signalled by the word “*therefore.*” There will be great sorrow and wailing. Typical of the proud, we find that Moab actually wails “*for Moab.*” At this point in time there is no repentant sorrow, just remorse or sadness.

Next comes a series of descriptions of the devastation that occur in the fields, vines and branches. The main city “*Kir*” is referred to as “*Kir Hareseth*” to highlight its being a stronghold as “*Hareseth*” signifies a wall of potsherds acting as a defence. The foundations of this city are

⁸⁴⁵ Translation provided by the Mechon Mamre website which has the Hebrew text and an English translation.
<https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt1016.htm>

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raised so that there was to be no escape and no hope for the strength of Moab. We have the following types of devastation:

[v7] Stricken (foundations of Kir Hareseth)	broken or wounded.
[v8] Languish (fields of Heshbon and vine of Sibmah)	feeble, weak, exhausted.
[v8] Broken down (choice plants)	smite, hammer, strike down.
[v8] Stretched out (branches of choice plants)	left alone, forsaken, abandon.

These descriptions are graphic and they leave us with the impression that the land of Moab would be utterly spoilt and ruined. However, we cannot but think also of the Saviour here who suffered in the same way. He was wounded for our sins, became weak, and was struck by the Lord a hammer blow that left Him utterly forsaken. Can any imagine that the physical suffering for sin is as bad as the spiritual? It cannot be. Whilst people the world over and throughout the ages have suffered temporary judgement because of sin, only the Lord Jesus suffered eternal punishment.

We see also the range of vegetation that suffered here. It was the *“fields”* of Heshbon, and the *“vine”* of Sibmah with her *“choice plants”* that was to see such devastation.⁸⁴⁶ These were to be *“broken down”* by *“the lords of the nations.”* And then they were to be spread out *“through the wilderness”* and even *“stretched out ... over the sea.”* In other words, the devastation was such as to send the outcasts and those that flee far and wide.

16:9-11.

The devastation depicted was so great that the summer fruits would be squashed by the battles, and the vineyards would not see those that tread and the wine being produced with any joy.⁸⁴⁷ But notice once again, the same expression of empathy comes through as we saw in Isaiah 15:5. This section starts off with the third person plural (*“we”*), indicating some objective outside viewers describing the situation, but in verse 9 we have a change to *“I.”* It would seem that what we have here is a description first of the Holy Trinity expressing the situation from verse 6 to 8, but that the coming Messiah (our Lord and Saviour Jesus), is the one speaking from verse 9. There is no doubt that we have the Lord expressing deep empathy in this situation. Here is what He said, according to verse 9:

846 Isaiah 16:8.

847 Isaiah 16:9,10.

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I will bewail the vine of Sibmah, with the weeping of Jazer.

I will drench you with my tears, O Heshbon and Elealeh..

When Lazarus died and the Lord came to raise him up we read that He “*wept,*” even though He knew that He would raise His friend shortly.⁸⁴⁸ The Lord is not immune to our sorrows because of our sin, or our pride. He too sees the devastation we face (rightly) because of our waywardness but He is moved with great compassion.

Why was the region wailing and weeping? Why had gladness and joy been taken and the plentiful field despoiled? Why was there no singing or shouting in joy at the new wine? The answer is that the Lord Himself had “*made their shouting cease.*”⁸⁴⁹ Justice and truth met with empathy and compassion. The Lord cannot simply ignore sin and let it pass. It must be dealt with properly, fairly, justly, and in truth. However the Lord is no despot administering justice and truth dispassionately without a care for the offenders. Not a bit of it. He must be just, but He also deeply mourns, bewails, and cries out because of their sin and fate. That this is no mere professional wailing like that we see at the healing of Jairus' daughter or the raising of Lazarus that we mentioned earlier, is evidenced by the expression of verse 11.⁸⁵⁰

*Therefore my heart shall resound like a harp for Moab, and my inner being for Kir Heres.*⁸⁵¹

Such deep compassion! We see it clearly in the Lord Jesus on many occasions.

16:12.

Such compassion feels for the desperate situation that Moab faced. For even though the people of Moab (placed here as “*Moab*”), come with their wailing and cries, it is all to no avail for they do not acknowledge the Lord God.⁸⁵² Instead they still cling to their old ways and their old pagan religion. Moab is weary of crying out because there is no answer. He comes to his sanctuary but never hears any response.⁸⁵³ The Lord God waits to have compassion, but they will not in their

848 John 11:35.

849 Isaiah 16:10.

850 Mark 5:38; John 11:19,31.

851 Isaiah 16:11.

852 Isaiah 16:12.

853 Isaiah 16:12.

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pride turn to Him.⁸⁵⁴ It cannot be that the Lord God would answer them in their cries, because this would lead them to conclude that their pagan ways were of real value. This is why it is impossible that folk who pray and who are steeped in other religions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and so on), would ever receive any answers from the Lord. He cannot answer their cries because it would confirm them in their superstitions. It is essential that the Hindu, the Moslem, the Buddhist, the atheist, and so on, turn from their ways and see the utter folly of the systems they have followed, before the Lord responds to the cry of faith which speaks of trust in the One true God. We have heard of many in these religions truly turning to the living God, but these have forsaken the waste and dead ways of their former way of life, and have not been confirmed in their false ways. The concept and notion that “all roads lead to God” (or that all people in religions are seeking the same God) is horrible because it stops people from **truly** turning to the living God.

[6] The word of the Lord for Moab. (Isaiah 16:13,14).

This burden ends with a word from the Lord about Moab's fate.⁸⁵⁵ It is time for the end for Moab. Three years is their lot. And yet in His great and just anger, there is hope for Moab. For although the great multitude and all Moab's pride and pomp will be despised, yet there is a remnant. It is “*small and feeble,*” but there are those who will turn and repent truly. This is the Lord's great grace and mercy.⁸⁵⁶

854 Isaiah 30:18,15.

855 Isaiah 16:13.

856 Isaiah 16:14.

Chapter 27.

Isaiah 17:1-18:7.

The burden against Damascus.

**[The sevenfold destruction of the Syrian-Ephraim alliance serving as a picture of
sevendestruction that encompasses the entire world.]**

Textual analysis.

#17 1 The burden against Damascus.

“Behold, Damascus
will cease from *being* a city,
and it will be a ruinous heap.

2 The cities of Aroer *are* forsaken;
they will be for flocks which lie down, and no one will make *them* afraid.

3 The fortress also will cease from Ephraim, the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria; they will
be as the glory of the children of Israel,”
says the Lord of hosts.

4 “In that day
it shall come to pass *that*
the glory of Jacob will wane,
and the fatness of his flesh grow lean.

5 It shall be as when
the harvester gathers the grain,
and reaps the heads with his arm;

it shall be as
he who gathers heads of grain in the Valley of Rephaim.

6 Yet gleaning grapes will be left in it, like the shaking of an olive tree, two *or* three olives at
the top of the uppermost bough, four *or* five in its most fruitful branches,”

says the Lord God of Israel.

7 In that day
a man will look to his Maker,
and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel.

8 He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands;
he will not respect what his fingers have made, nor the wooden images nor the incense altars.

9 In that day
his strong cities will be as
a forsaken bough
and an uppermost branch, which they left because of the children of Israel;
and there will be desolation.

10 Because
you have forgotten the God of your salvation,
and have not been mindful of the Rock of your stronghold,

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therefore you will
plant pleasant plants and set out foreign seedlings;
11 In the day you will
make your plant to grow,
and in the morning you will
make your seed to flourish;
but the harvest *will be* a heap of ruins in the day of grief and desperate sorrow.

12 Woe
to the multitude of many people
who make a noise like the roar of the seas,
and to the rushing of nations
that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters!

13 The nations will rush like the rushing of many waters;

but *God*

will rebuke them
and they will flee far away,
and be chased
like the chaff of the mountains before the wind,
like a rolling thing before the whirlwind.

14 Then behold,
at eventide,
trouble!
And before the morning,
he is no more.

This *is* the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who rob us.

#18 1 Woe

to the land shadowed with buzzing wings,
which *is* beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,
2 Which sends ambassadors by sea, even in vessels of reed on the waters, *saying*,
“Go, swift messengers,
to a nation tall and smooth *of skin*,
to a people terrible from their beginning onward,
a nation powerful and treading down, whose land the rivers divide.”

3 All inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth:
when he lifts up a banner on the mountains, you see *it*;
and when he blows a trumpet, you hear *it*.

4 For so the **Lord** said to me,
“I will take My rest,

and I will look from My dwelling place like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.”

5 For before the harvest, when the bud is perfect and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, He will both
cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks
and take away *and* cut down the branches

. **6** They will be left together
for the mountain birds of prey
and for the beasts of the earth;
the birds of prey will summer on them,
and all the beasts of the earth will winter on them.

7 In that time a present will be brought to the **Lord of hosts**
from a people tall and smooth *of skin*,
and from

a people terrible from their beginning onward,
a nation powerful and treading down, whose land the rivers divide—
to the place of the name of the **Lord of hosts**,
to Mount Zion.

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We noted in the first burden concerning Babylon that the message was one for the entire world. We have the same idea expressed here in this burden. It opens with a focus on Damascus, the centre of the Syrian-Israel coalition, but ends with reference to the peoples, nations and inhabitants of the world⁸⁵⁷ Thus we are to understand that the message is one for all time, with Syria-Israel used as an example, There are three main divisions to this section as shown below, but the last two can be further sub-divided:

[1] The burden against Damascus – a warning for all! (Isaiah 17:1-3).

[2] Salvation and judgement “*in that day*”! (Isaiah 17:4-11).

[a] Jacob wanes. (Isaiah 17:4-6).

[b] A man will look to his Maker. (Isaiah 17:7-8).

[c] Desolation to those who still forget God. (Isaiah 17:9-11).

[3] Two woes to the world. (Isaiah 17:12-18:7)

[a] Woe to the world who plunder the people of God (Isaiah 17:12-14).

[b] Woe to the far off nations for God will judge (Isaiah 18:1-7).

Like many divisions constructed by us, these are by no means perfect. The burden against Damascus contains within it some words which have application specifically to different time periods. Whenever we read the words “*in that day*” we must be aware of the fact that the time spoken of may be referring to the first coming of Christ, or His return on the day of judgment. Sometimes both are in view. The first time we come across this expression at verse 4 we are directed to consider the plight of “*Jacob*” and “*Israel*.”⁸⁵⁸ Although in our analysis we have separated the second section into three according to the use of this phrase “*in that day*,” it will be seen that the first ends with the words “*says the Lord God of Israel*,” which phrase marks a break in thought in the same way that the phrase “*says the Lord of hosts*” does at the end of verse 3. We thus have the following ideas.

- The end of Syria and Ephraim and their confederacy is prophesied. (Isaiah 17:1-3).
- The end of Israel as a nation will occur “*in that day*.” (Isaiah 17:4-6).
- A man will look to His Maker “*in that day*.” (Isaiah 17:7,8).
- The forsaking and desolation of those who forget God “*in that day*.” (Isaiah 17:9-11).

857 Isaiah 17:12,13; 18:3.

858 Isaiah 17:4,6.

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Whilst the first two of these have to do with Syria and Israel (although not exclusively), the third speaks universally. It is simply *“a man”* who will turn and reconsider. The last theme continues this thought on to consider those whose cities and lives will become desolate on that day. Thus overall in Isaiah 17:4-11 we are given a glimpse into the gospel age where some will repent and turn to the *“Holy One of Israel,”* whilst many whose lives are bound to the earth (they sow, plant, reap and that is their only focus), will see all forsaken and ruined at the last day.⁸⁵⁹

[1] The burden against Damascus – a warning for all! (Isaiah 17:1-3).

The burden is, ostensibly, against Damascus as the opening verse suggests, but there is also a reference to Ephraim in verse 3 so that Damascus is put as representative of the Syrian-Israelite confederacy that we met in chapter 7 (Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel). Ahaz king of Judah was warned by the Lord not to worry about *“these two stubs of smoking firebrands”* and their plan to take Judah, because God was going to thwart their plans and was about to remove Ephraim (Israel) once and for all.⁸⁶⁰

17:1-3.

The burden begins with the announcement that Damascus will become a ruin, so that it is no longer to be considered as a *“city.”*⁸⁶¹ Aroer was a town just north of the Arnon river which had been in Moab and then a part of Israel. The name means “ruin” and so the emphasis is on destruction here.⁸⁶²

In this short section we have seven definite actions some of which **will** happen and one which is put forth as an example.

1. [Damascus] *“will cease from being a city.”* (v1).
2. Damascus *“will be a ruinous heap.”* (v1).
3. *“The cities of Aroer are forsaken.”* (v2).
4. [the cities of Aroer] *“will be for flocks which lie down, and no one will make them afraid.”* (v2).
5. *“The fortress also will cease from Ephraim.”* (v3).

859 Isaiah 17:9-11.

860 Isaiah 7:4,7.

861 Isaiah 17:1.

862 Isaiah 17:2.

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6. *“The kingdom [will cease] from Damascus.”* (v3).
7. *“The remnant of Syria ... will be as the glory of the children of Israel.”* (v3).

Aroer and its environs have already been forsaken by its inhabitants, and it will eventually become a place where shepherds could feed their flocks in peace and safety unmolested by the hubbub of the city and international affairs.⁸⁶³ Ephraim will no longer have a fortress or stronghold, and Damascus will cease to be a ruler.⁸⁶⁴ As if this was not enough, we find that those of Damascus that would be left would lose whatever glory they may have had. Just as Israel was to be defeated and despoiled no longer to be a nation, so also this same fate would befall Damascus. The statement: *“they will be as the glory of the children of Israel,”* is ironic.⁸⁶⁵ The glory had departed from that nation when the Assyrians despoiled and ruined them.

In the next section we read that *“the glory of Jacob will wane, and the fatness of his flesh grow lean.”*⁸⁶⁶ Hosea gave a similar prophecy:

*As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird— No birth, no pregnancy, and no conception!*⁸⁶⁷

So what can we learn from this short prophecy? Well, given that we have the background in chapter 7 we learn that any who form confederacies, cliques, or groups that seek ascendancy and rule over others for position and gain will suffer the same ignominious fall. It is not at all surprising that this burden against Damascus stands as a warning. Damascus was governed by Rezin, and Samaria by Pekah, and these two were simply men who got too big for themselves. How often do we see this type of cliquey behaviour? Our fellowship in church ought never to have this feel about it. As soon as we see the ambition of some over others, whether it be to gain position or influence, we ought to hang our heads in shame and seek the Lord for repentance. Such clawing for position and a desire for reputation is (sadly) endemic amongst human souls. We note that such confederacies are built on human strength and ingenuity. The formation of the first city, it will be remembered, was by the sinful Cain who sought to promote his son Enoch, (most likely) in opposition to his godly namesake.⁸⁶⁸ To reinforce the selfish hoarding of possessions and influence it is necessary (in this

863 Isaiah 17:2.

864 Samaria, Israel's capital, was defeated in 722 BC and Israel ceased to be a nation from that time onwards.

865 Isaiah 17:3.

866 Isaiah 17:4.

867 Hosea 9:11.

868 See Genesis 4 & 5. We do not know that Enoch of Cain was contemporary with Enoch from Seth. However

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world) to protect what you have gathered and so a stronghold or fortress becomes a necessity.⁸⁶⁹ Frightened that other powers, who have also built their own kingdoms, will usurp their meagre possessions and influence, the next step in this sorry affair is to build an ever expanding kingdom. From small beginnings of selfishness and greed, empires and wars are constructed.⁸⁷⁰ That such a state of affairs may happen in the church is evident from such as we find in 1Corinthians. There we read of factions and groups which the apostle roundly condemned. We ought to be very careful of drifting into friendships and groupings which tend towards empire building. We must avoid at all costs the tendency to form cliques, for however innocuous they may seem and operate, the outcome will be disastrous, not to say dishonouring to the Lord and His righteous ways.

[2] Salvation and judgement “in that day”! (Isaiah 17:4-11).

This next section is identified by the threefold statement “*in that day*” which occurs in verses 4, 7 and 9. This is one of Isaiah's favourite phrases and whilst it refers immediately to an impending judgement to come, it has reference also to the coming of the Messiah. We must pay attention to the immediate reference but must never stay with this, for, as we have pointed out before, the Scriptures primarily teach us about the Saviour.

Broadly speaking we have an overview of what will happen “*in that day*” to Jacob, (i.e. Israel – verses 4 to 6), to those who repent (verses 7 and 8), and to those who fail to repent, (verses 9 to 11).

[a] Jacob wanes. (Isaiah 17:4-6).

17:4.

These verses teach that when “*that day*” comes, Jacob will be on the decrease and his glory will wane or diminish. This speaks clearly of the final phase for Israel. God had chosen them above all nations to be His special people from the time of the Exodus. They were given the oracles and the promises, the temple, and the sacrifices. Theirs was the right to dwell in the land of Canaan as God's witnesses to the gospel. Their mission was to point forward to the coming of the Messiah and,

given that people in the pre-flood days lived such long lives (up to 1,000 years), it is likely that they were. Whatever the case, the Holy Spirit has organised these chapters (Genesis 4 & 5) so that we will not miss the comparison between the two Enochs (and the the two Lamechs). Enoch's name means “dedicated” and whilst Enoch from Cain was dedicated to the building of an earthly empire exhibited by the building of a city, Enoch of Seth was dedicated to walking with God.

869 Exemplified by Nimrod – see Genesis 10 & 11 – who built Babylon.

870 James 4:1,2.

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in the meantime, to represent God on earth. However their time was never to be eternal. Their coming and flourishing would last for a season. Israel were a temporary thing, for the true “Israel,” the true Servant of the Lord, was none other than Christ Himself. They could have continued indefinitely if they had been able to keep the covenant. However the covenant was broken by them and so the new covenant which had been promised since Adam and Eve fell, was now to be realised. The old covenant established at Sinai was of the form: “do this and you shall live,” whilst the new covenant of promise was of the form “Live! And you shall do ...”⁸⁷¹

And so Jacob will pass. This is exemplified by two New Testament themes. First in John the Baptist. He was an Old Testament prophet living in New Testament times. One of the most important things he declared concerning Christ was:

He must increase, but I must decrease.⁸⁷²

In other words the old way of things is over. Christ referred to John the Baptist as the last of the Old Testament prophets, but any who came after him were greater because they would be part of the New Testament way.⁸⁷³ A second theme concerns fig trees. In Matthew 21:18f we read about the Lord cursing an unfruitful fig tree.⁸⁷⁴ At another time he tells a parable about an unfruitful fig tree.⁸⁷⁵ These incidents serve to indicate that Israel was to pass. It had been left long in order for it to bear fruit but it had failed and now the time had come to cut it down. In our text the image used is of harvesting. However there will be a few gleanings left. This points us to the truth that there would be some, at least, of Israel who would remain and come into the new kingdom. Thus in the Acts of the apostles we read that a number of priests were obedient to the faith.⁸⁷⁶

Given this prophecy, and many other Scriptures besides, we wonder why it is that many follow the idea known as pre-millennialism whereby Israel is believed to have a resurgence. It seems to me that the term “Israel” is not always referring to the ancient people, nor even to the land where they dwelt. As Paul comments:

For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.⁸⁷⁷

871 See Galatians 3:12; Leviticus 18:5.
872 John 3:30.
873 Matthew 11:9-11.
874 See also Mark 11:12f.
875 Luke 13:6f.
876 Acts 6:7.
877 Romans 9:6.

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The true Israel are those who exhibit the faith of Abraham, not those merely descended from Jacob.⁸⁷⁸

17:5,6.

The end of Israel is depicted in terms of the harvest. The harvester has gone across the fields and has gathered in the grain with his arm, reaping all *“the heads.”*⁸⁷⁹ Even the verdant and greatly fruitful *“Valley of Rephaim”* (valley of the giants) would be reaped fully.

17:6.

Despite the final reaping and removal of all those populating Israel so that the glory of Israel is gone, there will nevertheless be something left to glean. Our text indicates that there will be *“gleaning grapes,”* or a few olives left in the *“uppermost bough”* or in its *“most fruitful branches.”* It may be impossible to gather every last olive or grape from a large tree. Those in the most fruitful parts may hide still a few, and those in the difficult to reach places may harbour a few more. And so in this figure we see that the Lord has His remnant, those who escape the final day.

[b] A man will look to his Maker. (Isaiah 17:7-8).

17:7.

After being taught that Jacob/Israel will come to an end in verses 4 to 6, we are next pointed to the wonderful truth that the gospel is open to any who may be called *“a man.”*⁸⁸⁰ It is quite wonderful, to say the very least, that there is no qualifying here. It isn't just Israel, or a select band of people, but *“a man.”* This indicates that any may come. All types of men. From the worst possible sinner to the most self-righteous. From the most eminent and wealthy to the poorest of the poor. From the simplest to the most intelligent. It is just *“a man.”* Furthermore we see the need not for a national faith in God, but a personal one. It is not a group of people that turn to see the Lord, but *“a man.”* This idea is taught in Jeremiah where we read:

878 Romans 4:12f.

879 Isaiah 17:5.

880 Needless to say this term refers to women too. We must remember that God made what we refer to humanity as “man,” and that “man” is male and female – together made in the image of God. They are equal in status and standing before God but different in structure and role.

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31 Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— **32** not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. **33** But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. **34** No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.⁸⁸¹

The Lord Jesus taught that people of faith would be taught by God Himself.⁸⁸² He also taught that Peter's confession about Christ was something revealed and taught him of the Father.⁸⁸³ And so we learn that faith is a matter of *individual* and *personal* experience of God, and not something garnered in a collective way. This does not mean we can carry out our own faith irrespective of others, for we are called as a body. What we are emphasising here, though, is that faith is a personal and singular matter.

The way in which a man may be changed and come into God's kingdom is here expressed by what “*will*” happen. Here we are taught that it is all a work of God, and, in particular, a work of His promise. There are two things “*a man*” will do positively, and two things that he will not do. By this fact we note that true saving faith has a negative component as well as a positive one. We cannot simply draw in from the Lord all His benefits without also rejecting the world and turning from sin. It is good, of course, that the positive comes first. A man will “*look*” and “*have respect*” for his Maker. There is a realisation that we are not just independent autonomous beings, but that we are owned by the Creator. When this truth is affirmed, then a man may begin to consider in depth and with greater attention the claims that the Creator of all things has upon us. The emphasis here is on looking and seeing, in the sense of perceiving. Hence the very thinking of a man changes. He now looks and sees with God in view, and no longer merely, “*under the sun,*” without any thought of God as Solomon expresses it in Ecclesiastes.⁸⁸⁴

881 Jeremiah 31:31-34.

882 John 6:45 – see Isaiah 54:13.

883 Matthew 16:17.

884 Ecclesiastes 1:3,9,14

17:8.

A man's attention is also drawn away from the earthly counterfeits. He recognises that all that he had invested time, money, and thought into, was none other than the work of his own hands. Here there are three things that this *“man”* will *“not look to,”* nor *“respect.”* First it is the *“altars”* which stand for the focus and centre of a person's life. That which he (or she) worships or makes sacrifices for. Second we have the *“wooden images”* which have been carefully constructed and which offer appeal and some sense of meaning to the worshipper. We might talk in modern terms of that which pleases us or is aesthetically valuable. Finally there is no longer trust in the *“incense altars”* which depict the sense of prayer or trust and hope placed in the idols. This is a great representation of true repentance and conversion. First a turning to the Lord, but equally (and just as important) a turning away from the old worship, the old meanings, the old trusts. So in these brief verses we are taught the need for both faith and repentance. Faith is exemplified by turning to view and appreciate deeply the God who owns us because He is our Creator, and repentance is displayed by the acknowledgement of the sorry state we have come to in substituting self-made objects and ideas we worship.

I wonder when modern man will come to realise and see that all his intellectual pursuits are self made and manufactured? The big bang, the theory of evolution, and many other altars constructed by mankind are all self made delusions. In our text we find that this man will turn away from, and will stop considering that which *“his fingers have made.”* By which phrase we take as implying that the constructions of mankind, be they theoretical (big bang, evolution), or visual (celebrity, trophies), are often elaborately made. It is not that man has simply thrown things together. Far from it. The constructions of men are intricate and detailed. But this does not make them of value, let alone true.

[c] Desolation to those who still forget God. (Isaiah 17:9-11).

In this last set of verses on *“that day”* we are brought to consider what will happen to those who do not take advantage of the great offer of salvation. Even though we do not have the offer stated explicitly in verses 7 and 8 we know that it is there from what it conveys and from a consideration of other Scriptures. The results of accepting such an offer are expressed in verses 7 and 8 at least. And then in these verses we have the results of not accepting the offer.

17:9,10

Now some may be a little confused here with the reference to the “*children of Israel*,” as though we still have the nation Israel in view. We have noted that the first set of verses (verses 4 to 6), point to the waning and fading of Israel. Where we wrong to assert this? Well not at all because the phrase “*children of Israel*” stands as an Old Testament representation of those who have faith in God. We in this gospel age are the “*children of Israel*” because we have the faith that Israel (Jacob) had.⁸⁸⁵

The people being addressed in this section are designated as “*his*,” “*they*,” and “*you*,” and so we have here a general reference to mankind. In particular we are thinking of those who have forgotten God. The remarkable thing is that these people are described as those who ought to know God. God ought to be considered by them as the God of their “*salvation*” and the “*Rock*” of their stronghold.⁸⁸⁶ It isn't just those selected by God to be the nation whom He has chosen. All people everywhere ought to be in right relation with God. God ought to be our Rock and salvation. If He isn't, then He will be our enemy!

When that final great day comes mankind's cities will be ruined and forsaken. Remarkably they have left these cities “*because of the children of Israel*”! This is a curious expression. Why will they have left their cities because of the true and faithful? I think we can see here a veiled and shadowy representation of Christ's return with the angels and the righteous saints as expressed by Jude:

14 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, **15** to execute judgement on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”⁸⁸⁷

You see when Christ returns, He will come with all those who have faithfully followed Him having responded positively to the offer of salvation. Many unwisely expand the time-frames concerning Christ's return, but I think the Scriptures speak of Christ's return as something that will happen all at once. Briefly, when the Lord returns, then all who love Him and who are (physically) dead but saved will be “caught up,” or “raptured,” to be with the Lord. They will then come down to earth as

885 Isaiah 17:9.

886 Isaiah 17:10.

887 Jude 1:14,15.

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the Lord begins judgement and the renewing of the heavens and the earth. Here in Isaiah 17:9f we have a faint image of this stupendous event. What we are being told is that those who reject Christ are those who flee from their cities because the righteous (children of Israel) are coming with their Captain!

The reason that these things will happen to mankind (who rejects the offer of salvation) is stated very clearly in verse 10. It is because mankind has forgotten that their maker is also the God of salvation, and the one in whom we can fully trust and rely – the Rock and our stronghold. I repeat that this is a remarkable truth which we would do well to drink in. You may be a believer and recognise these truths for yourself – that God is your Rock and stronghold – but do you realise that God is also the Rock and only means of salvation for *every* man, woman, and child you come across whether they know it or not? I am not saying that all people therefore are thence saved. This is patent nonsense. Most people are lost. However God is the ONLY means of salvation and therefore He ALONE is the only Rock and stronghold available. Do we know this? Do we live this? Do we express this truth winsomely and invitingly so that people will see their need and run to Christ? If not, then let us weep and pray that the Lord will change us that others may see Christ properly.

17:11.

We must note that the expression given in Isaiah 17:10 is similar to the theme expressed throughout Jeremiah that people have forgotten and forsaken the Lord. This is how people generally are with respect to God. They do not bring Him to mind. We who love Him, must live so much as to bring the Lord to mind in order that many may turn and see Christ the Saviour.⁸⁸⁸ However in the mean time prior to *“that day,”* those who forget the Lord will live and plant and grow but to no avail. Isn't this the experience of everyone in the world? When we plant our seeds, when we build our cities, when we plan our projects, what is the outcome? I mean really, what is the result? It is always the case, without exception, that in the end whatever man does, it comes to an end and brings much less than we intended. I can well remember the excitement that a new product a company I was involved in generated. It was going to be the payday to end all! It promised so much but within two years the whole enterprise collapsed and came to a crushing failure! Now I know that many who read this may be thinking, well what about? There are many companies which appear to be successful and ongoing. However take a moment to reflect here. What about those companies in my youth which were world leaders and internationally respected? Where are they

⁸⁸⁸ Psalm 40:3.

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now? So many have fallen and failed! Or take a longer view. What do you think of those great Pharaohs who built monumental structures? Do we remember them? Hardly! We struggle to discern what they did and thought. In their day they were the '*bees knees*,' but now – forgotten! I think we must take stock and recognise that whatever man does it fails rather than flourishes. We must take this as an overarching theme but does this mean we hang our hands in despair? Not a bit of it. The whole point is to drive us back to the Lord. If we honour Him – truly – we may succeed. If we honour Him we must follow Him. We are stewards of this world still. We must make our way through it as His ambassadors. But we must never think that this world will succeed and that we will reap earthly rewards aplenty. This passage teaches us that the fruit of man's works, whatever they may be, will end in disaster and failure. That should drive us to the Lord in hope of redemption.

[3] Two woes to the world. (Isaiah 17:12-18:7).

The burden against Damascus ends with two woes. The first is against those who would rob the people who have trusted God as stronghold and Rock. The second is to the nations that are far off and that may think they could escape notice.

[a] Woe to the world who plunder the people of God (Isaiah 17:12-14).

17:12.

This first woe is addressed to the "*many people*" and to the "*nations*." These two groupings of humanity are characterised in two rather distinct but overlapping ways that have to do with water. The many peoples make much noise and are described like the seas when they roar. A sea in which the waves are tempestuous is an awesome sight I am sure you will agree. This figure is one used often in Scripture. For example:

*You who still the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the peoples.*⁸⁸⁹

The sea in all its turmoil is a very good picture of the multitudes with their clamour for recognition, for having things, for their rights, for their way and so on. You only have to look at the world today with its sheer confusion and panic because of poor and desperately worrying leadership to see the

889 Psalm 65:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

peoples roar. There are those on one side who want to start a revolution because they feel the leaders are failing, and then there are those on the other hand who cry foul! What a din! However the greatest din and noise is reserved by these multitudes for those who want to follow the Lord. Isn't it the case that the crowds cry "crucify!" against the Lord's people? I think both types of din and hullabaloo are meant here. That against the people of God is clearly shown by the last phrase of this section, which refers to the people of God being robbed and plundered.⁸⁹⁰

17:13,14.

So we have a rush and a din against one another, and the same against the way of righteousness. But this is not just confined to many peoples, groups of peoples, be they the rich, the corporate bigwigs, the noisy lefties, the pompous traditionalists and so on, for we read that whole nations are rushing hither and thither and crashing about to gain an advantage. Isn't this what we see in the news today? Isn't this what has happened throughout time?

Well there is no need to worry! For this din and roar is but a minor fracas to God. I am reminded of Psalm 2 where we find that when the nations plot a vain thing, the Lord sits in heaven and laughs! In our text we have that wonderful contrasting word "*but.*"⁸⁹¹ But God will rebuke this noisy rabble so that they will flee and be like chaff or like something tumbling away driven by a whirlwind. It is as if you had blown away the dust off the mantle-piece, or brushed the crumbs off your toast from the plate. God will brush these noisy folk away in an instant. It will occur suddenly, for at evening there is trouble, and by morning the noisy nation is gone!⁸⁹²

This woe is offered to warn the reckless, but chiefly given to comfort those who have the faith of Jacob. Such a fate – the driving of the wind against the chaff – is that which the enemies of the godly who rob and plunder, will suffer. The unrighteous noisy tumultuous peoples and nations rob the godly of peace and well-being. Well in an instant they will be driven away and will be no more.

I am reminded that the Lord speaks in Jeremiah concerning the word of God and the prattle of dreamers and the (so-called) wise. The dreams and the sayings of men are mere chaff compared to the word of God which is wheat (true food), fire, and a hammer (capable of destroying all of the rubbish).⁸⁹³

890 Isaiah 17:14.

891 Isaiah 17:13.

892 Isaiah 17:14.

893 Jeremiah 23:28,29.

[b] Woe to the far off nations for God will judge (Isaiah 18:1-7).

In the second woe we must first attend to a matter of identity. Many commentators are of the opinion that the main nation spoken of in verse 2 is Ethiopia. That is, there is a nation beyond Ethiopia (v1) which sends ambassadors to Ethiopia who are described as a “*nation tall and smooth*” and so on (v2). Now I am not at all sure that this is the correct way of viewing these verses. We need to consider these in some detail.

18:1,2. The nation beyond the rivers of Ethiopia.

In verse 1 we are told of a land that is *beyond* the rivers of Ethiopia. It is described as “*the land shadowed with buzzing wings,*” by which is meant that it is a land populated with many creatures that could fly. Whether these were birds, pterosaurs, or insects is not clear. What is clear is that this land was renown for being shadowed by flying creatures. Where or what this land is, is equally unclear. If we assume we are looking *from the perspective* of Canaan, then it would represent a place further south or possibly west of Ethiopia, which was south of Egypt. On the other hand, if we are looking *from the perspective* of Ethiopia, we may be pointed either towards Egypt as the land shadowed with buzzing wings, or we could be directed in the opposite way again south. It is highly unlikely that Egypt would be meant, because the next burden in Isaiah 19 is the burden of Egypt. It would seem better to consider this description as being viewed from the perspective of Canaan, so that we are being pointed to a land beyond Ethiopia very far away.

Now this land, to which the woe is addressed, is one which has dealings with another nation described in verse 2 in four ways as follows:

a nation tall and smooth *of skin*.

a people terrible from their beginning onward.

a nation powerful and treading down.

[a nation] whose land the rivers divide.

What nation do these descriptions suggest? Again the commentators veer towards Egypt or Ethiopia. However these do not seem to me to fit the descriptions we have here. The fourth description could be descriptive of Babylon/Assyria whose rivers the Tigris and the Euphrates carve up the land from the Persian gulf travelling north west.⁸⁹⁴ Some may object that all lands can be

⁸⁹⁴ The land was populated by Nimrod at first where Babel was built (from which comes Babylon), and Assyria.

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described by this expression because most lands are bisected and divided by river systems. But taken as a whole these descriptions seem to fit Babylon of old well. The Euphrates river features quite extensively in the Old Testament. The Tigris is only mentioned once but this is because it is the most northerly of the two rivers. The other descriptions would equally fit the nations situated amongst the two great rivers. Nimrod was the builder of Babel/Babylon and he is referred to in Scripture as the first military dictator (*“a mighty hunter before the Lord”*).⁸⁹⁵ From Nimrod's beginning these northern nations could certainly be described as being *“terrible,” “powerful,”* and ones who tread down.⁸⁹⁶

We must mention the means by which these ambassadors travelled, namely by the reed boat. It is well known that these craft were ones built not just by Egyptians and those who inhabited the land of Babylon/Assyria, but also in Ethiopia and as far away as in Lake Titicaca, South America.⁸⁹⁷ Thus a journey was made by reed boat from one country *“beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,”* which we take to a country further south in the African continent, to *“to a people terrible from their beginning onward, a nation powerful and treading down,”* by which we believe Babylon is intended.



Figure 3: An ancient reed boat. From: African-American museum in Washington DC USA.

Over the years the land was Assyrian or Babylonian depending on the rulers who governed there.

895 Genesis 10:8f. The phrase *“before the Lord”* means literally “in front of” or “in the face of” and signifies a defiant attitude against God.

896 I am well aware that other interpretations are offered for these verses. I offer these as a possibility.

897 These boats form one of the many pieces of evidence which illustrate and demonstrate the dispersal of cultures from the Babel beginning of Genesis 10 and 11.

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And so we have a land south of Ethiopia in the depths of the African continent sending ambassadors to the terrible nations that inhabited the land settled by Nimrod. What is the meaning and point of verses 1 and 2? The point is simply that the nations of the far extremities who make treaties between one another and who think that they can determine the course of their own history are deluding themselves. Damascus (Syria-Israel) is put at the head of this burden because these featured heavily in Judah's affairs as we found in Isaiah 7. However those who were larger and more powerful but who were beyond Judah's experience are equally in view. Whether the bully is a small fellow who troubles a local set of young people, or a multi-national conglomerate who impoverishes multitudes through sharp and dubious practices, the fate is all the same. The details of God's judgement follow in verses 3 and following.

18:3. Judgement is coming.

From verse 2 we move to a more universal reference expressed in verse 3. Now the Lord directs our thoughts away from the big powers who may be far off, to *“all inhabitants of the world and dwellers on earth”*! The Scriptures are amazing! They speak to us today just as much as they spoke to Isaiah's audience. In verse 3 we read of what the Lord intends to do. He is going to lift up a banner or standard on the mountains. We have come across this concept already. It stands for the Lord's conspicuous work which is also a rallying call. It stands for the Lord's death at Calvary. Now here in verse 3 we have another expression, *“when he blows a trumpet”* which would signify the final judgement. So we have here the gospel age contracted into two statements. These expressions, the *“banner”* and the *“trumpet”* may refer in popular thought to the coming of an army, but they signify the great work of God who comes in salvation first, and then in final judgement.

18:4.

In verse 4 we find the prophet Isaiah telling us what the Lord had said to him. The implication of God taking His *“rest”* and looking from His *“dwelling place”* may seem odd here. What rest does God need? This only makes sense if we consider that the Lord who came to earth and was lifted up on Calvary, has now ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father:

His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person,

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and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.⁸⁹⁸

The Lord looks down from His *“dwelling place”* which we presume is heaven, that is, to where He had ascended after His resurrection. There are two ways in which the Lord will look. First *“like clear heat in sunshine.”* Older versions like the AKJV suggest: *“like a clear heat upon herbs ”* or, *“like a clear heat after rain,”* but these translations seem unlikely. This first phrase seems to indicate a fresh, clear, and bright light such as plants love in order to flourish and grow. The second phrase: *“like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest”* is more straight forward. It suggests a luxuriant environment where the right amount of water and heat in a still climate promotes the best growth. These descriptions pertain to the harvest of good fruits which the Lord is bringing forth, by which we mean the true Israel of God, true believers.

18:5,6.

Judgement is expressed in verses 5 and 6. Before the harvest has come the Lord will have acted. We read that God will prune and take away the branches from the flowers and plants which these nations are represented by.⁸⁹⁹ We are reminded here that God the Father is the gardener who prunes and gathers fruitless branches for the fire.⁹⁰⁰ Are we being pruned and seeking to be fruitful? In this instance the action of God is one of justice. He will cut off all that is evil and wicked and remove those branches which have no use. The figure then changes to one in which those cut off and removed will be left as food for birds of prey and beasts of the field.⁹⁰¹ And so judgement is pronounced on all that Damascus represents. That is, nations who form treaties to ride roughshod over the rest of the world, or individuals who seek to promote their selfish wishes to the detriment of others.

18:7.

But the burden does not end at this point. In verse 7 we have the phrase *“in that time.”* This is not the same as the earlier phrase *“in that day,”* for it speaks of a season or period of time, that is, during those days. So what will happen? We read that *“a present”* will be brought from the land described by the four phrases we met in verse 2. This present is brought from Babylon/Assyria – the

898 Hebrews 1:2b,3.

899 Isaiah 18:5.

900 John 15.

901 Isaiah 18:6.

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land where people are tall and have smooth skin, who were terrible from their beginning – and it was going to be delivered *“to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, to Mount Zion.”* Here we have a prophecy of the Magi! The wise men came from the east – from the region of Babylon – and brought gifts to the new born king.

Chapter 28.

Isaiah 19:1-20:6.

The burden against Egypt.

Textual analysis.

The burden against Egypt can be divided into three unequal parts. In the first 15 verses of Isaiah 19 we have the burden stated and explained. I have titled this section: “folly breeds folly and a drunken stupor.” It never ceases to amaze that man thinks he can build a life for himself independent of God – how foolish! Then in verses 16 to 25 we are given a series of statements about what will happen *“in that day.”* Finally, the first six verses of Isaiah chapter 20 describe the capture of Egypt and Ethiopia by the Assyrians. The specific analysis for each section will be given as we come to consider each portion of the text.

[1] Folly breeds folly and a drunken stupor. (Isaiah 19:1-15).

[a] Egypt is to be destroyed. (Isaiah 19:1-4).

[b] The return of the plagues. (Isaiah 19:5-10).

[c] When the wise fail. (Isaiah 19:11-15).

[2] In that day. (Isaiah 19:16-25).

[3] Egypt brought to nakedness. (Isaiah 20:1-6).

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[1] Folly breeds folly and a drunken stupor. (Isaiah 19:1-15).

#19 1 The burden against Egypt.

Behold,

the **Lord** rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt;
the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and
the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst.

2 "I will set Egyptians against Egyptians;
everyone will fight against his brother,
and everyone against his neighbour,
city against city,
kingdom against kingdom.

3 The spirit of Egypt will fail in its midst;
I will destroy their counsel, and they will consult the idols and the charmers, the mediums and the
sorcerers.

4 And the Egyptians I will give into the hand of a cruel master, and a fierce king will rule over them,"
says the **Lord**, the **Lord of hosts**.

5 The waters will fail from the sea, and
the river will be wasted and dried up.

6 The rivers will turn foul;
the brooks of defence will be emptied and dried up;
the reeds and rushes will wither.

7 The papyrus reeds by the River, by the mouth of the River, and everything sown by the River, will wither, be
driven away, and be no more.

8 The fishermen also will mourn; all those will lament who cast hooks into the River, and they will languish
who spread nets on the waters.

9 Moreover those who work in fine flax and those who weave fine fabric will be ashamed;

10 And its foundations will be broken.

All who make wages *will be* troubled of soul.

11 Surely the princes of Zoan *are* fools;

Pharaoh's wise counsellors give foolish counsel.

How do you say to Pharaoh,

"I *am* the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings?"

12 Where *are* they?

Where are your wise men?

Let them tell you now,

and let them know what the **Lord of hosts** has purposed against Egypt.

13 The princes of Zoan have become fools;

the princes of Noph are deceived;

they have also deluded Egypt, *those who are* the mainstay of its tribes.

14 The **Lord** has mingled a perverse spirit in her midst;

and they have caused Egypt to err in all her work, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit.

15 Neither will there be *any* work for Egypt, which the head or tail, palm branch or bulrush, may do.

This first part can be divided into three sub-sections. In the first (up to verse 4) we are given an overview of the destruction of Egypt which arises due to God's sovereign will, and their utter folly and confusion. In the second we are told about the specifics of how Egypt will be destroyed. These 6 verses (verse 5 to 10) are reminiscent of the suffering encountered during the plagues of Exodus. The last part (from verse 11 to 15) describes the failure of their wise men and counsellors.

[a] Egypt is to be destroyed. (Isaiah 19:1-4).

19:1.

The burden against Egypt starts with the Lord coming on a cloud at some speed. It would seem that the Lord is not slow in judgement here. There are also clear echoes of the Lord's great coming on Mount Sinai in a thick cloud. As the Lord comes there are some inevitable results. God cannot stand in the presence of idolatry and error, and so the idols will fall, and hearts set against the Lord will quiver and melt.

The idols are said to *“totter”* and to *“melt”* at the Lord's presence. The image is graphic. These false statues and idols which men put so much store in cannot do anything as the Lord approaches. All they can do is wobble, quiver, and crumble as the Lord's mighty presence is felt. It is very interesting to note how the two statements at the end of verse 1 are put. We have *“the idols of Egypt”* in one sentence and the *“heart of Egypt”* in the second, so that it would seem these are intimately connected. The very heart of Egypt was given to their idols and their idolatrous system.

19:2-4.

We are also given some detail about the effects of God's coming in verses 2 to 4. There are three key things mentioned here:

- *In-fighting or civil war (v2).*
- *Failure in counsel (v3).*
- *Dictator rule/Totalitarianism (v4).*

We find here that it is the Lord who sets Egyptian against Egyptian (*“I will set ...”*).⁹⁰² This is the consequence of a sinful and selfish lifestyle. If people are out for what they want for themselves with no thought of others, then it will not be long before factions are formed and wars result.⁹⁰³ But this is something that the Lord sets or establishes. We might think this rather odd. But the point is that to reject God and His ways is utter folly. There is no other way of describing the action of human rebellion. It is, to use the hackneyed phrase, cutting off one's nose to spite one's face. By turning away from God, humanity has resorted to the gutter or (perhaps more realistically) to the sewers. And so when a people turn from what is good and reject God, the Lord Himself

902 Isaiah 19:2.

903 James 4:1f.

Studies in Isaiah.

establishes them in their choice. It is, in effect, a work of mercy. For by seeing what life is like without God there is an opportunity to come to one's senses as the prodigal son did as we wallow in the pig sty.⁹⁰⁴ Sadly man fails to see even the outcome of his sinful ways. All that happens is a personal pursuit of rights and a determination to live for self. This then elevates into faction forming and party groups or tribalism, so that we have "*city against city*" and eventually "*kingdom against kingdom*."⁹⁰⁵

Next we find that a country or a group who establish wisdom *from* themselves will end up with no reliable counsel. This results in a lack of spirit – or a lack of confidence and trust. This loss will start within the midst of the nation. Instead of the reliable counsel from God, they will seek the wild and hopeless idols with their associated charmers and mediums.⁹⁰⁶ Finally the people will have a dictator and a totalitarian government.⁹⁰⁷ The inevitable consequences of rejecting God and of following idols, is that wars and fighting result alongside no counsel and a loss of essential integrity and spirit. It hardly needs saying that what has happened to Egypt has also happened many times since. We might point to the Nazi regime prior to the second world war, or the ruler-ship of many of the communist regimes. But then also we look closely at what is happening in the UK today and ask: are we any better?

We marvel at the utter folly of mankind as he seeks counsel and wisdom from himself, from his own mind and machinations. This theme is one repeated time and time again in Scripture, from Solomon's expressions in Ecclesiastes to Paul's assertions of the emptiness and darkness of the mind of man, And yet what we see here as well is the fact that the Lord is the one who actually destroys their counsel. When the Lord lets man follow his own ways and ideas He confirms them in the folly of what they propose.⁹⁰⁸

These general themes of despair are expanded in verses 5 to 15, particularly with regard to the background for why there was such civil war. The economy and life of Egypt centred on the river Nile. It was this that enabled people to get their living. Apart from the irrigation of the land for farming and fish, the Nile provided the papyrus reeds useful for making paper and structural items such as reed boats and dwellings. The Mediterranean Sea also provided a source of income too in trade and commerce. In these verses we find that the waters fail and the rivers dry up. It is quite remarkable how fragile the systems of the world are. We do not invest these with an independence

904 Luke 15:17.

905 Isaiah 19:2.

906 Isaiah 19:3.

907 Isaiah 19:4.

908 Romans 1:24,26.

Studies in Isaiah.

such as modern day biologists do, for the Scriptures teach us clearly that all things are in God's hands. He is the one who causes the rain and the wind, the flower to bloom, and the deer to calve.⁹⁰⁹

However, He has so organised the world of which He is the ruler, that it operates according to what we observe to be regular laws. We should never think that these “laws” are so fixed that they are inviolable. It is God who is ruling, governing and overseeing. These ideas we use to express God's involvement are not really adequate because we do not mean to say that God only attends to these things for part of the time as a governor may. Not a bit of it! God holds all things in His hands and in Him all things consist permanently and continually without let-up or change.⁹¹⁰ Now we must add to this the fact that God has also placed a curse on the universe because of Adam and Eve's first sin. Still, the Lord governs continually and permanently. So here in Egypt the river and the sea fails. This is not something that can be reversed except the Lord do something to bring such reversal about. We know that the environment all around us fails and falters if we treat it badly, and it seems to recover if we treat it well. We are still to be stewards of this planet, even though it is doomed to destruction by fire. God is in charge and rules moment-by-moment. He expects us to obey His ways and to do His will. If we treat the physical world in cavalier fashion we will reap disaster. God sometimes allows the physical world to falter and fail due to sin and sinful actions. It does not follow automatically that if we seek to repair the damage the physical world will repair. God may be gracious and allow this. But it is often the case that the failures of the river and sea is a judgement from God. It would seem that the Egyptians were thoroughly worldly in their outlook on life. They had their gods and beliefs, but much of their religious system was tied up in the Nile. As they trusted in the Nile to produce, now they find that it is failing. This is ever the case! Oh that we would put all our trust in God alone.

[b] The return of the plagues. (Isaiah 19:5-10).

19:5-7.

In verses 5 to 7 we are taught with reference to the physical world that things are failing in a number of different ways.

We have a number of key themes and ideas as follows:

909 Psalm 104 (for example).

910 Colossians 1:17.

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Fail – the waters from the sea. (v5)

Wasted/dried up – the river. (v5)

Foul – the river. (v6)

Emptied/dried up – the brooks of defence. (v6)

Wither – reeds and rushes. (v6)

Wither/driven away/no more – papyrus reeds and everything sown. (v7)

Essentially these descriptions amount to a variety of different ways of saying the same thing, that the Nile will fail and dry up. It seems that many descriptions are presented to give a sense of utter despair and hopelessness. It is as though someone comes home to a house that has been burgled. They go from room to room and everywhere has been ransacked and desecrated. There is no place that is left untouched. What they had put their trust in was failing them.

19:8-10.

Then in verses 8 to 10 we are taught about the effects on the people who have trusted in the Nile and the Sea. We have three types of effect this failure of the Nile brings about

Mourn/lament/languish – the fishermen. (v8)

Ashamed – those who work in ... (v9)

Troubled of soul – those who make wages. (v10)

There are three types of worker mentioned in these verses. First we have “*the fishermen*” who are also referred to as those “*who cast hooks,*” and then also as those “*who spread nets.*” These three descriptions are put to show us the involved industry going on at the Nile. The work of fishing (like many professions) involves more than simply catching fish. Equipment needs to be devised and maintained, and the product needs to be processed, marketed, and delivered. The second type of worker are those who work in “*fine flax*” and in “*fine fabric*” whose work probably derives from the reeds and papyrus which grew freely along the banks of the Nile. Finally we have a general description: “*all who make wages*” which leads us to the idea that there were others whose livelihood depended upon the central work of fishing and fabric production.

The same thought is expressed for the people and their reactions. They will mourn and become ashamed because their great source of life – the Nile – was failing! In verse 10 we have a

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statement which seems to have application to both the environment of the Nile and to the people who drew their living from it. The very foundations of the Nile will be broken up so that what supplies it with its flowing waters will be removed. And so, as a result, the foundation that the people had trusted in will be gone too leaving them in anguish and *“troubled of soul.”*⁹¹¹

[c] When the wise fail. (Isaiah 19:11-15).

For the remainder of this section we are brought to consider the leadership. In verses 11 to 15 we read of the *“princes,”* and of *“Pharaoh's wise counsellors.”* It would seem that there were centres of learning and wisdom at Zoan and Noph. These cities were situated in the Nile delta. It would seem also that the wise men of Egypt were being blamed for the failure of the Nile and the sea. Egypt's whole system of life and thought was bound up with their mythology which involved the Nile, the stars, and various triads of gods. Their “science” and “technology,” which helped them build the pyramids and irrigate the land, was all wrapped up in their religious life. Today, of course, modern man has foolishly tried to set science and technology apart from religious belief and practice. This is an impossibility. In doing so what happens, of course, is that science and technology become the religion of the day.

19:11.

The wise men of Egypt are called by several descriptive terms. First of all they are termed *“fools”* who give *“foolish counsel.”*⁹¹² The root meaning of the term “fool” is “perverse.” It includes the ideas of impiety, quarrelsomeness, and licentiousness. These wise men give *“brutish”* counsel, according to the AKJV. It is stupid and silly advice. It is advice which literally burns up or consumes, or, in other words, ends up in flames. Their advice is such that it is shameful and results in the question at the end of verse 11. How can these so-called wise men call themselves such to Pharaoh? We must recall the situation at the time just prior to the Exodus. Moses was sent to deliver the people from Egypt. He met with Pharaoh and requested leave but was denied. There then follows the great contest between the wisdom of God, and the wisdom of the wise men and counsellors of Pharaoh. The contest was no contest of course for all the wise men could do was to ape and mimic what Moses was doing! In the end these wise men had nothing to offer Pharaoh and retreated in shame.

911 Isaiah 19:10.

912 Isaiah 19:11.

19:12,13.

Then in verse 12 of Isaiah 19 another question is asked. Can these wise men tell us what God has purposed against Egypt? The answer is obviously, no they cannot. The reason for this is that they have no trust in God or His revealed word. They have rejected Him and have followed the path of folly. This has singularly and signally failed. So where are they? What wisdom do they have? Aren't we on familiar territory here? How our wise men have failed! They have charted a course of enquiry and have set out on a path of knowledge which not only usurps the place of God, but actively denies Him any place at all! What wisdom do they have if they cannot give God His rightful place?

These wise counsellors are not merely fools on one occasion, for they continue in this way and become even more foolish.⁹¹³ In being fools and acting foolishly, they (necessarily) become deceived and deluded. In being deluded they, through their counsel, delude others. Oh how important it is to know the truth! If we follow a lie, or are deceived by error, whatever we promote to others leads them in the same errors and lies. The whole edifice of modern knowledge is built on a lie. How our educators are deceiving themselves and leading others in delusion! Sadly the elite of our day, the intelligentsia, are deluded by modern secular thought and, in their foolish wisdom, they are leading our nation down the path of folly. God is not mocked. He is still sovereign. In His wonderful way He can cause the error of the wicked to work for the good of those who love and follow Him. He can stop the mouths and plans of the wicked and He will bring all things to justice when the Lord Jesus returns. In the meantime our job is to live for Christ and proclaim His wonderful good news.

19:14,15.

It is one thing to see that foolish behaviour and a foolish course of action will lead to yet more folly, but quite another to see that it is the Lord who is behind this. In verse 14 we find that the Lord actively mingles the *“perverse spirit”* in the midst of Egypt so that Egypt will *“err”* and become like a *“drunken man.”*⁹¹⁴ Is this what we expect of a loving God? Well of course we look at things all wrong and from a perverse perspective. We constantly think that we are gods ourselves and that we have the right to determine our own destiny. What we read here is much the same as the action that God took at the Tower of Babel. The people, under the leadership of Nimrod, (the

913 Isaiah 19:13.

914 Isaiah 19:14.

Studies in Isaiah.

mighty hunter against God), were set on a foolish course of action and life which excluded God. They wanted to build their own life, their own religion, and their own way. God confounded them. He confused them and their language to make what they were doing useless. In a similar way the Lord displayed His power over creation to the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus. It must have confused them terribly. What is happening? Everything we had thought was true is now going haywire! And here in our text we find that the Lord effectively speeds up and follows through the course of action these Egyptians were taking. By way of illustration, imagine a wayward son (or daughter) who even after repeated warnings that the course of action they were taking was no good, still continues to pursue the foolish path. What should you do? Well imagine now the father (or mother) turns to the child and suggests that they continue in the path they are going. Is that giving up? As an extreme version of this idea I remember a film in which a son who was caught smoking some cigars at a young age, was then given a whole boxful and told to smoke to his heart's delight in a small room where he would not be disturbed. After a time the child become thoroughly disgusted with cigars! The same thought, I believe, is being expressed here. The Lord is effectively saying that if they are determined on this foolish course of action, well then go to it and let's see what happens. Or consider another illustration. There are some cases where a parent would not want a child to fall into difficulties. Imagine a child wanting to put their hands in a fire. I am more than sure that every parent would restrain the child. But what if a child was insistent and persistent in doing such a thing? You may say that the child has some serious problem, and you would be right. I can imagine an exasperated parent who has tried to explain and illustrate the folly of plunging a hand into fire many times coming to the point of saying "all right son, go ahead and do it, and see what happens." It may be a great kindness to the rebellious child to let them see the disastrous consequences of pursuing a foolish course of action. It is in this sense that we find the Lord has *"mingled a perverse spirit"* within Egypt.⁹¹⁵ We bring to mind the comment that Abraham made concerning the judgement on Sodom: *"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"*⁹¹⁶ What God does is, of necessity, good, for God is good and does only good.⁹¹⁷ The pursuit of perversion is something these Egyptians were hell bent on, and so the Lord empowers them to continue in it in order that they might begin to see its folly. Sadly many still fail to see the folly they pursue despite God's grace in showing what will happen. The Pharaoh of the Exodus is a case in point. The apostle Paul pointed out to the Thessalonians that when the man of deception comes, the lawless one, a

915 Isaiah 19:14.

916 Genesis 18:25.

917 Psalm 119:68.

Studies in Isaiah.

similar thing will occur, for the Lord “*will send them strong delusion*”:

9 The coming of the *lawless* one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, **10** and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. **11** And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, **12** that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.⁹¹⁸

We must be extremely careful that we do not fall into such a way that despite the countless warnings and appeals made by God through circumstance, through others pointing out the folly of our ways, or from other warnings, we stubbornly refuse to hear. Pride is an awful, awful thing. Let us always humble ourselves! We have a loving Father!

But look at the sorry outcome. One who is foolish and who leads others astray, and who fails to heed warnings and stubbornly persists in error, will be confirmed in that path by God and will end up looking as foolish and disgusting as a drunken man staggering in his own vomit. People laugh at those who are drunk. I am not sure it is something to laugh about at all. However, that the drunk man looks stupid and foolish is clearly evident. Thus it will be for the silly foolish counsellors who insist that their way and their world view is right. They will be shown up as drunk men wallowing in their own effluvia. And what is the final result? Well such a man cannot do anything useful at all. And so we find in verse 15 that all the Egyptians will become useless. They will not be enabled to do work, or to do anything useful at all. Such is the outcome of a foolish set of counsellors! What a tragedy! But how tragic to realise that our own nation is no different! Please Lord God have mercy upon us.

[2] In that day. (Isaiah 19:16-25).

- 16** In that day Egypt
will be like women, and
will be afraid and fear
because of the waving of the hand of the **Lord of hosts**, which He waves over it.
- 17** And the land of Judah
will be a terror to Egypt; everyone who makes mention of it will be afraid in himself,
because of the counsel of the **Lord of hosts** which He has determined against it.
- 18** In that day five cities in the land of Egypt
will speak the language of Canaan and swear by the **Lord of hosts**;
one
will be called the City of Destruction.
- 19** In that day there

918 2Thessalonians 2:9-12.

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will be an altar to the **Lord** in the midst of the land of Egypt, and
a pillar to the **Lord** at its border.

20 And it will be

for a sign and

for a witness to the **Lord of hosts** in the land of Egypt;

for they will cry to the **Lord** because of the oppressors, and

He will send them a Saviour and a Mighty One, and

He will deliver them.

21 Then the **Lord** will be known to Egypt,

and the Egyptians

will know the **Lord** in that day,

and will make sacrifice and offering;

yes, they will make a vow to the **Lord** and perform *it*.

22 And the **Lord** will strike Egypt,

He will strike and heal *it*;

they will return to the **Lord**,

and He will be entreated by them and heal them.

23 In that day there

will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria,
and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians.

24 In that day Israel

will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land, 25 whom the **Lord of hosts**
shall bless, saying,

“Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.”

The Egyptian folly has been described in detail and the end result has been pictured: a drunken man staggering in his own vomit. In this section we have a series of descriptions centred around the phrase “*in that day*.” There are seven of these phrases, and once again it signals both the first and second comings of Christ, for we read of a mixture of salvation blessings and judgement through these verses. The last of these occurs at the end of the burden in chapter 20 of Isaiah, which we shall look at later on.

19:16,17.

The section begins with the Egyptians being terribly afraid. We must not be alarmed that the figure used is “*women*” here, because the idea is that women are the weaker sex and so stand rightly as an image of fear. In these days of political correctness this thought is obscured. The point is that Egyptians will be so afraid because they will not have any strength at all. The reason for this great fear comes at the end of verse 16 where we discover that it was as a result of “*the waving of the hand of the Lord of hosts*,” and this waving is emphasised by being referred to again in the phrase “*which He waves over it*.” The waving of the Lord of host's hand indicates His determined action. Picture a king standing and waving his arms this way and that as he gives instructions to his ministers, overseeing his grand plan. That is the scene here.

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Verse 17 continues this idea but now speaks of “*the land of Judah*” being the source of fear to Egypt. There is some disagreement amongst translators on the rendition of verse 17 as the selection of translations detailed in table 28.1 demonstrates. My translation of verse 17 is as follows:

and the land of Judah will be a terror
to Egypt,
to everyone who makes mention of the land,
to him who will be afraid because of the counsel of the Lord of hosts which He has
determined above/over him.

Table 28.1: Various translations of Isaiah 19:17.

NKJV	HCSB	ESV	EHV	LEB
And the land of Judah will be a terror to Egypt;	The land of Judah will terrify Egypt;	And the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians.	The land of Judah will terrify Egypt.	And the land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt,
everyone who makes mention of it will be afraid in himself,	whenever Judah is mentioned, Egypt will tremble	Everyone to whom it is mentioned will fear	Everyone who hears about Judah will be filled with dread,	everyone to whom one mentions it will be afraid in himself
because of the counsel of the Lord of hosts which He has determined against it.	because of what the LORD of Hosts has planned against it.	because of the purpose that the Lord of hosts has purposed against them.	because of what the Lord of Armies is planning against Egypt.	because of the plan of Yahweh of hosts that he <i>is</i> planning against him.

The last clause is particularly interesting. The idea seems to be a consideration of one particular person, for the second person masculine singular is used throughout. Thus, we discover that it would be “*the land of Judah*” which would be a horror and an alarm to Egypt. But not only this, for the land of Judah would also be a terror to every single one who simply makes mention of it (the land). The last part of verse 17 as rendered by the NKJV is ambiguous, What is to be made of the phrase “*which He has determined against it*”? To what does the “*it*” refer? Well it is clear from the Hebrew that actually it is still just one person that is referred to. In other words, it is not the land being referenced, but those who simply refer to the land in any way.

Thus Judah will rule over Egypt. In Isaiah's day such a thought was very far from reality, but

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now that Christ has come the reality is sure. The Lord will direct the course of Egypt's future. The Egyptians will be afraid because of the counsel that God has determined against them. It is in this way that Egypt is made to see the fruit of their folly. In the same way people who follow the path of Egypt and make a way in this world in pride, will come to see the outcome and will be afraid. Whenever the gospel is first brought to the hearing of such a one there is fear, and sometimes horror. Fear that the course of life pursued is horribly wrong. Horror that the outcome is unspeakable. Some in their pride and terror refuse to hear and become violent, but when the church makes known the gospel, fear is often a first result.

We cannot pass over the fact that the *“counsel of the Lord of hosts”* is that which is *“determined against”* something. We are apt to think about the wisdom of God and His counsel being that which is a blessing and which is positive, but we must remember that God hates and cannot tolerate sin. And so He is determined against that which causes and promotes sin.

19:18.

In the second of the seven occurrences of the phrase *“in that day”* we see that only one out of six cities in Egypt will suffer destruction, whilst five will be converted. This is a beautiful description of conversion here. The Egyptians will forgo the language of their land and will speak the language of the promised land (*“the language of Canaan”*), in the name of the Lord.⁹¹⁹ The phrase: to *“swear by the Lord of hosts”* means to have God as foundation. A person who does such is willing to accept the judgement from God in any and all disputes. We find also that if you do not want to be called *“the City of Destruction”* then you had better forsake the language of your birth.⁹²⁰ Of course, we are not talking about language in terms of grammar and speech. Since Pentecost, the gospel is for all languages and not just for Hebrews. However there is a vocabulary and a form of speech which those in the Kingdom of heaven know and learn. If the lips and speech are not touched by God then we cannot really claim to be under His rule. I wonder sometimes if modern Christians recognise the language of the kingdom of God? It seems to me that many still want the language of Egypt and the pleasure of Canaan all at the same time.

19:19,20.

Moving on we find in verses 19 and 20 a wonder and a delight! In the land of many gods

919 See also: Zephaniah 3:9.

920 Isaiah 19:18.

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and much delusion, there now stands an *“altar to the Lord.”* Note carefully that there is just one altar, and also observe that it stands *“in the midst of the land of Egypt.”*⁹²¹ There can only be one altar.⁹²² Egypt was renown for its variety of triads. Each city seems to have had its own version of the mythology adhered to by the nation. The triads were different but very similar. There was rivalry and competition. But now there is just one altar, and it is sited at the very heart and centre of the land. How vital it is for us to have this one altar, namely, Christ Jesus and Him crucified, in our very centres. Such will dispel the confusion and delusion resulting from the competing varieties of gods we used to follow.

Apart from the altar, there will also be a pillar to the Lord at the border. This is not for the people, but for the Lord.⁹²³ It will serve as a reminder to the Lord that He will rescue Egypt. Just as He once rescued Israel from Egypt, now we find that the Lord will come to the aid of Egypt when the Egyptians cry because of oppression. How wonderful! The gospel which had been formerly demonstrated in Israel and in their rescue from Egypt, is to be given and demonstrated in Egypt. And so the Egyptians will end up crying to the Lord on account of oppression, and when they do the Lord will send *“a Saviour and a Mighty One,”* who will deliver them! How marvellous. The Lord is truly the God and Saviour of all the world, of all those who heed His word and repent.

19;21.22.

In the next two verses we find that once Egypt has called for rescue, and the Mighty One, the Saviour has delivered, then in that day, the Egyptians will know the Lord.⁹²⁴ Such a turn around! But notice how this rescue is expressed in verse 22. The Egyptians will know the Lord and will sacrifice as the Lord leads, but this will not come about without some pain. God will strike Egypt! He does this with a view to healing it! We see here a reflection of the opening message in Isaiah. The Lord had struck Israel repeatedly to bring them to their senses.⁹²⁵ Now we see the same thing in connection with Egypt. In order for the Lord to bring rescue, it is inevitable that some damage must be done. It is so often the case that we cling to sin or some error even, as we are being rescued. Think of Lot's wife! Don't look back she was warned, but she did look back and paid a heavy price for doing so.⁹²⁶ Think of Jacob who found it so hard to leave his life of lies, that he ended up having

921 Isaiah 19:19.

922 Hebrews 10:12,14.

923 Isaiah 19:20.

924 Isaiah 19:21,22.

925 Isaiah 1:5f.

926 Genesis 19:26; Luke 17:32.

Studies in Isaiah.

to worship the Lord with a hip out of joint.⁹²⁷ If we cling to an attitude, or to some thing which takes the place of God in our lives, we cannot blame the Lord for doing damage. Imagine that a person was floundering in the sea but would not let go of some treasured possession which was dragging them down. The rescuers are shouting to the person to let go the thing they are gripping with all their might so that it will fall to the sea bed. But the person is desperate to hold on to it! We cannot blame the rescuers when they force the object out of the hands of the person being rescued, and in doing so unavoidably break the person's fingers. To prise us from our sin it is sometimes necessary for the Lord to do some damage. When we are freed we will recognise such an act as a kindness. Herein is true repentance figured. We call to the Lord for help. We are stuck because of our sin. We cling to what we know and love but we know it is hurting us. The Lord strikes at us to separate us from that which is harming us, just like a parasite which has latched onto us. The Lord harms us but His action frees us, and we return to Him and seek for His restoration and blessing. Oh this ought to warn us and help us understand the great grace and mercy of God!

19:23,24.

In the last two verses of this section we find the expression *“in that day”* twice.⁹²⁸ The same basic idea is expressed throughout. No longer will Egypt be a single autonomous entity, but now she will be alongside, and in communion with, Assyria! This is unimaginable. Such enemies have now come to be partners. There is to be a highway between Egypt and Assyria so that communication between two very different peoples will be sweet indeed. How wonderful this is. It stands for a general truth that peoples from all nations will be blessed with such communication and such friendship. Wonderfully there will no longer be the domination of one nation over the other, for instead we read that both nations will serve together. The emphasis is on service rather than dominion.⁹²⁹ There can only be one ruler, and He came as a ransom and as the Suffering Servant. He is our Captain and Pioneer. The Egyptians no longer wish to dominate and rule but have come, like their Saviour, to serve. So too for the Assyrian, and so too for any who claim the name “Christian.”

In verse 24 the point is pressed further by naming Israel alongside Egypt and Assyria. This threefold union is so opposite to the historical toing and froing between Egyptian and Assyrian dominance over Israel in the middle. Such a communion is ever the intention of the Lord our Saviour for He is the Three in One. The union and communion of the blessed Trinity is ever put to

927 Hebrews 11:21.

928 Isaiah 19:23,24.

929 Isaiah 19:23.

Studies in Isaiah.

us as the goal and aim for future life. Just as God created man in His image, so we also made in the image of God ought to reflect His wonderful Being. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. The Spirit beams from the radiance of the Father and honours the Son in all His beauty. Here the Assyrian, the Egyptian and the Israelite are to be in such a fellowship that it reflects the very experience of the Holy Trinity. This is what we are called to.

The section ends with God pronouncing a blessing on His people, Egypt, Assyria, and Israel. The designations of each may be applied to all. We are His people, the work of His hands, and we are His inheritance, whether we be Egyptian, Assyrian or Israelite – which nations stand for all the world of those who truly believe.

[3] Egypt brought to nakedness. (Isaiah 20:1-6).

#20 **1** In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it, **2** at the same time the **Lord** spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying,

“Go, and remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet.”

And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

3 Then the **Lord** said,

“Just as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years *for* a sign and a wonder against Egypt and Ethiopia, **4** so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as prisoners and the Ethiopians as captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. **5** Then they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation and Egypt their glory. **6** And the inhabitant of this territory will say *in that day*,

‘Surely such *is* our expectation, wherever we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and how shall we escape?’”

20:1.

This final piece begins with a reference to the Assyrian defeat of Ashdod, a port city on the Israelite coast. Egypt was no longer in a position to mount any attack to preserve its influence in Judah and Israel.

Sargon was the son of Shalmaneser and the father of Sennacherib. Shalmaneser was the king who began the siege of Samaria but Sargon claimed the final victory for the destruction of Israel. He was king of Assyria from around 721 to 705 BC. Sennacherib was the Assyrian king at the time of Hezekiah king in Judah. Now Sargon had sent his commander in chief “*Tartan*” to the Philistine city of “*Ashdod*,” which lay close to the coast and was due west of Jerusalem. This historical note serves to show the tensions at this time. Assyria were very much the super-power of the day and their conquest of Philistia was a warning to the people of God. It would also serve to show that Egypt were no longer at their peak of power. And so this burden ends with Isaiah being presented as a sign to Egypt and Ethiopia.

20:2.

The occasion of Assyria's defeat of the port city of Ashdod marks the beginning of Isaiah's call by the Lord to walk *"naked and barefoot."*⁹³⁰ He was commanded to remove his sackcloth coat and his sandals. It is not likely that Isaiah was thus rendered stark naked. Rather it indicates that he was not wearing his distinctive clothing and was humbled further by being clothed merely in some form of under-garments, or tunic, and barefoot. The word rendered *"naked"* can signify partially unclothed as well as fully naked.

20:3,4.

Isaiah stood without his sackcloth and sandals as a sign and as a wonder against Egypt and Ethiopia.⁹³¹ For three years the king of Assyria would hold both the Egyptian and the Ethiopian captive in a state of humiliation.⁹³² It would seem that Egypt had relied on Ethiopia for aid and strength, because Ethiopia is described here as *"their [Egypt's] expectation."*⁹³³ However even though the people looked to their southern neighbour for strength, this had not diminished their pride because Egypt is referred to as *"their [the people's] glory."*⁹³⁴ Well, such hope and pride was about to be dashed. The graphic image of Isaiah walking naked so that his buttocks could be seen is put as reflecting the situation Egypt would soon face at the hand of the Assyrians.⁹³⁵

The burden ends with a hopeless question (*"how shall we escape?"*).⁹³⁶ Looking to any power on earth for aid will always fail and disappoint so how then can a person (or even a nation) be rescued and delivered? There will be no escape *"in that day."* And yet before we get to this ending we have been treated with a future hope that encompasses not just the proud Egyptian who relied on his gods and Ethiopia, but the Assyrian oppressor too! But it is essential that we come to the point of reckoning ourselves naked before the Lord, and forlorn of any hope from that which we trust or hope in that is not the Lord. When we forsake our pride and glory, and when we turn from our earth-bound expectation, it is then, and only then, that we are ready to cry out to the Lord for help. As we have seen, He is willing to respond to the one who truly cries for help in repentance and faith.

930 Isaiah 20:2.

931 Isaiah 20:3.

932 Isaiah 20:4.

933 Isaiah 20:5.

934 Isaiah 20:5.

935 Buttocks uncovered does not mean complete nakedness but simply the showing of the buttocks.

936 Isaiah 20:6.

Chapter 29.

Isaiah 21:1-10.

The burden against the Wilderness of the Sea.

Textual analysis.

1 The burden against the Wilderness of the Sea.

As whirlwinds in the South pass through, *so* it comes from the desert, from a terrible land.

2 A distressing vision is declared to me;
the treacherous dealer deals treacherously,
and the plunderer plunders.

Go up, O Elam!

Besiege, O Media!

All its sighing I have made to cease.

3 Therefore

my loins are filled with pain;
pangs have taken hold of me, like the pangs of a woman in labour.
I was distressed when *I* heard *it*;
I was dismayed when *I* saw *it*.

4 My heart wavered,
fearfulness frightened me;
the night for which I longed He turned into fear for me.

5 Prepare the table,
set a watchman in the tower,
eat and drink.

Arise, you princes,
anoint the shield!

6 For thus has the **Lord** said to me:

“go, set a watchman, let him declare what he sees.”

7 And he saw

a chariot *with* a pair of horsemen,
a chariot of donkeys,
and a chariot of camels,

and he listened earnestly with great care.

8 Then he cried,

“A lion, my Lord! I stand continually on the watchtower in the daytime; I have sat at my post every night. **9**
And look, here comes a chariot of men *with* a pair of horsemen!”

Then he answered and said,

“Babylon is fallen, is fallen! And all the carved images of her gods He has broken to the ground.”

10 Oh, my threshing and the grain of my floor!

That which I have heard from the **Lord of hosts**, the **God** of Israel, I have declared to you.

Studies in Isaiah.

Our text must be considered as a unit but can be split into three parts. In the first (Isaiah 21:1,2) we have the burden stated. In the second (Isaiah 21:3,4) we hear something of the prophet's pain. Then last of all (Isaiah 21:5- 10) we hear of the watchman declaring the fall of Babylon. And once again we have a vision that touches us all, not just some words which speak of the distant past. In these words we also see the incredible love and compassion the Lord has for people.

[1] A truly distressing vision for all. (Isaiah 21:1,2).

[2] The prophet's compassion. (Isaiah 21:3,4).

[3] Sudden disaster! (Isaiah 21:5-10).

[1] A truly distressing vision for all. (Isaiah 21:1,2).

21:1.

The passage opens with a very curious location. The “*Wilderness of the Sea*” conjures up memories of the Israelite's journey in connection with the Red Sea. The expression “*by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea*” is used to describe the Lord's intended route for when Israel departed from Egypt:

So God led the people around *by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea*. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.⁹³⁷

When the people feared to go into Canaan because of the giants in the land, we find that the Lord set about to chastise the people for their lack of faith. They were told to go back and wander in “*the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea*”:

Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valley; tomorrow turn and move out into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea.⁹³⁸

The same expression is used by Moses when he reflected on the Israelite's journeys:

937 Exodus 13:18.

938 Numbers 14:25.

Studies in Isaiah.

But *as for* you, turn and take your journey into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea.⁹³⁹

The reference to a whirlwind in the south and to a desert land in verse 1 of Isaiah 21 would seem to strengthen the idea that the burden appertains to the wilderness region around the Red Sea. However I am not at all sure that the main reference is meant to settle our thoughts in that location. We must ask why did the Holy Spirit not add “*Red*” in the title and instead simply spoke of the burden against the “*Wilderness of the Sea*”?

In Scripture we also find reference to the “*Great Sea,*” by which is meant the Mediterranean Sea.⁹⁴⁰ However if the Mediterranean were meant here, then surely the Holy Spirit would have added that word “*great.*” I believe that the Holy Spirit is reminding us of the wilderness wandering experiences of Israel around the desert lands of the Red Sea. but is intimating a much wider scope and reference. The sea signifies the tumultuous roar and din of peoples and nations, as suggested by these prior verses in Isaiah:

In that day they will roar against them Like the roaring of the sea. And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and sorrow; and the light is darkened by the clouds.⁹⁴¹

Woe to the multitude of many people who make a noise like the roar of the seas, and to the rushing of nations that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters!⁹⁴²

The wilderness signifies a desert place where life cannot be sustained except by some form of miracle. Thus the Israelites were kept in their wilderness by the provision of manna and their clothes and shoes never wore out.⁹⁴³

The phrase “*Wilderness of the Sea*” would seem to indicate the impoverished desert-like state of the nations of the peoples. The people may be unaware of their condition, but in truth they are in turmoil like the roar of the waves, and they are parched and thirsty languishing in the heat of the burning harshness of life “*under the sun.*”⁹⁴⁴ This describes life on planet earth throughout time since the fall. So once again we have a burden that applies to everyone, not just a select and ancient bunch of people.

939 Deuteronomy 1:40.

940 Numbers 34:6,7; Joshua 1:4; 9:1; 15:12,47; 23:4; Ezekiel 47:10,15,19,20,28; Daniel 7:2.

941 Isaiah 5:30.

942 Isaiah 17:12.

943 Deuteronomy 8:3,16; 29:5.

944 The phrase “*under the sun*” is the one Solomon uses in Ecclesiastes to signify life without reference to God.

Studies in Isaiah.

Now later on in this burden we find that the prophecy specifically applies to Babylon, for we read that Babylon will fall.⁹⁴⁵ But we must not rush to the simple conclusion that the entire burden is simply directed to Babylon. The Holy Spirit wants us to recognise that the entire world is being addressed and that Babylon is but one example of the whole. This vision is distressing. It is hard, harsh, difficult, and heavy. We shall understand the depths of despair this burden generated in a moment. Here we pause to reflect that the burden of Scripture, the message of Scripture, is singular in force. If we do not heed the gospel call, we are in danger of eternal damnation. These words trip off the tongue, and are easy to write, but do we seriously think about them? Our message is extremely sobering. We are offered freedom in Christ, forgiveness of sins, restoration of life, fellowship with God! If we do not take up this offer, or if on hearing it we pass it by as something and nothing, then what awaits is awful and terrifying indeed. We have already been alerted to the terror and fearful aspect of this vision in the first verse of Isaiah 21 where we are told that the whirlwind comes from “*a terrible land.*”⁹⁴⁶ This land is a place where serpents dwelt, and where the Israelites suffered because of them.⁹⁴⁷

21:2.

In this vision Isaiah saw two types of people, the “*treacherous*” and the “*plunderer.*” These characteristics were enough to describe the nature and character of the whole! The treacherous were those who acted covertly, fraudulently, and deceitfully. Lies. This is the nature of man when he will not listen to the gospel. Instead man butters himself up with false stories and myths which appeal to his flesh. The plunderer is a violent person who seeks nothing but to steal and take away. Theft. Lies and theft. What does this remind us of? Surely it points to Satan, the father of lies and the murderer from the beginning.⁹⁴⁸ What then of other sins? Do those who exhibit pride or lust slip from detection here? Not at all! The point is that we are sinners by nature. When one sin is committed, others follow after. Here the focus is on deceit and violence. It reminds us of the condition of the world before the flood. There was violence and corruption.⁹⁴⁹ How we need to recognise our own situation. We lie to preserve self. We grab and envy because we want more. These are but the first steps of a sinful bent. When, however, they are practised often and allowed to flourish, they become not just lying and theft, but treachery and plundering. The treacherous can only continue to spin

945 Isaiah 21:9.

946 Isaiah 21:1.

947 Numbers 21:6; Isaiah 30:6.

948 John 8:44; 10:10.

949 Genesis 6:11.

Studies in Isaiah.

webs of deceit to cover the untruths and lies borne out of a sinful nature. The one who grabs position, possessions, or power, continues to tread on any who may block their way. Sin worsens the more it is practised. This is why the world falls and falls. As the apostle Paul wrote:

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.⁹⁵⁰

We are all “*evil*” by nature. Oh we may not be as evil as some, but if we do not acknowledge the Lord and His right over our lives, then we are evil men. I say this because God is good. The longer we put off repentance, the longer we hesitate, the longer we deceive ourselves against running to the Lord for help, the worse we will get. There comes a time when there will be no point of return. At that point the treacherous cannot be anything but treacherous and the plunderer cannot be anything else but a plunderer. The sinner is confirmed in the way they have chosen and it is truly awful and desperate.

The prophet calls upon “*Elam*” and “*Media*” to go up and to besiege at the end of verse 2. We are yet to realise that Babylon is meant specifically, but here we have our first clue as to the specifics of this prophecy. We recall again that the way in which this prophecy has been written is meant to alert us to a general condition of mankind. Elam and Media were regions north of the Persian gulf and east of the Euphrates. They would later become the basis of the Persian empire. Here then we have prophecy of the destruction of Babylon by what would become the Persian empire. This was fulfilled in Daniel's day.⁹⁵¹ The moaning and groaning of those who pursued a life of treachery, deceit, and violence would finally come to an end.

[2] The prophet's compassion. (Isaiah 21:3,4).

In verses 3 and 4 we have a brief diversion where we are given the prophet's personal reflection. Isaiah uses a number of different words to describe his experience. He starts with words used for the pain of giving birth. He is writhing in pain so much that he is bent double, and he is twisted out of shape so much that he is staggering and wayward in his heart. Such pain makes him not just afraid but truly terrified. He trembles and shudders in the horror of the fear he can feel and see that awaits the “*Wilderness of the Sea.*” Nothing gave him any hope. This was truly a terrifying vision.

950 2Timothy 3:13.

951 Daniel 5.

Studies in Isaiah.

Several words are used to express the depth of pain felt. The first (*“pain,”*) signifies the pain of childbirth or “trembling terror.” The second (*“pangs”*) which occurs twice in verse 3 indicates pain which leads to writhing, or of being bent double. The third word used to represent the depths of suffering is given as *“distressed”* in the NKJV of verse 3. It means “to bend,” “to twist,” “to curve,” or “to distort.” The fourth word of significance (*“dismayed”*) indicates “to tremble inwardly,” or “to be in trepidation.” The next word which comes in verse 4 applies to the heart (*“wavered”*). This word suggests the idea of vacillation, or “to go astray,” or “to wander.” Following this we have the phrase *“fearfulness frightened me,”* which includes the idea of “horror,” and “terror” combined – a dreadful fear. And so the *“night of my pleasure,”* as the AKJV puts it, has become an occasion for quaking, fear, and great anxiety. Thus, having hoped for the end of a day where rest might be had as in the night of rest and recuperation, the outcome is more fear and anxiety. It is not possible to over-emphasize the immensity of fear, dread, terror, horror, and utter dismay that is being expressed here.

At the very heart of this prophecy, therefore, we have a graphic description outlining the terror and horror to be faced and the compassion expressed by the prophet. We ought to remember that Isaiah was inspired of the Holy Spirit, and so this expresses the compassion of the Lord primarily. When we preach or witness, are we as Isaiah and the Lord expressing such compassion and reality about that which we profess to be true? Here also, let it be noted, we have a picture into the anguish that our Saviour went through in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross when the Father poured out His wrath against sin.

[3] Sudden disaster! (Isaiah 21:5-10).

21:5.

There is an abrupt change of direction at verse 5. The prophet switches to the scene depicting the impending disaster. The text of verse 5 can be understood better following the NASB rendition:

They set the table, they spread out the cloth, they eat, they drink; “rise up, captains, oil the shields.”⁹⁵²

The phrase *“set a watchman in the tower”* is translated *“they spread out the cloth”* in the NASB. Both translations are possible, but the NASB rendering seems to fit the context better. The picture is

952 Isaiah 21:5, NASB.

Studies in Isaiah.

one of revelry and partying suddenly interrupted by an unexpected attack. There are a group of people designated simply as “*they*,” and these people are organising a great party. But in the midst of their celebrations we find a sudden call for the captains to get ready and to prepare their shields. Now many commentators suggest that this was prophetic of Belshazzar's feast recorded in Daniel 5. During the feast Belshazzar is interrupted by a direct message from God (the writing on the wall) which had to be interpreted by Daniel. At the end of the chapter we read these words:

30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.⁹⁵³

21:6,7.

The picture changes abruptly again, for in verse 6 we are back with the prophet Isaiah. He has presented the situation in the context of being deeply distressed. The statements of verse 5 are thus disinterested but alarming. These people are partying but why? What are they up to? In verse 6 the Lord had given Isaiah a charge. A watchman was set up to look out and report the proceedings. In verse 7 the watchman is instructed to look carefully for a particular sight. Again the NASB rendering is clearer:

When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, a train of donkeys, a train of camels, let him pay close attention, very close attention.⁹⁵⁴

In the NKJV the text reports what the watchman had seen, whereas in the NASB it is set as part of the command. The sense is that the watchman must look out carefully and when he sees the chariots and horsemen he is to pay particular attention and to call out what he sees.

21:8,9.

Then in verses 8 and 9 we have the words called out by the watchman. The NKJV has the watchman calling out that a lion can be seen, whereas other translations have the watchman calling out *as* a lion, or in a lion-like voice (i.e. with great force). The latter sense seems to be better. The watchman is greatly animated and calls out, having stood faithfully and continually both day and night, that now he sees something definite. The NKJV suggests that what he saw was a single chariot and a pair of horsemen, but the NASB puts this as an army:

953 Daniel 5:30,31.

954 Isaiah 21:7, NASB.

Studies in Isaiah.

Now behold, here comes a troop of riders, horsemen in pairs.⁹⁵⁵

This was the signal that something was happening. Then at the end of verse 9 we have the answer, which seems to have been uttered by another voice. Babylon has fallen! This is such an astonishing thing and a great surprise. Not only had Babylon fallen, but all the idols were shown up for what they were truly worth. They were broken to the ground and have become dust, and all this by the hand of the Lord.

21:10.

Then finally in verse 10 we return to the compassion of God as expressed through the prophet. In the NASB we have:

O my threshed *people*, and my afflicted of the threshing floor!⁹⁵⁶

It is the Lord who has brought judgement on Babylon, but this does not mean that He is without great concern and compassion. Judgement must be carried out, and since God is good He does good and always does what is right, this judgement is perfect for the occasion. However the Lord never acts in cold blooded indifference. We should be reminded of the Saviour's compassion for Jerusalem even though He knew they would reject Him, crucify Him, and then some 40 years later suffer the ultimate judgement at the hands of the Romans:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing!⁹⁵⁷

The burden ends with the prophet declaring that all had been stated as God intended. He states that what he had heard from the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, he had passed on faithfully to his hearers. We learn from this that the prophet merely acted as a conduit, and the message is not harmed, nor is it altered by being passed through him. Furthermore, we learn that it is a message given for all, as the word that ends the section is "*you*," which signifies any who happen to read this prophecy. We must therefore take heed that Babylon, (by which is signified the world order), is

955 Isaiah 21:9, NASB.

956 Isaiah 21:10, NASB.

957 Matthew 23:37.

Studies in Isaiah.

going to fall with the utter destruction of all idols. This judgement is most definitely coming upon the world, and it fully deserves such punishment, but God still has compassion. The fact of the matter is that God has made a way for us to repent and turn from sin and judgement. If we fail to take note of this and act accordingly, the right judgement will fall, but God still takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Chapter 30.

Isaiah 21:11,12.

The burden against Dumah.

Textual analysis.

- 11 The burden against Dumah. He calls to me out of Seir,
 "Watchman, what of the night?
 Watchman, what of the night?"
- 12 The watchman said,
 "The morning comes, and also the night.
 If you will inquire, inquire;
 return! Come back!"

21:11.

Dumah is a symbolic name for Edom. It has the meaning: "silence," or "struck dumb."⁹⁵⁸ That Edom is intended here is clear from the mention of "*Seir*," the mountainous region populated by the descendants of Esau, who is Edom. So we have a burden delivered to one who is silent, silent as the grave. Coupling this with the meaning of Edom (akin to Adam which means "red" from the earth) we have the concept of sinful man and his return to the earth in death.

One person is calling from Seir. It is an Edomite, a man of the earth whose life is characterised by the silence, stillness, and certainty of the grave of death. This one calls out to the prophet. He refers to Isaiah as: "*watchman*." In our text the Hebrew word is *shamar* which signifies the idea of "to keep" or "to guard."⁹⁵⁹ The idea is one who protects or stands watch over something precious. The same word is used in Psalm 127:1 where the idea of a lookout also seems to be in view. Thus it would seem that there is a dual sense in which the term is being used. We have the idea of someone protecting something as well as looking out for danger.

The request from the people of Seir is one that is repeated. This may signify that it comes from more than one person. The idea being, that this question is on everyone's mind and heart, and one calls out, then another. It signifies a deep concern. The people want to know "*what of the*

958 Psalm 94:17; 115:17.

959 Isaiah 21:11. See, for example, Genesis 2:15; 3:24.

Studies in Isaiah.

night”? Or, in other words, what is going to happen in the night? The night signifies darkness, and calamity. The question being asked is: when will this darkness end? Are we out of danger and despair? This question is one that is asked by many throughout the ages. When will the darkness end? When will the calamity, the horror, the terror end?

21:12.

So what is the response? In verse 12 we hear this from the watchman (Isaiah). It is not the response that they wanted. The watchman says that the morning will come, but then so also will the night. In other words there will come mornings, but there will also be nights again. This is not the time for heaven to come to earth. This is the time when darkness comes, is dispelled by day, and then the darkness comes back. The cycles of life follow this pattern. There are times of light and life, and there are times of darkness and despair. Life on earth is characterised by this cycle. Sin has brought death, disease, decay, and disaster. We do not have these things all at once and all the time. We experience periods when these are known interspersed with times of joy and light. This is life on earth. Christians and unbelievers are all in the same boat. We all experience the same general things – a fallen world.

Next we have something which is easily missed as we read these words. What we have, in effect, is a gospel call. First, the watchman attempts to get the people calling out from Seir to go further. He says *“if you inquire, inquire”* by which he means, as you are seeking and asking, then continue and go deeper in this. This is what the Lord asks and calls us to do:

7 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.⁹⁶⁰

Those who really inquire will press on and seek and seek. This is a principle that the Lord uses. He calls, and then withdraws slightly. The initial call is heard, but what will the hearer do? The Lord withdraws slightly, the hearer asks did I really hear the Lord calling me? There are then two options. Either the hearer will press further and seek more, or he may conclude his hearing has gone off and shrug the thought away. Now the thing is that many people ask the initial question. They ask why are things so hard? When are things going to improve? Why do we die? They ask these questions, but are they then going to inquire, to seek, and to press to gain the answers? Sadly many simply

960 Matthew 7:7,8.

Studies in Isaiah.

take the contemporary drug to dull the senses, whether it be watching TV soaps, or imbibing alcohol or some other drug. Others try all sorts of options offered, which promise some panacea or another. Only those whose initial inquiry is a serious one will succeed for these are willing to be guided by truth.

Immediately after this call to press inquiry further, there is a call for the people to *“return”* and *“come back.”* Here we have the call to repentance. I wonder if we realise that our natural (sinful not originally created) state is one which constantly diverts us and makes us turn away from the truth, from the light and from the Lord.

Chapter 31.

Isaiah 21:13-17.

The burden against Arabia.

Textual analysis.

13 The burden against Arabia.
In the forest in Arabia you will lodge,
O you travelling companies of Dedanites.
14 O inhabitants of the land of Tema,
bring water to him who is thirsty;
with their bread they met him who fled.
15 For they fled
from the swords,
from the drawn sword,
from the bent bow, and
from the distress of war.
16 For thus the **Lord** has said to me:
“Within a year, according to the year of a hired man,
all the glory of Kedar will fail; **17** and
the remainder of
the number of archers,
the mighty men of the people of Kedar,
will be diminished;
for the **Lord God** of Israel has spoken *it*.”

21:13.

Dedan, Tema and Kedar were places in the Arabian peninsula. The Arabians were also a nomadic people. Different tribes lived in different regions, but they were also traders so that they moved about in companies of camel trains. In verse 13 we find that the Dedanites were to lodge in forest thickets. The Arabian peninsula does not have forests but it does have oases. It is probable that what is meant by the phrase “*forest in Arabia*” is one of these oases or thickets of vegetation. The point being stressed is that the Arabians must now hide for life in their own country.

21:14-17.

In verse 14 we read of the Temanites giving shelter and food to those who are fleeing the

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war.⁹⁶¹ At the heart of this prophecy we see a company of people (possibly the Dedanites) fleeing a great disaster of war.⁹⁶² There is a stark contrast between the Arabians who were archers, following in the footsteps of their great ancestor Ishmael, and the army of invaders who wielded a variety of weaponry detailed in verse 15.⁹⁶³ The Arabians are put here as those who would help the fleeing hordes. They would help them by bringing water and bread to those who have fled and are consequently in dire need. However even though the Arabians do not seem to have been involved in the war, they too would suffer greatly. A definite period, marked as the year a hired man would be employed, is given for them to come to their end. There are two outcomes. All of their “glory” will “fail,” and the number of “mighty men” (archers) would be greatly “diminished.”⁹⁶⁴

From these words we learn that even the travelling folk and those who dwell in tents amongst the desert tribes will not escape the judgement to come. These Arabians seem to have kept themselves to themselves except for times when they needed to trade. They did not flee to Judah and Jerusalem for help in times of war and tragedy, and they seem not to have linked arms with any other grouping. They wanted an independence and an isolated existence. However no man can exist alone, and no man can stand on neutral ground. It simply isn't the case that we can stand objectively outside of warring ideas and take a neutral position. Sitting on the fence is never an option. The Arabians will be caught up in the judgement to come. This is so important! If we simply defer our decision about following Christ, or if we say it can wait, we delude ourselves. If we think we will be treated specially because we are honest, and have integrity, but we do not align ourselves with the Lord, we are again deluding ourselves. The Scriptures teach that if we will not believe in the Christ sent of the Father then “the wrath of God abides” on us.⁹⁶⁵ The Arabians were given just one year to come to terms with their fate. How this year was to be reckoned we are not told, but that it would come is a sure fact because this was spoken about by the Lord.

We note in closing that even though the Arabian tribes were never ones to be fixed or firm in their convictions, and so would suffer judgement, there would, nevertheless, be a “remnant,” for the archers of Kedar would not be completely removed, but they would be “diminished.” That is, although they would be few in number, nevertheless there would still be some. Such is the grace of God that whilst He warns and then brings judgement, such is always attended by grace and mercy. What would become of these Arabians? Would they heed the words of this prophecy and seek

961 Isaiah 21:14.

962 Isaiah 21:15.

963 Genesis 21:20.

964 Isaiah 21:17.

965 John 3:36.

Studies in Isaiah.

refuge with the Lord? Or would they endure the pain of the judgement to come and then reflect on the great wonder of God? How would the remnant think about what to do? Would the experience of God's righteous judgement bring them to their knees in seeking God? Or would they build themselves up again and follow in their fathers' footsteps? It is ever the same throughout history. A nation, tribe or group seeks their own business and seeks an independent and isolated lifestyle only surfacing when absolutely necessary. God cannot let such behaviour continue! Our God is a company of persons in pure and delightful fellowship, and His will is that all peoples would share in this communion. This is part of how we were created. If we work against this we will be working against our very constitution. What is He to do and say to those who say they want to plough their own course and lead their own lives, not making comment on what anyone else is up to? This type of characteristic is that displayed by many folk today. In fact the English spirit is very much of this stamp. An English man seeks his own company, and doesn't meddle in other peoples' affairs. That may be laudable, but we were made to relate one to another as Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate within the Godhead in holy communion. We cannot walk this earth in splendid isolation. It is ruinous. We are our brothers keeper!⁹⁶⁶

Dear reader if you have chosen to duck the bullets fired by all comers fighting for recognition, or if you have dulled your critical faculties and shunned any form of interaction with reasoned spiritual thought, you are no more than an Arabian (as depicted here in Isaiah).⁹⁶⁷ The issues of life and the arguments that contend for recognition must be encountered. To be sure we must take hold of Scripture and use this in our stand to bring life and light to the world, but an isolated indifference, or an apathetic disdain are unbecoming to say the least.

⁹⁶⁶ Genesis 4:9.

⁹⁶⁷ Please note that the characteristics displayed by one group or nation or another in Scripture in no way indicates that such are worse or irredeemable. The situation displayed here by these Arabian tribes is set for an example to us. I wonder what the Lord would say of the Englishman, the Welshman, the Scotsman or the Irishman?

Chapter 32.

Isaiah 22:1-25.

The burden against the Valley of Vision.

Textual analysis.

1 The burden against the Valley of Vision.

What ails you now, that you have all gone up to the housetops, **2** you
who are full of noise,
a tumultuous city,
a joyous city?

Your slain *men are* not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle.

3 All your rulers have fled together; they are captured by the archers.

All who are found in you are bound together; they have fled from afar.

4 Therefore I said,

“Look away from me,
I will weep bitterly;
do not labour to comfort me because of the plundering of the daughter of my people.”

5 For *it is* a day of

trouble
and treading down
and perplexity

by the **Lord God of hosts** in the Valley of Vision—
breaking down the walls and of crying to the mountain.

6 Elam bore the quiver with chariots of men *and* horsemen,
and Kir uncovered the shield.

7 It shall come to pass *that* your choicest valleys shall be full of chariots, and the horsemen shall set
themselves in array at the gate.

8 He removed the protection of Judah.

You looked in that day to the armour of the House of the Forest;

9 you also saw the damage to the city of David, that it was great;
and you gathered together the waters of the lower pool.

10 You numbered the houses of Jerusalem,
and the houses you broke down to fortify the wall.

11 You also made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool.

But

you did not look to its Maker,
nor did you have respect for Him who fashioned it long ago.

12 And in that day the **Lord God of hosts** called
for weeping
and for mourning,
for baldness
and for girding with sackcloth.

13 But instead,
joy

Studies in Isaiah.

and gladness,
slaying oxen
and killing sheep,
eating meat
and drinking wine:

“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”

14 Then it was revealed in my hearing by the **Lord of hosts**,

“Surely for this iniquity there will be no atonement for you, even to your death,”
says the **Lord God of hosts**.

15 Thus says the **Lord God of hosts**:

“Go, proceed to this steward, to Shebna, who *is* over the house, *and say*:

16 ‘What have you here,
and whom have you here,

that you have hewn a sepulchre here, *as* he who hews himself a sepulchre on high, who
carves a tomb for himself in a rock?

17 Indeed, the **Lord**

will throw you away violently, O mighty man,
and will surely seize you.

18 He

will surely turn violently
and toss you like a ball into a large country;
there you shall die,
and there your glorious chariots *shall be* the shame of your master’s house.

19 So I will

drive you out of your office,
and from your position he will pull you down.

20 ‘Then it shall be *in that day*, that I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah;

21 I will

clothe him with your robe
and strengthen him with your belt;

I will commit your responsibility into his hand.

He shall be a father
to the inhabitants of Jerusalem
and to the house of Judah.

22 The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder;

so he shall open, and no one shall shut;
and he shall shut, and no one shall open.

23 I will fasten him *as* a peg in a secure place,
and he will become a glorious throne to his father’s house.

24 ‘They will hang on him all the glory of his father’s house, the offspring and the posterity, all
vessels of small quantity, from the cups to all the pitchers.

25 *In that day*,’ says the **Lord of hosts**, ‘the peg that is fastened in the secure place will be removed
and be cut down and fall, and the burden that *was* on it will be cut off; for the **Lord** has spoken.’”

Once again we have a large text to deal with but we provide the complete analysis here at the start. This passage divides into two parts. The first describes the day of trouble when the Lord removed His protection and reaches to verse 14. The second part (verses 15 to 25) concerns the replacing of an important individual who was “*over the house*.”⁹⁶⁸

968 Isaiah 22:15.

Studies in Isaiah.

[1] The judgement on Judah. (Isaiah 22:1-14).

[2] The judgement on Shebna. (Isaiah 22:15-25).

[1] The judgement on Judah. (Isaiah 22:1-14).

We come now to a very troubling burden which centres on the people of God. Although the burden is styled against *“the Valley of Vision,”* this is an enigmatic title representing the people of God. There is reference throughout the burden to the *“daughter of my people,” “Judah,” “the city of David,” “the houses Jerusalem,”* and then also to the one over the house of David, Shebna, who had hewn out a sepulchre for himself. Perhaps the title was given to highlight the fact that whilst they ought to have been the ones who received the true vision and revelation of God, they were in the habit of constructing their own dreams and visions. All the while they had the law (the Torah) and the prophets, they rejected these in favour of ideas and dreams of their own making. In this title then, we see a stark reminder of their privileged position (the only nation chosen of God and to whom He revealed Himself), and their folly (the folly of rejecting true revelation for man-made substitutes).

The burden is troubling for several reasons. First, given the burdens thus far delivered we might have expected that God's people being favoured by His goodness would escape judgement. Second we see pictured a great invasion by the enemies from the north titled *“Elam,”* and *“Kir.”* Elam, which means “eternity,” stands for the Persian nation that would overcome Babylon in the time of Daniel. Kir, a city of Mesopotamia signifies a wall, or fortress. It indicates the impregnability (humanly speaking) of this invading force. Thirdly we are troubled by the fact that the Lord's protection was to be withdrawn.⁹⁶⁹ Lastly it is troubling for the words of verse 14 which strike a cord of hopeless finality. No atonement available is an unthinkable and unspeakable thing.

22:1-5.

The burden begins with a question posed to the inhabitants of the land in verse 1. We can easily picture the scene. People are rushing about trying to get ready for the invasion by going to their housetops. Those being slain seem to be slaughtered by arrows. The rulers have fled but they too are captured by the archers. Others have fled to Jerusalem and are all huddled together in a very sorry state. It is such an awful scene that the prophet (and by implication the Lord) cries out that the

969 Isaiah 22:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

situation is deeply distressing.⁹⁷⁰ I am reminded of some of the desperate situations portrayed in the Lord of the Rings trilogy. The besieged huddle in the city for defence, but the forces arranged against them are formidable. Unlike the escapes unfolded in the films, here there is no prospect of deliverance, for it is the Lord who is behind the invasion.⁹⁷¹ This coming day is described in verse 5 not just as from the hand of the Lord, but with three very distressing and descriptive words which are very close in sound and meaning:

← Hebrew reads from the right

וּמְבוּכָה
ûmĕbuhkah

וּמְבוּסָה
ûmĕbuwsah

מְהוּמָה
mĕhuwmah

Read transliterated into English we would hear: mĕhuwmah, ûmĕbuwsah, ûmĕbuhkah. There is an assonance which lends itself to highlighting the deep distress and disaster here. In English we might suggest: “trouble, trampling, tumult,” or “problems, persecution, perplexity” as alliterative ways of phrasing the impending disaster at the hands of the Lord. The invading army would come in wave after wave and would break down all the walls so that there would be much crying and wailing as people sought to run for safety to the mountains.

22:6-11.

In verses 6 to 11 we are informed of the Lord's agents against the people of God. It would be Elam and Kir, whose power and strength vastly outweighed and outnumbered little Judah. These would be fine archers and warriors with chariots and horsemen. Against these, Judah would have no defences. The whole country would be overrun with chariots, and banks of archers would be set in rows and battle arrays against the city. Then also we are taught the reason for their failure and defeat. The Lord removed the protection from Judah!⁹⁷² Why did He do this? Well it is always impossible for us to objectively view the responsibility of man with the sovereignty of God, but the human angle is clearly displayed here. Judah, the people of God, put all their trust in their own strength and wisdom, even whilst the battle was on-going. In verse 8 we are informed that in the day of their trouble, they looked *“to the armour of the House of the Forest.”* They trusted to the provision and strength of *human ingenuity*. Now we must pause a while and be very careful here. It

970 Isaiah 22:4.

971 Isaiah 22:5.

972 Isaiah 22:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

was not wrong for the Israelites to have a place where weapons could be stored. It was Solomon who built the House of the Forest where he placed 300 shields of gold.⁹⁷³ Perhaps this was a symbolic act or maybe a show of strength to the world. Whatever the case we repeatedly read in Scripture that it is important for us to make some preparations. However we must never ever begin with these or trust that these are sufficient in themselves. Always, and without exception, our trust must be in the Lord. We may have to have some form of defence or protection which the Lord enables us to procure, but our trust and help is always, without exception, in the Lord. We ought always to begin any venture or any action when trouble arises, with prayer. What does God say on the matter? The question of what we do in any given situation ought always to begin with an appeal to the Lord. In short we must be those who 'cry out to the Lord.'⁹⁷⁴ Perhaps one obvious example is in the story of Noah. It was the Lord who protected Noah and his family in the flood. Of this there is no doubt. How many other constructed objects of that time would have been obliterated and destroyed by the tumultuous waters of the flood? Notwithstanding God's protection, the Lord required Noah to construct the ark just as He commanded.⁹⁷⁵ In a very similar way we must follow the Lord's commands in all He says, all the while trusting only in God, not in what we are commanded to do. The seventeenth century puritan William Gurnall wrote these astute words:

Christian, take special care not to trust in the armour of God, but in the *God* of the armour.⁹⁷⁶

When the people saw that the city was damaged, they then set about preparing for siege. The water supply was secured and the stones of the houses were used to fortify the walls.⁹⁷⁷ Again there is no prayer, no crying out to the Lord. It may have been the right thing to do, to organise the water supply and defend the city, but only in response to true faith in God and reliance on His guide. Here the emphasis is on action and activity rather than on action borne from faith and reliance on God.

Once all their activity is listed and described, the prophet gives us the great contrasting "*but*" in verse 11. The people did not look to their Maker and the the one who formed all things! How easily we fall into the same trap and fault. We get so used to doing things the way they have always been done. We get so used to doing whatever everyone else is doing. We do not begin and

973 1Kings 7:2; 14:17

974 2Samuel 22:7; Psalm 107:28; 142:1.

975 Genesis 6:13-22.

976 **William Gurnall.** *A Christian in Complete Armour.* Volume 1. Banner of Truth. Abridged version in three volumes. 1986. P67.

977 Isaiah 22:9-11.

Studies in Isaiah.

infuse what we do with true devoted prayer. After all, the Commander-in-Chief is the Lord and this is His battle! We are merely footsoldiers. Footsoldiers do not take command. How we need to be on our knees!

Their condition and state is far worse than merely overlooking some reference to the Lord, for in verse 12 we read that the Lord was speaking to the people (through prophets like Isaiah). We note that it was in that day that *“the Lord God of hosts called”* them. The verb “to call” is actually the first verse of the Hebrew. Literally rendered the words read: “and He called, (namely), the Lord God of hosts, in that day.” Note that the Lord is the Lord God of hosts, or of armies. This is the Captain and Commander calling here. What did He call for? He called for repentance which would be indicated by the four characteristics listed, (weeping, mourning, baldness, sackcloth). It is not the mere going through these various emotions and actions, but a deeply repentant heart that seeks to understand and turn from wickedness. However, the people were far from such a heart to change their minds. Instead the feeling was to make merry. The feeling and sentiment was to enjoy the moment, to take pleasure for the day, to seize every moment for joy and enjoyment. How tragic and sad! Sadly it is true that the greatest joy the world offers and experiences is the most sad and terrible. Why? Well, because the joy and happiness of **this** world is hollow at best and ends in disaster at worst. The greatest happiness will be afforded by being sorrowful and mourning because in doing so the end result is fellowship with God and the joy of heaven. Christians may have a reputation for being sorrowful and killjoys but in truth they are the happiest people of all, even when they sorrow for sin and mourn for their fellow mankind.

The Lord is still calling people to mourn and weep and put on sackcloth. Why? Well, because the happiness of this world is folly, futile and fruitless. It is mere enjoyment for the self's sake. It has no godliness nor truth in it. Does this mean that a Christian cannot enjoy the things of this world? Not at all. But the Christian's enjoyment of the things given of God (for He is Creator) are really enjoyment *of God*. Do we not experience the immense joy of receiving some poor gift from someone we love because they have given it rather than the gift? Your son or daughter comes home from school with something they have made and as they give it to you, you gather them up in your arms and rejoice for the gift even though in a few days it will be consigned to the fridge door or maybe even the waste-paper basket! Our current world appears to live by the motto at the end of verse 13. The essence of modern life is to enjoy life for all you can, rather than to consider the importance of what we are and do. Now the even more tragic thing is that it was for this sin, for the sin of rejecting God's call to mourn, and for their seeking enjoyment in this world alone, that God

Studies in Isaiah.

replies that there can be no salvation, no means of atonement, no means of forgiveness and renewal. What a state to be in! That atonement has been provided we are sure because of the rest of Scripture. It was promised in the Old Testament and figured or represented by the tabernacle, the temple and the sacrifices. It was fulfilled perfectly and fully by the Lord Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. This is the one and only means of atonement. If we reject this, we have nothing left but to face the judgement that we deserve. There can be no other atonement.

[2] *The judgement on Shebna. (Isaiah 22:15-25).*

In verses 15 to 25 the burden shifts from focusing on the people of Judah, to two specific people, Shebna and Eliakim, son of Hilkiah. This piece of history reminds us of the film “The Return of the King” which features a battle at Minas Tirith. The steward of Gondor, lord of Minas Tirith was a pretender to the throne. He is completely defeated and defeatist. He ends up trying to kill himself and his son on a funeral pyre, and does nothing to save or help the people. In many ways Shebna of Isaiah 22 is very similar.

Before we look at the detail, the construction of this passage is worthy of note. In verses 15 to 19 we have Shebna described and his obsession with death and glory (for himself). In verses 20 to 25 we have Eliakim the son of Hilkiah described whom the Lord was to call. It is interesting that these three names, Shebna, Eliakim and Hilkiah tell part of the story. Shebna's name means “vigour” and this signifies human strength and ingenuity. Shebna could only see death and despair, and so to make the best of a bad lot he sets about making his final resting place a place to be remembered and celebrated. Now isn't this what the world does? It celebrates “vigour” and all that the human spirit can achieve. It elevates the great and the good, even if it is really not that good! And then recognising that death comes to all, mankind seeks to ameliorate the terror and horror it produces. How we dress death up! How we celebrate the memory and the glory! We decorate the tombs whereas we should be repenting of our sin that leads to death! Heed these words of the Saviour:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous.⁹⁷⁸

In doing such we ignore the whole horror of death and we humanise it. We fail to see the terrible thing that death is, and we (foolishly) laugh it away or decorate in gaudy colours. Eliakim's name

978 Matthew 23:29.

Studies in Isaiah.

means “God raises,” or “God sets up.” Eliakim was son of Hilkiah, whose name means “my portion is Jehovah.” Straight away we see a shift from human vigour to God! We ought to be moved to think of the resurrection in Eliakim's name. The essential idea is that God raises up, or makes to stand. It could be taken in the sense of placing in authority as suggested by the removal of Shebna and the elevation of Eliakim in his place. However the name points us to the concept of lifting up from nowhere, i.e. death. Then we have the name “Hilkiah” which signifies a close and devoted reliance on God – the very thing missing in Judah. Thus Eliakim was one raised up from nowhere and who was the son of one devoted to God. There is no doubt here that the Saviour is being prefigured. He alone was one truly devoted to the Father and He alone would be the one raised up from death.⁹⁷⁹

[a] Shebna is judged. (Isaiah 22:15-19).

22:15-19.

Shebna seems to have been one who despaired of any help and who sought to make an escape for himself in death. There is more than a hint of copying the kings of Egypt who fashioned glorious tombs believing that they would be privileged in the afterlife. He fashions a tomb “*on high.*”⁹⁸⁰ By which is signified a craftsman-like construction in an elevated and glorious position. By contrast the Lord is going to cast him away so that whatever glory he thought he was going to have would turn out to be shame to him.⁹⁸¹ There is a violence and suddenness to Shebna's demise which is reminiscent of the fate suffered by the Steward of Gondor in 'The Return of the King.' as he is launched as a burning flame off the city walls. We read that the Lord Himself will throw Shebna away “*violently*” having seized him all of a sudden. Further, he is to be treated like “*a ball*” that is tossed away.⁹⁸²

All of us who usurp position, who aspire to heights that originate in human thinking, will suffer this same end. This does not just apply to despots and tyrants who seize power by force, for it applies to all of us. Who has not sought to gain a position for themselves in their rejection of God and His ways? Who has not sought to carve a life out for himself built on their own understanding? All of us have usurped the office of ruler. We have all decided that we are king over our own lives!

979 John 8:29.

980 Isaiah 22:16.

981 Isaiah 22:17-19.

982 Isaiah 22:17,18.

Studies in Isaiah.

However such a thing is really not true! We can never rule ourselves. We always fail. We always defer to sin. We fail and fall because we are sinful by nature and so we cannot rule ourselves well or even at all. Oh many will respond that they are doing quite a grand job thank you very much. They foolishly think that their career and their standing, their charity and their kindness is enough to warrant acceptance by anyone of substance. However in that they have failed to reckon themselves as owned by God, for He alone is Creator, and in that they have failed to recognise that they are rebels against Him defying His righteous perfect and good ways, they render themselves fit only for judgement. All our righteousness is filthy rags.⁹⁸³ All our *supposed* achievements are nothing at all. We need to recognise the slight and demeaning we place on God in rejecting Him and His truth. If we do not listen to what God is saying, how can we stand before Him in truth and expect Him to listen to us? We are not His equal. God is good, extremely good, so why do we not listen to what He says? Do we hate ourselves so? Stupidly we have this idea that we are our own and we can determine what is right for us. Stupidly we think that what God decides, or what He says can be taken or left alone. Stupidly we think that God ought to accept our offerings and abilities and products and lives as something He ought to be proud of. This is all so stupid because we do not listen to Him. Imagine a father who tells his son something very important that he must do. Now imagine that the son ignores this and does something else instead. How will the father react? Let us be precise. Imagine a young son, say five years old, believes that he can drive his father's car. The father has warned repeatedly that he is too young and will not be able to do this properly or safely. If the son ignores his father's warnings what will be the result? Or, if you prefer, picture the situation where a father tells his son that he is never to handle the gun on his desk or the pills in the medicine cabinet. The son believes he is able and ignores his father's warnings. What will be the result? These illustrations are extremely weak in comparison to the situation described here. If we reject God and His ways, if we think we can continue independently – regardless of how good it may look to us and the world – we are doing the very worst thing imaginable. We slight God who is perfect and never gives wrong, false, nor untrue commands. And so, we place ourselves under His righteous condemnation and judgement. The language of expulsion and violence seems harsh to modern ears. However we need to remember that all who reject God and His ways, align themselves with the enemy of souls, Satan. He is behind all the rebellion on earth. Sadly many who seek to rebel against God do not realise that they are signing up in the devil's army. The violence and terror is due to Satan for his utter disregard and hatred of all that is true, godly and lovely. We

983 Isaiah 64:6.

Studies in Isaiah.

soften our view of ourselves so much because we do not see the utter horror and evil of sin and rebellion, nor do we see the perfect beauty of God and His ways. We have fallen hook, line and sinker for the terrible untruth that we are independent and can command our own destiny.

[b] Eliakim to succeed Shebna. (Isaiah 22:20-25).

22:20.

Contrast that spoken of Shebna with what we read of Eliakim son of Hilkiyah. He is styled “*My servant*” which title we shall see later is very important in Isaiah.⁹⁸⁴ This is the title of our Saviour.⁹⁸⁵ This one will not be thrust out violently for his service to sin, self and Satan. Bob Dylan once wrote a song “Gotta serve somebody” in which he made clear that there is no independent or neutral position. The lyrics of the chorus go like this: ⁹⁸⁶

But you’re gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed,
You’re gonna have to serve somebody.
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord,
But you’re gonna have to serve somebody

This is true. We serve either the devil, or we serve the Lord. We have been so constituted and constructed that in our very make-up we serve somebody. There are only these two options. If we serve anything other than the Lord, we are, in effect, serving the devil. If we serve ourselves, our career, our family, our dream, our country, our whatever, we are thus serving the devil because:

*the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.*⁹⁸⁷

Now you may object that serving your family or your country is a godly thing to do. But remember what the Lord said:

*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*⁹⁸⁸

984 Isaiah 22:20.

985 Isaiah 42:1 and the other “Servant songs.” See also: Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45.

986 The song appears on his album “Slow Train Coming.” <https://bobdylan.com/songs/gotta-serve-somebody/>

987 1John 5:19.

988 Matthew 10:37.

Studies in Isaiah.

46 While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. **47** Then one said to Him, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You.” **48** But He answered and said to the one who told Him, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” **49** And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! **50** For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.”⁹⁸⁹

Now it is very clear that the Lord was not at all speaking of neglect and indifference to family, country, colleagues and so on.⁹⁹⁰ His point was that our love must be centred on God alone. Out of this, other love would follow. If anyone loves God but does not care for his brother, the apostle John taught, then he is a liar.⁹⁹¹ However, love for God and devotion to Him is not just essential, but all-consuming. If we did love God as we should, what a difference it would make! People would be overwhelmed by the love expressed.

22:21,22.

It is to be observed that there are several *“I will”* statements throughout these verses serving to show the Lord's intended actions concerning Eliakim.

Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, (the raised servant of God), is given a number of things by the Lord. He will be arrayed with the emblems of kingship and would rule in Shebna's place.⁹⁹² But instead of looking out for himself, Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, will be a father to the dwellers in Jerusalem.⁹⁹³ Here we see hope. There will be inhabitants in Jerusalem, despite the coming judgement. In verse 22 we have those important words concerning the *“key of the house of David”* by which is meant the right to rule and be in authority.⁹⁹⁴ This key was in the possession of the Lord Jesus as the rightful heir to the throne of David.⁹⁹⁵ What this king determines can be overthrown by no one. In this we see the hand of God acting, for only God can determine what will, or will not, come to pass.

22:23,24.

Not only will this one be the king ruling in complete sovereignty, but, importantly for us, He

989 Matthew 12:46-50.

990 The apostle Paul taught that neglect of family was a denial of the faith – see 1 Timothy 5:8.

991 1 John 4:20 – see also 1 John 2:9,11; 3:15.

992 Isaiah 22:21.

993 Isaiah 22:21.

994 Isaiah 22:22.

995 Revelation 1:18; 3:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

will be secure.⁹⁹⁶ Now, none of the kings of Judah were fully secure. David ruled for forty years but knew much war. Solomon ruled for forty years and knew a great deal of peace. However his son acted foolishly and the kingdom was split into two, and from then on the kings of Judah and Israel knew nothing but trouble. But this king, typified by Eliakim son of Hilkiah, will bring complete security (fastened *“as a peg in a secure place”*). The word translated as *“secure”* has the idea of truthfulness or faithfulness connected to it. It speaks of a firm and established place based on truth and what is right. What a wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ! He truly is the Rock – a secure and fixed point upon which we can rest secure. But He is much more than a safe haven (a tower, a refuge under whose wings we can shelter), for we discover also that He will also *“become a glorious throne to his father’s house,”* or, in other words, the place of ruler-ship and governance.

And so, He will not only know security but glory as well. The Lord is jealous concerning His glory. None but God can be glorious, for He alone is God, and He alone possesses the characteristics which display such glory. The only way in which anyone else may have this glory is that they too are God! Well this is the situation with Christ, for He is The King, of the line of David directly descended from him, but He is equally God too.⁹⁹⁷ And so upon Him will be hung *“all the glory of his father’s house,”* by which we learn that He is the new temple. The glory of God dwells completely and fully within Christ for He is the very Image of God.

And then we discover that there are a variety of *“vessels,” “cups,”* and *“pitchers”* which are initially described as *“the offspring and the posterity.”* True believers are likened to vessels in God’s house by Paul in his second letter to Timothy:

20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honour and some for dishonour. **21** Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honour, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.⁹⁹⁸

The tabernacle and the temple were filled with a variety of vessels and utensils too, and these all speak of our usefulness to the Lord. These vessels are various ranging from *“cups”* to *“pitchers,”* and they all appear to be *“of small quantity.”* This teaches us that we are all different, having different uses, but also (importantly) that we are by no means all-sufficient in and of ourselves, for we are all *“of small quantity.”* How vital it is that we understand the great limits of our usefulness

996 Isaiah 22:23.

997 Isaiah 22:23.

998 2Timothy 2:20,21.

Studies in Isaiah.

to the Lord. We need one another and the Lord uses whom He has chosen in whatever way He sees fit. Let us always remember that our task is simply to follow and to obey what the Master says. We are not the Captain! We are simply the rank and file private foot-soldiers in God's army,

22:25.

Our passage ends with a very interesting statement in verse 25. At first glance you might be lead to think of Shebna's being cut off. However the reference to "*a secure place*" is found in verse 23 and 25. Since Eliakim son of Hilkiah is to replace Shebna and will be set in a secure place, we are thus lead to think of Eliakim son of Hilkiah being the one mentioned. This secure peg which brings security is to suffer in three ways:

- *It is to be removed.*
- *It is to be cut down.*
- *It will fall.*

Our Lord Jesus was taken away and lead captive by the Romans. Hence He was removed from the public arena. Then He was cut down. This phrase indicates the chopping down of a tree. Such a figure is found throughout Scripture and indicates the death and removal of kings from the throne.⁹⁹⁹ Finally we note that this secure peg will fall, which signifies a violent death. Here we are being told of the great death and crucifixion of the Saviour. Next we find that the burden that was situated on this peg will be cut off. The burden that this "*peg*" was carrying was the weight of sin! This burden was to be cut off! Wonderful truth! Do we see here the awesome truth that in dying for sin the Lord removed utterly the burden and weight of sin from us?

⁹⁹⁹ Luke 23:31.

Chapter 33.
Isaiah 23:1-18.
The burden against Tyre.

Textual analysis.

1 The burden against Tyre.

Wail, you ships of Tarshish!

For it is laid waste, so that there is
no house,
no harbour;
from the land of Cyprus it is revealed to them.

2 Be still,

you inhabitants of the coastland,
you merchants of Sidon,
whom those who cross the sea have filled.

3 And on great waters the grain of Shihor, the harvest of the River, *is* her revenue;
and she is a marketplace for the nations.

4 Be ashamed, O Sidon;

for the sea has spoken,
the strength of the sea, saying,

“I do not labour, nor bring forth children; neither do I rear young men, *nor* bring up virgins.”

5 When the report *reaches* Egypt, they also will be in agony at the report of Tyre.

6 Cross over to Tarshish;

wail, you inhabitants of the coastland!

7 *Is* this your joyous city,

whose antiquity *is* from ancient days,
whose feet carried her far off to dwell?

8 Who has taken this counsel against Tyre,

the crowning city,
whose merchants *are* princes,
whose traders *are* the honourable of the earth?

9 The **Lord of hosts** has purposed it,

to bring to dishonour the pride of all glory,
to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.

10 Overflow through your land like the River, O daughter of Tarshish; *there is* no more strength.

11 He stretched out His hand over the sea,

He shook the kingdoms;

the **Lord** has given a commandment against Canaan to destroy its strongholds.

12 And He said,

“You will rejoice no more, O you oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon.
Arise, cross over to Cyprus; there also you will have no rest.”

13 Behold, the land of the Chaldeans, this people *which* was not; Assyria founded it for wild beasts of the desert.

They set up its towers,
they raised up its palaces, *and* brought it to ruin.

Studies in Isaiah.

14 Wail, you ships of Tarshish!

For your strength is laid waste.

15 Now it shall come to pass in that day

that Tyre will be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king.

At the end of seventy years it will happen to Tyre as *in* the song of the harlot:

16 “take a harp, go about the city, you forgotten harlot; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that you may be remembered.”

17 And it shall be, at the end of seventy years, that the **Lord** will deal with Tyre.

She will return to her hire, and commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth.

18 Her gain and her pay will be set apart for the **Lord**;

it will not be treasured nor laid up,

for her gain will be for those who dwell before the **Lord**,
to eat sufficiently,
and for fine clothing.

The burden comes in three parts but the analysis has been provided above be in full. First we are given news of Tyre's destruction (verses 1 to 7). Then, from verses 8 to 14 we read that the Lord brings judgement. Finally from verses 15 to 18 we discover that the time is now up and there are no second chances.

[1] News of Tyre's destruction. (Isaiah 23:1-7).

[2] The Lord brings judgement. (Isaiah 23:8-14).

[3] Time is up. (Isaiah 23:15-18).

The last “*burden*” is given against the city of Tyre. It would appear from verses 2,3 and 8 that Tyre was a centre of international trade. Ships would come from the distant west to bring goods for distribution throughout the land of Palestine and Mesopotamia. We are not certain where the land or city of Tarshish was located. Suggestions range from Sardinia, the west of Spain, and even as far as Cornwall. The uncertainty of its location gives us no cause for concern for the main point is to suggest a place far away needing ships capable of travelling on long journeys. In Ezekiel we find that Tarshish was a main trading partner dealing in a variety of metals from silver, iron, tin and lead.¹⁰⁰⁰ We have already come across the phrase “*ships of Tarshish*” in chapter 2 where they were part of the proud and great achievements of man.¹⁰⁰¹ Thus the emphasis is on the great achievements of men at that time to discover minerals and goods, and transport them great distances. We are perhaps used to considering ancient man as local and not adventurous. There is a bias towards

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ezekiel 27:12,25. Tarshish as a source of tin has lead some to suggest Cornwall as a possible location. See also 1Kings 10:22 and 1Kings 22:48 where we read of ships of Tarshish going to “*Ophir*” which was south of Palestine.

¹⁰⁰¹ Isaiah 2:16.

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conceiving of ancient man as stuck in one locale, but in truth the peoples of ancient times had covered the globe. We know this from the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. From that incident the various peoples descended from the three sons of Noah spread across the world inhabiting places as far apart as the Americas, Australia and the antipodes, northern Europe and southern Africa. And so we are brought to consider Tyre as the centre of trade from distant lands.

[1] News of Tyre's destruction. (Isaiah 23:1-7).

23:1-3.

In the opening verses we read about how all Tyre's trading partners are told the news about Tyre's fate. That her trading partners were extensive and rich is a feature of this passage. We are left in no doubt here that this is the cream and the wealthy of the world. We read of "*grain*" and "*harvest*" coming from the "*great waters*" (distant lands), and the "*River*" (the Nile), and that Tyre was "*a marketplace for the nations.*"¹⁰⁰² In today's terms we might be led to think of Bill Gates, of the great electronics/car manufacturers of the Asian world, of the stock markets and exchanges, or of other huge multi-national companies. Now Tyre is to be destroyed so that there would no longer be any house or harbour.¹⁰⁰³ The word and news gets spread to all the ports far and wide, and each is given an imperative command which expresses their horror at the news. These trading partners are to "*wail,*" "*be still,*" and "*be ashamed.*"¹⁰⁰⁴ Wailing is howling. It is an onomatopoeic word sounding very much like the type of wailing and howling those who mourn would make. To "*be still*" is really to be struck dumb, or to become silent. Those who are to "*be still*" include the "*inhabitants of the coastland.*"¹⁰⁰⁵ This is the first time we come across the idea of a "*coastland*" peoples, but it will not be the last.¹⁰⁰⁶ Genesis 10:5 is the first use which reads as follows:

From these the coastland *peoples* of the Gentiles were separated into their lands,
everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations.¹⁰⁰⁷

Hence the term "*coastland(s)*" indicates the Gentiles. The idea in verse 2 where the "*coastland*"

1002 Isaiah 23:3.

1003 Isaiah 23:1.

1004 Isaiah 23:1,2,4.

1005 Isaiah 23:2.

1006 Isaiah 23:2,6; 24:15; 41:1,5; 42:4,10,12,15; 49:1; 51:5; 59:18; 60:9; 66:19. This accounts for two thirds of all usage of this term. Apart from Genesis 10:5, the phrase only occurs in six other places: Jeremiah 25:22; Ezekiel 26:15,18; 27:3; 39:6; Daniel 11:18.

1007 Genesis 10:5.

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peoples and those from “*Sidon*” are to remain still, is that there is no words or answer that can be given in response. It is reminiscent of the friends of Job who sat in astonished silence when they first met him in his sorrowful state.¹⁰⁰⁸

23:4-7.

The merchants are to “*be ashamed*” by which is meant the sudden loss of colour when a terrible or horrific thing is observed. It signifies confusion and terror of mind. In these three expressions we are taught that what has happened to the trading centre of the world is simply awful and gut-rending. Verse 4 is stark. Tyre was a city that was situated on an island a short distance from the mainland joined by a causeway. It was the perfect choice for a harbour and the receipt of vessels from afar. In verse 4 we learn that in trying to be over the sea, Tyre would fail and no longer be able to support and produce offspring. She who had benefited from the strength of the sea was now no longer to produce fruit. The message is given to “*Sidon*” because she was the former city from whence Tyre originated. But eventually word gets out to Egypt where the news brings “*agony*.”¹⁰⁰⁹ Then also news reaches “*Tarshish*” and the far distant coastlands who “*wail*” at the loss. Those who deal in the big leagues require the middlemen, the logistics crews, and the consumers to make their profits. You cannot be a big trader if the main conduit for trade goes down.

The section ends with a rhetorical question.¹⁰¹⁰ Is this failed and destroyed city, that was once the envy of the world but now was destitute, really the same as the “*joyous city*” (the one that exults) that the merchants knew? Tyre, like many a port, became not just a centre for trade but a place of delights and pleasures. As such it may stand for the great dual sins of man – his greed and his lust. But all has been lost! Think of the modern counterparts. How many places were once vibrant and thriving centres of trade plying all kinds of goods and services but have now disappeared.

[2] The Lord brings judgement. (Isaiah 23:8-14).

23:8,9.

In the second section we learn who is responsible for the destruction of this exulted and crowned city. It was such an elevated place that the merchants were considered as royalty and were

1008 Job 2:13.

1009 Isaiah 23:5.

1010 Isaiah 23:7.

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those esteemed and lauded in the earth.¹⁰¹¹ Tyre was the place to be! Perhaps we might consider Hollywood, Las Vegas, or Dubai as similar types of locations in the modern world for prestige, honour and wealth. So why then was Tyre to be destroyed? In verse 9 we are given the reason. Note that wealth and riches are not the reason for Tyre's ruin, pride is. Tyre had become a place where vaunting, arrogance and all the other vile traits associated with pride were to be seen. Sadly wealth often does this to people. When people glory in that which is not really glorious it is terrible to behold. Truly glory belongs to God alone, who is wise, beautiful, good and pure. It would seem that Tyre was a centre of the arrogance and pride which came along with wealth and riches. Those associated with Tyre made a name and a reputation for themselves. They made a name for *themselves*. People love to see their names on placards and billboards, on honours lists and in prominent places.

The falling of Tyre was to have deep repercussions throughout the world so that *“all the honourable of the earth”* would be brought to *“contempt.”*¹⁰¹² The Hebrew word translated *“contempt”* has the meaning “light” or “of no account,” and it is set deliberately in contrast to the word *“honourable”* which has the basic meaning “weight” or “substantial.” In other words those who are held in high esteem and who are considered to be substantial and weighty in reputation will be considered as vacuous and flimsy at this time. Isn't it the case when things suddenly go from glory to ruin that the real nature of man's heart is revealed? We are being given a picture of a tremendous fall from splendour, like the famous Wall Street crash in early twentieth century USA, or the more recent depression from 2008 made into various films, which reaped tremendous terror and worry across the globe. Pride is an awful thing. How it needs this act of God!

23:10,11.

Verses 10 and 11 picture the onslaught of destruction as an overflowing river in flood. When water pours through a town or city there is no stopping it. I am reminded of the terrible devastation which the Boxing day Tsunami of 2004 caused, killing over a quarter of a million people. The end of verse ten is poignant. There is no more strength so that there comes a point where there is no more resistance to the inevitable, no more fight against what is coming. And all of this is at the hands of the Lord. It was *“He”* who stretched out His hands and shook the kingdoms. These expressions found in verse 11 are indicative of judgement. We have noted the reason for judgement

1011 Isaiah 23:8.

1012 Isaiah 23:9.

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– pride – now we see the sentence passed. By “*Canaan*” here is meant the region of Canaan represented by Tyre and Sidon. All her strongholds are to be destroyed and there will be no escape. Sidon was the first city which later gave its strength to Tyre as it began to flourish in trade. And so the beginning of this region – Sidon – was to have no more rest even if they fled to Cyprus to rebuild.

23:12,13.

It is highly significant how the Lord describes them here. They are the “*oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon.*”¹⁰¹³ Even the proud are oppressed. It is true that the cause is our own sinful nature, but the outworking of sin brings its own oppression. There can only be real freedom when one is indwelt by Immanuel.¹⁰¹⁴ Finally in verse 13 we are reminded of what became of the even more ancient peoples of Chaldea. The words and phrases used here remind us instantly of what we read of in Genesis 10 where Nimrod built Babel and Nineveh.¹⁰¹⁵ They were once not a people but became one as Nimrod lead a rebellion to make a name for themselves. Towers and defences were built, but it all came to nothing and was left in ruins, again at the hand of God.¹⁰¹⁶ The very same fate is reserved here for Tyre. This second section ends just as it began with the call for the far off ships to wail and lament. Tyre's strength is gone and so the ships from far lands must howl and lament for their gravy train and honoured reputation has become dust.

[3] Time is up. (Isaiah 23:15-18).

23:15-17.

In the final section we are informed of a time limit for Tyre. She is to be ruined and left desolate for seventy years – the length of life of a king.¹⁰¹⁷ Then after the seventy years have passed Tyre is to be restored, but not completely. The picture of Tyre's recovery is not altogether a good one. The image set before us is of a prostitute singing songs throughout the city.¹⁰¹⁸ Tyre is like the prostitute who plied her trade among many princes of the world. Now she is to rise and sing her

1013 Isaiah 23:12.

1014 By freedom I do not mean to suggest independence. True freedom comes when we are in right relationship with the Lord. See 2Corinthians 3:17.

1015 Genesis 10:9-11.

1016 Genesis 11:1f.

1017 Isaiah 23:15.

1018 Isaiah 23:15.

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songs once again touting for custom.¹⁰¹⁹ But there is no return to the former glory, pomp and pride. Note that Tyre is not raised up in any spiritual sense. There is no repentance or salvation for Tyre. She is a city that was once destroyed for her pride and arrogance. Now she is to be raised again to continue her former profession of prostitution “*with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth.*”¹⁰²⁰ These words are ones we find also in the book of Revelation. This time, however, the city is not Tyre but Babylon.¹⁰²¹ Babylon had prostituted herself with the nations through blasphemy, idolatry and persecution. Tyre had prostituted herself through wealth and pride. When the seventy years are complete the Lord will allow her to return to her old ways. In such an act we see the Lord's hand of restraint. There is no salvation here – only the hand of restraint. We are reminded of the incident in Genesis 11 we referred to a moment ago. What would have happened if Nimrod and his band had succeeded in their rebellion? It doesn't bear thinking about. We see the same throughout history. Nations, organisations and even individuals are allowed to go so far in their prostitution and idolatry, but then comes the hand of God's restraint. All of God's actions are good for He alone is good.¹⁰²²

23:18.

And here we find that Tyre is only allowed to continue plying her trade so that what she reaps will be given to the Lord, and specifically to fund those who “ *dwell before the Lord*” that they may “*eat sufficiently*” and be clothed well!¹⁰²³ What a remarkable picture. We must not get worried and stressed about food and clothing. This is something the Lord Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount.¹⁰²⁴ Remarkably the nations who seek wealth, reputation, honour and glory all in rebellion to the Lord do not realise that they are thereby making provision for God's people! Now, of course, we must note that no man can be lazy. The idle man will never be provided for. If a man will not work neither should he eat.¹⁰²⁵ We are to seek gainful employment. What we are not to do, however, is to so worry about it all that we are constrained into working all hours or working in some compromised or even sinful way. Somehow the world engages in a prostituted system of trade for selfish reasons, and within this system godly men and women can make a livelihood. The godly must do all they can to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, believing that the

1019 Isaiah 23:16.

1020 Isaiah 23:17.

1021 See Revelation 14:8; 17:1-6.

1022 Matthew 19:17; Psalm 119:68.

1023 Isaiah 23:18.

1024 Matthew 6:25-34.

1025 2Thessalonians 3:10.

Studies in Isaiah.

system of the world that God is allowing to continue will somehow be the means of provision for them. Now I know that often, times are harsh and difficult. However the Christian can be content when honour is given to God and His ways by them, that the Lord will find a way to provide for them according to His promise in Matthew 6.

With the burden on Tyre we come to the end of the burdens against the nations which forms a major section of the first part of Isaiah. Having opened with a message against Babylon, representing the entire world, which would be punished for its evil and pride, the series of burdens closes with a message against Tyre for proudly prostituting itself in trade with all the nations of the world.¹⁰²⁶ In the next chapter Isaiah brings all of the preceding messages to a fulcrum and focus as he announces a final judgement on the entire world.

¹⁰²⁶ Isaiah 13:11,19; 23:9,17,18.

Chapter 34.
Isaiah 24:1-23.
Universal judgement!

Textual analysis.

1 Behold, the **Lord** makes the **earth**
empty
and makes it waste,
distorts its surface
and scatters abroad its inhabitants.

2 And it shall be:

as with the people, so with the priest;
as with the servant, so with his master;
as with the maid, so with her mistress;
as with the buyer, so with the seller;
as with the lender, so with the borrower;
as with the creditor, so with the debtor.

3 The **land** shall be
entirely emptied
and utterly plundered,
for the **Lord** has spoken this word.

4 The **earth**
mourns
and fades away,
the **world**
languishes
and fades away;
the haughty people of the **earth** languish.

5 The **earth** is also
defiled under its inhabitants,
because they have
transgressed the laws,
changed the ordinance,
broken the everlasting covenant.

6 Therefore the curse has devoured the **earth**, and those who dwell in it are desolate.
Therefore the inhabitants of the **earth** are burned, and few men *are* left.

7 The new wine fails,
the vine languishes,
all the merry-hearted sigh.

8 The mirth of the tambourine ceases,
the noise of the jubilant ends,
the joy of the harp ceases.

9 They shall not drink wine with a song;

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strong drink is bitter to those who drink it.

10 The city of confusion is broken down;
every house is shut up, so that none may go in.

11 There is a cry for wine in the streets,
all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone.

12 In the city desolation is left,
and the gate is stricken with destruction.

13 When it shall be thus in the midst of the land among the people, *it shall be*
like the shaking of an olive tree,
like the gleanings of grapes when the vintage is done.

14 They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing;
for the majesty of the Lord they shall cry aloud from the sea.

15 Therefore
glorify the Lord in the dawning light,
the name of the Lord God of Israel in the coastlands of the sea.

16 From the ends of the earth we have heard songs:
“Glory to the righteous!”

But I said,

“I am ruined, ruined!
Woe to me!
The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously,
indeed, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.”

17 Fear and the pit and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth.

18 And it shall be that
he who flees from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit,
and he who comes up from the midst of the pit shall be caught in the snare;
for
the windows from on high are open,
and the foundations of the earth are shaken.

19 The earth is violently broken,
the earth is split open,
the earth is shaken exceedingly.

20 The earth
shall reel to and fro like a drunkard,
and shall totter like a hut;
its transgression shall be heavy upon it,
and it will fall, and not rise again.

21 It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will punish on high
the host of exalted ones,
and on the earth the kings of the earth.

22 They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit,
and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished.

23 Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed;
for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously.

Whilst the burden against Tyre concluded the messages to the nations and so formed a fitting end to the section, chapter 24 acts as a postscript or final consummation ending to the burdens. It begins with a very important word translated “*behold*” in the NKJV which awakens our interest. We might paraphrase the translation: “and in conclusion” serving to sum up all that has been prophesied thus far.

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It is to be observed carefully that the prophecies thus far have had a twofold perspective. Each is certainly delivered with respect to a nation, city, grouping, or tribe and their immediate concerns. However, as we have already mentioned, much of these prophecies is for the whole world.¹⁰²⁷ In this chapter there is no mistaking the main reference. It is a prophecy given to the entire world, to all inhabitants on earth. Nineteen times there are references to the “*earth*,” the “*world*,” or to the “*land*.” The Hebrew words, meanings and occurrences of these are shown in the table below.

Table 33.1: “Earth,” “world,” and “land” in Isaiah 24 (NKJV).

Hebrew	Translation/meaning	Occurrences in NKJV		Total
		Translation	Verses in Isaiah 24	
'erets	Earth, land.	“ <i>earth</i> ”	1, 4(x2), 5, 6(x2), 16, 17, 18, 19(x3), 20	13
		“ <i>land</i> ”	3, 11, 13	3
tebel	The whole earth in reference to creation, especially the habitable part.	“ <i>world</i> ”	4	1
'adamah	Earth as in ground – related to Adam's name so signifies the dust.	“ <i>earth</i> ”	21(x2)	2

TOTAL = 19

There are numerous other reasons for suggesting that the entire planet is meant by the terms listed in the table above. Not least of these is the reference to the physical surface of the earth in verse 1, the curse placed on the earth in verse 6, and the allusion to the Genesis flood in verse 18 with the physical effects noted in verses 19 and 20.¹⁰²⁸

The chapter may be divided into three sections. The first introduces the coming final judgement upon the earth and runs down to verse 6 concluding with a statement beginning “*therefore ...*” The second section focuses in on one particular city, the city of confusion. This runs from verse 7 to verse 12. The final section from verse 13 returns to a global view and concludes at the end of the chapter with a glorious finale. The second and last section may also be considered as one unit which starts off considering a particular city and then expands outwards to encompass the

¹⁰²⁷ See, for example, Isaiah 13:11; 18:3.

¹⁰²⁸ Cf. Genesis 7:11; 8:2.

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whole earth but it seems better to consider it in these three parts.¹⁰²⁹

[1] We're all doomed! (Isaiah 24:1-6).

[2] The city of confusion. (Isaiah 24:7-12).

[3] No escape from God's rule and reign. (Isaiah 24:13-23).

[1] We're all doomed! (Isaiah 24:1-6).

I have provided the textual analysis once again here because there are some terms which need further unpacking.

1 Behold, the **Lord** makes the **earth**

empty
and makes it waste,
distorts its surface
and scatters abroad its inhabitants.

2 And it shall be:

as with the people, so with the priest;
as with the servant, so with his master;
as with the maid, so with her mistress;
as with the buyer, so with the seller;
as with the lender, so with the borrower;
as with the creditor, so with the debtor.

3 The **land** * shall be

entirely emptied
and utterly plundered,

for the **Lord** has spoken this word.

4 The **earth**

mourns
and fades away,

the **world** **

languishes
and fades away;

the haughty people of the **earth** languish.

5 The **earth** is also

defiled under its inhabitants,
because they have
transgressed the laws,
changed the ordinance,
broken the everlasting covenant.

6 Therefore the curse has devoured the **earth**, and those who dwell in it are desolate.
Therefore the inhabitants of the **earth** are burned, and few men *are* left.

* Same Hebrew word as rendered "earth" ('**erets**).

** The habitable world (**tebel**).

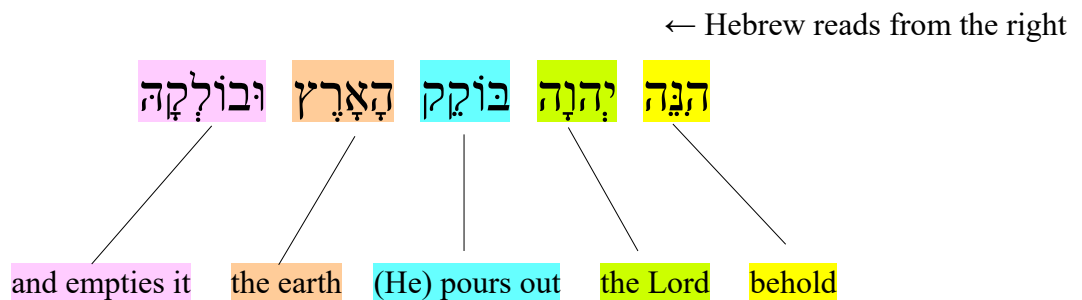
¹⁰²⁹ The NASB organises the chapter in this way.

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Our first passage can be split into two sections with the words at the end of verse 3 (*“for the Lord has spoken this word”*) acting as a marker. However we must not consider these two parts as being independent as though they speak of different things. What is in view here is an awesome and dreadful devastation of the earth. The focus is, in part, on the effect it will have on the people who dwell on its surface, but the devastation occurs to the entire globe.

24:1-3.

In the opening three verses we learn that the Lord is going to completely ruin the entire planet so that all its inhabitants will be displaced and moved out of any security. Now some may limit these words to a more local affair saying that the word “land” should be used rather than “earth” which implies the globe. However the reference to the curse and the concluding statement in verse 6 force us to consider these words in a *universal* sense. It will be helpful to look at some of the details of the words used in the first verse here. My translation of the Hebrew is shown.



From this we would have:

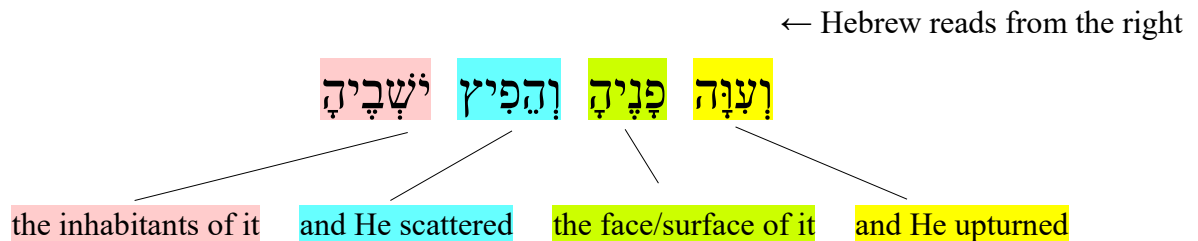
Behold the Lord (He) pours out the earth and empties it.

In this first part of the verse we have the Hebrew word *boqeq*, which is an active singular participle of the verb “to empty,” or “to pour out.”¹⁰³⁰ Thus it would be translated as “he is pouring out” or “he is emptying.” The sound of the word in Hebrew is similar to the sound that a liquid makes when poured out of a bottle, (as indicated by the doubling of the consonant **q**). The last Hebrew word in this part of the sentence *wubol’qah* is also an active singular participle of another verb “to empty,”

¹⁰³⁰ This is in the Kal form of the Hebrew verb which may be translated in the past or present but which signifies simple action.

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“to waste,” or “to devastate.”¹⁰³¹ It has the third person singular suffix added to it which links it with the feminine word “the earth.” Thus the earth is likened to a bottle which is being emptied. In such a way as to bring waste and devastation.



From this we would have:

And He upturned the face/surface of it and He scattered the inhabitants of it.

In the second half of the verse, the theme of the first part continues but is developed further. We have moved from the bottle or jug image, to a more realistic picture. That is, we are being told that the very “surface” or “face” of the earth is being upturned. The word translated here “upturned” has the basic meaning of crooked or perverted.¹⁰³² Thus we could render this as: “And He distorted the surface of it (the earth) and scatted its inhabitants.” Clearly something devastating is going to happen to the earth's surface. We are instantly reminded of the words found in Isaiah 2 which report the effect of the coming terror of God on the people:

19 They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily. 20 In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made, each for himself to worship, to the moles and bats, 21 to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the crags of the rugged rocks, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily.¹⁰³³

In verse 2 we are given the breadth of people affected by this terrible devastation. We have six comparative descriptions taken from a variety of different “walks of life.”

1031 Again it is the Kal form of the verb – so simple action implied.

1032 The word can be translated as “*iniquity*.” See: 2Samuel 7/14; 19:19; Psalm 106:6; Jeremiah 9:5; Daniel 9:5.

1033 Isaiah 2:19-21.

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And it shall be:

as with the people,
so with the priest;
as with the servant,
so with his master;
as with the maid,
so with her mistress;
as with the buyer,
so with the seller;
as with the lender,
so with the borrower;
as with the creditor,
so with the debtor.

In Hebrew there is a rhythmic sound which is partly captured by the translation here with “*as with ... so with.*” The number six is the number of man, and with these different types of polar extremes we are being informed that everyone will be included in this devastation. There is no distinction here between the laity or the priesthood. Although the priests were consecrated and set apart, being a priest would not excuse you from what is pictured as happening. In our day we may suggest those in power, MPs, or the extremely wealthy. It matters not one jot whether you are in one income bracket or you have no income at all. All will be affected. The other comparative extremes simply serve to cover all of mankind and we may include any other categories we can think of in a modern context. Perhaps celebrity and wannabe, or amateur sportsman and professional, or entrepreneur and employee. Whatever distinctions or classes of people we may hold dear, all will be encompassed by this soon coming event. In many ways the people are, in fact, represented by the liquid in the bottle. This serves to highlight our commonality or unity. Whether we are the Queen, or a tramp, all of us are human beings and we will all face this dreadful event.

Having considered the effect on the people in verse 2, the focus shifts to the “*land*” (earth) again in verse 3. Here the Hebrew uses a form of emphasis. The word “*emptied*” (signifying waste) is used twice, and the word “*plundered*” is also used twice. The idea is that the earth, (which sits in the centre of these doubled expressions) will certainly and utterly be emptied and plundered. Literally we would have the following:

To be emptied, it will be emptied, the earth, and to be plundered it will be plundered.

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There will not remain a single drop or person once this devastation has come, and all will be taken and plundered with nothing left at all. Now note here that it is not the earth as in the people, but the earth as in the physical globe or land. This earth will be emptied and this earth will be plundered. Although we are anticipating the theme of verse 6 the idea of such a despoiling is ably captured by Peter in the third chapter of his second letter.¹⁰³⁴ The last part of verse 3 emphasises the origin and source of this devastation. Just as the Lord created all things out of nothing with just a word as Genesis 1 records, so He will devastate and destroy it with another word.

24:4.

In the second part of this opening word concerning the earth, we have a number of descriptions which focus on both the earth physically, and the inhabitants who dwell there. We must emphasise the unity of creation here. We are apt to consider the world in a physical sense apart from those who inhabit it but Genesis chapter 1 teaches us that the earth was made for inhabitants to dwell on.¹⁰³⁵ There is no such thing as a physical world without its inhabitants. Equally we must not think of the world of people without connecting them to the place wherein they dwell. This explains why the prophet weaves his description so tightly and moves from the dwellers to the habitat so freely.

In verse 4 we are taught that whilst the earth (*'erets*) mourns and fades away, the world (*tebel*) languishes and fades away. The word **tebel** indicates the habitable part of the world. It does not simply indicate the population, but the land surfaces where the population of the world dwells. The emphasis is on habitation. The world was built to house and cater for creation, of which Adam and Eve were the pinnacle. Now this habitation or dwelling is being destroyed. That being said, the majority of the words in the whole chapter are in fact the word *'erets* which here stands for the entire globe.

The Hebrew words used in verse 4 to describe the situation being portrayed all sound similar producing in any listener's ears a mournful tone. The words could indicate a person who is mourning and with their head drooping in sadness. The word used and translated "*fades away*" twice, is similar to the name "*Nabal*" who was the foolish man who denied David sustenance.¹⁰³⁶

1034 2Peter 3:10.

1035 Perhaps the fault for this attitude must be laid at the door of modern science which for many years now has emphasised the disunity of creation in its belief in pre-history and millions of years. These fanciful thoughts are actually destructive and ruin any true understanding of creation, fall and redemption.

1036 Isaiah 24:4. Nabal's wife Abigail came to the rescue and averted a great disaster but Nabal fell dead some short time later – see 1Samuel 25:2f.

Studies in Isaiah.

The basic meaning of this word is to fall or droop as in a leaf which droops, withers and then falls. The habitable world also mourns and languishes failing and drooping too. Then at the end of the verse we find that the lofty people of the earth will also droop and fall. Once again we are reminded of the proud and lofty ones listed in Isaiah chapter 2 who would run into the caves and holes in the rocks when the Lord of terror comes. By using both *'erets* and *tebel* here, we are brought to consider not just the people who lived on the earth's surface, but the very world as well. The whole picture is one of great anguish and lament as the world fades and diminishes.

24:5.

In verse 5 we are given the reasons for this sorry state of affairs. We are taught that the earth is corrupted or profaned (the essential meaning of the word translated *“defiled”*) for a single reason which is expressed in three ways. The people of the earth have:

Transgressed the laws,
Changed the ordinance,
Broken the everlasting covenant.

The people have gone against the rules that govern the earth, they have altered and corrupted the details of such a law, and thereby have broken the covenant given of God from eternity. The phrase *“the everlasting covenant”* may be referring to the covenant of works given to Adam, or it may refer to the covenant given at Sinai.¹⁰³⁷ Both of these were covenants with man (Adam and Israel) which required human beings to do something. In fact we can sum up the covenant at Sinai by this phrase: “do this and you will live.”¹⁰³⁸ This covenant was impossible for sinful and fallen men and women to keep, even though they were duty bound to keep it. The only one who could keep such a covenant was the sinless Saviour Jesus Christ. In that He has kept the everlasting covenant we are all thereby blessed beyond compare and ought to rejoice, but this applies to the new creation. The creation within which we find ourselves is under condemnation. The consequence of this rebellion – the breaking of the everlasting covenant – results in the conclusions found in verse 6.

1037 Isaiah 24:5.

1038 See, for example: Leviticus 18:5: *“you shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgements, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord,”* Romans 10:5: *“For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “the man who does those things shall live by them,””* and Galatians 3:12: *“yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.””*

24:6.

Immediately we read verse 6 we are transported to Genesis 3, and to Adam and Eve's sin with its consequences. However we are also brought to consider (with equal force) the plain fact that the people of the world have all had a part in breaking this covenant with God, and of rebelling against His law and the precise instructions it contains. The entire world is under the curse because the people of this world have corrupted it. We can also link this Scripture back to Genesis 6 where the Lord tells us that the entire world was corrupt and violent, and as a consequence the flood was to wash the earth clean. Here we learn that the sin of Adam is perpetuated. As a consequence the earth is devoured, consumed, and eaten away. As a further consequence the people, who are guilty, having failed to do what was required of them, are burned! The ultimate end of the inhabitants is that they are to be burned up! We must not separate this from the fate of the earth itself as Peter makes clear.¹⁰³⁹ But the amazing thing is that despite this end, there will be a "*few men*" who escape. Paul alludes to this when he wrote to the Corinthian believers about the works they were doing. Would their efforts receive a reward or would they be burned up on the last day?

13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. **14** If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.¹⁰⁴⁰

The world is to be destroyed by fire but those who truly follow Christ will escape the conflagration just as the three Hebrews escaped the fire in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace.¹⁰⁴¹

[2] The city of confusion. (Isaiah 24:7-12).

Once again, I have provided the textual analysis here because there are some terms which need further unpacking.

7 The new wine fails,
the vine languishes,
all the merry-hearted sigh.
8 The mirth of the tambourine ceases,
the noise of the jubilant ends,
the joy of the harp ceases.

1039 2Peter 3:10.

1040 1Corinthians 3:13-15.

1041 Daniel 3:25.

Studies in Isaiah.

9 They shall not drink wine with a song;
strong drink is bitter to those who drink it.
10 The city of confusion is broken down;
every house is shut up, so that none may go in.
11 There is a cry for wine in the streets,
all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land * is gone.
12 In the city desolation is left,
and the gate is stricken with destruction.

* Same as “earth” (‘erets)

After this opening picture in which the earth (both the globe and the people on it) are to be judged for their rebellion, we are brought back to a specific situation on earth, the “city of confusion.”¹⁰⁴² It is not clear exactly which city is meant directly. In verse 11 we have the word “land” which is a translation of the Hebrew ‘erets and elsewhere rendered as “earth.” It would be best to consider this city as representative of cities on the entire globe. In other words, the detail we are given here is representative of cities and places throughout the earth. One example is given to us of what is universally occurring the world over.

The word “confusion” is a translation of the same Hebrew word found in Genesis 1:2 and translated there as “without form.”¹⁰⁴³ Here this condition has resulted due to judgement, but in Genesis 1:2 it was a condition of unformed newly created matter-energy.

Having rebelled against God and His law, the city (an example of life on earth the world over), has gone into confusion and chaos. Abandoning God's laws leads to enacting laws of our own choosing. What a devastatingly terrible picture! In the UK we have gone through a century of dramatic change brought about by changes in our laws (or perhaps the laws enacted are reflections of the changing culture). Hardly a day goes by without some new law being passed or some old law being repealed. We do not really know how to constitute a legal framework and a justice system because we have no roots, no moorings and no firm ground. The sea of relativism we currently sail in means that the laws of today will be anathema tomorrow just as the culture of yesteryear is looked down on by society today. I have heard many a tale concerning the failure of justice for the common man because the system is geared towards the wealthy, or unscrupulous lawyers who can earn untold sums by delaying procedures.¹⁰⁴⁴

1042 Isaiah 24:10.

1043 We have already discussed the use of this word. The reader is reminded that in Genesis 1:2 this word and the closely related word rendered “void” does not indicate a prior judgement due to the sin of some pre-Adamite peoples. The whole of Genesis 1:1-2:4a is couched under the term “good” and describes the pristine condition of creation before the fall.

1044 I have personal testimony to this effect and know of people who have been swindled by lawyers and the legal system even though they have a just cause.

Studies in Isaiah.

Of course we bring down judgement on ourselves in the sense that by rejecting God's perfect way, we fall foul of our own sinful traps and snares. However we ought also to recognise that this is also a direct judgement of God. It is God who is sovereign. His righteous judgement is awesome and just. We ought to tremble as we see the effects of rebellion and the judgement of God. We ought to repent at once and seek Him for His goodness and mercy. Why do we delay?

24:7-9.

In this passage we can see the fruits of rebellion. It opens with the failure and loss of joy and mirth. Interestingly the same Hebrew words we came across in verse 4 occur here in verse 7. That which brought happiness now *"fails"* and *"languishes,"* so that people now *"sigh"* instead of enjoying their partying.¹⁰⁴⁵ The sound of happiness evoked by various musical instruments is now ended (*"ceases"*), and there is no more jubilation and celebration.¹⁰⁴⁶ All joy is gone. Anything that once brought joy and happiness, such as fresh wine, a strong and tasty drink, the harp and the tambourine are all now things that cease and end!¹⁰⁴⁷ It is interesting to observe the movement from drink through entertainment back to drink in verses 7 to 9. Having begun by noting the failure of the wine (either by loss or through loss of taste) in verse 7, we move to the end of celebration and entertainment in verse 8, and then to a reiteration of the fact that *"wine"* and *"strong drink"* will either not be drunk or will taste *"bitter."* Thus the whole panoply of activities centred around entertainment, be they alcohol based, music based, or whatever else may be thrown into the mix, will be empty, will be tasteless or worse, and will cease.

24:10-12.

The descriptions are stark. It isn't just that joy is failing, for example, but that *"all joy is darkened."*¹⁰⁴⁸ In other words, the sun has set on joy, and now it is the night where no life will survive. The city which is described as a place of *"confusion"* is now unformed and so is utterly *"broken down."*¹⁰⁴⁹ All the houses are boarded up and shut so that they can no longer be entered, and all happiness or mirth has departed.¹⁰⁵⁰ The city is desolate and deserted. It is not just that the ruling powers will be corrupt, they simply will not be operating, for *"the gate is stricken with*

1045 Isaiah 24:7.

1046 Isaiah 24:8.

1047 Isaiah 24:9.

1048 Isaiah 24:11.

1049 Recall that the word used and given as *"confusion"* here is the same as that found in Genesis 1:2 and rendered as *"without form."*

1050 Isaiah 24:10,11.

Studies in Isaiah.

destruction.”¹⁰⁵¹ What remains of government is crushed and in ruins.

[3] No escape from God's rule and reign. (Isaiah 24:13-23).

Once more, I have provided the textual analysis here for clarity.

13 When it shall be thus in the midst of the **land** among the people, *it shall be*
like the shaking of an olive tree,
like the gleanings of grapes when the vintage is done.

14 They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing;
for the majesty of the **Lord** they shall cry aloud from the sea.

15 Therefore
glorify the **Lord** in the dawning light,
the name of the **Lord God** of Israel in the coastlands of the sea.

16 From the ends of the **earth** we have heard songs:
“Glory to the righteous!”

But I said,
“I am ruined, ruined!
Woe to me!
The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously,
indeed, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.”

17 Fear and the pit and the snare *are* upon you, O inhabitant of the **earth**.

18 And it shall be *that*
he who flees from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit,
and he who comes up from the midst of the pit shall be caught in the snare;
for
the windows from on high are open,
and the foundations of the **earth** are shaken.

19 The **earth** is violently broken,
the **earth** is split open,
the **earth** is shaken exceedingly.

20 The **earth**
shall reel to and fro like a drunkard,
and shall totter like a hut;
its transgression shall be heavy upon it,
and it will fall, and not rise again.

21 It shall come to pass in that day *that* the **Lord** will punish on high
the host of exalted ones,
and on the **earth** * the kings of the **earth**. *

22 They will be gathered together, *as* prisoners are gathered in the pit,
and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished.

23 Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed;
for the **Lord of hosts** will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously.

* Hebrew: '**adamah** – the ground or dust of the earth.

24:13.

Verse 13 can be construed as a continuation from verse 12 as the NKJV seems to suggest, but it is better to consider this as a new section. Another way of rendering this verse is:

¹⁰⁵¹ The gate stands for the ruling and governing leaders.

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For thus it will be in the midst of the earth among the peoples, as the shaking of an olive tree, as the gleanings when the grape harvest is over. [NASB].

With such a translation we recognise the connection with the city of confusion with the opening words looking back, but we note also that we have a new theme and direction. The city of confusion is just one example of what will be happening over all of the earth. The striking thing here is that we have people who seem to be worshipping the Lord and singing songs. This seems strange in view of the devastation and curse on the earth that we have been introduced to. So what is happening here?

Well it would seem that we are directed away from the devastation of the city of confusion (a sight repeated the world over) to those who are the Lord's and who love His name. Thus when such a situation as described in verses 7 to 12 obtains, then in the midst of the earth among the peoples (the word is plural signifying all the nations of the world), a select bunch of people will be gleaned. These are the remnant, the few left unsullied. After harvest is done there remain a few grapes and olives that were missed or dropped. These are the remnant. In the verses following verse 13 these folk are simply described as *"they."* The remarkable thing is that it is not "Israel," or "Judah," or the people of God, but from among the peoples (all nations on earth).

24:14-16.

Verses 14 to 16 describe the people who know the Lord, their witness and the difficulties they may face exemplified by one individual, namely the prophet. Thus in stark contrast to those who live in the city of confusion, these dear folk will be enabled not just to sing, but will *"lift up their voice."*¹⁰⁵² It is striking how the prophet Isaiah puts it here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These will cry aloud *"from the sea."*¹⁰⁵³ This location indicates the place of the Gentiles (far away over the Great Sea – the Mediterranean). At the centre of their worship is the *"majesty of the Lord."*¹⁰⁵⁴ They are focused on the majesty of the Lord. The regal glory and splendour which radiates from His great goodness! Here we are given a picture of the believers, the church, worshipping and praising God for His majesty, in the midst of confusion, rebellion, decay and mourning because things are falling, failing and fainting. This is not all. We find further that there is an imperative command which results from this situation. The world is in confusion. Those who

1052 Isaiah 24:14.

1053 Isaiah 24:14.

1054 Isaiah 24:14.

Studies in Isaiah.

own the Lord and worship His majesty sing for all their worth. The result? People everywhere are to *“glorify the Lord!”*¹⁰⁵⁵ This speaks of mission and witness. The new creation although not referenced here is coming. The dawning light of God's new creation is on the horizon, and people everywhere are being called by the few godly ones to glorify the Lord as His glorious reign approaches. Again the call is not just to Israel or Judah as we may expect but to the *“coastlands of the sea”* (i.e. the Gentiles).¹⁰⁵⁶ Verse 16 has been rendered better in some translations than it is in the NKJV. The NASB 1995 rendering is a good example:

From the ends of the earth we hear songs, “Glory to the Righteous One,” but I say, “Woe to me! Woe to me! Alas for me! The treacherous deal treacherously, and the treacherous deal very treacherously.”¹⁰⁵⁷

The Hebrew word rendered simply as *“the righteous”* in the NKJV ought to be *“the Righteous One”* as in the NASB translation because the word is singular. Thus an individual person is indicated rather than a grouping as suggested by the NKJV rendition. Clearly we have a prophecy of the One promised. There is none righteous, no not one. The only exception is the One who comes into the world, namely the promised Messiah. Thus the songs being sung are in honour and worship of *“the Righteous One.”*

Now this glory and worship of the Righteous One is set amidst the backdrop of continued difficulties. At the end of verse 16 we read the prophet's words. He despairs that he is *“ruined,”* by which term is signified that he is “lean” and “wasting.” The reason for this “thin” existence is that there are treacherous folk plying their treachery, and they are doing this with impunity. The NKJV translation is quite good here as the word *“treacherous”* is continually repeated to give the sense that such an attitude is everywhere and rampant. The idea behind the word *“treacherous”* is one of deceit, or of fraudulent or covert activity.

24:17.

The end of verse 16 leads naturally into what follows. Because there is treachery (deceit and a cover-up) all around, it will follow that disaster will come to these inhabitants of the earth (*“fear and the pit and the snare”*). It would appear from the way these words are arranged, that we are meant to associate the inhabitants of the earth with the characteristic of deceit and treachery. All are

1055 Isaiah 24:15.

1056 Isaiah 24:15.

1057 Isaiah 24:16, NASB 1995.

Studies in Isaiah.

involved in this. Because there is such deceit and covert behaviour, the traps, snares, pits, and terror set by individuals become so rampant that the very people who set them may fall into them.¹⁰⁵⁸

24:18.

At the end of verse 18 we must note an allusion to the flood recorded in Genesis 6 to 9. Only the word “*windows*” is the same in our text and in the two verses where the source of the flood is recorded in Genesis.¹⁰⁵⁹ However the themes are so close in thought that it is clear that a direct allusion is meant. In Genesis we have the following statements:

on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.¹⁰⁶⁰

The fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were also stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained.¹⁰⁶¹

Compare these with the statement in Isaiah 24:

for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth are shaken.¹⁰⁶²

Now, of course, the source of the flood waters has all gone, so what is meant by this connection? It would seem clear that a twofold destruction is imminent both from the heavens and from the depths of the earth. In this case, however, the object of destruction is not going to be water as it was in the flood. The foundations of the earth are not broken up here but are “*shaken.*”¹⁰⁶³ Again we see a connection with Isaiah 2 where the earth is shaken mightily. What will bring the destruction? We are not told, but in connecting the reader's thought with what happened at the flood leads us to note that this destruction will be equally catastrophic and inescapable.

24:19,20.

Next in verses 19 and 20 we read of several further descriptions of the earth's fate. In verse

1058 Isaiah 24:17,18.

1059 Genesis 7:11; 8:2.

1060 Genesis 7:11b.

1061 Genesis 8:2

1062 Isaiah 24:18b.

1063 Isaiah 24:18.

Studies in Isaiah.

19 we have emphatic statements made up of Hebrew words repeated as we have noted elsewhere. The earth is not just broken, it is broken completely. The earth is broken open or split into two and it totters and shakes violently. The earth is so tottering and wobbly that it looks very much like a drunken man who cannot keep a straight line as he walks. It is further described as a weak hut or a booth which will fall at the slightest puff of wind.¹⁰⁶⁴ All of this is because its law-breaking and guilt rest heavily upon it. The people have rebelled so much that the word to describe the inhabitants of the earth is *“treacherous.”*¹⁰⁶⁵ Their burden is heavy. They reel and totter. They are broken and split in several ways so much that they will fall and never rise again. The end of verse 20 is tremendously sad. That the earth will *“not rise again”* signals a dreadful end. Just as the Titanic was doomed to sink, so the earth is destined to be broken up and ruined for ever.

24:21,22.

Having described the hopeless end of the planet, the message moves to consider the great and the good. In verse 21 we are informed that the Lord will punish two sets of people. First the *“host of exalted ones”* who are located *“on high.”* Second *“the kings of the earth”* who are found *“on the earth.”* The way in which these two groups are styled suggests that we have spiritual beings (most likely fallen angels) on high being punished alongside the leaders or kings of the earth. These two groups have been working in concert and collusion, even though the kings of the earth may not be conscious of such an alignment or confederacy. In psalm 2 we read that:

*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed.*¹⁰⁶⁶

Alternatively, the two descriptions might also refer to those who rule on earth (*“kings”*) and those who have influence from a high position (*“exalted ones”*). But the reference to *“host”* and being *“on high”* in contrast to the kings being *“on earth”* seems to favour the idea of a confederacy between the rulers and the fallen angels (albeit an unrecognised one). Recall also the apostle John tells us in his first epistle that:

*the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.*¹⁰⁶⁷

1064 Isaiah 1:8.
1065 Isaiah 24:16.
1066 Psalm 2:2.
1067 1John 5:19.

Studies in Isaiah.

How we are duped into thinking that kings and rulers act independently! They are under orders from the enemy of souls. Do we realise this? How far the rulers actively collude with the enemy of souls or whether they are simply manipulated through their evil desire is something we cannot tell (and need not know).

Well we must not fear. Psalm 2 tells us that even though the kings join together against the Lord, the Lord laughs at their puny attempts at taking control. Here in our text we are taught that the spiritual hordes lead by Satan acting over and with the leaders of this world will all be “*gathered together*” and will become “*prisoners.*”¹⁰⁶⁸ Then when the Lord is ready they will be “*punished*” for their sin and rebellion. We can read more details concerning this judgement and punishment in Revelation.¹⁰⁶⁹

24:23.

The chapter ends with signs in the heavens, and the perfect reign of the Lord on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. In view of the final destruction of the earth we must take these last words of verse 23 as depicting heaven and the new earth. This fits in with the idea that the moon and the sun are disgraced and ashamed, for the Lord Himself will be our source of light.¹⁰⁷⁰ Now, as all has come to completion, the Lord reigns in the heavenly city and it will be truly glorious!

1068 Isaiah 24:22.

1069 Revelation 19:20; 20:10,14,15.

1070 Revelation 22:5.

Chapter 35.

Isaiah 25:1-12.

Praise for the Lord's great work **on “this mountain.”**

Textual analysis.

1 O **Lord**, You *are* my **God**.

I will exalt You,

I will praise Your name,

for You have done wonderful *things*;

Your counsels of old *are* faithfulness *and* truth.

2 For You have made

a **city** a ruin,

a fortified **city** a ruin,

a palace of foreigners to be a **city** no more; it will never be rebuilt.

3 Therefore

the strong people will glorify You;

the **city** of the terrible nations will fear You.

4 For You have been

a strength to the poor,

a strength to the needy in his distress,

a refuge from the storm,

a shade from the heat;

for the blast of the terrible ones *is* as a storm *against* the wall.

5 You will reduce the noise of aliens,

as heat in a dry place;

as heat in the shadow of a cloud, the song of the terrible ones will be diminished.

6 And in **this mountain**

the **Lord of hosts** will make

for all people

a feast

of choice pieces,

a feast

of wines on the lees,

of fat things full of marrow,

of well-refined wines on the lees.

7 And He will destroy on **this mountain**

the surface of the covering cast over all people,

and the veil that is spread over all nations.

8 He will swallow up

Studies in Isaiah.

death forever,
and the **Lord God** will
wipe away tears from all faces;
the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth;
for the **Lord** has spoken.
9 And it will be said in that day:
“Behold, this *is* our **God**;
we have waited for Him,
and He will save us.
This *is* the **Lord**;
we have waited for Him;
we will be glad
and rejoice in His salvation.”
10 For on **this mountain**
the hand of the **Lord** will rest,
and Moab shall be trampled down under Him, as straw is trampled down for the refuse heap.
11 And He will spread out His hands in their midst as a swimmer reaches out to swim,
and He will bring down their pride together with the trickery of their hands.
12 The fortress of the high fort of your walls He will
bring down,
lay low,
and bring to the ground, down to the dust.

General thoughts.

The next three chapters of the book of Isaiah form a concluding sub-section which describe the gospel in clear but distinctive ways. In chapter 25 we are treated to a hymn of praise with two specific reasons given for such worship. In chapter 26 we are given the song of Judah which focuses on salvation, whilst in chapter 27 we have a message against “*Leviathan*,” the great enemy of souls – the devil.¹⁰⁷¹

At the end of the prophecies against the nations, we have in chapter 25 the prophet speaking in a personal and responsive way to all that has been thus spoken of against the world. As a result of all the messages in the foregoing chapters to the world, which included warning and promise, the prophet cannot but resort to praise. The opening section speaks of a “*city*” but this is not clearly specified.¹⁰⁷² Then in the second section of chapter 25 we have reference to “*this mountain*” which points to the mountain of the house of the Lord thus indicating that Jerusalem is most probably in view.¹⁰⁷³ Consequently we are brought to consider the great work of God in justice against the city which focuses on all that is godless. In that it is not actually specified, and yet from later verses seems to be pointing to Jerusalem, I take it that we can apply this to many if not all cities. It may not be obvious, but it would appear that wherever people congregate and agglomerate into large groupings this is the occasion for greater evils. City centres seem to attract vice.

1071 Isaiah 27:1.

1072 Isaiah 25:2,3.

1073 Isaiah 2:6,7,10.

Studies in Isaiah.

We shall consider this chapter in its two parts. The opening section starts with praise to God for His judgement against the sinful city.¹⁰⁷⁴ The second section highlights what the Lord will do *“in this mountain.”*¹⁰⁷⁵ This second section has one major theme but is bisected by verse 9 which is the fulcrum or pivot upon which the whole turns. Given these divisions we will consider this chapter under the following headings:

[1] Personal response – praise to God. (Isaiah 25:1-5).

[2] What God will do on *“this mountain.”* (Isaiah 25:6-12).

[a] Salvation is coming. (Isaiah 25:9).

[b] A feast for all! (Isaiah 25:6).

[c] Death swallowed forever! (Isaiah 25:7,8).

[d] Moab (pride) laid low! (Isaiah 25:10-12).

A note on translation.

It will be noted that I have split the text up according to the main ideas rather than simply follow a verse-by-verse order.

[1] Personal response – praise to God. (Isaiah 25:1-5).

We must pause and consider these opening words carefully. In the midst of great and expansive themes, ranging from different nations and their sinfulness to the great doctrines of God's character and work, we cannot pass by without praising God personally. You cannot read the great writers without noting their devotional nature. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' lectures on great doctrines is an example. Hardly a sentence passes without some form of worship or praise. In doing this Lloyd-Jones and others are following the example of Paul whose letters burst repeatedly with praise. Here is a single example:

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out! **34** “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor?” **35** “Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?” **36** For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.¹⁰⁷⁶

1074 Isaiah 25:1-5.

1075 Isaiah 25:6-12.

1076 Romans 11:33-36.

Studies in Isaiah.

This ought to be our way too. In the midst of whatever we are doing, and especially working for the Lord, we ought to be bursting out with praise to the Lord. Are we of this nature? These things are no mere points of debate, nor are they simply things we need to know or expound. We are dealing with great things and a truly great God. Shouldn't our hearts burn in praise?

25:1.

Here in Isaiah 25 we have the prophet owning the Lord (*"my God"*). This is essential. We cannot worship the Lord unless we have a personal and individual relationship with the Lord. In these days where the corporate angle is often pushed, it is necessary to remind ourselves that we must each worship the Lord personally. It is *"I will"* exalt and praise you Lord, and this individual and personal intimation in combination with others leads to the corporate worship of God. In other words, the expression of worship must start from the ground so-to-speak upwards. It must start from the individual in communion with God, who is also in communion with others, who are in communion with God. Such true individual communion with God leads to true corporate worship and praise.

Isaiah desires, in the first place, that the Lord is given the highest place (*"I will exalt You"*). There are many things which are elevated and esteemed amongst men, but only the Lord ought to have the highest place. It is significant that the apostle Paul outlines how it was that Christ Jesus would be raised to the highest place and given the name above all names. It began with Him humbling Himself to come to this earth and die a criminal's death.¹⁰⁷⁷ Humility before elevation.

We are next given one reason for this personal worship at the end of verse 1, but it is to be noted here that there are two other reasons given in later verses. Thus we have three reasons as follows:

- *God's character and work in a general sense* *verse 1b.*
- *His judgement on the terrible ones and their city* *verses 2 to 3 and verse 5.*
- *The Lord's strength and refuge for the weak and poor* *verse 4.*

In the first reason Isaiah is moved to focus on the Lord's works (*"for You have done wonderful things"*). In the Hebrew it would seem that the wonders are in fact God's counsels. Elsewhere in Isaiah we will find this theme of God's revelation being from the beginning a repeated

¹⁰⁷⁷ Philippians 2:5f.

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one.¹⁰⁷⁸ Here we are brought to understand that God's advice and His instruction is always reliable and certain, and has always been of this character. Why then do we fail to trust the Lord's word? Oh the depth of our sinful and rebellious hearts! I know that sometimes men may misunderstand or distort the Scriptures, but in the essential truths they are plain and easy to understand. It is nothing more nor less than outright rebellion to ignore or pass over the counsel and advice of the Lord and to follow the ideas and schemes of men.

25:2,3.

The second reason for praise may seem somewhat unusual. There are three statements made concerning the Lord's action and all have to do with ruination and destruction. The Lord has made:

a city a ruin,
a fortified city a ruin,
a palace of foreigners to be a city no more; it will never be rebuilt.

As we noted earlier, we are not immediately sure which *"city"* is intended here. It might be thought here that the city being referenced was Jerusalem now overrun by foreign influences and practices, however there is no clear indication of this in the opening verses. Later when we read of the thrice mentioned phrase: *"in/on this mountain,"* which is a place where death and sin is to be defeated, the reference to Jerusalem is unmistakable.¹⁰⁷⁹ So we would conclude that here we have a general reference to *"a city"* to signify any city which is characterised by the descriptions of verse 2.

Now looking at the detail of verses 2 and 3 in particular, it is difficult not to be reminded of Nimrod in Genesis 10 and 11. That rebel was the instigator of a kingdom and rule which had militaristic impetus and design. Nimrod was the heart of a group which sought their own way and religion, and which sought to defend their way against any attack. Indeed their military intentions seem to be such that they were on the front foot and sought to dominate the world. In the early days of this kingdom, the efforts of their great project was defeated by confusion brought in by God. We might be startled at such a thought. Is God the author of confusion?¹⁰⁸⁰ Surely not! However in Genesis 11 the Lord brings confusion to disrupt and bring to a halt the error and the effect of that rebellion. Such was an act of mercy. If the rebellion had succeeded who knows how irredeemable

1078 Isaiah 45:19,21; 48:5.

1079 Isaiah 25:6,7,10.

1080 1Corinthians 14:33.

Studies in Isaiah.

the world would have become? The intention and outcome of God's temporal judgements is to bring people to realise the glory of God. Ultimately at the end of the ages all will glorify the Lord, even though many may be cast into the pit with Satan. One day all will bow the knee and worship Christ as Lord, even if they have not come to faith in what He has done. Now, at this moment in time, we do not see "*the terrible nations*" and their strong city worshipping God.¹⁰⁸¹ They are worse than indifferent to Him, for they openly work against Him. But then, when He returns, they will indeed fear God and "*glorify*" Him.¹⁰⁸² And so there is praise due to the Lord on account of His destruction of the rebellious city which action results in the rebels fearing God and bringing Him glory.

25:4.

Then, we are given yet another reason for praise to God in verse 4, and this highlights the plight of the poor and weak. The Lord has been "*a strength,*" to those described as "*poor*" and those "*needy in distress,*" and He has been "*a refuge,*" and "*a shade*" from the "*storm*" and the "*heat.*" Here we see comfort to those who have nothing and are in great need, and protection from the effects of wickedness and disaster. The phrases used in verse 4 brings to remembrance the following verse of Isaiah chapter 4:

*And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.*¹⁰⁸³

Which in turn provides an answer to the condition faced by Israel of old as expressed in Isaiah chapter 1:

*So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.*¹⁰⁸⁴

Whereas Jerusalem ("*the daughter of Zion*") was a vulnerable site which could never withstand any onslaught (as pictured by terrible storms), the Lord Himself has been a refuge and a strength. It is the poor and needy who are strengthened and find refuge. The lofty, the proud, and the arrogant have no refuge. How we need to know that it is always the humble, those who recognise their great need, that the Lord turns and blesses. Notice that is the needy "*in his distress*" and turmoil of soul

1081 Isaiah 25:3.

1082 Isaiah 25:4.

1083 Isaiah 4:6.

1084 Isaiah 1:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

who will know the strength of the Lord.¹⁰⁸⁵ The terrible ones, the proud and arrogant, are the ones who bring in the storm. The rich, the famous, the well known, and those of repute, make life terrible and difficult for those who are in need and want. We are talking of spiritual things, but the material situation is no less in view. This world's multi-nationals, great dictators, and groups of rulers make life terrible and desperate for the average ordinary man. We may have it easy in the West but there are many, many, more in more needy countries who suffer terrible hardships of need elsewhere. But then also think how the poor and needy spiritually speaking suffer at the hands of unscrupulous charlatans who proffer and peddle false gospels. How many there are! Even in Christian garb! Well the Lord is more than equal to the task. He is our strength! He is a refuge and a shade from the torrential rain and blast from the godless and spiritually destitute who push poor and vain doctrines. How wonderful to read those closing words of verse 4: *“for the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall,”* for it teaches us that whatever the wicked ungodly may throw at us, the effect is dissipated as if it had been met by an unmoving and unmoveable wall.

25:5.

In the meantime before this ultimate judgement, and before these strong and terrible peoples bow the knee, the Lord *“will reduce the noise of aliens.”*¹⁰⁸⁶ By this we take it that God will not allow the great random noise and waffle of His (and our) enemies to have any serious effect. The world roars at Christians, but the roar is the synthetic roar of a vapour and a will-o-the-wisp. The taunting song of the ones who bring terror will be brought low. The similes used are not easy to unpick in the English translation. It would seem that the idea is that heat of a drought is dissipated by the coming of a cloud which obscures the sunlight. This can be seen by translating the text as follows:

As heat in a dry place (You will reduce the noise of aliens) [**as**] heat by the shadow of a cloud (the song of the terrible ones will be diminished).

The second *“as”* is not in the Hebrew and so the thought is: “As heat in a dry place [is reduced] by the shadow of a cloud.” The idea of being reduced is supplied by what God is doing – *“You will reduce...”* and *“... will be diminished.”* By this construction the effects seen in the world in a physical sense (heat in a dry place reduced by covering clouds) are closely connected with God's

1085 Isaiah 25:4.

1086 Isaiah 25:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

actions. We do not think in this way as we ought. We have a strange dichotomy of thought that what happens in “nature” is distinct and separate from what God does in His actions.¹⁰⁸⁷ We ought to recognise that all that transpires is at the hand of God.

[2] What God will do on “this mountain.” (Isaiah 25:6-12).

Having considered praise to the Lord for three good reasons, (His wonderful counsels, His destruction of rebellion, and His kindness and protection to the poor and needy), this second section focuses attention on what the Lord will do “*on this mountain.*” For a start we must identify the location and significance of the phrase “*this mountain,*” which occurs three times.¹⁰⁸⁸ This phrase is only found in Isaiah in this chapter, but the first occurrence in Scripture is in reference to Horeb where the Lord met with Moses.¹⁰⁸⁹ Next we read this phrase in connection with Mount Nebo where Moses was to die.¹⁰⁹⁰ Then we read in Joshua about Caleb who sought to have the mountain of Hebron for an inheritance.¹⁰⁹¹ Finally we have a reference to Mount Zion in the Psalms.¹⁰⁹² In the context of Isaiah it would seem that Mount Zion is clearly the place we are meant to understand. Couple this with the other references to “*mountain*” in Isaiah and the identification cannot be anything else.¹⁰⁹³

The structure of this second part of chapter 25 hinges on verse 9 which is the central focus. Built around this central focus are the three themes connected with “*this mountain.*” All three point to what the Lord will do on “*that day.*” The three themes are separated for us (verse 6, 7 to 8 and 10 to 12), but we are meant to understand that these are happening all at once in a *single* event. In what follows we shall look first at the central focus in verse 9, and then at the three themes which will occur on “*this mountain.*” To aid in our studies I will repeat the analysis for each section.

[a] Salvation is coming. (Isaiah 25:9).

I have provided the analysis for this verse again as I think it important for us to see how emphatic the coming of the Lord is put.

1087 We ought always to speak of “creation” and never of nature.

1088 Isaiah 25:6,7,10.

1089 Exodus 3:12; Deuteronomy 1:6; 2:3.

1090 Deuteronomy 32:49.

1091 Joshua 14:12

1092 Psalm 78:54.

1093 See especially Isaiah 2:2,3; 11:9; 14:25.

Studies in Isaiah.

9 And it will be said in that day:

“Behold, this *is* our **God**;

we have waited for Him,

and He will save us.

This *is* the **Lord**;

we have waited for Him;

we will be glad

and rejoice in His salvation.”

Note that we have two statements to the effect that this is the Lord and this is God.

25:9.

Verse 9 is the only place where we have any time reference, namely “*that day*” which signifies the day when the Lord will come. We must remember that in Old Testament prophecy the “*day of the Lord*” has a dual reference. It often signifies what will come to pass on Christ's first advent, and then also what will come to pass when the Lord Jesus returns. Here the prime focus is on the Lord's first advent, but not exclusively. For example, the Lord dealt a death blow to death on the cross but we still die physically in this age. There will come a time when Christ returns when death will be finally vanquished in the resurrection unto life.

However that the first advent of Christ is the main focus is indicated by mention of the fact that the Lord will “*save*” His people and they will be rejoicing in the “*salvation*” He brings. Again we remember that there is a “now” and a “not yet” reference, for Christ came to save when He was on the earth, but final salvation awaits His return.¹⁰⁹⁴ Nevertheless Christ came the first time with reference to salvation, and the second is reserved for judgement.¹⁰⁹⁵

Now this is not the only place in Isaiah where we read about the coming Messiah who is the Lord God.¹⁰⁹⁶ The people are waiting for Him and now He has come. He is God – the Almighty, and He is Lord – the I AM! And so the focal point is God coming as **Saviour!** In the preceding verses we read about two of the things that will take place on “*this mountain,*” and then following verse 9 we have the third event that will occur. Consequently we have three events or themes that are connected closely with God coming as Saviour. The three are not really separate for they occur all at once, but these three things are truly wonderful news. They speak in prophetic terms of what God will do when He comes to save. From our perspective today, we can look back at what the Lord did

1094 Mark 10:45; 1Peter 1:5,9.

1095 Always remember that although the Lord Jesus came at first to seek and to save, He was judged on our behalf at Calvary, and so there is a strong element of judgement too. Further, although His second coming will be primarily for judgment, nevertheless those for whom He died will receive the full fruits of their salvation procured for them by Christ. Thus salvation and judgment are both to be found in each of Christ's advents.

1096 Isaiah 35:4; 40:9,10

Studies in Isaiah.

on the cross, but here we have the advantage of seeing how the prophecies of Old were fulfilled in Christ.

Twice we read that the people “*waited for Him,*” and this serves to show that His coming was a long awaited event. Eve may have thought her firstborn was the promised one, but many centuries had to elapse before the One coming finally appeared!¹⁰⁹⁷ The long wait was necessary for we read that Christ appeared at the “*right time.*”¹⁰⁹⁸ But once He has come the emphasis is on the definiteness of salvation (“*He will save us*”) and the joy that will result (“*we will be glad and rejoice*”). Such certainty in salvation and joy ought to be our watchword as Christians!

[b] A feast for all! (Isaiah 25:6).

Again I provide the analysis for this verse to help us see what the Lord was to actually do on “*this mountain.*”

6 And in this mountain
the Lord of hosts will make
for all people
a feast
of choice pieces,
a feast
of wines on the lees,
of fat things full of marrow,
of well-refined wines on the lees.

The very first thing we read of that the Lord will do on “*this mountain*” which concerns His great act of salvation, is to make a great feast or banquet. Perhaps naturally we may be inclined to think of the great marriage supper of the Lamb.¹⁰⁹⁹ But it is important to recognise that the marriage supper of the Lamb will not take place until the Lord returns, after His second advent. In contrast, the location and site for this feast that we read of in Isaiah 25 is “*in this mountain.*” In other words, what the Lord will do at this specific place will be as though a great feast will be had! The expressions describing this feast are extravagant and lavish. No expense will have been spared.

The verse opens with a statement about what the Lord will do. Literally we have:

1097 Genesis 4:1f.

1098 Romans 5:6, NASB. Note that the time was long because the preparations required to make way for the coming of the Lord into this world were all necessary. The call of Abraham, the birth of Israel as a nation, its failure to do what it was called by God to do, its keeping of the oracles, the law and so on, the coming of the prophets, and all the long history of God's dealing with His people were all needed to make way for the incarnation of the Lord Jesus.

1099 Revelation 19:9.

Studies in Isaiah.

← Hebrew reads from the right

וַיַּעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לְכָל-הָעַמִּים בְּהָר הַזֶּה
in this mountain unto all the people the Lord of hosts and He will make

Which we would render:

And the Lord of hosts will make unto all the people in this mountain.

This feast is for all peoples! It is not just for the Israelites. And note that the Lord is “*the Lord of hosts*” here. He is Lord of all armies and powers. Our Captain and Commander is the One who will make a feast! We are reminded of the last supper where the Lord acts as host and gathers himself to serve His disciples as He washed their feet.¹¹⁰⁰

The remainder of this verse can be translated as follows:

← Hebrew reads from the right

מִשְׁתֵּה שְׂמָנִים מִשְׁתֵּה שְׂמָרִים שְׂמָנִים מְמֻחָיִם שְׂמָרִים מְזֻקָּקִים
well refined of wine on the lees full of marrow of fat things of wine on the lees a feast of choice pieces a feast

Which we render:

a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined

These words following the introduction we have studied ought to be heard in their original Hebrew language. I have transliterated the text as follows:

← Hebrew reads from the right

מִשְׁתֵּה שְׂמָנִים מִשְׁתֵּה שְׂמָרִים שְׂמָנִים מְמֻחָיִם שְׂמָרִים מְזֻקָּקִים
m[°]zuqāqîm š[°]mārîm m[°]muḥāyim š[°]mānîm š[°]mārîm miš[°]tēh š[°]mānîm miš[°]tēh

¹¹⁰⁰ John 13:2-5.

Studies in Isaiah.

Ordering these word according to English we would have:

miš^etēh š^emānîm miš^etēh š^emārîm š^emānîm m^emuḥāyim š^emārîm m^ezuqāqîm

Apart from the fact that some words are repeated, all of the words have very similar sounds, particularly their endings. The endings of these words all indicate plurals and so suggest abundance. The duplication, or using the same words again also indicates abundance suggesting the idea of multiplication rather than addition. The sound is rhythmical and lyrical. It suggests a joyful and bouncing occasion! So what do all these words mean? Here are the meanings of some of these words:

miš ^e tēh:	a drinking party, feast, banquet.
š ^e mānîm:	olive oil
š ^e mārîm:	settled (strong) wine
m ^e muḥāyim:	marrow
m ^e zuqāqîm:	distil, refine, purify

Well the sense is of a sumptuous, rich and extravagant party. Not the sort of party with a few sausage rolls and some curled up sandwiches! No! This is one of those occasions where the food and the drink is not just plentiful, varied and great to look at and taste, but where the quality is out of this world! Forget “The Great British Menu” this is far and away better. The drink, for example, is not just settled, aged or perfected but purified as well. I am not much of a drinker, but it is well known that the best of wines are aged and allowed to refine. That is the idea here. Then also the food is from the best of sources. The banquet given by king Ahasuerus in the book of Esther pails by comparison.

Now when we consider the cross of our Saviour there are two aspects which lend themselves to this idea. First we could be drawn to consider the Lord's words in John 6 where the Saviour stated unequivocally that we must partake of His flesh and blood.¹¹⁰¹ Much nonsense has been written in connection with these words! All that our Saviour was teaching was that we must have such intimate communion with Him that our very lives become His. When He died on the cross and gave His life for us He did so in two important ways. First, He gave it as a substitute so that we

¹¹⁰¹ John 6:53,54,56.

Studies in Isaiah.

would not have to face the wrath of God because He has done so. But second, He gave us His earthly life and righteousness. We need to feed on Christ by the Holy Spirit, and we do so in and through His word. By feeding on His word our faith will grow, it will be unpacked and exercised, and as a result we will become the people we were meant to be. That is, we will be individuals created to be in right fellowship with God and reflecting His glory and goodness. We can only do this by drawing from Christ the life that He lead whilst here on earth.

A second way that the cross of Christ could be considered a great feast is to take thought of the great joy and thrill that comes to those saved when they recognise just what the Lord has done in dying on the cross and raising to new life. To say that we could feast on this forever is a vast understatement. The reader is encouraged to feast on the great delights and blessings that have poured forth from God by means of the cross of Christ.¹¹⁰²

[c] Death swallowed forever! (Isaiah 25:7,8).

The analysis for these two verses is shown here again for the reader's aid:

7 And He will destroy on **this mountain**
the surface of the covering cast over all people,
and the veil that is spread over all nations.
8 He will swallow up
death forever,
and the **Lord God** will
wipe away tears from all faces;
the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth;
for the **Lord** has spoken.

This passage together with another in Hosea are incredible prophecies which teach us of the end of death! It is such a remarkable thing and such a comforting thing to know that death is now fully dealt with.

I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes.¹¹⁰³

These two passages together teach us that the Lord will deal with the problem of death by ransoming people from its grip and power on this mountain.

1102 Read through Psalm 103 and ask the question: how have all these benefits come to me? Consider also the wonderful spiritual blessings in heavenly places detailed in Ephesians 1. By what means do we receive these?

1103 Hosea 13:14.

Studies in Isaiah.

It is, perhaps, important to rehearse how mankind has come to find himself in such a sorry state. You will recall that when Adam was created he was given a single command.¹¹⁰⁴ In this command the Lord stated clearly that if Adam was to disobey, then he would most surely die. The Hebrew expression can be translated as follows: “dying, you will die.” This is a remarkable way of describing what happened to Adam, and what has happened to every son and daughter of Adam's ever since. Adam did not die physically immediately. He died physically when he reached the age of 930 years.¹¹⁰⁵ However he did die spiritually the moment he disobeyed, for he was immediately cut off from the close presence of the Lord. Thus the expression “dying, you will die” is a fitting one. The moment Adam disobeyed he was dead spiritually, and then became subject to death eventually succumbing at the age of 930 years of age. People often say that the only thing you can be certain of in life is “death and taxes.” I am not so sure about the taxes! However we all know full well that there is a day appointed when we must leave this world.¹¹⁰⁶ We do not like to think of it. We sorrow greatly when others we know or hear of have “passed on.” But the fact of the matter is that we all die, and the reason for this is because of sin. As Paul puts it: *“the wages of sin is death ...”*¹¹⁰⁷ Sadly most attribute death to a natural process. Many consider it a part of evolution. How terrible such a thought is. Not only does it deny all that God has said, it brings no comfort to the sorrowing soul that struggles with death. Those who steel themselves to think that they will one day die and become one with the physical universe, and that's all there is to it, are not only in for a tremendous shock, but also are robbing people of the truth. Now is not the time to consider the great folly of evolution or other false ideas, but here we are being encouraged that death which has come about because of sin (our sin) will be dealt with. So let us consider the teaching of these verses.

25:7,8. (Introductory thoughts).

We shall begin by noting that this is all a work of the Lord's for we read throughout verses 7 and 8 that the Lord *“will”* do various things. Furthermore we can be assured of the Lord who wills being successful because *“the Lord has spoken.”*¹¹⁰⁸ When the Lord speaks, He never does so arbitrarily or theoretically. When He speaks what He speaks is done – perfectly.¹¹⁰⁹ What confidence we can have then! We have an ever greater privilege, of course, because we can look back and view

1104 Genesis 2:17.

1105 Genesis 5:5.

1106 Hebrews 9:27.

1107 Romans 6:23.

1108 Isaiah 25:8.

1109 Psalm 33:9..

Studies in Isaiah.

Christ's victory over the grave in His resurrection. He dealt with sin in full, and as a result death had no more hold of Him! ¹¹¹⁰

25:7.

The problem that mankind faces is described in various ways in these verses. But before we look at the details we need to note that the structure of verses 7 and 8 is significant. They are not identical to one another. Verse 7 starts with what the Lord will do on *“this mountain.”* Next we have two ideas expressed with rhythm and rhyme. There is a clear paralleling between these two ideas. Listen to the sound of each of these phrases. We have:

- **p̄nê hallôṭ hallôṭ ‘al kāl hā‘ammîm**
 - the surface of the covering spread over all the people
- **w̄hammasēkāh hann̄sūkāh ‘al kāl haggôyim**
 - the woven veil woven/spread over all the nations

The end phrase of each idea (over all the people/nations) is similar and rhyming (the beginning and ending of this phrase sounds the same). The opening phrase either repeats a word (*hallôṭ hallôṭ*) or has a similar sound (*w̄hammasēkāh hann̄sūkāh*). By using this style the writer is emphasising the close connection of ideas. The surface of the covering spread over, and the woven veil that is woven or spread over, are the same thing. Interestingly the word chosen in the first part (*hallôṭ*) is the same as the name *“Lot,”* whose name means “covering.” The word translated *“veil”* (*w̄hammasēkāh*) indicates something like a veil that is intricately woven, but is also used of cast and moulded idols. The idea at the base of the Hebrew word is a pouring out, as when molten metal is poured into a mould, or pouring out as in pouring out a libation. Thus the covering spread over all peoples (both Jew and Gentile) is something which is connected, or at least recollects and reminds us, of their idolatry. When Adam rebelled and transgressed it was the first mark of idolatry. The wages of his sin was death and here the death that all peoples have as a cover and a cloak is a deep reminder of the rebellion and the idolatry of their souls.

¹¹¹⁰ Acts 2:24.

25:8.

The structure of verse 8 is somewhat different. In this verse we have four clear ideas. The last of these is: *“for the Lord has spoken”* and it indicates a definite conclusion. It is similar in import to the phrase *“it is written.”*¹¹¹¹ What the Lord has spoken cannot be rescinded as we have already commented. The four ideas are shown below. In what follows I have provided the Hebrew text and a literal translation of that Hebrew text.

← Hebrew reads from the right

- בְּלַע הַמָּוֶת לְנֶצַח
 - He will swallow up death forever.
- וּמָחָה אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה דְּמָעָה מֵעַל כָּל-פָּנִים
 - And He will wipe away the Lord GOD tears from off all faces.
[i.e. And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces].
- וְחָרַפְתָּ עֲמוֹ יִסִּיר מֵעַל כָּל-הָאָרֶץ
 - And the reproach of His people will He take away from off all the earth.
- כִּי יְהוִה דִּבֶּר
 - For the Lord has spoken.

In the first idea the last word signifies a bright object at a great distance to which one travels. It conveys the idea of the distant and end goal. The AKJV translators suggest *“victory”* here as the goal and end-point. The eternal, or the everlasting realms, is equally acceptable. In the second phrase it is vital to note that we have the two divine names (Adonay Yahweh) and they are sandwiched between the first Hebrew word (וּמָחָה rendered *“and He will wipe away”*) and the fourth Hebrew word (דְּמָעָה rendered *“tears”*). It is God Himself who sits in the midst of our tears! So given this structure which highlights the fact that God is in the midst, that what He will do is perfect, let us consider what it is that the Lord will destroy, and then we shall look at how the Lord will go about this great act.

¹¹¹¹ See, for example, Matthew 4:4,6,7,10.

25:7,8. (Further thoughts).

We do not reach the word “*death*” until the beginning of verse 8 at the heart of these ideas. Death is first described as a veil and a covering in verse 7, and then after this by means of the effects this covering entails. Death brings tears and sorrow. How we tend to cover over death and push it away! It ought to make us sad. Death is not natural. It is a horrible thing. The Lord Jesus Himself wept over the death of his friend Lazarus.¹¹¹² Not only is death a sadness it is also a reproach. It is horrible and despicable. Think of what we mean by death. A person we once knew and loved dearly suddenly ceases to respond. Their spirit and soul have departed. We often say that they have “passed on” or “passed away.” The body is left and begins to decay. In actual fact decay began at birth but this truth is obscured by the ability of the body to grow and repair itself in the early years. However if you are older you begin to notice that certain things are not working as well as they once did. However when a person dies their body decomposes and the stench soon becomes apparent. When we lay them to rest in the grave it will not be long before the worms have their feast. All of these thoughts are despicable! They are in truth horrible. Why do we not face these things?

Now we must ask, why then does the Lord describe death as a covering and a veil? We have considered some of the meanings behind the words used here. We must remind ourselves that sin earns us the wages of death. When Adam sinned he died. He died spiritually first and then after 930 years he died physically. Death is not, as many modern people understand it, an annihilation or a complete destruction. Death really means separation. People by nature are spiritually dead. By saying this we do not mean to say that people have no spiritual existence. What we mean to imply is that their spiritual existence is cut off from its source of life, namely God. When we die physically, we do not cease to exist, but the soul and spirit are separated from the physical. We see the body without the person. And so here the Lord uses the term covering or veil spread out and covering all people. The veil of death separates us from God.

One other reason I believe that the Lord uses this figure of speech is to highlight the fact that in the typical representation of God's presence, the tabernacle and then later the temple, what separates the people from God's presence was the veil or curtain which covered the holy of holies. Now in Christ, and in His death on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.¹¹¹³ By Christ's death on the cross, the veil that separated us was done away with. Thus death

1112 John 11:35.

1113 Matthew 27:51.

Studies in Isaiah.

itself was dealt with! So much for what it is that the Lord will destroy. How then will He do this work of destruction? Following the three references to death (the cover or veil, death, the effects of death) we have three acts expressed in our English translations:

He will destroy

He will swallow up

The Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces

Interestingly the word translated “*destroy*” in verse 7 is actually the same Hebrew word which is translated in verse 8 as “*swallow up*.” Thus, what He will do to the covering and veil, He is to do to death itself. In verse 7 we are brought to think of the utter end and removal of that which covers and separates us from the Lord. In verse 8 we see how it is that the Lord will do this destruction. It will be on “*this mountain*” that the Lord God will literally swallow up death. How so? Well if we consider for a moment what the Lord Jesus did on the cross it will become clearer. Our Saviour went to the cross and was forsaken by the Father. The Lord Jesus soaked up all the wrath of God that was due as payment for the sins of the world (of all those who would trust to Him). Jesus paid the price in full. He cleared all the debts owing. There is nothing more left to do. In such a case death no longer has a hold on Christ for there remains no more sin. He was made sin for us but He paid for that sin in full. And so in taking the wrath of God and suffering in our place, the Lord Jesus Christ *swallowed* up death. He literally engulfed it and nullified it. When we swallow things they become assimilated in our bodies, or eliminated. The Lord Jesus took all the judgement of God and paid the debt and thereby he swallowed death and snuffed it out!

And now all that remains is for the Lord, who has swallowed up death, to wipe away its effects. He will wipe our tears and He will remove, and completely take away all that attaches to death – the horror, the terror, the fear and the shame. Here is a Scripture that gives immense hope to all who love the Lord as we still await our physical deaths:

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.¹¹¹⁴

May the Lord richly bless you as you contemplate these glorious words! Do not let them pass by without giving grateful thanks unto the Lord!

1114 Psalm 116:15.

Studies in Isaiah.

[d] Moab (pride) laid low! (Isaiah 25:10-12).

The analysis for these three verses is provided below:

- 10 For on **this mountain**
the hand of the **Lord** will rest,
and Moab shall be trampled down under Him, as straw is trampled down for the refuse heap.
11 And He will spread out His hands in their midst as a swimmer reaches out to swim,
and He will bring down their pride together with the trickery of their hands.
12 The fortress of the high fort of your walls He will
bring down,
lay low,
and bring to the ground, down to the dust.

A note on translation.

Before we get into the wonders of this part we must deal with an issue of translation. Verses 10 to 12 have been translated very differently by modern translators. The NKJV follows the older AKJV but modern translations cast verse 11 as being the experience and action of Moab, rather than reflecting the Lord's actions. Take, for example, the NASB version:

10 For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain, and Moab will be trampled down in his place as straw is trampled down in the water of a manure pile. 11 And he will spread out his hands in the middle of it as a swimmer spreads out *his hands* to swim, but *the Lord* will lay low his pride together with the trickery of his hands. 12 The unassailable fortifications of your walls He will bring down, lay low, and throw to the ground, to the dust.¹¹¹⁵

The translators have supplied extra words to convey their view of what verse 11 actually means (highlighted by italics and underlined above). The second occurrence of the phrase "*his hands*," and the words "*the Lord*" are not in the Hebrew. The NASB translators have added the Lord as a contrast here because it was their view that the first part of verse 11 is speaking of Moab's actions.¹¹¹⁶

Now I have attempted to translate these verses to see if the newer translations are correct. It would seem that their view is a plausible and even a possible translation, but I fear that there is something missing from these newer translations. There seems no dispute when it comes to verses 10 and 12, and all translations suggest that it is the Lord who is acting and Moab is passive. The trouble arises only in verse 11. My translation of verses 10 to 12 is as follows:

¹¹¹⁵ Isaiah 25:10-12, NASB.

¹¹¹⁶ The NIV adds "*God*" and the ESV adds "*the Lord*" in verse 11.

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10 For He will rest (the hand of the Lord) in this mountain, and Moab will be trodden down, he (**is**) beneath as a straw-heap is trodden down in a dunghill. **11** And He will spread out His hands in (the) midst of him/it just as a swimmer spreads out to swim, and He will cause to be made low his pride together with his hands of deceit. **12** And the high fortress of your walls He will bring down, bring low, strike to the ground even to the dust.

I have left the translation in a semi-literal form to show up the indication of what I believe is being conveyed here. Analysing this text shows the following: As all translations agree, verses 10 and 12 speak of the Lord's actions.

25:10.

In verse 10 the opening idea is expressed forcefully. The first word in the Hebrew sentence is *“rest.”* The Lord is going to bring His hand to rest, or sit down and be quiet and at peace, and He is going to do it *“on this mountain.”* The term *“the hand of the Lord”* is one widely used in Scripture to signify the Lord and His strength. It would appear further that this is most likely another title of the Messiah or pre-incarnate Christ.¹¹¹⁷ Now we are privileged to be able to look back at what the Lord has done in pouring out His wrath upon the Saviour – Jesus Christ – who suffered and died on Calvary's cross in Zion on the hill of crucifixion. But then we find that the next thing we are brought to consider is Moab. We shall consider the reason for this shortly, but before we do so it is important to look at how these words have been constructed. In the Hebrew the next three words have Moab in the middle. Literally we have the following:

and he will be trodden down Moab he is below/beneath

Moab is passive. He will be trodden down. He will be brought below and will be *“beneath”* which speaks of the grave, and death. Next we have the metaphor about the straw-heap and dunghill to emphasise the low and perilous position that Moab finds himself in at the hand of the Lord. Verse 12 continues the idea of Moab being brought low. The verbs are all causative active. It is the Lord who is going to destroy and bring to dust the walls and fortresses of Moab.

¹¹¹⁷ See Exodus 9:3; 13:f; Joshua 4:24; 1Kings 18:46; Job 12:9; Psalm 75:8; 118:15,16; Isaiah 41:20; Ezekiel 3:22. See especially Isaiah 66:14 where the “hand of the Lord” can be known.

25:11.

Now in between we have verse 11. As I have mentioned, all the new translations suggest that it speaks about Moab and Moab's actions. Some suggest the figure is of a person trying to swim against the tide of God's judgement. This idea has much to commend it but it does not do justice to the flow of ideas in these verses. I say this because the verbs in verse 11 are *intensive* active forms. The person spoken of here is intending to do this action with determination. Now, of course, we could imagine Moab fighting against the Lord treading them down and bringing them low, but I rather feel that this idea is not in the text. What we have here is a person set about to carry out a determined set of actions. In verse 10 Moab is passive – being trodden down and being subjugated (made beneath or underneath). It would hardly do to then read about Moab actively swimming against the tide! In contrast the Lord is acting with determination. Consequently I prefer to translate verse 11 as the older commentators had it. It would seem to fit the flow of ideas much better. Here is a finished translation following on from the literalistic one I offered earlier:

10 For the hand of the Lord will rest in this mountain, and Moab will be trodden down, he is underneath as a straw-heap is trodden down in a dunghill. **11** And He will spread out His hands in the midst of **Moab** just as a swimmer spreads out to swim, and He will cause to be made low **Moab's** pride together with his hands of deceit. **12** And the high fortress of your walls He will bring down, bring low, strike to the ground even to the dust.¹¹¹⁸

In this view we have the Lord acting throughout.

10 For the hand of the Lord will rest in this mountain,
and Moab will be trodden down,
he is underneath as a straw-heap is trodden down in a dunghill.
11 And He will spread out His hands in the midst of Moab
just as a swimmer spreads out to swim,
and He will cause to be made low Moab's pride together with his hands of deceit.
12 And the high fortress of your walls He will bring down, bring low, strike to the ground
even to the dust.

The action of the Lord in verse 11 is highly symbolic as well as graphic. Just as a swimmer spreads his hands out in a sweeping action to push the water behind him, so the Lord will sweep away Moab. I mentioned that this is symbolic as well because in saying that the Lord spreads His hands

¹¹¹⁸ As with modern translations I have supplied the words in bold type face to show how I believe the text ought to be translated.

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out as a swimmer, it rather reminds me of the Lord Jesus who spread out His hands and arms as He was nailed to the cross! We must never move away from the central focus of Scripture, for it always speaks of Christ.¹¹¹⁹ On this mountain Moab will be destroyed and it will come about by the Lord stretching out His hands both to sweep Moab away and to suffer and die at the hands of sinners on Calvary's cross.

Now I am aware that there are many modern translators which have opted for the alternative view. and although I have expressed my view of these verses I do not want to be contentious or dogmatic. The alternative view would read something like this:

10 For the hand of the Lord will rest in this mountain, and Moab will be trodden down, he is underneath as a straw-heap is trodden down in a dunghill. **11** And **Moab** will spread out his hands in the midst of it just as a swimmer spreads out to swim, but He [the Lord] will cause to be made low **Moab's** pride together with his hand of deceit. **12** And the high fortress of your walls He will bring down, bring low, strike to the ground even to the dust.

It will be seen that the only difference is in the translation of the first part of verse 11 for both translations have the Lord bringing Moab's pride low in the second part. So the first part could be:

And **Moab** will spread out his hands in the midst of it just as a swimmer spreads out to swim,

Or it could be:

And He (the Lord) will spread out His hands in the midst of **Moab** just as a swimmer spreads out to swim,

The amazing thing is that when we think of the cross, the Lord Jesus was active in putting to death sin and the flesh! Whichever way we translate these verses, what we have is the Lord bringing the pride and sinful trickery of Moab low. We remind ourselves of what the apostle Paul teaches concerning the cross, that the Lord took sin and the flesh and nailed it to the cross!¹¹²⁰

3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned

1119 Read Luke 24!

1120 See also Colossians 2:14,15 and Romans 6.

Studies in Isaiah.

sin in the flesh, **4** that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.¹¹²¹

Moab is presented in these verses as the one to be destroyed because this people typify the sinful nature, especially in regard to pride.¹¹²² The name “*Moab*” means “of his father.” We remember that Moab was the son of Lot by one of his daughters. We have already been alerted to Lot in verse 7 where we were thinking of the veil of death that covers all peoples. Lot was not a great example of faith. You will remember that he choose to live in the plains of the Jordan close to Sodom where there was much (physical) fruitfulness and water. He later moves into Sodom and even though he was vexed in spirit by what he observed, nevertheless he stands as one who is worldly in nature.¹¹²³ Moab was a proud and worldly tribe, and as such they typify the fallen sinful human nature that needs to be put to death on the cross. We all have Moab within us, but praise the Lord for He has crucified sin in the flesh!

25:12.

Verse 12 ends the section with a reminder of Isaiah 2:12f. That which is lofty will brought to the dust. It was from dust that Adam was made, and it will be to dust that Moab and all that is flesh and sin will be brought low and uncreated. And so we have a wonderful description of the salvation that God brings. It is a feast to celebrate, the death of death, and the destruction of the sinful (proud) human nature.

1121 Romans 8:3,4.

1122 Isaiah 16:6

1123 Genesis 13:10-12; 2Peter 2:7;

Chapter 36.

Isaiah 26:1-21.

The song of the just and the fate of the wicked.

Textual analysis.

1 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

“We have a strong **city**;

God will appoint salvation *for* walls and bulwarks.

2 Open the gates,

that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.

3 You will keep *him* in perfect peace,

whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.

4 Trust in the **Lord** forever,

for in YAH, the **Lord**, *is* everlasting strength.

5 For He brings down

those who dwell on high,

the lofty **city**;

He lays it low,

He lays it low to the ground,

He brings it down to the dust.

6 The foot shall tread it down—

the feet of the poor

and the steps of the needy.”

7 The way of the just *is* uprightness;

O **Most Upright**, You weigh the path of the just.

8 Yes, in the way of Your judgements, O **Lord**, we have waited for You;

the desire of *our* soul *is* for Your name and for the remembrance of You.

9 With my soul I have desired You in the night, yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early;

for when Your judgements *are* in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

10 Let grace be shown to the wicked, *yet* he will not learn righteousness;

in the land of uprightness he

will deal unjustly,

and will not behold the majesty of the **Lord**.

11 **Lord**, *when* Your hand is lifted up,

they will not see.

But they will see and be ashamed for *their* envy of people; yes, the fire of Your enemies shall devour them.

12 **Lord**, You will establish peace for us, for You have also done all our works in us.

13 O **Lord** our **God**,

masters besides **You** have had dominion over us;

but by **You** only we make mention of **Your** name.

14 *They are* dead, [The dead or The dying! (“they” are in italics)]

they will not live;

Studies in Isaiah.

they are deceased, [The deceased! [languid, flaccid, lifeless]]
they will not rise.

Therefore **You** have
punished* and destroyed them, and [*visited them]
made all their memory to perish.

15 You have increased the nation, O **Lord**,
You have increased the nation;
You are glorified;
You have expanded all the borders of the land.

16 **Lord**,
in trouble
they have
visited* You, [*same word in v14 translated punished]
they
poured out a prayer *when* Your chastening *was* upon **them**.

17 As a woman with child is in pain and cries out in her pangs, *when* she draws near
the time of her delivery,

so have **we** been in Your sight, O **Lord**.

18 **We** have been with child,

we have been in pain;

we have, as it were, brought forth wind;

we have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth, nor have the
inhabitants of the world fallen.

19 Your dead shall live; *together with* my dead body they shall arise.

Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew *is like* the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

20 Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little
moment, until the indignation is past.

21 For behold, the **Lord** comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth will
also disclose her blood, and will no more cover her slain.

Following on from Isaiah's personal note of praise, chapter 26 opens with a song that will be
sung in "*that day*" by those who truly dwell in Judah. The song extends to verse 19 with a response
from the Lord in verses 20 and 21.

The song has three main sections before ending with the Lord's compassionate appeal. In the
opening six verses we have "the tale of two cities" contrasting the "*strong*" with the "*lofty*" city.
Next, in verses 7 to 11, comes the comparison of "the two ways." The essential message here is to
encourage the "*just*" in their way of righteousness (which has been given to them), all the while
they live amongst wicked men. Then finally, in verses 12 to 19, we have what amounts to a
declaration or confession of the saints in this age. The statements are up front and honest and
illustrate some of the struggles that the people of God experience. These passages are for the gospel
age. There can be no doubt about this as they indicate the type of experiences felt and known by us
who live in this age. The chapter ends in verses 20 and 21 with reference to the second and final
coming of the Messiah for judgement. We shall consider this chapter under the following headings:

Studies in Isaiah.

[1] A tale of two cities. (Isaiah 26:1-6).

[2] The way of the just and the fate of the wicked. (Isaiah 26:7-11).

[a] The way of the Just. (Isaiah 26:7-9).

[b] The fate of the Wicked. (Isaiah 26:10,11).

[3] The lord establishes peace and where man has failed the Lord will raise up. (Isaiah 26:12-19).

[4] Final judgement is coming. (Isaiah 26:20,21).

[1] A tale of two cities. (Isaiah 26:1-6).

Some consider that the song can be found only in the first six verses of this chapter, but there is no reason not to consider the rest of the chapter as being part of the song. The main point to glean from this is that the overall tenor and feeling of the age being spoken of here, is one of worship and praise, even in the most difficult of times.

I have reproduced the structure of this passage below with some slight alterations, to show that there is a focal point in verse 4. On either side of this we have the nature of the city and what the Lord will do:

The city of peace:	1 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: “We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation <i>for</i> walls and bulwarks.
	2 Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.
	3 You will keep <i>him</i> in perfect peace, <i>whose</i> mind <i>is</i> stayed <i>on You</i> , because he trusts in You.

Focal point:	4 Trust in the Lord forever, for in YAH, the Lord, <i>is</i> everlasting strength.

What the Lord (and His people) do:	5 For He brings down those who dwell on high, the lofty city; He lays it low, He lays it low to the ground, He brings it down to the dust. 6 The foot shall tread it down— the feet of the poor <i>and</i> the steps of the needy.”

Thus in the first six verses we return to the theme of the city, specifically two cities contrasted: the

Studies in Isaiah.

“strong city” and the *“lofty city.”* Considering the structure of the passage as a whole we have the following:

- *The strong and safe city of God where individuals know peace* *verses 1 to 3*
- *The focal point of the city – YAH the Lord* *verse 4*
- *What the Lord (and all those in Him) will do to the proud city* *verses 5 and 6*

26:1.

We begin in verse 1 with the city where God dwells, which is described as a *“strong”* city. The Hebrew of this verse indicates the relationship of the city to its inhabitants. Literally rendered it should read: “a strong city unto us” which serves to highlight the fact that the strong city is in fact a gift and not something that has become strong by anything done or generated by its inhabitants. The language of this verse reminds us of Psalm 48 and 87 which speak of the city of Zion, Jerusalem, as the new creation, the church of the gospel age. In Psalm 87 we read about foreigners being registered in the city because they they were born there.¹¹²⁴ Here we have a reference to the second or new birth. These foreigners are included in the people of God. This is no more nor less than a prophecy of the current church age where nationality is no impediment to belonging to the kingdom of God. In Psalm 46 we have the city being described in detail because it represented God Himself!

12 Walk about Zion, and go all around her. Count her towers; **13** mark well her bulwarks; consider her palaces; that you may tell it to the generation following. **14** For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death.¹¹²⁵

The impact of verse 14 in Psalm 48 should not be missed. There is such a close connection between the city and God that to all intents and purposes we should see no difference. Now this is what the church is today! When the people of the world look at the church they are seeing the Lord Himself! Does not the Lord use the picture of a body of which He is the head? The church, then, is the Body of Christ. Now I hasten to add here that just as not all “Israel” are the true Israel, so equally not all who claim to be the church are the true church. This does not just apply to the “Church of Rome” but also to many places where the name is vacuous. Some may even be “evangelical” or “reformed” and yet they do not reflect the Lord at all to their shame.

1124 Psalm 87:4,5,6.

1125 Psalm 48:12-14.

Studies in Isaiah.

The next part of verse one, which is translated: “*God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks*” is a rendering which seeks to deal with the Hebrew as best it can, but which hides something wonderfully exciting! I believe that the translation ought to be something like this:

Salvation – [He] sets up – walls and ramparts (fortresses/bulwarks)

The word “*salvation*” is significant. It comes first in this part of the sentence. However the translators have assumed that God is the main character despite the fact that we do not read His name until verse 4. To make sense of the Hebrew the translators supply “*God*” at the start (which is why in the NKJV it is in italics suggesting that it is not in the original Hebrew). Salvation is then assumed to be the outcome of God's action in making a strong city with walls and ramparts. However the word salvation is *yeshu'a* is very close in sound and meaning to the name “*Joshua*” (*yehoshe'a*). We could then consider the word “*salvation*” as representing the Saviour. In Isaiah 12:2,3 we have a very closely related statement:

2 Behold, God *is* my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; ‘for Yah, the Lord, *is* my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.’” **3** Therefore with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation.¹¹²⁶

Note how God is described directly as “*salvation*” in Isaiah 12. Thus we are brought to consider that “*Salvation*” (*yeshu'a*) is the one who is about to set up walls and ramparts for safety. Here then, we have a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ!

The strong city, therefore, is God Himself who is also designated in our passage as Salvation. The city of God, the Kingdom of God, is not something that can be observed.¹¹²⁷ Consequently when we think primarily of the Kingdom of God, the rule of God, we must not think visibly. We are not to consider structures (cathedrals, churches and so on), nor are we to consider hierarchies (the Church of England). The city of God where the people of God dwell is none other than the Lord Himself, and this means that our dwelling place is not some visible structure but the invisible God. How vital it is that we consider our home and its meaning. The Lord and all His works, form the place in which we live! We are to think deeply about the Lord and who He is and what He is done, for in Him we live and move and have our being!¹¹²⁸

1126 Isaiah 12:2,3.

1127 Luke 17:22.

1128 Acts 17:28.

26:2.

The city of God is full of wonder and joy. Its very walls and ramparts are built for salvation. Now because it a safe and secure place it is possible for a *“righteous nation”* to come home. Thus in verse 2 we read that the gates are open. Here we note two things. First there is only one entrance. This is so important. Entrance into the Kingdom of God is exclusively through the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in Him alone is the only way of entering this strong city.¹¹²⁹ But second we need to highlight the truth that these gates are open. The way of salvation is open.¹¹³⁰ This is a most wonderful thing because there is ready access. That being said, it is only the *“righteous nation”* which can enter.¹¹³¹ Where has this *“righteous nation”* come from? In Psalm 24 we read that it is only the righteous and those who have *“clean hands”* who may enter the holy city. In the second part of the Psalm we find that it is the *“King of glory”* who can enter the gates and take up residence in the holy city. So how then does the nation come in? How is it that the nation is described as being *“righteous”*? In verse 4 we shall find that the Lord is the focus for faith. The nation are not independent of *“YAH the Lord.”* They are those who *“trust in the Lord”* so that they dwell *“in”* Him (*“in YAH”*).¹¹³² Being *“in”* the Lord means that no longer do the people have their own life apart from the Lord God. This opening section not only describes the heavenly city on earth (the church) but also delineates the way in which the righteous nation may *continue*. Righteousness is not inherent but imputed. The Lord Himself entered the city by right because His hands were clean and pure (He knew no sin) and so we may enter in after Him as though we are *“in Him”* because He passes this righteousness onto us.¹¹³³ Notice that the righteous nation (righteous by virtue of being *“in”* the Messiah), can come into the city because they *“keep the truth.”*¹¹³⁴ This is something which is so forgotten today. Righteousness implies truthfulness. Thus, holding to the truth is an essential part of being righteous. So when people tell you that truth is a matter of choice or opinion, or that it is not important to believe the truth on certain matters because they are not central to the gospel, they are going directly against this Scripture. The righteous nation are permitted to enter because they keep *“the truth.”* How many who claim to be in the Kingdom of God, who claim to be true Christians, are fleeing from the truth! Rampant denials of creation, of human nature, of what it means to be a Christian, and so on are rife. Yet those who are truly the

1129 John 14:6; Acts 4:12.

1130 Isaiah 26:2.

1131 Isaiah 26:2.

1132 Isaiah 26:4

1133 Romans 3:22; 4:11; 5:17; 10:6; 2Corinthians 5:21.

1134 Isaiah 26:2.

Studies in Isaiah.

righteous (by faith) nation will love the truth and consequently live it, defend it, declare it and die for it.¹¹³⁵ There is a desperate need for godliness in leadership and seriousness in knowing the Lord doctrinally:

11 And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.¹¹³⁶

26:3.

The consequence for the righteous nation entering the strong city is peace – shalom! In verse 3 we have the particular experience of an individual who forms the righteous nation. This verse reads literally:

← Hebrew reads from the right

יָצַר סִמּוּךְ תִּצֹר שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם כִּי בָּךְ בָּטוּחַ

the mind stayed/rested/leaning on You You will keep [in] peace peace because in You he trusts

The Hebrew: שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם (literally: peace peace) sits at the centre of this sentence. However, we note also that the Lord God is really in the centre of this sentence too, for we see the pronoun “*You*” three times mentioned (highlighted in yellow). Thus, if we are to know true peace, He must be at the centre of our lives. Note what type of peace this is. It is not just but “*peace* [upon] *peace*.” That is, a lasting peace. In Hebrew the superlative is expressed by repeating the word and so here we have an abundance of peace. But how do we appropriate such peace? It is quite simple. First it is by faith. The mind that *rests* or *leans* upon the Lord is the one who will experience peace. The reason why they experience peace? It is solely because these ones *trust* in the Lord. And so faith (trust or

1135 Psalm 119:97,113,163,165.

1136 Ephesians 4:11-16.

Studies in Isaiah.

rest) forms the bookends of this sentence. We begin and end with faith. Faith is only ended when Christ returns. We have already noted that faith is never in opposition to reason or evidence. All people have some faith or reliance. All people and all systems have some form of assumption or presupposition. Here the faith of the Christian is something given of God and it has content. We trust in the details of whom God is and how He acts. We begin and end with this trust in God who forms the centre piece of our existence. Abundant peace (wholesomeness) is our reward. How people need this today! There is worry and concern aplenty.

26:4.

Here, then, in Isaiah we have the beginning of this idea of an identity between the city and God's saving presence. It is significantly interesting, as we have already noted, that the Lord's name (YHWH) does not occur until verse 4. In the NKJV the translators have supplied "*God*" in the first verse but there is no reference to the Lord except by pronouns. Thus verse 4 forms the central pivot, or fulcrum for this opening section of the song. We have two key phrases which both end with eternity in view, and both have the idea of being "*in*" the Lord at their heart. We could state them like this:

Trust **in the Lord** **forever and ever.**

For **in Yah the Lord** is strength (a rock) of **eternity.**

At the very heart of this passage we have the Lord mentioned, highlighting the need for us to make Him central in all we do (as we have already noted). But there is more, for here in verse 4 we have the Lord's name mentioned three times indicating the Holy Trinity ("*Lord,*" "*Yah,*" "*Lord*"). Further we have reference to the Lord as the "*Rock.*" Finally we have a reference to eternity. We are exhorted to trust Him forever, for He is the Rock of eternity (the eternal Rock).

The sentiments of verse 4 reminds us of many other verses such as:

*The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.*¹¹³⁷

And yet the passage opens with mention of the "*strong city,*" the city which represents the Lord, which is contrasted with the "*lofty city*" at the end of the section, which stands for the world in its

¹¹³⁷ Proverbs 18:10.

Studies in Isaiah.

pride. The Lord will bring down all pride as we have read in Isaiah chapter 2.

26:5,6.

Following hard after the focal point (verse 4) we have a description of the Lord's actions to ensure the safety and strength of His city in verses 5 and 6. We read that the Lord (again there are pronouns used throughout rather than the Lord's name) will bring the proud and lofty ones down. The same idea is repeated four times. We read that "*He*" (the Lord):

Brings down those who dwell on high, the lofty city;
Lays it low,
Lays it low to the ground,
Brings it down to the dust.

Perhaps by mentioning this theme four times we are meant to understand this as covering the entire globe – the four corners of the world. There is a progression downwards here. The lofty city dwelt "*on high*" – perhaps in the mountains on an unassailable perch. They are to be brought down. But it does not stop there, for they are also to be laid "*low*" even "*to the ground.*" Then finally we note that they are to be brought so low that they become one with "*the dust.*" This idea hints at the creation of Adam who was made from the dust of the ground and so suggests an unmaking, or an 'un-creating' of the city.

Coming in some three centuries later the prophet Daniel would be given the task of interpreting the king's dream revealed in Daniel chapter 2:

31 You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendour *was* excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. **32** This image's head *was* of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, **33** its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. **34** You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. **35** Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.¹¹³⁸

1138 Daniel 2:31-35.

Studies in Isaiah.

The kingdoms of this world as represented by the glorious statue with the head of gold down to the feet of clay and iron was to be demolished by a stone “*cut out without hands*” which would grow to become a mountain. The stone would crush the statue so that it would become as dust. This is what the gospel and the kingdom of God does. It renders all earthly ideals and systems as useless. For a time these earthly kingdoms and ideas may have some kind of existence, but in time they will be crushed to nothing, all the while the kingdom of God increases unabated. Bringing to the dust reminds us of the Lord's words in Genesis 3:

17 Then to Adam He said, “because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: “cursed *is* the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. 18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. 19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you *are*, and to dust you shall return.”¹¹³⁹

The Lord made Adam from the dust of the ground, but he would return to the dust as though uncreated because of sin. In the same way all pride and sin will be brought low to dust and judgement.

To end this section we observe that although it is the Lord who brings low the lofty city and brings it to the dust, the people of God are also involved too. Look at verse 6:

The foot shall tread it down— the feet of the poor *and* the steps of the needy.

It is the foot that will tread down the lofty city and this is explained as being the “*feet of the poor and the steps of the needy*”! I think the main idea is not one of arrogance. This expression is akin to what we find in Hebrews 11:7 which records a summary of the life and witness of Noah:

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.¹¹⁴⁰

Noah was all about building the ark for saving his family. In doing this, which was commanded by the Lord, Noah condemned the world. Effectively by building a huge boat he was pointing to the

1139 Genesis 3:17-19.

1140 Hebrews 11:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

judgement to come and declaring the need to be rescued. He did not openly point the finger and tread down the world as-it-were. He simply obeyed the command of the Lord and in doing so his actions borne of faith condemned the world. In the same way the poor and the needy trample on pride because they run for mercy and forgiveness. These poor benighted people ignore the wisdom and clamour of this world and rush to the Saviour and to the strong city. In doing so they trample on pride (their own pride) and they count as less than worthless all things they once held dear.¹¹⁴¹

In the next section we find that aspects of the way of the righteous is worked out. This then ends with a statement about those outside the righteous nation which is taken up in the following section. This connected linkage between passages is clear and runs throughout chapter 26.

[2] The way of the just and the fate of the wicked. (Isaiah 26:7-11).

Having considered the Lord as our Saviour city which will bring to the dust the lofty city of man's pride, we turn next in the song to the theme of the two ways and the two types of people. We often like to characterise people in many different ways by their personality type, by their education or upbringing, by the careers or hobbies and pastimes they engage in. However Scripture really only knows of two distinct types – the righteous and the wicked.¹¹⁴² Coupled with this great theme, as we have already noted, is the concept of a “way” which serves to depict the journey of life. This theme is also found frequently throughout Scripture. The righteous walk the path of the just, whilst the wicked journey on the road of destruction. These two themes are ones we can see in many places in Scripture. Consider, for example, our Lord's mention of the “*broad*” and “*narrow*” ways.¹¹⁴³ The first reference to this theme of two types of people can be found in the book of Genesis and is illustrated by the two genealogical lists of Genesis 4 and 5. In one is the line of Cain and the outcome is pure worldliness as exemplified by the offspring of the godless Lamech. In the other is the line of Seth (the substitute for Abel killed by Cain) out of which comes the righteous Noah who would bring rest. Here in our text in Isaiah we have the righteous and just contrasted with the wicked and the ways that each traverse.

1141 Philippians 3:8.

1142 This is not to say that Scripture does not deal with the many different types of character and behaviour exhibited by mankind. The Scriptures are a rich source for godly psychology – not the psychology that begins with modern scientific (or otherwise) theories, but with an understanding of man and his constitution as God sees it. True godly preaching ought to deal with the psychological problems man faces as a matter of course.

1143 Matthew 7:13.

[a] The way of the Just. (Isaiah 26:7-9).

Verses 7 to 9 give us the main points concerning the way of the just, but we also get “flavours” of their path when we are brought to consider the wicked in verses 10f. There are seven key characteristics of the just.

26:7.

First their way is, of course, characterised by the concept we know as righteousness. Verse 7 highlights this beautifully with an indication of the source of their righteousness:

The way of the just *is* uprightness; O Most Upright ...

Later in verse 10 we read of the “*land of uprightness*” which is so because the Lord Himself is present in the city which He is building. Righteousness is certainly not ours by nature as we have learnt many times both by way of the Scriptures, and (if we are honest), by reflecting on our lives. It is God alone who is “*Most Upright,*” for righteousness, truth, justice, and fairness are all characteristics that He exemplifies. The Lord is, of course, upright and true. There is no shadow of turning and no variation or alteration in Him whatsoever.¹¹⁴⁴ This is something that attracts us. Do you not agree that it is good to see something that is truly true and upright and which is not bent, crooked or dodgy? Don't we crave this type of character in our politicians? And so a true believer is one concerned about righteousness and uprightness. They see the beauty of the Lord Jesus and they crave His good righteousness. So when we realise that we have been given His righteousness we rejoice! We are also mortified when we fall into sin knowing that we do not need to. There is always this internal battle but Christ has won the victory for us.

21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. **22** For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. **23** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. **24** O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? **25** I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!¹¹⁴⁵

Then second we note that the Lord is vitally involved with us in our life of righteousness. In

1144 James 1:17.

1145 Romans 7:21-25.

Studies in Isaiah.

the NKJV we read that the Lord will “*weigh the path of the just,*” but the NASB rendering of verse 7 is more helpful I think to our understanding. It reads as follows:

*The way of the righteous is smooth; O Upright One, make the path of the righteous level.*¹¹⁴⁶

The NKJV gives the impression of judgement: “*you weigh the path of the just,*” but the NASB translation indicates a different perspective. The basic idea behind the words is “He makes level pathways and considers accurately their way.” What is intended, I believe, is a fatherly concern about his child's growth and development. In verse 10 we read that the wicked refuses to learn the way of righteousness. Here, though, the just have their path organised for them by the Lord our Father. Psalm 33:15 tells us that God fashions the hearts of people “*individually*” and that He considers all their works. Thus God's path for us is tailor made. This is quite remarkable don't you agree? The Lord is concerned to make of you and I a glorious thing. We are destined to be more and more like Jesus. As a result the Lord constructs our pathway. This is why it is so vital that we do not kick and scream against circumstances. I do not mean to imply that we do nothing to change circumstances. On the contrary. We seek to make things better. After all if our house is dirty we clean it up. We do not let it rot and waste away! In the same way, as we have opportunity, we seek to improve our conditions and the conditions of those around us. However we recognise fully that the Lord is sovereign over all and He determines the steps we take.¹¹⁴⁷

The stock phrase we often hear “God has a plan for your life” is true! However it is not quite what people may think. It may often be taken in the sense that we will have success in life and that our desires will be fulfilled – a type of dream fulfilment. This is not the idea. What is intended is that every difficulty, every person, every circumstance, every hard knock, every joy and happiness, every feature of life's experience is provided for you in order that you may draw nearer to the Lord! This is not to gloss over or belittle the hardships people may face. You may have experienced great hurt and pain. However we need to recognise that these are all part of God's plan for our lives. The Lord is truly a loving heavenly Father.

1146 Isaiah 26:7, NASB.

1147 Psalm 37:23; Proverbs 16:9; 20:24; Jeremiah 10:23.

26:8.

The third feature that characterises the just is found in verse 8: “*Yes, in the way of Your judgements, O Lord, we have waited for You ...*” What excites and energises the just is to know the will of the Lord. They seek to be guided by the Lord in *all things*. Judgements here are the decisions we make, or what we should do in different circumstances. This concerns both those decisions we each face personally, and those which we face together as believers. This latter point is not to be overlooked. As individuals we may be concerned about spending a large sum of money on purchasing a car. We ask the Lord for His view and guide on the matter. Are we simply indulging our own whim and fancy? Or, are we seeking for something which would be for good use? These things are never cut and dried because each person and each person's walk with the Lord is special and tailored by the Lord. However as a body of believers we need to consider the Lord's view on the great issues that affect all of us. For example, how do we respond to the rapidly developing science of genetic engineering? You can be assured that society at large will not share our ethical concerns. What then is our response to this new thing? I have to say that I find it quite sad (to say the least) that the church (true believers mind you) have not considered this (and many other issues besides).¹¹⁴⁸ But what characterises the true believer who is just and upright is the concern for the weak in society. What could be more weak than those just conceived? I have just recently marked some 600 responses at GCSE level on genetic engineering and you may (or may not) be surprised to learn that the average teenager considers that human embryos exist to further the medical well-being for humanity.¹¹⁴⁹ I am not lying here. There seems to be virtually no understanding that a human embryo is a human life.

There are many other issues we do need to come to decisions on. In fact given that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ, it surely is our duty to demonstrate that all things have a centre and focus in Christ?¹¹⁵⁰ Where are the people thinking about all subjects, all experiences, all endeavours from a truly Christian perspective? Yes we live in a secular society. But we are Christians! Our love is Christ! And we want Him to be glorified. We want to see Him as the focal point and the very reason for life. How then does this affect the Christian radiographer, the Christian accountant, the Christian sportsman and so on? Sure they all ought to be exemplary in behaviour and attitude. But what about the very *essence* of what they do in their daily lives? Surely

1148 I call all who read these words to take stock and consider how we should respond to the new science of genetic engineering.

1149 Needless to say I cannot reveal the papers nor the exam board but these were marked in the summer of 2018.

1150 Colossians 2:2,3.

Studies in Isaiah.

this too ought to be grounded in Christ – He is the reason for doing it in the first place, and then energised and promoted through Christ – He gives meaning and purpose to its pursuit. Hear four key Scriptures on these thoughts:

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.¹¹⁵¹

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.¹¹⁵²

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.¹¹⁵³

Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers.¹¹⁵⁴

This brings us to the fourth thing which characterises the just, namely, their desire to give God all the glory: *“the desire of our soul is for Your name and for the remembrance of You.”* It is this desire that God be faithfully represented and declared which is uppermost in the heart and mind of the just. We cannot bear to think of the Lord being misrepresented or misunderstood. Doesn't it upset you when people misrepresent the Lord? Don't you find yourself getting hurt when people say such things like: “if God is good why does such-and-such happen?”? The way in which we stand for the glory of the Lord is vital. It is not a question of evangelism (although this is necessary and good). It is a question of declaration and heralding. The old view was that preaching was a heralding of gospel truth. This is still true, but sadly we do not herald and declare the truths of God publicly. In proverbs we learn that wisdom was stationed at the main meeting points of life, at the junctions in the highways, and there wisdom called aloud. We ought to be declaring truths about the Lord openly and publicly that all may see we truly love the Lord.¹¹⁵⁵ Of course this must be backed up by righteous lives – not self-righteous mind you – but lives that show the great and gracious goodness of God.¹¹⁵⁶

It strikes me that the medieval period was one which had this sense of declaring God's glory. I take it that that was the main idea behind the great cathedrals. Life in the medieval period was centred around the worship of God. Now I am not suggesting that we return to such an expression

1151 1Corinthians 10:31.

1152 Colossians 3:17.

1153 Colossians 3:23.

1154 3John 1:5.

1155 Proverbs 8:1f.

1156 Psalm 145.

Studies in Isaiah.

of Christian truth, but I am asking the question: how do we **publicly** declare the great goodness of God? We should not build cathedrals perhaps, although I remember Bill Bryson at my son's graduation in Durham make the point that the cathedral where the graduation ceremony was held had lasted a lot longer than many of the new gadgets and gizmos we cannot do without today! How then do we set about **publicly** declaring how great and good God is? It is not enough to sing songs to that effect in our worship services. This is a good thing to do – a very good thing – but it doesn't really answer this important aspect of openly, fully, publicly, declaring the great goodness of God. We need some answer to this question of how we represent the Lord on the world stage.

26:9.

The fifth characteristic of the just is to rest and wait on the Lord completely in wholehearted worship and devotion. We see this expressed in the first part of verse 9: *“With my soul I have desired You in the night, yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early.”* We see it expressed negatively in verse 10 amongst the wicked who did not want to *“behold the majesty of the Lord.”* This characteristic gives a pause to zeal. It is good to be zealous. However it is necessary to be devoted to Christ and to come under His rule and leading. All our worth, all our treasure, all our sum and substance is to be found in Him. We may have a zeal for the honour of God but we must not strike out in our own strength as Peter did on the night before Christ died, for if we do, we may well be fighting against the very thing the Lord is working towards.¹¹⁵⁷ Our desire is not for a cause, not for an ideal or a great principle. Our desire is Christ! It is to know Him. Yes we want to see Him honoured and glorified, but it is because we know Him and are related to Him and have so much to be thankful that we seek His glory in His way.

The sixth feature that describes the just is a desire for *compassionate* evangelism, or, in other words, the desire that others may come to know Christ. This is shown by the end of verse 9: *“for when Your judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.”* How is it that the Lord's judgements are in the earth? The only way this can be true is if true believers are in the world demonstrating the fact. They do this by their lives which show how the Lord's judgements and decisions work in practice. They also do this by speaking about the judgements of the Lord. Thus evangelism is an expression of concern for the lost. We seek to show forth the testimony of Jesus. The Lord Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father and we are commissioned to be His ambassadors showing to the world what the heavenly Kingdom is like.¹¹⁵⁸

1157 Matthew 26:33,34.

1158 2Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 1:20; 6:20; Hebrews 8:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

How many times do we read of the welcoming attitude expressed by true believers? Here are just two I have selected at random:

Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.¹¹⁵⁹

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And
let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.¹¹⁶⁰

Because of a deep and passionate love for Christ we want to share Him and His beauty with others too! That's evangelism! It is worth pausing for thought here concerning our nation. There have been many times when the gospel was widespread and well known. I do not think that that is the case today. Consider this fact for starters. Did you know that according to the office of national statistics, 697,852 children were born in the year 2015.¹¹⁶¹ That amounts to 1,911 children born each day, or 1.3 children born every minute. Will these dear folk know of Christ and His great goodness? Sadly they will not. Their parents may never have heard about Christ so what chance have these new ones? Then also think of the tremendous changes there have been in our population through the later half of the twentieth and on into this century. Perhaps the multitudes who have come to our shores have been sent of the Lord so that they may hear the truth of the gospel? In the thunder and bluster of excessive immigration do we as believers stop to consider that this is a tremendous blessing? The Lord has brought the mission field to our door!

26:10.

The seventh and final feature of the just is one we may have expected to be put first. It is only expressed in our text amongst the statements made concerning the wicked. Here is the statement, which we read in verse 10: *"Let grace be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord."* I have quoted the whole verse but it is those first few words which are important at this point. All that the just experience is a work of *"grace."* How vital and important this is. Whatever we have, we have as a gift of God. May it never be that we forget this! I sometimes think that it is

1159 Isaiah 2:3.

1160 Revelation 22:17.

1161 See:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsummarytableenglandandwales/2015>

Studies in Isaiah.

because we forget our true standing (in grace) that we fail so badly in our witness, our evangelism, our declaration of the great goodness of God and so on. How we ought to review this grace daily, hourly, moment-by-moment. Many people mistake grace for weakness. I do not believe we ought to be cowering, quivering, mealy-mouthed and pathetic. Not a bit of it. We must be meek. However grace does not imply these weak ways. Yes we depend fully on the Lord. Without His energising and help we can do nothing. What I mean to emphasise by pointing to grace is that we are not self-made people. We do not generate enthusiasm, endeavour, enterprise and effort from self. All the enterprise, vim and vigour we express comes as a result of the gifting of God. It is God who comes to us with His offer of salvation, and it is God who gives everything we need to not only live a godly life to the full on this planet, but also to declare His praise and to be engaged alongside Him in His mission.¹¹⁶²

[b] The fate of the wicked. (Isaiah 26:10,11).

Having considered the characteristics that define the just, we need now to turn and consider the features that depict the wicked. As I have said the Bible seems to describe all humanity in terms of these two categories. That isn't to say that there are not many sub-divisions we may want to consider, but for the main purpose we need to recognise that people are either saved or unsaved, born again or unconverted, believers or unbelievers. Just as with the just there are seven features that illustrate the wicked.

26:10,11.

First we note that the way of the wicked is to reject righteousness. This is demonstrated in verses 10 and 11. Even though the wicked is shown grace, yet still he will not learn righteousness. Even though the wicked lives amongst godly people, they will still refuse to behold the majesty of the Lord. The apostle Paul highlights this type of attitude in his letter to the Romans. He declares that the unrighteous suppress the truth.¹¹⁶³ This is stark. It serves to remind us of two key things. First it shows up the current age as one of deception. Most people believe that they are objective and neutral when it comes to things like faith and the Christian way. Our society's leaders and media promote this idea, believing that they take an impartial or neutral stance on things. This is a lie. You cannot sit on the fence! It is impossible. There are only two ways. If you walk on the path of the just

1162 2Peter 1.

1163 Romans 1:18.

Studies in Isaiah.

that is one option, but if you choose not to walk that path then your only option is to walk the path of the wicked. There is no neutral ground. In so doing, the wicked necessarily reject the way of righteousness. Now isn't this what we find today? People have thrown off the "restrictions" that the Christian faith (as they see it) has imposed.¹¹⁶⁴ They are hell bent on exploring unrighteous options – so-called self-determination or self-expression. The more we go on in life, the more we will find that this rejection of the way of righteousness will increase. The second thing it reminds us to take note of is the tremendous effort and power required to turn someone around and convert them. What the Lord does in turning someone around to show them the truth is astonishing. It is a great mystery. How does God do it? I do not know but it drives me to prayer both to praise God for what He does, and to ask for His grace and mercy to save people we know.

The second feature of the wicked is that they will *"not learn righteousness."*¹¹⁶⁵ Now this becomes something of a problem. It is a problem when we consider the great commission as expressed at the end of Matthew's gospel.¹¹⁶⁶ In those words we find that our main mission is to teach and make disciples. However what we find here in Isaiah is that the wicked will not learn righteousness. This serves to highlight the fact that we need to be praying in earnest. Unless the Lord does a work within those we engage we will have no hope of seeing people saved or of declaring God's goodness.¹¹⁶⁷ Our task is clear. We need to teach people with persuasion but we equally need to plead for them at the throne of grace! If you merely educate a sinner all you get is an educated sinner. If, on the other hand, you plead for grace and you educate with passion, then if the Lord grants salvation, the result will be a new born believer! It is sad to note that because of this imperative need to pray earnestly for those we seek to witness to and disciple, many argue that teaching is therefore not vital. If people are saved by what the Lord does alone, and teaching doesn't save anyone, why teach? – so the argument goes. No one will be converted if we merely teach them the gospel. Surely, such folk argue, we should simply spend all our time in prayer for these unsaved folk? That, I believe, is a hopeless attitude. We have been commissioned to teach and to disciple. This is what we have been asked to do. If we fail in this how do you think the Lord will respond? Yes it is true that our teaching is not the means by which people will be saved. Yes it is true that God does the work of salvation even though we seek to persuade. But no this does not mean we can neglect the task God has given to us. We must teach, and we must teach with passion and

1164 Psalm 2:3.

1165 Isaiah 26:10.

1166 Matthew 28:18-20.

1167 Psalm 127:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

determination. We must teach with prayer – much prayer. We must seek the Lord for His help both to teach and for the saving of the souls we minister to. Let it never be said that teaching is not necessary, I believe that teaching is more vital today than it has been for a century. People (Christian people) do not know their Bibles and in not knowing their Bibles they show poor knowledge of the living God.

The third feature of the wicked is that they will deal unjustly even amongst and in the land of uprightness. Verse 10 reads: *“in the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly.”* Corruption and unjust practices are the meat and drink of those who reject righteousness. Such folk live and breathe with fewer and fewer restraints on their practices. The more the nation throws off the shackles that bind them, the more corrupt the nation and individuals become. Sadly the notion that society is ridding itself of outmoded ideas, and throwing off restraint and the shackles that bind, is all propaganda and bluster. The fact of the matter is that a person is only truly “free” and at peace when they are “in Christ” and in obedience to His will and ways. This is because we have been made to be in good and right relationship with the Lord. If that relationship is broken, we are broken ourselves. Sadly by throwing off the supposed shackles that bind, modern man is increasingly becoming in bondage to other masters – mainly himself. Liberal thinkers do not realise that by rejecting the truth (the way of righteousness) they are effectively binding themselves up in knots with Satan's ropes. Take, for example, the modern view of sexual relations. Young people are advised to have sex responsibly. Whatever does that mean? Do not people understand that when a woman gives herself to a man there is more than a mere physical union? There is a deeper bond and if that bond is broken by union with others the result is great damage in an emotional and mental sense. I cannot begin to imagine the bondage people will be coming into through unnatural forms of sexual activity. But what I want to make abundantly clear is that in attempting to gain freedom, they rather fall into bondage. Considerations such as these are important for the believer for two reasons. First it is a timely reminder that things tend to get worse with time as Paul noted for Timothy:

*But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*¹¹⁶⁸

Second it highlights again our need to rely on the Lord completely because we will face opposition from those who reject righteousness, and the task of bringing people in will require much prayer.

The fourth feature of the wicked is their refusal to behold the majesty of the Lord. It is not

¹¹⁶⁸ 2Timothy 3:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

just that they refuse to walk the righteous path, they will not even consider that the Lord is truly good. Many years ago I was living in an area which had many humanists who were very vocal about their faith and very antagonistic about the Christian faith. I managed to get an article in the local newspaper in which I challenged the humanists to consider something key to their viewpoint. If they wanted to exalt the best in humanity as the ideal that should be followed, then why not start with the greatest human being that has ever lived? There can be no doubt whatsoever that Christ, the second and last Adam, was the greatest human being that ever lived.¹¹⁶⁹ Needless to say the humanists did not warm to this theme! But the point is made. Christ is the best and this is so self-evident. How do we know that He was the best? Well surely His offer of life and His sacrifice for sin cannot be beaten? If you don't reckon these are good enough (they are), then what about His earthly ministry? He only did good to all! He healed and forgave! Whom has done anything near this in wonder and goodness?

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.¹¹⁷⁰

The fifth theme that characterises the wicked is their refusal to see things when they are plainly shown them. We find this in verse 11: *“Lord, when Your hand is lifted up, they will not see. But they will see and be ashamed for their envy of people; yes, the fire of Your enemies shall devour them.”* This is so so sad. But it is true. See how great the Lord's love is that He can turn around stubborn rebellious people who refuse to see the truth! Now when there are judgements or chastisements from the hand of God in the world, the world chooses not to see them for what they are. This is particularly true when it comes to the great flood. The Lord wiped out the ancient world for its horrendous wickedness and violence. The effect was so devastating that it ruined the surface of this earth. The upheaval created by such a cataclysmic event was awesome, creating the great mountain ranges we see today, and the river systems, and valleys and so on. But what does the world preach regarding the surface of our globe? It teaches evolution! It denies the plain and self-evident fact that a global flood destroyed the earth because of its gross sin! I have made it one of my aims to photograph the evidence of rocks highlighting the aftermath of the great flood. People do not want to hear this truth but it is really so obvious. To make matters worse, modern man has been so taught to consider this world and its operation as an independent thing (called “nature”) that he

1169 1Corinthians 15:45,47.

1170 Romans 5:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

does not see God's hand in creation. When disasters happen, or when elections go horribly wrong, modern man puts it down to some natural effect. However what the Christian declares is that it is God who is sovereign over all.

*A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.*¹¹⁷¹

*The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.*¹¹⁷²

Who amongst our contemporaries describes the events of our day (disaster or blessing) as being at the hand of the Lord? He is sovereign but the wicked do not see!

The sixth feature characterising the wicked is that they exhibit envy and great dissatisfaction. This characteristic becomes evident when the Lord will bring the wicked to account as we read in verse 11: *"Lord, when Your hand is lifted up, they will not see. But they will see and be ashamed for their envy of people; yes, the fire of Your enemies shall devour them."* Only the way of the just leads to satisfaction and delight. The way of the wicked always leads to envy and dissatisfaction. This stands to reason because if a person rejects the Lord who made them, and chooses some other deity (themselves, a partner, money, fame or whatever), they will always be unhappy. Such 'gods' cannot satisfy! Isn't it true that the wicked are never really satisfied? A person spends their life getting as much money as they can only to want more! Another seeks to win all manner of trophies for some endeavour only to look towards the next! What does it profit a person if they get everything they want and yet still do not have enough and end up losing their souls?¹¹⁷³

The seventh and final characteristic of the wicked is that their way leads to shame.¹¹⁷⁴ There will come a day when the wicked will be made to see what they have done and what they have rejected. Now our task is to make the wicked (unsaved, lost), see the truth by preaching and living the gospel. However the day is coming when every eye will see and know what is true and right.

*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.*¹¹⁷⁵

1171 Proverbs 16:9.

1172 Proverbs 21:1.

1173 Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36.

1174 Isaiah 26:11.

1175 Revelation 1:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

The last phrase of verse 11 is a bit awkward and might be better rendered: “Indeed, fire will devour Your enemies.” If we take it as it stands in the NKJV (*“the fire of Your enemies shall devour them”*) then it indicates that the error of their ways and the wickedness of their endeavours will bring a ruinous outcome. But then the idea of a fire reminds us of what Peter taught in his second epistle, that is, that the end of the world will be a great conflagration!¹¹⁷⁶

[3] The lord establishes peace and the Lord will raise up when men fail. (Isaiah 26:12-19).

The song of Judah continues in verses 12 to 19 and contains what I have referred to as series of confessions or statements of faith. The structure of the passage will help us break it open. The passage splits into three sections. First we have in verses 12 to 15 a series of confessional statements in connection with the Lord, both concerning what He has done and may do, and concerning the people's relationship with Him. Then from verse 16 to verse 18 we have an expression of confessional prayer. I may have entitled this section: “where we have failed the Lord brings peace and life.” Then in the final verse (19) we have an astonishing statement followed by a rousing appeal to action!

Notice how frequently we have the Lord's name in these verses compared to the rest of the chapter. This highlights the prayer focus of this part of the song. There are seven clear declarations in these verses. The first three confessional statements are found in verses 12 to 15.

26:12.

First we note that the trust the just have is that the Lord will establish a final lasting peace. This is based on the realisation that the Lord has done everything needed thus far (*“Lord, You will establish peace for us”*).¹¹⁷⁷ It is not that the just do not yet know this peace – they do. It is rather that the peace they experience in the world where the wicked are still at large will one day be a peace without opposition. Trust in the Lord is developed further. We note, again from verse 12, that all is done by the Lord God. It is only God who can do this. Only He can establish peace because we have rebelled. How could rebels make peace with an offended God? The Lord takes the initiative and offers terms of peace. By the Lord Jesus' death on the cross peace could be proffered. But this teaching that God has done all goes much deeper because we read that it is only God who has *“also done all our works in us.”*¹¹⁷⁸ God called us. God gave us the gift of faith. God put His

1176 2Peter 3:10f.

1177 Isaiah 26:12.

1178 Isaiah 26:12.

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Holy Spirit in us. God delivers us and sanctifies us. God will bring us safely home. Does this mean we can rest in passivity and let the Lord do all? Not a bit of it. What we have here is one side of the story. How God does these things in us is the other side of the story and this involves our responsibilities. Listen, for example, to the apostle Peter's call to the dispersed Christians:

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.¹¹⁷⁹

Paul teaches us supremely that it is God who re-creates us:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.¹¹⁸⁰

And the apostle goes on to explain how through prayer we continue in our walk and yet all glory must go to God who works in us:

14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **15** from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, **16** that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, **17** that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— **19** to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. **20** Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, **21** to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.¹¹⁸¹

However here In Isaiah the focus is on God and His work! He is the one who does all things well.

26:13.

The second declaration comes in verse 13 and it is a confession of our rebellious nature. It is an honest appraisal. We may have claimed an independent and autonomous rule or to have taken a neutral stance with regard to God. These are modern expressions of how people excuse themselves from relying in true faith upon God. But here there is an honest and true confession. It isn't that we

1179 2Peter 1:10.

1180 Ephesians 2:10.

1181 Ephesians 3:14-21.

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have been “our own man” so-to-speak, but that we have had other masters rule over us. We have opted and chosen another master. There are numerous such masters. It may be money, fame, or lust. It may be a hobby, a career or an addiction. It may be a spouse, a child or a lover. Whomever or whatever it is it is our master. This teaches us something about our very nature which we cannot escape. We are not God! We are dependent and contingent. We must have a master to rule us. This is such a lesson! The only master worthy is the Lord.

The words of verse 13 are a wonderful confession. It combines the thoughts previously made in verse 12. The confession of these people is not some self-generated affair, for we read that it is *“by You only we make mention of Your name.”* It is the Lord who brings us to true confession!

26:14.

Then there is a realisation of the nature and character of these other masters. Verse 14 has two parallel thoughts in which the emphasis is on the dead nature of these masters. Literally we have

The dead! They will not live.

The deceased! They will not rise.

God alone is the source and origin of life. It is vital that we recognise how *“dead”* the masters who rule us have been. They will not live and they will not rise. At the end of this section we read that the Lord visits these other masters with the intention of punishing them to destruction. They have caused havoc and mayhem and have ruined the people they have ensnared. God will destroy them completely so that they will no longer rule over feckless rebellious dullards.

26:15.

The third and final confessional statement in connection with the Lord comes in verse 15. It affirms the first confession that God is the One who does all things well. It is God alone who can bring the “increase.” God alone is the One who can make the message work. God alone is the One who brings in the harvest and increases the fruitfulness of the peoples. We must play our part of love and devotion to the Lord fully, but only God can change things for the best. We take heart that even though the nation may not be increasing in our neck of the woods, it is in other parts of the world. God has not abandoned His people but is working still. Just as the apostle Paul stated that

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whilst he planted and Apollos watered, it was God who gave the increase.¹¹⁸² It is the same with what we may term “natural” growth. The farmer sows and ensures there is sufficient water and safety for the crop. But it is God alone who causes the crop to grow.

26:16-18.

It is always a good thing to start confession with clear truths about God and about ourselves. This is what we have been observing here. God brings peace. God is the One who can do all things. We have had other masters apart from God. We have drifted and left the Lord who is God. God alone brings the fruit. Now we move to a confessional prayer. Rather than bold statements we have the people pouring out their hearts. Verse 16 and 17 move from the third person plural reference (they) to second person plural (we). This type of shift is a common one in Scripture. We may start our prayers with a general reference to the nation and what the nation may be going through, but it should not be long before we include ourselves and reckon ourselves fully in the essence of what we are praying. As an example of the opposite consider the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.¹¹⁸³ And so the prayer begins with reference to a people who have suffered trouble and punishment and chastening, and who have poured out their hearts to the Lord. The one praying describes the experience they have been through as a pregnancy which brings forth nothing but wind.¹¹⁸⁴ They have suffered hard and long. They have laboured and struggled. But all in vain. Isn't this the situation we encounter when we have done so much but not at the Lord's leading and aid? Isn't this the situation we face when we do much in our own strength? It is because other masters have held sway over our minds and hearts. Other ideals and desires. Those not of God's making. And so we bring forth through much effort and labour, nothing but wind!

26:19.

But, wonder of wonders, at the end of this section we now find that there is the most beautiful of all promises! It is worth quoting verse 19 again so that we can take in its full force:

Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise.¹¹⁸⁵

Those first four words are rich with meaning. Notice that it is “*Your dead*”! These who have

1182 1Corinthians 3:6.

1183 Luke 18:9-14.

1184 Isaiah 26:18.

1185 Isaiah 25:19a.

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brought forth wind and who are dead and in whom is no success are God's possession! They have not been abandoned by the Lord, they are still His. This brings great comfort to us when we have failed and see no hope in sight. But there is still a greater truth expressed in the last eight words. I cannot help but see the Lord Jesus Christ here. Listen again to these words:

together with my dead body they shall arise.¹¹⁸⁶

Isn't this wonderful? There is one person here who is saying that the dead whom the Lord owns will arise along with Him when He rises. What else could be meant here other than the resurrection of Christ which includes the resurrection of those for whom He died? It truly is the Lord who brings life. God is the source of life and can bring to life what was once dead and hopeless.

And so the song ends with an exhortation which really comes from the Lord, even though it is still part of the song of Judah. Remember that when the Lord speaks, action will surely follow.

Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.¹¹⁸⁷

Only God can do this! Only God is the One who can speak to dry bones and bring life from death. Here we have an exhortation to wake up and to sing! We who dwell in dust, who dwell amongst the debris of this world, are exhorted to come to life and to sing. Just as the lepers were healed, the crippled and lame made to rise up and walk, so you and I are offered life! We should leap up and sing! Those who respond, those whom the Lord awakens and who come to life, will be like the dew of herbs. There is a freshness and a refreshing feel about the just whom the Lord justifies. The consequence from this is that the earth will cast out the dead! I take it that this means more new life will arise. It could also be taken negatively – that the dead will be removed. If that is the case it would fit with verse 21 but it is probably better to take it positively here. What an amazing thing. Once again it is God who does all things. Our part is merely to respond. We ought to grasp hold of the life and fruit the Lord is giving and do all that He commands. Let us live!

1186 Isaiah 25:19b.

1187 Isaiah 25:19b.

[4] Final judgement is coming. (Isaiah 26:20,21).

26:20.

And so the song of Judah is complete. But that is not the end. We have in verse 20 an appeal to the people of God direct from the Lord. There is a clear echo in these words with Genesis 7:1:

Then the Lord said to Noah, “Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen *that you are* righteous before Me in this generation.”¹¹⁸⁸

In view of the opening theme, the two cities with an emphasis on the city of God, it is probably best to take these words as referring to entering into the city of God. In a sense we could take this in terms of the heavenly city yet to come, the one that Abraham was waiting for.¹¹⁸⁹ But whilst we wait on this we are called to enter the city of God on earth – the invisible city where God Himself dwells. There is also an amazing sense here of identity with Christ. We must remember the link with the ark of Noah. The ark suffered the wrath of God's righteous outpouring of water, whereas Christ “our ark” suffered the wrath and indignation of God's judgement. And so we go in to Christ and remain there whilst the judgement falls. This is a call not to withdraw from the world stage, for that would make little sense of what has gone before, but to ensure that we ourselves are always “*in Christ.*” It is the only place of safety. If we venture out of this we are doomed and will feel the full weight of God's wrath. But whilst we are “*in Christ,*” in our chambers safe and secure, we can be the city of God on earth and declare His great goodness and call sinners to turn to Him.

26:21.

The end is nigh! In the final verse of the chapter we have a statement which describes what God will do at the end of time:

For behold, the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth will also disclose her blood, and will no more cover her slain.¹¹⁹⁰

Justice will be done.

1188 Genesis 7:1.
1189 Cf. John 14:1f.
1190 Isaiah 26:21.

Chapter 37.
Isaiah 27:1-13.
The end of Leviathan!

Textual analysis.

- 1 In that day the **Lord** with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish
Leviathan the fleeing serpent,
Leviathan that twisted serpent;
and He will slay
the reptile that *is* in the sea.
- 2 In that day sing to her,
“A vineyard of red wine!
3 I, the **Lord**, keep it,
I water it every moment; lest any hurt it,
I keep it night and day.
4 Fury *is* not in Me.
Who would set briers *and* thorns against Me in battle?
I would go through them,
I would burn them together.
5 Or let him take hold of My strength,
that he may make peace with Me;
and he shall make peace with Me.”
- 6 Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob;
Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.
- 7 Has He struck Israel as He struck those who struck him?
Or has He been slain according to the slaughter of those who were slain by Him?
- 8 In measure, by sending it away, You contended with it.
He removes *it* by His rough wind in the day of the east wind.
9 Therefore by this the iniquity of Jacob will be covered;
and this *is* all the fruit of taking away his sin:
when he makes all the stones of the altar like chalk stones that are beaten to dust, wooden images and
incense altars shall not stand.
- 10 Yet the fortified city *will be* desolate,
the habitation forsaken and left like a wilderness;
there the calf will feed,
and there it will lie down and consume its branches.
- 11 When its boughs are withered, they will be broken off; the women come *and* set them on fire.
For it *is* a people of no understanding;
therefore
He who made them will not have mercy on them,
and He who formed them will show them no favour.
- 12 And it shall come to pass in that day
that the **Lord** will thresh, from the channel of the River to the Brook of Egypt;

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and you will be gathered one by one, O you children of Israel.
13 So it shall be in that day:
the great trumpet will be blown;
they will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria,
and they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt,
and shall worship the **Lord** in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

Isaiah 27 falls neatly into three distinct sections, each of which is headed by the phrase “*in that day.*” We have already come across this phrase on numerous occasions but it is not always a marker for designating sections in Scripture. Here there does seem to be a separation of ideas formed around this phrase. I have titled this chapter: “The end of Leviathan” because even though this subject matter forms just the opening idea found in verse 1, it is nevertheless a vitally important theme. Verses 2 to 11 focus on the vineyard of God, whilst verses 12 and 13 conclude with statements about the end of the world.

[1] The end of Leviathan! (Isaiah 27:1).

[a] A note on hermeneutics.

[b] Leviathan's true identity.

[c] Leviathan's end.

[2] The vineyard and the fortified city. (Isaiah 27:2-11).

[a] The song of the vineyard. (Isaiah 27:2-5).

[b] The covering and removal of sin. (Isaiah 27:6-9).

[c] The desolation of the fortified city. (Isaiah 27:10,11).

Understanding

[3] The great trumpet will be blown! (Isaiah 27:12,13).

[1] The end of Leviathan! (Isaiah 27:1).

[a] A note on hermeneutics.

Before we examine this verse we need to establish a principal of hermeneutical interpretation. The Bible alone is the revealed word and will of God. We believe in the inspiration of an infallible and inerrant word. As such, the Bible is the standard by which we test all things. When we come to any passage of Scripture we do not need to go outside of the Bible to aid us in its interpretation. There is enough information within the text, or within the whole of Scripture, for us

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to rightly interpret the passage under consideration. There are other important tools and principles that must be considered, such as the nature and state of the heart, but the one principal we need to emphasise at this point, is that we do not need anything outside of Scripture, to understand Scripture aright.

It is vital we say this here because there are many who have imbibed a very dangerous teaching and way of understanding that has effectively undermined the gospel. I am referring to those whose way of viewing is to consider the Scriptures in the context of the ancient Near East cultures.¹¹⁹¹ To some extent such a way of viewing Scripture has come about by means of the grammatical-historical method.¹¹⁹² In some versions of the use of this method, it is assumed that we can only interpret a passage of Scripture if we know the (human) author and cultural circumstances in which the passage is located. Now this method works for certain books where the information is to hand. So, for example, some of Paul's letters can be dated by cross-referencing with the Acts of the apostles. Such information is often helpful when it comes to interpretation. The same is true with regard to some prophets and the books of Kings and Chronicles. However where a passage has no information about the (human) author, nor any about the culture, mistakes in interpretation are made if such information is sought in extra-Biblical sources. The reason for this is that the extra-Biblical information is not part of God's revelation. It is information about which we have no certainty, and, since it is used to help interpret a passage, it effectively stands as ground or basis for the passage in hand.

Now many have suggested that the correct interpretation of such a passage as Genesis 1, can only be done by setting the text in the context of the ANE. By this method it is assumed that the details of Genesis 1 have their origin either in an ANE culture, or are, at least, born within an ANE culture. By such a means interpreters have insisted, for example, that Genesis 1:2 speaks of a "chaos" because such a feature is one prominent in ANE creation texts. With regard to our passage in Isaiah 27:1 many have suggested that Leviathan was a Biblical example of an ANE chaos monster. The idea of a chaos monster features prominently in the myths of the ANE. In some cases there is a "hero" figure who slays the chaos monster and thereby restores creation. It must be emphasised in the **strongest** possible terms that the Bible is pre-eminent. The Bible accounts are prime and came first. The myths of the ANE are all derivative and have their origins in distorted

1191 These are the Egyptian, Babylonian, Hittite, Canaanite cultures. Hereafter we shall refer to these by the acronym ANE.

1192 The correct use of the grammatical-historical method is where interpreters look at the nuts and bolts of the grammar of the passage in its Biblical context, and takes account of the cultural and historical information that comes from the Bible itself and which is relevant to the passage.

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word-of-mouth accounts from Genesis 1-11, embellished with the worship of local heroes who take the place of Nimrod, the mighty hunter who stood against God.

Having cleared the way and rejected the idea that Leviathan is a chaos-monster of the type featuring in ANE accounts, we need to begin to ask whom this character is. However we have no need to struggle here as our text is pregnant with references to show the way.

[b] Leviathan's true identity.

Isaiah 27:1 tells us three important things about the identity of this character. First, of course, we need to consider the name “*Leviathan.*” The Hebrew word means “wreathed” or “twisted in folds.” It stands for a serpent or dragon creature of huge proportions. We get some more information about Leviathan from the Lord's revelation to Job in Job 41:

1 Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook, or *snare* his tongue with a line *which* you lower? **2** Can you put a reed through his nose, or pierce his jaw with a hook? **3** Will he make many supplications to you? Will he speak softly to you? **4** Will he make a covenant with you? Will you take him as a servant forever? **5** Will you play with him as *with* a bird, or will you leash him for your maidens? **6** Will *your* companions make a banquet of him? Will they apportion him among the merchants? **7** Can you fill his skin with harpoons, or his head with fishing spears? **8** Lay your hand on him; remember the battle— never do it again! **9** Indeed, *any* hope of *overcoming* him is false; shall *one not* be overwhelmed at the sight of him? **10** No one *is so* fierce that he would dare stir him up. Who then is able to stand against Me? **11** Who has preceded Me, that I should pay *him*? Everything under heaven is Mine. **12** I will not conceal his limbs, his mighty power, or his graceful proportions. **13** Who can remove his outer coat? Who can approach *him* with a double bridle? **14** Who can open the doors of his face, *with* his terrible teeth all around? **15** *His* rows of scales are *his* pride, shut up tightly *as with* a seal; **16** one is so near another that no air can come between them; **17** they are joined one to another, they stick together and cannot be parted. **18** His sneezings flash forth light, and his eyes *are* like the eyelids of the morning. **19** Out of his mouth go burning lights; sparks of fire shoot out. **20** Smoke goes out of his nostrils, as *from* a boiling pot and burning rushes. **21** His breath kindles coals, and a flame goes out of his mouth. **22** Strength dwells in his neck, and sorrow dances before him. **23** The folds of his flesh are joined together; they are firm on him and cannot be moved. **24** His heart is as hard as stone, even as hard as the lower *millstone*. **25** When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid; because of his crashings they are beside themselves. **26** *Though* the sword reaches him, it cannot avail; nor does spear, dart, or javelin. **27** He regards iron as straw, *and* bronze as rotten wood. **28** The arrow cannot make him flee; sling-stones become like stubble to him. **29** Darts are regarded as straw; he laughs at the threat of javelins. **30** His undersides *are* like sharp potsherds; he spreads pointed *marks* in the mire. **31** He makes the deep boil like a pot; he makes the sea like a pot of ointment. **32** He leaves

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a shining wake behind him; *one* would think the deep had white hair. **33** On earth there is nothing like him, which is made without fear. **34** He beholds every high thing; he is king over all the children of pride.¹¹⁹³

The first thing we need to say is that the description is clearly of a real living animal of immense proportions. The Lord uses Leviathan as an object lesson for Job. Job has been (unknown to him) fighting against Satan. Here the Lord points out with a series of piercing questions that Job is no match for Leviathan. Next we must point out that he is described at the end of the chapter as one who is not just proud, but as: *“king over all the children of pride.”*¹¹⁹⁴ Then further we need to recognise that this creature is not one we now recognise as a particular living species. Leviathan is not just huge, but one who can breathe fire and smoke.¹¹⁹⁵ His skin is impenetrable and there is no hope of hunting and catching him as the opening verses make very clear. This cannot be a giant blue whale, therefore, because man has caught such a creature. It is fruitless trying to identify the identity of Leviathan with recognisable species, but it is certain that we are speaking of one of the largest, if not the largest of all creatures.

The second thing we observe in Isaiah 27:1 is that this Leviathan is also described as a serpent. The Hebrew word is *nachash* and is used in Genesis chapter 3 for the one who deceived Eve. In our text the serpent is described further as *“fleeing,”* and as *“twisted.”* The term *“fleeing”* indicates one who is a fugitive. The term *“twisted”* indicates one who is crooked, twisted out of shape, distorted, or perverted. With these ideas we come to recognise that we are talking about Satan, the Devil. The Devil was cast to the earth and became a fugitive. The same experience is seen in the life of Cain. The New Testament describes Cain as *“of the wicked one,”* because he murdered his brother.¹¹⁹⁶ If you read Genesis 4 you will find that Cain was cast forth and became a *“fugitive in the earth.”*¹¹⁹⁷ Thus Cain represents a type of Satan.

In Revelation 12 we read more about the Devil who is described as a *“dragon”* with seven heads. Psalm 74 speaks of the Lord's victory over Leviathan who had several heads, but in Revelation the identity is clear.¹¹⁹⁸ There is a *“great, fiery red dragon”* whose *“tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.”*¹¹⁹⁹ This dragon sought to slay the woman who bore the Messiah but before he could do anything the Messiah was caught up into heaven and the

1193 Job 41.

1194 Job 41:34.

1195 Job 41:18,22.

1196 1John 3:12.

1197 Genesis 4:12,14.

1198 Psalm 74:13,14.

1199 Revelation 12:3,4.

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woman fled to the wilderness to be cared for by God. Meanwhile, war broke out and the dragon was defeated and “*cast out*” from heaven. He is named as “*that serpent of old,*” and called “*the Devil and Satan*” for he deceives the whole world.¹²⁰⁰ In consequence of being cast to the earth, (along with his angels), the dragon sought to persecute the brethren, but these will withstand him because they “*overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.*”¹²⁰¹

The third thing we learn about this character “*Leviathan*” is that he is a “*reptile that is in the sea.*” We have already noted the fact that Satan was cast out of heaven and now roams the earth holding sway of the thoughts and minds of mankind.¹²⁰² The sea is often put to depict mankind in his lost and tumultuous state. So this “*reptile*” holds sway over all the sea, acting rather like the king of the sea.

And so we learn that this “*Leviathan*” is none other than the Devil and Satan, who, having been cast out to the earth from heaven for his rebellion, reeks havoc as a fugitive. He is perverted and twisted seeking only to destroy and kill.¹²⁰³

[c] Leviathan's end.

In the opening words of Isaiah 27:1 in the Hebrew, the word translated as “*punish*” comes before the description of the Lord's sword, so that we are assured of the end of Leviathan.

← Hebrew reads from the right

וְהַחֲזָקָה	וְהַגְדֹּלָה	הַקָּשָׁה	בְּחֶרְבוֹ	יְהוָה	יַפְקֹד	בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא
strong	great	severe	with His sword	the Lord	He will punish	in that day

The three descriptive words relating to the Lord's sword come at the end. In English, of course, we usually put the adjectives before the noun. However we might render the above as follows:

In that day the Lord will punish with His sword (which is) severe, great and strong.

The words “*punish*” and “*sword*” are clearly central and foremost. The word rendered “*punish*”

1200 Revelation 12:9.
1201 Revelation 12:11.
1202 1John 5:19.
1203 John 8:44; 10:10.

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really means “to visit to bring to account.” Thus Satan will be visited in such a way that he must render account of all he has done, and when found wanting will be punished and slain. The means of Satan's end is the sword of the Lord. This sword makes frequent appearances in the Old Testament, especially where there is a Christophany.¹²⁰⁴ This sword is described as “*severe*,” which means unrelenting. It will keep devouring and slaying where it is right and just to do so. This means all sin and rebellion will be subject to its judgement. Consequently the unrepentant rebellious evil one will be slain finally with this great sword. It is also described as being “*great*,” by which is meant that it will reach all corners where sin and rebellion exist. There is no place which this sword cannot reach! And there is nowhere for any to hide. Finally it is depicted as “*strong*,” so that it will meet no resistance, nor opposition. The sword of the Lord cannot be parried or deflected. It will fall and deliver its judgement perfectly. The Devil is doomed. But then so are all who align with him! Many may like to think that they most certainly are not on the Devil's side but listen to what the apostle John has to say:

*The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.*¹²⁰⁵

Our Saviour made it abundantly clear that if you were not gathering with Him (i.e. given to the Lord completely), then you would be on the only other side that there is, the Devil's.¹²⁰⁶ We like to think there is a third, neutral option, but there isn't. As Bob Dylan put it:

... but you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed you're gonna have to serve somebody well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord but you're gonna have to serve somebody.¹²⁰⁷

[2] The vineyard and the fortified city. (Isaiah 27:2-11).

In this second section we have a message for Israel, and, consequently, for the church, (all true believers). It is found in three parts. The first is a song for the vineyard, the second concerns the means by which sin and rebellion will be dealt with, and the third (and last) is a warning for those who continue in rebellion or who hanker after this world.

1204 Pre-incarnate appearances of Christ. See for example: Genesis 3:24; Numbers 22:23,31; Deuteronomy 32:39; Joshua 5:13; Judges 7:18,20; 1Chronicles 21:16.

1205 1John 5:19.

1206 Luke 11:23.

1207 On the song “Gotta Serve Somebody,” from the album “Slow Train Coming.”

[a] The song of the vineyard. (Isaiah 27:2-5).

27:1,2,3.

We have already met the theme of the vineyard in chapter 5. This theme is taken up by the Lord in John 15. Here in Isaiah 27 we have the vineyard that is clearly vibrant and full, for it is described as one with “*red wine.*”¹²⁰⁸ The Lord is the gardener and keeper of this vineyard. Note how carefully He tends it. We have a clear and emphatic statement that it is the Lord who is the keeper, for two times we read of the Lord keeping, (or guarding and protecting), this vineyard. Notice also that the Lord looks after this vineyard continuously. He gives the vines water “*every moment,*” which means that they are never in need.¹²⁰⁹ Then also we note the Lord's guarding the vineyard both by day and by night.¹²¹⁰ How great is the Lord God!

In the Old Testament we find that God supplied everything necessary for Israel to be a beacon for the whole world. He gave them the law, the priesthood, the tabernacle, the temple, the Scriptures and much more besides. Sadly they failed in their allotted task. The Old Testament provision was perfect, but it required the obedience of the people of God. As Paul puts it, it was a question of “do this and you shall live.”¹²¹¹ The gospel of God's righteousness which is given by faith is contained *within* the Old Testament Scriptures. The people of that time were meant to come to the point of despair and hopelessness as they sought to be obedient, and recognising their disobedience and the hopeless failure of their lives, could call out for the mercy of God. There were many who came to this, especially such as David, the prophets, and many others. But the Lord has also given New Testament believers everything necessary too. This time the order is reversed. It is no longer, “do this and live,” but “live! And do this.” In other words it is no longer obey and thereby live – a question of works righteousness – but rather it is a call to live and as a consequence of this new life, obedience will follow. Now it is very important to recognise that the call to faith and repentance which brings in new life has definite consequences. We see this everywhere in the New Testament. For example, the classic *faith* text in Ephesians 2:8,9 is usually quoted without reference to verse 10. Whilst faith is essential, (we are justified only by faith), true faith works:¹²¹²

1208 Isaiah 27:2.

1209 Isaiah 27:3.

1210 Isaiah 27:3.

1211 Galatians 3:12. See also Leviticus 18:5.

1212 Romans 5:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God,* **9** not of works, lest anyone should boast. **10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.¹²¹³

Remember, God is an abundant giver! Just as He gave water and guarded the vineyard of old, day and night continually, we find that the Father prunes the Vine and removes those branches which do not bear fruit so that those which do will bear even more fruit.¹²¹⁴

27:4.

Following this brief song we have a quite remarkable statement in verse 4. The statement is a matter concerning the nature of God. It is something the Lord Himself reveals to us, and it has a definite purpose. We have been taught that Leviathan (the Devil) will surely be punished and slain for his rebellion and sin, and so the concept of any other coming against the Lord is laughable, let alone unthinkable. Well here in verses 4 and 5 we find that the Lord is the final authority with all strength and none can best Him – the mere thought is utterly ridiculous! But what is so wonderful here is the Lord's self-revelation in verse 4 which we repeat for contemplation:

Fury is not in Me.

At first reading of this we may think that there is something wrong. After all we have in our minds verses which speak of the *“wrath of God.”*¹²¹⁵ But a moments reflection will make things clear. What we read here in Isaiah 27:4 is that fury or wrath does not reside in, or form part of God's nature. In contrast, as John puts it, we understand that: *“God is love.”*¹²¹⁶ This is a wonderful thought! And yet we still must take thought of the phrase the *“wrath of God.”* How can it be if fury is not in God, that there is such a thing as the *“wrath of God”*? It may be as some suggest, that here the idea is that the Lord's fury is spent. He has vented His fury and now no longer has any left. However, I think there is more to this statement, and I think we can understand this by taking note of some other Scriptures. First we must consider the holiness and purity of God. Second we should consider those Scriptures where we find that God has a “hatred” of sin, error, rebellion, transgression and iniquity.

1213 Ephesians 2:8-10.

1214 John 15:1-8.

1215 John 3:36; Romans 1:18; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6; Revelation 14:10,19; 15:1.

1216 1John 4:8,16.

Studies in Isaiah.

The Lord is holy, (separate), and absolutely pure. Nothing that is evil, iniquitous, in error, or tainted with sin can coexist with God. God's holiness and glory is of such brilliance and radiance that Scripture also describes God as dwelling in fire. There are many Scriptures which teach that God is a consuming fire. Thus the Lord descended on Mount Sinai in fire, and later this glory of the Lord is described as being *"like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel."*¹²¹⁷ The Lord actually spoke to the Israelites from the mountain, out of fire.¹²¹⁸ When the people later complained and grumbled in the wilderness, the fire of the Lord went out and consumed many.¹²¹⁹ Those who rebelled against Moses and the Lord and offered strange incense were consumed by the fire of the Lord.¹²²⁰ Then also we read about the Lord being *"a consuming fire."*¹²²¹ Fire from the Lord came and consumed Elijah's sacrifice but not the prophet of Baal's.¹²²² Now since the Lord is so holy that His very being acts as an all-consuming fire, we should not be surprised that He comes in judgement. However it is not that God is vengeful, angry and capricious or tyrannical. Not a bit of it! His anger and wrath, according to John Stott is: "His steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations."¹²²³

We come now to consider the fact that there are indeed things which are detestable or an abomination to the Lord. What are these? First, we find that homosexual behaviour (amongst other aberrant sexual practices carried on by the nations) is abominable.¹²²⁴ The silver and gold that covered the idols was abominable to the Lord.¹²²⁵ False and inadequate sacrifices were an abomination to the Lord.¹²²⁶ Before the Israelites entered the land, the Lord warned them about the many abominations of the nations. These included sacrificing children in the fire, and the practice of witchcraft in any of its many forms.¹²²⁷ Transvestism is an abomination to the Lord.¹²²⁸ The wages of a prostitute (male or female) is abominable to the Lord.¹²²⁹ Those who behave unrighteously are an abomination to the Lord.¹²³⁰ A *"perverse"* person, and those who are of a *"perverse heart"* are

1217 Exodus 19:18; 24:17.

1218 Deuteronomy 4:12,15; 5:4; 9:10; 10:4

1219 Numbers 11:1-3. See also Isaiah 66:16.

1220 Numbers 16:35.

1221 Deuteronomy 4:24; 9:3; Hebrews 12:29.

1222 1Kings 18:38. See also: 2Chronicles 7:1.

1223 **John Stott.** *The Cross of Christ.* InterVarsity Press. 2006. P171.

1224 Leviticus 18:22; 20:13.

1225 Deuteronomy 7:25.

1226 Deuteronomy 12:31; 17:1

1227 Deuteronomy 18:9-12.

1228 Deuteronomy 22:5.

1229 Deuteronomy 23:18.

1230 Deuteronomy 25:16.

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an abomination to the Lord.¹²³¹ Proverbs 6 lists seven things which the Lord counts as an abomination.¹²³² These comprise:

a proud look
a lying tongue
hands that shed innocent blood
a heart that devises wicked plans
feet that are swift in running to evil
a false witness *who* speaks lies
one who sows discord among brethren

Dishonest scales, diverse weights, and diverse measures are all an abomination to the Lord.¹²³³ Sacrifice offered by the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.¹²³⁴ The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, as are their thoughts.¹²³⁵ Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord, as are lying lips.¹²³⁶ These abominations are so because the Lord God is utterly good, pure, holy, right, true and perfect in His very essence.

There are many texts which indicate that the Lord is so angry against sin that His fire will come to consume all that is evil:

Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench *it*, because of the evil of your doings.¹²³⁷

Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads, says the Lord God.¹²³⁸

Seek the Lord and live, lest He break out like fire *in* the house of Joseph, and devour *it*, with no one to quench *it* in Bethel—¹²³⁹

1231 Proverbs 3:32; 11:20.
1232 Proverbs 6:16-19.
1233 Proverbs 11:1; 20:10,23.
1234 Proverbs 15:8; 21:27.
1235 Proverbs 15:9,26.
1236 Proverbs 12:22; 16:5.
1237 Jeremiah 4:4.
1238 Ezekiel 22:31.
1239 Amos 5:6.

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Therefore wait for Me, says the Lord, until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination *is* to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy.¹²⁴⁰

We ought to remember that the fire of God's judgement awaits the whole of the unrepentant world.¹²⁴¹ Thus God's wrath and anger against sin results from His holiness and goodness. He is a consuming fire and simply cannot abide nor tolerate any evil, but there is no fury *in* Him, residing within His very essence. God does express His wrath against all sin always, but there is never any *"fury"* in Him.

Now the thought of any coming against God is not merely laughable, but equally utterly ridiculous. However if one did attempt such a thing by bringing *"briers and thorns"* in opposition to the Lord in a fight, these, of course, would be no obstacle to the God who exists amidst fire. He would simply *"burn them together,"* both the thorns and briers, and the one who fights against Him.¹²⁴² It is interesting that an opponent or enemy of God is pictured coming against Him with those things which typify the curse on the ground, (briers and thorns). It may be that the opponents of God are blaming Him for the fact of the curse. Now whilst it was God who cursed the ground, the sole reason for this was Adam and Eve's sin.¹²⁴³ It is quite typical that men and women blame God for those things which are in fact their own fault.

27:5.

In the context of all that we have discussed thus far, verse 5 is quite astonishing, although more astonishing things are still to come! It would seem that the Lord is saying here that those who may initially come with all guns blazing against God, may then be turned in their folly to make peace with God! It is like an angry toddler who runs at father or mother with rage, but then realises that they cannot have any victory, and so fall into mum or dad's arms with tears of sorrow. We simply cannot take hold of God's strength in opposition to Him, but look how marvellous and gracious He is! We can take hold of God's strength to make peace! That the God who is a consuming fire and who obliterates sin because of His pure and holy being, would make it possible for us, (who are in essence sin), to be at peace, is, quite simply, remarkable. But it is true, for the piece ends with a definite promise: *"he shall make peace with Me."*

1240 Zephaniah 3:8.

1241 2Thessalonians 1:8; 2Peter 3:7,10.

1242 Isaiah 27:4.

1243 Genesis 3:17.

[b] The covering and removal of sin. (Isaiah 27:6-9).

27:6.

This next section follows hard on the heels of the first. We have just been thinking in verse 5 about how those who are opposed to the Lord may turn and instead make peace with God. Here in verse 6 we open with those who come to the Lord. In the following verses we have not only those who come to the Lord, but also a discussion of how this is possible given the problem of sin. Remarkably we have an incredible contrast which sets the striking of Israel alongside the striking of the Lord Himself! More of that in a moment.

We start with a consideration of coming to peace with God.¹²⁴⁴ God is so welcoming! You only need to hear the many appeals throughout Scripture to know this.¹²⁴⁵ But here we find that whoever comes, whatever their status or position, they will be made to *“take root in Jacob”*! The point here is that God is the Great Gardener who tends His vineyard and includes any who come and truly want peace with Him. These will be planted in God's vineyard. In New Testament terms we can think of the idea of being *“grafted”* into the vine.¹²⁴⁶ The reference to Jacob highlights the sinful origins of Israel (Jacob was a deceiver). But then we find Israel mentioned – a new name. Remember that this new name means “wrestling with God,” as it points back to the occasion when Jacob fought with God and would not let the Lord go until he received a blessing.¹²⁴⁷ This is significant given what we have already discussed from verse 4, where the one who fights against the Lord can take hold of the strength of the Lord in repentance to make peace. Now Israel will be cultivated and shall blossom and bud, and their fruit will become worldwide! How this has been fulfilled in the great story of the New Testament church (by which I mean true believers not the various organisations which claim the name “church” such as the Roman Catholics).

27:7.

Verse 7 poses somewhat of a challenge, as it is quite a difficult read! There is a variety amongst different translations. The difficulty comes in identifying the pronouns. Some translations attempt to clarify by adding the Lord's name and Israel.

1244 Isaiah 27:6.

1245 Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:17.

1246 Romans 11:17f.

1247 Genesis 32:22-29.

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Table 37.1: Various translations of Isaiah 27:7.

NKJV	NASB	ESV	EHV	AKJV	YLT
Has He struck Israel as He struck those who struck him?	Like the striking of Him who has struck them, has He struck them?	Has he struck them as he struck those who struck them?	Has he struck Israel the way he struck those who struck them?	Hath he smitten him, as he smote those that smote him?	As the smiting of his smiter hath He smitten him?
Or has He been slain according to the slaughter of those who were slain by Him?	Or like the slaughter of His slain, have they been slain?	Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain?	Have they been killed the same way those who killed them were killed?	Or is he slain according to the slaughter of them that are slain by him?	As the slaying of his slain doth He slay?

Harman points out that there is rhythmic alliteration in Isaiah 27:7, and he and offers the following transliteration:¹²⁴⁸

← Hebrew reads from the right

הַכֹּמֶכֶת מַכֵּהוּ הִכָּהוּ אִם-כְּהָרֶג הֲרָגוּ הָרָג
 / / / / / / /
 horâg h̄rugâv k^ehereg 'im hikkâhû makkêhû hakk^emakkat

Reading in English:

hakk^emakkat makkêhû hikkâhû 'im k^ehereg h̄rugâv horâg

The first thing to make plain here is that there are only two different verbs employed throughout the whole verse, but each is used three times. In the first part we have the Hebrew verb: **נָכָה** *nākāh* used three times, which means: “to strike,” or “to smite.” In the second half of the verse we have the Hebrew verb: **הָרַג** *hārag* used three times which means “to kill,” or “to slay.” The first verb implies being brought low or knocked down, whilst the second suggests the loss of life.

How should we understand the first part of Isaiah 27:7?

¹²⁴⁸ Harman. *Isaiah*. P209.

← Hebrew reads from the right

הַכֹּמֶכֶת מִכֶּהוּ הַכֹּהוּג

hikkâhû makkêhû h^{ak}mak^{at}

Although we only have the masculine pronouns used throughout, it would seem best to recognise that we have three different subjects here, Israel, the enemies of Israel, and the Lord. Taking the NKJV rendering, it seems to be asking whether the Lord had struck Israel in the same way as He had struck those who struck them. In other words, has the Lord dealt as harshly with Israel as their enemies had been with them (whom the Lord eventually struck)? The answer to this is obviously, of course not!¹²⁴⁹ The point is that the Lord has disciplined Israel but He has not struck the people of God as He has the enemies of God. There is a vast difference between judgement (on the enemies) and chastisement (on the people of God). This seems to be the main point of the text.

The second sentence can be understood differently depending on how we identify the first pronoun.

← Hebrew reads from the right

אִם-כִּהְרֹג הֶרְגִּיו הֶרֶג

horâg h^erugâv k^ehereg 'im

For many, the second sentence is an affirmation of the first. In this case the pronoun “*he*” would refer to Israel. We would render the second sentence if this were the case as:

Has **Israel** been slain according to the slaughter of those who were slain by Him?

However the NKJV has capitalised the pronoun, which would indicate that the Lord is meant by the pronoun. In this case the sentence would read like this:

Has **the Lord** been slain according to the slaughter of those who were slain by Him?

¹²⁴⁹ These are identified as enemies because they are the ones who struck Israel (“*those who struck him*”).

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Now most, if not all, favour the first rendering. However the second version would give us the wonderful truth that the Lord has been slain by God! In other words we have a reference to the sacrifice of Christ!

Whatever the case may be, we do well to remember that Israel does sometimes stand as a type of the Messiah. In later chapters of Isaiah we read about the servant of God who is sometimes Israel and at other times the Messiah. If this second sentence must be taken as Israel and not the Lord then we are brought to the truth that Israel does indeed deserve to die, but their death will not be as that experienced by the enemies of God. Remember also that as believers, whilst Christ died in our place, we are also *"in Christ"* so that we too share in the death that Christ experienced although, remarkably, not to the same degree!

One objection to the rendering I have favoured is that it would indicate that the Lord's death is, somehow, not as severe as that of the enemies of God. This is not possible when we realise that the Saviour took upon Himself the very wrath of God. However the Saviour could not be held by death because He was perfect. The enemies of God suffer the final and ultimate death – eternal separation from God's goodness and glory. The two are remarkably different.

27:8,9.

The last two verses of this section show how the Lord has dealt with sin. The opening word translated *"in measure"* is unusual and seems to be derived from the word which was used to indicate "a measure." It is unusual because it is a doubling of the original word (*ca'cē'ah* instead of *cē'ah*). Perhaps it should be rendered: "measure for measure" which would be similar to the phrase "an eye for an eye" suggesting a form of judgement. Some translations supply feminine pronouns because of the implication of divorce from the phrase *"sending ... away."* This is forced and does not seem to be true to the text. The NKJV seems to be the only translation which uses the word *"it"* in verse 8. Other translations supply *"them"* or *"her"* signifying Israel. However verse 9 speaks of the Lord *"taking away his sin"* and so the NKJV seems to be correct.

The idea, then, is that the Lord is going to deal with sin and iniquity. Let us consider exactly what the Lord is doing here. First we have the Lord sending this sin and iniquity away and in so doing He is also contending with it. There is a sense of banishment, a judgement, of casting away as far as one can go. The next part of verse 8 would be a further description that amplified the first part. The phrase *"rough wind"* only occurs here but the phrase *"east wind"* can be found in several

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other places in Scripture. The east wind is one that brings blight in the form of locusts.¹²⁵⁰ The east wind seems to have been a violent one for it could carry away a man, and break the ships of Tarshish.¹²⁵¹ It is described in Jonah as a vehement wind.¹²⁵² The east wind causes plants to wither and dry up.¹²⁵³ The east wind is also called *“the wind of the Lord.”*¹²⁵⁴ The thought then would be that the Lord would not just send the sin away, but utterly remove it with a vehement and devastating storm-force wind!

Then in verse 9 we have the clear statement that Jacob's iniquity will be covered and his sin will be taken away. How wonderful! And what will be the sign that such a thing has been accomplished? Well the *“fruit of taking away his sin”* will be that his false worship and idolatry with wooden images and incense altars will be rendered as useless as the dust. The altars will be so smashed up that there will only be dust remaining and the images and idols will *“not stand.”* Literally it will be such that the idols and images will not arise to stand on the altars because they are mere dust. It is hard not to see here a negative implication of false worship and idolatry. Such cannot bring resurrection (will not arise)! One rendering of verse 9 makes the idea clear:

when he makes the stones of the altar as chalk dust beaten to dust so that the idols and images shall rise no more.

The “resurrection” or rising of the idols was false, of course, but the action of this repentant one has shown that there is no new life within them – they will rise no more.

[c] The desolation of the fortified city. (Isaiah 27:10,11).

27:10.

The final part of this section issues a warning to those who would seek to continue with this world and its ways. We are alerted that this is indeed a warning by the opening words. The city is one described as *“fortified.”* Perhaps we are being lead to consider Jerusalem in an ironic sense? It was once a fortified city but now it is desolate. Such news is hard to hear if you are an Israelite. Jerusalem was everything. However in the New Testament the Lord Jesus made it abundantly clear

1250 Genesis 41:6,23,27.

1251 Job 27:21; Psalm 48:7; Jeremiah 18:17. See also Ezekiel 27:26.

1252 Jonah 4:8.

1253 Ezekiel 17:10; 19:12

1254 Hosea 13:15.

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that place and location were far less important in the new creation.¹²⁵⁵ Or alternatively we are being directed to those cities of fortification which indicate a rebellion against the Lord. We would start by considering Nimrod, the first in the post-flood world to build cities with defences and fortifications.¹²⁵⁶ The Lord is against war – human war – of all kinds. And so here we read that the Lord has made this “*fortified city*” to be desolate, (i.e. solitary and alone), “*forsaken*,” (i.e. abandoned without inhabitant), and a “*wilderness*,” (i.e. where nothing can grow and flourish). The once fortified city is now overrun to such an extent that it is left as a place for the calf to lie down and eat whatever remains by way of vegetation.

27:11.

The boughs and branches may be a reference to the city considered as a vine. If so it is a vine which is dying and withering. There are no men left in the city, but the women come and use the broken branches as fuel. There is no enterprise, energy, nor vitality left in this city. The only activity that is going on is calves feeding and women warming themselves. The comment that concludes this very sorry state of affairs is telling. This is a people of “*no understanding*.”

Understanding.

I think it vital that we pause a moment to consider this concept. The Bible seems to be full of the idea that God requires us to understand. Understanding and knowledge receive short shrift in our day amongst Christians, but this is folly. Understanding and knowledge is initiated through a reverent fear of the Lord.¹²⁵⁷ It is not generated by independent autonomous seeking, as supposed by modern science and philosophy. This fear of God is a vitally necessary thing, because without it we would plough onwards in our own strength. With the fear of God we come to a halt, and begin to truly listen to what the Lord has to say. Such thoughts highlight the quite amazing fact that as humans we rely so much on ourselves, on our own way and understanding. Here in this text the people have none, and this is evident not because things have become desperate (it is the case that folly and lack of understanding has lead to this state of affairs as chapter one indicates), but because no one seems to want to do anything about the situation. The women merely warm themselves with the broken boughs. What understanding do we have? What true knowledge do we possess? How are

1255 See John 42:19 where the Lord spoke of His body as the new temple, not the edifice in Jerusalem. See John 4:21-24 where the Lord points out that true worship was to be in Spirit and Truth, not in any set location be it Jerusalem or on another mountain.

1256 Genesis 10:10-12; 11:1-9.

1257 Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Ecclesiastes 12:13.

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we making use of such to be wise? These are foundational thoughts, but they speak into the whole issue of the relationship between modern science and the Christian faith, or of that between what the world demands and says and what the Lord leads us into. For far too long many Christians have been duped into thinking that the Christian faith has limited knowledge and understanding, or that it needs supplementing with that which comes from modern science, for example. Then there are those whose knowledge and understanding focuses on a narrow band of things. Some know a great deal about Luther or Calvin and their doctrines, or about the history of the church. Such pay little heed to any other disciplines or avenues of enquiry. However the Bible, the revealed will and word of God, must be considered the foundation and basis for **any and all** legitimate enquiry. The Christian ought to be an understanding person with true knowledge and an authority on all things. Why? It is because in Christ are *“hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,”* and our knowledge of Christ comes solely (in an objective sense) from Scripture.¹²⁵⁸ We know nothing at all that is not conveyed by means of the word of God imparted to us by the Spirit of God. It is possible for a person (even a Christian) to read Scripture and be none the wiser. However the Christian who seeks the Lord in sincerity will be governed and directed by the Holy Spirit to discern the truth and gain an understanding which will answer **any** situation, and provide **the basis** for reflection and work in all endeavours and disciplines. The fact that many Christians disagree must be because their understanding has been influenced (or tainted), by sin, by this world's ways, or by modern science rather than by the Spirit of God. It is a dreadful state of affairs in which we find ourselves that so many Christian leaders have absorbed and imbibed that which comes from modern science (evolution) and other worldly ways of thinking.

You may think that the last conclusion is harsh. But remember how much the Lord has done. There comes a point where no more can be done. Remember the situation before the flood. God warned the world that He could no longer strive with man. They had gone to that point at which there was no hope, and so judgement was going to fall. Incidentally we must hold to a universal flood that devastated the entire globe and caused what we now see as sedimentary deposits all around the world. If we do not, we run the terrible risk of limiting the final judgement. Peter in his second epistle links the two, and if we limit the flood to a local affair, then why not limit the final judgement to a few or an isolated location?

To return to the concluding point. God is long suffering and not willing that any should perish. However He knows when that point of hopelessness is reached as far as any individual is

¹²⁵⁸ Colossians 2:2,3.

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concerned. Thankfully we do not know this point. When we come across any person, no matter whom they be, our attitude should be: this one was made in the image of God and must hear the gospel! We ought to warn every man and teach them everything we know of the Saviour. Listen to these words of Paul at the conclusion of the first chapter of his letter to the Colossians:

28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. **29** To this *end* I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.¹²⁵⁹

This is to be our heart! But do remember the vastness and the limitlessness of our subject! *“Him we preach”* is surely inexhaustible!¹²⁶⁰

27:11. (Revisited).

Note how this conclusion begins with the fact that it is the Lord who made us (*“He who made them,” “He who formed them”*). We do not think like this do we? We assume that we have a right to exist and determine our own way! And yet God owns us! He made us! And how foolish if we refuse to listen, and if we have no understanding. Mercy is long – very long – but it does have an end. We get a very similar thought in Paul's letter to the Romans in chapter 9:

19 You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” **20** But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, “Why have you made me like this?” **21** Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honour and another for dishonour? **22** *What* if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, **23** and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, **24** even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?¹²⁶¹

God is the *“Potter”* and as such He has the perfect right to discard a lump of clay that will not submit! We do not like to think of ourselves as being fully owned. However we ought always to remember that we did not chose to be created. We awaken in consciousness and grow and develop, but no one ever decided in and of themselves to come to be! We were made. We were formed. And we were made and formed by God, not by our parents, and certainly not by evolution!

1259 Colossians 1:28,29.

1260 See also Romans 11:33.

1261 Romans 9:19-24.

[3] The great trumpet will be blown! (Isaiah 27:12,13).

The final section of Isaiah 27 concerns the end. It does not include all that will happen, for there is specific focus intended. We can divide verses 12 and 13 into two parts signalled by the repetition of the phrase “*in that day,*” and the mention of the “*great trumpet.*” In verse 12 we read of the Lord doing a work, whereas in verse 13 we find that something happens as a result of the “*great trumpet*” being blown. This difference is also shown by the subjects in each case.

27:12.

In verse 12 we find the Lord threshing the harvest. He will gather His fruit from as far as Babylon where “*the River*” is found, down to the “*Brook of Egypt.*” The phrase “*the channel of the River*” is curious in the Hebrew. It can be translated either as “flowing stream” or as “a head of grain.” So there is a play on words here. The idea of gathering or gleaning picks up on this. The idea is that every individual, grain by grain, shall be collected and gathered up from off the ground from the River (Euphrates) to the gates and borders of Egypt. It is all the children of Israel (i.e. true believers) who will be gathered and gleaned. This is the great in-gathering at the end which the Lord refers to in His teachings.¹²⁶² The idea of being threshed is that the grain is separated from the husk. And so we learn that when called finally by the Lord in His great gathering of the redeemed, these will be fully made new, with new bodies and no taint of sin or error!

27:13.

But the second group of people will not be personally gathered by the Lord. These are the ones who will be “called” (or better alerted) by the sound of the great trumpet. That is, they will be arrested by the coming judgment having failed to heed the gentle call of the gospel throughout the last days. Every ear will hear that blast which signals the end and the return of The King. None will be able to resist coming and being held to account. They may try and run to caves and holes in the ground, but still they will come, for the trumpet blast of God has been given.¹²⁶³ So whom are these who respond to this blast on the trumpet? They are described in two ways. They are those “*who are about to perish,*” and those “*who are outcasts.*” The first of these indicates the idea of perishing or being destroyed as one who is lost. The term “*outcasts*” signifies those who are banished or thrust out. In both of these expressions we are being shown that in contrast to the “*gathered*” we have

1262 See for example: Matthew 13:30f; 22:10f; 23:37; 24:31f.

1263 Isaiah 2:19; Revelation 6:15.

Studies in Isaiah.

those who are thrust into “*outer darkness.*”¹²⁶⁴ These lost outcasts are to be found “*in the land of Egypt*” and “*in the land of Assyria.*” In other words they are not part of the children of Israel, but are children of this world. Both Egypt and Assyria have features which display aspects of the world's way, rather than those of heaven and the kingdom of God. The descriptions show us that there are those destined to be gathered by the Lord, and there are those who are lost and fit only to be thrown out. So what will happen to these two groups? As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, this text does not tell us everything which will happen at the end of time. Here the focus is on the glory of God. And so we find that both groups of people will be brought to the “*holy mount at Jerusalem*” for the purpose of worshipping the Lord. This is not a great jamboree, nor is it like a great church gathering. Instead it fits in with the apostle Paul's statements concerning Christ's exaltation which are found in Philippians 2:

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, **11** and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.¹²⁶⁵

And also of Paul's reflection on judgement found in Romans:

11 For it is written: “as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” **12** So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.¹²⁶⁶

The quote Paul is using comes from Isaiah:

I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.¹²⁶⁷

This includes everyone, both those who are being saved and those who are perishing. For the former the worship is a joy, but for the latter it is a sudden realisation of the truth without time to change. This should move us to ensure that people hear the great gospel now before it is too late.

1264 Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30.

1265 Philippians 2:9-11.

1266 Romans 14:11,12.

1267 Isaiah 45:23.

Chapter 38.

Isaiah 28:1-29.

Woe (1) to the pride of leadership!

The third major section of Isaiah's first part (Isaiah 1-39), runs from Isaiah 28 to Isaiah 39. It includes a series of six “woes” that also includes some wonderful descriptions of the king who will reign in righteousness and the highway of holiness. It is to be recalled that Isaiah has already given six woes in chapter 5.

Textual analysis.

The first woe centres around the pride and arrogance of leadership both in Israel (Ephraim) and Judah (Jerusalem). There is a dual contrast here. On the one hand we have the contrast between true knowledge and drunken behaviour (Ephraim), and on the other hand we have the contrast between the word of the Lord and a false covenant (with death – Jerusalem). At the end there is a concluding comment about how true wisdom comes from God. We can organise the contents of this first woe as follows:

[1] The pride of intoxicated man is a fading flower (Isaiah 28:1-13).

[2] Woe to the scornful leaders who give up hope (Isaiah 28:14-22).

[3] The God who instructs. (Isaiah 28:23-29).

[4] General comments on the text as a whole.

The analysis for each section will be given separately as we come to it.

Studies in Isaiah.

[1] The pride of intoxicated man is a fading flower (Isaiah 28:1-13).

1 Woe

to the crown of pride,
to the drunkards of Ephraim,
whose glorious beauty
is a fading flower which is at the head of the verdant valleys,
to those who are overcome with wine!

2 Behold,

the Lord has
a mighty and strong one,
like
a tempest of hail and
a destroying storm,
like
a flood of mighty waters overflowing,
who will bring *them* down to the earth with *His* hand.
3 The crown of pride,
the drunkards of Ephraim,
will be trampled underfoot; 4 And
the glorious beauty
is a fading flower which is at the head of the verdant valley,
like the first fruit before the summer,
which an observer sees;
he eats it up while it is still in his hand.

5 In that day

the Lord of hosts will be for
a crown of glory and
a diadem of beauty
to the remnant of His people,

6 For

a spirit of justice
to him who sits in judgement,
and for
strength
to those who turn back the battle at the gate.

7 But they also have erred through wine, and
through intoxicating drink are out of the way;

the priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink,
they are swallowed up by wine,
they are out of the way through intoxicating drink;
they err in vision,
they stumble *in* judgement.

8 For all tables are full of vomit *and* filth;
no place *is* clean.

9 “Whom will he teach knowledge? and

whom will he make to understand the message?

Those *just* weaned from milk?

Those *just* drawn from the breasts?

10 For

precept *must be* upon precept,
precept upon precept,
line upon line,
line upon line,
here a little,
there a little.”

Studies in Isaiah.

11 For
with stammering lips and
another tongue
He will speak
to this people,
12 To whom
He said,
“This *is* the rest *with which* you may cause the weary to rest,”
and,
“This *is* the refreshing”;
yet they would not hear.

13 But
the word of the Lord
was to them,
“precept upon precept,
precept upon precept,
line upon line,
line upon line,
here a little,
there a little,”
that they
might go and fall backward, and
be broken and snared and caught.

The first part of this “*woe*” is addressed to Ephraim – the northern kingdom of Israel who had compromised their faith through alliances with other nations, and who had destroyed the true faith for one with man-made inventions. The passage begins by showing us a contrast between the Lord and those who lead in Ephraim. It then goes on to detail the Lord's intentions “*in that day*” but does not dispense with the contrast. Then also we are given details of the Lord's intentions to teach and train.

28:1.

The first woe is addressed to Ephraim which tribe stands for Israel, (the northern kingdom), since it was one of the largest and more prominent of the tribes. The problem addressed is spelt out very clearly here. Their basic attitude was to drink wine and dwell in their pride. We note that they were once possessed of a “*glorious beauty*” and this reminds us that God made all things good in the beginning.¹²⁶⁸ Man is made in the very image of God which whilst fallen and broken post-fall, is nonetheless still reflective of the Maker of all things. Ephraim were not just occasional party-goers, for they were “*overcome with wine*” which indicates an obsession, and so they were known as “*drunkards.*” What, I wonder, are we known as? The problem is compounded by the fact that they were also proud. Their headgear was pride (“*the crown of pride*”) and this indicates that the very

1268 Genesis 1.

Studies in Isaiah.

top leaders of the nation were involved in this excess. It was not just a problem within the populace, but went to the very top. To be an alcoholic is one thing, but to be a proud one is infinitely worse, for who can speak or advise such a person? It is one thing to be consumed by some habit. It is quite another to refuse to hear or listen to those who seek to correct and adjust errant behaviour. Isn't mankind proud? Who likes to be corrected? Who is humble enough to accept the judgement of another on an aspect of behaviour. Here it would seem that these leaders wore crowns of pride!¹²⁶⁹ In other words they celebrated their drunken behaviour. It was all that they lived for. They do not seem to have bothered with learning what God had revealed, neither were they really bothered about doing that which God had commissioned them for. These two factors meant that what they really were had been destroyed.

Now the outcome of being drunk and proud was that whatever glory they possessed by virtue of their creation was now *"fading."* The location for this *"fading flower"* signifies a prominent place, for it was *"at the head of the verdant valley."* Such a description serves to remind us that the Lord gave Israel (Ephraim) every opportunity and blessing possible. They were in a prime location (*"at the head"*), which was rich in life (*"verdant valley"*). But now their glory is turned to shame. Now they had become unsightly. Picture the scene. We have a verdant valley full of life and abundance, but there at the top, in the most prominent place, was this *"fading flower."* How this speaks to us today. What was once a glorious church in England at one time is now no more than a dried up, shrivelled up weed.

28:2.

Having pronounced the *"woe"* and given the reasons for such, we next have a stark contrast which is introduced with the word *"behold."* This word arrests the attention, informing us to look carefully. So what are we to pay heed to? Well, we are told that *"the Lord"* has someone who will *"bring them down to the earth with His hand."* Such a statement indicates the moving from an elevated position to one of lowliness. Considering the flower of Ephraim that is now *"fading"* the point is that it will be uprooted and thrown down to the ground, no longer to be seen *"at the head of the verdant valley."* So whom is the person who will do this? The Lord has one who is described as both *"mighty"* and as the *"strong one,"* and this one is further described as being like three things:

¹²⁶⁹ Isaiah 28:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

a tempest of hail.
a destroying storm
a flood of mighty waters overflowing.

The Lord God Himself is termed the *“Mighty One”* and this idea of might, as in overcoming power, is frequent in Isaiah.¹²⁷⁰ It speaks of the champion, the victor. Thus the Lord is styled early in Isaiah as *“the Mighty One of Israel,”* and as one who would *“send them a Saviour and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them,”* and then later He is described as: *“the Lord shall [who shall] go forth like a mighty man.”*¹²⁷¹ In contrast the *“mighty”* men of this world are insufficient and are thus to be judged and will be diminished.¹²⁷² Then we read of the *“strong one.”* Such a phrase only occurs three times but the other two are linked to mere men.¹²⁷³ In fact we ought to note that the Hebrew reads literally as follows:

Behold a mighty and strong one to the Lord ...

The two thoughts, then, are combined. We see this connection also at Psalm 24:8:

*The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.*¹²⁷⁴

With the threefold descriptions which follow, we are thus to understand one who is truly mighty and capable of great exploits. However the emphasis is not on salvation but upon judgment. The hail, the storm, and the overflowing flood are all pictures of the wrath of God being poured out. For example, the Lord rained down hail upon the Egyptians as one of the ten plagues, and used the same in helping Joshua overrun the Amorites.¹²⁷⁵ We need hardly mention the great flood at the time of Noah which was sent to judge the world.¹²⁷⁶ The *“storm”* is also another means by which the Lord brings judgement.¹²⁷⁷

1270 Psalm 24:8; 45:3; 50:1; 89:8; 132:2,5; Isaiah 1:24; 10:34; 19:20; 30:29; 49:26; 60:16; Jeremiah 20:11; Zephaniah 3:17.

1271 Isaiah 42:13.

1272 Isaiah 3:2,25; 21:17; 22:17.

1273 Jeremiah 8:16; Ezekiel 30:22.

1274 Psalm 24:8.

1275 Exodus 9:18f; Joshua 10:11.

1276 Genesis 6-9.

1277 Jonah 1:4.

28:3,4.

At verse 3 we are given a repeat of the designation of Ephraim as a proud drunk using the same words we noted in verse 1, and we are informed that such will be *“trampled underfoot.”* This phrase signifies that which is useless and worthless, as salt that has lost its savour.¹²⁷⁸ In Lamentations chapter 1 we read these words:

The Lord has trampled underfoot all my mighty *men* in my midst; He has called an assembly against me to crush my young men; the Lord trampled *as* in a wine-press the virgin daughter of Judah.¹²⁷⁹

This brings to mind the idea of the wine-press where the Lord treads upon the sinners in judgement.¹²⁸⁰

And then in verse 4 we are told again of Ephraim's fading nature, and we are informed that Ephraim as such is as a summer fruit which is ripe for consumption. The expression: *“which an observer sees; he eats it up while it is still in his hand”* is meant to convey haste. It is as though a ripe apple is seen on a branch and immediately that it is seen it is taken and devoured all at once.

The repeat of phrases found in verse 1 serves to make these opening four verses a complete section. From this we are to see the nature of Ephraim and the judgment that is coming swiftly. Although we have analysed this text already it is helpful to see it arranged with these repeated phrases arranged in synchrony:

- 1 Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim,
whose glorious beauty is a fading flower which is at the head of the verdant valleys,
to those who are overcome with wine!
- 2 Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one, like a tempest of hail and a
destroying storm, like a flood of mighty waters overflowing, who will bring
them down to the earth with His hand.
- 3 The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, will be trampled underfoot;
- 4 And the glorious beauty is a fading flower which is at the head of the verdant
valley, like the first fruit before the summer, which an observer sees; he eats it up
while it is still in his hand.

From this arrangement it can be seen that the Lord and His mighty one are at the centre bringing judgement. The section opens with a clear and frank description of the failure of Ephraim and its

1278 Matthew 5:13.

1279 Lamentations 1:15.

1280 Isaiah 63:1,3.

Studies in Isaiah.

sin, and closes with a restatement of this but set in the context of judgement (*“will be trampled underfoot,”* and the idea of being consumed at the end of verse 4).

28:5,6.

In these two verses we learn more of what the Lord will be to certain people, who are termed *“the remnant of His people.”*¹²⁸¹ These were the ones saved from, or out of, destruction and speak of the true believers. Before we begin commenting further it is important to see how these two verses go together, and so we remind the reader of the analysis of the text:

5 In that day
the LORD of hosts will be
for
a crown of glory
and a diadem of beauty
to the remnant of His people,
6 for
a spirit of justice
to him who sits in judgment,
and for
strength
to those who turn back the battle at the gate.

From this arrangement it is clear that the “Lord of hosts” will be three things for His people, who are also described in three different ways. We begin by noting that this crown and diadem is to be worn by the whole company, that is, *“the remnant of His people.”* The New Testament speaks of a personal crown given to those who overcome and who persevere by grace and with the Spirit's lead reaching heaven's glory.¹²⁸² However, what is in view here is the crown and diadem to be given in place of the rotten headgear worn by Ephraim. Now the Lord Himself (*“the Lord of hosts”*) will be both *“a crown of glory,”* and also *“a diadem of beauty”* for the remnant. These were to supplant and take the place of the *“crown of pride”* and the fading flower that was supposed to be the *“glorious beauty”* of Ephraim.¹²⁸³ In that the same idea is given twice here, we are thus to accept the great certainty of this event. The crown will not just be something of great beauty because of its inherent glory and boast, but also it will be beautiful on account of the embellishments and decorations. The word *“glory”* describing the *“crown”* in verse 5 comes from a word that means

1281 Isaiah 28:5.

1282 1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 2:5; 4:8; James 1:12.

1283 Isaiah 28:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

“to swell up,” whilst the word *“beauty”* which is linked with the *“diadem”* comes from a word meaning “to embellish” or “adorn.”

It will be *“in that day”* when the Lord comes, that He will be first a crown of splendour that speaks of the true pride and glory which comes from God, not the false and vaunted pride which man delights in. Only the perfect, holy, good, and right God can glory and bring boast in purity. Thus He will be the headgear for us which speaks of glory.

But then second, the Lord Himself will be a *“diadem”* which is beautiful on account of its many attributes or adornments. We move from a consideration of the Lord in His splendour and glory, to some of the fine details of why He is so glorious. The crown worn by our Queen has many jewels which adorn it but none meet the beauty and radiance of those which beam from our diadem!

But what do we understand by this image? What is implied by the fact that the remnant will wear a crown of glory which will be none other than the Lord Himself? Well I think that it speaks first of the rule and governance of the people. In the New Testament we learn that Christ is the only Head of the church.¹²⁸⁴ This is such an important truth which I feel is ignored by the modern expressions of church. In the UK we have a state church whose head is the Queen and which has a very definite and developed hierarchy with archbishops, bishops, and various other posts, none of which we can find in the Bible. All we do find in Scripture is that all believers are priests unto God, and there are those set apart as pastors and deacons with the express purpose of serving the church, but by no means exercising authority independent of Christ and His word. In fact Paul makes it very clear that the body (the individual members of the church) are all connected to the One Head, Christ.¹²⁸⁵ Paul writes that some who were cheating the Colossians of their reward were those:

*... not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.*¹²⁸⁶

The Lord is each individual believer's Captain, Master, Beloved, Friend and so on, so that we are then justified in applying these verses to true followers of Christ individually.¹²⁸⁷ This is backed up by the fact that all believers are priests and kings in the Lord's Kingdom.¹²⁸⁸ Taking the idea of a personal crown, might we not also be drawn here to consider that as true believers we *“have the*

1284 Colossians 1:18.

1285 Colossians 2:19.

1286 Colossians 2:19.

1287 Jeremiah 31:34.

1288 1Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6.

Studies in Isaiah.

mind of Christ”?¹²⁸⁹ Can we not see here that we are enabled by the great grace of God to think God's thoughts after Him? Further, Paul speaks of receiving a crown on *“that day”* when the Lord returns but he also exhorts us to be continually renewed in mind and not to be conformed to this world's way of thinking.¹²⁹⁰ When the Lord comes again He will give us this crown to wear so that we shall be *“like Him,”* but in the meantime we are being fitted to wear this great crown, and in the process of sanctification as we gaze into His glory, we are being transformed from *“glory to glory”* into His image by the Spirit.¹²⁹¹

We have concentrated on the details of this crown and diadem thus far, but in verse 6 we learn about the dual purpose for the remnant being given such a crown and diadem. In the first place we discover that this crown was to be *“for a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgement.”* This speaks of those who may have any authority, such as a pastor, a deacon, or a parent, for example. There is need to make decisions in life, but how do we do this? Well we have a crown and so can exercise authority but we do not do this simply from our own strength, nor from our own ideas or thoughts. The crown we wear is not merely a headpiece. It is Christ Himself! And so we exercise authority in the name and power of Christ. In other words we do not do our own will but the will of Him who is the Head. He is the crown. He is the authority. What does this mean in practice? Well unless the Lord leads, and unless we are lead by the Spirit, and unless we are guided by what God has spoken (His word) let us never claim to be wearing the crown of glory!¹²⁹² And so we are lead by prayer and consecration to the Lord, and through deep spiritual and prayerful study of His word. In this way we can give right decisions or right judgement and justice.

But then a second purpose is also expressed thus: *“and for strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.”* This is not just *“strength”* in battle, but such that comes at the very gate of the city, by which we mean the entryways into the church. In this we are taught the same basic truth as we find in the letter of Jude who argued for a necessary contending for the faith. There are many who seek to subvert and despoil what Christ has brought, and many do this from within the church. But we have this incredible crown (Christ Himself) who will be our strength in battle and in defence at the gate. How vital it is to oppose error and heresy. It seems as though the church at present is falling, and is falling in a rapid way. Many pastors do not hold to creation and are swayed by science and evolution. There are those who are departing from the doctrine of substitutionary

1289 1Corinthians 2:16.

1290 Romans 12:1,2; Ephesians 4:23; 2Timothy 4:8.

1291 2Corinthians 3:18; 1John 3:2.

1292 Psalm 119:105; 127:1; Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18.

Studies in Isaiah.

atonement and want only a “God of love,” and there are those who are redefining the very nature and constitution of man so that sexuality is fluid and there is no longer any trust that the soul of man is immortal. There are many other drifts and errors too numerous to list now, but what are we to do? Well in the first place we must never panic because true believers and the true church are crowned with Christ – He is our Head. If we hold fast to Him and to His word we need never fear but we should be of *“good cheer,”* for He has overcome the world even though there are these terrible tribulations all around us.¹²⁹³ The second thing we do is to get ourselves closer to Christ and to His word. We are still works in progress and we are still being sanctified. Where error is found it causes us to go back and confirm what is true and has always been true. I believe that the Lord will never leave nor forsake those who are truly His, and He will not allow such to stray far. The sheep (true sheep) know the Master's voice and will not follow any other.¹²⁹⁴ But in seeing error we may be checked ourselves if we have drifted or have been influenced by such departures. Remember that we are exhorted by Paul In Hebrews to: *“... give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.”*¹²⁹⁵

Apart from the check on error and heresy that bedevils the church at its gate by unscrupulous individuals and by the devil himself, we learn also from this second purpose, that we need Christ our crown for strength in battle. We are in a fight and we are (in truth) soldiers.¹²⁹⁶ We battle not against flesh and blood, but against sin, the world, and the devil.¹²⁹⁷ How we need to consider Paul's teaching in Ephesians 6:10f! The Lord has given us armour to wear and we are fools if we neglect such things. But over and above all else we ought always to defer to the Head, to our Captain in all things.

28:7,8.

From the heady heights of thinking on Christ our crown, we are brought back with a bump to view the awful plight of those in Ephraim once again. We learn in these two verses what effect the intoxication has and the outcome it produces. In verse 7 we are introduced to *“they,”* by which we are to understand the people of Ephraim (Israel). But then as we read on, we discover that it was primarily *“the priest and the prophet,”* those who ought to have been governed and ruled by the Lord and His law, and not by wine (or any other intoxicant), that are the subject of focus.

1293 John 16:33.

1294 John 10:4,5,27.

1295 Hebrews 2:1.

1296 1Timothy 6:12; 2Timothy 2:3,4.

1297 2Corinthians 10:4,5.

Studies in Isaiah.

In table 38.1 we can see that four Hebrew words are used to express what has happened to these folk (and especially the prophets and priests). They have “*erred*” or gone astray, they are “*out of the way*” or are vacillating, they are “*swallowed up*” or are consumed and hence destroyed, and they “*stumble*” or move this way and that so as to stumble. It can be seen that the word “*err*,” occurs three times, and the phrase “*out of the way*,” occurs twice. Then also we note that there are five references to “*wine*” and “*intoxicating drink*.” The prevailing environment and the motivating factor that drove society was intoxication. Here the emphasis is on alcohol and wine, but please note that intoxication and addiction can take many forms.

Table 38.1: Four words used in Isaiah 28:7 illustrating departure.

Hebrew word used.	Statements made in verse 7 (NKJV).	Meaning of Hebrew word.
שָׁגָה	- But they also have erred through wine - the priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink - they err in vision	to stray, to wander.
תָּעָה	- through intoxicating drink are out of the way - they are out of the way through intoxicating drink	to vacillate, i.e. reel or stray (literally or figuratively).
כָּלַע	they are swallowed up by wine	to swallow down, to devour, to make away with (specifically by swallowing); generally, to destroy.
פָּוַק	they stumble in judgement	to move to and fro, to waver.

Now of course a drunken man cannot walk straight and wanders all over the place. In the same way these prophets and priests were going astray. This aspect of their behaviour is applied to their particular offices. The prophets have gone astray in their vision. What they are considering as true revelation, as a word from God, has become confused. Isn't this what we find today? Many in charismatic circles are confused as to what is true in terms of vision and prophecy. If we stick closely to the Scriptures and what these reveal we cannot err. If we think we have new revelation and vision we shall be as these wayward folk and will err as a drunken man. The priests stumble in judgement. It was not just that the prophets got the revelation (vision) wrong, but the priests could not (or would not) apply the vision correctly. Their judgement (decisions) were all astray. Do we not see the same today? Many who claim love for Christ are saying that it is alright to be a “gay” Christian. These misguided leaders are advocates for same-sex relationships and variations of, or

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the self-determination of, gender! Rejection of the truth of Scripture, and supplementing it with man-made vision and idea, inevitably leads to the wrong application of these “new” truths. Sadly many today are drunk. They may not be drunk with wine but they are drunk with power, with excitement, with notoriety or fame, with pleasure, or with many other things. Wine is pleasant to drink. It tastes nice. Intoxicating drink has an exhilarating effect. But these things, the taste and the effect, are temporal and not long lasting. How we emulate these silly leaders by obsessing with different things this world offers! It may be a strong obsession with modern science and scientific “truths” leading to a wrong concept of God, creation and salvation. It may be with ecstatic and mystical happenings which lead to all sorts of error. It may be with political hopes which are doomed to fail. Whatever our obsession and whatever we get drunk on, these will lead us astray and cause us to err.

The second result of these leaders drinking is that the leaders are “*out of the way*” which continues the theme of being in error.¹²⁹⁸ This phrase is given twice for emphasis. They have gone off the track, and have wandered from the truth. The third result is that they have become “*swallowed up*” in their drinking.¹²⁹⁹ It is ironic that what a person consumes to excess ends up with the person being consumed! It is ever the case. A man who worships anything apart from the Lord God will end up becoming like that which he worships. These have not become masters of the drink, but have become swallowed up by their drinking. Alcoholism is a terrible thing. It is not a disease. It is a behaviour and an addiction. What the alcoholic needs to do is to plead with the Lord for mercy and for mastery over their addiction. God is good and does lead such who truly seek Him.

And then in verse 8 we see the dreadful outcome of such an obsession with alcohol. Vomit, filth, and all that is unclean are prevalent everywhere. It isn't just that there is some unseemly things around, but the place was “*full*” of it so that there was “*no place*” that was clean. Isn't this the problem today? Rampant sin and vileness leads to filth and degradation.

28:9,10.

Verse 9 brings forward a series of rhetorical questions made by those in opposition to the prophet. The first question concerns “*knowledge*,” the things that ought to be known. The second question takes this a step further. We need knowledge, of course, but we also need “*understanding*” as well. To understand is to grasp, to separate mentally, or to distinguish. But to “*whom*” will such

1298 Isaiah 28:7.

1299 Isaiah 28:

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a teacher, teach such “*knowledge*” and “*understanding*”? The pronoun “*he*” stands for Isaiah the prophet as one who is to teach. But what we have here is the leaders taunting Isaiah. To whom would this upstart prophet teach knowledge? The last two questions make the suggestion that what Isaiah is bringing forth is fit only for babies and those at the breast.

The taunt continues in verse 10 with them offering a possible answer to their question. Isaiah's message is only suitable for babies because it is babyishly simple and certainly not profound. The Hebrew along with a transliteration is as follows:

← Hebrew reads from the right

צוֹ לְצוֹ צוֹ לְצוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ--זַעִיר שָׁם זַעִיר שָׁם

ṣaw lāṣāw ṣaw lāṣāw qaw lāqāw qaw lāqāw - - z^e‘êr šām z^e‘êr šām

Putting the transliteration in English speaking order we have:

šām z^e‘êr šām z^e‘êr - - lāqāw qaw lāqāw qaw lāṣāw ṣaw lāṣāw ṣaw

Just to sound out these words gives the impression of a babyish gobbledegook or drivel. The term “*precept*” indicates a law or a command, whilst the word “*line*” indicates a rule or standard. How can Isaiah teach commands and standards in such a babyish way?

28:11,12.

Having heard the taunt of those in opposition we come now to the Lord's response. The expressions at the start of verse 11 (“*stammering lips*” and “*another tongue*”) are curious. What do these imply? Other translations differ in their rendering of these phrases (see table 38.2). The first word (“*stammering*”) is the Hebrew word: לֵעָג *lā‘ēg*, which means: “a buffoon,” or a “mocker,” as it comes from a root word meaning “to deride,” or “to speak unintelligibly.” The second word (“*another*”) is the Hebrew word: אֲחֵר *‘ahēr*, which just means: “another,” “other,” or “different.” When we hear a foreign language for the first time it is unintelligible and sounds very unusual. It almost sounds like gibberish or 'baby language.' And so the Lord having spoken openly and clearly, now resorts to speaking in a foreign tongue which will come across as unintelligible and strange.

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Table 38.2: Different translations of Isaiah 28:11.

NKJV	ESV	YLT	NIV	EHV
For with	For by people of	For by	Very well then, with	So the LORD will speak to this people with
stammering lips	strange lips	scorned lip	foreign lips	barbarous lips
and another tongue	and with a foreign tongue	and by another tongue	strange tongues	and in a foreign tongue.
He will speak to this people	the LORD will speak to this people	Doth He speak unto this people.	God will speak to this people	

In verse 12 we learn that the Lord had indeed spoken to this people in straight forward ways. He had told them of a “*rest*” that was available for those who were “*weary*.” Such language reminds us of the Saviour's call to the weary and heavy laden who would be given rest.¹³⁰⁰ And then in a second statement we find that the Lord had a “*refreshing*” for them too. This “*rest*” and “*refreshing*” speaks of a safe and quiet habitation, a place of repose and respite. Such was what the Lord had already said that He had spoken to them about, but remarkably and with great astonishment we discover that “*they would not hear*.”

28:13.

And so in fact we discover that this people who had been offered “*rest*” and “*refreshing*” actually considered that “*the word of the Lord*” was nothing but a monotonous drudge, a series of babyish talk (as we noted in our comments at verse 10). In future God will speak to these leaders by means of foreign tongues and “*stammering lips*,” or in a broken fashion. He had already spoken to them when He gave them rest from their journeyings. He offered both rest and refreshing but they would not hear. This reminds us of the words in Hebrews and Psalm 95 where the Lord implores the people not to harden their hearts as the people had done in the wilderness.¹³⁰¹ However what they will hear from the Lord will be that which they accused Isaiah of speaking. Since they claimed that what He was saying was gibberish, then all they will hear when God speaks is gibberish. The reason? So that they would fall back, suffer brokenness, and be trapped. This would not be an end in itself, but would actually be a mercy, for in such a state they should then be brought to cry for

¹³⁰⁰ Matthew 11:28-30.

¹³⁰¹ Hebrews 3:8,15; 4:7; Psalm 95:8.

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mercy. But would they do that, or would they continue in pride? Isn't this what we often observe? People who think that a Christian who speaks out the gospel is talking rubbish will end up by only hearing rubbish when the Lord speaks. That is a dreadful place to be!

[2] Woe to the scornful leaders who give up hope (Isaiah 28:14-22).

- 14 Therefore hear the word of the **Lord**,
you scornful men, who rule this people who *are* in Jerusalem,
15 because you have said,
 “we have made a covenant with death,
 and with Sheol we are in agreement.
 When the overflowing scourge passes through, it will not come to us, for we have made lies our
 refuge, and under falsehood we have hidden ourselves.”
- 16 Therefore thus says the **Lord God**
 “behold, I lay in Zion
 a stone for a foundation,
 a tried stone,
 a precious cornerstone,
 a sure foundation;
 whoever believes will not act hastily.
- 17 Also I will make
 justice the measuring line,
 and righteousness the plummet;
 the hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,
 and the waters will overflow the hiding place.
- 18 Your covenant with death will be annulled,
and your agreement with Sheol will not stand;
when the overflowing scourge passes through, then you will be trampled down by it. 19 As often as it
goes out it will take you; for morning by morning it will pass over, and by day and by night; it will be
a terror just to understand the report.”
- 20 For the bed is too short to stretch out *on*,
and the covering so narrow that one cannot wrap himself *in it*.
- 21 For the **Lord** will rise up as *at* Mount Perazim,
He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon—
 that He may do
 His work,
 His awesome work,
and bring to pass
 His act,
 His unusual act.
- 22 Now therefore, do not be mockers, lest your bonds be made strong;
for I have heard from the **Lord God of hosts**, a destruction determined even upon the whole earth.

28:14,15.

This second part of Isaiah 28 is addressed to the “*scornful men*” and the “*mockers*” who lead and ruled in Jerusalem.¹³⁰² In verse 15 we read that these folk had “*made a covenant with death.*” Some commentators suggest that this is some form of necromancy which was forbidden by

1302 Isaiah 28:14,22.

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the law.¹³⁰³ We could also suggest that these folk had ignored the truth of death and had, somehow, assumed that it did not apply to them. To some extent this is what modern evolutionists have done. Rather than accept that death is a fruit of sin as Scripture teaches, they have amalgamated death into their myth of creation. For the evolutionist death is part of the engine and drive for evolution. And so these modern folk have made their own covenant with death.

But note how these scornful mockers had come to such a position. They simply thought that the coming doom (*“the overflowing scourge”*) would not affect them.¹³⁰⁴ Whether this is the judgement that would fall on Judah, or death itself, they had chosen to believe that they would glide through it all unaffected. How did they come to such a ridiculous assertion? They had chosen lies and falsehood for their refuge and hiding place! Isn't this exactly what the modern evolutionists do? They have suppressed the truth and chosen to believe the lie!

28:16.

Next, from verse 16, we have the Lord's response to their folly. What does the Lord offer? First we read about a *“stone.”* Perhaps we ought to write “The Stone” for this is clearly a messianic reference. Before we launch into this wonderful verse about the Messiah, pause a moment and reflect that God's answer to folly and the futile and desperate attempts of man to deal with their situation is none other than the best and most beautiful of answers! It is none other than Himself come into our world! We need to pause here and note that the Lord does not say that he will rebuild a temple or restore Zion, but that He will bring about an especial stone. This is clearly intended in a personal sense rather than in a physical sense. Peter picks up on this personal aspect of the promised stone in his first letter, upon which believers are termed *“living stones.”*¹³⁰⁵ Although elsewhere there is reference to a new Jerusalem or a restoration of the land, here it seems as though this personal reference is used to point us away from the literal physical fulfilment of the land, the temple and so on. So what do we learn about the Messiah here as a response to the folly of man? Note first and foremost that this is the work of the Lord God (*“I”*). The Lord Himself brings the answer to all questions and problems. Next, note that the Lord is still concerned about *“Zion,”* or, in other words, His people and their existence. The Lord is still concerned about the true Zion which is not so much a place as a people.¹³⁰⁶ The Lord God is going to lay a stone in Zion. Now what is the

1303 Deuteronomy 18:11.

1304 Isaiah 28:15.

1305 1Peter 2:4-9.

1306 Hebrews 12:22.

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purpose of this? Well I think that the prime focus is not so much on the object (the stone) as on the adjectives that describe this stone. We may consider the stone to be the certain and solid rock which is the Lord Himself, but looking at the descriptive words will lead us to deeper thoughts, I believe. What then do we have? First we have a stone which will be *“for a foundation.”* This is the bedrock, the very basis upon which the building of God will stand and arise. Our foundation is this stone, this rock which the Lord lays. Consider Christ and His being. He is the Word made flesh, the One promised from the beginning, the God-man who answers all. Next we find that this stone is one which has stood the test of time. Think of what the Lord had to suffer! He did all that the Father asked of Him and accomplished everything that was necessary. Further, He is also the *“precious”* stone. You cannot set a price on this beautiful One. Would you not sell all the multitude of pearls and possessions you have to acquire this pearl of great price?¹³⁰⁷ Finally, He is the *“sure”* foundation, a foundation which cannot be moved come what may. Whoever puts their trust in this stone and builds upon it will be satisfied and safe.

28:17-19.

The Lord's message continues with further statements about what Zion would be like. Thus in verse 17 we read that the Lord will judge by righteousness and justice so that the *“overflowing scourge”* of verse 15 which they thought would not affect them, will now come. The hail and waters point us back to the plagues poured out on Egypt and the flood of Noah's time.¹³⁰⁸ These servants of God's justice will be used to remove lies and deception. Following these words we get a graphic description of how judgement will indeed fall on these scornful rulers. Any agreement with death by way of ignoring it or assuming that death is not real will be removed and will fail.¹³⁰⁹ This reminds us that no man is master of his destiny. We cannot add a single second to the length of life and so making any agreement concerning death is sheer folly. The coming judgement will not just come to these scornful ones, but will also overflow them and trample them down. This is by no means a one-off event for in verse 19 we are taught that it will be repeated. There will be waves of judgement which will come day by day. Each evening the reports of what has happened through the day will be so devastating that to read them will be terrifying (*“it will be a terror just to understand the report”*).¹³¹⁰

1307 Matthew 13:45,46.

1308 Isaiah 28:17.

1309 Isaiah 28:18.

1310 Isaiah 28:19.

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28:20-22.

Isaiah then gives an illustration of the situation that will be faced by these scornful ones spoken of in verse 20. I wonder if you have ever lain on a bed which is too short or have had covers that do not cover? It is a frustrating experience. It is uncomfortable and cold. Such was to be their experience.

This judgement is intended by the Lord who gives two historical references describing what it will be like. First it will be similar to the occasion when the Lord broke through the Philistines in the reign of David:

8 Now when the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over all Israel, all the Philistines went up to search for David. And David heard *of it* and went out against them. **9** Then the Philistines went and made a raid on the Valley of Rephaim. **10** And David inquired of God, saying, “Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand?” The Lord said to him, “Go up, for I will deliver them into your hand.” **11** So they went up to Baal Perazim, and David defeated them there. Then David said, “God has broken through my enemies by my hand like a breakthrough of water.” Therefore they called the name of that place Baal Perazim. **12** And when they left their gods there, David gave a commandment, and they were burned with fire.¹³¹¹

The defeat of the Philistines is described as a breach brought about by waters. It is as though the rivers have burst their banks and carried whatever was on the land away. The second historical reference is found in Joshua. It is the occasion whereby the sun and moon were miraculously stayed in their courses so that the defeat of the enemies (Amorites) could be completed:

10 So the Lord routed them before Israel, killed them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, chased them along the road that goes to Beth Horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah. **11** And it happened, as they fled before Israel *and* were on the descent of Beth Horon, that the Lord cast down large hailstones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. *There were* more who died from the hailstones than the children of Israel killed with the sword. **12** Then Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel: “Sun, stand still over Gibeon; and Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.” **13** So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the people had revenge upon their enemies.¹³¹²

It is to be noted here, that in this defeat of the enemies more died from hail than from the sword.

1311 1Chronicles 14:8-12 – see also 2Samuel 5:17-21.

1312 Joshua 10:10-13.

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These two incidents indicate that the judgement would be severe and directly at the hand of God – a judicial punishment.

Then at the end of verse 21 we find that the work of the Lord is described with emphasis in a doubled manner. It is *“His work, His awesome work,”* and it is *“His act, His unusual act.”* The words rendered *“awesome”* and *“unusual”* are really two different Hebrew words which both mean “strange” or “foreign.” The first is *zuwr*, which indicates the notion of foreign rather than native or home-grown. The second is *nokriy* which points to foreign in the sense of unheard of or unfamiliar. Thus what the Lord proposes does not seem to be an expected or normal thing for Israel. The section concludes with a call to the scornful leaders of the people of God to refrain from any inclination to mock. The destruction determined as described thus far is not just for sinners and rebels at this time, but is a destruction that is determined *“upon the whole earth.”*¹³¹³

[3] The God who instructs. (Isaiah 28:23-29).

23 Give ear and hear my voice,
listen and hear my speech.

24 Does the ploughman keep ploughing all day to sow?
Does he keep turning his soil and breaking the clods?

25 When he has levelled its surface, does he not
sow the black cumin and
scatter the cumin,
plant

the wheat in rows,
the barley in the appointed place, and
the spelt in its place?

26 For He instructs him in right judgement,
His **God** teaches him.

27 For

the black cumin is not threshed with a threshing sledge,
nor is a cartwheel rolled over the cumin;
but the black cumin is beaten out with a stick, and the cumin with a rod.

28 Bread *flour* must be ground; therefore he does not thresh it forever, break *it with* his cartwheel, or
crush it *with* his horsemen.

29 This also comes from the **Lord of hosts**, *who* is
wonderful in counsel
and excellent in guidance.

The last seven verses of this first woe introduce the idea that God is a great teacher. The concept of teaching and learning is a theme that runs throughout the Scriptures. Knowledge is vital. However knowledge needs to be gained from the correct source (God) and needs to be used wisely. Without these two book-ends, knowledge ends up a woeful thing. It either leads to folly, falsehood and disaster, or it leads to pride and a puffed up heart. True knowledge is essential and is a thing

1313 Isaiah 28:22.

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sadly lacking at the present time. We could represent these verses as follows:

Table 38.3: The symmetry in Isaiah 28:23-29.

Call	23 Give ear and hear my voice, listen and hear my speech.	
Ploughing and sowing	24 Does the ploughman keep ploughing all day to sow? Does he keep turning his soil and breaking the clods? 25 When he has levelled its surface, does he not sow the black cumin and scatter the cumin, plant the wheat in rows, the barley in the appointed place, and the spelt in its place?	Instruction concerning ploughing and sowing.
Purpose	26 For He instructs him in right judgment, His God teaches him.	
Reaping and harvesting.	27 For the black cumin is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over the cumin; but the black cumin is beaten out with a stick, and the cumin with a rod. 28 Bread <i>flour</i> must be ground; therefore he does not thresh it forever, break <i>it with</i> his cartwheel, or crush it <i>with</i> his horsemen.	Instruction concerning reaping, threshing and harvesting.
Conclusion	29 This also comes from the Lord of hosts, <i>who</i> is wonderful in counsel <i>and</i> excellent in guidance.	

28:23.

Whenever we have a call to listen closely which is repeated as we see in verse 23, you can be sure that this is a very important thing! Isaiah uses this device on a number of occasions and Our Lord also used it with His introductory phrase sometimes translated *“verily, verily I say unto you.”*¹³¹⁴ In fact we have the call not just doubled but quadrupled. We have *“give ear,” “hear my voice,” “listen,”* and *“hear my speech,”* so the call is a real wake-up call.

28:24,25.

The idea in verse 24 is to show that what the ordinary ploughman does is not without understanding and sense. The ploughman does not just plough and keep ploughing, he ploughs for the purpose of sowing. It would be utterly foolish if all the ploughman did was to plough, continually *“turning his soil and breaking the clods,”* without doing anything else. It is obvious that ploughing is a task that needs to be done in order for the seed to be sown. In other words, ploughing is for a time and it is for a purpose. When ploughing is done the sowing must begin, and this too is done with sense and purpose. In verse 25 we find that after making the ground ready the farmer applies the various seeds to the soil in different ways. The *“black cumin”* is sown, whilst the *“cumin”* is scattered. Wheat is planted *“in rows,”* whilst barley is given its *“appointed place,”* and spelt too is located in some specific way.

¹³¹⁴ Isaiah 51:4 for example. AKJV John 1:51; 3:3,5,11 etc.

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28:26.

At the end of verse 26 we read that it is God who teaches. It is the Lord who gives *“right judgment”* or the correct way of doing things. This is the central point to recognise. It is not just that the Lord teaches on spiritual matters, no He teaches people on ordinary matters too. In this case, as we have already noted, we have a series of instructions on how to deal with different seeds and crops.

28:27,28.

Continuing the theme of farming we move now to the work of harvesting and reaping. We are reminded in verse 27 that *“black cumin”* must not be threshed with a threshing sledge, and *“cumin”* must not be treated with a cartwheel. Rather the former must be *“beaten out with a stick,”* whilst the latter with a *“rod.”* In verse 28 we are further told that the *“bread flour”* should also be treated in a special way. It was to be ground fine but was not to be threshed for a long time and must not be broken with the cartwheel. Different crops need different treatment in the processing stage. These steps to make the products useful depend on the very nature of the crops themselves.

28:29.

Now all of this natural knowledge *“comes from the Lord of hosts”* because He is truly *“wonderful in counsel,”* and also is *“excellent in guidance.”* How is it that the Lord teaches the farmer these things?

[4] General comments on the text as a whole.

Having considered some of the detail it is worth looking at this section as a whole, and especially to consider some of the spiritual applications of what is revealed here.

One of the things that never ceases to amaze me is the fact that the Lord is so patient and careful. Here, the teaching is that the normal every-day things about farming are those things which are taught by the Lord. If we cannot get these things right it will be disastrous for us because we will not reap a plentiful and good supply of food to eat. It is vital we get these basics right. God instructs the farmer concerning these things. It may have been through trial-and-error, it may have been passed down from father to son, but ultimately it was God who taught these things by the very nature of each thing in and of itself. Presumably black cumin could not be reaped in a harsh way or otherwise it would be destroyed. Different seeds need different planting locations and sites. All of

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this is taught by the Lord through experience and providence, and by the nature of things. Now what amazes me about so much that passes for Christianity in this first part of the twenty-first century is how poorly many understand the mere basics of Christian truths. When I was a young Christian I grappled with the competing notions of our origins. But once I studied the various options proposed with Scripture in view, two things became clear. First, it was a simple matter to establish that God created all things in six days some 6,000 years ago. There can be no argument about this for it is plain in Scripture. But the second thing I observed was that many could not accept this and so used many means to side-step the issue. These were those whose first love was not the Lord and His word. In short, the issue raises concerns about how we view Scripture. Is it God's word or not? Clearly to the true Christian it is, and so the issue is resolved – God created all things in six days some 6,000 years ago just as He has made this plain. I came to realise that this issue of origins was a basic and simple issue. The Lord teaches this basic thing – which is straight forward – so that if people cannot get this right, (because they reject the word of God – they have an issue with Biblical inerrancy), why then accept their teaching or judgement on more weighty matters?¹³¹⁵

We might also apply these verses to the whole aspect of godly teaching.¹³¹⁶ If God teaches the farmer how to sow, plant, and reap, what then of spiritual sowing, planting and reaping? The first question indicates that ploughing is a task which requires some time but certainly not an end in itself nor is it something which is indefinite. It has a purpose. The farmer ploughs the field in order for the seeds to be sown. In the same way the spiritual farmer must plough the field of hearts by removing stones (obstacles) and making sure that there is a ready reception for the seed. Ploughing is hard work. It is difficult work. It is a breaking work. But if all we do in our witness and preaching is to break up the fallow ground and then re-work it and break it again, the field will be no better off in the end. Be very careful that you prepare people to hear what you have to say, but do not overdo it. We have to break people's misconceptions, remove obstacles (even those which are cherished!) but we cannot do this and this alone. No! We need also to sow some seed. The surface needs to be levelled. We need a fair and even playing field. This may mean answering objections. It will certainly mean dispelling misunderstandings. It will also require bringing to bear some harsh truths.

¹³¹⁵ I know that many people who take a wrong view of creation and origins do say some valid things about other issues of greater importance, but my point is that this basic issue of origins must be sorted first in order to make headway on more weighty matters. We may get many things right despite a poor beginning but if we fail at the first hurdle, we are likely to stumble elsewhere. The principle of a right understanding of Scripture is vital.

¹³¹⁶ In 1Corinthians 9:9f, Paul points out that God is not primarily concerned about oxen feeding when He taught through Moses, but He uses the simple thoughts concerning farm animals to lead to the higher truths concerning provision for godly preachers and teachers.

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But once we have a level field we can then plant some seeds. Now in this illustration there are five different types of seed mentioned, (black cumin, cumin, wheat, barley, and spelt). Each of these has its own preferred setting. Some require to be buried in the soil, others need to sit on top. Some need much water, others need little. When we come to plant a seed of the word of God it is vital that we bring it to people with some clear intention and purpose. We need to bury some truths deep into people's hearts, whilst others may sit on the surface. Thus some words need to be driven home forcefully whilst others must be gently delivered. This all depends on the word being brought. To some extent the prevailing culture will affect how we deliver certain words. This prevailing culture may be likened to the weather or pests that destroy the seeds. Today, perhaps the concepts of man and His image, the idea of creation and absolute truth are “words” which need a forceful application.

When it comes to allowing these seeds to grow and then the resulting shoots to be harvested, once again there are differences. The separation and distinction of truths needs careful application of the right “tools.” When we try and bring someone, or a whole congregation, to some form of response we must do so according to the seed sown. It would be useless to rant and rave for some decisive action if the word we have brought is a gentle one of directing the hearers to a consideration of the beauty of Christ. But equally we cannot merely call people to change their minds as though they are changing a pair of trousers when there is much sin to be repented of. The threshing or harvesting must be done according to the type of seed that needs sowing.

And so the chapter ends by informing us that the Lord of hosts (armies) is “*wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance,*” which thought is so important not just as a truth to keep, but to bear in mind for future chapters. We find that we often have cause to rebuke all of mankind for our foolish forgetfulness of this truth. “*Wonderful*” implies distinct, separate, or unique. There is nothing like the counsel and advice of God. It is singular and thence miraculous – a signal thing. The last part of the phrase could be rendered “great in wisdom.” In other words, it is infinite in applying truths to life. This is obvious but needs shouting loudly. The God who made us, knows how we work! The God who knows us, knows how to guide and direct. Why oh why do we seek counsel elsewhere? I am constantly amazed at how frequently and repeatedly people seek counsel from all sorts of places except from the Lord. How many times have I had people (Christian people) say things like “do not spout platitudinous Bible verses at me!” Oh I am well aware that merely quoting Scripture can be counter productive. We have laboured to point out that God instructs the farmer concerning seeds, sowing, and reaping, but is He really concerned just with this form of

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activity? To use the apostle Paul's words: God forbid! He instructs the godly man how to apply Scripture in needful circumstances and this form of ministry is vital today. But what worries me greatly is the speed with which people run to the doctor, the secular humanist, the godless expert, or the world's fruitless offerings for answers to problems and issues, rather than grappling with the Lord and His word in the depths of prayer. How foolish we are! To think that a quick spoken prayer will do when what is required (often) is a humbling of self and a calling out to the Lord for mercy all the while we mine His word for a word in season. It will not be difficult to find if we seek for it truly with all our hearts because God is truly a loving heavenly Father and a true giver of life.

Chapter 39.

Isaiah 29:1-14.

Woe (2) to Ariel – the lion of God!

Textual analysis.

1 “Woe

to Ariel,
to Ariel,

the city *where* David dwelt!

Add year to year;

let feasts come around.

2 Yet I will

distress Ariel;

there shall be

heaviness

and sorrow,

and it shall be to Me as Ariel.

3 I will

encamp against you all around,

I will

lay siege against you with a mound, and

I will

raise siege works against you.

4 You shall be

brought down,

you shall

speak out of the ground;

your speech shall be low, out of the dust;

your voice shall be like a medium's, out of the ground; and

your speech shall whisper out of the dust.

5 “Moreover

the multitude of your foes shall be like fine dust, and

the multitude of the terrible ones like chaff that passes away;

yes, it shall be in an instant, suddenly.

6 You will be punished by the Lord **of hosts** with

thunder and

earthquake and

great noise, *with*

storm and

tempest and

the flame of devouring fire.

7 The multitude of all the nations

who fight against Ariel, even

all who fight against her and her fortress, and distress her,

shall be as a dream of a night vision.

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8 It shall even be as when a hungry man dreams,
and look—he eats;
but he awakes, and
his soul is still empty;
or as when a thirsty man dreams,
and look—he drinks;
but he awakes, and
indeed *he is* faint, and
his soul still craves:
so the multitude of all the nations shall be, who fight against Mount Zion.”

9 Pause and wonder!

Blind yourselves and be blind!

They are drunk, but not with wine;
they stagger, but not with intoxicating drink.

10 For the **Lord** has

poured out on you the spirit of deep sleep, and
has closed your eyes,
namely, the prophets; and
He has covered your heads,
namely, the seers.

11 The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed,
which *men* deliver to one who is literate, saying,

“Read this, please.”

And he says,

“I cannot, for it *is* sealed.”

12 Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying,

“Read this, please.”

And he says,

“I am not literate.”

13 Therefore the **Lord** said:

“inasmuch as these people
draw near with their mouths and
honour Me with their lips, but
have removed their hearts far from Me, and
their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,

14 Therefore, behold,

I will again do
a marvellous work among this people,
a marvellous work and
a wonder;
for the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, and
the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hidden.”

The second woe is against “*Ariel*” which our text identifies clearly with the city of David – Jerusalem. The whole chapter is concerned with this single woe but can be split into two sections as follows:

[1] The woe against Ariel. (Isaiah 29:1-8).

[2] Refusal to heed leads to blindness and a sealed vision. (Isaiah 29:9-14).

[1] The woe against Ariel. (Isaiah 29:1-8).

29:1.

Concerning the name “*Ariel*,” apart from one occasion in Ezra which speaks of a man, the name is only encountered in Isaiah 29.¹³¹⁷ However the same Hebrew word is also found in Ezekiel 43:15,16 where it is translated as “*altar*,” or “*hearth*” for sacrifice. The name “*Ariel*” actually means “lion of God.” Perhaps this name was given to Jerusalem because Judah's king reigned there and Judah was known as a lion.¹³¹⁸ Perhaps the people and the leaders in particular had become too proud and arrogant. The lion was a symbol of power, strength and majesty, but the city of David had become anything but these. Note that the woe is issued twice in effect with the repeating of the name “*Ariel*.” This serves to show the urgent need to hear what God is saying. Further, note that this was the city where David had previously dwelt indicating that such a glorious age was now long past. The end of verse 1 simply points to their regular calendar of feasts by which they may have drawn comfort. Here is the city taken by David, where the temple was and where the great feasts were celebrated. Such a place may have been held to be almost beyond reproach and problem, given its pedigree and heritage. Perhaps the people had become complacent and had taken their many blessings for granted. But now the “*woe*” was pronounced on the one with such privileges and such self exalted feelings.

29:2,3.

In verses 2 and 3 we read of the Lord's intentions. He would “*distress*” Ariel so that they would be straightened and hard pressed. The text describes three effects of this. First the distress will bring “*heaviness*,” which signifies mourning, lamentation, and grieving. Then next we have “*sorrow*,” which indicates much the same thing, namely, lamentation, and mourning. Finally we have this distress as being unto the Lord “*as Ariel*,” by which is meant that it would be as a hearth or altar. In other words we have the idea of a sacrifice. Thus the city of David which had taken so much for granted, was going to be in great distress leading to mourning, lamentation, and sorrow because it would become a sacrifice. We cannot help but see the prophetic aspect of this for the true Israel, namely Christ, was to become the sacrifice for sin. In the case of the city of David this distress would come in the form of a siege. Three times we read of this in verse 3, and we note that

1317 Ezra 8:16.

1318 Genesis 49:9. See also Revelation 5:5.

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it is the Lord who is encamping around the city building the siege against them. Where sin is found it is not the harshness of life nor of the world that causes sorrow, mourning, and affliction, but the Lord. Why? Well He is so very concerned about what is true and right that He will oppose all sin and rebellion.

29:4.

Verse 4 describes how this will affect the city and, in particular, its people. There are two main effects, one of which is developed and repeated. First we observe that the people will be humbled or *“brought down.”* This indicates that there was a large measure of pride in vogue. This is clear from Isaiah 28:1 which, although speaks of Ephraim, is also applicable to Judah from the description given in Isaiah 28:14 where the people are described as scornful men. The second effect concerns the people's speech. Their speech will be:

out of the ground
low, out of the dust
like a medium's, out of the ground
[like a] whisper out of the dust

Note the repetitive element in this verse (*“out of the ground”* and *“out of the dust”* are both repeated phrases).¹³¹⁹ The sound is low and a whisper like a medium's or a ghost's, that is, ephemeral and vague. They would have little confidence. Their speech and their wisdom is merely from the ground and the dust. We remember that the ground was cursed in Genesis 3 and the Lord told Adam that he would return to the dust from where he originally came, speaking of an “un-creation.” There is no heavenly wisdom, no good revelation, and no godly truth. It is almost as if the people had become those who exemplify the approach followed by Solomon in Ecclesiastes. All was vanity because it was all considered *“under the sun,”* and with no influence or direction from the Lord.¹³²⁰ The people had continually rejected God's word, and so they would be besieged by God and their wisdom and their truth would be only all man-made.

1319 Isaiah 29:4.

1320 Ecclesiastes 1:3,9,14 etc.

29:5.

Verse 5 is something of a surprise. The siege is described as being built and arranged by God, but we know that the Lord used Judah's enemies like Assyria to bring about His judgement. Here in verse 5, however, we find that Judah's foes will also be like *"fine dust"* and like *"chaff"* which will be blown away. The foes are also described as the *"terrible ones"* which indicates a tyrannical and vicious attitude. The destruction of the enemies will be sudden. This would appear to be a prophecy concerning the defeat of the Assyrian attack under Sennacherib, which Isaiah describes in chapter 37, where the *"Angel of the Lord"* would kill 186,000 Assyrian troops.¹³²¹ Nevertheless it is also prophetic of the last great day as well, for verses 7 and 8 continue the theme of destruction against Ariel's enemies.

29:6.

In verse 6 we are brought back to a consideration of Ariel's destruction.. The people of God will be punished by all the force of the created world and, to cap it all, by *"the flame of a devouring fire."*¹³²² From this verse we learn that such 'natural' disasters are not those things that simply happen as a result of the laws of nature. They are very much agents of God in His punishment and chastisement of this world. We are bathed in such a secular society that we fail to see the disasters we experience as God's warnings and judgements.

The element of fire is an essential feature of what we find in the last great judgement when the Lord returns. However we pause and reflect that when Christ was sacrificed His death was accompanied by earthquake, darkness, and the temple veil being torn from top to bottom.¹³²³ Such features help us understand that Christ's death accomplished a full atonement. The Judgement of God fell fully upon the Saviour.

29:7,8.

Verse 7 points to how the nations that fought against Ariel would appear. Again we can see a fulfilment in the routed defeat of Sennacherib as described in Isaiah 37.¹³²⁴ These vicious forces who would later camp outside of Jerusalem would become *"as a dream of a night vision,"* and so would vanish the moment when one awakes from sleep. Notwithstanding the immediate prophecy,

1321 Isaiah 37:36.

1322" 2Peter 3:10f.

1323 Matthew 27:45,51-54.

1324 See also 2Kings 19:35.

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these verses also depict a time when the nations of the entire world will fight in unison against the people of God (the true Israel, the church). Their threats and their intimidation, even their bullying, will all of a sudden disappear just as a dream vanishes when we awake. Verse 8 is graphic. There is a man who is hungry and he dreams, and as he does so he dreams of food and so *“he eats.”* But when he wakes up, he finds that it was all a dream so that *“his soul is still empty.”* This scene is repeated but this time for a man who thirsts. These two scenes show the vacuous nature of all threats and fights against the Lord's people. Now note that it is not that the people will never suffer. They do, for we read in verse 7 of the *“fight”* and the *“distress.”* These are real and are truly felt by the Lord's people. But the intended effect of the nations who are against the people of God is fully empty and vacuous. They think that they can consume and destroy the people of God (swallow them whole), but they will soon realise that they have been deluding themselves – for it is all in their dreams! We shall come across this same teaching in Isaiah 54 where we read these wonderfully encouraging words:

*“No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me,” says the Lord.*¹³²⁵

Christ has surely won the victory!

[2] Refusal to heed leads to blindness and a sealed vision. (Isaiah 29:9-14).

29:9,10.

We are still considering the woe against Ariel (Jerusalem) but now there is a slightly different approach. The words of verse 9 to 14 are still spoken to Ariel in the main but there is a wider audience as evidenced by the opening words of verse 9, and the use of third person plurals which serve to point out the people of God to others (*“they are ...”* and *“they stagger ...”*). Because the people had blinded themselves (*“blind yourselves”*) by their refusal to heed the word of the Lord, then such an attitude would be reinforced for them (*“and be blind”*). The people were drunk and staggered about, but not through wine or alcohol. Earlier in chapter 28 we learnt that the Ephraimite leaders (and by implication Judah's leaders too) were drunk through wine. Now we learn that this state of intoxication was as a result of the Lord's action. The Lord had made them fall into a

¹³²⁵ Isaiah 54:17.

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deep sleep and had closed their eyes by removing the prophets and seers.

29:11,12.

It was not that the vision had failed, for verse 11 speaks of the vision being accessible. Rather it was that they had no understanding. We note that the *“whole vision”* is depicted as *“the words of a book.”* This reminds us that we too have the words of the Book which is the vision of God, or the revelation of all that God wants us to know, (i.e. Scripture). Now in this current case the vision is *“sealed”* so that they cannot understand it. The words of verses 11 and 12 give a sense of desperation. First the book is given to those who can read but the literate man cannot read it because it is sealed. In other words it cannot be opened up. Next, in desperation, they take the book to one who cannot read! Again there is no success. This is a woeful situation. But we must pause and wonder for a moment, because it seems to characterise the age in which we live. How foolish are the multitude of varying interpretations of Scripture that are flying around today! How sad it is to find literate people unable to read Scripture straight! How equally woeful is it to hear of people who have no understanding or true knowledge being given the reins of leadership and authority. This can be seen in the world where even children are seemingly given authority! But it is also endemic in the church where the ungodly, the foolish and the unwise are ruling and lording it over the sheep of God.

29:13.

Verse 13 describes what was going on and it also seems like a synopsis of our current age. The people were drawing near in hypocrisy. They did all the right things. They practised all the right feasts. However it was all a matter of form and procedure with no vestige of heart or truth. What was going on had all the appearance of true religion and worship, true regulation and civil life, but it was all a sham. There was no heart in it at all. Why so? It was because their reverence of God was not informed by the Lord but by the *“commandment of men.”*¹³²⁶ Isn't this the case today? People will not believe in the Bible's view of creation but instead listen to godless scientists who invent stories! People will not listen to the Lord and heed His counsel for depression, anxiety, and the ails of human experience. Instead they rush to the doctors and psychiatrists for pills and therapy which are mere sticking plasters invented by men.¹³²⁷

1326 Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7; Colossians 2:22.

1327 Please do not misunderstand me here. I do not advocate turning to Christians for healing of illnesses and sorrows. What I do advocate is that the Physician of souls alone can bring about healing and redemption. The Lord's

29:14.

In verse 14 we find that the Lord is not finished with these people, for He is about to do a marvellous and wonderful work amongst them. What is this work? Surprisingly it is that the wisdom of their wise and the understanding of those with a reputation will “*perish*” and will be “*hidden.*” It will be ruined and become obscure. Think of the great civilisations with their pomp and grandeur. All of these ancient civilisations and their wise men and their sages. But where are they now? We know something of them from the ruins of their lives, but the practice of their intellectual prowess is gone, hidden, destroyed. Think of this now. What will become of the great intellects of today? They too will perish and their thoughts and “wisdom” (so-called) will become obscure, left for future archaeologists to argue over and speculate upon. This has happened before and will happen again. Why then do people take as “gospel” and as “sacrosanct” all that the wise men of today pronounce? Instead we ought to heed the word of the Lord. This will never perish and will never become obscure. It may seem that few listen to its wisdom, but there are many who do, and even if people ignore it, it will not be swept away as the writings and follies of the men of wisdom of this age.

In light of this we ought to pay more earnest heed to the things we have read of, learned and seen from Scripture.¹³²⁸ This is all wisdom! It will never fail! In stark contrast the paltry musings of the great people in our age will come to nought! It may seem incredible to say this, but it is true! The writings of Einstein, Hawking, Newton, and many many lesser “worthies” are nonsense in comparison to the Scriptures. Oh that we had our eyes opened to its beautiful truth so that we may turn and be healed and walk with God!

rescue and deliverance for needy souls (be they depressed or in some terrible fix) may involve a convoluted route which encompasses the godless and mind-numbingly stupid medical profession, but the afflicted one ought to look to God alone, crying out in full dependence upon Him.

1328 Hebrews 2:1.

Chapter 40.

Isaiah 29:15-24.

Woe (3) to those who hide!

Textual analysis.

15 Woe

to those who
seek deep to hide their counsel far from the **Lord**, and
their works are in the dark;
they say,
“Who sees us?” and,
“Who knows us?”

16 Surely you have things turned around!

Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay;
for shall the thing made say of him who made it,
“He did not make me”?
Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it,
“He has no understanding”?

17 *Is* it not yet a very little while till Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest?

18 In that day

the deaf
shall hear the words of the book, and
the eyes of the blind
shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.

19 The humble also

shall increase *their* joy in the Lord, and
the poor among men
shall rejoice in the **Holy One** of Israel.

20 For the terrible one is
brought to nothing,
the scornful one is
consumed, and
all who watch for iniquity are
cut off—

21 Who make a man an offender by a word, and
lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, and
turn aside the just by empty words.

22 Therefore thus says the **Lord**, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob:

“Jacob shall not now be ashamed,
nor shall his face now grow pale;

23 But when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst,
they will
hallow My name, and

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hallow the Holy One of Jacob, and
fear the God of Israel.
24 These also who erred in spirit will
come to understanding, and
those who complained will
learn doctrine.”

This third woe is reserved for those who have no thought of God in their minds. They seek to hide what they do and assume that God has no influence. We might like to refer to these people as atheists, or at least “practical” atheists. Following this there is a wonderful promise of hope to come. The passage seems to fall into two sections. The first, verses 15 and 16, describes the woe upon the atheists. The second from verse 17 to 24 describes the Lord's intention to bring fruit and a forest, that is, a blessing.

[1] Practical atheism. (Isaiah 29:15,16).

[2] Fruit and forest! (Isaiah 29:17-24).

[1] Practical atheism. (Isaiah 29:15,16).

This woe is addressed to those people who do their works with no thought of God. There is, in reality, no such thing as an atheist. It is utterly impossible to believe that there is no God. However it is possible to act as though God does not exist. Many people fall into this category. Even those who actually profess some form of belief in God but in reality do not acknowledge such in their actions.

29:15.

Notice that these folk are deeply entrenched in their ways, for they “*seek deep to hide their counsel*” and so, consequently, what they do is always done “*in the dark.*” Atheists, practical atheists, are unaware that they operate completely in the dark. If they had light they would be forced to acknowledge the truth of the gospel, but they reject this and so operate within their own sphere. In fact when the light is shone on their ways they react with anger and bitterness towards the light. This is pride, but we see it so often do we not? Since they have no light within themselves they can only proceed in darkness. This is the great folly and terror of atheism. Many would not accept this, of course, but what light they think they have is false and really only darkness.

The two rhetorical questions (“*who sees us?*” and “*who knows us?*” expecting the answer

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“none”) show forth their world view. There is no one who can see what we are doing, or who knows our innermost being to make judgement, they say. Thus they proceed with impunity and act as though they reigned supreme in their lives. This is the type who claim that their destiny is in their hands, or that they can make their own luck.

29:16.

The response of verse 16 is extremely important for us as Christians to consider. The response begins with an appeal to these folk to consider that they are walking and journeying in the wrong direction. Here we note that our task is all about correcting the world view that atheists live in. Such atheists need to repent, to think again, and so to turn around. The main illustration used is the potter and the clay. This brings us right back to Genesis 2:7 and a consideration of creation. To answer atheism we must begin with creation. Unless the atheist realise that they are not their own, and owe all to their Maker, we cannot hope that they will become normal (i.e. become saved). How vital the whole creation issue is today! I have written repeatedly on this issue but to sum up here, unless we stand full square on the plain teaching of Genesis 1 and 2, that God made all things from nothing in six 24 hour days some 6,000 years ago, we cannot hope to gain a hearing for the gospel. Of course this truth is roundly rejected by modern society. Therefore we have our work cut out to make these truths about creation plain and understandable. The fact that many believers carry on as though creation is unimportant, or who have capitulated to some drastic compromise like theistic evolution, is testimony to the low state of the church. We cannot continue with such a hopeless stance. The world rejects the gospel in part because it has explained away the need for a Creator by its myth of evolution. Our task is to wake people up to recognise what is plainly true – that they have not just come about through chance and time, but **The Creator God** has formed them. Can the clay usurp the position of the potter? Ridiculous! Can the clay claim that the potter who has formed it, has no understanding and did not really form it? Absurd! We are made in the image of God. God has fashioned each person in their mother's womb individually. Thus as clay we owe allegiance and reverence to the Potter who formed us. Anything else is rank folly and the height of stupidity.

[2] Fruit and forest! (Isaiah 29:17-24).

Despite the folly of practical atheism, God is still going to bring great blessing! We ought to be astonished at this! What grace!

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29:17.

It would appear that verse 17 and following are put as rebukes to those who would seek to operate as though God did not exist. Surely such people who think they can get away with their folly of denying God His rightful place will be shown up when the fruit of the gospel comes through? Lebanon was always a place of great fruitfulness and forests. It seems from verse 17 that Lebanon would face disaster, but would then become fruitful and full of trees once again.

29:18,19.

Verse 18 brings us to consider what will come to pass *“in that day.”* Four different kinds of people will be blessed on this glorious day. This theme is repeated in Isaiah 61 from which the Lord derived the basis for His ministry.¹³²⁹ Thus we have:

the deaf
the blind
the humble
the poor

Such descriptions as we find here in verses 18 and 19 serve to show the true lost state of mankind. We are deaf and blind, we are poor and brought low. If we claim sight and position, wisdom and independence as the atheists do, then we are doomed. Now these deaf and blind ones will be enabled to *“hear the words of the book”* and to *“see out of obscurity and out of darkness.”* Such ideas point unmistakably to gospel fruit. The saved become seeing and hearing. They see what God has said, and they hear what God has said. But this is not all, for having seen and heard what God has said (in His word), they rejoice in it – specifically in the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.¹³³⁰ Can you see this? When a true believer hears the gospel for the first time they rejoice in what the Lord has to say because it is true and light and beauty. Rejoicing in it leads to the obedience of faith. True belief leads to life because there is joy in doing what the Lord has commanded – because it is so right and pure and true.

1329 Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1f.

1330 Isaiah 29:19.

29:20,21.

We remind ourselves too that the folly of unsaved people trying to understand the book, even though it was sealed and some of those asked to interpret it were illiterate, was put down as a judgement on the people because of their ritualism.¹³³¹ But then further we are given reasons for this increase in joy. The “*terrible one*” and the “*scornful one*” will end up as nothing and will be consumed. All who revile the truth and who ridicule the gospel will suffer such fate. All of these are emulating the terrible, scornful one, namely, Satan. He is the terrible, scornful one who will be consumed in the eternal fires of hell. The terrible and the scornful are further described at the end of verse 20 and in verse 21. These are the ones who look out for sin. They rejoice in it and celebrate it. These are those who pick fault with people for the words they use, and they turn aside the truth, justice and righteousness by mere foolish empty speaking. These are the ones who trip up any who would point out the truth and bring reproof. How the modern mind hates being judged! How awful is it that those held in high esteem are in fact scornful and terrible because they hate truth, justice and reproof. But these are being brought to account and will be as nothing!

29:22-24.

And then, remarkably, in verses 22 to 24 we have further wonders of God's great grace. Verse 22 begins with the word “*therefore*” which signals a conclusion based on prior truths. It begins with a reminder of God's grace to Abraham. It continues by pointing out that Israel had one father, namely Jacob – the deceiver. Jacob (Israel) will now be unashamed and will not grow pale or embarrassed. Instead Jacob will see what the Lord has done to his children! We find that they will now hallow the name of the Lord, the Holy One of Jacob. They will be concerned for holiness and God's glory. Isn't it wonderful that the Holy One is identified with Jacob – the deceiver? God comes into our sinful world and draws us out of it! The passage ends with what I believe is a timely word for today. The people of the Lord who were all at sea and were not in the right spirit, will now “*come to understanding,*” and will “*learn doctrine.*” It never ceases to amaze me that in our current day the idea of doctrine, understanding, and truth is all but eclipsed. When I suggest to people that they read some theology, or read some of Martyn Lloyd-Jones' works, or consider the Puritan writers, I so often hear people say things like, “I have not got the time!” Or “That is too advanced for me!” Or “I just stick with Jesus and sing my songs!” Where are those believers who so love the Lord that they want to seek Him for all their worth by diving into the Scriptures and getting

¹³³¹ Isaiah 29:10-12.

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to know Him? Let us endeavour to break up the Scriptures depending upon the Holy Spirit so that we can hear and listen to what the Lord of glory is saying!

Chapter 41.

Isaiah 30:1-33.

Woe (4) to the rebellious children!

Textual analysis.

1 “Woe

to the rebellious children,” says the **Lord**,
“who take counsel, but not of Me, and
who devise plans, but not of My Spirit, that they may add sin to sin;
2 who walk to go down to Egypt, and have not asked My advice,
to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and
to trust in the shadow of Egypt!

3 Therefore

the strength of Pharaoh shall be your shame, and
trust in the shadow of Egypt shall be *your* humiliation.

4 For his princes were at Zoan, and
his ambassadors came to Hanes.

5 They were all ashamed of a people *who*
could not benefit them,
or be help or benefit,
but a shame and
also a reproach.”

6 The burden against the beasts of the South.

Through a land of trouble and anguish,
from which *came* the lioness and lion,
the viper and fiery flying serpent,
they will carry

their riches on the backs of young donkeys, and
their treasures on the humps of camels,
to a people *who* shall not profit;

7 for the Egyptians shall help in vain and to no purpose.

Therefore I have called her Rahab-Hem-Shebeth.

8 Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and note it on a scroll, that it may be for time to come, forever and ever:

9 That this *is*

a rebellious people,
lying children,
children *who* will not hear the law of the **Lord**;

10 Who say to the seers,

“Do not see,”

and to the prophets,

“Do not prophesy to us right things;

speak to us smooth things,

prophesy deceits.

11 Get out of the way,

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turn aside from the path,
cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.”

12 Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel:

“because you
despise this word, and
trust in
oppression and
perversity, and
rely on them,

13 therefore this iniquity shall be to you like

a breach ready to fall,
a bulge in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant.

14 And He shall break it like the breaking of the potter’s vessel, which is broken in pieces;
He shall not spare. So there shall not be found among its fragments a shard to take fire from the
hearth, or to take water from the cistern.”

15 For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel:

“in returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.”

But you would not,

16 And you said,

“No, for we will flee on horses”— therefore you shall flee! And,
“We will ride on swift horses”— therefore those who pursue you shall be swift!

17 One thousand *shall flee* at the threat of one, at the threat of five you shall flee, till you are left as a
pole on top of a mountain and as a banner on a hill.

18 Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you;
and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you.

For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him.

19 For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; you shall weep no more.
He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.

20 And *though* the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction,
yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner any more,
but your eyes shall see your teachers.

21 Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying,
“this is the way, walk in it,” whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.

22 You will also defile the covering of your images of silver, and the ornament of your moulded images of
gold.

You will throw them away as an unclean thing; you will say to them,
“Get away!”

23 Then He will give

the rain for your seed with which you sow the ground,
and bread of the increase of the earth; it will be fat and plentiful.

In that day your cattle will feed in large pastures.

24 Likewise the oxen and the young donkeys that work the ground will eat cured fodder, which has been winnowed
with the shovel and fan.

25 There will be

on every high mountain
and on every high hill
rivers and streams of waters, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall.

26 Moreover

the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun,
and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days,
in the day that the Lord
binds up the bruise of His people
and heals the stroke of their wound.

27 Behold,

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the name of the **Lord** comes from afar,
burning *with* His anger,
and *His* burden *is* heavy;
His lips are full of indignation,
and His tongue like a devouring fire.
28 His breath is like an overflowing stream,
which reaches up to the neck,
to sift the nations with the sieve of futility;
and *there shall be* a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing *them* to err.

29 You shall have
a song as in the night *when* a holy festival is kept,
and gladness of heart as when one goes with a flute,
to come into the mountain of the **Lord**,
to the **Mighty One** of Israel.

30 The **Lord** will
cause His glorious voice to be heard,
and show the descent of His arm,
with the indignation of *His* anger
and the flame of a devouring fire,
with scattering, tempest, and hailstones.

31 For through the voice of the **Lord**
Assyria will be beaten down, as He strikes with the rod.

32 And *in* every place where the staff of punishment passes, which the **Lord** lays on him,

it will be with tambourines and harps;
and in battles of brandishing He will fight with it.

33 For Tophet *was* established of old, yes, for the king it is prepared.
He has made *it* deep and large; its pyre *is* fire with much wood; the breath of the **Lord**, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it.

This fourth woe follows hard on the heels of the end of the last woe. The theme concerns rebellion in the area of seeking advice and wisdom. In this woe we have four separate sections, beginning with the woe issued and explained, (verses 1 to 5), followed by a long section or “burden” which details the nature of the errors being expressed and their consequences, (verses 6 to 17), then by a section which points to blessing which is dependent upon the Lord waiting, (verses 18 to 26), finally closing with a message concerning the end of all things, (verses 27 to 33).

[1] The woe issued – taking counsel from Egypt. (Isaiah 30:1-5).

[2] The burden against the beasts of the South. (Isaiah 30:6-17).

[a] The burden of the journey. (Isaiah 30:6,7).

[b] The sin of the people. (Isaiah 30:8-11).

[c] The fruit of their rebellion. (Isaiah 30:12-14).

[d] What the people missed in their pride. (Isaiah 30:15-17).

[3] The Lord waits to be gracious. (Isaiah 30:18-26).

[4] The Lord will come finally as a burning fire. (Isaiah 30:27-33).

[1] The woe issued – taking counsel from Egypt. (Isaiah 30:1-5).

30:1.

Here the subject for warning are rebels who do not take counsel of the Lord. It is so important that we recognise that counsel can only be from two sources, either from the Lord or from elsewhere (i.e. from man or from demons). If it is from elsewhere, then wherever it is from, it isn't from the Lord, and so therefore it will be wrong! Our text tells us further that the rebellious who take counsel from sources other than the Lord will be multiplying sins (*“add sin to sin”*). This is obvious because if we rebel against God we are sinning.

We should note also that true counsel comes from the Lord and, in particular, from the Holy Spirit (*“My Spirit”*) for He is the agent through which revelation is brought to us both through the word written (the Bible or Scripture) and by way of His guide within us as we read and pray.

30:2.

In verse 2 we find that these *“rebellious children”* were going to Egypt for advice. We note that these *“rebellious”* ones did not ask for advice from the Lord. Their impulse was simply to look to that which was at hand, openly visible, and readily apparent. In particular they were seeking for strength and protection (*“trust in the shadow”*) from Egypt! This is so strange given how often we read that God Himself is *“The Rock,”* or the strength, the shield, and the defender.¹³³² Then also we read frequently that believers can hide under the shadow of the Lord's wing.¹³³³ Given these, and many other Scriptures recounting the Lord's help and deliverance of His people, why would they ever consider going to Egypt for help?

30:3.

The consequence of such rebellion is worked out from verse 3. That which they were trusting in, which was their hope, would instead become their shame and humiliation. It always comes to this because the help of man is weak at best, and downright hopeless at worst. What could Pharaoh provide by way of strength? What protection could Egypt offer? It may be that someone would argue that there are regimes throughout history and there are people of power who could offer such solace and care, but when we examine these properly we know in truth that such are always weak, and they always fall far short of what is required. However when we take the Lord

¹³³² Deuteronomy 32:4,31; 2Samuel 22:32,47; Psalm 18:2,31,46; 31:3 etc.

¹³³³ Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 63:7.

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into account as well, the situation becomes even more stark. Who could offer solace and protection from God's gaze? Who could offer help and care in competition with the Lord? What does any man-made system, organisation, ruling power, great thinker, key leader, or any other man-centred base for wisdom offer in comparison to the Lord? Nothing! Why then do modern Christians keep seeking advice from the varied worldly ideas, schemes, world view, or modern methods for help? It is sheer folly at best and in reality it is rank rebellion.

30:4,5.

The princes of Judah went specifically to Zoan where Pharaoh had his wise counsellors.¹³³⁴ The name "*Hanes*" means "grace has fled." And so the leaders of Judah were seeking advice from Egypt in a place where grace was nowhere to be seen, for it was repudiated. This is ever the case, for the world despises grace. It cannot do with anything that does not elevate man and his efforts. Surely, many say, we cannot accept any system of belief that requires us to give up any hope of making an advance from a human perspective or by virtue of good works? Well the situation was that the leaders of Judah had come to these cities of Egypt for advice and help. But when they got there they found no help. We read in verse 5 that these advisers could not be a "*help*" and were of no "*benefit*." Such is always the case where man's help is sought, and even if the receiver thinks it has been of help, they are wrong. The beginning and end of verse 5 highlights shame. Trust in Egypt brought failure. It is rather like the man who is desperate for some essential part to complete his great project and has one last chance to succeed, but in going all the way to some famous storehouse he discovers that they were bankrupt and all the stock has been removed. What shame!

[2] The burden against the beasts of the South. (Isaiah 30:6-17).

This section of Isaiah comes in four separate parts. First we have a journey to Egypt described in verses 6 and 7. Then we have a declaration of the true state and condition of the people of God in verses 8 to 11. Next we are given the consequence of their state and action in verses 12 to 14. Finally we see the outcome and what they have missed through their rebellion in verses 15 to 17. Within this whole section we see the Lord's actions and intentions to His people. The people are rebellious and are unwilling to listen, but God waits to have compassion and mercy. And even though they are rebellious the Lord will bring home His salvation.

¹³³⁴ Isaiah 19:11.

[a] The burden of the journey. (Isaiah 30:6,7).

30:6,7.

In the first section we have a return to the *“burden”* type of speech we met with earlier in chapters 13 to 23. The main idea expressed here is of Judah going south towards Egypt. Why were they going? Presumably to get counsel and advice. But the Lord points out here that to get there they have to pass a very rough and treacherous stretch of land. In this region three distinct types of creatures are mentioned. First we have the *“lioness”* and the *“lion,”* which species is one of the fiercest predators of the land. Then we have the *“viper,”* which is a very poisonous and agile snake. Finally we have a *“fiery flying serpent,”* which other translations render simply as *“flying serpent”* or as simply *“darting snakes.”* The pressure to view these creatures as just venomous snakes is very strong. However, the Hebrew words used indicate the idea of “flying,” and are also those used to represent the angels that Isaiah saw in the year that Uzziah died.¹³³⁵ It is true that many commentators argue that there is a form of parallelism going on here. The use of the term *“viper”* is taken by these folk as instructive for the term *“fiery flying serpent.”* Consequently these commentators argue that these were snakes of an extreme venomous nature.

The problem with this interpretation is that we have no form of parallelism when the first animal is noted, namely, the lion. If there is no parallelism in connection with the lion, why should we accept that there is for the viper? But then when we come back to the Hebrew terms we have further problems. Why use a term to indicate flying, and why use a term which indicates the seraphim of Isaiah 6 (angelic beings)? We need to note further that the terminology of Isaiah 30:6 is also found in Deuteronomy 8:15 where the people of God were going through the same region but in this case from Egypt up towards the land of Canaan. In this verse we read of snakes, (נָחָשׁ) seraphs (שָׂרָף) and scorpions (עֲקָרָב). There is no mention of *“flying”* in the verse in Deuteronomy but the mention of seraphs (שָׂרָף) is significant.¹³³⁶ It would appear that there were creatures which were burning bright (as seraphs) and which could fly. What creatures could these be? Many have suggested that these are some form of flying dinosaur such as a pterodactyl or pteranodon. Of course the modern mind cannot accept this line of reasoning because we have been indoctrinated that such creatures have been extinct for many millions of years. We know from what God has revealed that the universe is but 6,000 years old. The text indicates three types of beast. The lion represents the

1335 Isaiah 6:2.

1336 Please note that many versions translate שָׂרָף as *“fiery”* or *“venomous.”*

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fiercest land animal, the viper the fiercest crawling animal, and the fiery flying serpent represents the fiercest creature of the skies. Thus the Israelites are hampered by fierceness on all sides, and so we read that it was: *“a land of trouble and anguish.”*

The idea that these creatures were in fact flying pterosaurs is not a new one. The 7th century Assyrian king Esarhaddon referred to serpents which could fly and which had deadly breath.¹³³⁷ The Greek historian Herodotus wrote of flying serpents that dwelt in the Arabian desert and which frequently attacked Egypt.¹³³⁸ There have been other reports even during medieval times and a helpful article written by David Woetzel for the Creation Research Society is well worth consulting.¹³³⁹

So then it would seem we have the king of fierce beasts (the lion), the most venomous of snakes, and pterosaurs flying in the southern regions of the promised land all vexing the people as they travelled south. It may have been thought that these would be a bar to going south, but the Israelites were determined, and not just to make a brief visit, for they were carrying both *“riches”* and *“treasures”* on the backs of pack animals. These may have been payment for the advice and counsel they hoped to receive, but could also indicate a desire to return to Egypt with all that they possessed.

The section ends with an awful statement of reality. The Egyptians were of no help and could not profit. This theme is emphasised heavily in verse 7 by repeated statements (*“help in vain”* and *“no purpose”*), and the name given to Egypt here (*“Rahab-Hem-Shebeth”*), which meant “Rahab (Egypt) sits idle.” This is a graphic picture of all of mankind's efforts to aid and help when it really comes to it. What help does man give or provide concerning the eternal truths, of death, sin, God's wrath and so on? None. It simply sits idle as Egypt did of old.

[b] The sin of the people. (Isaiah 30:8-11).

30:8,9.

The prophet is commanded to write down their condition and state so that the people would know, and also that it would be preserved for ever that all would see. So what was their state and condition? Well it is first described in verse 9 by three ideas that characterise them, and then

1337 **Moshe Weinfield.** *Deuteronomy 1-11.* Doubleday. 1991. P395. See also: <http://thetorah.com/what-is-the-biblical-flying-serpent/>

1338 **Herodotus.** *Histories III.* P107.

1339 **David Woetzel.** *The Fiery Flying Serpent.* Creation Research Society. Volume 42. March 2006. PP241 – 251. See also: http://www.creationresearch.org/members-only/crsq/42/42_4/2005v42n4p241.pdf

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developed further in verses 10 and 11 showing how they spoke and acted. Thus these were

a rebellious people

lying children

children *who* will not hear the law of the Lord

The people refused to listen to the Lord and His word, and so rebelled and sought other avenues of help, covering up as they went along. Those who rebel and who go outside of God's way will be outside the truth and will be following the lie. Consequently they will have to cover up the reality of their chosen path with more lies. Rebellion always leads to lying because there is only one way, one truth – in Christ alone! As a follow on, the people who rebel and who therefore operate outside of the truth in the realm of lies will refuse to hear the law of God.

30:10,11.

Now such rebels are described further in verses 10 and 11. First of all we find that they tell the prophets negatively to stop prophesying concerning the right way. This is inevitable because rebels who refuse to hear will not want others prophesying what is right. Instead the prophets and seers are exhorted to prophesy “*smooth things.*” So it isn't that they were to stop their role, but rather that what they offered must be that which is acceptable or “*smooth*” in the sense of level and easy. Something which would cause no offence or occasion to stumble. Then further, the prophets and seers were told that they must leave the way and path of righteousness. This is finally explained explicitly with reference to the “*Holy One of Israel,*” i.e. the Lord Himself, for He is to “*cease from before*” the people. This expression is monstrous! They are effectively saying that they want the Lord to be dead to them! The word used and rendered “*cease*” is actually the word for Sabbath rest. They want a Sabbath rest from God! How absurd! However such expressions are not uncommon today. How often do we hear people saying “give it a rest” when we speak of spiritual things? “Don't keep talking about God all the time” they say to us, “we want to have fun.” Well the expressions of rebellion are sometimes masked in positive terms to make them sound good, but here there is nothing good at all. The rebels have made it quite clear that they want nothing more to do with the Holy One of Israel, and they want easy preaching which is not a part of the “*way*” or “*path*” that leads to righteousness.

[c] The fruit of their rebellion. (Isaiah 30:12-14).

The Holy One of Israel is not about to acquiesce to their demands. His reply is final. Twice we have the word “*therefore*” in the English which indicates a concluding comment.¹³⁴⁰ The consequences of such rebellion as stated in previous words is now going to be drawn out clearly for Israel. The finality of these conclusions is emphasised by the phrase “*thus says the Holy One of Israel.*”¹³⁴¹ There can be no changes made to what God has said and determined.

30:12.

First the Holy One gives the reason for the consequences, it is because they “*despise*” the message revealed and delivered. They think that what the Lord has to say is beneath them, of no account, and must be rejected. Is this not the same today? Note then, that the first consequence of rejecting God's word, or of despising it, is that the rebels must, of necessity, place their trust in something else. Because it is not God, it is therefore outside of God, and must then be described in real terms. People like to assume that there is a neutral ground. They assume that a rejection of God doesn't limit them to something evil or not good. The truth is that if you reject God and His word, you move away from all that is good, true, right, perfect, satisfying, and so on. What is left is “*oppression*” and “*perversity.*” They rely on what is perverse, which is out of the way, for their support, and they rely on oppression as their course of action. This is what rejecting God does to a person, or a people. Isn't this an accurate description of our day? People have rejected God and what He has to say, and consequently they put their trust in what is off the track or perverse. You cannot get more perverse than the current madness with regard to gender and sexuality. The people of today also resort to oppression by not just belittling those who speak against this perversion, but actively ostracise them even to the point of persecution. Such is the immediate consequence of their rebellion but there is more to come.

30:13.

Next we read in verse 13 of what will happen to them because of this rebellion. At some point, (unknown to man), their sin will lead to the break-up of society. It is described in verse 13 in the following ways:

1340 Isaiah 30:12,13.

1341 Isaiah 30:12,

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a breach ready to fall

a bulge in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant.

The image depicted is of a high wall which suddenly bursts open with a great bulge and falls down on them. Imagine some missile which is fired at a city wall defence but which is breached and breaks up. In verse 14 we are told that it is God (*“He”*) who is doing this. However the fruit of sin and rebellion always leads to such a break down in relations because a reliance on perversity and oppression will always be destructive. Who likes to be oppressed? One man's perversion is another's horror and disdain. Such behaviour cannot last long. That being said we are taught in no uncertain terms that God is bringing the destruction to pass. The God who upholds all things by the word of His power will lead rebellion to its sure conclusion – disaster.

30:14.

In this verse we read that the Lord acts as one who breaks a potters vessel to such an extent that nothing of use will be left. You will not be able to use any broken pieces to pick up water or ashes from a fire. At the beginning of verse 14 we have a very emphatic statement *“He will not spare.”* Rebellion is always met with judgement. There is a dreadful malaise amongst modern day Christians who promote a judgement-free faith. These misguided and deluded folk think that talk of judgement is un-Christian. God is only concerned with love and mercy. However verses like these that we are currently reading cannot be ignored. God will not spare. This is to be taken as a statement against rebellion and those who rebel. For those who do so, they must expect that God will not overlook their sin and iniquity. They will be judged. Is there no hope for such rebels? None whatsoever if they continue in their rebellion! However if they turn and repent and run to the Lord for mercy and forgiveness, evidenced by a deep desire to heed what the Lord is saying, then there is a way out! Of course the rebellion they have practised cannot be excused. It must be judged. The only way that such rebellion can be judged and the repentant rebel forgiven is through The Substitute – Christ Jesus – who lived a righteousness life and paid the penalty for our rebellion.

[d] What the people missed in their pride. (Isaiah 30:15-17).

30:15.

Pride is a terrible, terrible sin. It stops so much blessing and it reaps so much horror. The

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Lord God, the Holy One, had already issued the great gracious gospel, but here we see Him calling the people to return to Him and seek His rest. The call expressed in verse 15 is wonderful. If you are a rebel against God you need to consider these words:

in returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.¹³⁴²

Four key words are given which ought to be the essence and focus of all who have rebelled (which means everyone). If these qualities are evident, then the outcome will be salvation and strength. The four qualities are:

- ***returning*** – *turn back, conversion.*
- ***rest*** – *setting down (of arms).*
- ***quietness*** – *to become tranquil, no more strife.*
- ***confidence*** – *trust, security*

There would seem to be a progression in these words which all define some aspect of conversion. We start with “***returning***,” or changing one's mind. This is repentance. Then we have the word “***rest***,” which suggests a setting down of something, for example when placing something on a table. In other words the repentant one has come to put down all their strife and unrest and now rests. Then we have the word “***quietness***,” which indicates a stillness of heart after hostile and strife-ridden arguments have been laid to rest. Finally we have “***confidence***,” which indicates a trust and security. Having turned and given up unrest for rest, the result ends with a secure confidence or trust in the One who is Holy. What a wonderful description of conversion! However, even though the people had heard such a message we find, very sadly, that they still refused to hear or obey it.

30:16,17.

Instead there is a brazen pride expressed in verse 16. They respond with an emphatic “***No!***” coupled with a determination to take hold of the strength of the horse. But the Lord has the last word. They will flee, but they will flee from pursuers who are swifter. The hope and strength they had relied on Egypt for, would be so little that even though they may have many horses, one

¹³⁴² Isaiah 30:15.

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thousand of them would flee from a single stronger pursuer.¹³⁴³ This would continue to the very point where all that would be left would be *“a pole on top of a mountain and as a banner on a hill.”*¹³⁴⁴ Thus once again we are back to the banner theme. Here the idea maybe of a lone person holding the battle standard having retreated to the safest, highest point. However we cannot miss the significance of this picture. There is only one left, and this is depicted not as holding the pole or banner, but as being the banner or standard. This is a clear reference to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who when He died and was lifted up as foretold by Moses, He was the last one all alone, and in bearing away sin was the standard set on the hill. My attempt at translating the Hebrew for the end of verse 17 is shown below:

← Hebrew reads from the right

הָהָר	עַל-רֹאשׁ	כַּתָּוִן
a mountain	the head	upon as a beacon
עַל-הַגְּבֻעָה	וְכַסֵּי	
a hill upon	and as a banner	

Thus my translation would read:

as a beacon upon the head of the mountain
and as a banner upon a hill

The word rendered *“beacon”* is **toren** (תָּוִן) and means mast (of a ship) or flagpole.¹³⁴⁵ It is linked with the word **'oren** (אֹרֶן) which is the word for a fir tree from its strength. The other word rendered *“banner”* is **nes** (נֵס) and derives from a word which means “to be lifted up.” It occurs in Numbers 21:8,9 to which the Lord Jesus refers in John 3:14. The two statements are complimentary. The beacon is the banner. The beacon emphasises the conspicuous nature of this sight. Now clearly the

1343 Isaiah 30:17.

1344 Isaiah 30:17.

1345 Only used three times in the Old Testament. Twice as a ship's mast at Isaiah 33:23 and Ezekiel 27:5 and once here as a beacon.

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point being made is that they will all be devastated fleeing away in horror so that only one remains. There would be no hope amongst the people at all. And this is what we discover in the New Testament. When Christ came into the world He had some popularity for a time. But eventually His popularity faded until at the end there was just Him and His disciples, and then at the very end He was alone and all were scattered as sheep. The Jews ought to have received Christ and exalted Him. But they would not. Instead they followed their own ideas. They went to the world's view of how to win the victory. And so they all fled. The Jewish leaders feared their occupiers (the Romans). The disciples were confused and did not understand, and so Christ was left alone. To the outsider looking in on what was happening it all seems forlorn and hopeless. Just one is left! How will that help? Ah but this One is Christ, the banner and the beacon!

[3] The Lord waits to be gracious. (Isaiah 30:18-26).

30:18.

Given their proud rebellion, and given that they refused to return and seek for mercy, what will the Lord do next? It is simply remarkable and breathtakingly wonderful to find that the Lord is so long-suffering toward mankind, as Peter puts it, *“not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”*¹³⁴⁶ And so we find that the Lord waits! Remarkable! The Lord of glory waits so that He can be gracious to His people. Perhaps this points towards the Lord Jesus' incarnation, but it also certainly has reference to an individual's experience. If you are a believer you may be able to look back over past experiences and see how patiently the Saviour was in waiting for just the right time to bring grace. If you are not a believer then know that there has been long ages amounting to thousands of years simply in order that people could be given space and time to repent. Do you not know this in your own lifetime? How many chances have you been given to consider the Lord and His ways? Do not presume these will continue indefinitely for there is coming a time when all will held to account, however, as it is still the day of God's gracious salvation why not return, rest, be quiet, and fully trust in Christ?

The second *“therefore”* in verse 18 shows us that this waiting is also designed to bring God glory, Now many have a problem with God getting glory. They wrongly assume that to get glory indicates some form of megalomania or power craze. The fact of the matter is that God is pure, holy, good, and perfect – infinitely so. Glory is His due! He waits for that perfect time when He can

¹³⁴⁶ 2Peter 3:9.

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be gracious and gain all the glory due His name. This is pointing to that stupendous time when Christ gave His life in our place. At one and the same time God was gracious to us and His wrath against sin and rebellion was satiated. God is a God of justice and no sin will be left unpunished. Hence those who wait for this wonderful event, who put their trust in what the Lord has done, will be blessed indeed.

General comments on Isaiah 30:19-26.

The remainder of this portion is full of the blessings for those who wait on and trust God. It really outlines and focuses on the whole subject of salvation, how it is to be sought and what it looks like. It will be helpful to list all of these blessings, of which there are twelve:

- 1. The people will have a settled dwelling in Zion (v19).*
- 2. There will be no more weeping (v19).*
- 3. The Lord will hear their cries graciously and He will respond quickly (v19).*
- 4. In the midst of tribulation there will be teachers who can lead (v20).*
- 5. They will be able to hear the counsel of God through their teachers (v21).*
- 6. They will reject their idols instead of the Lord (v22).*
- 7. There will be plenty of provision (v23).*
- 8. There will be increase and growth (v23).*
- 9. The oxen and donkeys will do their work with success (v24).*
- 10. There will be streams of water in the mountains (v25).*
- 11. There will be a great more light to replace the darkness (v26).*
- 12. The wounds and bruises of the people will be healed and bound up (v26).*

These blessings depict the type of experiences that the church in the gospel age has come to know. We can see these blessings clearly in the New Testament church. Of course the New Testament *“Zion”* is no longer the location of Jerusalem, but the dwelling place of God – Immanuel. The Holy Spirit has come and now the believers know a deeper intimacy and closeness to the Saviour. There is a ready rejection of idolatry and all it stands for. The church increases by the day and more are sent out to harvest the fruit of gospel grace. Oxen and donkeys are often used figuratively for those who carry the burden and responsibility of taking the good news out into the world (field).

30:19.

The statement that the people will “*dwell in Zion at Jerusalem*” may seem to indicate that such will literally be the case. Of course all the while Christ Jesus is yet to come this would be true. The people of God would be taken into captivity during the time when Jeremiah prophesied, but then they would return from exile to dwell again in Jerusalem. But when Christ eventually came through the incarnation, all consideration of such a return to the location of Jerusalem was at an end. The reason for this is because Christ is the purpose or goal for all of the law and the prophets.¹³⁴⁷ Since He has come there is no longer need for Israel, Jerusalem, and all of the former temporal aids to faith. We can see this expressed in the New Testament in many places but perhaps an easy one to grasp is the Lord's indication that the temple was no longer needed for He is the temple, and that true worshippers were not constrained to any specific location.¹³⁴⁸

We thus need to see these words in their spiritual sense. Whenever we read such ideas we must always have Christ in view, for He is the true temple, and He is the true Head of the church. Thus to “*dwell in Zion at Jerusalem*” is to be a true member of God's family, to be a true member of the church of the living God. Paul in Hebrews speaks of this.¹³⁴⁹ And those who enter into the Lord's Kingdom will “*weep no more.*” This is not speaking of heaven just yet, for we also read that such still “*cry,*” but the reason for their weeping is gone. The point being that they no longer weep for sins and their lost state because the Lord has redeemed them. But they may weep for the troubles and afflictions this world brings to bear.

The last sentence of verse 19 is one of the greatest comforts for the true believer. The Lord is gracious, incredibly so. But here we are told that He “*will be very gracious*” to us when we are in tears. It will be at the very “*sound*” of our cry, and the very moment “*He hears it,*” that He will respond with an answer. How wonderful these words are. Our Father in heaven knows us intimately and desires our very best. He is attentive to us just as the good father looks upon his children with love, care, and protection.

30:20.

That what is being described in this section pertains to the gospel age and not the age to come is shown forth by this verse. We discover that even though the Lord is incredibly gracious to those who now dwell in the true Zion and will answer their cries speedily, nevertheless there will

1347 Matthew 5:17,18; Romans 10:4.

1348 John 2:18-22; 4:21-24.

1349 Hebrews 12:18-24.

Studies in Isaiah.

also be *“the bread of adversity and the water of affliction.”* What does this phrase indicate? Well it suggests two things. First it indicates that we will know *“adversity”* and *“affliction.”* These are one of the Lord's means of our sanctification. The word given as *“adversity”* comes from the root word meaning: “narrow” or “tight.” This reminds us that the way of the Lord is narrow and not broad like the way that leads to destruction.¹³⁵⁰ Such a statement is obvious in our experience, of course, because the way of the Lord is diametrically opposed to the way of the world. The idea, then, is that we shall know trouble and tribulation, just as the Lord promised us.¹³⁵¹ Such are truly those means by which the Lord sanctifies us.¹³⁵² Our food and drink will not be all that pleasant and great. These words speak of those who suffer in prisons where the rations are measured and mean. Believers do not generally have the best of things this world can offer, but they are provided for. There is *“bread”* and there is *“water.”* What is much more vital and important is to have the bread and water *of life*. Of these we have abundance!

We have many Scriptures which teach us that the Lord will keep us and provide for us in this world, but we are not to expect the luxuries and the best that money can supply! The wonder is that so many times the Lord does give good gifts even in regard to food and drink at times, but the general pattern is that we have what we need. Perhaps the best advice we can offer here is to consider the apostle Paul who wrote these words:

11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: **12** I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.¹³⁵³

A person might live for some weeks without food, but without water we will not last long. The Lord knows that we need such things but He calls us to seek and to centre our lives on *“the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”*¹³⁵⁴ In truth you may find that a good plate of food made at home out of the simplest ingredients by one who loves is far better than a fancy dish served up costing the earth in some super restaurant.¹³⁵⁵

Despite the fact that we will not have the best of the world (and to be honest the best is not

1350 Matthew 7:13.

1351 John 16:33.

1352 Psalm 119:67,71.

1353 Philippians 4:11,12.

1354 Matthew 6:33.

1355 Proverbs 23:1-8.

Studies in Isaiah.

always the best) what we do have, and what we are promised, is godly and true *“teachers.”* The priests were meant to teach the people out of the law but they failed in great measure. In times of gospel blessing there are great and godly teachers. We recall that in the New Testament gospel age as prophesied by Jeremiah, none will need to teach their brother saying *“know the Lord”* for all will know Him *“from the least of them to the greatest of them.”*¹³⁵⁶ All believers have access to the Lord and all will be taught of Him personally.¹³⁵⁷ Nevertheless the Lord has seen fit to provide us with teachers as the New Testament makes clear.¹³⁵⁸ We need to remember also that there are false teachers too and so we need to beware.¹³⁵⁹ Teachers are needed to lead and to bring people to an understanding of the truth and how to walk. Paul was repeatedly teaching the churches not only the doctrines and how vital they were, but how to live too. But these teachers are not to be dominators or despots but servants. People need to adopt a Berean attitude.¹³⁶⁰ These folk were those who heard Paul preach and went to the Scriptures themselves to check out what Paul was saying. They did not do this to find fault, but did it because they knew the Lord (and His word) and wanted to make sure of what they were hearing.

And so the promise of the Lord for this gospel age is that the teachers would no longer *“be moved into a corner”* and instead the people would be able to see their teachers. In other words there is great provision for growth in the Lord. A brief view of church history ought to show the connection between godly and gifted teachers and the state of the church. We look today in vain for many great teachers and what of the church today? Contrast this with the times of the Puritan preachers of the seventeenth century or the great evangelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Spurgeon preached to many thousands in the nineteenth century. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached for many years to thousands too in the twentieth century but not as many went to hear Lloyd-Jones as heard Spurgeon. But where today are such godly Bible-focused preachers? There are many who may draw crowds but they do not preach the word nor the whole counsel of God, and so the church languishes.¹³⁶¹ We do not despair, for the Lord has promised us teachers. We need to cry out, for He has promised to hear us! May He raise up godly men to teach and preach the word of life to rouse the church and usher in the new life Christ won!

1356 Jeremiah 31:34.

1357 Matthew 16:17.

1358 1Corinthians 12:28,29; Ephesians 4:11; James 3:1.

1359 2Peter 2:1f.

1360 Acts 17:11.

1361 Acts 20:27; 2Timothy 4:2.

30:21.

Look now at the detail of such teachers. Verse 21 speaks of discipleship. There is a teacher who stands behind the disciple looking over his charge and showing him (or her) the way to walk. In many ways what is written here in verse 21 sounds very much like how a father or mother trains a little child. The child is learning to read and the mother guides them in their words and encourages as they try and do what they have been set. The teacher stands behind the pupil as the pupil writes their answers to the questions posed. The teacher prompts them to take one route or another and so the pupil learns.¹³⁶² These words speak of detail. The idea is of one being trained to follow a specific path, or of one being taught how to read a map. How we need good godly guides who can advise us on the course of action to be taken in our varied walks of life. Be very wary of any who mingle the world's ideas with Scripture. There are countless so-called counsellors and teachers who look to the world for its ideas of mankind and society, and who clothe their sayings in Biblical phrases but who are wolves in sheep's clothing. Many espouse secular psychology or business practices. Others advocate socialism or Marxism or some other philosophy they take the liking of. Run from such as fast as you can. What you want is godly teachers steeped in the word of God.

Many interpret these words to refer to the Spirit of God, for He is our guide and teacher in truth.¹³⁶³ This is fine but do remember that the Spirit of God authored Scripture and so He will never contradict what is written. If you are in a place where you are exhorted to rest on the mutterings of the Spirit and not to rely on the word of God you are in the wrong place! The heart is deceitful and we will go astray if we simply let the inner man lead us. We need to heed the Spirit who guides as we search the Scriptures, for only in these will we find Christ.

30:22.

One of the effects of such godly teachers is that people will be drawn to give up their idols. So we read that the people will *“defile”* their idols and images and will *“throw them away”* considering them as *“unclean.”* This is, of course, the mark and test of true godly teaching. We see an example of this in the book of Acts where Paul preached in Ephesus and many who believed burned their magic books and caused a tremendous downturn in the idol trade!¹³⁶⁴

It is interesting to note that the people would actively desecrate and destroy the very fabric

1362 I know that modern teaching theory and practice is very different to this but remember the word of God is living! We ought to get our teaching theory from the Scriptures.

1363 John 16:13.

1364 Acts 19:18,19,23-27.

Studies in Isaiah.

of the images and idols they had relied upon. So disgusted by their former trust they now considered them *“unclean”* (as a menstrual cloth) and shouted for them to *“get away!”* If we observe people who like to cling onto their former ways and their former trusts, we ought not to be convinced of their salvation. But sadly today we often find a poor call to repentance in preaching and teaching. People like to have Jesus and all their worldly thrills and pleasures, all their trusts and talismans. Where are those who forsake **all** for Christ? Where are those who say like Paul:

For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.¹³⁶⁵

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.¹³⁶⁶

To be translated or conveyed from *“the power of darkness”* and then into *“the kingdom of the Son of His love,”* is to go from a dungeon into the wide open places of paradise.¹³⁶⁷ The thought of holding on to what you may have trusted in whilst in the dungeon of this world is utterly unthinkable.

30:23.

In Isaiah 30:20 we heard about the *“bread of adversity and the water of affliction,”* but here we read that the Lord will give such a blessing in the land that the *“bread”* which is produced will be *“fat and plentiful.”* Is this a contradiction? Of course not! The point is that adversity and affliction are for a moment and serve the purpose of weaning people from this world. Where there is godly teaching and attentive disciples the blessings of God will follow. But we must never think of this as inevitable or as a foregone conclusion, as though it were some type of mathematical equation. Never merely think that if we have godly teachers and the disciples hear and obey then it will always be happiness, peace, and plenty. We must never presume such. However we observe that when things are right and godly, blessings and fruitfulness are the result. What we must do is remember that God is sovereign. It is He who causes the rain and the sun to shine.

Instead what we should see in these thoughts is that there are seasons of drought and seasons of fruitfulness. Our history teaches us this. The Lord at times brings adversity and affliction, and

1365 Phillipians 1:21.

1366 Philippians 3:8.

1367 Colossians 1:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

then at other times blessing and great bounty. All the while there are times of adversity the Lord provides and He has His people to witness and to worship. Just as in the days of Elijah who thought he was all alone, nevertheless there were seven thousand who did not worship Baal.¹³⁶⁸ At such a time of drought the Lord is still working and providing, even through the means of a raven!¹³⁶⁹ In contrast to the times of drought and difficulty, where blessing and fruitfulness are seen as in the reign of Solomon, there are those who sow the seeds of destruction and bring about the times of reproach. The book of Judges also speaks of this cycle of blessing followed by times of adversity through history, all attendant upon the respective judge. Whilst the godly judge ruled in accordance with the Lord's wishes there was peace and fruitfulness. But then the people drift and depart and sinned once again, and so adversity comes back to try and test the people. Will they cry out to Him in repentance?

When we consider these things we ought always to do as an old pastor once advised me. Keep short accounts. Always speak to the Lord in truth (why do otherwise?). The trouble is that we naturally drift from the Lord.¹³⁷⁰ Thus we must bring ourselves back into line with the Lord whom we love. It does always start with love. Whom do we really love? Once settled on this – it is God alone who deserves our all – we strive to keep ourselves in His love.¹³⁷¹

Now although the first meaning is the literal one which speaks of blessings in provisions and the things needed for sustaining life, we ought also to consider that this speaks of gospel ministry. The seed in the parable of the sower is the word of God.¹³⁷² The ground is the hearts that may receive the seed sown. The rain is the both the word of God and the Spirit who brings this word. And so we see that the Lord wills to give (a matter of grace) increase in gospel ministry. He is sovereign and He knows His plan. But we rejoice in the fact that there are times of such gospel increase. We may not see such great increases in this day here in the UK. But there have been in the past and who is to say there will not be in days to come?

Let him who sows the seed in faithfulness know that he is about his Master's business, and as long as he walks as taught by his godly teachers (and walking in the Spirit) he will see fruit from his labours. The statement: *“in that day your cattle will feed in large pastures”* may be taken in the same way. Cattle are often put for those who plough and who carry burdens. As such they serve to typify gospel preachers and witnesses. The picture is of great abundance such that the cattle may

1368 1Kings 19:18; Romans 11:3,4.

1369 1Kings 17:4,6.

1370 Hebrews 2:1.

1371 Jude 1:21.

1372 Matthew 13:1f.

Studies in Isaiah.

feed to their full, and thus fed are energised to continue the work. How we need workers and gospel ministers who are fed well, who know the Lord truly, and who are not tossed hither and thither by every controversy and distraction!

30:24.

Next we read of *“oxen and the young donkeys.”* These too were given to do work in the fields. The oxen to pull the plough, and the donkey to carry the burden of harvest. These animals are said *“to work the ground”* by which we take it that they are involved in ploughing and harvesting as we have suggested. But note further that the ground was cursed after the first human pair sinned.¹³⁷³ So we see here that gospel ministry is an undoing of the curse, because these servants were working the ground.

And then we read of these animals feeding greatly on *“cured fodder;”* by which is meant savoury meal (a mixture of prepared grains). The expression: *“which has been winnowed with the shovel and fan”* serves to indicate the great care and the extent taken to make the animals' foodstuff. The idea here is of plenty and pure clean food. We see such a thing at Pentecost and after, for the apostles preached the word and great success was had, and so much so that they had to request helpers (deacons) so that they could continue in the work of the word.¹³⁷⁴

30:25.

The high places had always been a problem for the people of God. This was where the pagan forerunners (Canaanites) had worshipped idols and images in shrines and under various trees. The people of God were supposed to have removed these completely on their entrance into the land, but they never really did, despite some valiant attempts by various godly kings at various times in their history. But now we discover a promise of God. In certain truth and without doubt *“there will be”* on all of the high places (whether *“mountain”* or *“hill”*) both *“rivers and streams of water.”* The implication here is of life – living waters – which speaks of the Holy Spirit and His great presence. In Jeremiah we get this wonderful title of God as *“the fountain of living waters,”* the continual supply of sustaining life, and there are several references to this idea in the New Testament.¹³⁷⁵

But when is this to occur? We read that it will be *“in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall.”* To what time does this refer? The first part of this phrase could signify the cross and

1373 Genesis 3:17.

1374 Acts 2:40-47; 6:1-4.

1375 Jeremiah 2:13; John 4:10,13,14; 7:37-39.

Studies in Isaiah.

Calvary where the Saviour died that great slaughter for sin. It might equally refer to the time when the Lord returns to bring punishment to all who have rejected Christ and His offer of rescue and salvation. But what of the second part of this phrase? Well we have already heard mention of towers falling in Isaiah 2.

12 For the day of the LORD of hosts *shall come* upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up— and it shall be brought low— ... **15** Upon every high tower ...¹³⁷⁶

This speaks of the time of Christ's second coming. Then also we note that Babylon was famously known for her towers. Chiefly, of course, from the origin of that place through Nimrod who instigated the great plan to build *"a tower whose top is in the heavens."*¹³⁷⁷ It would seem then that we could take this in a dual sense to refer to both when Christ first came and then when He returns. If the first advent is in view, then the *"great slaughter"* would speak of Christ's sacrifice and in that moment, for all who repent and turn to Christ, their own inner towers would tumble and fall. Alternatively the *"great slaughter"* might be taken as the final day when all the enemies of Christ will be dealt with once and for all. Babylon – the world – with all its pride (the towers) will fall forever. It matters little really whether we take it one way or the other. The fact of the matter is that all pride will fall and this is closely connected with the *"great slaughter."* When Christ died He took the punishment for sins and all the pride of those who truly repent is swept aside. If people do not heed the call to come to Christ, then they will be a part of the *"great slaughter"* to come when all pride (wherever it may be found) will fall.

30:26.

When the gospel spreads and goes forth, the lights are truly turned on! In this verse we are told that the moon will be as radiant as the sun, and the sun will be seven times as bright *"as the light of seven days."* Now the sun depicts in typical form the Lord Himself.¹³⁷⁸ He is the very radiance or brilliance of God's glory.¹³⁷⁹ The mention of a sevenfold brightness indicates a perfect or complete light. This is the pure and beautiful light of God, the Word made flesh, the Saviour of all the world. And His light will be shone in perfection. This can only speak of the coming of the

1376 Isaiah 2:12,15a.

1377 Genesis 11:4

1378 Psalm 19:4; Malachi 4:2; Matthew 4:16; Luke 1:78.

1379 Hebrews 1:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

Messiah at first. His light shone beautifully in the old economy but when He arrived in earth then the light was truly seen and was truly perfect.¹³⁸⁰

The moon reflects the sun's light and so typifies the church and all those that truly believe. Since the sun's light has increased greatly, the moon's does too. I think the idea here is that the light reflected by the moon is representative of the sun. In other words, people can truly see Christ in true believers. Is this not the case? Have you not come across this? People come across a bunch of true believers who are living and worshipping on the way of Christ, and they see something about them which can only be termed "divine." Often the believers are ignorant of this. In their lives and struggles they seek to live for the Lord and wrestle with sin, seeking the Lord. But unbelievers (those that are being drawn in and being saved) see in these believers the Lord Himself.¹³⁸¹ What an amazing God! How this ought to encourage us!

Now this day which is spoken of is that time when He saves by binding the bruises (*"binds up the bruise of His people"*), and healing the wounds (*"and heals the stroke of their wound"*). It is natural, I think, to relate these to Christ's first coming. When Christ died on Calvary He truly healed His people. But then we must not forget that whilst salvation was accomplished at Calvary and experienced in truth the moment a believer repented, they do not get all the benefits until the Lord returns. So once again we may apply these words to both the first and second comings of the Lord.

[4] The Lord will come finally as a burning fire. (Isaiah 30:27-33).

The gospel has been proclaimed, the benefits and blessings have been displayed, but still Israel refuses to heed and so the Lord waits in His long-suffering patience. But such will never continue indefinitely. There will come a time when all must be finally judged and reckoned up. Sin, all sin and rebellion, will be paid for. It will either have been paid by Christ at Calvary's cross, or it will be paid by the individual at the day of reckoning. Before we embark on our comments it will pay dividends to consider the whole passage first.

The fires of hell – a brief consideration.

Notice in these last seven verses how often fire or burning is mentioned. The passage seems to begin, end, and centre on fire and burning.

1380 Hebrews 1:1-3.

1381 Matthew 10:40; Luke 9:48; John 13:20.

Studies in Isaiah.

Burning <i>with</i> His anger.	(v27).
His tongue like a devouring fire.	(v27).
The flame of a devouring fire.	(v30).
Tophet (means: place of burning).	(v33).
Its [Tophet's] pyre <i>is</i> fire with much wood.	(v33).
The breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it.	(v33).

It is difficult, if not impossible, to consider that these references point directly to hell's fire which is depicted by the Saviour with great clarity:

... to go to hell, the fire that shall never be quenched.¹³⁸²

Indeed the mention of “*Tophet*” which was the place of continual burning where the people degenerated into sacrificing children in the fires of Molech, seems to signify a visual representation of hell. We pause and reflect here. The doctrine of hell is forgotten in our time. It is to be remembered that man is mortal and is subject to death, but this is because of sin. We understand this from the history recorded in Genesis and man's fall in the garden of Eden.¹³⁸³ But man also has an immortal soul. At physical death the soul is separated from the body. This truth is downplayed and even denied in many (so-called) Christian circles. That man has an immortal soul is easy to demonstrate from Scripture. We have the record of creation in Genesis 2:7, for example, and then we have repeated references in both Old and New Testaments to the clear teaching that there is life after death.¹³⁸⁴ Consider, as just one example, Job who declared the following:

25 For I know *that* my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; **26** and after my skin is destroyed, this *I know*, that in my flesh I shall see God, **27** whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. *How my heart yearns within me!*¹³⁸⁵

Since man has an immortal soul it is imperative we know what will happen when we die physically. Where does this incorporeal spiritual part of us go? Scripture makes quite plain that there are only

1382 Mark 9:43. See also Mark 9:44,45,46,48; 2Peter 3:10f.

1383 Genesis 2:17; 3:17f; 4:1f; 5:5f. See also: Ezekiel 18:4,20; Romans 6:23.

1384 Psalm 16:10; Ecclesiastes 3:11; 12:7; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2,3; Matthew 22:31,32; Luke 12:4,5; 2Corinthians 5:6-8.

1385 Job 19:25-27.

Studies in Isaiah.

two places: heaven or hell. We learn from the Saviour Himself that there will be a judgment at the end of time when He returns.¹³⁸⁶ Then in Hebrews the point is made plain for we learn that:

*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.*¹³⁸⁷

When Christ returns there will be a final judgement for all mankind. But the destination of a soul depends entirely upon how that soul has responded to the wonder of Christ and His work.

30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.¹³⁸⁸

What awaits the righteous (those who have placed their faith in the Lord) and the wicked (those who have rejected the gospel)? Well the Lord Jesus made this abundantly clear:

28 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice **29** and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.¹³⁸⁹
And these [the unrighteous] will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.¹³⁹⁰

That there are but these two options alone is made very clear by the Saviour in a graphic depiction of the destiny of two people described in the gospel of Luke as *“a certain rich man”* and *“a certain beggar.”*¹³⁹¹ These two folk are described in terms of their position and status in this world, so that the rich man signifies those who were bent on following the ways of this world (to get riches), whilst the beggar depicts the ones who forsakes this world and its riches and is thus treated harshly.¹³⁹² When the beggar (Lazarus) died we discover that he *“was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom,”* which is an interesting description of heaven.¹³⁹³ But when the rich man died we find simply that he *“was buried,”* and then we discover that he was *“in torments in Hades,”* and

1386 Matthew 25:31-46; Mark 9:42-48; Luke 16:19-31.

1387 Hebrews 9:27.

1388 Acts 17:30,31

1389 John 5:28,29.

1390 Matthew 25:46.

1391 Luke 16:19,20.

1392 Luke 16:19-22.

1393 Luke 16:22.

Studies in Isaiah.

that he was separated a great distance from Lazarus in heaven.¹³⁹⁴ We discover further that the rich man's experience was one of conscious torment in flames of fire, and that the “*gulf*” between heaven and hell was such that none could pass from one place to the other.¹³⁹⁵ From this account, and other Scriptures, we learn that there are only two types of people. There are the righteous who are so alone by faith in Christ and His death. And then there are the unrighteous (wicked) who are so because they have rejected the offer of the Lord's righteousness and gone their own way. We learn further that after death there is judgement, and that the righteous are taken to paradise, whilst the unrighteous are sent to hell where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched and those who are there exist in torment in flames.¹³⁹⁶ These are sobering words. No one likes to think too long on them. But these are the words of the Saviour who came to bring life and give His life as a ransom.¹³⁹⁷ Now as I write these words I have in mind the fact that the Lord has “*no pleasure in the death of the wicked.*”¹³⁹⁸ The Lord would that all turn to Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of life, but sadly many do not want to come.¹³⁹⁹ How should the Lord respond to those who reject this incredible offer? Remember here that we are not gods. We are not independent beings who can remonstrate with the eternal God. We are creatures made by Him who have rebelled. When He graciously offers reconciliation and rescue what can He do to those who ignore it and who shove it back in His face? Remember also that this offer of the gospel is the *only* thing that will not only renew right fellowship with God, but which also corrects and repairs us from our lost condition. We are in a dreadful state. There is no other way to remake and to repair mankind. All his own attempts prove and keep proving that he is a failure and needs desperate help from God who made him. If there is only one thing that can be done to make things right and good again, and the only One who can do this comes and freely does it, what can be said to those who reject such an offer? There is no other thing that can be said. The ones who reject the Lord Jesus have declared that they have rejected God and all that He stands for. Where then will they go but into “*outer darkness*” and the torment that comes from the absence of God's good presence?¹⁴⁰⁰

1394 Luke 16:23.

1395 Luke 16:24,26.

1396 The penitent thief who hung on a cross besides Jesus was told: “*today you will be with Me in Paradise*” (Luke 23:43). See also: Mark 9:42-48.

1397 Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1Timothy 2:6.

1398 Ezekiel 33:11. See also: Isaiah 14:5; Jeremiah 48:30-32; Ezekiel 18:32; Matthew 23:37.

1399 1Timothy 2:4.

1400 Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30.

30:27,28.

The final day is signalled in this passage by that very important word *“behold,”* which indicates that something is about to happen which we ought to pay attention to. What then, are we to *“behold”*? None other than the very *“name of the Lord”* which comes from afar (from heaven's glory). The name of the Lord is put for the Lord Himself. It represents His character and being. How then is this depicted for us? Now in this particular passage the key figure deserving of God's wrath is Assyria. This nation would be punished for their wrong-doing. However elsewhere in this piece we get an indication that this message also depicts the very end of time (e.g. in verse 28 we read that the Lord will *“sift the nations”*). Through Assyria's temporal experience we have a message that is fit for the end-time judgement.

Then next I want you to notice that this hell-fire is not something independent of God. We do not read of some place separate from, and distant from God. It is the name of the Lord that comes with the fires of His anger, and it is the Lord's lips which are full of indignation. It is the Lord's tongue that acts like a devouring fire, and it is His arm which comes down with anger and a devouring fire. We are reminded of the Lord's coming on Mount Sinai where there was fire and smoke like a furnace, along with lightning flashes as well.¹⁴⁰¹ Then also we think of Ezekiel's visions where fire was at the very centre of God's presence.¹⁴⁰²

In the midst of this we find two very different descriptions of those who will be saved and those who perish. Verse 28 tells us that the Lord's breath (the Holy Spirit) will be like a raging stream which will sort out the nations and shall direct them towards their proud and rebellious choice, *“causing them to err.”* The expression: *“to sift the nations with the sieve of futility,”* speaks of the Lord measuring each nation to see if it is futile or vain and empty. Such as are found to be futile will have a *“bridle”* placed upon them to confirm them in the course of their error. Thus if a nation or a person has determined to follow error, such an one will be confirmed in this sin. We note, by way of remembrance, that it was indeed Pharaoh who hardened his heart against all that Moses spoke from God, but equally we note that it was God who hardened Pharaoh's heart too.¹⁴⁰³ Thus the nations will be confirmed in their error to bring them to a just judgement.

1401 Exodus 19:16,18

1402 Ezekiel 1:4,13,27.

1403 Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 8:15,32; 9:12,34 and so on.

30:29.

At the same time as we read about the plight of the nations, we also read in verse 29 that the people who have repented (*“you”*) will be singing! The *“you”* here sets a great contrast to what we have just been reading. Thus believers will be joyful and will be entering the mountain of the Lord to be with the *“Mighty One of Israel.”* We have two examples of occasions where songs and gladness are experienced. First, we are brought to consider the *“night when a holy festival is kept.”* The word *“festival”* is most often rendered as *“feast”* in the AKJV and speaks of the sacrificial aspect of the several festivals kept in Israel. The three main feasts (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles) speak clearly in a prophetic way about our salvation. We have been rescued by the Lamb of God our Passover. We have been born again by the Spirit of God our Pentecost. Here we have no place in this world (*“no continuing city”*) but only a temporary sojourn.¹⁴⁰⁴ The second example was going up *“with a flute to come into the mountain of the Lord.”* This could well have been on the occasion of the various feasts, but seems rather to be a general reference to coming to Jerusalem. The three main feasts we just mentioned required all males to go to Jerusalem and so this may be the idea expressed here. But note also that specifically we read of the *“mountain of the Lord,”* and when we recall the teaching of Isaiah 25 we cannot but think of the work of our Saviour on Calvary. So the saved are those who rejoice because of the great work of God in salvation!

30:30.

But outside of this joy and rejoicing for the people of God, there will be harsh judgement. The Lord will ensure that His voice, so long rejected and ridiculed, will be heard in no uncertain terms. People who reject the gospel suppress the truth, but when the Lord returns they will no longer be able to do so. Along with the fact that the nations will hear the Lord's voice, they will also see *“the descent of His arm,”* by which phrase is meant the return of the Lord Jesus, the right hand of God. When the Lord Jesus returns it will be with fire:

... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, **8** in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁰⁵

We note once again that the Lord will come both with *“the indignation of His anger,”* and

1404 Hebrews 13:14.

1405 2Thessalonians 1:7b,8.

Studies in Isaiah.

with *“the flame of a devouring fire.”* Is it not right and fair that the Lord Jesus who came to bring salvation will return to judge those who have rejected His incredible offer? We have already referred to judgment and hell at the start of this section but note that throughout Scripture this coming with fire and flames is everywhere reported. Consider these Scriptures:

Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him.¹⁴⁰⁶

... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, **8** in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁰⁷

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. **11** Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **12** looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?¹⁴⁰⁸

30:31.

The *“voice of the Lord”* which will be heard when Christ returns is now particularised to Assyria. This nation (representative of the world in general) will be *“beaten down”* by means of the *“voice of the Lord.”* The voice that has come to bring salvation, life, and peace, has now come to render just judgment. In the description of the risen Lord given through John in Revelation we read that: *“out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.”*¹⁴⁰⁹ Later in the same book we read these words:

Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.¹⁴¹⁰

Assyria has been called *“the rod of My anger,”* by the Lord.¹⁴¹¹ But now the Assyrians will be terrified or *“terror-stricken”* as the ESV puts it when the Lord brings the rod to strike them.

1406 Psalm 50:3.

1407 2Thessalonians 1:7b,8.

1408 2Peter 3:10-12.

1409 Revelation 1:16.

1410 Revelation 19:15.

1411 Isaiah 10:5.

30:32.

The statement made here is curious. The Lord will rain down the rod of correction upon Assyria in “*every place,*” and as He does this, it will be done “*with tambourine and harps,*” all the while there are “*battles of brandishing*” with which “*He will fight with it.*” The picture, then, is of a great warrior who in fighting with his enemy, does so with music and rejoicing and much arm waving, for the Hebrew word given as: “*brandishing*” signifies “the shaking or waving of the hand in threatening pose.” This is a righteous and just fight. In ancient times armies would enter battle with loud music and singing to frighten the enemy, just as the Scots did with their pipes and drums.

30:33.

The mention of “*Tophet*” is a reminder to the reader of what Ahaz did in his wickedness. We read from 2Kings that Ahaz:

... walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel.¹⁴¹²

From 2Chronicles we discover that Ahaz:

... burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.¹⁴¹³

This is the king who was given the chance to choose a sign by the Lord but who refused.¹⁴¹⁴ Tophet was thus “the place of burning,” so named because it was where sacrifices of children were made by fire to the god Molech (Moloch). The picture here is of the preparations made by the king for his wicked endeavour. The area was extensive (“*deep and large*”) and it was a place of intense heat by flames (“*its pyre is fire with much wood*”). It was sited in the valley of Hinnom near to Jerusalem, and on account of these facts it now stands as a graphic picture of hell.¹⁴¹⁵

1412 2Kings 16:3.

1413 2Chronicles 28:3.

1414 Isaiah 7:11.

1415 See: 2Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31-33; 19:6,11-14; Mark 9:43; Luke 12:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

The last statement (*“the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it.”*) reminds us that it is indeed the Lord who gives rise to these flames of fire in hell. Mention of *“brimstone”* brings us back to the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah.¹⁴¹⁶

Such will be the events when the Lord Jesus returns, and these words in Isaiah 30:27-33 are a sober reminder to us all that if we are of this world (like Assyria in this instance) we will face judgement. But for all those who have repented and rested in Christ, there will be joy, rejoicing, and song. This is not to spite those being judged, but instead it is to honour and glorify the king, for what He is doing in this judgement is not only right, it is gloriously right, and will be seen to be right.

¹⁴¹⁶ Genesis 19:24.

Chapter 42.

Isaiah 31:1-32:20.

Woe (5) to those who ask Egypt's help!

Textual analysis.

#31 1 Woe

to those who
go down to Egypt for help, *and*
rely on horses,
who trust
in chariots because *they are* many, and
in horsemen because they are very strong,
but who
do not look to the Holy One of Israel,
nor seek the Lord!

2 Yet He also *is* wise and
will bring disaster, and
will not call back His words, but
will arise
against the house of evildoers, and
against the help of those who work iniquity.

3 Now

the Egyptians *are*
men, and
not God;
and their horses are
flesh, and
not spirit.

When the Lord stretches out His hand, both
he who helps will fall, and
he who is helped will fall down;
they all will perish together.

4 For thus the Lord has spoken to me:

“as a lion roars, and a young lion over his prey (when a multitude of shepherds is summoned against him, *He*
will not be afraid of their voice nor be disturbed by their noise),
so the Lord of hosts will come down to fight for Mount Zion and for its hill.

5 Like birds flying about, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem.
Defending, He will also deliver *it*;
passing over, He will preserve *it*.”

6 Return to Him against whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted.

7 For in that day every man shall throw away his idols of silver and his idols of gold—sin, which your own hands have made for yourselves.

Studies in Isaiah.

8 “Then Assyria shall fall by a sword not of man, and a sword not of mankind shall devour him. But he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall become forced labour. 9 He shall cross over to his stronghold for fear, and his princes shall be afraid of the banner,” says the **Lord**, whose fire *is* in Zion and whose furnace *is* in Jerusalem.

#33 1 Behold,

a king will reign in righteousness,
and princes will rule with justice.

2 A man will be

as a hiding place from the wind,
and a cover from the tempest,
as rivers of water in a dry place,
as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

3 The eyes of those who see will not be dim,
and the ears of those who hear will listen.

4 Also the heart of the rash will understand knowledge,
and the tongue of the stammerers will be ready to speak plainly.

5 The foolish person will no longer be called generous, nor the miser said *to be* bountiful;

6 for the foolish person will speak foolishness,
and his heart will work iniquity:
to practice ungodliness,
to utter error against the **Lord**,
to keep the hungry unsatisfied,
and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.

7 Also the schemes of the schemer *are* evil;

he devises wicked plans to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaks justice.

8 But a generous man devises generous things, and by generosity he shall stand.

9 Rise up,

you women who are at ease,
hear my voice;
you complacent daughters,
give ear to my speech.

10 In a year and *some* days you will be troubled, you complacent women;
for

the vintage will fail,
the gathering will not come.

11 Tremble,

you *women* who are at ease;
be troubled,

you complacent ones;
strip yourselves, make yourselves bare,
and gird *sackcloth* on *your* waists.

12 People shall mourn upon their breasts

for the pleasant fields,
for the fruitful vine.

13 On the land of my people will come up thorns *and* briers,
yes, on all the happy homes *in* the joyous city;

14 because

the palaces will be forsaken,
the bustling city will be deserted.

The forts and towers will become lairs forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks—

15 Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest.

16 Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness remain in the fruitful field.

17 The work of righteousness will be peace,

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and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.

18 My people will dwell

in a peaceful habitation,

in secure dwellings,

and in quiet resting places,

19 though hail comes down on the forest, and the city is brought low in humiliation.

20 Blessed *are* you who sow beside all waters, who send out freely the feet of the ox and the donkey.

It may seem strange that this woe is against Egypt considering that we have already had one woe against that nation in the previous chapter. However the tendency of man to trust the world and to go to Egypt for help is so strong it takes repeated messages to get the horror of such a foolish action to strike home in the heart. In this woe we have a great contrast. We start with a woe pronounced on all who rely on Egypt ending with a prophecy against Assyria (chapter 31 verses 1 to 9), and then we have the great contrast shown by a king who will reign properly and with truth and justice, ending with a blessing (chapter 32 verses 1 to 20).

[1] Woe to those who trust the world. (Isaiah 31:1-9).

[2] Be blessed, for a king will reign in righteousness. (Isaiah 32:1-20).

[a] The righteous kingdom. (Isaiah 32:1-4).

[b] The foolish and the complacent. (Isaiah 32:5-14).

[c] When the Spirit comes. (Isaiah 32:15-20).

[1] Woe to those who trust the world. (Isaiah 31:1-9).

31:1.

Some truths need often to be repeated. How the heart continually seeks help from anyone but the Lord. Why is this so? It shows how weak the heart is, and how prone to rely on the flesh and those things we see and hear, rather than on what the Spirit of God tells us. It would seem that the people had forgotten how often the Lord had undertaken for them in such wonderful ways. We could think of the Red Sea crossing and the victory at Jericho besides many other events to show how the Lord looked after His people. Why then did they now run to Egypt and rely solely on horses and chariots? Where was their trust in the Lord? Of course the Lord could use the horse and the chariot to help and to protect – the instruments of protection or defence were not the issue. What Israel had failed to do was to seek the Lord for His help and aid. But this, it seems, they were dogged in their determination not to do!

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Note that the Lord is also referred to here as *“the Holy One of Israel.”* In this we are reminded of the perfect and exclusivity of God. There is no other. The race to Egypt and the reliance on the world for help and life is not just folly, but an affront to the *“Holy One”* who waits to be gracious, but who will by no means acquit the guilty.¹⁴¹⁷

31:2.

In verse 2 we have the Lord responding that He will bring disaster. There is a sense of irony in the opening words. God is not just wise as anyone else may be, He is infinitely wise. The irony is meant to shock the people. But what God determines cannot be rescinded by anyone. God will do three things. He will initiate ruin and destruction, He will not change His mind, and He will stand up against all those who sin and continue in such a way. Those whom He is *“against”* are described in two ways here. They are first *“the house of evildoers.”* They are a company of closely related folk bent on doing evil. Second they are described as *“those who work iniquity.”* This statement centres on their enterprise and projects. The word given as *“work”* indicates “to do or make in a systematic and habitual way.” We might supply the word “practice” here. They are those who practice, or are given to, iniquity and sin.

31:3.

In stark contrast, verse 3 tells us how the Egyptians fare. These are but mere men and they are not God! One of mankind's great problems is that he vastly overestimates the grandeur and status of himself and his fellow man, and vastly underestimates the beauty and glory of God. If ever we had time to think, then one of the most important things to think on, is the vast gulf that exists between God's infinite Being and our created existence. We do not mean to suggest that we cannot know God or that God is so “other” or that He is beyond our knowledge and reach. Far from it. But what we do mean to emphasise is that God is so far and away greater and more beautiful, wonderful, amazing, awesome and ... than we are! Just as the Egyptians are mere men and not God, so equally the Egyptian horses are simply created flesh and cannot move and work as the Spirit does.¹⁴¹⁸

In the next clause we have a reference to the Lord's hand (*“when the Lord stretches out His*

1417 Exodus 34:8; Numbers 14:18; Isaiah 30:18.

1418 Although the word spirit may indicate merely the spirit of a man, it would seem better to suggest that the Holy Spirit is here meant to complete the parallel. Just as the Egyptians are men and not God, so their horses are flesh and not the Holy Spirit.

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hand”). Of course God does not have hands as we do. What is indicated by such a simile is the Lord's action in this world. Such action was done perfectly by the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many references to the Lord Jesus being at the right hand of God.¹⁴¹⁹ However in Psalm 118 we have a reference which seems to suggest that the right hand of the Lord God is actually the Saviour.¹⁴²⁰

... The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. **16** The right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.¹⁴²¹

Thus when the Lord acts and sends His One and Only Son, then be aware. He is The Word, and when God speaks His word it will not turn back nor will it return. The Lord will do all that He intends. In this case both helper and helped will fall down and perish. There are two words given as *“fall”* here in the Hebrew. The first suggests stumbling, whilst the second indicates the idea of falling down completely. The one who helps will stumble and fall, because he thought he was able to help, and the one who is helped will fall down fully because he failed to look in the right way.¹⁴²²

31:4,5.

In verses 4 and 5 we are given some picture images to help us understand what the Lord will certainly do to help true believers and preserve His message. Then in verses 6 to 8 we have a call to repent (v6), the reason for acting sooner rather than later (v7), and an imminent prophecy concerning Assyria given as a warning and object lesson (v8).

Just as a lion with his prey is unapproachable and will not be beaten, so also is the Lord of hosts (the Lord of armies), who will come and fight for Zion, and especially for *“its hill.”*¹⁴²³ This latter expression may seem odd. Why doesn't it say for the people (believers)? Well I think what is meant here is that the Lord will defend at all costs His gospel – the hill on which His great work was accomplished. A second image focuses on birds that fly about.¹⁴²⁴ Just as they hover over their nest to protect their young, so also will the Lord defend Jerusalem. The figure reminds us of the Holy Spirit who hovered over the first creation, and equally of those many references which have

1419 Romans 8:34; 2Corinthians 6:7; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 10:12.

1420 We have a common expression that a trusted person is our “right hand man,” which serves to indicate that they would do exactly that which we would do, so that it was as if they were our very own right hand.

1421 Psalm 118:15b,16.

1422 Isaiah 31:3.

1423 Isaiah 31:4.

1424 Isaiah 31:5.

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the Lord as one who protects with His wings, or as a brooding hen.¹⁴²⁵ The text continues with a reference to the “Passover,” for we read that He will preserve Jerusalem by “*passing over*” it.¹⁴²⁶

31:6,7.

Given the Lord's protection and care, we next read of a call to repent. The people of the Lord had “*deeply revolted*” against the Lord, but they could still turn around and run towards the Lord for mercy.¹⁴²⁷ It is necessary to repent soon because on the last day all will certainly see their own hand-made idols for what they are truly worth – sin! And they will hurl them into oblivion because they could not save.¹⁴²⁸ Sadly this will be too late! It would have been far better if they heeded the call to repent in light of the message of the Lord. Given this, what of you dear reader? You should ensure that you have turned to the Lord before there is no time left. Now is the time as you read these words. Stop, turn, and repent. It may be too late if you let this moment pass by.

31:8,9.

To cement the call to return, the Lord issues a prophecy which we will see being fulfilled in a few chapters time. The people had rejected the Lord and His counsel and had sought help from Egypt which offered nothing. Assyria would soon confront Jerusalem and taunt the people with bravado and pride. But the Lord would ensure that Assyria would not prevail and would in fact fall by means other than the sword of man. Their doom would come by the sword, but it would not be one wielded by man (“*not of man ... not of mankind*”).¹⁴²⁹ The Assyrian will flee and his young men will become slaves (“*forced labour*”). They will try and hide in a stronghold, but then we read that the princes or leaders will be “*afraid of the banner.*”¹⁴³⁰ This is that signal and ensign which we have had cause to mention on several occasions in Isaiah. Although a military standard might be in view, chiefly the reference is to the Lord Jesus Christ who was lifted up on high as a conspicuous sign to die the death we deserved. The world is afraid of the banner! It is afraid because the death of Christ points first to the clear fact that we are wrong and in need of great change. Such a message is feared because people love to think that they are good, fine, perfect and making things work in life.

This section ends with a quite remarkable statement about the Lord and Zion. We have a

1425 Genesis 1:2; Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 63:1; Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34.

1426 Isaiah 31:5.

1427 Isaiah 31:6.

1428 Isaiah 31:7.

1429 Isaiah 31:8.

1430 Isaiah 31:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

couplet. The first part states that the Lord's "*fire is in Zion*" and the second states that His "*furnace is in Jerusalem*."¹⁴³¹ What can this mean? Well I think that it means primarily that God's presence is in the city. God is a consuming fire, so the city would therefore be the Lord's fire and furnace. Now the city also has the people of God within – true believers. These have been made fit to dwell in Jerusalem and so are not burnt up by the fire of God. Such a situation was prefigured at the burning bush when Moses met with God. A fire that burned but did not consume. The same figure is seen at Pentecost where the Holy Spirit alighted as tongues of fire on the disciples. This is what happens for believers who dwell with the Lord in the new Jerusalem. The Lord does not burn them up because they have been made fit for such a place. However those who do not know God will be stubble and firewood and will be consumed in an instant. The church of God is thus a fire and a furnace. What an awesome thing!

[2] Be blessed, for a king will reign in righteousness. (Isaiah 32:1-20).

This section could easily be considered as a separate piece independent of the woes we have been studying. However it is better to consider the main divisor as incorporating the messages of hope. Here we learn some wonderful truths about the Messiah and His people. It is vitally important that we begin by considering the structure of this passage. We have an opening statement of the gospel future in verses 1 to 4. In this first part we learn of a righteous king and the fruit that His reign brings. This speaks of the Messiah. This is mirrored by the concluding section of verses 15 to 19 which speaks of what will happen when the Spirit is poured out. In between these "book ends" we have a description of what the nation of sin was currently like. The whole piece ends in verse 20 with a statement which encourages the proclamation of good news.

[a] The righteous kingdom. (Isaiah 32:1-4).

32:1,2.

We begin then by considering what the righteous king brings. First we note that his reign is fully righteous.¹⁴³² Up to this point kings had reigned with varying effects. The summary of each king's rule was either wicked or good with some qualifying statements but none could be truly termed "righteous."¹⁴³³ Only one king could lay claim to such a rule, and that is the Lord Jesus

1431 Isaiah 31:9.

1432 Isaiah 32:1.

1433 See for example: 1Kings 15:26,34; 22:43 etc.

Studies in Isaiah.

Christ, great David's greater Son. The first consequence of such a righteous rule will be that delegated leaders, princes, would also rule "*with justice.*"¹⁴³⁴ The leaders of the nation are termed "*princes*" because, of course, we are talking about the kingdom of God which is made up of members who have been adopted into the family of God, and thereby must be designated as being of the royal family whose head is the King of kings. Another consequence of this from verse 2 is that the ordinary man in the street would have such a good character that his life could also be described as right and just. In the case of the ordinary man the fruit of this righteous reign is given to us by four similes. This ordinary man will be like:

a hiding place from the wind.

a cover from the tempest.

rivers of water in a dry place.

the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

The wind, the tempest, the dryness, and the desert weariness characterise the world cursed by the fall. But this ordinary man will be someone who can provide refuge. This theme is shown by the first two statements and the last. The ordinary man gives refuge and protection from the wind and tempest. He also acts as a shadow of a great rock. Because the Lord is our hiding place, the ordinary man who lives under the reign of the righteous king will also be a hiding place and a security from the wind of a cursed world.¹⁴³⁵ Because the Lord is the rock, the ordinary man will act like the shadow of this rock and will shelter from the effects of the desert. How the Christian should act as a refuge for those suffering! It is not just a possibility but a necessity. The third simile suggests not just a protection but also a provision. How often the Scriptures use the image of water for the thirsty! The idea of water in dry places is a frequent illustration for new life given of the Holy Spirit. And so the ordinary man will give shelter, refuge, and will give water to the thirsty. How is this possible? Well because a king reigns righteously. It is all derived from the King. He brings life and as we receive it we must also freely give!

1434 Isaiah 32:1.

1435 Psalm 32:7; 119:114

32:3,4.

The consequences of the righteous reign of the king are also worked out in verses 3 and 4. Eyes and ears will be opened. The heart will come to understand, and the tongue will be enabled to speak. These verses speak of one who is being healed. They can now see and hear properly, their heart operates as it ought, and their tongue can do its work. These images all indicate the idea of knowing and understanding. Those who live in such a righteous kingdom are those who have come to an understanding and who can obey what they hear and pass it on faithfully.

In verse 3 the focus is on a restoration to sight and hearing. These are people who can already see to a degree (*“the eyes of those who see”*), but they are dim and now they will no longer be (*“will not be dim”*). Suddenly things will seem clearer and brighter. The light has shone and those who had dim eyes will see clearly. These will now listen with attention. Their perception is attuned and now they are ready to hear.

Those who could be termed *“rash,”* now have hearts which truly *“understand knowledge.”*¹⁴³⁶ The people were dim of sight, they failed to hear and thus acted rashly, but now their sight is restored, they are willing to listen and the fruit is true knowledge. Further, those who speak with a stammer, who stutter and speak in a halting manner, will be enabled to *“speak plainly.”*¹⁴³⁷ The idea here is on clear and intelligible speech. Where the word of God is truly understood, then there is knowledge and wisdom.

[b] The foolish and the complacent. (Isaiah 32:5-14).

General comments.

In the middle of this piece in Isaiah chapter 32 we have a digression discussing two types of people who are not part of the righteous kingdom. We have the *“foolish person,”* described in two distinct ways (the *“miser”* and the *“schemer”*), and then also the *“complacent daughters.”*¹⁴³⁸

32:5-8.

The foolish and their effects are described in verses 5 to 8. It would seem that the intention here is to show that during the reign of the righteous king (the gospel age) there are still those who are outside of this kingdom.

1436 Isaiah 32:4.

1437 Isaiah 32:4.

1438 Isaiah 32:5,7,9.

Studies in Isaiah.

Foolishness is used to denote those who deny God, either His existence or His rule in mankind's affairs.¹⁴³⁹ It would also seem that the foolish person was often given plaudits and accolades, being described as *“generous.”*¹⁴⁴⁰ In our current day we find this. People who deny God and who deny His rule with vim and vigour are applauded and counted as those with a generous or magnanimous heart. Then further we have those who act in miserly ways being spoken of as being *“bountiful.”*¹⁴⁴¹ Think of the many celebrities who love to have their faces in the public eye at some charitable event, and who say that they are doing it all for charity, but behind all the show there is a larger motive to promote their latest film or book or whatever. On top of all this these foolish folk speak out of their heart. Their folly, their rejection of God, is evident as they offer their personal version of home-spun philosophy from a heart not given to God and ruled by His great gracious love, and so is wicked to the core. Look at what these foolish folk offer. In truth the *“foolish person”* can really only speak *“foolishness,”* for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.¹⁴⁴²

And so these foolish people promote the *“practice of ungodliness.”*¹⁴⁴³ Isn't this the norm for our day? They speak error and untruth about God. One of the terrible things about the foolish is their misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the things of God. They are prone to *“utter error against the Lord,”* to claim things about Him and what He has done which are untrue.¹⁴⁴⁴ Isn't the ignorance about God so prevalent in our day, even amongst Christians? Amongst many who claim to be Christian leaders we note that Steve Chalke has wreaked havoc with his nonsense about the atonement, and that Rob Bell has sullied the name of Christ by denying Him any anger against sin and those who fail to repent.¹⁴⁴⁵ There are (unfortunately) many others who speak wicked things of God apart from these. In so doing there are countless people who are separated from the truth and are kept hungry, *“unsatisfied,”* and *“thirsty.”*¹⁴⁴⁶ So many young, so many young families, so many people who do not know the truths we are expounding and who have been duped by the errors of the modern age. And yet note that these characteristics of the foolish are described in verse 5 in a way which states their influence is about to wane and fade (*“no longer be called ...”*).

1439 Psalm 14:1; 53:1.

1440 Isaiah 32:5.

1441 Isaiah 32:5.

1442 Isaiah 32:6; Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:45.

1443 Isaiah 32:6.

1444 Isaiah 32:6.

1445 Steve Chalke is renown for claiming that belief in substitutionary atonement makes God the Father guilty of “cosmic child abuse.” Rob Bell insists that God is only the God of love and not the God of wrath.

1446 Isaiah 32:4.

Studies in Isaiah.

We then read of those who scheme. These are those foolish folk who are not merely intent on going with what the consensus believe, they are also out to spoil things for the godly. These devise schemes which are “*evil*” and they devise plans which deny the poor their “*justice*.”¹⁴⁴⁷ If the truth is denied, and if God is ignored, then what passes for wisdom is evil and will do evil. The poor who need Christ are denied access to Him! They are fed lying words! How this aptly describes our day.

This section ends with a contrast. These foolish folk will not succeed – they will fail. In their place there is a “*generous man*.”¹⁴⁴⁸ What a wonderful word to describe the character of those who live under the rule of the righteous king! I wonder if that characterises us? Are we generous? Do we spend time, money, effort, love, consideration and so on for the benefit of others? Well here the contrast and antidote to the failure of the foolish miser and schemer is a generous heart. May the Lord grant us such a heart! This one thinks and plans “*generous things*.” Remember what the Lord Jesus said. He declared that the thief (Satan) came only to destroy and kill, but He came that we might have life and such life that would be called “*abundant*.”¹⁴⁴⁹ Make no mistake that the Lord is not talking about material wealth. This may come and it will certainly go. No! He was talking about resurrection life. Full life. What a generous Saviour! And we, as His ambassadors and representatives, ought to be just as generous. Do you have a testimony of love for Christ? Share it! Be enthusiastic, eager and honest. Do you have a large bank balance? Make use of it for the glory of God. Do you have plenty of time? Go out of your way to be generous in heart and seek the lost. Such generosity cannot but succeed. The generous man will stand by such an outgoing and giving lifestyle.

32:9-14.

This thought leads in nicely to the second major characteristic of those outside of the rule of the righteous king. In verses 9 to 14 we read of the “*complacent*” women who “*are at ease*.” The first thing we must note here is that whilst the prophet speaks particularly against the women who were lazy and care-free, this does not just apply to the fairer sex. We note that the characteristics displayed by these women that Isaiah references has a deep resonance with men too. Note how often these twin characteristics are repeated in these verses. We have the word “*complacent*” stated three times in verses 9, 10 and 11. We have the idea of women “*at ease*” mentioned twice in verses

1447 Isaiah 32:7.

1448 Isaiah 31:8.

1449 John 10:10.

Studies in Isaiah.

9 and 10. Both words have the idea of arrogant, self-sufficiency connected with them. It is that attitude of being in need of no one, coupled with a confidence in self and self-determination. It is the type of attitude which seems to be promoted as laudable in much of the world today. Now verses 9 to 11 give us the image using the idea of complacent and idle women. Verses 12 to 14 apply this to the people of the land who refuse the rule of the righteous king.

It is time to take action. At the time which Isaiah is speaking there were many women at ease. Things were going very well and all was wonderful and satisfying. But this would come to an abrupt end in a very short time. They were putting their confident assurance in the harvest and the vintage being the same if not better year on year. Is this not how modern society today operates? If the growth rate is low we all fear and worry! How these words are a sober reminder that we cannot presume on things being the same all of the time. In recent years we have been through what is often referred to as a great “crash” in the markets, particularly housing and banks. The aftermath has been very difficult for many. But as we come out of this and hope for better days we must not consider such improving economic circumstances as a right and a norm.

The prophet outlines what will happen. There will be trouble. Specifically the vineyards will fail and there will be no harvest. He also gives the complacent, arrogant, presumptuous folk several stirring commands. These are as follows:

Rise up	(v9)
Hear my voice	(v9)
Give ear to my speech	(v9)
Tremble	(v11)
Be troubled	(v11)
Strip yourselves	(v11)
Make yourselves bare	(v11)
Gird <i>sackcloth</i> on your waist	(v11)

Now the wonderful thing here is that the first command is a resurrection command. Do we not hear the Lord Jesus speaking to the sick, the lame, and the dead when we read these words “*rise up*”?¹⁴⁵⁰ This gives us great hope and consolation. The women who had arrogantly assumed that life was easy and nothing need be done are in for a rude awakening if they continue in their pride. But if

¹⁴⁵⁰ Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:9,11; Luke 5:24.

Studies in Isaiah.

they heed this warning then hope is around the corner. What must they do? Twice the command is issued to listen which means that they must give serious attention to what is being said.¹⁴⁵¹ They are to *“tremble”* and *“to be troubled.”*¹⁴⁵² Facing reality is hard. People spend most of their lives avoiding it or decorating it. Think, for example, how we avoid the subject of death. Think how we do not consider what happens after death. Think how we like to carve out a slice of niceness for life. We book holidays, plan entertainments, focus on the weekends and constantly acquire possessions and pleasures in which to drown ourselves. But now is not the time for such ease. Now is the time to take stock and to tremble at the real situation we face. We have offended the Holy One and we deserve eternal punishment. This doom awaits us like the sword of Damocles.¹⁴⁵³ So to tremble is to recognise the horror of the situation we face. How few feel this! But we ought to! We ought to be seriously troubled or moved with agitation and fear because of this awful future we face. Then we ought to own our own shame. To *“strip”* naked and to make oneself *“bare”* is to recognise that even though we face an awful future, we are to blame and the shame and guilt lies with us.¹⁴⁵⁴ Such an attitude is the beginning of repentance. Then the clothes of ease and complacency must be exchanged for the sackcloth of sorrow and repentance (*“gird sackcloth on your waists”*).¹⁴⁵⁵

Having issued the call to rise and repent, the prophet now describes how the people of the land would be affected. People who had been complacent will mourn, beating their breasts for sorrow.¹⁴⁵⁶ What was once pleasant fields and fruitful vines, would now be overtaken with *“thorns and briers”* – the results of the curse from the fall of man.¹⁴⁵⁷ This would extend into the cities and into the once joyous happy homes.¹⁴⁵⁸ Some may say that this is cruel. Why destroy happiness and joy? Well what joy and happiness can there be when the truth is obscured and reality is denied? Can we decorate death and paper over sin and its effects? Absurd! We must call out on this nonsense. We are all going to die, and then what? We all live amongst the filth of sin and rebellion. Such a reality is horrible and awful. Why say otherwise? Jerusalem was to suffer this awful future, but this stands as a picture of what the entire world will face sooner than we think. Palaces with their rich finery

1451 This repeating of the call to hear is frequent in Scripture and it reminds us as gospel preachers and witnesses that we must be patient and issue the call repeatedly, for the people are very dull of hearing. It also leads us to seek the Lord in much prayer because unless the Spirit issue the call to rise, they will not rise.

1452 Isaiah 32:11.

1453 See also John 3:36.

1454 Isaiah 32:11.

1455 Isaiah 32:11.

1456 Isaiah 32:12.

1457 Isaiah 32:13.

1458 Isaiah 32:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

and luxuries where the complacent sit at ease will be *“forsaken.”*¹⁴⁵⁹ This happened when Jerusalem was finally overrun. It will happen when the Lord returns. The many cities of the world where business and trade is the meat and drink of modern man will be *“deserted.”*¹⁴⁶⁰ All military bases and weapons sites and stores will be abandoned and will be left as *“a joy of donkeys, a pasture of flocks.”*¹⁴⁶¹ Those sites which were impregnable and fortified will be overrun with the earth and vegetation so much that it will be left as a place where animals may roam and feed. Who can face the Lord when He returns? Even though in these verses a temporal judgement is in view so that in the place of palaces, of cities, and of military installations there will be donkeys and flocks finding pasture, we should not neglect the bigger picture. The Lord God is coming to judge and we had better take stock.

[c] When the Spirit comes. (Isaiah 32:15-20).

Thus far we have been considering the fact of judgement for sin, (especially complacency and pride), which requires an urgent sober reflection and repentance. In this final piece we are brought to consider the prophecy of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The deserted palaces, cities and military sites now overrun by animals will last only until the Holy Spirit comes. This is important. The coming of the Holy Spirit signals the birth of the New Testament church. There is continuity because the New Testament church is none other than the new Jerusalem, the new Zion which has been in existence ever since there have been those who have had faith.¹⁴⁶² But in the New Testament when the Holy Spirit came, a new era was begun. No longer was there need to have a temple, a city, and a land where the presence of God was veiled. Now the Spirit indwells His people wherever they may be, for Immanuel (God with us) has come.¹⁴⁶³

32:15

What do we learn about the Holy Spirit's coming? First we note that the Spirit is to be poured out on people (*“us”*) from heaven (*“on high”*). Second we note that this will have a dramatic effect on all surroundings. In other words it isn't just that people become saved or indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but that such a wonderful thing has dramatic consequences for all of creation too. The *“wilderness”* will bring forth fruit and there will be great growth (fields becoming forests).

1459 Isaiah 32:14.

1460 Isaiah 32:14.

1461 Isaiah 32:14.

1462 Adam, Eve, Abel, Noah, Abraham ... were all people who had the same faith as believers today.

1463 Acts 2:1f.

32:16,17.

Luxuriant growth of plants is not, of course, the main point of the Spirit's coming. After all we do not read of a material plenty in the land of Israel in the book of Acts. The fruit and growth is explained and expanded upon in verses 16 and 17. The major outcome of the coming of the Holy Spirit is that *"justice"* and *"righteousness"* will be observed, and will *"dwell"* and *"remain."*¹⁴⁶⁴ Of course true believers have exchanged their sin and sin nature for Christ's righteousness. Thus justice and righteousness are the currency of the believer's new life. These new characteristics in turn have their effect. True righteousness brings *"peace," "assurance,"* and *"quietness."*¹⁴⁶⁵ How the world longs for these things but never gets them! But true godliness which leads to righteousness brings about these settled fruits. Note that it is the *"work of righteousness,"* and the *"effect of righteousness."* The word *"effect"* indicates service. We remind ourselves that salvation is by grace and not works. It is all a gift of God and not of self effort or works so that none can boast.¹⁴⁶⁶ But we hasten to add that the one so saved is delivered in order to do good works which God has prepared beforehand.¹⁴⁶⁷ Thus righteousness works and brings service. These are the settled and restful condition of being saved. Note that these are not temporal but *"forever."*

32:18.

It is noteworthy that the effects for the people listed in verse 18 are a mirror to what the Lord promised earlier, but which the people rejected in their pride and stubbornness.¹⁴⁶⁸ Thus the people who have received the Spirit will now live in peace, with security, and in quietness. And even though all around them there is danger and trouble, depicted by the hail and the humiliation of the city, nevertheless these folk will be secure. What a wonderful description of the life of the believers in the book of Acts.

32:19,20.

Verse 19 is proof that these events prophesied by Isaiah fit the New Testament age, for in the New heavens and earth there can be no trouble nor humiliation. Despite the difficulties of life in this world for the believer, there is a blessing pronounced. The hail may fall, and the city wherein we find ourselves may be brought low, but still blessed are those who *"sow beside all waters, who send*

1464 Isaiah 32:16.

1465 Isaiah 32:17.

1466 Ephesians 2:8,9.

1467 Ephesians 2:10.

1468 Isaiah 30:15.

Studies in Isaiah.

out freely the feet of the ox and the donkey."¹⁴⁶⁹ This phrase speaks about how the Holy Spirit works in the world.¹⁴⁷⁰ As we have observed, those indwelt by the Spirit will be generous and will spread what they have been given (salvation) freely. They are those who sow the word in places where it will grow (*"besides all waters"*). They are those who serve by ploughing the fields like the oxen, or of bearing burdens like the donkey. Such is evident in the New Testament accounts. Such is also evident today. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is not just liberty and fruitfulness of character, but a spreading word and a growing kingdom.¹⁴⁷¹ Well then, how vital it is to concentrate on sending out more sowers, oxen, and donkeys! We need those who can sow a seed of the word of God. We need those who can plough through difficult terrain, through hearts hardened by sin and deceit. We need those who can bear the burdens of the lost and bear with them. How diverse is the Spirit's work! Where are these dear Spirit filled people? Why are we so complacent?

1469 Isaiah 32:20.

1470 See: 1Corinthians 9:9; 1Timothy 5:18.

1471 2Corinthians 3:17; Acts 13:4.

Chapter 43.

Isaiah 33:1-24.

Woe (6) to the treacherous plunderers!

Textual analysis.

1 Woe

to you who plunder,
though you *have not been* plundered;
and you who deal treacherously,
though they have not dealt treacherously with you!
When you cease plundering,
you will be plundered;
when you make an end of dealing treacherously,
they will deal treacherously with you.

2 O **Lord**,

be gracious to us; we have waited for You.
Be
their arm every morning,
our salvation also in the time of trouble.

3 At the noise of the tumult
the people shall flee;

when You lift Yourself up,

the nations shall be scattered;

4 And Your plunder shall be gathered

like the gathering of the caterpillar;
as the running to and fro of locusts,
He shall run upon them.

5 The **Lord** is exalted, for He dwells on high;

He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness.

6 Wisdom and knowledge will be

the stability of your times,

and the strength of salvation;

the fear of the **Lord** *is* His treasure.

7 Surely

their valiant ones shall cry outside,
the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly.

8 The highways lie waste,

the travelling man ceases.

He has broken the covenant,

he has despised the cities,

he regards no man.

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9 The earth mourns *and* languishes,
Lebanon is shamed *and* shrivelled;
Sharon is like a wilderness,
and Bashan and Carmel shake off *their* fruits.

10 “Now I will rise,” says the **Lord**;

“now I will be exalted,
now I will lift Myself up.

11 You shall conceive chaff,
you shall bring forth stubble;
your breath, *as* fire, shall devour you.

12 And the people shall be
like the burnings of lime;
like thorns cut up
they shall be burned in the fire.

13 Hear,
you *who are* afar off, what I have done;
and you *who are* near, acknowledge My might.”

14 The sinners in Zion are afraid;
fearfulness has seized the hypocrites:

“who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?
Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?”

15 He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly,
he

who despises the gain of oppressions,
who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes,
who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed,
and shuts his eyes from seeing evil:

16 he will dwell on high;
his place of defence *will be* the fortress of rocks;
bread will be given him,
his water *will be* sure.

17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty;
they will see the land that is very far off.

18 Your heart will meditate on terror:
“where *is* the scribe?
Where *is* he who weighs?
Where *is* he who counts the towers?”

19 You will not see
a fierce people,
a people
of obscure speech, beyond perception,
of a stammering tongue *that you* cannot understand.

20 Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts;
your eyes will see Jerusalem,
a quiet home,
a tabernacle *that* will
not be taken down;
not one of its stakes will ever be removed,
nor will any of its cords be broken.

21 But there
the majestic **Lord** *will be* for us a place of broad rivers *and* streams,
in which
no galley with oars will sail,
nor majestic ships pass by

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22 (For the **Lord** is our Judge,
the **Lord** is our Lawgiver,
the **Lord** is our King; He will save us);

23 Your tackle is loosed, they could not strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail. Then the prey of great plunder is divided; the lame take the prey. 24 And the inhabitant will not say, "I am sick"; the people who dwell in it *will be* forgiven *their* iniquity.

Isaiah chapter 33 can be divided as follows:

[1] The woe against plundering and treachery spoken. (Isaiah 33:1).

[2] Isaiah's prayer for grace. (Isaiah 33:2-9).

[a] A call for grace from God. (Isaiah 33:2).

[b] A reflection on what God will do in the "tumult." (Isaiah 33:3,4).

[c] A hymn of praise to God. (Isaiah 33:5,6).rt

[d] A plaintive plea concerning their sorry situation. (Isaiah 33:7-9).

[3] The Lord's response. (Isaiah 33:10-19).

[4] A call to reconsider Jerusalem. (Isaiah 33:20-24).

It is to be noted that the woe pronounced in verse 1 finds its fulfilment in verse 23. Furthermore Isaiah's prayer in verses 5 and 6 would be answered in what God would do expressed in verses 10 to 19.

[1] The woe against plundering and treachery spoken. (Isaiah 33:1).

33:1.

The last woe focuses on the people who plunder and who are treacherous. In other words, those who are self-centred or who see only their own interests as important. In Isaiah's time the Assyrian threat to the north could have been described by these words. However we must recognise that these words speak to us today. What type of characteristics are we being led to consider here? Well, it is those who 'take,' who 'usurp' and who hide their intentions and aims to gain the best advantage. In the first place this describes much of modern business life. The aim is to gain an advantage in the market place by stealth and cunning. The modern business man does not scruple when he seizes the opportunity to tread on the public punters and squeeze out their hard earned cash. Long gone is the attitude of providing a service of value, or of painstakingly providing goods

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of true use and value. I realise that there are still many who seek to provide value for money and are honest and equitable, however, we live in the days after the terrible bank crashes that occurred at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. We live at a time where multi-nationals govern life to a large extent, and where huge internet corporations who pay no, or little, tax take advantage of workers. Whilst the owners of these big corporations cream off their profits, the people who provide the effort to make it all work are paid a pittance. But then also there are those individual characters who act in such a way. They take the best of provisions without thought for others. They grab the best seat in the room without consideration for others. They think of their comforts and needs with no thought of what those around may need. This is selfishness in the extreme. The trouble with such people and corporations is that they never stop acting in this way. When they do stop for a brief moment, those around them seize the opportunity to give back a dose of what they have received, (*“when you cease plundering, you will be plundered; when you make an end of dealing treacherously, they will deal treacherously with you”*). Isn't this the type of experience we see all around us as the world falls further and further into sin and selfishness? Some modern thinkers seem to think it important that we promote a degree of self-assertiveness. Many go in for self-help courses of one description or another. All along the world promotes the idea that each person must know their own worth and promote their brand and talents. If taken to extreme we end up with the situation we find in verse 1 of chapter 33. Of course all of us are selfish and many of us would continue in such a manner were it not for pressures from society, from the law, or from peers. Such restraints are being removed more and more. Those of us who love the Lord have seen the opposite at work in Christ – selfless love. Such love attracts us and we begin to walk on the journey of holiness which is true love. We are not perfect, but we know which way to go. We take up our cross and we pursue the true knowledge of God which expresses itself in love and selflessness. However we ought to be aware that this intention to selfish behaviour is the essence of the sin nature.

[2] Isaiah's prayer for grace. (Isaiah 33:2-9).

Now in the midst of such generally selfish behaviour we find Isaiah cry out to the Lord for grace. Isaiah does not pray simply for himself, but on behalf of the nation, for he uses the third person in verse 2, (*“us ... we our”*). We can consider this prayer in several parts.

Studies in Isaiah.

[a] A call for grace from God (v2).

[b] A reflection on what God will do in the “tumult” (v3,4).

[c] A hymn of praise to God (v5,6).

[c] A plaintive plea concerning their sorry situation (v7-9).

[a] A call for grace from God. (Isaiah 33:2).

33:2.

The prayer begins, as have noted, with a request for grace expressed in a corporate reliance on God (“*we have waited for You*”). Grace is a marvellous word! Unmerited favour. The complete opposite of plundering and treachery. Instead of getting for oneself, there is a crying out to the Lord for His grace.

Next we have the call for strength and salvation. The first request is that the Lord would “*be their arm every morning,*” indicating the *continued* need for reliance. By asking for the arm of the Lord the people are indicating their need to work through the Lord's strength, using His arms, and not their own. The second statement brings the thought through towards deliverance from difficulty. Thus we have a reliance on the Lord and His arm through life's varied issues, and a rescue when things become too difficult. Such is the life of the believer. Trusting daily in the grace of God to do the will of the Lord in His strength, and a prayer for deliverance when things get too much. Christ truly is our very life!

[b] A reflection on what God will do in the “tumult.” (Isaiah 33:3,4).

33:3,4.

The prayer next turns from the experience of the faithful, to a consideration of those referred to as “*the people,*” and “*the nations*” in verses 3 and 4. The people and the nations will hear the “*noise of the tumult*” which is coincidental with the occasion of the Lord's lifting Himself up. To those who do not call for grace, the Lord's appearing is nothing but a tumult, a noise of great terror. It causes those who do not cry for grace to flee and be scattered. When the Lord comes there are always these two responses. Those who cry out for grace and those who flee from what they perceive to be a tumult and a noise. Those who do not cry for grace are the selfish ones who seek to plunder and be treacherous. The great treasures and plunder that the selfish have gathered will be

Studies in Isaiah.

collected up. This collection is described in two ways. First it is pictured as *“the gathering of the caterpillar.”*¹⁴⁷² How does a caterpillar gather? I do not know if you have seen a caterpillar gathering? They do not store or pile up in some secret place. Rather they seem to devour continuously in a systematic manner as they chew through the leaf they are holding onto, getting fatter and fatter. Then secondly it is described as being like *“the running to and fro of locusts.”*¹⁴⁷³ Again this seems to be suggesting the idea of continuous eating. Locusts descend on a crop and simply devour and eat as they walk back and forth. Thus all that a selfish man has gathered and hoarded to the loss and hurt of others, will be consumed and eaten up. I am reminded of the parable of the rich man who had many goods:

15 And He said to them, “take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” **16** Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “the ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. **17** And he thought within himself, saying, ‘what shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ **18** So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. **19** And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry.”’ **20** But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ **21** “So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”¹⁴⁷⁴

And then we find at the end of verse 4 that the pictures of consumption provided by the caterpillar and locust is connected with the Lord Himself, (*“He”*). It would be the Lord who would *“run upon them”* and devour them! Remember that the Lord is a consuming fire.

[c] A hymn of praise to God. (Isaiah 33:5,6).

33:5.

At the heart of this prayer we have a declaration of the great goodness of the Lord, and a description of the benefits He brings. We read, then, that the Lord is *“exalted,”* that is, He occupies the highest place in all respects.¹⁴⁷⁵ You cannot get higher than God, for He is truly God! We are given two specific reasons for the Lord's being exalted. First we are reminded that He inhabits the highest place. He is above all that is called “creation,” and so is truly the exalted One. But secondly

1472 Isaiah 33:4.

1473 Isaiah 33:4.

1474 Luke 12:15-21.

1475 Isaiah 33:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

He (alone) has made it so that Zion is filled “*with justice and righteousness.*”¹⁴⁷⁶ The Israelites were given all the privileges and necessary requirements to bring this state of affairs to pass, but it all failed. The righteousness of God's holy law and all its judgements were in Zion, but Israel failed woefully. Only the Lord, the incarnate Word, could bring these godly qualities to truly dwell in the city of Zion. When He came, righteousness and justice were with Him as He preached and healed, but then what would happen after He returned to heaven? Well the picture is that righteousness and the outworking of righteousness (justice) would dwell in Zion, the church, because the church is in Christ.

33:6.

From these qualities and characteristics we note that there will be great and good consequences.¹⁴⁷⁷ To understand this we need to consider verse 6 in some more detail. First we note that other translations render this verse differently. The NASB, for example has:

*And He will be the stability of your times, a wealth of salvation, wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is his treasure.*¹⁴⁷⁸

The difficulty of translation here is to understand what the subject of the verb “*will be*” is. The verb can be rendered as either: “*it* will be,” or as “*he* will be.” The NKJV suggests that the central words, wisdom and knowledge are the subject, whilst the NASB suggests that the pronoun “*He*” is the subject (see table 43.1).

Table 43.1: Isaiah 33:6 – NKJV & NASB.

NKJV	NASB
Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, <i>and</i> the strength of salvation; the fear of the Lord <i>is</i> His treasure.	And He will be the stability of your times, a wealth of salvation, wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is his treasure.

1476 Isaiah 33:5.

1477 Isaiah 33:6.

1478 Isaiah 33:6, NASB.

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All translations seem to have the phrase *“the fear of the Lord is His treasure”* as a separate clause at the end. It is very tempting to follow the modern translations which opt for the pronoun as the subject (*“He will be the ...”*). It would make sense to take it this way following on from the verse before where we learn about what the Lord had been doing. On the other hand the NKJV rendering helps too. It maybe that since both translations are admissible we should consider both.

Thus we have the idea that the Lord is the One through whom strength, wisdom, knowledge and so on should come, but practically speaking we are also taught that wisdom and knowledge are key. Looking at the NKJV rendering we have:

wisdom and
knowledge
will be
the stability of your times, *and*
the strength of salvation;
the fear of the Lord *is* His treasure.

Thus two things, *“wisdom and knowledge”* are the essential subject. We remind ourselves that Colossians 2:2,3 teaches us that it is *“in Christ”* that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found, so the connection between the two subjects we have discussed (the Lord and wisdom/strength) is vital and strong. How we need both true knowledge and true wisdom! We live in a curious age which at once esteems knowledge through such media as the internet and books and so on, but at the same time discredits knowledge when it is too demanding. We seem to want knowledge that is easy and palatable, which is useful to our selfish lifestyle, and which will not rock the boat. As soon as there is any depth to the knowledge, we cry in protest that it is too hard. How we need true wisdom, that is, the right use and application of the knowledge we have. In our text these twin qualities are stated as having two effects. First it will be *“stability.”* Selfishness and sin always leads to destruction and anarchy. If one seeks their own and another the things they want, it will not be too long before there is a fight! Instead if we have true knowledge, (the knowledge of God and of grace), and true wisdom (the ability to reflect God's love and goodness), then how things change! But not only does wisdom and knowledge bring stability, they will also bring, secondly, *“the strength of salvation.”* That is, they will bring rescue and deliverance which establishes a strong and stable existence. All that is a part of selfishness and sin necessarily leads to instability and destructive forces. The antidote is Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found, so that it is *“He”* who is the source and life, following the NASB

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rendering of verse 6. I repeat how desperately we need the knowledge of God and the wisdom that flows from the Spirit of God! Now all of that which we have discussed thus far can really be summed up in the final phrase: *“the fear of the Lord is His treasure.”* We learn a lot about the fear of the Lord in Scripture. Here we are taught that the Lord's treasure, that which is truly worthy, is the fear of the Lord. A right and true appreciation and respect for God which results in correct behaviour and obedience is really the essence of the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom.¹⁴⁷⁹ The fear of the Lord leads to a hatred of evil and brings length of life.¹⁴⁸⁰ The fear of the Lord brings confidence and true life.¹⁴⁸¹

[d] A plaintive plea concerning their sorry situation. (Isaiah 33:7-9).

33:7,8.

The prayer ends with a reflection on the situation they currently faced. The Lord is strength and stability, true, but what a sorry state of affairs existed! The term translated *“valiant ones”* is related to the word *“Ariel”* which we have come across in Isaiah 29:1. The idea is of a brave cast of warrior, or “lion-like” men. So it would appear that ambassadors and warriors went out from Israel (presumably sent by king Hezekiah) to make peace with the Assyrian invaders, but all to no avail.

The valiant ones and the ambassadors *“cry outside,”* and *“weep bitterly.”*¹⁴⁸² Why so? It would seem that their circumstances and the condition of the world around them is harrowing and traumatic. There is nowhere to travel in safety and comfort, so that a travelling man becomes rare. People are shut up in their homes and cities for fear of the danger they will face on the roads and highways. The reason for this is given at the end of verse 8. There are three things that *“he,”* (a representative man of the world), has done as shown below. He:

has broken the covenant,
has despised the cities,
regards no man.

1479 Psalms 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10.

1480 Proverbs 8:13; 10:27. 16:6.

1481 Proverbs 14:26,27

1482 Isaiah 33:7.

33:9.



Figure 4: Locations noted in Isaiah 33:9.

Then in verse 9 we read of the devastating effects on the whole world and then on specific named places (Lebanon, Sharon, Bashan and Carmel). We discover that the “*earth mourns and languishes.*”

This verse is reminiscent of Isaiah 24 where we read about the devastation of sin's curse on the world. Man (“*he*”) has broken the covenant. It could be here that a

foreign king (e.g. from Assyria) has ripped up any agreements made. However the key point is that man's promises count for nothing. Such an one cares little for order and groups of people who dwell in cities, for he has no consideration for men.

[3] The Lord's response. (Isaiah 33:10-19).

33:10.

But, wonder of wonders, at the point of greatest concern, when things are at the worst possible state, this is when the Lord takes action for we read in verse 10 “*Now I will rise.*” We cannot help but see here a resurrection reference here (“*I will rise*”). It was just when the disciples had reached their lowest point, when Christ had been crucified and was now dead and buried, that the Lord rose from the dead. Such a link with Christ's resurrection is confirmed by the remainder of this verse. We note that the Lord also declares “*now I will be exalted*” and further “*now I will lift Myself up.*” Listen to the words of Jesus, first as He spoke to Nicodemus, and then second as He spoke to the crowds:

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And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.¹⁴⁸³

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself.¹⁴⁸⁴

These statements speak of Christ's death on the cross which, (obviously), come before the resurrection. And so it is the death and resurrection of the Messiah that forms the focus of events here. Out of these two things comes the greatest of hope and joy.

33:11,12.

However, for those who reject the Lord and who do not come to Him for grace, we find that they will simply bring forth "*chaff*," and "*stubble*."¹⁴⁸⁵ In effect what these people produce is vacuous and of no worth. Even their breath, that which they speak, will effectively consume their fruit (what they produce), just as a fire will consume the stubble and chaff which is thrown away. Verse 12 continues the theme as the people will become a thing to be consumed by fire. The phrase "*burnings of lime*" suggests a situation where bones are so dry that they flare up in a moment. The statement; "*thorns cut up*" suggests again the idea of being readily flammable. Powders and finely divided material can combust very easily.¹⁴⁸⁶

33:13,14.

The Lord then issues a wake-up call to those near and far to recognise that the Lord God has acted. The ones who oppress, act treacherously, and who plunder (the Assyrians at this time) were going to be burned up and consumed so they had better wake up and listen! It is the same today. If people act in such a treacherous and grabbing manner, they too must face the risen Lord who acts in righteousness. Far better to hear the call to come for salvation now, than to face the call to give an account on judgement day. We had all better realise the awesome might of the Lord.¹⁴⁸⁷ Thus having risen up and become exalted, which we reiterate is a clear reference to the death and resurrection of the Messiah, a question forms in the people's minds, who are described here as "*sinners*" and

1483 John 3:14.

1484 John 12:32.

1485 Isaiah 33:11.

1486 As a teacher I used to love doing an experiment where a long pole was extended from a bench on which was placed a Bunsen burner parallel with the ground. Fine powder was then dropped from a height over the flame – the effect was dramatic! Flour mills and factories producing fine powders are keenly aware of the danger of fire because of the ease of flammability of such materials.

1487 Isaiah 33:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

*“hypocrites.”*¹⁴⁸⁸ This question is repeated, giving the impression that such a question was asked by several people at once in hurried and startled conversation. It is reminiscent of what we saw in Isaiah 31:9 where we are told that the Lord's fire and furnace are in Zion. Thus the effect of the Lord being raised has caused the sinners and hypocrites to ask this searching question: who can abide with such an awesome and fearsome One who burns with devouring brightness and fire? In the New Testament we note that the Lord God is described as a *“consuming fire.”*¹⁴⁸⁹ We see also that the Lord Jesus would come baptizing *“with the Holy Spirit and fire.”*¹⁴⁹⁰ We are also told that the Lord will return with His holy angels *“in flaming fire.”*¹⁴⁹¹

33:15.

The answer to the questions posed in verse 14 is given to us in verse 15. It is only the one who displays six characteristics who will be enabled to dwell in such a radiant fire. It is the one who:

- walks righteously.
- speaks uprightly.
- despises the gain of oppressions.
- gestures with his hands, refusing bribes.
- stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed.
- shuts his eyes from seeing evil.

Six is the number of man. Man ought to walk in righteousness (doing right), and ought to speak uprightly (only that which is true and pure). He ought to hate oppression and bribery, and he ought to walk away from hearing or seeing evil and bloodshed. Who is like this? No one. There is not a single human being on earth who meets these requirements. It is only because from before the foundation of the world the second person of the Holy Trinity agreed to step down into the world and take human flesh that we have One who meets these requirements. But it isn't enough that this One (the Messiah) do this. What must happen is that this One come and represent a people. He will act in such a way as that all who are *“in Him”* will follow in His footsteps and live the life that He

1488 Isaiah 33:14.

1489 Hebrews 12:29.

1490 Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16.

1491 2Thessalonians 1:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

lived.¹⁴⁹² It is not that they simply look to Him and copy Him out of their own strength. Rather it is that the Lord's righteousness has become theirs by faith. Those who turn to the Lord and come to Him, He gives them His righteousness. Make no mistake, faith in the Messiah (true saving faith in Christ) must work itself out into a life of righteousness. The only person who may live in Zion is the one who lives a righteous life, and this means the one who has true faith in the great Pioneer, Christ. The question is, will we receive Christ now and be baptised with the purifying fire of His love and grace, receiving His righteousness, or will we resist His call until the day when He returns to consume all that is wicked and evil?

33:16-19.

In verses 16 to 19 we are given seven fruits and blessings for the ones who do meet these requirements. These are as follows:

1. Their dwelling place will be in high places. (v16).
2. Their defence will be sure. (v16).
3. They will be fed and watered. (v16).
4. They will *"see the King in His beauty."* (v17).
5. They will see the land yet to come which is *"very far off."* (v17).
6. They will consider the terror to come and ponder what will happen to the wise. (v18).
7. They will not be oppressed by a fierce people whom they cannot understand. (v19).

That such as experience these blessings are not yet in heaven's glory after the second coming, is clear from the fifth blessing because they see the land from a great distance, and also from the last two blessings which imply that the return of the Messiah has not yet happened. However look at what these righteous (by faith) receive. They are now living in the heavenly places. This is what the apostle Paul wrote about in his letter to the Ephesians:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*¹⁴⁹³

¹⁴⁹² Ephesians 1:4,7,10,11,13; Colossians 2:7,10,11.

¹⁴⁹³ Ephesians 1:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

... and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus.¹⁴⁹⁴

They have a sure defence because they live among *“the fortress of rocks.”*¹⁴⁹⁵ This latter phrase implies a place of impregnability and full safety. These will be fully provided for. They will also get to see the King! How marvellous! We do not yet see Him, but every day we read our Scriptures and we walk with Him we do see Him in action, and we do observe and experience His love.¹⁴⁹⁶ Then further we consider from afar the land to which we have been called. We seek the city and builder of heaven and we have come to mount Zion!¹⁴⁹⁷ Then finally we note that such ones will ponder over the terror to come, but it will not be their experience, for the fierceness and evil of the wicked will not come near to them.¹⁴⁹⁸ However much the enemy tries to spoil and ruin, the people of strange speech and life will have no effect on the ones who have called out to the Lord for grace.

The statements found in verse 18 are ones which we see repeated in the first letter to the Corinthians:

Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?¹⁴⁹⁹

It is noteworthy that Paul also quoted just before the above from Isaiah 29:14 in 1Corinthians 1:19:

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **19** For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?¹⁵⁰⁰

At such times when the Lord is clearly present (supremely when He walked this earth, during revivals, and when He returns), the wisdom of this world is shown up for the nonsense and futility it really is. And so the believers will puzzle about this. That which is highly esteemed in the world and considered wise is nowhere to be seen! The believers in Zion will no longer see enemies and people who are described as *“fierce.”* They will not have to deal with people whose understanding is

1494 Ephesians 2:6.

1495 Isaiah 33:16.

1496 Isaiah 33:17. See also 1Peter 1:8.

1497 Hebrews 11:10,16; 12:22; 13:14.

1498 Isaiah 33:18,19.

1499 1Corinthians 1:20.

1500 1Corinthians 1:18,19.

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“obscure” and difficult to understand. This is what the Lord Jesus did. People came with all sorts of questions to trap Him, but He silenced them all, and showed up their great learning as vacuous and silly.¹⁵⁰¹

[4] A call to reconsider Jerusalem. (Isaiah 33:20-24).

33:20.

In the last five verses of the chapter, we have described for us the city of Zion as it will be in the gospel age, and also prophetically when the Lord returns. The description begins with a call to the redeemed to *“look upon Zion”* and it is important that we too consider these words. We must look at what the Lord has done in providing for His people as they gather in fellowship. Too much complaining and moaning will not go unpunished. Does that mean we accept for “church” whatever we find in the many and varied denominations and institutions that currently exist? By no means! It is imperative that we think carefully about what really is church. Let us consider the remainder of these verses to see what church ought to be like.

First it is described in a way which we may have expected given Israel's history, namely, as a city where the *“appointed feasts”* were to be celebrated. Here the emphasis is upon the celebration of the great feasts, all of which, for the Christian, find their fulfilment in Christ and His great work at Calvary, in His resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Are we a people who rejoice (truly rejoice) at what the Lord has accomplished for us in His great mission to earth? The New Testament lists quite a number of reasons for the Christian to joy and rejoice.¹⁵⁰²

Then second, the church is a place of quietness. It is a place where peace truly dwells. We should always remember that Christ has won our peace. He spoke *“peace”* on meeting the disciples after His resurrection.¹⁵⁰³ He Himself is our peace for it was by His blood shed on the cross that peace has come, and now *“having been justified by faith we have peace with God.”*¹⁵⁰⁴ Christ offered those who come to Him, rest, and those who have ceased from self-effort and their own agenda may enter the rest of God.¹⁵⁰⁵ I am sure you know the experience of longing to be home from work or some other duty where you know you can experience some peace and quiet! Well the church ought to be a place where quietness and peace are the atmosphere we breathe. Those who

1501 Luke 20:26-40.

1502 Philippians 1:18,25; 2:16,17; 3:1,3; 4:4,10.

1503 John 20:19,21.

1504 Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14; Colossians 1:20.

1505 Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 4:9-11.

Studies in Isaiah.

have been given true peace from God ought also to be a peaceful people. The church is to be a place where wars have ceased and where the sword is exchanged for an implement used to make things or to farm the land.¹⁵⁰⁶ God has called us to peace, so that we ought to live with one another in a culture of peace.¹⁵⁰⁷ Is this our experience? Or do we have squabbles and tension?¹⁵⁰⁸

Third we note that the church is a place of temporary dwelling. It is a *"tabernacle,"* or tent indicating the temporary nature of the church.¹⁵⁰⁹ We are being prepared as a bride, but a bride is only a bride for the wedding day. Thereafter she is wife to her husband. In this figure we also see that we are part of God's family, for the tabernacle or tent is where nomadic families such as the Patriarchs dwelt. Since believers are those who have been adopted into the family of God, the church ought to be our home.¹⁵¹⁰

Next, fourthly, we note the fact that the church, even though it may be temporary, is still a place of security. This point is emphasised very strongly at the end of verse 20. Note well how this is stated. The church is a tabernacle, or tent which cannot be *"taken down."* None of its *"stakes,"* nor none of its *"cords"* can be removed or taken away to destroy the tent. A tent is vulnerable. The stakes could be removed easily. The cords could be cut. However here we are assured of the security of this temporary place, because the tent cords and stakes **will not** be removed or taken down ever. In other words, the Lord will preserve the church.¹⁵¹¹ Believers are kept by God's power, and the Lord will guard them from the evil one.¹⁵¹² The gates of hell will never prevail against the church.¹⁵¹³

We ought also to mention at this point that our very lives are described by the apostle Paul as being like a tent:

For we know that if our earthly house, *this tent,* is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.¹⁵¹⁴

The emphasis in this New Testament reference is to the frailty and temporary nature of our lives, but in Isaiah 33:20 we are being told that the tabernacle which is the church can never be loosed and

1506 Isaiah 2:4.

1507 Romans 12:18; 1Corinthians 7:15; 2Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:3.

1508 James 4:1-3.

1509 Hebrews 11:13; 13:14; 1Peter 1:1; 2:11.

1510 John 1:12,13; Romans 8:15.

1511 John 10:29; 17:12.

1512 1Peter 1:5; 2Thessalonians 3:3.

1513 Matthew 16:18.

1514 2Corinthians 5:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

pulled down. What wonderful assurance we have! Now some so-called churches come and then disappear in time. But the true church lasts and cannot fail! I wonder sometimes that we make such a meal of 'church' so that we add in our human and earthly traditions and additions which cause the church to be something other than it is supposed to be. The church will never be pulled down even if buildings are, or if temples are used as second-hand carpet warehouses or whatever. Note also that the so-called institutional churches display their earth-bound natures with their permanence and earth-centred focus, and thus indicate that they are not true churches at all.

33:21,22.

In the fifth place we are taught the single most important truth about the church. This is where the Lord dwells. But note how He is described in this setting. The Lord Himself is pictured as a series of rivers and streams upon which no galley that is rowed nor any majestic ship may pass.¹⁵¹⁵ If we look back at Isaiah 2 we remember that one of the signals of great pride is the majestic ships built to sail the seas. In fact, if a foreign ship were to traverse these rivers it would be broken and vulnerable so that the inhabitants of Zion could easily plunder it. The point then is that there will be nothing of pride, of man's pride and arrogance, that could benefit from these streams and rivers. As we have noted, the Lord Himself is described as "*broad rivers*" and "*streams.*"¹⁵¹⁶ The "*broad rivers*" suggest both the idea of great room or space, and also the idea of life on account of the water.¹⁵¹⁷ The "*streams*" suggest a more personal application. In both figures we see both the personal drawing of water from the wells of salvation, and the corporate aspect as shown by the expanse of waters ("*broad rivers*"). Through the idea of a large amount of water, perhaps we are also meant to consider that the Holy Spirit is the One who will be there indwelling the people who live in Zion. Finally we learn also that the Lord is truly the King!¹⁵¹⁸ He is fully King because He is equally the lawgiver and the judge. He will reign righteously.

33:23.

In the sixth place we learn that despite the nations and the unrighteous who could not sail or row down the streams of God because of their pride, the plunder that they plundered will be shared amongst the truly righteous who are here described as "*lame*" and as "*inhabitants.*" Thus here we

1515 Isaiah 33:21.

1516 Isaiah 33:21.

1517 John 7:37-39; Psalm 46; 84:5-7.

1518 Isaiah 33:22.

Studies in Isaiah.

learn that the Lord is concerned for justice. Notice that these righteous ones were once lame but now they inhabit Zion! They can plunder the ships and galleys who have foolishly traversed these rivers.

33:24.

In the seventh, and final place, we learn that there will be forgiveness and healing. We are taught that the church is the place where forgiveness operates and where healing of body occurs. Now, of course, full healing (and indeed full sanctification) will not be accomplished until we reach heaven's glory. But we need to remember that the church is a place where healing and forgiveness occur. Is that what we experience?

These seven characteristics ought to be the experience of the church. To sum up we have:

[1] A place of joy and celebration chiefly concerning the Lord and His wonderful works.

[2] A place of quietness and peace where wars have ceased and swords are changed into farming implements.

[3] A place of temporary dwelling – where we look for the permanent place of heaven's glory.

[4] A place of great security which cannot be brought down.

[5] A place where the Lord dwells and whose streams and rivers provide for the people.

[6] A place of justice where what was plundered is returned.

[7] A place of forgiveness, healing and wholeness.

Chapter 44.

Isaiah 34:1-17.

Come and hear: Judgement!

Textual analysis.

1 Come near, you nations, to hear; and heed, you people!

Let the earth hear, and all that is in it,
the world and all things that come forth from it.

2 For the indignation of the **Lord** is

against all nations,

and *His* fury

against all their armies;

He has utterly destroyed them,

He has given them over to the slaughter.

3 Also

their slain shall be thrown out;
their stench shall rise from their corpses, and
the mountains shall be melted with their blood.

4 All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and
the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll;
all their host shall fall down

as the leaf falls from the vine,
and as *fruit* falling from a fig tree.

5 “For My sword

shall be bathed in heaven;

indeed it shall come down

on Edom, and

on the people of My curse,

for judgement.

6 The sword of the **Lord**

is filled with blood,

it is made overflowing

with fatness,

with the blood of lambs and goats,

with the fat of the kidneys of rams.

For the **Lord** has

a sacrifice in Bozrah, and

a great slaughter in the land of Edom.

7 The wild oxen shall come down with them, and the young bulls with the
mighty bulls; their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust saturated
with fatness.”

8 For *it is*

the day of the **Lord**’s vengeance,

the year of recompense for the cause of Zion.

Studies in Isaiah.

9 Its streams shall be turned into pitch, and
its dust into brimstone;
its land shall become burning pitch.

10 It shall not be quenched night or day;
its smoke shall ascend forever.
From generation to generation it shall lie waste;
no one shall pass through it forever and ever.

11 But the pelican and the porcupine shall possess it,
also the owl and the raven shall dwell in it.

And He shall stretch out over it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness.

12 They shall call its nobles to the kingdom, but none *shall be* there, and all its princes shall
be nothing.

13 And thorns shall come up in its palaces, nettles and brambles in its fortresses;
it shall be a habitation of jackals, a courtyard for ostriches.

14 The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the jackals, and the wild goat shall bleat
to its companion; also the night creature shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest.

15 There the arrow snake shall make her nest and lay *eggs* and hatch, and gather *them* under
her shadow; there also shall the hawks be gathered, every one with her mate.

16 “Search from the book of the **Lord**, and read: not one of these shall fail; not one shall lack
her mate. For My mouth has commanded it, and His Spirit has gathered them. 17 He has cast
the lot for them, and His hand has divided it among them with a measuring line. They shall
possess it forever; from generation to generation they shall dwell in it.”

Isaiah chapter 34 stands in a similar relation to the chapters that come before, as chapter 25 does to Isaiah 13 to 24. In some ways it also connects with Isaiah 24 which seems to be a summary judgement on the entire world. However Isaiah 25 and 34 focus on Moab and Edom respectively. Moab has been castigated chiefly for their pride. Edom, on the other hand stems from Esau, Jacob's brother. Esau was a sensual and selfish man. Edom, the nation, shared the characteristics of their progenitor. They were self-seeking and insular. They would not allow Israel passage into the promised land after the Exodus, and were concerned for their preservation at all costs.¹⁵¹⁹ They were strong and self assured.¹⁵²⁰ They rejoiced when Israel and Jerusalem was finally conquered.¹⁵²¹ It would seem then that whilst Moab is put before us to show our pride as sinful human beings, Edom is used to illustrate our sensuality, selfishness and pleasure seeking.

Isaiah 34 can be divided up into three parts as follows:

[1] Final judgement on the world. (Isaiah 34:1-4).

[2] The Lord's sacrifice. (Isaiah 34:5-7).

[3] The day of vengeance. (Isaiah 34:8-17).

1519 Numbers 20:14-21.

1520 Psalm 60:9; 108:10.

1521 Psalm 137:7.

[1] Final judgement on the world. (Isaiah 34:1-4).

34:1,2.

The chapter opens with a call issued to a variety of subjects. From verses 1 and 2 we have:

you nations.
you people.
the earth.
all that is in it (earth).
the world.
all things that come forth from it (the world).
all nations
all their armies.

In the next section in verse 5 we also have reference to Edom who are described as *“the people of My curse.”* Such an appellation applies to all of Adam's descendants as Genesis 3 teaches us. And so we have the entire human population indicated and indicted here, but represented by Edom as the prime example. It is significant that Edom and Adam in Hebrew share the same three consonants and differ only in their pointing (Adam = אָדָם; Edom = אֶדֶם). But further, we also have the entirety of creation indicted, for the statements of verse 1 concern all that is in the earth and the world. It is directed to both those that fill, or inhabit the earth, and to those who spring forth from it, or all those who flourish in it. There is a distinct hint of creation statements made in Genesis 1, and so these statements will include the animal life as well as the vegetation.

The call issued is to *“come near ... to hear and heed.”*¹⁵²² The idea expressed here is forceful. The whole world is being instructed to come and approach, to sit down, listen to what is said and then do as requested. This form of emphatic call is found throughout the Scriptures and it reminds us very forcefully that we are so often dull of hearing. The Lord has to shout almost to get our attention! What then is it that the world needs to hear? There is just one thing named but this is expressed in three different ways. First, it is given in three words. Thus we read about the *“indignation of the Lord.”* Second we note that it is His *“fury”* which will be poured forth. Third

1522 Isaiah 34:1.

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we find that God has a “*slaughter*” which the people will be given over to.¹⁵²³ Thus God's anger is against the entire world, and the world is being prepared for the slaughter. None shall escape because all fall foul of His requirements.

The outcome of this situation is described as already having been enacted. It is not that God will judge, but that they have already been judged. The entire world has been “*utterly destroyed*” and has been “*given ... over to the slaughter.*”¹⁵²⁴ These are not hesitant and tentative words and expressions. Destruction here is literally: “to be put under the ban,” or to be devoted to complete ruination with no hope of release. This is not like a life sentence issued by judges today with the hope of parole. Not at all. Destruction is complete. Note that this is not annihilation nor extinction, but destruction. This is a slaughter, such as may be seen in the killing and preparing of animals for consumption, but such a consumption which lasts for eternity

34:3,4.

The descriptions of verse 3 are appalling. In today's graphic cinematic depictions of war and its destruction, we may have a pretty good idea of the awful scenes described here. But then in verse 4 we have mention not so much of the devastation that falls on all peoples, but the destruction meted out to the entire universe. There are three statements which apply to “*the host of heaven*” and “*the heavens.*”¹⁵²⁵ In other words, it describes not just the physical universe but the spiritual as well. The “*host*” indicate the armies and the principalities in high places. It would appear that these descriptions are meant to apply to all the heavens and their host. What then will happen? Well there are three descriptions. They shall:

be dissolved.

be rolled up like a scroll.

fall down as the leaf falls from the vine, and as *fruit* from a falling fig tree.

The word “*dissolved*” has within it the concept of melting or becoming decayed to oblivion.¹⁵²⁶ The apostle Peter picks up this concept in his second letter (as we have already had cause to quote earlier):

1523 Isaiah 34:2.

1524 Isaiah 34:2.

1525 Isaiah 34:4.

1526 Isaiah 34:4.

Studies in Isaiah.

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. **11** Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **12** looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?¹⁵²⁷

The heavens will be brought back to its original raw condition. The next two descriptions point us to the fact that the heavens (and their host) will not be able to function as they once did. Being rolled up as a scroll suggests that, like a scroll that is rolled up, you will no longer be able to see what was once evident. Then the notion of a leaf falling from a tree suggests that being cut off from its source of life, it will decay and die. The word *“fruit”* is in italics indicating that it is not in the Hebrew text and has been supplied to make sense in the English. I would venture to suggest that fruit is not meant here because the fruit does have a purpose and a life within to bring new growth. Here there appears to be none of this concept because the initial idea of dissolution and melting is being reinforced by loss of purpose. The heavens can no longer be seen to give light and to mark seasons, and they are removed from the very source that brings them into being and so truly die.

Perhaps the major lesson in all of this is to truly understand that final judgement is something that cannot be stopped and will certainly come to pass. This is such a needed lesson for today because so many have dulled their ears and fallen for a sentimental view of the future. How we need to warn people that this is coming!

[2] The Lord's sacrifice. (Isaiah 34:5-7).

34:5.

In this next section we are brought to consider the slaughter and sacrifice that the people of the world will be brought to. Although Edom is the main recipient of this judgement, what happened to them is put as the example of what will also happen to *“the people of My curse.”*¹⁵²⁸ This phrase can only mean all of humanity whose father Adam sinned and whose sin brought the curse of God.¹⁵²⁹

God has a sword and He is about to wield it upon Edom. It is significant that the sword starts

1527 2Peter 3:10-12.

1528 Isaiah 34:5.

1529 Genesis 3:17f.

Studies in Isaiah.

in heaven (*"bathed in heaven"*) because the heavens are the place where the hosts to be judged are. It would appear, then, that the heavenly hosts are culpable. The connection between the evil powers of the heavens and the sins of men on the world is complex. We know from the apostle John that *"the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one."*¹⁵³⁰ The Lord Jesus spoke to disbelieving Jews and referred to them as being of their father the devil.¹⁵³¹ The devil tempts and taunts, going to and fro as a roaring lion to deceive.¹⁵³² He deceived Eve by casting doubt on God's word. Some are so given over to evil that they are possessed by evil spirits. Others are rebellious in just the same ways the devil was. When Satan tempts us and we give in we have abandoned truth and goodness. The serpent deceived Eve and was cursed. The sword of the Lord is bathed in heaven first.

The sword does not satisfy itself with merely the beginnings of sin and rebellion. Not at all! It continues to mete out judgement wherever sin and rebellion are found. Thus Edom with their hedonistic and sensual lifestyle are under the ban too. The sword will *"come down on Edom,"* and it will come down equally on all and every one who acts like Edom. He counted the birthright and all the privileges to be conferred from Jacob as of no account.¹⁵³³ He counted what God designated as important as of no account because he was too concerned about his stomach.¹⁵³⁴ Are we equally concerned for our bellies over what God wants?¹⁵³⁵ Do we concern ourselves with bodily appetites as of prime importance? Do we have earthly eyes and desires? If so this is being like Esau who is Edom and their fate will be ours when that day comes.

34:6,7.

In verse 6 the language is of a sacrifice. This sacrifice is to take place in *"Bozrah,"* a stronghold and outpost of Edom. This was their strongest point. The name signifies a walled enclosure or city within which those enclosed could come to their full potential. It is often mistaken for a sheepfold. However the idea contained in the sheepfold is present in the name. It is the idea of restraining. Thus Bozrah represents a place of protected bondage to sensuality and worldliness. This place of hedonistic selfish sensuality is a place ripe for sacrifice. We shall have cause to re-visit this in a later chapter. For now it is enough to reiterate the point that all fleshly and worldly life will be sacrificed, just as it was at Bozrah long ago.

1530 1John 5:19.

1531 John 8:44.

1532 Job 1:7; 1Peter 5:8; Revelation 18:23; 20:3,8.

1533 Genesis 25:32.

1534 Genesis 25:34.

1535 Romans 16:18; Philipians 3:19.

[3] The day of vengeance. (Isaiah 34:8-17).

34:8.

The theme of sacrifice and judgement continues in this final piece which seems to focus on the day of the Lord. We begin with a marvel. This day of the Lord is a day of vengeance against all that is ungodly, and in particular the fleshly sensual bent of Edom. God is perfect and pure, and the selfish and earth-bound nature of humanity needs to be slaughtered because it is ruinous and degrading both to man, but especially to God and His honour. But there is a great marvel, for this day of vengeance is also termed as *“the year of recompense for the cause of Zion.”* The reference of a year indicates a period of judgement and destruction faced by the Edomites of old. However what is striking here is that God's vengeance against Edom is also a recompense for Zion and its cause. This is not really a marvel because the Lord's people (Zion) are *“in Him”* and so united with God that what they do and follow is none other than what God is interested in. Edom, as we have already mentioned, were disreputable to Israel. They failed to let Israel through to the promised land after the Exodus, and they derided the people of God when they were finally defeated.¹⁵³⁶ In the same way the hedonistic and sensual lifestyle is ruinous and disastrous to man. When God rains down judgement on all that is so sinful, the people of God will rejoice because the evils of the flesh are truly evil.

34:9,10.

In verses 9 and following we are given a graphic description of the devastation of the land of Edom of old. There is a recollection of the judgement faced by Sodom and Gomorrah here, with mention of pitch, brimstone and smoke.¹⁵³⁷ That which was once water and thus helpful for life will become pitch. The foundation of the land will become brimstone. These indicate disaster and a removal of purpose and usefulness. Where we read that *“it shall not be quenched night or day”* we understand that such judgment is an eternal one – never ending.¹⁵³⁸ Mention of the eternal nature of this comes three times (*“forever,” “from generation to generation,” “forever and ever”*).¹⁵³⁹ From this we learn that hell will also be everlasting.

1536 Numbers 20:21; Ezekiel 35:15; Obadiah 1:12.

1537 Isaiah 34:9,10.

1538 Isaiah 34:10.

1539 Isaiah 34:10.

34:11-15.

Edom will be ruined perpetually so that there will be no coming back. Instead the cities will only be inhabited by wildlife (table 44.1).¹⁵⁴⁰

Table 44.1: Creatures inhabiting Edom after judgment.

Verse	Creature.	Some details.
11	Pelican	A ceremonially unclean bird (pelican or cormorant).
	Porcupine	The bittern, porcupine or hedgehog.
	Owl	An unclean (aquatic) bird (heron or owl).
	Raven	Raven – from its dusky hue.
13	Jackals	The AKJV has “ <i>dragons.</i> ” Hebrew: תַּנִּין <i>tannîn</i> is the intensive form of a very large creature, hence some form of dinosaur.
13	Ostriches	An unclean bird (owl, ostrich, literally translated as “daughters of the owl”).
14	Wild beasts	A desert-dweller, i.e. nomad or wild beast.
	Jackals	Different Hebrew word from that in verse 13 translated as “ <i>beasts of the island</i> ” in the AKJV. A howler (used only in plural) – i.e. any solitary creature.
	Wild goat	The AKJV has “ <i>satyr.</i> ” Usually thought of as a goat or faun.
	Night creature	AKJV has “ <i>screech owl.</i> ” The Hebrew word also indicates the name of a female goddess known as a night demon who haunts the desolate places of Edom.
15	Arrow snake	This creature gets its name from contracting and springing forth.
	Hawks	A bird of prey – possibly falcon, kite, hawk.

These creatures are all those which inhabit desolate waste places. They seem to be those which do not dwell well with humanity. And so the Lord will render the land of Edom a ruin. The description hints at the initial raw state of creation before any structure and form were built. The Lord will “*stretch out over it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness.*”¹⁵⁴¹ Thus order and plenitude will be gone. The creation is uncreated. Where nobles and kings once delighted, there will be nothing left but the fruits of the curse (thorns, nettles, brambles).¹⁵⁴²

1540 Isaiah 34:11-14.

1541 Isaiah 34:11.

1542 Isaiah 34:12,13.

34:16,17.

The message ends with a remarkable statement about the promises of God's word. We note in verses 16 and 17 that what Isaiah has been stating is all from the very mouth of God. There is a command for people to search *“from the book of the Lord,”* by which is meant all that Isaiah had been writing thus far. Clearly, then, we have Isaiah claiming that what he is saying and writing was none other than what God intended in His book. Notice further that the Lord's book is linked with His mouth and with His Spirit (*“My mouth has commanded it, and His Spirit has gathered them”*).¹⁵⁴³ The three concepts are closely bound. What God writes issues forth from His mouth (just as in creation) and comes by His Spirit. Those who would separate God's word from the Holy Spirit are well wide of the mark. That is not to say that those who spout Scripture are necessarily doing God's work, for without the indwelling Spirit all is of no account. Nevertheless the Scriptures are God's word, given by and of the Holy Spirit, and this connection cannot be severed.

What the Lord claims in these last verses is not to be skated over. Edom will be devastated and will become the inhabitant of wild animals. Such a fate has been determined and what God has spoken cannot be altered.

1543 Isaiah 34:16.

Chapter 45.

Isaiah 35:1-10.

An oasis in the desert.

Textual analysis.

- 1 The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them,
and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;
- 2 It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the excellence of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the **Lord**, the excellency of our **God**.
- 3 Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.
- 4 Say to those *who are* fearful-hearted,
“be strong, do not fear!
Behold, your **God** will come *with* vengeance, *with* the recompense of **God**;
He will come and save you.”
- 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.
- 6 Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the dumb sing.
For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert.
- 7 The parched ground shall become a pool,
and the thirsty land springs of water;
in the habitation of jackals, where each lay, *there shall be* grass with reeds and rushes.
- 8 A highway shall be there,
and a road,
and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness.
The unclean shall not pass over it, but it *shall be* for others.
Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray.
- 9 No lion shall be there, nor shall *any* ravenous beast go up on it; it shall not be found there.
But the redeemed shall walk *there*,
- 10 And the ransomed of the **Lord** shall
return,
and come to Zion
with singing,
with everlasting joy on their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Studies in Isaiah.

Chapters 34 and 35 form the conclusion to the group of messages running from Isaiah 25. Following this in chapters 36 to 39 there is a change in writing style from the poetic to that of narrative. This is because Isaiah will relate some historical information which pertains clearly to the essence of the messages we have been considering. Chiefly they concern both Assyria and the attack on Judah and Jerusalem by Sennacherib, and then the meeting of Hezekiah with Babylonian representatives. Now whilst Isaiah 25 featured the judgement seen from the perspective of the first coming of Christ, Isaiah 34 seems to fit with judgement in reference to the second coming of the Messiah. The chapters following these detail blessings for God's people. Thus in Isaiah 35 we have a wonderful depiction of the gospel age. We can split the chapter up into three sections:

[1] The desert blooms! (Isaiah 35:1,2)

[2] Behold your God. (Isaiah 35:3-7).

[3] Highway of holiness. (Isaiah 35:8-10).

[1] The desert blooms! (Isaiah 35:1,2)

35:1,2.

Our text is not quite correct in the first clause. The words “*for them*” at the end of the first sentence of verse 1 are not necessary, as the main idea is that the wilderness and wasteland will be exultant and will rejoice. There is an emphasis on joy and exultation in these opening verses. The rose shall not just appear but appear with abundance. Such is the way with the new creation. When a person comes to true faith, there is an abundance of life which is a joy to see. The mention of joy and singing is rounded off at the end of the chapter with a statement concerning the ransomed of the Lord coming back with joy and much singing.

In this chapter we see that the desert will become better than the surrounding areas. The plain of Sharon was famous for its flowers.¹⁵⁴⁴ The mountains of Lebanon were famous for the majestic trees (cedars) that adorned them.¹⁵⁴⁵ Carmel was the “garden land.” And so the great glory of these lands would be surpassed by the glory to be found within this desert wasteland.

At the beginning we are introduced to the desert and the wasteland being glorious, but then we find by verses 3 and 4 we are speaking of people. And so in verse 2 when we read “*they shall*

1544 Song of Solomon 2:1.

1545 1Kings 4:33

Studies in Isaiah.

see ...” we really ought to think of the people intended here. The desert and the wasteland blooming ought to point us to people within whom the blooming rose and the blossoming flowers are growing in abundance. What these folk, who were a wasteland but now are a beautiful garden, see is *“the glory of the Lord, the excellency of our God.”* Here we see the idea that the Lord Himself (Emmanuel) will come.¹⁵⁴⁶ How marvellous! We are reminded of John's words in John 1 where we read of the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt amongst us and whose glory was declared.

[2] Behold your God. (Isaiah 35:3-7).

35:3,4.

As the Lord is about to come, there is a call to the people with a promise of blessing. Hands that were once weak should be strengthened, and knees that are wobbling must be made firm.¹⁵⁴⁷ The hands speak of action and doing, whilst the knees point us to walking and standing which speak of life's walk. These figures are used to point us to the twin themes of life's walk and what we ought to do (with our hands). Those who have weak hands and feeble knees are those described in verse 4 as being fearful (*“fearful-hearted”*). So how should hands be strengthened and knees made firm? Well verse 4 gives us the answer. It is simply by stating words which God has uttered! How we make things so complicated! To make hands strong and knees firm we need to utter the words of God. In this case we have two imperatives followed by a promise. How many times do we hear the Lord saying *“be strong”*?¹⁵⁴⁸ How many times also do we hear the Lord utter those words *“do not fear”*?¹⁵⁴⁹ When the Lord speaks these words, know that He is not simply saying things for mere effect. With the Lord the blessing of the word comes too. The Lord says to us both of these things in what He has done in sending His Son who came to die and rise again. When He rose from the dead He ushers those wonderful words *“peace”*!¹⁵⁵⁰ There is also a promise given that when the Lord comes, He will come with vengeance and recompense, for He will come to deliver and save. All the way through the gospels in the New Testament we find that the Lord had come to seek and to save the lost and to give His life as a ransom.¹⁵⁵¹

But how, you may ask, did the Lord come in vengeance and recompense? Well the answer

1546 See also Isaiah 40:9,10.

1547 Isaiah 35:3.

1548 Deuteronomy 31:6,7,23; Joshua 1:6,7,9,18; 10:25 and etc.

1549 Genesis 26:24; 46:3; Exodus 20:20; Deuteronomy 1:21; 31:6,8; Judges 6:23 and etc.

1550 John 20:19,21,26.

1551 Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45. Luke 19:10.

Studies in Isaiah.

is, of course, that Christ's comings (first and second), contain both elements of judgement and salvation. In the first coming we tend to emphasise the deliverance and salvation aspect. In His death on the cross and His resurrection Christ delivers and saves. However, we forget, to our great shame, that God poured out His wrath and judgement upon Christ our substitute. When we come to consider the second coming we naturally focus on the judgement aspect. However Christ's coming again is for the salvation of those who have turned to Him in repentance and faith.

35:5,6.

Next we can see the effect of the Lord's coming. This puts the flesh, so-to-speak, on the images of desert and wilderness blossoming. We read of a fourfold effect:

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, (v5).
and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. (v5).
Then the lame shall leap like a deer, (v6).
and the tongue of the dumb sing. (v6).

Eyes being opened to see. This is the first effect of salvation. We see that which we have never seen, and we understand and perceive what we have been utterly ignorant of, a new world. Then next, our ears are unstopped in order that we may do and obey that which we now hear and see. The third effect is that the crippled lame are now, not just able to walk (and so live properly) but, more importantly, are able to leap! This brings to mind the man healed at the gate beautiful who leapt and began leaping and praising God.¹⁵⁵² Finally we note that the tongue of the dumb is opened so that they can sing. Once saved and brought into the kingdom, we are freed to sing and speak the wonderful goodness and greatness of God.¹⁵⁵³

35:6,7.

This picture of the fourfold nature of salvation is explained at the end of verses 6 and 7. We read about water, streams, pools, springs of water bursting forth, and water-borne plants flourishing as a result. The Lord Jesus stated that the thirsty who came to Him for sustenance would have rivers of living water flowing from their hearts, which is explained as the presence of the Holy Spirit:

1552 Acts 3:1-10.

1553 1Peter 2:9.

Studies in Isaiah.

37 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. **38** He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” **39** But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.¹⁵⁵⁴

This is a luxuriant and beautiful picture and it reminds us of the initial creation. God brought forth and abundance of life which filled the seas, the land, and the air. God is consistent. When He created in the beginning, it was full and abundant, and now in the new creation, the same ideas burst through. There is flourishing, water bursting forth, rapid and full growth and beauty all around.

[3] Highway of holiness. (Isaiah 35:8-10).

Having described how the Lord's coming brings salvation which restores life to a parched and filthy world, we end with what is truly implied by this new growth and life. We often think of life in very odd and unsatisfactory ways. We do not seem to see that true life and true beauty is concomitant with holiness and purity. In these last three verses the theme is abundant life described as a roadway wherein no unholy thing can be found.

35:8.

There is a way back to God from the dark paths of sin, an old hymn recounts. This way is described here as both a “*highway*” and as a “*road*” in verse 8. The first word (“*highway*”) is used only here in Isaiah 35:8. It seems to indicate a public highway which is raised and has embankments. The second word is the more usual word and it means “a roadway,” or “a journey,” and is frequently put to depict the journey of life. Now our text calls this route the “*highway of holiness.*” However the phrase is actually “way of holiness,” or “road of holiness,” because the first word in the phrase is the more common Hebrew word. Our ordinary lives ought to be depicted by holiness and they should be public. We are on God's highway, and our path, our journey on that public roadway is to be characterised by holiness.

35:8-10.

Holiness is described for us in verses 8 to 10, but before we examine the details we must comment on the various translations that have been made. The difficulty occurs at the end of verse 8. Table 45.1 below shows a number of different translations that have been suggested. The first

¹⁵⁵⁴ John 7:37-39.

Studies in Isaiah.

part seems to be fairly straight forward. All translations seem to state that this way of holiness is for the ones who choose to go on it. However the second part is variously rendered. The NKJV and the ESV opt for the idea that whoever goes on the road, *even though he may be a fool*, will not err or go astray. The NASB opts for the idea that fools will not go on this road. What is certain, I believe, is that the foolish cannot go along this way. A fool, by definition, is unholy. The unclean will not go on this way. The sense therefore would be that those who *were* once foolish (and known to be so) will not go astray when they are on this road.

Table 45.1: Translations of Isaiah 34:8.

NKJV ¹⁵⁵⁵	NASB	ESV	AKJV	My translation
But it <i>shall be</i> for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray.	But it <i>will</i> be for him who walks <i>that</i> way,	It shall belong to those who walk on the way;	but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men,	And these, the walkers, a road.
	and fools will not wander <i>on it</i> .	even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.	though fools, shall not err therein.	But the foolish will not err/go astray.

Perhaps something akin to the ESV's rendering slightly altered would fit the sense:

even if (they were once) fools, (now they have chosen this way), they will not err/go astray.

Verses 8 to 10 describe seven characteristics of those who walk the highway of holiness. We shall list these using the NKJV rendering but taking note of the discussion over translation above (see table 45.2).

First, then, we note that the *“unclean”* will not walk this road. This road is for the washed ones, the cleansed ones, for those sanctified and being sanctified. Have we been washed from our sins? Are we confessing sin and being forgiven and cleansed daily? Do we regularly go to the *Fountain of Life* for His cleansing, healing, washing touch?

Next, in the second statement, we read that it will be for *“others”* and then for *“whoever.”* The NKJV rendering is a little awkward at this point. The NASB renders this as: *“but it will be for him who walks that way.”* The implication here is that the way is open. It is for whoever. Anyone may walk on it. The only stipulation is that they agree to it being a way of holiness, a life that is

¹⁵⁵⁵ The NKJV seems to struggle with both concepts. The phrase *“whoever walks the road”* goes both with the first phrase (*“but it shall be for others”*) and also with the last (*“although a fool, shall not go astray”*).

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pure and being purified.

The third statement leads us to the idea that those walking it will not err or go astray. Fools cannot walk this road (and remain fools), but those who were once foolish (we were all such before conversion) will be enabled to keep on the straight and narrow. Now here we learn that false teaching will be rejected by believers. They may be lead astray at times, but ultimately they will never be in error.

Table 45.2: The seven features of the Highway of Holiness.

[1]	<i>This way is not for the unclean.</i>	<i>[The unclean shall not pass over it,] (v8).</i>
[2]	<i>Whoever chooses shall travel on it.</i>	<i>[but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road,] (v8).</i>
[3]	<i>Those who travel on it will not go astray or err.</i>	<i>[Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray.] (v8).</i>
[4]	<i>There will be no danger (from beasts).</i>	<i>[No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; it shall not be found there.] (v9).</i>
[5]	<i>It is a way for the ransomed and redeemed only.</i>	<i>[But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord] (v9).</i>
[6]	<i>It is a way back, a returning, to Zion.</i>	<i>[But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion] (v9,10).</i>
[7]	<i>Those who travel on it will rejoice and will be made glad.</i>	<i>[... come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.] (v10).</i>

Next (fourth) we discover that this roadway will have no ravenous beasts on its path. The roads of ancient times were treacherous and dangerous for two main reasons. First there were bandits who robbed you.¹⁵⁵⁶ But also there were beasts such as the lion who could maul you.¹⁵⁵⁷ The phrase “*ravenous beast*” is literally “murderous creature” or “living thing that robs.” It is nearly always translated as a vicious creature that kills. However I think that both vicious and wild animals and marauding robbers are intended in the statement of verse 9. Thus although the devil is as a roaring lion seeking to devour whom he can, he cannot get up onto the highway of holiness and reek havoc.¹⁵⁵⁸ On this route all will be protected. We are not told how in these verses, but this highway clearly has its guardians.

1556 Luke 10:25-27.

1557 Judges 14:5.

1558 1Peter 5:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

The fifth statement gives some more meat to earlier statements describing whom may travel on this road. Whilst the person cannot be unclean, there is no limit or restriction to the type of person who can walk on the highway of holiness, for it is “*whoever.*” In verses 9 and 10, however, we find that it is exclusively the ransomed and the redeemed who are admitted passage. It is only those whose lives have been bought back from sin and rebellion, and who have had a price paid for them by another. In verse 9 the Hebrew word rendered “*redeemed*” is that which points to the person, that is, the kinsman redeemer. The term “*ransomed*” has the idea of being loosed or set free. We cannot but think of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who redeemed and ransomed us by His precious life offered on Calvary. Praise His glorious name!

Then in the sixth place we note from verse 10 that this route is a “way back” to Zion. It indicates a return and so points us towards the idea of repentance. At one time we ran hither and thither on our own course of destructive selfish single mindedness. Now we are on the highway of holiness and we are turning back from those sinful paths, back to where the Lord dwells.

Finally, in the seventh place, the highway of holiness is a road where those returning express great joy and delight, and who in doing so experience more gladness and joy! I know that full joy and the dismissal of all sorrow and sighing cannot be experienced until we reach heaven's glory, but surely we must note that those on this pure road do at least have some gladness of heart? I go further. The Christian man, woman, boy, or girl will be glad and joyful and will experience the fleeing of sorrow and sighing. How can we who often look to Zion, and see our Saviour and Lord in all His glory not rejoice? It is impossible and unthinkable. Yes we do experience difficulty, hardship, sorrow, and sadness. But overriding these is the joy set before us!¹⁵⁵⁹

In the last three chapters of the first part of Isaiah we have an historical section which describes two main events. The first concerns the Assyrian king Sennacherib who sought to defeat Judah but was thwarted by God. The second sees Hezekiah welcoming ambassadors from the newly rising power of Babylon. Interestingly the second event recounted in Isaiah 38 and 39 comes before the first recorded in Isaiah 36 and 37. We can establish this from Isaiah 38:6 where Hezekiah is told that the Lord will deliver the king and Jerusalem from the king of Assyria.

¹⁵⁵⁹ Hebrews 12:2.

Chapter 46.

Isaiah 36:1-37:38.

They answered him not a word.

Textual analysis.

1 Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah *that* Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. 2 Then the king of Assyria sent *the* Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. And he stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's Field. 3 And Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came out to him.

4 Then *the* Rabshakeh said to them,

“Say now to Hezekiah,

‘Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria:

“What confidence is this in which you trust? 5 I say you speak of having plans and power for war; but *they are* mere words. Now in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me? 6 Look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So *is* Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him. 7 “But if you say to me,

‘We trust in the Lord our God,’

is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem,

‘You shall worship before this altar?’”

8 Now therefore, I urge you, give a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses—if you are able on your part to put riders on them! 9 How then will you repel one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen? 10 Have I now come up without the Lord against this land to destroy it? The Lord said to me, ‘Go up against this land, and destroy it.’”

11 Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to *the* Rabshakeh,

“Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand *it*; and do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people who *are* on the wall.”

12 But *the* Rabshakeh said,

“Has my master sent me to your master and to you to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat and drink their own waste with you?”

13 Then *the* Rabshakeh stood and called out with a loud voice in Hebrew, and said,

“Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! 14 Thus says the king:

‘Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you; 15 nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying,

“The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.”’

16 Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria:

‘Make *peace* with me *by a* present and come out to me; and every one of you eat from his own vine and every one from his own fig tree, and every one of you drink the waters of his own cistern; 17 until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards. 18 *Beware* lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying,

Studies in Isaiah.

“The Lord will deliver us.”

Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? **19** Where *are* the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where *are* the gods of Sepharvaim? Indeed, have they delivered Samaria from my hand? **20** Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?”

21 But they held their peace and answered him not a word; for the king’s commandment was,
“Do not answer him.”

22 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who *was* over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with *their* clothes torn, and told him the words of *the* Rabshakeh.

#37 1 And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard *it*, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord.

2 Then he sent Eliakim, who *was* over the household, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. **3** And they said to him,

“Thus says Hezekiah:

‘This day *is* a day of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but *there is* no strength to bring them forth. **4** It may be that the Lord your God will hear the words of *the* Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the Lord your God has heard. Therefore lift up *your* prayer for the remnant that is left.’”

5 So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. **6** And Isaiah said to them,

“Thus you shall say to your master,

‘Thus says the Lord:

“Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. **7** Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumour and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.’”

8 Then *the* Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he heard that he had departed from Lachish.

9 And the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia,

“He has come out to make war with you.”

So when he heard *it*, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying,

10 “Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying:

‘Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying,

“Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.”

11 Look! You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by utterly destroying them; and shall you be delivered? **12** Have the gods of the nations delivered those whom my fathers have destroyed, Gozan and Haran and Rezeph, and the people of Eden who *were* in Telassar? **13** Where *is* the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?”

14 And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.

15 Then Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, saying:

16 “O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, *the One* who dwells *between* the cherubim, You *are* God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. **17** Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. **18** Truly, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, **19** and have cast their gods into the fire; for they *were* not gods, but the work of men’s hands—wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them. **20** Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You *are* the Lord, You alone.”

21 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying,

“Thus says the Lord God of Israel,

‘Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, **22** *this is* the word which the Lord has spoken concerning him:

“The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised you, laughed you to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem has shaken *her* head behind your back!

Studies in Isaiah.

23 “Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised *your* voice, and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel. 24 By your servants you have reproached the Lord, and said,

‘by the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains, to the limits of Lebanon; I will cut down its tall cedars *and* its choice cypress trees; I will enter its farthest height, to its fruitful forest. 25 I have dug and drunk water, and with the soles of my feet I have dried up all the brooks of defence.’

26 “Did you not hear long ago *how* I made it, from ancient times that I formed it? Now I have brought it to pass, that you should be for crushing fortified cities *into* heaps of ruins. 27 Therefore their inhabitants *had* little power; they were dismayed and confounded; they were *as* the grass of the field and the green herb, *as* the grass on the housetops and *grain* blighted before it is grown.

28 “But I know your dwelling place, your going out and your coming in, and your rage against Me. 29 Because your rage against Me and your tumult have come up to My ears, therefore I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came.”

30 “This *shall be* a sign to you: you shall eat this year such as grows of itself, and the second year what springs from the same; also in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. 31 And the remnant who have escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. 32 For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and those who escape from Mount Zion. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. 33 “Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria:

‘he shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it. 34 By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and he shall not come into this city,’ says the Lord.

35 ‘For I will defend this city, to save it for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.’”

36 Then the angel of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when *people* arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. 37 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned *home*, and remained at Nineveh. 38 Now it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

This episode encompasses several scenes which I have delineated as follows:

[1] Attack from Assyria! (Isaiah 36:1-3)

[2] When the enemy confronts us. (Isaiah 36:4-21).

[3] Hezekiah cries out to the Lord. (Isaiah 36:22-37:7).

[4] When the enemy is distracted the threat may still remain. (Isaiah 37:8-14).

[5] Hezekiah prays in earnest, and the Lord wonderfully answers. (Isaiah 37:15-38).

[a] The prayer. (Isaiah 37:15-20).

[b] The Lord responds. (Isaiah 37:21-33).

[c] The Assyrian king dealt with. (Isaiah 37:36-38).

[1] Attack from Assyria! (Isaiah 36:1-3).

36:1,2.

Assuming the reference in Isaiah 36:1 applies to Hezekiah's sole regency, the fourteenth year would bring us to 701 BC. Isaiah omits the references made in 2Kings 18:13f concerning Hezekiah's plea for mercy to Sennacherib and his agreeing to pay whatever tribute was demanded. The account in Isaiah's prophecy is given to emphasise what God was going to do for the people of God and how their enemy would be defeated.

Isaiah presents us straight away in Isaiah 36:1 with the invasion against Judah in which all the fortified cities surrounding Jerusalem were captured. One of these was Lachish.¹⁵⁶⁰ From there Sennacherib sends *“the Rabshakeh with a great army”* to Hezekiah at Jerusalem.¹⁵⁶¹ The term “Rabshakeh” seems to mean “chief cup-bearer,” probably suggesting a high ranking position. The next statement at the end of Isaiah 36:2 is very significant and points us back to an occasion concerning king Ahaz. The Rabshakeh comes and stands *“by the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller’s Field,”* which is exactly the same place which Isaiah was commanded to meet Ahaz in Isaiah 7:3:

Then the Lord said to Isaiah, “go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jashub your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller’s Field.”¹⁵⁶²

Well we have just been reading about the highway of holiness in Isaiah 35, so the mention of the highway to the Fuller's Field is significant. This place where there was running water and other things required for fullers to carry out their cleansing and washing tasks. So by highlighting this place the Holy Spirit seeks to point us to man-made means of seeking cleansing and holiness. For Ahaz in Isaiah 7 the point was to warn the king that his attempts to fend off the enemies (the Syria-Israel confederacy) were futile. Here too the implication is clear that any amount of human skill and artifice will not do. We all try and wash ourselves clean using all sorts of ingenious things just as Adam and Eve tried to hide their nakedness by sewing fig leaves together. We may be tempted to wash in the streams of self-righteousness, or in the sewer-filled rivers much adored by some pagan

1560 The British museum has wall reliefs which depict the capture of Lachish. See: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=366876&partId=1&searchText=lachish+relief&page=1

1561 Isaiah 36:2.

1562 Isaiah 7:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

peoples, or we may be tempted to devise a cleaning programme suitable to our needs. The problem is that whatever we do is always far, far short of requirements.

36:3.

As the Rabshakeh comes forward three leaders from Jerusalem come to meet him. We have Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah. He was a good and honourable man who had charge over the household.¹⁵⁶³ You may recall that Eliakim was put in place of Shebna as ruler over the house in Isaiah 22.¹⁵⁶⁴ His name meant “God raises” or “God sets up.” He was son of Hilkiyah, whose name meant “my portion is Jehovah.” Then next we have Shebna the scribe whose name meant “vigour.” Finally there is Joah the recorder whose name meant “Jehovah is brother,” and his father was Asaph whose name meant “gatherer,” or “assembler.” In this three folk there was, then, some reminder of God and faith in Him as they faced the terror of the enemy. From this I wonder what things we may have put in place to encourage and aid us at times of deep distress? Can you imagine the situation they faced in Jerusalem? Sennacherib was claiming that he had shut Hezekiah up in Jerusalem like a “caged bird.”¹⁵⁶⁵ There they were waiting for the battle to come closer and closer. Hezekiah calls to his chief steward using his name which means “God raises”! The steward Eliakim calls to his colleagues whose names were “vigour” and “Jehovah is brother”! At least these names were pointers to encouragement. So what do you have in place for encouragement? Have you memorised Scriptures? Are you regularly seeking the Lord and fellow-shiping with brothers and sisters? Are there good books or perhaps wall hangings with Bible texts or words of encouragement that you frequently see?

[2] When the enemy confronts us. (Isaiah 36:4-21).

36:4-10.

The exchange between the Rabshakeh and the three ministers of state from Jerusalem begins with a taunt from the Assyrian in verses 4 to 10. The taunt consists of five main themes and indicates that the Assyrians had considerable intelligence concerning Judah. After announcing that he speaks as representative of “*the great king, the king of Assyria,*” the Rabshakeh continues by casting doubt on Hezekiah's confidence and trust. How can Hezekiah compare with Sennacherib the

1563 Isaiah 22:20f; 2Kings 18:37.

1564 Isaiah 22:15-25.

1565 See, for example, <http://www.bible-history.com/empires/prism.html>

Studies in Isaiah.

“*great king*”?¹⁵⁶⁶ Hezekiah's trust was in “*mere words*.”¹⁵⁶⁷ This is a taunt which says, in effect, “show me what you can **do** or are you simply speaking mere words with no power”? This is often a trick the enemy uses. We place trust in the words of God, not in our own actions and powers. Some (indeed many) reply with a scathing put-down that *mere words* have no power over strength and might displayed by the great, the powerful, and the intelligent. The word of God is laughed at and ridiculed at the heat of the moment, but always the words of God come true and they show forth the power of the One who spoke them. We must trust the Lord and His words.

Then next the Rabshakeh taunts them about their repeated trust in Egypt and their help.¹⁵⁶⁸ Israel had been formed as a nation after the Exodus from Egypt, but there was a continued return to, and re-trust in, their former place of bondage. We have already seen in Isaiah how the Lord rebuked the people of God at this time for their trust in Egypt.¹⁵⁶⁹ It would seem that Egypt were no longer the super power they had once been, so that the Assyrians were seeking to show their dominance and their claim to be 'top dog' in the world.

Then third, the taunt turns to something which shows that the Assyrians had inside information about Judah.¹⁵⁷⁰ Hezekiah's reforms began with the temple.¹⁵⁷¹ He sought to restore worship and invited those from the north (outside Judah) to come and worship.¹⁵⁷² This was laughed at by some, but others from the north (Israel) came to worship. Subsequently a gathering in Jerusalem sought to remove the high places.¹⁵⁷³ Following this mini revival those who had come from Israel (in the north) returned and sought to destroy the high places in Judah.¹⁵⁷⁴ Now of course the high places were a compromise. There ought to have been just one place for worship, the temple, but due to the influences of the pagans surrounding them, the people of God had re-built some of the high places. This was ostensibly to worship Jehovah, but was also fuelled by Solomon's terrible apostasy in building shrines to the gods worshipped by his many wives.¹⁵⁷⁵ Hezekiah's reforms were what was expected and which were true to Jehovah, but Sennacherib and the Rabshakeh had (conveniently) misinterpreted the intelligence. They thought that Hezekiah was destroying the worship of Jehovah. However it may also be that the Rabshakeh was playing a

1566 Isaiah 36:4,13.

1567 Isaiah 36:5.

1568 Isaiah 36:6.

1569 Isaiah 30 and 31.

1570 Isaiah 36:7.

1571 2Chronicles 29:1f

1572 2Chronicles 30:1f.

1573 2Chronicles 30:14.

1574 2Chronicles 31:1f.

1575 1Kings 11:1f.

Studies in Isaiah.

shrewd card here. Perhaps he was playing the populace who might have preferred the syncretised worship on the high places against the puritanical Hezekiah who was cleansing the land? Whatever the case it appears that the taunt has got deeply personal. Who will you trust? Will you trust Hezekiah who has destroyed what you prefer?¹⁵⁷⁶ This is a classic divide and conquer strategy.

Next the Rabshakeh challenges them! How can you place any trust in Hezekiah, or in Egypt for that matter, when you do not have enough warriors to put on the horses the Egyptians may manage to scrape together? To help out, the Rabshakeh will supply two thousand horses just to even up the odds!¹⁵⁷⁷ It is rather like the huge bully taunting some smaller boy in a fight when he says “I’ll fight you with one hand tied behind my back”!

Finally there comes the killer punch. The Rabshakeh states that he has come up at the Lord's request! He claims that the Lord spoke to him and told him to come and destroy the land.¹⁵⁷⁸ Now this is always a trick of the enemy. How can we be sure that what we hear is from God? Well we need to follow Isaiah's admonition expressed shortly after the incident with Ahaz in Isaiah 7. Here is what Isaiah says to his disciples:

To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.¹⁵⁷⁹

It is to the written word and to the living word in faithful disciples that we should turn. That is, the Scriptures alone, and those whose lives have shown forth the gospel in glory to God. Clearly the Rabshakeh could not claim to be in that company. But we need to be careful. There are frequent claims to hearing *new words* from God, but unless these fit clearly and closely with the written word, the Scriptures we must reject them.

36:11-13.

The next thrust of the knife in the guts comes in verse 11. It would appear that the Rabshakeh was speaking in Hebrew, and at the request of the three ministers of state for the Assyrian to speak in Aramaic, the godless ambassador replies with a stinging threat. He claims that the message he brings is not just for the leaders, but for all the men of Jerusalem who will suffer

1576 Isaiah 36:7.

1577 Isaiah 36:8,9.

1578 Isaiah 36:10.

1579 Isaiah 8:20.

Studies in Isaiah.

when the siege comes, for they *“will eat and drink their own waste with you.”*¹⁵⁸⁰ None who heard that would be happy, but the Rabshakeh continues and speaks out with an even louder voice in Hebrew to continue the taunts. He continues in verse 13 by re-emphasising that his master was the *“great king, the king of Assyria,”* and then makes three further points.¹⁵⁸¹

36:14-20.

First he suggests that their king (Hezekiah) was a deceiver and was not able to offer any rescue or help.¹⁵⁸² It is interesting how the Rabshakeh expresses himself here, for he sought to parody the prophets, for he declares *“thus says the king”* (of Assyria) in opposition to the prophetic call *“thus says the Lord.”*¹⁵⁸³ Further he impugns the trust Hezekiah placed in Jehovah. It would appear that the Rabshakeh has caught hold of some of the words that Hezekiah might have used. Perhaps Hezekiah had said to the people to turn to the Lord and to trust Him for He would deliver them (*“the Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria”*).¹⁵⁸⁴ The Rabshakeh pours scorn on this idea.

Next he suggests to the ordinary men in Jerusalem that they ought to make peace with him. If they want to eat in security they ought to make peace. The reference to eating from their *“own vine”* and their *“own fig tree”* is a classic expression of dwelling in peace and security reminiscent of the reign of Solomon.¹⁵⁸⁵

24 For he had dominion over all *the region* on this side of the River from Tiphseh even to Gaza, namely over all the kings on this side of the River; and he had peace on every side all around him. **25** And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.¹⁵⁸⁶

All that was necessary was for them to bring the Assyrian king a *“present”* and to go forth to him (*“come out to me”*).¹⁵⁸⁷ But therein lay the sting! For their peace and security would not be long lasting. They may dwell safely if they submit to the Assyrian king, but only for a while. And so this was not really an offer of peace at all, for they would be taken to another land and would have to

1580 Isaiah 36:12.

1581 Isaiah 36:14-20.

1582 Isaiah 36:14.

1583 Isaiah 36:14. See Isaiah 7:7; 10:24; 22:15; 28:16; 29:22; 30:15; 37:6,21,33; 38:1,5; 43:1,14,16; 44:2,6,24; 45:1,11,14,18; 48:17; 49:7,8,22,25; 50:1; 52:3,4; 56:1,4; 65:8,13; 66:1,12.

1584 Isaiah 36:15.

1585 Isaiah 36:16.

1586 1Kings 4:24,25.

1587 Isaiah 36:16.

Studies in Isaiah.

leave Immanuel's land forever.¹⁵⁸⁸ The Rabshakeh is being a realist. The Assyrians had far superior forces. There wasn't any hope that the Judeans could withstand the Assyrian army, so why not sue for peace and allow them to determine their lot? However, the Rabshakeh's promise of a land of fruit and produce was shallow. As with all offers of fruit and blessing from bullies there would be strings attached. They would not be in Immanuel's land but would be carted off to a land chosen by Assyria.¹⁵⁸⁹

Finally, the Rabshakeh draws on the recent news stories. He reiterates his claim that it would be sheer folly to rely on Hezekiah and his trust in the Lord.¹⁵⁹⁰ All the other lands had been defeated. Where were their gods now?¹⁵⁹¹ If the Assyrians had defeated many nations and their gods, what hope do you Judeans have? It is inevitable that you will fail so do not listen to Hezekiah, the Assyrian general speaking on behalf of his king asserts.¹⁵⁹²

36:21.

Verse 21, which concludes this section of events, is a great testimony to the three ministers. They had been told by their king not to say a word, and that is exactly what they did. Here is great advice for us. It reminds us of the Saviour who, when reviled and accused by the authorities and then finally challenged by Pilate, we read of Him that *"He answered him not one word."*¹⁵⁹³ When the taunts of a godless person spout forth such nonsense as has come from the Rabshakeh, the best thing to do is be quiet. Such a person is never going to listen, nor are they going to repent. They are on the offensive and muster arguments that have no validity, but it is their sheer determination and bluster which leads them to a hopeless position. They can never receive the truth. We could formulate arguments against the Rabshakeh's diatribe easily, but such would be wasted on him for he has no intention of entering a debate and heeding his opponent's views.

For the record, we ought to point out that the Rabshakeh is totally wrong about Jehovah for He is the only true God. Of course, all of the gods of the nations were man-made follies, and it was also true that Hezekiah (personally) could not deliver them, but the Assyrians had not bargained that the true God had great love for His people. We must be like these three ministers of state and be still and quiet when nonsense and bluster is shouted from the parapets to taunt. All of that attack will fail

1588 Isaiah 36:17. See also: Isaiah 8:8.

1589 Isaiah 36:17.

1590 Isaiah 36:18.

1591 Isaiah 36:19,20.

1592 Isaiah 36:20.

1593 Matthew 27:14.

Studies in Isaiah.

– it is *mere* words! What we need to do is to be silent, but we also need to be trusting in Jehovah. At times like this it is well worth rehearsing the great, grace, goodness, and glory of our God.¹⁵⁹⁴ He is able! If we get opportunities to declare His praise, or if we get opportunities to state the reason for the hope we have, then we should seize them eagerly, but if we are the target of a tirade of nonsense and bluster with no hope of change, be still and wait on the Lord.

[3] Hezekiah cries out to the Lord. (Isaiah 36:22-37:7).

Well it would seem that the threats have been issued and the battle lines have been drawn. In this section (Isaiah 36:22-37:7), we read about how the three ministers of state bring the news to the king and what Hezekiah does next. Following this, from Isaiah 37:8 onwards there are further exchanges with the Rabshakeh, but for now the spotlight is on the private chambers of the king who is in conference with his three ministers.

36:22-37:2.

And so the three ministers of state come with torn clothes signifying humility and sorrow.¹⁵⁹⁵ The result of their report to the king was that he too tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and went to the Lord's house.¹⁵⁹⁶ What a response! Is this our testimony? When we hear horrendous news which will affect us personally, do we humble ourselves and seek the Lord? Or do we shout back, bluster, and try to deal with the offending enemy with might and human ingenuity? People of all types and conditions have faced all kinds of difficulties and hardships, including the evils and horrors of war under siege. Bullies have threatened and made people's lives an utter misery, but the question remains: what do we do about it, or better, how do we react? Hezekiah responds in humility and enters the house of the Lord. This is the right *first* thing to do. When faced with great difficulty and the threat of danger we must humble ourselves and seek the Lord, but he does not stop there. Hezekiah is humbled and in the presence of God, but he sends others to Isaiah the prophet.

It is interesting that whilst Isaiah 36:22 tells us that the three ministers of state ("*Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder*"), inform Hezekiah of the threat, the king sends Eliakim and Shebna but not Joah the son of Asaph. Instead of Joah we find that he also sends, "*the elders of the priests, covered with*

1594 Psalm 145.

1595 Isaiah 36:22.

1596 Isaiah 37:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

sackcloth."¹⁵⁹⁷ The three who went to meet the Rabshakeh were the steward or guardian of the house, the scribe who wrote things down, and the recorder whose job was to recall and bring things to mind. Now, however, when Hezekiah sent representation to the prophet Isaiah, he sends the steward and the scribe, **but not** the one who recalled things to mind. In place of Joah, the elders of the priest were sent. This is significant. When seeking the Lord's help and revelation via the prophet Isaiah the king sent his trusted steward who had authority over all the house, one to write down all that was heard, and the ones whose job it was to worship God! The absence of the one whose job was to recall things is meant to point us to consider that sometimes our memories need to be quiet. We need to listen and write down what will be revealed and we need to worship. We do not need (in this case) to bring all that is on our minds. How sad it is that most of our prayers seem to be telling God what we think He has forgotten! How we list all the events and the circumstances we face and we tell Him all about them, instead of being ready to listen and write down what He says (i.e. consider it seriously) and being ready to act as priests – worshipping Him.

37:3,4.

Now this band of representatives bring Hezekiah's words to the prophet. Here is a breakdown of what the king was thinking from Isaiah 37:3,4:

Table 46.1: How Hezekiah was thinking from Isaiah 37:3,4.

HOW HE VIEWED THE SITUATION:	This day <i>is</i> a day of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy; (v3).
REASON:	for the children have come to birth, but <i>there is</i> no strength to bring them forth. (v3).
HOPE:	It may be that the Lord your God will hear the words of <i>the</i> Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the Lord your God has heard. (v4).
REQUEST:	Therefore lift up <i>your</i> prayer for the remnant that is left. (v4).

The day they were facing was considered by Hezekiah to be one of "*trouble,*" (or tightness, straitness, distress), "*rebuke,*" (punishment or chastisement), and "*blasphemy*" (contempt).¹⁵⁹⁸ He describes first how they felt. They were in a bind and a tight spot with their back to the wall. Then

1597 Isaiah 37:2.

1598 Isaiah 37:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

he looks at how the situation may be viewed objectively, It was a punishment for their sin. Finally he looks at how the enemy was viewing them. They were held in contempt. It is good to view our situation not just from a personal perspective, (how we feel), but also from how we see God's hand upon us (is He angry with us or distant?), and then also from the perspective of outsiders. Is what we are going through leading people to hold us, or the Lord in contempt? Is what we face making it difficult for people to see things correctly. It was indeed a day of trouble.

Hezekiah gives us the reason for his assessment of the situation. He uses the illustration of a woman about to give birth, but views this from the perspective of the children in the womb.¹⁵⁹⁹ It would seem that he viewed the people of whom he is leader, as the children in a womb. Here they were as God's people but they were stuck in this difficult situation. They had no strength to come through and be delivered. They wanted to be delivered but had no strength!

Then Hezekiah expresses a hope. It is very tentative, but it is also very honest.¹⁶⁰⁰ We can be definite about the Lord and whom He is. However we cannot be definite about what He will do in every situation. To one person who suffers terrible illness He brings instant healing. To another He brings comfort through the pain. To yet another He seems distant but wants to teach patience. There are many different scenarios, and so we read that Hezekiah states that *"it may be that the Lord,"* would respond with deliverance.¹⁶⁰¹ On the other hand it may be that He will not. The Lord, of course, hears all things. The point that Hezekiah is making is that the Lord may choose to act having heard the words of the Rabshakeh sent by the king of Assyria. It may be that the Lord will rebuke the intentions of the Assyrians. Who knows? Hezekiah knows that God can deliver them at this troubled time, but will He?

Hezekiah ends with his request of Isaiah to offer a prayer for the remnant that is left (*"therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left"*).¹⁶⁰² The theme of a small surviving group is one that recurs throughout Isaiah. The essential theme is deliverance for a few, or for a reduced number. It teaches us that the entirety of the nation is so bad that only a few will be saved. We do not deserve salvation. It is entirely by grace that we are saved. God owes nothing to us and it is completely through love and grace that He chooses to deliver a small band. He could still be loving, gracious, and kind, and save none! Our sin and evil demands justice and judgement. I do not think we really grasp the horror or evil of what, and who, we are by nature. Perhaps Hezekiah felt

1599 Isaiah 37:3.

1600 Isaiah 37:4.

1601 Isaiah 37:4.

1602 Isaiah 37:4.

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that the Assyrians would attack and be successful. In such an eventuality Hezekiah knew that the line of David must surely continue even if in greatly reduced numbers. And so he asks for prayer concerning the small numbers that remain. When we face harrowing times we often come through in a much thinner shape than when we entered them. The Lord knows how to chisel off and break off the sin and the wrong-headed notions we love to cling to.

37:5,6.

The servants of Hezekiah return to Isaiah and we then read Isaiah's response.¹⁶⁰³ The prophet tells the representatives to go back to Hezekiah with a direct word from God (*"Thus says the Lord"*).¹⁶⁰⁴ The Lord has a command for Hezekiah and a promise of action against Assyria which will not only flow from their own course of action, but which will also help in Hezekiah's obedience. There is also a true assessment of the situation. Hezekiah is not to be afraid of the words of the Assyrian king.¹⁶⁰⁵ How often are we taught not to be afraid? It is a repeated theme throughout Scripture but it does not always follow that we shouldn't be afraid. If we sin, or rebel, we ought to be very afraid just as Adam was in the garden of Eden because of his sin. But in this case the king of Assyria has blasphemed the Lord. He has spoken of God words which ought not to have been spoken. He has said that which is not true about the Lord, and has acted not just against God's people, but against God Himself (*"... have blasphemed Me"*).¹⁶⁰⁶ Here we see how closely the Lord identified with His people. Taunts against the people and the king of Judah were taunts against God. The same was true concerning Saul (later the apostle Paul) and his actions before he was saved. He persecuted those who were Christians but the Lord spoke to him from heaven with these words:

*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*¹⁶⁰⁷

When Saul had Christians beaten, tortured, and jailed he was persecuting the Lord, not just the church.

1603 Isaiah 37:5.

1604 Isaiah 37:6.

1605 Isaiah 37:6.

1606 Isaiah 37:6.

1607 Acts 9:4.

37:7.

The Lord will act. But His actions are wholly consistent with the Scriptural principle that what a man sows that he will also reap. The king of Assyria was a bully. We can see this in the words of his representative, the Rabshakeh. This bully who likes to fight will be taken by the sword in his own home. We read from the Lord's own words that the Lord Himself *“will send a spirit upon him”* which will have the effect of turning the king back home.¹⁶⁰⁸ God is, of course, ruler of spirits. He is ruler of all. We are not told whether this was an evil spirit suggestion, or whether it was a thought in the king's mind. It leads us to think how it is that thoughts “come” to us? Have you experienced thoughts which are stray, unexpected, random, off-centre? Who governs our minds? If we are the Lord's we will be protected in heart and mind, but this doesn't mean we are above temptation. The devil (or his hordes) can make suggestions to lead us astray. The thing we need to remember is how to deal with these unwanted thoughts. If we allow them house room and develop them we have taken the devil's bait. What we need to do is resist the devil.¹⁶⁰⁹ How important it is for us to wield spiritual weapons that will hold every thought captive to Christ:

4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, **5** casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.¹⁶¹⁰

And so we have the attitude of heart required for a godly response to great hardship and trouble. How vital it is to come in humility and to rest with God and all He is and does. He alone knows the right course of action. He alone can vindicate His name. Our job is to be His representatives in humble obedience and trust of Him. Let us resolve to worship Him and give Him all the glory.

When the king of Assyria finally returns home, disaster awaits him, for the Lord will *“cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.”*¹⁶¹¹ Again this follows the principle of that which a man sows so he will reap. We shall see this come to pass at the end of Isaiah 37.¹⁶¹²

1608 Isaiah 37:7.
1609 1James 4:7.
1610 2Corinthians 10:4,5.
1611 Isaiah 37:7.
1612 Isaiah 37:36-38.

[4] When the enemy is distracted the threat may still remain. (Isaiah 37:8-14).

37:8,9.

In this passage we read about what happens next. It would appear that the Rabshakeh goes back to find that the king of Assyria has left Lachish and was fighting against Libnah, which was further north.¹⁶¹³ Then we read that the king of Assyria was deflected from his campaign against Judah by the king of Ethiopia, Tirhakah, who had come to war against the king of Assyria.¹⁶¹⁴ We pause to consider that no man is his own master. Events can overtake us, but He for whom the circumstances of the events around us are but the staged scenery to be moved where He sees fit, is over all and all is under His command. The king of Assyria being deflected to deal with the king of Ethiopia, does not want to let go of his hoped for prize of Judah. The bully always threatens domination even if he is deflected at times. And thus the king of Assyria sends a written message, a letter, to Hezekiah.¹⁶¹⁵ It is ever the case with the bully. They leave off for a while but their threats linger on.

37:10-13.

The essence of the letter is a threat.¹⁶¹⁶ It would appear that the Rabshakeh knew about Hezekiah's attitude and intention for his people – that they should trust in the Lord. The Rabshakeh issues a command to Hezekiah not to trust God, for such trust (he claims) would be a deceit.¹⁶¹⁷ The Rabshakeh boasts that the *“kings of Assyria”* had overrun and conquered *“all lands by utterly destroying them,”* so it is impossible that Judah would not escape their attention.¹⁶¹⁸ It is one thing to boast of achievements, but quite another to make assumptions. Then the Rabshakeh gives his reasons for such blasphemy, and herein lies the mistake the Rabshakeh makes. He likens the true God, the Lord of the covenant, to the gods of the nations.¹⁶¹⁹ There follows a list of places in verses 12 and 13 that Assyria had defeated, first in Assyria proper (Mesopotamia), and then towards Judah in Syria. Gozan, Haran, Rezeph and Telassar were Mesopotamian cities. Haran was the place that Abraham stopped off at in his journey from Ur, and it is where Terah died. Telassar is thought to be

1613 Isaiah 37:8.

1614 Isaiah 37:9.

1615 Isaiah 37:9.

1616 Although we are told first about messengers being sent in Isaiah 37:9, we read in Isaiah 37:14 that this message came in the form of a letter.

1617 Isaiah 37:10.

1618 Isaiah 37:11.

1619 Isaiah 37:12.

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the “hill of Asshur.” Hamath and Arpad were cities in Aramea or Syria north of Israel/Judah. Separavaim is not easy to locate. There was a place in Babylonia with this name but it is more likely that a city in Syria/Aramea is meant close to Hamath and Arpad. Hena and Ivah were also probably places in Syria/Aram. The Rabshakeh boasts that none of the gods of the nations have saved these cities, so why should Jerusalem think it could escape? A very good point from a human perspective. The bully always argues from his record of victories, but what the Assyrians do not realise is that the Lord God is not a made-up deity. He is the living God and the creator of all things. It was He who superintended Assyria's victories, for He alone is sovereign over all.

37:14.

Having received the letter and read it, Hezekiah then takes it to the Lord and spreads it out before Him.¹⁶²⁰ Are we to imagine that the Lord was present in theophany? It is not certain but by no means impossible. What we do know is that the Lord was present in the temple. Once again Hezekiah's response is surely one we ought to emulate. Look Lord the enemy has attacked and taunted!

[5] Hezekiah prays in earnest, and the Lord wonderfully answers. (Isaiah 37:15-38).

Hezekiah's prayer and the response of the Lord, both through the prophet and in the action He takes, form the essence of this passage. After the king pours his heart out to the Lord, the bulk of our text describes the Lord's response through the prophet Isaiah.¹⁶²¹ The last three verses show what happened to the Assyrian king.

[a] The prayer. (Isaiah 37:15-20).

Hezekiah's prayer comes in the first five verses of this section.¹⁶²² The prayer can be considered in four separate parts which are worth our thoughtful consideration. We have first an open adoration and praise of God in verse 16, (worship). Then verse 17 is an appeal for the the Lord to hear and give consideration to their current plight and difficulty, (appeal). Third in verses 18 and 19 we have a description of the situation in the world around Judah, but with a true perspective and not one offered from the human earthly angle, (reality faced). Finally we have the request for deliverance and a reason given for this, (request for help).

1620 Isaiah 37:14.

1621 Isaiah 37:21-35.

1622 Isaiah 37:16-20.

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37:16. Worship.

It is essential that prayer begin with this adoration of the Lord first. This is primarily because God is, indeed, God. Whatever the situation faced, whatever the difficulty, we must worship the Lord! How good is God! Take a moment now and stop reading here and worship Him! Begin with these wonderful words that Hezekiah uses. As you do so, focus on each and let your thinking develop each theme. If you struggle with any of these titles or aspects of God's character, then make a study of it. Search the Scriptures and see how each characteristic demonstrates the great goodness and gracious glory that surrounds the Saviour!

It will be helpful simply to begin by listing these statements concerning God and His nature that Hezekiah focuses on:

O Lord of hosts,
God of Israel,
the One who dwells *between* the cherubim,
You *are* God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth.
You have made heaven and earth.

We have first in Hezekiah's list a designation that He is "*Lord of hosts.*" Undoubtedly Hezekiah's focus is on the Lord as commander of the universe, ruler over all principalities and powers, because he recognised their own need. God is in charge. The enemy they faced was not all powerful, God is.

Then next Hezekiah worships the "*God of Israel.*" He was *their* God, personally. What this means is not that the Lord was subject to them and their personal whims. I fear that sometimes this is what is conveyed by saying that God is personal. What is meant, rather, is that it is God who gives us personality. Have you ever wondered where personality came from? If you follow evolution (or any other man-made system of thought) you do not have any real explanation for personality, for us being *persons*. Here, however, in the idea that God is the "*God of Israel*" we are brought to consider the vitally important notion of relationship. Chiefly, of course, we are reminded that the Lord had called Abraham and had then called the nation of Israel. But this title indicates the amazing fact that we were created to know God and to relate to Him. This is what Genesis 1:26,27 and Genesis 2 is all about. God is my God not because I own Him, but because He owns me! Furthermore, He has stepped down into my world and has reconciled Himself to me. Wonder of

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wonders! God wants to know me! He is nonetheless still Lord and sovereign. So my relationship to Him is one of subservience. He is the Master and I am His servant. And yet He also deigns to call us *“friends”*!¹⁶²³ Amazing love!

Next we read that God is *“the One who dwells between the Cherubim.”*¹⁶²⁴ Literally this is: *“sitting on the cherubim,”* and so is a direct reference to the ark of the covenant found in the holy of holies. This was where the Lord “dwelt” and spoke to Moses.¹⁶²⁵ Hence we are brought now to consider the holiness of God. He could not be approached simply by anyone. To go into meet with the Lord, sacrifice had to be performed, and atonement had to be made. Now, of course, the Lord Jesus has made the way into the heavenly places possible by His death on the cross which rent the veil that guarded the holiest place.¹⁶²⁶ However we must still remember that we cannot simply rush in on our own terms. We approach the Father through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling us, and we do so recognising that the Son poured out His life-blood on our behalf having offered up a perfect life too.

Next we read of the Lord being God alone, out *“of all the kingdoms of the earth.”* Hezekiah is responding to the Rabshakeh's taunts and misconceptions of the Lord. God is not simply *“God of Israel,”* and so just like any other territorial deity (which had no real existence). No! He was *“God of Israel”* (the personally relating God), but He was much more than this, for He was also the only (true) God – God alone. No rivals. There was none like Him in all the kingdoms of the earth, past, present or future.

The Last reference to the Lord concerns His right to rule and govern over all things including the nations. He alone was Creator, and maker of the heavens and the earth. It is significant that the phrase used here is identical in the Hebrew to that found in Genesis 1:1, where the signs of the definite direct object are used (highlighted in yellow):

← Hebrew reads from the right

אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ
the heavens and the earth

1623 John 15:15.

1624 Isaiah 37:16.

1625 Exodus 25:22; Numbers 7:89; 2Samuel 6:2; 1Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 18:10; 80:1; 99:1.

1626 Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38.

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The purpose of these is to emphasise that the heavens and the earth which we see and experience, both together, are the object of God's creative action.

Well it is instructive to consider these titles and characteristics of God in the light of what Hezekiah was facing. The onslaught of the Assyrians was to be seen in the perspective of God who alone was Lord of armies, (be they friend or foe), and who alone was Creator of all things and so able by right and by power to govern what was to come to pass.

37:17. *Appeal.*

Having worshipped God, and having stated all the *relevant* truths about His status and character, we now move onto the appeal in verse 17. Hezekiah appeals to both the 'ears' and the 'eyes' of the Lord. Can the Lord not hear and see what is happening? The thought is unthinkable. It is not that the Lord cannot see nor hear the events that Hezekiah was facing, and therefore must be roused and called to use His faculties. No! Rather it is that Hezekiah is appealing to the Lord for Him to act knowing that He can in fact see and hear deeper than Hezekiah into this situation. Hezekiah points to these words before him on that letter and notes that these words are a “*reproach to the living God.*”¹⁶²⁷ Here we have another title which directs us to the great contrast between the Lord and all other so-called deities. He alone was “*living*” and the very source of life! Nevertheless these words of the Assyrians were indeed a reproach and a taunt to the living God. What was God going to do about them? Hezekiah does not presume to take things into his own hands and fight for the honour of God. No, he seeks the Lord and asks what He, the Lord of hosts, the Holy One, the Only true God, the Creator of all things, the living God, will do. This is something we need to learn – to come to the Lord and recognise that the difficulty of persecution that we face is actually a reproach towards Him.

37:18,19. *Reality faced.*

Next we find that Hezekiah faces up to the reality of his situation. It was the case that the kings of Assyria had destroyed towns and cities round about Jerusalem and other cities and districts beyond.¹⁶²⁸ The Assyrians were a real threat and could indeed reek havoc. It really is no good when we fail to acknowledge the reality of any situation. Yes God is ultimately in charge, and our enemies do what they do only by permission. Yet it is nevertheless the case that enemies do destroy. Think of

1627 Isaiah 37:17.

1628 Isaiah 37:18.

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all those who suffer tremendous persecution. There are still people in the world who are tortured and killed brutally simply for being Christians or even simply for owning a Bible. The dangers these dear folk face daily are real and cannot be escaped. But Hezekiah in accepting the reality of what Assyria had done, brings this down to the fact that these lands and these other nations had no faith in the real God. They worshipped the work of their own hands – man-made idols – and so it was no surprise that Assyria defeated them.¹⁶²⁹ A right and honest appraisal of the situation is part and parcel of prayer. We need to be careful, though, that we do not simply tell God things about our situation as if He doesn't know! Sometimes it is the case that in and through our prayers we are processing and appraising the situation – that is all well and good – but don't just tell God things!

37:20. Request for help.

Finally Hezekiah comes to his request. In view of what he has been saying (*“Now therefore”*), Hezekiah appeals to the *“Lord our God”* for salvation and deliverance.¹⁶³⁰ Notice that this is an appeal made by the king on behalf of the nation. How vital it is that we have a sense of our corporate existence. Is what we pray for individually an individual thing only, or do we have this sense of being united with other brothers and sisters? I do not mean, for one moment, that we cannot pray for individual things, events, or occasions. What I mean to suggest is the idea that when we pray we have this sense of our being a part of the whole body of true believers. We are not just single ambassadors, even if we are alone in actual fact. We are part of a worldwide group which has representatives in every age (including the future) and also in the heavens. We must remember that we are truly a part of the body of Christ. Notice that Hezekiah does not just request salvation, but salvation *with a purpose*. They (Judah) were still a city on a hill and a light to the nations. Hezekiah requests that salvation would come so that the entire world (*“all the kingdoms of the earth”*) might know that The Lord **alone** is God. When we face difficulties and we cry out to the Lord for help, do we have this aim that God's glory will be vindicated and exalted through our salvation? After all, the Lord is GOOD. What He does is always good. Why then do we not realise that our requests ought not just be simply met, but that in meeting them the Lord is wonderfully glorified? I think perhaps that we do not realise how wonderful and beautiful God really is. There is no pride, nor arrogance, nor bravado, nor anything of that nature in wanting God to be glorified. It is just that He is perfect and absolutely pure. He is holy and true and right. He is good and just. So when we pray

1629 Isaiah 37:19.

1630 Isaiah 37:20.

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let us remember that in seeking for relief, for help, for aid, for deliverance, we ought to desire God's good glory to be seen too.

[b] The Lord responds. (Isaiah 37:21-33).

37:21,22.

Once Hezekiah's prayer had been offered we have a response from God via Isaiah.¹⁶³¹ The intention here is, I believe, that we can see that God has heard and responded the moment Hezekiah finishes his prayer. The prayer Hezekiah offered was, according to the Lord, one *“against Sennacherib king of Assyria.”*¹⁶³² As a result the Lord has a message about Sennacherib for Hezekiah. First the Lord speaks concerning how His people will respond to the king of Assyria and their taunts. The Lord refers to His people here as *“the virgin, the daughter of Zion,”* which speaks of His people as a betrothed bride.¹⁶³³ That is what God's people are – a betrothed bride. What a wonderful truth! The onslaughts of the king of Assyria do not alter this truth that the (real and true) people of God are His bride. Now this bride will come to consider the king of Assyria as an object of ridicule, scorn, and derision. They will shake their heads in contempt and scorn.¹⁶³⁴ Such a response is perhaps, unfitting, for the Christian you may think. However when we come to remember that the Assyrian king is but a type of the antichrist, or the evil one, our indignation ought to be short-lived. The devil, Satan, deserves no respect nor honour. He is a liar, a murderer and a deceiver.¹⁶³⁵

37:23-27.

Next we find an extended piece on how the Lord identifies with His people, so that to reproach them is to do the same to the Lord Himself.¹⁶³⁶ Sennacherib was a boastful and proud king who thought that he had conquered lands by his own prowess.¹⁶³⁷ In verses 24b and 25 we get the personal pronoun indicating the king of Assyria five times, declaring what he personally had done. He did not realise that the Lord had allowed him to do all this for His own (good) purposes. Sennacherib must come to realise that God made this world, (*“I made it, from ancient times ... I*

1631 Isaiah 37:21f.

1632 Isaiah 37:21.

1633 Isaiah 37:22.

1634 Isaiah 37:22.

1635 John 8:44.

1636 Isaiah 37:23.

1637 Isaiah 37:24b,25.

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formed it”), even the places the Assyrian king had decimated, and the Lord had made Sennacherib the one who would bring judgement to pass (*“I have brought it to pass that you should be for crushing fortified cities into heaps of ruins”*).¹⁶³⁸ We are woefully ignorant of true thinking in our day. Do our leaders know or understand that they are but the Lord's servants? The wicked things they do, they do from their own evil hearts. But the actions they are allowed to carry out accomplish all that God intends. Sometimes it is for judgement. Sometimes for deliverance. But all the time the Lord is in charge. Verse 27 depicts the status of all that Sennacherib had conquered. They *“had little power,”* and were simply as *“the grass”* which could easily be overrun. Consequently they were *“dismayed and confounded.”* These descriptions picture the veritable weakness of man not just before a tyrannical despotic ruler such as the king of Assyria, but they show forth the inherent weakness of man in the face of all difficulties. Recall these words of Peter who was referring back to Isaiah 40:6:

*All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away.*¹⁶³⁹

37:28-35.

The Lord then speaks about Sennacherib's own heart and intentions, and how the Lord will deal with this sinful man.¹⁶⁴⁰ Verse 28 is a reminder that God knows all things. He really does know our deep thoughts, our intentions, and our motives. We cannot escape this fact. Psalm 139 gives the same teaching but in the context of a believer's experience. Sennacherib was in a rage against God.¹⁶⁴¹ This is a description of all sinful people who are at war with God. Supremely, though, it depicts Satan's bitter and twisted anger against the great, good, and glorious God. Sennacherib was an angry and a proud man. The word *“tumult,”* has the sense of being at ease in the sense of being arrogant and proud. Now God will turn the king of Assyria back with a hook and a bridle to bring him back to his home.¹⁶⁴² Verse 30 informs us that he will be fine for a short while, but afterwards the people whom he sought to destroy would flourish.¹⁶⁴³

We learn incidentally something about what the Lord will do for Judah. The small band of survivors from Judah (the *“remnant”*) will once again *“take root downward, and bear fruit*

1638 Isaiah 37:26.

1639 1Peter 1:24.

1640 Isaiah 37:28,29.

1641 Isaiah 37:29.

1642 Isaiah 37:29.

1643 Isaiah 37:31,32.

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upward."¹⁶⁴⁴ This is the great thing! The Lord saves and enables those whom He has saved to form a place to dwell and they will bear fruit. It speaks clearly about how we ought to be. We need deep roots which search out the true living waters, (Christ the fountain of living waters), and only then will we bear fruit.¹⁶⁴⁵ Only those who dig deep into Christ and His word truly, will bear fruit. But notice that the confidence that the remnant will indeed come "*out of Jerusalem*" and will certainly "*escape from Mount Zion*" is only on account of the Lord's zeal ("*the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this*").¹⁶⁴⁶ This contrasts starkly with the self-confidence and boasting of the king of Assyria who really did not understand that he was enabled and permitted to succeed in conquest because God was in charge.¹⁶⁴⁷

At the end of the response the Lord speaks in no uncertain terms with respect to the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria will not only not succeed, but further there will not even be any arrow, siege, nor any offensive weapon against the city.¹⁶⁴⁸ The repeated negative statements of verse 33 are stunning in force:

← Hebrew reads from the right

he shall

not come into this city,

nor shoot an arrow there,

nor come before it with shield,

nor build a siege mound against it

לֹא יָבֹוא אֶל-הָעִיר הַזֹּאת

וְלֹא-יֹרֶה שָׁם חֵץ

וְלֹא-יָקֵד מִנֶּה מִגֶּן

וְלֹא-יִשְׁפֹּךְ עָלֶיהָ סִלְלָה

The king of Assyria will return home and will not come to Jerusalem again. In fact he will have to retrace his steps, for "*by the way that he came, by the same shall he return.*"¹⁶⁴⁹ The one who walks in pride will be humbled and will have to take back his words and retrace his steps. God will defend and save the city not for their sakes (although this is the by-product), but for the Lord's sake and for the sake of His servant David's.¹⁶⁵⁰ Here the response from the Lord ends.

1644 Isaiah 37:31.

1645 Jeremiah 2:13.

1646 Isaiah 37:32.

1647 Isaiah 37:24b,25.

1648 Isaiah 37:33.

1649 Isaiah 37:34.

1650 Isaiah 37:35.

[c] The Assyrian king dealt with. (Isaiah 37:36-38).

Isaiah 37 ends with a description of what the Lord did, and what happened to Sennacherib.¹⁶⁵¹ The events surrounding Sennacherib come some twenty years later than the events concerning Jerusalem.

37:26.

The words of Isaiah 37:36 are stark. We read that *“the Angel of the Lord went out”* and destroyed all of the Assyrians so that none were left. This can be none other than the true messenger of God, the pre-incarnate Christ.¹⁶⁵² Remember that the Lord alone has the right to give and take life, for He alone is God. What Hezekiah faced and was deeply concerned with, was dealt with in a moment by the Lord. This is so heart warming. We must remember that the Lord can deal with anything instantly. After all, He created all things in an instant, and the Lord Jesus healed and raised from the dead with a word. Why do we doubt Him? Well, of course, we are not party to all the details of God's plans. We know what has been revealed, but we do not know how things may happen moment-by-moment. The situation we face today may be turned around in an instant, for God is not thwarted by circumstance. However it may be that what we face will not be altered by the Lord and we will have to endure, or go through hardships. Enough is said throughout Scripture for us to recognise this simple fact. What is essential is that we must realise that God is still good, and is still working out His plans for His glory. When some may suffer for their faith, we must remember that none has suffered as Christ has, and in reminding ourselves of His suffering we bring to mind these words from the book of Hebrews:

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, *who for the joy that was set before Him* endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.¹⁶⁵³

It does no good us claiming that because the Lord delivered Jerusalem in such a way that He will always do so. He may do. But He may have a better plan. We ought to follow Hezekiah's example. What He did seems to have been right. In humility he sought the Lord's counsel and brought his prayer and request to the Lord. But the outcome is always the Lord's choice. We may have our

1651 Isaiah 37:36-38.

1652 Recall that Hagar considered the *“Angel of the Lord”* who spoke to her as none other than God. See Genesis 16:10,13.

1653 Hebrews 12:2.

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preferred wish about how the difficulty should be resolved, but we ought really accept the Commander's wisdom and command.

37:38.

Isaiah 37 ends with Sennacherib's death. It is very sad reading. All the boast and arrogance is now gone. His own sons killed him whilst he was worshipping the false idol "*Nisroch.*"¹⁶⁵⁴ This was a true tragedy of historical proportions which, sad to say, has been repeated in many places. After Sennacherib came Esarhaddon who appears to have been another son of the doomed Assyrian king.

¹⁶⁵⁴ Isaiah 37:38.

Chapter 47.

Isaiah 38:1-39:8.

Sickness, recovery and folly.

Textual analysis.

#38 1 In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death.

And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him,

“Thus says the Lord:

‘set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.’”

2 Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord, **3** and said,

“Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done *what is good* in Your sight.”

And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

4 And the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, saying,

5 “Go and tell Hezekiah,

‘Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father:

“I have heard your prayer,

I have seen your tears;

surely I will add to your days fifteen years.

6 I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city.”

7 And *this is* the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing which He has spoken:

8 “Behold, I will bring the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down with the sun on the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward.”

So the sun returned ten degrees on the dial by which it had gone down.

9 This is the writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness:

10 I said,

“in the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of Sheol; I am deprived of the remainder of my years.”

11 I said,

“I shall not see Yah, the Lord in the land of the living; I shall observe man no more among the inhabitants of the world. **12** My life span is gone, taken from me like a shepherd’s tent; I have cut off my life like a weaver. He cuts me off from the loom; from day until night You make an end of me. **13** I have considered until morning — like a lion, so He breaks all my bones; from day until night You make an end of me. **14** Like a crane *or* a swallow, so I chattered; I mourned like a dove; my eyes fail *from looking* upward. O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me!

15 “What shall I say? He has both spoken to me, and He Himself has done *it*. I shall walk carefully all my years in the bitterness of my soul. **16** O Lord, by these *things men* live; and in all these *things is* the life of my spirit; so You will restore me and make me live. **17** Indeed *it was* for *my own* peace *that* I had great bitterness; but You have lovingly *delivered* my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back. **18** For Sheol cannot thank You, death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth. **19** The living, the living man, he shall praise You, as I *do* this day; the father shall make known Your truth to the children.

20 “The Lord *was ready* to save me; therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord.”

Studies in Isaiah.

21 Now Isaiah had said,
“let them take a lump of figs, and apply *it* as a poultice on the boil, and he shall recover.”

22 And Hezekiah had said,
“What *is* the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?”

#39 1 At that time Merodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered.

2 And Hezekiah was pleased with them, and showed them the house of his treasures—
the silver and gold,
the spices and precious ointment,
and all his armoury—
all that was found among his treasures.
There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.

3 Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him,
“what did these men say, and from where did they come to you?”

So Hezekiah said,
“they came to me from a far country, from Babylon.”

4 And he said,
“what have they seen in your house?”

So Hezekiah answered,
“They have seen all that *is* in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.”

5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah,
“hear the word of the Lord of hosts:
6 ‘behold, the days are coming when all that *is* in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,’ says the Lord.
7 ‘And they shall take away *some* of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’”

8 So Hezekiah said to Isaiah,
“the word of the Lord which you have spoken *is* good!”

For he said,
“At least there will be peace and truth in my days.”

General introductory considerations.

We know that Isaiah 38 and 39 come before the details of Isaiah 36 and 37 as far as time is concerned, because of the words of Isaiah 38:6, where the Lord promises deliverance from the Assyrian threat. Now even though the contents of Isaiah 38 and 39 occur before Isaiah 36 and 37, they have been placed at the end of this first part of Isaiah's work for a good reason. The threat of Assyria was current during Isaiah's days but the threat from Babylon was still in the future. It is for this reason that this incident concerning Babylon is placed last in the first section of the book of Isaiah.

In these last two chapters of the first part of the book of Isaiah, we have a record of king Hezekiah's dire sickness, a record of his miraculous recovery, and then a visit from well-wishers who hailed from the Babylonian kingdom. We shall consider what we have in these two chapters using the following divisions:

Studies in Isaiah.

[1] New life for a seriously ill king. (Isaiah 38:1-8).

[2] The personal testimony of Hezekiah. (Isaiah 38:9-22).

[3] Beware of well-wishers. (Isaiah 39:1-8).

[1] New life for a seriously ill king. (Isaiah 38:1-8).

38:1-3.

Thus at some point prior to Assyria's threat, perhaps during the battles for Lachish and other Judean towns, the Lord makes it plain that Hezekiah was about to die.¹⁶⁵⁵ It was not simply a statement of fact as though Isaiah would die some time in the future. Instead what is meant is that Hezekiah would die in the immediate time, very shortly. Hezekiah was obviously seriously ill because he was lying on his bed when he heard the news from Isaiah. We read later of a *“boil”* which Isaiah commands to be treated.¹⁶⁵⁶ The term used simply means an “inflamed” region and may have been cancerous. The Lord tells him to get his *“house in order”* because his case was terminal.¹⁶⁵⁷ How many people have heard those dreadful words as the doctor informs them they are shortly going to die? But this brings us to consider that we all face death and thus we all ought to have things in order. When the king hears the news that his sickness is terminal, he turns away from the prophet and cries out to the Lord.¹⁶⁵⁸ He lays his integrity before the Lord. He had walked before the Lord and had been faithful to Him doing what was right.¹⁶⁵⁹ The Scriptures testify to this fact, for this was, in fact, the summary statement we find describing Hezekiah's reign.¹⁶⁶⁰ Hezekiah was distraught. It may be that he had no heir. Hezekiah died in the year 686 BC. Fifteen years before this takes us to 701 BC which was the date given at the start of Isaiah 36. This would be before Manasseh, his son who would succeed him, was born.¹⁶⁶¹

38:4-8.

Some little time later verse 4 tells us that the Lord brings a word to Isaiah for Hezekiah. We have, in this verse, the expression *“the word of the Lord came”* once again, and it may be that this

1655 Isaiah 38:1.

1656 Isaiah 38:21.

1657 Isaiah 38:1.

1658 Isaiah 38:2.

1659 Isaiah 38:3.

1660 2Kings 18:3; 2Chronicles 31:20,32.

1661 2Kings 21:1 tells us Manasseh was 12 years old when he began to reign, presumably as sole regent, on the death of Hezekiah in 686. This means his birth was in the year 698 BC.

Studies in Isaiah.

was a Christophany.¹⁶⁶² In addressing the king, the Lord reminds Hezekiah that He was *“the God of David your father.”*¹⁶⁶³ Here there is an encouragement to Hezekiah that the line of promise is still active. The Lord had not only *“heard”* the king's pleas, but He had also *“seen”* his tears. The Lord is graciously compassionate and knows His children well. We next read of three things that the Lord would do on hearing Hezekiah's impassioned pleas. First, an extra fifteen years will be given to the king on earth.¹⁶⁶⁴ This promise begins with the word *“surely”* so it is no mere hope but a definite answer to prayer. Second, the Lord promises deliverance from the Assyrian threat.¹⁶⁶⁵ Third, we hear that the Lord Himself will defend the city. And then the Lord adds that He will give a *“sign,”* or a token of His intentions.¹⁶⁶⁶ We get more detail in 2Kings 20 where we find that actually Hezekiah asks for some sign that the Lord would heal him, and the Lord gives him two options.¹⁶⁶⁷ Hezekiah chooses what he thinks to be the more difficult or unlikely option of the shadow going backward by ten degrees.¹⁶⁶⁸ And so the sign is given to seal the word, and at the prayer of Isaiah the prophet, the *“sun returned ten degrees on the dial.”*¹⁶⁶⁹

[2] The personal testimony of Hezekiah. (Isaiah 38:9-22).

38:9.

From verses 9 through to 20 we have what we will call Hezekiah's 'song of thanksgiving.' It is given to us as *“the writing of Hezekiah,”* but the contents speak of worship to the Lord and in verse 20 the king speaks of his *“songs.”*¹⁶⁷⁰ It is important to recognise, however that the healing was not instant. Verses 21 and 22 give the impression of what had happened in the past, but the Hebrew is better understood as following in sequence. In other words the instructions given by Isaiah in verse 21 describe what was to be done not what happened some time earlier. The song of Hezekiah can be split into three parts. First in verses 10 to 14 we have the king's distress expressed. Then in verses 15 to 19 we have an anticipation and trust in future restoration. Finally in verse 20 we have thanksgiving. Verse 9 tells us that Hezekiah wrote the song down after he had recovered.

1662 Isaiah 38:4.

1663 Isaiah 38:5.

1664 Isaiah 38:5.

1665 Isaiah 38:6.

1666 Isaiah 38:7.

1667 2Kings 20:8,9.

1668 2Kings 20:10; Isaiah 38:8.

1669 2Kings 20:11; Isaiah 38:8.

1670 Isaiah 38:9,20.

38:10-14.

In the first part of the song the king expresses his sorrow about dying. He was in the prime of his life and would die too young.¹⁶⁷¹ We know, of course, that our death date is appointed by the Lord, after which follows judgement.¹⁶⁷² But this does not stop us also realising and understanding that death is really an interloper. Yes the wages of sin results in death, but death is the enemy, it is horrible.¹⁶⁷³ Hezekiah is sick, but his sorrow comes because he will not see the Lord and his fellow man in the land of the living.¹⁶⁷⁴ Does this mean that he has no understanding of heaven and the life after death? By no means! Hezekiah was king over Judah, the nation that God had chosen. He is sorrowful because what Judah ought to be, appeared to be about to fall and fail. How could this be? The words he expresses in verses 12 to 14 are ones we all know if we make an honest reflection. Life is so short. It is just like a tent when the moorings are loosed.¹⁶⁷⁵ As quickly as the loom moves or as the weaver operates, so life is gone in a flash.¹⁶⁷⁶ It looks as though Hezekiah was facing an imminent death, so that he was not sure of making morning, because the lion had broken all his bones.¹⁶⁷⁷ Hezekiah was like a chattering bird, a mournful dove, and he was oppressed. He pleads with the Lord to *“undertake”* for him.¹⁶⁷⁸ What else could he do?

38:15,16.

In the next part of the song Hezekiah asks the question: *“what shall I say?”* by which he means how was he to deal with this dreadful news?¹⁶⁷⁹ He recalls the fact that God had *“spoken”* and that it was the Lord Himself who had brought about this turn of events (*“He Himself has done it”*).¹⁶⁸⁰ And so we hear him saying that he would *“walk carefully ... in the bitterness”* of his soul for the remainder of his life. Perhaps here we see his desire to be more circumspect and sober. Then we hear the king saying that it was, in fact, by such things (the word and work of God) that men could *“live,”* and, further, in such words Hezekiah's spirit would continue.¹⁶⁸¹ This was his plea. We live and breathe on account of what God says and does. How many know this? Do we have such

1671 Isaiah 38:10.

1672 Hebrews 9:27.

1673 Romans 6:23; 1Corinthians 15:26.

1674 Isaiah 38:11.

1675 Isaiah 38:12.

1676 Isaiah 38:12.

1677 Isaiah 38:13.

1678 Isaiah 38:14.

1679 Isaiah 38:15.

1680 Isaiah 38:15.

1681 Isaiah 38:16.

Studies in Isaiah.

faith in the Lord's words? Do we consider them to be life and health to us? Here the king focuses on the promise made by the Lord that he would be restored.¹⁶⁸²

Is there a dual sense here in that he speaks of resurrection as well as his extended life span? It seems likely that the main import of these verses is a reference to his extended life. He states that as a result of what the Lord had promised (an extra fifteen years) he would *“walk carefully”* from then on. The expression *“in the bitterness of my soul”* should probably be taken as similar to the expression found in Psalm 23, where the Psalmist speaks of walking *“through the valley of the shadow of death.”*¹⁶⁸³ It is a statement of reality. In this world we may know the joy of the Lord, but we are still in a sin-cursed world. Who cannot be moved by the horrors and evils of this world?

38:17-19.

Next we learn a wonderful truth. It was for Hezekiah's peace that he was brought to such a bitter experience in this sickness.¹⁶⁸⁴ Our sufferings come as medicine from the Lord to bring peace. How we cling to this world! How we mistake the darkness for light! We are brought to sickness and we cry for help from God. It is this which brings us back to Him and to our peace! Hezekiah recognises this, and we too must remember that when illness causes sorrow and bitter feelings these must bring us to our knees. When we confess that God is truly sovereign and that He truly is good and the lover of men, we will understand that what He has allowed has brought us to that wonderful state of peace and trust. This is a difficult path. We naturally think that sickness is all wrong. It is wrong – it is part of this cursed world but will be forever banished in the new heavens and earth.¹⁶⁸⁵ We slavishly and narrow-mindedly consider that a loving Father would heal instantly. But our Father has a much better purpose and plan in store. We cannot enter heaven in the state we are in. We need to be made holy. Sometimes this may be through the pathway of illness and sickness so that in sorrow we rely and seek His help. Only then are we weaned from reliance and trust in this world. How we think that this world is all there is! How we fail in trying to make a permanent home here! We need to be about making treasures in heaven.¹⁶⁸⁶ Oh I do not mean we are foolish and silly not caring at all how we live through our days on this earth. Not at all! But we really need to have a heaven set focus. Imagine you are moving to a new country. Think of all the preparations you make to get ready. Now think of the place you are leaving. Somehow the run-down nature of the house

1682 Isaiah 38:16.

1683 Psalm 23:4.

1684 Isaiah 38:17.

1685 John 16:33; Revelation 21:4.

1686 Matthew 6:19,20; Mark 10:21; Luke 12:33.

Studies in Isaiah.

you are living in doesn't really matter any more because you are anticipating the new home in the new country. Well that illustration is weak. Apologies, but it does serve to point us to consider the mansions Christ has prepared for us! Here we really do not have any continuing city.¹⁶⁸⁷

The Lord had *“lovingly delivered”* Hezekiah *“from the pit of corruption.”*¹⁶⁸⁸ He is speaking of hell, not of mere death. We know this because he goes on to say *“for, You have cast all my sins behind Your back.”*¹⁶⁸⁹ The Lord has forgiven Hezekiah. Propitiation and atonement have been made. God no longer sees Hezekiah's sins, and so Hezekiah is saved and delivered from the pit. Mention of *“Sheol”* in verse 18 must be interpreted along with reference to *“the pit”* in verses 17 and 18. These are not merely descriptions of the grave but a reference to the eternal state of corruption. In such a place the inhabitants cannot even *“hope for the truth,”* for such a place is where the father of lies will reside. Now that Hezekiah was promised deliverance he can continue in praise to God, and, importantly make known God's truth to his children.¹⁶⁹⁰ I wonder how much of this truth Hezekiah imparted to Manasseh? Manasseh was a terribly wicked king!¹⁶⁹¹

38:20-22.

Then next we find that Hezekiah's personal praise turns to a corporate expression of worship (*“we will sing my songs”*).¹⁶⁹² I wonder whether we ever think of taking our personal salvation events and consider turning them into praise songs for all? I sometimes think our expression of life in Christ is somewhat straitened and enforced. Where are the outbursts of praise for what the Lord has done in our lives (personally)? Notice that Hezekiah speaks of praising with instruments for *“all the days”* of their lives.¹⁶⁹³

This section ends with instructions given by Isaiah to deal with the illness. Hezekiah was suffering from something which made boils erupt on his skin. Maybe it was something like the plague or possibly cancer? We cannot be sure. Whatever it was, the poultice made from figs was not the means of healing for the Lord had promised healing already. Notice that Hezekiah's main desire was to know when he would be ready to get back to the house of God from his sick bed.¹⁶⁹⁴ This is why he asks about the sign God was to give.

1687 John 14:1f; Hebrews 13:14.

1688 Isaiah 38:17.

1689 Isaiah 38:17.

1690 Isaiah 38:19.

1691 2Kings 21:1f. We do learn, however, of Manasseh's repentance in 2Chronicles 33:19.

1692 Isaiah 38:20.

1693 Isaiah 38:20.

1694 Isaiah 38:22.

[3] Beware of well-wishers. (Isaiah 39:1-8).

The last chapter in the first part of Isaiah's prophecy concerns the immediate aftermath of Hezekiah's recovery. It is not clear here whether this event occurred before the coming of the king of Assyria, or whether it was after the event. The opening words of the first verse gives the indication that it was pretty soon after Hezekiah's recovery.

39:1.

The opening words inform us of a well-wisher for Hezekiah. We are thus introduced to this character by name and title and these are significant. The well-wisher is none other than the king of Babylon, namely, *“Merodach-Baladan, the son of Baladan.”* The name *“Merodach”* means “your rebellion” and the name *“Baladan,”* means “Bel is Lord.” In this we are brought back to the original rebellion at the tower of Babel. It is necessary to remind the reader at this point that Nimrod's name is very close to Merodach. Although these names may not look the same in English, in Hebrew the two names have three very significant consonants which form the basis of the name and which signify the idea of rebellion, (for Merodach we have **M-R-D-CH** and for Nimrod we have **N-M-R-D**).¹⁶⁹⁵

The king of Babylon sends a letter and presents to Hezekiah. Why does he do this? This is key. It is unthinkable that the king of Babylon would do so without having some political motivation. We read in the second verse that Hezekiah was pleased with the present and letters. One wonders what these may have been? Perhaps they appealed to Hezekiah's flesh. Perhaps they were flattering and in praise of the king of Judah? We must always be wary of flattery.¹⁶⁹⁶ The apostle Paul wrote on one occasion that he was content no matter what circumstances he faced and I think we ought to be so minded too.¹⁶⁹⁷

39:2.

Next we read that Hezekiah has the Babylonian king over for an inspection. Verse 2 moves quickly from the receipt of the present and letters to Hezekiah doing a grand tour of his properties. The expressions in verse 2 leave us in no doubt that Hezekiah was open and free with his tour. We read that Hezekiah *“was pleased with”* his visitors and was keen to show all of his possessions. The details expressed are not exhaustive but representative. He showed them his wealth (*“the silver and*

1695 Genesis 10:8-12; 11:1f.

1696 Job 17:5; Psalm 5:9; 12:2,3; Daniel 11:32.

1697 Philippians 4:11.

Studies in Isaiah.

gold”), his comforts and delicacies (*“the spices and precious ointment”*), and his strength and power (*“and all his armoury”*). That this was indeed a fully comprehensive inspection is shown by the last statement in the list: *“all that was found among his treasures,”* which is then reinforced by the concluding summary which makes the point even more clear, for, *“there was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.”* I wonder if he was thinking of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon?¹⁶⁹⁸ That event was one which showed the glory of Israel under God's rule to a foreign Queen who expressed her appreciation of all the wisdom and greatness that the Lord through Solomon had brought. Hezekiah was not in the same state or position. If this was after the Assyrian threat and deliverance it may be that Hezekiah had become puffed with pride.

39:3,4.

Now the next thing we read is that the prophet Isaiah comes with some questions. Hezekiah does not seem to understand that what he had done was foolish, and his response to Isaiah's questions seems to be wishful thinking. It was as though he thought that these visitors were very far off and so would not pose any threat (*“... from a far country, from Babylon”*).¹⁶⁹⁹ When asked what the Babylonians had seen, Hezekiah does not hold back. Is there still a sense of pride here?¹⁷⁰⁰ The end of verse 4 certainly does seem to indicate some sense of rejoicing and pride, for Hezekiah states unequivocally that there was *“nothing among”* all Hezekiah's *“treasures”* that was not seen and observed by the visitors.

39:5-7.

Following this, the prophet brings *“the word of the Lord of hosts.”* The use of this title highlights the military nature of this situation. It is as though the Commander in chief (*“the Lord of hosts”*), is about to speak. The message of *“the word of the Lord of hosts,”* is frightening.¹⁷⁰¹ Because Hezekiah had shown the Babylonians all his house and treasures, all of these and his sons too would be taken captive.¹⁷⁰² All that was in Hezekiah's house, and all that they had gathered would be taken into captivity. Some of Hezekiah's sons would become eunuchs in the king of Babylon's household. And of course such came to pass in the days of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Such a terrible thing indicates clearly that Hezekiah's motives were less than perfect. He may have

1698 1Kings 10.

1699 Isaiah 39:3.

1700 Isaiah 39:4.

1701 Isaiah 39:5.

1702 Isaiah 39:6,7.

Studies in Isaiah.

been naïve, or perhaps he was getting a bit too proud. The fact is that the consequences described in verses 6 and 7 are the direct outcome of Hezekiah's actions in showing the Babylonians all his treasures.

39:8.

The last words of the chapter in verse 8 may sound like an unthinking thing to say on Hezekiah's part. It is almost as though he did not care what may happen in the distant future because in his days things would be fine. However this does not square with his expression of thanks and his trust in God displayed elsewhere. It rather seems that Hezekiah has been brought to consider that his action in showing the Babylonians all his treasure was foolish, and he is expressing the fact that God's judgement on this was good (*“the word of the Lord ... is good”*).¹⁷⁰³ Furthermore, he expresses belief that for some time there would be *“peace and truth”* in his days. I do not think he is displaying an unthinking attitude but one of trust that for the mean time goodness will be the people of God's lot. It would seem that Hezekiah is really saying that whilst he is alive he would seek to bring God's truth to bear and, in so doing, there would be truth and peace.

¹⁷⁰³ Isaiah 39:8.

Chapter 48.

The second part of Isaiah (40-66).

And so ends the first part of the book of Isaiah. The second part of the book of Isaiah covering the 27 chapters from Isaiah 40 to Isaiah 66, comes to us with no time markers nor temporal references. We have noted that Isaiah opens his work by telling us through which reigns of the kings of Judah he ministered. These were: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.¹⁷⁰⁴ Throughout the first part of Isaiah there are references to these kings. Uzziah's death was mentioned in Isaiah 6:1. Jotham is briefly mentioned as Ahaz's father in Isaiah 7. Ahaz is featured in Isaiah 7, 14 and 38. Hezekiah turns up in Isaiah 36 to 39. But from Isaiah 40 onwards we have no reference to any reigning king. It is perhaps useless to speculate about what happened, but some have suggested that as Manasseh was such a wicked king, Isaiah may have been forced into the background and continued his ministry in secret or, perhaps, by writing. It seems that there was a withdrawal from public position at the time of Ahaz as indicated by Isaiah's words in chapter 8:

16 Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. 17 And I will wait on the Lord, who hides His face from the house of Jacob; and I will hope in Him. 18 Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion.¹⁷⁰⁵

However even though the second part of Isaiah appears to be distinct from the first, there are sound reasons to believe that it is all from the same prophet Isaiah. Not least amongst the proofs of the unity of the book having one human penman is the frequent use of the phrase the "*Holy One of Israel,*" which although not exclusive to Isaiah is only used a few times elsewhere. Thus we find this phrase, once in 2Kings, three times in the book of Psalms, twice in Jeremiah, and twenty-five times in Isaiah, (12 times in Isaiah 1 to 39 and 13 times in Isaiah 40 to 66).¹⁷⁰⁶

Now as far as the second part of Isaiah is concerned we find that it can be sub-divided into

1704 Isaiah 1:1.

1705 Isaiah 8:16-18.

1706 2Kings 19:22; Psalm 71:22; 78:41; 89:19; Isaiah 1:4; 5:19,24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11,12,15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14,16,20; 43:3,14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9,14; Jeremiah 50:29; 51:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

three sections, each of which ends with some reference to a lack of peace for the wicked.¹⁷⁰⁷ The first part covers chapters 40 to 48, the second from chapters 49 to 57 and the last from chapter 58 to 66.

In the first section which runs from Isaiah 40:1 to 48:22 we have a series of references which appeal to the Creator God in opposition to false idols. What is particularly interesting in this section is the clear references to Genesis as shown in table 48.1. Eight times we read the phrase *“from the beginning”* and the clear teaching spelt out is that God has not been silent but has openly and publicly spoken from the very beginning of time. To whom was He speaking? Genesis 1 and 2 make this plain as Adam was involved in the creation of Woman, so that God's revelation of Himself started the moment He created all things. He has spoken openly and publicly to man ever since. The beginning (a point in time contrary to John Sailhammer) is concomitant with mankind being extant.¹⁷⁰⁸ These first nine chapters of the second part of Isaiah speak of the first man's sin, of a time before *“the day”* being formed, of the making of *“light,”* of man being formed of clay and having the breath of life, amongst other things. The implication is very clear. God through Isaiah wanted the Israelites to know without any doubt that He created all things and that the account in Genesis is true and accurate history.

In the second set of nine chapters (Isaiah 49 to 57) we continue with more about the *“Servant of the Lord.”* The pinnacle to the whole book of Isaiah must surely be that section which runs from the end of chapter 52 through to the end of chapter 53 showing forth the great atoning work of the Lord. Immediately following this high point we get a series of chapters which apply this work. First we get the song of the barren woman who will bring forth more than the married showing forth the greater fruit as a result. Then comes the wonderful chapter of gospel call *“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come ...”* We also learn that the foreigner and eunuchs are to be included in God's family, and that repentance is essential.

In the last nine chapters (Isaiah 58 to 66) We see more application of the gospel to the church in the last days, including the true nature of faith and fasting, the call of the Gentile nations to come, and the wonderful building up of the church of God. We also see the Victor's success over Edom (the flesh) and the section concludes with a prayer from the prophet answered in detail by the Lord.

1707 Isaiah 48:22; 57:21. Although the last verse (Isaiah 66:24) does not have the same form of words, the idea of the wicked having no peace is more forcefully described.

1708 **John H. Sailhammer.** *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account.* 1996. Multnomah Press. Sailhammer contends (erroneously) that the phrase *“in the beginning”* of Genesis 1:1 speaks of an extended time.

Studies in Isaiah.

Table 48.1: “Beginning” in Isaiah.

Isaiah	Text (NKJV)	Comment
40:21	Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?	God has spoken from the beginning.
41:4	Who has performed and done <i>it</i> , calling the generations from the beginning ? ‘I, the Lord, am the first; and with the last I <i>am</i> He.’	Reference to “ <i>generations.</i> ” The Hebrew word is: דֹּר דֹּר.
44:26	Who has declared from the beginning , that we may know? And former times, that we may say, ‘ <i>He is</i> righteous’? Surely <i>there is</i> no one who shows, surely <i>there is</i> no one who declares, surely <i>there is</i> no one who hears your words.	God has spoken from the beginning.
42:5	Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it.	A reference to the breath of life – see Genesis 2:7.
43:13	Indeed before the day <i>was</i> , I <i>am</i> He; and <i>there is</i> no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?”	“ <i>Before the day,</i> ” points to a time before the six days of Genesis 1.
43:27	Your first father sinned, and your mediators have transgressed against Me.	Reference to Adam. The word “ <i>first</i> ” is derived from the word for “beginning.”
45:7	I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these <i>things</i> .’	Reference to creation of light and separation from darkness.
45:9	Woe to him who strives with his Maker! <i>Let</i> the potsherd <i>strive</i> with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ Or shall your handiwork <i>say</i> , ‘He has no hands’?	Reference to man made from clay and to God as a Potter.
45:12	I have made the earth, and created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded.	God made the earth and then created man on it.
45:18,19	For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: “I <i>am</i> the Lord, and <i>there is</i> no other. 19 I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth; I did not say to the seed of Jacob, ‘Seek Me in vain’; I, the Lord, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.	God made the world “ <i>good</i> ” not to be left “ <i>in vain.</i> ” He formed it to be inhabited (not left a waste for long ages). He has spoken openly and publicly.
46:10	Declaring the end from the beginning , and from ancient times <i>things</i> that are not <i>yet</i> done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,’	What is to come (“ <i>the end</i> ”) has been declared “ <i>from the beginning.</i> ”
48:3	I have declared the former things from the beginning ; they went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did <i>them</i> , and they came to pass.	Reference to instantaneous creation – that which was spoken was done (“ <i>and it was so</i> ”)
48:5	Even from the beginning I have declared <i>it</i> to you; before it came to pass I proclaimed <i>it</i> to you, lest you should say, ‘My idol has done them, and my carved image and my moulded image have commanded them.’	God has spoken from the beginning.
48:7	They are created now and not from the beginning ; and before this day you have not heard them, lest you should say, ‘of course I knew them.’	Reference to what was done “ <i>from the beginning.</i> ”
48:12,13	12 Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel, My called: I <i>am</i> He, I <i>am</i> the First, I <i>am</i> also the Last. 13 Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has stretched out the heavens; <i>when</i> I call to them, they stand up together.	God laid “ <i>the foundation of the earth.</i> ”
48:16	Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning ; from the time that it was, I <i>was</i> there. And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me.	The second person of the Trinity speaks – He has spoken openly “ <i>from the beginning.</i> ”

Chapter 49.

Isaiah 40:1-31.

Behold your God – there is none like Him!

Textual analysis.

- 1 “Comfort, yes, comfort My people!”
Says your **God**.
- 2 “Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and
cry out to her,
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned;
for she has received from the **Lord**’s hand double for all her sins.”
- 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
“prepare the way of the **Lord**;
make straight in the desert a highway for our **God**.
- 4 Every valley shall be exalted
and every mountain and hill brought low;
the crooked places shall be made straight
and the rough places smooth;
- 5 The glory of the **Lord** shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see *it* together;
for the mouth of the **Lord** has spoken.”
- 6 The voice said,
“cry out!”
And he said,
“What shall I cry?”
“All flesh *is* grass,
and all its loveliness *is* like the flower of the field.
- 7 The grass withers,
the flower fades,
because the breath of the **Lord** blows upon it;
Surely the people *are* grass.
- 8 The grass withers,
the flower fades,
but the word of our **God** stands forever.”
- 9 O Zion,
you who bring **good tidings**,
get up into the high mountain;
- O Jerusalem,
you who bring **good tidings**,
lift up your voice with strength,
lift *it* up,
be not afraid;
say to the cities of Judah,
“behold your **God**!”

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10 Behold,
the **Lord God** shall come with a strong *hand*, and His arm shall rule for Him;
behold,
His reward *is* with Him,
and His work before Him.
11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd;
He will
gather the lambs with His arm,
and carry *them* in His bosom,
and gently lead those who are with young.

12 Who has
measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,
measured heaven with a span
and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure?
Weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?

13 Who has
directed the Spirit of the **Lord**,
or *as* His counsellor has taught Him?

14 With whom did He take counsel,
and *who*
instructed Him,
and taught Him in the path of justice?

Who
taught Him knowledge,
and showed Him the way of understanding?

15 Behold,
the nations *are* as a drop in a bucket,
and are counted as the small dust on the scales;

look,
He lifts up the isles as a very little thing.
16 And Lebanon *is* not sufficient to burn,
nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering.
17 All nations before Him *are* as nothing,
and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.

18 To whom then will you liken **God**?

Or what likeness will you compare to Him?

19 The workman moulds an image,
the goldsmith overspreads it with gold,
and the silversmith casts silver chains.

20 Whoever *is* too impoverished for *such* a contribution chooses a tree *that* will not rot;
he seeks for himself a skilful workman to prepare a carved image *that* will not totter.

21 Have you not known? Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

22 *It is* He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants *are* like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.

23 He brings the princes to nothing;
He makes the judges of the earth useless.

24 Scarcely shall they be planted,
scarcely shall they be sown,
scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth,
when He will also blow on them, and they will wither, and the whirlwind will take them away like stubble.

25 “To whom then will you liken **Me**,

or to *whom* shall I be equal?” says the Holy One.

Studies in Isaiah.

26 Lift up your eyes on high,
and see who has created these *things*,
Who brings out their host by number;
He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of *His* power; not one is missing.

27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel:

“my way is hidden from the **Lord**, and my just claim is passed over by my **God**”?

28 **Have you not known? Have you not heard?**

The everlasting **God**, the **Lord**, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary.
His understanding is unsearchable.

29 He gives power to the weak,
and to *those who have* no might He increases strength.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall,

31 but those who wait on the **Lord** shall renew *their* strength;

they shall mount up with wings like eagles,

they shall run and not be weary,

they shall walk and not faint.

General introductory thoughts.

In this second half of the book of Isaiah we are given a veritable feast of truth and goodness from the Lord. Having ended the first half on a prophecy concerning future exile, we come here in Isaiah 40 to a note of comfort. We have come across this word “*comfort*” twice already. Once given positively in the wonderful hymn of praise in Isaiah 12, and then once in a negative context in Isaiah 22. In this second half of Isaiah we have this word “*comfort*” 14 times.¹⁷⁰⁹ This difference indicates a change in intent. We must remember that always the Lord brings His whole counsel to bear, so that all the truths from sin and judgement, to grace, mercy and salvation are present throughout the book. However in the first part we saw an emphasis on judgement for sin. Here in the second part judgement is not excluded but there is a greater focus on comfort.

Isaiah 40 can be split into two unequal sections which sandwich a focal point that forms the highlight of the chapter. In the first part (up to verse 9) we have the preparation for the Lord's coming previewed by “*the voice of one crying in the wilderness.*” The second section (from verse 12 to 31) contains a series of questions framed around the theme of God's unique and incomparable nature. In between these two parts (verses 10 and 11) we have the announcement of God's arrival. The three sections can be described as follows:

[1] Comfort! Cry out! (Isaiah 40:1-9). [Preparation for the Lord's coming].

[a] Comfort! (Isaiah 40:1,2).

[b] The voice crying out! (Isaiah 40:3-9).

The voice.

1709 Isaiah 40:1(x2); 49:13; 51:3(x2),12,19; 52:9; 54:11; 57:6; 61:2; 66:13(x3).

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[2] Behold the Lord God shall come. (Isaiah 40:10,11). [The Lord incarnate].

[3] Michael! Whom is like God? (Isaiah 40:12-31). [God's great questions].

[a] Who has? (Isaiah 40:12-17).

[b] To whom will the pagan nations liken God? (Isaiah 40:18-24).

[c] To whom will Israel/Jacob liken God? (Isaiah 40:25-31).

[1] Comfort! Cry out! (Isaiah 40:1-9).

This first section opens with words of comfort in verses 1 and 2, and closes with an announcement that the Lord God is about to come in verse 9 (*“behold your God”*!). In the middle we have reference to the voice crying in the wilderness.

[a] Comfort! (Isaiah 40:1,2).

40:1,2.

Three times in our English translation we read the word *“comfort”* in these first two verses. Wherever we see things given three times we are alerted to consider that the Trinity is involved. God always works in concert. That is, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all working together in union to bring the eternal plans to pass. Now the word *“comfort”* is given twice in verse 1 and these are the same word in Hebrew, but the Hebrew word used in verse 2 is different and this is significant. The first word used twice in verse 1 signifies the idea of exercising pity or consolation. The other word found in verse 2 is more often translated “heart.” Thus the idea of comfort is continued but this is not a mere superficial comfort, for these words are addressed to the heart, or inner being.

The doubling of the word *“comfort”* in verse 1 suggests that this will be an absolute certainty. This is similar to the Lord's use of the phrase *“verily, verily ...”* which gives the idea that what is about to be said is absolute and must not be doubted. The opening two verbs are Hebrew Piel imperatives which indicates intensive action. Thus it is not just comfort that is indicated here, but deep, abundant, and superlative comfort that is implied. The repetition of the word, and this intensive imperative force is remarkable. The Lord only needs to utter a word for things to be done.¹⁷¹⁰ But here the intensive and forceful nature of these commands serves to show that what is commanded will definitely happen, and it is given in such a way to encourage those who were the

¹⁷¹⁰ Psalm 33:6,9; Isaiah 55:10,11.

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recipients of this comfort.

The objects of this forceful command are *“My people.”* Here we have a further word of encouragement. The Lord has not abandoned those who trust in Him. They are still ones who belong to God. In verse 2 the focus is on Jerusalem which, in Isaiah, was the centre for the people of God. The opening verb of verse 2 rendered *“comfort”* is, again, a Piel imperative in Hebrew. Literally verse 2 can be rendered: “speak to the heart of Jerusalem,” or, perhaps better as, “declare (emphatically) over the heart of Jerusalem.” The next sentence which begins with *“and cry out to her”* gives two definitive statements and a reason. First, Jerusalem has fully experienced all the warfare that she needs to so that *“her warfare is ended,”* and second, her sins have been paid off and so have been *“pardoned.”* The reason given is that the city had received *“double for all her sins”* from the hand of the Lord. This does not mean that she has paid twice for her sins. It simply means that all required has been paid in full. In the book of the law the thief must pay back double for his theft.¹⁷¹¹ Hence because Israel had effectively stolen from the Lord – by taking their lives for themselves – they must repay double. But the intention of this is not that they pay more than required, but that they pay that which is certainly required with no loss. How, then is it that this payment has been made? Well here, and for the moment, we are not told but Isaiah leaves us in no doubt in other places!

[b] The voice crying out! (Isaiah 40:3-9).

Now that we have been informed that the time has come for the people, (i.e. Jerusalem), to receive full and abundant comfort, we learn that there must first come the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Before we make further comments we need to clarify a point of identity.

The voice.

There is a little confusion here over whom is speaking and whom is identified as *“the voice,”* in verses 3 and 6. In verse 3 we have *“the voice”* calling out instructions, which are given from the rest of verse 3 to verse 5. Then in verse 6 we have *“the voice”* saying *“cry out”* and then another person responding *“what shall I cry?”* So the question is: whom is this *“the voice”* of verse 6? Is it the Lord, or is it the one who prepares the way? It would seem that the New Testament writers identify the voice of verse 3 as John the Baptist.¹⁷¹² It would follow that the one speaking in

1711 Exodus 22:4,7,9

1712 Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3.

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verse 6 must be the Lord, for it would be odd for the messenger to issue such a call, which really sits better as coming from the mouth of God.

The confusion appears in the NKJV because both verse 3 and 6 have this phrase “*the voice*,” which in English would naturally be assumed to refer to the same person.¹⁷¹³ The Hebrew for verses 3 and 6 is literally:

verse 3:	A voice/report/sound	crying	
verse 6:	A voice/report/sound	saying	cry out

There is no definite article so “*the voice*” is, strictly speaking, incorrect. The first word in verses 3 and 6 is identical. The choice of “*voice*” rather than “report,” or “sound,” is probably made on the basis of the verbs following. Reports or sounds cannot be said to be “crying” or “saying.” The construction is meant to alert us to a parallel, but this does not mean that the “*voice*” in each case is identical. In verse 3 we have a voice calling out instructions. In verse 6 we have a *different* voice saying (to someone) “*cry out!*” The one responding to this command would then, naturally, be the “*voice*” of verse 3.

40:3-5.

Thus in verses 3 to 5 we have a “*voice of one crying in the wilderness.*” As we have noted this is connected to John the Baptist by Matthew and Mark. This is fitting, for John the Baptist was one who inhabited the wilderness and who preached to the masses calling, or crying out. What then was he proclaiming? We are given eight statements in four sets of two, which are shown below:

prepare the way of the Lord (v3).
make straight in the desert a highway for our God (v3).

every valley shall be exalted and (v4).
every mountain and hill brought low (v4).

the crooked places shall be made straight (v4).
and the rough places smooth (v4).

the glory of the Lord shall be revealed (v5).
and all flesh shall see it together (v5).

¹⁷¹³ Most other translations give a very similar rendition.

Studies in Isaiah.

First of all, then, a road or pathway must be made for the Lord to make His entrance. The pathway is defined as *“the way of the Lord,”* and as *“a highway for our God.”*¹⁷¹⁴ The theme of a pathway or a highway is a frequent one in Scripture. It is *“the way of the Lord,”* or the way and path that He takes, which is being prepared.¹⁷¹⁵ Here we are brought to consider the Lord as an example of what it is to live in the world, as well as the entrance or pathway to be trodden by Him. It is also *“a highway for our God,”* and this brings us to consider the theme of holiness, for in Isaiah 35 we have already been introduced to *“the Highway of Holiness.”*¹⁷¹⁶ Thus our thoughts are directed to a scheme which will provide the means by which holiness will prevail amongst men. This pathway which will allow the entrance and route for God to appear, is to be *“prepared”* and to be made *“straight”* in the desert.¹⁷¹⁷ The first word given as *“prepared”* comes from the Hebrew word “to turn.” It is a Piel imperative and so indicates the idea of “causing to depart,” and so is rendered as “to remove/take out of the way,” or “to clear (from confusion or mess).” Thus the preparation is one which involves moving obstacles and boulders out of the way. The second word given as *“straight”* has the sense of making “upright” or “right.”¹⁷¹⁸ And so we have the idea of removing rubble and debris, and then of levelling the surface to make a smooth pathway. Spiritually it amounts to removing obstacles, errors, wrong thoughts, and then supplying godly and upright ones in their place.

Second we are brought to consider how this road will be constructed. It requires that all the valleys are to be raised and the mountains levelled.¹⁷¹⁹ We have already come across the notion of pride being represented as a mountain in Isaiah 2:14, so here we are being taught that the proud must be brought low, whilst the downcast and the lowly will be brought up.

Third we are told that the *“crooked”* and *“rough”* places will be corrected.¹⁷²⁰ The first term indicates deceitfulness or fraud, whilst the second suggests a very tight or tricky path such as a mountain ridge that binds summits together, or, in other words, a dangerous or treacherous pathway. How the world makes life difficult! We walk amongst deceitfulness and treachery! It is a truism to point to the fact that many a city harbours vice and sin alongside places you dare not travel alone or by night for fear of being mugged or worse. We may be lucky to avoid such places, but then all life is brushed by the horrors of deceit and danger. The crooked places will be made straight or upright

1714 Isaiah 40:3.
1715 Isaiah 40:3.
1716 Isaiah 35:8.
1717 Isaiah 40:3.
1718 Isaiah 40:3.
1719 Isaiah 40:4.
1720 Isaiah 40:4.

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and true, whilst the rough places will be made into a valley (i.e. safe).

Fourthly we find that the Lord Himself will appear, or, to be more exact, the “*glory of the Lord*” shall be shown openly so that everyone will see it.¹⁷²¹ We cannot but think of the Lord Jesus here as the incarnate Son of God. But further we also have a faint reflection of the second coming as well. It was not possible on Christ's first appearance that everyone could see Him, but (somehow) when He returns we know that all will indeed see Him.

The section ends with a statement giving certainty to what has been revealed for we read that “*the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*”¹⁷²² This one who calls out and cries out in the wilderness is not speaking from his own mind and heart, for what he speaks comes directly from the very mouth of the Lord. When God speaks we had better pay attention, for His word is final, and His word is perfect.

40:6-8.

In the next part, from verses 6 to 8, we have a conversation. First, in verse 6, we have a voice saying, or commanding, or giving the order, for another to “*cry out!*” As we have already noted it seems best to suggest that the Lord is the one issuing this command. Then next we find that one styled as “*he*” replies with a question as to what should be the content of this proclamation. We understand that this “*he*” is the original “*voice*” from verse 3 crying in the wilderness. It may seem odd to our thinking that this call by the Lord to “*the voice*” (of verse 3) made in verse 6 comes after the initial proclamations made from verses 3 to 6. However we note that Isaiah's call to ministry does not come until Isaiah 6. Then further we note that the opening declarations from verses 3 to 6 are general, whilst the instructions in verses 6 to 8 are particular. What then does the Lord respond to the “*voice*” who asks what shall he cry out? Essentially we find that the message centres on the nature of the people in contrast to the word of God. People are transitory. They are likened to grass and flowers which are here today but gone tomorrow.¹⁷²³ Flowers and grass once established do not last long. They both wither and fade. Isn't this like human life? How quickly it goes! The import of this message is that we had better listen carefully because we might not be here tomorrow! In amazing contrast we note that the word of God “*stands forever.*”¹⁷²⁴ Now is this phrase referring to Scripture or is it referring to the Lord whom John calls “*the Word of God*”?¹⁷²⁵ It may be natural to

1721 Isaiah 40:5.
1722 Isaiah 40:5.
1723 Isaiah 40:6.
1724 Isaiah 40:8.
1725 John 1:1,14.

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conclude that the phrase merely refers to what the Lord has spoken – the word of God – the Bible. However we have just been informed in verse 5 that the “*glory of the Lord*” will be revealed, so the Lord Himself is also very much in view here. The word given as “*stands*” in the NKJV is the Hebrew word which has often been translated as “*arise*” which speaks of the language of resurrection. Young's Literal Translation opts for such a word:

Withered hath grass, faded the flower, But a word of our God riseth for ever.¹⁷²⁶

The Hebrew phrase is as follows:

← Hebrew reads from the right

וְדָבָר - אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִקוּם לְעוֹלָם

and/now/but the word of our God he stands/rises to/for forever

The verb is actually in the third person masculine singular. The subject is “*the word of our God*” and so the clear implication is that this is a person. It is more natural to speak of a person standing or arising than a word or a message. It is, perhaps, best to have both ideas in view. The Word of God (the incarnate Son) is exclusively revealed faithfully in the word of God (the Bible).

It is worth adding here that the apostle Peter in quoting Isaiah 40:6-8 in his first letter clearly indicates a connection between the Lord and the word (written).¹⁷²⁷ At the end of the first chapter Peter seeks to encourage love for the brethren on the foundation of the new birth. He states that believers have been born again “*not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever*” and then he quotes Isaiah 40:6-8.¹⁷²⁸ It may be thought that his statement concerning new birth from a pure “*seed*” is simply a device or metaphor, but I rather think he has Genesis 3:15 in view which talks of the promised “*Seed*” of the woman, i.e. Christ.¹⁷²⁹ Believers are born from Christ and His glorious work. We are united to Christ. Peter then goes on to say that the gospel preached to the believers is “*the word,*” and then after calling for a laying aside of various sinful attitudes he presses his readers to “*desire the pure milk of the word*” in order to

1726 Isaiah 40:8, YLT.

1727 1Peter 1:22-2:4.

1728 1Peter 1:22-25.

1729 1Peter 1:23; Genesis 3:15. See also Genesis 12:7 & Galatians 3:16.

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grow.¹⁷³⁰ What is significant, however, is that he then adds these words: *“if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious,”* which statement clearly equates the concept of the *“word”* with the Lord Himself.¹⁷³¹ We were *“born again ... through the word of God”* by the gospel which was preached, because the word of the Lord God *“lives and abides forever”* and also *“endures forever”*¹⁷³² Peter then continues the theme of drawing from Christ but changes tack and speaks of *“coming to Him as to a living stone.”*¹⁷³³ Thus all of these statements formed around the quote from Isaiah 40:6-8 in Peter's first letter force us to see that the word of God is none other than Christ Himself who is beautifully declared in the Scriptures (the written word of God).

40:9.

This opening section, which focuses on the voice that cries in the wilderness, concludes in verse 9 with a command to announce the coming of the very soon coming king. Here it is not *“the voice”* of verses 3 and 6, but *“Zion”* and *“Jerusalem,”* which stand for all the true people of God. Notice how Zion and Jerusalem are referred to here. Both are described as *“you who brings good tidings.”* This is tremendous. The essential purpose and task of the people of God is to *“bring good tidings.”* The Hebrew word has the flavour of “beauty,” and “joy.” Now Zion and Jerusalem are to go and site themselves on *“the high mountain.”* This indicates the place where God is, as Isaiah 2:2 makes clear, and it also indicates a place where they may be seen and heard. Zion and Jerusalem, (the people of God), must declare the great good tidings, both from the very presence of God and from a vantage point which is clearly visible. I am reminded that Wisdom makes a public declaration in the open square and at the crossroads.¹⁷³⁴ We are thereby exhorted to declare the great good news from the perspective of God, and from a place of visibility. We are not to preach our own ideas or gimmicks gathered from the latest fashion promoted by the world. And we are not to keep the good news to ourselves and our favoured few in a holy huddle. We are to make known the gospel of God widely and openly for all to hear and see.¹⁷³⁵

Then at the end of verse 9 we have further instruction. The people of God are to speak up loudly *“with strength,”* and are to be unafraid. Where are they to get such strength, and how will they not fear? Well the answer lies in the fact that what they are to declare to the *“cities of Judah,”*

1730 1Peter 1:25-2:2.

1731 1Peter 2:3.

1732 1Peter 1:23,25.

1733 1Peter 2:4.

1734 Proverbs 8:2,3.

1735 Romans 1:1; 15:16; 2Corinthians 11:7; 1Thessalonians 2:2,8,9; 1Timothy 1:11; 1Peter 4:17.

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which had been overrun by the Assyrians, was that God was coming imminently: *“behold your God.”* Why isn't this to the entire world? Well perhaps at this time because the nation had shrunk significantly and because the cities in Judah were being overrun, the cry is to them first that God was on His way. It would appear from this that we are meant to cry out in the same way to all around us, *“behold your God”* as we proclaim the gospel.

[2] Behold the Lord God shall come. (Isaiah 40:10,11).

40:10,11.

Sandwiched in the centre of the chapter we have the announcement of the coming of the Lord in verses 10 and 11. These verses form the essential highlight of the whole chapter. We have been alerted to this announcement already in verse 9, for Zion and Jerusalem were to declare the coming of the Lord (*“behold your God”*). Now we read again similar words: *“behold the Lord God shall come ...”* We are informed that this God will come in strength and will rule. His hand and His arm indicate the actions He will perform. The Lord is not simply a king in word but also in deed too. At the end of verse 10 we read further that He will bring a *“reward”* and He has a *“work.”* Both words signify the idea of work which is paid or gives wages. It is as though He has been given His wages for the work He is about to perform. Clearly we are referring to the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. He came with the wages the Father had given Him to complete the work He would do that He would earn those wages by. He accomplished salvation and redemption on the cross and His reward, or wages, were those whom the Father had given Him, namely all those who put their faith in Him. This thought is enhanced by what we read in verse 11. He comes as a shepherd. He comes to feed His flock, to gather and to carry the new-born lambs, and to lead all those who have become a part of His flock. This is a marvellous picture of His work. He has gathered His flock and will bring them safe home! It is instructive to highlight the work He has done (and is still doing) by looking closely at the verbs used here.

feed

gather

carry

gently lead

Studies in Isaiah.

The Lord sustains us! He brings meat and drink to us. Not just physical drink and food, but the real food which brings meaning and purpose to life. His wonderful heart is always out-going and so He gathers. Isn't this what we see in the New Testament accounts of the Saviour? How we fail in this respect! If we are of His family we ought to be like Him and gather people. Then wonderfully the Lord carries us. How we need Him daily for all things! How could we survive without the Lord lifting us up onto His shoulders as our great High Priest?¹⁷³⁶ Why is it that many seek to be carried by other things, like psychology or modern science or? The Lord has not left us but He leads! He lead the children of Israel in the wilderness by the pillar of fire by night and cloud by day. He lead His disciples as He walked in Palestine. He has lead His people at all times in all places. He will lead us too! He will lead us home to be with Him forever. It is, perhaps, significant that whilst the Lord feeds, gathers and carries all, He seems only to *“lead”* the ones *“who are with young.”* It is those who have borne young or who have gathered in new-born ones that will be lead by the Lord. How this teaches us the vital importance of seeking the lost and gathering the flock.

[3] Michael! Whom is like God? (Isaiah 40:12-31).

The second main section of Isaiah 40 seems to focus on the people of Isaiah's time. In the first part we have noted that the Lord had announced that comfort was coming because the Lord Himself was on the way: *“behold your God.”* Now in this second part we have a very strong teaching given on the vital importance of understanding whom God really is. Who is the God we are to *“behold”*?

We can divide the passage up into three sections as follows:

[a] Who has?	(verses 12 to 17).
[b] To whom will the pagan nations liken God?	(verses 18 to 24).
[c] To whom will Israel/Jacob liken God?	(verses 25 to 31).

[a] Who has? (Isaiah 40:12-17).

Have you ever wondered what God is really like? We have wonderful revelation of Him all throughout Scripture, but here we are brought to consider Him through a series of questions followed by a series of statements made by way of contrast with the nations. The questions essentially ask: who is like God? In verse 12 the focus is on God as Creator. In verses 13 to 14 the

¹⁷³⁶ Exodus 28:12; Isaiah 9:6; Hebrews 4:15.

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main theme is wisdom and knowledge – a question of epistemology. Verses 15 to 17 make some comparisons between God and the nations.

40:12.

We begin with a question concerning creation. Verse 12 contains a number of verbs all concerning measurement of the universe as follows:

measured	– to stretch out or extend (i.e. so as to measure).
measured ... span	– to level off, hence to weigh ... a unit of measure.
calculated a measure	– to measure by containing ... a stated measurement.
weighed ... scales ... balance	– to weigh ... balance/equilibrium ... scales/balance.

You may be thinking: haven't scientists measured the universe? Don't we know these days how big it is and how far away the stars are? Don't we now know all about the stuff the universe is made from and how much there is? But in truth modern science doesn't know the measurements really. We think we know, but our knowledge is dependent on our theories and these will undoubtedly change.¹⁷³⁷ Now the essence of verse 12 goes deeper than merely measuring aspects of the universe. In these words the question isn't: who has measured the universe? But rather it is: who has been able to stand apart from the universe and measure it completely and *objectively*? We are extremely tiny and we are so proud to think that we have measured the universe. But God is the (only) One who can say that He has held the waters in His hand and determined their precise mass and dimensions. Of course the answer really is that no one has ever got anywhere near these measurements, except God. To Him such measurements are trivial. How vital it is to get this aspect of creation across to people today! God created all things and so the contents, the physical parameters, and whatever measurements anyone may care to request are all in God's mind. He knows all things from beginning to end. The types of measurements we may care to make are as nothing to Him, but what about those measurements He knows about of which we have no understanding? I wonder if you have ever thought of that? We tend to think in very physical terms. We may want to know how much the universe weighs or how much distance it crosses, but what of other factors or characteristics about the universe of which we have absolutely no cognizance? These are all known unto the Lord!

¹⁷³⁷ For more on this subject the reader is referred to my book: *Sin, Science, and Salvation*, which can be requested free by sending an email to: thedoc.mike@gmail.com.

40:13,14.

From verse 13 to verse 14 we have questions concerning God's knowledge and wisdom. The first question in this section uses a verb which we have come across already. The Hebrew word of verse 13 we have translated as *"directed"* was translated in verse 12 as *"measured"* (in connection with the heavens). Here in verse 13 the idea seems to be: who has stretched the Lord or put Him under examination? In the remainder of verse 13 the question asks: who has taught the Lord? These thoughts are ridiculous, hilarious even. Who would deign to direct, or teach, or test and examine God? And yet this is exactly what people do! They hold God to account for their perceived (and preconceived) ideas of what they think is going on! Ridiculous.

In verse 14 the question asked is: who acted as advisor to God? Who was God's mentor? Again the notion behind these questions is folly. The various words used for teaching or instruction point us to the concept of schooling or tutoring. We may paraphrase these in the following ways: where did God go to school? How does He know what is right or true? The world, of course, has its own view of counsel (advice), justice, knowledge, and understanding. Having these as its own standard it often calls Christians and thereby the Lord Himself to account. Such thinking is wholly nonsensical, of course. God is God. He alone knows what is true and right. He created all things and therefore all things must start and end with Him. To ask these questions with any seriousness is to display sheer folly, and yet this is what man has come to! The asking of these questions is meant to make the reader laugh! And yet modern man still asks such foolish questions as: who made God? They ask this all the while they hold to some other universal and absolute truth, be it modern science or whatever. We must conclude that God is the source of all knowledge, justice, truth, advice and understanding. As the apostle Paul puts it concerning Christ:

*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*¹⁷³⁸

Why then do we ever dream of going anywhere else for these things? God knows all things. God's advice is not just superb, it is final and authoritative.

40:15-17.

In the last part of this opening teaching about God in verses 15 to 17, we have the contrast made between God and the nations. The nations are but *"a drop in a bucket"* and must be

¹⁷³⁸ Colossians 2:3.

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considered as simply *“the small dust on scales.”* Both phrases mean simply, insignificant, or not worth bothering about. The nations, (collectively mind you and not as individual nations), are but the ninth decimal place figure in some unimaginably large number. Say, for example, we have the number 1 billion and 1 billionth. (i.e. 1,000,000,000.000,000,001). The 1 billionth part (0.000,000,001) represents the drop in the bucket. It is not worth mentioning. The *“isles”* (i.e. the coastlands or Gentile nations) are easily removed and considered *“as a very little thing.”* Again the meaning is that they are insignificant. This is further explained with reference to Lebanon with its multiple forests and manifold wildlife being of such insignificant amounts that they would not do for making a fire or providing adequate sacrifice. Verse 17 sums the whole situation up. Altogether the nations both past, present, and future (*“all nations before Him”*) are described by three terms. They are:

as nothing	– idol, falsehood, light, nothing.
less than nothing	– from beyond the end point/finality
worthless	– empty, vain, worthless.

The nations are just like the idols they worship, i.e. they are zero, nothing, nada. In fact they are beyond zero. Zero is too much or too big for them! They are less than zero. In fact they are worthless, vacuous, empty, vain, and of no account.

And so God is described by means of the various questions posed, but the nations are vacuous, vanity and utterly worthless. This acts as the perfect introduction to the two sections that follow, both of which ask the question of which the name “Michael” is a form – *“to whom then will you liken God?”*

[b] To whom will the pagan nations liken God? (Isaiah 40:18-24).

The structure of this passage (verses 18 to 24), is similar to the one that follows, (verses 25 to 31). In both we start with a question: to whom shall we liken God? This is addressed to the nations in this passage, but to the people of God in the next one. After this we have another set of questions which are rhetorical. These are incredulous questions, which bring about a sense of astonishment. The import of these questions is: surely you have heard and have known?

40:18.

Verse 18 opens with a question posed twice. It is important to note here that there is a close connection with God's creation of mankind, since the words translated "*liken*" and "*likeness*" in our text are from the same Hebrew word found in Genesis 1:26 where we read that God made mankind according to His "*likeness*." The tables have been turned. People are defining God as they wish. It is no longer the case that people worship God because they are made by Him to reflect His character and ways. Rather we have a situation where people are constructing the object of worship in their likeness. Here the charge is: to what can you compare or liken God? The answer is clearly nothing at all, for God is truly unique. Before ever there was anything called "creation" all that existed was God. It is folly in the highest to consider that God should be likened to anything.

40:19,20.

Then in verses 19 and 20 we have a description of the nations constructing their gods and idols. Different types of idols are considered here from the expensive and extravagant to those made by the poor. In all cases the idol is made with skill. We have the terms, "*workman*," "*goldsmith*," "*silversmith*," and "*skilful workman*," here, indicating ingenuity and craftsmanship. The Hebrew word translated "*workman*" indicates a craftsman and the term "*skilful workman*" is literally a "wise craftsman." Thus, much care, planning, and training have gone into these works. They are not made without any plan or forethought. We are quick to dismiss these follies even today as something way beneath our modern ways. But take care, because we need to consider all the skilful and intricate devices and artifices we have made and which we worship today. They are all covered by the description of idolatry we have here. Take for example the elaborate theories of the universe or of mankind's composition and form. I am not referring to the observational skills and findings of modern science, but the ideas which weave these facts into a story. These theories of men (be they about our origins or our make-up and constitution) are elaborate tales and they are garnished with the gold and silver of truth we observe in the world. As such they become appealing to man because they look so good and right. Underneath their construction belies their origin – man-made! Man has made, moulded, carved and fabricated all sorts of '*truths*' and stories to suit his needs. They may be dressed up in some realities but underneath they are hopeless. Modern scientists like Stephen Hawking have been constantly in the search for the ultimate theory, the Grand Unified Theory, or the Theory of Everything. They have been seeking an equation which would describe everything. Such is one of the most popular idols of our day.

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Both forms of idol given in our text, the cast metal adorned with silver decoration and the wooden image, are not just skilful workmanship, they serve a (man-made) purpose. In the case of the elaborate cast idol the emphasis is on outer beauty and appeal. In the case of the wooden idol the emphasis is on something that “*will not totter,*” or, in other words, something which will stand – at least as far as man is concerned. How wonderfully we dress our idols and how hopeful we are that they endure. We have been thinking about the ideas of modern science as idols but we note that these do not appeal to everyone, for not all can fathom their intricacies! Also they do not seem to stand that long, because soon another more elaborate and intricate one comes along to replace the old-fashioned notions. Or consider the Hollywood idols of today, the celebrities followed by millions, whether they be pop idols, rock stars, Hollywood actors, or other eminent people that the masses follow. How we love to see them in fine apparel, the designer dresses and suits! How we long that their lives are somehow better and more meaningful than our ordinary and mundane ones. And then it all comes crashing to earth when we find that that they are just as us! They soon make a rotten film or show themselves up in some terrible way. They soon age and disappear. How foolish is mankind in his fabrication of something to look up to, something to adore, something to worship! There are many, many other forms of idolatry apart from the worship of celebrity or the adoration of ideas and theories. Make no mistake, whatever is fabricated by man as an object of worship is built for appearance and to simply stand there to give some form of stability to mankind. In both instances they fail miserably.

40:21.

Now in this setting which describes idolatry, the Lord asks the penetrating questions given in verse 21. The questions pack a double-edged punch. First they indicate with great clarity a theme which Isaiah will repeat, that God has been open in revealing Himself right from the very beginning of creation. Second they challenge the nations who ought to have known, and ought to have heard. The words of verse 21 are worth repeating here:

*Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?*¹⁷³⁹

Note that the beginning here is not some point within human history such as the beginning of the nation's settlement. The beginning referred to here is when the earth itself was first founded, and

¹⁷³⁹ Isaiah 40:21.

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hence we are brought right back to Genesis 1. It is not for want of God's revelation to man that he does not know, for the very moment that Adam and the woman sinned, the Lord issued the first great gospel statement in Genesis 3:15. This was then immediately followed by the making of clothes for the first human pair, from which the instructions for sacrifice were then followed by their godly son Abel.¹⁷⁴⁰

40:22-24.

What then ought they to have known and heard? We are given the details of this in verses 22 to 24. First in verse 22 we are brought to consider the Lord who is seated above the circuit of the earth so that all those who dwell on its surface are but grasshoppers. But further, the Lord is He who causes the heavens to be stretched out just as a curtain of a tent so that he can peak in. The idea seems to be that since the Lord is way beyond and above, and outside of creation, He must spread the heavens apart like the curtain of a tent so that He can enter in. Next in verse 23 we find that the *“princes”* and the *“judges”* of the world are brought to nothing. This is reminiscent of Psalm 2. The Hebrew word translated *“nothing”* is the one often used to represent idols because they are false and empty. The word translated *“useless”* also means vain or empty. We are being lead to consider the Lord looking into the tent of some vain and empty people who are but grasshoppers! Then, finally, in verse 24 we see how pitiful these rulers of the earth measure up against God. They are hardly established as rulers before the Lord removes them with a mere puff of breath. They do not simply get blown away, but the effect of the Lord's blowing on them is first to cause them to *“wither”* and then for them to be taken away as stubble or dust in the wind. That word *“wither”* means “to dry up,” and it has the sense of becoming utterly devoid of life, animation, or vitality. We say that an actor on stage who has forgotten his lines “dries up” because they have nothing to say. Well here the leaders are dried up so much that they become like the chaff when it is blown away from the wheat as the farmer winnows.

To sum up, the nations ought to have remembered that there is a Creator God who governs all things, because He is the Creator. And they ought to have remembered that the leaders and rulers of this earth are as nothing at all in God's sight.

¹⁷⁴⁰ Genesis 3:21; 4:4; Hebrews 11:4; 1John 3:12.

[c] To whom will Israel/Jacob liken God? (Isaiah 40:25-31).

40:25,26.

We turn now to the people of God, to Jacob-Israel. We note first that the question is framed slightly differently here in addressing Jacob-Israel, compared to when the Lord addressed the nations. When He addressed the nations He is *“God,”* but here He is called *“the Holy One.”* Then also the question is framed in a more personal way: *“to whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?”*¹⁷⁴¹ Nevertheless the same basic question is being asked. Instead of remembering that the people were made in the image of God, they had also succumbed to the notion that God must be designated by things they thought were important. How easy it is to fall into this trap! How often do people who love God formulate ideas about Him which suits their needs and desires? We must never do this! We must come to Him with all His character in view and we must humble ourselves before *Him*.

Now the Lord makes the people focus on the heavens and makes them remember that it was He who made it all. So first, the Lord says that the people were to raise their gaze to look above into the heavens. This is a great first principle. The point is to look up to God and remember Him. It is not to look at heaven and simply remain there glorying in the beauty of the heavens, for the Lord says *“and see who has created these.”*¹⁷⁴² Thus they were called to consider the One who made all things in heaven, not the heavens. The stars and other bodies we see in the heavens are all under God's command. It is He (alone) who brings them out and names them. The bodies of the heavens are referred to as a *“host”* signifying both a large number and also an army. He knows all the stars personally as He has named each one. His power and strength are such that all is in perfect order and there are no errors, mistakes or omissions (*“not one is missing”*).¹⁷⁴³

40:27.

The Lord then issues another question just for the people of God. Why is it that they, of all people, consider that what they were up to was *“hidden from the Lord”*?¹⁷⁴⁴ Such a thing is unthinkable. We might have imagined that the nations may have forgotten God and concluded that He was not interested in knowing about them and their ways, but for Israel to think this was

1741 Isaiah 40:25.

1742 Isaiah 40:26.

1743 Isaiah 40:26.

1744 Isaiah 40:27.

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deplorable. It seems that they also thought that the Lord was not interested in making any decisions for them or in bringing guidance, as intimated by the words: *“my just claim is passed over by my God.”* The NASB renders this phrase in a more clear way: *“and the justice due me escapes the notice of my God.”* The point would be that Israel had come to think that the Lord had departed and was no longer concerned about them.

40:28.

Once again, in verse 28, we have the two rhetorical questions asked. Has Israel not known or heard? What then have they forgotten and not remembered? The response is remarkable. It focuses on the Lord and His nature, and also on how He deals with the faithful. First, then, we have some depictions concerning God's character and disposition. He is not just *“God,”* but *“the everlasting God.”* We ought to understand from the term *“God”* that He is eternal, but this is made very clear by this further elaboration. How many times in Scripture do we read this? We need to be reminded often that God has no birthday and will not end, Then also we have the personal name of God, *“the Lord,”* or, the *“I am.”* Again we are brought to consider the eternality of God. He is the self-sufficient One who has no beginning nor end and is ever the *“I am.”* We, of course, have a beginning, a past, a present and then we pass out of this world, but God is always *“I am.”* Next we are reminded (again) that the Lord is the *“Creator,”* and, to be specific, the One who has created *“the ends of the earth,”* which suggests the limits and extremities of the earth, and so includes all of it as well. This One, this Creator, in doing all this, does not get faint nor weary. How we fail to remember the great power of God. He never gets tired or weary. He never suffers from toil-weariness. He never has to sleep. And this thought is extended by the next where we are taught that the Lord's *“understanding is unsearchable.”* The idea being that we cannot get to the end of God's understanding and wisdom, so why ever would we imagine that He could grow weary?

40:29-31.

Then in verses 29 to 31 after a focus on the nature and being of God, we find mention of how the Lord provides and strengthens the people of God. It is only God who can strengthen the weak and provide an increase in strength. If we were to look at the youths of the world who we may naturally think to be full of vigour and vim, we must remember that even they grow tired and weary. However it is those who *“wait on the Lord”* that will be enabled to gain extra strength.¹⁷⁴⁵ What is it

¹⁷⁴⁵ Isaiah 40:31.

Studies in Isaiah.

to “*wait on the Lord*”? It is to trust on Him completely. Just as a servant stands waiting for His master's commands, so the believer must wait for the Lord to issue the command.¹⁷⁴⁶ The servant of the Lord does not fret or worry. He does not seek to fill the silence with his own noise and nonsense. He waits. Unless the Lord build the house the labourers would labour in vain.¹⁷⁴⁷ Finally we note that those who rest and look to the Lord will be like the eagles. These birds soar to great heights as they effortlessly ride the thermals. Those who wait on the Lord will rise up just as the eagles, but not on thermals, they rise on the goodness of God and His great character. The Lord enables such to run and to walk as necessary. Wonder of wonders. I am reminded of Elijah who raced ahead of Ahab after the contest at Carmel.¹⁷⁴⁸ Or, in a negative sense, what of Jeremiah who was rebuked by the Lord for getting weary in the heat of trouble:

If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?¹⁷⁴⁹

And so we end the opening chapter of this second half of Isaiah. We have been treated to a grand announcement of the coming Lord, and we have been treated to a searching series of questions to demonstrate the nature of God, and the puny and insignificance of mankind and their realm.

1746 Psalm 123:2.
1747 Psalm 127:1.
1748 1Kings 18:46.
1749 Jeremiah 12:5.

Chapter 50.

Isaiah 41:1-29.

True servants and the folly of idols.

Textual analysis.

- 1 “Keep silence before Me, O coastlands,
and let the people renew *their* strength!
Let them come near,
then let them speak;
let us come near together for judgement.
- 2 “Who raised up one from the east?
Who in righteousness called him to His feet?
Who gave the nations before him, and made *him* rule over kings?
Who gave *them* as the dust *to* his sword, as driven stubble to his bow?
- 3 Who pursued them, *and* passed safely by the way *that* he had not gone with his feet?
- 4 Who has performed and done *it*, calling the generations from the beginning?
‘I, the Lord, am the first; and with the last I *am* He.’”
- 5 The coastlands saw *it* and feared,
the ends of the earth were afraid;
they drew near and came.
- 6 Everyone helped his neighbour, and said to his brother,
“be of good courage!”
- 7 So the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith;
He who smooths *with* the hammer *inspired* him who strikes the anvil, saying,
“it *is* ready for the soldering”;
then he fastened it with pegs, *that* it might not totter.
- 8 “But you,
Israel, *are* My servant,
Jacob whom I have chosen,
the descendants of Abraham My friend.
- 9 *You* whom I have taken from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest regions,
and said to you,
‘you *are* My servant,
I have chosen you and have not cast you away:
- 10 Fear not, for I *am* with you;
be not dismayed, for I *am* your God.
I will strengthen you, yes,
I will help you,
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’
- 11 “Behold,
all those who were incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced;
they shall be as nothing,
and those who strive with you shall perish.

Studies in Isaiah.

12 You shall seek them and not find them— those who contended with you.
Those who war against you shall be as nothing, as a non-existent thing.

13 For

I, the **Lord** your **God**, will hold your right hand, saying to you,
'Fear not, I will help you.'

14 "Fear not,

you worm Jacob,
you men of Israel!

I will help you," says the **Lord** and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

15 "Behold,

I will make you into a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth;
you shall thresh the mountains and beat *them* small, and make the hills like chaff.

16 You shall winnow them, the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them;

you shall rejoice in the **Lord**, and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

17 "The poor and needy seek water, but *there is* none, their tongues fail for thirst.

I, the **Lord**, will hear them;

I, the **God** of Israel, will not forsake them.

18 I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys;

I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

19 I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree;

I will set in the desert the cypress tree *and* the pine and the box tree together,

20 That they may see and know, and consider and understand together,
that the hand of the **Lord** has done this,
and the Holy One of Israel has created it.

21 "Present your case," says the Lord.

"bring forth your strong *reasons*," says the King of Jacob.

22 "Let them bring forth and show us what will happen;

let them show the former things, what they *were*, that we may consider them,
and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come.

23 Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you *are* gods;
yes, do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed and see *it* together.

24 Indeed you *are* nothing, and your work *is* nothing;

He who chooses you *is* an abomination.

25 "I have raised up one from the north,

and he shall come; from the rising of the sun he shall call on My name;

and he shall come against princes as *though* mortar, as the potter treads clay.

26 Who has declared from the beginning, that we may know?

And former times, that we may say, '*He is* righteous'?

Surely *there is* no one who shows,

surely *there is* no one who declares,

surely *there is* no one who hears your words.

27 The first time *I said* to Zion, 'look, there they are!'

And I will give to Jerusalem one who brings good tidings.

28 For

I looked, and *there was* no man;

I looked among them, but *there was* no counsellor, who, when I asked of them, could answer a word.

29 Indeed they *are* all worthless;

their works *are* nothing;

their moulded images *are* wind and confusion.

Studies in Isaiah.

Isaiah 41 follows on from Isaiah 40 with a message to both the nations who love their idols, and the people of God who were encouraged to serve their Lord. This chapter can be divided into three sections as follows:

[1] The coastlands in fear of God continue in idolatry. (Isaiah 41:1-7).

[2] But Israel will be God's instrument for service. (Isaiah 41:8-20).

[3] The folly of a man-made solution. (Isaiah 41:21-29).

However the whole chapter forms a unified whole in which the Lord speaks of His nature, challenges the “*coastlands*” about their idol worship, and encourages the people of God to be unafraid and to continue in their efforts and service.

[1] The coastlands in fear of God continue in idolatry. (Isaiah 41:1-7).

41:1.

This first section falls into two halves with the self-declaration in verse 4 forming the hub or fulcrum of the whole. The chapter opens with a challenge. It is almost like a court scene. The judge requests silence so that the coastlands can be heard and can give an answer to the questions the Judge of all will put to them.

The Lord gives opportunity to the people of the coastlands (the Gentile nations) to gather strength so that they are able to speak. What grace and mercy! The Lord would not just scare the nations (coastlands) by His awesome presence, otherwise He would destroy them utterly. And so He enables them to listen to the questions that God has for them. There is such gracious condescension here that the Lord can say “*let us come near together for judgement*”! How reasonable!

41:2-4a.

Now in verses 2 to 4a we have a series of seven questions which we have summarised below:

- [1] Who raised up one from the east?
- [2] Who in righteousness called him to His feet?
- [3] Who gave the nations before him?

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[4] [Who] made *him* rule over kings?

[5] Who gave *them* as the dust *to* his sword, as driven stubble to his bow?

[6] Who pursued them, *and* passed safely by the way *that* he had not gone with his feet?

[7] Who has performed and done *it*, calling the generations from the beginning?

The first question concerns one that the Lord has raised from the east.¹⁷⁵⁰ Earlier commentators suggested that these words were a reference to Abraham. The Lord did indeed call Abraham from the east, and He made him righteous by his faith. We may not think that He was made ruler over nations, and yet he did defeat the confederacy which took Lot.¹⁷⁵¹ He was kept safe all the while he travelled through the promised land, and the reference to “*generations from the beginning*” would force us to look back at Genesis.¹⁷⁵² So this may be the intention. Abraham was the one whom God called from the east and he made him into a great nation. And yet in Isaiah there is also another who will be called from the east to do God's will. We will find out later who this one will be.

Here, it appears that the Lord is querying the coastlands concerning the current world ruler. Although there is a reflection back to Abraham as we have intimated, in this case we are not told who this “*one from the east*” will be.¹⁷⁵³ It is tempting to suggest a candidate but that would be to miss the essential point. There was a world ruler. He was from the east (possibly Assyria or Babylon). The Lord called this man to rule over all the nations then in existence, and gave him victory in battle where nations rebelled, and the Lord has done all this “*in righteousness*.”¹⁷⁵⁴ We pause to consider that the very same situation prevails today. The nations are ruled by leaders and some are formed into groups, but it is the Lord alone who has so organised things for His good and wonderful purposes. Right at the end of this set of questions, all of which demand the answer: “God has done it,” we have the second reference to the Lord's work which has continued from the very start of all things. We read in verse 4: “*who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning?*” Again, this question brings immediately to mind the book of Genesis, with its mention of “*generations*.” The Lord alone is the one who calls “*the generations from the beginning*.” The point is that the Lord has not left some vast gulf of time between creation and redemption. Sadly there are many who have capitulated to the fairy stories told by modern science, with its millions of years. Here in Isaiah we are taught repeatedly that God has not stopped working

1750 Isaiah 41:2.

1751 Genesis 14.

1752 Isaiah 41:4.

1753 Isaiah 41:2.

1754 Isaiah 41:2.

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“from the beginning.” Thus, after creation, the work of redemption was begun and the Lord has continued ever since.¹⁷⁵⁵ And so the Lord can call attention to His record of action throughout time, from the beginning. The notion that there have been vast ages of time in which nothing much happens except the supposed evolution of the world, and then God began His work of redemption many many millions of years later is so wide of the mark that it is laughable.

Well we are left in no doubt who it is that has done all the things questioned in verses 2 to 4, for we read these words at the end of verse 4:

I, the Lord, am the first; and with the last I *am* He.

Such a self-designation takes us a step on from what the Lord declared in Exodus 3:14 which reads:

And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”¹⁷⁵⁶

In Hebrew the statement *“I am who I am”* is based on the verb “to be,” (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה). Now although this is different to the expression we have here in Isaiah, which uses the two pronouns *“I”* and *“He”* with no verb to be, (אֲנִי-הוּא), nevertheless gives the same basic idea, namely, God's self-existence. But In Isaiah 41:4 we find that the *“I AM”* is also *“the first”* and He is *“with the last.”* The statement that He is the first could be rendered: “I am the beginning,” which thought brings us back to Christ as the very agent of creation.¹⁷⁵⁷

41:5-7.

Now that the questions have been posed, and the answer supplied, what do the coastlands – the Gentile nations – make of this? Verses 5 to 7 describe what is going on in the pagan lands. Their first reaction is fear. But this was not the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.¹⁷⁵⁸ No, it is the craven fear of being found out, or of being held to account. As a consequence of this distorted fear, the peoples gather together and help each in the promotion and continuance of their false idols. Verse 5 ends with the peoples drawing near and verse 6 begins with each helping their

1755 The history of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 also depicts the story of redemption. Genesis 3 which records the historical fall of man also gives us the first verbal mention of the gospel in Genesis 3:15.

1756 Exodus 3:14.

1757 Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-3,10; Colossians 1:15-20; Revelation 1:8; 3:14; 21:6. See also my comments on Genesis 1:1 in my devotional commentary on Genesis.

1758 Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10.

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neighbour in their joint and false ventures. Verses 6 and 7 picture the craftsman of different skill working together and encouraging one another in their vain enterprise. It is all so hopeless. Look how their ingenuity and skill goes into constructing this great edifice so that *"it might not totter."*¹⁷⁵⁹ We see such hopeless trust in the nonsense of evolution encouraged and promoted when the truth of the gospel dispels its essential tenets. In the same way, when any false system is challenged by truth the adherents and promoters rally to their cause and push their vain and empty idols further into public view. To document the attempts by these benighted folk would be tedious.

[2] But Israel will be God's instrument for service. (Isaiah 41:8-20).

41:8.

At verse 8 there is a grand contrast. The coastlands, (the Gentile nations), are bedevilled by their own sin and idolatry, but Israel is called God's *"servant."* The servant is a key theme in Isaiah. Israel, once called *"Jacob"* (the deceiver), is the one whom God has chosen, for they are the descendants of Abraham who was God's friend. The designation as God's servant is placed uppermost in this section, and this idea is repeated in verse 9. There is much encouragement for the servant in these verses.

41:9.

Now apart from the servant idea, we have the closely related concept of God's election. In verse 9 we have the idea of God's electing choice. God had taken Israel from *"the ends of the earth,"* and *"from its farthest regions."* We may be drawn at first to consider Abraham who was chosen out of Ur in Mesopotamia to go into the promised land. Or then also, we may be lead to consider the Exodus from Egypt, or possibly the return from Exile. All of these are cases where the Lord has drawn people to come and return to the place where He dwells (Jerusalem). But I think the generality of these statements are meant to appeal to us today. God has called people from all over the world throughout all ages. Now in this case we are thinking (in the main) about Israel called from Egypt. The last part of verse 9 and verse 10 describes what the Lord says to this servant Israel by way of encouragement. First we are told for a second time, that Israel is *"My servant,"* or, in other words, God's servant. There is a selective and personal element here. This is enhanced by a statement of God's election which is put both positively (*"I have chosen you"*) and negatively

¹⁷⁵⁹ Isaiah 41:7.

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(*“and have not cast you away”*). The reality is that God could very well have cast Israel aside. This is what we all deserve because of our rebellion. But God has not done this. Instead He has chosen them (and, by implication, us).

41:10.

Then next the Lord issues a double call for Israel to be unafraid. They are not to fear and they are not to look around as though frightened. The Lord gives them two reasons they should not fear. First because God is with them, and second because He is indeed their God. They are not just in the presence of God, they belong to Him by adoption. We may feel safe when we have a strong presence nearby when we are in danger. For example, imagine you were in a dangerous part of the country you may fear. But if the police are with you then you feel safe and at ease. That is all well and good, but the picture here is much better. God is not just with them, but they ***belong*** to Him. They are a part of His deep concern. They are part of the family. Hence they have protection because God is strong, but they have more, they have His love and concern too.

Then next in the second half of verse 10 we read of three things that the Lord will do for them. He will:

strengthen them

help them

uphold them with His righteous right hand

The Lord will make them stronger, will be an aid or helper to them, and will hold them firmly by the hand. This is the kind of language that describes how a father trains up a child. Imagine, for example, a father teaching his child to ride a bike. The father puts training wheels on first to give strength and support. Then next he removes these and holds the back of the saddle to begin with, supporting the child with his hand. Well what could be more encouraging? Israel have been elected, are adopted, and have God with them who will train them and strengthen them for the task of being His servant. Wonderful! The last phrase is instructive. The suggestion that the Lord will hold them by His *“righteous right hand”* points us unequivocally to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone was God's right hand!

41:11,12.

The Scriptures are always true. The word from the Father is always real. Having encouraged Israel to remember whom they are, and who it is who is for them, (God Himself), we next read about opposition, (verses 11 and 12). The Lord Jesus faced great opposition which ultimately lead to His death. His followers will suffer opposition too as He Himself has taught us.¹⁷⁶⁰ But here the focus is on how the Lord will deal with such opposition. We read of four types or kinds of opposition:

- *They were incensed against Israel.*
- *They strove with Israel.*
- *They contended with Israel.*
- *They made war against Israel.*

All who were “*incensed against*” them will be “*ashamed and disgraced,*” and those who “*strive*” with them will “*perish.*” The antagonists were furious and hot with rage against Israel. They brought disputes and legal cases against them. They contended with Israel and made war with them. I wonder, do we too feel the rage and hot fury of those who oppose us? Do we know true opposition in law or in contention for our faith? I know many who are persecuted for their faith experience such indignation, but do we? It may be that we do not experience such, because we are far too timid in our declaration of the truth and love of God. When people hear that they are dead in trespasses and sins, that they are enemies of God, and that they are lepers in the sight of a holy God, they hate it! We bring glad tidings of great joy, but this is only accepted by those who feel their deep need of a rescuer and deliverer. Well such will be “*ashamed and disgraced,*” they will be humiliated at the realisation of what they have done, but when will this happen? Well it would appear from that word “*perish,*” and from the statements made in verse 12 that we are talking about the final day. However it is also true that such reversals and changes to bring shame and disgrace and to remove the wicked have also happened throughout history, but the main thrust is that one day, in “*that day*” they will be no more. There will be no more trace of those who contend or fight against the people of God. It will be as though they never existed!

¹⁷⁶⁰ John 15:20; 16:33.

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41:13,14.

What proof do we have that this will be so? Verse 13 tells us the answer. It is because the Lord God will be with Israel, and He will be holding their hand at the moment of opposition, and as Israel faces the difficulties, the Lord will be saying to them *"fear not, I will help you."* How amazing! Then this point is repeated again (a third time) in verse 14, where the men of Israel are referred to here as *"you worm Jacob."* They are not to get any idea that they are anything special. The point is that they were deceivers and were nothing but worms! Does this make us awkward? Does this make us shudder? The fact of the matter is that whomever we are, we are rebels and sinners who, in God's sight, appear as filthy, vile, and wretched, just like a worm. The worm is a disgusting thing. It is slimy and wriggly and eats dirt. That is what we are by nature. We writhe and squirm this way and that deceiving and being deceived. We eat dirt. How disgusting are we? And yet the Lord in calling Israel *"you worm"* to remind them of their nature, also calls them to *"fear not,"* because the Lord Himself will help them! It is none other than the Lord, their *"Redeemer"* and *"the Holy One of Israel."* God is not stopped by our vile nature. The Lord Jesus stepped down from heaven's glory into our world of sin and dirt and extended His hand to lepers, the dying, the outcasts, and the sick and rescued them!

41:15,16.

Verses 15 and 16 deal with how the Lord will strengthen, help, and uphold His servant Israel (once the worm Jacob), to enable them to do His will and carry out their service. Notice the word *"behold"* at the start of verse 15. This is a signal, a word to make us sit up and listen. Consider what is being said. It is God alone who wills to make. He will make Israel His servant. What then does He do? The Lord is about to make Israel into a *"new threshing sledge"* that has *"sharp teeth."* What is the significance of this? Well the threshing sledge was a device which was made up of four planks of wood bound together either with sharp flints or knife edges on the bottom surface, or with two metal rollers embedded with knife edges. A seat was fixed on the top surface for a man to sit and the sledge was drawn by oxen. The threshing sledge would ride over the grain to separate out the kernels from the husks. Now in this prophecy Israel were to be a *"new"* threshing sledge and were to have *"sharp"* teeth. A freshly made and perfectly designed instrument. What were they to do? The threshing sledge was to be used to *"thresh"* and *"beat up"* the *"mountains,"* to make them *"small."* Further they were to reduce the *"hills"* to *"chaff."* Why *"mountains"* and *"hills"*? I think, from Isaiah 2, that we can take these to represent all that is lofty and proud. The fact that the

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threshing sledge was going to make the hills “*small*” and like “*chaff*” indicates the intention, to humble the proud.

Then next we read about the art of winnowing.¹⁷⁶¹ Once the grain was separated from the husks or chaff, the pile of threshed grain with loose husks was lifted up into the air with a winnowing fork. This enabled the wind that was blowing, to drive the light and flighty husks and chaff away, whilst the heavy grains fell straight down in a pile. And so Israel were to thresh and winnow. They were to bring down the lofty and the proud, and were to cast away all the vacuous and thin or light nonsense, allowing the wind to blow it all away. How this is a picture of the Christian in their lives. I am reminded of the testimony of Noah as written by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews:

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.¹⁷⁶²

Noah was a preacher of righteousness, but his main efforts were put into the building of the ark, which was for salvation and deliverance from the judgement of the flood.¹⁷⁶³ In doing this, and in focusing on the work of salvation, Noah “*condemned the world.*” As we preach the wonders of salvation and truth, we are dragging the threshing sledge over the backs of the proud world. The flesh needs breaking into! Think also of the parable of the soils.¹⁷⁶⁴ How we need something to break up the fallow ground.¹⁷⁶⁵ Remember too, that the word of God is likened to a “*hammer*” which will break up petrified hearts.¹⁷⁶⁶ The world, if left to its own devices, will harden itself against God more and more. Now I am not saying we should be belligerent and difficult! Not a bit of it. We must be winsome and loving, patient and long suffering. However we must speak the truth in love, we must proclaim salvation in Christ alone. This requires that we speak to people about their sinful ways.

Notice finally that there is a promise to Israel, as the Lord makes them into a new threshing sledge, for they will “*rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the Holy One of Israel.*” This is because this work is all God's work and mission. He has included us in His great work! And so when we are

1761 Isaiah 41:16.

1762 Hebrews 11:7.

1763 2Peter 2:5.

1764 Matthew 13:1f.

1765 Jeremiah 4:3; Hosea 10:12.

1766 Jeremiah 23:29.

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about our Father's business He enables us to share in the company profits! Wonder of wonders! How great is the Lord! Notice too the great change that comes about in those who are chosen by God. Their joy and rejoicing is no longer in this world, but in the Lord God who is described as *"the Holy One of Israel."* Thus such as have been so renewed rejoice in all that is holy where once they rushed as worms to the dirt and the mire of this world.

41:17,18.

This section, which focuses on Israel as the servant, ends with what will happen in the great plan of God as Israel carries out her service. It is put in terms of what the Lord does (*"I will ..."*), but it includes the fact that the Lord has used Israel as His threshing sledge and winnowing fork. In verse 17 the Lord describes the situation for all mankind. All of us are *"poor and needy,"* although many deny this fact. Sadly it is only those who truly understand that they are *"poor and needy"* whom the Lord will bless. Now this is why the Lord uses Israel as a threshing sledge. The mountains of pride need to be levelled, and people need to realise that, whether they are rich or poor, intelligent or simple, beautiful or plain, all are *"poor and needy."* These seek water but have no success. They have tried all avenues and schemes but there is no water. So what will the Lord do? We read of six things that the Lord will do. On each occasion (bar the second), we have the personal pronoun *"I"* which points us back to the idea of God's self-sufficiency for He alone is *"I AM."* These six things come in three sets of twos. The first two speak of the Lord hearing the poor and needy and of Him not forsaking them. The second in verse 18 tells of the provision of water in a variety of settings. We have:

rivers being opened in desolate heights.
fountains found in the midst of valleys.
the wilderness becoming a pool of water.
the dry land having springs of water.

These are all remarkable and not natural things. Water is put for that which is necessary to sustain life. Rivers, fountains, pools, and springs are all useful sources of water for peoples. Once the water source is sorted, then plants such as trees can grow. Trees, of course, are plants which need an immense amount of water. A typical large oak tree will draw between 50 and 300 gallons of water from the soil in a day, depending on the prevailing conditions. That converts to 220 to 1360 litres.

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Since 1 litre is equivalent to 1000 cm³ (or ml), and since the density of water is 1 g/cm³, that equates to between a quarter and over 1 and a quarter tonnes of water! Thus for trees to flourish in such places, the amounts of water must be abundant.

41:19,20.

We are informed of seven different trees flourishing in these localities. It is the Lord who will “*plant*” and “*set*” these trees in the “*wilderness*” and the “*desert.*” The trees are:

Cedar – Acacia – Myrtle – Oil tree – Cypress – Pine – Box tree.

Why these trees? We are told the reason why the Lord will bring abundance of water and the flourishing of trees in a general sense in verse 20. It is in order that people, the poor and needy among them, may realise that it is all at God's hand. Notice that this is a communal appreciation, for the text reads: “*that they may see and know, and consider and understand together.*” It is so that together all people will come to the stark realisation that God is bringing in a new creation. It is not just the “*Lord,*” but the “*Holy One of Israel,*” and it is not just that He has done this, or brought it to pass, but that he has “*created it.*” That word “*created*” is exactly the same word found in Genesis 1:1, so we are talking about a re-creation, or a new creation here. But I repeat, why *these* seven trees? In table 50.1 we have outlined some features of each tree mentioned in the text. It would seem from these brief facts that we have the same basic thing – in each case a tree – but with different main characteristics. I wonder if we are meant to take from this the idea that God is building His church making people new and giving each a different type of character? Some may be like the myrtle and so give good shade, providing succour and help to others. Others may be oil trees (the olive) and are thus abundant in that which is good – perhaps they are, somehow, more full of the Spirit. Still others have incredible stability and so stand wonderfully like the cedar tree. I am not at all sure about the details here but I think the main point is that the Lord is making things new and He is going to plant a complete (i.e. seven) set of great trees, each with their own function and purpose.

When I was a teacher I set one class the task of determining as many uses of a Palm tree as they could find. It was staggering how useful this tree was. From the trunk and branches, to the leaves and fruits, from the oils it possessed to other chemicals it could be made to give up and many more besides. The list generated ran into more than 50 items! And so we see that the Lord is going

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to make all things new, and His trees of righteousness (these all stand erect and upright) will be there to do all His will from providing shade to producing fruit and so on.

Table 50.1: The seven trees of Isaiah 41:19.

Tree.	Hebrew.	Key features.	Prominent thought.
Cedar	אַרְז	So called from the firmness of its roots, hence they stand for something that is stable and firm. They are generally very tall with greatly extended branches and canopy.	Firmness/Stability.
Acacia.	שִׁטָּה	A large tree with bark covered in black thorns. The wood is very hard and when old the wood resembles ebony.	Resilient.
Myrtle.	הָדָס	The myrtle is a rapid grower. The myrtle is a short shrubby but upright tree of about 8 to 10 feet in height. They form a dense and close top, and so are valued especially for their ability to provide shade.	Provider of shade.
Oil tree.	שֶׁמֶן	Fatness. A tree that gives out oil. Most likely the olive tree is meant.	Producer of oil.
Cypress	כְּרוֹשׁ	A very tall tree that is often associated with the Cedar. The wood from these trees is remarkable for its durability. It forms a broad canopy of branches and with its dense foliage is a good tree to provide shade.	Durability.
Pine.	תְּדֵהָר	A firm and enduring tree.	Enduring.
Box tree.	תְּאֵשׁוּר	A tall erect tree (from the idea of upright or straightness).	Upright.

[3] The folly of a man-made solution (Isaiah 41:21-29).

General thoughts.

Having dealt with Israel as God's servant and the fruitfulness of God's new creation for the poor and needy, we return to the idolatry of the coastlands, the Gentile nations. It is important to look at this passage and get a feel for the structure as it oscillates between a focus on the Gentile nations, back to the Lord, and then to the people of God. This is shown in table 50.2 below.

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Table 50.2: The structure of Isaiah 41:21-29 examined.

Verses	Details
21-23	A court room scene with the announcement of the case and an appeal to the Gentile idolators to demonstrate their validity and reasonableness.
24	Verdict announced by the Lord.
25	Declaration of what the Lord has done.
26	Repeated question to demonstrate the fact that no one can declare truth.
27,28	The astonishing thing concerning Zion and Jerusalem – even they have failed!
29	Final conclusion concerning the Gentile idolators.

48:21-23.

And so we have here in verse 21 a court room scene where the Gentile idolators are called to declare their “*case*” and state their “*reasons.*” The Lord is treating the Gentile idolators as though they were reasonable and could argue a reasoned case. Of course, in reality, this isn't the case. Man does not really set out to establish a system of idolatry (whether it be to worship sticks and stones or an idea or an equation) and hedge it about with reasons. Usually the idolatry that people fall into is learned from parents and society, and is promoted and altered by those of influence. Reasons are given for the system, but these are usually argued from a need to contend with competing views. When it comes to presenting a case for idolatry to God, then we find that the idolators are utterly silent. The court room is settled, and everyone is waiting and then the plaintiff begins with an opening statement.¹⁷⁶⁷ Further analysis for verses 22 and 23 is shown in table 50.3.

The challenge begins with a request that the idolators and their idols inform the court “*what will happen,*” which theme is repeated twice at the end of verse 22 and the beginning of verse 23. Can these idols and their worshippers inform the court what is “*to come*” and what is “*to come hereafter*” so that we can know that they are “*gods*”?¹⁷⁶⁸ Who can tell the future? Can any man? Does modern science know the answer to such a question? Well they may pretend that they could predict a variety of outcomes but, in truth, they (and all mankind) are utterly flummoxed. Of course understanding the future is dependent upon truly knowing the past. This is what the middle section of verse 22 tells us. Can these idols and their worshippers say what has happened in the past, giving a true historical record, so that they can then plot the course for the future? Can they so declare what has happened in history so that it becomes obvious what may happen next? This is a telling and

¹⁷⁶⁷ Isaiah 41:22,23.

¹⁷⁶⁸ Isaiah 41:23.

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searching question. It is often said how important history is but I wonder how much of our modern history is true or reliable?

Table 50.3: Further analysis of Isaiah 41:22,23.

22	“Let them	bring forth and show us	what will happen;
	let them	show	the former things, what they <i>were</i> ,
			that we may
			consider them, and
			know the latter end of them;
	or	declare to us	things to come.
23	Show	the things that are to come hereafter,	that we may
			know that you <i>are</i> gods;
	yes,	do good or do evil,	that we may
			be dismayed and see <i>it</i> together.

When it comes to Biblical history there are so many false records of what the Bible claims that it becomes very difficult to declare to people what the Lord has actually fully revealed. The Bible is true. It does tell us what the true history of the world is. However many so-called scholars have so melded the data of Scripture with what the secular world says, that the outcome is a muddled history that bears little resemblance to the truth. When it comes to the history that follows the Bible, (i.e. after the New Testament was completed), we are at the mercy of the faithfulness of men. Oh please do not get me wrong! There are many good records of what happened in the past. We know for certain that there were two world wars in the last century and we know the details of the battles and what the various parties were up to, but only to a degree. How many times do we read of some new discovery or some new slant on the past which re-tells the story in a different way? Take for example the experience of those at Dunkirk at the start of the second world war. There have been films and documentaries made of these. But how many, I wonder, would

understand this as a deliverance by God for those British soldiers? How many would recognise the part played by the prayers of the saints in the UK (and elsewhere)? ¹⁷⁶⁹

41:23b,24.

Well the idols and their makers are called to give an account. Can you tell us what has happened and how things will play out? Then the challenge is extended. It is not just a matter of understanding. Can these idols and their makers do anything either good or bad? Can they order and control events and things to bring dismay and fear to the people of the world?¹⁷⁷⁰ Can they? Well the answer is obvious, of course, but it appears that the defendants are not given any chance to respond. Or maybe their response is so much silence that there is nothing left but for God to declare the verdict?

The idols are nothing at all, and all their fruit and result is the same. How this contrasts with the Lord! He is wonderful and infinite and all He does is good and marvellous. The idols are *“nothing”* and what they do is *“nothing.”* The first word is from the Hebrew: **אֵין** *’in*, which really means “to be nothing,” or to be non-existent.” The second word is from the Hebrew: **אֵפֶס** *’ep*, which comes from a root word that means, “to breathe,” “a breath,” hence “nothing.” They are thus vacuous, empty, transitory and powerless. Any who choose to follow these idols or who copy the ones who make them are *“an abomination.”*¹⁷⁷¹ Do we realise that all of us were once idolators and so were considered as an abomination, or in other words, a disgusting sight to God? I cannot express this as deeply and as soberly as I wish. There are only two choices. We either fall down in humility and cry for mercy to the loving and thrice holy but wonderful God, or we choose to make, follow, and worship some form of idol. The second of these choices is not just wrong, it is abominable, disgusting, revolting. It isn't just a poor choice, it is the height of stupidity and folly. Looked at from the point of view of the choice made it is stupid, foolish, disgusting and an utter waste. However we ought not to simply look at idolatry from the point of view of its outcome and effect. We must do this, but it is far more important to look at this from the point of view of failing to choose God and His ways. How absurd to reject God! How unutterably stupid and foolish to look at the Lord and all His beauty, strength, power, grace, mercy, love, forgiveness, restorative power, and so on, and to walk away! What could we liken this to? It is difficult to imagine anything more foolish and stupid. We would look astonished at a man offered the most amazing of opportunities,

1769 The same could be said for the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 under the rule of Queen Elizabeth I.

1770 Isaiah 41:23b.

1771 Isaiah 41:24.

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or possessions, or chance in life if he turned his nose up at it all. Such an analogy is so weak it doesn't bear mentioning, but what about one who is given an amazing offer of prestige, position and so on by the Queen of our land but then considers it all beneath them? It is unthinkable! Yet how much more appalling is it when we have all rejected what the Lord Jesus Christ has offered to us completely freely?

41:25,26.

In verse 25 the Lord then focuses on what He is actually doing. He has already mentioned that He is bringing *“one from the east”* in Isaiah 41:2 who will rule and subdue as the Lord gives him power. This time we read that it will be *“one from the north.”* There is no conflict with the idea that he was to come from the east, as journeying from places like Babylon required the traveller to head north towards Haran before turning south into the promised land. It was impractical to cross directly over the desert of Arabia in an easterly direction. Thus coming from the east really required the traveller to head north west towards Haran and then turn south, hence coming from the north.

What do we read of this character? Well he is to call on the name of the Lord and will be against rulers in the same way that a potter has mastery over the clay.¹⁷⁷² The Lord brings this information to the fore to show that He alone knows and brings things to pass – He alone is sovereign. In verse 26 we have the remarkable statement which demonstrates that God alone knows and declares. It is put in the form of a question. Let us be truthful and objective. Who, amongst men, has told us what has happened *“from the beginning”* or what has happened in *“former times”*? None! Then three times we have the word *“surely”* in our translation which really means “moreover” or “indeed” and gives the sense of something which is certainly true. There most certainly is not any who can show us the things that have and will happen. There most certainly is not any who can tell us or declare what has or will happen. There is most certainly not any who can get hold of God's words or who has been in His counsel.

41:27.

Verse 27 has caused some trouble for translators as table 50.4 shows.

¹⁷⁷² Isaiah 41:25.

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Table 50.4: Five versions of Isaiah 41:27 compared.

Version	First clause	Second clause
AKJV	The first shall say to Zion, Behold, behold them:	and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings.
NIV	I was the first to tell Zion, ‘Look, here they are!’	I gave to Jerusalem a messenger of good news.
ESV	I was the first to say to Zion, “Behold, here they are!”	And I give to Jerusalem a herald of good news.
NASB	Formerly <i>I said</i> to Zion, ‘Behold, here they are.’	And to Jerusalem, ‘I will give a messenger of good news.’
NKJV	The first time <i>I said</i> to Zion, ‘look, there they are!’	And I will give to Jerusalem one who brings good tidings.

The literal translation of the words in Hebrew are as follows:

← Hebrew reads from the right

ראשון הנה הנהם לציון
[the] first behold behold them unto Zion

[the] first – unto Zion – behold – behold them

← Hebrew reads from the right

ולירושלם מבשר אֶתֵּן
and unto Jerusalem bringer of good news I give

and unto Jerusalem – bringer of good news – I give

It would appear that some translations in trying to make sense of the Hebrew supply an extra verb, “to say,” thus giving the idea that the Lord was the first to bring good tidings to Zion and Jerusalem. However there is no need to add an extra verb. We have the verb “to give,” right at the end of the sentence. Perhaps the tricky part is the middle where we have the word “*behold*” mentioned twice, the second with the added suffix “*them*.” Before and after these two words we have “*unto Zion*”

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and “*and unto Jerusalem.*” The middle then is a focal point. If I might suggest the following translation:

unto Zion and unto Jerusalem – Yes! Unto these!

At the beginning or head of the sentence we have the word rendered “[*the*] *first*,” which suggests emphasis. Then at the end we have the verb and the main subject, hence we would have: “*I give [the] bringer of good news.*” Putting these together we would have:

First! I give [the] bringer of good news unto Zion and unto Jerusalem – Yes! Unto these!

Or to make this a little clearer in English we might suggest:

I was the first to give the bringer of good news unto Zion and unto Jerusalem – Yes! Unto these!

The idols and idolaters have provided nothing. But the Lord alone is the one who has brought the “*bringer of good news*” to the people.

41:28.

The next verse is incredibly stark. Verse 28 follows on from verse 27, and I have translated this as follows to give this sense:

and I look but there is no man, even from these, but there is no counsellor that they would cause to turn back a word

The Lord who brought good news to Zion, to Jerusalem, looked for one among them to bring counsel and advice but there was none among them that could be found, not even a single man.

Thus whilst verse 26 declares the absolute certainty that no one among the Gentiles can tell what has or will happen and none have been in the counsel of God, verse 27 informs us of the remarkable truth that whilst God gave glad tidings to the people of God first, yet even amongst them there was none who could be found who could say what was to happen either! This is astonishing. We have here two very important applications. First we must demonstrate that

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whatever the world knows, thinks it knows, or boasts in, it simply cannot tell the beginning from the end, and it simply doesn't know the truth because they have not heard God's words, nor been in His counsel. The second thing we must, sadly, consider is that the people of God are often in the same sorry situation. Now these words tell us that when the Lord looked at Zion and Jerusalem where He had brought good news first, there was none there who could respond with any advice at all! Is it not the case that far too often the people of God, instead of getting to grips with God's word, seeking Him, and knowing Him, they would rather play with the world and mix things up taking advice from here or there and formulating rules or systems to suit themselves? Oh we need to hang our heads in shame! If we would but seek the Lord and know Him we may be of use and may have a word in season for all around us.

41:29.

This passage concludes with a final statement on the nature of idols. We could render verse 29 as follows:

behold all of them (are) nothing [and] fail/cease. Their works, [and] their images are wind and confusion.

The word for wind is the same as that for “spirit” and the intention is that they ought to be spiritual but they are not, they are just wind. The idols and their makers are **zero** and have failed completely. What they bring is less than worthless because it is confusion. I wonder if we truly recognise that this is the situation with all mankind? Whether they be high born, wealthy, clever and intelligent or cultured and gifted, whether they be ingenious or dextrous, or whatever they bring, all is worthless and empty. This is essentially the teaching of the book of Ecclesiastes.

Chapter 51.

Isaiah 42:1-17.

The Servant of the Lord (part 1)!

Textual analysis.

1 “Behold!

My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

2 He will

not cry out,
nor raise *His voice*,
nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.

3 A bruised reed He will not break,
and smoking flax He will not quench;
He will bring forth justice for truth.

4 He will not fail nor be discouraged,
till He has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands shall wait for His law.”

5 Thus says **God** the **Lord**,

Who created the heavens and stretched them out,
Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it,
Who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it:

6 “I, the **Lord**, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand;
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles,

7 To open blind eyes,
to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.

8 I *am* the **Lord**, that *is* My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images.

9 Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

10 Sing to the **Lord** a new song,
and His praise from the ends of the earth,
you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it,
you coastlands
and you inhabitants of them!

11 Let the wilderness and its cities lift up *their voice*, the villages *that* Kedar inhabits.
Let the inhabitants of Sela sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains.

12 Let them give glory to the **Lord**, and declare His praise in the coastlands.

13 The **Lord** shall go forth like a mighty man;
He shall stir up *His* zeal like a man of war.

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He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud;

He shall prevail against His enemies.

14 "I have held My peace a long time,

I have been still and restrained Myself.

Now I will cry like a woman in labour,

I will pant and gasp at once.

15 I will lay waste the mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation;

I will make the rivers coastlands, and I will dry up the pools.

16 I will bring the blind by a way they did not know;

I will lead them in paths they have not known.

I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight.

These things I will do for them, and not forsake them.

17 They shall be turned back,

they shall be greatly ashamed,

who trust in carved images,

who say to the moulded images,

'you *are* our gods.'

The prophecy of Isaiah is remarkable for its portrayal of the soon coming king. Here we have the first open prophecy of the "*Servant of the Lord.*" This first "song" can be split up into four sections as follows:

[1] The Servant of the Lord announced! (Isaiah 42:1-4).

[2] The Servant of the Lord commissioned! (Isaiah 42:5-9).

[3] The Servant of the Lord praised and worshipped! (Isaiah 42:10-12).

[4] The Servant of the Lord goes forth! (Isaiah 42:13-17).

[1] The Servant of the Lord announced! (Isaiah 42:1-4).

42:1.

We are introduced to the servant of the Lord with the word "*behold.*" This indicates that we must sit up and take note, listen carefully, and behold. This servant is not just the Lord God's special servant, but one whom the Lord God upholds. We read about this relationship in greater detail in the gospel according to John. Here is some of what the Lord Jesus tells us of His relationship with the Father:

19 ... "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. 20 For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.... 30 I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My

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own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.¹⁷⁷³

Not only does God uphold His Servant, but He delights in His *“Elect One.”* God also puts His Spirit on Him. Here, then, we have a glimpse into the relationships in the Trinity. The Father upholds the chosen One and delights in Him, and gives of His Holy Spirit in fullness so that the Servant may do His will.

Finally, in this opening verse, we read the purpose for the Lord's delight and upholding of the Servant. It is in order that *“He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”* We might jump to the conclusion that this is judgement upon the Gentiles. However, the context of what follows indicates that this is something of a gift. After all, this is the *“Servant”* of the Lord here, not some tyrannical despot! We shall consider this theme more in what follows.

42:1b-4.

The will of the Father is expressed in a number of ways from the end of verse 1 to verse 4. The key theme is *“justice,”* by which is meant a judicial verdict or decision. We have the following expressions concerning justice:

- *Justice will be brought to the Gentiles* (verse 1).
- *Justice will be brought forth in truth or faithfully* (verse 3).
- *Justice will be brought to the earth and He will not fail in this* (verse 4).

As we noted above, one might be tempted to think that this is a judgement in terms of removing sin and dealing with error. What the Lord does is always this, of course, because He is holy. However the emphasis is not so much on judgement meted out as a final verdict, but on establishing the right, and that which is true. It is salvific. The Servant will bring forth justice to, or for, the Gentiles. Since the Servant is *“our righteousness,”* it indicates that His coming and His mission will establish the giving and procuring of what is right amongst the lives of the Gentiles.¹⁷⁷⁴ What the law and what Israel as the chosen nation failed to do, the Servant will most certainly accomplish. The Servant will do this faithfully, or in accordance with truth. There is no 'patching up,' or 'half-hearted fix,' and there is no overlooking the truth, for all will be done exactly according to truth and holiness.

¹⁷⁷³ John 5:19,20,30.

¹⁷⁷⁴ Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16.

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Furthermore what the Servant will do is going to succeed. We can have confidence that this is so from verse 4 where the emphasis is on success, although this is not without some supreme effort made by the Servant as evidenced by the mention that he will not *“be discouraged.”*

Now apart from the central theme of making things right by bringing justice to bear on the Gentile nations, we are also given something about the way this will be done. Verses 2 and 4 teach us these things. First we find that the Servant is not coming in indignation, with a loud voice. We are told that He will not come demanding to be heard, issuing orders, or acting as a commander of some terrible army. Now, we do read in the book of Proverbs that *“wisdom”* does *“cry out”* and lifts up her voice to be heard, so is there a contradiction here?¹⁷⁷⁵ Not at all! The idea in Proverbs is that the Lord is coming *publicly*. In Isaiah, however, the Servant will be amongst the people and will teach and show the way, but He will not be demanding and insisting that He be heard. He had every right to insist that people listen and obey, but He will not do this because His intention is to bring justice (what is right) to, and for, the Gentiles, and this needed a very winsome approach. Now the Servant does not belittle justice or sidestep it. He still brings justice *“for truth,”* but He does so in such an appealing, compassionate way. This winsome approach is expressed in verse 3 with two illustrations:

*A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench.*¹⁷⁷⁶

The bruised reed and smoking flax are illustrations of the poor and needy people. They are those who have been broken or battered by this world, by their own sin and failure, or by the sin of others. And they are those whose spirit is so weak and defiled, it is like the torch whose flame has gone out and all that remains is some thin wisps of smoke. There is no fire to be observed – only smoke. Now these are descriptions of sinful broken human beings. We are all dead in trespasses and sins. We are all bruised and broken, and almost snuffed out, as far as relationship with the Lord is concerned. Sadly so many hardly even hear the gospel, and their lives are blighted terribly by the vice and sin which is running rampant in our society. Nevertheless the Lord is coming, and He will bring truth and justice for all!

But then also we learn that the Servant is no mere hireling nor employee. He is the express image of the Father sent by the Father and filled with the Spirit doing that which He wills along

1775 Proverbs 8:1f.

1776 Isaiah 42:3.

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with His Father.¹⁷⁷⁷ Now the Servant will not fail, and He will never give up! The two words used here “*fail*,” and “*discouraged*,” are actually from the same basic Hebrew root used for “*smoking*,” and “*bruised*,” as shown in table 51.1.

Table 51:1: Words in Isaiah 42:3,4 compared.

	English.	Hebrew.	Parsing.	Root verb.	Basic meaning.
42:3	bruised	רָצוץ	Qal participle sing. pass. mas.	רָצַץ	A primitive root; to crack in pieces, literally or figuratively, i.e. break, bruise, crush, discourage, oppress.
	smoking	כָּהָה	Adjective sing. fem.	כָּהָה	A primitive root; to be weak.
42:4	fail	יִכָּהֶה	Qal imperfect 3 rd mas. sing.	כָּהָה	A primitive root; to be weak.
	discouraged	יָרוּץ	Qal imperfect 3 rd mas. sing.	רָצַץ	A primitive root; to crack in pieces, literally or figuratively, i.e. break, bruise, crush, discourage, oppress.

From this we learn that what was “*bruised*” by sin and oppression will be overcome for the Servant most certainly will not be “*discouraged*.” And also, the “*smoking*” flax, illustrative of a lost cause and which is all but dead is met by the Servant who will most certainly not “*fail*.” By using the same root verb in each case the Servant is bringing about a reverse in the situation faced.

Right at the end of verse 4 we read that the coastlands are expecting or waiting for what the Servant brings (they “*wait for His law*”). This is encouraging. The Lord is not bringing a justice and truth which is alien to humankind. Sadly men and women rebel against that which they truly need, so the Servant will face great opposition. Nevertheless the law is that which the human constitution and frame desperately needs. It is rather like a doctor who knows that his patient needs a certain medicine to be cured. The patient sees the doctor and recoils in horror, but the doctor has what the sick person needs. We need to hear the law, and we wait for it from the Servant even though our sinful flesh recoils and wants to run away.

¹⁷⁷⁷ John 3:34; 5:30,36,37; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3.

[2] The Servant of the Lord commissioned! (Isaiah 42:5-9).

42:5.

In this section we find that “*God the Lord,*” the Father, is commissioning the Son. The Father is introduced to us as the creator in a three-fold sense.

First, we are told that He is the one who made “*the heavens*” from nothing. The verb used for “*created*” is the same one found in Genesis 1:1 and speaks of creation that only God could perform using no pre-existing material. We are not to assume here that this only applies to the heavens. These are summary statements for the whole. We know from Genesis 1 that the Lord God created all things both in the heavens and in the earth from nothing. The choice of “*the heavens*” here is representative. The point is that He is Creator ex nihilo.

Then second, we find that He also “*stretched them out.*” Now much is made by some about the so-called expanding nature of the universe. I do not think we should simply connect this idea of God stretching out the heavens with the modern concept of an ever expanding universe. Why? Because the idea of an expanding universe is not necessarily correct. It is a theory which depends heavily upon assumptions, especially in connection with what is known as “red shift.”¹⁷⁷⁸ Now it may be that this idea is true, but we can never fully know because we do not stand objectively in relation to creation. Now this expression of God's stretching out the heavens is repeated in Isaiah. The word used here in verse 5 is: נָטָה *nāṭāh*, and it has the following meanings:

I. To stretch out, extend, as the hand, a measure &etc. II. To stretch, spread out, expand, as a tent. III. To incline, bow. IV. To turn, lean to.¹⁷⁷⁹

The use of this word in Isaiah is also shown below in table 51.2. It can be seen from the definition given above that the main meanings are: to extend, to unfurl, or to unravel (that is, offerings I and II). The idea of inclining to, or of turning to, or of lean towards (offerings III and IV) comes from this notion of unfurling. If we ignore (for the moment) the references to the heavens, and those which speak of inclining or turning to, the rest speak of unravelling something which is wrapped up. Thus the clenched fist is unfurled and so extended. The curtains of a tent are unwrapped so as to be extended across an opening. The proud women usurpers extend their necks to the fullest point. A

1778 For more on this subject see: **M. Viccary**. *Right From the Start. A devotional commentary on Genesis.*. Appendix 2: Red shift data translated into distances.

1779 Davidson's Lexicon. P546.

Studies in Isaiah.

craftsman opens up his rule to its fullest extent. A cover is thrown over an area and spread out to its maximum amount. Now given these uses it seems sensible to apply the same basic meaning to the idea of the heavens being stretched out. In other words the heavens were created and spread out to their fullest extent by the Lord. Given that creation is a finished event (as Genesis 1 and 2 make abundantly clear), this extension of God's hand to make the entire heavens must have been accomplished *“in the beginning.”*¹⁷⁸⁰

Table 51.2: Uses of the Hebrew word: נָטָה nāṭāh in Isaiah.¹⁷⁸¹

Idea expressed in text of Isaiah (NKJV)	References.
Relating to the hands being stretched out.	5:25; 9:12,17,21; 10:4; 14:26,27; 23:11; 31:3.
Relating to the heavens being stretched out.	40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 51:13.
Relating to curtains (in a tent) being stretched out.	54:2.
Relating to necks being stretched out.	3:16
Relating to a covering being stretched out.	34:11
Relating to a rule being stretched out.	44:13
Used to speak of turning aside. (AKJV).	10:2; 29:21; 30:11; 44:20.
Used of inclining the ear. (AKJV).	37:17; 55:3
Used of extending peace. (AKJV).	66:12.

Third, in the actions of the Lord God we find that He *“spread forth the earth.”* The word *“spread”* is a translation of the Hebrew word: רָקַע *rāqaʿ*. The basic idea behind this word is the concept of hammering or pounding something solid to make it spread out. In Genesis 1 we read of a *“firmament”* or an expanse being made which separated the waters into two locations, and of the separation of land from sea. These details must be what is intended by such a statement,

Fourth, we note that the Lord God also *“spread forth ... that which comes from it (the*

1780 Genesis 1:1.

1781 Other words translated as *“stretch(ed)”* in the NKJV include:

מָטָה *muṭṭeh* which is only used once in the OT and comes from נָטָה *nāṭāh* relating to the stretching out of wings in Isaiah 8:8.

נָטַשׁ *nāṭaš* related to branches being stretched out in Isaiah 16:8. This Hebrew word is also used as *“forsaken”* in Isaiah 2:6; 32:14, as *“drawn (sword)”* in Isaiah 21:15, and as *“loosed”* in Isaiah 33:23.

שָׁרַע *šāraʿ* related to a bed being too short to stretch out on in Isaiah 28:20. This Hebrew word is also found in Leviticus 21:18; 22:23 as *“superfluous”* in AKJV. Put as *“too long”* in NKJV.

טָפַח *tāpah* given in Isaiah 48:13 as: *“And My right hand has stretched out the heavens.”* It also occurs as *“swaddled”* in Lamentations 2:22 in AKJV.

פָּרַשׁ *pāraś* relating to the Lord stretching out His hands to the rebellious people in Isaiah 65:2. This word is also given as *“spread forth”* in Isaiah 1:15; 25:11, as *“spread (nets)”* in Isaiah 19:8, as *“spread (the sail)”* in Isaiah 33:23, and as *“spread”* (the letter) in Isaiah 37:14.

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earth).” This must refer to the fact that the various types of vegetation and all the creatures that were made were caused to come about at God's word.

Fifth, we find mention of life. The Lord God gave “*breath*” to those who were on the earth. Now at the start there was only Adam and then the Woman. But all who have been created upon the earth (i.e. everyone who has ever lived) were given their breath. Life truly is a gift from the Lord. In the first instance the Lord breathed into Adam's nostrils and he became a living being. So here we learn that our very life's breath is a gift of God. May we honour and praise Him for life!

Sixth, and finally, we note that the Lord also gave רִיחַ *rûah* to us as well. This is important. Life is not simply about our body and our breath. We have spirit too, that is, something not corporeal, not physical. This is something not just not understood by modern man, but is actually denied. We could extend this thought here to speak about mankind dead in spirit through the fall, and those born again and re-created by the Holy Spirit. But the essential point here is that all mankind has this spirit as a fundamental part of his existence. We are truly body, soul, and spirit. The connection between these three entities is far too complex and marvellous for us to understand, although the Scriptures speak about all three and how they operate under God's guiding hand.¹⁷⁸²

42:6,7.

This Father, the creator of all things, states three key things with regard to the Servant. First, He has called the Servant “*in righteousness*.” This means both that the bringing in of the Servant is a right thing, but also that the Servant is coming with righteousness. We will talk more of this in a moment. Next, we read that the Father will uphold the Servant by holding His “*hand*,” and will also “*keep*” Him. That is, His security is sure, for He is both held onto tightly, and guarded and watched. The Father would never abandon the Son, but rather was with Him at all times as He walked the earth. Finally, we note that the Servant is given as a “*covenant*” to the Gentiles. The word “*give*” is, of course, the word for gift. It signifies grace. What the Father does is to give His Son freely.¹⁷⁸³ This final aspect of what the Father does in sending the Servant is expanded on in verses 6 and 7. He is to be a “*covenant to the people*.”¹⁷⁸⁴ This is quite remarkable. We are familiar with the idea of a covenant as an agreement between two parties, but here we have a person being given as the covenant. This is not a set of rules or laws as, for example, the ten commandments were. We are brought to view the Servant Himself as the covenant. He is the agreement. How does

1782 It would pay immense dividends to make a study of this, See also: Psalm 139:6; Romans 11:33-35.

1783 John 3:16.

1784 Isaiah 42:6.

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this work out? Well we know that the Father and the Son made an agreement in eternity in which the Father would send the Son, and the Son would voluntarily come, in order that He might do completely what mankind failed to do. Adam was given one commandment, and the Israelites were issued ten commandments, but the Servant comes as the covenant – a person who acts as the agreement! Remarkable. We preach, therefore, not a set of rules, nor an ethical conduct to be adhered to, but a person – the Servant of God.¹⁷⁸⁵

Now this Servant was also given *“as a light to the Gentiles.”*¹⁷⁸⁶ The light is revealing. It shows the way and demonstrates what is right and true. The light is given to do two things. First, to *“open blind eyes,”* and second, to *“bring out prisoners from the prison.”*¹⁷⁸⁷ Wonderful truths here! The light comes to open eyes so that the Gentiles can see! This is explained as being released from prison. We are all blind because we have turned from the light, from the Father, and so consequently we are in darkness but bound in a prison house. The light comes and opens eyes, and then opens the prison doors that we may be released. I am reminded of Charles Wesley's hymn “And can it be,” and especially the fourth verse:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

Now these words are repeated again with greater emphasis in Isaiah 61:1, and these words were those which the Lord Jesus quoted in His address in a synagogue at the start of His ministry.¹⁷⁸⁸

42:8,9.

The commissioning section ends with the Father making a dual statement with respect to His nature and what He has done. First we note that the Lord states His name, (YHWH), and makes it plain that God will never give to anyone His glory. It is not that He will not give this glory to the Servant, because the Servant already possesses it. Rather it is that God will not give glory to anything

1785 Colossians 1:28.

1786 Isaiah 42:6.

1787 Isaiah 42:7.

1788 Luke 4:16-22.

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which rivals Him, which, in effect, is an idol (*“carved images”*).¹⁷⁸⁹ How can anyone praise something made by man as though it were the sum, substance, and source of life? The idea is preposterous. And so the Lord will never allow such to happen. The Lord alone deserves the praise and the Lord alone is the possessor of glory. This becomes evident the more we read in Scripture and the more we learn of Him. He is superb to the nth degree. He is wonderful in all His doings. He is beautiful without comparison.

In verse 9 we get a further reflection on the incredibly gracious nature of the Lord with regard to His revelation. Notice once again the word *“behold.”* It is there to grab the attention. Listen, and listen attentively. First we are informed that *“the former things”* which the Lord had revealed, have indeed *“come to pass.”* This speaks both of the pre-eminent things and the things that came first (i.e. in the beginning). Once again, then, we have a reference to the fact that God has revealed truth, and Himself, to mankind from the very beginning of time. Not only that, He has not wasted time on trivia, for all that He brings has life and truth within it. Then further we discover that the Lord God is also declaring *“new things”* which He reveals *“before they spring forth,”* This is a remarkable insight into the whole history of revelation. In these words we get a glimpse into the new creation.

[3] The Servant of the Lord praised and worshipped! (Isaiah 42:10-12).

42:10,11.

Such is the great nature of the Servant of the Lord that the only response and reaction is to worship and praise! The worship of God and of His Servant is described as a command here, *“sing ...”* Look carefully at what is being asked. All the inhabitants of the world are commanded to praise. It is *“from the ends of the earth,”* which includes both those *“who go down to the sea,”* as well as those *“from the top of the mountains.”*¹⁷⁹⁰ Thus the *“wilderness,”* the *“cities,”* and the inhabitants of the *“villages,”* are all mentioned as places where worship should be expressed.¹⁷⁹¹ Note particularly here that the temple is not mentioned. Just as we read in John 4 that worship in the New Testament should be *“in spirit and truth,”* and not in any fixed location, so we see here that worship and praise is to be offered the world over.¹⁷⁹²

1789 Isaiah 42:8.

1790 Isaiah 42:10,11.

1791 Isaiah 42:11.

1792 John 4:23,24.

Studies in Isaiah.

We are not given any content here but we note that the praise of the Lord should be with “*a new song.*”¹⁷⁹³ This indicates a freshness as well as having the flavour of the new creation. I sometimes wonder if we are too locked into traditions by singing ancient hymns. Please do not misunderstand me here. Old hymns are full of great gospel truths. The point rather is that the work of God within the people of God in our day ought to flow out in the songs that we sing. Where are the men and women who can compose the songs of our age? We rejoice in hymns ancient because these describe thoughts our older brothers and sisters expressed, but we must be concerned to bring in a new song. Now although we are not given the content here we are informed of the bounds. Our worship must be “*His praise*” and no other.¹⁷⁹⁴

42:12.

Yet another important feature of praise is that it must be that which will “*give glory to the Lord*” (alone).¹⁷⁹⁵ This is a notable boundary to the songs of worship we ought to sing. How do the songs we sing reflect the glory of God and show forth His praise? Notice also that such praise must be declared “*in the coastlands,*” by which is understood the distant Gentile lands.

[4] The Servant of the Lord goes forth! (Isaiah 42:13-17).

42:13.

And now we are taught about the Servant of the Lord in His mission. First we read that He will go forth as a “*mighty man.*” The Servant of the Lord is a champion, or warrior, which brings into focus a number of examples, such as David's fight with Goliath, or Gideon's fight with the Midianites. When David finally met with Goliath one of the key points in the story is David's boldness in the Lord and his rushing toward the Philistine:

So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.¹⁷⁹⁶

The Servant of the Lord is zealous in His mission to conquer. We are taught in Exodus that:

1793 Isaiah 42:10.
1794 Isaiah 42:10.
1795 Isaiah 43:12.
1796 1Samuel 17:48.

Studies in Isaiah.

The Lord *is* a man of war; The Lord *is* His name.¹⁷⁹⁷

Further we are taught that the Servant of the Lord cries out with a shout against His enemies and He will be victorious. There is no failure, for the Servant will be mighty and strong, and so will “*prevail*” against His foes.

42:14a.

Next we find two statements concerning what the Servant had been doing, (“*I have held My peace,*” and “*I have been still and restrained Myself*”). followed by nine statements about what He will do. The Servant had been quiet and restrained for a “*long time.*” The Lord may have expected honour and praise from all of His creation, but was, instead, rejected and, worse still, ignored. And so He waits and restrains Himself. What a marvellous thing! We are reminded of the statement made by Peter in his second letter, that God:

... is long suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.¹⁷⁹⁸

4:14b-16.

Then we have nine statements of His future intentions. We read of the Lord that He will:

Cry like a woman in labour.

Pant and gasp at once.

Lay waste the mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation.

Make the rivers coastlands.

Dry up the pools.

Bring the blind by a way they did not know.

Lead them in paths they have not known.

Make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight.

Do [these things] for them, and not forsake them.

The first two statements are surprising. We have been introduced to the Servant as a mighty warrior

1797 Exodus 15:3.

1798 2Peter 3:9.

Studies in Isaiah.

and now we find that He is to cry out like a woman in labour, panting, and gasping. These statements lead us to the understanding that what this warrior will be doing will be something that will include great suffering – the travail of His soul. He is no mere freedom fighter nor grand champion in the style of military history. His victory required His death.

The next three statements speak of changes to the land surface.¹⁷⁹⁹ Mountains and hills are to be laid waste, whilst the vegetation on them will be withered. Then the rivers will become coastlands and the pools of water dried up. These statements reflect the effects of the great flood of Genesis 6 and following. The essential point is that the whole creation is under the curse. The mountains and hills also stand for those who are proud. These will be brought low. The vegetation will be dried up so that there will be no food, no covering, and no natural habitats. This is as a consequence of the fact that the pools of waters are dried up. Then also the rivers will become coastlands. The great sources of profit and wealth will be removed.

In the midst of these things the Servant of the Lord will do four things for the peoples.¹⁸⁰⁰ First we read about the blind, those who do not see, nor know the Lord. The Servant of the Lord will guide them in unknown paths. Light will replace darkness, and the crooked paths will be straightened. This is talk of salvation and rescue. Sin and darkness makes life extremely difficult, if not impossible. But when the Servant of the Lord defeats the enemies, light and righteousness are the result. Further we note that this is no temporary affair, for the Servant of the Lord will do all these things for them and He will not forsake them. How marvellous that when the Lord rescues it is forever!

Finally in verse 17 we read about the consequences for the peoples. The Lord acts as a warrior, and He brings about great changes in the world, both physically and spiritually, but for the peoples there are also changes. The first effect or consequence is that the peoples will be *“turned back,”* signifying a change or repentance. The peoples of the world are all walking in totally the wrong direction. Rescue and deliverance requires a 180 degree turnabout. A repentance or complete reversal of thought. The second thing is the way the people feel or express themselves. They shall be *“greatly ashamed.”* Repentance involves the feeling of shame. When we come to understand the nature of sin, and how it affects God, we become ashamed. Of course the great sin is idolatry. Putting anything in place of God is utterly unthinkable, but it is, in effect, what all of us have done. We have chosen a substitute for the Living God! How absurd! And yet it is true of all of us. We may

1799 Isaiah 42:15.

1800 Isaiah 42:16.

Studies in Isaiah.

not have carved an image, but we have formed and formulated all sorts of alternatives to the Living God. Thus repentance involves this feeling of shame because of making idols to replace God.

Chapter 52.

Isaiah 42:18-43:13.

The Lord's witnesses.

Textual analysis.

18 “Hear, you deaf; and look, you blind, that you may see.

19 Who *is* blind but My servant, or deaf as My messenger *whom* I send?

Who *is* blind as *he who is* perfect, and blind as the **Lord**’s servant?

20 Seeing many things, but you do not observe; opening the ears, but he does not hear.”

21 The **Lord** is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake;

He will exalt the law and make *it* honourable.

22 But this *is* a people

robbed and plundered;

all of them

are snared in holes,

and they

are hidden in prison houses;

they

are

for prey,

and no one delivers;

for plunder,

and no one says, “restore!”

23 Who among you will give ear to this?

Who will listen and hear for the time to come?

24 Who gave Jacob for plunder, and Israel to the robbers?

Was it not the **Lord**, He against whom we have sinned?

For they would not walk in His ways, nor were they obedient to His law.

25 Therefore He has poured on him

the fury of His anger

and the strength of battle;

it has set him on fire all around,

yet he did not know;

and it burned him,

yet he did not take *it* to heart.

1 But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel:

“fear not, for

I have redeemed you;

I have called *you* by your name; you *are* Mine.

2 When you pass

through the waters, I *will be* with you; and

through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.

When you walk

through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.

Studies in Isaiah.

3 For *I am the Lord* your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. 4 Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honoured, and I have loved you; therefore I will give men for you, and people for your life.

5 Fear not, for

I am with you;

I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west;

6 I will say

to the north, 'give them up!' And

to the south, 'do not keep them back!'

Bring

My sons from afar, and

My daughters from the ends of the earth—

7 Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory;

I have formed him, yes, I have made him."

8 Bring out

the blind people who have eyes, and

the deaf who have ears.

9 Let all the nations be gathered together, and

let the people be assembled.

Who among them can declare this, and show us former things?

Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified; or

let them hear and say, "*it is truth.*"

10 "You *are* My witnesses," says the Lord,

"and My servant whom I have chosen,

that you may

know and

believe Me, and

understand

that

I am He.

Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.

11 I, *even* I, *am* the Lord, and besides Me *there is* no saviour.

12 I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and *there was* no foreign *god* among you;

therefore you *are* My witnesses," says the Lord,

"that

I am God.

13 Indeed before the day *was*, I *am* He; and

there is no one who can deliver out of My hand;

I work, and who will reverse it?"

Having been introduced to the Servant of the Lord who is the champion, we are now brought to the idea of those rescued being incorporated into the very work of God. They are to become God's witnesses. The passage can be considered in two parts.

[1] Israel the deaf and blind witness (Isaiah 42:18-25).

[2] Israel to become true witnesses (Isaiah 43:1-13).

Studies in Isaiah.

In the first part (verses 18 to 25 of chapter 42), we have Israel described as a deaf and blind witness. In the second part (verses 1 to 13 of chapter 43), we have the great contrast – what God will do to make Israel a true witness. It is instructive to note also that there is a striking connection in the flow of thought between 42:22f and 43:1f as both start with the word “*but*” indicating strong contrasts.

[1] Israel the deaf and blind witness (Isaiah 42:18-25).

42:18-20.

This section opens with a call from the Lord. This is God's grace. We are going to be told of the sorry state of Israel (called Jacob in verse 24) in a few moments, but the Lord issues a double call which is a general call to all who may be described as “*deaf*” (unable to hear) and “*blind*” (unable to see).¹⁸⁰¹ Clearly the physical disabilities are put for spiritual ones. Remember that when the Lord calls, He also creates. The deaf will, by the power of God's word, be enabled to hear and the blind, again by the power of God's word, will be enabled to see. In verse 19 we find, startlingly, that amongst the general group of blind and deaf are to be found the Lord's “*servant,*” and “*messenger.*” It is clear from the following words (especially in verse 22) that “*the Servant of the Lord,*” (the Saviour), is **not** meant, but that Israel (Jacob) as God's human ambassadors on earth are being depicted. Notice that those whom God calls, He also sends.¹⁸⁰²

The startling truth that the witnesses for God are actually no better than those to whom they witness is something we too must bear in mind. We have had our eyes opened and our ears unstopped but, in truth, here “*we see in a mirror dimly.*”¹⁸⁰³ In order to be a true witness and a true ambassador we need to have been healed spiritually first. Verse 19 describes the privileged position of Israel. These are His “*servant,*” His “*messenger,*” and are partakers, or recipients, of the covenant of peace. The word translated as “*perfect*” has the idea of being in *shalom* – truly at peace or fully restored. The Lord had given Israel full privileges as a nation. They were able to see “*many things*” and were blessed in hearing too.¹⁸⁰⁴ They heard the very voice of God at Sinai, were given the law, and heard God speak through Moses and all the prophets. What is more, they had the visual representation of God's goodness and presence in the tabernacle and then in the temple, and so were in a right relationship with God as far as the outward and visible was concerned. And yet although

1801 Isaiah 42:18.

1802 Isaiah 6:8.

1803 1Corinthians 13:12.

1804 Isaiah 42:20.

Studies in Isaiah.

so privileged, they did “*not observe*” and did “*not hear*” so as to obey.¹⁸⁰⁵ The problem was that this did not extend deep down into the heart of the nation. Now, of course, all the way through the Old Testament we have this twin theme of God's provision for mankind, (as exemplified by Israel and the law), but which failed because man was weak, and then also we have the gospel being continually offered so that all who would come could be truly like Abraham, (a man of faith).

42:21.

Now we hasten to add that these things the Lord gave to Israel were all good and a real blessing. Thus in verse 21 we find that the Lord “*will exalt the law,*” so that it would be seen as “*honourable.*” The law is glorious, great, and honourable because, of course, it comes from the Lord Himself, who is good and glorious. Consequently the Lord was pleased with the law because it was righteous, again, since it comes from Him. The apostle Paul makes a similar statement in the book of Romans:

12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. ... **14**
For we know that the law is spiritual ... **16** ... I agree with the law that it is good. ...
22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.¹⁸⁰⁶

It was not the fault of the law that Israel failed. Paul states that it was sin that was the cause:

11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.
13 ... But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.¹⁸⁰⁷

All that God does is good. The law was brought in for the express purpose of demonstrating the righteous character of God, but then next, in verse 22, we have the great contrast. The Lord had made very plain how Israel were to behave – in accordance with His law – but the reality was very different.

42:22.

Israel are described in graphic terms in verse 22. They are described as victims, but they are victims of their own sin and rebellion. Israel have been “*robbed and plundered,*” and have become

1805 Isaiah 42:20.

1806 Romans 7:12,14,16,22

1807 Romans 7:11,13.

Studies in Isaiah.

“prey,” and *“plunder.”* The idea of being despoiled and ruined is repeated throughout verse 22, so that the consequence for them is that they are prisoners who are *“snared in holes,”* and *“hidden in prison houses.”* There is none who can rescue or deliver. How graphic this is! It describes the condition of all lost in sin. We are all robbed and plundered by our sin. We are all locked in our prison houses and holes. Nothing can release us from the burden and trouble we have brought upon ourselves by rebelling against the Lord. We are, as Paul describes, *“dead in trespasses and sins.”*¹⁸⁰⁸

42:23.

The great tragedy is not just that Israel are robbed and plundered, but, it appears, they will not recognise this fact. In verse 23 the Lord asks who will listen and consider? The implication is that none will contemplate the truth that they are robbed and spoiled. What a tragedy! To be a victim of sin's terror is one tragedy, but to be a victim of sin and not to admit it, is tragedy beyond tragedy. Is this not the situation of people today? They will not accept the gospel and the truth that God has spoken. They are utterly ignorant of their own woeful state.

42:24,25.

We soon learn why it was that Israel were robbed and plundered. The great surprise is that it was the Lord who brought this to pass. It was because Israel had sinned against the Lord. They had refused to walk in God's ways and had disobeyed God's righteous law. The consequence was that Israel now faced the judgement and wrath of God! Verse 25 is strong. The Lord God has *“poured”* on Israel all His wrath and has come against Israel with *“the strength of battle.”* God is at war with Israel! In the same way all of us are enemies of God and at war with Him by nature. The apostle Paul describes our plight in these words, *“we were enemies,”* and we were *“alienated and enemies”* in our thinking doing wicked works.¹⁸⁰⁹ The tragedy is multiplied because Israel didn't even know that they were at war, and in enmity against God! Israel suffered the fires and tragedies of war – all at the hand of God – but was totally unaware of this! None thought to consider that it may have been the Lord's doing, to make Israel repent. In exactly the same way we often fail to recognise that we have sinned against God, and that the consequence of such rebellion leads to a judgement which is both brought in by the Lord, and also arises as a direct consequence of our rebellion. We suffer for sin and we moan and groan about it, but we do not know why it has

1808 Ephesians 2:1.

1809 Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21.

Studies in Isaiah.

happened, nor do we recognise its perfect purpose – to lead us back to God. We do not take things to heart and we treat things lightly. How utterly, utterly foolish we are!

So much for the plight and state of Israel.

[2] Israel to become true witnesses (Isaiah 43:1-13).

Now God does not leave Israel in this sorry state for long. In chapter 43, which continues the theme, we find a second great contrast. The law was righteous and good, but Israel were a people robbed and despoiled. The law is still righteous and good but Thank God for this but! We take delight in the God who not only lays out our condition for us, who has brought us to this condition for His name's sake and for our good, but also has much more by way of blessings to deliver! God truly waits to be gracious. He cannot let sin pass or be accounted as nothing. We must be brought face-to-face with our sinful condition, but God has blessings in store!

43:1.

Verse 1 of chapter 43 is energised and strengthened in force by the phrase *“thus says the Lord.”* Whenever we read such words we know that what is about to be said is a sure and certain thing. When God made the world He only had to speak. Here these words inform us that God is speaking and that what God speaks will certainly come to pass. To further emphasise the importance of what He is about to say, the Lord gives us His credentials. As if He needed to do any such thing! He is, after all, the Lord (the *“I AM”*). And yet He appeals to Israel to take note that it was He (and He alone) who *“created”* Jacob and *“formed”* Israel. The word *“created”* is the same word we find in Genesis 1:1. The word *“formed”* is the same word as found in Genesis 2:7 which speaks of God forming Adam's body, as though He were a potter moulding the clay. Such gracious appeals! How we miss these things by our immersion in godless speculation. Evolution has done such untold damage to people so that when these words are spoken or read aloud the import and implication is missed! God created every one of us! God formed (moulded or knit together) each and every one of us! What then does God say by way of contrast concerning Israel who had been plundered because of their sin?

Twice in this section the Lord tells the people to *“fear not.”*¹⁸¹⁰ Fear is a human experience borne out of our alienation. Why are we here? What is life all about? What will happen to me in the future? And so this imperative is needful, and only the Lord can utter such. For any man to say

1810 Isaiah 43:1,5.

Studies in Isaiah.

“fear not” would be presumptuous for what help and aid can any man bring? In verse 1 of chapter 43 two reasons are given to support this. First we are reminded that the Lord had *“redeemed”* them. The Lord had purchased them. After the Exodus Israel was called *“the people whom You have redeemed.”*¹⁸¹¹ Moses wrote these words concerning Israel: *“the Lord ... redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”*¹⁸¹² Such a reminder is comforting and breeds much assurance. But then we have the second reason which is equally precious. The Lord had *“called”* them by name. Here the idea is that the Lord had become father to them – He had adopted them and now they belonged to Him. God is no tyrant and despot! He is eternal love. The Holy One is He who calls the people. He invites them to join Him! What a privilege! We see this unutterably wonderful theme of the call of God right from the point when Adam and Eve fell. The Lord calls them in the garden: *“where are you Adam?”*¹⁸¹³ Of course the omniscient Lord knew exactly where they were. He was calling Adam to consider and to turn! And this call by God has continued right up to the occasion when the Lord Jesus uttered these wonderful words:

28 Come to Me, all *you* who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.”¹⁸¹⁴

And then we note that it is our duty – in fact it is our privilege – to utter this call as we take the gospel far and wide:

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.¹⁸¹⁵

But then the Lord does not call us out of this world just yet:

I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.¹⁸¹⁶

And so we must suffer tribulation because the world hates the gospel and it also hates God!¹⁸¹⁷

1811 Exodus 15:13.

1812 Deuteronomy 7:8.

1813 Genesis 3:9.

1814 Matthew 11:28-30.

1815 Revelation 22:17.

1816 John 17:15.

1817 John 7:7; 15:18,19; 16:33; 17:14.

43:2.

Consequently the Lord offers a dual promise. First, when we go through difficult times (*“pass through the waters”*), the Lord promises to be with us. We will face difficult times, but when we do we must remember that God is with us. Remember that the Lord Jesus suffered tribulation both in His life on earth and on the cross. But then secondly, the Lord promises that whatever we face will never be overwhelming. The rivers of trouble will come but they will never overflow or overwhelm us! Concerning the sin we hate we read these words:

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.¹⁸¹⁸

Concerning persecution and trials we read:

5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. **6** In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, **7** that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.¹⁸¹⁹

Thus the Lord keeps those who suffer such trials! Wonder of wonders. He does not take us from these difficulties, but walks with us so that we can show forth His great grace and goodness!

The Lord then pushes these thoughts further by speaking of fire. It is interesting that we have the history of Noah who went through the waters of judgement to a new earth, and now we read of walking through fire. This present world is reserved for judgement by fire.¹⁸²⁰ A prime example of this will come in years to come as far as Isaiah is concerned. I refer to the three Hebrew boys in captivity in Babylon.¹⁸²¹ These three suffered the fires but were saved remarkably by the risen Lord. Now here the Lord also promises that the people of God will *“not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.”* How do we take these words when we hear of terrible atrocities happening to the people of God?¹⁸²² Has God's promise failed? Not at all. We do face trials, even terrible suffering in this world but when the fires of God's judgement come we will suffer no harm! The fire

1818 1Corinthians 10:13.

1819 1Peter 1:5-7.

1820 2Peter 3:10f.

1821 Daniel 3.

1822 Consider, for example, the many martyrs burned at the stake for their faith.

Studies in Isaiah.

of God's final judgement has no effect on the people of God.

43:3,4.

Next, in verse 3, we are given the reason and the basis for our confidence in God and why we should not be afraid. First the Lord reminds us of His name, His character. We are given four titles. He is YHWH and He is 'Elohim. That is, He is the covenant God who is also the Almighty creator. He is the *“Holy One”* who cannot tolerate sin and evil but, wonderfully also He is *“Saviour.”* Having given us His credentials we move next to what He was doing for Israel and it is startling. We find that others will be sacrificed in their place. Egypt, Ethiopia, Seba are all to be given over to ransom Israel! Verse 4 tells us the even more startling news that the Israelites were *“precious”* in His sight. God *“honoured”* them and *“loved”* them so that He would rather give up others in order to secure the well-being of Israel. Such sentiments are difficult to reconcile with the character and nature of God but we read in Proverbs some similar ideas:

*The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead.*¹⁸²³

*The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the unfaithful for the upright.*¹⁸²⁴

I think it may be best to understand these ideas of ransom in the context of selective delivery. In verse 2 we find that God would deliver Israel whether they be in the flames or the floods. In such instances where many may suffer the same hardship, the Lord selectively chose to rescue Israel and passed over the other nations mentioned here. Imagine a house on fire with several people stuck inside. In many cases it may not be possible to save all, so the rescuer must select whom to save.

43:5-9.

In verses 5 to 9 the deliverance is put positively. Again Israel are to *“fear not”* because the Lord God would be with them and will bring all back from the east and west, the north and the south – a universal return.¹⁸²⁵ What God promises is certain. Notice that in verse 6 the Lord merely has to speak. This reminds us of His creator-ship. It was at His word that all creation came to be, and it will be because He has spoken, that the return from exile will certainly take place. How we ought to trust the promises of His word! Then further we note that the Lord calls for His sons and

1823 Proverbs 11:18.

1824 Proverbs 21:18.

1825 Isaiah 43:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

daughters to be brought back *“from afar”* and *“from the ends of the earth.”*¹⁸²⁶ These are those who may have thought that there was no likelihood of return, who were beyond the reach and beyond the pail so-to-speak. These too would be brought back. Then further we find in verse 7 that it will be all those who are described by two distinct themes or phrases, the second of which is expanded upon. First it is all who were *“called by My name.”* Second it is all those whom God had *“created for My glory”* or all those whom God had *“formed”* and *“made.”*¹⁸²⁷ The whole spectrum of creation words are used. God creates both out of nothing and by means. He moulds and makes, and He brings to pass where nothing previously existed. We are reminded of the words Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God,* **9** not of works, lest anyone should boast. **10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.¹⁸²⁸

Thus we have the doctrine of calling and of new birth expressed here. God calls His people and in so doing He makes them new and re-creates them. The call and word of God is expressed first with the word *“say,”* in verse 6, then with the word *“bring”* at the end of the same verse, and finally the phrase *“bring out”* in verse 8.¹⁸²⁹ These last two (*“bring”* and *“bring out”*) are commands. There seems to be a gradual increase in effect. A declaration in verse 6, followed by commands in verses 6 and 8. All those from the north, the south, the east, and the west, and all those from distant and far flung regions will not only be called, but compelled to return. All whom God has called and created will come.¹⁸³⁰ This gives us great confidence when we think of evangelism. God will not fail in calling His people, however weak and feeble our efforts may be. The thought continues with a description of these sons and daughters in verse 8. These are those who have eyes and ears but who are blind and deaf! This speaks of spiritual blindness and deafness. It reminds us of the events and story found in John 9 where the Lord heals a man who was blind from birth. The man not only gets healed but seems to come deeper and closer into faith in Christ. At the same time the Pharisees who boasted of their great vision and foresight were shown to be blind leaders getting ever more blind in

1826 Isaiah 43:6.

1827 Isaiah 43:7.

1828 Ephesians 2:8-10.

1829 The second *“bring”* is a translation of a different Hebrew word from that of verse 6, but seems to be synonymous in meaning.

1830 Isaiah 43:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

their hatred of the Lord.

This part of the message concludes with an appeal to the nations.¹⁸³¹ Can they declare what will happen or what is true? Let them say so if they can!¹⁸³² Who among the nations (even today) can declare what will come to pass? It is a stark and necessary reminder to us that the nations, the people, (whoever they may be and whatever era they may live in), cannot bring forth truth and cannot declare what is to be. This point is such a vital one and it seems to be repeated throughout Isaiah and the Scriptures. Can anyone tell us what is true? Can anyone say what will come to pass? Has anyone been beyond the grave and returned to tell us what is right? Has anyone come from eternity and has seen the whole world from a different perspective? Of course none have, with the single exception of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now how vital it is that we teach ourselves and others the great limitations of man. Many may lay claim to “the answer” or to the method of finding the answer. These are blind leaders of the blind. Their boast and pomp is without evidence, even though they may seem impressive to many.

43:10-13.

The nations, the people, have no answer, but then the Lord speaks in the next four verses about His witnesses. Twice over we read that Israel (the true believers) are God's witnesses.¹⁸³³ First there is the declaration of the truth. They are witnesses to God because they are God's servants and have been chosen by Him. Earlier we noted the essential truth that Israel had been created and made – speaking of the new birth. Now we are brought to consider this in terms of election and calling. Israel are God's servants and thereby are His witnesses. Next we find the reason for this in verse 10. It is for them to truly know God! They are to:

know

believe

understand

that God is the one described by the phrase *“I am He.”*¹⁸³⁴ This points us back to Exodus 3:14 where the Lord revealed Himself to Moses as *“I AM WHO I AM.”* God is the self-existent One!

1831 Isaiah 43:9.

1832 Isaiah 43:9.

1833 Isaiah 43:10,12.

1834 Isaiah 43:10.

Studies in Isaiah.

This is explained further with the words *“Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.”*¹⁸³⁵ There is only One God. None came before Him, and none will be after Him. The self-existence and Unity of God are essential truths which need burning into our hearts. We know that God is Trinity, and we know that Christ is the incarnate God made flesh. However we need to be reminded that there is but one God and He is self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite. There can be no rival nor alternative and Israel were to be witness to this existence of God.

Note that the form of their witness was threefold. They were to *“know”* this truth. That means they were to be first-hand witnesses to this unity and self-existence of God. We as believers today must know God like this too. Our experiences matter. Do we know God? Have we truly experienced His awesome majesty? We may never have seen God as Moses did, but unless we truly and really experience God, as the Only One who can do anything, and as the Only One who is worthy, and as the Only One to whom honour, praise and glory is due, then we are not true Christians. But then Israel were called as witnesses to believe the truth of God's self-existence and unity. Now here we also need to recognise that *experience* may not be enough. Many experienced the presence of Christ and yet walked away as unbelievers and died in their sins. The Lord asks us to know Him, to experience Him, but also to believe Him. In other words, to accept as true the reality they had experienced, and the truths that they had been taught. Do we have faith, the faith of Abraham? This is vital. Many make the mistake of believing but not experiencing. For these it is a matter of head knowledge and assent to the truth. Others make the equally foolish mistake of experiencing God but pay little attention to faith and its content. The New Testament fills this idea out in detail as it talks about *“the faith”* which was delivered once for the saints.¹⁸³⁶ There is a body of truth which make up *“the faith”* and these are things which ought to be believed.¹⁸³⁷

But God is not satisfied with His witnesses merely experiencing Him nor simply that they believe in Him. God wants His witnesses to be understanding.¹⁸³⁸ This is mind-blowing! None can truly comprehend God for He is infinite. However we can grasp the truths of whom He is as far as He has revealed them to us through His word. Many miss this and are content simply to accept the truths at face value without teasing them out and asking God what the significance of them may be. God truly wants us to know Him. To understand certain things about Him and what He has done. He wants to interact and relate to us so that we can relate to others our experiences of Him. This is

1835 Isaiah 43:10.

1836 Jude 1:3.

1837 Acts 6:7; 14:22; Romans 1:5; 1Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:23; 2:7; 2Timothy 4:7 etc.

1838 Isaiah 43:10.

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the nature of true witnesses. They are ones who witnessed something. They saw, they experienced God. They believed what they saw, but further, they understood something of what was revealed. This is truly amazing! We are not merely to be those who can simply say “I saw and I believed.” We are to be those who say “I know God and I can tell you something about whom He is and what He has done”!

The Lord then adds more in verses 11, 12 and 13 before concluding that they are therefore His witnesses. In verses 11 and 13 we have a reiteration of the idea of God's self-existence. The Lord is the only true *“I”* and He alone is the sole *“saviour.”*¹⁸³⁹ But then in verse 13 we learn something more. We read there that God is to be described as self-existent, (*“I am He”*), *“before the day was.”* In other words, before any *“day”* was created. Here, then we are being informed of God's sole pre-existence before ever there was any created thing. Verse 12 states that this God has, unlike the idols or the futile worshippers of the idols, *“declared”* the truth, has acted to save people, and has *“proclaimed”* what He has done.¹⁸⁴⁰ And all the while He has acted in such a loving and gracious manner *“there was no foreign god”* among them.¹⁸⁴¹ Since He alone is the self-existent One and was there before ever there was a day, and since He has delivered and spoken openly telling the truth, we are not surprised to read further that none could *“deliver”* from His *“hand,”* and that whatever He decides to do and work cannot be reversed.¹⁸⁴²

1839 Isaiah 43:11.

1840 Isaiah 43:12.

1841 Isaiah 43:12.

1842 Isaiah 43:13.

Chapter 53.
Isaiah 43:14-44:5.
A new exodus.

Textual analysis.

14 Thus says the **Lord**, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:

“for your sake I will send to Babylon, and bring them all down as fugitives— The Chaldeans, who rejoice in their ships. **15** I *am* the **Lord**, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.”

16 Thus says the **Lord**,

Who makes a way in the sea and a path through the mighty waters,

17 Who brings forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power (they shall lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinguished, they are quenched like a wick):

18 “do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old.

19 Behold,

I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it?

I will even make a road in the wilderness *and* rivers in the desert.

20 The beast of the field will honour Me,
the jackals and the ostriches,
because I give

waters in the wilderness *and*

rivers in the desert,

to give drink to

My people,

My chosen.

21 This people I have formed for
Myself;

they shall declare My praise.

22 “But

you have not called upon Me, O Jacob; and

you have been weary of Me, O Israel.

23 You have not brought Me the sheep for your burnt offerings,

nor have you honoured Me with your sacrifices.

I have not caused you to serve with grain offerings, nor wearied you with incense.

24 You have bought Me no sweet cane with money,

nor have you satisfied Me with the fat of your sacrifices;

but you have burdened Me with your sins,

you have wearied Me with your iniquities.

25 “I, *even* I, *am* He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.

26 Put Me in remembrance;

let us contend together;

state your *case*, that you may be acquitted.

27 Your first father sinned, and your mediators have transgressed against Me.

28 Therefore

I will profane the princes of the sanctuary;

I will give Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.

Studies in Isaiah.

1 “Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen.

2 Thus says the **Lord** who made you and formed you from the womb, *who* will help you:

‘fear not, O Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

3 For

I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground;

I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring;

4 They will spring up among the grass like willows by the watercourses.’

5 One will say, ‘I *am* the **Lord**’s’;

another will call *himself* by the name of Jacob;

another will write *with* his hand,

‘the **Lord**’s,’ and name *himself* by the name of Israel.

Our passage forms one continuous thread but can be considered in two unequal sections. In the first eight verses we have the Lord who is about to make all things new.¹⁸⁴³ In the remainder of the passage we have the contrast between what Jacob/Israel were like, and what the Lord intended to do. In this longer second section we have two sub-divisions. First in the remainder of Isaiah 43 we have a depiction of Jacob/Israel's sorry state.¹⁸⁴⁴ Then second, in the first 5 verses of Isaiah 44 we have what the Lord intends to do.¹⁸⁴⁵

[1] Behold, I will do a new thing. (Isaiah 43:14-21).

[2] But you ...I, even I, am He ...yet hear now. (Isaiah 43:22-44:5).

[a] But you ... (Isaiah 43:22-24).

[b] I, even I, am He ... (Isaiah 43:25-28).

[c] Yet hear now. (Isaiah 44:1-5).

[1] Behold, I will do a new thing. (Isaiah 43:14-21).

43:14,15.

This passage begins with a remarkable prophecy concerning Babylon and the Chaldeans who were proud of their ships. It opens with yet another declaration of the nature and character of God. He is the “**Lord**” who is their “**Redeemer**” and the “**Holy One of Israel**.” Verse 15 concludes the opening declaration with another statement about God's nature. This time He is the “**Lord**” their “**Holy One**” the “**Creator of Israel**” and their “**King**.” Such frequency of use of these terms helps to burn into the heart the character and being of God. I wonder, do we Christians think often and

1843 Isaiah 43:14-21.

1844 Isaiah 43:22-28.

1845 Isaiah 44:1-5.

Studies in Isaiah.

deeply about the names of God? Do we consider, the Lord God, the sovereign self-existent One who is all powerful? Or do we approach the Holy One, who cannot tolerate sin because He is all purity and beauty, in a sloppy unthinking way? How about His character as Creator or Redeemer? These are massive themes and we ought to rehearse them daily, even moment-by-moment.

Now this One who had created and redeemed Israel, was about to bring the Babylonians and Chaldeans down into Israel as fugitives! Instead of Israel being captive to the nations, Babylon will be captive to Israel.¹⁸⁴⁶ Now before we get too carried away with Israel being a despotic and harsh conqueror of the nations exacting retribution and dominance over her neighbours, we ought to pause and reflect on the character of God. He is here described by these great terms. He is the Lord – YHWH – the self-existent covenant making God. He is the Redeemer and He is the King. He is by no means a tyrant and despot. Finally He is the Holy One who creates and makes. If we take the verses that follow as being a continuation in thought, the idea being expressed is that God will bring the Babylonians and Chaldeans down from their pride (glorying in their ships which speaks of their trade, travel and ingenuity) to a saving faith. Verses 14 and 15 serve, therefore, as a kind of summary heading for the whole section.

43:16,17.

Verses 16 and 17 seems to be a recall of the experience of Israel in crossing the Red Sea. It was God who made a way through the Red Sea for Israel to cross in safety, but when the Egyptians sought to follow them, they were drowned and destroyed.¹⁸⁴⁷ The chariots, the horses, the army, and the power (of Egypt) were drawn into the parted waters, but were made to *“lie down together,”* were unable to rise up, were *“extinguished,”* and were *“quenched like a wick.”* This is comprehensive. Nothing will escape. It reminds us of the repeated expressions of the death of all creatures during the flood.¹⁸⁴⁸

43:18.

Then in verse 18 the Lord, having reminded Israel of their past deliverance from Egypt, calls them to forgot this! This is startling. They are not to remember these things, and are to not consider the old things. Although this seems odd at first sight, the intention is not to forget utterly what God had done, but to make them realise that God was about to do something very different indeed. This

1846 Isaiah 43:14.

1847 Exodus 15:1f.

1848 Genesis 7:21f.

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was to be something new. When we put God in a box and claim that because He is the Rock who does not change He must always act in a certain way, we become guilty of terrible things. God is not confined to a pattern of repeating Himself. It is certainly true that God does not change. He is immutable. But this does not mean that He is duty bound to do the same things year in and year out. I sometimes wonder whether modern evangelicals get stuck in a terrible rut when they expect God to work in the ways that they are familiar with, and which they understand. God is too wonderful! Yes He calls us as witnesses to know, believe, and understand, but we are servants and we must never hold Him in a box and expect Him to do things in the same way all the time. His ways are perfect and when once He delivers by wonders and signs, He may repeat this, or He may choose to save through disaster or by means of a still and quiet witness or voice. It is not our place to make pronouncements on how the Lord will deal with things. I sometimes wonder if we slip into holding God to account rather than submitting to His perfect and sovereign will. I am not stating we sit back and let it all happen. Far from it. We are commanded to do certain things from a standpoint of faith in Christ. What we cannot demand is that the Lord will act in a way *we think* is appropriate. Some argue that we should be calling upon the Lord for revival, but then expect the Lord to do wonders and signs in some way they have read about in times past (e.g. the Welsh revival at the beginning of the twentieth century). Let us lean heavily upon the Lord and trust Him, but let us never demand that He work in a way we deem to be right. Who are we?

Now in this passage we are told of a truly amazing event that is about to take place. Where once God destroyed the enemies of Israel (the Egyptians) to deliver them, now a very different approach is to be made. God is perfect and all His ways are just. So when He destroyed Egypt (as was His prerogative and perfect will) this was done also to show the great need to die from the old ways and for man to put to death the deeds of the flesh (cutting off Egypt entirely). But now, again in God's perfect, good, and just plan, there is a very different aim.

43:19-21.

That word "*behold*" in verse 19 signals the introduction of a new thing. God is going to do something new and very different. It will happen very soon so that the people who are hearing this message will know it. God will make a road in the wilderness and a river where there is desert. He is going to make it possible for people to travel to Jerusalem and He will provide water for life. The idea being expressed is that God will be welcoming outsiders into the fold! In verse 20 the Lord uses the figures and pictures of some wild animals. The beast of the field, the jackals, and the

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ostriches – these will honour God and give Him praise. Why these creatures? Well it would seem that the jackal and the ostrich were desert dwellers. The word “*jackals*” is given as “*dragon*” in the AKJV. It is a translation of the Hebrew: תַּנִּינִים (*tanniyn*), which comes from a word that meant “to elongate” and so is taken as signifying a large monster-type creature, and may well indicate some form of dinosaur.¹⁸⁴⁹ Whatever the exact form of this creature, neither the jackal nor the ostrich have any great qualities about them. They are not elegant, nor are they virtuous. Rather they appear to be depictions of what is base and evil. These are put for the people of Babylon and Chaldea. Outwardly they appear as ostriches who neglect their young and as jackals who are the dogs of the desert. But a way for them to come to Jerusalem is being made, and provision is being given to them for life (rivers). These base and inglorious beasts are then termed “*My people*” in verse 20, and a people that God has formed for Himself who will declare His praise in verse 21. God is remarkable! He can raise up sons and daughters of Zion from the beasts of the field or from the stones and rocks in the desert. This ought to give us great confidence when we preach and declare the great gospel.

[2] But you ...I, even I, am He ... yet hear now. (Isaiah 43:22-44:5).

From Isaiah 43:22 to 44:5 we have a great contrast between what Israel (Jacob) had not done, (43:22-24), with what God will do (44:1-5). In between these contrasts we have a wonderful statement of the nature of God and His judgments (43:25-28). Thus we have the following:

[a] But you ... (Isaiah 43:22-24).

43:22-24.

We are brought back from a consideration of the new thing that God will do, to Israel's situation at hand.¹⁸⁵⁰ This is indicated by the contrast given by the word “*but,*” in verse 22. In this verse we are given nine statements which indicate Israel's failures. Now these are not given to beat Israel over the head, but are given as a record of the real and true situation. Sadly there are many in our day who hate to hear the truth. They say to us: “do not keep telling us we are sinners!” Such is

1849 It is well known that there are ancient stories and inscriptions throughout the world which show certain dinosaurs were still in existence in post-flood times.

See: <https://creation.com/concealed-under-carlisle-cathedral-carpet-dinosaurs>, <https://answersingenesis.org/extinct-animals/ice-age/messages-on-stone/> and <https://answersingenesis.org/dinosaurs/dragon-legends/>

1850 Note that although we are considering Judah in these prophecies, the terminology used is “*Israel,*” and “*Jacob.*” Israel signifies the nation as a whole prior to their split. Jacob signifies the root from whence the came, a man of deceit, reminding them of their state and condition when lost.

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misguided and dangerous. To be clear, it is equally bad to keep pointing out fault and failure without offering hope. Here the hope follows immediately in verse 25 and following. But before we get to this, we need to look carefully at the truth Israel of old faced. What were they like? Verses 22 to 24 detail their state and condition, and these verses can be arranged as shown below:

22 “But

you have not called upon Me, O Jacob; and
you have been weary of Me, O Israel.

23 You have not brought Me the sheep for your burnt offerings,
nor have you honoured Me with your sacrifices.

I have not caused you to serve with grain offerings, nor wearied you
with incense.

24 You have bought Me no sweet cane with money,
nor have you satisfied Me with the fat of your sacrifices;
but you have burdened Me with your sins,
you have wearied Me with your iniquities.

There is a clear pattern to these nine statements. Apart from the central one, which we shall consider in a moment, the others appear as pairs with the first two being mirrored by the last two and the second set of two mirrored by the penultimate pair of two.

We start with the fact that Israel had not “*called upon*” the Lord, but had become “*weary of*” the Lord. This is mirrored by the statements that instead they had “*burdened*” the Lord with their sins and had “*wearied*” the Lord with their iniquities. The point is that Israel had kept hold of the sins and iniquities rather than keeping hold of and cleaving to the Lord. Calling upon the Lord is essentially the thing that true believers do. It was in fact the thing done right after the first sin and departure from God. Men “*began to call upon the Lord.*”¹⁸⁵¹ In other words a dependent trust. It includes an exchange. In fleeing to Him for help, the One we have offended, we need to turn from and run from that which separates us from Him, namely, our sins. Clinging to sin and dwelling on it is the exact opposite of calling on the name of the Lord. The hesitant person will not give up sin and flee to the Lord. Remember Lot's wife.¹⁸⁵² The words “*weary*” and “*wearied*” are the same in the Hebrew. Instead of being weary of sin and wanting rid of it, the people were weary of the Lord. Rather than calling upon the Lord in complete dependence for mercy, the people had “*burdened*” the Lord with their sins. The words rendered “*burdened*” and “*weary*” all have the connotation of labour and work. It was as though all the business and dealings between Israel and the Lord were

1851 Genesis 4:26.

1852 Luke 17:32; Genesis 19:26.

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consumed with sin, centred on sin, and not focused on the Lord and His goodness. It is so easy to be drowned in a self-obsessed and self-absorbed introspection of sin and evil, that we fail to put any trust in the Lord. Such is wearying and burdening of the Lord. The fact of the matter is that He has dealt with sin once-and-for-all. The issue of sanctification, our daily dealing with sin, is not the focus here. It is rather the idea that sin and its judgement has been completely dealt with. In the Old Testament economy, of course, this was demonstrated by the sacrificial system which prophesied the perfect fulfilment found in Christ. In the New Testament economy we stand forgiven at the cross:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.¹⁸⁵³

How vital it is to keep coming to the Lord with the intention of seeking Him in truth and holiness!¹⁸⁵⁴ To do this we know we cannot drag our sinful ways along with us, for the Lord is holy – a consuming fire – and He will not countenance such behaviour. In our desire to seek Him, we are given a desire to hate our sin. This is what calling on the name of the Lord entails. The name, do not forget, signifies the character of God. We do not simply rely on His mercy, for we are attracted and drawn also by His goodness and purity, His greatness and His glory.

The second set of statements in verse 23a and the penultimate set in verse 24a all have to do with the objective means by which we call upon the Lord, namely sacrifice. Perhaps the key phrase comes at the end in verse 24a – the Lord was not “*satisfied*.” They had not “*brought*” the sheep of the sacrifices nor the sweet cane, nor had they “*honoured*” the Lord with them. In Isaiah 1 we hear the Lord rebuking Israel for bringing copious but futile sacrifices:

10 Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah: **11** “To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” Says the Lord. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. **12** “When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?¹⁸⁵⁵

This was probably during the reign of Uzziah early in the prophet's ministry. The date for our current passage is not clear but may well have been during the reign of the most wicked king to rule

1853 Romans 5:8.

1854 Hebrews 12:14.

1855 Isaiah 1:10-12.

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in Judah, namely, Manasseh. Perhaps the sacrificial system was in steep decline because of the multitude of idols being worshipped?

At the heart of these rebukes comes the statement of 23b. This reads differently in other versions. The NASB, for example, reads thus:

I have not burdened you with offerings, nor wearied you with incense.¹⁸⁵⁶

Note the use of the words *“burdened,”* and *“wearied,”* which link with the thoughts of verse 22, 23a, and 24b. The NKJV focuses our thoughts on the whole concept of service or *works* of sacrifice. Thus the Lord has not demanded these sacrifices as works from the Israelites. These were not meant to be a burden and wearisome. They were meant to show the gospel and bring forth faith and repentance. Look what our sins deserve, the shed blood of these animals! Look how detailed and deep seated is our sin that there are so many different types of sacrifice! What does all this mean? Surely the Lord will bring these things to completion one day for the sacrifice of animals can never fully atone for human sin? These are the types of thoughts the sacrificial system ought to have engendered. God had not instituted this system to burden Israel, but to bless them. How foolish we are! We make the great, good news of God into some form of system which ends up becoming a stumbling block to many. The Pharisees did this with all their rules and regulations based on their view of how to keep the law. The Roman (and other) Catholic churches do the same with their rituals and hierarchies. They block ready access to the Saviour with hurdles and stumbling blocks rather than provide an open access to the Lord. The Roman Catholics, for example, decry personal interpretation of Scripture. They say that an individual cannot grasp the meaning clearly and needs the church to do it for them! What tosh! What nonsense! With the Scriptures in our hands we can come to Christ, we can call upon the Lord and hear what He has to say.

[b] I, even I, am He ... (Isaiah 43:25-28).

Before we come to the great statements concerning what the Lord God will do, we have a kind of bridge section in which we learn things about God's nature and we hear an appeal of reason from the Lord.

¹⁸⁵⁶ Isaiah 43:23b, NASB.

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43:25.

Verse 25 gives us an emphatic statement with regard to the Lord's identity. We have already come across the idea that God is the *"I am"* from chapter 41:4. Now, the statement *"I am"* can be seen twenty times in Isaiah, twelve of which occur connected with the divine name. The details of these are shown in table 53.1 below.

Table 53.1: "I am" statements found in Isaiah.

Type of "I am" statement.	Scripture reference in Isaiah.	Frequency.
<i>"I am God"</i> ('El)	43:12; 45:22; 46:9.	3
<i>"I am the Lord"</i> (YHWH)	43:15; 44:24; 45:5,6,18; 48:17; 49:23; 51:15.	8
<i>"I, even, I am the Lord"</i> (YHWH)	43:10.	1
<i>"I am He"</i>	41:4; 43:10,13; 46:4; 48:12; 52:6.	6
<i>"I, even, I am He"</i>	43:25; 51:12.	2

Thus here in 43:25 the emphatic *"I, even, I am He"* is found. It will be observed that the conjunction *"even"* occurs in italics in the Biblical text signifying that it is not present in the Hebrew. What we actually have is *"I, I am He."* A duplication of the personal pronoun serves to emphasise the truth. We should be in absolutely no doubt as to whom is being referred to here. This is God, the Lord, who is acting, and He removes all rebellion for His own sake. Remarkably the Lord, the great *"I am"* will forget and not bring to remembrance the sins of His people.

43:26.

Interestingly, whilst the Lord would forget sins, Israel was to put the Lord in remembrance. This is remarkable! It is a theme we read of repeatedly in Scripture, that people forget God.¹⁸⁵⁷ How absurd! Not only are there copious reminders of God's presence within creation, we stagger to wonder why people (ourselves included) forget the Lord in view of all that He has done for us! Be that as it may we still forget God! I wonder, dear reader, how often do you think upon the Lord? Do you forget Him for an hour or two? Or maybe you forget Him during the day whilst at work? Perhaps you forget Him for several days, or maybe you forget Him until it is time to gather with others on the Lord's day? Or is it the case that weeks go by without a thought of God? How vital it is for us to put the Lord in our minds. Think often and frequently about the Lord. Bring your

¹⁸⁵⁷ Jeremiah 2:32; 3:21; 13:25; 18:15; Ezekiel 22:12; 23:35.

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thoughts back to Him and His works and doings. Be assured that the sinful nature drifts and leaves the Lord, and we forsake our first love far too often and easily.¹⁸⁵⁸

But here the Lord brings His presence to bear upon the people of God in order to give them a chance to put their case! This is ironic! It is even, dare I say it, funny. Puny Israel who had forgotten God were being reminded of Him so that they could put their case to contend for their position! It is not anywhere near the same league, but imagine a small boy forgetting that his father will return soon from work and will be somewhat disappointed at the awful mess he has made of the front room! When he returns the father quietly says to the boy: “OK son, tell me why is this room in such a mess?”

43:27,28.

Hardly have we had time to draw a breath when the Lord responds in verse 27. The people of God have no time to put their case, (they have none), because the facts of the matter are brought to bear. The Lord reminds us that their *“first father sinned.”* This, undoubtedly, brings us back to Adam. Then further we read of their *“mediators”* who also have rebelled against the Lord. What is probably implied by this reference is the priesthood which stood as a go-between for the people before God. The *“mediators”* are referred to in verse 28 as *“the princes of the sanctuary”* which phrase seems to suggest that the Levitical priesthood is in view. Having ancestry which stems from sin (Adam's transgression) would be enough to convict the people. But then also the ones who had acted as mediators between the fallen race of man and God had become perverted and sinful too. What could be done now? From mankind's perspective we have two failures, Adam's and the Levitical priesthood. Where could the people of God turn for help now? The outcome and fruit of this double failure is expressed as a conclusion in verse 28.

We find that the priesthood have been profaned. Literally, the Hebrew word suggests that they have been bored through or perforated, rendering them useless. There are holes in all of their arguments, so much so that it resembles a string vest! Then the Lord will give over the people of God to *“the curse,”* and to *“reproaches.”* The first idea is that of a net or a restricted area or place which was reserved for accursed things and which were under the ban. The second suggests being reviled and considered a reproach. Now we immediately recognise that the *“I am,”* the Lord of glory, has all the right to bring to justice the evil and rebellion expressed by the priesthood and the people. But this is not the end of the story!

¹⁸⁵⁸ Hebrews 2:1f; Revelation 2:4.

[c] Yet hear now. (Isaiah 44:1-5).

44:1.

In the next chapter of Isaiah we are given some wonderful comfort and promises. The word rendered “yet” in the NKJV could be rendered as “but” as we saw in 43:22, to form a response to the situation that Israel found itself in. The people did not bring sacrifice as requested with a right heart. The Lord God will remove sin but He will by no means ignore the evil – all evil must be judged. Now in 44:1-5 we find what the Lord will do for His chosen people who are also His servant.

44:2.

After reminding the people of their election and calling them to listen, the Lord goes on to remind the people that the Lord had created them in the womb. There is a constant reminder to us throughout the Scriptures that God is Creator. Here there is reference to the people having been “made” and “formed.” The former word points us back to Genesis 1. Although it is not the word which speaks of divine creation out of nothing, it is a word used synonymously with it throughout the creation story. The second word is the word that signifies the potter and the moulding of pots. There are many Scriptures teaching us the fact that God Himself is responsible for creating each and every individual in the womb.¹⁸⁵⁹ We are so often dulled by our so-called advanced knowledge about how pregnancy proceeds that we forget the fact that all occurs by the hand of God. Now the Lord speaks to Israel and tells them to “fear not,” by which we know that great mercy is in view. The thrice holy and awesome God coming to sinners who have failed and whom deserve judgement, ought to have consumed all in His path – and rightly so – but instead He comes with a “fear not!” How marvellous is our gracious God! As if to emphasise the grace aspect we get a repeat of the names and titles of the people of God but this time in place of “Israel” we have “Jeshurun.” This name means, literally “upright one.” It occurs in only three other places in Scripture at Deuteronomy 32:15; 33:5,26, and serves to indicate their state of being justified by faith. From verse 3 to 5 we are given detail on what the Lord intends to do to the nation by way of sanctification and evidence for the justified state they are in.

¹⁸⁵⁹ Job 10:8-12,18; 31:15; Psalm 22:9; 139:13; Isaiah 44:2,24.

44:3-5.

First there is the promise of water, but no mere trickle! There will be “*floods*” on the dry parched ground. We are not to think of Noah's inundation here. Rather we are to consider this as streams that flow readily.¹⁸⁶⁰ This is then further explained as an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and God's “*blessing*.” Clearly what is intimated is real and lasting life. The dry ground and the desert may harbour hardy and scant life, but the streams are full of living things. God will make Jeshurun a place of vibrant life! The offspring and descendants will receive the blessings that were initially promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:7. The fruitful growth will appear suddenly as they are said to “*spring up*” suddenly.¹⁸⁶¹ This is the new birth. It comes all at once. The phrase, “*like willows by the watercourses*” reminds us of Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:7,8. The righteous are like upright trees that are sited close to a running, living, river. In verse 5 we find that such as are blessed by the Holy Spirit and have new birth will begin to identify themselves as belonging to the Lord, (“*I am the Lord's*”), and will readily identify with the people of God, (“*call himself by the name of Jacob*”). It is very interesting that both ideas are expressed. A true born again believer is more than happy not just to be linked to God in a public way, but owns the family too. This is one of the tests that the apostle John marks out for us in his first epistle.¹⁸⁶² Note that the connection to the family is by means of the name of “*Jacob*,” which name signifies their sinful origins. Believers know their fallen state and even though the Lord may call us “*Jeshurun*,” nevertheless, we own our sinful state and remember humbly from whence we came. It is only by the grace of God that we can stand before the Lord.

1860 See Exodus 15:8; Numbers 24:7; Deuteronomy 32:2; Psalm 78:16; 147:18; Proverbs 5:15; Jeremiah 18:14.

1861 Isaiah 44:4.

1862 1John 3:17; 4:20,21.

Chapter 54.

Isaiah 44:6-23.

Return to Me for there is no other Rock!

Textual analysis.

6 “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:

‘I *am* the First and I *am* the Last; besides Me *there is* no God.

7 And who can proclaim as I do?

Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people.

And the things that are coming and shall come, let them show these to them.

8 Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that time, and declared *it*?

You *are* My witnesses.

Is there a God besides Me? Indeed *there is* no other Rock; I know not *one*.”

9 Those who make an image,

all of them *are* useless,

and their precious things shall not profit;

they *are* their own witnesses;

they neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed.

10 Who would form a god or mould an image *that* profits him nothing?

11 Surely all his companions would be ashamed; and the workmen, they *are* mere men.

Let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, they shall be ashamed together.

12 The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals, fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms. Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails; He drinks no water and is faint.

13 The craftsman stretches out *his* rule, he marks one out with chalk; he fashions it with a plane, he marks it out with the compass, and makes it like the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house. **14**

He cuts down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak; he secures *it* for himself among the trees of the forest. he plants a pine, and the rain nourishes *it*. **15** Then it shall be for a man to burn, for he will take some of it and warm himself; yes, he kindles *it* and bakes bread; indeed he makes a god and worships *it*; he makes it a carved image, and falls down to it. **16** He burns half of it in the fire; with this half he eats meat; he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms *himself* and says, “ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire.” **17** And the rest of it he makes into a god, his carved image. He falls down before it and worships *it*, prays to it and says, “deliver me, for you *are* my god!”

18 They do not know nor understand;

for He has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, *and* their hearts, so that they cannot understand.

19 And no one considers in his heart, nor *is there* knowledge nor understanding to say,

“I have burned half of it in the fire,

yes, I have also baked bread on its coals;

I have roasted meat and eaten *it*;

and shall I make the rest of it an abomination?

Shall I fall down before a block of wood?”

20 He feeds on ashes; a deceived heart has turned him aside; and he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, “*Is there* not a lie in my right hand?”

Studies in Isaiah.

21 “Remember these, O Jacob, and Israel, for you *are* My servant;
I have formed you, you *are* My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me!
22 I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins.
Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.”
23 Sing, O heavens,
 for the Lord has done *it*!
Shout, you lower parts of the earth;
break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it!
 For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel.

These 18 verses fall into three distinct parts. First in verses 6 to 8 we have a clear declaration of the exclusivity of God. He alone is God. This is what the very title “*God*” really means. Then in verses 9 to 20 we have an extended description of the folly of idols and idol makers. Finally in verses 21 to 23 we have a call to repentance and a declaration of victory in redemption. Verse 22, which describes the Lord's action against sin, recalls the Lord's words in Isaiah 43:25, so there are connections of thought that run through the divisions we are using.

[1] I am the Lord and there is no other. (Isaiah 44:6-8).

[2] The folly of idolatry. (Isaiah 44:9-20).

[3] Return to Me! (Isaiah 44:21-23).

[1] I am the Lord and there is no other. (Isaiah 44:6-8).

44:6.

Once again we are treated to a dose of titles. On this occasion we have four titles as follows:

Lord
King of Israel
Redeemer
Lord of hosts

We have the covenant name (YHWH), which reminds us of the relationship between the people and God. Next we have God as head over all Israel. They may have earthly kings but the true and rightful king was the Lord. The third title follows nicely from the second. Israel had failed terribly under the covenant and were rebels. They rejected the Lord as King and so we find that the Lord acts as the kinsman Redeemer, bringing the people back in grace and mercy. It is noteworthy to

Studies in Isaiah.

comment here that Hosea was a contemporary of Isaiah. In Hosea's prophecy we see the Lord acting wonderfully to buy back Israel from their lovers depicted by the prophet's reclamation of his wife Gomer. Then finally we have the Lord as Captain and Lord of all the hosts of heaven. No army can muster with any confidence when the Lord's army is near!

Now the Lord's first words in this section are a further revelation of His character. He describes Himself as *"the First"* and also as *"the Last."* We have already come across this designation and it only occurs three times in Isaiah.¹⁸⁶³ It is a title that we will find in the last book of the Bible, Revelation.¹⁸⁶⁴ It clearly signifies the fact that He was before all things and will be after all has finished. It thus teaches us that this order, this world and time, is finite and that the infinite God encompasses and engulfs all things. It further intimates that God never fails in bringing His plans and purposes to pass. He has begun something and will complete it. At the end of verse 6 we have the statement: *"besides Me there is no God."* Similar statements occur throughout the book of Isaiah as follows:¹⁸⁶⁵

I, even I, *am* the Lord, and besides Me **there is no** saviour.¹⁸⁶⁶

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I *am* the First and I *am* the Last; besides Me **there is no** God.'¹⁸⁶⁷

Is there a God besides Me? Indeed **there is no other** Rock; I know not *one*.¹⁸⁶⁸

I *am* the Lord, and **there is no other**; **there is no** God besides Me.¹⁸⁶⁹

That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that *there is none* besides Me. I *am* the Lord, and **there is no other**.¹⁸⁷⁰

They will make supplication to you, *saying*, surely God *is* in you, and **there is no other**; **there is no other** God.¹⁸⁷¹

For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: "I *am* the Lord, and **there is no other**."¹⁸⁷²

1863 Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12.

1864 Revelation 1:11,17; 22:13.

1865 There are twelve occurrences of this phrase in Isaiah.

1866 Isaiah 43:11.

1867 Isaiah 44:6.

1868 Isaiah 44:8.

1869 Isaiah 45:5.

1870 Isaiah 45:6.

1871 Isaiah 45:14.

1872 Isaiah 45:18.

Studies in Isaiah.

Who has declared this from ancient time? *Who* has told it from that time? *Have* not I, the Lord? And **there is no other** God besides Me, a just God and a Saviour; *There is none besides Me.*¹⁸⁷³

Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I *am* God, and **there is no other.**¹⁸⁷⁴

Remember the former things of old, for I *am* God, and **there is no other**; I *am* God, and *there is none like Me.*¹⁸⁷⁵

This idea comes first in the book of Deuteronomy, but it also occurs in 1Kings, Daniel and Joel.¹⁸⁷⁶ As if the title “*God*” was not enough, the Lord repeatedly declares, and demonstrates, that He has no rivals. There is only one God and there are no others who can be put in His category.

44:7.

Next the Lord asks a simple question. Whom can state truth and prophecy as the Lord does? Who can declare what is, and what will be, except the Lord who is the first and the last? The challenge for anyone to come and declare what will be is issued but, of course, there are none who can meet this. Here is the test for any who claim to challenge God. Can you (or anyone) set in order the things that will come to pass? To ask such a question is to answer it. All mankind is locked in time and is bound to it. We have a hard job remembering former times! How could we possibly declare what will come in the future, or even tomorrow?

44:8.

In verse 8 the theme of God's unique nature and exclusive right to declare truth and prophecy is restated, but this time we have a new title, “*Rock.*” What a glorious title is this! The stable One on whom we can build. The immovable One who needs no alteration in His being or plans, for all He does is perfect. The solid One who is substantial and contrasts dramatically with the sinking and shifting sands of all other claims to truth. Now the Lord again calls His people to not be afraid, and this command can be issued because the Lord has indeed declared the truth and has prophesied from the beginning of time! He had told the Israelites of that time through the various prophets as well as in type and shadow through the law and the tabernacle and sacrifices.

1873 Isaiah 45:21.

1874 Isaiah 45:22.

1875 Isaiah 46:9.

1876 Deuteronomy 4:35,39; 1Kings 8:60; Daniel 3:29; Joel 2:27.

Studies in Isaiah.

But then also He has spoken from the very beginning of time. Even in creation itself He has spoken of the future and of salvation. Then when Adam and Woman fell, He spoke again. And His people have been witnesses of these things (*“you are My witnesses”*). This truth is one we must take hold of with all the strength the Lord supplies. To be a witness is to give evidence. We are often called to bear witness to the Lord. Let us never be ashamed of the Lord and His words.¹⁸⁷⁷

We ought to have great confidence in God! He has told us what will be and how things will progress time and time again. He has issued the call to faith. He has provided every possible means for us to trust in Christ. Let us press on and trust in Him.

[2] The folly of idolatry. (Isaiah 44:9-20).

Verses 9 to 20 are one long presentation against idolatry. The Lord makes the case against idols simply by outlining what an idol is and how it is made. By doing this simple thing we learn the great folly of idolatry.

Idolatry, of course, encompasses all those things made by man as an object of worship. That includes ideas, philosophies, and world views as well as physical objects described here. We worship that which we consider of great worth. If, for example, I value as the most important thing of all my reputation as an academic, then I will be effectively worshipping my own research and achievements, or, in other words, myself. If, on the other hand, all my thoughts are focused on a single person, (my wife, a celebrity, or a hero), then clearly I will be worshipping that person. Now, of course, we can honour people and value things without really worshipping them. It is when the focus of attention is so given to a particular object or person such that my thoughts are driven by them, that we have fallen into worship.

44:9.

In verse 9 we find the Lord speaking of those things that someone *“makes”* and which are *“precious.”* The word for *“make”* is יָצַר *yatsar*, which means “to mould or fashion (as a potter).” The word *“precious”* is חֲמַד *chamad*, which comes from the idea of “delighting in,” “to desire,” or “to covet.” When our deep desires are expressed by our ingenuity in forming, formulating, and fashioning, then these are idols. We make and devise things and schemes which satisfy our own personal desires and greeds. Thus when the modern scientist builds and constructs ideas and theories to suit his own thoughts of importance and wishful thinking, he is making an idol. As

¹⁸⁷⁷ Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26.

Studies in Isaiah.

Solomon once put it:

Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.¹⁸⁷⁸

The word “*useless*” is the word **תהו** *tohu* which means essentially, “without form.” This word occurs in Genesis 1:2 where it refers to initial creation of the raw material that awaits God's constructing work. It is rather like a large slab of marble before being made into a statue, or a blank word document before the writer begins to type his novel. However, it is the people who make such things, who are formless and unmade, and this is ironic. What they make or fashion with all their ingenuity and skill comes from something “unmade.” Having rejected their Creator they have become disconnected and so unmade. That which the idolator esteems and holds in great value actually does “*not profit*” them. It does not bring excellence or use. It fails in the very way it was intended. The idol makers then demonstrate the folly of what they are doing, for they are their own witnesses. What they are doing actually witnesses to the great folly they produce! How remarkable! We perhaps spend so much time fretting over false religion and philosophy, trying to build arguments against them all, when all the time these systems of men are, in fact, witnessing against themselves! The idol makers cannot see and recognize their own folly, for if they did they would become ashamed. They are thus exactly like the things they have made, which cannot see and cannot know, because they are simply made of things (or ideas which stem from the minds of men).

44:10,11.

Verse 10 asks a rhetorical question. It is outrageous and wholly pathetic to expend so much effort and time moulding and casting an image which ends up being useless and of no profit. Why do such a thing? And yet every man does it! We see it all around. Atheism, humanism, all the religions and philosophies of the world, the theory of evolution, faith in modern science, the pursuit of money, fame, or gratification of lust, and so on are all ultimately pointless. Verse 11 continues the thought of verse 10. If it comes to the point when the idol carefully crafted amounts to nothing and fails in its purpose, then surely there would be many red faces around! Imagine a great company embarking on the launch of a new product. The advertising and promotional people galvanise into action, and the day for release comes. What a shock and what huge embarrassment would result when the product in the stores fails and has to be recalled! All in the company would be sorely

¹⁸⁷⁸ Ecclesiastes 7:29, AKJV.

Studies in Isaiah.

ashamed. Verse 11 continues with statements emphasising that such shame would in fact be the idol makers' experience. They will be gathered and will be held to account and will be ashamed together. This gives believers great confidence. We are at the stage perhaps of pre-launch, if we consider our earlier illustration. Those around us who favour one philosophy or idea above all else, (evolution for example), will hold that it promises great rewards if we will be wait a while. However the fact of the matter is that those who promote ideas contrary to God and His ways will be shown up for the folly they devise.

44:12-14.

From verse 12 through to verse 14 we are given a description of the method to make crafted idols at that time. It must be stated that this stands for all the various methods of making an idol, whether it be an image of the pope, or a scientific theory of everything. The principles outlined here apply to all versions of making idols. So what are we taught here? Two types of craftsmen are detailed here. First in verse 12 the blacksmith who makes a cast idol in the furnace, and second from verse 13 the carpenter craftsman who plants trees specifically for the making of his idols, and expends great energy and ingenuity in designing and crafting a wooden idol. The descriptions are detailed and serve to show the lengths to which idol worshippers go. Thus we have the blacksmith who with his skill uses the heat of the furnace and his hammers to form the idol into some designed form.¹⁸⁷⁹ This is tiring and exhausting work so that he becomes *"hungry," "his strength fails,"* and he becomes *"faint"* through lack of water.¹⁸⁸⁰ And then we read of the carpenter *"craftsman"* who is equally skilled and skilful, even in his planting and selecting the various wood types required.¹⁸⁸¹ He makes the idol into the *"the figure of a man"* in all his *"beauty,"* in order that it may take up residence *"in the house."*¹⁸⁸² From these descriptions it is very clear that great energy and effort is expended to form and make these various idols.

My mind automatically moves to consider the great scientific enterprise of the modern age. Undoubtedly the governing paradigm, which has become an idol in itself, is evolution.¹⁸⁸³ When you think of the lengths scientist have gone to, to bolster their theory against attack, the mind boggles. Consider, for example, the massive particle accelerators made in Europe whose chief purpose is to investigate the so-called origins of the universe! We may laugh at and turn our noses up at the

1879 Isaiah 44:12.

1880 Isaiah 44:12.

1881 Isaiah 44:13,14.

1882 Isaiah 44:13.

1883 Biological, geological, and cosmological.

Studies in Isaiah.

simplistic descriptions given here of the blacksmith and carpenter. Modern science is oh so much more sophisticated! But is it, really? If you look at the incredible workmanship of ancient man, say, for example, the pyramids you cannot help but admire the skill and mastery involved. Man has not really changed all that much in four millenia. In short anything which does not have the great commandment in view – to love the Lord God with all that we have – will always be idolatrous.¹⁸⁸⁴ We may expend great effort and energy in pursuing our chosen dreams, but whatever we do it will be nothing more nor less than what these skilled craftsmen are doing here.

44:15-17.

The situation is made particularly laughable in connection with the carpenter. The Holy Spirit presses the point that the skilled workman carves his idol from the very same stock of wood that he also uses to cook his meals and warm his bones! The same substance is both worshipped and honoured as being all-providing (calling to the god in verse 17 for deliverance), and used to burn to supply energy for food and warmth! How absurd! Now the wooden idol is crafted into the likeness of a man in all his beauty – hence focusing on the positive traits – but still it is simply a *“mere”* man. Ultimately all idols have this human characteristic about them. We are not capable of inventing anything outside of our experience. To invest in a piece of wood the qualities and attributes of mankind seems silly in the extreme. But do we do any less in worshipping science, or economic systems, or a political ideal? These are our gods! We devise schemes and inventions out of our experience. They have qualities of the human make-up. Often they are not beautiful. We take our eyes off the Lord of glory and worship the schemes and theories we have built which exalt some aspect of human nature we can see. How pitiful. How pathetic.

44:18-20.

In verses 18 to 20 we are given some concluding thoughts. The idol (and its maker) are completely ignorant and have no understanding! How ironic! In the modern age and its quest for truth and discovery, they build a theory and system to encompass everything, but God's verdict and assessment is: *“they do not know nor understand.”*¹⁸⁸⁵ How so? Well God has shut their eyes and made it so that they cannot understand. The same thought is expressed by Paul in his letter to the Romans:

1884 Deuteronomy 6:5; 10:12.

1885 Isaiah 44:18.

Studies in Isaiah.

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, **19** because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. **20** For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, **21** because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. **22** Professing to be wise, they became fools, **23** and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. **24** Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonour their bodies among themselves, **25** who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. **26** For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. **27** Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. **28** And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; **29** being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, **30** backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, **31** undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; **32** who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.¹⁸⁸⁶

Thus God gave those who suppressed the truth over to their intentions, their “*vile passions*” and their “*debased minds*,” to do those things which they approved of but were “*not fitting*.” When we are bent on following our own desires, our own dreams, we ought not to be surprised when the Lord gives us over to these. He closes our eyes to the reality and truth of the situation so that we will pursue that which we have stubbornly chosen. In this case such idolaters haven't the understanding to realise the inconsistency in their position.

In Isaiah 44:19 we read that “*no one considers*” in their innermost being, and that none have “*knowledge nor understanding*.”¹⁸⁸⁷ This is then explained by the fact that the same wood that is carved into an intricate and detailed idol, is also used as fuel to make their meal. The very same thing people use for worship and meaning, they also burn in the fire for food and fuel. In all other idolatrous cases there is this same inconsistency, this same contradiction. That which I construct to suit my wishes and intentions will also yield inconsistencies and contradictions. That which I build

1886 Romans 1:18-32.

1887 Isaiah 44:19.

Studies in Isaiah.

to satisfy my needs and desires is also that which will destroy me (because I have rejected God and He will confirm me in my rejection). The idolater effectively *“feeds on ashes.”*¹⁸⁸⁸ In other words the real value of the idol that he has made is nothing but ashes, for the wood used to make the idol is used to burn to cook food. As such the idolater has *“a deceived heart”* and this has *“turned him aside.”* And (very sadly) there is nothing that the idolater can do for *“he cannot deliver his soul.”* They cannot come to the truth concerning their idols that such is really *“a lie”* in their *“right hand,”* the hand of their action.¹⁸⁸⁹

Summarising the discussion above we have the following:

[1] Idols are made only within the experience of man.

- *They reflect something of man's character and being.*
- *They never come from outside of his experience, and therefore do not come from God.*
- *They are all, if you like, humanistic in nature.*

[2] Idols are often fashioned with immense skill and creativity.

- *They are works of great beauty and artistry.*

[3] Idols always show up contradictions and inconsistencies.

- *They never truly satisfy and fail in their intentions.*

[3] Return to Me! (Isaiah 44:21-23).

44:21,22.

The people of God are called to keep these idols and idol makers in mind (*“remember these”*). The question we ask is, why? Well if we do not do this, you can be sure that we will fall into this way of thinking far too readily. By looking at these misguided folk we are brought to a realisation of their folly and are deflected from traversing these byways.

In calling Israel and Jacob, (described as God's *“servant”*), to remember these idols and idol makers, the Lord is also calling them to remember that it was God who *“formed”* them and that although they may forget Him, He will never forget them.¹⁸⁹⁰ Thus we are not to remember the folly of idolatry only, but the fact that God created us, and that He did so in His image. The Lord will

1888 Isaiah 44:20.

1889 Isaiah 44:20.

1890 Isaiah 44:21.

Studies in Isaiah.

never forget His people because He has dealt finally with their sin and rebellion.¹⁸⁹¹ God has “*blotted out*” or erased and fully removed the stain of sin far better than any stain remover removes blemishes from clothes!¹⁸⁹² These stains have been removed by clouds which serve to completely hide and obliterate them. Thus Israel are called to “*return*” to the Lord because of His redemption.¹⁸⁹³ Note how the act of redemption precedes the call to repentance. It is only on the basis of what the Lord has done in bringing about redemption, that we can respond to His call to return and repent. The cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ secured redemption fully and finally. There is no need for any other priest, priesthood, sacrifice, or observance. All that was needed to be done was done at the cross. The cross was the focal point of all the promises in the Old Testament. In looking to the Lord on the cross and in His resurrection we are secure and at rest.

44:23.

Because the Lord has completed the work (“*the Lord has done it*”), our passage ends with a call to the whole of creation to worship God in verse 23. From the “*heavens*” to the “*lower parts of the earth*” which includes the mountains, forests and the individual trees within, all are instructed to “*break forth into singing.*” The completed work is the work of redemption – God buying Israel back from the sinful state – which also results in the Lord being “*glorified ... in Israel.*” Here we have the doctrine of union with Christ. As Paul writing to the Colossians puts it:

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.¹⁸⁹⁴

Thus God glorifies Himself within those He has redeemed. The redeemed are those who call upon the Lord, repent, and return embracing all that God desires. No longer are their hearts given to idols!

1891 Isaiah 44:22.

1892 Isaiah 44:22.

1893 Isaiah 44:22.

1894 Colossians 1:27.

Chapter 55.

Isaiah 44:24-45:25.

Cyrus – the Lord's shepherd!

Textual analysis.

- 24 Thus says the **Lord**, your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: “I *am* the **Lord**,
Who makes all *things*,
Who stretches out the heavens all alone,
Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself;
25 Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, and drives diviners mad;
Who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolishness;
26 Who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers;
Who says to Jerusalem, ‘you shall be inhabited,’ to the cities of Judah, ‘You shall be built,’ and I will raise up
her waste places;
27 Who says to the deep, ‘be dry! And I will dry up your rivers’;
28 Who says of Cyrus,
 ‘*He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem,*
 “You shall be built,” and to the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.”’
- 1 “Thus says the **Lord**
to His anointed,
to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—
to subdue nations before him and loose the armour of kings,
to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut:
2 ‘I will go before you and make the crooked places straight;
I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron.
3 I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may
know that I, the **Lord**, who call *you* by your name, *am* the God of Israel.
4 For Jacob My servant’s sake, and Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I
have named you, though you have not known Me.
5 I *am* the **Lord**, and *there is* no other; *there is* no God besides Me.
I will gird you, though you have not known Me, 6 That they may know from the rising of the
sun to its setting that *there is* none besides Me.
I *am* the **Lord**, and *there is* no other;
7 I form the light and create darkness,
I make peace and create calamity;
I, the **Lord**, do all these *things*.’
8 “Rain down, you heavens, from above, and
let the skies pour down righteousness;
let the earth open,
let them bring forth salvation, and
let righteousness spring up together.
I, the **Lord**, have created it.
9 “Woe to him who strives with his Maker!

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Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth!
Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?'
Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands'?
10 Woe to him who says to *his* father, 'what are you begetting?' Or to the woman,
'What have you brought forth?'"

11 Thus says the **Lord**, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker:

"ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; and concerning the work of My hands, you command Me.

12 I have made the earth, and created man on it.

I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded.

13 I have raised him up in righteousness, and

I will direct all his ways;

he shall build My city and let My exiles go free, not for price nor reward," says the **Lord** of hosts.

14 Thus says the **Lord**:

"the labour of Egypt and merchandise of Cush and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you, and

they shall be yours;

they shall walk behind you,

they shall come over in chains; and

they shall bow down to you.

They will make supplication to you, *saying*,

"Surely **God** is in you, and *there is no other; there is no other God.*"

15 Truly You are **God**, who hide Yourself, O **God** of Israel, the Saviour!

16 They shall be ashamed and also disgraced, all of them;

they shall go in confusion together, *who are* makers of idols.

17 But Israel shall be saved by the **Lord** with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed or disgraced forever and ever.

18 For thus says the **Lord**,

Who created the heavens,

Who is **God**,

Who formed the earth and made it,

Who has established it,

Who did not create it in vain,

Who formed it to be inhabited:

"I *am* the **Lord**, and *there is no other.*"

19 I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth;

I did not say to the seed of Jacob, 'seek Me in vain';

I, the **Lord**, speak righteousness,

I declare things that are right.

20 "Assemble yourselves and

come;

draw near together,

you *who have* escaped from the nations.

They have no knowledge, who carry the wood of their carved image, and pray to a god *that* cannot save.

21 Tell and bring forth *your case*; yes,

let them take counsel together.

Who has declared this from ancient time?

Who has told it from that time?

Have not I, the **Lord**?

And

there is no other **God** besides Me, a just **God** and a Saviour;

Studies in Isaiah.

there is none besides Me.

22 “Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!

For I *am* **God**, and *there is* no other.

23 I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. 24 He shall say,

‘surely in the **Lord** I have righteousness and strength. To Him *men* shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him. 25 In the **Lord** all the descendants of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory.’”

The opening words of this section are closely connected in thought to the end of the last. All creation has been called to worship, because God has redeemed Israel. Now we are brought to consider some truths concerning this great “*Redeemer.*” This section falls into five sections each of which begins with the phrase “*thus says the Lord.*” The unifying theme of the passage is a surprise, but is something which has already been hinted at in Isaiah 41:2,25. Thus the focus is on God's deliverance effected through a pagan king named “*Cyrus.*”¹⁸⁹⁵ This great (future) salvation is used to issue a call to all the earth to return and be saved.¹⁸⁹⁶ We shall consider each section in turn.

[1] *The basis for choosing Cyrus. (Isaiah 44:24-28).*

[2] *The details of the Lord's instructions to Cyrus. (Isaiah 45:1-10).*

[3] *Should we question God's wisdom in using Cyrus? By no means! (Isaiah 45:11-13).*

[4] *The salvation of Israel astounds the idol makers. (Isaiah 45:14-17).*

[5] *To make the point clear! (Isaiah 45:18-25).*

[1] *The basis for choosing Cyrus. (Isaiah 44:24-28).*

In verses 24 to 28 we have a series of statements about God and whom He is as the basis for His choosing Cyrus as God's “*shepherd.*” Although Cyrus is a (yet-to-be) future king, nevertheless he is set forth as a type of the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ.

44:24.

First let us consider the way in which God is described here. We are reminded that He is “*Lord,*” and so sovereign, that He is their “*Redeemer,*” and, lastly, that he is their Creator, (“*formed you*”), and so therefore, doubly owned. Our culture rejects both rights of God to our lives. However we must reaffirm both the fact that God owns us, because He made us in the first place (we are “*formed from the womb*”), and also because of the great work of redemption in Christ.

1895 Isaiah 44:28; 45:1,13.

1896 Isaiah 45:22.

Studies in Isaiah.

Arguments about whether this second ownership applies to all are redundant. Christ died for sinners, Christ died for the world. The fact that Christ's death and resurrection is only effectually applied to those who are truly saved matters little here at this point. It is vital that we state that Christ's death and resurrection – His act of redemption – is sufficient for all, for whoever who call on Him for salvation. What the Lord actually declares here as first and foremost, is that He is “*the Lord.*” There is no other! There then follows a series nine statements of the things He does.¹⁸⁹⁷ There seems to be three sets of three things that God does. First we have things concerning creation. God is He:

Who makes all *things*
Who stretches out the heavens all alone
Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself

Whether we think of the earth or of heaven, God made all, (i.e. everything), and He did it “*all alone*” and by Himself. He extended the heavens to contain the starry host and he spread out the earth and its inhabitants to cover the globe. All was created by Him alone. Those who consider the stars ought to take note that God is the creator of what they study. This ought to arrest the thinking of astronomers and cosmologists!

44:25,26a.

Then next we have those things concerning truth, prophecy and wisdom. God is He:

Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, and drives diviners mad
Who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolishness
Who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers

It never ceases to amaze me that this theme of only two ways: God's word versus everything else, is reiterated time and again, and yet, it is ignored and refuted by people, even by some wings of the church (so-called). What can be compared to God's word? Here the word of God is put as “*the word of His servant.*” We remind ourselves that servants of God cannot change the message. Our task is simply to pass on the message we have received. It is out of God's great grace and mercy that

¹⁸⁹⁷ Isaiah 44:24-28.

Studies in Isaiah.

we can partake of such a ministry, that when we have the word of God it is called “*the word of His servant!*” Well the word of God is confirmed (literally “to arise,” which speaks of resurrection and new life), and performed (that is, the idea of completion to wholeness or peace), by the Lord. The word of God is given to bring about life and it will not fail. God confirms and performs all that He said He would. What great confidence we should have! If God will confirm His word and perform it, then we had better take heed to all that He has said!

In stark and unimaginable contrast, all that man may claim, say, or even do, is to be frustrated, turned backward, and rendered as folly! God frustrates, or breaks in pieces rendering then as nothing, the efforts and great show of those who claim to speak truth, but are in fact fabricators of fiction, (“*babblers*” is rendered “*liars*” in the AKJV and comes from the root, “to fabricate or fashion”). Thus even though the prophets of this world may claim sophistication and intelligence, they are simply operating in the hands of God. They may think they are speaking great things, but their words and claims are vacuous. Moving from those who claim to be prophets the Lord next takes control of the wise men, or the academics of society. In many ways our age is governed by the academy. The interplay between politicians, big business, and multinationals (the tradesmen of the world), and the so-called intelligentsia is a subtle one. In the medieval period there existed the kings and court, the church and bishops, and the traders and merchants. But here the focus in this second statement is the academy, upon which many decisions in business or trade and international relations are made. Well, the wisdom of the wise will be turned “*backward,*” or around. The direction that the wise thought they were going in, is reversed. One of the favourite expressions of modern scientists is: “pushing back the frontiers in our onward advance!” They may like to think this but in reality they are going in reverse! They are, in point of fact, making things worse. You only have to consider the doctrine of evolution to realise this. The “knowledge” modern scientists have is in the wrong direction. It is foolishness and silly. Actually it is more than this for it is dangerous. And then further we find that the Lord makes the wisdom of the wise “*foolishness.*” Now such a theme is one repeated throughout Scripture and is a particular point that the apostle Paul makes:

*Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*¹⁸⁹⁸

Many may argue with this straight forward antithesis between what God says and what man

1898 1Corinthians 1:20.

Studies in Isaiah.

discovers, but if you start to think clearly about the aim and implications of a particular route you can see that such a view is true. For example, many assume that modern science is broadly speaking on the right tracks. We may have an issue with evolution, but otherwise modern scientists are seeking truth and finding it. Is that the case? Well consider the following Scriptures first:

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16** For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. **17** And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. **18** And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.¹⁸⁹⁹

... Christ, **3** in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.¹⁹⁰⁰

All things were created by Christ through Him, and were created for Him. All things bear direct relation to Him because in Him all things consist. Because He is the Creator, the Agent of creation and the purpose for creation, the apostle can write that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are “*hidden*” in Him. Given these simple statements, (and there are many more we could consider), how ought this to affect how modern science is carried out? If Christ is the Agent of creation and creation is for Him, then surely our thinking ought to be governed by Him and thoughts of Him? Look into modern science and there is a complete absence of Christ or God. This isn't surprising because modern science begins with assuming materialism and ignores all things supernatural. And yet this has not always been the case in the history of science.

“*What is the chaff to the wheat?*” The word of God, declares the Lord in Jeremiah 23:28, is so far above all else that proceeds out of mankind's mouth, that there is no comparison. Wheat is eminently useful, the chaff is utterly useless. And so it is with all the theories and philosophies of mankind. Study them, if you will, to see where man fails and gets distracted. But better still, study God's word to see truth, life, and peace. The Lord confirms His word given to His servants, and carries out all His will as declared by His witnesses. What an immense privilege it is to speak and proclaim the message of God! The word of God comes from the mouth and mind of God. What He says is final. This word is also called His “*counsel*.” In the first expression (“*word*”) we have the objective thoughts which come from the Lord, but in this second word (“*counsel*”) we have the fruit and application of this word. That is, we are given through God's word and message, His

1899 Colossians 1:15-18.

1900 Colossians 2:2,3.

Studies in Isaiah.

advice, and His purpose. In other words the message brought is not just the objective truth which comes from God, but the useful and effective advice which pays dividends in life.

44:26b-28.

In the final three statements we are brought to consider what the Lord would do for Judah and Jerusalem in the near future. Isaiah was prophesying in the late eighth and early seventh centuries BC. What he is prophesying about here would not take place until the late sixth century, in other words, about a century and more in the future. Remember that the Babylonian captivity is still in the future too. The prophecy is precise and would have been quite shocking to the Israelites because although the temple was repeatedly despoiled by various kings, it was still operating at this time. What then does the prophet foretell?

Who says to Jerusalem, 'you shall be inhabited,' to the cities of Judah, 'You shall be built,' and I will raise up her waste places.¹⁹⁰¹

Who says to the deep, 'be dry! And I will dry up your rivers.'¹⁹⁰²

Who says of Cyrus, '*He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."*'¹⁹⁰³

First we find that Jerusalem will be repopulated, and the cities of Judah will be made up, again (presumably) to be inhabited. Thus we are to understand that there would be great growth in the population. In the days leading up to the Exodus the Lord promised a great increase in the numbers of Israel. Whilst during their wilderness years the numbers did not increase or increase, nevertheless their numbers increased dramatically in their early years in Egypt.¹⁹⁰⁴ The Lord then promised the nation that this increase would continue on condition of their keeping the covenant.¹⁹⁰⁵ Thus here we have the promise of an increase being fulfilled, despite their failure. In this we see the gospel increase. There will be multitudes coming to Christ, so that Jerusalem (the church) will increase and be inhabited, and cities will be needed because this increase will be all over the world. In Daniel chapter 2 we have a picture and prophecy of the growth of the church described as:

1901 Isaiah 44:26b.

1902 Isaiah 44:27.

1903 Isaiah 44:28.

1904 Genesis 47:27; Exodus 1:7; Deuteronomy 1:10. 32:13

1905 Deuteronomy 6:3:7:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces ... And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.¹⁹⁰⁶

Furthermore, we learn that Jerusalem's waste places will be raised up. This is 'resurrection' language. The waste places where all the rubbish and detritus of the people were thrown speaks of the outcasts and the lost. These will be raised, indicating new life!

The second statement brings to mind both the experience of the flood of Noah's day, and the crossing of the Red Sea at the Exodus. If we consider the flood, the waters were waters of judgement. These came down in an unprecedented torrent to wipe the face of the earth clean from its sinfulness. The judgement of God came upon the earth and all who were not in the ark (a type of Christ) were destroyed and cleansed away. Thus by saying that the *"deep"* would be *"dry,"* amounts to saying that judgement is passed. But taking this statement in connection with the Red Sea crossing suggests that we are being told that the entrance into the promised land is now open again. Spiritually speaking we are being told that the way back into God's promises are available.

The third statement gives specific information about what will happen to Jerusalem and the temple. There will come a king called *"Cyrus"* who is described as the Lord's *"shepherd."* Cyrus will do all that God wills and will rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. In hindsight we can see all the fulfilment of this and we rejoice at such things.¹⁹⁰⁷ But the greater truth is that these things stand as types for the real Great, Good and Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁰⁸ Although Cyrus did all that God intended, only Christ could *"perform all"* the Father's *"pleasure."* He alone did all that pleased the Father, and the apostle Peter recorded the Father's words spoken on the Mount of Transfiguration in which He stated: *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*¹⁹⁰⁹ Again, only the Lord Jesus can be said to have truly built Jerusalem and the temple. These, of course, are the spiritual realities of which the physical are but types. We see this most clearly in connection with the temple. Thus in John we read of Christ's zeal for His Father's house, where He drove out the merchants from the temple. When He had done this the Jews were indignant:

18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" **19** Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." **20** Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to

1906 Daaniel 2:34,35.

1907 2Chronicles 36:22; Ezra 1:1f.

1908 John 10:7,11,14; Hebrews 13:20; 1Peter 5:4.

1909 John 8:29; 2Peter 1:17.

Studies in Isaiah.

build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” **21** But He was speaking of the temple of His body. **22** Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.¹⁹¹⁰

So whilst the Jews were fixated on the physical temple, Jesus pointed His believers and disciples to the true temple, namely, His body. We, as true believers, are the body of Christ. Both this figure and the illustration of the city of Jerusalem are used as types and pictures of the church which is made up exclusively of born again believers.

[2] The details of the Lord's instructions to Cyrus. (Isaiah 45:1-10).

Isaiah 45 verses 1 to 10 give us some of the details of the instructions for Cyrus to effect the return from exile. Spiritually speaking we are thinking about the Saviour's work of redemption.

45:1.

We begin by noting that Cyrus is referred to as “*His anointed,*” (i.e. God's anointed one). To be anointed was to be set apart for a specific task. Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil for specific tasks.¹⁹¹¹ Anointing with oil was symbolic of being empowered by the Holy Spirit. Thus Cyrus was set apart by the Lord for the task the Lord was giving him. Then we note also that Cyrus was the one “*whose right hand*” the Lord God held. These two features are indicative of Christ, so that Cyrus is being put forward as a type. There are two specific tasks that Cyrus was given to do. First he was to “*subdue nations*” which is also described as a removal of the weapons of kings. But second Cyrus was “*to open*” doors so that the gates would never be shut. The doors or gates referred to would be those concerning Jerusalem and the temple. These two things are the key aspects of the Lord's great work. He opened the way in through the true temple through His death on the cross. This is shown by the following words from Hebrews:

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh.¹⁹¹²

Christ, we remember, is the true temple and we enter into the heavenly places, into the presence of

1910 John 2:18-22.

1911 **Prophets:** 1Kings 19:16; 1Chronicles 16:22; Psalm 105:15. **Priests:** Exodus 40:15; Numbers 3:3; Exodus 29:29; Leviticus 4:3; 16:32. **Kings:** 1Samuel 9:16; 10:1; 1Kings 1:34,39;

1912 Hebrews 10:19,20.

Studies in Isaiah.

God the Father, exclusively through the Lord Jesus, who said these words:

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.¹⁹¹³

But second the Lord Jesus subdued the nations, by which is meant all the godless powers, as the following Scriptures demonstrate:

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.¹⁹¹⁴

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.¹⁹¹⁵

45:2,3.

Verses 2 and 3 describe what the Lord God would do as a precursor for Cyrus. These actions would be carried out so that Cyrus would know that the Lord is truly God. The Lord God would do the following:

I will go before you and make the crooked places straight

I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron

I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places

To what is the Lord referring? Cyrus was the king who would rebuild the temple and subdue the nations. In order to make the way smooth, the Lord would go before him and straighten out all the obstacles. Reference to the crooked paths being straightened has come up already in Isaiah 40:4 and 42:16. The idea is one of redemption. The reference to “*gates of bronze*” and “*bars of iron*” being rent is also seen in Psalm 107 where the implication is of a rescue from dungeons or prisons:

10 Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and irons— **11** because they rebelled against the words of God, and despised the counsel of the Most High, **12** therefore He brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and *there was none to help.* **13** Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,

1913 John 14:6.

1914 1John 3:8.

1915 Colossians 2:15.

Studies in Isaiah.

*and He saved them out of their distresses. 14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their chains in pieces. 15 Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! 16 For He has broken the gates of bronze, and cut the bars of iron in two.*¹⁹¹⁶

Those who had rebelled against God's word and who suffered trouble and distress, were then rescued by the Lord when they called upon His name. They were *"brought out of darkness"* because the Lord had *"broken the gates of bronze"* and He had *"cut the bars of iron"* asunder. These same (or similar) expressions in connection with Cyrus must have the same basic meaning. Cyrus would set free the prisoners from their dungeons and would remove the obstacles to the return. These are figurative (as well as being historically true), for they depict the great work of salvation. Crooked lives are straightened and darkened minds are enlightened by the coming of the great and glorious King Jesus.

These thoughts are enhanced and brought into fullness of light by the third statement. Thus the Lord God in going before Cyrus would give him *"the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places."*¹⁹¹⁷ Now it turns out that Cyrus gained treasures hidden in Babylon when he conquered that city.¹⁹¹⁸ But what is the Lord intending for us to understand spiritually? If Cyrus is put as a type of Christ what then are these treasures and riches, and why are they described as being dark and hidden? Well it would be a good start to consider what is truly precious in God's sight. What, for God, would be deemed as a treasure? For men the treasures of this world are to be found in things such as precious jewels and gold and so on, but what of the Lord? What does He count as precious? Here are fifteen things Scripture speaks of as precious:

1. *Christ, the cornerstone is precious.*¹⁹¹⁹
2. *Christ's blood is precious.*¹⁹²⁰
3. *The loving kindness of God is precious.*¹⁹²¹
4. *The anointing, or the fullness of the Holy Spirit is precious.*¹⁹²²
5. *The word of God – the Lord's promises are precious.*¹⁹²³

1916 Psalm 107:10-16.

1917 Isaiah 45:3.

1918 **Joseph A. Alexander.** *Commentary on Isaiah.* Volume 2. Kregel publishers. 1992. P178. Hereafter: **Alexander.** *Isaiah.* Volume 2.

1919 Isaiah 28:16; 1Peter 2:4,7.

1920 1Peter 1:19.

1921 Psalm 36:7a.

1922 Psalm 133:2.

1923 2Peter 1:4.

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6. *God's thoughts are precious.*¹⁹²⁴
7. *Faith is precious.*¹⁹²⁵
8. *The trial of our faith is precious.*¹⁹²⁶
9. *The redemption of a soul is precious.*¹⁹²⁷
10. *The "sons of Zion" are precious.*¹⁹²⁸
11. *The lips that tell of true knowledge are precious.*¹⁹²⁹
12. *Wisdom is "more precious than rubies."*¹⁹³⁰
13. *A quiet and a gentle spirit is precious.*¹⁹³¹
14. *A virtuous wife is worth far more than rubies.*¹⁹³²
15. *The death of the saints is precious.*¹⁹³³

Summing these thoughts up we find that God's love and concern is truly demonstrated when people from all nations, tribes and tongues receive Christ and His work. These are precious things to Him. When a person counts as precious the blood of the Saviour. When a person values highly the thoughts of God and the word of God – His promises. When a person esteems Christ above all else and values the faith they have been given. When a person values true knowledge and wisdom which yields a quiet and gentle spirit so that they adorn the goodness and character of God. These are precious things to God. And so we find that the Lord is concerned to have an inheritance among the people. But there is a problem. People, the world over, are all darkened and enslaved. They are hidden amongst the secret places of the earth so that their thoughts and lives are not found to be amongst the bright and airy heavenly places.

For the Lord, the people whom He chose to redeem and rescue were His inheritance, as Solomon declared during the dedication of the temple:

51 for they *are* Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out of Egypt, out of the iron furnace ... **53** For You separated them from among all the peoples of the earth *to be* Your inheritance, as You spoke by Your servant Moses, when You

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1924	Psalm 139:17.
1925	2Peter 1:1.
1926	1Peter 1:7.
1927	Psalm 49:8.
1928	Lamentations 4:2.
1929	Proverbs 20:15.
1930	Proverbs 3:15.
1931	1Peter 3:4.
1932	Proverbs 31:10.
1933	Psalm 116:15.

Studies in Isaiah.

brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God.¹⁹³⁴

Frequently we find reference to Israel or Judah being the Lord's inheritance.¹⁹³⁵ However the prophet Isaiah foretells a day when this inheritance will be enlarged:

24 In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land, **25** whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, “Blessed *is* Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.”¹⁹³⁶

It should be noted that all three nations (Israel, Egypt and Assyria) are included in the idea of inheritance. Each of the descriptions appended to a nation would apply to the other two. Thus all three nations would be “*blessed*,” all three would be described as “*the work of My hands*,” and all three would be known as “*My inheritance*.”

When we turn to consider Christ's inheritance we note first that He has inherited a name which is far above all others, whether angelic, or amongst men. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews states this with respect to the angels:

.. having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.¹⁹³⁷

And the apostle Paul comments that:

... God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, **11** and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.¹⁹³⁸

But then we also read that Christ had an “*inheritance in the saints*.”¹⁹³⁹ We learn more about this from the Old Testament prophecies. First in the great suffering Servant song of Isaiah 53 we read these amazing words:

1934 1Kings 8:51,53. See also: Exodus 34:9; Deuteronomy 4:20; 9:25-29; 32:9; Psalm 33:12.

1935 Psalm 78:71; 94:14; Isaiah 47:6; Zechariah 2:12.

1936 Isaiah 19:24,25.

1937 Hebrews 1:4.

1938 Philippians 2:9-11.

1939 Ephesians 1:18.

Studies in Isaiah.

Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.¹⁹⁴⁰

On account of Christ's work in suffering death, He would receive "*a portion*" and "*spoil.*" However, in a far more direct statement from Psalm 2 we discover that the Father would give the Son all the nations for His inheritance:

*Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.*¹⁹⁴¹

This inheritance can also be viewed from the perspective of the Lord receiving a kingdom. We remember that it would be in the Seed of Abraham that all the families of the earth shall be blessed.¹⁹⁴² But we learn more about this rule in Psalm 72 and in the book of Daniel. Psalm 72 is a Psalm of Solomon, but it describes a prophetic vision of the Messiah's reign. We read that

8 He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. **9** Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, and His enemies will lick the dust. **10** The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. **11** Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him.¹⁹⁴³

These words were only partially fulfilled in Solomon's reign, but speak clearly in a prophetic way of the extensive reign of the Lord Jesus. Then in Daniel we read of a great kingdom which shall overshadow and supersede all other earthly kingdoms. This prophecy came via king Nebuchadnezzar whose dream Daniel was able to interpret by the grace of God.¹⁹⁴⁴ Here is the essence of the prophecy about the kingdom rule of Christ:

44 And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. **45** Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the

1940 Isaiah 53:12.

1941 Psalm 2:8.

1942 Genesis 12:1-7.

1943 Psalm 72:8-11.

1944 Daniel 2:27-30.

Studies in Isaiah.

great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.¹⁹⁴⁵

Later in his life Daniel himself received a vision of God during which he learned more of this kingdom:

13 I was watching in the night visions, and behold, *One* like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. **14** Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom *the one* which shall not be destroyed.¹⁹⁴⁶

Thus we find that the “*Son of Man*” would rule in a kingdom that comprised “*all peoples, nations, and languages,*” and that this kingdom would be “*everlasting,*” would “*not pass away*” (as others have and still do), and would never be “*destroyed.*”

And so the “*the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places,*” are, spiritually speaking, Christ's inheritance amongst the saints from every tribe, nation, and tongue, who have been redeemed from sin, death, and darkness.¹⁹⁴⁷ He has broken the “*gates of bronze*” and “*bars of iron,*” and has gathered His inheritance, the rubies and diamonds that are the faith and restored lives of His people. Oh the riches of Christ's wonders!

45:4-7.

Now Cyrus was to be the one who restored to Israel their land and temple. But such an act was not Cyrus' doing. It was all God's doing. That this was a work of God was to be shown by the recovery of these immense hidden treasures. It was through discovering these that Cyrus would know that the Lord had called him by his name.¹⁹⁴⁸ The Lord had not called Cyrus for his sake, but for Israel's, and through the events surrounding Cyrus' success and Israel's return from exile, the world at large would come to know that there was no other God, or, “*none besides Me.*”¹⁹⁴⁹ Twice we read that Cyrus had “*not known*” God.¹⁹⁵⁰ Nevertheless we read twice also that the Lord would call Cyrus “*by name.*”¹⁹⁵¹ In what follows we find an emphasis on the uniqueness and superiority of

1945 Daniel 2:44,45.

1946 Daniel 7:13,14.

1947 Isaiah 45:3.

1948 Isaiah 45:3.

1949 Isaiah 45:4,5.

1950 Isaiah 45:6.

1951 Isaiah 45:3,4.

Studies in Isaiah.

God. Not only is the Lord, the “*God of Israel,*” but He is the Lord and there is “*none*” beside Him and there is “*no other*” who may take such a position.¹⁹⁵²

We note here that God is able to raise up whomsoever He will to do His work. We are reminded that the Lord used the godless prophet Balaam to reveal truths about Himself and His plans, and here the pagan king from Persia is used to bring about His purpose for the people of God.¹⁹⁵³ In the same way the Lord used the nation of Rome and the sinful leaders of Israel to bring about His great work of redemption. The sovereignty of God is further expressed by the statements of verse 7. My translation of this verse is shown below:

← Hebrew reads from the right

יֹצֵר	אֹר	וּבֹרָא	חֹשֶׁךְ
I form	the light	and create	darkness
עֹשֶׂה	שְׁלוֹם	וּבֹרָא	רָע
I make	peace	and create	calamity
אֲנִי	יְהוָה	עֹשֶׂה	כָּל-אֵלֶּה
I the Lord	I make	all	these things

It is to be observed from my translation that the the Lord, forms (יָצַר *yāṣar*) “*light,*” makes (עֹשֶׂה *‘āśāh*) “*peace,*” and “*all these things,*” but, He creates (בָּרָא *ḥārā*) “*darkness*” and “*calamity.*” The Lord is never to be placed in a box. We can see that He can not only form “*light,*” as we have it here in Isaiah 45:7, but also He can “*create darkness.*” The Hebrew verb used here for “*create*” is the same as that found in Genesis 1:1 (בָּרָא *ḥārā*). In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth He began on the raw material He had created and formed “*light,*” by His word.¹⁹⁵⁴ But then He separated this from the darkness and named both.¹⁹⁵⁵ In that instance the darkness was not indicative of evil, because it was named, and it was all under the banner of being described by God as “*good,*” and “*very good.*”¹⁹⁵⁶ However in Isaiah 45:7 we find that the making of light and the

1952 Isaiah 45:3,5,6.

1953 Numbers 22-24.

1954 Genesis 1:3.

1955 Genesis 1:4,5.

1956 Genesis 1:4,10,10,12,18,21,25,31. Note that spiritually speaking darkness is indicative of evil but in physical terms darkness is a good thing for it enabled man to be refreshed in sleep.

Studies in Isaiah.

creation of darkness is paralleled by the statement: *"I make peace and create calamity."*¹⁹⁵⁷ The word *"make"* is the Hebrew word also found in Genesis 1 and given there as *"made,"* or *"make."*¹⁹⁵⁸ But again the word *"create"* is the same Hebrew word as found in Genesis 1:1 (בָּרָא *bārā*). Now whilst the light was formed or moulded and peace was made by the Lord, both the darkness and evil (calamity), were created. That is, they were made from nothing (ex nihilo).

Now it is utterly impossible that God is the author and origin of evil. So how do we understand this verse? Well I would suggest that here we have a situation in which the goodness of God which results from His desired will, must be counterpoised with the evil that ensues when God's perfect will and ways are resisted. The latter we may call God's "permissive will," or that which He allows even though it is not His desired will. The question which arises immediately is why does God allow evil even though He cannot be its author nor its originator? Well this is a very difficult subject to which I have no real answers except to say that Scripture is replete with instances where the evil of men is turned into the goodness of God. God displayed His glory in rescuing Israel from Egypt through the many plagues that fell on Egypt through the Pharaoh's hardness of heart. Chiefly, though, the greatest example of evil being turned into good comes with the death of the Saviour, which was planned in eternity but put into effect by *"lawless hands."*¹⁹⁵⁹

It should also be added that the Lord has brought many temporal judgements (or calamities) upon the world since Adam and Eve fell. The greatest example, of course, was the judgement by the flood waters. These are disasters, but they are disasters brought about both by the fruit of sinful lives, and by the just judgement of God.

45:8.

In verse 8 we turn from this general situation serving to show the Lord's sovereign rule over all things, to His intention to bring *"righteousness"* and *"salvation."*¹⁹⁶⁰ The Lord calls for the heavens to rain down righteousness, and for the earth to open up and bring forth salvation. This twofold aspect is interesting. It reminds us of the twofold source of water for the flood – the *"fountains of the great deep"* and the *"windows of heaven."*¹⁹⁶¹ Here we have rain from the heavens and the earth sprouting forth. The rain falls down and waters the ground, and where there are the seeds of life they will bring forth life. Thus we have this oft-repeated theme of the rain of blessing.

1957 Isaiah 45:7.

1958 Genesis 1:7,16,25,26,31.

1959 Acts 2:23.

1960 Isaiah 45:8.

1961 Genesis 7:11.

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This points us to the word of God.

Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distil as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass.¹⁹⁶²

10 For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, **11** So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.¹⁹⁶³

We pause and remind ourselves that the word of God has been used for all sorts of enterprises and many of these are not good! What is being expressed here is the idea that the word of God will indeed come, and will indeed bring salvation and righteousness. The gospel – when faithfully preached – does bring about salvation and righteousness.¹⁹⁶⁴ Paul instructed Timothy that the goal of teaching is love from a true faith. The theme of salvation coupled to righteousness is one found only in Isaiah and several Psalms.¹⁹⁶⁵ The two words come together only once in the New Testament:

For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.¹⁹⁶⁶

Thus righteousness is a gift which comes from true faith (the imputation from Christ), and this is put alongside salvation which is experienced in the life by confession. An inner trust and faith is worked out by confession and new life. We cannot, therefore, separate righteousness from salvation. Any mention of salvation which does not mention righteousness and holy living is false.

45:9,10.

The last two verses of this section issue an important warning or woe. We are never in any position to argue with God! The thought is absurd! Now please do not misunderstand me here. It is possible to bring questions and puzzles to the Lord as Habakkuk did.¹⁹⁶⁷ But then we cannot do as Job did without hearing the Lord say:

1962 Deuteronomy 32:2.

1963 Isaiah 55:10,11.

1964 Romans 10:17; 1 Timothy 1:5.

1965 See: Psalm 24:5; 40:10; 51:14; 65:5; 71:15; 98:2; Isaiah 45:8; 46:13; 51:5; 51:6; 51:8; 56:1; 59:16,17; 61:10; 62:1; 63:1.

1966 Romans 10:10.

1967 Habakkuk 1:1f.

Studies in Isaiah.

Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?¹⁹⁶⁸

In our text the image of the potter and the clay is brought to the fore. Can the “*clay*” speak? Can the “*clay*” challenge the Potter? It is absurd! The next statement is even more laughable, for we find that the “*handiwork*” is spouting utter nonsense by claiming that the Craftsman “*has no hands*”!¹⁹⁶⁹ What a monstrous thought! The Creator of all things is being challenged and is being told that He cannot do such a work! The theme is further illustrated with reference to children complaining about their parents bringing them forth. In these verses we have the Lord put as “*Maker,*” “*Potter,*” and “*Father.*” These are all wonderfully comforting themes. But the absurdity here is that the things made and formed, and the people born are acting as usurpers and belligerents towards the Maker, Potter, and Father of all. Sadly, of course, we have all fallen into this way of thinking and it is only by the great grace of God that we are brought out, our eyes are enlightened, and we can give God the glory and praise He is due.

[3] Should we question God's wisdom in using Cyrus? By no means! (Isaiah 45:11-13).

Now it may be thought that some might question the wisdom of God here in choosing Cyrus, a pagan king, to do the work that God was planning. This short section is written to rebut and rebuff all those who think that they know better than God. All God's ways are good. He needs no plan “B,” and He delights in using crooked things for good ends. None can challenge that which is wholly good and beyond all our comprehension. It is, of course, true that we can comprehend all that God has revealed to us – otherwise why would He go to all that effort? However to think that we can put God in some sort of box or predict exactly how He will act is folly in the extreme. The Lord delights to surprise and do way beyond what we could imagine or think. So here we find that the Lord has planned His good work of redemption by means of Cyrus the pagan king.

45:11.

This section is introduced with three titles of God. We have the covenant name of the “*I AM,*” (i.e. “*Lord*”), reminding us of the encounter with Moses at the burning bush and the Exodus, the “*Holy One of Israel,*” to show His purity and His glory, and then finally we have the title “*Maker,*” which highlights the One who created by forming or fashioning Israel. Thus we have the

1968 Job 38:2.
1969 Isaiah 45:9.

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sovereign Lord of glory who formed them. Who can answer such an One? But this One asks the question. The Lord thus asks the people to command Him, to tell Him what should be and how His work should be done. Can anyone tell God how things should be done concerning His people? Is there anyone wise enough to respond to this question?

45:12,13.

As if to prevent any embarrassment the Lord responds (verse 12) before any fool takes up the challenge!¹⁹⁷⁰ Only God can claim to be the Creator of both heaven and earth. Only God has the claim to creation with respect to people. God alone made man. Evolution and all other ideas are held in contempt, for it is self-evident to one and all that we have been created and that God alone was responsible. Only God has made the universe. Only God has created the starry host, the angelic beings, and the invisible realms. Therefore He has the perfect right as sovereign Creator to raise up whom He will. He raised up Cyrus (referred to here by the pronouns) and His calling of Cyrus has been done *“in righteousness.”*¹⁹⁷¹ In other words, what God has done in calling Cyrus is perfectly in tune with His holy and glorious ways. Since God is sovereign over all, He will *“direct all his ways.”* Let us remember that we are in God's hands. If we choose to do right it is all because the sovereign Lord has lead us in this way, but if we rebel and resist His perfect will, we are fools in the extreme to think that He has suddenly stopped being God! We cannot thwart Him. All our paths are governed by Him ultimately. And so Cyrus will do what God has planned. Let no one excuse their actions by saying that the Lord made them do it. We are responsible for our choices whether good or bad, but God will not be withstood, and all His good and perfect will shall still be accomplished.

Thus Cyrus is the one that God has chosen to build the city of Jerusalem and will release the exiles from captivity. It is wonderful that the Holy Spirit adds, *“not for price nor reward,”* for this work is all a work of grace. God delivered the captives to freedom to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, and they were released without cost or money! In the same way all believers are freed from the dominion of sin without money or price.¹⁹⁷² As if to emphasise the truth of this, this short passage concludes with a reaffirmation of the Person whom is speaking, (*“says the Lord of hosts”*). The Lord of the heavenly and all armies has spoken, let none reply!

1970 Isaiah 45:12.

1971 Isaiah 45:13.

1972 See Isaiah 55:1f.

[4] The salvation of Israel astounds the idol makers. (Isaiah 45:14-17).

The people addressed in verse 14 appears to be the people of God (Israel). In this short section we learn that the exiles will reap earthly rewards and blessings from the surrounding nations. The ones who have despoiled and ridiculed Israel in times passed will now be called upon to supply their need. There are three sub-sections to this passage. In verse 14 we learn how the people of Israel will be like those who first experienced the Exodus to establish the nation in the promised land. Then next we learn something about the One (God) who has done all of this wonderful thing in verse 15. Finally in verses 16 and 17 we learn about the great contrast between the idol makers and those who have faith in God (Israel).

45:14.

Thus first we note in verse 14 that the *“labour”* and *“merchandise”* of foreign nations will be given to the people. This covers both possessions and finance. This is reminiscent of the silver and possessions that the Egyptians gave to the Israelites as they left Egypt.¹⁹⁷³ In the same way the labour and merchandise of this world will be made over for the church to make use of. It does not always seem that this is the case, but remember that our Lord and Saviour is the King and He is also the treasurer. The whole earth and all it contains is the Lord's who owns the cattle on all the hills, and so He is well able to provide that which we need for service in the Kingdom!¹⁹⁷⁴ There are three nations listed here (Egypt, Cush – which is Ethiopia – and Saba in the southern Arabian Peninsula), and all were south of Israel. Remember that these prophecies are largely to do with the return from exile in Babylon in the north so are probably selected as counterpoint to deliverance from the north. That which will be given over includes *“men of stature,”* or, in other words, men of no mean height intending to signify those of use and ability. Following this we read five statements which show the nature and way in which these foreigners will *“come over.”* Note that this is not meant to be in subservience nor in subjugation, but in humility as befits those coming to the gospel of grace. Foreigners will come to the house of God. The first thing we learn is that these *“shall be yours,”* or, in other words, they shall belong to the people of God. Again not in any servile or slave-related way, but will be part of the nation. Here we see a faint hint of the doctrine of adoption.

Next we read that these foreigners *“shall walk behind you.”* Again there is humility, but no servility. These foreigners shall walk the same paths as those who love God. The Jew comes first

1973 Exodus 11:2; 12:35.

1974 Psalm 24:1; 50:10.

Studies in Isaiah.

and then the Gentiles, because this is the order in which God has determined. We who trust in Christ now walk behind those who have walked with the Lord before us. The third statement seems to picture these foreigners as slaves because these folk *“shall come over in chains.”* But we remember that none are ever free in the modern sense of having cast off all restraint and connection. Those born again have substituted one lord and master (sin) for another (Jesus). We are bound to Christ as His servants. Next we find that these *“shall bow down to you,”* by which we understand that they have come to a humble and repentant state. This is not worship (or it may be ignorant worship – the honouring of Christ in the believer). Here we see the humble acceptance of the people of God as being the Lord's and a willingness to be yoked together with the Lord's people. Finally we hear these foreigners declaring truth. It is this last statement that indicates the saving nature of these statements (*“Surely God is in you, and there is no other; there is no other God.”*). There is a recognition that God is with His people and that this God is unique! Isn't this the testimony of all those who come to faith amongst the brethren? The newcomer suddenly sees something about these folk called “Christians,” and begins to humble themselves. They follow this group closely eager to learn from those who have gone before. They are ready to expend their substance and talents in the service of the people of God. How wonderful is the gospel!

45:15.

Right in the middle of this short section we have a resounding statement of praise in verse 15. This sharpens the focus of the reader. God is at the centre. He is pre-eminent. He alone is orchestrating events. The verse begins with an emphatic and forceful affirmative. We might say “without a shadow of a doubt.” What is being declared comes from the heart of conviction. It is like the soldier who declared at the crucifixion:

*Truly this Man was the Son of God.*¹⁹⁷⁵

We are given two other titles at the end of this verse but then a curious statement in the middle, (*“God, who hide Yourself”*). This is none other than God, the *“God of Israel,”* and *“the Saviour.”* By the former title we understand that this was all prophesied long ago. It is not something new, for it is the God who was Israel's God from the days of the patriarchs. By the second title we come to realise that this God is not just deliverer and saviour but *“the”* Saviour, for there is no other God as

¹⁹⁷⁵ Mark 15:39. See also Matthew 27:54.

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the foreigners have already freely confessed. But is this God the one who hides? We are reminded of the fact that Jesus did not want to openly confess who He was, except to those who had faith in Him.¹⁹⁷⁶ God seems to work through His people and stands in the back ground, all the while acting in mysterious sovereignty. How often the enemies of God shout out such things as the following:

Where *is* your God?¹⁹⁷⁷

The answer to all who say such things is: “He is everywhere and He is within His people, can't you see?” It is just as we cannot see the wind but we can certainly see the effects of the wind, so also we may not see God, but what He does is plainly evident to all.¹⁹⁷⁸ The reality is that men suppress the truth that is clearly seen.¹⁹⁷⁹

45:16,17.

Finally in verses 16 and 17 we see the separation of those who follow and trust God from those who continue in their idolatrous ways. The “*makers of idols,*” (or the skilful craftsmen of images), which phrase characterises everyone who is not amongst the true people of God, will be described in three ways. They shall be:

Ashamed.

Disgraced.

Go in confusion together.

All three ideas are facets of shame. The last word “*confusion*” is derived from the second “*disgraced.*”¹⁹⁸⁰ The idol makers will be ashamed in the sense that they pale at what they are brought to see. They come to a sudden realisation of utter disappointment and all their vain hopes are dashed. The word “*disgraced*” amounts to a humiliation which will wound them and be excruciatingly painful. Finally they will be seen in a state of ignominy and reproach. Those who see them in their real and true state will be disgusted and horrified at what they are. My dear reader, how vital it is to see these things! All of us who have been guilty of making our own idols and

1976 Mark 1:40-45; 8:29,30.

1977 Psalm 42:10. See also Psalm 42:3; 79:10; 115:2; Joel 2:17; Micah 7:10; Malachi 2:17.

1978 John 3:8

1979 Romans 1:18-20.

1980

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images, fashioning them ever so craftily and with skill, look utterly disgusting! We need to wake up to this and turn earnestly, throwing all our man-made treasures to the dung heap where they belong.

But Israel, those who trust in God and follow Him, will never be *“ashamed or disgraced,”* because the Lord has *“saved”* them. The emphasis here is the eternal nature both of salvation and the condition negatively expressed. All shame and disgrace will be removed from those who have eternal salvation. How marvellous! What a stark contrast! How we must run and rush to destroy and cast aside all idols and images!

[5] To make the point clear! (Isaiah 45:18-25).

This last section amounts to a glorious summation of that which has already been established. The Lord gathers together all the main points to demonstrate the truth of what has been said, that God the Creator of all is God alone, and that idolatry is such stupid nonsense that the people must see it and flee from it into the arms of the great and glorious God who is to be adored.

We begin with eight statements characterising whom God is. We have six in verse 18 which centre on God as Creator, and then two more in verse 21 which focus on revelation, but separated by a series of statements that God makes. The eight focal points are as follows. God is He who:

verse 18:

1. Created the heavens,
2. Is God,
3. Formed the earth and made it,
4. Has established it,
5. Did not create it in vain,
6. Formed it to be inhabited:

verse 21:

7. Has declared this from ancient time?
8. Has told it from that time?

How many times are we reminded of creation in Scripture? It is the basis upon which the Lord frequently establishes His case. Has anyone apart from God created the universe or created anything like it? The thought is absurd and yet in our day and age man has fallen for the utterly ridiculous and hopelessly stupid idea that all things came to exist by themselves. How did we ever get to such

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a stupid state? My dear reader please abandon all thoughts and beliefs generated by so-called scientists that man is an evolved animal, or that the earth is an evolved rock, or the universe has come from the “Big Bang.” Such ideas are patent nonsense and destructive of all that is good. We cannot hope for any good at all if we entertain such ideas as promulgated under the banner of “evolution.” Such thinking leads to death, despair, and destruction. Can we not see the fruits of evolution in godlessness, world wars promoted by false ideologies born from such thinking, and the current stupidity over human identity?

45:18,19.

First and foremost the Lord tells us that He “*created the heavens.*” The word for “*created*” is the same word used in Genesis 1:1, and signifies creation ex nihilo – a work which God alone does. Then the Lord tells us that He is “*God,*” by which He claims exclusivity and supremacy. There is no other God – a theme stated later on. Next in the third statement, the Lord tells us that He created the “*earth.*” It is significant that we have heaven mentioned before the earth because the heavens are always considered as beyond and above. If God made the heavens then the forming of the earth is surely simpler? Thus we have the idea expressed that God alone created from nothing at all, and the idea that God made and formed (i.e. moulded as the Potter) all things as the Master Craftsman. The fourth, fifth, and sixth statements are all concerned with the earth. God “*established*” it, meaning that He organised it into a built and constructed place. Then we find a statement which is often misunderstood and has been used to drive a wedge into Genesis 1 in order to accommodate scientific thinking. The statement that God “*did not create it in vain*” has often been used to deny the creation statement of Genesis 1:2 which states:

The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.¹⁹⁸¹

The phrase “*without form*” in Genesis 1:2 is the same as the phrase “*in vain*” here in Isaiah 45:18. Thus some argue that because God did not create the earth “*in vain*” or “*without form,*” then the statement of Genesis 1:2 cannot be speaking of initial creation, but must be some condition that existed later on. This thinking is flawed because the construction of Genesis 1:1,2 is such that the conditions of Genesis 1:2 are those resulting from Genesis 1:1. In other words when God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning, the earth was, in point-of-fact, “*without form.*” That is,

1981 Genesis 1:2.

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it was in a raw state. Note, we must not say it was in a *primitive* state because that gives the implication of an inferior or less evolved condition. Rather what is being expressed is the idea of some raw material (a block of marble or a blank word document) which awaits some processing. What Isaiah 45:18 is claiming, however, is that the overall and completed creation (which did not result until day 7) was a state which was not *"in vain"* (or, in other words, was formed). Thus the statement in Isaiah 45:18 amounts to saying that when you look at creation as a week's event, God did not make the earth without form. It began without form after the initial creation out of nothing on day 1, but by the end of the 6-day creation it was fully formed and very good. God *"formed"* the earth so that it would be *"inhabited"* or populated by the creatures He had made.

We have digressed necessarily to argue against those who wrongly divide Scripture, but the main point is that all exists simply because God willed it so. His choice of the means of creation is demonstrated clearly in Genesis 1 (and elsewhere), and reiterated in summary form here in Isaiah 45:18. God is *"The Creator"* and there is no other. Furthermore as a consequence of this we are all owned by Him.

The last two statements concern God's revelation. This theme is another favourite of Isaiah's which we saw in Isaiah 40 and will see again later on. God has *"declared"* these things, and *"told"* them *"from ancient time."* Later we will see that God has spoken *"from the beginning,"* but here it is simply *"from ancient time,"* and *"from that time."*¹⁹⁸² Now God has literally "caused to hear" the things He has revealed. In other words the emphasis is not so much on simply declaring or speaking out, but in making it so that it is impossible for the recipients not to hear. It is rather like shouting out loudly so that no one can mistake what is being said. The other word *"told"* signifies to bring to light or to demonstrate clearly. Thus in these two words we have the idea of God's revelation by His word made plain and clear so that no one can argue and plead ignorance.

After these statements concerning God we must focus on what the Lord actually says. At the end of verse 18 we read the first of three statements which tell us that God is unique. The One we have been considering is the sovereign *"I AM"* and there exists no other in the same category, for He is unique. Wonderfully, the first statement He utters concerns the fact that this One has revealed Himself and all His intentions to us. First the Lord corrects the misconceptions about how He has revealed, and then He makes two statements about how He speaks. Thus God has not revealed and given His word or message *"in secret,"* or in some *"dark place of the earth,"* where only those

1982 Isaiah 48:16.

Studies in Isaiah.

privileged or the elite may hear.¹⁹⁸³ The pagan cults had their whispering oracles and their secret societies, but God is extravagant, effusive, and lavish in speaking of truth. This is vital. God is public and open. He reveals so that all may hear and understand. He is not about giving esoteric and privileged information to special club members. The fact that many do not understand or turn a deaf ear is all to do with sin and rebellion, and nothing to do with God and His word. Next we are brought to a specific thought concerning the *“seed of Jacob,”* namely, the offspring of those who are the people of God. God has called the *“seed of Jacob”* to seek Him and such a call is not a *“vain”* one. This is the heart of the matter and it is so sad that many miss it. God calls *“Jacob”* (the people of God) to seek Him. That seeking God is not easy we readily admit, but the Lord is saying here that God did not call us to seek Him for us to fail in this. God did not call us to seek Him *“in vain.”* Be assured that if God calls us to seek Him we will find Him. This means, however, that we come in His way, at His bidding, through His means. Christ alone is the name through which a person is saved and comes into the presence of God. Humility and holiness are the avenues which must be traversed. Truth, faith, and repentance are the paths of progress. It is startling to find that the Lord has to add that He *“speaks righteousness,”* and that He *“declares things that are right.”* Would this not be self-evident since He is God? Yet the Lord must speak such things to fallen human beings!

45:20,21.

The next thing that the Lord speaks is a word of reason to the people of God that none has been able to declare truth and what will be, except Him. Thus in verses 20 and 21 we have the Lord gathering those who have *“escaped from the nations.”* The people referred to here, will be the exiles who will return in the future from the perspective of Isaiah, but signify all who have come out of this world and have been translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love.¹⁹⁸⁴ Such as have escaped this world are called to gather themselves and to draw near to hear what the Lord declares. What the Lord declares is a statement of fact. Those who *“carry”* their idols in dependence, and who call upon *“a god that cannot save,”* are those who *“have no knowledge.”* This is quite something. How the world likes to claim the right to knowledge and truth! And yet all who make and carry idols are empty with regard to knowledge. The beginning of knowledge is to fear God.¹⁹⁸⁵ Unless we first put God in view and make Him the beginning and focus, we are utterly ignorant.

1983 Isaiah 45:19.

1984 Colossians 1:13.

1985 Proverbs 1:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

This theme is one which is all over the Scriptures, so that to miss it is to be blind indeed. Then, once again, we have the Lord issuing a challenge to those who carry idols and pray to them. Can you gather together and assemble a group for counsel that could find out whom has told and declared the truth from “*ancient time*”? Of course not! Only the Lord has done such a thing.

Next we must focus our attention on the thrice repeated theme that there is no other God besides the Lord.¹⁹⁸⁶ Surely this is commensurate with the concept of the Holy Trinity? One God in three divine Persons. This Thrice Holy God is described in these declarations that demonstrate His unique being. In the first we have the title “*Lord,*” signifying the eternal covenant keeping Sovereign One. In the second, God is described as “*a just God*” and also as “*a Saviour.*” God will not overlook sin. All sin is rebellion and all must be dealt with by punishment. And yet the Lord God is also a “*Saviour,*” as One who rescues and delivers from impossible situations!¹⁹⁸⁷ These twin attributes come together only in Christ Jesus at the cross of calvary. There, and there only, do justice and mercy meet.¹⁹⁸⁸

45:22.

In the last statement of God's unique nature, we find that it is used as a reason to look to Him for salvation:

Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!¹⁹⁸⁹

There is rescue and deliverance from sin and all its fruits by simply “looking”! If we but “*look*” to God, then we will be rescued and delivered so that our condition will be “*saved*”! Who is being addressed? Everyone! The reason to “*look*” is given at the end of verse 22 in five simple words, which read literally like this: “for I God and no other.” There simply is no other possibility for there is but one God and only one who can do anything to help in our desperate state.

45:23-25.

It will be helpful to explore some further analysis of these verses first before commenting. We can arrange the text as follows:

1986 Isaiah 45:18,21,22.
1987 Isaiah 45:21.
1988 Psalm 85:10.
1989 Isaiah 45:22.

Studies in Isaiah.

23 I have sworn by Myself;
the word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness, and shall not return,
that to Me

every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall take an oath.

24 He shall say,

‘surely in the **Lord** I have righteousness and strength.
To Him *men* shall come,
and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him.

25 In the **Lord** all the descendants of Israel
shall be justified,
and shall glory.’”

45:23.

In verse 23 we are given an extended declaration of the Lord's intentions. First we discover that the Lord has “*sworn*,” that is, He has taken an oath. And since there is none higher or more elevated than Himself, He has made the oath on the basis of His own Person (“*sworn by Myself*”). Then second, we learn that the Lord has spoken, for the word has “*gone out*” of His “*mouth*.” We recall that when God speaks, He never needs to alter what He has said, and He never has to recall any of His words. When He speaks, He speaks in perfection and truth, for He is true and perfect. But this statement about the word going forth is then supported by two further statements. The Lord has spoken “*in righteousness*.” Why emphasise this? If we know that God has spoken, we know that He has spoken in righteousness because He is perfectly righteous. But the emphasis here is to drive home the point. What the Lord is declaring is utterly right. Further we are informed that what He has spoken “*shall not return*.” In other words, His words will not fail to accomplish what they intend and He will not have to take back what He has said. When God speaks His will is carried forth in utter perfection.

So what is it that the Lord has “*sworn*” will take place, and has spoken so that it will “*not return*”? Two things are recorded at the end of verse 23, and these amount to a twofold description of humility and deference towards Him due from all peoples. First “*every knee shall bow*.” This serves to show that at this time spoken of every person past, present, and future, will ultimately recognise God as true God. He will be afforded His due by one and all. There will be no exceptions. Currently many do not 'bow the knee,' and the Lord permits this for the present time. But them all will see and recognise that God is more than worthy of praise and glory. This first statement speaks of a disposition. People will not stand and will not oppose. They will be subject and will give due honour and respect to God. We might have in our minds a scene where rebels are brought before a

Studies in Isaiah.

reigning earthly king and falling down in subjection to the power they have slighted, but all earthly analogies pail here. The recognition that God is truly God, that He is Ruler and Creator, will be experienced fully by one and all. And this recognition of God's true worth will be accompanied by the taking of *"an oath."* This amounts to a declaration and an affirmation of the truth concerning the very nature and work of God, whether they had owned it prior to this time, or have come to a realisation of it at this end of days.

45:24.

In verse 24 we are told of a representative person. All, as we found in verse 23, will both *'bow the knee'* and will *'take an oath,'* but now the focus is upon a single man (*"he"*) as an example. There then follows three statements, the first of which is personal, whilst the second and third depict what all others will do. This representative man is a believer for he acknowledges personally the truth that he has *"righteousness and strength"* only *"in the Lord."* There will, of course, be many who confess Christ Jesus as Lord, but this one person is shown forth as an example of all those who have believed. The confession is emphatic. The first word spoken, *"surely,"* which actually comes first in the Hebrew is an adverb of certainty. It is often translated as "only" to indicate the idea of exclusion. We might render the first part of this verse as follows:

Only in the Lord to Me he will say 'I have righteousness and strength.'

Such indicates an open confession unto the Lord that *"righteousness and strength"* are found only in Him. The second statement (*"to Him men shall come"*) and the third (*"and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him"*) speak of what others who have not confessed the Lord in faith will do. They will come – there is no other option – and these who had been *"incensed against"* the Lord would now be totally *"ashamed."* The word given as *"incensed"* really signifies anger and burning with rage. This is the characteristic of all who do not currently bow the knee. We might not like to say this, but the truth is that mankind in rebellion is angry with God. Mankind does not like to be challenged and is angry when questioned or when brought to a knowledge of what is true and real. But at this point their anger will be dissipated by shame, for there is a realisation that their anger has been in vain and utterly misplaced. How could they be angry with this glorious One? The realisation of the truth causes them to pale in the face as the blood drains from them in sheer terror and horror.

45:25.

The rebellious have been shamed, their skin has paled, but what of the true Israel? Well here in this last verse we learn that these shall be justified. It is worth noting that we have the expression *“in the Lord”* twice, once in verse 24 and then a second time in verse 25. This can only be applied to true believers, or those who have true faith. It is worth showing the Hebrew and a literal translation here:

← Hebrew reads from the right

בְּיְהוָה יִצְדָּקוּ וְיִתְהַלְּלוּ כָּל-זֶרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל

in the Lord they shall be justified and they shall glory all the seed of Israel

Thus the ones spoken of here are *“the seed of Israel,”* which speaks more of those who are the faith of Abraham, rather than simply mere descendants. If we apply this to all the literal descendants of Israel we will run into difficulties, for it is clear that not all of these had true faith. The application is thus only to those who had true faith. Of these, of the true “seed of Israel” we discover two things about them. They will *“be justified”* and they *“shall glory.”* The doctrine of justification by faith is one we find all through the Bible. We see it, for example in Genesis 15:6 where Abraham believed in the Lord and what He had revealed, and so his faith was *“accounted it to him for righteousness.”* We see it in many other places too numerous to mention, and we see it here in Isaiah too. The only means of salvation is by faith and this faith (true belief which relies wholly on the Lord) is credited as righteousness.

But the second feature of the true *“seed of Israel”* who are *“in the Lord”* is that they will *“glory.”* What does this signify? I think at the very least it points to their boast. They boast only in the Lord and His works.¹⁹⁹⁰ But I think we are also justified in saying that it indicates where they will end up too, namely, in glory. I say this because of the order in which these statements are made. First the seed of Israel are justified (because of their true faith) and then they will glory. We see this same order in Paul's letter to the Romans:

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.¹⁹⁹¹

1990 Galatians 6:14.

1991 Romans 8:30.

Chapter 56.

Isaiah 46:1-13.

**The God who carries even to old age
and brings righteousness near!**

Textual analysis.

- 1 Bel bows down,
Nebo stoops;
 their idols were
 on the beasts
 and on the cattle.
Your carriages *were*
 heavily loaded,
 a burden to the weary *beast*.
- 2 They stoop,
they bow down together;
they could not deliver the burden, but have themselves gone into captivity.
- 3 “Listen to Me,
 O house of Jacob, and
 all the remnant of the house of Israel,
 who have been upheld *by Me* from birth,
 who have been carried from the womb:
 4 Even to *your* old age,
 I *am* He, and
 even to grey hairs
 I will carry *you!*
 I have made, and
 I will bear; even
 I will carry, and will deliver *you*.
- 5 “To whom will you liken Me, and make *Me* equal and compare Me, that we should be alike?
- 6 They lavish gold out of the bag,
and weigh silver on the scales;
they hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god;
they prostrate themselves, yes, they worship.
- 7 They bear it on the shoulder,
they carry it and set it in its place, and it stands;
 from its place it shall not move.
 Though *one* cries out to it, yet it cannot answer nor save him out of his trouble.
- 8 “Remember this, and show yourselves men;
recall to mind, O you transgressors.

Studies in Isaiah.

- 9 Remember the former things of old,
for I *am* God, and *there is* no other;
I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me,
 10 Declaring the end from the beginning,
 and from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done, saying,
 ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,’
 11 Calling a bird of prey from the east,
 the man who executes My counsel, from a far country.
Indeed I have spoken *it*; I will also bring it to pass.
I have purposed *it*; I will also do it.
- 12 “Listen to Me,
 you stubborn-hearted, who *are* far from righteousness:
13 I bring My righteousness near,
 it shall not be far off;
My salvation shall not linger.
And I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel My glory.

It is extremely difficult to conceive of a succinct title for this chapter in Isaiah because there is great richness as well as scope. I might have titled it: 'against the Babylonian idols,' or I might have entitled it: 'listen to God whose salvation is near.' That idolatry is ridiculed in this passage is clear for there is no better example in Scripture. But this isn't the main point. What is, is the clear idea that God carries His people and brings His righteousness near. The structure of the passage may be delineated as follows:

- [1] Idols – a burden to bear. (Isaiah 46:1,2).*
- [2] The God who carries His people! (Isaiah 46:3-5).*
- [3] Another look at the folly of idolatry. (Isaiah 46:6,7).*
- [4] Remember this ... (Isaiah 46:8-11).*
- [5] Listen to this! (Isaiah 46:12,13).*

There is an interweaving of ideas from looking at the folly of idols and showing them for what they are, to declarations of the truth of whom God is and what He has done, and to repeated calls to “*listen*” and “*remember.*”

[1] Idols – a burden to bear. (Isaiah 46:1,2).

46:1,2.

The chapter begins by naming two idols, “*Bel,*” and “*Nebo.*” Bel means “lord” and was a Babylonian deity worshipped all over the world.¹⁹⁹² He corresponds to the Roman god Jupiter. Nebo signifies prophecy or oracle. He corresponds to the Greek Hermes, Roman Mercury and Egyptian Thoth. These seem to be the chief deities in the Babylonian pantheon, with Bel standing as supreme and Nebo as the god of literature and letters. Now these two chief deities of Babylon are described in less than honouring terms. These idols were clearly heavy and burdensome. Although verse 1 describes Bel as bowing down or buckling at the knees, and Nebo as stooping to a collapse, both are said to have this humble position in verse 2 (“*they stoop, they bow down together*”). There would seem to be a progression from buckling at the knees to complete collapse. The image is of two idols which have been made far too heavy even to bear their own weight. Then further, we find that both idols had to be carried (“*their idols were on the beasts and on the cattle*”), as they obviously could not go about under their own steam! The idols were such a heavy burden that the carriages became overloaded, and the beasts that bore them were made “*weary.*”

What good do these idols offer? So far they have been described as buckling and collapsing under their own weight, and far too big and heavy to carry! These idols could do nothing to carry themselves and therefore were completely unable to “*deliver the burden*” they themselves had created! As a result these idols have become ensnared in their own inability and become captive! This contrasts with the people of God who were taken captive (at the command of the God who rules all). In the next section we are going to learn something about the burden-carrying God who keeps His people throughout all their lives as a stark and great contrast. But for the moment we ought to focus purely on the folly and danger that idols make. They promise much (perhaps) but deliver less than nothing. They deliver less than nothing because they become a burden. They must be born and carried. Now this thought applies to the modern idols such as evolution and science. These monstrous ideas are not easily grasped and in thinking them through they become a pain and a burden to all who worship them. We should not simply consider the publicists and the promoters of such ideas, for they are sold out to them and paper over all cracks. But scratch the surface and the burden will appear. Idolatry doesn't just offer nothing, it takes from you! You become less and less, not more and more. They do not enhance nor adorn but become burdens to bear.

¹⁹⁹² Jeremiah 50:2; 51:44.

Studies in Isaiah.

This theme of burdening is one we see in the New Testament when we consider the teachers of the law. They held the keys but did not use them and put stumbling blocks in the way of those that they taught. It was their views and ideas of the law and the faith which were idolatrous, for otherwise they would have recognised the Saviour as He came amongst them.¹⁹⁹³

[2] The God who carries His people! (Isaiah 46:3-5).

46:3.

The first command to “*listen*” to the Lord is found immediately after the description of the Babylonian pantheon (as exemplified by the two chief deities), in verse 3 and following. We must pause a moment and consider that this word “*listen*” is not just a redundant word, for it reminds us that we become dull of hearing. The word has the force of hearing intelligently with the aim of obeying whatever is commanded. The picture is of a lower rank hearing the commander issuing orders, or a servant waiting on their mistress for instructions.¹⁹⁹⁴ The call is given to the “*house of Jacob*” signifying the people of God from their worldly (sinful) origins, and to “*all the remnant of the house of Israel,*” signifying the returnees from exile and hence all those who are born again. There are not two peoples described by these titles. It is just that the people of God must ever remember from when they have come (Jacob) lest they get proud and forgetful of God's saving grace, and they must remember to what they have been called (Israel), for God prevails and transforms. They are also described as the “*remnant*” which reminds us of our small number amongst the multitudes. The description of the people does not stop there, for the Lord adds two statements which are the two sides of the same idea, namely, that God has carried them all this time. Thus we have a people:

who have been upheld *by Me* from birth,
who have been carried from the womb:

The first idea (“*upheld*”) signifies to lift up and carry. This contrasts wonderfully with what the false idols were like with their buckling and collapsing nature! Note that the Lord has “*upheld*” this people “*from birth,*” or, literally, from the womb. The second idea “*carried*” also has the sense of

1993 Luke 11:52.

1994 Psalm 123:2.

Studies in Isaiah.

to lift up and is used in a great variety of applications including lifting up the head, eyes, or countenance.¹⁹⁹⁵ Perhaps a fitting illustration is to consider a poor benighted babe wailing on the ground until its mother comes, lifts it up, bears it on her breast and causes the babe's eyes to see her accepting face. That is the type of thing being expressed here.

46:4,5.

But this is by no means the end of things, for the Lord continues by saying that even unto *“old age”* or *“to grey hairs,”* He is the faithful Father. Thus *“from birth ... even to your old age,”* or, in other words, throughout your entire life, God is Father. This fatherhood of God is expressed beautifully in verse 5. It starts with a declaration of God as the self-existent One using a phrase frequently occurring in Isaiah and which also occurs in the New Testament, namely, *“I am He.”*¹⁹⁹⁶ With such assurance as to the nature of God, who is independent and needs nothing to aid or supplement Him, we add the fact that God has also *“made”* or created this people. Surely the Creator knows how to bear with those whom He has made? Twice we find that the Lord will *“carry”* them in verse 5, which word signifies the idea of bearing continually a heavy burden. Then also we have repeated the idea that the Lord will lift up (*“bear”*) them so that they will thrive and do well. Finally we are taught that the Lord will *“deliver”* which has the notion of slipping away or making a smooth exit from danger or difficulty. The Lord is the One to whom belong *“escapes from death.”*¹⁹⁹⁷

Given all these truths about the great fatherhood of God, (and remember this is God speaking), the question of verse 5 needs no answer. There is none that we can liken God to for none are His equal. However idolatry always seeks to make something which attempts (but never succeeds) to rival God. Can anything compare? Can anything or anyone be placed alongside God as equal? The idea is preposterous because God alone is unique and is the sole Creator and Redeemer. The question is put to the people of God here, so we must understand that this fault and failing is one we are still prone too in our fallen nature. Praise the Lord that we have a new heart! But we must ever be like the apostle Paul who wrote:

21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. **22** For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. **23** But I see

1995 Zechariah 2:4; 2Samuel 2:22; Psalm 121:1.

1996 See the earlier discussion on this title.

1997 Psalm 68:20.

Studies in Isaiah.

another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. **24** O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? **25** I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!¹⁹⁹⁸

[3] Another look at the folly of idolatry. (Isaiah 46:6,7).

46:6.

Since God is unique, (the *"I AM"*), and none can compare, a description of idols ought to show them up for the vanity they are. In verses 6 and 7 this is exactly what is given. The passage is descriptive of what idol makers do. No expense is spared for the making of idols, for the makers *"lavish gold,"* (literally, pour it out), and they *"weigh silver."* Such terms imply excess, and such extravagance is multiplied as they hire special craftsmen to do the job for them. Think of the training and skill needed here! We cannot but consider the vast expense and considerable training modern scientists both require and expend, all to fathom a story of nonsense relating our origins!

46:7.

Once the god is formed by the craftsman, the people fall down to it and give it their allegiance, and their strength, hoping for satisfaction and safety. Alas, they are sorely disappointed because the very ones who make and fashion such expensive and well crafted idols must carry them! They must elevate it and lift it up, (*"bear it on the shoulder"*), whereas the Lord does this for His people! They must not only bear it, but they must also carry this great burden, (*"carry it"*), to a place for it to rest, whereas God does not need to rest, and He calls us to rest!¹⁹⁹⁹ The man-made idols must be placed somewhere and established so that it will not fall! Contrast this with God who is omnipresent and needs nothing to support Him, and no place in which to dwell! The idols are established and fixed in place, so this also means they cannot move, nor can they do anything positive or negative. Consequently, as a result of this fixed position, any who cry out to it for help or advice gain nothing, for the idol is dumb and cannot rescue!

1998 Romans 7:
1999 Matthew 11:28f.

[4] Remember this ... (Isaiah 46:8-11).

46:8.

In view of the folly and ridiculous nature of the idols, the Lord calls His people to “remember” and to “recall,” these things to mind. We ought to bear these facts constantly in mind. All idols will be like this. They have to be carried and borne. They have to be established and fixed in place. They cannot move or do anything and they cannot save. Is this not true of the modern idolatry known as modern science? This whole monstrosity must be constructed with copious funds and much effort and training. The systems and thoughts of men must be established amongst their peers. Oh how they like to jostle and argue, to claim and counterclaim in their journals and at their conferences! They claim a false humility but underneath are fierce tempers and vicious ambitions. Once one idea has gained the pre-eminence amongst many (such as evolution today) they fight to maintain its position and place. But once it is set and established what does it accomplish? Are we any better off for the ideas mankind generates? Do they do anything for us or help us at all? Why then are we in such a piteous state? Why is their poverty when so many are rich? Why is there hunger when so much food goes to waste? Why is there such depression, suicide and anxiety if we have such a great understanding of the human condition with our ideas and theories? None of these man-made schemes ever does anything! They are dumb, deaf, and blind. Since they are utterly immobile they cannot rescue, nor can they save. What a hopeless situation mankind finds himself in when left to his idols!

Now we are to remember and to recall because on the surface idolatry appeals and seems so helpful and good. We are exhorted to show that we are “men,” by which is meant that we need to take courage and stand up to the onslaught of the world's idols. The ESV renders verse 8 as follows:

Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors.²⁰⁰⁰

Alongside this call to be strong and courageous there is a reminder that we too are “transgressors.” It is very easy to slip into a condemnatory mindset when battling idolatry in the world. We see the folly and the stupidity of it all, and this we are exhorted to remember and work out in each particular case (e.g. the modern idol of evolution), but we sometimes forget that we too have been foolish in following our idols, we too are transgressors. There are, of course, many other idols made

2000 Isaiah 46:8, ESV.

Studies in Isaiah.

by men, such as ambition, the pursuit of dreams, money, power, adulation and acclaim and so on.

46:9.

Then also the people of God are to recall and remember *“the former things of old.”* This is quite remarkable, for we live in a day and age when that which is old and *“former”* is held in low esteem. The people of antiquity and of the former ages were (according to modern man's way of thinking fuelled by evolution), less tolerant, less sophisticated, less knowledgeable, less wise, and less cool! Such pride will be modern man's downfall. Pride is always brought low (eventually).

The reason given to remember ancient things is that God (אל 'אל) alone is God (אלהים 'ēlōhîm). Twice we are informed that there are no rivals (*“there is no other”*) and none who can compare with God (*“there is none like Me”*).

46:10,11.

Now this call to remember former times indicates the fact that the Lord has always been speaking His truth even from the very first day of creation. God alone has spoken *“from the beginning,”* and He alone has decided what shall come to pass and has always stuck to His plans. The Lord's *“counsel”* always comes to pass (*“shall stand”*) for the Lord will do just as He pleases (*“I will do all My pleasure”*). This last statement always sounds somewhat selfish in our modern ears, but it is nothing of the kind when spoken by God because He is perfect, pure, and good.

Specifically here in Isaiah we have this prophecy concerning Cyrus who will be the means by which the return from exile in Babylon (yet in the future as far as Isaiah is concerned) will be effected. Cyrus is referred to in verse 11 rather cryptically (*“a bird of prey from the east”*), and as the one man who does all the Lord's *“counsel.”* It is notable that this *“bird of prey from the east”* has come *“from a far country.”* This designation serves also to illustrate the coming of the Messiah from heaven, or, in other words, His incarnation. Recall that the Lord often mentions coming either to or from a far country in the parables He taught.²⁰⁰¹ Twice at the end of verse 11 we find the idea that what God speaks will most definitely come to pass. Since God has *“spoken”* He most certainly will *“bring”* what He has said *“to pass.”* Further, since He, the Lord, has *“purposed it,”* that is, has made it His settled intention, then most definitely He *“will also do it.”* In these two firm affirmations we are reminded of the creation which was accomplished by what God said. He alone has foretold and He alone has spoken openly. His counsel will stand because He will do all that He

2001 Matthew 25:14; Mark 13:34; Luke 19:12.

Studies in Isaiah.

determines in His good will and pleasure, just as He did when He created all things. Remember this, that God is good, and all that He does is good. Why then do we ever challenge Him?

[5] Listen to this! (Isaiah 46:12,13).

46:12.

Once again there is a call to listen intently. The remarkable thing here is that we are being asked to consider great good news! It may seem like a harsh thing to open with calling the people *“stubborn-hearted,”* but the fact of the matter is that mankind is recalcitrant in his pride. Since man has gone his own way from the fall, it is no surprise that he is *“far from righteousness.”* Righteousness is a characteristic of God alone. So to be far from God is also to be far from righteousness. Man in rebellion and sin is therefore not righteous. Consequently he earns the just and complete condemnation and wrath of God. Surely this is plain? If I defy authority and go against it at all points, do I not rule myself out of law, and become an outlaw? We are outlaws as far as God and righteousness are concerned.

46:13.

And yet the amazing thing here is that the Lord does something so beautiful it makes the heart leap for joy and weep in sorrow all at the same time. The Lord says that He will bring His *“righteousness near”*! That this is joyful and wonderful is made plain by the second part of verse 13 which amplifies this first statement. He adds that His *“salvation shall not linger.”* God's *“salvation,”* then, involves the bringing near of His *“righteousness.”* The theme of righteousness and salvation has already been met in Isaiah 45:8 and 46:13. It shall reappear in Isaiah 51:5,6,8; 56:1; 59:16,17; 61:10; 52:1; 63:1. Interestingly we only ever find these two terms appear together elsewhere in Scripture in Romans and the Psalms.²⁰⁰²

This bringing of righteousness near is not to condemn but to make good, to bring about salvation. The Lord brings His righteousness to us! Then finally the last sentence makes all plain. The Lord will *“place salvation in Zion.”* This is a clear reference to the salvation that Christ brought through His death and resurrection at Calvary. How marvellous that stubborn and rebellious creatures are no obstacle to the God who saves, for He alone can bring His *“righteousness”* to us to make us right! Notice that the bringing near of righteousness is necessary to make us right and fit

2002 Psalm 24:5; 37:39; 40:10; 51:14; 65:5; 71:15; 98:1,2; 118:15; 119:123; Romans 10:10.

Studies in Isaiah.

for communion with God. True salvation always includes being made right, or being righteous, but this righteousness is not self-generated. It is the great gift of God in Christ. There can be no salvation without receiving the righteousness of God.

Chapter 57.

Isaiah 47:1-15.

Where is the wisdom of this world?

Textual analysis.

1 “Come down
and sit in the dust,

O virgin daughter of Babylon;

sit on the ground without a throne,

O daughter of the Chaldeans!

For you shall no more be called tender and delicate.

2 Take the millstones and grind meal.

Remove your veil, take off the skirt, uncover the thigh, pass through the rivers.

3 Your nakedness shall be uncovered, yes, your shame will be seen;

I will take vengeance,

and I will not arbitrate with a man.”

4 *As for* our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts *is* His name, the Holy One of Israel.

5 “Sit in silence, and go into darkness,

O daughter of the Chaldeans;

for you shall no longer be called the Lady of Kingdoms.

6 I was angry with My people;

I have profaned My inheritance, and given them into your hand.

You showed them no mercy;

on the elderly you laid your yoke very heavily.

7 And you said,

‘I shall be a lady forever,’

so that you did not take these *things* to heart, nor remember the latter end of them.

8 “Therefore hear this now,

you

who are given to pleasures,

who dwell securely,

who say in your heart,

‘I am, and there is no one else besides me;

I shall

not sit as a widow,

nor shall I know the loss of children’;

9 but these two *things* shall come to you in a moment, in one day:

the loss of children,

and widowhood.

They shall come upon you in their fullness

because of the multitude of your sorceries,

for the great abundance of your enchantments.

10 “For you have trusted in your wickedness;

you have said, ‘No one sees me’;

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your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you;
and you have said in your heart, 'I am, and *there is* no one else
besides me.'

11 Therefore

evil shall come upon you; you shall not know
from where it arises.

And trouble shall fall upon you; you will not be
able to put it off.

And desolation shall come upon you suddenly,
which you shall not know.

12 "Stand now with your enchantments and the multitude of your sorceries, in which you have laboured from your youth—

perhaps you will be able to profit,
perhaps you will prevail.

13 You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels;
let now

the astrologers,
the stargazers,
and the monthly prognosticators

stand up
and save you

from what shall come upon you.

14 Behold,

they shall be as stubble,
the fire shall burn them;
they shall not deliver themselves

from the power of the flame;

it shall not *be* a coal to be warmed by,

nor a fire to sit before!

15 Thus shall they be to you with whom you have laboured, your merchants from your youth;
they shall wander each one to his quarter.

No one shall save you.

In this chapter we have a message to Babylon, and also to the Chaldeans calling them to repent. The whole chapter forms a complete message that cannot be easily split into different parts. Whilst it is notable that the main emphasis is on calling Babylon to repent, there are (somewhat oblique) references to Israel in verse 4 and 6. Notwithstanding our opening comments, for convenience sake we shall consider the whole in three parts as follows:

[1] A call to repent issued through bringing truth to bear. (Isaiah 47:1-7).

[2] An appeal to listen for impending doom is coming. (Isaiah 47:8-11).

[3] Recognise that your counsellors and entrepreneurs will not save you. (Isaiah 47:12-15).

[1] A call to repent issued through bringing truth to bear. (Isaiah 47:1-7).

47:1.

The chapter opens with the Lord speaking words of instruction to the “*virgin daughter of Babylon*,” also styled as the “*daughter of the Chaldeans*.” The phrase “*daughter of*” is used to represent a group of men, or a city or satellite towns of a city, or a region in a land, or a group of people.²⁰⁰³ The Chaldeans were an ancient group of people that hailed from the region of Ur where Abraham derived from.²⁰⁰⁴ It would seem, according to Jones' dictionary of Old Testament names and Brown-Driver-Briggs dictionary, that the term “*Chaldean*” (or “*Chaldee*”) derives from the name of Shem's son “*Arphaxad*.”²⁰⁰⁵

Table 57.1: Arphaxad and Chaldea compared.

אַרְפַּכְשָׁד	Arphaxad
בְּאוּר כַּשְׁדִּים	In Ur of the Chaldees

It will be noted that there is a similarity between the name “*Chaldee*” and *Arphaxad*” as shown by the three letters given in blue.²⁰⁰⁶ *Arphaxad* must have settled around the region of the Persian gulf and the people of that region were named after him, the former part of his name being dropped.

In the time of Job, the Chaldeans raided and stole his camels.²⁰⁰⁷ According to Isaiah we find that the Chaldeans were a proud people associated with ancient Assyria and engaged in travel on the sea (possibly trade).²⁰⁰⁸ In our passage and elsewhere we learn that they were renowned for their 'wisdom' and intellectual abilities.²⁰⁰⁹

So it would seem that the Babylonians who would take Judah into captivity more than a century in Isaiah's future, are here being depicted as the people that have ancient origins stemming

2003 Micah 5:1; 2Chronicles 25:13; Psalm 45:10,13; Isaiah 23:10; 52:2; Jeremiah 4:11,31; 31:21,22.

2004 Genesis 11:28,31; 15:7. I am well aware that the scholars argue that this reference to Chaldea in Genesis is a later addition or a gloss because, in the modern scholars viewpoint, the Chaldeans did not enter history until about 1000 years after Abraham. See: **William D. Barrick, Th.D.** (Professor of Old Testament). *Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen. 11:28-31). A model for dealing with difficult texts.* TMSJ 20/1. (Spring 2009). PP7-18.

2005 **F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs.** The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. Oxford Clarendon Press. 1906. Hereafter as **BDB**.

2006 The last two letters on the Hebrew for Chaldee (i.e. כַּשְׁ) are just the plural ending in Hebrew.

2007 Job 1:17.

2008 Isaiah 13:19; 23:13; 43:14

2009 Daniel 1:4; 2:2.

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back to the days immediately after the flood. The instructions given in Isaiah 47:1 are threefold:

Come down and
Sit in the dust,
Sit on the ground without a throne,

Such a call is one all people need to hear! Before we can be exalted to being with the Lord in the heavenly places, we need first to be humbled. We are to “*come down*” and be small. The trouble is that mankind always elevates himself no matter whom he is, nor what he has done. It is clear with regard to Babylon from their earliest days. Nimrod their first 'king' wanted his band of rebels to “*make a name*” for themselves.²⁰¹⁰ Such vaunting is not difficult to find both in our day and throughout history, which is littered with tyrants, dictators, and so on. But it is equally true of even the most humble person today. How can I claim this? Well I wonder truly who amongst man really understands their true position and status? Are we not talented in puffing one another up because of the hardships (as perceived by the unfaithful) of life? If we were to see ourselves in truth I fear we would be horrified. When anyone is challenged as a sinner there is usually a reaction in which the person responds by saying that they are not “that bad.”

And so Babylon are called to come down, and to “*sit in the dust,*” and to “*sit on the ground without a throne.*” The implication is clear. Give up your exalted status. Get back to earth. We were made from the dust, and Adam was made from the ground, so get real!²⁰¹¹ It would seem that exaltation leads to a state of delicacy. Those who are in a position to rule and govern rarely dirty their hands. Only the best kings have lead their warriors out on the battle field. But Babylon, from top to bottom, were “*tender*” and “*delicate*” people, pampered and molly coddled.

47:2,3.

Next we read in verse 2 that they were to become menial servants, and were to get back to basic living. They were to become millers and were to grind their own flour (“*grind meal*”), and to do so they needed to remove their finery so that they could get through the rivers where the millstones were. As a result their naked shame would be evident.²⁰¹² Instead of pomp and finery, there would be grime and abasement. At the end of verse 3 we read that the Lord will (justly) “*take*

2010 Genesis 10:8f; 11:4.

2011 The name “*Adam*” is linked to the Hebrew name for “*ground*” which is: אָדָמָה *'ādāmāh*.

2012 Isaiah 47:3.

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vengeance,” and that He would not take any excuse or back chat – there would be no arbitration or negotiation! I sometimes wonder why we ever think that we could answer God back? He who made us in our mothers' wombs, who knit us together and has provided not just everything needful for physical and temporal well-being, but has provided life and peace and health through Christ, the incarnate God, and yet we feel the need to shake a fist at Him because things are not going the way we planned. How absurd. Humble yourself! Come down off your high horse! Consider yourself as low and in desperate need. Do this now! And do it before He brings you to such a state.

47:4.

At verse 4 there is a break in the train of thought. Almost out of the blue we are told about Israel and Judah's *“Redeemer.”* It seems out of place, and yet it is the perfect place to hear such a word. Humble yourself, bring yourself down – but there is a *“Redeemer.”* But do note that this Redeemer who has purchased His own people is also known as *“the Lord of hosts”* or the Lord of armies! God is not delicate nor tender, and He is no pushover! Far from it. The Redeemer is also known as *“the Holy One of Israel.”* God is holy and we must reckon with such. The whole point is to come back to the truth, and to come back to what we were really created to be. To be back in relationship with God – the Redeemer who buys back the departed relative – we need to be like Him, which means to be holy.

47:5.

With this interlude to point the way back to the Lord mentioned and now passed, we return to two further instructions. First we read that Babylon was to *“sit in silence.”* What words do we bring to the Holy Lord of hosts when it comes to judgement? Job responded to the Lord's revelation with these important words:

4 Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. **5** Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.²⁰¹³

When the Lord speaks there is no answer but to obey! Christ comes with salvation on offer, why would we reject His offer? The second instruction to *“go into darkness”* seems curious. Surely the Lord would bring light to show up sin and to illumine the glory of God? Well I think the point is that we need first to reckon ourselves in darkness. The thing is that we often consider we are wise

2013 Job 40:4,5.

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and have much light. Take modern science today. The feeling among the science community is that we have never known so much and gained so much knowledge. And yet the knowledge modern science presumes to own is utter darkness in truth. I do not mean to suggest that any true observations made by modern science are wrong, but merely that their prevailing *ideas* are all nonsense. Evolution, the Big Bang, man is simply a physical machine, and so on are all not just contrary to the Bible, but against common sense. And thus we must come to reckon that all our vaunted light and knowledge is but nonsense and darkness. This is the testimony of Solomon in his work, Ecclesiastes.

As a result Babylon shall no longer be known as *“the Lady of Kingdoms.”* Think of this, Babylon was the great centre of the world. Such a title smacks of pride. And yet Scripture's view of Babylon is very different. In the book of Revelation we read that Babylon was styled as *“Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and the abominations of the earth.”*²⁰¹⁴ Have we accolades and titles? Do we have great qualifications and superb CVs? Take note that the only qualification worth anything is the free one offered by God as Paul teaches. Those who have humbled themselves and considered their light to be nothing but darkness and so have truly trusted Christ are to:

*.. give thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.*²⁰¹⁵

We remind ourselves that Babylon was yet to be a super-power at the time that Isaiah was prophesying.

47:6.

In verse 6 we find that Judah was going to be forsaken by the Lord and yet this future event is put to us here as though it had already happened. The Lord was *“angry”* with the people He had chosen. Why was this? Well we must remember that God's wrath (His righteous anger) rests on all who deserve such. Who deserves His wrath? All who reject the true and right ways that are fit and right for humanity. The great evil and false notion prevalent today is that people are basically fine and should be left to get on with life as they are. When God demands righteousness and truth, people are up in arms – who is God that He should make such demands? But the trouble is that we were designed and created by God to live in certain ways. It simply cannot work if we attempt to

2014 Revelation 17:5.

2015 Colossians 1:12.

Studies in Isaiah.

live life independently and self generated. We not only need the Lord God in our lives, we actually need Him at the centre of life. This is simply the only way to truly live life. If we reject this we do not opt for a second best, but a one millionth best! Furthermore we must also remember that by rejecting God and His ways (which are the only ways really) we are effectively saying that God is wrong, that His counsels are nonsense, and that His ways are not sufficient or good. How wicked! God is good and does only good. He graciously calls us and points out the flaws in our lives and the true way, and we reject it all and opt for the worst possible option of going our own way and thereby we incur His righteous anger. Which parent would not feel aggrieved and horrified if the son they raised and loved rejected the wise advice to give up their addiction and instead deepens it for a far more addictive drug?

And thus the Lord God was aggrieved. This is shown by Him letting go of the land and by Him no longer protecting and guarding them. The Lord had *“given them”* into the hand of the Babylonians. Now the Babylonians acted harshly towards them and this is the Lord's assessment of their actions. They:

Were merciless (*“you showed them no mercy”*). (v6).

Laid heavy burdens on them (*“on the elderly you laid your yoke very heavily”*). (v6).

Acted in great pride claiming a form of eternity (*“I shall be a lady forever”*). (v7).

Acted with superficiality (*“did not take these things to heart”*). (v7).

Did not think carefully (they did not *“remember the latter end of them”*). (v7).

To begin with, we note that the actions of the Babylonians were very much like the actions of the ancient Egyptians towards the people of God when they were in Egypt. There were hard task-masters and laid upon them heavy burdens which weighed the people down and had no thoughts of welfare at all.²⁰¹⁶ This is always the way of the world. These actions are, in fact, typical of the fruit and results of not accepting God and His ways. Whatever idol we may follow, or whatever bondage we sell ourselves into (and effectively this is what Israel did), we will end up suffering in these dreadful ways. Sadly we do not seem to realise that the Lord God acts in precisely the opposite ways. Let us consider some of the things that the Lord has indeed done for us. The Lord, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, has showed us great mercy:

2016 Exodus 1:13,14.

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But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us.²⁰¹⁷

He has also offered rest and a simple yoke:

28 Come to Me, all *you* who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.²⁰¹⁸

He came to earth in great humility and so has received the name above all names:

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, **6** who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, **7** but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. **9** Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, **11** and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.²⁰¹⁹

He has acted with great compassion and deep thoughts towards the objects of His love:

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.²⁰²⁰

He has a perfect plan which gives people the deserved fruit for their choice:

4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, **5** having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.²⁰²¹

How we malign God! How we mistake and overestimate our personal choices! How foolish we are.

2017 Ephesians 2:4.
2018 Matthew 11:28,29.
2019 Philippians 2:5-11.
2020 Jeremiah 29:11.
2021 Ephesians 1:4,5.

[2] An appeal to listen for impending doom is coming. (Isaiah 47:8-11).

General comments.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter it is not really possible to separate out the text into separate and distinct parts. What comes next in verse 8 follows on from the 'charge' issued by the Lord to the Babylonians in the previous verses. They who had shown no mercy and had exacted heavy burdens must now hear the judgment of God (*"therefore hear this now"*).²⁰²²

However before we get to this judgment which comes in verses 9 and 11, we find further characteristics and traits of the Babylonian overlords. We find these spread throughout verses 8, 9 and 10 which are as follows:

They were *"given to pleasures."* (v8).

They lived in security (*"dwell securely"*) (v8).

They trusted in their own *"wisdom," "sorceries,"* and *"enchantments."* (v 9,10).

47:8.

Thus first, their aim and purpose was to live the hedonistic life. They were *"given to pleasures,"* that is, their life was grounded in pleasing themselves. That which delighted the senses and boosted the bodily drives. Such a drive is obviously a strong one in the worldly person, because the senses seem to be all that count. But a desire to please the senses leads to bondage. Those who pursue such drives often care less about others and, consequently, walk over them in their pursuits. Think of those given to addictions. Their drug of choice is usually very expensive and therefore they are tempted to a life of crime to support their habit. Not only do they do great damage to their own lives, they affect those whom they steal from, and any who are related or who share lodgings with them. It is not only the obvious evils of desire which lead to bondage. Take a legitimate pursuit such as being entertained through drama. An excess of film watching leads to bondage in a different way. When a great film is once seen there is a desire to see an even greater one. Some spend hours upon hours watching a series of films and do so to such a great extent that they can recite verbatim the script! But what type of material forms the subject of 'entertainment' these days? Horror, sex, power, war, envy, greed, and so on. Now, of course, we can enjoy a good film and we can be challenged by the message a good director may bring, but a focus on these so that we live life

2022 Isaiah 47:8.

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governed by them will lead to bondage.

The second characteristic (*“who dwell securely”*) is actually one which was not really true. It was only in their perception. They thought that they were secure and that none could harm them. This is why the Lord refers to their *“delicate”* and *“tender”* natures. They had been closeted and cloistered in such a 'bubble' or cocoon that they thought of no dangers to their existence. This false security is displayed by what they said, or how they spoke to one another:

‘I am, and *there is* no one else besides me;
I shall not sit *as* a widow,
nor shall I know the loss of children’

The opening statement in this quote is startling and it shows idolatry and the rejection of God for what it really is, namely, being anti-God. By this term 'anti-God' I mean to imply that people take the place of God. Hence here we read that the people of Babylon could say *“I am, and there is no one else beside me.”* Self-sufficiency, self-absorption, and self-pleasing! No one else really matters! How starkly different to the true *“I AM”* who acts out of love and blessing! The true *“I AM”* gives life, pours out love, acts in mercy, and does wonders. The other two statements are equally defiant (*“I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children”*). We have here pictured the daughter of Babylon as a representative of the people of Babylon. This woman who was sensuous and secure believed that she would never lose her status and position, and that she would always bear fruit. She would never become a widow nor would she be barren or lose children. The Old Testament Scriptures use the threefold figure of 'orphan,' 'stranger,' and 'widow' to depict the plight of humanity in its lost and hopeless state. The widow without a husband was without status and thus lost. The child without father had no provision and security. The alien stranger had no place or right within the land which was foreign to them. Now these sensuous ones boasted that they were not lost at all. They had status, provision, pride and a place! They did not realise that it was in God's good grace that they had these, and that at any moment they could be removed.

47:9,10.

And such would soon happen to them! As they sat in their self-security and pleasure, suddenly, *“in a moment,”* and *“in one day,”* both conditions (widowhood and loss of children) would be their lot. The reference to the loss of children reminds us of the loss of the firstborn in Egypt. And thus we are meant to realise that such judgement was at the hands of God. Note that

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such a condition would come to them in its *“fullness,”* Or, in complete totality.²⁰²³ There would be no doubt or ambiguity here. They would lose husband and children, not just the firstborn as in Egypt.

The third characteristic of the Chaldeans we mentioned earlier, is one for which they were well known. Furthermore, it was for this disposition and trait which they possessed, which would result in God's judgement. Thus

They engaged in a *“multitude”* of *“sorceries.”* (v9).

They practised a *“great abundance”* of *“enchantments.”* (v9).

These unnatural forms of revelation were in fact *“wickedness”* because they were done in secret so that none could see them (*“no one sees me”*).²⁰²⁴ We find further that the statement we came across in verse 8 depicting a challenge to God's eternal being (*“I am, and there is no one else besides me”*), occurs again in verse 10. Clearly, then, these were a people who had a great deal of confidence! Sorceries were witchcraft practices done in whispers. Partly to hide them from detection and challenge, and partly to ensure ambiguity and mystery. Error and evil is always foggy and unclear. How wonderful it is to have the clear and perfect word of God! Enchantments were charms and promises done in a 'fellowship' of people. The Babylonians trusted in these secret chants and whispers which promised much but were shrouded in mystery and nuance. But such reliance on witchcraft resulted in their *“wisdom”* and *“knowledge”* becoming *“warped.”* That is, it turned away from truth and became perverted.

47:11.

In verse 11 we find the end result as shown by the word *“therefore.”* The Babylonians will know *“evil,”* *“trouble,”* and *“desolation,”* because of their reliance on wickedness and self-sufficiency. This will come to them suddenly, from a source they have no knowledge of, and which they will not be able to ignore. Because of being given to sensuous self-satisfaction, they will be completely unaware of this, despite their reliance on witchcraft, sorcery and enchantment. For all their excess in these forbidden extra-Biblical sources of revelation, they will have no knowledge of what is about to happen. Isn't this the case today? People who rely on modern science believe that

2023 Isaiah 47:9.

2024 Isaiah 47:10.

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the universe will continue on for many millions of years and that when we die we simply revert to atoms in different compounds scattered throughout the earth. What a shock such will find when they die or when Christ returns!

[3] Recognise that your counsellors and entrepreneurs will not save you. (Isaiah 47:12-15).

47:12.

The Lord's words of assessment and judgement continue on to a climax in verse 15. The “*enchantments*” and “*sorceries*” referred to earlier in verse 9 are mentioned again in verse 12 where we discover that they had worked on these as something highly prized from their “*youth.*” Clearly this false wisdom was highly prized because it was taught to the youth and there was an abundance and a multitude of them.

Verse 12 opens with a challenge to the Babylonians. Can they “*stand now*” and display their talents to show some profit? At the end of verse 12 we read what may appear to be a faint hope that their false wisdom may be of some benefit. The AKJV renders the two last clauses which each begin with the word “*perhaps*” in our version as:

if so be thou shalt be able to profit,
if so be thou mayest prevail.

There is no hope at all! This is similar to the challenge offered by Elijah to the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel.²⁰²⁵ The idea is a challenge. We might paraphrase this as: “see if you can bring any profit or lasting fruit!”

47:13.

But the truth is stark. They were “*wearied in the multitude of your counsels.*” They were exhausted. Just as the prophets of Baal carried on their hopeless and fruitless rituals, these Babylonian wise men tried everything they could think of to the point of exhaustion. In verse 13 we find how extensive their reliance on self-wisdom had become. They had “*astrologers,*” “*stargazers,*” and “*monthly prognosticators.*” They were (probably) good astronomers but they had made their observations subservient to their mythology. There were divisions and sub-divisions

²⁰²⁵ 1Kings 18:19f.

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amongst their wise men. It would appear that they engaged in some form of prophecy or acted as “seers” or “visionaries.” The last term indicates some reliance and dependence upon the moon with mention of the term *“monthly.”* The call to them is to *“stand up”* and be counted, and, more importantly, to bring salvation from what God has already pronounced! Can they do this? They were so confident (*“I am, and there is no one else besides me”*), so surely they could take a stand and declare rescue and deliverance from what was about to happen? If not why the confidence?²⁰²⁶

47:14.

Well the truth was they couldn't. They were all mouth and bluster, and when faced up they crumble. To begin with we note that the people are dry and ready to be burned up, (*“they have become like stubble”*). Then next we note that the fire that will burn them is no mere bonfire nor a brazier by which they might be warmed. This is a conflagration! There is no deliverance from this fire!

47:15.

In verse 15 the focus shifts towards the merchants, or the ones with whom they had *“laboured.”* This was hard work – a part of the curse. Work is a God-given created blessing, but labour and toil is as a result of the curse. The Babylonians had been hard worked so that what they were engaged in could be described as labour and toil, and this had been happening from their earliest days.

The word translated as *“quarter”* in verse 15 is interesting. It means “a region on the other or opposite side” and suggests that which is outside the land. Other translations suggest that the idea is of error or of going one's own way.

The Babylonians had concentrated on trade and business, but such a focus lead to a heavy burden, and it had also lead them to a connection which served them no real benefit. You would think that those whom you spend much time with would be close and helpful. However these merchants with whom Babylon laboured simply wandered away to that which concerned them, that is, beyond the region of interest. The end conclusion was that there was no one to help nor to save. The fire will come and it cannot be stopped by ingenuity, determination, or any third party.

2026 Isaiah 47:10.

Chapter 58.

Isaiah 48:1-22.

I have not spoken in secret!

Textual analysis.

- 1 "Hear this,
 O house of Jacob,
 who
 are called by the name of Israel,
 and have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah;
 who
 swear by the name of the Lord,
 and make mention of the God of Israel,
 but not in truth or in righteousness;
 2 for they
 call themselves after the holy city,
 and lean on the God of Israel;
 the Lord of hosts *is* His name:
- 3 "I have declared
 the former things
 from the beginning;
 they went forth from My mouth,
 and I caused them to hear it.
 Suddenly I did *them*,
 and they came to pass.
- 4 Because I knew that
 you *were* obstinate,
 and your neck *was* an iron sinew,
 and your brow bronze,
- 5 even from the beginning
 I have declared *it* to you;
before it came to pass
 I proclaimed *it* to you,
 lest you should say,
 'My idol has done them, and my carved image and my moulded image have commanded them.'
- 6 "You have heard; see all this.
And will you not declare *it*?
I have made you hear
 new things from this time,
 even hidden things, and you did not know them.
- 7 They are created now and not from the beginning;
and before this day you have not heard them,
 lest you should say,
 'of course I knew them.'

Studies in Isaiah.

8 Surely you did not hear,
surely you did not know;
surely from long ago your ear was not opened.

For I knew that you would deal very treacherously,
and were called a transgressor from the womb.

9 “For My name’s sake I will defer My anger,
and *for* My praise I will restrain it from you, so that I do not cut you off.

10 Behold,
I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

11 For My own sake,
for My own sake,

I will do *it*;

for how should *My name* be profaned?

And I will not give My glory to another.

12 “Listen to Me,
O Jacob,
and Israel,
My called:

I *am* He,
I *am* the First,
I *am* also the Last.

13 Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth,
and My right hand has stretched out the heavens;
when I call to them, they stand up together.

14 “All of you, assemble yourselves, and hear!
Who among them has declared these *things*?
The Lord loves him;

He shall do His pleasure on Babylon,
and His arm *shall be against* the Chaldeans.

15 I, *even* I, have spoken;
yes, I have called him,
I have brought him, and his way will prosper.

16 “Come near to Me, hear this:
I have not spoken in secret from the beginning;
from the time that it was, I *was* there.
And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me.”

17 Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
“I *am* the Lord your God,
who teaches you to profit,
who leads you by the way you should go.

18 Oh, that you had heeded My commandments!

Then

your peace would have been like a river,
and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

19 Your descendants also would have been like the sand,
and the offspring of your body like the grains of sand;
his name would not have been cut off nor destroyed from before Me.”

20 Go forth from Babylon!

Flee from the Chaldeans!

With a voice of singing,
declare,
proclaim this,
utter it to the end of the earth;
say,

“the Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob!”

Studies in Isaiah.

21 And they did not thirst when He led them through the deserts;
He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them;
He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out.

22 “There is no peace,” says the Lord, “for the wicked.”

General comments.

Unlike the previous chapter this one falls into two parts as shown by the phrases “*hear this*” in verse 1 and “*listen to Me*” in verse 12. The outline for this chapter is as follows:

[1] Hear this, O house of Jacob (Isaiah 48:1-11).

[a] What the Lord has declared. (Isaiah 48:3-5).

[b] What the people had heard. (Isaiah 48:6-8).

[c] Wrath and glory. (Isaiah 48:9-11).

[2] Listen to Me, O Jacob ... (Isaiah 48:12-22).

[a] Listen and hear! (Isaiah 48:12-16).

[i] Listen to Me! (Isaiah 48:12,13).

[ii] Assemble yourselves! (Isaiah 48:14,15).

[iii] Come near to Me! (Isaiah 48:16).

[b] Go forth from Babylon. (Isaiah 48:17-22).

[i] Thus says the Lord. (Isaiah 48:17).

[ii] Oh that you had ...! (Isaiah 48:18,19).

[iii] Go forth from Babylon! (Isaiah 48:20,21).

[iv] No peace for the wicked. (Isaiah 48:22).

Each section is addressed to the same people named “*Jacob*” and “*Israel*.” The Lord's message comes to the people of God who thus are styled both by their ancient father's given name, “*Jacob*,” and also by the name given him by the Lord, “*Israel*,” in both verse 1 and verse 12.²⁰²⁷ They are thus brought to remember the origin of the great patriarch and his subsequent deliverance by God. The reader will recall that Jacob was so named because he grabbed his brother Esau's heel as they were entering this world.²⁰²⁸ Esau was the firstborn and by grabbing his heel Jacob showed his 'supplanting,' deceitful nature as depicted for us in the history related in Genesis.²⁰²⁹ But then God meets with Jacob and endures a wrestling match! At this occasion the Lord renames Jacob as

2027 Genesis 32:28.

2028 Genesis 25:26.

2029 Genesis 25:29f.

Studies in Isaiah.

“Israel,” which name means “prevailed with God,” or “prince of God.”²⁰³⁰ We must never forget from what the Lord has saved us, but then equally we must not hold onto this but realise that the Lord has given us a new name.²⁰³¹

The main emphasis throughout is upon what the Lord has done by way of revelation and this contrasts cleverly with the Babylonian false revelation. It also serves to teach us something about how the Lord reveals Himself. Then also this word of God is given as a call to the (future) return from exile as shown by verses 12 and 14.

[1] Hear this, O house of Jacob (Isaiah 48:1-11).

48:1,2.

The first two verses inform us of not just the origin or name of the people that the Lord addresses, but also their current nature. In verse 1 the people are also referred to by a number of other descriptions apart from the dual names (*“Jacob,” “Israel”*). The first of these highlights God's provision for them, for they benefited from the many wells and sources of water found in Judah. In fact the expression signifies the doctrine of new birth. They had *“come forth”* suggests the idea of birth. The word can be found in Genesis 1 where we read that *“the earth brought forth grass”* and also *“the living creature after his kind.”*²⁰³² It is also the word found on the lips of the Lord as He encouraged Abraham to believe that his heir would *“come forth”* from *“his own bowels.”*²⁰³³ Although there are other words employed for giving birth, it is used for this event too.²⁰³⁴ However the word is also used in a wide variety of other applications where the idea of proceeding from one place to another is in view.²⁰³⁵ The intention here in Isaiah 48 is to point the people to their rich heritage. Now there is always a tension between the physical provision and the spiritual. They had received a land flowing with milk and honey, with vines, wells, and springs which they had not worked for.²⁰³⁶ In such a way we can see the great grace of God. We have not worked for our salvation but have been given such grace and such delights expressed by the Lord in terms of a great fountain and rivers:

2030 Genesis 32:28f.

2031 Revelation 2:17; 3:12.

2032 Genesis 1:12,24.

2033 Genesis 15:4.

2034 Ecclesiastes 5:15.

2035 Psalm 146:4; Proverbs 30:27; Song 7:11.

2036 Exodus 3:8; Deuteronomy 6:11; 8:7-9.

Studies in Isaiah.

37 On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. **38** He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” **39** But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.²⁰³⁷

And so we have Jacob/Israel described in this way, they had “*come forth from the wellsprings of Judah.*” It is pertinent to remind ourselves that Isaiah has already spoken of the wells of salvation in chapter 12. But this isn't the only description we have here. The second phrase, (“*who swear by the name of the Lord*”), begins with the word “*who,*” and this is meant to imply that the people's language and conversation was centred in the Lord. To “*swear by the name of the Lord*” suggests to speak in truth from God's perspective and revelation. The next phrase continues this theme so that they will “*mention*” (or remember) the God of Israel in all that they do. However there is a sting in the tail, for at the end of this description, we find that all of this is “*not in truth or in righteousness.*”

In verse 2 we find that the people of Israel also refer to themselves by the name of their “*holy city,*” and we read that they put their trust *on* the Lord (“*lean on the God of Israel, the Lord of hosts is His name*”). What are we to make of these statements? Well by looking at the form of translation, it would seem that the first two statements concerning their new name and their origin (“*come forth from*”) were true:

Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah ...²⁰³⁸

After all, God had renamed Jacob as Israel, and the people were given the land with its wells so that the generations that followed came forth from the fruit of that land. In other words these opening statements look back to their former entrance into God's care and concern. But the other four statements seem to follow a pattern, as follows:

who swear by the name of the Lord,
and make mention of the God of Israel,
but not in truth or in righteousness;
2 for they call themselves after the holy city,
and lean on the God of Israel; the Lord of hosts *is* His name:

2037 John 7:37-39.

2038 Isaiah 48:1a.

Studies in Isaiah.

Thus the first two speak of conversation and the last two speak of identity and dependence. It is always necessary to consider truly who we are before God. The Lord always shows us our nature and being, and is always concerned with truth and integrity. Consider how the Lord Jesus spoke openly with the phrase “*woe*” to the Pharisees, for example.²⁰³⁹ Thus here the people had fallen into a presumptive way. They made mention of God and spoke of Him, even assuming His love, and they appeared to put their trust in Him and referred to themselves as belonging to God, but all of this was “*not in truth and righteousness.*”

The remaining message in this first section comes in three parts. The first, which comes in verses 3 to 5, concerns what the Lord **had** declared in the past. The second covers verses 6 to 8 and features what the people had heard or had been caused to hear. The Last in verses 9 to 11 deals with God's wrath and His glory.

[a] What the Lord has declared. (Isaiah 48:3-5).

48:3-5.

In these three verses we have a remarkable truth which ought not to be limited in any way, although, sad to say, it often is. Thus it is usually taken to suggest that God was instructing these people as to how He had spoken to them in earlier days about what was about to happen soon. In other words, it is assumed that the Lord had told them about future things *just before* they were about to happen. However what is clearly implied by verse 3 is that God has been revealing Himself undoubtedly *from the very beginning of time*! How can I justify this statement? Well to begin with, we have that phrase “*from the beginning*” in verse 3 and verse 5. It is not the same phrase in Hebrew as found in Genesis 1:1, but nevertheless the intention is pointing us back to the start of time. But next note how the Lord speaks here. He states that these things He had declared had gone forth from His “*mouth*” by which we are reminded of God speaking creation into being in Genesis 1. Then also note the last part of verse 3 (“*Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass*”), which is very similar to what we find in Psalm 33:

6 By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. ... **9** For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.²⁰⁴⁰

2039 Matthew 23:1f.

2040 Psalm 33:6,9.

Studies in Isaiah.

It was “*suddenly*” that the Lord did these things and immediately “*they came to pass.*” The same is shown by God's creative acts in Genesis 1, and by the Son of God through His miracles. Thus in verse 3 we have the clear statement that the Lord had spoken from the very beginning!

Perhaps the main import of what is being taught here is that God told the people beforehand what was going to come to pass. He uses the fact that He had revealed truth from the very beginning to demonstrate His open heart. He had always told them all they needed to know beforehand. Why had He done this? Well verse 4 tells us that they were obstinate and resisted the truth, just as the first pair had. Therefore it was “*even from the beginning,*” that the Lord had openly declared to them the truth. Otherwise they may have thought that what was about to come to pass had come from their (false) idols.²⁰⁴¹

These verses teach another very important point. Sadly many today look at Genesis through the lens or view point of the ancient Near East and its culture. But here we find that God had declared the truth from the very beginning of time so that there would be no doubt that the gospel has its origins in eternity. Those who claim that the Pentateuch is a polemic written within and against the culture of the ancient Near East have not read these verses carefully enough! To say that the idea of sacrifice, covenant, and law, for example, have come from the ancient Near East and have been adapted by Bible writers is monstrous nonsense. To say that the creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2 are simply Hebrew expressions of ancient Near East mythology is pure stupidity. The ancient Near East cultures got their cosmologies, their origin stories, and their rites and regulations from the original stream of truth of which Genesis is the forerunner.

[b] What the people had heard. (Isaiah 48:6-8).

48:6,7.

Having spoken of what He had revealed from the beginning of time, the Lord next moves to speak of those things that were happening round about Isaiah's day. In verse 6 we hear the Lord state that the people had heard and seen all the truth revealed. Thus it would be only natural for them to “*declare it*” because it would be within their experience. It is significant that whilst the first phrase (“*you have heard; see all this*”), and the last phrase (“*I have made ... you did not know them*”) are singulars, spoken to an individual, the middle phrase (“*and will you not declare it?*”) is

2041 Isaiah 48:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

plural.²⁰⁴² It is as though the Lord singles out one person to begin and end with, but looks out over the entire nation in the middle of what He is saying. In other words the Lord speaks to an individual first and last as representatives of the whole nation.

At the beginning the Lord appeals to them as individuals and as a nation to consider all that He has thus said and done. Surely they have seen and heard what the Lord has openly and freely declared? Surely they would (as a nation) declare that this is true, and that the Lord had spoken and acted as He has said? Thus far we are brought to consider the fact that from the very beginning up until this point in time, the Lord has declared and shown forth all that He has done. But then there is a change in focus. Now we are brought to consider the present and the future. They had heard, but now the Lord will make them hear. We ought not to miss the causative nature of this expression. The Lord was going to insist that the people hear and so the expression given here in the NKJV is *“I have made you hear.”* So what was it that the Lord wanted them to hear? Well we discover four features about the things the Lord was about to reveal, but we do not yet hear what this revelation will be. The four things they were made to hear were:

1. New things.
2. Hidden things.
3. Things unknown to the people (*“you did not know them”*).
4. Things created now.

These would be new and fresh, and they would be things never before heard about, in fact they would not just be things unheard of by certain people, for they were not created until this time. The word *“created”* in verse 7 is the same word as that found in Genesis 1:1 and which means creation ex nihilo (out of nothing). Thus these new things would be created at this time and *“not from the beginning”* nor from *“before this day.”* These ideas are reflected in the book of Revelation where we read these words:

Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”²⁰⁴³

2042 My translation would be: “**Thou** hast heard! See! All these things. And will **ye** not declare it? I have caused **thee** to hear new things from this time, even secret things, and things **thou** hast not known (them).”

2043 Revelation 21:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

Hence we are being brought to consider the 'new creation.' That these were new and unknown is counterpoised with the notion that they were *"hidden"* things. The word rendered *"hidden"* actually has the idea of that which is guarded or kept securely. They are the precious and secret things which cannot be known until God wills them to be known.

48:8.

It would seem from the rest of verse 7 and 8 that the Lord knew well the heart of the people. When things were revealed to them they appear to have made out that they knew it all along and that it wasn't really that important at all. The Lord is making them understand that what He is about to do and reveal is a new thing which they have never heard of, and which they could never have known. He has done it this way to stop them saying that they knew before hand. The statements in verse 8 are emphatic. It is most certainly and definitely true that they *"did not hear"* and that they *"did not know."* He then draws a general principle concerning their dullness of hearing. It was *"from long ago"* that they had ears that were *"not opened."* How dull of hearing we all are! How little respect we pay to what God has said and done! The verse ends with a statement about the Lord's knowledge. Think carefully about what is being claimed here. The Lord knew their state and condition. He knew that they *"would deal very treacherously"* because they were, in fact, *"a transgressor from the womb."* Here is the essential problem of mankind. He was born in sin and is a sinner by nature. Consequently man in his sin will be treacherous, deceitful, and will act covertly. Left to ourselves and without any restraints or checks we would end up dealing very treacherously indeed. All of us have this 'name': *"a transgressor from the womb."* The word used here (*"transgressor"*) signifies a rebel, or one who breaks away. It is seen in the kings of the earth who take a stand against God and throw off the shackles and restraints they feel:

2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, *saying*, **3** "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us."²⁰⁴⁴

But the Lord has the last laugh!

²⁰⁴⁴ Psalm 2:2,3.

[c] Wrath and glory. (Isaiah 48:9-11).

48:9-11.

In this last part we learn what the Lord had done to the people of Israel and what He intended to do with them in the future as well, along with the reasons for these actions. The Lord had already “*refined*” them and “*tested*” them but He had not done so fully. They had been sorely tried “*in the furnace of affliction,*” but they had yet to be refined perfectly “*as silver.*”²⁰⁴⁵ In other words they were still not completely dealt with. But now we find that the Lord will draw His anger back. We read that the Lord would “*defer*” and “*restrain*” His anger from them, so that they would not be “*cut off.*”²⁰⁴⁶ These words are reminiscent of those we found in Isaiah chapter 1:

5 Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. **6** From the sole of the foot even to the head, *there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.*²⁰⁴⁷

Israel deserved punishment. However their suffering did not affect their state. They were simply being made worse and were not being brought to new life! Here in Isaiah 48 the same thing is being described. If the Lord punished as they deserved then they would be utterly “*cut off*” and destroyed.

We are also given the reasons for this deferring of God's anger. It is “*for My name's sake,*” and also for “*My praise.*”²⁰⁴⁸ The question that arises is: how does withholding His anger bring about the Lord's praise? Well the answer comes in verse 11 where we read that it was unthinkable that the Lord's name should be “*profaned.*” Why then did the Lord punish Israel so with refining, affliction and so on, only to hold back from bringing the full weight of punishment that they deserved? Well it can only be for two reasons. First it would be unthinkable that sin go unpunished, at least to some degree. If people get away scot free for doing all kinds of wicked and evil things then there is no telling how deeply depraved they may go. Wrongdoing and evil must be shown to be wrong. Consequently Israel (and everyone in the world) receives a measure of punishment in this world for sin. I understand that that is what the curse on the world was introduced for. All of us suffer in this world to some degree and the cause is Adam's sin, of which we all share the guilt.²⁰⁴⁹

2045 Isaiah 48:10.

2046 Isaiah 48:9.

2047 Isaiah 1:5,6.

2048 Isaiah 48:9,11.

2049 Romans 5:12.

Studies in Isaiah.

Thus we eat bread by the sweat of our brows and our wives suffer great pain in childbirth. Things never always go smoothly and we must work hard to keep our lives in some degree of order. On top of this there are diseases and disasters which, whilst not always directly brought in as judgements on sin, nevertheless remind us that we are reaping what we have sown.²⁰⁵⁰ But then secondly, if we truly got our just deserts for our rebellion and our sinfulness none would survive for a single second. The Lord truly is long-suffering.²⁰⁵¹

The Lord was to defer His anger even though He had tested Israel sorely. We cannot help but see the main reason which stands behind this speech. There will be One who would come and would bear all their sin away, taking the full wrath of God for sin and rebellion! How wonderful and how marvellous! The Lord would never give His glory *“to another.”*²⁰⁵² He alone who bore our sin is worthy of honour, praise and glory! For He is God.

[2] Listen to Me, O Jacob ... (Isaiah 48:12-22).

General comments.

In this second part we learn again the rallying call to *“listen”* and *“hear,”* but this time we learn of the Messiah and the great need for Him. We also find a great rallying call which, whilst given to Israel to promote their return from exile, actually stands as one of the great calls to all who own the name of Christ. This passage falls into two halves, the first containing three instructions to listen in verses 12, 14 and 16. The second part starts with a *“thus says the Lord”* in verse 17 and describes the reason for the Messiah's coming and a call to depart from Babylon.

[a] Listen and hear! (Isaiah 48:12-16).

This first part of Isaiah 48 describes three separate calls which we may assume all apply to *“Jacob and Israel,”* or any who may fit the title *“My called,”* or, in other words, all those who are born again of the Spirit of God.

2050 Paul mentions that some of the Corinthians were sick and some even died because of their irreverent behaviour – 1Corinthians 10:30.

2051 Ezra 9:13; 2Peter 3:9.

2052 Isaiah 48:11.

[i] Listen to Me! (Isaiah 48:12,13).

48:12.

In the first call we are given the basis for why these three appeals ought to be heeded.²⁰⁵³ The two bases upon which a hearing is demanded are: the character and nature of the One issuing the call, and, the work which this One has done. It is, of course, God who calls those whom He has “called” to listen to Him. At the end of verse 12 we have three “I” statements which in the Hebrew looks like this:

← Hebrew reads from the right

אֲנִי אַחֲרֹן	אָף	אֲנִי רִאשׁוֹן	אֲנִי-הוּא
'ānî 'aḥărôn	'ap	'ānî ri'shôn	'ānî hû'
I last	indeed	I first	I (am He)

Reading in English:

'ānî hû' 'ānî ri'shôn 'ap 'ānî 'aḥărôn
 I (am) He I first indeed I last

The first phrase reads literally as: “I” (*'ānî*) “He” (*hû'*) and the verb “to be” has been supplied by the translators hence written in italics in the NKJV text. Here we have the divine title that occurs frequently in Isaiah. It indicates the eternal self-sufficient nature of God. He alone is the “I AM.” Now the use of the pronoun “He” will become significant later on. The next phrase is “I am the first” but we might have rendered this as “I am the beginning,” for the root word means “head,” “chief,” “first,” or “beginning.”²⁰⁵⁴ After this we have a conjunction (*'ap*) which is rendered variously depending on context but here should be translated as an emphatic, such as “moreover,” or “how much more” or “more than that.”²⁰⁵⁵ Thus we might translate this as:

²⁰⁵³ Isaiah 48:12,13.

²⁰⁵⁴ Genesis 1:1; 10:10; Exodus 23:19;

²⁰⁵⁵ E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*. Volume 3. W. B. Eerdmans publishing Company. 1992. P255. Hereafter: E. J. Young, *Isaiah*. Volume 3.

Studies in Isaiah.

I am He, I am the first and what is more I am the last.

Each phrase is independent and can stand alone, but the conjunction (**'ap**) serves to heighten the tension. We might put it like this in written form:

I am He, I am the first, I am also the last.

It is enough, of course, for us to read the words *"I am He"*! This is stupendous, but there is a building of emphasis. The Lord God is the self-sufficient eternal God. Therefore it follows very clearly that He is the beginning, the first, the pre-eminent One.²⁰⁵⁶ Since He is before all things and is the very first, it follows further that He will be the last, and will outlive all. Now this word given in the NKJV as *"last"* indicates the idea of what is beyond or what is hinder-most as opposed to foremost. It is a word which signifies the end of a period of time and so occurs frequently in the phrase *"the last days."*²⁰⁵⁷ Thus we see in a more personal sense that the Lord goes before and comes behind. He is the Pioneer who leads us and is the watch at the rear. He is before and behind the God who loves us and is concerned for our great good and well-being.

48:13.

Following on from considering the Lord as the self-sufficient eternal God, we are brought to consider His works. Verse 13 begins with the conjunction **'ap**, and so our interest is heightened. We might translate this as "furthermore" to give the sense of mounting wonder and the increased need to listen. The reference to creation is all-encompassing. We have a shorthand reference from the *"foundation of the earth"* to the furthest reaches of the *"heavens"* which the Lord *"has stretched out."* All is encompassed and nothing is left out. We are informed that it was the *"hand"* and the *"right hand"* of the Lord which carried out all of this work. This is a reference to the Agent of creation, namely, Christ the Messiah. We then get a reference to the Lord's voice and word, for these two extremities (earth and heavens) *"stand up together"* when the Lord called to them. They were created with a word (Christ the Word) and they obey when God commands. They both respond equally to His call in full obedience, like soldiers called to attention. This last part of verse 13 forms a fitting conclusion to this call to listen. Since the entirety of creation, from the lowest parts of earth

2056 Colossians 1:18.

2057 Numbers 24:14; Deuteronomy 4:30; Isaiah 2:2; Jeremiah 23:20; 30:24.

Studies in Isaiah.

to the furthest parts of the heavens, respond in immediate obedience to the Lord's call, what should Israel and those called by Him do? Anything less than a rapid readiness to listen and obey is folly.

[ii] Assemble yourselves! (Isaiah 48:14,15).

48:14.

The second call instructs the people to gather and assemble for there is something they need to hear, a great contrast between the idols and their makers and the Lord of glory. Having called the people to gather and hear, the Lord asks the rhetorical question: who amongst the idols and their makers, amongst all those who claim to be something, has told us about all these things? Whom else can reveal? Scientists put an immense amount of store and value on their discoveries, but these are not really uncovering truths at all. All they amount to is inventions built around a collection of observations. Did Newton discover how gravity works? Not at all. All he did was to build an equation which mirrors how massive bodies interact. Did Einstein discover relativity and overthrow Newton's understanding? Not at all, he merely devised a new scheme to interpret the same data, but with different equations. Well the point is that none throughout history (the entire history of the universe) has come up with anything at all which would make any difference. God alone has declared and God alone has revealed. He is gracious and loving and has shown us what is required.

Then next in this short call from God we are told about someone that the Lord loves, and something about what this beloved One will do. Immediately we ask the question: to whom is the Lord referring when He mentions "*him*"? To which we have only one answer, it is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. This One is truly loved by the Father. What does He do? Well it appears that this One will do that which is right (the pleasure of God) concerning Babylon and the Chaldeans.

48:15.

Verse 15 begins with the personal pronoun repeated (*'ănî 'ănî*), highlighting the self-sufficient and eternal nature of the Lord. God has spoken! Then we have the same conjunction again (*'ap*), signalling the idea of assurance or definiteness which is shown in the NKJV by the word "*yes*" as a kind of affirmation. In other words, be assured that God is speaking – yes it most definitely is the Lord speaking! Then next we read of three things about the One whom the Lord was speaking:

Studies in Isaiah.

I have called him.
I have brought him.
His way will prosper.

Thus the Lord has “*called*” this One and He has “*brought him.*” The first indicates a commission. The Father commissioned or sent the Son. The second points us towards the incarnation for the word used has the idea of an entrance. The last phrase is translated better in the NASB which reads: “*He will make his ways successful.*” It isn't just that His way will be successful, but that this One will make or cause His way to be successful. In other words this One is no mere man, but is the Lord who is able! And so “*His way,*” by which we understand His course of life and His achievements will certainly succeed. And this is what we see and know when we read our New Testament of Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour!

[iii] Come near to Me! (Isaiah 48:16).

In this final call we are asked to “*come near*” to the Lord. How are we to obey this? What is required? Can we draw near to God by dint of will? Or is it that we need to approach the Lord through some mystical means? Or maybe there are certain rules by which we come into God's presence? Well there are three important New Testament texts which teach us about access to the Lord. In the first we learn that we have access through faith:

1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2** through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.²⁰⁵⁸

In the second and third we learn that our access is granted (it is all of grace) through Christ and His work on the cross, and is empowered in us through the Holy Spirit:

For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.²⁰⁵⁹

11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, **12** in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.²⁰⁶⁰

2058 Romans 5:1,2.

2059 Ephesians 1:18.

2060 Ephesians 3:11,12.

Studies in Isaiah.

Thus we come to the Lord by faith, through the Spirit's power and ability, and we come because we are "*in Christ*" and He is our focus and goal. Our drawing near to Him is something which must be done in sincerity and truth of heart.²⁰⁶¹ It is no good coming to the Lord with sin lodged in the breast. And so our drawing near includes repentance. It requires that we be washed and cleansed:

let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.²⁰⁶²

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded.²⁰⁶³

But to be cleansed and washed we need to listen to and draw from the Lord's word to us because faith to believe only comes by "*hearing the word of God.*"²⁰⁶⁴ The Lord Jesus Himself told the disciples in the upper room that they were "*already clean because of the word*" which He had spoken to them.²⁰⁶⁵ Thus a right, true, and humble acceptance of all that the Lord has spoken (in His word) is required to draw near to Him. Believing in the Lord's word is life changing! In fact it is life transforming as the following Scriptures teach:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.²⁰⁶⁶

having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.²⁰⁶⁷

But more than this, the word of God is extremely effectual in bringing about transformation and healing.

7 The law of the Lord *is* perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord *is* sure, making wise the simple; **8** the statutes of the Lord *are* right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord *is* pure, enlightening the eyes; **9** The fear of the Lord *is* clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord *are* true *and* righteous altogether. **10** More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than much fine gold;

2061 Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8.

2062 Hebrews 10:22.

2063 James 4:8.

2064 Romans 10:17.

2065 John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26.

2066 John 5:24.

2067 1Peter 1:23.

Studies in Isaiah.

sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. **11** Moreover by them Your servant is warned, *and in keeping them there is great reward.*²⁰⁶⁸

To conclude this thought we must realise that in order to increase in the *“knowledge of God,”* and to truly partake of the *“divine nature,”* we need to recognise that the Lord has *“given to us all things”* necessary to lead godly lives, and, furthermore, He has provided the means, namely, through His *“exceedingly great and precious promises,”* or, in other words, His word.²⁰⁶⁹

Now the main thrust of this section is contained in the three phrases that follow in verse 16, and these are remarkable and a great blessing. We start by noting that we have here the words of the Messiah, the pre-incarnate Christ. We say this because the person speaking (*“I”*), mentions two other persons both of whom are divine, namely the *“Lord God.”* and, *“His Spirit.”* Consequently we have in verse 16 a glimpse into the Holy Trinity. The message concerns the way in which God has revealed Himself. From the New Testament we understand that God has chosen chiefly to speak to us through His Son who is the very image of God.²⁰⁷⁰ We may think that in the Old Testament we have the word of God the Father. From our text, however, the teaching seems to be that it is the second person of the Holy Trinity who is responsible for delivering the message and word of the Godhead. However we cannot be so prescriptive because the Trinity works in unison or in concert. The Son only does what He sees the Father doing, and the Spirit does in the name of the Son what the Father requests.²⁰⁷¹ We believe that the word of God written is given to us by the inspiration of God (the Father), and that it was also delivered via *“holy men”* who were *“moved by the Holy Spirit.”*²⁰⁷² We believe also that the word of God teaches us all about the Word of God, Christ Jesus.²⁰⁷³

Returning to Isaiah 48:16 we learn about God's great will to make Himself and His plans known. There are two very special points we need to note concerning God's self-revelation. First we discover that the Lord has never *“spoken in secret.”* God has declared openly and publicly for the whole world to hear. We see this in the many references throughout Isaiah which call on the *“coastlands”* as well as to various nations and to the chosen people too.²⁰⁷⁴ From this we must realise that our faith is not just a private matter. The Lord brings us into His kingdom for the benefit

2068 Psalm 19:7-11.

2069 2Peter 1:2-4.

2070 John 1:14,18; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:1-3.

2071 John 5:19-26; 14:26; 15:26.

2072 2Timothy 3:16; 2Peter 1:21.

2073 Luke 24:27,44-47; John 5:39.

2074 Isaiah 23:2; 41:1; 49:1. See also Isaiah chapters 13 to 24.

Studies in Isaiah.

of others. We are supposed to be *“a city that is set on a hill,”* and *“a light of the world.”*²⁰⁷⁵ The Lord is concerned to get His message out. Then secondly, we note that the Lord in revealing His will, and Himself, has done so repeatedly *“from the beginning.”* I sometimes get very sad when I see Christians holding to a secular view of the world. In many cases it is not their fault, they were brought up with a secular view which teaches repeatedly that the universe is billions of years old and so on. When it comes to looking at the history of the world and how the Lord speaks through His word such people go back to 1500 BC at the most.²⁰⁷⁶ How then could it be that God has spoken *“from the beginning”*? Where was God in the billions of years between creation and the time of Moses? To which I know that many may respond that the *“beginning”* referred to here is not *the beginning of time*, but a beginning of Israel or the nation. However this will not do because the next phrase speaks about that *“beginning,”* and it leaves us in no doubt whatsoever that the beginning referred to was *the beginning of time*. See also Luke 1:70:

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began.

And Acts 3:21:

whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

The second phrase of Isaiah 48:16 (*“from the time that it was, I was there”*), is not isolated from the first. The first word in the Hebrew should be rendered: “from this time,” or “from that time.” The time being referred to is, of course, *“the beginning.”* In other words the person speaking is pointing out that they were present *“in the beginning.”* It is tempting to speculate that the apostle John used this and other Scriptures when writing His gospel.²⁰⁷⁷ The rest of the phrase has been translated in a variety of ways, and four examples are shown below:

²⁰⁷⁵ Matthew 5:14.

²⁰⁷⁶ Exodus to Deuteronomy written through Moses at about 1500 BC, but Genesis compiled and organised from much earlier documents, including a book written by Adam – see Genesis 5:1.

²⁰⁷⁷ I hasten to add that the book of John was inspired by God.

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From the time it came to be I have been **there**.²⁰⁷⁸

From the time of its being, **there** [am] I.²⁰⁷⁹

From the time it took place, I was **there**.²⁰⁸⁰

From the time that it was, I *was* **there**.²⁰⁸¹

All the versions give the same translation for the first Hebrew word, but differ with regard to the remaining three. The literal rendering of the phrase is:

“From that time it was to be in that place I (am).”

The Hebrew transliterated is shown below:

← Hebrew reads from the right

אֲנִי--	שָׁם	הָיָה	מֵעַתָּה
I (am)	in that place	he/she/it was to be	from that time

Now the second Hebrew word (from the verb “to be”) suggests the idea of existence. That is why the ESV and the YLT use phrases like: “*it came to be*,” or “*of its being*.” The question to ask then is, to what does the “*it*” refer? To which the answer must be, “*the beginning*.” In other words we might paraphrase the sentence thus: “from that time (the beginning) when all started their existence.” Then next we have the word which I have translated “*in that place*,” (but which is translated by most versions as “*there*”), which again must be referring to the starting point of creation, (i.e. when the heavens and earth were created). The last word is the personal pronoun we have already met (’*ānī*), to which is appended the verb “to be” by most translators to complete the sense, so that we have the statement: “*I am*.” If we did not add the present tense of the verb to be we would simply be left with the personal pronoun at the end of the phrase and the reading would be something like this: “from that time, it was to be, in that place, I.” This has the force of simply stating the pre-existent nature of the One speaking which is no different to adding the word “am” to

2078 Isaiah 48:16, ESV.

2079 Isaiah 48:16, YLT.

2080 Isaiah 48:16, NASB.

2081 Isaiah 48:16, NKJV.

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make this clear. And so this One was present at the very beginning of all things that exist now, (i.e. creation).

Our last phrase looks forward. The first word in Hebrew comes from the same root which was translated “*time*” in the second phrase. The NKJV uses the word “*now*” to indicate the contrast in time. I have opted in my literal translation for using the same word “*time*”:

← Hebrew reads from the right

וְרוּחוֹ	שְׁלַחְנִי--	אֲלֵנִי יְהוָה	וְעַתָּה
/	/		
and His Spirit	He has sent Me	the Lord God	and at this time

And at this time the Lord God has sent Me and His Spirit.

The reader will notice that the word order shown by my literal translation is different to the NKJV rendering which places the Spirit with the Lord God as subjects. There has been some debate about this in the various commentaries. Is the Lord saying that the Father and the Spirit have sent the Son as the NKJV intimates:

And now **the Lord God and His Spirit** have **sent Me**.

Or is it that the Lord God has sent the Son and also the Spirit as many modern translations suggest:

And now **the Lord God** has **sent me, and his Spirit**.²⁰⁸²

And now **the Lord Jehovah** hath **sent me, and His Spirit**.²⁰⁸³

And now **the Lord God** has **sent Me, and His Spirit**.²⁰⁸⁴

E. J. Young opts for the modern view that the Lord (the Father) has sent the Son and the Spirit:

2082 Isaiah 48:16, ESV.

2083 Isaiah 48:16, YLT.

2084 Isaiah 48:16, NASB.

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“Are the words *and his Spirit* part of the subject, or are they construed as an object? If the Spirit is subject, the teaching is the the Lord together with His Spirit has sent the servant. If, on the hand, the words are object, then the verse teaches that the Lord has sent the servant and also has sent His Spirit. We incline toward this latter position, for the subject is made emphatic by being placed before the verb. The work of the servant is in the hands of the Lord God, and hence it would seem best to regard the Lord God as the only subject. The words *and His Spirit* in any case are in a somewhat subordinate position. If taken as an object, then the conjunction would probably have the force *together with*, and the teaching would be that the servant did not come alone but that his entire ministry was in the power of the Spirit, a definite Messianic concept.”²⁰⁸⁵

With regard to the positioning of the phrase “*and His Spirit*,” it is to be added that they are linked with the Hebrew version of a hyphen to the verb “sent,” which could again mean that the Spirit was involved in the sending or that the Spirit was sent.

A. Harman suggest that the older renderings of the NKJV and the AKJV is to be preferred:

“There is ambiguity in the Hebrew text regarding the final phrase, 'and his Spirit'. Grammatically this could be part of the subject ('the Lord God and his Spirit') or part of the object ('the Lord God has sent me and his Spirit'). The context in Isaiah suggests that the first of these is preferable. The sending of the servant is an activity of the eternal God and his Spirit.”²⁰⁸⁶

Whilst A. Alexander in discussing the various options, highlights the real possibility that both senses were intended by the Lord (the real author of these words):

“*And His Spirit*. It has long been a subject of dispute whether these words belong to the subject or the object of the verb *hath sent*. The English Version removes all ambiguity by changing the collocation of the words (*the Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me*). ... The exegetical question is not one of much importance; because both senses yielded are consistent with the usage of the Scriptures, and the ambiguity may be intended to let both suggest themselves. ... the safest course is either to admit that both ideas were meant to be suggested; although probably in different degrees, or else to fall back upon the general rule, though liable to numberless exceptions, that the preference is due to the nearest antecedent or to that construction which adheres most closely to the actual collocation of the words. The application of this principle in this case would decide the doubt in favour of the prevailing modern doctrine, that Jehovah had sent the person speaking and endued him with his Spirit, as a necessary preparation for the work to which he was appointed.”²⁰⁸⁷

2085 E. J. Young. *Isaiah*. Volume 3. P259.

2086 Harman. *Isaiah*. P382,383.

2087 Alexander. *Isaiah*. Volume 2. P219.

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If we take it as we have it in the NKJV we are being taught that the Father and the Spirit sent the Son. Are there any other Scriptures which support this view? Well perhaps we may see this in terms of the incarnation. The sending of the Son by the Father is taught clearly in John's gospel:

He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him.²⁰⁸⁸

... Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world ...²⁰⁸⁹

But the coming of the Son was by means of the Holy Spirit as we learn in the historical records of Christ's birth:

... that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.²⁰⁹⁰

And the angel answered and said to her, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*"²⁰⁹¹

So in this sense we could say that the Spirit of God was sending the Son.

However if we take the words in the modern sense so that it was the Father who sent the Son and then also sent the Holy Spirit, such a view is also amply supported by Scripture. Chiefly we have the references of our Saviour which teach that the Father and the Son sent the Spirit:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.²⁰⁹²

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.²⁰⁹³

Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.²⁰⁹⁴

However I feel that many commentators have missed something which I suggest the text shows. If we look at the word order we have: **time – Lord God – the Son sent – My Spirit**. It will be noted

2088 John 5:23.
2089 John 10:36.
2090 Matthew 1:20.
2091 Luke 1:35.
2092 John 14:26.
2093 John 15:26.
2094 John 16:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

that the object of the verb is the Son who is being sent. The Son is placed between the Lord God (Father) and the Spirit. He is the focus. If the Hebrew word order went thus: **time – Lord God – My Spirit – the Son sent**, then the focus is drawn away from the Son being sent. Either way we have a remarkable reference to the operations of the Trinity with regard to the gospel.

[b] Go forth from Babylon. (Isaiah 48:17-22).

General comments.

Having reached the crescendo of the Son being sent in verse 16, we come in this second part of Isaiah 48 to an application to the people. The section can be split into four parts which are, nevertheless, interconnected. We start with an opening statement of whom the Lord is and what He proposes to do for the people.²⁰⁹⁵ Then we come to a remarkable series of statements in verse 18 whereby we learn both the failure of the people of God and an interesting reference to the need of the substitute, our Saviour. The next two verses give us an imperative command.²⁰⁹⁶ Finally we have a concluding statement which serves to end the first third of the second part of Isaiah.²⁰⁹⁷

[i] Thus says the Lord. (Isaiah 48:17).

The second section begins with a declaration (*“thus says the Lord”*) indicating with certainty that what follows is most definitely the word from God. The Lord is described by four distinct titles as follows:

The Lord (YHWH).

Your Redeemer.

The Holy One of Israel.

The Lord your God.

The second and third titles bring our attention to the idea of our rescued and purchased state. We have been bought with a price, and we have been bought to be ruled by the One who is pure and perfect, who is holy. The Lord who exists as the *“I AM”* is the sovereign and Almighty God, but He is also our Redeemer and the Holy One. These twin themes of salvation and sanctification whilst

2095 Isaiah 48:17.

2096 Isaiah 48:20,21.

2097 Isaiah 48:22.

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distinct must never be separated. Salvation always means rescue from sin, unto holiness. Sanctification presupposes salvation, for it is no use making holy that which has yet to be redeemed.

In the remainder of the verse we are taught that this Holy Redeemer does two things. He

Teaches you to profit,

Leads you by the way you should go.

The actions the Lord takes points us to Him as a Father. The father was chiefly the one who was responsible to teach and lead his children. We can see this clearly, for example, in the opening seven chapters of Proverbs. Teaching and leading presuppose the idea of relationship. We are not automatons and we are not brute beasts, even though we often fall into the latter state as the opening chapter of Isaiah pointed out. Teaching indicates the need for growth. A student is trained in a discipline in order to become useful and more able. The Lord is our Teacher! What a marvellous and wonderful thought. How we fail miserably in our day because we heap to our ears human teachers who give us mainly what we want to hear, but who at the same time drain us of our lives through their lack and thinness of being. What we need is not human teachers but the Lord our Teacher! This theme is one not to be missed. We see it when Peter confessed Christ as the Son of God. The Lord Jesus declared that Peter was blessed indeed because he had heard the Father's revelation.²⁰⁹⁸ This idea that we are taught by God is found elsewhere too:

*Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses.*²⁰⁹⁹

*All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children.*²¹⁰⁰

What then is the role of a pastor or a teacher? Now without doubt the hierarchical idea with levels and tiers of Christians with different responsibilities and positions such as you find in the Roman Catholic organisation (each level of which act as a kind of barrier or gatehouse) is wholly wrong. In such a group or gathering the laity attend 'worship' and are dealt their needs by the priest who is ruled by a bishop who is ruled by a cardinal whose authority comes from the pope.²¹⁰¹ This is

2098 Matthew 16:17.

2099 Psalm 25:12.

2100 Isaiah 54:13.

2101 I cannot bring myself to describe Roman Catholicism as Christian or as a church because what they depict is so far from what the Bible teaches.

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monstrous! But then it is equally monstrous when we have a similar arrangement in modern evangelical circles. Oh we don't like to think we are so worldly like the Roman Catholic organisation is, but when you look carefully at what passes for leadership amongst modern evangelicals there is very little difference. We might not have the regalia and the trappings and we might not have as many levels or tiers, but we certainly have barriers and obstacles. In some circles pastors are treated as gods! Nothing can be done without a meeting of the deacons and the pastor who has the final say! The pastor teaches in a bible study and what he declares is truth. Dare to challenge what is brought and you are treated as a rebel and a trouble maker. This is all wrong.

Let me be clear here. The word of God, the Bible, is our standard and it is the very pure word of the living God. However when a man takes it upon himself to dictate and rule as though he and he alone has the sense of the Scriptures we must be wary indeed. All believers are taught of the Lord. This is a vital principle which we must uphold. A pastor's role is very clearly described in the Scriptures. He is an under shepherd. Shepherds lead and guide a flock. They do not brow beat, force nor lord it over. Instead a pastor is a servant, like our Ransom.²¹⁰² The notion of a “minister” is meant to indicate the idea of a servant or slave. In our culture the term “minister” has taken on a degree of elevation and respectability which has destroyed the original sense of the term. Pastors are those whose lives are close to God and their love and faith are evident by the fruit they bear. Pastors are those who show faith and trust in the Lord to a great degree. They are able to teach because they have learned the lessons through walking with the Lord.²¹⁰³

Sadly in our day the role of pastor has changed from the Biblical pattern. Instead of a servant who teaches Scripture by word and deed acting in a servant-like way, pastors of today seem to enjoy demanding obedience to the patterns of thought handed down by tradition. For example, in a couple of recent bible studies we were treated to what amounted to a treatise on the nature of the church and the role of a pastor. Much of what was declared was 'biblical' in the sense that it had support from various verses. However it was “thin” and almost without truth because it was simply a monograph on important points to bear in mind. The speaker concluded his message on the nature of the church by stating that the church was a “preaching station,” for the sole purpose of the church was to preach the gospel. How could anyone who knows the Lord Jesus disagree with the wonder of the gospel? How could we ever add anything to the gospel? Such thoughts are impossible! There is only one gospel. We agree.

2102 Matthew 20:24-28.

2103 1Timothy 3:2.

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However is the church merely a “preaching station”? I do not want to belittle preaching because preaching is vital and essential. But there is more to a church, much more. I have recently considered the nature of the church in my discussions with a dear friend who has walked the journey into Catholicism. For him the central feature he felt that was missing was the visible and continuous nature of the church. For this dear man he was fed up with the factions, and the fall outs that bedevil the protestant churches. He saw in the Roman Catholic organisation both a continuity and a clearly visible and public presence which attracted him. Having been brought up as a Roman Catholic and having known their teachings and ways from my youth I sought earnestly to dissuade him from traversing that path. But in my discussions with him I had to agree that much of modern evangelical experience of what is called “church” leaves an awful lot to be desired.

When we view the Bible's view of the church we cannot but see a wonderful range of teachings which modern evangelical thought has missed. In some ways, (especially amongst reformed groups), there has been a tendency to simply repeat what former believers have held to and defended. It is considered that if we go against this we are attacking the faith! But our forefathers never intended (I believe) that we simply rest with what they experienced. The church is more than merely a preaching station. When the Lord sent out the disciples, first as a twelve and then later on as seventy in twos, He taught them to preach and to heal the sick. They were acting as evangelists and were demonstrating the great good news of release from sin and death. How wonderful! But in turning to these simple examples, we see that church is not just a place where the gospel is preached! It must be outgoing. It must be compassionate. It must be concerned for welfare. Please do not misunderstand my point here. Unless people hear the gospel and turn and repent and come to a true faith being born again of the Spirit of God there is no point at all. This is vital! But a church that simply declares the gospel and does nothing else is not a church.

We can show this further by mentioning the numerous other depictions of the church we find in Scripture. In another book I am working on I am attempting to outline ten illustrations the Bible gives for the church. Here I will simply mention them and make a few comments to show that the church is more than a simple preaching house. I give them as a couplet with the Lord being represented first and then believers by the second image:

Shepherd – Sheep.

Ezekiel 34; John 10.

Head – Body.

Romans 12:4,5; 1Corinthians 12; Colossians 1:18.

Bridegroom – Bride.

Matthew 9:15; 25; John 3:29; Revelation 21.

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<i>Vine – Branches.</i>	<i>Isaiah 5; John 15.</i>
<i>Cornerstone – Temple.</i>	<i>1Corinthians 3:16,17; 1Peter 2.</i>
<i>King – Kingdom.</i>	<i>Daniel 2:35; 7:13,14; Luke 22:30; Revelation 19:16.</i>
<i>Father – Family.</i>	<i>Romans 1:7; 8:15; Ephesians 2:19; 3:15; 1John 3:1,2.</i>
<i>High Priest – Royal priesthood.</i>	<i>Hebrews 2:17; 3:1; 1Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6.</i>
<i>Architect/Builder – City and citizens.</i>	<i>Proverbs 8:30; Ephesians 2:19; Hebrews 11:10.</i>
<i>Sun – Moon.</i>	<i>Psalms 19:4-6; 84:11; Song 6:10; Revelation 1:16.</i>

Just by looking at the various illustrations used for the church makes us understand that its function and life is rich and varied. Does a **body**, for example need only to sit and listen to preaching? Preaching is vital. Without the word of God being preached we cannot increase faith.²¹⁰⁴ But this does not mean that the word of God doesn't go abroad and out from one believer to the next! Or think of us as a **kingdom** as another example. What kingdom doesn't have a variety of activity going on in its midst? If there is no management of resources, trade, communication, work, and the other activities that comprise a kingdom what are we about? Then think of the **family** picture. Could anything be more diverse? I am extremely blessed to have five wonderful children, but they are so different to one another. The expression of their differences is a joy even though they are all united by being siblings and having inherited characteristics from my wife and I. In the family of God we have such variety too and this ought to be expressed! How is it in a church which simply meets to hear preaching? Again please do not think I have something against preaching. I do not. It is essential. My point is simply that the idea of church (the called out ones) contains within it a whole lot more than being a place where preaching happens.

We could extend this point by looking at the other illustrations but I shall end this sermon by pointing out that the Lord has indeed given every believer both talents and a gift. The Saviour told two slightly different parables teaching that He was to dispense both a trusted deposit and something with which His citizens were to do business. In Matthew 25 in one of the parables of the kingdom we read about each believer being given different amounts of talents.

14 For the kingdom of heaven is like a man travelling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. **15** And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and

²¹⁰⁴ Romans 10:17.

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immediately he went on a journey.²¹⁰⁵

There are two interesting things about this parable. First each is given a different amount *“according to his own ability.”* This suggests the idea of our personality and abilities as created by God. The second thing is that there were no instructions given. There is an implication of reckoning for we read that the master had delivered his possessions and goods to the servants and on his return he calls each to give an account. However there were no instructions given at the start when he set out. From this we learn that each believer has within them abilities and talents which differ from others. Some have one level of ability and another a greater or lesser level of ability. One has this skill or aptitude and another a different one. Yet each believer will be held to account for the use of their talents given of God. The question is: how does the church help each believer express their talents?

The second parable, found in Luke 19 is slightly different:

11 Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. **12** Therefore He said: “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. **13** So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Do business till I come.’²¹⁰⁶

Again it is a kingdom parable and so has reference to the church. In this case each and every believer has been given the same deposit of ten minas. But in this case each has been instructed beforehand to *“do business.”* It would seem to be here that the Lord's intention was not to highlight our different abilities and skills, but to focus on the deposit we have all received. All of us have been entrusted with the same deposit of truth, the gospel. What do we do with it? Well we must do business. What does this mean? Well surely it means we must engage with the gospel. Seek to understand it. Look at how the gospel is progressing in our lives and then how we represent the gospel. We are not all evangelists but we are all ambassadors representing the Lord in this world. How do we adorn the gospel? Does our life show forth the radiance of Christ? What are we doing to make the gospel known? How are we stewarding the immense treasure we have been given?

Finally we note that on top of our abilities and the deposit of truth we have been given to steward, the Lord has also given each a supernatural gift:

2105 Matthew 25:14,15.

2106 Luke 19:11-13.

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4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*.²¹⁰⁷

Paul points out that all believers are gifted and these gifts are for the benefit of all! How can this be accommodated within what we call “church” today?

Well to conclude the thought of the first point the Lord makes, we do need teachers of the gospel and the word, and so pastors are a gift given to the church, but please note that we must all be taught of God and we must all learn to express our faith together in the united body of the Lord.

The second phrase of Isaiah 48:17 amplifies and enhances the first. It highlights not just our need of teaching (or discipling), but that we need to be lead, (*“leads you by the way you should go”*).²¹⁰⁸ Note that we are being informed that it is the Holy Redeemer, (i.e. the Lord God), who leads and teaches us. We have already pointed out that we do need pastors but that we must all be taught directly from the Lord. The same is true here. A pastor ought to be a leader. Not in the modern secular sense of one who rouses and demands allegiance and fealty and so on. No but a leader like Christ Jesus was a leader. He lead by example and He lead by His teaching and training. He did not teach as the Pharisees or as the Scribes and Teacher of the law. His teaching was with grace and humility. He lead the way and He asked people to follow. They could choose to follow or not. Now here in Isaiah 48 we are being taught that chiefly the Lord Himself is the Shepherd. He is still leading His people. The role of the pastor is simply to be one who is closer to the Lord and who by being closer reflects His character and disposition. How we mangle the true nature of true leaders in the kingdom! Where obedience and submission are often promoted it seems as though those calling for such act as lords and overmasters. Where are those who are so devoted to Christ that their life and speech draws people to follow The Master, Jesus Christ?

Note further that the Lord (the Holy Redeemer) will teach us to *“profit.”* This term derives from a root which means “to ascend on high,” or “to be elevated.” The idea is, therefore, of success. We cannot pass over the implication here that to truly profit we need to be elevated and raised on high. We need to be raised from the dead to new life and we need to be heavenly minded setting our hearts and minds on *“things above.”*²¹⁰⁹ Success does not mean earthly success, or success as the world knows. It means victory over sin, the devil, and the world. The Lord will teach each and

2107 1Corinthians 12:4-7.

2108 Isaiah 48:17.

2109 Colossians 3:1,2.

Studies in Isaiah.

every one of us to lift up our heads to Him and draw from Him that we might have life, and walk in the newness of life.²¹¹⁰ Then also the Lord will lead us *“by the way you should go.”* The emphasis in this phrase is walking on the road. The Bible has a lot to say about this. It is the way to heaven. It is the way of holiness.²¹¹¹ It is the way of righteousness. The Lord will teach us about how to change and to become more like Him, to be holy. He will also teach us about the specific paths we need to take. Whether to live here or there, to work in this place or that, and so on. The Lord will guide us along life's journey and He will lead us gently as a Father, in the way of holiness and sanctification. We need pastors, and we need each other for this, but ultimately the Lord will be our Teacher and Guide.

[ii] Oh that you had ...! (Isaiah 48:18,19).

48:18,19.

We move now to a plea from the Lord concerning the people's failure. They had every opportunity. The Lord had given them everything possible so that they could honour the Lord and do all He said, and by so doing would have ensured a nation under the authority of God. In this verse we find what the results would have been for such obedience, and then also an outcome which would not have happened but one for which we are eternally grateful.

The essence of what is required is obedience to the Lord's commands. The great problem is that mankind exists in a state of sin and rebellion and is therefore unable to keep any commandments properly. The failure of Adam and Eve has resulted in all subsequent peoples being born in a state of sin. Individuals may be able to keep some commandments in a limited sense for a time, but never all of them, and if one is broken the whole law is broken.²¹¹² Thus all fail and none are able to keep the law! Except One. The Lord Jesus Christ has done what no one else was able to do. He satisfied all the laws demands, perfectly.²¹¹³

Now if Israel had kept the law and done the commandments asked of them then there would have been three main results and one thing prevented. The three things which would result were:

2110 Luke 21:28; John 10:10; Romans 6:4.

2111 Isaiah 35:8.

2112 James 2:10.

2113 Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:44.

Studies in Isaiah.

1. Peace	Like a river	v18
2. Righteousness	Like the waves of the sea	v18
3. Offspring (descendants)	Like sand and grains of sand	v19

First their obedience would have resulted in a peace which, like a river, flows continuously. Secondly they would have lived righteously and godly just as the waves of the sea roll onto the shore one after another. As a result of their obedience they would also gain descendants and offspring who would be as numerous as the number of grains of sand on the shore. This was the promise given to the people on condition of their obedience.

Now none of these things were earned by Israel because of their disobedience. In fact they were warned of the opposite fruits because of their failure to obey, and these we can see looking back are what they received.²¹¹⁴ However the perfect obedience of the Saviour has earned these fruits!

Finally in this verse we read a statement which highlights the awful failure of Israel. This failure is not just theirs, for they have been set up as representatives of humanity. The failure is the failure of all mankind. Since none had matched the requirements of the Lord, the end result is that they are to be cut off forever. However what we read at the end of verse 19 is very curious. The statement made is shown below:

*his name would not have been cut off nor destroyed from before Me.*²¹¹⁵

Many translations suggest that a single person ("*his*") is not in view but a people. For example the NASB and the ESV versions read as follows:

*Their name would never be cut off or destroyed from My presence.*²¹¹⁶

*Their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me.*²¹¹⁷

However the Hebrew word *šmô* is the noun "name" which has a third person singular suffix, which must be translated as "*his*." It is to be noted that the other pronouns in verses 18 and 19 are singular

2114 Deuteronomy 28:15f.

2115 Isaiah 48:19b.

2116 Isaiah 48:19, NASB.

2117 Isaiah 48:19, ESV.

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too. Israel is being spoken of as a single person here, and thus represents them all. But at the end of verse 19 we have this person who is described as having to be “*cut off*” and “*destroyed*” before the Lord. Clearly those who disobey will be cut off, but the point being made is that if they had not disobeyed, and if they had done the Lord's commandments then this one would not have to be cut off and destroyed. As it is, because of disobedience, then this one must be cut off and destroyed. We cannot help but see a reference to the One, namely Christ, who was cut off on our behalf. If Israel had obeyed then there would have been no need for Christ to suffer, but as it is the Saviour had to die.

We learn here, then, something about the Lord's death. We learn that it would be His “*name*” that would be destroyed. His character and reputation as a man who represented all humanity would be ruined and sacrificed. This would be “*cut off*” and “*destroyed*” before the Lord. The first phrase is used to refer to the idea of a covenant. Hence we are brought to the idea of a sacrifice as the animals were cut into two in the offering ceremonies.

[iii] Go forth from Babylon! (Isaiah 48:20,21).

48:20.

Having discussed the Lord our Teacher and then (briefly) the Lord our Sacrifice, we learn about what the people must do. They are to come out of Babylon and they must run from the Chaldeans. The city of Babylon represents the world and its ways. The Chaldeans were the 'intelligentsia' or the wise of those lands. We have three enemies. Sin is our chief enemy because this is ingrained and something we own. The second enemy is the world which is also bathed in and energised by sin. The final enemy is the devil who is the author and originator of sin and rebellion. In this passage the call is to leave and forsake the world and its ways. Chief amongst the sins of the world is its so-called wisdom. We can say this without fear because the wisdom of this world always objects to God and His wisdom.²¹¹⁸ It is always diametrically opposed to the Lord. But in focusing on this we cannot ignore the other two enemies, (the devil and ingrained sin). The world is fuelled by the enemy of souls because “*the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.*”²¹¹⁹ The world and its evil systems are all as a result (humanly speaking) of sin. Thus when the Lord calls us to forsake the world He is asking us to forsake Satan's domain, and the sin that enslaves.

2118 1Corinthians 1:20,21; 3:19.

2119 1John 5:19.

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The wonderful thing to note is that the fleeing from Babylon, which will be experienced by the returnees from the exile, is to be done in great joy and rejoicing. They are to leave *“with a voice of singing!”* When a person comes to true faith in Christ there is always joy and rejoicing. Actually we ought to rejoice daily when we have victory over the world, sin, and the devil! The Lord has won this victory for us! But then they are to rejoice in songs which also act as heralds and declarations. I wonder if we realise that our songs ought to be heard all over the world? This thought shows how vital it is that our songs are good songs. We want to declare the truths and beauties of what the Lord has done for us. Here the focus is on redemption, but there are other valid topics borne from the fruit of Christ and His work. Note how the text says that we should publish our songs *“to the end of the earth,”* or, in other words in every place on the planet. The end of verse 20 gives the content of these songs but as we reach this the figure has changed from one of song to one of declaration because we are to *“utter”* and to *“say”* this good news. Songs are wonderful and give a pithy summary of the truths we love. We should be singing them the world over. But of more importance is our speaking, declaration, and our uttering. The word rendered *“declare”* means “to be conspicuous!” How timid we are today! But we are commanded to be out there in the market place, visible, and evident shouting the good news to one and all. The word translated as *“proclaim”* has the idea of informing or passing on things with intelligence. This signals that we are to teach and cause people to understand the truths we love. How we need to take great care in our work of gospel proclamation. Finally what comes forth from our mouths, or that which is uttered, ought to be gospel centred and it should spread everywhere. Our conversation ought not to be of this world's things but of Christ and His work. How can we change our way? How can we begin to speak as the Lord has spoken to us? How can we learn to “gossip the gospel” so that all around can hear the wonders of the Saviour? Oh may He help us to so live and breathe His beauty and truth that all may see and hear the good news!

The content of what should be sung, declared, proclaimed, and uttered is all that is needed. We may tease out the details of this glorious theme, but the statement we read is complete and full. First note that it is all of the Lord's doing. It is His initiative. No man can save. No man has sufficient power or righteousness to do anything at all. It must be the Lord who works, and so it is. Second note the theme of redemption. The Lord has purchased a people! The cost was immense. The Father sent the Son as pre-planned in eternity to be our ransom. He came and offered His life in the place of needy sinners. And so the Lord has redeemed! This is always true from the beginning

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of time, because the Lord is presented to us as: *“the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”*²¹²⁰ Then thirdly note who is the object of this redemption. It is *“Jacob!”* The one who deceived and was deceived. It was the man who lied to get what he thought was his just deserts. It is the sinner! The Lord has come to redeem sinners! How marvellous, how wonderful! Then finally and fourthly note that the sinner (Jacob) is still called the Lord's *“servant.”* This is remarkable. The Lord still calls us His servants, His possession, His instruments, His ministers. What a wonderful God! Many in the world may not understand the beauty of this. The point is that God made people to be in direct and close relationship with Him to do all His will. Since God is good – I mean really good in the sense of being beautiful and perfect – then who would not want to be His employee, His servant, His possession? I see some people bask in the service of the great and the grand who treat their households well. There is a rush to be amongst those counted as worthy. But what would you say to the greatest Lord of all who is infinitely good? Would you not long to be in His service? David could say:

*For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.*²¹²¹

48:21.

But then we are treated to more in verse 21, where we read some of the blessings and benefits that Israel received when they were redeemed from Egypt. There follows three statements in verse 21 which, at first sight, seem to be a bit repetitious. The main theme is, thirst quenched. Sinners who are locked in Babylon (this world) are in need of living waters. Although many do not know it they are parched and appear dessicated in a spiritual sense. They have no true life in them. And so they need water, the water of life, which only God can provide.

It will be helpful if we repeat these three statements of verse 21 again. In what follows I have highlighted various things. First you can see the theme of water and thirst in each of the three statements highlighted in **blue**. Second you will see what the Lord Himself has done highlighted in **green**. Finally I have underlined in bold the phrase *“the rock,”* which appears twice.

2120 Revelation 13:8.

2121 Psalm 84:10.

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And they did not thirst when He led them through the deserts;
He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them;
He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out.

These three statements look back to Israel's experience on leaving Egypt. Jacob has been called to flee Babylon in the same way that Israel were redeemed from Egypt. First, then, we learn that in the wilderness journey of old, the Lord did not leave them but gave them water, or, in other words, life itself. This is a promise to us also who walk through the wilderness of this world. He will not forsake us and will give us the living waters.²¹²² We note also that it is the Lord Himself who leads through the desert:

And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night.²¹²³

The second sentence points back to the occasion of Exodus 17. The people were thirsty and began to complain. Moses cried out to the Lord and the Lord gave Moses some instructions which we read in verses 5 and 6 of Exodus 17:

5 And the Lord said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. 6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink."²¹²⁴

The Lord was to stand before Moses on the rock, and Moses was to strike the rock so that water would come out of it. Here is a remarkable reference to the Lord's sacrifice. When Moses struck the rock it is quite possible that the Lord suffered the blows too, or if He did not (i.e. He stood above the point that Moses was to strike), the point is still clear. The rock must be struck before water can flow. In the same way Christ must be dealt death's blow before life can issue forth. Now this event occurred early in the journey of Israel in the wilderness.

Now there was another time when the Lord brought water forth from a rock, and this (I believe) is referenced by the third statement.²¹²⁵ This second occasion can be found in Numbers 20.

2122 John 7:37-39.

2123 Exodus 13:21.

2124 Exodus 17:5,6.

2125 Psalm 78:12-20 also describes both of these events.

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It is significant that here in this third statement of Isaiah 48:21 we read that *“the waters gushed out,”* which statement is reflected in the Numbers 20 account where we are told that *“water came out abundantly.”*²¹²⁶ With regard to the first statement in Isaiah 48:21, the Exodus 17 account doesn't tell us anything about how much water flowed. Now this second event occurred towards the end of the wilderness wanderings, for it happened after Miriam died. On this occasion the people complained again, and Moses with Aaron went to the Lord at the tabernacle of meeting to seek His guidance. Then we read:

7 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 8 “Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.” 9 So Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him. 10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?” 11 Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.²¹²⁷

It is noteworthy here that the Lord commanded Moses to *“speak to the rock”* so that it would bring forth water. The rock had already been struck before in Exodus 17 thereby indicating the fact that Christ need die only once. Although Moses disobeyed the Lord and would suffer punishment for this, nevertheless the Lord was gracious in allowing the water to flow.²¹²⁸

In reminding the people about these events they are being encouraged that God will indeed supply their most important need. This has come from the rock which has been struck once, and we learn that to draw water again we need only speak to the rock. How marvellous! Christ has died once for all time and this is never to be repeated. Now all we need to do is to speak to the rock! He will give us the water we need!

[iv] No peace for the wicked. (Isaiah 48:22).

This last phrase is also to be found at the end of Isaiah 57, but a fuller, more detailed statement is found at the end of Isaiah 66, the end of the book. These statements ultimately point us towards the final destination of the wicked. Now we need to understand this statement as an absolute statement. Remember that the Scriptures speak of only two categories of people. These are,

2126 Numbers 20:12.

2127 Numbers 20:7-11.

2128 Numbers 20:12.

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the righteous, and the wicked, or, in other words, the saved and the unsaved. We know we can categorise the unsaved into many distinct categories each of which require distinct approaches, but ultimately people are either saved (and made righteous by faith in the blood of Christ), or they are unsaved. And so we read here the woeful and sorrowful truth that for the wicked, that is, for those who reject all that the Lord has to offer, (redemption, salvation, forgiveness and so on through the sacrifice of His Son), there is *“no peace.”* Such a statement is not made easily and it is one that ought not trip off the tongue without thought. But such a statement must be said because it is a statement to which the words *“says the Lord”* are affixed. In other words these are the very words of God. There is no peace for those who reject Christ. This is awesome and it is terrible. Of course the positive expression is the one we love to focus on. In Christ there is abundance of joy and life and peace and delight. But we are duty bound to point out that it is ONLY in Christ that such things can be found. No one likes to be negative. However the Lord is more concerned with the truth and with our salvation, and so we must declare (with compassion and explanation) that there is absolutely no peace nor safety, there is no wholeness nor fullness for the wicked – those who reject the offer of salvation in Christ.

Chapter 59.

Isaiah 49:1-13.

The Servant and His ministry.

Textual analysis.

1 “Listen, O coastlands, to Me, and
take heed, you peoples from afar!

The Lord has called Me
from the womb;
from the matrix of My mother
He has made mention of My name. 2 And
He has made My mouth like a sharp sword;
in the shadow of His hand He has
hidden Me, and
made Me a polished shaft;
in His quiver He has hidden Me.”

3 “And He said to me,
‘You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’

4 Then I said,
‘I have laboured in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain;
yet surely my just reward is with the Lord, and my work with my God.’”

5 “And now the Lord says,
who formed Me from the womb
to be His servant,
to bring Jacob back to Him,
so that Israel is gathered to Him
(for
I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and
My God shall be My strength),

6 Indeed He says,
‘it is too small a thing
that You should be My servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and
to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

7 Thus says
the Lord,
the Redeemer of Israel,
their Holy One,
to Him whom man despises,
to Him whom the nation abhors,
to the servant of rulers:
“kings shall see and arise,

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princes also shall worship,
because
of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and
He has chosen You.”

8 Thus says the Lord:

“In an acceptable time I have heard You, and
in the day of salvation I have helped You;
I will

preserve You and
give You as a covenant to the **people**,
to restore the **earth**,
to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages;

9 that You may say
to the prisoners,
‘go forth,’
to those who *are* in darkness,
‘show yourselves.’

“They shall feed along the roads, and
their pastures *shall be* on all desolate heights.

10 They shall neither hunger nor thirst,
neither heat nor sun shall strike them;
for He who has mercy on them will lead them,
even by the springs of water He will guide them.

11 I will make each of My mountains a road, and
My highways shall be elevated.

12 Surely these shall come from afar; look!
Those from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim.”

13 Sing, O heavens!
Be joyful, O earth! And
break out in singing, O mountains!

For the Lord
has comforted His people, and
will have mercy on His afflicted.

In this chapter we have the second “Servant Song” in Isaiah where we are given more detail on the nature of His ministry. Before looking at this passage in detail we shall first offer some comments of a general nature concerning whom is being addressed. We shall then consider the passage under the following three headings:

[1] The nature of this Servant. (Isaiah 49:1-4).

[2] The ministry of the Servant. (Isaiah 49:5-12).

[3] The only fitting response! Joyful worship. (Isaiah 49:13).

General comments – The people addressed.

From the very start in verse 1 we find that the Lord addresses these words to people from afar. The term “*coastlands*” is taken as those places which must be accessed by sea, and so a long

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way away. In verse 6 we find that the Servant will be light for the “*Gentiles*,” and salvation to the “*ends of the earth*.” This earth-wide reference is continued in verse 8 where the Servant will be a covenant to the “*people*,” (rather than just Israel or Judah), and is set to restore the “*earth*.” As if to ensure that a universal application of the Servant's work is not missed, we read in verse 12 that those who “*come from afar*,” hail not just come from all points of the compass, but derive also from “*the land of Sinim*,” or, in other words, from the far distant land of what is now known as China.

It is extremely hard not to see the universal nature of the great gospel of God here. The exclusivity of the Pharisees in New Testament times, and the reluctance of the early disciples in taking the gospel to distant lands must surely have stemmed from a blinkered view of a passage such as this.²¹²⁹ It is imperative that we take these words seriously and preach the gospel to every creature on earth. It is certain that only those “*being saved*” will heed the word, but our mission is to ensure that *everyone*, young and old, freeborn and slave, rich and poor, privileged and oppressed – that all may hear the great good news.²¹³⁰

[1] The nature of this Servant. (Isaiah 49:1-4).

We must begin by noting that the great object of our devotion is called the “*Servant*.” However twice He is referred to as “*My Servant*” and once as “*His Servant*,” before being called “*the Servant*.”²¹³¹ From these facts we note that this “*Servant*” chiefly belongs to God. Now we cannot skate over this title here because it is of the essence of the Lord and His mission. Christ came as a servant to serve sinners as exemplified by His sacrificial death. However we can see this title expanded in the passage we are considering, for the Servant is not just *the Servant of the Lord*, but is also titled: “*the Servant of rulers*,”²¹³² Although He is Lord of all and none can reverse His command and word, He comes as a servant! How vital this is! It is not for no reason that our government are titled as “ministers of state” and they are lead by our “prime minister.” They ought to be servants of the state! But whatever the origins of our governing titles and how far the holders of them have fallen, the fact is that Christ Jesus is the great Servant. How marvellous! How it chastens us! Oh that we should serve and be ministers to one another like our Master!

2129 Luke 18:11; Acts 10.

2130 1Corinthians 1:18.

2131 Isaiah 49:3,5,6,7.

2132 Isaiah 49:7.

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49:1.

Now the first thing we are told about the Servant in verse 1 is that He was “*called ... from the womb*” and from the depths of His mother. By this we are pointed to the doctrine of the incarnation. We read also that the Lord caused His name to be remembered (rather than simply “*made mention of My name*” as our text has it).²¹³³ Now nowhere else do we read of one *called* from the womb, so this expression is unique to the Servant. Jeremiah was only *known* before the Lord *formed* him in the womb:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you;
I ordained you a prophet to the nations.²¹³⁴

Hence here in Isaiah 49:1 we are being lead to consider the incarnation in some detail. It was not, of course, that the human nature was not formed in Mary's womb by the Lord God in the normal way, but rather we have something especial here in that the Servant was called by the Lord who caused His name (His character and essential being) to be made known or remembered. There is a divine sense of coming by means of the womb of Mary here. We remember that our Saviour was named prior to His conception, as the angel spoke to Mary:

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.²¹³⁵

And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.²¹³⁶

We noted earlier in Isaiah 48:8 that the people of Jacob were: “*called a transgressor from the womb.*” There is no direct reference to the *sinless* nature of the Messiah here, but the means by which this Servant was called, leads us to such an idea of His sinless state, when we consider the statements of verses 2 and 3. The word “*polished,*” for example, has also been translated as “*pure.*”²¹³⁷

2133 Isaiah 49:1.

2134 Jeremiah 1:5.

2135 Luke 1:31.

2136 Luke 2:21.

2137 In the AKJV see: 2Samuel 22:27; Psalm 18:26; Zephaniah 3:9.

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49:2-4.

Verse 2 focuses on an aspect of the character of the Servant which indicates the main emphasis of His mission. His mouth is as *“a sharp sword,”* and He is likened to an arrow, as shown by the statement that He is *“a polished shaft,”* and has been *“hidden”* in the Lord's *“quiver.”* In the Old Testament the connection between a sword and the mouth is suggestive of war and judgement.²¹³⁸ This figure is also found in the book of Revelation.²¹³⁹ The same idea is expressed in Hebrews 4:

For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.²¹⁴⁰

Thus we are to expect that the Servant will cut deep with the words of His mouth, bringing sin and evil to justice, and displaying the righteousness of God. The figure of an arrow helps us understand the idea that the Father sent the Son into the world. His is an arrow sent to hit multiple targets, since He was sent into the world to redeem and save sinners.

Then also we learn that this Servant was hidden in *“the shadow of His hand”* and in *“His quiver.”* Why hidden? Well the mystery of Christ as God in the flesh is revealed to those who have faith.²¹⁴¹ The Lord Jesus prevented the demons from speaking what they knew because it was not from trust and faith. Only those who come to Him in faith and repentance with humility and sorrow for sin will know the truth of His nature really.²¹⁴² Others may hear the truths expressed – that Christ is the Son of God, and so on – but they will not act on this knowledge as true faith does. The Servant is hidden in the Lord's quiver ready to be used and shot as the Father wills. Even now the arrow that is Christ will speed to the heart and wound the self-righteous, the self-made, and the self-gratifying person. Some will be *“cut to the heart”* and will turn and repent, but others will flee and seek to save their own lives.²¹⁴³

This Servant is clearly one in whom was no sin. We learn this from several angles. First He was a *“polished”* shaft and hence pure and clean. Second He was *“hidden”* by the Father both *“in the shadow of His hand,”* and *“in His quiver,”* and so was in close and intimate communion in the

2138 See, for example: Job 5:15; Psalm 55:21; 59:7.

2139 Revelation 1:16; 2:16; 19:15.

2140 Hebrews 4:12.

2141 Ephesians 1; Colossians 1:26,27.

2142 Psalm 25:14.

2143 Acts 2:37; 7:54.

Studies in Isaiah.

bosom of the Father, hence truly pure and holy.²¹⁴⁴ Notice that there is only one arrow in God's quiver! Then thirdly, He is the one whom can speak truth and judgement. His is the mouth which will bring justice to bear, and so must be holy and pure. Fourthly, this Servant is the one in whom the Father *"will be glorified."*²¹⁴⁵ Elsewhere the Lord has declared that He will not share or give His glory to another.²¹⁴⁶ If the Servant will glorify the Father, He must be of the same divine nature, hence holy.²¹⁴⁷ Fifthly, in verse 4, we note that the Servant would reap a *"just reward"* for His *"work,"* by which we understand that this One must be perfectly sinless and thus alone could succeed where Adam and all mankind with him had failed.

The divine nature of the Servant is pre-eminently in view in this song, but the human nature is not ignored. Thus in verse 4 we find a very human expression of the progress of the work the Servant came to do. It very much appears that the work and effort was *"in vain"* and that His strength was *"for nothing."* However the Servant does not despair, but concludes that His *"just reward"* and His *"work"* is with the Lord His God. During the Lord's earthly ministry we can see the frustrations and difficulties He faced as people misunderstood and mistook what He was saying.²¹⁴⁸ The people's hearts were so dull and hardened, and even His disciples were extremely slow to comprehend. Then at the moment of greatest need (humanly speaking) he was alone and abandoned.²¹⁴⁹ All looked hopeless and empty, from the human perspective.

[2] The ministry of the Servant. (Isaiah 49:5-12).

49:5-7.

We learn much about His ministry and how He is seen in the world. As already noted, from the human perspective, His work and effort appeared empty and vacuous.²¹⁵⁰ This is how the world perceives the Messiah's efforts, for in verse 7 we read that He is the One *"whom man despises,"* and *"whom the nation abhors."* That which man esteems is in contradistinction to that which the Lord honours and vice versa. Mankind in sin and rebellion is not just far away from God, but he is running in the opposite direction to God.²¹⁵¹ But no matter, for God's plans can never be thwarted.

2144 John 1:18.

2145 Isaiah 49:3.

2146 Genesis 42:8; 48:11.

2147 John 17:1.

2148 Mark 9:32; Luke 2:50; 9:45; John 8:27; 10:6; 12:16;

2149 Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:50.

2150 Isaiah 49:4.

2151 Luke 16:15.

Studies in Isaiah.

Next we learn in verse 5 that this Servant was called to gather *“Israel”* and to *“bring Jacob back”* to God. Verse 6 tells us further that He would *“raise up the tribes of Jacob,”* and would *“restore the preserved ones of Israel.”* The Messiah was thus sent first to the nation of Israel to bring the good news to those who ought to have welcomed Him.²¹⁵² Now clearly this also serves as a reminder to all who truly call on the name of the Lord that we need often to heed the Saviour's call. The purpose of this gathering and calling is so that He will be glorious. However such a mission to the chosen nation is considered *“too small a thing,”* and so there is much more to the Servant's great ministry. He will also be the *“light,”* (understanding and revelation) for the *“Gentiles,”* and will be God's *“salvation,”* (deliverance – their 'Joshua' – hence 'Jesus') for all mankind (*“to the ends of the earth”*). What the Lord was to Israel, He would also be to all mankind. Now this truth is not one which has suddenly come to fruition, for it was always God's intention. Ever since before the fall of Adam, the Lord intended that people everywhere should come back to Him in repentance. The nation of Israel was established partly to be a beacon for others to see God's goodness and to flock to Him for deliverance and salvation. In Israel's failure we see God's design and deliverance. The fact that Israel failed to be the beacon of light, and the example of God's grace, shows us that what man attempts and what man tries will always fail. This was God's intention lest anyone think that it would ever be possible to make heaven on this fallen and cursed world. We can say this because although Israel were led by God to become the nation, and they were given everything they needed to do what the Lord required, the problem was that it required them to do it. Of this they were incapable and the whole experience of Israel from the time of Moses until the coming of John the Baptist was meant to show forth the failure of man and his efforts at obeying God. Much more was needed – a radical change of heart.

49:8.

Now all of the above is explained in verse 8 as the Servant being given *“as a covenant to the people.”* What a marvellous thing! We have noted the universal application (*“to the people”*) so that it is to all the families of the earth (as spoken to Abram).²¹⁵³ But the remarkable thing is that this Person – The Servant – is to be the covenant. He is the agreement! Thus no longer do we have a law by which we must abide if we are to be in fellowship with God. Instead we have the promise of a Person. This One is **the** covenant. In this One is the binding agreement. We can only “explain” this

2152 Matthew 15:24; Mark 7:27.

2153 Genesis 12:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

by assuming here that the Father and the Son came to an agreement with the Holy Spirit that the Son would be our surety and promise. In short, we preach Christ, and Him crucified, for we do not speak of systems, organisations, groupings, ritual, and theories!²¹⁵⁴ Now the Lord Jesus fully met the demands of the law. He did all the Father requested of Him. He kept all the law and took upon Himself all the sins of those whom would repent and trust in Him. Christ kept the covenant of works that Adam failed to keep, and we partake of the fruits and blessings Christ earned by His great work. We call this second covenant, the covenant of grace. It is by God's grace that we are saved. The message of forgiveness in and through Christ and reconciliation with God is preached and must be believed. He (or she) who accepts this message is saved and becomes a sharer in the covenant blessings earned by Christ.

Notice what this covenant (this Servant) will do. It will *“restore the earth,”* and it will enable the people (*“them”*) to *“inherit the desolate heritages.”* In other words, we are speaking of the new heavens and earth, (the new creation), and we are brought to consider all those places and things which have become lost, desolate and despoiled by sin and the fall. All that was lost by Adam will be restored. Now Israel, (the nation), lost much – especially by way of territory – and this would be restored in the return from exile. However what mankind has lost through Adam's sin will be restored. A living relationship with God, a fruitful life of meaning and purpose lived with God as Father, and delights of heaven and glory beyond imagination!

49:9.

In verse 9 we are given some more detail about what the ministry entails. In this passage we focus only on two aspects of the lost state of mankind, (*“prisoners”* and *“those who are in darkness”*). Later on there will be other characteristics explored.²¹⁵⁵ The prisoner is bound in a cell because of some misdemeanour or transgression. Man also is bound by his sin and is locked into a prison, as it were. Many people experience this prison-like status consciously. Sadly many others do not. If we recognise that we are lost prisoners guilty and condemned, then there is hope for us! However if we stubbornly refuse to accept our state as bound by sin, we are of all people most piteous. To the ones who know they are truly prisoners and deserve their punishment, the Servant says: *“go forth!”* How marvellous to be set free from sin. Do not mistake this true freedom, however. The freedom man often craves is actually another prison. We are only truly free if we are

2154 1Corinthians 1:23.

2155 See Isaiah 61:1f, for example.

Studies in Isaiah.

bound to Christ and become His servants. This is life indeed. This is true freedom. This is joy unspeakable, for He is the delight of the soul.

The second state of man is that he is in *"darkness."* He is blind and does not understand. Often ancient prisons were places of darkness too. How blind and unknowing we are as fallen human beings! Well to those who have no understanding and who grope about in darkness the Servant says: *"show yourselves."* This is a startling instruction. We might have expected that the Servant would say something like, "see," or "be knowing." But in reality we need to come to an understanding of our naked and hopeless state. We are naked and in need of His covering. When we come to a realisation of this state we shall run to Him for help. This call and instruction is a call to be honest and to own our sinful state. The proud and the froward will recoil, but those who see their sin will run to the Servant for rescue.

49:10-12.

Those who respond to these instructions will be well fed and watered on their journey to the promised land. Obviously the returnees from exile are primarily in view here, but they stand as types for all who seek the Lord in truth. Just as the Israelites were fed and given water in the wilderness before they entered the promised land, so too those who will return to Jerusalem will be well provided for. There is encouragement too that they will not be alone, for it is *"He who has mercy"* that will *"lead them"* on the way. There is protection too for *"neither heat nor sun shall strike them."* The Lord will smooth the way for those who return. Isn't this the testimony of those who follow Him? It is not that everything is easy and plain *in this world*, far from it, but that the path of truth and the way of righteousness is readily given and provided for those who turn to Him. All is made smooth for the pilgrims to partake of the delights of God. Mountains lowered and the Lord's *"highways"* raised so that they are easy for those with true faith to walk along. The Lord will bring His people *"from afar,"* from all points of the compass, and even from as great a distance as *"Sinim."*²¹⁵⁶

Now although the world despises the Servant (and still does), nevertheless the kings and princes of the world will be made to *"arise"* and *"worship"* because the Lord is faithful and holy, and because this Servant is the Father's chosen vessel.²¹⁵⁷ If God has decreed so, whom can change His commands or wishes? The Servant need not fear failure because the Father will prosper His

2156 Isaiah 49:12.

2157 Isaiah 49:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

work in this “*acceptable time,*” which is called, “*the day of salvation.*”²¹⁵⁸ The Father will preserve the Servant throughout this era. Now of course what is being spoken of here is the Servant's mission which proceeds through His body, the church. What great promises we have! The Lord of glory will keep and “*preserve*” the Servant and His body as He exercises His covenant work.²¹⁵⁹

[3] The only fitting response! Joyful worship. (Isaiah 49:13).

49:13.

Having described the Servant and His ministry we are left awestruck and in great wonder. Who could devise such a great plan, and who could carry it all out? The only fitting response is to sing for joy. The whole of creation (“*heavens,*” “*earth,*” and “*mountains*”) are instructed to praise the Lord and worship, and so what should creatures made in His image do but excel in this worship? And the reason? Well the Lord has “*comforted*” all those who have turned to Him, and has had “*mercy*” on us who were sorely “*afflicted.*” The Hebrew words rendered “*comfort*” and “*mercy*” sound similar (*niḥam* נִחַם y^{raḥem} יְרַחֵם) and convey a rounded salvation of pity, deep love and compassion.

2158 Isaiah 49:8.

2159 Isaiah 49:8.

Chapter 60.

Isaiah 49:14-26.

God never forsakes His people!

analysis.

- 14 But Zion said,
 “the Lord has forsaken me,
 and my Lord has forgotten me.”
- 15 “Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you.
- 16 See, I have inscribed you on the palms *of My hands*; your walls *are* continually before Me. 17 Your sons shall make haste; your destroyers and those who laid you waste shall go away from you.
- 18 Lift up your eyes, look around and see;
 all these gather together *and* come to you.
 As I live,” says the Lord, “you shall surely clothe yourselves with them all as an ornament, and bind them *on you* as a bride *does*.
- 19 “For your waste and desolate places, and the land of your destruction, will even now be too small for the inhabitants; and those who swallowed you up will be far away.
- 20 The children you will have, after you have lost the others, will say again in your ears,
 ‘the place *is* too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell.’
- 21 Then you will say in your heart,
 ‘who has begotten these for me, since I have lost my children and am desolate, a captive, and wandering to and fro? And who has brought these up? There I was, left alone; but these, where *were* they?’”
- 22 Thus says the Lord God:
 “behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations,
 and set up My standard for the peoples;
 they shall bring your sons in *their* arms, and your daughters shall be carried on *their* shoulders; 23
 Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with *their* faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet.
 Then you will know that I *am* the Lord, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me.”
- 24 Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of the righteous be delivered?
- 25 But thus says the Lord:
 “even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away,
 and the prey of the terrible be delivered;
 for I will contend with him who contends with you,
 and I will save your children.
26 I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh,
 and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine.
 All flesh shall know that I, the Lord, *am* your Saviour, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

Studies in Isaiah.

Having been introduced to the ministry of the “*Servant of rulers*” in the first part of Isaiah 49, we are now brought to consider how this ministry will proper and will continue to succeed.²¹⁶⁰ The end results are true knowledge of God and a recognition that He alone is Saviour.²¹⁶¹ We thus have two main sections in this second half of Isaiah 49 for which we have given the following titles, with their sub-divisions:

[1] But Zion said ... When doubts arise. (Isaiah 49:14-21).

[a] A rhetorical question. (Isaiah 49:15).

[b] A reminder of the truth and its fruit. (Isaiah 49:16,17).

[c] A call to consider what God will do. (Isaiah 49:18-21).

[2] The will of God – My Standard for the nations! (Isaiah 49:22-26).

[a] The Standard for all peoples. (Isaiah 49:22,23).

[b] The care and protection of God's flock. (Isaiah 49:24-26).

[1] But Zion said ... When doubts arise. (Isaiah 49:14-21).

49:14.

We begin with a “*but*” indicating a contrast or an objection. Isn't this always the case with fallen sinful human beings? The Lord tells us something wonderful so that the only fitting response ought to be worship, (“*Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted*”), and what do we do?²¹⁶² We bring in the doubts and the “buts”!²¹⁶³ How often have great blessings been followed by deep despair and sorrow because we take our eyes off the Lord? Zion, by which is meant the people of God, had concluded that the Lord had forsaken and forgotten them. Notice here that the reference is also singular (“*me*”) indicating how individuals within Zion were feeling. Perhaps this was something that people declared to one another so that the whole place (Zion) was saying the same thing? I wonder dear reader, do you ever feel this way? I know that I have! All around us feels as though the Lord is far away. We do not seem to feel and experience the greatness and the goodness of God we once knew. We do not seem to know joy and peace as we once did. Now these things

2160 Isaiah 49:7.

2161 Isaiah 49:23,26.

2162 Isaiah 49:13.

2163 Isaiah 49:14.

Studies in Isaiah.

occur for a multitude of reasons but our conclusions – the Lord has departed and left us – is hopelessly wide of the mark!²¹⁶⁴ Somehow we have fallen for the lie and concluded that we are in such a low condition because the Lord has left us. But look at the words of God in response to Zion's despair! Wonder of wonders, such a downward and desperate exclamation coming from individuals in Zion elicits a most gracious response from the Lord. How good is God? Infinitely so! We have here the following:

[a] A rhetorical question (verse 15)

[b] A reminder of the truth and its fruit (verses 16 and 17)

[c] A call to consider what God will do (verses 18 to 21)

[a] A rhetorical question. (Isaiah 49:15).

49:15.

What a question! Such love and compassion! The idea that any woman who has carried her baby for 9 months would then immediately forget her offspring is unthinkable. I need hardly mention the fact that the process of giving birth is incredibly arduous, but surely, after all the effort of carrying and then producing a child, such is enough to stimulate the love and care a mother naturally has? Having seen five children come into the world and witnessed the flush of joy that my wife had when each baby was laid in her arms, and now having witnessed the effort and love she pours on them and their children, still I cannot imagine any woman ignoring let alone spurning the offspring she has borne. But there may be some who do so for some extenuating or extreme reasons. But God is not like that! Far from it! He uses the experience of love and concern a mother naturally has for the child she has borne and raised as a base. If women can love their children so, how much more will the Lord God love Zion? The statement at the end of this verse is clear. The Lord will not leave aside, neglect, nor forget His people. Now such a sentiment is found in numerous places throughout Scripture and I want to highlight just two for the reader's encouragement. First we have these words of the Saviour when He commissioned the church:

²¹⁶⁴ It may be instructive to consider some of these reasons. It could be because of sin or disobedience. It could be that we have left our first love. It may be because of an onslaught of Satan. It might be because we have drifted and let slip the things we have known. When we forget to seek the Lord know for certain that the enemy will prowl and pounce!

Studies in Isaiah.

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” Amen.²¹⁶⁵

The Lord has not left His people as orphans and has promised that He will be with us as we continue His mission. But the second Scripture that comes to mind is rather more personal. It comes from David in Psalm 8:

What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?²¹⁶⁶

The word used for “*man*” is the Hebrew word which conveys the idea of man in his mortality, frailty, and weakness. It is spoken to man in his fallen sinful condition. Consider what David says here! Why is the Lord of glory who made all the heavens through the work of His fingers, so concerned about weak, frail, and mortal man? And yet He is! More than that He is “*mindful*” of them! And He “*visits*” them! The Lord is for His people! How we do the Lord great disservice when we utter words like those of Isaiah 49:14. It is unthinkable that the Lord God who gave Israel so much and the believer (in all ages) much more would ever forget or forsake the sons of His love. We need to banish all thoughts of neglect and rejection from our minds concerning the Lord. When it appears that the Lord has forsaken us we need to remember this central fact: God does not forsake His people.²¹⁶⁷

How then, it may be asked, should we look at a Scripture such as found in Jeremiah 15?

5 “For who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Or who will bemoan you? Or who will turn aside to ask how you are doing? **6** You have forsaken Me,” says the Lord, “You have gone backward. Therefore I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am weary of relenting! **7** And I will winnow them with a winnowing fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave *them* of children; I will destroy My people, *since* they do not return from their ways. **8** Their widows will be increased to Me more than the sand of the seas; I will bring against them, against the mother of the young men, a plunderer at noonday; I will cause anguish and terror to fall on them suddenly.”²¹⁶⁸

Also contained within this Scripture is the curious thought that God has become weary and has

2165 Matthew 28:19,20.

2166 Psalm 8:4.

2167 1Samuel 12:22; Psalm 94:14.

2168 Jeremiah 15:5-8.

Studies in Isaiah.

relented, and that He will destroy His people. How do such ideas sit with the truth that God does not change?²¹⁶⁹ Now within the passage above we learn that the people of God had, in point of fact, turned away so much from God that they had placed themselves within the camp of all the unrighteous. Consequently it is no wonder that in forsaking God, God would forsake them, for this is what they presented to the Lord as being their preferred choice even after persistent warnings from the Lord.

With regard to God never being weary we have repeated proof in Scripture. Isaiah has already made this clear:

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.²¹⁷⁰

Psalms 121 teaches the same idea and other Scriptures lead us to the same view that God is unchanging.²¹⁷¹ And yet in Jeremiah 15:6 and in other places too we find that God is wearied.²¹⁷² The answer to this conundrum that God can never be weary and yet He wearies comes from a deeper appreciation of the incarnation. The Second Person of the Trinity became flesh and this was decreed from all eternity. In such an event deity was not altered. Christ Jesus is described as the One in whom:

... all the fullness should dwell.²¹⁷³

and further, the One in whom dwelt:

... all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.²¹⁷⁴

And yet in such a wonderful way the Lord Himself, our Saviour, assumed human flesh. He was (and is) fully God and fully human. We can do no better than quote the words of the statement made at Chalcedon by our forebears in AD 451:

2169 Malachi 3:6.

2170 Isaiah 40:28.

2171 Psalm 121:4;

2172 Isaiah 1:14; 43:24.

2173 Colossians 1:19.

2174 Colossians 2:9.

Studies in Isaiah.

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.²¹⁷⁵

These statements are all derived from a consideration of whom Christ was as found in the New Testament. At one and the same time the Lord Jesus is fully God and fully (sinless) man. Thus when we see expressions of weariness attributed to God, would it not be indicative of the Son of God who would be made flesh who grew weary and was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? In other words, when we read of the Lord relenting, being sorry, and being weary and so on, these are all expressions of the pre-incarnate Christ, the Son of God. Another way of considering such characteristics as relenting, being sorry, and being weary when connected to God, is to think of them as anthropomorphisms. In other words these are the types of response that a normal human person would come to in such situations. Now in the end we cannot attribute to God any form of change or variation, for He is the Rock! But when we remember that Christ Jesus was the Word who became flesh and who shares our humanity, it is much more than heart warming to know that He is acquainted personally with our lot and fully knows our frame and condition.

God will never forsake His people. Even when we read statements such as we find in Jeremiah 15, we recognise that such a truth is not being negated. God knows all things. Whilst Israel of old was forsaken by departing far from the Lord, those who were the true Israel were not forsaken and will never be forsaken. The nation was a temporary affair but the individual saints of old were not neglected. God would cause the nation to be overrun and to be taken into captivity so that Jerusalem would be forsaken, but nevertheless we read that the captives would be described in terms of God's favour.²¹⁷⁶ We need also to remember that the Lord is patient and deals with us as

2175 <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-hypostatic-union/>

2176 Jeremiah 24:1f.

Studies in Isaiah.

sons chastening us because of our waywardness.²¹⁷⁷ This is done out of love – supreme love.²¹⁷⁸ When things seem so bleak and all the world and Satan are telling you that God has forgotten and neglected you, you need, by faith in the God who appears far off, to heed these words:

12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.²¹⁷⁹

How do we do this? How do we strengthen our hands and knees and make straight paths for our feet? The answer is to flee to the Lord and pour our hearts out to Him! The answer is to put right those things we know are all wrong. The answer is to lift up holy hands in prayer to God, to stand en-clothed with the full armour of God, and to remove the sin that weighs us down and enslaves us. The answer is to repent and believe. The answer is always that simple. Turn away from this world and its sin and walk in newness of life with the Lord.

[b] A reminder of the truth and its fruit. (Isaiah 49:16,17).

49:16.

As if what has already been stated is not enough, the Lord continues to show His demonstrable love. Such is the great grace and love of God that He gives in abundance. Do we need assurance? Why do we neglect to heed these words of God? How much more can He do or say? Now the names of the tribes of Israel were engraved on the precious stones worn by the high priest.²¹⁸⁰ Thus the High Priest bore the people of God over his breast and on his shoulders indicating both a deep concern (they were on his heart) as well as a provision for sin (he bore the weight of their guilt and sin). The High Priest is, of course, a type of Christ who truly bore us with Him on the cross showing immense compassion and great provision of deliverance as He bore our sin and guilt away. But even more here we have the very fact that the Lord has His people engraved onto the palms of His hands (*“see, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands”*). What is the significance of this? Obviously the Lord as Spirit does not have hands, so we need to dig a little deeper. The idea being presented is of an engraving or carving which typically suggests some form

2177 Hebrews 12:5-11.

2178 John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Hebrews 12:10.

2179 Hebrews 12:11,12.

2180 Exodus 28:9f; 39:6f.

Studies in Isaiah.

of writing, as when wedges were cut out in clay tablets.²¹⁸¹ So we might think about the Lord cutting into His very form the essence of the people of God. However, this is much more than a mere tattoo as though the Lord had simply put a reminder in a place that He would often view! Being graven into the palms of God's hands demonstrates His great love and care, for who could ignore that which is cut into the palms? I once suffered a severe burn to my left palm and, apart from it being extremely sore, it was always on my mind! How much more does God consider His people because He has cut them into His palms? Now since the people of God are so engraved into His palms we note further that this means whatever He does, whatever actions He takes, also concerns His people. It never ceases to amaze me that the sovereign God has included His people and their prayers in His perfect plan! Further, He has included the whole scope of His special revelation (the Word of God, the Bible), as the means by which He will save, heal, restore, and revive! How silly our arguments are about how God works when some claim this mode and another that!²¹⁸² He is truly sovereign and yet He so works through His word, by prayer, through fellowship and suffering all things for the good of those who love Him.²¹⁸³

A final thought about being cut into the Lord's palms leads us to consider His tender care once more. We read elsewhere in Scripture that He wrote His commandments with His finger, and the heavens are the work of God's fingers.²¹⁸⁴ These speak of an intricate and detailed work that does not require mere strength as when a hand grasps something to turn or move it, but delicacy and finesse. As God has worked with His fingers to create and to reveal, so He involves us as ones engraved in His palms from whence the fingers extend. Such thoughts are too marvellous for words. The Lord is concerned not just as an external One looking condescendingly down upon those of low misfortune, but He has involved Himself intimately with those who need His love. Nowhere is this more evident than in the incarnation. The Son of God became man! This did not involve any change in God, of course, because He is unchangeable, but what a change for man!

Taking this somewhat further we note that our Lord and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, did indeed have His hands cut by the nails driven through to pin Him to the cross. These nail print wounds were still visible after His resurrection.²¹⁸⁵ They are ever a reminder of His connection to us. He died in our place and such a truth is eternal in the heavens! In such a way we are truly engraved on the palms of His hands.

2181 Job 19:23.

2182 The misuse of Scripture is sad when people set the Bible and the Spirit at odds with one another.

2183 Romans 8:28.

2184 Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10; Psalm 8:3

2185 John 20-25-27.

Studies in Isaiah.

Now the figure used in Isaiah 49:16 really concerns the city – Zion. The first part speaking of God's palms is anthropomorphic and can really only be understood in a physical human sense, but the second half focuses our attention on the city of Zion. The Lord replies to the concerns of the people of God (Zion) with these comforting words: *“your walls are continually before Me.”* How should we understand this? Well I think that first we should recognise again the Lord's care and concern. He is watching out for Zion. He is the Watcher! He is our defence and our guard! How remarkable is this? But second by referring specifically to the walls, we note that the Lord is concerned for Zion's salvation. Twice in Isaiah the walls of the city are given representing salvation:

*In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: “we have a strong city; God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks.”*²¹⁸⁶

*Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.*²¹⁸⁷

By this we understand that God's great concern, then, is the salvation and rescue of His people! How marvellous! The Lord Jesus Christ brought in an *everlasting* salvation. He is the eternal advocate and His blood pleads forgiveness and deliverance eternally.²¹⁸⁸ Thus our salvation is a perpetual thing being *“continually before”* the Lord. We need never fear that one day what Christ has done (and thence our position) may slip or fail. Once a person is truly saved they can never be unsaved. Such a thought has great implications. For example, it is not possible for a person to claim salvation and continue a path of sin.²¹⁸⁹ But whenever a person has truly died to this world and forsaken all to live life anew in the light of the resurrection and in the life of the Spirit, all things are changed and there is no turning back – such a thing is impossible.²¹⁹⁰

49:17.

In verse 17 we are still being brought to consider the city of Zion, the people of God. The consequence of the Lord's care and concern for His people, (Zion), has two outcomes. First we read: *“Your sons shall make haste,”* and second we note that *“your destroyers and those who laid you waste shall go away from you.”* The first result of the Lord's watching over Zion is to energise the

2186 Isaiah 26:1.

2187 Isaiah 60:18.

2188 Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 1John 2:1.

2189 See Romans 6:1f for example.

2190 Colossians 2:20; Luke 14:33; Philippians 3:8; Galatians 6:14; 2Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1f.

Studies in Isaiah.

people who are truly His. Some translations opt for the term “builders” in place of “*sons*” and this is perfectly possible. The point being that God's sons, those who are true believers, are also Zion's builders. These builder sons are going to “*make haste.*” What does this imply? Well the thought is to act quickly and speedily but not in any slap-dash or higgledy-piggledy manner. Rather the idea is to act decisively and efficiently. The builders know what is to be done and they do it without fuss or bother. They are diligent and set on course, hence the work is done speedily. I often wonder how slow and lethargic the work of the church is in our days. We would do well to look at the book of Nehemiah where the walls of Jerusalem were built under the governorship of Nehemiah in 52 days!²¹⁹¹ When Nehemiah presents the work to the people and the reasons for it, the people responded eagerly: “*Then they set their hands to this good work.*”²¹⁹² The way in which the people worked is instructive. They worked alongside one another, they had a mind to work, and were ready to fight the enemy as well as build.²¹⁹³ In the same way we ought to be diligent and eager in the work of the Lord. Noah attended to the work of the ark and our task is to work for the salvation of souls:

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*²¹⁹⁴

Now in contrast to the builders of Nehemiah's day, these builders will build unfettered and unhindered, for we read that “*your destroyers and those who laid you waste shall go away from you.*” Those who may cause harm and bother will go away from them!

[c] A call to consider what God will do. (Isaiah 49:18-21).

After the rhetorical question and the statement of truth and its fruits, we are then introduced to a series of things that the Lord God will do. Before we get into the detail we ought to remark that God is so expansive and all-encompassing. We have seen how the Lord has appealed to maternal love and reminded them of His having them in His hands, but now we see further aspects of what the Lord intends.

2191 Nehemiah 6:15.

2192 Nehemiah 2:18.

2193 Nehemiah 3:2,4,5,7,9,10 etc.; 4:6,17,18.

2194 1Corinthians 15:58.

Studies in Isaiah.

49:18.

The Lord instructs the people to “*lift up*” their eyes and to “*look around and see.*” This is always good advice for those who are despondent. How often we look down and look at the earth when we should be looking towards the heavens, towards the Lord, and towards His soon coming kingdom. The point is that there is evidence of God's love and work all around, if we would only really *see* it! First, then, we read: “*all these gather together and come to you.*” What the people are to observe is that there will be many coming towards them for succour and help! It reminds us of the passage in Isaiah 2 where there are many flowing up to Zion to hear the word of the Lord. Zion feels low and forsaken of God – which was not true – and the Lord tells them to look around because there are people gathering to come to them!

Next we are given a promise which is first founded on the very character and being of God. He states: “*as I live*”! It is on the very existence of God that the promise will come. In other words, as sure as it certain that God lives, so the truth that follows is assured. Thus we can take it as certain that those who gather and come to them, will come and adorn the people of God. The people of God will “*clothe*” themselves with those who come “*as an ornament,*” and will “*bind*” these new additions in the same way that a “*bride*” is decorated with gifts. If it seems odd that the gathering throngs become dress and attire, consider the following:

Children's children *are* the crown of old men, and the glory of children *is* their father.²¹⁹⁵

As they come those who join with Zion become the ornaments and trophies of the people of God. Do we consider those who join the church as they repent and believe as trophies and ornaments?

49:19,20.

Next we observe two particulars concerning the coming throng who will join Zion. First in verse 19 we note that there will not be enough room! The ruined and destroyed places that were the land of Israel (which was room enough for the people the Lord lead out of Egypt) will be unable to accommodate the new comers. Now there will also be new children, who will also complain that there is not enough room (verse 20). We are not to imagine that such statements about lack of space indicates any flaw or problem. The point is that what was provided first for Israel, will simply be utterly inadequate. This leads us again to consider that Israel as the nation chosen of the Lord were

²¹⁹⁵ Proverbs 17:6.

Studies in Isaiah.

a temporary thing. The Lord God had in mind something much greater than Israel the nation – the church! Of course the Lord will provide a spacious and roomy place for those who are called into His glory. The night before He was crucified the Lord told the disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them and He describes the Father's *“house”* as having *“many mansions.”*²¹⁹⁶

49:20,21.

Thus, second, in verses 20 and 21, we find that the Lord will supply new children for those lost. How marvellous! Notice how astounding this is! The expressions of verse 21 leave us in no doubt that these children have not come through any effort or plan of the people of God. They ask *“who has begotten these”* and then *“who has brought these up”*? The people had been *“left alone”* (and yet they were not forsaken), and so where all these children have come from and how they arrived and were provided for is a mystery. I sometimes wonder how much the church, or certain people in the church, claim success and acclaim for the advancement of the church? We look at the great preachers of the past and laud their efforts and note how many were brought in under their ministry. We bemoan the fact that we do not have such great preachers today and we do not see such revival. And yet here we learn that in reality the people of God are at a loss as to how this great assembly has come about! We must give God all the glory! He alone will build His church.²¹⁹⁷ Let us never consider that our efforts have done this or that. We are but cogs in the great plan of God. We ought to be satisfied that He has inscribed us into the palms of His hands and be content to be used by Him as He sees fit.

[2] The will of God – My Standard for the nations! (Isaiah 49:22-26).

Having considered how the assembly will increase from the point of view of the people who considered themselves forsaken of God, we move next to see how this will come about in God's plan. Verses 22 to 26 can be split into two parts. There is some symmetry here. In each we have a *“thus says the Lord”* near the start and then at the end a reference to assurance (*“you will know ...”* and *“all flesh shall know ...”*).

In the first part we learn that the Lord will be outgoing and will draw in the new assembly in order that the people will be assured that God truly is *“the Lord.”*²¹⁹⁸ In the second we observe the Lord's singular care and protection of His people so that the whole world (*“all flesh”*) will come to

2196 John 14:2.

2197 Psalm 127:1; Matthew 16:18.

2198 Isaiah 49:23.

Studies in Isaiah.

know that the Lord is the true “*Saviour*” and “*Redeemer*” of His people.²¹⁹⁹

[a] The Standard for all peoples. (Isaiah 49:22,23).

49:22.

How incredible is the scene we have in verse 22. The Lord Himself will still the world and will raise His hand in a promise to the whole world, and in so doing will establish His “*standard*” for all the peoples. This “*standard*” is undoubtedly the Lord Jesus Christ crucified as we have had occasion already to note.²²⁰⁰ Recall that a standard was a rallying point. The rallying point, the only rallying point, is the Lord Jesus Christ and supremely His work at Calvary. People from all statuses and all conditions, people of all ages and types, will come and will humble themselves to be a part of this gathering.

49:23.

Some who had been royals will take the place of parents caring for children (“*Kings ... foster fathers ... queens ... nursing mothers*”). These who were once of note and repute are now humble (they “*bow down ... with their faces to the earth*”) and will minister by removing the “*dust*” from the feet of the people of God. This latter act recalls our Saviour's washing of the disciples' feet, and speaks of the need to cleanse from the dust and detritus of the world.²²⁰¹ By such an amazing in-gathering, the people of God will come to deepen their faith and knowledge of God. Such remarkable scenes are not given to those who fret and strive in their own strength, but to those who “*wait for*” the Lord. Once again we learn that our part is obedience – the obedience that comes from faith – and to see the salvation of God. How we fail here and assume that the mission and all tasks are ours to perform! Yes we must use our gifts, and yes we must be diligent in doing all that the Lord commands. But we must recognise and rejoice in the fact that the Captain is still working and the Lord has not left us as orphans. He will build His church!²²⁰²

2199 Isaiah 49:26.

2200 John 3:14.

2201 John 13:5.

2202 Matthew 16:18.

[b] The care and protection of God's flock. (Isaiah 49:24-26).

49:24,25.

Sometimes we think our lot and our task is impossible. There lies a hopeless case full of sin and depravity tied up in evil. What hope is there? What can we do? In another place there is a tangled knot of relationship problems that seems impenetrable, unfathomable, and utterly without remedy. We walk on by and look only with ignorance. But the Lord is the Master. Can He deliver? Of course! Can He recover the prey caught in the hunter's mouth? Of course! Can He recover the captives distraught and hopeless in the darkest dungeons?²²⁰³ Of course! The Lord is the One who *“contends”* on our behalf.²²⁰⁴ It is not David who is our champion and advocate but Christ Jesus. He will contend with those who contend against us. He will deliver and rescue! And this is not merely on a single occasion and once done the champion departs over the horizon! Not at all! The Lord is our close friend and champion. The Lord is our shield and defence.²²⁰⁵

At the start of verse 25 we have the demonstrative phrase *“but thus says the Lord.”* This strikes the needed contrast to the question asked in verse 24 and gives the reader confidence because God has spoken. Our Saviour does not merely rescue the prey from the mouth of the lion, nor does He merely open the prison doors! He deals with both lion and oppressor too! The Lord healed the broken hearted, delivered the captive blind, but He has also dealt a death blow to Satan and all man's enemies.²²⁰⁶ What is more, the Lord did this publicly! His demonstration of love to the sinner and the concomitant destruction of all that opposes God was not done in some small corner of the world, but openly, declaratively and demonstrably.²²⁰⁷ When Christ died on the cross the world that then was saw it clearly and now that it is enshrined in the word of God, has been publicly declared the world over.

Notice here in these verses a great comfort for those who have children. I must confess that bringing children into this world is not an easy task, spiritually speaking. It is not difficult to bear children and bring them in a physical sense. But to teach them, train them, and lead them spiritually is quite another matter. Again we sometimes think it is all up to us, but here we learn that the Lord has our children (be they true physical children or spiritual children who have heard the gospel from

2203 Isaiah 49:24.

2204 Isaiah 49:25.

2205 Genesis 15:1f; Psalm 3:3; 5:12; 18:2,30,35; 28:7; 33:20 etc.

2206 Colossians 2:13-15; 1John 3:8.

2207 Romans 5:8; Colossians 2:14,15.

Studies in Isaiah.

our lips) in His own heart for we read: *"I will save your children."*²²⁰⁸ The Lord Jesus accepted and welcomed children on many occasions and it is a great comfort to parents that the Lord still has His care and concern for our offspring.²²⁰⁹ Does this mean we let them live as they please because God will save them and take care of them? Of course not! Those who truly love their children will do all in their power to bring them into the safety of the kingdom, but all the while they know very well that salvation is of the Lord and in no way depends on us.

49:26.

The assurance that the Lord will indeed rescue and save is expressed further in verse 26. Not only will the Lord deliver, but He will also protect those whom He has saved. Their enemies had acted as oppressors, but now these will be turned to self consumption. They will not feed on the Lord's people to consume, but will be left to eat themselves. Such an image is grotesque, and it is meant to be. The outcome of oppression is always domineering and down treading of the one oppressed, but when there are no victims, the only thing left is to act oppressively to oneself. We see this in nations where leaders who have no more enemies or weak ones to subdue, turn in on themselves and fight one another. The oppressor is never satisfied. If he cannot eat and consume another what else is left?

Verse 26 ends with a further assurance to the redeemed, for all will most definitely come to know that the Lord truly is *"Saviour," "Redeemer,"* and *"the Mighty One of Jacob."*

2208 Isaiah 49:25.

2209 Matthew 18:3; Mark 9:37; 10:14.

Chapter 61.

Isaiah 50:1-11.

No man can save but the Servant!

Textual analysis.

#50 **1** Thus says the Lord:

“where *is* the certificate of your mother’s divorce, whom I have put away?

Or which of My creditors *is it* to whom I have sold you?

For your iniquities you have sold yourselves,

and for your transgressions your mother has been put away.

2 Why, when I came, *was there* no man?

Why, when I called, *was there* none to answer?

Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem?

Or have I no power to deliver?

Indeed with My rebuke I dry up the sea,

I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stink because *there is* no water, and die of thirst.

3 I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.”

4 “The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to *him who is* weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned. **5** The Lord God has opened My ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. **6** I gave My back to those who struck *Me*, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting. **7** “For the Lord God will help Me; therefore I will not be disgraced; therefore I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed. **8** *He is* near who justifies Me; who will contend with Me? Let us stand together. Who *is* My adversary? Let him come near Me. **9** Surely the Lord God will help Me; Who *is* he *who* will condemn Me? Indeed they will all grow old like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

10 “Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God. **11** Look, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle *yourselves* with sparks: walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled— This you shall have from My hand: you shall lie down in torment.

This section can be divided into three parts as follows:

[1] Why was there no one to save you? (Isaiah 50:1-3).

[2] The Servant’s expression of faith. (Isaiah 50:4-9).

[a] The Lord God has given Me (Isaiah 50:4,5).

[b] I gave My back to ... (Isaiah 50:6-9).

[3] Two alternatives: the fear of the Lord OR to lie down in torment. (Isaiah 50:10,11).

Studies in Isaiah.

In Isaiah 50:1-11 we are treated to another view of The Servant – the promised Messiah.

[1] Why was there no one to save you? (Isaiah 50:1-3).

50:1.

The passage begins by establishing why the people were in need of salvation. Thus in verse 1 we are confronted with two questions from the Lord which are intended to challenge the people. The questions are startling and are indicative of the false notions that were prevalent among the people of those days. What we need to affirm here is that the Lord had indeed *“put away”* the people and they had indeed been *“sold.”* However the cause for these states comes at the end of verse 1, for it was not true to say that the Lord had divorced the nation, and it was unthinkable that He had any creditors. Thus the question *“where is the certificate of your mother's divorce”* is ironic and meant to catch them out. How could they have considered that God would divorce them? In Malachi we read that God hates divorce.²²¹⁰ In Hosea we note that even though Gomer was a prostitute and continued to prostitute herself despite being married to Hosea, the Lord instructed the prophet to keep taking her back, because this is what the Lord did with regard to the nation.²²¹¹ We pause a moment and reflect that because marriage is such a sacred thing created by God to reflect His great love for His people, we dare not belittle it by changing its nature or by counting it a temporary affair.²²¹² It is so very sad that the world today has such a muddled view of marriage that the beauty of God and His love for us is muddled and ruined.²²¹³ And so we learn that it was probably the *thought* of the people that God had divorced them and left them to their own devices rather than an actual departure. But such a notion (God separating from His people) is unthinkable! So where, then, is the certificate of divorce? Nowhere because there wasn't one!

The second question had a similar purpose and intent. Could the people point out to which of the Lord's creditors that they had been sold? The idea is laughable! Perhaps they believed that the Lord had sold them out, but did they really think that the Lord was forced to do this because He owed another party? The idea is wholly ridiculous but it serves to show that we sometimes think the most silly things of God. Here were the people of God saying such hopelessly wrong things and the

2210 Malachi 2:16.

2211 Hosea 3:1.

2212 Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:25f.

2213 It is necessary to affirm that marriage is between one man and one woman as God originally created it and not between members of the same sex. Further marriage is to entered into for as long as life itself because God will never forsake His people.

Studies in Isaiah.

Lord has to make them aware of what they were doing. Turning these questions on their heads we learn equally that God has no interest in divorce and that He never owes anyone anything at all. God is love and He does all from His own good purpose and will. He is never forced to do anything and He never needs to do anything either. All He does do is characterised by love. That does not mean to say that He will never express His anger for even this is done in love. Those who peddle a “love-only” gospel are fools.²²¹⁴ The Scriptures reveal to us the God who is described as “love” as also being the One who is utterly holy and who despises sin and the sinner!²²¹⁵ And so we learn the grace and compassion of the Lord in asking the people these two questions. It served to show them their false thinking about the Lord and thereby it also indicated the true characteristics of the Lord – His love and His supremacy.

But the Lord does not leave them hanging to answer His two questions, for He makes the situation very plain. It was their sin and transgressions that had caused them to be “*put away*” and to be “*sold*” into captivity. Notice the repeated use of the words “*your,*” “*you,*” and “*yourselves.*” Sin and rebellion always leads to consequences. The Lord put them away and sold them off because their sins demanded such an action. It is not that God is duty bound to do this because of some external law or truth, but because He Himself is true and such actions were of His choice. He could not tolerate a people who acted as though they were not married to Him nor a people who ran up debts aplenty. It is not through lack of love nor power, but because they have chosen their path by sin and transgression.

50:2,3.

The Lord continues His method of teaching the people by using further questions in verse 2. There are two basic ideas expressed in four questions. The first two questions seek to establish the fact that there was, in point of fact, no one at all who could do anything about their condition. To be a little more specific, the Lord begins by asking them “*why*” it was that there was no one available to save. The concept of salvation is not explicitly expressed here in these first two questions, but the idea is evident from a consideration of the second set of questions which we shall come to in a moment. So then, why was there no man available when the Lord came, and why would none answer the call that He issued? The situation can be pictured like this. A king has left one of His palaces to go on a journey. Later He finds that the palace has rebelled and that what was once all

2214 I have in mind the likes of Rob Bell and Steve Chalke. The latter is hopelessly confused as to whom God is and in his utterances and writings displays no evidence of being a Christian at all.

2215 Leviticus 11:44f; 19:2 etc. Psalm 5:5; 11:5; 45:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

peace and orderly is now nothing but war and waste. As He returns He asks the question: who is available to do anything about this sorry state of affairs? There is no reply! There is none who can answer! This describes the condition mankind faces in his lost condition and depravity. Who amongst us can do anything to remedy our lot and repair the damage? Who can reverse the hideousness we daily observe around us. Think of the poor homeless people! Think of the hateful proud people who tolerate anything and everything! Think of the self-obsessed people who walk wherever they wish and on whomever they wish! Think of the sick and the lame and the lonely who are desperate for help! Think of the brainwashed and the unthinking masses as they imbibe their screen-time and podcasts, their reality shows, and drugs of choice! Whom amongst man can do anything at all? Can the politicians? The thought is transient as such change their vision and drive with the wind! Can the journalists? Are they dispensing truth or fiction to us? Do they relate wisdom and prudence? Can the doctors and nurses? They do a good job but only for a limited time as death visits us all. Can the scientists? What is their story but one of hopelessness and futility? There is none! There was none in the days of Isaiah, and there are none among men today. Now all of this is intended to lead the people to despair of self-reliance or of man-made reliance. It was so easy to look to other nations, to other ideas, to great men, or to groups who seem to have an answer. But for some reason (which is buried deep within our sinful state) we will not look to God. And so the Lord asks a second duo of questions.

Effectively He tells them that they knew full well that there was no man who could do anything at all to help, but then what about the Lord? Can He do anything to remedy the situation? Is the Lord's hand so short that He cannot reach down into the earth and make amends? Ridiculous! Is the Lord Almighty, Creator of the heavens and the earth, powerless to do anything? Absurd! In these two questions we learn that the Lord would indeed come down and that His *“right hand”* would make right that which was all wrong, for He is omnipotent.²²¹⁶ The Lord then reminds them of the things He had already done in their past. He dried up the Red Sea so that they could cross over with dry feet. He also sent His signs to Egypt for their rebellion.²²¹⁷ The statement of verse 3 probably has reference to the plague of darkness and the final plague where the Egyptians lost their firstborn. Their experience of God's awesome power at the Exodus may have been a long time ago, but nevertheless it is still awesome. In the same way we look back to all that the Lord Jesus did at Calvary.

2216 Psalm 44:3; 45:4; 48:10; 98:1; 118:15; 139:10.

2217 Exodus 7:17,18; 10:21,22; 14:16,21,22.

Studies in Isaiah.

[2] The Servant's expression of faith. (Verses 4 to 9).

Now having illustrated the problem and condition of the people, and having pointed out not only that there was none amongst men to save, but also that God was mighty to save, we now turn to a great depiction and prophecy concerning The Servant given to us in His own words.

This description of the Servant falls into two parts. First in verses 4 and 5 we learn something of the Servant's relationship to the Lord God and how He is enabled to pass on what He has learned. Then in verses 6 to 9 we learn something about the Servant's ministry in the face of opposition.

[a] The Lord God has given Me (Isaiah 50:4,5).

50:4,5.

The main emphasis here is on how the Servant learns from the Lord. We are expressly told the purpose for which the Servant learns, i.e. that He is able to give *“a word in season”* to the *“weary,”* but this appears incidental to the main thrust and purpose of the passage. The Servant would be One who could instruct and teach the people to bring rest from weariness and labour.²²¹⁸ This points us directly to Christ whose teaching brought comfort and life to the lost and the sinful. More importantly, however, is the means by which this Servant received His tongue or learning. We find that the Pharisees were nonplussed at Christ because He did not receive instruction in the customary way.²²¹⁹ So then, we note first that the Servant was *“given”* the ability to speak as one who is learned.²²²⁰ This comes from the Lord God so that He can teach the weary. Then we find that such learning comes through direct teaching from the Lord God. We observe that the Servant was wakened every morning, that His ear was wakened to receive teaching, and that the Lord God opened His ear especially for the purpose of instruction. Now the Saviour was given to a life of seeking His Father. We read, for example, in Mark:

*Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.*²²²¹

Then further we note that the Lord Jesus was prepared early to bring His word in season:

2218 Matthew 11:28f.

2219 John 7:15. Matthew 7:28; Mark 1:22; 6:2.

2220 Isaiah 50:4.

2221 Mark 1:35.

Studies in Isaiah.

Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them.²²²²

In John we learn that the Lord Jesus was sent of the Father, and was also instructed by the Father in an intimate relationship:

19 Then Jesus answered and said to them, “most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. **20** For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.²²²³

Wonderful truths! The Son of God learned from the Father morning by morning, He had His ear opened to receive instructions for the weary!

Such a wonderful depiction of the relationship between the Lord Jesus (The Servant) and the Lord God (the Father) leads us to recognise something of immense importance. We could put it like this. The Son of God who came down from heaven's glory learned daily at the throne of God. How much more ought we to be seated at the Saviour's feet to learn from Him? I am reminded that Mary sat at Jesus' feet hanging on every word. When Martha asks Jesus to rebuke Mary because she wasn't helping with all the preparations, the Lord replies:

... “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. **42** But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”²²²⁴

Given this I wonder how much we sit at Jesus' feet drawing in all He has to say to us? Compare the amount of time you do this with the amount of time you watch TV, drink in music, and go to the cinema.

Notice here that the Servant took all that the Lord God had for Him and He was “*not rebellious*” and neither did He “*turn away*.”²²²⁵ I think these statements are put to point us to the opposite positive notion, as we may discern from statements such as are found in Psalm 40:

2222 John 8:2.

2223 John 5:19,20.

2224 Luke 10:41,42.

2225 Isaiah 50:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

6 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. 7 Then I said, “behold, I come; in the scroll of the book *it is* written of me. 8 I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law *is* within my heart.”²²²⁶

Then also we have the words of the Saviour Himself:

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.”²²²⁷

And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.²²²⁸

[b] I gave My back to ... (Isaiah 50:6-9).

50:6.

Having considered the Servant's life as a willing and obedient Son learning from the Father, we next discover how He progresses through life in the sin-sick world that He has entered. We are shocked to find that the Servant is not welcome. John remarks in his opening words that:

10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.²²²⁹

But here in Isaiah 50 we find that the Servant was to suffer terrible persecution. It is tempting to see that verse 6 was fulfilled by the experience of Christ during His mock trials when He was struck on the cheek, scourged, and spat upon.²²³⁰ However this treatment was the culmination of rejection and scorn felt by the Saviour throughout a large part of His ministry. It is to be recalled that He received no honour in His home town, and that immediately after the great confession that Peter utters as spokesman for the disciples we read these words:

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.²²³¹

2226 Psalm 40:6-8.

2227 John 4:34.

2228 John 8:29.

2229 John 1:10,11.

2230 Matthew 26:67; 27:26,30; Mark 14:65; 15:19; John 18:22.

2231 Mark 8:31.

Studies in Isaiah.

Such rejection and suffering did not only occur at His trials. Then also we are reminded that He called His disciples to suffer in much the same way:

39 ... But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. **40** If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also. **41** And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. **42** Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.²²³²

If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *will they call* those of his household! **26** Therefore do not fear them.²²³³

50:7-9.

Now the Servant is not alone for He has the Lord God as His help. It is noteworthy that we read twice of the help of the Lord God, once at the start of verse 7 and then again at the beginning of verse 9. In fact we learn not only that the Lord God will *“help”* the Servant, but that it is He who *“justifies,”* that is, brings a righteous verdict as well.²²³⁴ With the Lord God as a helper and as legal counsel, the Servant is thereby enabled to set His *“face like flint”* in sure determination.²²³⁵ Even though the Servant faces such opposition to make Him a laughing stock and vilified in this world's eyes, yet He will not be *“disgraced”* nor will He be *“ashamed.”*²²³⁶ Now talk of an *“adversary,”* and one *“who will contend”* with the Servant leads us to consider not just earthly opposition in the world of men, but spiritual, in the form of Satan.²²³⁷ Our Saviour could confidently declare that:

*... the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.*²²³⁸

None could withstand the force and righteousness of the Saviour both in life and in His voluntary death. The rulers and adversaries of this world, energised and promoted by Satan and his wiles, will *“all grow old like a garment”* and will be devoured by the moth.²²³⁹ This is simply because they are fixed into this world's order and so are always subject to the curse of death and decay. Note that the Lord God is a very present help to the Servant because *“He is near.”* We can see this closeness expressed clearly in John's gospel:

2232 Matthew 5:39b-42.

2233 Matthew 10:25b,26a.

2234 Isaiah 50:8.

2235 Isaiah 50:7.

2236 Isaiah 50:7.

2237 Isaiah 50:8.

2238 John 14:30.

2239 Isaiah 50:9.

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And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.²²⁴⁰

And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.²²⁴¹

Such expressions relating to the help and care of the Servant lead us to be confident as friends of the Servant. If the Lord God helped the Saviour, and every indication of the events throughout the gospels proves this (especially in John), then what have we to be afraid of? We may be disgraced and ashamed within this world's view point, but as far as the truth is concerned we are never disgraced or ashamed. We must never be ashamed of the Lord's ways and His words, otherwise the Lord will be ashamed of us.²²⁴²

[3] Two alternatives: the fear of the Lord OR to lie down in torment. (Verses 10 and 11).

Having heard about the ministry of the Servant from His own experience in this world in verses 4 to 9, the section ends with the need for a response, and there are only two possible ones that can be taken. We either end up fearing the Lord, or we end up lying in torment.

50:10.

The words of verse 10 are extremely appealing and inviting. In the third question we are asked who amongst us recognises that they walk in darkness without any light to show the way? This is a graphic picture of life on earth without God. But such a question is preceded by two which drive the focus onto our relationship with the Lord. We are first asked – who “*fears the Lord*”? And this is then supplemented with another question which teaches us that the Lord and the Servant are of equal importance. If we fear the Lord, we must also obey “*the voice of the Servant.*” As Christ Himself stated:

He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him.²²⁴³

The Christian life is one of reverence. In fact all life has this quality. We revere that which we worship. Some may worship themselves but for the Christian, life can be summarised by this

2240 John 8:29.

2241 John 16:32.

2242 Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26.

2243 John 5:23.

Studies in Isaiah.

phrase: *“the fear of the Lord.”*²²⁴⁴ We hold the Lord God in the highest esteem possible. And this means that we honour the Servant by obeying His voice. Just as we fear the Lord, so also we must fear the Servant. Following on from the enquiring questions we then have an imperative statement. If we choose to fear the Lord God and obey the Servant's voice, this means we will also *“trust”* in the very character of God. This last clause is put in an interesting way. We are called to put trust in the Lord's character, but then we are told that we should: *“rely upon his God,”* by which is meant that we should trust in the God of the Servant! As the Son trusted the Father and obeyed His voice, we are to trust the Servant and thereby fear the Lord God.

50:11.

But then there is another option. If we do not fear the Lord, nor obey the voice of the Servant, nor rely or trust on God, then we are left to our own devices. The opening word of verse 11 *“look”* indicates an abrupt attention jolter. It has the force of “watch out”! If we do not trust in the Lord there is only one place to go and that is self-reliance.

Now self-reliance can take many forms. We may truly rely on self – we become self-made people. Or we may rely on another or some item, theme or ideal. Whatever it may be that we put our trust in, it actually ends up being self trust. We trust something because we value it and consider it worthy. But nothing is truly worthy of our trust except God. So here the point is that if we do not trust God then we will *“kindle a fire,”* or, in other words, we will make our own light and warmth, hence become self-reliant, self-justifying, and self-obsessed. It is significant that this self-generated fire is described as *“sparks”* which a person has made. This is not a blaze or a great fire by which one can light up the surrounding area, but mere sparks which are puffed out almost as they come into being. The light and warmth that man generates for himself are a pathetic spark or a mere blip which amounts to nothing.

The harrowing thing about this pathetic scenario is that if a person opts for this self-made route, relying on self-generated light to *“encircle”* themselves (i.e. to encompass their lives), then the Lord will confirm them in such a path. The last sentence is truly harrowing and it drives us to be certain concerning the path we take: fear God, or, build your own fire. For the one who ignites their own sparks the Lord will give from His own hand an end that is characterised by torment: *“you shall lie down in torment.”* By saying *“lie down”* the Lord is intimating the end of life, i.e. death. Those who kindle a fire and encircle themselves in self-made ideas will, when they die, suffer

²²⁴⁴ Job 28:28; Psalm 19:9 and etc.

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torment, the torment of hell. This is a place of pain, a place of grief, and a place of terror. It is diametrically opposed to heaven where no pain nor sorrow can be felt. With this we warn ourselves that if we become self-reliant and proud, refusing the help of God such that we humble ourselves under His gracious hand, we deserve nothing but the pain of desertion from the Lord.

Chapter 62.

Isaiah 51:1-8.

A Trinitarian call to a threefold outlook!

Textual analysis.

- 1 “Listen to Me,
you who follow after righteousness,
You who seek the Lord:
Look to the rock *from which* you were hewn,
And to the hole of the pit *from which* you were dug.
2 Look to Abraham your father,
And to Sarah *who* bore you;
For I called him alone,
And blessed him and increased him.”
3 For the Lord will comfort Zion,
He will comfort all her waste places;
He will make her wilderness like Eden,
And her desert like the garden of the Lord;
Joy and gladness will be found in it,
Thanksgiving and the voice of melody.
- 4 “Listen to Me,
My people;
And give ear to Me,
O My nation:
For law will proceed from Me,
And I will make My justice rest
As a light of the peoples.
5 My righteousness *is* near,
My salvation has gone forth,
And My arms will judge the peoples;
The **coastlands** will wait upon Me,
And on My arm they will trust.
6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
And look on the earth beneath.
For the heavens will vanish away like smoke,
The earth will grow old like a garment,
And those who dwell in it will die in like manner;
But My salvation will be forever,
And My righteousness will not be abolished.
- 7 “Listen to Me,
you who know righteousness,
You people in whose heart *is* My law:
Do not fear the reproach of men,

Studies in Isaiah.

Nor be afraid of their insults.

8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment,
And the worm will eat them like wool;
But My righteousness will be forever,
And My salvation from generation to generation.”

General considerations.

Like much of the book of Isaiah we find that each different section is both a self-contained message, but one which also moves towards a definite goal or aim. In chapter 51 we are moving towards a highlight in the Servant Songs of Isaiah 52:12-53:12. Here in Isaiah 51:1-8 we have a threefold call to a specific people to listen with intensity and take on a threefold set of perspectives. Whilst this part of Isaiah, (from chapter 40 onwards), interweaves references to the servants of God (Israel), the Servant of God (the Messiah), and the Gentile nations or coastlands (idol worshippers), here in Isaiah 51:1-8 there is a distinct change in the form of address used. Thus rather than it being “*Jacob*” or “*Israel*” that is being addressed, we have a more specific set of people referred to. The way in which these people are described leaves us with no uncertainty about what is meant by true faith in God. It is not just that these are the people of God descended from Jacob/Israel, but that these people are those who *truly* know the Lord.

We must start our consideration of this passage by noting that three times we have a call to “*listen*” or “*hear*” (verses 1,4,7), three times we have the people addressed (verses 1,4,7), and three times we have some new perspective to be adopted (verses 1,6,7). Furthermore, three times, for example, we read about God's salvation and righteousness (verses 5,6,8). It is clear from this arrangement that we are meant to recognise that the Holy Trinity is the one behind these words. This is always the teaching of the Bible, but to emphasise this we have the divine name YHWH three times in verses 1 and 3. The covenant keeping, self-existent God of the universe is addressing us here. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect harmony address a specific people concerning their outlook and perspective on things. How wonderful to know that all three persons in the Godhead are involved and concerned with us and our salvation! Anyone who sets Father against Son or centres on the Holy Spirit exclusively make a monster of their own invention!

It is also interesting to note the symmetry of this passage of Scripture (table 62.1). In this section we will look at these eight verses in a thematic way, commenting on verses under headings rather than in chronological sequence. Our headings are as follows:

Studies in Isaiah.

[1] Listen! (Isaiah 51:1,4,7).

[2] The true nature of faith. (Isaiah 51:1,4,7).

[3] A threefold perspective on life part 1 – LOOK BACK. (Isaiah 51:1-3).

[4] A threefold perspective on life part 2 – LOOK UP AND DOWN. (Isaiah 51:4-6).

[5] A threefold perspective on life part 3 – LOOK OUT. (Isaiah 51:7,8).

Table 62.1: The Trinitarian symmetry in Isaiah 51:1-8.

First call (Isaiah 51:1-3).	Second call (Isaiah 51:4-6).	Third call (Isaiah 51:7,8).
<i>The call to listen (v1)</i>	<i>The call to listen and give ear (v4)</i>	<i>The call to listen (v7)</i>
<i>The people addressed (v1)</i>	<i>The people addressed (v4)</i>	<i>The people addressed (v7)</i>
	<i>Reasons & promises (v4,5)</i>	
<i>First perspective to hold – LOOK BACK (v1,2)</i>	<i>Second perspective to hold – LOOK UP & DOWN (v6)</i>	<i>Third perspective to hold – LOOK OUT (v7)</i>
<i>Reasons & promises (v2,3)</i>	<i>Reasons & promises (v6)</i>	<i>Reasons & promises (v8)</i>

[1] Listen! (Isaiah 51:1,4,7).

I wonder if you have ever been in the situation where the need to listen carefully to instructions is so important that your very life depends on it? Imagine, for example, that you were in a building on the fifth floor which was on fire all beneath you. Out of the window a fireman approaches on an extended ladder, and as he draws near he issues some instructions for your safety. I feel confident that you would listen intently to him! Well here in Isaiah 51 we have three Hebrew words used to get this idea of paying attention across. One word is used in verses 1 and 7 and two others in verse 4. The one in verses 1 and 7 has the idea of listening in order to obey the instructions given. It includes the concept of comprehension or understanding. In verse 4 two words are used which have the idea of bending the ear, or having the ears pricked up, or of concentrating closely. Taken together the point is that we need to pay strict and close attention to this passage and to what the Lord is saying. It is quite astonishing that we are called to pay attention and to listen closely! After all when things are in our favour we have ready ears don't we? Sadly when the most important person to hear, and the most vital thing to pay heed to, comes along we are in desperate need to being aroused and awakened! The plain fact of the matter is that in an unregenerate state we are

Studies in Isaiah.

dead! Dead in trespasses and sins – Paul tells us.²²⁴⁵ Ah but here the address is given to believers so surely they will listen wont they? Sadly, even though believers are born again and alive to the Spirit of God, they too need to be roused and called to action. This passage teaches us that we must attend to what God is saying by taking stock and thinking carefully. The New Testament writers knew about this didn't they? Here are just two calls to pay attention:

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.²²⁴⁶

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.²²⁴⁷

But there are countless others from the Lord's call to “*watch*,” to Peter's call to bring to mind and remember, and including Paul's calls to consider.²²⁴⁸ It seems that the pull of this world, the harassment of the enemy, and the weight of sin, all conspire to deaden the message and so it is imperative that we rouse ourselves and awaken to what God has to say.

We can take great comfort, however, from the fact that when the Lord speaks, He does so with complete success. Think about how He calls people. Consider the call of Lazarus from the dead:

Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.”²²⁴⁹

The loud call Jesus issued was not to awaken Lazarus but to arouse those living! The Lord's call goes deep. Have you heard His call into your soul? Listen to Him! Once you have been roused and are now awake, it is imperative that you heed what the Lord has to say. How we need to awaken our souls and listen intently to all the Lord has to say! What does this mean? Well I wonder if you have a plan of study and prayer to know the Lord? Are you serious about this faith that you have and profess? Are you seeking the Lord? Are you planning how you will find out more and get to know God better? Are you considering how to live this Christian life?

2245 Ephesians 2:1f.

2246 1Peter 1:13.

2247 Hebrews 2:1.

2248 Mark 13:9,33,34,35,37; Romans 14:14; 2Timothy 2:7; Hebrews 3:1; 7:4; 10:24; 12:3; 2Peter 1:12,13,15; 3:1.

2249 John 11:43,44.

[2] The true nature of faith. (Isaiah 51:1,4,7).

We have already pointed out the truth that in this section we have a more detailed description of what it is to believe. It is not enough to be part of the nation of Israel, or to be descended from Jacob. Instead the triune Lord addresses the people in these three ways. First he describes them as those who *“follow after righteousness.”*²²⁵⁰ It may come as quite a shock that this inclination is so uppermost. Modern day Christianity focuses far more on the second designation – to *“seek the Lord”* – but the two descriptions are in fact synonymous. We are brought to consider that righteousness is vital. It immediately leads us to the ready recognition that all is not right with the world. How unrighteous is the world! How unrighteous are we! If we are true, we realise that we are at fault and we immediately want to find the “right” and the “good.” This attitude of seeking what is right and true is concomitant with seeking the Lord for He alone is right! If we seek the Lord, we are seeking righteousness, and if we are seeking what is right we must be seeking the Lord. Those who seek what is right and exclude the Lord Jesus are doomed to failure. But equally those who seek the Lord Jesus without seeking righteousness are equally destined for disaster. Thankfully we do not (and indeed cannot) seek a righteousness of our own making. If we are true, we know this cannot be because all about us is unrighteousness. But when we come to realise this we desperately need the right to come into view. And then we see Jesus who not only is pure righteousness, but has given His righteousness to us! Wonder of wonders! The apostle Paul makes it very clear that the righteousness of God is revealed to us apart from the law, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, and is appropriated only by faith in Christ.²²⁵¹ So a believer is characterised by this twin aspect of seeking – both the righteousness of God and God Himself!

In verse 7 we can see this idea of seeking the righteousness of God by seeking the Lord developed further. We are reminded that the Lord Jesus taught that the most important thing was to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness rather than to focus on the things of this world that we may need.²²⁵² But here in verse 7 we find that believers are characterised as those who know by experience the life of faith. These are those who know the righteousness of God – how good and perfect and true God really is – and this is coupled with the idea of having the law in the heart. Again we have a twofold or two-sided description. To know righteousness is to know God, for God alone is righteous. To know righteousness is to have the law in the heart. To have what God says and has said in the heart indicates a process. We are reminded of the patriarch Job who said:

2250 Isaiah 51:1.

2251 Romans 1:17; 3:21-26.

2252 Matthew 6:33.

Studies in Isaiah.

I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary *food*.²²⁵³

And we recall what the Psalmist said too:

Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.²²⁵⁴

But we are taught that the new birth, which involves the word of God, also yields the wonderful truth that those called of God get the word of God implanted in the soul:

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.²²⁵⁵

And here is the teaching we need to grasp. The word of God – the Lord Jesus and His word (the Bible) which is the only representation of Him we have – has been implanted in the soul as a seed. We need to water this seed by submitting to the Lord and by reading the Bible. In short we need to work out our salvation as Paul tells us.²²⁵⁶ Changing the image completely we need to unpack the treasures and delights of the great gift of treasure – the pearl of great price – we have received.²²⁵⁷ If we meditate on His word and work out what God has worked in, if we think with the Lord about His truth, and if we walk with the Lord through the history of His dealings with men, then we will know righteousness, we will know the Lord!

The final designation of true faith, which actually comes second in order, is a description which teaches our community nature. We are described by the Lord as those who are His people, and His nation (*“My people Mt nation”*).²²⁵⁸ Two key things are taught here. First we are brought to consider the whole concept of adoption. We are His people – we are in His family. The corporate nature of faith is here emphasised. We are now in His family and we have arrived there by adoption. We have not earned this right or status, but we have been brought in by faith. The second way in which this comes across is that we are the Lord's nation. Here we are brought into contact with the idea of the Kingdom of God. We are citizens of God's nation. We are under His rule. We are part of the heavenly country and not of this world. Now I know that we live in different

2253 Job 23:12.

2254 Psalm 119:11.

2255 James 1:21.

2256 Philippians 2:12.

2257 Matthew 13:45,46.

2258 Isaiah 51:4.

Studies in Isaiah.

countries with different customs and so on, but of far more importance and of much greater significance, is the fact that we are members of the heavenly city. The writer to the Hebrews and the apostle Peter speak eloquently on this theme. Here we have no permanent home and we look for the celestial city. Here we are pilgrims and sojourners like the patriarchs of old.²²⁵⁹ We do not, therefore, put down deep roots here in this world, but rather we lay up treasures in heaven.

[3] A threefold perspective on life part 1 – LOOK BACK. (Isaiah 51:1-3).

51:1,2.

It seemed sensible to consider the three calls to listen and the threefold designation of those whom God the Lord addressed first before we looked at the instructions that the Lord issued. In this first one we are instructed to look back. Let us remind ourselves of the Lord's words here:

Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you ..²²⁶⁰

Notice here that again we have a twofold instruction, with each part split into two again. In the first part we are called to look back:

to the rock *from which* you were hewn, and
to the hole of the pit *from which* you were dug

In the second part we are called to look back to two people. We are asked to look back:

to Abraham your father, and
to Sarah *who* bore you

Taking the first call to look “*to the rock*” and “*the hole of the pit*” we must ask the question: to what are these descriptions pointing? The key to this, I believe, is the phrase “*hole of the pit*” which is a singular one here, but the term “*pit*” signifies the grave in other Scriptures. Although the term

2259 Hebrews 11:13; 13:14; 1Peter 1:1; 2:11.

2260 Isaiah 51:1b,2a.

Studies in Isaiah.

can mean a cistern, it more usually refers to the grave.²²⁶¹ How does this fit in with the first part where we are brought to consider *“the rock from which you were hewn”*? There are two themes we can trace here. First we may obviously, and quite naturally, consider the *“rock”* theme as a metaphor for refuge, and in particular, for God as our refuge and strength. We may point to Daniel 2 for warrant along these lines:

34 You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. **35** Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.²²⁶²

The stone cut out without hands which destroys the governmental systems of this world and which grows to become a mountain, may indicate the concept of our being borne of the rock which is Christ and of being part of His ever growing Kingdom. However this idea does not seem to be the natural one taken alongside the idea of a grave as signified by the pit. The better idea would seem to be that of a quarry or of a building material. We are reminded of Adam's creation who, although not brought out of rock, was indeed made from the clay of the ground. Here we can see that our origin is inanimate and ordinary matter.

But there is a verse earlier in Isaiah which may cast some light on the reference:

*What have you here, and whom have you here, That you have hewn a sepulchre here,
As he who hews himself a sepulchre on high, Who carves a tomb for himself in a
rock?*²²⁶³

Although not conclusive, we find that Christ was buried in a tomb which was hewn out the rock.²²⁶⁴ So again we are being brought to consider the idea of origins from the place of death, the grave and from tombs. We can see there is a parallel in the next reference to Abraham and Sarah. Abraham the rock, and Sarah the hole of the pit indicating the womb. But it does seem to me that the essential reference is to our origin from inanimate earthly material and from death. Adam was created from the ground, and Eve from Adam's side when Adam was put to sleep (i.e. brought into a state which

2261 Psalm 28:1; 30:3; 40:2; 88:4,6; 143:7.

2262 Daniel 2:34,35.

2263 Isaiah 22:16.

2264 Matthew 27:60.

typifies death).²²⁶⁵ So the people of God are here being made to consider their origin from the material dust of the ground, and from death. What have we to offer? We are dead! We are dead in trespasses and sins and we can do nothing to change our lot. We did not bring about our entrance into this world and we cannot bring about our rebirth either.

So much for the first part found in verse 1, but what of the second? Many commentators subsume the first section under the second suggesting that Abraham is the rock, and that Sarah is the hole of the pit. I think that the two images are separate so that we are brought to consider a different aspect of our origins in verse 2. In this second part we are brought to look back to the start of Israel. Israel, of course, was the son of Abraham's son Isaac. With Abraham we have a new beginning. After the flood and after the debacle of the tower of Babel, the Lord called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and promised him a son.²²⁶⁶ It would take twenty-five years for the promise to be fulfilled when Abraham was 100 years old, but eventually in her old age Sarah bore Abraham a son, Isaac.²²⁶⁷

So in what sense were the people of Isaiah's time required to *"look to Abraham ... and to Sarah"*? Was it to rejoice in the fact that they were descendants of their father Abraham? In view of our Saviour's teaching on that it seems highly unlikely. You will recall that in John 8 there was some sharp disagreements between the Lord and the Jews. They claimed to be descended from Abraham and thought that as a consequence they were free from bondage.²²⁶⁸ The Saviour acknowledged their physical descent from Abraham but continued by telling them that they were spiritually connected to Satan!²²⁶⁹ In fact the Lord tells them that despite being descended from Abraham in the physical sense they did not really have Abraham as their spiritual father.²²⁷⁰ Rather they were of their *"father the devil."*²²⁷¹ So looking to Abraham must mean considering him in a spiritual sense. What then do we learn from Abraham? Well it would appear from the New Testament references that Abraham's faith is to be commended. Paul in Romans picks up the theme that Abraham in Genesis 15 believed God, and that such faith was accounted to him as righteousness.²²⁷² Paul also speaks of *"the faith of Abraham"* and then goes on to link this with the patriarch being *"the father of us all"* if we are of

2265 Genesis 2:21f.

2266 Acts 7:2-4; Genesis 12:1f etc.

2267 Genesis 21:5.

2268 John 8:33.

2269 John 8:37,39,44.

2270 John 8:39f.

2271 John 8:44.

2272 Romans 4:4; Genesis 15:6. See also Galatians 3:6.

Studies in Isaiah.

the same faith.²²⁷³ He puts it more decisively in Galatians where he states:

Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.²²⁷⁴

Now there is another sense in which Abraham should be looked to, and the apostle Paul brings this out from the history of Genesis very clearly. This is shown particularly in Galatians chapter 3 where we read:

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “and to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “and to your Seed,” who is Christ.²²⁷⁵

So then, they are to look to Abraham for the promised seed, the Messiah, who is foreshadowed and foretold in the son of promise, namely Isaac. The call to look ends in verse 2 with these words:

For I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him.²²⁷⁶

We note here that the call is issued personally. The Lord only called Abraham. It would be in him and His Seed that all the families would be blessed. In the same way the Lord calls individuals. He calls each person to trust in Him alone.

But then also they are to “*look to Sarah,*” and in this case we are also reminded that it was she “*who bore you.*” We are given an insight into Sarah's significance by the writer to the Hebrews who made this comment:

By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.²²⁷⁷

This commentary informs us that Sarah believed the Lord and, even though she was old and passed the age of child bearing, she allowed herself to become pregnant by Abraham. Imagine this! A woman who is old and passed the age of bearing children would also be much less agile to care and nurture a newborn. Sarah demonstrated her faith in the Lord by allowing herself to conceive. But the main point here is that the people to whom Isaiah was speaking and writing were to consider

2273 Romans 4:16.

2274 Galatians 3:7.

2275 Galatians 3:16.

2276 Isaiah 51:2.

2277 Hebrews 11:11.

Studies in Isaiah.

Sarah in the context of her giving birth to the son of promise. Hence the key point is that we look to Abraham with regard to faith, and we look to Sarah in connection with our birth. Since we are not to think of this in physical terms we can only look at these statements in spiritual terms. In other words we must consider faith and new birth as the two themes which define our origins. When a person is truly born again of the Spirit of God, humanly speaking this is observed as the operation of true faith. The Son of Promise is born by faith. Thus when a person looks to Christ in faith they are born again, and become united with Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. How vital it is for us to remember our true origins as Christians. We look to those like Abraham who have demonstrated faith in God, and we look to those like Sarah who have so trusted the Lord that they have given birth to the Son of Promise.

Taken together we discover that faith, and the fruit of that which has been conceived by promise from God are the things to be looked to. In other words true faith is that which gives birth to the Son of Promise. Here we can see the two sides of faith, namely trust and works. True faith does not simply remain in the mind as something affirmed, for it works out in action. Abraham and Sarah believed the Lord when He came and said that in one year's time Sarah would have a son.²²⁷⁸ The outcome of their faith in what God had promised to them in their old age was that Sarah had strength to conceive Isaac!

Our first section ends with some reasons issued for looking to our origins, and this is truly wonderful. True faith which works in bearing fruit does not just lead to many offspring, for it issues in much more besides. Abraham was blessed with an amazing increase in descendants (*“For I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him”*), which is recorded through the rest of Genesis and then in Exodus.²²⁷⁹ The same fruitfulness is seen when true faith operates.

51:3.

But verse 3 tells us that along with the increase in fruit by way of numbers, other blessings abound. These are all at the hand of the Lord! We discover first that the Lord will bring *“comfort”* to the people of God. He will comfort her in all her desolations and *“all her waste places.”* The idea is of bringing great sympathy and concern. Compassion. What a truth! We are reminded of Isaiah 40:1 where the Lord issues the call for comfort twice. This speaks of a reversal. Once when all was hopeless and desolate, now will be reversed and the first note that is heard is one of sorrow

²²⁷⁸ Compare Genesis 17:24; 18:10,14 when Abraham was 99 years old with Genesis 21:1-5 when he was 100 years old.

²²⁷⁹ Isaiah 51:2.

Studies in Isaiah.

and mourning for loss and desolation. When a child comes to grief the first thing we do is show sympathy and compassion, even as we gather them up in our arms and deal with their bruise or graze. Then next we learn that the Lord will take action. Having brought comfort and sympathy we need something to change, and what a promise is here! We discover that the Lord will put in place or will establish by way of setting aright what is presently *“her wilderness”* so that it will be *“like Eden.”* I feel that it is always important to attend carefully to the words the Holy Spirit uses. Notice that Eden is not restored – we can never go back to Eden. Instead the wilderness will be set aright and reconstituted so that it would be *like* Eden. In other words there will be some form of goodness and fruitfulness apparent. This idea is repeated and enhanced in the second statement which reads: *“and her desert like the garden of the Lord.”* This sentiment establishes the important point that what will be restored is the Lord's workplace. For such a thing to happen requires the Lord's presence as we can observe in Genesis 2, for there we note that the Lord acted as gardener and showed Adam how to live and work. In the same way the desert of the people of God will become the place where the Lord Himself will show them His works and will lead them in His mission.

Finally, we find that in looking to our true origins not only will a re-establishing of order and purpose result, but it will be accompanied by some beautiful characteristics. First we have the idea of *“joy and gladness.”* The Hebrew expressions seems to imply a great exulting happiness and mirth! We could say, in fact, that we have here an outburst and an abundance of happiness and glee! This joy and gladness is found only in what the Lord does for those who look carefully to where they have come from. This fact teaches us that we can never leave the cross. We were brought into the kingdom of God by what our Saviour the Lord Jesus did in dying in our place and rising to new life. God forbid that we should exult and glory in anything other than the atonement!²²⁸⁰ Alongside this exceeding glee comes thanksgiving. The idea behind the word is an extension of the hand. We can take this in two ways. First, as an expression of adoration and praise. Second, it could indicate a willingness to obey and serve. This is the true mark of the Lord's work and presence. Suddenly a person becomes immediately aware of just what the Lord has done for them, and they cannot but rejoice and burst with thankfulness! This is accompanied by the unstoppable and insatiable desire to pour forth praise in singing and music, No wonder that at the times when the church is most alive and close to the Lord there are new expressions of music and song. We may ask how fares the church in our day? Is it characterised by this incredible happiness and glee? Are we truly thankful? Are we eager to serve the Lord? Do we really know what the Lord has done to make us thankful

2280 Galatians 6:14: 1Corinthians 2:2.

Studies in Isaiah.

and in His eternal debt? Where are the outbursts of song and melody? The word for “*melody*” encompasses both music and song. Where are our Handels, Bachs and Haydns? Where are our song and hymn writers? Oh I know there are some here and there, but we seem not to be in a time of great exultation as was experienced in times past. Isaac Watts wrote over 6000 hymns! Some of these are still good for today but wouldn't it be wonderful if modern expressions of the same truths were in such abundance?

[4] *A threefold perspective on life part 2 – LOOK UP AND DOWN. (Isaiah 51:4-6).*

General comments.

In the second division of this section the arrangement is rather different (see table 62.1). After the call to “*listen*” and to “*give ear*” is issued in verse 4a, we have several reasons given first in verses 4b and 5, then we get the command to “*look*” at the start of verse 6, ending up with further reasons in the last part of verse 6. The instruction to look, then is sandwiched between a selection of reasons. We shall consider the command first and then discuss the reasons that act as envelopes afterwards.

Now I have titled this section “look up and down” because the instruction of verse 6 has a dual application. In one sense we must be focused on reality. We need to consider the heavens (space, stars, galaxies and so on) and this earth (the land, countries, the oceans) in its physical presentation because this universe is fallen, cursed and will be judged by fire.²²⁸¹ But then also we need to consider the heavens and the earth in their new future sense too, and this sense is suggested or hinted at by the reasons which come before and after the command. In other words our view point must be both realistic – look carefully at the world as it is now in its fallen state – and also hopeful – look to what the Lord will bring in the future (the new heavens and the new earth), Perhaps the main sense in the passage is in the destruction of this present sin-cursed world, but the future hope is one we must never let go of.

51:4.

The first reason for the people and nation to pay attention to the Lord and to listen carefully to Him is that “*law will proceed from*” the Lord. This reminds us of Isaiah 2:

2281 2Peter 3:10f.

Studies in Isaiah.

Many people shall come and say, “come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.²²⁸²

This passage, as we have noted, points to the New Testament age where the gospel has gone forth. Note that the law will still come forth from the Lord. We do not like to think in terms of law because we hate to be constrained. But it is imperative that we learn that the *only* truth and righteousness stems and comes from God. He alone is right. He alone is “*The Truth.*”²²⁸³ How we like to twist and alter truth! Such is happening at an alarming rate today, and amidst all the confusion and change where can people find stability and certainty? Only from the great “*Lawgiver*”!²²⁸⁴ This way of expressing what is uppermost for us to heed is important. We need truth, certainty, absoluteness, but we also need it applied to our current day. Truth never changes. However the expression and experience of the truths may need some care in application. This is not meant to excuse those who accommodate to cultural changes. If some say that it is fine to have new expressions of sexuality, for example, then they are not applying the truth in a new situation. No! They are merely swapping the truth for a lie. Rather what I mean by saying that the word “*law*” here indicates truth applied, is that sometimes the same truth which shines forth does so in a distinct way in one age different to another. We can illustrate this with respect to Bible history. If I were a true believer, with the faith of Abraham, living some time during the times of the prophets, it would be normal for me to offer a sacrifice. My faith will be in the One foreshadowed by this sacrifice, not in the actual sacrifice itself. But, of course, I do not live in those days, and so my faith is expressed in the Lord's atonement by taking the Lord's supper faithfully and living the way the Lord commands me. Taking a more modern example we could consider the expressions of faith given in certain eras. Many baptists adhere to the 1689 confession of faith. Such a statement was not written in a vacuum. It leant heavily on other contemporary confessions, and was also a document of its time. Those who compiled this treatise did not have to deal with many issues and difficulties we observe today. For instance, they were not faced with a denial of creation, they did not observe a fluidity in gender, and did not know the awful consequences of abortion and euthanasia. The doctrine of man as expressed in ancient confessions may not be sufficient as a vehicle for promoting the truth today. Today we need to be very clear that man is made in the image of God as male and

2282 Isaiah 2:3.

2283 John 14:6.

2284 Isaiah 33:22.

Studies in Isaiah.

female only, and that a spectrum of genders suggested by evolutionary thinking is wrong. Well these thoughts could be extended, and they ought to be considered carefully, but here is not the place to do it. Suffice to say that we need to heed the law of God today. We need to be on our knees and digging carefully in Scripture to give an answer to the people of today who so desperately need to heed the Lord and His great goodness.

The second reason for the people to hear carefully is that the Lord is about to make His *“justice rest as a light of the peoples.”* What does this expression mean? Well first we note the extension (frequently observed in Isaiah) from the nation of Israel to all peoples of the earth. The gospel was never meant simply for Israel. Israel were to be a beacon drawing all mankind in to a knowledge and love of God. The church of today is to be the same beacon of light to the world. How do we fare? I do not think well! Of course the Lord never fails and He will build His church to do His will, but that which is called “church” often fails to display the true likeness of Christ. So the expression indicates an expansive view covering the entire world for what the Lord intends, but what does the first part of this reason (*“I will make My justice rest”*) signify? Well I think we must understand by this that God's justice is true righteousness. His justice is true and absolutely so, because it comes from His being as the truth and as holy and pure. We are so swayed by the every changing standard of justice we observe in the world. It is God's standard of justice that we need to view. Now God's justice is said to *“rest”* but what is indicated by this? I think the implication is that the Lord's justice will be satisfied. The Lord's justice will not just be satisfied but it will be seen by all because it appears *“as a light of the peoples.”* Such a statement finds its resolution in the cross of Calvary. The Lord satisfied His just demands against sin by pouring forth His wrath on the Lord Jesus Christ who became sin for us. At that moment when the Lord Jesus cried in dereliction *“My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?”* God's justice was rested!²²⁸⁵

51:5.

Verse 5 begins the first appearance of three of the couplets which mentions the Lord's righteousness and His salvation. The other two occur in verse 6 in this section and then in verse 8 in the last section. Thus once again we have a trinity of references to the same themes which points us to the Trinity! Here in verse 5 we learn that the Lord's righteousness *“is near”* and that His salvation *“has gone forth.”* The connection between these two ideas is important. We may be tempted to consider that God in His righteousness is coming to bring justice and judgement and we

²²⁸⁵ Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.

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had better be very careful. However such an interpretation is not what these verses teach. What we have instead is the idea that the Lord is about to bring His salvation to the peoples and this requires that He also brings for us His righteousness – His imputed righteousness. Then next, we note that the Lord's *“arms will judge the peoples.”* Here again we might consider this to be a matter of final judgement, but then the last expression of verse 5 leads us in this other salvific direction. The *“coastlands”* (i.e. the distant lands reached by sea voyage), are going to *“wait”* on the Lord and will put their *“trust”* in the Lord's *“arm.”* How then do we take this expression *“My arms will judge the peoples”*? Well we can take it either to indicate that the Lord will bring right judgement in the sense of decision and guidance, or we could take it in the sense of union with the Servant. In other words, we have the idea that when Christ died on the cross all who would surely put their trust in Him are united with Him so that their sin is dealt with completely. The Lord judges the peoples' sin by judging the Servant who took their place. Either way, what we have here is a clear statement of the gospel. The Lord will judge and bring His justice to rest so that His justice will be fully satisfied and this means that His salvation will go forth for His righteousness will be given freely! We are drawn to put trust in the Lord and to wait wholly upon the Lord. Specifically we are lead to put trust on the Lord's *“arm.”* Why His arm? Well clearly it indicates the fact that God is able and fully powerful to do what He wills. Nothing is too hard for Him. However we also have in Scripture frequent reference to the *“arm of the Lord”* indicating a person, or, in truth, The Person (Christ Jesus).²²⁸⁶ We shall have reason to develop this idea a little later on in Isaiah, but for now we are brought to understand the great theme of the incarnation. The promises of God that His righteousness and salvation are near and will come to us are realised in the coming of the very arm of the Lord, i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ.

51:6.

Now the command in verse 6 to lift up our eyes and to look to the earth, comes to make, (as we have already noted), the distinction between an earthly view point and a heavenly one. But in verse 6 the prime significance is to consider the falling sin-sick earth and heavens. The first reason we must look at the universe (heavens above and earth beneath our feet) is that these are all temporary and wearing out. The heavens are depicted as *“smoke”* that is dissipating and hence disappearing. Thus it is not the eternal thing many may like to believe with their millions and billions of years. The heavens are, in point of fact, fragile. They will disappear just as smoke

²²⁸⁶ Psalm 98:1; Isaiah 40:10;

Studies in Isaiah.

spreads and vanishes. What a picture! This is far from the reliance on a universe which will go on and on and on. Then further we note that the earth is like an old garment. It will wear out! How amazing. This thought is something that is alien to modern minds, but it is all around us! Don't we experience the breaking down and the decaying of everything around us? Our bodies grow old and decay. Our cars, houses, possessions all get older and change. In the same way the earth, and, in fact, the entire universe, is wearing out. This is all because of the curse imposed on the universe by the Lord as a result of Adam and Eve's sin.²²⁸⁷ This growing old and decay doesn't just affect the material world, it affects all peoples too, for all who live on this *decaying cloth* we call the earth will *"in like manner"* die. Thus death is the essence of our current existence both physical and material.

But in stark and remarkable contrast, the Lord's salvation and righteousness will not partake of this decaying death! No! The lord's salvation endures *"forever,"* and the Lord's righteousness *"will not be abolished."* These are the only things that have the stamp and quality of eternity. Therefore it is imperative that the peoples become partakers of this righteousness and this salvation. Notice that this salvation and this righteousness both belong to the Lord, (*"My salvation" "My righteousness"*). Thus we are to look up and down so that we can distinguish between a universe that is decaying and will be destroyed, and the Lord's eternal salvation and righteousness. We like to think in terms of us and our state and condition, but the Lord speaks to us here about His eternal righteousness and salvation, and we are meant to come on board with this.

[5] A threefold perspective on life part 3 – LOOK OUT. (Isaiah 51:7,8).

51:7.

Now the last section does not actually contain an express command to "look." What we do find, however, is a repeated command not to be afraid, (*"do not fear" "nor be afraid"*). In particular the people were not to *"fear the reproach of men,"* and were not to be afraid *"of their insults."* Thus, the command effectively is to look out. Immediately we are brought to understand that those who follow the Lord in truth, who are given His salvation and righteousness, and who know the Lord, will face opposition and persecution. The world hates God. The world detests the Lord. Why so? Well all that the Lord says is true and pure, but the world has rejected His way by going its own way in self-reliance and trust. Consequently when the Lord speaks and opens His

²²⁸⁷ Genesis 3:17; Isaiah 24; Romans 8:22.

Studies in Isaiah.

heart to the world it shows up the error and futility of the ways of man. In his pride, man squirms and rebels. The people pour scorn on the things the people of God portray. They offer nothing but insult, reproach, and scorn. There will be those who repent and turn to the Lord as they hear the gospel, but there are always those who reject it and pour scorn upon the truth.

51:8.

At the end of this passage we are reminded of the reason why the people who trust the Lord should not be afraid or fear reproach. Again we learn that just as a garment decays through the destruction by the mouths of moths, so the people who offer insults will be eaten by worms. Such references lead us to the idea of hell's torment. It is pertinent to recall the Lord Jesus' words which are relevant to this particular passage:

19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.²²⁸⁸

These words capture the essence of what we have been studying in Isaiah 51. Where is our treasure? Where is our focus? Are we going to seek His salvation and righteousness or are we going to be subject to the decay and destruction of this world? A lifeline is offered! Grab hold of it! The section ends with a reaffirmation of the fact that the Lord's righteousness is eternal and that His salvation will go from "*generation to generation.*" This last thought reminds us that the Lord has His people in every generation. Those who are being saved are not simply those who have turned to Christ since the Saviour came, but those who have heard the Lord and have run to Him in repentance and faith from the very day when Adam and Eve sinned. We ought to pass on this wonderful salvation to the generations that follow!

2288 Matthew 6:19,20.

Chapter 63.

Isaiah 51:9-52:6.

A threefold call to awake!

Textual analysis.

9 Awake, awake,

put on strength, O arm of the Lord!

Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old.

Are You not *the arm* that cut Rahab apart, *and* wounded the serpent?

10 *Are* You not *the One* who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; that made the depths of the sea a road for the redeemed to cross over?

11 So the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

12 “I, *even I, am* He who comforts you.

Who *are* you that you should be afraid of a man *who* will die, and of the son of a man *who* will be made like grass?

13 And

you forget the Lord your Maker,

who stretched out the heavens

and laid the foundations of the earth;

you have feared continually every day

because of the fury of the oppressor, when *he has* prepared to destroy.

And

where *is* the fury of the oppressor? 14 The captive exile hastens, that he may be loosed, that he should not die in the pit, and that his bread should not fail.

15 But I *am* the Lord your God, who divided the sea whose waves roared— The Lord of hosts *is* His name.

16 And

I have put My words in your mouth;

I have covered you with the shadow of My hand,

that I may

plant the heavens,

lay the foundations of the earth,

and say to Zion,

‘You *are* My people.’”

17 Awake, awake!

Stand up, O Jerusalem,

you who have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury;

you have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling, *and* drained *it* out.

18 *There is* no one to guide her among all the sons she has brought forth;

nor is there any who takes her by the hand among all the sons she has brought up.

19 These two *things* have come to you; who will be sorry for you? — Desolation and destruction, famine and sword — By whom will I comfort you?

20 Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, like an antelope in a net; they are full of the fury of the

Studies in Isaiah.

Lord, the rebuke of your God.

21 Therefore please hear this, you afflicted, and drunk but not with wine. **22** Thus says your Lord, the Lord and your God, *who* pleads the cause of His people:

“see, I have taken out of your hand the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of My fury; you shall no longer drink it.

23 But I will put it into the hand of those who afflict you, who have said to you, ‘lie down, that we may walk over you.’ And you have laid your body like the ground, and as the street, for those who walk over.”

#52 1 Awake, awake!

Put on your strength, O Zion;

put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city!

For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall no longer come to you.

2 Shake yourself from the dust, arise; sit down, O Jerusalem!

Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion!

3 For thus says the Lord:

“you have sold yourselves for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.”

4 For thus says the Lord God:

“My people went down at first into Egypt to dwell there;

then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause.

5 Now therefore, what have I here,” says the Lord, “that My people are taken away for nothing?

Those who rule over them make them wail,” says the Lord,

“and My name *is* blasphemed continually every day.

6 Therefore My people shall know My name; therefore *they shall know* in that day that I *am* He who speaks: ‘behold, *it is I*.’”

In this section we have three pieces each headed with an exhortation to “*awake*” from slumber. In the first we have a call to the “*arm of the Lord*” to awake, who represents the Saviour (the Servant of the Lord), whilst in the second and third the call is to “*Jerusalem,*” and to “*Zion,*” representing the people of God.

[1] Awake Lord! A prayer answered! (Isaiah 51:9-16).

[a] The prayer. (Isaiah 51:9-11).

[b] The Lord's response. (Isaiah 51:12-16).

[i] Who are we? (Isaiah 51:12-14).

[ii] But God is the Lord. (Isaiah 51:15,16).

[2] Awake, awake O Jerusalem – the cup removed! (Isaiah 51:17-23).

[3] Awake, awake, O Zion – redeemed without money! (Isaiah 52:1-6).

[1] Awake Lord! A prayer answered! (Isaiah 51:9-16).

In this first piece we have a call to the Lord, (a prayer), in which the supplicant wants the Lord to awake and act as He has done in olden times (Isaiah 51:9-11), followed by the Lord's response (Isaiah 51:12-16).

[a] The prayer. (Isaiah 51:9-11).

51:9,10.

The supplicant appears to see the Lord as a sleeping warrior who needs to be aroused from slumber. It is reminiscent of the disciples calling the Lord Jesus to awake when they were on the Sea of Galilee:

22 Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out. **23** But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a wind storm came down on the lake, and they were filling *with water*, and were in jeopardy. **24** And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. **25** But He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and marvelled, saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"²²⁸⁹

The Lord God, of course does not sleep nor does He slumber.²²⁹⁰ But the Saviour did sleep! And so we have an indication of the Lord as the God-man. This is reinforced by the descriptive title "*arm of the Lord.*" This is the first time we come across this title, but not the first time we find the theme of the Lord's hand or arm bringing salvation.²²⁹¹ Thus in Exodus we read about the Lord bringing salvation with His "*outstretched arm,*" and by the "*greatness*" of His "*arm.*"²²⁹² This theme is also to be found in Numbers, Deuteronomy, 2Kings, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and John.²²⁹³ The last time we have this theme identifies Christ very clearly as "*the arm of the Lord.*" Even though the Saviour had done many miracles the people still did not believe and so John quotes Isaiah 53:1 as the prophetic word which accurately depicted this situation:

37 But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, **38** that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"²²⁹⁴

2289 Luke 8:22-25.

2290 Psalm 121:4.

2291 For a helpful overview of this theme see David Schrock's web article at:
<https://davidschrock.com/2017/12/13/the-arm-of-the-lord-from-moses-to-isaiah-to-christ/>

2292 Exodus 6:6; 15:16.

2293 Numbers 11:23; Deuteronomy 4:23; 5:15; 7:19; 11:2; 26:8; 2Kings 17:36; Psalm 98:1; Isaiah 30:30; 33:2; 40:10; 48:14; 51:5,9; 52:10; 53:1; 59:16; 62:8; 63:5,12; Jeremiah 32:17; Ezekiel 20:33; John 12:38.

2294 John 12:37,38.

Studies in Isaiah.

Thus we have a suppliant calling upon the Saviour (*“the arm of the Lord”*) to arise and do again what He did of olden times (*“as in the ancient days”* or *“the generations of old”*). The suppliant then calls to mind two specific incidents in the ancient history at the end of verse 9 and the beginning of verse 10. The first appears to be a general reference to many deliverances whilst the second homes in on the event which features often in Israel's history, namely, the Exodus.

The first recollection concerns *“Rahab.”*²²⁹⁵ Now this may arouse confusion in the mind because of the woman who helped the spies at Jericho.²²⁹⁶ Is this woman the focus here? It is to be noted that the name *“Rahab”* is also an epithet for Egypt. Its basic meaning is: “bluster,” “pride,” “boasting strength.” Our English Bibles give the same set of letters (Rahab) for both, but the two are very different as can be shown below looking at the Hebrew (table 63.1).

Table 63.1: The name “Rahab” in Scripture.

Identification	Hebrew	Transliteration	Meaning
Rahab who helped the spies in Jericho:	רַחַב	Rāḥāb or Rāchāb	To be or become large or wide — mostly of territory but also of fame, abilities, courage, trouble and so on.
Rahab as an insulting name for Egypt:	רַהַב	Rahab	To embolden or be haughty. Thus indicates fierceness, insolence, pride.

In Matthew chapter 1 we are given the genealogy of the Saviour. At verse 5 we are informed that it was the woman *Ῥαχαβ* who bore Boaz to Salmon. In most English Bibles this woman's name is given simply as *“Rahab,”* (although the AKJV has *“Rachab”*). The Greek name Matthew uses (*Ῥαχαβ*), transliterates to *“Rachab”* in English which corresponds to the English transliteration of the Hebrew name (רַחַב), that is, *Rāḥāb* or *Rāchāb*.²²⁹⁷ Thus we can be confident that the woman referred to by Matthew in Matthew 1:5 is none other than the *“Rahab”* of Joshua 2 (and following) who hid the Israelite spies. This same woman is also referred to in Hebrews 11:31 and in James 2:25. However in both of these cases the Greek name offered is: *Ῥααβ*, that is, without the letter *χ* (chi). In both instances the writers have made it clear that Rahab of Joshua 2 is meant, by identifying her as the woman who helped the spies. Perhaps the difficulty has arisen because of different conventions used to transliterate the Hebrew name, or maybe this latter version was a

²²⁹⁵ Isaiah 51:9.

²²⁹⁶ See Joshua 2:1f.

²²⁹⁷ The ā sounds identical to an ordinary 'a.' The bar above simply indicates that it is the Hebrew qamets form rather than a pathach form (with no bar).

Studies in Isaiah.

simpler shortened name. It is interesting to note that the letter χ (chi) sits in the middle of the name as Matthew translates it. Perhaps this is significant and indicative of her life transformed by the cross.

Well this woman Rahab (Rachab) who occupies a place in the ancestry of the Lord Jesus is not being referred to here in Isaiah 51:9. What we do have instead is a name used to speak both contemptuously of Egypt:

For the Egyptians shall help in vain and to no purpose. Therefore I have called her Rahab-Hem-Shebeth. [Literally: Rahab sits idle]²²⁹⁸

And then also of the great sea monster referred to elsewhere as "*Leviathan*," and also as a great "*Serpent*."

12 "He quieted the sea with His power, and by His understanding He shattered Rahab. 13 "By His breath the heavens are cleared; His hand has pierced the fleeing serpent. 14 "Behold, these are the fringes of His ways; and how faint a word we hear of Him! But His mighty thunder, who can understand?"²²⁹⁹

Leviathan represented a "wreathed animal" of gargantuan proportions. Often thought of as a "serpent," or as a "dragon," the name derives from a word which signifies entwining or being closely joined to another.²³⁰⁰ The description of Leviathan in Job helps us to understand this for there we read of a enormous sea-creature whose flesh were made from scales so tightly connected that not even air could come between them.²³⁰¹ Thus Rahab, Leviathan, and the Serpent were all depictions of the most fierce and ferocious of creatures exhibiting the greatest of pride and swagger. The term "*Leviathan*" tells us the type of creature and its impregnable structure, the name "*Rahab*" signifies this creature's pride and ferocity and the term "*Serpent*" suggests the origin and back-drop behind this creature.²³⁰² Before we continue it is necessary to point out again that these references are in no way dependent upon the ancient Near Eastern myths. The serpent of Genesis 3 is depicted

2298 Isaiah 30:7.

2299 Job 26:12-14, NASB. See also Psalm 89:10.

2300 See comments made at Isaiah 27:1f.

2301 Job 41:15-17. See also Psalm 87:4.

2302 See Genesis 3:1f. The English word "*serpent*" is a translation of three main words in Hebrew. The first comes from the idea of "hissing" and is linked to the word used for enchantments and whispering. This points us to the deceiving one – Satan. The second is often rendered as "*dragon*" and signifies some monstrous beast (i.e. a dinosaur). The third is often rendered as "*Seraph*" and indicates a type of winged beast with a fiery burning appearance.

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by the Lord in Job as Leviathan (the largest and fiercest animal on earth), and then also by the idea of a serpent with wings (a Seraph). Rahab signifies the character: pride. In short then the term *“Rahab”* as we find it here in Isaiah 51:9 signifies Egypt in pride and arrogance whose puppet-master is the devil or Satan.

Now our text appeals to the Lord (*“the arm of the Lord”*) as the One who had already *“cut Rahab apart”* and who had also *“wounded the serpent.”* The latter expression brings us straight back to Genesis 3:15 where we first read of the gospel. But how had this already happened? What event could be linked with the cutting into two of Egypt and the wounding of the serpent? In answer to this question we need to consider the summary statements reflecting on God's wondrous salvation acts to be found in Psalm 74:

12 For God *is* my King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. **13** You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters. **14** You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces, *and* gave him *as* food to the people inhabiting the wilderness. **15** You broke open the fountain and the flood; You dried up mighty rivers. **16** The day *is* Yours, the night also *is* Yours; You have prepared the light and the sun. **17** You have set all the borders of the earth; You have made summer and winter.²³⁰³

The Lord is a great deliverer who breaks the heads of monsters and those who oppose His ways. How many times has He judged the wicked and the monstrous whose ways are to follow Satan?

In verse 10 Isaiah continues with a direct reference to the Exodus where the Red Sea was made dry, so that the *“Redeemed”* could *“cross over,”* but in verse 9 the reference is more general and extensive and has reference to all the occasions where the Lord has delivered in times past.

51:11.

The petitioner and suppliant shows his aim in verse 11. Why is the Lord, (*“the arm of the Lord”*) not awake so that the ransomed can return? Where is the Lord now? The suppliant longs for a time when there is true repentance, linked with great joy, so that *“sorrow and sighing”* will *“flee away.”* Such a wonderful wish! Is this not our wish too? Have we not known times like this? The petitioner is right to plead to God for such a thing! It reminds us that we can be pushed to the very limits of faith. In remembering the olden days when the Lord brought His arm of salvation to bear and delivered the people from Egypt, our suppliant asks: where are you now Lord? Will the Lord

2303 Psalm 74:12-17.

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not “*awake*” and “*put on strength*”? Oh dear reader do you plead with the Lord for such help and aid both for yourself and those among whom you live? If not then you ought to!

[b] The Lord's response. (Isaiah 51:12-16).

After the prayer comes the answer from the Lord and what a response! We ought not to consider this response a rebuke, for it is quite the opposite, a great encouragement to the soul! There is structure in these five verses. First note that verses 12 and 15 begin with the Lord reminding us of His name and being. Then consider that we have two rhetorical questions posed by the Lord designed to stimulate thought (verses 12 and 14). Then finally note that whilst verses 12 and 13 focus on how the people behaved, verse 15 and following strike a great contrast telling us whom the Lord is and what He has done.

[i] Who are we? (Isaiah 51:12-14).

51:12a.

It is ever the case that a good start always begins with God. Never forget that the Bible itself opens with these words: “*In the beginning God ...*”²³⁰⁴ And so here the Lord leads us with a reminder of His nature and being. You will notice that in the NKJV we are using, that the words “*even*” and “*am*” are in italics indicating that they have been supplied by the translators. Literally the Hebrew reads like this: “*I, I, He who comforts you.*” The emphasis then is on the fact that the Lord is the self-existent One who gives meaning and life to all things. Our standard, our source, our “go-to,” our ground, sky and sun, the very reason we wake and do anything at all, is the Lord and nothing else! So what does the Lord do first as a matter of course here? He comforts us! How marvellous. We are drawn instantly to the truth that the Holy Spirit comes alongside to comfort us in our anxieties and sorrows and will strengthen us for the fight.

General comments.

Now at the end of verse 12 we find that the Lord asks a question. This is one of the Lord's main teaching methods. Some commentators and some translations include verse 13 as part of one long string of rhetorical questions. The NKJV which we will follow here has two questions at the beginning and end of this section, in the midst of which we find a couple of statements that

2304 Genesis 1:1.

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characterise the forgetful heart, along with further teaching (table 63.2). Having begun by reminding ourselves whom God is (and we ought to stop and contemplate His great majesty and beauty and then worship and praise Him!) it is quite natural for the Lord to remind us with this question about our human nature. The question points us back to our constitution – our very make-up. We may expand this in the following way: what type of person are you that you have fallen so far to become afraid of another human being who will vanish just as the grass withers and dies?

Table 63.2: Analysis of Isaiah 51:12-14.

Question 1:	12 Who <i>are</i> you that you should be afraid of a man <i>who</i> will die, and of the son of a man <i>who</i> will be made like grass?
Statement 1:	13 And you forget the Lord your Maker,
Teaching:	who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth;
Statement 2:	you have feared continually every day
Teaching:	because of the fury of the oppressor, when <i>he has</i> prepared to destroy.
Question 2:	And where <i>is</i> the fury of the oppressor?
Statement 3	14 The captive exile hastens, that he may be loosed, that he should not die in the pit, and that his bread should not fail.

This is a perennial problem amongst men, and its source is a lack of trust and belief in God. If we truly knew God, how ever could we fear another human being? I know that some are powerful and wield strength and power with great ferocity. I know that some are esteemed highly and have great reputations. I know that some can commandeer great swathes to follow them. All of these types we see around us in society today. The political leaders and the media gurus command power and strength and if you cross their ways and ideas you will suffer for it. It is becoming increasingly difficult to express godly principles in our country without being branded a bigot and an out of date dinosaur! But if we recognise that those who bluff and bluster with great pomp and show are mere men whose lives will fade and die as the grass and the flowers, then we will not be so afraid. More importantly, if we look into the Lord's great grace, mercy, and goodness, and get to know Him truly, what can man do or say that will make even an ounce of a difference? Let them do what they may, why worry? The sovereign Lord who comforts us owns all things and these mere men must give an account to the Lord on that last day.

51:13.

The first statement is a matter of great sorrow to the true believer but it is also something known in daily experience. How we forget the Lord! And how we forget that He is the Maker, the Creator, the One who made all things including our very own beings! We should never forget but we do! The truth is that we let slip and we do not recall and keep in remembrance the things we have received from the Lord. As a matter of course we ought to make every effort to bring to remembrance the things of God. Every professional knows that unless they practice and keep up with their profession, their skills and talents will rust away. The footballer or cricketer who forgets to practice will soon be dropped from the team. How vital then for the Christian soldier, athlete and farmer to renew his (or her) doctrines and truths so that the walk of faith and righteousness will be all that it was intended – a witness to the goodness and glory of God.

And then, how often have we come across this idea that man in his folly and weakness forgets that God is our Maker *“who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth.”* Why, Oh why, do people argue against these oft repeated truths in Scripture and offer false and noxious notions about how all things came to be? More sad and heartbreaking is the fact that many Christians opt for some form of compromise on God as Creator. Oh they wont go so far as to say that God is not the Creator, but by amalgamating thoughts with the world or by adopting the world's view of origins they effectively deny that God is the Creator. To put the matter bluntly – why do Christians accept any form of evolution and gradualism promoted by godless secular humanism? It is the height of wickedness that so many leaders and teachers in our day fail at this point, and I would ask the reader to stop listening to such people. Oh please do not misunderstand my call. I am not at all saying that I have got everything right – not a bit of it. What I am saying is that those who compromise at the very first page have given up on God. How else can we call it? If I were to set down on the very first page of my Opus Magnus something that you flatly contradict, what am I to make of your flattery concerning the latter pages?

The consequence of such compromise with regard to origins is more fear. People fear men and so compromise. Not many are willing to stand up and state unequivocally that God created all things 6,000 years ago in 6 days. It sounds so foolish amidst the mass of voices that say otherwise, with their great machines and telescopes, their Nobel prizes, and their prestigious centres of learning. How can we oppose all of that? Would we not appear to be foolish? Well yes of course we would, but what does it matter? I am not calling for any obscurantist declamation here. I do recognise the need to give reasons for the hope we have, but make no mistake we need to shout

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loudly and clearly the truth that God is Creator and not kowtow to the great and the worthy who command respect in our current world.

Note that by forgetting the Lord as Creator men end up fearing other men “*continually every day.*” This is the lot of those who have accepted evolution, such as signatories and contributors to BioLogos, for example.²³⁰⁵ Afraid of ridicule and loss of position, career, and opportunity, they must continue to follow the pronouncements and dictates of the world's so-called science. It appears to me that such who have opted for this course end up with not much at all. The world of science cares little for those who profess belief in God but compromise with evolution. What does it matter to the modern scientist? What have they gained by such compromise? Nothing! In fact those who lean towards modern science are double losers. They have not gained the respect they so eagerly seek. And they have renounced the truth in opting for the lie of evolution. Where are those who having forsaken the world, have taken up the challenge to truly seek the truth? Where are those who want to explore God's creation from a biblical creation perspective? Thank the Lord for those who do walk such paths!²³⁰⁶

Such fear of men comes not just from mere opposition to God, but from vocal, raucous, vitriolic, and excessive expressions of such. It never ceases to amaze how heated and almost violent is the response to one who expresses belief in creation. I do not mean to say that those who favour creation in 6 days some 6,000 years ago are saintly in their ways (but they ought to be). What I have observed, however, is the fact that those who oppose creation are always scathing, ridiculing, and contemptuous of believers. Their fury is open and obvious. Their aim is equally obvious – the obliteration of all who take such a biblical view.²³⁰⁷

But then the Lord concludes by asking His second question. For all their noise and bluster, their vitriol and hate, “*where is the fury of the oppressor*” who opposes the truth? What does it amount to? They may be able to hound us out of jobs and into obscurity. They may even be able to have us jailed and ridiculed publicly. They might even get to the point of putting us to death. But then what? For those who have been so horribly treated it will not just be a relief, but a great victory as they enter heaven's glory! What can man do to us except take our physical lives (which are

2305 BioLogos is a website initiated by Francis Collins who is famed for presiding over the Human Genome project. In his book *The Language of God*, he takes a theistic evolutionary stance. It is clear from his testimony that science (modern science) must come first.

2306 Organisation such as Answers in Genesis, Creation Ministries International and the Institute for Creation Research are just three of many other smaller concerns and individuals. May I ask dear reader that you offer these your support in prayer and giving?

2307 I write at a time where education is a fierce battleground. Modern scientists have been repeatedly insistent on their evolutionary view being the only acceptable one within science education.

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already under the death sentence anyway)? We ought to fear the One who having taken our physical lives has the right and power to cast our very souls into the fires of hell.²³⁰⁸

51:14.

Well in answer to this question the Lord points out that those who are captives will indeed be released. It is wonderful how the Lord expresses this here. The captive is released so that *“he should not die in the pit”*! This is a reference to the fires of hell that we have just made mention of! But true believers are those captive exiles who have been set free (*“loosed”*). They were once in bondage and captivity, but now on account of the Lord's work they have been released. Consequently they make speed to flee from their captive state (*“hastens”*), and are spared the eternal death in hell's fires. Do we recognise the narrow escape all true believers have made? Destined for destruction on account of sin and rebellion, the captive exile has been set free. It is no wonder that such an one *“hastens”*! We are enabled by God's grace to flee from the wrath that is coming. But there is also a third consequence to the hastening of the freed slave, and that is *“that his bread should not fail.”* This may seem a curious note to conclude on, but the point is that the captive has now found true sustenance. In captivity there is no guarantee that food will be available, but with the Lord's release there is always an abundance of the heavenly manna, even if the temporal supplies sometimes run low.

[ii] But God is the Lord. (Isaiah 51:15,16).

51:15.

Having looked at the unnecessary fear that man indulges in, we now turn to the great contrast signalled by the word *“but.”* Again we are reminded of the nature of God, but this time the reference to the Lord's being is made personal. He is *“I,”* therefore the self-existent One, but He is also *“the Lord **your** God,”* hence belonging to those who had feared. Is He **your** God too, dear reader? Now here the Lord points not to creation but to the great miracle at the Red Sea and the Exodus. All Israel knew the history. Hemmed in by the hills, the Red Sea, and the marauding Egyptians in hot pursuit, what were the fearful Israelites to do? Well the story can be read in the book of Exodus, but the main point is that the Lord opened the way by making a path through the Red Sea for all the millions of Israelites to pass through. In the text we get a glimpse of the

2308 Matthew 10:28.

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awesomeness of the situation. As the Israelites waited by the Red Sea the “*waves roared,*” indicating that it was no mere flat calm. Such a sight may have struck fear and terror into their hearts, but the Lord changed all that by His amazing act which made a way through. As if to enhance and reinforce the greatness of this act, the Lord then refers to Himself as “*the Lord of hosts,*” or the Lord who commands all armies.

51:16.

Then next in verse 16 we discover something rather wonderful. It may be that from verse 9f we have the prayer of Isaiah the prophet. However there is nothing specific to limit this to the prophet. The language seems to suggest a single person is here represented as petitioning the Lord to rise and act, but then we have a plural reference in verse 12 (“*who comfort you*”) and then also in verse 16 (“*My people*”). This is shown clearly in the AKJV where the old pronouns “*thou,*” “*thy,*” “*thee,*” have been used:

12 I, even I, am he that comforteth *you*: who *art thou*, that *thou* shouldest be afraid of a man *that* shall die, and of the son of man *which* shall be made *as* grass; **13** and forgettest the Lord *thy* maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where *is* the fury of the oppressor? **14** The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. **15** But I *am* the Lord *thy* God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: the Lord of hosts *is* his name. **16** And I have put my words in *thy* mouth, and I have covered *thee* in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, *thou art* my people.²³⁰⁹

What appears to be happening here is that the Lord addresses all people but uses a particular instance, a single person, as an example. This highlights the personal nature. The whole body is referenced, but each individual is reckoned as representative of the whole. So what does the Lord say here? Well there are two things that the Lord had done. First He had placed His own words in each true believer's mouth (“*I have put My words in your mouth*”)! Can this be so? Surely only the prophets have this promise? Is it the case that every believer has the words from God in their mouths? I think this is one of the great beauties and wonders of the New Testament church. It is not a collection of Prophets of the calibre and status of Isaiah or Jeremiah to whom the word of the

2309 Isaiah 51:12-16, AKJV.

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Lord came in an infallible way. Instead it is such that every believer now has ready access to the word so much so that it is in their very mouths. I think we can state this on the basis of the New Testament teaching from James and elsewhere. James wrote that we should:

*receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*²³¹⁰

The word of God is *"implanted"* within the soul. Every believer has this word within them when they are born again. However we need to *"receive with meekness"* this implanted word. In other words, we need to dig it out by digging into the word, the Bible. We do this in the power of the Spirit and with humility and meekness as James stresses. When this happens little by little the implanted word is a word on the mouth. Now there is more to this idea of the words of God being on our mouths. Chiefly the idea is that what we speak of is that which the Lord is interested in. Our conversation is godly. Instead of this world's frivolity and vanity, the believer has different lips which are consecrated by the word of God and become fitting to speak such things as revealed by the Lord of glory.

The second thing that the Lord has done is that He placed believers under His care and protection (*"I have covered you with the shadow of My hand"*). The hand of the Lord is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's hand, (Christ), stands before us so that we are protected by Him and thereby we stand in His shadow. How marvellous. We are protected by our Captain, our Pioneer – the Commander-in-Chief. Our conversation and speech is His conversation and speech. We are truly united with Him in being and behaviour.

Then, we are given three reasons for these two things which the Lord has done. The first two are really expressing one main idea, namely, the idea that now the Lord may bring about the new creation. In saying: *"that I may plant the heavens, lay the foundations of the earth,"* He really and truly means that He will thereby bring about a creation! Obviously the first creation came about simply at Gods' command (Christ the eternal Word being the agent). Now, however, we read that there is to be a further creation, which by implication, must be the new creation. The reason the Lord has placed His words in the believers' mouths (each one individually) and then protected them by going before them as a Pioneer, is so that they will be fit and ready for this new creation. The last reason given for these two things the Lord has done is that now such people will truly by God's people (*"and say to Zion 'you are My people.'"*).

²³¹⁰ James 1:21.

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[2] Awake, awake O Jerusalem – the cup removed! (Isaiah 51:17-23).

Having heard the prayer of one who called to the Lord to wake up because it appeared nothing was going on, we now have two further calls to awake but this time directed by the Lord to the church, to the people of Jerusalem and Zion.

In this first call the Lord announces that the cup of judgement is to be removed and that the Lord will plead the cause of His people because no one else within their courts and precincts was found able or capable to bring comfort.

51:17.

The passage begins with the command to *“stand up,”* (or rise up). Such indicates resurrection life. We are reminded of the Lord calling out to Lazarus who had been dead four days and who lay wrapped in grave clothes in a tomb, and then, all of a sudden, there he was alive at the opening of the tomb!²³¹¹ Jerusalem had been punished sorely at the hand of the Lord and had drunk down to the very bottom of the cup, draining it to completion. Now such language is prophetic because although the city of Jerusalem was indeed to be punished for her sins when Nebuchadnezzar was to come, in reality the city was left with a remnant and would later be rebuilt. Surely we ought to see in these words of verse 17 a clear description of the One who truly drank *“at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury”* to the point of utter completion, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ? Verse 17, taken in this way, is therefore a reference really to the resurrection of Christ preceded by His full and complete bearing of the wrath of God at Calvary. In that we (believers) are united with Christ, we too share in the resurrection as we have partaken in His death.

51:18,19.

Verses 18f speaks of the situation prior to that which we have read of in verse 17. Verse 17 is, in fact, the conclusion but it is put here at the start to show the certain outcome. Resurrection is assured because full atonement has been made. Jerusalem (typifying Christ) had taken the full force of the wrath of God and had drunk to the last drop the cup of His fury. But verse 18 takes a step backwards. Among the sons of Jerusalem that have come throughout the ages since she was at first the place of God's dwelling, there has been *“no one to guide her”* and none who could take *“her by the hand”* to lead her to peace. Instead two things have come and each is defined by two words. First there is, *“desolation and destruction.”* By these terms we are meant to understand that

²³¹¹ John 11:43,44.

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Jerusalem has suffered such violence as to be utterly broken, fractured and spoilt. Second we have *“famine and sword.”* By these terms we see that amongst the population there is no satisfaction, (only hunger), and there is no hope, (only death by the sword). Then we read these awful and haunting words: *“by whom will I comfort you?”* The answer has already been given – there was no one to guide or take her by the hand.

51:20.

Verse 20 is a graphic description of the those sons of Jerusalem who had become *“full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of your God.”* No one could do anything about the situation, all were under the condemnation of the Lord. That is the situation we all face. We have nothing we can bring to God, no offering, no reparation, no appeasement, no chance, and no hope before God. Given these clear truths, (and it is an immense shame that the modern world is yet to come to such a position), we are then treated to the great antidote and salve for such rebellion and sin.

51:21,22.

In verse 21 we have a rousing call to listen to what will follow, and in verse 22 what follows comes from the *“your Lord, the Lord and your God,”* signalling that the whole Trinity is involved, since we have three distinct references to God. How marvellous is the word that God now speaks! We do well to dwell a moment on these next stupendous words. None amongst the great sons of Jerusalem could be found and so instead it is the triune God *“who pleads the cause of His people.”*²³¹² Amazing. The people have fallen, failed, and forsaken God. Jerusalem stands condemned and under the judgement and fury of God. Yet despite all of this it is the Lord Himself who will represent the people! Here is grace! The city was staggering under the judgement of God and now comes the rescue. Then we read that in pleading the cause of the people the Lord Himself has removed from their hand *“the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup”* of His fury.²³¹³

51:23.

This cup is now to be placed into the hands of Jerusalem's oppressors. We may have expected something else here, but the point is that all humanity lies under the wrath of God for their rebellion. Jerusalem staggered under the just condemnation of God and so drank that cup of His

2312 Isaiah 51:22.

2313 Isaiah 51:22.

Studies in Isaiah.

fury, but now they were to be relieved from this burden and judgement. But those peoples and nations who had opposed, afflicted, and trodden down the people of God were going to suffer themselves. They too will drink the cup of the Lord's great fury. It is not that these oppressors do not deserve such. It isn't that they have stood idly by and now somehow (unfairly) the Lord is removing the cup of judgement from Jerusalem to place it on her opponents. No! These opponents have their just deserts. The fact that the Lord has removed the cup of judgment from those who receive His grace does not excuse those who reject such grace from the judgement to come.

[3] Awake, awake, O Zion – redeemed without money! (Isaiah 52:1-6).

52:1.

In this third and final call to rise and awake, the call comes once again to the people ("*Zion*" and "*Jerusalem*"). This time the call is to get dressed! Zion was to dress herself in "*strength*" and Jerusalem is called to put on her "*beautiful garments.*" Having the cup of judgement removed is one thing, here the other side is presented. The removal of judgement for sin requires also the covering of nakedness by strength and the appropriate apparel, i.e. the righteousness of Christ. This passage speaks much about the fruits and blessings of salvation. Apart from the new dress, there is the promise that "*the uncircumcised and the unclean shall no longer come*" to them. What does this indicate? Well it does not mean that peoples from foreign lands will not come. What it indicates is that those who do come will, in fact, be the (truly) circumcised and clean ones. In other words, the Lord will bring to Jerusalem such as are being saved. The church, the people of God, will no longer be a mixed multitude with believers and unbelievers sharing the same streets and houses. The nation of Israel (and then Judah and Israel as separate entities) were always hampered by this admixture. There were those Israelites who mixed their adherence to the national identity with faith, and there were those who were simply Israelites by birth and their lives were untouched by the peripheral things. The church of Jesus Christ ought to be pure, and there is every reason to make it so because the Lord instructs us in no uncertain terms to ensure that it is pure. We are to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, for example, not to mention the exhortations concerning church discipline and not associating with those who are unruly.²³¹⁴

²³¹⁴ Ephesians 4:3; 2Thessalonians 3:6;

52:2.

In verse 2 we have an exhortation to remove the dust and grime of this world by shaking ourselves. We do live in an ungodly world, and it is inevitable that the dust of this world (cursed) will cling to us. That is why we need to be cleansed. I am reminded once again of the Lord washing the disciples feet and exhorting us to do likewise in John 13. We ought not just to shake the dust from our beautiful raiment, but also encourage one another as we walk this earth. After all, would you not point out to someone who has some dirt on their jacket of the case? Or would you not tell another who has a smudge of dirt on their cheek? I am sure, if you have any love or grace, you would kindly point it out and remedy their appearance. In the same way we ought to shake the world's dross and dirt from the folds and creases of our clothes. Following this exhortation we are then again told to *“arise,”* and then to *“sit down.”* Taking these along with the injunction to remove the dust we can see the great teaching of our salvation. We ought to repent, casting off the sin of the world, then arise and live in the newness of resurrection life, and having done that we will have peace being enabled to sit down.

The last exhortation is a different expression put for the first, or, if you will, another facet of the first. We are to shake the dust from us and loose the neck from its former bonds (*“loose yourself from the bonds of your neck”*). This expression shows that in the gospel the yoke of sin is broken but often we fail to take it off and throw it down. The Lord in His wonderful provision had taken the burden of sin and loosed the captive from the dungeons, but sometimes the freed captive wears their broken bonds as forgotten adornments. Shake off the dust, loose the former bonds!

52:3.

There next follows a bit of history in which the people are reminded of their folly. They had sold themselves for no profit. Isn't that always the case with sin and the independent (rebellious) life? We think we can walk and live freely as we determine, with no say from anyone else, and we think that we are masters of our own fate. Oh we may suffer advice and get help from all sorts, but life (so modern man assumes) is ours for the living. Who would say otherwise? Who would argue with this? And yet in our individual paths (guided by peers and those we may trust) have we not sold ourselves for no profit or benefit whatsoever? The Lord Jesus, our Saviour, made this point very clearly as He was calling people to leave their lives and to take up their cross to follow Him. It is probable that He was calling attention to the teaching found in Ecclesiastes.²³¹⁵

2315 Ecclesiastes 1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:9,11,16.

Studies in Isaiah.

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?²³¹⁶

To whom do we give our souls? Such a question may seem curious but it is a vital one. We perhaps do not realise that our souls are very precious and they need looking after and offering. Think of it like this. Mankind was made in the image of God. When God made mankind He made them male and female. Eve was created for Adam. This is not to say that she was created for Adam's use but that the two were created so that they could each give themselves to another. In that mankind was created in the image of God, our human experience is a reflection of that of the Trinity. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, and each adore the Holy Spirit. But to whom do we give ourselves? Often, I fear, it is to self. Sometimes it is to another and one who has no interest in God, the truth or righteousness. Sometimes it is to an ideal, or a theory, or a dream. By giving ourselves to such things we are effectively selling our souls. The benefits we reap are vacuous. There may be immediate titillations, but ultimately it is all for nothing. And so the Lord will redeem without price or money.

52:4,5.

Verse 4 opens with the statement *“thus says the Lord God,”* by which we understand that what follows is utterly true. The first thing we hear from the Lord is a reference to some of the history. But before we consider this it is noteworthy that the Lord refers specifically to the nation as *“My people”* on three occasions, the first of which comes here in verse 4.²³¹⁷ By this designation we learn of the Lord's concern and love for them, for in saying that they are *“My people,”* He identifies closely with them.

And thus we read of the two main enemies of the people of God referred to here, namely the Egyptians and the Assyrians. When the Egyptians or the Assyrians rule the consequences are dire. Both stand for this world. Both are of different character, but ultimately they ape the type of lifestyle and aim that Nimrod developed in Genesis 11:1f at the tower of Babel. Such worldly systems provide a religion – the current one to which all are being enforced to follow is secular humanism – and they provide a system of government, protection, technology and so on. It may all seem pretty much fine in many people's eyes. Life is lived under these watchers and many coast along weaving their own path under the authority's gaze. But the Christian is not of this world. The

²³¹⁶ Matthew 16:26.

²³¹⁷ See also Isaiah 52:5,6.

Studies in Isaiah.

kingdom of which we are citizens has no dealings with this world. Yes, we eat and work and breathe amongst the world and its systems, but our passports are given by the Lord. Israel of old were given the opportunity to be in God's kingdom and some (the remnant) gladly accepted the offer, but the nation forsook their privilege and instead they went *“down”* into Egypt to live. That is ever the case. Forsaking God leads to a downward descent. After this the *“Assyrian oppressed”* the nation.²³¹⁸ The outcome? The people were taken away at no cost and ended up wailing at the hand of their oppressors.²³¹⁹ But far worse than this terror is the blasphemy that is poured upon the name of the Lord.²³²⁰ I wonder if we truly realise that God identifies with us? If we fail and turn and go down to Egypt (the world and its ways or system) we end up allowing the very name of Christ to be blasphemed. This has happened and is even happening now. When Christ's people give up on the word and accept evolution, or when the people of God acquiesce and accept godless behaviour as the norm, or when the business world and its principles govern the running of our churches, the name of God is blasphemed.

52:6.

But the Lord will redeem without money or price! The words of this verse give us two *“therefore”* statements as follows:

My people shall know My name.

they shall know in that day that I *am* He who speaks: ‘behold, *it is I*.’

And when the Lord brings redemption, the people will truly know the character (the *“Name”*) of God. He alone is Yahweh, the One who has the right to determine what is good. He alone is the only one capable of saying what is right, good, and true. We show by our current state how flimsy is our grasp of truth and righteousness, but when a person is redeemed and rescued from themselves, from their idols, and from their aimless life, they will know that the Lord is the only One with a reputation and a name worth considering. But apart from knowing the Lord and His character, they will also know that it is *“He who speaks.”* This idea is emphasised by addition of the words *“behold it is I.”* There is thus tremendous assurance concerning the veracity and truth of the Bible.

2318 Isaiah 52:4.

2319 Isaiah 52:5.

2320 Isaiah 52:5.

Chapter 64.

Isaiah 52:7-12.

In preparation for the coming Servant!

Textual analysis.

7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him
 who brings good news,
 who proclaims peace,
 who brings glad tidings of good *things*,
 who proclaims salvation,
 who says to Zion,
 “your God reigns!”

8 Your watchmen shall lift up *their* voices, with their voices they shall sing together;
 for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion.

9 Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem!

 For the Lord has comforted His people,
 He has redeemed Jerusalem.

 10 The Lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the
 salvation of our God.

11 Depart! Depart! Go out from there, touch no unclean *thing*; go out from the midst of her, be clean, you who bear the
vessels of the Lord.

 12 For you shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel
 will be your rear guard.

We have just been treated to a trilogy of rousing exhortations in which we learned that the Lord does not slumber, nor sleep, even though we may think He appears to, and in which we have heard the call to rise up and grasp hold of the redemption that the Lord, who has pleaded the cause of His people, has provided. Now we are brought to a piece which acts as a fitting preparation to the Servant Song in which we see our Messiah in all His glory. All the way through Isaiah we are offered the way of salvation. Sometimes we are given one picture pointing the way, and then at other times the main features are different, but all the while the same thread runs through all. We are now approaching, perhaps, the pinnacle of revelation in Isaiah 52:12-53:12, but before we scale the heights of that mountain we are offered an introduction to it by way of preparation.

There are three important parts to this little section as follows:

Studies in Isaiah.

[1] The gospel announced is beautiful. (Isaiah 52:7).

[2] The gospel stated deserves rejoicing in. (Isaiah 52:8,9).

[3] The gospel followed requires action and obedience. (Isaiah 52:10-12).

[1] The gospel announced is beautiful. (Isaiah 52:7).

52:7.

The message we proclaim, and which forms the essence of Scripture, is most often referred to by Christian people as “the gospel.” Now this is described for us in verse 7 by a single term which is rendered in the NKJV by two phrases “*good news*,” and “*glad tidings*.” It is also described as having four essential components, which are, “*peace*,” “*good things*,” “*salvation*,” and in the phrase “*your God reigns*,” or, in other words, the sovereign rule of God.

The passage starts with a declaration that the very feet of the one who carries this gospel are “*beautiful*.” The Hebrew word used really means “at home,” or, in other words, “fitting, perfect, comfortable and in the right place.” Thus the bringing of the gospel to the world (“*upon the mountains*”), which may feel awkward and difficult, is, in point of fact, actually very fitting and perfect, so that the word “*beautiful*” sums up this idea well because it is in opposition to all that is ugly or “not at home” and “unfitting” or “awkward.” The “*mountains*” represent all the lofty peaks of the world. Essentially it depicts the idea of one who has to cross great places to get to all corners of the world, but it also represents individual people, or people groups and kingdoms, in their pride. In Isaiah 2:2 we are reminded that the

... the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains,
and shall be exalted above the hills.

Later in the same chapter we read that all that is lofty including the great mountains will be brought low at the terror of the Lord's return.²³²¹ Thus this one who brings the good news to all the world in its pride is truly “*beautiful*” and fitting. We should never be ashamed of the gospel! It is the greatest news ever to be told and it is the most wonderful of truths to behold.

I have attempted a translation of this verse to depict the symmetry of the words employed. I have kept those words which are repeated in the Hebrew as the same in English. I show this below with the ESV rendering for comparison in table 64.1.

2321 Isaiah 2:12,14,19.

Studies in Isaiah.

Table 64.1: Translation of Isaiah 52:7.

My translation	ESV
How beautiful (at home) upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news , who <i>cause to hear</i> peace, who brings good news of good who <i>cause to hear</i> salvation who says to Zion “Your God reigns.”	How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news , who <i>publishes</i> peace, who brings good news of happiness, who <i>publishes</i> salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

Thus the phrases, “*good news*,” and “*cause to hear*,” (or “*proclaims*” in the NKJV or “*publishes*” in the ESV), both occur twice. The basic idea behind the Hebrew word rendered as “*good news*” is actually fullness, freshness, and joy. It does not just mean news or a report, but joyous news which brings with it something wholesome or that which is full. The second time this phrase appears, the concept of “goodness” is reinforced for it is “*good news of good*.” The ESV suggests “*happiness*” for this word, but I have left the word as it is usually translated to convey the idea of the gospel being substantial. The word “*good*” is that word which we find repeated 7 times in Genesis 1 to depict a perfect, un-fallen and sinless world.²³²² This good news, or gospel, points us back to creation and thence forward to the new creation because it is a gospel which can truly be described as “*good*.”

The second word which occurs twice is “*proclaims*” which the ESV renders as “*publishes*.” Now this word in its basic form signifies to hear with intelligence. The form of the verb is a 'Hiphil' which signifies a causative mood. Thus the idea is to cause people to hear with intelligence, hence to proclaim openly or to publish. Now the two options provided by the NKJV and the ESV do not necessarily indicate the idea of making people understand or making the message plain. However the essential point here is that gospel preachers have a duty to be heard, that is, they have a duty to make the gospel plainly understood.

Apart from the “*good news*” being good and pointing us to new creation, there are three key aspects we are informed of. These are

- [1] Peace.
- [2] Salvation.
- [3] The rule or reign of God.

²³²² Genesis 1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31.

Studies in Isaiah.

Peace! The Hebrew concept of peace means much more than the absence of noise. It signifies a wholesome well-being. With regard to the gospel the key point is that the enmity between us and God is now removed. As the apostle Paul wrote:

14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, **15** having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, **16** and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. **17** And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.²³²³

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.²³²⁴

This is the great fruit of the gospel. The world hardly realises that the condemnation of God, His righteous wrath against all that is evil, rests squarely on every man, woman and child who has yet to bend the knee in submission to God. But there can only be “*no condemnation*” for those:

... who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.²³²⁵

How the world clamours for peace! How it seeks peace in earnest but a peace which papers over the cracks and whitewashes the rottenness it seeks to hide. When governments make accords and treaties what peace is the result? I am all for nations being at peace, but these flimsy agreements do not bring the true peace required that only God can bring through Christ and His death on the cross.

Then further we read of “*salvation*.” This word is related to the name “*Joshua*,” which is the Hebrew equivalent of the name “*Jesus*” in the New Testament. Thus salvation points us to Christ Jesus who was so named because He is the only One who can save His people from their sins.²³²⁶ We are thinking, of course, primarily of deliverance and rescue from a disastrous condition. Sin, rebellion, and evil are all states of the human race which render them dead to God. The only way to bring revival is through Christ's substitutionary atonement. He took our sins and paid the price for them – His death. And then we gain His righteousness in return no longer to continue in the path of sin.

2323 Ephesians 2:14-17.

2324 Romans 5:1.

2325 Romans 8:1.

2326 Matthew 1:21.

Studies in Isaiah.

This brings us to the last theme, namely, the rule or reign of God. The text, of course, puts it as a declaration saying “*your God reigns,*” and thus we are lead to consider the universal reign of the risen Lord, For our purposes individually this means we are under the ownership and rule of the Lord.

The good news is truly good and substantial for it ushers in the new creation. It brings true peace and reconciliation with God from whom our estrangement has wrought such havoc and mayhem in our lives. The good news is a rescue and deliverance from all sin and evil, and it brings in a restored relationship with our true ruler and king, Jesus! Why would we want to be ruled and governed by anyone else? Can we ourselves match the grace, glory, and goodness of God in Christ? Perish the thought! We know it isn't true. Can anyone measure up to the beauty, the truth, the wholesomeness, the wonder, the glory of God in Christ? Again discard such a notion! The good news is that things are not just 'restored to factory settings,' but made wholly new. We have a better relationship with the God of all things, and His perfect rule and reign will be our life, health and happiness.

[2] The gospel stated deserves rejoicing in. (Isaiah 52:8,9).

Now that we have had the gospel described to us, or defined if you like, it is time to worship! Actually, for true believers, it is not possible to take these thoughts upon our hearts and contemplate them in our minds without rising in worship. That one who considers these things only in an intellectual sense will fall and flounder. Whenever we come to the Bible our attitude ought to be that of the apostle who stated that

... the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.²³²⁷

Our motivation, then, ought to be that as we read and study, as we dig deeply into the word, we should find that our love for Christ, our love for the Father and the Holy Spirit would increase greatly, and that our experience of God by faith would deepen.

52:8.

The text begins with mention of the “*watchmen.*” Who are signified by this term? These are the ones who strain forward and seek to observe what is to come. They are the sentries posted on

²³²⁷ 1Timothy 1:5, NASB.

Studies in Isaiah.

the high towers and walls waiting for news, either good (the coming of the rains for a bountiful harvest), or bad (signs of an invading army). Here, because the one coming bears good news the watchmen are brought to rejoice. How then do they respond? We read that the watchmen of the city will:

- [1] Lift up their voices to sing.
- [2] Sing in unison with one voice.
- [3] Shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion.

Now the last phrase has been translated rather differently by other translations:

Table 64.2: Various translations of Isaiah 52:8b.

NKJV	AKJV	ESV	NASB	YLT	RSV
For they shall see eye to eye	For they shall see eye to eye,	For eye to eye they see	For they will see with their own eyes	Because eye to eye they see,	For eye to eye they see
when the Lord brings back Zion.	when the Lord shall bring again Zion.	the return of the Lord to Zion.	when the Lord restores Zion.	in Jehovah's turning back [to] Zion.	the return of the Lord to Zion.

The first part of this phrase actually should be rendered literally as follows: “eye with eye.” The idea being that both eyes are working together to see, rather than just taking a one-eyed view or looking out of the corner of one eye. Taken in this way the meaning is that it is “plain sight,” or, “to see plainly.” The NASB seems to be the best rendering for this part of the verse.

The second part of the phrase is a little more difficult. As can be seen from the various renditions there are two options:

- [1] The Lord restores Zion or brings Zion back. [NKJV, AKJV, NASB].
- [2] The Lord comes back or returns to Zion. [ESV, YLT, RSV].

Literally we have: “to return – the Lord – Zion.” The Lord is clearly the main focus. Whatever is happening it is the Lord doing it. We could then render these words thus: “the Lord – to return – Zion.” What then does this signify? Does it tell us that the Lord is returning Zion or does it tell us that He is returning **to** Zion? Since it is ambiguous we would be best to leave the ambiguity. If the

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Lord returns to Zion this actually amounts to the restoration of Zion, or the restoring/returning of Zion's fortunes.

So then what do we have here? First the watchmen, the ones posted to warn of impending doom, raise their voices in rejoicing. Having seen the bearer of good news traversing the mountains, and having heard the content of this good news why would we not rejoice? But note that these watchmen sing in unison! Harmony. The gospel brings great unity and harmony in true worship. Have you ever been in a fellowship or church where true believers gather and rejoice in unison? Their singing may not merit comment from the greatest exponents of the voice, but the sound is wonderful to behold. When believers pour out their praise together in unison it is a truly wonderful thing to a part of. And then we have this last rather ambiguous phrase. The watchmen see “eye with eye,” that is, with both eyes plainly, and so very clearly, that the Lord Himself is returning to Zion and in that return comes the restoration of the city. What a wonderful gospel!

52:9,10.

Then in verse 9 there is a command for the singing to continue, but this time it is not the watchmen on the towers, but “*waste places*” which are called on. What is the meaning? Well clearly from the tops and heights of the city to the depths and lowly places, and from the respected and revered or honoured, to the base and despised – all are to sing in unison. It matters little who you are. If you are a member of the new Zion, whether low-born or high, whether you have repute or are of no value in the world, all will sing joyfully in unison! There then follows three reasons:

[1] The Lord has comforted His people.

[2] He has redeemed Jerusalem.

[3} The Lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all nations ...

First, the Lord brings comfort and so strength. We cannot but think of the work of the Holy Spirit, the one who comforts, and then also of the God who is described by Paul as “*the God of all comfort.*”²³²⁸ What compassion! What strength! Are we in a sorry state, languishing in despair, sick, lonely, destitute? The Lord is the only One who can truly bring comfort to energise the soul and restore to life, health, and peace. Not only has the Lord brought comfort and succour but He has made things right. Once sold into sin and slavery by our own rebellious ways, the Lord has now

2328 2Corinthians 1:3.

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bought us back. We are redeemed. A ransom price has been paid for us and now we are His! How has He done this? Our third cause for worship centres on the very means by which the Lord has brought comfort and has redeemed us. Thus, His *“holy arm”* is another reference to the Lord Jesus, our Saviour.²³²⁹ Salvation was brought about by the Trinity working in unison, but as far as the human aspect is concerned, the coming of the Saviour into the world and His offering up of Himself in life and in death as a fitting substitute and perfect atoning sacrifice is what has secured salvation for the many. This was not done in secret but publicly. As the apostle Paul puts it:

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*²³³⁰

Think of the facts concerning the Saviour's life, ministry, and death. He openly preached both in the open places as well as the temple. There were many times that He preached when the crowds were so large that He had to get in a boat or set Himself on the top of a hill. The Romans observed Him, Herod wanted to know something about Him, the Pharisees couldn't but see His work, and the ordinary people flocked to hear Him. In His trials and His death the public were ever present. They called for His crucifixion in exchange for Barabbas the insurrectionist. All was done openly for every man to see. The texts of Scripture were written faithfully recording these events and were copied copiously so that the early church had ready access to these things. And all throughout the world to this day the story (the history) of Christ and His work of redemption has been openly declared so that all may hear and rejoice in it. This is still our task to ensure that *“all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”*²³³¹ Now many reply with scepticism saying: 'how can anyone see what has gone in time past'? After all it is 2,000 years since Christ died! But how faithless! How can we not see it when we open the Scriptures and the living word jumps out at us and speaks as-it-were the very words of God. The Saviour rebuked the Sadducees for their lack of faith concerning spiritual things and He remonstrated with them concerning the occasion of Moses' meeting with the Lord at the burning bush:

*But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying.*²³³²

2329 Isaiah 52:10.

2330 Romans 5:8.

2331 Isaiah 52:10.

2332 Matthew 22:31.

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What the Sadducees could read in Exodus written 1500 years earlier is that which was “*spoken to*” them “*by God*” in their day! In other words, reading Scripture amounts to hearing God actually speak. We can say this with confidence for many reasons, but perhaps one to grasp hold of is that when God speaks He never needs to change His mind, and He never needs to draw back His words to alter them in any way. Once spoken the words of God will overtake not just men but the prophets too.²³³³

[3] The gospel followed requires action and obedience. (Isaiah 52:11,12).

52:11.

The gospel has come. The gospel has been preached. The gospel has been demonstrated and defined. What then? Well there must be a response. Scripture speaks of only two responses (in reality) to what God has spoken. We either embrace it wholeheartedly or we reject it.

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*²³³⁴

The cry and call comes in verse 11. There must be a departing from Babylon in order to come back to Zion. In the same way a believer must depart this world in order to enter the kingdom of God. I do not talk about death when the believer finally enters paradise, I am talking about conversion. Listen to Paul's way of putting things regarding conversion:

*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.*²³³⁵

If this has happened to you, dear reader, then you will have forsaken this world and all it proffers. But such an attitude becomes us, we no longer wish to be part of this world with its rotten ways destined for fire and destruction. The one who returns must first depart from the old ways. We are instructed to leave the Babylon of this world and to avoid touching the “*unclean thing.*” Further we are instructed to “*be clean.*” Here is holiness. Here is purity. How can we maintain this? Our propensity and inclination is to fall, to sin, and to drift! The writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells

2333 Zechariah 1:6.

2334 1Corinthians 1:18.

2335 Colossians 1:13.

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us to “*pursue holiness*” if we wish to see the Lord.²³³⁶ Peter commands us to “*be holy*” following the Lord's lead.²³³⁷ If we are living stones then let us yield to the master builder who knows how to deal with our lives. Our part is to hear Him and willingly comply with joy and thanksgiving! For practical instruction consider what Jude had to say:

20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, **21** keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.²³³⁸

And then we note wonderfully that our flight from Babylon (this world) and our return to Zion (God's kingdom) is not to be unaccompanied.

52:12.

We read in verse 12 that “*the Lord will go before*” us and also that “*the God of Israel will be*” behind as our “*rear guard.*” The Lord is our Pioneer and underneath are the everlasting arms.²³³⁹ These words remind us of the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day which guided Israel all through their wilderness journey.²³⁴⁰ Notice the titles used here. It is both the covenant name signifying the self-existent one (YHWH) and the Almighty God who created all things by the word of His power. There is no fear! God is before and God is behind. Their departure would not be from fear or in the measure of panic as if to escape from terror. Not at all! Their leaving will be ordered and not “*by flight.*” It will be guided and not “*with haste.*” And so the return from exile would indeed be ordered and without haste.

And thereby ends the introductory note before the great Servant Song that we shall turn to and consider in a moment. We have been introduced to the gospel as a beautiful and fit thing which is truly good, brought by one walking upon the mountains. The gospel which the watchmen saw coming with their own eyes and which caused them to rejoice in unified song along with the lowly ones as well, is one which causes those who draw near to flee from Babylon's cruel captivity.

2336 Hebrews 12:14.

2337 1Peter 1:16.

2338 Jude 1:20,21.

2339 Deuteronomy 33:27.

2340 Exodus 13:21,22; Numbers 14:14 and etc.

Chapter 65.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

The Suffering Servant!

Text.

13 Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. **14** Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men; **15** So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider. **#53 1** Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? **2** For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire Him. **3** He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. **4** Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. **5** But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. **6** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. **7** He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. **8** He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. **9** And they made His grave with the wicked— but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor *was any* deceit in His mouth. **10** Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. **11** He shall see the labour of His soul, *and* be satisfied. by His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. **12** Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

I hesitate to begin commenting on this most glorious of passages and would ask the reader before he or she begins to peruse what I have to say to seek the Lord in prayer. Read through the text carefully and as you do seek the Lord who is here for all to see and delight in. You will note that I have left it in a simple format and have not (yet) applied any analysis. After you have read through it spend some moments in reflection and worship. Although I have tried to call the reader

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throughout these pages to be close to the Lord in obedience and worship, this passage is the holy of holies and we dare not attend to it with speed nor with flippancy.

Textual analysis.

In most translations this section, which falls in the very centre of Isaiah 40-66, is divided up into five sections each of three verses. This will be a convenient division for us to use as we feast on the Lord and His provision for us. However it is (as always) necessary to note that these words are all interconnected with one another, and we cannot really isolate each section from subsequent statements. There is a narrative running through the entire passage and it is essential that we keep this fact in mind. Some suggest that the middle three sections ought to be considered as a unit so that the structure would be as follows:

Isaiah 52:12-15	Summary statement of humiliation and glory of the Suffering Servant.
Isaiah 53:1-9	The suffering endured by the Servant amongst the “ <i>many.</i> ”
Isaiah 53:10-12	The Father's pleasure shows the fruits and victory over sin.

However it will be more effective to consider the whole in five separate parts each comprising three verses. Textual analysis will be given for each separate section as we proceed.

[1] Behold My Servant! (Isaiah 52:13-15).

[2] But who will believe? (Isaiah 53:1-3).

[3] He bore our sin! (Isaiah 53:4-6).

[4] Tried, sentenced, executed. (Isaiah 53:7-9).

[5] And it was the Father's pleasure. (Isaiah 53:10-12).

[a] It pleased the Father. (Isaiah 53:10a).

[b] The fruit of the work of the Son. (Isaiah 53:10b,11).

[c] The Father and Son work in unison. (Isaiah 53:12).

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[1] Behold My Servant! (Isaiah 52:13-15).

- 13 Behold,
 My Servant shall deal prudently;
 He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.
- 14 Just as many were astonished at you,
 so His visage was marred more than any man,
 and His form more than the sons of men;
- 15 So shall He sprinkle many nations.
Kings shall shut their mouths at Him;
 for what had not been told them they shall see,
 and what they had not heard they shall consider.

The first section acts both as a bridge between what follows in this passage on the Suffering Servant and what has preceded in Isaiah 52:1-12. It could easily be considered as a fitting conclusion to Isaiah 52:1-12. You will recall that this former passage ends with a call to Israel (believers) in verse 11 to leave Babylon and become clean. Then in verse 12 we read these words:

For you shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight; for the Lord will go before you,
and the God of Israel *will be* your rear guard.²³⁴¹

The future return from exile is pictured with the Lord Himself going both before and behind, reminiscent of their experiences in the wilderness with the pillar of fire and cloud.²³⁴² Now in the passage under consideration we have these great opening words “*Behold, My Servant ..*” followed by a summary description of this wonderful person. The whole section appears to be a summary statement (which we shall examine shortly) and so could be included in the preparation for the coming Suffering Servant.

52:13.

However the opening word “*behold*” does rather indicate a new section as it serves to direct our attention to something new.²³⁴³ In verse 13 we are told two things. First that the Lord's Servant will “*deal prudently.*” What is meant by this? The English word “prudent” means acting with care and thought for the future. Now there is a definite active sense to the action of this verb but it has been translated differently in some modern translations. The NASB has “*shall prosper,*” whilst the ESV and the NIV have “*shall act wisely.*” The basic meaning of the verb is: to act with intelligence

2341 Isaiah 52:12.

2342 Exodus 13:21,22; 14:24; Numbers 14:14.

2343 This word is used frequently in Isaiah to announce not just something new but wonderful. See, for example: Isaiah 7:14; 12:2; 25:9; 30:27; 35:4; 40:9,10; 42:1; 52:6. These are by no means exhaustive.

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or care so as to succeed. In other words this person so described as the Lord's Servant will come and do a work which is done thoughtfully, well, and with success. If we were to paraphrase we might say: "Behold, My Servant has come to act with care and wisdom and so will succeed."

The fact that such a work has indeed succeeded perfectly can be seen in the second statement found in verse 13. This Servant will not just be "*exalted*," but will also be "*extolled*," and will be "*very high*." The first word ("*exalted*") can mean "to rise up," or "to raise up." The second word ("*extolled*") can mean "to lift up" or "to bear up." The third word ("*high*") can mean "to soar" or "to be elevated." This last word is emphasised with an adverb which is rendered "*very*" but which has the sense of "with vehemence or force," or "abundance," or "exceedingly." In other words you cannot be as elevated any further! It is hard not to see the whole range of experiences that Christ would undergo from His death and resurrection, to His ascension and glorification in these words. It may not be possible to push the meanings too far. It would appear at least that Isaiah (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) simply intended to state that the Lord's Servant was exalted in the greatest possible way. However as New Testament Christians we consider Christ's exaltation as it occurred through His death, resurrection and ascension. And so, as I have said, it is difficult not to see this in the words of verse 13.

52:14.

Then in verse 14 we have reference to the Servant amongst the people described simply as the "*many*," in what may be called a parenthesis. The statements of verse 14 are, simply put, astounding. The "*many*" were "*astonished at*" Him. That is, they were appalled, repulsed or horrified even. Why was this the case? Well we are informed that His "*visage*" and "*form*," "*was marred*" much more than that of any other person. Specifically it was His *appearance* ("*visage*") and His *outline structure* ("*form*") which were astonishing. More than this, these were "*marred*," that is, disfigured or corrupted more than any other human being to such an extent that He no longer appeared human. Many commentators simply derive from these words ideas of Christ's humiliation both during His ministry (reviled and hated by the Pharisees and Sadducees for example), and then treated harshly and wickedly during the trials and crucifixion. Undoubtedly these thoughts are contained within the words expressed here, but I do not think we can shy away from the force of the basic meaning. It would thus seem that Christ's human appearance was off-putting because He was disfigured in some way. Of this we cannot be entirely sure because none of the gospel accounts mention His appearance. However it is difficult to neglect the basic meaning of the words before us

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that He was so unlike normal humans in form and appearance that it appalled and horrified the “*many*.” We could also relate these terms to His general disposition and ministry. The Suffering Servant's very form and appearance as the Messiah were repulsive and horrific to the “*many*.” They were not at all what was expected. They expected a victorious Messiah, a warrior King. What did they get? A humble carpenter born of a Virgin (seemingly outside of wedlock) in lowly circumstances, and one who did not fit in with society. In modern terms they may have hoped for a “screen idol,” but all they got was the “circus freak.” Alternatively they might have hoped for a burly mountain of a man, but instead they get a weakling!

52:15.

Verse 15 picks up the thought started in verse 14. Where the “*many*” were astonished at the Suffering Servant (He was not what was expected as shown in the parenthetical statements concerning His “*visage*” and “*form*”), so now we discover that He will “*sprinkle many nations.*” What does this signify? Well the term “*sprinkle*” is a technical term used of blood, water, or oil, for the purification or cleansing of someone. Thus blood would be sprinkled upon a person who was to be cleansed of leprosy, or would be sprinkled before the Lord as an atonement.²³⁴⁴ Oil also would be sprinkled on the altar to consecrate it to the Lord.²³⁴⁵ The main meaning, therefore, is the idea of a purification or consecration. This is expressed clearly for us in the letter to the Hebrews:

*let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*²³⁴⁶

The Suffering Servant, the Messiah, will apply His blood of atonement to the “*many nations,*” in fulfilment of the prophecy given to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. Consequently, the kings of these disparate nations will have nothing to reply, for their mouths will be stopped. There are no objections and there are no excuses. The nations that will be blessed as foretold in Genesis 12:3 are those whose rulers gladly accept the sprinkled blood of the Messiah, the Suffering Servant. And so it has been the case down through the ages that leaders of nations or families have stopped their mouths in the humility that comes from faith and have gladly accepted the Lord's atoning sacrifice.

The last part of verse 15 is reminiscent of something you might hear in a “Lord of the

2344 Exodus 24:8; Leviticus 1:5; 4:6; 14:7; Hebrews 9:19,21.

2345 Leviticus 8:11.

2346 Hebrews 10:22.

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Rings” film.²³⁴⁷ Essentially these kings who submit and are sprinkled could never have come up with the things revealed in this glorious gospel. These things “*had not been told them*” and they had no awareness of them, but nevertheless in wonder and beauty “*they shall see*” them, or, in other words, they shall observe them first hand. It would not be something they knew of in history and might have been expecting, no. It is something they will observe and see for themselves as they submit to the atoning work of Christ. In the second phrase, the same idea is expressed but this time with respect to hearing what was spoken. Thus, it is “*what they had not heard*” that becomes apparent to them. They had never had it in their history, but now as they see it before their very eyes they “*consider*” it, that is they shall discern it, understand it, and think about it.

[2] But who will believe? (Isaiah 53:1-3).

#53 1 Who has believed our report?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
2 For He shall grow up before Him
as a tender plant, and
as a root out of dry ground.
He has no form or comeliness;
and when we see Him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire Him.
3 He is despised and rejected by men,
a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter the next three sections go together, but we shall consider each trio of verses separately. This part is introduced by two rhetorical questions and there then follows a detailed description of the Servant's earthly life. These verses seem to be taken up with those aspects of the Saviour's life prior to His crucifixion, but we must not exclude them from that final act either.

53:1.

At the start of Isaiah's prophecy we are presented with an astonishing fact. Israel did not know God and did not consider His ways.²³⁴⁸ Here the astonishing question is put: whom has actually believed the report or record that the Suffering Servant has produced? I wonder if you have ever written a report that no one has read? Many might have such an experience! I can remember a

2347 Galadriel spoke to Frodo Baggins in a similar way before a fountain at night [“...things that were... things that are... and some things ... that have not yet come to pass.”]. But perhaps it is more truthful to say that Tolkein borrowed Biblical phraseology for his characters!

2348 Isaiah 1:3.

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geography teacher who never read through our work at all. My classmates and I came to this belief because the teacher just used to put ticks every two or three inches along the margins. We tested this theory out by writing jokes or nonsense in the middle of the next essay and low and behold there were the ticks evenly spaced as ever! He had never read the essays. Perhaps you have slaved hard at work preparing a report for some “high-ups” but then no one takes any notice and the work is archived. But consider this. The holy God in concert, Father and Son, had made a report to the world. We are studying this now together. The Lord has revealed His word which contains His perfect will. Have any believed it? Have any taken it up and acted on its recommendations? Are there any who have listened to the Lord and followed through with His requirements? Well the implication of this question is that none have. *“Who has believed our report?”* No one! The second question takes the first and expands upon it. In this we have a title of the Lord Jesus, namely, *“the arm of the Lord.”* This title signifies the action of God through the Son. We use this title by saying that a trusted friend or colleague is our “right hand man.” In other words this is a person who carries out the work of the other perfectly. We see this expounded in John's gospel:

19 Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. **20** For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. **21** For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to *them*, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. **22** For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, **23** that all should honour the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him.”²³⁴⁹

To whom has the Suffering Servant who does the will of His Father been revealed? Again the answer is no one! Now of course we speak from the vantage of ones who have listened to the Lord in His word and have had the Lord's beauty revealed to us. But the thing is, that this has happened because of what God Himself has done and not because we have come to our own reasoned thinking and ingenuity. In short, we are dead in trespasses and sins and unless the Lord raise us up again and cause us to be born again, we would never believe the report or see the arm of the Lord.

²³⁴⁹ John 5:19-23.

53:2,3.

In the next two verses we are treated to a detailed description of the Suffering Servant (our Saviour). This person will come as a man, born of a Virgin, and so will “*grow up*” before the Lord on the earth. This simple statement indicates clearly that the Suffering Servant was indeed a man made in our likeness as Paul states it.²³⁵⁰ Then we discover that the growth of this one is considered to be like two figures. First “*a tender plant,*” and second “*a root out of dry ground.*”²³⁵¹ These figures have already appeared in Isaiah, however the actual word translated as “*a tender plant*” is only used here in Isaiah 53:1. The essential meaning of the word is “sucker,” or “sucking one,” and so is rendered as a tender shoot or plant which is full of sap. The implication is of one who draws nourishment from its source. The second illustration points us back to a former revelation concerning the Messiah in Isaiah 11:1. Here we find that this one comes from hopeless origins, “*out of dry ground.*”²³⁵² The parched and lifeless ground as cursed by God after Adam and Eve's fall. The idea is that He has come from humble and unpromising origins. In fact all human origins would be such, it is just that man likes to dress up the high-born and privileged with gaudy attire. Underneath there is still the lifeless and death-ridden fallen sinful man. And so this Suffering Servant comes from unpromising origins – humanly speaking. Nevertheless He is watched over and given aid and succour from His Father as befits a loving parent:

*And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.*²³⁵³

From the rest of verse 2 and through verse 3 we are then given a series of descriptions of the Servant, as follows:

- [1] He has no **form** or **comeliness** (verse 2).
- [2] [visibly] *there is* **no beauty** that we should desire Him (verse 2).
- [3] He is **despised** and **rejected** by men (verse 3).
- [4] [He is] a Man of **sorrows** and acquainted with **grief** (verse 3).
- [5] And we **hid**, as it were, *our* faces **from Him** (verse 3).
- [6] He was **despised**, and we **did not esteem** Him (verse 3).

2350 Romans 8:3; Philippians 2:7; Hebrews 7:15.

2351 Isaiah 53:2.

2352 Isaiah 53:2.

2353 John 8:29.

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Again we learn that the Servant had no pleasing appearance. His form or physical demeanour was unappealing. He also had no adornments or features that would lead people to be drawn to Him. He was not the popular guy, or the one around whom people would gather. Twice we read that He was *“despised,”* so that He was considered worthless and not worth knowing.²³⁵⁴ The first time He is described by this term the idea of rejection or forsaking is connected to it. The idea being that when He is viewed He is thought so little of that He does not even register! He has nothing that people of this world value or esteem. When they gaze upon His disfigured form and lack of beauty they ignore Him and cast Him aside. Consequently the Suffering Servant is described as *“a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”*²³⁵⁵ Can anyone match such derision in their experiences? To be so cast aside and derided because you have nothing to offer (as far as this world is concerned) may be too much for many. But the Saviour knew such utter rejection of men – he would never be among the popular crowd – that He also experienced the rejection as sorrow and grief. People shunned Him and turned their faces from Him. They did not value nor esteem Him and despised His lowly condition. We might want to limit these terms of rejection to the Saviour's experience on the cross, but that would be too narrow, for all His life He was rejected and despised.

The apostle John refers to this rejection in the opening of his gospel account. After introducing the Word of God who was in the beginning and through whom all things were made followed by a reference to the Baptist, we come eventually to the high point of the incarnation at verse 14:

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*²³⁵⁶

But immediately prior to the incarnation John notes that the following:

*10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.*²³⁵⁷

There are many appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ throughout the Old Testament but although

2354 Isaiah 53:3.

2355 Isaiah 53:3.

2356 John 1:14.

2357 John 1:10,11.

Studies in Isaiah.

some believe, in general *“the world did not know Him”* and most *“did not receive Him.”*²³⁵⁸ We could chart the Saviour's rejection throughout His ministry on earth. At times we may think that people flocked to Him and were in favour of Him, but think also of those who turned back when the teaching appeared too hard, or think also of the religious leaders who wanted Him dead, and then consider the crowds that had welcomed Him into Jerusalem with shouts of praise who would within a short time yell for His execution!²³⁵⁹

And is it any different in the world today? Oh of course many would feign allegiance to Jesus, but in reality it is a Jesus of their own making. Would they align themselves to the one who spoke about the need to die to self and forsake the world? Would many in the world agree to the Lord's ways where He says unless we believe in Him and His work we will suffer hell's torment for eternity? Do people readily accept that there is absolutely nothing they can do to help themselves and that they need another to do all on their behalf? Pride will not let them, unless the Lord humble them! But can't you see, dear reader, that the beautiful One in heaven's estimation is hated and thought worthless in the sight of the world? If they had any ounce of esteem for the Saviour would He not find a place in the assemblies, government lobbies, great palaces, temples, halls of state and so on? But He is nowhere to be found! We ought to remember that whilst the *“nations rage”* and organise wickedness, setting themselves to *“take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed,”* nevertheless the Lord *“who sits in the heavens,”* will have the last laugh, for He will *“hold them in derision,”* and *“He shall speak to them in wrath.”*²³⁶⁰ Despite such wicked antagonism and enmity which began at the fall of man in Genesis 3, we must also rejoice in the fact that the Lord has set and established His king on the *“holy hill of Zion.”*²³⁶¹ The cross is the signpost for glory. Oh how we must exalt the work of the Saviour for it is the only means by which selfish, sinful, proud man can come to know God, and this is what we are drawn to next.

2358 John 1:12,13.

2359 John 6:52,60,66; Matthew 26:4; John 7:1,19; 8:27,40; Matthew 21:9,15; John 12:13; Mark 15:13,14.

2360 Psalm 2:1-5.

2361 Psalm 2:6.

Studies in Isaiah.

[3] He bore our sin! (Isaiah 53:4-6).

4 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed Him
 stricken,
 smitten by God, and
 afflicted.

5 But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,
and by His stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned, every one, to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

In these verses we come to the very heart of the gospel. It is important to recognise that when our Saviour suffered, He suffered both through His lifetime on earth but, of course, more especially on the cross. He was a sin-bearer and bore our sins all the while He lived and then particularly when He died. The nineteenth century writer George Smeaton brings these points out in his book *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*. For example, he answers the thorny problem as to why Christ submitted Himself to baptism by John in the following way:

Hence, in submitting Himself to baptism as Mediator in an official capacity, the Lord Jesus virtually said, "Though sinless in a world of sinners, and without having contracted any personal taint, I come for baptism; because, in my public or official capacity, I am a debtor in the room of many, and bring with Me the sin of the whole world, for which I am the propitiation." He was already atoning for sin, and had been bearing it on His body since He took the flesh; and in His mediatorial capacity promises had been made to Him as the basis of His faith, and as the ground upon which His confidence was exercised at every step.²³⁶²

With regard to Christ's suffering experience in life, Smeaton points out that these are not merely "*the opposition of the ungodly,*" but must be considered as part of Christ's "*curse-bearing career.*"

In the Gospels there are several passages to be found which bring out far deeper views on the subject of Christ's curse-bearing and suffering life than have commonly been adopted, or, at least, than have been taken up in earnest in the Church. Most readers who merely read the narrative of Christ's life as they do a common history, see nothing more in these sufferings than the opposition of ungodly men to the cause of God, or limit the endurance of the curse on the part of Jesus to the hours when He hung upon the cross. But the curse-bearing career of Christ was by no means of that

²³⁶² **George Smeaton.** *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement.* Banner of Truth. 1991 [first published 1870]. P131. Hereafter: **Smeaton.** *Christ's Doctrine.*

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nature, nor limited to that time.²³⁶³

.... He went through all life in a double capacity, and must be regarded at every moment as at once the curse-bearer and the fulfiller of all righteousness.²³⁶⁴

Thus as we read through these verses in Isaiah 53:4-6 we can see that they have reference both to His life on earth as well as to His death at Calvary.

53:4.

Verse 4 begins with a strong affirmation. Thus, what is to be described is most definite and certain. So what has the Saviour done? Well first He has carried and taken upon Himself our *“griefs,”* by which is meant sicknesses, diseases or calamities. Then second, He has taken the weight of *“sorrows,”* by which is meant pain and anguish. It is very curious that most modern translations opt for “griefs,” and “sorrows,” here rather than sickness and pain. Young's Literal Translation suggests the following rendition:

*Surely our sicknesses he hath borne, and our pains -- he hath carried them ...*²³⁶⁵

Perhaps we may not be justified in limiting these terms to the physical realm, but we ought to recognise that the physical arena is indeed part of what our Saviour suffered. Matthew quotes Isaiah 53:4 in relation to Christ's healing ministry. However it was not just physical sicknesses that the Lord healed, for the demon possessed were also delivered:

16 When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, **17** that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: “He Himself took our infirmities and bore *our* sicknesses.”²³⁶⁶

The Saviour's bearing our sickness and pain is thus put as the simplest form of deliverance. He bore the consequences of sin.

Following on from this we have an estimation of Him from the many. In the previous verse (verse 3) we learnt that the many did not esteem Him. In other words they did not value Him at all.

2363 **Smeaton.** *Christ's Doctrine.* P135.

2364 **Smeaton.** *Christ's Doctrine.* P137.

2365 Isaiah 52:4a YLT.

2366 Matthew 8:16,17.

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Now we are told that there was still an estimation of the Suffering Servant. They *“esteemed Him,”* by which is meant that they calculated in heart, or made a valuation of this Suffering Servant. So how did they evaluate the Vicarious One? Three words are brought to our attention, and although only one of these is described as being from God, I think we can take it that the many assume that God is behind all three. The Suffering Servant was first *“stricken”* (by God we assume). This indicates a striking or a blow inflicted. Then second we learn that the Saviour was *“smitten,”* which is another word for striking. The last word *“afflicted”* signals the idea of being overwhelmed, depressed or oppressed. Thus the image is of one who has suffered blow upon blow repeatedly and so much that they are unable to get up or to consider anything other than the blows they are facing.

53:5.

Verse 5 comes deeper still into the wonders of the atonement. First we must note the substitutionary element. Notice in this connection the repeated use of the word *“for,”* signalling the idea of *“in place of.”* Christ Jesus was:

☐ Wounded

☐ Bruised

☐ Chastised

The first word has the main idea of being perforated, pierced, or bored through. Imagine someone thrusting a sword at you and the blade sinks deep into your body. You would be *“wounded”* by such piercing. The second word (*“bruised”*), suggests the idea of being crushed, broken in pieces, or being crumbled. The third word indicates correction and discipline. Thus Christ was pierced through and wounded because of *“our transgressions.”* It was because we had transgressed and broken the law, that Christ would suffer this wounding or piercing. The Lord would be broken asunder because of *“our iniquities,”* or, in other words, because of our perversity and evil. In our place the Lord was suffering the verdict so that we could receive *“peace,”* or well being. All of these blows, piercings, crushing blows, and disciplines were to be *“upon Him.”* Finally we learn that the *“stripes,”* or the marks of strokes seen on the skin, which have come through punishment, are the means by which *“we are healed,”* or mended, sewn together, or cured.

In this single verse we learn that the Suffering Servant suffers punishment to the point of death on behalf of others because of their sinful state, (breaking the law and acting in perverseness),

Studies in Isaiah.

in order that these sinful ones will find peace and well-being, and will be repaired, mended and cured!

53:6.

In verse 6 our gaze is shifted for a moment to the many, before returning back one again to the Suffering Servant. The many are described as sheep that have “*gone astray*,” or have erred in some way. This is not through idiocy or simply through naivete, because we read further that each has gone astray by deliberate choice. Each and “*every one*” has “*turned*” and pursued their “*own way*.” How remarkable and simple is the gospel. It is described in many Scriptures and also by the Saviour as a “*way*,” and He alone claims exclusive ownership of the right way.²³⁶⁷ Why then, have we gone our “*own way*”? To say it is rebellion is to say not much at all. It is sheer stupidity! The Lord has made us and constituted us to be in correct alignment and relationship to Himself. We simply cannot work any other way. To make a way for ourselves, or to say along with Frank Sinatra “*I did it my way*” is sheer folly.²³⁶⁸ This is such a vital point that it needs expounding further. The route or path of life is not something we can make up as we go along. How we conduct our lives both as to the things we do (such as career), and the attitudes we adopt in relationships cannot simply be dreamed up on the spot, and relying on the patterns laid down by our forebears is not always that good either, (to say the least). Yet how often do we hear people say that they are making it up as they go along? Furthermore, life's journey isn't something we can construct from the ruinous broken cisterns that other mere men have made. Why should their way be any good? We cannot work out the path of life from philosophy, tradition, or from religion, for all of these are man-made too. The only way that makes any sense, that brings peace, that leads to true life, is the way that the Lord Himself has made. He alone is “*the way*.”²³⁶⁹

2367 John 14:6.

2368 Apparently Sinatra's last words were “I'm losing,” an acceptance of the fact that ultimately, in the end he could not do it his way.

2369 John 14:6.

[4] Tried, sentenced, executed. (Isaiah 53:7-9).

7 He was oppressed and
He was afflicted,
 yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led
 as a lamb to the slaughter, and
 as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
 so He opened not His mouth.
8 He was taken from prison and from judgment,
 and who will declare His generation?
For He was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgressions of My people He was stricken.
9 And they made His grave with the wicked
 — but with the rich at His death, because
 He had done no violence,
 nor *was any* deceit in His mouth.

In these next three verses we learn more about the Saviour's experiences under trial, in prison and at His execution.

53:7.

Once again we find that He was not valued or esteemed at all, even as a human being. He was “*oppressed*,” or, in other words, harassed, pressed, and driven as one under compulsion. He was “*afflicted*,” or, in other words, held down, depressed, and humiliated. Such were the experiences of the Lord when He was arrested and brought before three courts, first the Sanhedrin, then before Pilate, and finally before Herod. Think of the mocking and cruelty He suffered. If we consider the account in Matthew, we find that the Jews sought false testimony against the Lord because they had no legitimate cause to put Him to death.²³⁷⁰ They insisted that He respond to these false accusations but He refused to speak until the high priest put Him under oath.²³⁷¹ When the Saviour confessed the truth, they charged the Son of God with blasphemy!²³⁷² Following this they spat at Him, beat Him, and struck Him.²³⁷³ In the morning the Jewish leaders made their plots to carry out their unjust sentence of death, even though they had no authority in the land to carry it out.²³⁷⁴ They had Him bound and lead Him to Pilate where they accused Him of many things, and yet He held His peace.²³⁷⁵ Pilate had Christ sent to Herod since He was a Galilean. Herod questioned Him at length merely to get some performance out of Him, but when Christ refused to

2370 Matthew 26:59-61.

2371 Luke 23:1-5 gives some details concerning these false accusations.

2372 Matthew 26:62-66..

2373 Matthew 26:67.

2374 Matthew 27:1.

2375 Matthew 27:2, 11-13.

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respond, despite the vehement accusations rained on Him from the Jewish leaders, Herod began to mock Him and treat Him with utter contempt.²³⁷⁶ Herod returned the Saviour to the Roman Governor, who had now become his friend. Pilate could find nothing in Christ to bring a verdict of death, and yet the Jewish leaders incited the crowds to ensure Christ's condemnation.²³⁷⁷ When He was finally condemned, the Roman soldiers ridiculed and mocked Him, spitting on Him and making Him wear a crown of thorns.²³⁷⁸

Thus was the Suffering Servant falsely and wrongly accused and sentenced by three ruling bodies. On each of these occasions the Lord did not open His mouth in order to refute their charges or protest His innocence. He replied to none of them except when compelled under oath to do so, or in response to Pilate's question regarding Him being the Messiah.²³⁷⁹ At the end of verse 7 we are told that the Saviour was being led not simply as an accused criminal, but as a sacrifice for the slaughter. Christ was spoken of at the beginning of His ministry by John the Baptist as: *"The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*²³⁸⁰ And here in Isaiah we can see this sacrificial language expressed clearly, for He was *"a lamb to the slaughter."* The second image of a sheep who is silent before its shearers may not suggest sacrificial language, but it does indicate the willing and voluntary nature of the Suffering Servant. Sheep know their owners and will stay docile (generally speaking) when sheared.

It is especially significant that we read two times in verse 7, that our Suffering Servant *"opened not His mouth."* We are certain of Christ's innocence as we read through the narrative of the cross. But what is more, is that we are equally certain of Christ's purity and His sinlessness. Such truth is brought out, for example, in the birth narratives where we read of how Mary was to conceive:

*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*²³⁸¹

The babe in her womb was *"that Holy One,"* a title pointing us back to the Messiah revealed especially in the book of Isaiah, Then, whilst speaking to the Jews after the incident with the sinful

2376 Luke 23:8-11.

2377 Matthew 27:15-23; John 18:38; 19:4,6.

2378 Matthew 27:27-31.

2379 Matthew 26:63,64; John 18:33-38.

2380 John 1:29,35.

2381 Luke 1:35.

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woman caught in adultery, the Lord could ask the following question:

*Which of you convicts Me of sin?*²³⁸²

The immediate context is Christ's declaration of the truth that He has come from the Father. No one could respond with any accusation and so none did. Then also, as a commentary on Christ, we read the following words from the writer of the letter to the Hebrews:

*or we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.*²³⁸³

As a final example in the New Testament, listen to the words of the apostle Paul:

*For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*²³⁸⁴

Of course we have the same thought of Christ's purity foretold here in Isaiah 53 at the end of verse 9 (*"He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth"*). We shall speak on verse 9 shortly but the essential point here is that an innocent man was *"afflicted"* and taken to be executed and yet *"He opened not His mouth."* Why was that? It is certain that the Messiah would not do such a thing as weak and sinful men might proclaim their innocence! It is impossible to think that Christ might have cried out in desperation that He was an innocent man as others may plead and cry. But what is astonishing is that our Saviour did not open His mouth in protest for the sake of truth! He was innocent, totally! He did nothing deserving of death and the Jews, Herod, and Pilate knew this truth without doubt. So why did the Lord not protest His innocence in a pure and gracious way? The answer is that He was, in point of fact, guilty as our last text from 2Corinthians tells us! The guilt was not His own! It was the guilt of all those sinners whom the Father gave to Christ to atone for! The Suffering Servant kept silent because He was bearing the guilt of sin for the whole world, for all those who would put their trust in Him. What an amazing truth! How beautiful are the Scriptures. Christ died for sinners and so *"He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,"* and *"He opened not His mouth"* to protest His innocence.

2382 John 8:46.

2383 Hebrews 4:15.

2384 2Corinthians 5:21.

53:8.

In verse 8 we learn of the Suffering Servant being “*taken from prison and from judgement.*” These statements cover the period from Christ's arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and the three trials that went through the night into the next day. Other translations suggest “oppression” or “restraint” for prison, possibly because there was no prolonged period of incarceration of the Saviour. However there were (brief) periods where Christ was imprisoned and maltreated by His captors. The next part of verse 8 is translated in a variety of ways depending on how the last word in the clause (rendered as “*declare*” in the NKJV) is to be taken. Literally this clause reads as follows:

And with – His generation – who – [he will] declare/meditate/consider.

Table 65.1: Various translations of Isaiah 53:8.

NKJV	YLT	NASB	ESV
He was taken from prison and from judgment,	By restraint and by judgment he hath been taken,	By oppression and judgment He was taken away;	By oppression and judgement he was taken away;
and who will declare His generation?	and of his generation who doth meditate,	and as for His generation, who considered	and as for his generation, who considered
For He was cut off from the land of the living;	that he hath been cut off from the land of the living?	that He was cut off out of the land of the living	that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
for the transgressions of My people He was stricken.	By the transgression of My people he is plagued.	for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?	tricken for the transgression of my people?

There is most definitely a question posed here, but where should we place the question mark? Some opt for the way the NKJV has it and suggest that the next word is explanatory giving us the reason (“*For...*”). Other translations render this connecting word as “*that,*” and connect it with the clause concerning the cutting off of the Messiah. The main idea, it seems, is that the question is asking who will consider or meditate on these things so that they could be made known? The NKJV makes a sharp disjunction and is difficult to comprehend. The NASB and ESV add the word “*as*” which seems unwarranted. The YLT seems to offer the best solution. Of the Suffering Servant's generation who among them will meditate and consider (so as to make known) the fact that the Servant has

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been cut off ? When we consider the fact that the disciples were slow to comprehend the fact that Christ needed to die, these words here in Isaiah 53:8 are clearly prophetic.²³⁸⁵ So the question posed in the NKJV: *“who will declare His generation?”* must be answered in the negative.

The Suffering Servant will be *“cut off”* indicating death, which is then reinforced by the added phrase *“from the land of the living.”*²³⁸⁶ This fact does not seem to be anything out of the ordinary, after all we all eventually die. However we need to recognise that we are dealing with this special person, the Suffering Servant. With other Scriptures we will learn that this One cannot die. But more importantly we read here the reason for His being *“cut off,”* which is *“for the transgressions of My people.”* In other words the Suffering Servant will die because of the transgressions of the Lord's people, (*“My people”*). Here is the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Note the limitation here. The atonement is most definite. What the Lord did was to most definitely secure forgiveness and to pay the price for actual people here described by the phrase *“My people,”* (i.e. the Lord's chosen people). We shy away from this unpalatable truth to modern minds but it is a clear truth expressed throughout Scripture: the Lord died in the place or stead of His people, a people given Him of the Father.²³⁸⁷ That being said we also preach the gospel that *whosoever* believes in Christ will have eternal life, and as many as *receive* Christ to them is given the right to become children of God.²³⁸⁸ Consider also the general call of Christ: *“Come unto Me ...”* and the final call at the end of Scripture:²³⁸⁹

*And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.*²³⁹⁰

53:9.

Verse 9 follows on in time from the trials and crucifixion, to the burial. Our Saviour was crucified with two criminals, one either side and all three died on their crosses. Thus the Suffering Servant had *“His grave with the wicked.”* And then we discover from the Gospel accounts that the Suffering Servant was buried in a rich man's tomb:

2385 Matthew 16:21,22.

2386 See Psalm 52:5; Jeremiah 11:19; Ezekiel 26:20.

2387 John 6:39-45.

2388 John 1:12; 3:16.

2389 Matthew 11:28f.

2390 Revelation 22:17.

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57 Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. **58** This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. **59** When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, **60** and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed. **61** And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb.²³⁹¹

The prophecy in Isaiah makes it clear that this Suffering Servant truly died. But this section ends with an affirmation of the Messiah's innocence. He had done nothing wrong deserving death. Specifically, "*He had done no violence,*" which phrase stands as an example of action. Then further we read that neither was there "*any deceit in His mouth.*" This latter phrase speaks to us not just of His speech, but His demeanour and disposition. These two phrases are singular representing wholes. The Suffering Servant was sinless. What came from His heart and was expressed in His mouth (His speech, attitude, and behaviour) was pure and without any falseness, error, or lie. Consequently His actions were good and wholesome so that there was "*no violence,*" either actual, intended, or suspected.

The Suffering Servant was sinless and suffered death in the place of God's people for their sin, iniquity and transgression. Hallelujah! What a Saviour"

[5] And it was the Father's pleasure. (Isaiah 53:10-12).

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him;
He has put *Him* to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin,
He shall see *His* seed,
He shall prolong *His* days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.
11 He shall see the labour of His soul, *and* be satisfied.
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
for He shall bear their iniquities.
12 Therefore
I will divide Him a portion with the great, and
He shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because
He poured out His soul unto death, and
He was numbered with the transgressors, and
He
bore the sin of many, and
made intercession for the transgressors.

This amazing section of Isaiah where we read of the Suffering Servant ends with a glimpse into what actually transpired at the cross. Verse 10 begins with three statements concerning the

²³⁹¹ Matthew 27:57-61.

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Father and then continues with statements concerning the Son. These statements concerning the Son continue on into verse 11, and then in verse 12 we have an action of the Father followed by an action of the Son which is concluded with several reasons.

[a] It pleased the Father. (Isaiah 53:10a).

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him;
He has put *Him* to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin,

53:10a.

How can it please a father to have His Son harmed? As with all Scripture we come to it with the understanding we have gleaned elsewhere in Scripture concerning the nature of God. We remember, chiefly from the Psalms, that God is good and does good.²³⁹² We also remember that there is no evil, nor error within God.²³⁹³ So whatever God does is always in keeping with His character which can be described as *good*, that is, wholesome, substantial and pleasing. The word *“pleased”* has the sense of “inclining towards,” or to “bend towards,” or to “desire or will” to do something. In other words it was God's intention and will to carry this plan of substitutionary atonement out, but can we say that it really *“pleased”* the Father in that it gave Him pleasure? Well it cannot have been a pleasure to see His Son endure pain, anguish, and rejection, but it most certainly was a delight to see the fruits of His Son's sacrifice. The import of the opening clause of each of these three sentences is to teach us that it was the Father's definite will that the Son should suffer. We note that *“it pleased the Lord to bruise Him,”* that *“He has put Him to grief,”* and that it was the Father (*“You”*) who *“make His soul an offering.”* The Holy Trinity does not work in separate spheres but in concert and in harmony. That said, we see here that it is the Father's will that the work of salvation demands the sacrifice of the Son.

Thus the work of salvation was an operation which finds its locus and source in the heart of the Father. There is a wonderful development of ideas in these three statements. The outcome for the Son is that He is *bruised*, put to *grief*, and made an *offering for sin*. We see in these statements the physical suffering (being bruised), the inner turmoil and pain (grief), and the objective aspect (Christ was an offering for sin). The word *“bruise”* signifies to “crush,” “break in pieces” or to “crumble.” This is no mere affliction but a crushing devastation. The word *“grief”* indicates “sickness” or “disease,” or to be “worn down.” In the last sentence we find the locus of these

2392 Psalm 34:8; 100:5; 119:68; 135:3; 145:9; Jeremiah 33:11; Lamentations 3:25; Nahum 1:7.

2393 Psalm 5:4; 92:15; 3John 1:11.

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sufferings. The Son is to be an offering for sin. His being crushed or bruised, and His suffering sickness and weakness is thus explained by His being the sacrifice. We note here that the Son's "*soul*" was to be the offering for sin. Whilst the physical aspects of the sacrifice are often to the fore, it is the inner sufferings which effect our salvation. Christ's soul was punished in our place. The sin of Adam, and the sin of us all, was to go our own way. We, by an act of will, determined to rebel. Hence sin is chiefly an act of the soul. Consequently it is the "*soul*" of the Saviour which must pay the price. His "*soul*" was the offering we ought to have made. Our souls are not our own and are forfeit to God. What have we done with the gift of life God has bestowed upon us? How can a man atone for His soul? It is an impossibility, and so the Son, the Suffering Servant Saviour suffers on our behalf. It was His "*soul*" which would pay the ultimate price.

[b] The fruit of the work of the Son. (Isaiah 53:10b,11).

He shall see *His* seed,

He shall prolong *His* days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

11 He shall see the labour of His soul, *and* be satisfied.

By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
for He shall bear their iniquities.

53:10b.

Now that we have seen that it was the Father's will and intention for the Son to be our sacrifice, we next find the outcome or fruit of the Son's work of sacrifice. First we discover that He will "*see His seed.*" This is a direct reference back to the first recorded promise found in the book of Genesis.²³⁹⁴ The Suffering Servant has seed, or offspring, and He will be enabled to see these. These are the ones who directly benefit from His work. They are the redeemed, the ones who have received Christ, and so have the right to become children of God.²³⁹⁵ This is also a clear reference to the resurrection, for this statement about Him being able to "*see His seed*" comes after His being made an offering for sin. The thought is strengthened in the second sentence where we read that "*He shall prolong His days.*" We are not to take this simply in the sense that He will have a longer life, but (perhaps) it refers to the interim period after the resurrection and before the ascension.

Then third, we find that the will of the Father would succeed through His action. This third idea brings us to a recognition that what "*pleased the Lord*" is that which the Suffering Servant was willing to take on board, for it was to "*prosper in His hand.*" The will of the Father was not carried out begrudgingly, nor subserviently. Neither was it done against the Suffering Servant's will. No!

²³⁹⁴ Genesis 3:15.

²³⁹⁵ John 1:12.

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He willingly offered Himself. It was as though the Son took on board the Father's will and desire and made it His own. Like Father like Son.

53:11.

In verse 11 we discover a fourth thing concerning the Son. Again we are told that He will “*see*” something, and so we have another reference to the resurrection. The Suffering Servant will see the fruit of His work, the outcome of the travail of “*His soul.*” The turmoil and anguish that was His when He was “*put to grief*” by the Father's wrath, would bear perfect fruit. The Saviour's work was done to completion for he was “*satisfied.*” Truly, alone among men, the Saviour could declare, “*it is finished,*” so that the work He came to do on the cross was indeed done, and done to perfection.²³⁹⁶ And then we come to the great climax of this work expressed in the last part of verse 11. The Suffering Servant is described as “*My righteous Servant*” here. Such a title indicates beautifully the nature of His work. It was His righteousness which achieved salvation for us. He alone will “*justify many*” sinners by virtue of the fact that He has borne “*their iniquities.*” This twin action of bearing sin and providing righteousness is what the Suffering Servant came to do. Now such work comes through the Suffering Servant's “*knowledge.*” How wonderful to know that the Lord our Saviour is all-knowing. There are no surprises. He knows precisely what to do and how to do it.

[c] The Father and Son work in unison. (Isaiah 53:12).

12 Therefore

I will divide Him a portion with the great, and

He shall divide the spoil with the strong,

because

He poured out His soul unto death, and

He was numbered with the transgressors, and

He

bore the sin of many, and

made intercession for the transgressors.

53:12.

The finale comes in verse 12 where we see that the great work of salvation was in fact a dual work in which the Father and the Son shared. It was the Father's “*pleasure,*” (His will) that the Son should suffer in the place of sinners, and therefore the Father “*will divide Him a portion,*” or, in other words, provide the benefits and fruits of the spoil gathered by such a stupendous work. Since

²³⁹⁶ John 19:30.

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it was the Father's initiative, it was therefore also His prerogative to confer the benefits too. The image is of a warrior or champion who having defeated the enemy gets to share the spoils of victory. Notice the unison between Father and Son. It is the Father who *"will divide,"* and also it is the Son who *"shall divide"* the portion and spoil. This is a wonderful glimpse into the relationship between Father and Son. They work as a company not as individuals. The word translated *"great"* actually signifies a multitude or the many. The same word is used for the *"many"* who are justified. The word *"strong"* indicates a great number too, but it is probably best to think this time of the many as now being strong by virtue of their salvation.

Finally we are reminded of what the Suffering Servant actually did to gain the great benefits of His victory, the spoils of war. It is *"because"* or, in other words, as a result of four vitally important things which we shall list below:

- [1] He poured out His soul unto death.
- [2] He was numbered with the transgressors.
- [3] He bore the sin of many.
- [4] [He] made intercession for the transgressors.

The last two are put together because we are still focusing on the work of the cross. Thus the first reason the Suffering Servant is enabled to divide up the spoil is because He willingly gave up His life, His very soul, to death, thereby taking the punishment we all deserve because of our sin. Remember that the just *"wages of sin"* is nothing other than separation from God, (death).²³⁹⁷ This is the heart of the atonement. Christ suffered in the place of sinners. Then second, we note that the Suffering Servant was *"numbered with the transgressors."* This is usually taken to be a prophetic statement concerning Christ's death amongst those who were considered criminals and between two others who were crucified with Him.²³⁹⁸ However it clearly also identifies His willingness to be identified with sinners.²³⁹⁹

Third we are reminded again that the Suffering Servant took upon Himself the *"sin of many."* It is interesting that the word *"sin"* is given in the singular. It most probably indicates the sin nature rather than specific sins or transgressions. Only those who come to Christ will have their sins washed away, and so there are *"many"* who will be saved, not all. At one and the same time the

2397 Romans 6:23.

2398 Mark 15:27,28; Luke 22:36,37.

2399 Romans 8:3; Hebrews 2:14.

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Suffering Servant also *“made intercession for the transgressors.”* This is not the work the Saviour does since His ascension in interceding for us in heaven, for the cross is in view here. Christ does indeed intercede on our behalf praying for us daily.²⁴⁰⁰ However, by taking our sin nature and all our transgressions, the Suffering Servant acted as our advocate and made intercession on our behalf as He died on the cross.

²⁴⁰⁰ Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 1John 2:1,2.

Chapter 66.

Isaiah 54:1-17.

The song of the barren: Salvation has come!

Textual analysis.

#54 1 “Sing, O barren,
 you *who* have not borne!
Break forth into singing, and cry aloud,
 you *who* have not laboured with child!
 For more *are* the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman,”

says the Lord.

2 “Enlarge the place of your tent, and
let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare;
lengthen your cords, and
strengthen your stakes.

3 For
 you shall expand to the right and to the left, and
 your descendants will
 inherit the nations, and
 make the desolate cities inhabited.

4 “Do not fear,
 for you will
 not be ashamed;
 neither be disgraced,
 for you will
 not be put to shame;
 for you
 will forget the shame of your youth, and
 will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore.

5 For
 your Maker *is* your husband,
 the Lord of hosts *is* His name; and
 your Redeemer *is* the Holy One of Israel;
 He is called the God of the whole earth.

6 For the Lord has called you
 like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit,
 like a youthful wife when you were refused,”

says your God.

7 “For a mere moment I have forsaken you,
 but with great mercies I will gather you.

8 With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment;
 but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,”

says the Lord, your Redeemer.

9 “For this *is* like the waters of Noah to Me;
 for

Studies in Isaiah.

as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth,
so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you.

10 For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed,
but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,”
says the Lord, who has mercy on you.

11 “O you
afflicted one,
tossed with tempest, *and*
not comforted,
behold,
I will
lay your stones with colourful gems, and
lay your foundations with sapphires.
12 I will make
your pinnacles of rubies,
your gates of crystal, and
all your walls of precious stones.
13 All your children *shall be* taught by the Lord, and
great *shall be* the peace of your children.
14 In righteousness you shall be established;
you shall be far
from oppression,
for you shall not fear; and
from terror,
for it shall not come near you.

15 Indeed they shall surely assemble, *but* not because of Me.
Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake.

16 “Behold, I have created the blacksmith
who blows the coals in the fire,
who brings forth an instrument for his work; and
I have created the spoiler to destroy.

17 No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and
every tongue *which* rises against you in judgment you shall condemn.

This *is* the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness *is* from Me,”
says the Lord.

This chapter is fitting indeed to follow on the great statement of the Suffering Servant's atoning sacrifice, for in it we read of the call of “*many*” to take hold of the benefits accrued. The chapter can be divided into two parts. The first entails a series of commands and some explanations for those who will benefit, and runs from verse 1 to verse 10. This first section can be sub-divided according to each command and the explanation for each of these commands. The second section covers verses 10 to 17 and is a great statement about how the Lord applies the benefits of His great atoning work. It has in view the city of Jerusalem, but it is equally applicable to individual servants of God.

Studies in Isaiah.

[1] A reasoned call to rejoice, spread out and fear not. (Isaiah 54:1-10)

[a] Sing! (Isaiah 54:1).

[b] Enlarge your tents. (Isaiah 54:2,3).

[c] Do not fear. (Isaiah 54:4-6).

[d] A momentary wrath exchanged for everlasting mercy. (Isaiah 54:7,8).

[e] A comparison with the judgment at Noah's time. (Isaiah 54:9).

[f] The permanence of the covenant of peace. (Isaiah 54:10).

[g] Summary thoughts.

[2] How the Lord applies salvation. (Isaiah 54:11-17).

[1] A reasoned call to rejoice, spread out and fear not. (Isaiah 54:1-10)

[a] Sing! (Isaiah 54:1).

54:1.

We begin by considering the one addressed in this chapter. It is the one described as *“barren,”* and the one who has *“not borne.”* To whom is the Lord referring here? There are, of course, many women in Scripture who struggled to bring forth a child. We can mention Sarai (Sarah), Hannah, and Elizabeth to name but three. In each of these cases we are taught about how the Lord overcame such difficulties. In the case of Sarai it was to be through the word of promise. She would have a child by her husband Abraham even though she was well beyond the age of child bearing. In the case of Hannah it would be as the result of impassioned prayer for her plight, and the result, Samuel, was that God heard her pleas. In the case of Elizabeth it was the provision of the forerunner, the one who was sent to announce the coming of the Messiah. However the import of the term is to suggest both the barrenness of Israel as a nation, and thence also, of each individual. We are all barren and thus not able to bear fruit. This is, of course, because we are born in trespasses and sins and so can be truly described as *“dead.”*²⁴⁰¹

Now things are about to change. The barren woman will bear fruit to such an extent that will outstrip the offspring of the *“married woman.”* The *“desolate,”* the one astonished to silence, will be enabled not just to *“sing,”* but to *“cry aloud.”* This is the exclamation of great joy. When a woman gives birth, the joy they experience on receiving the child into their arms is a wonder to

2401 Ephesians 2:1f.

Studies in Isaiah.

behold. But such a normal or regular experience pails into insignificance in comparison to what is expressed here.

In saying that there will be more offspring from the barren, desolate woman than from the one married, the intention is to show the wonder of God. Only God can bring forth life and abundance, for He is the source of life itself. Only God can alter the course of events. In this fallen world the production of children is limited both by virtue of the limit of child bearing age and the extent of life.²⁴⁰² But God is making all things new. He is ordering a new creation. Therefore the most unpromising examples are made to show forth God's work. The barren brings forth a greater number of children than would normally be the case from a woman married and able to produce naturally.

[b] Enlarge your tents. (Isaiah 54:2,3).

54:2.

The image now changes from barren and married women to the illustration of a tent. Now this image speaks of dwelling, abiding, and living, but only in a temporary sense. We are not thinking here of a permanent dwelling built of stone or brick. The apostle Paul uses this figure of a tent to depict our transitory lives:

1 For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. **2** For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, **3** if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. **4** For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. **5** Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.²⁴⁰³

Here in Isaiah the reference may be to remind us of the temporary dwelling for the ark of the covenant, namely, the tabernacle. However, given that the temple had been in operation for several hundred years, it would be odd for Isaiah to hark back to the tabernacle. It would seem more natural to take the figure as a representation of the nation as a whole, and thence, by spiritual intention, to the individual.

2402 In pre-flood times people lived much longer and so it is reasonable to assume also that child bearing was possible over a longer period.

2403 2Corinthians 5:1-4.

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The command is first to *“enlarge”* the area where the tent was to be pitched. Clearly the tent itself was also to expand as shown by the fact that the tent *“curtains”* were to be stretched too. The opening sentence ends with a further instruction that they should *“not spare,”* or, in other words have no restraint or limit. Thus an unspecified (or limitless) increase is to be expected. This is further expanded by the injunction to *“lengthen your cords”* and to *“strengthen your stakes.”* Such instructions indicate that a much bigger tent is in view. By spreading out and stretching the curtains, more strength to hold the structure in place would also be required. The idea then, is of a growing but temporary structure. As we have noted, the temple had replaced the tabernacle, so although the figure of a tent is being used, we are not meant to take this in a literal sense as though the tabernacle was to be reinstated. The point is of an expanding tent. Using the tent here signals also the temporary nature of this enlarging dwelling place.

The prophecy found in Daniel chapter 2 that was given first to Nebuchadnezzar in the form of a dream but then passed to Daniel as a result of great prayer is worth recalling here:

31 “You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendour *was* excellent, stood before you; and its form *was* awesome. **32** This image’s head *was* of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, **33** its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. **34** You watched while **a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.** **35** Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. **And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.** **36** “This *is* the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. **37** You, O king, *are* a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; **38** and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given *them* into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you *are* this head of gold. **39** But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. **40** And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, *that kingdom* will break in pieces and crush all the others. **41** Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. **42** And *as* the toes of the feet *were* partly of iron and partly of clay, *so* the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. **43** As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. **44** And in the days of these kings **the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in**

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pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. 45 Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”²⁴⁰⁴

Thus to Nebuchadnezzar via Daniel, we discover that a great kingdom would arise that would be very different to all the former earthly kingdoms. There would come a “*stone*” that would be “*cut out without hands,*” and this would strike the image (representing the former kingdoms of this world) and would turn into “*a great mountain,*” which would fill “*the whole earth.*” The stone represents the Messiah, and by His coming a new kingdom would result which will not be limited to one locality or one people group, but would instead be so big that it would include all of the earth. Such images here in Isaiah and in Daniel, clearly pre-figure the gospel age, for in this age the growth of the church has been nothing short of phenomenal. Small Judah and Israel saw the Messiah come and strike a blow to the nations of the world with “*the rod of His mouth.*”²⁴⁰⁵ From just a handful of disciples the church spread into Asia, Europe, and now covers the entire globe.

54:3.

In verse 3 we switch from figure and illustration, to simple statements. The word “*expand*” is more literally “to break forth” as in coming from the womb, for example. This sudden spread is described as going “*to the right and to the left,*” which language would suggest the idea of a river gushing forth and breaking its banks on both sides to spread abroad. Then we read that the “*descendants*” of this barren, desolate one will be enabled to do two things. First, to “*inherit the nations.*” This does not mean that a new nation would be formed. The increase from the state of barrenness and desolation would not be the same as when Israel were delivered from Egypt to be founded in Canaan. The idea of nationhood is not to be perpetuated. Instead this desolate, barren one is to “*inherit*” a multitude of peoples. Here we have the fulfilling of the promise given to Abraham:

... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”²⁴⁰⁶

Then second, we discover that their “*descendants*” will “*make the desolate cities inhabited.*”

2404 Daniel 2:31-45.

2405 Isaiah 11:4. See also Psalm 2:9; Revelation 1:16; 2:16; 19:15.

2406 Genesis 12:3.

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Places which had come to rack and ruin through sin, lack of care, the judgement of God, will now be restored and made fit for dwelling in again. This is a beautiful illustration of the effects of the gospel. People in our day like to speak of the “regeneration” of old dilapidated cities and towns. But such requires investment and effort and rarely does any lasting good. However, the gospel alone can regenerate a city because of the new life and hope that is brought to be! Where truly rescued and redeemed people are, there also will be the fruits of their regeneration in the regeneration of the place where they live. How about this for a government policy! Preach the gospel and get people back to God, and the fruit of such *real regeneration* will be the renewing of the towns and cities where such are found. Think of the effects of revivals in times past! New businesses run on godly principles begin. Magistrates do not bother to sit in judgement because there are few cases to hear. Schools and hospitals are founded because of the generous beneficence of saved philanthropists.

[c] Do not fear. (Isaiah 54:4-6).

In this next section, having been told that there will be a great increase, the barren, desolate one is called on to not fear, and this command is supported by reasons. First there are reasons concerning what the Lord will do for them (verse 4). Then there are reasons given on the basis of whom the Lord is to this desolate, barren one, and how He has called them (verses 5 and 6).

54:4.

How many times have we seen this command “*do not fear*”?²⁴⁰⁷ In light of the great expansion expected by the advance of the gospel, it is inevitable that the growing church would face opposition. This is because the gospel runs counter to everything man honours and esteems. In such circumstances it might be expected that the new born ones would fear, but they are commanded not to, and with good reason. First whatever they may face, they will not be “*ashamed*,” nor be “*disgraced*,” and would not suffer “*shame*.” How so? Are not true believers suffering in this way today? Are not the persecuted ones disgraced and shamed by the world? Well the real issue here is: in whose eyes? The first word (“*ashamed*”) signifies to “become pale” and indicates disappointment. The second word (“*disgraced*”) signifies “to wound” in a figurative sense, hence “to taunt,” or “to insult.” The last word of the three (“*shame*”) signifies “to blush.” A person would truly only be disappointed and come to blush if they felt they were shown up as being wrong or without any status, value, or right. But the believer knows that their worth and their value is in their

²⁴⁰⁷ It comes 5 times in Isaiah: 7:4; 35:4; 44:8; 51:7; 54:4.

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name, that they belong to God. Why blush if someone taunts and ridicules you for being on the Lord's side? Of course you may blush and feel a sense of disappointment or shame if you are not truly on the Lord's side. But one who is at home with God, and who is a part of His family, can never feel shame, nor disappointment, and cannot suffer ignominy because they belong to the King of kings.

Of course some may raise old spectres and ghosts, but the *“shame”* of youth and the *“reproach”* of being a widow will be forgotten and not remembered. To be a widow was indeed a reproach in those days. Without a man to provide and give status, woman were bereft. The youth were not respected. A man would need to come of age to be accepted as of value in those ancient cultures. Thus youths and widows represented those without true status and worth. Such is not the case today, of course, but the point here is that such shame and reproach would be gone entirely. There would be no reason to feel embarrassed at all. This statement leads us into the further reasons not to fear, which are grounded in the nature of God and His calling.

54:5.

Verse 5 gives us a fourfold, expanded set of statements about God. Each one includes a title and an explanation, or exposition, or expansion of that title. First we read that: *“your Maker is your husband.”* The title here (*“Maker”*) comes from the verb used in Genesis 1 and translated *“make”* or *“made.”* The one who made them, the Creator, is also their *“husband,”* or “Lord” and master. In other words, they would become of worth and value because they were now united to their Maker who would be their husband and therefore their provider and master. Next we read that the *“name,”* that is the character and reputation or standing of their God, is *“the Lord of hosts.”* This title indicates that the Lord (that is, the *“I am”* Yahweh), is the Commander-in-Chief of all armies. The covenant making and keeping Lord is in charge and none can overturn His decisions, for He is in supreme command. Third we discover that the Lord is also *“Redeemer,”* the one who purchases or buys back the people of His desire. This title is connected to another title (*“the Holy One of Israel”*) which is frequent in Isaiah, and serves to ground salvation in its right setting, namely, holiness. Finally we learn that this great God is to be known not just as the *“God of Israel,”* but as *“the God of the whole earth.”* Since God is Creator, it stands to reason that He is equally *“the God of the whole earth”* by right, but here we see this in actuality as people the world over will be coming in submission to His great grace and guide.

The section ends with reference to the calling of God. He had *“called”* them whilst they

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were in a “*forsaken*” state. This reminds us of Paul's great statement in Romans chapter 5:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.²⁴⁰⁸

54:6.

Verse 6 also informs us again of their state as a “*youthful wife*,” and as a “*woman forsaken*.” As a consequence of their condition, they were “*refused*,” that is, “rejected,” or “despised,” and were “*grieved in spirit*.” They did not measure up, and so were discarded and their condition left them bereft in heart. This state will change wonderfully in a later section.²⁴⁰⁹

[d] A momentary wrath exchanged for everlasting mercy. (Isaiah 54:7,8).

This section follows on closely from the last. There is symmetry in verses 7 and 8. The first parts of each verse (7 and 8) begins with the idea that God's anger was but for a moment, whilst the second part of each verse describes God's great kindness.

7 “For a mere moment I have forsaken you,
but with great mercies I will gather you.
8 With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment;
but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,”
says the Lord, your Redeemer.

54:7,8.

In verse 7 the first idea is that God's forsaking of His people was for a “*mere moment*,” so that it was barely noticeable. In verse 8 the idea is rather more forceful, but again God's wrath is momentary (the same Hebrew word is used to express the shortness of time). This time, however, we learn that there was an outburst of anger, but as soon as this surfaced, the Lord hides “*His face*.” He turns away.

Contrasting this momentary outburst of anger such that the Lord turns His face away, we are told that His kindness and mercy is rather more prolonged. In verse 7 we discover that the Lord's aim is to gather or assemble them with His “*great mercies*.” In verse 8 we learn of His “*everlasting kindness*” and “*mercy*.” The section ends with the Lord being addressed as their “*Redeemer*.” How great is our God! In these few words we find the essence of the great mercy and love of God who

2408 Romans 5:8.

2409 Isaiah 62:4.

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has purchased His people again. Who can but think of the wrath borne by Christ during those hours on Calvary, followed by the consequent outpouring of mercy and kindness to the people of God ever since? God's wrath was diverted from us to His Son, who bore it all away on that great day. And ever since that day He has spoken peace to His people! Indeed, such is the way of God even from the garden of Eden. His anger was but for a moment and the remedy for Adam and Woman's sin was provided in type and future promise.²⁴¹⁰ Think also of the rescue from Egypt with the Passover! Oh how marvellous is the gospel of God shown forth here in essential detail: God's anger is but for a moment, but His mercy and kindness are everlasting. It was because the sinless Saviour, the God-man, could bear away God's wrath that we could go free. If we were to bear the wrath of God we would never be able to bear it even unto eternity, but the infinite one on the cross could and did take away our sin as the very Lamb of God.²⁴¹¹

[e] A comparison with the judgment at Noah's time. (Isaiah 54:9).

54:9.

The first thing we must note is the importance of the events of Genesis 6 to 9. The flood of Noah's day was such a signal event that it stands as a stark pointer to the soon coming judgement on that final day. But oh how modern man has squashed all recognition and remembrance of this incredible event! The theory of evolution has washed away from the minds of men the great record of God's judgement on wickedness. It cannot wash away the evidence in the rocks and fossils, but can only blind people to its ready message. Instead they laud creation itself as the great former and maker of things in a long slow march of increasing complexity. What nonsense! We need to shout loud and clear that the rocks, the fossils, indeed the very surface of the earth with its mountains and valleys, all declare that judgement that came once some four thousand years ago to this globe for its terrible sin and wickedness.

Now once judgement came at the time of Noah, the Lord subsequently promised that He would never again flood the entire globe.²⁴¹² This is one reason we cannot accept any view which localises the flood story because there have been many local floods, some of which have killed millions of people. If the flood of Genesis 6 to 9 were merely a local Mesopotamian affair, then God is held to be a liar, and that simply will not do. No! The flood was universal and covered the entire

2410 Genesis 3:15,20,21.

2411 John 1:29.

2412 Genesis 9:11.

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earth. We can see that fact clearly in the words of verse 9 here in Isaiah chapter 54. The Lord reminds the people that He had “*sworn*” that the flood waters were never again going to “*cover the earth.*” Such language is certainly universal! But then the Lord says that just as He promised no longer to judge with flood waters, so equally He would refrain from judging His people. He has now sworn that He will not be angry with them, nor will He rebuke them. It is not, of course, that He has chosen to ignore sin and wickedness. That could never be, because God is holy and cannot tolerate sin in any form. Sin is rebellion. Sin is error. Sin is like a blot or stain on an otherwise perfect surface. It must be removed. No! God has not simply decided to forget sin and ignore it. What He has done is to deal with it finally, and He has done this in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ as we have seen described clearly in Isaiah 52:12-53:12 (and elsewhere in Isaiah's great book). This promise is wonderful. Since it is clear that the Lord has indeed kept His promise with regard to the flood, so we trust that He will no longer be angry with us, all because of what Christ has done.

[f] The permanence of the covenant of peace. (Isaiah 54:10).

54:10.

In verse 10 we have mention of the “*covenant of peace.*” The first time this phrase is found in Scripture is in Numbers 25 and it occurs only two other times.²⁴¹³ Up to this point in Israel's journey they had withstood the attempted curses which Balak king of Moab had requisitioned from Balaam the false prophet.²⁴¹⁴ Since a direct attack failed, the next ploy of the wicked one was to entice the men with prostitution. Along with the enticement of the women came acceptance of the gods of Moab, and so it was that “*Israel was joined to Baal of Peor.*”²⁴¹⁵ Now such a departure incurred the great wrath of God and the people were plagued.²⁴¹⁶ To deal with this the Lord told Moses to execute all the ringleaders.²⁴¹⁷ However even after this was done, and the people were weeping because of the terrible thing that had occurred in Israel, nevertheless one man brazenly presented his foreign Midianite wife. At this, the high priest Eleazar became so incensed at such rebellion that he took a javelin, ran after the man and his woman, and thrust it through both of them to remove the offence. Even though this stopped the plague among the Israelites, nevertheless

2413 Ezekiel 34:25; 37:26.

2414 Numbers 22:1f.

2415 Numbers 25:3.

2416 Numbers 25:3,8.

2417 Numbers 25:4,5.

24,000 of them died.²⁴¹⁸ It was at this point that the Lord spoke again to Moses with these words:

11 “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. **12** Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; **13** and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.’”²⁴¹⁹

Now it may seem odd to modern ears that the Lord would give to Eleazar this *“covenant of peace”* for taking the life of a man and woman. But that is only because we have forgotten God and the ways of truth. We have so belittled sin and rebellion in our autonomy and independence. We have decided that life is utterly sacrosanct and none deserve to die! How foolish this is when the Scriptures declare that all who sin must die.²⁴²⁰ In this instance the man (Zimri) and his wife (Cozbi) were from prominent families and were in open defiance and rebellion.²⁴²¹ He *“presented”* the woman to Moses and all the congregation so that, in effect, he was saying: “you cannot tell me what to do!” What should be done to someone who not only defies the truth, but seeks to destroy the very foundation of God's order and rule? It must be borne in mind that the Lord was building the nation Israel at this point. For such open defiance to be ignored would sound the end of the whole project. How would we today deal with such defiance? Well today the point is that the kingdom of God is not of this world. Open defiance of God and His ways will never destroy the true work of God in His kingdom. In the Old Testament there was the real danger of the nation being infiltrated and ruined by sin and rebellion. Consequently it was vital to have such removed. Furthermore, we must remember that the nation were representative of the Lord in a typical sense. In other words, what the Lord had devised for the nation was not only for its best operation and for its good, it also showed forth the character and nature of the soon coming Messiah. If the nations' behaviour was allowed to accommodate to the surrounding nations, then its witness would be marred and indistinct from that of other nations and would not be representative of God. And so Eleazar is to be given this *“covenant of peace.”* Thus we recognise that the Lord respected Eleazar's action because he was zealous for the Lord and His ways.

What is this *“covenant of peace”*? In our text it is defined by the opening statement of the

2418 Numbers 25:7-9.

2419 Numbers 25:11-13.

2420 Ezekiel 18:4,20; Romans 6:23.

2421 Numbers 25:14,15.

Studies in Isaiah.

contrast (signalled by the word “*but*”) as God's “*kindness*,” that is, His mercy, His love. The “*covenant of peace*.” was, of course, only brought in through sacrifice. Christ Himself is our peace and by His death has established peace for us.²⁴²² Now this covenant is to be contrasted with the apparently permanent nature of the Earth's surface features and is never to “*be removed*.” If mountains and hills can be removed after great ages or through a mighty flood and through the soon coming judgement, the “*covenant of peace*” will never be taken away! The former covenant made with Israel at Mount Sinai was broken by the Israelites. This ancient covenant is still in force but none can keep it, with the great and single exception of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are thus saved by works, namely, the works of Christ, who kept this covenant in full on our behalf.

[g] Summary thoughts.

Putting these thoughts from verses 1 through to verse 10 together, we have a remarkable picture of the promise of life in the gospel age. The apparently hopeless cause where the leader had been crucified and those who followed were few in number and in great fear, pictured here in Isaiah 54 as a woman who is described as “*barren*” and “*desolate*,” is to be turned around in the most dramatic of ways. Such will have an abundance of “*children*” so much that the place of their dwelling would need to be greatly enlarged. We see this in the early dramatic influx of believers in the Acts of the apostles. The consequences of this expansion would encompass all the earth's nations, and would bring life back into the forsaken cities. How this has been fulfilled not just in the on-going story of the Acts of apostles, but all through Church history since then! In such a time the people who are a part of this “*covenant of peace*” ought not to fear nor be afraid, for God is their Maker, their husband, their Redeemer and He is the “*God of the whole earth*.” They were forsaken for a very short while but now the “*great mercies*” and “*kindness*” of God would be with them forever.,

[2] How the Lord applies salvation. (Isaiah 54:11-17).

In this second section we are brought to consider the city of Zion (Jerusalem) in salvific terms, and this is finally described at the end as “*the heritage of the servants of the Lord*.” In other words, we have a promise for those who truly follow Christ, pictured as a blessing upon Zion. We could also take this as representative of the church as a whole.

²⁴²² Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14f; Colossians 1:20.

54:11.

The passage begins with a description of the favoured city. We are given a three-fold depiction in verse 11. It is the:

- Afflicted one.
- One tossed with tempest.
- One not comforted.

The first word (*“afflicted”*) signifies one depressed in mind or circumstances. The reference to being *“tossed with tempest”* indicates one who is violently shaken or disturbed. The last of the three descriptions defines one who sighs, laments and grieves. Thus we have one who is brought low in mind and condition, who is terribly disturbed and who mourns and groans in this condition. Listen to our Lord's words from the Sermon on the Mount:

- 3** Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 Blessed *are* those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
5 Blessed *are* the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
6 Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.
7 Blessed *are* the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
8 Blessed *are* the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
9 Blessed *are* the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
10 Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.²⁴²³

The first stage of coming to faith and entering the kingdom of God is to recognise your lost and terrible state. Sometimes you read the importance of humbling oneself before coming to God.²⁴²⁴ Essentially we need to recognise the fact that we are hopeless, helpless, and hapless. We are in desperate need of help because we are all wrong, out of kilter, distorted, and perverse. These may be harsh words, but they are true. Whether we are exercising gross sins, or simply doing our own thing in an outwardly (supposedly) right sort of way, we are not right and not true to God. We remind ourselves of the opening charge in Isaiah 1 where we discover that Israel did not know God! This is true of everyone, not just of Israel. None know God by nature and must be brought to such a condition through the gospel. Thus this three-fold description in Isaiah 54:11 describes all of us in

²⁴²³ Matthew 5:3-10.

²⁴²⁴ Psalm 69:32; Micah 6:8; James 4:10; 1Peter 5:6.

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our lost condition. Another term used in Scripture is: *“dead in trespasses and sins.”*²⁴²⁵ Our we could consider our Saviour's general call recorded in Matthew chapter 11 in which the Lord calls all who *“labour and are heavy laden,”* by which terms He indicates the alienated state of those called.²⁴²⁶

Now such ones are told to pay attention and were to *“behold,”* for the Lord is about to do something on their behalf. The Lord will not just restore the city, but will build it with lavish and splendid riches. The stones to be used were not just bare stones but stones set *“with colourful gems,”* and the foundation was to be set with *“sapphires.”* The first phrase actually indicates beautiful colouring which shimmers or moves about.

54:12.

Then further in verse 12 we read that the tower tops would be made of *“rubies,”* the gates of *“crystal,”* and the walls of *“precious stones.”* The first of these signifies fire from forged metals, (hence the ruby), the second is a stone which is also fiery, and the third is a stone of delight. But why these adornments? Well now there are two clear colourings suggested. First we have the blue of sapphires, and then also we have the red of fire for rubies and crystal. These colours were glimmering or shimmering suggestive of animation or life. One points us to heaven and the other speaks of the blood of life.

54:13,14.

Having described the city construction in terms of precious stones from its foundation through to its walls that act to protect, the description moves to an appreciation of those who dwell in the city. The dwellers of the city are first described as *“children”* but why? Perhaps this is to point them to the future, but perhaps also it suggests the idea of being born in the city as found in Psalm 87. Now the statement of verse 13 is a theme found in Jeremiah and then also as a quote, made by the Lord Jesus, in the New Testament.²⁴²⁷

*It is written in the prophets, ‘and they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.*²⁴²⁸

2425 Ephesians 2:1.

2426 Matthew 11:28.

2427 Jeremiah 31:34; John 6:45;

2428 John 6:45.

Studies in Isaiah.

This theme echoes an earlier description of the gospel age as found in Isaiah 2:3f. It also leads us towards the new covenant idea as expressed, for example, by Jeremiah nearly a century later.²⁴²⁹ Instead of the need for mediating priests to teach the law, the law would be written on people's minds. This promise of the children being taught directly of the Lord is the first of four promises which are as follows:

- Children will be taught of the Lord (not by corrupt priests). (v13).
- Children will possess great peace (no threat of war). (v13).
- The dwellers of the city will be established in righteousness. (v14).
- The dwellers of the city will be far from oppression and terror. (v14).

Such descriptions may suggest a look towards heaven. However the verses following rather suggest a description of the gospel age where the church experiences these things amidst the world's continued falling.

The last of the above statements indicating a great distance from oppression and terror do not imply an absence of these things. Instead the people will *“not fear,”* and such things will not be *“near”* them, but they will be there. The second and third statements coming at the end of verse 13 and the start of verse 14 are the crux of the gospel experience. The children now taught of the Lord will have great peace because of what the Lord has done. We are reminded of Paul's words in Romans 5:

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*²⁴³⁰

And the third statement points us to that given righteousness of God. We have no righteousness of our own and need it to be given. When Christ took upon Himself sin, He gave freely to those who trust in Him His righteousness. These statements in Isaiah do not yet fully speak in New Testament terms, but to understand them we need a New Testament perspective. How, under the old covenant, could they be *“taught by the Lord”*? How could they know such great *“peace,”* when they are enemies of God through their sin? How could they be built up in *“righteousness,”* when they were steeped in sin? These things were not possible in the realm of “do this and you shall live,” but were

²⁴²⁹ See Jeremiah 24:7; 31:31f.

²⁴³⁰ Romans 5:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

possible under the new covenant of “live! And you shall do this.”²⁴³¹ All this and more was certainly not just possible but actual. Here then, in veiled form is a description of the the new gospel age, the new covenant.

Well the description of the new city in the new covenant era ends at verse 14 but the reality within which such a city exists has not really changed as shown by verse 15 and following. We are not in heaven yet. There are still enemies. However the experience of God and the walk of faith have been supremely elevated in this description showing forth the new covenant era. So what are these enemies that the church of God face?

54:15-17. General comments.

We might have entitled verses 15 to 17: “*despite opposition we are protected.*” There is symmetry in these various statements as can be seen through the arrangement and highlighting shown below.

15 Indeed they shall surely assemble, *but* not because of Me.

Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake.

16 “Behold, I have created the blacksmith

who blows the coals in the fire,

who brings forth an instrument for his work; and

I have created the spoiler to destroy.

17 No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and

every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn.

54:15.

The opening word in verse 15 is more often translated as “*behold.*” Exactly the same Hebrew word appears at the start of verse 16. The word signals a call to look and consider with attention. There is a certainty about what the Lord is revealing here. The phrase “*they shall surely assemble*” is a translation of the word “assemble” doubled, which we might render: “assembling they will assemble” (גֹּר יְגוּר *gôr yogûr*). Thus there will be a gathering together of those who will be “*against you,*” that is, the people of God. But this will not be something that God desires, nor is it something He has formulated as a matter of His desired will (“*but not because of Me*”). Such who assemble against the people of God will, however, not succeed. They will “*fall for your sake.*” Such a statement does nothing to remove the fact of opposition, but it does indicate the ultimate fate of it. The people of God will suffer persecution. This is something we read of continually in

2431 Leviticus 18:5; Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:12.

Studies in Isaiah.

Scripture.²⁴³² But the ultimate aim of such persecution always fails. The persecutor can never destroy the will of God who is for His people. Those who do *“assemble against”* God's people will fall and they will fall for the *“sake”* of the people of God. In other words they will fall because the people of God must be secure (in the long run).

54:16.

Verse 16 tells the other side of this story. The Lord never wills nor intends those who would *“assemble against”* the people of God, but He is the one who is Creator and Sovereign ruler over all. There is an emphasis on the fact that the Lord created the *“blacksmith”* here. The personal pronoun, *“I,”* (אֲנִי) is supplemented by the verb with the first person singular suffix, (בָּרַאתִי *“I have created”*) so that we are to be under no illusions as to whom is ultimately in charge. The verb here is also that which is found in Genesis 1, so we have divine creation in view. Now the Lord has created all people including the *“blacksmith”* or fabricator, craftsman of any skilled type. Here the term is further elucidated by two descriptive clauses. He is one *“who blows the coals of fire,”* and one *“who brings forth an instrument for his work.”* These descriptions naturally lead us to the image of a blacksmith but could equally be indicative of any skilled craftsman who uses a furnace and *“instruments”* for his work. What is being suggested by these figures is man's inventive and craftsman-like creative and ingenious nature. The *“blacksmith”* is supplemented with the *“spoiler.”* The later term signifies wasting, corrupting, or destroying. The blacksmith image points us towards the ingenuity and skill, but the *“spoiler”* term shows this up for what it really is, a wasteful despoiling, and destructive enterprise. It is noteworthy that much of modern scientific research is geared towards weaponry and towards other evil intentions such as genetic engineering. Here the point seems to be that the *“blacksmith”* is one who creates implements of destruction and corruption. The skilled artisan and craftsman bends his skill to making implements of torture and persecution.

And so we read that it is the Lord who has indeed created such to do their work. His intention and will is not to persecute, and yet He has created both the *“blacksmith”* and the *“spoiler.”* How should we reconcile such things? God is good and always does good. There can be no thought of evil or wrongdoing associated with the pure and holy God who is righteous through and through. Given His sovereignty, given His Creator-ship, all things, even the evil (including Satan), are under His control. Yet none of the evil intentions of these wicked ones ever entered His

2432 Matthew 5:10,11,12,44; John 16:33; Romans 12:14; 2Corinthians 4:9; Revelation 12:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

thought. God is love. How can evil dwell with God? And yet He allows such evil to do their work in His plan and purpose, making their evil ends doing His righteous work. We struggle to explain this and the origin of evil, but when we focus our attention on the death of the Saviour all things find their resting place. He who came to die for sinners and who gave His life a ransom for the lost did so at the express will and purpose of the Father.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.²⁴³³

And yet in the course of human affairs, it was “*lawless hands*” that took the Saviour and crucified Him:

Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.²⁴³⁴

What mankind intended as a wicked act to end the Saviour, God had pre-ordained for the blessing and benefit of mankind! The Lord makes evil work for good, He makes the crooked paths straight.²⁴³⁵ We cannot always see this on the ground so-to-speak, but this one truth concerning Christ's great work of atonement and self-giving for sin illustrates the great principle. God always does good. The harm and the evil which men perpetrate is no fault of God's. It is the fault of man. Wherever evil abounds there does the grace of God much more abound, but only because God makes evil work for the good.²⁴³⁶

54:17.

Finally we reach verse 17 where the promise of God comes. My attempt at translation is as follows:

Every vessel poured out upon you will not succeed.
And every slanderous tongue that rises up towards you to judge you shall condemn.
This is the inheritance of the servants of the Lord.
And their righteousness is from Me says the Lord.

2433 John 3:16.

2434 Acts 2:23.

2435 Isaiah 40:4; 42:16; 45:2.

2436 Romans 5:20; 8:28.

Studies in Isaiah.

The promise is twofold and concerns both physical and mental persecution. First, we are told that *“no weapon formed against you shall prosper.”* Immediately we need to ask the question: in what sense do we take this word prosper? It is to be noted that the saints have been persecuted and martyred since the days of the apostles. We have no need to read Foxe's Book of Martyrs to demonstrate this. Peter was crucified upside down, Paul was beheaded and countless others since those apostolic days have been murdered and slain. In our day the persecution of Christians is rife in many countries. How then can it be said that *“no weapon formed against you shall prosper”*? The Hebrew text indicates a literal sense here. The *“weapon”* (something prepared or an apparatus) will not advance or push forward. In other words the implement of destruction engineered by the wicked will not succeed in its purpose. For example, a sword forged with keen edges will not push towards a person so as to slice them asunder. And yet we know that many have been slain by the sword or murdered by the bomb and other implements designed to destroy. And yet these weapons cannot ultimately destroy the believer. To make sense of this we need to remember the Lord's words:

*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*²⁴³⁷

Now persecution of the body is not the only form to be experienced by people. Persecution of the mind is equally pernicious. How the words of men hurt. But one day these words will be held to account. We note of course that such persecution was faced by the Saviour in an extreme way as He was being persecuted physically on the cross. Such ridicule and taunting were met with only love and grace. He prayed for his executioners' forgiveness, and he lead a dying criminal who mocked him to salvation. How we ought to draw from His righteousness and emulate such love towards our enemies! Oh dear Lord help me to be such as You were!

Such is the *“heritage”* or future expectation of all who own the title *“servants of the Lord.”* None will escape persecution and tribulation:

*These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*²⁴³⁸

*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*²⁴³⁹

2437 Matthew 10:28.

2438 John 16:33.

2439 2Timothy 3:12.

Studies in Isaiah.

Apart from such sobering thoughts, which stem from the fact that godliness and God's way are diametrically opposed to the proud ways of man bent on rebellion and fleeing from the Lord, we learn also that these *“servants of the Lord”* are not righteous and true by nature, but have such from the Lord (*“their righteousness is from Me”*). This is a very clear statement of how the gospel works. We have no righteousness of our own because we are sinful and rebellious, but God has made it possible for us to receive His righteousness in place for our sin. The great doctrine of substitution is here implied.

Chapter 67.

Isaiah 55:1-13.

A call to thirsty: salvation has come!

Textual analysis.

#55 1 “Ho!

Everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;

and you

who have no money,
come, buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine and milk
without money
and without price.

2 Why do you spend

money
for *what is* not bread,
and your wages
for *what* does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to Me,

and eat *what is* good,
and let your soul delight itself in abundance.

3 Incline your ear,

and come to Me.

Hear,

and your soul shall live;
and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—
the sure mercies of David.

4 Indeed I have given him *as*

a witness to the people,
a leader
and commander for the people.

5 Surely

you shall call a nation you do not know,
and nations *who* do not know you shall run to you,
because of
the Lord your God,
and the Holy One of Israel;
for He has glorified you.”

6 Seek the Lord

while He may be found,
call upon Him
while He is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake his way,

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and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return
to the Lord,
and He will have mercy on him;
and
to our God,
for He will abundantly pardon.

8 “For
My thoughts *are* not your thoughts,
nor *are* your ways My ways,”
says the Lord.

9 “For
as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are
My ways higher than your ways,
and
My thoughts than your thoughts.

10 “For
as the rain comes down,
and the snow from heaven,
and do not return there,
but water the earth,
and make it bring forth and bud,
that it may give
seed to the sower
and bread to the eater,
11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
it shall not return to Me void,
but it shall accomplish what I please,
and it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

12 “For you shall
go out with joy,
and be led out with peace;
the mountains
and the hills
shall break forth into singing before you,
and all the trees of the field
shall clap *their* hands.
13 Instead of the thorn
shall come up the cypress tree,
and instead of the brier
shall come up the myrtle tree;
and it
shall be to the Lord
for a name,
for an everlasting sign
that shall not be cut off.”

In this chapter we have the Lord speaking in two parts, separated by a description of those who truly thirst. The first part of the Lord's speaking comes in verses 1 to 5, and this is evidenced by such statements as: *“listen carefully to Me,” “come to Me,” “I will make an everlasting*

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covenant with you,” and *“I have given him as a witness.”*²⁴⁴⁰ In this section we have the gospel call to *“everyone who thirsts.”* The second part of the Lord's speaking comes in verses 8 to 13 where we have the expression, *“says the Lord”* in verse 8, and then references to the Lord in the first person (*“My ways,” “My thoughts,”* and *“My word”*).²⁴⁴¹ In this section we have an assurance of the promise of the gospel and a firm and beautiful expression, or declaration, of the *“sure mercies of David.”* Sandwiched in between these two, we have a clear description of what is required of those who are *“thirsty.”* The three parts of the text will be considered under the following headings:

[1] The gospel call. (Isaiah 55:1-5).

[2] What it means to truly thirst. (Isaiah 55:6,7).

[3] The sure mercies of David. (Isaiah 55:8-13).

[1] The gospel call. (Isaiah 55:1-5).

55:1.

The passage opens with an interjection often rendered as we have it here as *“Ho!”* It is a dramatic and publicly vocal arrest of the attention, somewhat akin to the town criers of olden times who brought news to the distant towns when they cried out “Oyez, oyez, oyez” (a contraction of: “Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye.”).

There are no conditions attached to those called except they be in dire need. This call comes to *“everyone,”* and not just to the Jew or the people of God, but to the Gentiles too. This is remarkable. How had the Jews of Jesus' day missed this? However there is this one stipulation, the call comes only to the one *“who thirsts.”* To the one who not only knows their need but is desperate too. A man who thirsts for water but yet hides his thirst is a fool. We cannot live physically without water for more than three or possibly four days. Anyone in such a condition will beg for water. Thus this call is to those who have come to recognise their spiritual thirst, their dire need for the waters that bring life.

The first call is to *“come to the waters.”* Some commentators imagine that we have here a parable in which there is a boat which has drawn along the quayside laden with goods and provisions from a distant land. However the emphasis in the text is to come to gain *water*, a very

2440 Isaiah 55:2,3,4.

2441 Isaiah 55:8,9,11.

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basic commodity needful for life, not goods and provisions. There is no description of where these waters are. It seems to me that they are readily accessible or nearby and the wonder is that the thirsty have not already partaken! Next, the call comes to those who are poor as suggested by the description that they *"have no money."* Thus the call is not just to one who is in great need and knows it, but further to those who know they can do nothing to alleviate their need. They have *"no money"* with which to satisfy their thirst. It might be thought at this point, that there could be some who do have the money to pay for such a need, but that would be a mistake. *"Everyone"* is addressed here. And *"everyone"* are described as having *"no money."* There is, thus, no currency and no amount of any currency which can procure satisfaction for this thirst. We are all bankrupt with regard to this need whether we be Jew or Gentile, rich or poor.

Those who have *"no money"* are exhorted to *"buy."* But how can one who is penniless buy anything? The answer is supplied *"without money and without price."* In other Scriptures we learn that salvation is a free gift of God's grace. But here we are taught to *"buy"* this water and yet without those things normally associated with procurement and trade. What then will a person give in exchange for this water? It is normal when buying anything to engage in a transaction but here there is no price nor money which is required. And yet when a person comes to Christ to take the water of life freely they must give themselves wholly unto the Lord. The true exchange is my sin for Christ's righteousness. What an incredible bargain!

The call is then expanded. This is the third time we get the word *"come"* in verse 1 and such triple reference leads to thoughts of the Trinity once more. The call is not just to take and buy water, but to *"eat"* as well, and further to *"buy wine and milk."* The parched and dry of soul are not just called to quench their thirst but to indulge in a veritable feast. There is a step up from water which is required for life, to milk which is that which nourishes and brings growth, and then to wine which brings the heart cheer.²⁴⁴² Wine, of course, also speaks of the New Covenant blood of Christ.²⁴⁴³

55:2,3.

In verse 2 the Lord switches from the rousing call issued in verse 1, to ask a rhetorical question that fits the experience of *"everyone."* Why is it that people use their hard earned cash and the wages they have laboured for, to waste it on that which *"is not bread,"* and for that which *"does not satisfy"*? What is the drive and motivation of life? Is it to get possessions and food and

2442 Judges 9:13; Proverbs 27:27; Ecclesiastes 9:7; Song of Solomon 5:1; 1Peter 2:2.

2443 1Corinthians 11:25.

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entertainment? What is of greater priority and must be gathered first? In the wilderness the people had to go out each morning and gather the “*manna*” which came down from heaven.²⁴⁴⁴ Why then do people ignore the Lord's rich blessings that drip abundantly from His risen Christ in our day daily?

There then follows a threefold imperative to pay attention. In that this is the risen Lord speaking I have no doubt, but we must always recognise that the Holy Trinity works together in perfect harmony. Wherever there is a threefold call or when a subject is three times referred to, it is a signal for us that the three persons of the Godhead are involved. There is One God but three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Those addressed are to “*listen carefully,*” “*incline*” the ear, and to “*hear.*”²⁴⁴⁵ The first of these phrases is another of those doubled uses of a single Hebrew word which we might render, “hearing you must hear.” This is a superlative expression. Hear like you have never heard before. The second expression (“*incline your ear*”) describes an action. We might say: “bend your ear,” or “prick up your ears.” The idea is to align yourself so that you truly hear what is being said. The last imperative is a single use of the word found in the first phrase. Thus we are exhorted to make it our prime business to attend to what is being said. Do not let this opportunity pass by. Hold yourself in check, arrest your heart and ears, and attend to this call.

It is astonishing that the Lord has to almost shout at us with an alarming wake-up call to hear the great, good news. Only this is food which is truly “*good*” and substantial for the soul. All other pretenders to nourishment are sawdust and hay. They are dust and ashes, chaff and dregs, and will simply bloat without providing sustenance. What can we fill the soul with in this world which will truly satisfy? As our Saviour declared:

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?²⁴⁴⁶

Only what the Lord has to offer will truly “*delight*” the soul. Look how generous the Lord is, for the soul is called to “*delight itself in abundance.*”²⁴⁴⁷ The Lord is no measly nor miserly giver! There is true nourishment and delight for the soul in great abundance. Why go elsewhere? Why try and stuff your mind and heart with worldly entertainment, worldly wisdom, and worldly deviations

2444 Exodus 16:13f.

2445 Isaiah 55:2,3.

2446 Matthew 16:26.

2447 Isaiah 55:2.

Studies in Isaiah.

and diversions? To partake of these delights requires us to come to the Lord (*“come to Me”*). This too is what the Saviour said:

28 Come to Me, all *you* who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.²⁴⁴⁸

How then do we come to Christ? The answer to that question is simple. Believe in whom He is and in what He has done. Rest your weary and famished soul entirely on Him. Trust not in yourself or in other gods (be they political, religious, scientific or whatever). Structure your thought, your life, your desire, your very being on this truth: that in Christ Jesus alone are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and you need nothing else besides Him.²⁴⁴⁹

The soul that heeds these calls and obeys by turning to look to Christ in faith will *“live.”*²⁴⁵⁰ This is remarkable for two reasons. First all souls are dead in trespasses and sins so how can they turn and look to Christ?²⁴⁵¹ The answer is simple again. The paralytic whose four friends lowered through a roof to be near Jesus was told to get up and take this bed and go home!²⁴⁵² Such a thing was impossible for the paralysed man, but when Christ spoke the word, the man obeyed by faith. It is the same here. You are dead in your sins and have no thought of God. You satisfy your soul with all manner of wood, hay, and stubble but you now realise how famished you are. Are you hearing this call? Can you hear the Lord speak to you through His word? Well then trust Him!

There is a second reason why this promise of life is remarkable. The covenant of Sinai in the Old Testament was a covenant of works. The requirement was for people to obey what was commanded and on that basis they would have life.

*You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.*²⁴⁵³

This was, of course, impossible except for one person, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. But the New Covenant puts things the other way around. The Lord comes with *“life”* so that a person may keep all that God commands. That is what is being expressed here in Isaiah 55:3. If we hear the gospel

2448 Matthew 11:28-30.

2449 Colossians 2:2,3.

2450 Isaiah 55:3.

2451 Ephesians 2:1f.

2452 Mark 2:11.

2453 Leviticus 18:5. See also: Nehemiah 9:29; Ezekiel 18:9; 20:11; Luke 10:28; Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:12.

Studies in Isaiah.

call we will *“live”*! We are no longer bound to keep the entire law perfectly in order to gain life! We have life on hearing the gospel, and then we are enabled to keep all that God commands. This is made plain in the next statement of verse 3, where we read: *“and I will make an everlasting covenant with you – the sure mercies of David.”* The Old Covenant failed not because it was inherently bad or faulty, but because of sin, our sin. But now a New Covenant has come, an *“everlasting covenant”* which cannot and will not fail because Christ kept the Old Covenant on our behalf perfectly. What then is meant by this phrase *“the sure mercies of David”*? Can David bring mercy? David was a man after God's own heart whom the Lord loved and blessed, but David was a man, a sinner like you and I.²⁴⁵⁴ How can David bring mercy? In order to answer this we must look at the new Testament where Stephen in Acts 13 appeals to this very statement in proof of Christ's resurrection:

And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’²⁴⁵⁵

David had been long dead at the time Isaiah was prophesying, and so we recognise that this was prophetic. The Lord was speaking not of David of old, but of the Son of David, namely Christ Jesus. Having kept the law perfectly, and having offered up His life in our place, the Lord, the Son of David, can say to those whom He is calling: *“Live!”* The New Covenant is a covenant of great mercy and assurance. It is the *“Amen”* mercies. The true and certain mercies. In this call there is but mercy! All that we deserve is withheld! And it is withheld on the basis that all that was required of us has been *“paid in full”* by Christ.

55:4,5.

Verses 4 and 5 describe the David to come in more detail. Verse 4 tells us something about the character of this David, the Messiah, and verse 5 is a statement from the Lord (the Father) about what the Messiah (David) will do. We begin by noting that this *“David”* is *“given”* to us!²⁴⁵⁶ First the Messiah is described as *“a witness to the people.”* This may be thought of as rather tame. Is this all the Messiah will be? However we need to realise what the Messiah is witness too! In Revelation He is described as the *“Faithful and True witness.”*²⁴⁵⁷ The Messiah is the only one who can bear

2454 1Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22.

2455 Acts 13:34.

2456 John 3:16.

2457 Revelation 1:5; 3:14.

Studies in Isaiah.

witness to all that the Father wants to reveal. In John's gospel we discover that the Word alone can make the Father known perfectly.

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*.²⁴⁵⁸

Thus the Messiah is witness to heaven, and He reveals the things of God.²⁴⁵⁹ But then second, the Messiah is not only the revealer of God, He is also “*a leader*.” This word has quite a semantic range but basically indicates a ruler, captain, or prince who is conspicuous and stands out. He is our pioneer. The last term “*commander*” signifies one who issues commands and makes appointments. In some ways these three designations of the Messiah point us to His threefold office of prophet, priest, and king. The Messiah is The Prophet who does not just reveal piecemeal, but is Himself the revelation of God. He is also the Priest who stands out and acts as a pioneer making the way through into the heavenly realms. He is the true King who rules and commands with authority and power.

On account of His status and being, the Messiah will “*call a nation*” unknown. Here we see the gospel going abroad to the Gentiles. The Lord had chosen Jacob and his descendants out of Egypt to be Israel, but now the Messiah will call an unknown nation to be His people. As a consequence of this call, other “*nations*” who know not the Messiah will “*run*” to Him!²⁴⁶⁰ We see this worked out in an individual sense in the first chapter of John's gospel. One disciple hears Jesus and calls a friend and he in turn calls another, and so on.²⁴⁶¹ In this instance it is not individuals but nations. One nation is called of God and is blessed with the gospel, and now that nation acts as a witness and other nations run to see what has transpired. So it is down through the ages as the plan and intention of God is worked out. This occurs not through the effort and exertion of man! We are so weak and pathetic to think that it is by our strategy, or by our missions, or by our programmes that Christ may be made known to the world! Oh please do not misunderstand me here. The Lord calls us to a work. He calls us to do certain things out of love for Him. But often we make the programmes and the activities our gods! Do all as unto the Lord heartily and seek to glorify Him alone.²⁴⁶² No! The witness to the world and the rushing forth of the nations comes about on account

2458 John 1:18. See also John 14:2,6,9-11.

2459 Hebrews 1:1-3.

2460 Isaiah 55:5.

2461 John 1:40-51.

2462 1Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17,23.

Studies in Isaiah.

of *“the Lord your God,”* and because of *“the Holy One of Israel.”* This is God's work! The success of this work comes because the Messiah is *“glorified.”* The night before He died the Lord Jesus requested of His Father that He receive back the glory He had when He was with the Father before the world began.²⁴⁶³ Such came about when the Lord was raised from the dead and then ascended into heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father.²⁴⁶⁴

Notice it is the work of the *“Holy One”* and so is pure and sanctified. The description we have here is one that depicts what happens in revivals. The Lord comes to a place and pours forth His Spirit. People are converted being convicted of sin and rush to the Saviour for relief. Others hear about what has transpired and rush to see what is going on. Before long revival spreads and others are brought in to eternal rest. Such is true on the wider national scale. One country comes under the gospel and then another and another. Sometimes (sadly) a country or nation backslides and falls from grace. This is our state today. We need the Lord to be merciful to us! Forgive us Saviour that we have squandered your rich blessings. Help us to heed the gospel call again!

What it means to truly thirst. (Isaiah 55:6,7).

55:6,7.

The gospel call has been issued. The Lord has spoken. What will men and women do? In these two verses we are given a set of imperatives which illustrate what it means to thirst. There are four aspects here to the nature of a true thirst, and these are described by the active verbs in these two verses, *“seek,” “call (upon),” “forsake,”* and *“return.”* The first two aspects *“seek,”* and *“call (upon)”* are part of that whole business of trust and faith. True faith is to seek, by which we mean to frequent and to enquire. There is a looking to the Lord with respect and trust as we ask and enquire of Him. Then further, there is a dependency as we cry out to Him. This aspect comes early in the history of the world when *“men began to call on the name of the Lord.”*²⁴⁶⁵ It signals a reliance on God as a matter of course, not just when things are tough. The command is to seek and to call upon *“while He may be found”* and *“while He is near.”*²⁴⁶⁶ From these statements we must make it plain that the Lord is not far away. He is nearby and can easily be found. Just as we observed that the *“waters”* must have been readily accessible, so we find that the source of those

2463 John 17:5.

2464 Luke 24:26; John 7:39; 13:31,32; Acts 3:13.

2465 Genesis 4:26.

2466 Isaiah 55:6.

Studies in Isaiah.

“waters,” (the very source of life), is at hand. The Lord does not issue a call for no reason. He is not capricious and fickle. Having gone to such lengths to bring salvation about, why would He make the reception of it so difficult? That is not to say that we ought not throw ourselves wholeheartedly upon His mercy and grace. We ought to rush and eagerly appropriate that which the Lord freely gives with thanks and praise. There is nothing withholding or barring reception of that which the Lord has procured. He is *“near”* and He may be *“found.”* Of course this means that He may not always be near, and there will come a time when He will not be found. I am chiefly speaking of the Lord's return in saying this, but for those who repeatedly reject the Lord's call such a time may come way before His return.

A part of true thirst is not only the seeking and calling upon the Lord in utter dependence, but also includes the forsaking of sin, the world, and wickedness. This is expressed by calling the wicked to give up *“his way.”*²⁴⁶⁷ Self dependence and independence are the roads to ruin. We were made to walk in concert with the Lord. Any walk that is without God is false and failing. Thus to thirst is to recognise the barrenness of the way we have taken thus far. It may be a way we have chosen or preferred, or it may be a way influenced by others and other ideals. But any way that is not the way of God is bound to be in opposition to God, and so becomes wicked. This forsaking does not just concern our lifestyle or way, but goes much deeper. It concerns a man's *“thoughts.”*²⁴⁶⁸ All that we base our life upon, our world view, and the way we think of things, must come under the Lord's rule. This is summed up by the word *“return”* which speaks of repentance or turning around and thinking again.²⁴⁶⁹ Thus we have this dual aspect to salvation. It concerns trust and faith – seeking and calling upon the Lord for help, rescue and aid. And it also includes giving up, thinking again, and reformulating all things in accordance with the way God wishes and thinks. Our return and repentance is unto *“the Lord,”* and to *“our God.”* In other words, we must repent and turn to the Self-existent one who IS and to the Almighty, the Creator of all things, which includes our very life. Look what such a *“return”* brings! It yields *“mercy”* (the withholding of justly deserved punishment), and abundant *“pardon,”* (free grace and forgiveness).²⁴⁷⁰ The Lord is not slow to forgive and to bestow favour to the one who heeds the call and runs to Him for safety! Why then delay? If we have stumbled, why waste time on the floor? Come to Him!

2467 Isaiah 55:7.

2468 Isaiah 55:7.

2469 Isaiah 55:7.

2470 Isaiah 55:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

The sure mercies of David. (Isaiah 55:8-13).

The phrase we have used as a title here comes in the first part of this chapter, but seems fitting because the essence of what transpires is an assurance of what the Lord will do for those who seek and who thirst. We have heard the gospel call (verses 1 to 5), and we have heard the imperative to seek, call, forsake sin, and repent (verses 6 & 7). Now we are given some clear reasons why we should run to the Lord for aid and rescue as evidenced by the word *“for”* which occurs four times in verses 8 to 12.

55:8,9.

First we are taught that our *“thoughts”* and *“ways”* are not those which the Lord has.²⁴⁷¹ We would choose the easy option, the way of safety and security, the way of self and preservation. How God views things and how we view things are not the same. How the Lord carries out His plans and how we exercise our wills are not the same. How could they be? We are conceived in sin and we walk in Adam's shadow. It is natural for us to sin and to continue in sin. This is not our created way, of course. It is rather our fallen *natural* way. Having the mind renewed and having the way of life redirected is described as a radical transformation. Paul speaks of being translated from one kingdom to another.²⁴⁷² Christ speaks of the need for a new birth.²⁴⁷³ The change is thus radical. We see this by simply considering God's ways and thoughts, which are righteous, good, holy, and pure, and ours, which are evil because they do not take thought of God nor how we were made to be in communion with Him. To cement this idea of a different order of magnitude between God and us, the Lord next uses an analogy.²⁴⁷⁴ The difference between God's ways and thoughts and ours is like the difference in height between *“the heavens,”* and *“the earth.”* Whether we confine ourselves to the created order here, or whether we speak of the true heavens where God dwells, the distance is of infinite proportions.²⁴⁷⁵

55:10,11.

Next, in verses 10 and 11 we are told that what God proposes in word and deed is so sure that we ought never to be in any no doubt on the matter. Another analogy is used. Just as the

2471 Isaiah 55:8.

2472 Colossians 1:13.

2473 John 3:1f.

2474 Isaiah 55:9.

2475 The reader should not take from this that the universe is necessarily infinite in extent. We make no such claim either way on this matter. The point is that it is impossible to locate the end or extremity of the heavens we call “space.”

Studies in Isaiah.

“rain” and *“snow”* pour forth *“from heaven”* and *“water the earth,”* so whenever God speaks His *“word,”* such will come and do all that God intended for it to do. This brings us to reconsider creation where, as the Psalmist put it, whenever God spoke so His command was obeyed.²⁴⁷⁶ God's word is thus likened to the rain which aids the growth of the plants that they may *“bring forth,”* *“bud,”* *“give seed to the sower,”* and thence in consequence bring *“bread to the eater.”*²⁴⁷⁷ God's word sent to earth does exactly what the Lord intended for it. It will not *“return ... void”* and it will *“accomplish”* everything that the Lord pleases.²⁴⁷⁸ When God decides to do something, or when He issues a spoken command, He never needs to adjust or correct His plans. God never has need of a “plan B.” All that God intends will be accomplished just exactly as He so determined. Since God is unchangeable and perfect, we can make the easy assumption that His word is also unchanging and perfect. Those who suggest that there may be error in Scripture, or who think of God's word as something separate from Scripture, or who think that we cannot ever really know what God has spoken err dangerously. God has spoken, who can but agree and obey?

55:12.

Given this unimpeachable truth that when God speaks His word is sure and certain, the assurance of verse 12 is extremely comforting to those who thirst and have come to the Lord for relief. To such as have heeded the gospel call we find that these will be the bearers of joy! Verse 12 is the assurance of faith we need to hear. First we are taught that those who trust will *“go out with joy.”* Where are these going? I think the answer is obvious. Believers are pilgrims in this earth.²⁴⁷⁹ They have no permanent dwelling place on earth.²⁴⁸⁰ Thus believers are to go about this world with joy! This is promised by the Lord. But they do not go out alone, for they are to *“be led out with peace.”* It is the Lord who leads, and He leads with peace! It is notable that when the Lord appeared to the disciples after His resurrection the first thing He spoke to His disciples was *“peace.”*²⁴⁸¹ This pilgrimage and journey will be celebrated by all of creation. Not only the *“mountains”* and *“hills,”* but the *“trees of the field”* will also join in the celebration. We might also consider these images as representative of people, as Isaiah is found of using such images to depict people.²⁴⁸²

2476 The words *“and it was so”* follow on from the action of God speaking in Genesis 1. See Genesis 1:6,7,9,11 etc. See also: Psalm 33:6,9.

2477 Isaiah 55:10.

2478 Isaiah 55:11.

2479 Hebrews 11:3; 1Peter 1:1; 2:11.

2480 Hebrews 13:14.

2481 John 20:19,21.

2482 Isaiah 2:14; 41:19.

55:13.

Then in verse 13 we discover that a reversal of the curse has occurred. In place of the *“thorn”* will arise the *“cypress tree,”* and in place of the *“brier”* will arise the *“myrtle tree.”* The thorn and briars are obvious indications of the curse.²⁴⁸³ But what might be indicated by the cypress and myrtle trees? These two trees are only ever mentioned together again in Isaiah 41 along with five others to depict the range of believers.

I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree;
I will set in the desert the cypress tree *and* the pine and the box tree together.²⁴⁸⁴

Perhaps then we have two extremes, the cypress being a tall stately tree and the myrtle being a spreading bush, as representatives of the whole. Whatever the case we have new life and new creation in place of the curse. This is the way of the Lord who recreates. Just as He made an abundance of vegetation and life in the beginning, so now throughout time He is recreating new life in readiness for the day of His return. These new creations will be in the earth as figures and pictures pointing towards the new creation that will be finally ushered in when Christ returns. They stand to represent the Lord and will be *“for a name”* and *“for an everlasting sign.”* True believers will show forth the name of God! True believers will be for a sign which speaks of eternity and which will never be *“cut off.”* What a tremendous privilege!

2483 Genesis 3:18.

2484 Isaiah 41:19.

Chapter 68.

Isaiah 56:1-8.

The son of the foreigner and the eunuch.

Textual analysis.

#56 1 Thus says the Lord:

“keep justice,
and do righteousness,
for My salvation *is* about to come,
and My righteousness to be revealed.

2 Blessed *is*

the man *who* does this,
and the son of man
who lays hold on it;
who

keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
and keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

3 Do not let the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord speak, saying,
“the Lord has utterly separated me from His people”;
nor let the eunuch say,
“here I am, a dry tree.”

4 For thus says the Lord:

“to the eunuchs who
keep My Sabbaths,
and choose what pleases Me,
and hold fast My covenant,

5 Even to them I will give
in My house
and within My walls

a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters;

I will give them

an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

6 “Also the sons of the foreigner who
join themselves to the Lord,
to serve Him,
and to love the name of the Lord,
to be His servants—

everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant—

7 Even them I will

bring to My holy mountain,
and make them joyful in My house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *will be* accepted on My altar;
for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

8 The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says,

“yet I will gather to him *others* besides those who are gathered to him.”

Studies in Isaiah.

Isaiah chapters 56 and 57 complete the second part of the second main division of Isaiah. The first eight verses of Isaiah 56 seem to point us towards the Lord's aim to include the Gentiles in His work of salvation, but then from verse 9 of Isaiah 56 to the end of Isaiah 57 we have a tirade against the *"sons of the sorceress,"* and against the *"offspring of the adulterer and the harlot."*²⁴⁸⁵ This section begins with a word of severe reproof for the *"watchmen"* and *"shepherds"* which speak of Israel's leaders.²⁴⁸⁶ Chapter 57 ends with a call for the backslider to repent.²⁴⁸⁷ Although these two chapters of Isaiah may be considered together, I have separated them so that the message concerning the Gentiles will be dealt with in this chapter, whilst the word of reproof and judgement against the wicked watchmen and evil leaders of Israel followed by the call to repent for the backslider will be treated in the next.

Isaiah 56:1-8 comes in three unequal sections. The first two verses describe the blessedness of the man who does what the Lord requires. This seems to be addressed to believing Israelites who are awaiting the coming of the Messiah who will bring salvation. Verses 3 to 7 describe the Lord's great mercy to those who were considered natural outcasts as far as Israel were concerned. Verse 8 points us to the in-gathering of both Israelites and others (Gentiles) as the purpose of God's plan.

[1] How believers should live. (Isaiah 56:1,2).

[2] Outcasts are cast out no more. (Isaiah 56:3-7).

[3] The gospel includes "others." (Isaiah 56:8).

[1] How believers should live. (Isaiah 56:1,2).

56:1.

It is important to keep in view what has already been made clear in the previous chapter. We read in that chapter (Isaiah 55) that the gospel is free and open to him who is thirsty. There is no thought in anything covered in Isaiah 55 of the Old Covenant which requires obedience before life. Consequently when we read here the Lord's words to *"keep justice, and do righteousness,"* we are not to imagine a reversion to the Old Covenant which says:

2485 Isaiah 57:3.

2486 Isaiah 56:9f.

2487 Isaiah 57:15-18.

Studies in Isaiah.

You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I *am* the Lord.²⁴⁸⁸

Rather we are to understand that the *consequence* of coming to the Lord in faith, of drinking the water of life, is a new life which must be evidenced by justice and righteousness. Faith comes first and the outcome of faith is a life that has been justified and is being sanctified.²⁴⁸⁹ Good works follow true faith.

Thus the exhortation to “*keep justice, and do righteousness,*” is a reminder of what salvation by faith is intended to do. A person is born again and thus puts their trust in God with the express purpose of being made new, made in the image of Christ, so as to be set apart as a sanctified vessel fit for the Master's use.

Now the next two statements might suggest to the reader that in fact the salvation announced in Isaiah 55 is *yet to come* and in the meantime people are to “*keep justice, and do righteousness,*” or, in other words, to do what is right that they may live (i.e. keep the Old Covenant). The expression “*for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed,*” does seem to indicate a future event in which the gospel – the provision of righteousness in Christ for salvation – is being anticipated.²⁴⁹⁰ However the fact that the advent of Christ is yet future does not stop the call of the gospel going out in advance. Thus in a personal sense, a person of Isaiah's time may experience salvation and procure the righteousness of Christ through faith even though it is yet to be revealed in point of time in an objective sense. It can hardly be the case that the Lord would appeal to people to take the waters of life without cost or money (“*come to Me, hear, and your soul shall live*”), only then to state that they must work for their salvation (“*keep justice, and do righteousness*”).²⁴⁹¹

We might also add that the last two statements (“*for My salvation is about to come and My righteousness to be revealed*”) can also be taken in the final sense. The reader is reminded that salvation has a threefold time aspect. A person is saved and receives Christ's righteousness the moment they truly trust the Lord.²⁴⁹² However they are also saved and made righteous the moment

2488 Leviticus 18:5.

2489 Ephesians 2:8-10.

2490 These two words “*righteousness*” and “*salvation*” are not synonymous but seem always to go together in Isaiah. See comments at Isaiah 45:8.

2491 Isaiah 55:3; 56:1.

2492 This may be during the time of Isaiah we are considering now, or any time after Christ's death and resurrection. It is the moment when a person actually turns and trusts the Lord for salvation and thus is subjective to the person themselves.

Studies in Isaiah.

Christ declared that *"it is finished."*²⁴⁹³ Then also, a person is saved ultimately and finally when the Lord returns and makes all things new. If we understand the first statement of Isaiah 56:1 as an exhortation to work out one's faith and to do the good works which the Lord had prepared beforehand, then we ought to take the last two statements as referring to their final application when Christ returns.²⁴⁹⁴

56:2.

In verse 2, the Lord then goes on to establish plainly what has been given in a general sense in verse 1. The man who is truly happy will be the one who *"does"* and who *"lays hold on"* certain things. Again we are not to take from this that the Lord is expressing the covenant of works, but is merely speaking of the outcome of a true trust and faith in the Lord. True salvation is not simply faith for it also involves repentance. Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. We separate them to aid in understanding, but in reality a person who trusts in the Lord and believes in Him will also turn from their former ways and make changes in their behaviour. Someone who truly sees the risen Lord by faith cannot be happy to continue in unrighteousness. However all of us stumble and are still in the process of being sanctified, and therefore we need these constant exhortations to righteousness. We will be *"blessed"* if we continue in faith and trust and if (as a result of this) we live according to God's ways. It is all a question of perspective. The Old Covenant says that we must keep the law fully in order to reap the rewards of life as promised by God. The New Covenant says that because we cannot keep the Old Covenant (and have broken it) we need a surety who has kept it on our behalf. We need further to entrust our lives wholly to that surety. We exchange our debts for His righteousness. We cannot simply be excused of our debts to God and walk away with no effect on our lives. We must also take hold of the righteousness which the Lord Jesus freely imputes to us.

Two statements are given as representatives of what might be expected of one who truly trusts and has living faith in the Lord. These are by no means exclusive. By mentioning these the Lord is not suggesting that other aspects of the moral law may be ignored or neglected. The first statement is specific and refers to the fourth commandment to *"remember the Sabbath day, to keep*

2493 John 19:30.

2494 Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:12. Of course if it is contended that these verses must indicate a reference to the Old Covenant (*"which if a man does, he shall live by them"* – Leviticus 18:5), then we ought to say that the Lord is perfectly justified in demanding that we uphold His righteous demands. A statement concerning the Old Covenant is always true. It is what we are meant to do. It is the measure by which we are judged. It is always the requirement of God. However because Isaiah 55 brings us right to the issue of the gospel it seems better to view Isaiah 56 as speaking concerning sanctification and the life of faith.

Studies in Isaiah.

it holy."²⁴⁹⁵ The second statement is more general and covers (at least) all the rest of the commandments. It may be that these two statements are one form of shorthand to cover all of the commandments. To truly honour the Sabbath it is necessary that we must also worship God to the exclusion of other pretensions to our affection. Thus the fourth commandment, in a very real sense, entails the first three commandments.

But why is there reference to the Sabbath here? When we consider the text, it appears that this was the issue that the Israelites of Isaiah's day had fallen foul of, and thus were guilty. They defiled the Sabbath. The commandment was to "*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,*" but there were obviously those around who were guilty of "*defiling the Sabbath,*" and so a blessed man would be one who "*keeps from defiling the Sabbath.*" The natural tendency of fallen mankind is to defile and desecrate what the Lord has given. New birth enables a person to "*keep*" that which the Lord requires of us, and one of those things is upholding the Sabbath. We must recall here, that the Sabbath is, in fact, a part of creation. God rested from His work of creation on the seventh day and we are commanded to rest from our works too. What is entailed in "*defiling the Sabbath*"? The key point about a Sabbath is the whole notion of rest. The Pharisees made the grave mistake of trying to define what constituted work so that their obedience could be measured. The New Testament teaches that the Sabbath is not a day of solemnity and drudge, which it is often portrayed as (unwittingly) by many "evangelicals," but a gift of God wherein we may rest from work, give unfettered praise to God, and enjoy His creation.²⁴⁹⁶ To defile such a gift is to ignore it, or to abuse it in some way. We could defile the Sabbath by simply continuing to work and not actually to rest.²⁴⁹⁷ Or we could abuse the gift and privilege by making it an onerous and difficult thing to observe. This is what the Pharisees did and what many who claim to be believers of a more austere disposition do.²⁴⁹⁸ The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.²⁴⁹⁹ By heaping up regulations upon people to observe the Sabbath, or by ignoring it and acting as if it matters little whether we rest or not, such are the ways that the Sabbath is defiled. Thus believers are enjoined to keep the Sabbath as a gift from the Lord. We stop our routine daily activities of work and so on and we rest. We enjoy God and give Him thanks and we enjoy the rich blessings He has showered upon us!

The remaining statement of verse 2 is a general one. The believer is to "*keep his hand from doing any evil.*" There are a multitude of things we may be lead into doing. Many are harmless but

2495 Exodus 20:8.

2496 See Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16,17; Hebrews 4:9,10.

2497 Obviously there are some occasions where work is necessary or even essential, such as saving lives.

2498 We ought always to respect the weaker brother. See Romans 14:1f.

2499 Mark 2:27.

Studies in Isaiah.

some are wicked. The natural inclination of the fallen nature is to do evil, to do that which displeases God. But now with a new heart and mind, the believer is encouraged to offer up his life and the members of his body to glorify God, forsaking the world and its proclivities.²⁵⁰⁰

[2] Outcasts are cast out no more. (Isaiah 56:3-7).

56:3.

Two specific people are named in verse 3. These are *“the son(s) of the foreigner,”* and *“the eunuch(s).”* Israel prided itself on being a separate nation all derived from the son of promise, namely Isaac. Isaac's son Jacob had twelve sons and these became the twelve tribes of Israel. However the Lord did not limit the promise to these people alone. It was possible for an outsider to be joined to Israel, at least to be counted amongst the faithful. Table 68.1 shows some examples of those who were drawn in to believe. However the case of foreigners is somewhat ambiguous when it comes to full participation in the nation. The law taught that aliens and foreigners were to be welcomed and protected because Israel had been a foreigner in Egypt.²⁵⁰¹ On the other hand we read in Ezra 9:1-4 that giving sons in marriage to foreign women appears not to be acceptable. Now in actual fact, the text of Ezra 9 makes it plain that the problem was not so much that the people had married foreign wives, as that they had *“not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with respect to the abominations”* of the various surrounding nations.²⁵⁰² Of course marrying a foreign wife might lead to mixture and compromise if that foreign wife did not want to depart from her pagan origins. Notwithstanding this, the law stated that a foreigner could not eat the Passover, and could not provide an animal for sacrifice.²⁵⁰³ Eunuchs of the tribe of Levi were banned from taking up priestly duties²⁵⁰⁴ In Deuteronomy it appears that there were different restrictions on people with defects and from different nations.

1 “He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the Lord. **2** “One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his *descendants* shall enter the assembly of the Lord. **3** “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his *descendants* shall enter the assembly of the Lord forever, **4** because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came

2500 Romans 6:13,19; 12:1,2; Ephesians 4:22-24.

2501 Leviticus 19:33,34.

2502 Ezra 9:1.

2503 Exodus 12:43; Leviticus 22:25.

2504 Leviticus 21:20

Studies in Isaiah.

out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. **5** Nevertheless the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. **6** You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever. **7** “You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he *is* your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. **8** The children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of the Lord.”²⁵⁰⁵

Table 68.1: Examples of outsiders drawn into faith in the Old Testament.

Person(s)	Their details	Text.
Caleb	One of the great warriors amongst Judah was actually a Kenite from a Canaanite tribe (Genesis 15:19)	Numbers 32:12.
Rahab	A woman of Jericho (a Canaanite) who hid the spies and was saved by her faith in God.	Joshua 2.
Gibeonites	These folk deceived Joshua but became a part of Israel.	Joshua 9.
Othniel	Othniel was Caleb's brother and so a Kenite of Canaan.	Judges 3:9.
Jael	This woman who killed Sisera was also a Kenite.	Judges 4-5.
Ruth	A woman of Moab but assimilated into Israel by marriage to Boaz.	Ruth.
Uriah	Married to Bathsheba and a warrior in David's army whom he had killed because of his duplicity with Uriah's wife. Uriah was a Hittite.	2Samuel 11-12.
Queen of Sheba	Visited Solomon and appears to have been converted.	1Kings 10.
Widow of Zarepeth	A poor widow who fed Elijah.	1Kings 17.
Naaman	Syrian army commander whose leprosy was healed.	2Kings 5.
Sailors	The sailors who were with Jonah appear to have been converted.	Jonah 1:16.
Ninevites	The people of Nineveh repented on hearing the preaching of Jonah.	Jonah 3.

Any “*son of the foreigner*” who has turned from his own ways and “*joined himself to the Lord*” has the right of being called a child of God. Such language is reminiscent of what we read in the prologue of John:

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: **13** who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”²⁵⁰⁶

2505 Deuteronomy 23:1-8.

2506 John 1:12,13.

The eunuch who may be described as “*a dry tree*” because he cannot pass on his seed to generate offspring must not say that he is “*a dry tree*” in truth and reality (that is spiritually). It may be true that he could not have sons (or daughters) but this does not bar him from the blessings of God. The stipulation we mentioned earlier with regard to eunuchs (and others) barred from enjoying temple privileges was typical. The shadow (the temple of old) was to be kept pure and blemish free because it represented the coming Christ. Thus not just any old worshipper and servant would do. Just as sacrifices must be without blemish, so those who served and ministered in the temple must be without blemish to preserve the typical purity of the shadow which points us to Christ. But these have no bearing with regard to the true faith being offered throughout Scripture. A eunuch who truly believed would experience all the blessings of God even though he be barred from temple worship. In some ways the situation is similar to that which Moses faced when he was barred from entering the promised land. He died only seeing the promised land from some distance.²⁵⁰⁷ But this fact omits the greater truth that in dying he entered the true promised land of which the land of Israel was but the type.

56:4,5.

In verses 4 and 5, there then follows a promise given to the eunuch who had truly believed. Such belief is described in terms of their “*work of faith*,” that is, the fruit of their deep seated belief.²⁵⁰⁸ They were ones who kept the Lord's “*Sabbaths*,” who opted for that which pleased the Lord, and who held fast to the Lord's “*covenant*.”²⁵⁰⁹ Again the covenant spoken of here is “*the sure mercies of David*,” that is, the new covenant and not the old.²⁵¹⁰ The mention of “*Sabbaths*” points us to consider all of the rest days which were part of the festivals and feasts, and not just the seventh day. The emphasis here, however, is the rest, joy, and peace which these feasts and festivals entailed. The eunuch who clung to the Lord Himself in faith and who trusted the Lord for salvation would long for God's Sabbaths and would desire to please Him.

As a consequence such a believing eunuch would be given a place in the Lord's “*house*.”²⁵¹¹ Once again we are not meant to think of the earthly type and shadow, the temple, but the true and real heavenly place of which the temple was a mere signpost. These words of verse 5 are

2507 Numbers 20:12; Deuteronomy 32:51,52; 34.

2508 1Thessalonians 1:3; 2Thessalonians 1:11.

2509 Isaiah 56:4.

2510 Isaiah 55:3.

2511 Isaiah 56:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

reminiscent of our Saviour's words to the disciples the night before He died:

1 Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were not so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. 4 And where I go you know, and the way you know.²⁵¹²

What is offered here to the eunuch is that which is offered to all believers. They are to have not only "*a place*," in the Lord's house and within His walls, but also "*a name*." This "*name*" or reputation is further designated by two extensive statements. First their name is to be "*better than that of sons and daughters*."²⁵¹³ This is remarkable. What could be better than to be considered a son or daughter? Perhaps the idea of friend is intimated? The next statement suggests that their "*name*" will be one that is "*everlasting*" and which will "*not be cut off*."²⁵¹⁴ By such we are meant to note the idea of everlasting life, but more, a life of goodness as befits a name that endures and which is "*better than that of sons and daughters*."

56:6,7.

In a similar way, blessings are pronounced upon the "*sons of the foreigner*."²⁵¹⁵ It is to be noted that the eunuch and the aliens mentioned are not given separate blessings which are distinct from one another. Rather the blessings showered on the eunuchs will also be those received by the "*sons of the foreigner*" and vice versa.

The persons mentioned here in verse 6 are those who "*join themselves to the Lord*." This speaks of being united to Him. It indicates a willingness to give up worldly nationality, and of forming an allegiance or alliance with God. Throwing ones lot in with the Lord entails discarding all other associations. These "*sons of the foreigner*" having allied themselves to God show their faith and love by serving God, loving the "*name*" or character of the Lord, and walking in obedience to that which pleases Him. Again they keep themselves from "*defiling the Sabbath*" and they are those which hold fast to the Lord's covenant, the covenant of grace.²⁵¹⁶ These are to be brought to the Lord's "*holy mountain*," and are to be made "*joyful*" in the Lord's "*house of*

2512 John 14:1-3.

2513 Isaiah 56:5.

2514 Isaiah 56:5.

2515 Isaiah 56:6.

2516 Isaiah 55:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

prayer."²⁵¹⁷ The holy mountain was the site of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. It was where the temple was built and it signifies acceptance to being within the Lord's household. This introduction into God's family is characterised by a state of joy. Prayer, speech and conversation with God, is never dull, nor hard, to the true believer walking in faith. The "*house of prayer*" ought to be a place of joyful delight. Is that the case with us? Shame on us if our prayer meetings are dull and lifeless! We must endeavour to keep ourselves in the love of Christ and make every effort to rejoice.²⁵¹⁸ The sacrifices these folk make are the true and singular sacrifice of Christ. Their faith in God shows by their obedience to Him in doing what He requested. For us in this day we look to the Saviour's sacrifice offered once for all time.²⁵¹⁹ Those of Isaiah's time were enjoined to offer the temple offerings and sacrifices not as an end in themselves but as pointers to the one sacrifice made by the Saviour. The very last sentence emphasises the scope of these words. It is not just to eunuchs and foreigners that the Lord is speaking. These are two extreme examples. What these words encompass is the entire world ("*all nations*").²⁵²⁰

[3] The gospel includes "others." (Isaiah 56:8).

56:8.

It may be thought natural for the Lord to gather His people who have become "*outcasts*" on account of their sin and rebellion, but what of "*others besides*" who had no allegiance to God at all?²⁵²¹ The remarkable thing is not so much that the Lord is long-suffering and patient in the extreme with His people, (this is remarkable enough), but that He also seeks to include those who have had nothing to do with God at all. How many of us can testify of God's grace and mercy whilst we were without thought of Him in any way at all?

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.*²⁵²²

It is very interesting that the opening statement seems to indicate that which the Lord had done as a matter of course. The Lord is one "*who gathers the outcasts of Israel*" and He does this naturally (I

2517 Isaiah 56:7.

2518 Philippians 2:28; 4:4; Jude 1:21.

2519 Hebrews 7:27; 10:1f.

2520 Isaiah 56:7.

2521 Isaiah 56:8.

2522 Romans 5:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

say this with reverence) because He is love. But then the next phrase is one which comes of determination. Nothing is spoken of the “*others besides*” Israel, except that they too must be considered as “*outcasts*” from the language that is used here. The Lord then signals His determination to include those who were not part of Israel and who were naturally considered as “*outcasts*” by those who were of Israel. In these statements we discover a levelling of status. It is as though the Lord is declaring that all people (from Israel or elsewhere) are essentially “*outcasts*” and so all stand on the same footing. This is the point Paul makes in his letter to the Romans.²⁵²³ What a marvellous God! There is no partiality with Him, for although He set apart Israel to bear the Saviour and to have the law, tabernacle and prophets, all of mankind stands in the same dire need of salvation whether he be Jew, Gentile, Barbarian, slave or whatever.

²⁵²³ See Romans 3:9,23,27-30.

Chapter 69.

Isaiah 56:9-57:21.

The need for repentance.

Textual analysis.

9 All you beasts of the field, come to devour, all you beasts in the forest.

10 His watchmen *are* blind,
they are all ignorant;
they *are* all dumb dogs,
they cannot bark;
 sleeping,
 lying down,
 loving to slumber.

11 Yes, *they are* greedy dogs *which* never have enough.

And they *are* shepherds who cannot understand;

they all look to their own way, every one for his own gain, from his *own* territory.

12 “Come,” *one says*, “I will bring wine, and we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink; tomorrow will be as today, *and* much more abundant.”

#57 1 The righteous perishes, and no man takes *it* to heart;

merciful men *are* taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil.

2 He shall enter into peace;
they shall rest in their beds,
each one walking *in* his uprightness.

3 “But come here,
 you sons of the sorceress,
 you offspring of the adulterer and the harlot!

4 Whom do you ridicule?
Against whom do you
 make a wide mouth
 and stick out the tongue?

Are you not
 children of transgression,
 offspring of falsehood,

5 Inflaming yourselves with gods under every green tree,
slaying the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks?

6 Among the smooth *stones* of the stream *is* your portion;
 they, they, *are* your lot!
Even to them

 you have poured a drink offering,
 you have offered a grain offering.

Should I receive comfort in these?

7 “On a lofty and high mountain you have set your bed;
even there you went up to offer sacrifice.

8 Also behind the doors and their posts you have set up your remembrance;

Studies in Isaiah.

for you have
uncovered yourself *to those other* than Me,
and have gone up to them;

you have
enlarged your bed
and made *a covenant* with them;

you have
loved their bed,
where you saw *their* nudity.

9 You went to the king with ointment, and increased your perfumes;
you sent your messengers far off, and *even* descended to Sheol.

10 You are wearied in the length of your way;
yet you did not say,
‘there is no hope.’

You have found the life of your hand; therefore you were not grieved.

11 “And of whom have you been afraid, or feared,
that you have lied
and not remembered Me,
nor taken *it* to your heart?

Is it not because I have held My peace from of old that you do not fear Me?

12 I will declare
your righteousness
and your works,
for they will not profit you.

13 When you cry out,
let your collection *of idols* deliver you.
but the wind will carry them all away, a breath will take *them*.

But he who puts his trust in Me shall possess the land, and shall inherit My holy mountain.”

14 And one shall say,
“heap it up!
Heap it up!
Prepare the way,
take the stumbling block out of the way of My people.”

15 For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name *is* Holy:

“I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

16 For I will not contend forever,
nor will I always be angry;
for the spirit would fail before Me,
and the souls *which* I have made.

17 For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him;
I hid and was angry, and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart.

18 I have seen his ways, and will heal him;
I will also lead him, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners.

19 “I create the fruit of the lips: peace, peace to *him who is* far off and to *him who is* near,”
says the Lord,
“and I will heal him.”

20 But the wicked *are* like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

21 “*There is* no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”

Studies in Isaiah.

Having described the blessings and benefits of salvation and righteousness enjoyed by true believers as exemplified by eunuchs and foreigners, the tenor of the message changes rather dramatically from verse 9 of Isaiah 56 onwards until the end of Isaiah 57. There are two separate parts which can be arranged as follows:

[1] A rebuke and a warning to Israel's leaders who ought to know better. (Isaiah 56:9-57:13).

[a] The “*watchmen*” and “*shepherds*” must face the beasts of the field! (Isaiah 56:9-12).

[b] The “*righteous*” perishes but no one cares! (Isaiah 57:1,2).

[c] The “*sons of the sorceress*” and the “*offspring of the adulterer ...*” are called to account. (Isaiah 57:3-13).

[2] A word of encouragement to the backslider who repents. (Isaiah 57:14-21).

[1] A rebuke and a warning to Israel's leaders who ought to know better. (Isaiah 56:9-57:13).

[a] The “*watchmen*” and “*shepherds*” must face the beasts of the field! (Isaiah 56:9-12).

56:9.

In this first section we are first introduced to two types of creature whom the Lord has called upon to exercise their (fallen) animal nature to “*devour.*”²⁵²⁴ Both sets of creature are of course the wild animals under God's care and command. They are ones which roam free in the country (“*beasts of the field*”) and may be seen, and they are ones that dwell in the thickets (“*beasts in the forest*”) and thus are not so easily seen. These could refer to foreign powers such as Assyria, Egypt and Babylon. Or they may be some aspects of creation of which the beasts were representative. In either case there will be destruction brought to bear upon Israel.

56:10.

The leaders of Israel are indicated here by the terms “*watchmen*” and “*shepherds.*”²⁵²⁵ The watchmen were to simply look out for danger and warn the people so that action could be taken

2524 Isaiah 56:9.

2525 Isaiah 56:10,11.

Studies in Isaiah.

before it was too late. Complimenting this ministry of warning, the shepherds were to provide nourishment and rest for the sheep. The leaders were thus to ensure both safety and also provision. But the descriptions of these ministers is rather other than what was expected.

First we get a depiction of the watchmen.²⁵²⁶ These were *“blind.”* Of course being blind is not something which a person born in such a condition should be rebuked for, nor is it something they may remedy. However choosing watchmen who are blind is the height of folly. Or it may be that they were once fully sighted but have now let themselves become blind through negligence or disease. In either case, of what use is a watchman if he cannot see? Then also these watchmen are *“ignorant.”* This is something they are responsible for. Perhaps they have no knowledge of the enemies or of their ordinance and ways of engagement. These are things a watchman ought to know about. Leaders with such a remit to act as watchmen ought to be cognizant of all the enemies around their flock To be ignorant of these is to play into their hands. Sins, worldly ways, demonic attacks, the tricks of the enemy to subvert and despoil. These are things taught in Scripture. How we ought to learn the lessons the Lord has prepared. Heed these words of David:

*Blessed be the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle.*²⁵²⁷

Ignorance is never bliss! Next we discover that the watchman are *“all dumb dogs.”* A dog in Israel was the lowest and worthless of the beasts. A dumb dog was utterly useless. A dog which could warn his owners of someone coming might bring some use, but a dog that could not bark has no use at all. These *“dumb dogs”* could not so much as bark and simply loved to lie down *“loving to slumber.”* The picture is stark. The watchmen fail in every respect and are next to useless.

56:11.

But the description of these watchmen continues in verse 11 where we discover that they are also *“greedy dogs which never have enough.”* A dog which could watch out for those who came near and who could bark to signal to his owners that someone was coming may earn his food, but these blind and dumb dogs ate more than their fare share. The image then moves from the watchmen to the *“shepherds.”* that *“cannot understand.”* These who should be providers for their flock *“look to their own way,”* rather than tend the sheep. Each shepherd is out for *“his own gain”*

2526 Isaiah 56:10,11a.

2527 Psalm 144:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

and is concerned only for his “*own territory*” or jurisdiction. Totally unconcerned for others and their needs, these shepherds seek to feather their own nests and ensure that their 'kingdom' and rule is kept intact. How single-minded! How selfish! But are not many pastors and church leaders somewhat like this in our day? Unconcerned for the lost, more concerned for their reputation and standing, and eager to ensure their influence is kept secure. Where are the risk-takers and those who care less about what the world thinks and simply goes full pelt for the lost sheep eager to bring needed food and water? How many pulpits are laying on banquets for fat sheep too lazy to lift a finger? Where is the effort made to take some of the sumptuous feast we enjoy to the poor benighted ones who crave for a morsel of hope?

56:12.

The situation is then nicely depicted in verse 12 by what one might overhear as these leaders (watchmen and shepherds) speak to one another. Their focus is on “*wine*” and “*intoxicating drink,*” of becoming inebriated so that the mind becomes dull and empty. Their focus is on pleasure seeking which never seems to be satiated, for they aim to continue on the next day with even more drink (“*much more abundant*”).

[b] The “*righteous*” perishes but no one cares! (Isaiah 57:1,2).

57:1.

Meanwhile the “*righteous,*” that is, the believing faithful, suffer terribly.²⁵²⁸ The watchmen should raise a warning that an enemy lurks around but they are all blind and dumb. The shepherds are busy fattening themselves and getting drunk so that the provision for the sheep is neglected, and so the “*righteous perishes.*” What an indictment! I do not think we can point the finger to Israel of Isaiah's day, for our leaders (so-called) are equally culpable. How many faithful believers are being fed rubbish and dung and are left unaware of the dangers they face? There are so many grievous errors and false teachers in our day that it is almost certain that real believers are being lead astray. None can truly, nor finally fall, for the Lord knows who are His and He is well able to deliver them. But this does not excuse the leaders who fail and who sit on their backsides attending to their needs and wants whilst the faithful languish.

The rapid increase in error is alarming. There are fools who say that it is alright for a

²⁵²⁸ Isaiah 57:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

Christian to exhibit any choice of sexual preference, rather than honour God in His creation (of one male and with one female in an exclusive union of matrimony). There are others who declare that it matters not one whit whether you believe in creation or evolution with all its evils. There are those who deny that Christ actually paid the price for sins and diverted the wrath of the Father from those who trust in Him as their substitute. There are those who proffer all kinds of excuse or alternatives to the gospel of God in Christ. Some put good works as the prime mover when all along faith in Christ is required. Oh yes we speak of faith which works, but let us never put the cart before the horse. None can offer up good works as a means for entry into heaven. Only Christ has done that and we, if we truly believe, ride in His wake. How many are warning people concerning these things? Judging by what is pushed forth as “Christian” in the public world it would seem there are not many watchmen, or that they are all blind and dumb. None take the plight of the righteous *“to heart.”* A second statement reinforces or parallels the first but this time we have *“merciful men”* and discover that these *“are taken away.”* As an aside we note here that the faithful are described as both *“righteous,”* and as *“merciful.”* This is wholly understandable because these are those who are righteous by faith and have had mercy shown unto them. They are not righteous by virtue of what they have done, but have received the Lord's righteousness through His great act of mercy. In consequence they act as merciful due to the mercy they have received.²⁵²⁹

Now these righteous and merciful ones *“perish”* or are *“taken away.”*²⁵³⁰ The first statement describes how they are treated by the world. They are disdained, executed, slaughtered, and martyred. The second describes the fact that God is sovereign. The death of any saint is precious in God's sight.²⁵³¹ They may be martyred and die earlier than might have been expected, but in truth, they are removed by the Lord for His good purposes.

57:2.

We learn in verse 2 that these precious ones are to receive *“peace,”* and *“rest.”* This is very important. They are reconciled with God and receive His peace. The statement: *“he shall enter into peace”* stands for their entrance into eternity, into heaven. Such righteous merciful ones will enter this peace and rest and will walk in their own *“uprightness.”* This is not something self-generated – it is given, imputed by Christ. And yet none can enter heaven without holiness. Life in eternity is a life of complete holiness and righteousness.

2529 See Micah 6:8.

2530 Isaiah 57:1.

2531 Psalm 116:15.

[c] The “*sons of the sorceress*” and the “*offspring of the adulterer ...*” called to account. (Isaiah 57:3-13).

57:3.

Having briefly outlined the plight of the true believer who suffered because of wicked leaders (blind and dumb watchmen and greedy shepherds), the focus moves back to the evil leaders. This time they are described in two ways:²⁵³²

[1] Sons of the sorceress.

[2] Offspring of the adulterer and the harlot.

Witchcraft, divination, sorcery, soothsaying, and consulting the dead were all practices banned outright by the Lord.²⁵³³ Such practices amount to denying the Lord His place of revelation (they actually cast a slur on His wise and bountiful word), and suggest that other ways of attaining truth are possible without God's interference. In short they amount to seeking truth by means of devils and evil spirits. We have met with this subject when we looked at Isaiah 8 where we read these words:

19 And when they say to you, “seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,” should not a people seek their God? *Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?* **20** To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is because there is no light in them.*²⁵³⁴

From this it would appear that the practice of seeking divination or soothsaying was widespread in the land amongst the people of Israel. However here in Isaiah 57:3 it would seem that the designation is more significant than merely calling to remembrance the fact that sorcery and witchcraft were in operation at this time. The imperative command to “*come here*” is forceful. These wicked leaders are designated as the offspring of sorcery, their mother is described as a “*sorceress.*” I would suggest that this is a reference to the fact that the first woman sought wisdom from the serpent in the garden of Eden. The woman was later named “*Eve*” for her trust in the promise of God. However Eve stands as the first sorceress. Through her (and Adam's) sin and rebellion by listening to the devil, we are all sons of the sorceress. The second description supplies

2532 Isaiah 57:3.

2533 Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:10-12.

2534 Isaiah 8:18-20.

Studies in Isaiah.

two people, namely. *“the adulterer,”* and *“the harlot.”* The former is masculine and the later is feminine. Thus in this characterisation we are brought to consider both Adam and Eve. They were adulterous in a spiritual sense. They ought to have drawn truth and strength from the Lord but chose to adulterate themselves by heeding what Satan had to offer.

57:4.

It would seem that the blind and dumb leaders were partial to ridicule and verbal attacks on (presumably) the righteous and merciful.²⁵³⁵ The expression *“to make a wide mouth”* indicates contempt and derision. Such was the case against David, and, by extension, Christ:

*They also opened their mouth wide against me, and said, “aha, aha! Our eyes have seen it.”*²⁵³⁶

The second expression: *“stick out the tongue”* possibly indicates some form of mimicry.²⁵³⁷ A more literal rendering would be: “to stretch out the tongue” and there is a suggestion that this might have been done rapidly as in a mocking style. The prophecy of Christ in Psalm 22 indicates some aspects of this. Mockers opened their mouths wide in a gaping fashion and they shot out their lip:

All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying
...²⁵³⁸

*They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion.*²⁵³⁹

Such contemptible attitudes towards the righteous and merciful is widespread today, just as it was in Isaiah's time. The Lord's question to these blind and dumb leaders in verse 4 highlights exactly how He sees the situation. It is as though He is asking this question with incredulity: Are you seriously mocking and ridiculing these righteous merciful ones who will enter My peace when they are martyred and end up perishing?

The Lord adds here a rhetorical question. Were they not: *“children of transgression, offspring of falsehood”*? Again the reference would appear to be to the first human pair, Adam and

2535 Isaiah 57:4.
2536 Psalm 35:21.
2537 Isaiah 57:4.
2538 Psalm 22:7.
2539 Psalm 22:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

Eve. We are all offspring of Adam and thereby are tainted by his transgression. As Paul puts it:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—²⁵⁴⁰

We are all sinners born from Adam, but can we be said to be “*offspring of falsehood*”? We could take these expressions in another way indicating the idea that the leaders were given to transgression and falsehood. Because they dealt in untruths and lies, because they wallowed in transgression and rebellion, it was as though they were born from such a cesspit and were fathered by lies and sin.

57:5.

Now the Lord leads us to the heart of the people's problem, namely, their worship of false gods and idols.²⁵⁴¹ The opening word in Hebrew has the meaning of to “be hot.” The people stirred up their passion and excitement by means of indulging in godless idolatry. What do we “*inflare*” ourselves with? What excites us and drive our passion? May it ever be Christ and Him alone!

The term “*under every green tree*” is indicative of the pagan practice of worship. In Deuteronomy the Lord gave the people instructions on what to do when they entered the promised land. One of them was to destroy all trace of pagan idolatry:

You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree.²⁵⁴²

The pagan Canaanite nations offered their sacrifices and worship on mountains and under all manner of trees. There were reasons for this. One Egyptian creation myth concerns four pairs of deities (male and female) who emerged from a sacred mountain. Although characterised as a 'creation' myth the details are more in tune with an oral tradition of the flood, (there were eight people that survived, four couples). Mountains were thus seen as the site of the gods and heroes. We can also see the connection with an elevated site in the tower of Babel and the ziggurats. The use of trees probably stems from a handed down recollection of the history of the garden of Eden. It is thus

2540 Romans 5:12.

2541 Isaiah 57:5.

2542 Deuteronomy 12:2. See also Jeremiah 3:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

important to recognise that pagan idolatry did have some correspondence with the truth of God. In recent days new movements have cropped up amongst Christians. One of these goes by the name “Progressive Christianity.” Within their literature are many terms recognizable as “Christian” but the essence of their belief misses the mark because they are focused on accommodation with the world and its ideas. For example, they see no reason to reject evolution, and they decry any exclusivism. If there had been no correspondence between pagan idolatry and the worship of God it is hard to see how Israel could have been so easily lead astray. It is to be remembered that the devil works as an *“angel of light.”*²⁵⁴³

The next statement (*“slaying the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks”*) focuses on one particular godless practice which occurred amongst the Canaanite peoples, namely child sacrifice.²⁵⁴⁴ The Lord had warned the people not to be involved in such practices which involved the god *“Molech.”*²⁵⁴⁵ This god was the deity of the Ammonites who were descendants of Lot by his younger daughter. The other tribe which also stemmed from the incestuous relationship between Lot and his oldest daughter was Moab whose chief deity was *“Chemosh.”* King Solomon ended up building sites of worship for both deities:

*Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon.*²⁵⁴⁶

The two reference points indicate the two sites of this awful worship. The phrase *“clefts of the rocks”* points to the high places.²⁵⁴⁷ The *“valleys”* direct us to the site of this godless practice where children were burned in fires (the valley of Hinnom).²⁵⁴⁸

57:6.

Next we discover that their fall into idolatry also included the worship of stones which were connected with streams.²⁵⁴⁹ The word *“stones”* is in italics and so is not present in the Hebrew. However the sense does seem to demand that *“smooth stones”* of the stream is suggested because the people poured out drink and grain offerings to them. Pagans took stones and polished them and

2543 2Corinthians 11:14.

2544 Isaiah 57:5.

2545 Leviticus 18:12; 20:1-5; Deuteronomy 12:31

2546 1Kings 11:7.

2547 Jeremiah 49:16; Obadiah 1:3.

2548 2Kings 23:10.

2549 Isaiah 57:6.

Studies in Isaiah.

then overlaid them with gold or silver to be their gods.²⁵⁵⁰ These were set up as pillars in various places in the valleys where the rivers flowed. Perhaps the idea was to draw strength from the flowing rivers. Whatever the pagan rituals and symbolism (we really do not need to know about it all) the point was that it was all in vain because it was derived from man-centred views rather than from the revelation of God. The Lord makes use of symbolism, of course, but this is given the context of His self-revelation. What the people were doing was copying the pagan nations whose ritual and practice was drawn from legend and myth centred on heroes and imagined gods. Thus the Israelites descended to the worship of mere stones, to which they poured out their drink and grain offerings. But how would the Lord be honoured and worshipped by such means? Where was the intelligence or the significant meaning? How did such help in life and truth? Since it was all disconnected from God and His revelation it had no real potency nor point.

57:7.

The focus now moves from the valleys to the mountains where the “high places” were sited.²⁵⁵¹ This was where the people had made their *“bed,”* or found their place of rest and comfort. Where the heart is there is the worship. These had made their bed, their dwelling place, amongst the pagan sites of worship, and there they offered their sacrifices and worship. It is always true that wherever we feel most at home and comfortable, then such is the focus of our worship. Expressed in other ways we might say that what a person spends their time thinking about and is concerned with (their world view), is that which they worship and value. How we need to be grounded in Christ, focused on Him to the exclusion of all other “loves” and drawing exclusively from Him!

57:8.

In verse 8 we discover another feature of this inclination towards pagan worship. It was done *“behind the doors,”* or, in other words, in secret out of public view. The Christian faith is always one which must be public and open to all. The places we worship must be open to all, for our worship of God ought to be an advert for His glory. Furthermore, the Christian is to be a *“light”* to the world.²⁵⁵² This worship of pagan deity was also behind *“their posts,”* by which we understand it was a foreign system or establishment and set-up. Instead of coming to God and His order of worship in the temple, these people had resorted to a foreign system and establishment, the

2550 Habakkuk 2:19.

2551 Isaiah 57:7.

2552 Matthew 5:14,16.

Studies in Isaiah.

(door)-posts of a foreign god, and there they made “*remembrance*” of what was important to them. It may have been that they attempted to worship the true and living God at these sites and places. If that was the case it would not have taken long for them to abandon any thoughts of the true God and fallen into accepting the foreign distorted and abominable versions.

Verse 8 continues with further statements describing what they had done:

for you have
 uncovered yourself *to those other* than Me,
 and have gone up to them;
you have
 enlarged your bed
 and made *a covenant* with them;
you have
 loved their bed,
 where you saw *their* nudity.

In essence they had given themselves over completely to the worship of foreign gods and had abandoned the true and living God. The language is intimate. To uncover oneself to something or someone is to become vulnerable to that thing or person. To go up to someone indicates a desire and a determination. This is not a mere hobby or distraction but a yielding of heart and mind, just as a person does when they are given in marriage to another. The terms used in verse 8 all point towards the marriage bed which has been “*enlarged*” and “*loved.*” It is described at one and the same time as “*your bed*” (i.e. the peoples') and as “*their bed*” (i.e. the foreign gods') indicating that an agreement such as a marriage contract had been fully signed up to.

57:9.

The direction of thought then moves away from the ritual and religious practice to the civil scene.²⁵⁵³ In ancient times religion and politics were intermixed. Having agreed with the pagan rituals such that they entered into a union with them as verse 8 describes, the imagery moves towards the person who served as the focus of this religious worship, namely the “*king.*” They had presented themselves as attractively as they could by wearing “*ointment*” and “*perfumes.*” True worship, the worship of God, ought to include us presenting ourselves as living sacrifices wholly pleasing unto Him.²⁵⁵⁴ The only ointment and perfume we need is the sweet smelling aroma of

2553 Isaiah 57:9.

2554 Romans 12:1,2.

Studies in Isaiah.

Christ.²⁵⁵⁵ If we adorn ourselves with Him, and all He has given to us, we will be swathed in the aroma of Christ and will thus be fully pleasing unto the Lord.²⁵⁵⁶

In doing this, (appealing to the king of the pagan nation), they needed to send messengers *“far off”* which contrasts with the true and living God who is ever nearby.²⁵⁵⁷ What folly! How we are distracted to the trinkets and baubles of the world when all the time the living God is nearby. He is closer than we often imagine, and ever ready to help and respond to the contrite and lowly! How gracious is the Lord, but how often we are duped by what the world has to offer, even though it is dung and refuse. To go this way of pagan worship is then described as a descent to the depths of *“Sheol.”* This is the grave, or death. Pagan worship, which amounts to saying anything but godly worship (the worship God reveals and shows us), is a harbinger of death, for it leads the worshipper to death.

57:10.

The path towards pagan and other forms of worship is not an easy path to follow. It leads to weariness of heart and soul.²⁵⁵⁸ This is partly because it requires a downward trajectory as we have already seen in verse 9, but also here because the path is a long one (*“the length of your way”*). Notice how it is put here. It is *“your way,”* or the way of independence in contradistinction to the way of submission and trust in God. Such weary and arduous travel might lead someone to say: “Is this really worth it?” But they who were on this path *“did not say, 'there is no hope'”* There is no question about the futility of traversing such a path even though the indications point towards this lack of hope. It is always the case that the way of folly, the way of self-reliance, of independence and worship centred on self (or pagan worship) throws up these warning signs. The path is long! The path leads nowhere! The path is dark and unknowing! The path is wearing! All these things are true and are evidenced in many examples in modern lives but supremely in the life of king Solomon and his work, Ecclesiastes. All indeed is *“vanity”* if pursued *“under the sun”* with no proper reference pr respect and fear of God.

The verse ends with a sorry and sad statement: *“you have found the life of your hand; therefore you were not grieved.”*²⁵⁵⁹ This speaks of self-satisfaction and self-reliance. They had done

2555 Ephesians 5:2. See also: 2Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 4:18.

2556 Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27.

2557 Isaiah 57:9; Deuteronomy 4:7; Acts 17:27; Ephesians 2:13. Note also that the Lord is *“Immanuel”* (Isaiah 7:14) which means “God with us.”

2558 Isaiah 57:10,

2559 Isaiah 57:10.

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it their way. This is a “*life*” of their own “*hand*,” or, in other hands, of their own making. They had structured their life, their lifestyle, and their path. As a consequence they had blinkered themselves, or as Paul expresses it, they had suppressed the truth.²⁵⁶⁰ This meant that they blocked out the natural griefs that ought to warn them of the danger of their self-made way. The Lord is gracious to us in that He sets up stumbling blocks upon which we can stub our toes as we walk blindly in the wrong direction. But these folk in their self-confidence have covered their toes with hob-nail boots! They stumble and fall but this does not concern them. We can illustrate this with real life examples. Consider the modern obsession with “identity politics.” People (it seems weird to say this) are no longer satisfied with the simple distinction between male and female and instead have opted to not just blur any differences but set up countless options from which to choose. Mankind has invented numerous terms such as: “non-binary,” “transgender,” “asexual,” “pansexual,” “gay,” and so on to cater for such wicked desires. Now such choices often throw up difficulties and dilemmas, especially when it comes to mental and emotional well-being. But what do people do? They seek to enforce their view and proclivity on the rest of humanity. As an example (which seems to be set as a precedent) the so-called “gay” movement has set up its “*pride*” marches to affirm their lifestyle and proclaim to the world that they want notice and affirmation. If we do not affirm such lifestyles we are deemed guilty of moral misconduct in these days. Now why would they need to enforce such views? In truth they know deep within that such a life style is wrong on many levels, but to help suppress the truth they want to deny they must work hard to keep the demons at bay.

57:11.

The opening question of Isaiah 57:11 highlights something which is often misunderstood. The fact of the matter is that we are constituted or constructed to give reverence to something or someone. It simply is not possible for us to be like God and act in neutrality and in an objective, stand-alone, independent way. Only God is the “*I AM*,” the Self-Existent One. We are contingent. That is we are dependent. We cannot govern ourselves, we need direction from outside of ourselves. So to ask: “*of whom have you been afraid or feared?*” is to ask the question: what is your ground and centre, what is the basis for your life? All of us derive life from a source. We are not the source but need something beyond ourselves to give life and to derive meaning. We know this by analogy. None of us are independent physically. If the temperature of my surroundings, the composition of the air around me, and the environmental conditions are not conducive to life then I will perish

²⁵⁶⁰ Romans 1:18.

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(physically). I need air to breathe. I need water and food. I need warmth and shelter. I need companionship. The same is true when it comes to meaning, spiritual considerations, and the direction or purpose of life. All of these physical requirements ought to lead me to the conclusion that I cannot act alone and I must rely on another. To whom do I (and you) owe fear? To whom do I attribute meaning, value and worth? I will attribute these to someone or something even if I do it passively, by just accepting what others do or what I have been trained to do. The thought of deriving meaning, value and worth from a thing simply beggars belief. And yet this is what modern science does. It attributes meaning and life to a mere equation or a set of laws that mankind has “discovered.” These are not discovered at all but invented to make sense of what we observe. But surely we need to consider the fact that for our existence to have meaning and purpose, that which we rely on or “*fear*” (i.e. give reverence to), must be personal? Sticks, stones, pagan ideas, modern ideas are all fruitless. The only thing to be truly feared and revered is God.

The people have gone for a pagan form of life and worship. They have “*lied*” to themselves by establishing a fear of something that is not true.²⁵⁶¹ They have forgotten God and have not considered the truth deeply. Then we have another rhetorical question. Has their lack of fear towards God come about because the Lord had “*held*” His “*peace from*” them? In other words, He had remained silent for some time. A lack of the revealed word of God is a terrible thing. If God withholds His revelation what is left? Of course the Lord had given them revelation and truth in a great degree through the temple, the sacrifices, in the law, and by the prophets. And yet these were of no avail without a constant appeal to them. As an example consider the pole with the bronze serpent that Moses made at the command of God to bring salvation to those bitten of the serpents.²⁵⁶² This item became an object of worship in and of itself and so had to be destroyed!²⁵⁶³ Then also consider the temple. In Jeremiah's day the prophet had to denounce the people because of their superstitious reliance on what had been a provision of God.²⁵⁶⁴ Even the ark of the covenant became a talisman rather than a sign and a type pointing to Christ.²⁵⁶⁵ And so the things the Lord provided as aids and helps to the Israelites became stumbling blocks because they did not attend in heart and mind to them. If the Lord withholds His fresh revelation, then the natural inclination of man is towards superstition.²⁵⁶⁶

2561 Isaiah 57:11. See: Romans 1:25.

2562 Numbers 21:4f.

2563 2Kings 18:4.

2564 Jeremiah 7:1f.

2565 1Samuel 4:1f.

2566 I am not advocating new revelation such as new prophecy because the canon of Scripture is closed. What I am advocating, however, is new and fresh revelation of the risen Christ by the Holy Spirit's presence and through God's

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57:12.

Having chosen whom they will fear and worship, the Lord now works out the implications.²⁵⁶⁷ What is the outcome of choosing one's own way? What type of life will result? In this case both their *"righteousness"* and their *"works"* are profitless. This is always the case. The only sure way in which a life can yield good results both in effect personally and towards all others is one submitted to God. The modern world does not like to think of *"righteousness"* because it has abandoned absolute truth and has opted for relativism.²⁵⁶⁸ But the norm and the accepted way today is to let everyone do their own thing and make no judgements. The problem with this is that it assumes each choice has no implications or impositions on others, and such an assumption is painfully and patently untrue.

57:13.

The great leveller is that the Lord will then let people who trust in their idols to fully rely on them. Isaiah 57:13 starts with the assumption that people will inevitably *"cry out."* Life always brings hardships and difficulties. We understand this because of revelation which teaches us that the world is under a curse because of Adam's sin. Consequently the world is bathed in what I often refer to as the "four Ds." These are: disaster, disease, decay and death. All of these come to us at one time or another, and they do so because of sin and rebellion and the curse imposed upon creation due to such sin. But when the people come to *"cry out"* because of such disaster, disease, decay or death, the Lord will say *"let your collection of idols deliver you."* We notice in this that they had to have not just one idol to replace God but a *"collection."* In Christ we discover all and every piece of required knowledge and wisdom and we need not go elsewhere, but reliance on paganism means that whatever god we choose we are always in need of another. This is because in essence the gods are man-made. Where one is devised for one contingency it will not do for another and so we supplement the first god with a second. This procedure continues ad infinitum and we end up like Hindus with a collection of gods.

What will these man-made gods yield? What effect will they have? The answer is nothing at all, because they are so flimsy that *"the wind will carry them all away,"* and *"a breath will take*

infallible, inerrant word. That does not mean to say that when the Holy Spirit comes to a person or is among a group of believers there is not any forth-telling of the wonders of God – there is – but there is no new revelation which has the character and status of "it is written" (i.e. Scripture).

²⁵⁶⁷ Isaiah 57:12.

²⁵⁶⁸ As a trivial example, the famed radio presented and TV personality Fearne Cotton recently published a book with the title: "Speak Your Truth." The subtitle is equally revealing: "Connecting with your inner truth and learning to find your voice."

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them.” Such is the value and worth of all man-made idols and ideals. They have no substance and no weight. Like the chaff they will be blown away by a puff of wind. Unlike the grain they have no substance or sustaining power. How different it is with the living God who supplies substance, life, meaning, and all the energy and power we may need. Thus the one who *“puts his trust”* in the Lord will end up with the substance, (i.e. *“the land”*) and will also reap immense benefits. These benefits stem from the fact that these trusting ones will *“inherit My holy mountain.”* This points us towards the new Jerusalem and the means of entry to that glorious heaven. We have already learned in Isaiah that salvation will come through *“this mountain.”*²⁵⁶⁹ However, the mountain is also the site of the temple and was where God chose to place His name, and so therefore indicates to us a pictorial representation of heaven.

[2] A word of encouragement to the backslider who repents. (Isaiah 57:14-21).

57:14.

This last passage opens with someone calling out an instruction.²⁵⁷⁰ The NKJV is not ideal here. It should be rendered: *“and He will say,”* intimating that it is the Lord who speaks the words of this command. This thought is reinforced by the later reference to *“My people,”* suggesting that it is the Lord speaking here. The command comes in four parts with the first two being identical (*“heap it up”*). Again the NKJV is unhelpful. The command is given in the plural form and so ought to be translated: *“cast ye up.”* The repetition of the command signifies the idea of making a thorough job. In other words, the Lord is commanding a large number of people to remove all objects that may be hindering the way into a heap or mound. It is not until we reach the third imperative (*“prepare the way”*) and the fourth (*“take the stumbling block out of the way of My people”*) that we realise exactly what is going on. The way being prepared is for the Lord Himself to arrive, of which we read more about in verse 15. And so it is necessary that the *“stumbling block”* be removed in order to *“prepare the way.”* This stumbling block is not those which the Lord places before people to cause them to fall and reconsider their way. It is rather the obstacle that exists between the people and God. This is anything which stops the people meeting with God. In truth what separates us is our sin. How can this be removed? Well the answer is that it is only removed by Christ's death on the cross for sin and His resurrection to life bringing justification. There can be no meeting with God except by this once-for-all-time sacrifice of the Saviour.

²⁵⁶⁹ Isaiah 25:6,7,10.

²⁵⁷⁰ Isaiah 57:14. Similar expressions can be found at: Isaiah 35:8; 40:3; 49:11; 62:10.

57:15.

Isaiah 57:15 introduces the main speaker, namely, the Lord who is described by position and state. He is the *“High and Lofty One”* signifying first His elevation beyond human reach, but second what He would be in sight of all men. The Lord alone is the One who dwells beyond creation and so can be spoken of in this way, but the choice of words also leads us to another thought. The title: *“the High and Lofty One”* in Hebrew is:

← Hebrew reads from the right

רָם וְנִשָּׂא

w^eniśā’ rom

He is raised up He raises up

I have offered possible translations for these two words above.²⁵⁷¹ Exactly the same Hebrew construction is also found in Isaiah 6:1 (and nowhere else). This One is the one who is *“high and lifted up.”*²⁵⁷² Such a thought also points us to Christ who in His conversation with Nicodemus stated:

*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*²⁵⁷³

However in my translation above it points us to the One who was not only raised up on the cross to die, but also to the same One who was raised from the dead. The two moods expressed above indicate both the active and passive aspects of Christ's ministry. He gave up His life, voluntarily, and He raised it up again too. However He was taken by wicked men to be crucified and killed.²⁵⁷⁴

Now such an One who is elevated beyond human understanding dwells in the eternal realms outside of time, for He is the Lord of time. This One is also described as *“Holy,”* that is, separate and apart from this world. Heaven (the place of eternity where God dwells) is characterised as a separate place which is “other” than this world and is pure and righteous. All of these thoughts are

2571 **Davidson.** *The Analytical Hebrew.* P684 indicates that רָם can be considered as Qal 3rd person singular masculine of רָם – hence *“He raises.”* **Davidson.** *The Analytical Hebrew.* P 564 indicates that וְנִשָּׂא can be considered as Niphal 3rd person singular masculine of וְנִשָּׂא – hence *“He is raised up.”*

2572 Isaiah 6:1.

2573 John 3:14.

2574 John 10:18; Acts 2:23.

contained in that title.

Then next we have a statement concerning the dwelling place of the Lord God. He may be found “*in the high and holy place.*”²⁵⁷⁵ But the text reads literally as follows:

High and Holy [*is the place where*] I dwell with the contrite and lowly spirit.

Unusually the verb comes late on in this sentence. The emphasis, therefore, is to point to the location which we have rendered as “*High and Holy*” in our literal rendering. Where is this? Is this in heaven? Or is this the elevated place of the Cross where Christ was raised up as a beacon to draw men in the same way as the bronze serpent Moses raised in the wilderness? I am not sure that it really matters for the entrance to heaven (the elevated place of holiness) is only by means of Christ and His work on the cross of Calvary.

The Lord dwells in His exalted position with those who are described as “*contrite and humble.*”²⁵⁷⁶ The term rendered “*contrite*” signifies broken, crushed, or cast down and without hope. The term given as “*humble*” indicates being low or brought to the ground. Note that these two descriptions refer to a man's “*spirit*” and so speak of his (or her) depths. Only those who know their need of a Saviour are willing to cling to the cross! Only those who know that there is no hope at all in themselves or anywhere else will flee to the Surety who died in their place.

The Lord dwells with such for a purpose. His aim is not simply to wallow in the dust with them, but to bring life! He dwells with the “*contrite and humble spirit*” in order:

to revive the spirit of the humble,
and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

The Scriptures use terms like “*heart*” and “*spirit*” interchangeably to speak of the inner non-corporeal part of man. They are not necessarily synonymous, for the heart signifies the centre or essence of a person, (the real inner being), and the spirit points us to the fact that we can communicate with God who is spirit.²⁵⁷⁷ But the Lord dwells with such to “*revive*” them. In both cases the Hebrew word is: לַהֲחַיִּיתָ , which is a Hiphil infinitive construct of the verb “to live” (חָיָה) with a prefix preposition often rendered as “to” or “for.”²⁵⁷⁸ Since a Hiphil verb signifies the

2575 Isaiah 57:15.

2576 Isaiah 57:15.

2577 John 4:24.

2578 Davidson. *The Analytical Hebrew*. P 414.

Studies in Isaiah.

causative active mood, it could be rendered as “to cause to live.” The Lord, thus, is causing to live again both the “*spirit of the humble,*” and the “*heart of the contrite ones.*” In such a way we are brought directly to the whole concept of the new birth and revival. The order is always the same.

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: **13** who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.²⁵⁷⁹

It is only those who truly “*receive*” Christ, who are broken and hopeless inside because of sin and are cast down to the ground in desperate need. These alone will receive but when they do they are brought back to life! Christ came to bring life in all its abundance, but none will take hold of such life unless they have forsaken their lives in this world.

I wonder if we understand the fact that God is in contention with mankind?²⁵⁸⁰ When you begin to consider the nature of God and the nature of man the idea of contention becomes inevitable. God is holy, righteous, pure, and cannot tolerate sin, iniquity, and rebellion. There is no room whatsoever for sinful men, women, and children to come into the presence of God. Mankind are enemies with God.

Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.²⁵⁸¹

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.²⁵⁸²

Their rebellion flies in the face of God who provides all that man needs only for it to be ignored, trampled on, and thrown back into His face. But the remarkable thing is that God in His incredible mercy and grace has done something about this enmity by sending forth His Son:

14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, **15** having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, **16** and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. **17** And He

2579 John 1:12,13.

2580 Isaiah 57:16.

2581 Romans 8:7.

2582 James 4:4.

Studies in Isaiah.

came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. **18**
For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.²⁵⁸³

57:16.

Now in our text in Isaiah we discover that the Lord will *“not contend forever.”*²⁵⁸⁴ We have heard such words before:

And the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he *is* indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”²⁵⁸⁵

Now this statement does not intend to convey the idea that God has given up and has let man win! What it does mean is that there is a point (which God alone knows) at which remonstrating with man is counter-productive. That the Lord has remonstrated with mankind is a feature we come across throughout the Scriptures. Take, for example the opening chapter in Isaiah where the Lord declares: *“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken.”*²⁵⁸⁶ Or consider these words of Isaiah 3: *“the Lord stands up to plead, and stands to judge the people.”*²⁵⁸⁷ Or what of these words in Jeremiah: *““therefore I will yet bring charges against you,” says the Lord, “and against your children’s children I will bring charges.”*”²⁵⁸⁸ Well I think enough has been said to demonstrate that God has a problem with mankind and so contends. But He will not keep on with this contention forever. Imagine you see someone with some bits of food around their mouth and you point it out to them but they take no notice. You consider that maybe they did not hear you so you point it out again to them. This time they hear but again take no action. Now you are puzzled. So you try once more to remonstrate with this person but they point blank refuse to take any action even though it is very clear that they have heard what you have said. At this point you give up and let the silly person continue to look silly! Now, of course, the Lord is infinitely more patient and gracious in His contention with us, and He does not stop with just three attempts. So when He says that He will not contend forever we ought to recognise that this is a very serious and terrible situation. If the infinite God has to stop, it means that there is no more that can be done. What a terrible thought.

2583 Ephesians 2:14-18.

2584 Isaiah 57:16.

2585 Genesis 6:3.

2586 Isaiah 1:2.

2587 Isaiah 3:13.

2588 Jeremiah 2:9.

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The statement continues with the parallel thought that the Lord will not *“always be angry.”*²⁵⁸⁹ It is not possible for God to ignore sin. Where there is iniquity this incurs the anger of God. Why? Well because where sin dwells it is in opposition to God and shows Him up as in error. If God tells us that we ought to live in a certain way and we refuse and choose another way, we have committed two grievous errors. First we have rejected what the Lord has said and in effect said that He is wrong, and second we have chosen a way which will fail and effectively sleight God. If a father tells a child to put butter on some bread and pour gravy onto their dinner, how would the father feel when the child does the opposite? Well the Lord is angry with sin because it opposes God who is good and it revels in what is false and evil. The Lord will not always be angry and so this indicates clearly that He has a plan to avert His anger. He will always be angry with sin, so the fact that His anger will stop indicates that something will be done to avert it.

Here the point being made is that if the Lord contends with man continually and relentlessly because of his sin, the outcome is not good. If we were to be confronted with our sinful natures in all its ugliness I doubt that anyone would survive the event. Were the Lord to contend and be angry with man continually then *“the spirit would fail,”* and even *“the souls”* made by an infinite God.²⁵⁹⁰

57:17.

At this point the Lord indicates one specific sinful characteristic, namely, *“the iniquity of his covetousness.”*²⁵⁹¹ Longing for another's possessions, relationships, place in society, circumstances, life, or any other thing indicates a lack of thankfulness and contentment for what you actually have. The problem with covetousness is that a person grasped by such an attitude can never be satisfied:

*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*²⁵⁹²

The fact of the matter is that for all people, at all times, and in all cultures, the Lord has given all that is necessary. I know that many will react to such a statement by highlighting the immense differences both through time and among cultures and countries. I do not doubt for one moment that we in these days have a better lifestyle and standard of living than our forefathers in the nineteenth century. I do not doubt also that people in some countries have a lack where those in others have a

2589 Isaiah 57:16.

2590 Isaiah 57:16.

2591 Isaiah 57:17.

2592 Matthew 16:26.

Studies in Isaiah.

surplus. These things concern material possessions and worldly opportunities. What I intend to make clear is that God does not withhold what is truly necessary from anyone. In particular the main need for all is the need for repentance and trust in God and the Lord has provided this throughout time and across the globe.

But discontent and a grabbing attitude is something which the Lord is angry with because it parades the idea that God has failed and has not provided, and that He is uncaring. What a travesty! God is good. God provides all that is necessary always. Thus the Lord *“struck him,”* and then withdrew (*“I hid”*), retaining His anger and yet *“he went on backsliding in the way of his heart.”*²⁵⁹³ The rod is necessary, but when applied it sometimes does not have the desired effect. The heart is, as Jeremiah informs us, *“desperately wicked.”*²⁵⁹⁴ The same thought is found in the opening chapter of Isaiah:

*Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints.*²⁵⁹⁵

57:18.

Now the Lord continues by informing us that He has *“seen his ways.”*²⁵⁹⁶ The Lord knows the frame of man and how it works and fails in its sin. In these words we see the Lord using a singular man as representative for mankind. And then we discover that the Lord knowing this covetousness nature, (never being content and always wanting more), and knowing that contention and punishment (the strike of the rod) will only lead to more backsliding, decides to *“heal him.”* We are not informed how this will be, but the Lord's grace shines through. Mankind is sinful and (in particular) covetous, and when he is brought to account and punished it makes no difference to the person who continues in his covetous ways. This point is something which pertains to our current judicial system. Crime must be punished and a person needs to be clear that if they break the law then they deserve the consequence, i.e. punishment. However the punishment is never intended to correct and restore the person. The punishment is there to show justice. Sin needs to be called out and shown up as wrong and deserving of punishment. But the person's behaviour can never be altered by the punishment. Something else needs to happen to change the condition of mankind and this is put here as the need for healing. Mankind needs the Great Physician to heal his broken and

2593 Isaiah 57:17.

2594 Jeremiah 17:9.

2595 Isaiah 1:5.

2596 Isaiah 57:18.

Studies in Isaiah.

incurable sickness and disease, namely sin.

Aside from healing, the Lord also will *“lead him,”* and will *“restore comforts to him.”*²⁵⁹⁷ This is wonderful. A good doctor seeks to bring healing to his patient but he does not stop there, for he wishes to bring restoration and wholeness too. The Lord comes to bring guidance and leading. He does not leave a person in the covetousness whirlwind and confusion, but will heal them and draw them out to show the correct way. Then further He *“restores comforts”* both to the representative man and to *“his mourners.”* Sin destroys. It does not just ruin but it destroys. Here the Lord will heal but He will also restore and rebuild. We sometimes think of sin simply as a mere inconvenience, like a cold. However a better description is to liken the effects of sin to that of leprosy. Leprosy is a disease that not only pervades throughout the body but also eats away at it. A leper is not just really sick, but needs restored body parts as well. Thus the Lord heals and restores. He makes good and He recreates those parts which have been destroyed.

The description here of what the Lord is doing reminds us of the Lord Jesus who healed the sick and raised the dead. As a particular example, consider the healing of the twelve year old girl (the daughter of Jairus) who died as Jesus was approaching. When Jesus eventually reaches the house where the girl was, our attention is drawn both to the girl and her sudden demise, and also to the parents and mourners who were suffering.²⁵⁹⁸ The Lord raised the young girl and as a result, *“they were overcome with great amazement.”*²⁵⁹⁹ The Lord was also concerned for the girl and tells them to give her something to eat.²⁶⁰⁰ It is this type of attention that we are familiar with in connection with Christ Jesus and His ministry, that we see here in Isaiah.

57:19.

The end of Isaiah 57:19 has a statement which repeats the Lord's intention to heal first intimated in verse 18. But what we are offered here at the beginning, is not the details of how the Lord heals, but the outcome and *“fruit.”* The opening word is a participle and would be best rendered as *“creating,”* signifying the ongoing work that the Lord does. The Hebrew root word is the one we find in Genesis 1 which speaks of divine action, for only God can *create* from nothing. The word used for *“lips”* can also mean language as that which is formed on the lips. Essentially the idea is of speech. Now is the Lord suggesting that when He speaks then the result is *“peace,”*

2597 Isaiah 57:18.

2598 Mark 5:38-40.

2599 Mark 5:42.

2600 Mark 5:43.

Studies in Isaiah.

peace, ”? Or is this phrase intended to speak of the outcome for the one being healed? I think the latter is intended here. When a person is healed and when the Lord restores, the outcome is lips which speak in praise of the Restorer. This speech (“*lips*”) is something which is being created by the Lord. Thus when a person is born again, the Lord moves that person to speak a different language. I do not mean to simply point our thoughts to Pentecost and the “*other tongues*, ” but that the style of a person's ordinary language is created anew.²⁶⁰¹ What a wonderful thought! New birth includes a new way of speaking!

The next statement which reads literally: “peace, peace to the far off and to the near,” seems to have a dual purpose.²⁶⁰² It seems to indicate the type of language the newly restored ones have. Their former covetous way where they were discontented is now replaced with contentment and peace. It is significant that the first words the Lord Jesus brought to the disciples after He rose from the dead were ones of peace:

Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace *be* with you.”²⁶⁰³

The Lord offers “*rest*” in His general call, and the central theme in the gospel is peace.²⁶⁰⁴

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁶⁰⁵

14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, **15** having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, **16** and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. **17** And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. **18** For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.²⁶⁰⁶

It is noteworthy that the apostle Paul mentions those “*afar off*” and those who “*were near*” in his letter to the Ephesians, and so probably has Isaiah 57:19 in view. Thus in that the Lord speaks peace

2601 Acts 2:4.

2602 Isaiah 57:19.

2603 John 20:19.

2604 Matthew 11:28f.

2605 Romans 5:1.

2606 Ephesians 2:14-18.

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to His people, their new lives will take this peace on board and their new language will be characterised by peace. No more war, back-biting, fighting for position, jostling for attention, but peace, contentment, and rest. This is the language of the saved. It is not that they do not stand for the truth, or give up contending for the faith. But their whole demeanour is now one of settled peace. The issues of life are decided. The Lord has saved and brought new life. I now need worry no more. Such a person has language of peace rather than war.

57:20.

Following on from the Lord's creation of peace and the fruit of lips which speak peace, we see a contrast when it comes to the *"wicked."*²⁶⁰⁷ The wicked are still at war, both with God and, in consequence, with one another. It is inevitable that this would be the case. The wicked are those who have chosen their own way rather than that of God. It may be that some choose to follow a similar path as others in their opposition to God, but no one ever follows exactly the same wayward path as another. Now since the wicked do this and follow a path of their own making it will not be long before conflict and disagreement is seen. This is the general tenor and flavour of the life of the *"wicked,"* by which is meant those who oppose or deny God His rightful place in their lives.

Our text describes the *"wicked"* (those not in alignment with God) as being *"like the troubled sea."*²⁶⁰⁸ This image is graphic but we are not left to work this out for ourselves, for we are also told that this sea *"cannot rest,"* and further that its *"waters cast up mire and dirt."*²⁶⁰⁹ Waters that are agitated are dirty and full of muck and silt. The waves rolling in from the sea on the shore are always sounding. The waters of the sea are never at rest. Agitation stirs up strife and discord. And so a person out of true with God is disturbed and restless. There is always *"mire and dirt"* being stirred up. There are always issues and problems from within. Anxiety, fear, discontentment, resentment, bitterness, discord, and so on. All these things bedevil mankind in his lost condition, but when a person is healed by God, there is peace. But for the *"wicked"* there can be no peace because they have kept themselves out of the enclave where peace is dispensed and remain in the war-zone where hostilities are ever evident.²⁶¹⁰

This ends the second part of the second half of Isaiah.

2607 Isaiah 57:20.

2608 Isaiah 57:20.

2609 Isaiah 57:20.

2610 Isaiah 57:21.

Chapter 70.
Isaiah 58:1-14.
True faith and fasting!

Textual analysis.

#58 1 “Cry aloud, spare not;
lift up your voice like a trumpet;
tell

My people their transgression, and
the house of Jacob their sins.

2 Yet they
seek Me daily, and
delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and
did not forsake the ordinance of their God.

They
ask of Me the ordinances of justice;
they
take delight in approaching God.

3 ‘Why have we fasted,’ *they say*, ‘and You have not seen?
Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?’

“In fact, in the day of your fast you
find pleasure, and
exploit all your labourers.

4 Indeed you fast
for strife and debate, and
to strike with the fist of wickedness.

You will not fast
as *you do* this day, to make your voice heard on high.

5 Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul?
Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes?
Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?

6 “*Is* this not the fast that I have chosen:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the heavy burdens,
to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?

7 *Is it* not
to share your bread with the hungry, and
that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;
when you see the naked, that you cover him, and
not hide yourself from your own flesh?

8 Then
your light shall break forth like the morning,
your healing shall spring forth speedily, and
your righteousness shall go before you;

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the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

9 Then

you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry, and He will say, 'here I *am*.'

"If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,

10 *If* you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul,
then

your light shall dawn in the darkness, and
your darkness shall *be* as the noonday.

11 The Lord will

guide you continually, and
satisfy your soul in drought, and
strengthen your bones;

you shall be

like a watered garden, and
like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

12 Those from among you shall build the old waste places;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and
you shall be called

the Repairer of the Breach,
the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

13 "If you

turn away your foot
from the Sabbath,
from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and
call the Sabbath

a delight,
the holy *day* of the Lord honourable, and

shall honour Him,
not doing your own ways,
nor finding your own pleasure,
nor speaking *your own* words,

14 Then

you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and
I will

cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and
feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.

The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

We move now to the last section of the second part of Isaiah which runs from Isaiah chapter 58 to Isaiah chapter 66. Our text for this chapter (Isaiah 58) is one seamless whole which deals with the nature of true faith and its outworking. However it will be convenient to split the chapter into two. I do this for the sake of clarity in exposition, but the reader must be aware that there is a continuation or progression in thought from the first main idea to the second. So then we shall consider the chapter under the following two headings:

[1] Tell my people their sins. (Isaiah 58:1-5).

[2] Is not this the fast I require? (Isaiah 58:6-14).

[1] Tell my people their sins. (Isaiah 58:1-5).

58:1

The opening words of Isaiah 58 are reminiscent of Isaiah 40:6 and expresses a dramatic and urgent appeal to the senses. There are four depictions of how this call is to be made. The first phrase “*cry aloud*” is literally “call from the throat” suggesting a deep and very vocal exclamation. Second, the caller or messenger is to not restrain himself in speaking out and must withhold nothing in making this message known. Thirdly the messenger is to make his voice sound “*like a trumpet.*” Reference to the trumpet indicates that a warning is being declared. So what is about to be declared is nothing menial nor superficial. Finally, the messenger is to “*tell*” which word is rather weak. The Hebrew signifies the idea of making conspicuous or to show or demonstrate, so the word “declare” might have been a better choice.²⁶¹¹

The precise message that needs to be loudly proclaimed is given in two parts. This message is for “*My people,*” and “*the house of Jacob.*” These designations serve to show the status of the people. They are the Lord's but they are reminded of their origins, that they come from the supplanter Jacob. The particular thing to be displayed and opened to the people is their “*transgression,*” and their “*sins.*” Transgression is breaking the law, doing that which is wrong and not good. Sin indicates missing the mark, doing something which is not the best but detrimental.

58:2.

The statements we find in verse 2 might at first sight indicate a healthy form of worship. However we have just been told that the nation needs to hear about their true state, sins and transgression, and then in verse 3 we have a more penetrating analysis of their condition and thought process from the Lord. First in verse 2 we have five statements characterising how they thought of their condition, of how they presented. They:

Seek Me daily

Delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness

Did not forsake the ordinance of their God

Ask of Me the ordinances of justice

Take delight in approaching God

²⁶¹¹ The ESV, NASB and YLT all opt for “*declare.*”

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These statements are what we might consider as commendable and good. However they cannot be divorced from motivation and intent. They could all be done in a spirit of disinterestedness, or for some personal gain, or simply as a matter of tradition. Translating these into modern day speech, we might speak of a person like this: they read their bible daily, they love the idea of goodness and right living, they pay attention to the golden rule and other rules they benefit from, they pray to God for blessing and they enjoy going to church and meeting others. All of these things could be done and might seem to be done with enthusiasm and even a “Christian” veneer. But if they are not done from the heart in true love of Christ and from a converted heart, then they are done in vain. Ultimately it is not what we do, but whom we are that is important. Are we Christ's? Are we brought to Him in a state of desperation because of our sinful condition and have we received new life from Him? Or are we simply amongst the Christian community and rather like the feeling we get from it all and so go along (broadly) with all the meetings, requirements and so on?

58:3.

In verse 3 we discover how the people spoke and thought about their life and worship. They “*fasted,*” and “*afflicted*” their souls in their efforts and worship, but they then felt as though such efforts were not worth it. They have two questions for God:

[1] Why has God not **seen** their fasting?

[2] Why has God **taken no notice** of their self-afflicting?

Such sentiments indicate clearly their true motive. They are not given to the Lord and acting out of thanks and delight, but rather are doing various religious duties in order to influence the Lord. The reference to the Lord taking “*no notice*” is particularly telling. Just like a spoilt child who does everything in the classroom to be observed and taken notice of, so that they can be lauded (either by the teacher if the pupil is sucking up, or by classmates if the pupil is playing up), these Israelites wanted God to notice them and respond to their great efforts and activity.

Following this insight into the thoughts and inner workings of the people, we now have the Lord's assessment of their behaviour. He begins by saying “*in fact,*” by which we understand that the truth is coming out. They do not realise the situation. The Lord highlights their fasting. He has two things to say about the nature of their fasting religious expression. First they were not doing it to please God, to bring pleasure to Him, but for their own “*pleasure.*” If we conclude from this that

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God is not interested in our pleasure we miss the point entirely. What these Israelites were doing was to fast in such a way that it brought them satisfaction. The essence of fasting is to give up food or other activity in which a person delights or needs in order to concentrate upon the Lord and let Him be first and uppermost in all considerations. As such it brings a degree of displeasure. If I cease from eating my necessary food I will suffer hunger pangs.²⁶¹² But to engage in a fast so that it brings satisfaction and delight in some way, is to miss the mark. The aim of such observance is not true. True fasting is to engage with God and to delight in Him. Thus by neglecting what we want and desire, and by looking to the Lord, we will find that He brings delight because He is delightful. If we seek delight and pleasure in and of itself, we will always be failing in the same way.

The second thing the Lord has to say is that in their fast they were guilty of exploiting their *“labourers.”* How so? How does their fast exploit the workers? It may be that in their denials from certain things, they actually forced servants and slaves to do what was lacking. Perhaps they arranged their day of fast in such a way as that the very thing they denied themselves they were supplied with by means of exploiting workers. We cannot be sure of this interpretation, but we can say that within their fasts they employed their workers so that they could not be partakers of the fasts or feasts.

58:4.

In verse 4 we have a new thought signalled by the word *“indeed”* which might easily have been rendered “behold.” The real purpose of their fast is now described by three statements, two positive and one negative. It was:

- [1] For strife and debate.
- [2] To strike with the first of wickedness.
- [3] Not to make the voice heard on high.

If the people are engaging in their religious worship for personal pleasure, it will not be long before their own personal feelings and wishes will be challenged or ignored by others. And then, as James discusses in his letter, wars and fighting would be the inevitable result.²⁶¹³ Thus *“strife and debate”* accompany the selfish pleasure-seeking religious worker.²⁶¹⁴ The apostle Paul taught his

2612 Job 23:12.

2613 James 4:1,2.

2614 Isaiah 58:4.

protégé, Timothy, to avoid quarrels.

*But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.*²⁶¹⁵

*But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.*²⁶¹⁶

But the religious man relishes debate and strife, and to such an extent that it ends in fisticuffs! When such behaviour is evident then things have gone very bad indeed. The final statement is presented as a negative one. They may appear to fast so as to be heard by the Lord, but in truth they are not successful. It is not that the Lord cannot hear them, but He is not disposed to listen to them because their heart and motives are all wrong. This brings us to note that it is our sin which stops God from hearing us.

58:5.

In verse 5 we are given a series of rhetorical questions. We are asked to consider exactly what it is that God requires (*“is it a fast that I have chosen”*). Was the fast they enjoyed the one that God required of them? Does God actually expect *“a man to afflict his soul”*? Often we embellish what we read. The Lord speaks of approaching Him and we add all sorts of ceremony and ritual to make us feel as though we have done something. The true heart and mind given to God needs no man-made embellishments! But in our sin and waywardness we cannot leave alone! The people had been bowing their heads *“like a bulrush,”* and were indulging in the openly visible and clearly displayed act of using *“sackcloth and ashes.”* Thus it was all open show and had no real substance and meaning. The final rhetorical question drives the point home. Is this outward observance, which has very visible demonstrations of their approach to God, really that which can be called a true *“fast”* or something which would be *“acceptable”* to the Lord? The expected answer is, of course, no! We must remember that the Lord's searching analysis is to draw attention to motive and heart. Are we when we worship guilty of falling into ritual and mechanical observance? We must do everything we can to make our approach to God sincere. No amount of formulation, nor ritualism, nor set forms will do. Whether you consider more formal liturgies (indulged in by Anglicans and Presbyterians) or those which might be described as more informal or loose (as observed by

2615 2Timothy 2:23.

2616 Titus 3:9.

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Independents and Baptists), the essential thing in worship is the heart and motive.²⁶¹⁷

[2] Is not this the fast I require? (Isaiah 58:6-14).

Having considered the form of fast, or scheme of worship, proffered by the Israelites, which seemed to be showy and superficial, it is now time to bring in what the Lord does require. Before we consider the series of rhetorical questions given to show the type of worship required, it would be helpful to preface this with words spoken in Micah:

He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?²⁶¹⁸

The motive and heart is essential. In order to walk with humility beside God, we need mercy and the mercy of God enables the righteousness of Christ to be ours both as a forensic justification and also as an on-going experience for sanctification of life. The order in this verse is reversed to that which we may expect thinking about salvation. However the order presented is the order of observation. God requires us to walk in righteousness ("*to do justly*"), and in order to do that properly (without self-righteousness rearing its ugly head, for example), we must also be merciful as we have received mercy from the Lord ("*to love mercy*"). The receipt and giving of mercy (one who has received mercy from God must himself be merciful to others) must come from a correct and right relationship with the Lord ("*to walk humbly with your God*"). How do we get to walk humbly with God? Only by faith in Christ, and repentance from our fallen sinful condition.

58:6,7.

Here in Isaiah the Lord puts it in a very appealing way, by saying "*is this not ... is it not ...*"²⁶¹⁹ There then follows seven statements concerning what a true "*fast*" and true worship entails which we describe as follows:

- [1] Loosing the bonds of wickedness. Isaiah 58:6.
- [2] Undoing the heavy burdens. Isaiah 58:6.
- [3] Letting the oppressed go free, and breaking every yoke. Isaiah 58:6.
- [4] Sharing your bread with the hungry. Isaiah 58:7.

²⁶¹⁷ Remember that even an informal form of worship can be a rigid scheme too.

²⁶¹⁸ Micah 6:8.

²⁶¹⁹ Isaiah 58:6,7.

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[5] Bringing to your house the poor who are cast out. Isaiah 58:7.

[6] Covering the naked when you see them. Isaiah 58:7.

[7] Not hiding yourself from your own flesh. Isaiah 58:7.

It can be seen in these statements that the essence of a right form of worship in this instance concerns relationships with others. Perhaps we may be reminded of words from James and the apostle John:

15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit?²⁶²⁰

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?²⁶²¹

First they ought to be ones who are concerned to release the cords which “*wickedness*” brings. Sin always spoils and ruins. It binds and constrains, despite the hope in sinful man's eyes that it would release and make free. The second and third statements both continue this thought. The second statement focuses on the release of “*heavy burdens.*” Thus sin and rebellion not only binds and constrains, but loads a person with things to carry. That is why the Lord Jesus calls for people to come to Him for He (alone) will give rest and release from the burden of sin.²⁶²² The third statement describes the freeing of those so burdened and also includes the breaking of all weights that encumber. It is generally not accepted by men and women of the world that the sin they love and engage themselves in, is that which binds, burdens, and bundles them up in all sorts of mayhem and confusion. The gospel is that alone which can loose the bonds, undo the burdens, and release from the bundled confused mayhem of life.

The fourth to sixth statements move us to consider a more positive aspect of the nature of true worship. First we read of being hospitable and sharing food. Then we have the idea of providing shelter. And the third of these statements speaks of giving covering of clothes. Now these six statements can be taken in the physical as we have described them (and there is no doubt that they ought to be taken this way as a starting point), but surely speak also of the spiritual aspect. In Israel the concept of looking after one's brother was enshrined in their constitution. But the main

2620 James 2:15,16.

2621 1John 4:20.

2622 Matthew 11:28f.

Studies in Isaiah.

point surely is to speak of the great deliverance from sin. How can a person in their fast and worship do these things? If a person brings the gospel both in word and through their life to another fellow human being, then this is the true fast! Ultimately a true love for God, for His Son, and for the Holy Spirit, is expressed in a love for all mankind. Whom amongst those who believe and who have received mercy would not want to pass on what they know? If I have had the *“bonds of wickedness”* removed, and have been set free from sin with all burdens taken away, and if I have been given the bread of life, have been given life-giving shelter and a new set of righteous dress which I did not deserve, why would I not want to point others to the great Giver of such things? The woman at the well of Samaria could not restrain herself from her fellow countrymen who had formerly disdained her, saying:

*Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?*²⁶²³

True worship, a true fast, is opening oneself to one's fellow human being and not withholding that which we have been freely given.²⁶²⁴ Salvation is a gift, but it is a gift we are encouraged to give away, and yet without any loss! The last statement points us to the great issue, apathy. The Israelites are not to hide themselves from their fellow man. Do we do this? Do we keep to ourselves out of fear? We have the words of eternal life and what are we doing with it? Let us speak and live the gospel for all we are worth!

58:8-14. General thoughts.

In Isaiah 58:8-14 we are given a string of outcomes that stem from the disposition the Lord requires. This is seen by the use of the word *“then”* in English.²⁶²⁵ There are also more details given about what characterises a true form of worship and fasting. We observe this at the end of verse 9 and at the beginning of verse 10, and then again in verse 13 as signalled by the words *“if you ...”*

An outgoing attitude of concern for the world is just what the Saviour had. It is also what the Father had in sending His Son as John 3:16 (and other Scriptures) testify to, and it is what the Holy Spirit is concerned with too. So we are to be children of our Father in heaven and foster and encourage an out-going heart. In consequence we will find that we too as partakers of divine benevolence, and being in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit will be enabled to do as He has done.

2623 John 4:29.

2624 Matthew 10:8. See also 2Kings 7:3f, 9.

2625 Isaiah 58:8,9,10,14.

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As there are 19 statements expressing something like 15 ideas (depending on how you view some couplets of ideas), we shall look at these verses in some more detail.

58:8.

Isaiah 58:8 gives us four distinct statements that are consequential on being a true believer, a true son of the Father. These are as follows:

your light shall break forth like the morning
your healing shall spring forth speedily, and
your righteousness shall go before you
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard

First, then, a believer is to be *“light”* just as the Lord was *“light.”*²⁶²⁶ Of course the Lord Jesus can be described as the *“light of the world”* because He is the source of life and light.²⁶²⁷ Light speaks of illumination and understanding. It speaks of being able to do and live because without light we grope about in hopelessness. And so a true believer who shows the family likeness to God will be light to the world. Is it any wonder that the world is now currently in darkness? We are hiding our light in the shade and we are not open and out there showing the love and truth of Christ. But if we take heed to what we know and live it, well then we shall be the light God expects us to be. Our light will shine forth just as the morning dawns!

The second statement points to a benefit that accrues to the believer themselves. In order to understand this we could look at a negative example we have in the New Testament from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. **30** For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. **31** For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. **32** But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.²⁶²⁸

It would thus appear that there were some who in abusing the Lord's supper suffered illnesses and

²⁶²⁶ Matthew 5:14,16; John 8:12; 9:5.

²⁶²⁷ John 8:12; 9:5.

²⁶²⁸ 1Corinthians 11:29-32.

Studies in Isaiah.

even died as a result. If we can suffer through abusing privilege, it is equally true that we can benefit by obedience. If we express our love of God publicly and sincerely as intended, then this will be for our healing! Of course we are all subject to the effects of ageing and (ultimately) physical death, but nevertheless we can grow old gracefully and in full vigour. It is notable that Abraham died *“in a good old age, an old man and full of years,”* and when Moses died *“his eyes were not dim nor his natural vigour diminished.”*²⁶²⁹ We get this same theme at the end of Psalm 92:

12 The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. **13** Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. **14** They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, **15** to declare that the Lord is upright; *He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.*²⁶³⁰

The third statement has the effect of cleansing the land, for as a consequence of an outgoing and godly lifestyle, the believer's *“righteousness”* will *“go before”* them. If a redeemed person acts true to the new nature, their life will be changed and the righteousness of Christ will be theirs. Instead of their former life focused on sin they no longer practice such things and instead live according to the commandments of God. This has a cleansing effect. I cannot claim to be perfect in anything at all but if you will allow me to offer a simple experience from my life it can (I believe) be amplified by the experience of countless others as well. Many years ago I worked for a technology firm in my capacity as a materials scientist. The company were in deep trouble and some drastic measures were being put in place. As I was walking down one corridor I overheard my boss (the owner of the company) say: “but Michael wont lie.” It was not that I had said repeatedly that I favoured the truth, but somehow my character as a believer came through. I had many occasions to express my faith to my colleagues and boss. Now this statement of my boss I realised at once was a doubled-edged compliment. It was complimentary that something of the Saviour's character shone through (no honour to me), but it also signalled that my services would soon no longer be required and I would be replaced with someone who would lie. Sadly this proved true but then shortly after this the company failed and went into liquidation. Perhaps this is not the best example of how the righteousness of God goes forth, but it does show how the Lord works above and beyond what we know. We perhaps ought rather to consider the effects of revivals. When the Holy Spirit comes and many are convicted of sin and turn and repent the side effects for society are

2629 Genesis 25:8; Deuteronomy 34:7.

2630 Psalm 92:

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tremendous. Here is one account of the effects felt in and after the Welsh Revival of 1904:

Thousands of people were saved. Public houses became almost empty. Men and women who used to waste their money getting drunk were now saving it and giving it to the church. They were using their money to buy clothes and food for their families. Stealing and other offences became less and less. Often a magistrate came to court and found that there were no cases for him to try. Men who blasphemed learned to talk purely. The miners put in a better day's work but the pit ponies could not understand what had happened to the miners as they spoke to them more kindly. They were so used to being sworn at that they became disobedient! People who had been careless about paying their bills or paying back money they had borrowed gave back all they owed. People who had quarrelled forgave each other and were reconciled. Society was changed and Wales became a God-fearing nation.²⁶³¹

Then finally in Isaiah 58:8, the fourth effect from true godliness is that the Lord offers His presence and protection. A similar statement to this appeared in Isaiah 52:12. Both hark back to the events following the Exodus where the people found themselves being pursued by the Egyptians.²⁶³²

19 And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them.
20 So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness *to the one*, and it gave light by night *to the other*; so that the one did not come near the other all that night.²⁶³³

Thus for the righteous who live by faith, the Lord Himself and His glory will 'keep our backs' and preserve us through the wilderness of this life. What a tremendous encouragement!

58:9,10.

In Isaiah 58:9 we have a doublet of statements which are related and which follow on from the fourth given in verse 8. Because the "*glory of the Lord*" will be behind watching out for the true believer, it will be that whenever such an one cries out, the Lord will most definitely hear. The statement is effectively repeated to encourage us. Whenever a righteous one calls out in consternation, or cries out in deeper despair, the Lord will "*answer,*" and will respond just like the Father who says "*here I am.*" Why are we so reluctant to believe this and so ready to feel abandoned? Surely it is because of sin, unbelief, and the accuser's tactics! But wait, for the Lord has

2631 <http://www.moriahchapel.org.uk/index.php?page=1904-revival>

2632 Exodus 14:5-11.

2633 Exodus 14:19,20.

Studies in Isaiah.

done so much more to enable us to overcome! Let us be ready to trust that the Lord is willing to hear us when trouble or difficulty arises.

We are then given further instruction which continues on from what we learnt in Isaiah 58:6,7. The instructions begin with the words *“if you ...”* and there are five aspects to what follows detailed at the end of verse 9 and the beginning of verse 10, with three negative injunctions (*“take away”*) and two positive (*“extend your soul satisfy”*).

If you take away
 the yoke from your midst,
 the pointing of the finger, and
 speaking wickedness,
If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul,

The conditional nature of these statements (*“if you”*) implies that they may not be done. We remind ourselves that the Lord is outlining the type of behaviour a true born-again believer ought to display. The first thing to be removed is the *“yoke”* or burden. To what does this refer? What yoke may have been placed within their *“midst”* to keep people bound up? Whatever it may have been in Isaiah's time, we can be sure that we today place unnecessary burdens and yokes on one another. As we act selfishly or demand our rights and to be heard, we lay burdens on those we live closest to. This should not be. We ought never to lay any yoke upon those around us by our own demands and requirements. Instead we ought to be ensuring that there are no stumbling blocks as a result of our actions.

The next thing to be removed is described simply as *“the pointing of the finger”* and this follows on from laying a yoke upon people.²⁶³⁴ How we love to judge and prejudge one another! Of course the preacher is called to declare God's word and the Lord often points the finger at sin, but that is not something we as individual believers ought to be engaged in! Does that mean we can never make any judgements about things or how to behave? Of course not! We are called to make right judgements on things, but to point the finger and accuse another person is not our task. We are all guilty before God. We deserve nothing but censure, and (ultimately) hell. How dare we stand and point the finger at another and cast them into hell in our minds. Hear this parable that the Lord Jesus taught on the matter:

²⁶³⁴ Isaiah 58:9.

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9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”²⁶³⁵

Brothers and sisters, if we see someone doing that which is not right our task is to love them and rescue them from sin. It is not to simply stand and judge.

The third and final thing to be removed is “*speaking wickedness.*”²⁶³⁶ This is somewhat a surprise. And yet we find the apostle Paul writing to the Ephesian Christians to abstain from such things too:

3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.²⁶³⁷

Clearly the effects of the world with its wickedness and sin can influence and affect the righteous man and it is necessary for us to withdraw from these attitudes and thoughts. Please note I am not talking about walking away from *others* who engage in such talk and attitudes, I am speaking of cutting out and rejecting such talk and thoughts from one's own heart by the power and aid of the Holy Spirit. And so when neighbours or colleagues speak wickedness (be it smutty talk, maliciousness, or sedition), we are not to point the finger, but first we are to ensure that we do not fall in line and engage in such thoughts as well, (which is so easy to do). In our own hearts and minds let us resolve that with the help of the Holy Spirit we will resist the temptation to engage in such wicked speaking, and instead point our fellow human beings to the God of all hope and love. I always find it instructive to note how the writer to the Hebrews spoke of Noah. Noah got on with doing what God asked him to do, and in so doing his actions condemned the world. It was not that Noah was judging people around him. No! He was building the ark and pointing to the means of salvation. Obviously we need to make a distinction here and point out that some things are wrong

2635 Luke 18:9-14.

2636 Isaiah 58:9.

2637 Ephesians 5:3,4.

Studies in Isaiah.

and sinful, but our task is not to judge people but rather to point to the rescue plan on offer!

And so it is fitting that the next two features which characterise the true believer are ones which act positively offering an answer to the wickedness (and wicked conversation) that is all around us.²⁶³⁸ We are not to judge people, (although we are to judge sin and error), but we are to offer the hope and rescue that God has come to bring. The way in which this is expressed at the start of verse 10 is very interesting. Please note that it is not merely a question of speaking out an alternative to what the world offers. Rather what is required of us is that we do something personally. The true believer is to “*extend*” their “*soul to the hungry,*” and are to actually “*satisfy the afflicted soul.*” This is deeply personal. I could limit myself to providing money for the poor and needy. Will that do? No! I could limit myself to speaking about the Saviour and publishing the truth. Will that do? Although this is important it is not sufficient. Paul spoke about sharing not just the gospel but his very life with others.²⁶³⁹ Think of the Saviour who came down into this world and met with people face-to-face. This is what we are meant to be. To extend one's soul to the hungry and to bring satisfaction to the afflicted requires personal interaction. Of course we cannot save, neither can we provide solutions to the problems of any. But we can share our lives and speak of the Saviour offering hospitality and love and friendship to all around. He, and He alone, can satisfy and provide the needed sustenance. Now to be so involved with the people around us without being swayed in belief, without being caused to drift in doctrine, without being lead astray requires some mettle and determination. But this is what we are called to. It is what the Saviour did, and so as we follow Him we ought to do likewise. There will be times when we draw away and times when we know we can do nothing. But as a general principle we ought always to be available to live with and love those whom we know to be made in the image of God.

Following this further elucidation on what is required of true believers, there next comes to benefits or outcomes.²⁶⁴⁰ These may seem to be two sides of one and the same benefit, but I think we ought to consider them separately. We have these two thoughts:

[1] your light shall dawn in the darkness, and

[2] your darkness shall *be* as the noonday.

When we reach out in truth by life as well as by word, then the light that is the light of Christ can

2638 Isaiah 58:10f.

2639 Romans 1:11; 1Thessalonians 2:8.

2640 Isaiah 58:10.

Studies in Isaiah.

shine into people's lives. The people of this world are in deep darkness. By coming to them and by truly walking with the Lord by faith and availing ourselves of His righteousness and mercy, we shine the light of truth into the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. That is the first benefit to following the Lord in a right way. But the second is personal. It affects us. In shining the light of Christ into the world and into others lives, we will observe that the darkness we possess (we are still sinners and the heart is desperately wicked) will be dispelled and will be *"as the noonday."* How wonderful it is that by taking God at His word and by being outgoing, not judging, but instead speaking truth and life, the result is illumination both for those we reach out to, and for ourselves as well. I wonder if the reader has ever experienced this? I remember one time in reaching out to some young men who were bent on procuring the services of a prostitute late in the night, feeling that I was not really present but the Lord was. I cannot claim anything of note here at all. I spoke to them of the Lord Jesus and reached out my hands to them. For a moment things hung in the balance, (were they going to set about me?), but the Lord was present and blessings abounded and I felt as though I was merely someone on the sidelines watching on as the Lord Jesus ministered. Sadly these young folk did not want to pursue Christ but there was a great blessing for me in seeing the Lord at work in such a clear and spiritual way.

58:11.

Isaiah 58:11 records three things the Lord will do for those who are righteous by faith, and then two characteristics of such persons who are true believers.

First the Lord will be their guide, but He will not do this in any piecemeal or temporary way for we are taught that he will guide *"continually."* How amazing! We ought never be in doubt of God's leading even when it seems mysterious or puzzling. How many times have we thought: why are we here doing this at this time? And yet the Lord has His answer and (if it be His will) will show us in due course. How many times have we looked back on life and praised God for leading us in such a way when it was so mysterious at the time? Just as the Lord lead the Israelites in the wilderness with the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, so the Lord promises to be our guide by the Spirit at all times. After all the Lord Jesus said this:

18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.... **23** Jesus answered and said ...
"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We
will come to him and make Our home with him."²⁶⁴¹

2641 John 14:18,23.

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Do we think that He could renege on such a promise? The very thought is absurd.

But then second we discover that the Lord will also *“satisfy”* the *“soul in drought.”* Drought will come. The world is deadly barren and drought abounds. None in this world has any water to speak of. In the midst of such a barren and desert-like environment, the Lord promises to be our satisfaction. There is no joy, no peace, no love in this world and its order so why ever would we expect such? At all times the Lord promises to guide and He will remain that which will fully satisfy.²⁶⁴²

Third we discover that the Lord will not just lead continually and be our source of delight, but that He will also *“strengthen”* our bones. In difficult times the bones grow weary and suffer breaks and softening, but the Lord is the one who can add strength and solidity to the frame. This speaks of endurance and perseverance. The Lord enables us to continue and to push onward. He truly will not leave us as orphans but instead will build us up and fortify our very constitutions. We are apt at times to be very super-spiritual. But here we see the Lord doing something for our bodies. We may naturally apply this to the spiritual life thinking, for example, of Ephesians 6:10f where we are exhorted to be *“strong in the Lord,”* but I feel equally that the Lord gives strength to the physical frame as well as the inner man.

Because of God's wonderful will and positive actions there are two outcomes which characterise the true believer in Christ, the one who truly lives by faith and is righteous as a result.²⁶⁴³ These are two versions or expressions of the same theme or idea. First they will be like a *“watered garden.”* This reminds us of similar expressions found in the Song of Solomon.²⁶⁴⁴ Mention of a garden also reminds of paradise before the fall. The Lord is the grand gardener who cultivates all manner of beautiful and fitting plants. In the same way the Lord is busy cultivating true godly characteristics within the believer. This garden is in need of water, for without water nothing grows. Thus the believer is watered by the indwelling Spirit of God who acts as-it-were as the very fountain of life.²⁶⁴⁵ But second such righteous ones will be *“like a spring of water.”* Whereas the first focuses our attention of a luxuriant garden where the main feature is growth of plants because they are watered, here the theme is more towards the benefits the believer is to others. The figure is extended by the addition of this thought: *“whose waters do not fail.”* This is a spring which will never run dry. What an amazing double picture! Those who are Christ's, who have

2642 Psalm 34:8.

2643 Isaiah 58:11.

2644 Song of Solomon 4:12,15.

2645 John 7:37,38.

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truly believed in Him for righteousness, will be like a luxuriant garden full of fruit and plants that have drunk their fill, and will also be like a spring of water that never ceases. How we are to be a delight and a source of the life we love (namely Christ Jesus)! These thoughts are echoed repeatedly in Isaiah but also in Psalm 84 where the man whose *“strength”* comes from God and who has set his heart on *“pilgrimage,”* will become such as to make the place of weeping a spring instead.²⁶⁴⁶ In other words they bring joy, life, sustenance, and hope to bear wherever they walk.²⁶⁴⁷ It is noteworthy that the Psalmist continues by saying that such ones who do this (trust in God truly and walk in His way) will *“go from strength to strength”* as they approach Zion (heaven).²⁶⁴⁸ Is it not also remarkable that for these righteous the supply will never *“fail”*? It is certainly not because they have any source or supply within themselves. Rather this thought speaks of the abundant supply of the Lord which is fully and readily available for the man of God.

58:12.

Then further in Isaiah 58:12 we discover that there will be specific benefits which will appear in the experience of the world. Clearly Isaiah presents this in terms of the nation. He seems to be speaking of a time when the ruined city of Jerusalem (destroyed by its sin through the agency of Nebuchadnezzar under God's guide) will be rebuilt after the return from exile. All of this is in the far distant future from Isaiah's stand point. But we must not linger back in history (for the exile into Babylon and the return were long, long ago). Rather we understand the basic principle. There will arise certain ones filled with the Spirit of God who will do exploits. Now all true believers are not left as orphans, but will be filled with the Spirit and will operate as a well watered garden and as a continually running spring to benefit those around (as they trust in the Lord). But some do greater exploits. Thus it will be *“those from among you”* and not everyone. Isn't this what we observe in church history? There have been great men and women whose faith has shone forth and has been of such quality that great good has been done. Of course this is all a work of the Lord and not by virtue of the men or women involved. The Lord selects His instruments as He wills. We can think of Martyn Lloyd-Jones whose ministry was greatly blessed in the middle of the last century. Or what of Charles Haddon Spurgeon in the century before that?²⁶⁴⁹ There are those who do great exploits. Some shall *“build the old waste places,”* whilst some *“shall raise up the foundations of many*

2646 Isaiah 32:15; 35:1,2; 41:19.

2647 Psalm 84:5,6.

2648 Psalm 84:7.

2649 As the writer to the letter to the Hebrews puts it: *“time would fail me to tell of ...”* many who could be named (Hebrews 11:32).

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generations.” Naturally, because of the fall and because of sin, things decay and fall into ruin and waste. Unless attention is paid to structures and repairs are made frequently, then things decay and fail. And so some recover these old places of decay. I sometimes wonder how silly we are in this age. We think that we are better than all others. We think we do not need anything especially. But we need to grasp hold of the vital truths being lived out by our fathers and make them ours. That which has grounded former believers and given them the platform to show forth the goodness of God (*“the foundations of many generations”*). And we need to grasp hold of the vital truths our fathers neglected and left fall into disrepair. Just as Nehemiah was lead by the Lord to organise the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem, so we have here ones who will not only repair (rebuild) the fallen places where there was a *“Breach,”* but who will also make it possible for people to dwell safely and securely in this new Jerusalem (*“Restorer of Streets to Dwell in”*). Our day is characterised by confusion – a true Babel. It is dangerous to openly speak of the truth concerning many issues. But there may come a time when God will raise up one (or many) who will enable restoration to be had so that it will no longer be fearful to be a Christian. Other Scriptures teach us that the believer must endure trials and tribulation and in so doing will bring glory to the Lord. But here the emphasis is upon a revival. Some will be raised up by God, just as He has always done in His (perfect) time, to rebuild the waste places and restore things for life.

It is worth pointing out here that only God can bring about such reversals and that whatever man does always leads to breaches and destruction. Think of the wickedness of sexual liberation and the plethora of (so-called) identities that are on offer today. How absurd! And yet when any call these things to account and describe them as folly and evil they are hounded and ridiculed by one and all. And yet is it not clear that such *'liberty'* is in fact bondage and destruction? When one decides to be a different sex to that which they were born as what mayhem ensues. I do not want to continue with this issue. There are many others we could name besides. But one day the Lord will come and destroy this hodgepodge nightmare and there will be those who restore order.

58:13.

In verse Isaiah 58:13 we have another statement which begins with the words *“if you”* which reminds us that these statements were intended to describe the character of true belief. If these things were done and carried out, then the blessings described would follow on. The focus is upon the Sabbath day. We must begin with creation. God made the world in six literal days and then stopped His work of creation because He had completed it all and rested from this work on the

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seventh day. When Moses received the ten commandments many years later, we read that keeping the Sabbath day is placed number four on the list:

8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. **9** Six days you shall labour and do all your work, **10** but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the Lord your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates. **11** For *in* six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.²⁶⁵⁰

Now undoubtedly there is a greater spiritual application of this Sabbath rest which the writer of the letter to the Hebrews speaks of in Hebrews chapter 4. We are to rest from our own works and place all our reliance on the work of God in Christ. But we cannot escape the clear fact that the Sabbath is part of creation and enshrined in the ten commandments which were written by the very finger of God.²⁶⁵¹ It is vital, therefore, that we uphold the principle of resting one day in the week. It seems that we are constituted and constructed in such a way. The person who ignores this will suffer consequences just as a person who tries to avoid sleeping does. But we are not therefore to conclude that Sabbath observance is to be a legal requirement which if flouted deserves punishment. The Lord Jesus corrected the Pharisees false conception of Sabbath observance by declaring:

The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.²⁶⁵²

The deeper spiritual understanding of moving from self-reliance to wholly trusting in God must be uppermost in our thinking, but the actual need for physical rest from work one day per week must never be denied. It is to be noted that the Sabbath is referred to by the Lord as His “*holy day.*” Although the Sabbath was made for man, nevertheless in that God made all things, the Sabbath day is (and always will be) His day. Now the arguments which are had about which day precisely should be observed are fatuous. Paul taught that we ought to let none judge our consciences concerning this issue.²⁶⁵³ What we observe in the life of Christ, however, is the great need for rest and recuperation.²⁶⁵⁴ But what then are the essential elements of true Sabbath keeping as declared by the Lord? How should we observe a day of rest? Bear in mind that the particular principles we discover

2650 Exodus 20:8-11.

2651 Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10.

2652 Mark 2:27.

2653 Colossians 2:16,17.

2654 Matthew 11:28f.

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here have a universal spiritual application.

To start with we discover that we should refrain from doing our own *“pleasure”* on this especial day. Now this principle applies to the new life. Believers are those who have stopped “doing their own thing” and have submitted to God in all things. Believers are not able to sing along with Frank Sinatra “I did it my way!” Lifestyle, career, purposes, intentions, business, and everything else all come under the governance of God. We are God's servants and are glad to do His bidding.²⁶⁵⁵ But on that one day in seven we are to stop doing the regular and necessary tasks which are ours given of God. The Sabbath is a *“holy day,”* and this means it ought to be separate, distinct. But does this mean that we are not able to enjoy diversions or hobbies such as reading, photography, mountaineering and so on? Of course not! Part of these recreational activities may indeed form the essence of what we may actually do on the Sabbath. The point is that we cannot simply continue on one path doing our regular activities, for we need to rest! And we ought not simply to indulge our own pursuits and pleasures as though it were our right. There is much more to true rest and the Sabbath than simply doing something different.

Next we find that what we must do is refer to God's special day as something to *“delight”* in. It is a day which is *“honourable.”* The word *“honourable”* is sometimes rendered as “glory” and signifies that which is substantial and weighty, in opposition to something flimsy and vacuous. The Sabbath is thus a time for good and weighty deliberation which will be truly pleasing! The worldly diversions cannot compete! Thirdly we find that we ought to *“honour”* (glorify) the Lord. We ought to make Him centre stage. This is true not just on this special day, but throughout all of life. If Christ is not the reason to awake and start the day then something else will be and our lives will not be governed by the Lord. To *“honour”* the Lord there are three things we are not to do. First we should not be engaged in our own course of life and interests (*“not doing your own ways”*). We need the Lord's perspective on what we should do. Remember that we have been saved by grace through faith and this faith is unto *“good works”* which God has *“prepared beforehand.”*²⁶⁵⁶ The Sabbath day should thus be a continuation of our normal Christian lives. We are not our own and we cannot determine our paths. We follow Christ and do His bidding. The same thought should follow into the Sabbath day. Second we are not to seek our *“own pleasure.”* That is, we are not to amuse ourselves. The lusts of the flesh are obvious and to be avoided. What we are to do is to seek the pleasure of God. He delights in us and delights to give! He has given us all things

2655 Psalm 123:2.

2656 Ephesians 2:8-10.

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to richly enjoy.²⁶⁵⁷ Finally we are not to speak our “*own words*,” by which is meant that we are not to start from our perspective, but from God's. We seek to say the things God desires from our hearts. We can only do this if we are born again.

It should be clear that what is not intended in these verses is the type of experience many were engaged in, in the middle of the twentieth century. Many Christians of that era were under the assumption that Britain was a 'Christian country' and that working life was separate from corporate worship. There was thus a distinction between meeting with fellow believers on Sunday for worship and then 'normal' life Monday to Saturday in work and school. The assumption undergirding existence in Britain was that all of life was generally 'Christian.' Of course the reality was very different because most of what went on during the week was driven by worldly ideas and pursuits. In some ways, the Christian life was merely an add-on or hobby to be pursued at the weekend. But such a dualistic form of life leads to hypocrisy. Our lives ought not to be compartmentalised (even though we do separate parts out for efficiency). Our lives should be one. The New Testament Christian is one who has entered God's rest and their entire life is under the governance of God from top to bottom, from beginning to end, from left to right. How then should the Sabbath day be different? Well, in short, it is the day we meet to fellowship and worship together, but this must never be the only day we engage in such activities! Every morning we ought to awake to the sound of God's grace and mercy and ought to be given to Him in totality. I am old enough to recognise a certain type of Pharisaical attitude to Sabbath keeping in which the best suits and dresses were worn on Sunday and certain behaviours were required and many activities banned. This type of thing is not at all what is being taught here. Rather there ought to be a continual and even-keeled nature to life, with one day in the week dedicated to rest and enjoyment of those things we rely on throughout the week. Whether we rest and read or engage in walking or other fun activity, all should be done under the gaze of a loving heavenly Father. God is no killjoy! He is awesome and majestic, but He is also a Father who loves incredibly and He has given us much to enjoy from His hand.

58:14.

The consequences of observing God's “*holy day*” are spelt out here in Isaiah 58:14. Taking time out to worship God (although we worship Him throughout all our days) and delight ourselves in His rich provision is the main point of the Sabbath rest. We rest from the normal activities of the week and look to the Lord to engage in restful and recuperative experiences. Freedom to rejoice in

²⁶⁵⁷ 1Timothy 6:17.

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God as we walk the lanes, stroll on a beach, read something worthwhile, or enjoy other people's company is a tremendous gift. Our conversation ought always to have God as the focus and ground. When we rest from work and meet with others, how blessed we are to share our experience of God!

The fruit of trusting in God in such a way is detailed by two illustrations. The Lord will:

cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and
feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.

What is the meaning of these two ideas? I think the first has to do with life and experience in this fallen world. Riding on the elevated peaks of the earth suggests being able to take the difficulties of life in our stride. There is also a hint of reflection on the ark of Noah 'riding' smoothly over the submerged mountains.²⁶⁵⁸ Such a reference reminds us that we must be "In Christ" (in the ark) in order to ride the mountains. The Lord Jesus taught His disciples that they would face much tribulation, but He also taught them not to fear because He has "*overcome the world.*"²⁶⁵⁹ We are to note here that God does not remove the "*high hills*" but enables us to ride over them. Difficulties and troubles will come. These are God's means of sanctifying us but rest assured we are not alone in them. We are in the ark and the Lord will protect us through all eventualities.

The second statement noted above brings in the thought of God's provision. The mention of "*Jacob*" rather than Israel signals our earthly and fallen origin. Jacob the deceiver received the blessing and goodness of God – what grace! Perhaps there is a hint of the Lord's provision of the manna in the wilderness here too. The essential thing is that God looks after His family. He provides for all His children. Since we are horrified when an earthly father fails to look after his children why would we doubt the good God providing perfectly for His family?

Thus in these two statements we see the protection and provision of God. If we turn to God fully and enter His rest (not just keeping one day in seven in a hypocritical way), but delight ourselves wholly and fully in God, then we can be assured of His provision and His protection.

At the end of Isaiah 58:14 we read "*the mouth of the Lord has spoken,*" by which we note that what has been said will surely come to pass. This is the comforting thing about God's word. Because God is good we know that what He says is good and none of His words will ever fail. What confidence we can have in God because He has spoken!

2658 Genesis 7:20; 8:4.

2659 John 16:33.

Chapter 71.

Isaiah 59:1-21.

God makes a way despite our sin!

Textual analysis.

#59 1 Behold,

the Lord's hand is not shortened,
that it cannot save;
nor His ear heavy,
that it cannot hear.

2 But

your iniquities have separated you from your God;
and your sins have hidden *His* face from you,
so that He will not hear.

3 For your hands are defiled with blood,
and your fingers with iniquity;
your lips have spoken lies,
your tongue has muttered perversity.

4 No one calls for justice,
nor does *any* plead for truth.

They trust in empty words and speak lies;
they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.

5 They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web;
he who eats of their eggs dies, and *from* that which is crushed a viper breaks out.

6 Their webs will not become garments,
nor will they cover themselves with their works;
their works *are* works of iniquity,
and the act of violence *is* in their hands.

7 Their feet run to evil,
and they make haste to shed innocent blood;
their thoughts *are* thoughts of iniquity;
wasting and destruction *are* in their paths.

8 The way of peace they have not known,
and *there is* no justice in their ways;
they have made themselves crooked paths;
whoever takes that way shall not know peace.

9 Therefore justice is far from us,
nor does righteousness overtake us;
we look

for light,
but there is darkness!

For brightness,
but we walk in blackness!

10 We grope for the wall like the blind,

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and we grope as if *we had* no eyes;
we stumble at noonday as at twilight;
we are as dead *men* in desolate places.

11 We all growl like bears, and moan sadly like doves;
we look

for justice,
but *there is* none;
for salvation,
but it is far from us.

12 For our transgressions are multiplied before You,
and our sins testify against us;
for our transgressions *are* with us,
and *as for* our iniquities, we know them:

13 In transgressing and lying against the Lord,
and departing from our God,
speaking oppression and revolt,
conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.

14 Justice is turned back,
and righteousness stands afar off;
for truth is fallen in the street,
and equity cannot enter.

15 So truth fails,
and he *who* departs from evil makes himself a prey.

Then the Lord saw *it*, and it displeased Him that *there was* no justice.

16 He saw that *there was* no man, and wondered that *there was* no intercessor;
therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him;
and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.

17 For He put on
righteousness as a breastplate,
and a helmet of salvation on His head;
He put on
the garments of vengeance for clothing,
and was clad with zeal as a cloak.

18 According to *their* deeds, accordingly He will repay,
fury to His adversaries,
recompense to His enemies;
the **coastlands** He will fully repay.

19 So shall they fear
the name of the Lord from the west,
and His glory from the rising of the sun;
when the enemy comes in like a flood,
the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.

20 "The Redeemer will come
to Zion,
and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,"

says the Lord.

21 "As for Me,"

says the Lord,

"this *is* My covenant with them:
My Spirit who *is* upon you,
and My words which I have put in your mouth,
shall not depart from your mouth,
nor from the mouth of your descendants,
nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants,"

says the Lord,

"from this time and forever more."

Studies in Isaiah.

Isaiah 59 forms a complete unit in itself. In this chapter we learn about the nature of true repentance and the new covenant. To begin with there is a detailed discussion of the fallen nature of man, a kind of exposition of Genesis 6:5 and 8:6 where we learn that man's inner life is wicked to the core. For convenience sake, can divide the passage up into three sections as follows:

[1] Sin separates us from God. (Isaiah 59:1-8).

[2] The nature of true repentance. (Isaiah 59:9- 15a).

[3] God makes the way! (Isaiah 59:15b-21).

[1] Sin separates us from God. (Isaiah 59:1-8).

59:1.

It is surely the work of goodness and grace that sees this chapter open not with its main theme, that our sin separates us from God, but instead begins with an affirmation of God's good and great character.²⁶⁶⁰ The word “*behold*” as we have noted elsewhere is an arresting call for the hearer to pay serious attention. Listen up! Immediately following this call we get a couplet of thoughts concerning God which we reproduce here:

the Lord's hand is not shortened,
that it cannot save;
nor His ear heavy,
that it cannot hear.

God does not have a body, and so does not have hands nor ears. But He who made our bodies, hands, and ears surely has greater capacity and ability! If He were a man surely His “*hand*” would not be so short that it could not save! The negative expression suggests the opposite positive affirmation. If His “*hand is not shortened that it cannot save*” we are meant to understand that God is more than able to extend His arm and hand to any depths to rescue. Equally, there is no whisper uttered in the depths of the deepest place to which God is not party. He hears everything, even our innermost secret and deepest thoughts. The problem, then, is not God. He knows all things (He is omniscient) and He can do all things (He is omnipotent). The problem is us and our sin.

²⁶⁶⁰ Isaiah 59:1.

59:2.

Having opened with a reminder of God's great goodness and His ability to hear and save, we are then given the contrast "*but.*"²⁶⁶¹ The problem is our sin. The word "*iniquities*" indicates the nature and consequences of sin. Sin is wicked and evil and it leads to terrible things, like idolatry. The word "*sins*" signifies missing the mark, or not doing perfectly what is required. Thus people have not done what they ought to have done, but instead have done wicked and evil things that lead to further evil. Because God is holy and cannot tolerate sin, there exists a separation or division between the sinful people and God. God now must hide "*His face*" from the people and no longer looks upon them with a countenance of peace so as to listen to them.²⁶⁶² In the remainder of this section (verses 3 to 8) we see a detailed depiction of the "*iniquities*" and "*sins*" the people were engaged in.

59:3.

To begin with in Isaiah 59:3 we find that the actions and work of the people (their "*hands*") were polluted with blood. In other words their actions and doings were violent and bloody. There was no gentleness and patience, but instead vehemence and violence. People grabbed, pushed, shoved, and asserted their rights in order to achieve their goals and get what they want. This was the nature of the people who lived before the flood, and we see it in operation today.²⁶⁶³ It is no wonder really that people are assertive and grabbing today given that their education is steeped in evolution and the survival of the fittest. Aggression is lauded!

But the depths of wickedness is not seen merely in a general sense in the peoples' actions, for their "*fingers*" were also polluted and wicked too. The fingers signify intricate and detailed work. Consider the craftsman in wood or the clockmaker. Such artisans use delicate tools manipulated not by hands but by the fingers. And so the peoples' sins were of such an intricate nature that they can be said to be fabricated and even planned. It is interesting that the serpent in Genesis 3 was described as "*cunning*" or crafty.²⁶⁶⁴

After a consideration of the hands and fingers indicating action and planning, we move next to the "*lips*" and "*tongue.*" What did the people speak of and talk about? What characterised their communications? Well sadly they spoke "*lies,*" and they "*muttered perversity.*" Conversation was

2661 Isaiah 59:2.

2662 Numbers 6:24-26.

2663 Genesis 6:11,13.

2664 Genesis 3:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

deceit. Lies, falsehood and “fake news” was the norm. They also groaned or growled with perverse thoughts and ideas. These were wicked, unjust, and even violent things. Do we not find the same today? Consider the vitriolic hate spewed forth online and in the media for any who go against the current weird fashions and perversions!

59:4.

Having begin with outward action and then moving to speech and communication, we find in Isaiah 59:4 that the next series of denunciations concern matters of the heart or the inner life. It seems that the concept of “*justice*” and “*truth*” as absolute things were ignored or had been removed. People no longer, it appears, had deep convictions of the truth and justice. Consequently, none would cry out for “*justice*” to be done, and none would demand that “*truth*” be adhered to. Of course many might call for justice that they demanded, but none called for what was absolutely right and true. Instead people trusted in “*empty words*” which lead them to “*speak lies.*” Paul warned against being cheated by worldly thinking which he described as “*empty deceit*”:

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.²⁶⁶⁵

Words and thoughts which begin from man and have nothing of the Spirit of God in them will always be empty and pointless. Anything which does not stem from God is, ultimately, a lie. The people not only spoke lies but they “*conceive evil*” and having done so, they then give birth to it and spew it forth. This conception and birth imagery is significant. How do thoughts originate within the heart? Evil is “*conceived.*” A person becomes pregnant with some thought. How so? If we cast our minds back to Genesis 3 we can see that the serpent (the Devil) was the one who sowed wrong thoughts and doubts about God into the mind of the Woman.²⁶⁶⁶ The Devil is a liar.²⁶⁶⁷ If we doubt God and His word be assured that the Devil will supply alternative “truths” and ideas. Listen to James:

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. **14** But each one is tempted when

2665 Colossians 2:8.

2666 Genesis 3:1f.

2667 John 8:44.

Studies in Isaiah.

he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. **15** Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.²⁶⁶⁸

We are tempted by being drawn away from God by our inner desires and lusts. The Devil plants an alternative to the truth (a lie) in our hearts and we mingle this with our thoughts and conceive a wicked desire. From this conception the birth of iniquity is inevitable. It is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks and if we have evil within, then evil will come out. It is *“as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he.”*²⁶⁶⁹

59:5.

The ideas expressed in Isaiah 59:5 continue the thought begun at the end of verse 4. Only a viper can *“hatch viper's eggs,”* and so the people are likened to vipers. This brings to mind John the Baptist's statement concerning the unrighteous Pharisees:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”²⁶⁷⁰

Our Lord and Saviour used this same expression for the Pharisees on two further occasions:

Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.²⁶⁷¹

Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?²⁶⁷²

Just as a viper brings forth viper eggs, so a deceitful and wicked heart can only bring forth evil and wickedness. What a terrible thought! Born in sin, dead to the Lord, and all we can do is bring forth evil.

The second image is that of a *“spider's web.”* This image is often employed to indicate deceit for the spider weaves his cunning design to trap unsuspecting prey for food! In this the emphasis is upon the weaving. Spiders are amazing creatures. Their engineering skills are remarkable. But the main aim of their designs is to trap prey. The tiny thin threads are not easy to

2668 James 1:13-16.

2669 Proverbs 23:7.

2670 Matthew 3:7.

2671 Matthew 12:34.

2672 Matthew 23:33.

Studies in Isaiah.

observe but they are incredibly strong and sticky. The unsuspecting fly cannot discern the threads until it is too late and they are caught fast by the sticky glue of the silken threads. Evil people devise evil webs to deceive and catch prey. This is the Devil's work, and sadly, fallen man is not only prey to such mischievousness, but also a ready servant of it too.

And so just as a viper can only bring forth more vipers from their eggs, what they bring forth is in essence death. Any who partake of their eggs will die. And the outcome of crushing of one who eats of the eggs will be another viper! This is a strange series of images but the point is very clear. Vipers produce only vipers. Furthermore, if you eat a viper you will become a viper. That is, if you assimilate the nature of a viper, a viper you will become. We often say don't we that you are what you eat? Well that is what is being expressed here. What we assimilate we become. If we focus on, and dwell among vipers, it will not be a surprise that we too are venomous vipers to boot. Now the point is that we are all vipers by nature. We sin and do iniquity. The outcome and fruit of a viper is simply the same. Like begets like. A sinner sins and begets more sinners.

59:6.

The thoughts expressed in Isaiah 59:6 continue the theme of the spider and his web. The web of deceit may trap prey but it cannot be used for anything else. Can you imagine trying to utilise a spider's web for anything at all? These structures are perfect for what they were designed for, but for nothing else. These things cannot provide for clothing to cover and will not be able to display any type of righteous good works. We need the covering of Christ and His good works! The thought of trying to atone for sins committed by the webs of deceit we weave is preposterous!

All works of the people are "*works of iniquity*" because we are born of Adam who fell into transgression. Any works done by Adam or Adam's posterity (of which we are all a part) are nothing but empty webs of deceit. Verse 6 ends with a note recalling the opening statement that human works are not just works of sinfulness but "*violence.*"

59:7.

We have heard of the fruit of their hands and lips and now we move in Isaiah 59:7 to consider the action of the "*feet.*" In speaking of hands, fingers, lips, and now feet the implication is that the entire person is engaged in the same iniquity. Here we learn that the people are bent on doing evil and that quickly, because "*their feet run to evil.*" It would seem that the lifestyle (their 'walk') is one that leans heavily towards evil rather than good. Again we are told that the people

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were quick to get violent and “*shed innocent blood.*” And then we come back to the inner person where we discover that thinking was governed by “*thoughts of iniquity.*” The fruit of such iniquitous thinking was a life of “*wasting and destruction.*” The repetitive nature of some of these statements implies seriousness of the ideas expressed. This is no mere deviation or waywardness that might be easily corrected. What is being expressed, it seems, is that their sin and iniquity was deep seated and pervasive. What follows in their wake is nothing but ruin and disaster.

59:8.

As if to emphasise the point of these negative assertions, the opposite positive which we might have hoped for is also declared (Isaiah 59:8). The people have “*not known*” the “*way of peace.*” Bent on sin and iniquity they have opted for violence and destruction, and so they have no thought of peace and a life governed by peace. We read elsewhere that God is the “*God of peace*” and He is the only one who can dispense peace.²⁶⁷³ What can man offer except violence?

Because of their sin and iniquity mankind can equally offer no true “*justice*” in the course of their lives. Despite the judicial systems we have built, justice is far from us. If you have the money or the “clout” you can get away with things. Those who deserve justice often suffer evil decisions. These ways of injustice and violence are ways that the people “*have made themselves*” and they end up as “*crooked paths.*” The outcome of such who travel on these man-made ways is that they “*shall not know peace.*”

A life of sin and iniquity results in violence and destruction, and so can never usher in peace or righteousness. All our paths that we have constructed for ourselves are crooked and not straight. They are unjust and not peaceful. What a stinging analysis of sin. There are but two ways. In one there is nothing but ruin and death. But in following God's way there is the hope of peace and life.

[2] The nature of true repentance. 59:9-15a.

Having been given a full analysis of the nature of sin by the Lord, we next discover the people taking this on board. What we have in these words is a statement of the people's confession as indicated by the frequent use of “*us,*” “*we*” and “*our*” in the first four verses of this second section.²⁶⁷⁴

2673 John 14:27; 20:19,21,26; Romans 5:1; 15:33; 16:20; Philippians 4:9; 1Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20.

2674 Isaiah 59:9,10,11,12.

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59:9,10.

As a result of the clear revelation from God about the sinful state of the nation, the conclusion can only be that *“justice”* and *“righteousness”* are foreign to the people in their experience.²⁶⁷⁵ The first part of verse 9 describes the state within which the people lived. Justice had departed and injustice was the norm. People did not treat one another (whether it be leaders to people or within the populace) well. The second statement (*“nor does righteousness overtake us”*) amplifies the first. It would appear that righteousness was hidden and lagging behind and had not pioneered in the peoples' experience. Why was this? Well without God there can be no righteousness nor justice. We may expect such things from the people (after all they have been greatly blessed) but these things are lacking because they are far from God.

Wherever the people turn and *“look for light,”* or *“for brightness,”* all they find instead is *“darkness,”* and they *“walk in blackness.”*²⁶⁷⁶ Why so? Well they are not in harmony with God. They are confessing this situation that they are in. They have not been looking to Him who is the light, and instead they have groped about in the ideas and thoughts of men whose lives are governed by the darkness. Consequently they *“grobe”* around as a *“blind”* man and *“stumble”* in broad daylight.²⁶⁷⁷ This is the nature of mankind without God. For all his pomp and achievements, his intellect and prowess, mankind is blind and groping in the dark. Now this is put as a confession here. The people were openly declaring their darkness, their lost state and their desolation.

59:11.

The description of their true state continues in Isaiah 59:11, where they are likened to *“bears”* who *“growl,”* and like the *“doves”* who *“moan”* in sadness. Without God people become like the beasts. All they can do is growl and moan. Within their experience and among those who they have trusted there is no *“justice”* and there is no *“salvation.”* They looked for such but found them lacking. Again we are hearing a true confession of the people. In mankind there is no true justice and certainly no salvation. Unrepentant peoples would always consider that somewhere we might hope for justice and salvation, but one who is repenting will have come to that point where they know that the only hope is from God.

2675 Isaiah 59:9.

2676 Isaiah 59:9.

2677 Isaiah 59:10.

Studies in Isaiah.

59:12.

In Isaiah 59:12 the essence of the matter is stated. It was because of their sin that they were separated from God, and it was because of their sin that they were lost and in darkness. It is worth pondering the detail of Isaiah 59:12 a little further. Four times we read that it was “*our*” sins and transgressions which were the problem. Owning up to our state before God is essential. If we say we have no sin we lie and the truth is not in us.²⁶⁷⁸ The people state four things concerning their own sins which are worth bearing in mind:

- [1] Their transgressions were multiplied before the Lord.
- [2] Their sins testified against them.
- [3] Their transgressions were with them.
- [4] Their iniquities were known by them.

Now regarding the first statement, it was not that there were many sins and rebellions made up or added to the list, but that when God takes account of sin then it is much greater both in effect and size than man would like to consider. The truth is, we do not see ourselves as sinful. We do not see the depth nor the extent of our sin. We forget that sin is against a holy and infinite God. To transgress God is to do an unspeakable act because all God does is good and wonderful. When we begin to see sin as God sees it, then sin is multiplied before us. The few sins we might care to confess are revealed in all their horrible ugliness and many others we have shielded, ignored, or were ignorant of also come to light. Sin is such a terrible thing. But one thing a sin does is to testify against the perpetrator. Be assured that your sins will find you out.²⁶⁷⁹ It is not possible to sin and leave no trace. Sin leaves devastation, ruin, and horror in its wake. Just as goodness shows forth beautiful fruit and delight, sin will reveal its true nature for all to see. It is not really possible to separate the sin from the sinner (except in and through Christ Jesus and His death and resurrection – praise God!). Sin witnesses against the sinner especially in God's sight. God watches us and He knows full well what we do. The idea that we can sin in secret and hidden places is laughable. The Lord watches over all the earth and sees the hearts of men, never mind their open actions.²⁶⁸⁰ The third statement is one which brings into focus the depth of this problem of sin. The people openly testify of their sin but the great trouble is that their transgressions were “*with*” them, or, in other

2678 1John 1:8.

2679 Numbers 32:23.

2680 Proverbs 15:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

words, wedded and embedded in their very natures. Sin is no external outward thing, but something that is within. We have a sinful, rebellious nature and out of this we commit sin and rebel. The great trouble then is that sin is *“with”* us, it is in us, and we have no means whatsoever of removing it. This is why the attempts of mankind to solve the problem is not just an utter failure, but a woeful thing to observe. Finally the people openly confess that they *“know them”* and they are aware of their true state. They know them so much that next we find them outlining them in some detail in Isaiah 59:13.

59:13.

First we note that the people confess that they had done their rebellion and sin *“against the Lord.”*²⁶⁸¹ This was David's confession too.²⁶⁸² Despite the fact that sins, iniquities, and transgressions are openly against both ourselves and others around us, the chief object insulted and transgressed against is the Lord God. Breaking God's commands (transgression), committing iniquity (doing evil), and not doing what is to be expected (missing the mark) involves *“lying”* to God. By doing something that is wholly out of kilter and the right course of action, if we do not openly confess such, we engage in a life of lies. We are not speaking the truth. Our lives, as lives of sin, are a lie.

The confession continues in the second statement where there is a recognition of *“departing from our God.”* It does not matter whom you are, whether you have been brought up as an atheist, a Hindu, a Moslem, or whatever, in leading your life in your own way, or in the way handed down by your fathers and impressed upon you from youth, you are guilty of *“departing from God.”* This is the essence of sin, a departure from God who is good and perfect, thus yielding the opposite of what is good, namely evil, error, falsehood, lies, and deceit. As a consequence of *“departing from God,”* a person will undoubtedly speak *“oppression and revolt.”* What issues from the mouth of a sinner is no wholesome thing. It is worth reiterating here that there is no neutral ground. Modern secularism has foisted this lie upon us in our day. But in truth you cannot stand on neutral soil. You have departed from God and are therefore one who speaks *“oppression and revolt,”* or you are with God and seek to honour His ways. Now all of this speech and action in going far from God stems from the attitude of heart and mind. Thus the great issue is the issue of the heart. Where are our hearts? The people recognised that they began to think in ways which were false. The text puts it like this:

2681 Isaiah 59:13.

2682 Psalm 51:4.

Studies in Isaiah.

“conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.” This rendition of the verse is accurate to the flow of the Hebrew words. It is *“from the heart.”* So the issue is a matter of the heart. The heart is incredibly wicked and thus we are in need of a new one. We discussed earlier the concept of where thoughts originate when looking at Isaiah 59:4. They are conceived in the inner most being and once formed give birth to their outflow. If they are noble or good thoughts then the outcome may be good fruit, but if evil then only falsehood and wickedness will result. A wicked heart which has fled from God can only utter *“falsehood.”*

59:14,15a.

Such open confession leads the people to recognise that in their experience and due to their wicked ways *“justice”* was not seen or had *“turned back.”*²⁶⁸³ Further that because of their sinful ways *“righteousness”* was nowhere near them.²⁶⁸⁴ Consequently *“truth”* and *“equity”* (that which is right and proper), were discounted and not taken account of. It becomes obvious to note that whenever sin abounds then truth falls victim amongst the webs of deceit and lies woven by iniquity. In their confession the people recognised that they had sacrificed the truth and had let it fail in their desire for self rule and sin (*“truth fails”*).²⁶⁸⁵ As a result of truth being discarded and discounted, those who would flee from error and sin would thence become *“a prey”* and an object of derision.²⁶⁸⁶

[3] God makes the way! (Isaiah 59:15b-21).

59:15b,16.

The confession of Isaiah 59:9-15a ends without any dressing up or excuse. It is bald and truthful. But then we find that the Lord God has been observing and hearing this all along.²⁶⁸⁷ It is almost as though the Lord Himself is present alongside the person who has poured out their heart in sorrow for their wayward life. What displeased God in this was that there appeared to be *“no justice,”* or perhaps better, no right decision or judgment. None could offer a solution which would be right and good, and there was *“no man”* and *“no intercessor”* who could broker a perfect

2683 Isaiah 59:14.

2684 Isaiah 59:14.

2685 Isaiah 59:15a.

2686 Isaiah 59:15a.

2687 Isaiah 59:15b.

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solution.²⁶⁸⁸ We need to pause a while and consider this statement. Adam and the Woman lived in perfect paradise and both were sinless. But because of their transgression, all born from them (the entire world), would share in their sinful nature. It is therefore impossible for there to be any man or any arbitrator, or intercessor from among men because all are Adam's progeny and thereby tainted with sin. Why then did the Lord find it astonishing that there was no one to offer a solution?²⁶⁸⁹ Clearly the Lord knows all things, the beginning from the end, so why does He wonder that none could be found? Well the answer is, of course, that He is expressing this thought as though He were a man. Mankind naturally would not accept that someone somewhere, or some system somehow, could not be used to make amends. The Lord in displaying this wonder seeks to show two things. First, that there is indeed none who could be found. But second the fact that mankind is responsible for his lost condition and he really ought to bring a solution to the problem. Man has sinned and done terrible things. Man must be held responsible to clear up the mess. What is he going to do about it? Well, of course, there is nothing anyone can do (because we are all sinful and tainted) but nevertheless we are still to be held responsible and must account for all this mess. It is vital that we understand that sin and rebellion is caused by man (Adam in the first instance and thereby all men), and that man is fully responsible for the debt incurred.²⁶⁹⁰ Who transgressed? Mankind transgressed. Whom is responsible and owes the debt incurred? Mankind is responsible and must pay in full. The trouble is that the offence and the payment required is far too great for any man to pay. So when the Lord looks for someone to make the payment there was none to be found.

In this sorry state of affairs, seeing that none could act for man, we find that the Lord Himself takes action. We read that *“His own arm brought salvation for Him.”* Not that this salvation was not for God in the sense that He needed it, but for Him as the solution for mankind. Note further that it was *“His own arm”* which would effect salvation. This brings us back to the start of Isaiah 59:1 where the Lord reminded the people that the Lord was well able to reach down and save them. The title *“the arm of the Lord”* occurs three times in Scripture as follows:

*Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! Awake as in the ancient days, In the generations of old. Are You not the arm that cut Rahab apart, and wounded the serpent?*²⁶⁹¹

2688 Isaiah 59:16.

2689 Isaiah 59:16.

2690 Romans 5:12.

2691 Isaiah 51:9.

Studies in Isaiah.

Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?²⁶⁹²

that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: “Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”²⁶⁹³

It is clear from these three occasions that this title “*the arm of the Lord*” is a designation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in particular in connection with His saving action.²⁶⁹⁴

The action of the Lord having revealed that there was no man to help is given in two statements as follows:

therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him;
and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.

The twin themes of “*salvation*” and “*righteousness*” are ones we have come across before, and will occur in later passages.²⁶⁹⁵ The Lord's salvation then, is not merely a rescue at any cost. It is a rescue which is right and true. It is a deliverance which deals with all aspects of justice. The Lord wondered at the fact that justice could not be found among men, and so He brings “*the arm of the Lord*” to effect a right and true salvation for mankind. It is interesting that whilst “*salvation*” is brought by “*His own arm*” (i.e. “*the arm of the Lord*”), in contrast the Lord's “*own righteousness*” bore Him up and enabled Him to carry out this work of salvation. Adam had lost his righteousness, but “*the arm of the Lord*” had a true righteousness which would enable Him to bring about the right salvation demanded by the situation – demanded by the holy God.

59:17.

Isaiah 59:17 moves the figure onwards. There was no man available amongst men and so the Lord Himself would provide the “*man*” (“*the arm of the Lord*”) who could bring the true and right salvation needed. This one is now to be described in some detail with regard to what He was to wear. The figure is of a warrior, or champion. Although we do not have mention of the incarnation here, the idea being expressed is that one from God Himself would come and would “*put on*” and thus would be dressed in the necessary accoutrements. This implies the idea of an incarnation, or at

2692 Isaiah 53:1.

2693 John 12:38.

2694 See earlier comments on Isaiah 51:9 and 53:1.

2695 Isaiah 45:8; 46:13; 51:5,6,8; 56:1; 59:16; 61:10; 62:1; 63:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

least, the provision of a man who would prevail.²⁶⁹⁶ There are four things that this warrior was to be adorned with:

righteousness as a breastplate,
and a helmet of salvation on His head;
the garments of vengeance for clothing,
and was clad with zeal as a cloak.

First He was to have a “*breastplate*” which represents “*righteousness.*” The heart must be protected at all costs and so warriors almost always put their breastplate on first. The heart must be righteous. The warrior-champion has a pure heart that is righteous in perfection. By His righteous act and life He is able to save.²⁶⁹⁷ Second the warrior must protect the head. Obviously this is vital for it is the control centre of the person. The Lord Jesus is described by Paul in Colossians as the one “*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*”²⁶⁹⁸ Thus nothing can harm nor alter the wisdom and knowledge of this warrior-champion, “*the arm of the Lord,*” and nothing can deceive Him either. Third, the champion has “*garments of vengeance.*” These are not protective equipment but clothes for a purpose. The warrior-champion, “*the arm of the Lord*” is dressed to effect God's righteous retribution upon all evil and sin. Fourth He was to be adorned with a “*cloak*” of “*zeal.*” The work that the “*arm of the Lord*” came to do was to be done in earnest and with incredible enthusiasm.²⁶⁹⁹

59:18.

These last thoughts are then amplified in Isaiah 59:18. Justice must be done and the warrior-champion will come and “*will repay*” all enemies “*according to their deeds.*”²⁷⁰⁰ At these words we may be somewhat alarmed. Surely the Lord is coming as a Saviour? But we must not forget that Christ's chief end was in condemning sin by His death on the cross. In order to effect the salvation of man the problem of sin (the true enemy) had to be dealt with.²⁷⁰¹ Of course we recognise that the Lord's second coming will be in flaming fire against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men too.²⁷⁰² Our problem, far too often, is that we home in on our part and what we get out of things. We

2696 Isaiah 59:17.

2697 Romans 5:18.

2698 Colossians 2:2,3.

2699 John 2:17.

2700 Isaiah 59:18.

2701 Ephesians 2:15,16; Colossians 2:14,15.

2702 2Thessalonians 1:7-10.

Studies in Isaiah.

need to take a step back and observe that God is dealing with things in the best way. Sin is awful. Evil is not good. So it must be dealt with. Christ came and paid in full for sin by His death on the cross. All who fail to apply to this one means by which a person can be forgiven and washed clean will pay in full on that last day. Now all that the Lord does is just and fair. People will be paid *“according to their deeds.”* The trouble is that none can pay this. The text continues with an amplification of the required payment for sin and rebellion. The Lord will repay *“fury to His adversaries.”* This is God's wrath, His hot displeasure. It is His settled, just, and righteous anger against all that is contrary to Him, i.e. to what is good. Then further, He will repay *“recompense to His enemies.”* In other words, God's enemies will reap the rewards and just desserts of their wicked behaviour. *“The wages of sin is death.”*²⁷⁰³ Finally the *“coastlands”* will be repaid in full. These were the Gentile regions which, although ignorant of Israel, nevertheless would be paid in full for their sin. Ignorance is never an excuse.

59:19.

The result of this warrior-champion who comes to execute vengeance against the enemies of God would be *“fear.”* We are reminded, at this point, of David's fight with Goliath. You may recall that David spoke openly to Goliath who had *“defied the armies of the living God,”* with these words:²⁷⁰⁴

45 Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. **46** This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. **47** Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle *is* the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands.”²⁷⁰⁵

Once David had defeated the giant cutting off his head (pointing us to Genesis 3:15), the Philistines fled in fear.²⁷⁰⁶ In the same way when Christ died on the cross and defeated Satan and then rose again, the result was great fear.²⁷⁰⁷ There are two things which will be feared:

2703 Romans 6:23.

2704 1Samuel 17:36.

2705 1Samuel 17:45-47.

2706 1Samuel 17:51.

2707 Matthew 27:54; 28:4,8.

Studies in Isaiah.

the name of the Lord from the west
and His glory from the rising of the sun

It is the *“name of the Lord”* and *“His glory”* which will be feared. When Christ came upon the earth His glory was hidden, except on various occasions.²⁷⁰⁸ But when He returns, the glory of the Lord will be readily evident. For now the *“name of the Lord”* and *“His glory”* are only revealed (as God so wills) through His people. May we be those whom God will use to display the glory of the name of God! Notice that whilst the name of the Lord is to be feared *“from the west,”* His glory is to be feared *“from the rising of the sun”* (i.e. east). Thus from east to west or universally (across the entire globe) the Lord's name and His glory will be feared.

At the end of Isaiah 59:19 the thought turns back to the enemies. When they approach *“like a flood,”* then at that time the Lord will act. Isn't this always the case with the Lord? When it seems all is lost, then at just the right time the Lord acts!²⁷⁰⁹ What does the Lord do? Well we are told that it will be *“the Spirit of the Lord”* who will act here. We remind ourselves that God is one, and that God is three persons. God the Father sent the Son, God the Son became our sacrifice and High Priest, and God the Holy Spirit brings to fruition the works of Christ. Now it is the *“Spirit of the Lord”* who will raise up *“a standard”* against the enemies. First we recall that although this word *“standard”* is one only used twice in Isaiah, the main teaching it points to is one frequently found throughout the prophecy.²⁷¹⁰ It signifies the rallying point, the point where the armies gather in readiness to defeat the enemy. But this rallying point, this standard, points unequivocally to the cross of Christ.²⁷¹¹ It is significant that the Lord Jesus was not only conceived of the Holy Spirit, but was also full of the Spirit of God, and was lead perfectly by the Spirit too.²⁷¹²

59:20.

And then in Isaiah 59:20 as a perfect follow on we read that the *“Redeemer”* will appear. This One will come to the city of God, and also to those who repent. This is a perfect representation of the Lord Jesus who came from heaven to Bethlehem, appeared amongst men in Galilee and

2708 Luke 9:32; John 1:14; 2:11.

2709 Galatians 4:4; Romans 5:6.

2710 Isaiah 49:22; 59:19. For the closely related term *“banner”* see: Isaiah 5:26; 11:10,12; 13:2; 18:3; 30:17; 31:9; 62:10. See also discussion concerning the *“banner”* in Isaiah chapter 11 (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14).

2711 The *“pole”* of Numbers 21:9 is the same Hebrew word as *“banner”* used in Isaiah. The Lord Jesus links His death on the cross with the pole raised by Moses in the desert, (John 3:14).

2712 Matthew 1:18,20; 3:11,16; 4:1; 12:28; Luke 4:18; John 3:34.

Studies in Isaiah.

Judea, and who set His face to reach Jerusalem where He was to die.²⁷¹³ The “*Redeemer*” still comes to all who “*turn from transgression,*” who recognise their sin and cry out to God for rescue.

59:21.

And then this section closes with a remarkable statement of the gospel in Isaiah 59:21. We might have separated out Isaiah 59:21 as a section on its own because we have those important words “*says the Lord*” at the end of Isaiah 59:20, and then two more times within Isaiah 59:21 acting as bookends. At the least we need to highlight the fact that these words are all God's. It is all that which God wants us to know. However on balance it would seem better to include this verse as the summit of the whole passage whose focus has been on God's act of redemption. Notwithstanding that, the use of the phrase “*says the Lord*” three times serves to place the emphasis on this last verse. It is worth quoting this verse in full:

21 “As for Me,”
says the Lord,
“this *is* My covenant with them:
My Spirit who *is* upon you,
and My words which I have put in your mouth,
shall not depart from your mouth,
nor from the mouth of your descendants,
nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,”
says the Lord,
“from this time and forever more.”

In the Hebrew the first “*says the Lord*” phrase comes after the statement concerning the covenant. A more literal translation would thus be:

And I, this [is] My covenant with them
says the Lord.
My Spirit who [is] upon you
and My words which I have put in your mouth
shall not depart from your mouth
nor from your seed's mouth,
nor from the seed of your seed's mouth
says the Lord.
From this time and unto eternity.

2713 Matthew 2:1; 4:15; Luke 9:51,53

Studies in Isaiah.

It will be seen from the above that the opening words bring us to a sharp focus upon God ("*and I*"). The modern translations nearly all adopt the phrase "*as for Me*" but all we have is the personal pronoun affixed to the particle usually rendered as "*and.*" Thus we have the "*I AM*" in focus at the beginning and then we are taught that His "*covenant*" is "*with them.*" To whom is the Lord referring? It can only be to those mentioned at the end of Isaiah 59:20, namely to those in "*Zion*" and to those "*who turn from transgression in Jacob*" to whom the "*Redeemer*" has come. So what does this "*covenant*" entail?

First we discover that the Spirit of God will be upon those who repent and are of Zion. John the Baptist advised all who came to him to look to the one who would baptise not with water but with the Holy Spirit and fire.²⁷¹⁴ How we need the Spirit of God! Without Him within, all is hopeless. But we receive great comfort from the writings of the apostle Paul who declared:

13 In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, **14** who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.²⁷¹⁵

But being filled with the Spirit of God is only half the story, for a second essential component of this covenant is God's words. We discover that God has put His words in our very mouths! What does this mean? Well I think we are meant to understand that God's word (the Bible) is not to be left on the shelf gathering dust. It is to be imbibed and drunk to the dregs! It is to be in us, and on our lips. The word of God ought to energise our mouths so that our daily conversation is of God and what He has to say. Now of course there is also teaching concerning inspiration here. God inspired the very words the prophets spoke out. The words of the Bible are "God-breathed."²⁷¹⁶ But when the Spirit comes upon a person He is very concerned to bring to that person the words of the Lord.²⁷¹⁷ May the words of the living God be on our lips! To be so, they must needs be in our heart. That is why the Psalmist said:

Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.²⁷¹⁸

2714 Matthew 3:11.

2715 Ephesians 1:13,14.

2716 2Timothy 3:16.

2717 John 3:34; 6:63; 16:13.

2718 Psalm 119:11.

Studies in Isaiah.

Our Lord and Saviour said “*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*” and so what can be more important than filling your heart with the things of God?²⁷¹⁹ Of course this only applies to those who have new hearts and have been born again. As babes they drink deeply the milk of the word, and as growing youngsters they exercise on the food they eat.²⁷²⁰ We need to feast on Christ and every word He utters for:

So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that **man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.**²⁷²¹

For our spiritual well-being we need *every single word* that comes forth from the mouth of God. Since God has provided us with everything needful, we observe that the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation (which is all the word of God) is our meat and drink.²⁷²²

What is really wonderful about this particular verse, though, is that it is not just for those who repent, but for their children, and their children's children! Of course God does not have grand children and every generation must seek Him and turn to Him in faith having repented of sin. But the blessings of the word of God are showered through the generations. It is this verse (among others) which gives impetus for the wonderful work of Sunday Schools and other attempts to teach the young people the things of God. Such must continue throughout all ages until the Lord returns.

2719 Matthew 12:34.

2720 Hebrews 5:14; 1Peter 2:2.

2721 Deuteronomy 8:3.

2722 2Peter 1:3,4.

Chapter 72.

Isaiah 60:1-22.

Arise! The call of the Gentiles.

Textual analysis.

#60 1 Arise, shine;
for

your light has come!

And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.

2 For behold,

the darkness shall cover the earth,
and deep darkness the people;
but

the Lord will arise over you,

and His glory will be seen upon you.

3 The Gentiles shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

4 "Lift up your eyes all around, and see:

they all gather together,

they come to you;

your sons shall come from afar,

and your daughters shall be nursed at your side.

5 Then you shall see and become radiant,

and your heart shall swell with joy;

because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,

the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.

6 The multitude of camels shall cover your land,

the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah;

all those from Sheba shall come;

they shall bring gold and incense,

and they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord.

7 All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you,

the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you;

they shall ascend with acceptance on My altar,

and I will glorify the house of My glory.

8 "Who are these who fly

like a cloud,

and like doves to their roosts?

9 Surely the coastlands shall wait for Me;

and the ships of Tarshish will come first,

to bring your sons from afar,

Studies in Isaiah.

their silver and their gold with them,
to the name of the Lord **your** God,
and to the Holy One of Israel,
because He has glorified **you**.

10 “The sons of foreigners shall build up **your** walls,
and their kings shall minister to **you**;
for in My wrath I struck **you**,
but in My favour I have had mercy on **you**.

11 Therefore **your** gates shall be open continually;
they shall not be shut day or night,
that *men* may bring to **you**
the wealth of the Gentiles,
and their kings in procession.

12 For the nation and kingdom which will not serve **you** shall
perish, and *those* nations shall be utterly ruined.

13 “The glory of Lebanon shall **come** to **you**,
the cypress,
the pine,
and the box tree together,
to beautify the place of My sanctuary;
and I will make the place of My feet glorious.

14 Also the sons of those who afflicted **you** shall **come** bowing to **you**,
and all those who despised **you** shall fall prostrate at the soles of **your** feet;
and they shall call **you**

The **City of the Lord**, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

15 “Whereas **you** have been forsaken and hated,
so that no one went through **you**,
I will make **you**
an eternal excellence,
a joy of many generations.

16 **You** shall drink
the milk of the Gentiles,
and milk the breast of kings;

you shall know that I, the Lord, *am* **your** Saviour and **your** Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

17 “Instead of bronze I will bring gold,
instead of iron I will bring silver,
instead of wood, bronze,
and instead of stones, iron.

I will also make
your officers peace,
and **your** magistrates righteousness.

18 Violence shall no longer be heard in **your** land,
neither wasting nor destruction within **your** borders;
but **you** shall call

your walls Salvation,
and **your** gates Praise.

19 “The sun shall no longer be **your** light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon give light to **you**;
but the Lord will be to **you** an everlasting light,
and **your** God **your** glory.

20 **Your** sun shall no longer go down,

Studies in Isaiah.

nor shall **your** moon withdraw itself;
for the Lord will be **your** everlasting light,
and the days of **your** mourning shall be ended.
21 Also **your** people *shall* all *be* righteous;
they shall inherit the land forever,
the branch of My planting,
the work of My hands,
that I may be glorified.
22 A little one shall become a thousand,
and a small one a strong nation.
I, the Lord, will hasten it in its time.”

This chapter, like many in Isaiah, is a seamless woven whole describing the redeemed people as those who draw in Gentiles from all over the globe to become part of their number. From the analysis we can see that the main object of interest is the city of God, as evidenced by use of the following words: “*altar,*” “*house,*” “*walls,*” “*gates,*” “*sanctuary,*” and “*City of God.*”²⁷²³ The use of the second person singular pronoun (“*you*” and “*your*”) also leads us towards the city of Jerusalem as the main object of the whole chapter. But perhaps we may also view this as indicative of the Son of God, of whom the city of Jerusalem is a type. In our last chapter we ended with the covenant that the Lord had made with those who repented. The Redeemer has come to Zion and His Spirit and His words are with those who dwell within in the righteousness that comes by faith. We shall consider this prophecy in three unequal parts as follows:

[1] Arise, shine! (Isaiah 60:1-3).

[2] The Gentiles flock to Zion. (Isaiah 60:4-18).

[a] The Gentiles shall come. (Isaiah 60:4,5).

[b] Distant relatives on camels shall come. (Isaiah 60:6).

[c] Distant relations shall come. (Isaiah 60:7).

[d] Travellers from afar (overseas) shall come. (Isaiah 60:8,9).

[e] Foreigners shall come. (Isaiah 60:10-12).

[f] The glory of Lebanon shall come. (Isaiah 60:13).

[g] Persecutor's sons will come. (Isaiah 60:14).

[h] You shall be an eternal excellence and joy. (Isaiah 60:15,16).

[I] You shall be well and at peace. (Isaiah 60:17,18).

[3] A taste of heaven. (Isaiah 60:19-22).

2723 Isaiah 60:7,10,11,13,14,18.

[1] Arise, shine! (Isaiah 60:1-3).

60:1.

To begin with we must note that the chapter opens with a command using the word “*arise*” as the first word in the Hebrew, but then this first sentence (Isaiah 60:1) ends with the word “*risen*,” indicating something that has taken place. This is important. The two words are similar in meaning and suggest the idea of elevation. The first word is a form of the verb: *qûm* which according to Wilson figuratively has the meaning:

“to arise, to begin to exist, to come to pass, connoting power and prevalency.”²⁷²⁴

The last word in the Hebrew sentence is from the verb *zārāh* which signifies:

“to rise or spring up; spoken of light, of the sun, of the majesty of the appearance of God.”²⁷²⁵

Thus we have an action of the Lord who has brought His light to bear upon the subject in a perfect and complete way, and this enables the command, “*arise*” to be issued. In other words, as a direct result of God's action in shining His glory, the command comes to rise up, or to be raised, to be born anew. The Light of God comes and in coming issues the command to be raised to new life. This is a very graphic description of what the Lord Jesus actually did as He walked through the land of Israel. He, who is described as “*the brightness of His glory*,” and as “*the light of the world*,” frequently issued the call to follow Him.²⁷²⁶ Just as the Lord raised Jairus' daughter, the widow of Nain's son, and Lazarus with a word, so too we hear this call to be raised up to new life because of the light of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.²⁷²⁷

But the call to arise (a resurrection to new life) is not the only imperative issued, for immediately following on we have the second command word “*shine*.” He who has the privilege of being born again, raised to new life, must “*shine*.” This word actually signals the idea of being a light. Once the light of Christ has shined upon us and brought about our new birth, we too must be a

2724 William Wilson. *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*. MacDonald Pub. P19. Hereafter: **W. Wilson. OT Word.**

2725 W. Wilson. *OT Word*. P358.

2726 Matthew 4:19; 8:22 etc.; 11:28-30; John 8:12; 9:5; Hebrews 1:3.

2727 The following is what the Lord said on each of these three occasions. To Jairus' daughter: “*little girl, I say to you, arise*.” Mark 5:41; To the widow of Nain's son: “*young man, I say to you, arise*.” Luke 7:14; to Lazarus: “*Lazarus, come forth!*” John 11:43. See also 2Corinthians 4:6.

Studies in Isaiah.

light unto the world.

14 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. **16** Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.²⁷²⁸

For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.²⁷²⁹

The express reason for such radiance and resurrection is because the “*light*” has come. The apostle John makes use of this theme extensively in his gospel account. The light has come and has shined in the darkness so that it will dispel it, and has shined upon mankind as the “*true light*” which enlightens and gives understanding.²⁷³⁰ This light is none other than “*the glory of God*”! The Saviour Jesus Christ is the very glory of God:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.²⁷³¹

Son ... **3** who being the brightness of *His* glory ...²⁷³²

And this glorious One has now risen upon us. He has dawned upon those who turn and repent. He has enlightened these and caused them to arise as they have listened to the words to come and be born anew. So that:

12 ... as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: **13** who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.²⁷³³

This wonderful opening which speaks of resurrection and new life brought about by the light of God and the command of God is then contrasted with the situation to be found the world over. The Lord calls those once dead in sins to arise and shine. We see in this the resurrection of Christ (who knew no sin but bore our sin as a substitute). We see this in the rebirth of Jerusalem after the exile.

2728 Matthew 5:14-16.

2729 Ephesians 5:8.

2730 John 1:5,9,14,18. See also John 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35,36,46.

2731 John 1:14.

2732 Hebrews 1:3.

2733 John 1:12,13.

Studies in Isaiah.

And we see this in every true believer who comes to the Lord in faith and repentance.

60:2.

But the world in stark contrast is in *“darkness.”*²⁷³⁴ This darkness is spread all over the world so that it completely covers it. There is no light in the world. There is none (we noted in the last chapter) that can intercede and bring the required solution, because all in the world is darkness. This darkness is not just a low level of light, as when you are in a dark room but there is some light by which you may navigate here and there, but is described as *“deep darkness,”* as when black clouds cover the sky and lead to a gloominess of heart. As we frequently find, there is a parallelism in the statements of verse 2. There is *“darkness”* over the *“earth”* and then there is *“deep darkness”* upon the *“people.”* There is an absence of light all around the globe and consequently those who inhabit the earth are in the deepest of glooms and depressions. This is the truth of the situation in the world ever since Adam and Woman sinned. It was the situation when Christ came into the world. It is the situation we face today. The world is in deep darkness and gloom. To some extent the people of the world know this. However there is always optimism about and activism here and there to try and convince some that we do have some light! But the truth is that whatever light we think we may have is nothing of the sort. It is all darkness. When a person truly recognises this and realises that they are in gross darkness and cannot do anything to see where to go, then the light dawns!

Now in contrast to the world which lies (and has done so since the fall) in deep darkness, those whom the Lord has redeemed, (Zion), are *given* the light. In the first verse we are taught that the *“light has come”* and so we should *“arise,”* but here at the end of verse 2 we are told that *“the Lord will arise over you.”* The point, I think, is that the Lord comes again and again enlightening this one and then another. All the way through time from His first coming the Lord has arisen upon the church, His people, adding to their number day-by-day. We are to be encouraged that even though the Lord has brought us to new birth, He has not left us as orphans. He will still come again and again and will fill us and baptize us with Himself so that *“His glory will be seen upon you.”* This is tremendous! Do we not long that the Lord would once again *“arise over”* us? He promises to! May it happen again and again to His glory! As individuals we ought frequently call upon the Lord to revive us with His close presence. This is what the writer of Psalm 119 frequently prayed for:

²⁷³⁴ Isaiah 60:2.

Studies in Isaiah.

My soul clings to the dust; **revive** me according to Your word.²⁷³⁵

Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, *and* **revive** me in Your way.²⁷³⁶

Behold, I long for Your precepts; **revive** me in Your righteousness.²⁷³⁷

Revive me according to Your loving kindness, so that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.²⁷³⁸

I am afflicted very much; **revive** me, O Lord, according to Your word.²⁷³⁹

Hear my voice according to Your loving kindness; O Lord, **revive** me according to Your justice.²⁷⁴⁰

Plead my cause and redeem me; **revive** me according to Your word.²⁷⁴¹

Great *are* Your tender mercies, O Lord; **revive** me according to Your judgments.²⁷⁴²

Consider how I love Your precepts; **revive** me, O Lord, according to Your loving kindness.²⁷⁴³

It would be well worth considering the features of this Psalmist's prayer. As a beginning observe the following:

Reviving is:

According to Your word and Your judgements.

In Your way.

In Your righteousness.

According to Your loving kindness.

According to Your justice.

I leave the reader to contemplate these truths for their own pleasure and benefit.

2735 Psalm 119:25.

2736 Psalm 119:37.

2737 Psalm 119:40.

2738 Psalm 119:88.

2739 Psalm 119:107.

2740 Psalm 119:149.

2741 Psalm 119:154.

2742 Psalm 119:156.

2743 Psalm 119:159.

60:3.

Then finally in this introductory section we see what the Lord will do as a result of shining upon the repentant ones. When a person or group is enlightened and resurrected to new life, such is attractive. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome or overpower it.²⁷⁴⁴ Instead the light illuminates what is there. It highlights the errors. It shows the right way. This is what the church is to do! It must do this in terms of life, showing the righteousness and holiness of Christ which is given of God and not earned. But it must also show this in terms of its mission and outreach. Because the light has shone and now new lights are shining, then *“the Gentiles”* will be drawn in, just as moths hover around the light.²⁷⁴⁵ Again we have two statements which reinforce one another:

The Gentiles shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

The second phrase emphasises the first and gives it deeper meaning. The Gentiles (as a general group) will come to the light and will see the truth (those that are being saved). But then also *“kings,”* or leaders and rulers will come too. We see this in the calling of Paul as expressed through the word given to Ananias who was to open his eyes:

15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. **16** For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”²⁷⁴⁶

But the remainder of this second statement concerning *“kings”* is very illuminating! Kings will be drawn to *“the brightness of your rising.”* It would appear that the resurrection to new birth of the true believers is so radiant and brilliant that it acts to draw attention to the Lord. Just as when someone was dramatically healed draws attention to the healer, so when a person is born again and raised to new life, there is an attraction to the source of that light.

2744 John 1:5.

2745 Isaiah 60:3.

2746 Acts 9:15,16.

Studies in Isaiah.

[2] The Gentiles flock to Zion. (Isaiah 60:4-18).

This second much larger section really flows and follows on from the opening three verses. We may have put verse 3 as the start for this section. However it does also nicely round off the opening two verses. Perhaps it is better to conceive of it as a bridge between what the Lord does in bringing about the resurrection life of new birth flowing from His covenant, and what follows here in verses 4 and onwards in drawing all peoples to the truth.

60:4a.

The section opens with an instruction or command in verse 4 to those who have arisen (resurrected to new life) to “*lift up*” their gaze to see what the Lord will do. Our gaze ought always to be heavenward. To those who may say: “he is so heavenly minded that he is of no earthly use” I reply: “listen to what God commands!”

1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. **2** Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. **3** For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ *who is our life* appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.²⁷⁴⁷

The fact of the matter is that I do not really want to be of “earthly use” because the world is fallen and passing away to destruction. I want to be of true heavenly use to God, and the only way to be used of God and fit for the Master's use is to look to Him!²⁷⁴⁸

But then there is something else which is instructive about this command to look up. It indicates that our part is not to be the proactive activists! All we are to do is to look at what God is doing! I qualify this by saying we are, of course, to do exactly what God commands. But often we find that the church is busy doing what *it* deems to be important which when analysed properly is of no importance at all. Imagine, for example, Noah building a massive church or cathedral instead of the ark he was commanded to! His efforts would all have been swept away in the flood. It seems to me that many in the church build their own ministries and empires. They have names and reputations and build massive enterprises. Maybe the Lord is behind these, or maybe not. But what the Lord demands of us is much more to follow His lead, to be like Christ, to do what is right, to be merciful and to humble ourselves to walk with Him.²⁷⁴⁹ When the Psalmist asked what he could do

2747 Colossians 3:1-4.

2748 2Timothy 2:21.

2749 Deuteronomy 10:12; Micah 6:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

in return for all the blessings and benefits he had received, he concludes:

13 I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. 14 I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people.²⁷⁵⁰

This command to “*lift up*” our gaze to see what God is doing is no more important than when we consider evangelism. I do not doubt for one minute that God calls many to go out and preach the gospel to one and all. That is essential. But what we often find in church circles is gimmicks. There are tea parties, games nights, bar-b-cues, and what-have-you. Of course I am not against relaxation and enjoyment, but we ought never to think that our various activities are what God commands of us. God told Noah to build an ark and that is what he did. The Lord tells us to “*make disciples*” but is that what we do?²⁷⁵¹ I am hard pressed to find anywhere today where there are true disciples being made. What is it to make a disciple? Well we only have to look at the Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul for examples. Christ Jesus selected twelve men and taught them and trained them over a period of three years. The apostle Paul taught and trained young disciples with his life and in word through his teaching. How does what we do today stack up with what we read about concerning Christ's or Paul's methods? Does a half hour prayer meeting concerned with minor ailments and worries and a forty minute exhortation once a week enable us to “*make disciples*”? I think not! Consider what the apostle Paul wrote to young Timothy:

10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra ... 14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.²⁷⁵²

Is this our experience? Do we “*carefully follow*” an older brother or sister in their life of faith? Do we “*continue*” in such things with perseverance? Are we eager personally to dig deep into Scripture to gain wisdom for salvation? The church ought to be a hive of enquiry and learning. Our thoughts ought to be energised by the pull of the Spirit in knowing Christ. When we see Christ at work in one another daily and yearn to be closer to Him, then maybe the world might take notice! But be assured that all our effort at publicity, at putting the gospel on the market stall, of working out how

2750 Psalm 116:13.

2751 Matthew 28:19.

2752 2Timothy 3:10,11,14,15.

Studies in Isaiah.

we might attract people and so on will come to nothing – it is generated from self. After all we are the weak, the uncultured, the uneducated, the base, the despised and the the things that are not considered worthy.²⁷⁵³ Why ever would we think to compete on the world's stage? Please do not misunderstand me here. I do not say we should not do our level best when declaring the gospel. We ought to work hard in our efforts of making Christ known.²⁷⁵⁴ But we do not work the way the world does. Our confidence is not in the flesh. It is in God and what He has to say – His word.

What is remarkably interesting in what follows from verse 4 is the way in which God works to bring people from all corners of the world to the light that He has shone! The work is God's! It is not our plan, our strategy, our mission. We are a part of the plan, but our part is to do what God has commanded. The commands of God are simple and not burdensome.²⁷⁵⁵ They are difficult only because of sin. It maybe that because what God demands of us is submission to Him that we shy away from that and occupy ourselves in what we deem to be a good work that might please God. This is awful! This is hypocrisy! This is what Israel did as the Lord declared in the first chapter of Isaiah. They thought they were doing a grand job with all their sacrifices but they had forgotten God and gone backwards and were unclean.²⁷⁵⁶ The Lord rebuked the people whom He refers to as *“rulers of Sodom”* and *“people of Gomorrah”* in order to arrest them in their sins, and called upon them to cleanse themselves!²⁷⁵⁷ Deep devotion to God! That is our business. I do not want you to conclude from this that we ignore our fellow man. Far from it. But deep consecration to God is utterly imperative before we can be of use to God to shine for Him to the world.

Now after this opening command to look up and observe what God will do, there follows nine separate blocks of material seven of which depict the coming of the Gentiles to Zion, to the people of God, and (ultimately) to God. The last two describe the characteristics of the new Zion, the regenerated city. We shall consider each block of verses in turn.

[a] The Gentiles shall come. (Isaiah 60:4,5).

60:4b.

The *“they”* in this first section refers back to the *“Gentiles”* of verse 3. These Gentiles will *“gather together”* which is in itself a remarkable thing. We are accustomed to thinking of the

2753 1Corinthians 1:28f.

2754 1Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17,23.

2755 1John 5:3.

2756 Isaiah 1:4; 11f.

2757 Isaiah 1:10,16,17.

Studies in Isaiah.

Gentiles as a whole group but they are, of course, a disparate and great variety of peoples. And now these very different peoples from different climes and cultures are gathering in union! What a remarkable thing the light of Christ does. It immediately dispels and renders redundant petty differences. These Gentiles are drawn towards those who possess the light, that is, born again believers (to put it in New Testament terms). This drawing to Christ (ultimately) was foreseen and foretold by the Saviour Himself:

*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.*²⁷⁵⁸

Next we note that these Gentile peoples are described as *“sons”* and *“daughters.”* it might be tempting and natural to assume that these are sons and daughters of the Gentile nations, and so simply pointing us to consider that it is more than a single generation. However the use of the second person singular pronoun *“your”* which is highlighted here, must refer to the City of God. In other words it is the City of God's *“sons”* and *“daughters.”* This is remarkable again. It calls to mind Psalm 87 where we discover that many from different nations would be *“born there”* in the City of God.²⁷⁵⁹ All who have been truly born again (from whatever nation they may have originated) are registered in Zion as having been *“born there”*! These *“sons”* from among the Gentile nations have come from some distance (*“afar”*). The *“daughters”* of these Gentile nations are those *“nursed”* in the city. But these separate thoughts are not exclusive. The daughters have also come from afar and the sons will be nourished in the city too. All will be drawn in, all will be registered as having been born in Zion, and all will be fed and nourished. Now that is what we mean by the church. The Lord God draws men, women, and children into the compass of His people and there they are cared for by the ministry of God's wonderful word.²⁷⁶⁰

60:5.

As a result of this grand drawing in the Gentiles from afar, verse 5 informs us that there will be two fruits or outcomes. First the people of God within Zion will *“see and become radiant.”* Thus we discover that the people of God will increase in brilliance. In other words, the addition of new lights increases the light already present. If there is one saved sinner who repents he may shine brightly, but surely if another joins him their combined light will be more radiant? The second

2758 John 12:32.

2759 Psalm 87:4,5,6.

2760 1Timothy 4:6; 1Peter 2:2.

Studies in Isaiah.

outcome of the Lord's drawing the Gentiles from afar is that the hearts of the people of God will “*swell with joy.*” Isn't it an immense joy and delight when we see new people come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Doesn't it delight you? Remember:

... there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance ... there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.²⁷⁶¹

This twofold fruit of becoming brighter and of knowing more joy all results because of what the Lord has done. This is described at the end of verse 5 in two parallel statements:

the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.

The first phrase points us towards creation where the sea teemed with an abundance.²⁷⁶² It is as though God is creating anew amongst the Gentiles! It also points us to the idea of fishing where a large catch is caught. Now the AKJV uses the word “*converted*” instead of “*turned*” in this first phrase. This signifies a turning over, a conversion, as the Lord draws people from all over the world, just as a fisherman draws the catch from his nets. In the second sentence the word “*wealth*” is unfortunate. We are not to imagine that the church suddenly becomes rich! The word has the following meanings: “valour in war,” “force(s),” “an army,” or “wealth.” The idea really is strength in numbers. Just as there will be an “*abundance*” from the sea, so shall there be a great number from among the Gentiles.

[b] Distant relatives on camels shall come. (Isaiah 60:6).

60:6.

Moving from a general consideration of the Gentiles, this next passage concerns those who travel on “*camels*” and “*dromedaries.*” Midian was a descendant of Abraham by Keturah and his family occupied a region in the Arabian peninsula.²⁷⁶³ Ephah was Midian's son.²⁷⁶⁴ Now, whilst

2761 Luke 15:7,10.

2762 Genesis 1:20.

2763 Genesis 25:2.

2764 Genesis 25:4.

Studies in Isaiah.

“Midian” means “strife,” *“Ephah”* means “darkness.” *“Sheba”* which name means “man,” is the name for the grandson of Cush, a son of Joktan, and also a son of Jokshan who was a son of Abraham by Keturah.²⁷⁶⁵ It is probably best to assume that this Sheba was the grandson of Abraham and Keturah by association with Midian and Ephah. Thus we have Arabian near relatives of the Israelites – those descended from Abraham, whose names signify mankind in his strife and darkness (i.e. utterly lost).

These folk (descended from Abraham) would arrive on camels and dromedaries bearing gifts. At once we recall from the gospel of Matthew the story of the *“Magi”* where *“wise men from the East came to Jerusalem.”*²⁷⁶⁶ Note that we have no clue in Matthew as to the correct origin and country of these *“Magi.”* However it is surely more than possible that in recoding the details Matthew knew he was reminded of this very passage in Isaiah. These distant relatives (from Abraham) dwelt east of Israel and brought only *“gold”* and *“incense.”* There is no mention of myrrh. However, to strengthen the connection with Matthew's *“Magi”* it is to be noted that the word rendered *“incense”* can also be rendered as *“frankincense.”* That these folk from the east in Arabia proclaimed *“the praises of the Lord,”* is reflected in the worship of the Magi for the Babe in Bethlehem, for when they entered the house where the *“young Child”* was and saw Him, they *“fell down and worshipped Him.”*²⁷⁶⁷ Given that Matthew makes considerable use of Isaiah in his gospel this connection cannot be coincidental.²⁷⁶⁸

[c] Distant relations shall come. (Isaiah 60:7).

60:7.

The name *“Kedar”* means “dark-skinned man.” Kedar was the second son of Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar the Egyptian. *“Nebaioth,”* whose name means “high places,” was the first son of Ishmael.²⁷⁶⁹ These tribes inhabited regions of the Arabian peninsula, and appear to have been pastoral keeping flocks and rams. These were to be *“gathered together to you”* (i.e. the city) and

2765 Genesis 10:7,28; 25:3.

2766 Matthew 2:1.

2767 Matthew 2:11.

2768 The Virgin will bear a child (Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14); The voice in the wilderness (Matthew 3:3; Isaiah 40:3); A light in the darkness (Matthew 4:15; Isaiah 9:1); Carried our diseases (Matthew 8:17; Isaiah 53:4); Behold My Servant (Matthew 12:18; Isaiah 42:2); The Hope for Gentiles (Matthew 12:21; Isaiah 42:4); Closed eyes and ears (Matthew 13:14; Isaiah 6:9); They worship in vain (Matthew 15:7; Isaiah 29:13); A house of prayer (Matthew 21:13; Isaiah 56:7).

2769 Genesis 25:13.

Studies in Isaiah.

would, furthermore, “*minister to you*” (i.e. the city). Once having been in darkness and worshipped on “high places” (insinuating pagan idolatry), the people of these places were now, along with their flocks and rams, to come into the city. The animals they bring are to “*ascend with acceptance on My altar.*” This is startling. Not merely is their sacrifice acceptable, but, the implication is, the people too. In accepting these offerings the Lord will bring glory to His “*house of My glory.*” It is necessary to remember that the prophecies are always cast within the context of the Old Testament tabernacle/temple worship. It would be anachronistic for Isaiah (and others) to present the real sacrifice as we see when we look at the gospel accounts. All of the Old Testament sacrifices were typical, and point us to Christ. So it is natural for the prophet to use this Old Testament imagery, but we are not to imagine that in the gospel age (or any future age) there might be a return to animal sacrifice. Some who advocate the system known as “dispensationalism” fall foul at this point.

[d] Travellers from afar (overseas) shall come. (Isaiah 60:8,9).

60:8.

Then next we have the distant “*coastlands,*” which is an important designation for the far spread Gentiles.²⁷⁷⁰ We have had cause to speak of “*Tarshish*” earlier in Isaiah 23, and we considered that its location was a distant port (possibly even as far as Cornwall) where various minerals and goods originated. These peoples are said to “*fly like a cloud,*” and to come “*like doves to their roosts.*”²⁷⁷¹ Both expressions indicate the idea of rapidity and of rest or settlement. We might imagine here pictured a flock of birds feeding in the shallows of some lake suddenly lifting in a great cloud and swooping down to their roosting sites. There is thus an eagerness and earnestness in these distant peoples flocking to the Lord. We might also consider the expressions separately. First there is the “*cloud*” that is blown rapidly by the wind racing across the sky indicating the rapidity of the peoples coming, blown by the wind (or drawn by the Spirit). Then also there are the “*doves*” returning to their roosts which signifies the peoples coming to their true and right settling place.

2770 Isaiah 60:9.

2771 Isaiah 60:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

60:9.

In verse 9 we have expressed the idea that these distant peoples will most definitely be in expectation for the Lord. There is a sense in which people are always thinking: 'there must be something else, something better.' The "*coastlands*" are in expectation awaiting that which is better. The "*ships of Tarshish*," (that distant port) will arrive "*first*" because when they hear they will be eager to come. And what will these distant vessels bring? They will bring to Jerusalem, that is, to the Lord, "*your sons.*" These are ones who have been born from above. They rightly belong in Jerusalem, not because they can prove their genealogy as the old Jews must have done, but because the Lord has adopted them into His fold. Peoples from all over the world will come and will flock to the Lord and His new provision. The sons come with "*their silver and their gold,*" but for what purpose? We need to remember that the Old Testament frame and structure centred on the temple with its wood, silver (signifying redemption) and gold (indicative of divinity). The Old Testament way is superseded by the New Testament reality. Instead of silver and gold the distant sons bring their new lives which are by means of redemption and in which God dwells by His Spirit. To what do these distant peoples come bringing their wealth (of testimony) and substance (of new life)? They bring it to "*the name of the Lord*" and "*to the Holy One of Israel.*" Their new status as sons finds its ultimate fulfilment and joy in the character and being of God and in His beautiful holiness. Why do they flock to the new Jerusalem, the new dwelling place of God? Well it is because God has "*glorified*" it. Our ultimate focus is upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father glorified Him because of His obedience. And we are united with Him. All our delight is to be found within the Son of God. we flock to Him and run to Him because He is the light and life we so desperately need.

[e] Foreigners shall come. (Isaiah 60:10-12).

60:10.

We have been speaking in these verses of Isaiah 60 of a wholesale flocking towards the Lord from all quarters of the world, particularly in the sense of coming to the new and restored Jerusalem, representative of God and His dwelling place with redeemed mankind. In verse 10 this theme is continued. The "*sons of foreigners*" which earlier were designated as "*your sons,*" that is sons of the new Jerusalem, are to be engaged in the new Jerusalem's welfare and advancement. In other words foreign peoples will be engaged in rebuilding the new Jerusalem by building up its

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“walls,” and by ministering and serving the new city.

The Lord struck Jerusalem in His *“wrath,”* but now He exercises *“favour”* and *“mercy.”* What a wonderful picture of the atonement here. The Lord Jesus suffered the full force of God's wrath and so is represented by the old Jerusalem being punished. But then by His resurrection we see the new Jerusalem is to the fore. Jerusalem suffered and was destroyed, but after the exile on the return it would be rebuilt and restored.

60:11.

The new Jerusalem will be in such a state that it will be *“open continually.”* How can this be? City states like Jerusalem in ancient times were built with walls for protection and defence. How is it that this new Jerusalem will have its *“gates ... open continually”*? Well the implication is that there is now nothing more to fear. There can be no more conquering of Jerusalem and instead there is an openness and a welcoming nature displayed by the new city. The emphasis is not upon fear and worry, but on an out-going display of salvation. Again we read of *“Gentiles”* bringing their substance. The idea is of joining in, of becoming a part of, of being accepted. The Gentiles do not come to overrule, to conquer, or to despoil the new city, but to be subject to its King, to be a part of the new creation. See how the Gentiles come. Their *“kings”* come in *“procession.”* There is an orderliness and a reverential approach to the place where God dwells amongst men. It is possible to see this last part of verse 11 as kings having been conquered in some great conflict, and being lead in procession to the victorious city. That feature of these words is also displayed by the idea of the *“wealth of the Gentiles”* being brought in as well. We know that Christ won the victory at Calvary, but the overwhelming sense of this feat is not simply subjugation of all that is evil (it is that of course), but rejoicing. The Lord has conquered death, sin, Satan, the world and all evil, but the people flock to Him in great joy.

60:12.

The last verse of this section (verse 12) issues a warning which reinforces the voluntary nature of this pilgrimage to the new city. Those nations, kings, and peoples conquered by the great victory that the Lord has won will bring their wealth and will come in orderly procession, but the outcome for those who refuse is altogether different. Those *“nations and kingdoms”* that *“will not serve,”* and that will not bow the knee to the Lord and His King will *“perish,”* and will be *“utterly ruined.”* The word *“perish”* indicates one who is lost and without hope, wandering in a wilderness.

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The phrase “*shall be utterly ruined*” has the Hebrew word which means “parched,” or “dried out” reduplicated suggesting a superlative. Note that there is no concept of such who fail to serve being annihilated. Instead they are brought to a condition of utter loss and as dry as a bone – without water, without life.

[f] The glory of Lebanon shall come. (Isaiah 60:13).

60:13.

Lebanon was the great range of mountains in Syria which was also rich in grand and stupendous trees. From this region king Solomon organised for a multitude of trees to be brought down by sea to help in the construction of the temple.²⁷⁷² Isaiah has already spoken of Lebanon and its trees. In chapter 2 they are put as one symbol of mankind's excessive pride upon which the “*day of the Lord of hosts*” will fall:

12 For the day of the Lord of hosts *shall come* upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up— and it shall be brought low— **13** Upon all the cedars of Lebanon *that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan.*²⁷⁷³

In Isaiah 10 Lebanon is pictured as a tree fallen by the “*Mighty One.*”²⁷⁷⁴ However, here the idea is more akin to transforming and restoration. Instead of lofty pride and earthly grandeur, the trees of Lebanon will be for the glory of God especially within His sanctuary. The three trees mentioned in verse 13 are also found in one other place in Isaiah alongside four other trees (cedar, acacia, myrtle and oil trees).²⁷⁷⁵ In that passage the prophecy speaks of seven tree types being planted in what was once a wilderness, thus creating a kind of oasis, signifying the effects of God's new creation. The three trees noted in our current passage (“*the cypress the pine, and the box tree*”) are tall and long-lasting or enduring trees. Together they will stand and endure because of what God has done in the new creation. In unison they will “*beautify the place*” of God's “*sanctuary.*” In other words these trees no longer stand for themselves, but instead they glory in the Lord. Their boast and joy is the Lord Himself, with whom they are inseparably united by grace.²⁷⁷⁶ We might suggest, using New Testament language, that true believers are ones who “*adorn*” the gospel and who “*walk worthy*”

2772 1Kings 5.

2773 Isaiah 2:12,13.

2774 Isaiah 10:34.

2775 Isaiah 41:18-20.

2776 Galatians 6:14.

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of it.²⁷⁷⁷ The last phrase (*“I will make the place of My feet glorious”*) speaks of the influence and walk of all those who are now a part of the true sanctuary (i.e. Christ Jesus). Trees from Lebanon were cut down in the Old Testament economy and taken to Jerusalem where they were used for the internal parts of the temple. In the New Covenant the lofty pride of man is brought low and the trees of God's planting will be united with the Saviour to adorn and display the great goodness, gloriousness, and grace of God. Thus the Lord, by means of those whom He has conquered, will go out and in adorning the gospel it will be as though the Lord Himself is walking the earth once again. This is a great truth and one we need to dwell upon.

[g] Persecutor's sons will come. (Isaiah 60:14).

60:14.

The last group described as coming to the new Jerusalem are those who persecuted the true believers. How often has it been the case that the offspring of those who reject and afflict the people of God bow the knee to God? We might consider those who followed after Jim Elliot who died in his witness to the Aucas in South America. Those who first heard the gospel from this American missionary acted as persecutors but then later they turned and repented. Other missionaries have suffered in similar ways with those that followed reaping a harvest. Or what of the apostle Paul? He was the great persecutor of the church and then all of a sudden he was brought to a place of humility and bowed to the Lord Jesus. These words highlight the clear fact that in his fallen state man is at war with God. When we hear the gospel we recoil. It offends our pride. We retaliate. But then the great goodness of God conquers our hearts and we *“come bowing”* and *“fall prostrate”* at the feet of the Lord. Only the gospel can do such a thing. In the natural world those who persecute another group bear descendants who accentuate and perpetuate the animosity (unless the grace of God breaks the chain). But when the gospel comes the afflicted ones can forgive their former persecutors because of the grace and forgiveness they have freely received.²⁷⁷⁸

Now these former persecutors have changed, and now they call that which they once detested, *“The City of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.”* It is not really possible for unregenerate unbelievers to refer to God's people in such exalted and wonderful terms. The unregenerate have no thought of God and cannot abide holiness. When a person comes to true faith

²⁷⁷⁷ Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10; 1Thessalonians 2:12; Titus 2:10.

²⁷⁷⁸ Matthew 6:14,15; Luke 7:47.

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in God they also come to appreciate God's dwelling place, the people of God, and have a right understanding of the exalted nature of such that the Lord has done.

[h] You shall be an eternal excellence and joy. (Isaiah 60:15,16).

60:15.

Having detailed all those who will come to the new Jerusalem, we now have two pieces which describe the state and condition of this redeemed peoples. They had been *"forsaken"* and *"hated,"* and considered of no value or worth. This will all change, and it will change at the Lord's will, The Lord will make the redeemed city a place of lasting splendour and substance (*"eternal excellence"*), and also a place of delight not just for many peoples, but for *"many generations."* All of these statements find their focus and fulfilment in the church of the gospel age. For two thousand years there have been abundant experience of God's grace and love in regions the world over where generations have known the joy of the Lord. And this will continue until the day the Lord returns.

60:16.

Verse 16 gives us some fruits for the people of God as a result of what the Lord will do for them. The first two ideas are curious. What does it mean, for example, that the people of God will *"milk the breast of kings"*? Milk, of course, is not just a drink but a substantial drink which gives protein. The best of produce, the pinnacle of what may be provided by kings, even from rulers of distant lands, will be given to the people of God. These expressions, then, speak of the enjoyment by the people of God of all the world's resources. Water is necessary but milk is a luxury item. And then, as a result of these great blessings, the people of God, the new Jerusalem, will come to know the Lord in a deeper and truer way. They shall know the Lord under three important titles:

- Saviour
- Redeemer
- Mighty One of Jacob.

He is the deliverer and rescuer from difficulties, terrors, and hardships. He is the restorer and our kinsman who brings us back into the fold, the family of God. He is also the great and infinitely powerful one who blessed Jacob and protected him from harm blessing him with a large family.

[i] You shall be well and at peace. (Isaiah 60:17,18).

60:17.

Having indicated their new found status and the way in which they were to be related to God (*“Saviour,” “Redeemer,”* and *“the Mighty One of Jacob”*), we next see something of how things will change on a practical level.²⁷⁷⁹ Things must change. Jerusalem was full of wicked leaders, violence and sin. Now that the Lord has rescued, delivered, redeemed, and acted as Champion on their behalf, what would transpire within its confines? The drab and mundane would be exchanged for the glorious and good. There will be an elevation of materials. Where poorer quality metals were used, these would be replaced with the right materials. Silver and gold were not just precious metals of value, but had significance. Silver speaks of redemption and gold of divinity. The presence of God and His redeeming work would be in evidence all around them. The lesser materials such as *“bronze,”* and *“iron,”* would be used not as substitutes for the precious metals, but in places fit for their use replacing the poorer make-do-and-mend items *“wood”* and *“stones.”* It is not really that any of these materials was inferior to the others (although gold and silver were considered more precious), but that there was a lack of the right stuff, and a cobbled-together attitude to how things ought to be made. As an illustration consider the nation under wartime conditions. Broken windows are boarded up with wood. Intricate artwork and decorations are dispensed with for functional structures (corrugated iron replaces ornate tiling and so on). Where there is a lack of foodstuffs, poorer substitutes are supplied such as milk powder for fresh milk, or margarine for butter. Having put right the material systems to rights, the human organisations are corrected too. Those who were in leadership would not be characterised by bribery, corruption, or violence, but by *“peace,”* (that is, well being), and *“righteousness”* (truth, justice and the right way).

60:18.

In verse 18 we are told that there would no longer be any *“violence,” “wasting,”* nor *“destruction.”* In fact such would *“no longer be heard”* of. In place of these the very structure of the new Jerusalem would show forth God's *“Salvation”* and *“Praise.”* The walls that were once a defence and for protection would serve to bring rescue and deliverance. The gates of a city were the place where decisions and judgements were made. These would now be for rejoicing and praise instead of a site that dished out injustice.

²⁷⁷⁹ Isaiah 60:17.

[3] A taste of heaven. (Isaiah 60:19-22).

60:19,20.

The chapter ends with what can only be described as a prophecy of the final new Jerusalem, or, in other words, heaven itself. The expressions we find here in verses 19 to 22 can really only be applied to the time after Christ's return. Up to this point we have been considering the new Jerusalem as the gathered people in the gospel age. Now the sentiments expressed here are echoed in Revelation 21. Thus the sun and moon would no longer be needed as light bearers. In their place we find the Lord Himself acting as "*an everlasting light,*" which phrase occurs twice giving us great confidence in the future we face.²⁷⁸⁰ And so we have the closeness of God. Instead of mediators such as the sun and moon we have that which stands behind such lights. Instead of the shadow we get the substance. Believers living today are increasingly blessed with substance in place of shadow, but there is yet more in the age to come. We may no longer be burdened by temple and animal sacrifices because we have Christ and the cross, but one day we will no longer need sun, moon, and stars, for God Himself will radiate the necessary heat and light by which we must live. With sun and moon replaced by God and His glory all "*mourning shall be ended.*"²⁷⁸¹ Heaven is a place that lacks sorrow because it is joyous, and there can be no more mourning for sin or anything else which causes it.

60:21.

Within this place where God is the true light and glory there can also be no unrighteousness. Hence the people within "*shall all be righteous.*" These folk will truly be given the land as an inheritance "*forever.*" The Lord then uses a particular illustration which features elsewhere in Scripture as representative of the church, the called out ones, and how they relate to their Lord. The people of God are "*the branch of My planting,*" and "*the work of My hands.*" The first thing we draw from these phrases is that salvation and redemption are all a work of God. The great Gardener is the One who plants and gives growth. In saying that the people are His "*branch*" we are brought to two ideas. First the many references to the "*Branch*" as prophetic of the Messiah.²⁷⁸² There is at least a hint of that if not a direct reference. Second in the sense of being grafted in to an already existing plant. This is something Paul explains with regard to Gentile believers being added to an

2780 Isaiah 60:19,20.

2781 Isaiah 60:20.

2782 Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

already existing stock.²⁷⁸³ Thus the Lord has a vine stock or plant to which He is busy tending as its Gardener. Some branches which bore no fruit were removed and others grafted in.²⁷⁸⁴ This is all a work of God for His glory. Remember that God is good and perfect and thus He deserves all the glory, for what He does is always good and wonderful.

60:22.

In verse 22 we are taught that this new group of people will be abundantly fruitful. Now at this point we can apply what we have here to both the growing church after Christ ascended into heaven, and as a picture of the abundant fecundity expressed within the new economy, (the new heavens and the new earth). What starts out as *“little,”* and *“small,”* will blossom and grow beyond what may be expected or imagined (they will become a *“thousand,”* and a *“strong nation”*). We see this expressed in the *“great mountain”* which grows from the stone cut out *“without hands”* (a picture of Christ) in Daniel.²⁷⁸⁵ Not only will the new Jerusalem, the new company of God's people, grow to be a large nation, but this will be a rapid expansion too. We see this fulfilled in the Acts of the apostles. From the twelve and about one hundred gathered at Pentecost, it was not too long before several thousands were added, and then after this we observe the grand expansion across Asia Minor and into Europe with Paul's various missionary journeys. All of this is a sovereign work of God. This is not to deny the fact that believers must live and preach the gospel, but the work is God's from start to finish.

2783 Romans 11:17f.

2784 John 15:1f.

2785 Daniel 2:35,45.

Chapter 73.

Isaiah 61:1-11.

The Servant's great ministry.

Textual analysis.

#61 1 “The Spirit of the Lord God *is* upon Me,
because

the Lord has anointed Me
to preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me
to heal the broken hearted,
to proclaim
liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound;

2 To proclaim
the acceptable year of the Lord,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn,

3 To console those who mourn in Zion,
to give them
beauty for ashes,
the oil of joy for mourning,
the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
that they may be called
trees of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord,
that He may be glorified.”

4 And they shall rebuild the old ruins,
they shall raise up the former desolations,
and they shall repair
the ruined cities,
the desolations of many generations.

5 Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,
and the sons of the foreigner *shall be*
your ploughmen
and your vine-dressers.

6 But you shall be named the priests of the Lord,
they shall call you the servants of our God.
You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles,
and in their glory you shall boast.

7 Instead of your shame *you shall have* double honour,
and *instead of* confusion they shall rejoice in their portion.
Therefore in their land
they shall possess double;

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everlasting joy shall be theirs.

8 “For I, the Lord, love justice;
I hate robbery for burnt offering;
I will direct their work in truth,
and will make with them an everlasting covenant.

9 Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles,
and their offspring among the people.
All who see them shall acknowledge them,
that they *are* the posterity *whom* the Lord has blessed.”

10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
My soul shall be joyful in my God;
for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks *himself* with ornaments,
and as a bride adorns *herself* with her jewels.

11 For
as the earth brings forth its bud,
as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before
all the nations.

I remember reading through the commentaries on Ephesians by that great twentieth century preacher M. Lloyd Jones and being struck by an oft repeated phrase he uses which went something like this: “what we are about to consider is the most vital and important doctrine for us at this time.” It was repeated so many times that I thought the great preacher was rather like the little boy who opens his presents and each one is the best of all! I soon realised that all of the doctrines of Scripture were in fact vital! And they are all vital for this reason, that all of them find their focus and locus in Christ. Remove one or discount another, and there is a thread left dangling which will mar the whole. Now of course we are not surprised by this because what we are about is in knowing the Lord. We want to know this incredible person – the Lord Jesus Christ – and He does not come to us in bits and parts. He comes in His entirety. Our small minds need to concentrate on one aspect and then another, but then we must always recognise that we worship and praise the Lord Jesus Christ. It is rather like the little child sitting in their father's lap and being taken up with one feature of the old man, but benefiting from the warm embrace and protection of him in total. We focus on one aspect of the Lord but never stray from that inner desire to know Him fully. Now in this chapter we have a single main theme of which there are four main facets. The main theme is the ministry of Christ, but our focus moves throughout from one aspect to another as follows:

Studies in Isaiah.

[1] A description of Christ's ministry – the last Servant Song. (Isaiah 61:1-3).

[a] The Saviour has been commissioned by God for His glory.

[b] The Saviour has a sevenfold and a ninefold ministry.

The content and compass of the Servant's ministry.

[c] The Saviour brings restoration and wholeness to His people, and satisfaction to God.

[2] The great outcome of Christ's ministry – restoration, repair, rejoicing. (Isaiah 61:4-7).

[3] The rationale for Christ's ministry – justice and truth. (Isaiah 61:8,9).

[4] In praise of Christ's ministry – being clothed and fruitful. (Isaiah 61:10,11).

[1] A description of Christ's ministry – the last Servant Song. (Isaiah 61:1-3).

General thoughts.

When the Lord Jesus began His ministry after His baptism and temptation, He used this very passage of Scripture in Isaiah as His text. We reproduce the text and its context here to show how the Lord Jesus made use of this passage we are considering in Isaiah 61.

13 Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. **14** Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. **15** And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. **16** So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. **17** And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

18 “The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to *the* poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to *the* captives and recovery of sight to *the* blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; **19** to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

20 Then He closed the book, and gave *it* back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. **21** And He began to say to them, “today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” **22** So all bore witness to Him, and marvelled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, “is this not Joseph’s son?”²⁷⁸⁶

2786 Luke 4:13-22.

Studies in Isaiah.

It is likely that as He preached in the various synagogues in Galilee that His opening messages were similar to what we have here as a representative of the start of His ministry. It was His normal practice to minister in the various synagogues of that region. And so He took the scroll of Isaiah and searched within the scroll to find the place He wanted to refer to ("*He found the place where it was written*"). He did this in order to make plain that He was the One spoken of ("*today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*"). Further, when challenged by John the Baptist, the Lord pointed the prophet to the essential elements which are found in these first verses of Isaiah 61 ("*The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them*").²⁷⁸⁷ It will be worth comparing the text we have in Isaiah with the one reproduced in Luke (see table 73.1).

Table 73.1: Comparison of Isaiah 61:1 with Luke 4:18,19.

Isaiah 61:1	Luke 4:18,19.
1 "The Spirit of the Lord God <i>is</i> upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to <i>those who are bound</i>; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, 3 To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."	18 "The Spirit of the Lord <i>is</i> upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to <i>the</i> poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to <i>the</i> captives and <i>recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed</i>; 19 to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

The differences are worth considering. In Isaiah we have two names of the Lord to begin with (אֲדֹנָי, 'ādōnāy *y'hwh*), and then the divine name (יְהוָה, *y'wāh*) as the subject, whilst in Luke we have just one use of the divine name (*kurios*) and then the personal pronoun ("*He*"). This is not really an issue, for what is recorded in Luke is an emphasis upon the Lord's ministry which is given of God, that is, the "*Spirit of the Lord.*" In Isaiah we have a clear reference to the Trinity ("*Spirit,*" "*Lord God,*" and "*Me*"). The second difference comes in the fourth aspect of the ministry which in

²⁷⁸⁷ Matthew 11:4-6.

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Luke is expanded to illustrate the blind being able to see once again. This may be because of an intention to show that the spiritually blind need to be able to comprehend and see the light as well as to reference physical recovery of sight. The final difference is in what was left out by the Lord which includes the second half of verse 2 and verse 3 of Isaiah 61. Now it is possible that the Lord Jesus omitted these in His reading because of their focus and emphasis on the conclusion of His ministry which would not occur until His return. Recall that as with all prophecy there is often an overlap in reference to both advents of the Lord Jesus. In Isaiah 61:1-3 we get a full blown description of the Messiah's ministry. Aspects of these will feature more prominently on His return (such as *"the day of vengeance"* and the provision of consolation and *"comfort"* in Zion), but we cannot rule them out as features of what Christ came to do on His first appearance.²⁷⁸⁸ After all the wrath of God was appeased when Christ died on the cross – at least in connection with all those who would truly repent. Further, the new birth does bring in a great measure of joy, of praise, and of new clothing, even if this is not to be fully realised until we reach glory.

What then can we learn from these opening verses in Isaiah? I would suggest that there are three essential subjects from which we can draw comfort and light.

[a] The Saviour has been commissioned by God for His glory.

[b] The Saviour has a sevenfold and a ninefold ministry.

[c] The Saviour brings restoration and wholeness to His people, and satisfaction to God.

[a] The Saviour has been commissioned by God for His glory.

As we have already mentioned, it appears that we have a reference to the Holy Trinity in these opening verses. The whole concerns the Servant whom we have designated as the "Saviour" in our heading. The *"Spirit"* will be the divine person who will anoint and empower the Messiah (the *"anointed"* One), whilst it is from the Father (*"the Lord God"*) that the *"Spirit"* comes. We discover next that there is a twofold commissioning. First the Servant has been *"anointed"* with the Spirit, sent from the Lord God. Second the Servant has been *"sent,"* that is, He has been commissioned with a charge and task. The Servant is thus empowered or equipped and then sent out on His task. When we read through the gospel accounts, and especially the gospel of John, we are repeatedly brought to this aspect of Christ's being sent and empowered.²⁷⁸⁹ The tasks that He was

2788 Isaiah 61:2.

2789 John 3:34; 4:34; 5:24,30,36,37; 6:38,39,40,44,57; 7:28,29,33; 8:16,18,26,29,42; 9:4; 11:42; 12:44,45,49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:8,18,21,23,25; 20:21.

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given to do were all for one purpose which comes right at the end of verse 3, “*that He may be glorified.*” Again this is a feature of Christ's ministry:

*I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.*²⁷⁹⁰

We discover further that God is glorified when Christ is glorified, and also when the disciples bear much fruit.²⁷⁹¹ Hence the ministry of the Messiah (Christ) is to bring about the restoration, healing, and wholesomeness of the people so that they may do as He does.

[b] The Saviour has a sevenfold and a ninefold ministry.

It might appear confusing that the heading for this section mentions both a sevenfold and a ninefold ministry. Why have I done this? Well the sevenfold aspect can be viewed by looking at the active words in verses 1 to 3 which are as follows:

- [1] Preach.
- [2] Heal.
- [3] Proclaim (salvation).
- [4] Proclaim (vindication).
- [5] Comfort.
- [6] Console.
- [7] Give.

The ninefold aspect comes from a consideration of the fact that there are four parts to the work of proclamation. We could extend this to eleven aspects if we separate the threefold act of giving.

to preach good tidings to the poor;
to heal the broken hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
to proclaim and the opening of the prison to *those who are bound*;
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,

²⁷⁹⁰ John 17:4.

²⁷⁹¹ John 13:32; 15:8; 17:1.

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to **proclaim** and the day of vengeance of our God;
to **comfort** all who mourn,
to **console** those who mourn in Zion,
to **give** them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;

Right at the end of verse 3 we are given a twofold reason for this incredible ministry. One aspect has to do with those to whom the Servant ministers, and the other has to do with the Servant's glory. Thus the ministry of Christ, the Servant of the Lord, is presented here in all its fullness. We have the commissioning and charge, (the sending), the content and compass, (the extent and scope), and the conclusion and consummation, (the outcome and fruit). We have already considered the commissioning and charge earlier, so we shall now turn to the content and compass. The conclusion and consummation will be considered in a separate section.

The content and compass of the Servant's ministry.

We outlined the various verbs used in describing this ministry and it will be worth looking at these in some more detail. The temptation is, of course, to rush towards the gospel accounts where we can easily see the fulfilment. Christ healed and preached and the results were so wonderful that we are content to say: praise be to His name! But let us pause a moment and consider the depths we have in these statements.

61:1.

First the Servant comes *“to preach good tidings to the poor.”* The verb used (בָּשַׂר *bāśar*) is put in the intensive active form. The verb primarily means “to be fresh,” or “full” in the sense of being cheerful or rosy of cheeks. The inference then, is that this “good news” is more than simply a pick-me-up but is incredibly good news to make someone inordinately happy! The news bulletins of old on the TV used to end with a snippet of good news amidst the tale of war and woe to bring people's spirits back to equilibrium. This announcing of good news is far more ebullient and exuberant. Now this incredible good news is sent and brought to the *“poor.”* The word is in the plural and has the basic meaning of “afflicted,” “depressed,” “lowly,” or “destitute.” The KJV renders the word as *“the meek,”* and there is a sense in which the condition is not one of choice. The general idea is, then, that this good news is openly declared to all who are truly downcast and

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in a poor state with no means of escape or rescue. It is the opposite of pride and self-righteousness.

Second the Servant comes *“to heal the broken hearted.”* These are ones whose heart has been broken into several pieces. The verb used has the meaning: “to bind up a wound (securely).” The picture, then, is of someone whose heart has burst open and is pierced by a sword so that it is irreparable. The Servant comes as the Great Physician to bind up the wounds with His superior surgical skills so that the patient is brought to wholeness once again.

Third the Servant has come to “call out,” or “cry out,” (*“proclaim”*) in eager earnestness accosting people so that they hear clearly, an especial proclamation which comes in two parts. The proclamation is delivered to *“captives,”* or those who have been lead away from their homes into bondage and a dungeon, and to those who are *“bound”* or who are held by fetters and chains. These are more than merely humbled. They are prisoners in the true sense of that word. It is not generally appreciated that mankind is in this sorry state. We have rather fallen for the lie that we are free and autonomous, whereas we are bound and in prison kept by sin and darkness. Well the Servant has two announcements or proclamations to make which He cries out. First is the call to *“liberty,”* a true freedom. The word has the sense of “flight” and “swift departure” or “escape.” Imagine the prisoner who sees his chance of escaping the high security prison and takes flight. Of course here the idea is of freedom in a righteous sense. The captive is free to leave their bondage. The second part of the proclamation has been rendered slightly differently by the various translations, as shown in table 73.2.

Table 73.2: Comparison of different translations of the last phrase in Isaiah 61:1.

NKJV	YLT	NASB	NIV	ESV
and the opening of the prison to <i>those who are bound</i> ;	And to bound ones an opening of bands.	And freedom to prisoners	and release from darkness for the prisoners	And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

The Hebrew text is rather more interesting. Literally rendered it would be: “and to those who are bound an opening of cords/bands.” Thus the prisoner locked in a dungeon far from home has his cords and fetters removed and broken and the doors to the prison opened that he might rise and flee with his freedom. We cannot help being reminded of the incident recorded in Acts where Paul and Silas wrongfully imprisoned were suddenly loosed from their bonds and the doors flung open!

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Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.²⁷⁹²

We might also be reminded, alternatively, by the fourth verse of that great hymn of Charles Wesley "And Can It Be."

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

The captive is loosed from their bonds and is free to depart from the dungeons!

61:2.

Fourth, the Servant issues another proclamation, which again comes in two parts. There is to be "*the acceptable year of the Lord,*" and then also, "*the day of vengeance of our God.*" As we noted earlier, the Lord Jesus in announcing His ministry stops after the first of these two statements. This, I believe, was because His mission on earth was to announce the good news, to bring healing and deliverance, and to declare grace and mercy. He came first for salvation and He will return for justice. Of course, when Christ came and offered Himself at Calvary there was both justice done and mercy and grace extended. When Christ returns there will be salvation (for the believers) as well as final judgement. Thus first there is to be the delightful, favourable, pleasurable year of the Lord. As to the intention of time, the year is simply an extended period of time. In the Hebrew the word "*year*" comes before the word rendered "*acceptable,*" so the phrase is perhaps better rendered as "the year of favour." The preposition attached to the divine name is more often rendered as "to," or "for," and so the sense would then be: "to proclaim the year of favour to the Lord." In other words this extended length of time is for God's favour and delight to be expressed and experienced. Now the translation offered by the NKJV ("*the acceptable year of the Lord*") is a very good translation. However we need to recognise that it is God who comes, and all things change because of His character. The pleasing "*year*" is to be contrasted with "*the day of vengeance.*" We read elsewhere about "*the day of the Lord,*" which indicates a shorter time-frame in which God

²⁷⁹² Acts 16:26.

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brings judgement. So the former statement points us to the gospel age and this second statement reminds us of the coming again of the Lord for final judgement. Vengeance, of course, is the required justice due to wrong suffered. God has been wronged terribly by human sin. Christ fully and completely atoned for sin, but those who reject this offer must be brought to account. The wrong they have done to whomever it may be, is ultimately a wrong done to God. Such wrong must be paid for. Thus in these two statements we find the declaration of a “*year*” for the gospel to be spread and received, and a “*day*” for the Lord to bring final judgement to bear. Our preaching ought to reflect this comparison. The Lord is very long-suffering. He does not wish any to be lost. And yet there must come an end, a consummation of all things.

Fifth the Servant comes to “*comfort all who mourn.*” Those who are downcast and afflicted will be mourning, wailing, and lamenting. The burden of sin and the suffering from the curse upon creation (due to Adam's sin) is too much to bear truly. Sadly, (I say this with great care), many dull their senses and spirits to obviate the sense of dread that sin and death bring. How many dull their sense by drink or drugs, or by endless entertainments? Well, when a person comes to their senses and recognises that they are (in truth) bound and in a dungeon of their own making, what else can result except mourning for their lost state? Wonderfully, the Lord comes to bring such as realise their condition the comfort they need.

61:3.

Sixth the Lord is concerned to bring consolation for all who “*mourn in Zion.*” It is to be noted that the word “*mourn*” which occurs here is identical to that which came in the previous phrase. This time, however, it is for those who are of such a state “*in Zion.*” In other words, it is for those believers who suffer and mourn. The word given as “*console*” in the NKJV is rendered differently by other versions (see table 73.3).

Table 73.3: Comparison of different translations of the first phrase in Isaiah 61:3.

NKJV	AKJV	YLT	NASB	NIV	ESV
To console those who mourn in Zion	To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion	To appoint to mourners in Zion	To grant those who mourn <i>in</i> Zion	and provide for those who grieve in Zion —	to provide for those who mourn in Zion

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The Hebrew verb (שׁוּם *śûm*) has a wide range of meanings but essentially it means “to put” in the sense of establishing, or ordaining. I think perhaps the sense is that the Lord is going to bring stability and bring things back into order. The YLT and AKJV suggest the idea of “appointing” which captures the main idea, but it fails because we are not told what it is that those who mourn are appointed to. The NASB, the NIV, and the ESV suggest the idea of provision or granting to those who mourn in Zion. Again we are not told what is provided or granted. The word “*console*” might not be the best choice when we consider the basic meaning of the Hebrew, but it does have the virtue of giving the sense of stability. Perhaps a word like “establish” would be better. The sense then is that the Lord has come to bring back order.

Seventh, the Servant comes to “*give.*” This is the heart of the gospel. God gives! It is all of grace. There are three things that are given, and they are each given in exchange for something else as follows:

beauty **for** ashes,
the oil of joy **for** mourning,
the garment of praise **for** the spirit of heaviness;

The word “*for*” can also be rendered as “in place of.” In other words, we have the idea of substitution. The Servant has come to bring three things to those who mourn in Zion which they do not have, and the three things they do have are to be removed from them. What then is to be given? The word given here as “*beauty*” comes from a word which signifies “a fancy head-dress,” “a tiara,” or some “elaborate ornamentation.” This is no mere tinsel and drapery, but the things which adorn and bring forth beauty, or enhances things by beautifying them. Good decorators or interior designers can adorn a room to beautify it with their skill. The Servant comes to bring beauty! Isn't that marvellous? The second thing given is “*the oil of joy.*” When we think of “oil” we are immediately brought to the idea of anointing, and thence to the operation of the Holy Spirit. We see this connection, of course, in the opening words of Isaiah 61. It is the Spirit who anoints. Believers are indwelt by the Spirit of God, and that being the case they are people of joy. Happiness, blessedness, gladness, a state of well being, and wholesomeness – these are all aspects of joy. The believer may mourn for sin and under the curse, but he also exults and rejoices in God who is His salvation. We often forget that the giver does not just give gifts as we are considering here, but He gives Himself. Never let us divorce the gift from the Giver! Finally the Servant gives us “*the*

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garment of praise.” The garment is an item which provides for covering of the person. Perhaps a cloak or wrap-around-mantle that encompasses the person. When we come to think of our new dress we cannot but think of the parable of the prodigal son who was enrobed by his father even though he was probably filthy from pig mess:

But the father said to his servants, ‘bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet.’²⁷⁹³

Such Scripture teaches how the Lord covers our filthy rags with the robe of His righteousness. This garment also has a purpose. The righteousness of Christ comes to us that we may wear this garb and praise the living God.

But what has been removed from us? First we have “*ashes*” removed from us. Ashes are the left-overs from burning. They are useless. In some cases ashes are put for the dust of the earth, and so indicate the basic constituents of physical existence.²⁷⁹⁴ Sometimes ashes are put on the head as a symbol of grief and mourning, or as a sign of repentance.²⁷⁹⁵ Ashes removed signifies the removal of the curse. All of creation was cursed but when ashes are removed, the curse will be removed as well. Then also we note that following true repentance comes faith and then the joy of salvation! We must never separate faith from repentance. We must often exercise our repentance from sin and thence our faith towards God, but what follows is the joy of forgiveness and of being united with Christ. Finally we have “*the spirit of heaviness*” taken away. This heaviness is a feeble darkness, it is a dimness, a dullness, a colourless and a failing feeble light by which nothing can be seen or understood.

[c] The Saviour brings restoration and wholeness to His people, and satisfaction to God.

The conclusion and consummation of the Servant's ministry comes at the end of verse 3 as indicated by the word “*that*” given twice. We have then, a twofold purpose:

that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord,
that He may be glorified.

2793 Luke 15:22.

2794 Genesis 18:27; Job 30:19; Ezekiel 28:18.

2795 Esther 4:1,3; Job 42:6; Jeremiah 6:26; Daniel 9:3.

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For those to whom the Servant comes to minister, there is the beauty of not just being covered and adorned, but of being new creatures. The Bible (and Isaiah in particular) often uses the illustration of trees to depict people. In Isaiah 2 we have supremely tall trees representing man in all his pride and arrogance. In Psalm 1 we have a righteous man being likened to a tree planted by the waters suggesting the need for a source of deep water, pointing to the Spirit's supply. Here we have the believer being described as a tree *"of righteousness"* which has been planted by the Lord. And so we come to recognise the essential point that we need a new beginning. The seed is sown in good soil and the sapling eventually grows into an adult tree. These trees are ones which have a plentiful supply of water (the Spirit of God) and which bear fruit in season as the parable of the vine in John 15 illustrates. Trees, of course, are majestic things. They are hard to miss in the landscape. They are beautiful. Each has its own majesty and beauty. In the same way those who are born again of the Spirit and have been planted afresh by the Lord show forth the glory of God. And this is the second conclusion, the consummation of all the Servant's ministry. The trees planted by God and nurtured by the watering of the Spirit shine forth the great goodness and mercy of God, so that He may be truly glorified. Never forget that God is good and he only does good. Such must be glorified. All else is sin and is to be denounced. Is it not obvious that the good should be celebrated and extolled? Who can claim to be good except God Himself (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) who is the very essence of all that is good, pure, and holy. He is delightfulness and beauty. Let us celebrate Him forever!

[2] The great outcome of Christ's ministry – restoration, repair, rejoicing. (Isaiah 61:4-7).

61:4.

We have seen the commission, the content and the conclusion of the Servant's ministry in the opening three verses of Isaiah 61, but now we find the outcome expounded in greater detail. The purpose of the Servant's ministry was to bring forth new creation (in the shape figuratively speaking of righteous trees planted by God) so that the Lord may be shown to be good and so be glorified. Now we are treated to greater detail.

The *"they"* here are all those described earlier as the *"planting of the Lord"* and as *"trees of righteousness."* In other words, the objects of the Lord's salvation are now the focus of verse 4. There are four things that this group of people will do as shown by our analysis of verse 4:

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4 And **they** shall rebuild the old ruins,
they shall raise up the former desolations,
and **they** shall repair
the ruined cities,
the desolations of many generations.

Which we can also put like this. They shall:

- [1] Rebuild (יִבְנוּ) the old ruins (תְּרֻבוֹת עוֹלָם).
- [2] Raise up (יִקְוִמְמוּ) the former desolations (שְׁמָמוֹת רֵאשִׁינִים).
- [3] Repair (יִחַדְּשׁוּ) the ruined cities (עָרֵי חָרֵב).
- [4] *Repair* the desolations of many generations (שְׁמָמוֹת דּוֹר וָדוֹר).

I have put the word “*repair*” in italics for the fourth part because it is actually assumed from the way the text is written. What guides me this way is that the word “*ruins*” and “*ruined*” comes in the first and third parts, whilst the word “*desolations*” is seen in the second and fourth parts showing a symmetry which I feel is important to preserve.

Immediately we can see an application of these verses to the return from exile which brought about the rebuilding of the temple and the walls around Jerusalem as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. However these (yet future) events are themselves but a simple expression of God's intention expressed here in Isaiah 61. We recall the fact that the Lord Jesus applies the opening verses to His ministry, so that it must follow that what we have in verse 4 comes subsequent to Christ's ministry. These are the things that the new born, newly planted trees of the Lord will do.

The first is to “*rebuild the old ruins.*” The verb “to build” is given in the perfect and so conveys the idea of a completed action. The word “*old*” can also be given as “everlasting” or “time out of mind.” These are the **very** ancient ruins, hence it is better to consider this as a rebuilding rather than a new innovation. What is it that is being rebuilt which was from some distant age? These are the תְּרֻבָּה *hōr̥bāh*. The word essentially means a dried up place or a place of drought. The implication is a region of waste or desert where nothing can grow and nothing can live because of the complete lack of water. Israel as a nation were given cities and vines in a land flowing with milk and honey.²⁷⁹⁶ Because of their rebellion there was drought and failure of crops.²⁷⁹⁷ Where the Lord

2796 Exodus 3:8,17; 13:5.

2797 1Kings 17:1; Jeremiah 14:1.

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is rejected, the source of life is removed and it is not long before there is drought and desert left behind.

The second is to *“raise up the former desolations.”* The word *“desolations”* (שָׁמֵם *šāmēm*) properly indicates “to stun,” “to devastate,” “to stupefy” or “to astonish.” The word *“former”* is properly “beginning” or “first.” Thus we have something which at the beginning was ruined to the point of astonishment and amazement now being “raised up.” The verb here is simply “to rise up” and speaks of resurrection language. In other words we have a statement here which suggests a resurrecting of what had been ruined in the beginning to the point of utter astonishment.

The third statement is to *“repair the ruined cities.”* Once again the word *“ruined”* signifies that which is lacking water and so lacks life. These *“cities”* are uninhabited and desolate. The word *“repair”* is rather “renew” or “to be new.” Thus nestled in our four statements is the idea of rebirth and renewal. Of course the rebuilding of ruined and devastated cities caused by the captivity of Israel would take place, but we believe this particular example points us to the idea of God's renewal and regeneration.

The fourth and final statement is to *repair “the desolations of many generations.”* There is a reduplication of the word *“generations”* in the Hebrew so the expression could be rendered “generation of generations.” The idea expressed here is to look back over the countless generations which have been lost and destroyed. It cannot be that the Lord intends us to only view the era of Israel's history. Rather we look back right to the dawn of time when Adam and the Woman first sinned and ushered in astonishing devastation and ruin as a result.

In all of these statements we can see restoration, resurrection, and renewal or regeneration. These are the great themes of redemption! These are remarkable themes which those who have been planted by the Lord (true believers) get to take a part in. We know that none can come to salvation except through the work of the Lord, in particular the work of regeneration by the Spirit bringing to bear the work of the Son sent of Father upon an individual. However, in some amazing way those who come to new birth are also included in this great work of restoration, resurrection, and renewal or regeneration. As we share our faith and live it out, the Lord is making use of us as His instruments doing His eternal work. What an immense privilege!

61:5.

Having described what the regenerate are to do in restoration we move to consider how those who were once outside the covenant promises are also to be included. The overall theme is still the rebuilding of the land devastated by the captivity. In verse 5 we move from the built sites of cities to the fields and pasture lands. In this new time “*strangers*” are to become Israel's shepherds. The “*sons of the foreigner*” are to be husband-men and farmers. Those who were not part of Israel's line are incorporated as normal and functioning members of the godly nation. Shepherds are those who oversee flocks. In many places shepherds were despised, but now the foreigners and strangers are amongst the people of God carrying out this humble profession.²⁷⁹⁸

61:6.

In verse 6 we are brought to view the situation of the new Israel (“*the planting of the Lord*”) from a different perspective. It is now “*you*” rather than “*they*.” At this point we need to recognise that the NKJV is slightly at fault in its rendition of verse 6. This can be seen by comparing other translations:

But **you** shall be named the priests of the Lord, they shall call **you** the servants of our God. **You** shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory **you** shall boast. [NKJV].

But **ye** shall be named the Priests of the Lord: men shall call **you** the Ministers of our God: **ye** shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall **ye** boast yourselves. [AKJV].

But **you** will be called the priests of the Lord; **you** will be spoken of as ministers of our God. **You** will eat the wealth of nations, and **you** will boast in their riches. [NASB].

But **you** shall be called “priests of the Lord,” it shall be said to **you** “servants of our God.” The riches of the Gentiles shall **you** eat and in their glory shall **you** boast. [My translation].

The phrases underlined are translations of the Hebrew verb: אָמַר *’amar*, “to say.” The exact form of this in the text is: יִאמַר, and it is a Niphal imperfect third masculine singular. The use of a third plural in the NKJV is a mistake. In my translation I have opted to use the neutral form “*it*,” whilst the NASB avoids the issue by rendering the verb in its passive sense. The point here is that these

2798 Genesis 46:34.

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people described as “*priests of the Lord,*” and as “*servants of our God*” are not calling themselves this. They are being named as such by other individuals. This is astounding! In the Old Testament only Levites could be priests, but now we have those not just outside of the tribe of Levi, but those outside of Israel taking important roles. This simple picture speaks of people from all lands and families partaking of the blessing of God's purposes. Thus not only is the old priesthood and separate class of ministers now superseded, but foreigners and strangers are amongst those so designated as “*priests*” and “*servants.*” This text is fulfilled in the New Testament where we read that all believers are now priests unto God.²⁷⁹⁹

Those who are now a part of this new Israel (“*the planting of the Lord*”) are enabled to “*eat the riches of the Gentiles.*” No longer would the new servants and priests of God be subject to strict dietary laws which served to imprint the concept of clean and unclean things. Again this was fulfilled in the New Testament times, although particular care was also taken by the leaders of the church to aid the Jews who had been raised in such a rigid culture.²⁸⁰⁰ The last phrase of verse 6 indicates the idea that the people of God would be blessed by the strength and vigour of the Gentiles. It is not that they add to what God has provided, but that in them coming in the vigour, strength, and blessings that God would bring about in them adds to the whole nation.

61:7.

In verse 7 we have a final statement about the restoration of the nation as an entirely new entity. Whereas the old had suffered “*shame*” and “*confusion,*” the new would receive “*double*” honour. The word “*honour*” is in italics indicating that it has been supplied by the translator to make sense in English. But another way of rendering this is shown by the YLT version which reads:

Instead of your shame and confusion, a second time they sing of their portion.
Therefore in their land a second time do they take possession, joy age-during [is] for them.²⁸⁰¹

The last part of this rendition is a little confusing but is an attempt at giving the literal form of the phrase:

2799 1Peter 2:9.

2800 Mark 7:19; Acts 10:13; 11:7; 15:29.

2801 Isaiah 61:7, YLT.

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← Hebrew reads from the right

שְׂמֶתָה עוֹלָם תְּהִיָּה לָהֶם
joy everlasting it shall be to them

The interesting thing about the YLT version is that it signals a new start, a second time for everlasting joy and rejoicing. Such a theme points us to the return of Christ where true everlasting joy is to be had. But it also serves to point towards the New Testament church – the gospel age – where the beginnings of heavenly joy are known and experienced by and large by all the saints. The Old Testament economy certainly had those who knew this everlasting joy, but the nation as a whole was ignorant of this experience. That is not to say that there were not periods of joy and celebration, but that such is the work of the Spirit in the inner being of those who are truly *“the planting of the Lord.”*

[3] The rationale for Christ's ministry – justice and truth. (Isaiah 61:8,9).

So far we have considered the ministry of Immanuel (Isaiah 61:1-43) and the outcome of such ministry in restoration and repair (Isaiah 61:4-7), but now we are given a kind of rationale or reason for this great work (Isaiah 61:8,9). The change in direction is signalled by the use of the personal pronoun which occurs three times.

61:8.

First we discover that the Lord loves *“justice,”* or that which is true and right and fair. It is to be remembered that justice is not some external thing to which the Lord assents. Justice – true justice – is that which God displays by His character. God alone is just. What is meant here, though, is as an expression of true justice in the world. Since God is just and cannot be anything but just (because He is God), it is obvious that where true justice is found there is His delight. Whilst in truth there is no objective justice to which God must adhere, there is such an objective view of justice in relation to man. We know what is just (to a degree) because we are made in the image of God. Of course sin disrupts and destroys true justice. But where justice prevails this will be in accord fully with the nature of God who is fully just.

The precise phrase we have here (*“I, the Lord, love justice”*) points us to the *“I AM,”* the self-sufficient, self-existent one whom we know by the name “Yahweh” (the Lord). This is the

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personal name of God used when speaking of relationship with His people by covenant. The I AM, the one who relies on nothing but Himself because He alone is God, is the one who loves justice. Let none declare God unjust! Such a thought is preposterous. He loves justice because He is the *“Just One.”*²⁸⁰² We have seen in Isaiah 41 that the Lord brought His *“elect one”* within whom was His *“Spirit”* to *“bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”*²⁸⁰³ The Lord Jesus, Immanuel, came to bring truth and justice to bear.

But this love of justice is contrasted with that which God hates. The two statements can be put like this:

← Hebrew reads from the right

כִּי

For

אֲנִי יְהוָה אֶהֱבֶה מִשְׁפָּט

I the LORD love justice

שָׂנֵא גְזֵלָה עֹלָה

I hate robbery in/with/by burnt offering

We have spoken of justice in its widest sense, but with the second phrase which mentions *“burnt offering,”* we are brought to consider the justice that is due to God. The whole burnt offering was a sacrifice which was entirely given to God to appease His righteous settled wrath against sin. Christ's once-for-all sacrifice on Calvary was the complete fulfilment of the burnt offerings.²⁸⁰⁴ But it would appear that the burnt offerings made in the nation were not offered in faith or with propriety. A number of modern versions (see table 73.4) seem to miss the main point and suggest ideas instead of *“burnt offering.”* The NIV and the ESV suggest *“wrongdoing”* or *“wrong,”* whilst the HCSB offers *“injustice,”* and the ISV *“iniquity.”* None of these are good translation here because the root idea of the word used is “to ascend.” It is used more than 260 times in the AKJV to signify the *“burnt offering.”* Furthermore such renditions are simply unnecessary repetition for to love justice is to hate injustice, wrong or iniquity. All that can be said for these modern translations is that they

2802 Acts 3:14.

2803 Isaiah 42:1.

2804 Leviticus 1:3; Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:10; 1Peter 1:19.

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are bemused by the connection between the two things put here. They struggle with the concept of a/the “*burnt offering*” being placed in juxtaposition to “*justice*” and so change the concept to suit their frame of reference. However the NKJV is at fault in its choice of preposition, whilst both the EHV and NASB at least give a possible translation for the prefixed **ב** which (in the main) is to be rendered as “*in,*” “*with,*” or “*by.*”

Table 73.4: Comparison of different translations of the second phrase in Isaiah 61:8.

NKJV	EHV	NASB	NIV	HCSB	ISV
I hate robbery for burnt offering.	I hate robbery in a burnt offering.	I hate robbery in the burnt offering.	I hate robbery and wrongdoing.	I hate robbery and injustice.	I hate robbery and iniquity.

The Lord detests robbery in/with/by the burnt offering. In other words when a burnt offering is made, if there is any hint of keeping back a part for the offerer, or for any other than God, it is robbery and, in point of fact, ceases to be the whole burnt sacrifice. There were, of course, offerings which could be made in which the offerer, or the one acting for the offerer, took a part. Some of the grain offering was given to the priests, and the Passover was a sacrifice that was to be shared amongst the family, are two simple examples.²⁸⁰⁵ The burnt offering, however, was only for God. The entire sacrifice was devoted to the Lord and nothing was to be left behind. We see in this an objective element and a subjective one. The burnt offering points us to Christ's unique sacrifice for sin on our behalf. If there is any addition made to this in any way, or if there is any subtraction from it again made in any way, it becomes robbery of the burnt offering. How many do this! The various cults and aberrations that call themselves “Christian” are guilty of this when they add rationalism, science, traditions, good works, or any other things, or when they say that Christ was merely a man, a martyr to emulate, or that He was not truly man and so on. By adding to Christ's sacrifice we take from it, for we are effectively saying that it was not sufficient and needs supplementing. But then subjectively if we are not wholehearted in our devotion and are not truly “*in Christ*” dead to sin and alive to God, then we are guilty of robbery in the burnt sacrifice. In this case we are talking of the application of Christ's unique work to us done on Calvary. Just as Christ was given up for sin and became a sweet smelling and pleasing fragrance to God – so that nothing else would do – we too must be wholly devoted to the Saviour holding back nothing at all. Such wholehearted devotion is required. It is something no man (or woman) is capable of, in and of themselves. Yet they must give

2805 Exodus 12:1f; Leviticus 2:10.

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it. So how? It is only because such are *“the planting of the Lord,”* that is, they are a new creation, that it is possible for them to give themselves fully to God.²⁸⁰⁶

In the second part of verse 8 we are given two things that the Lord will do. First we find that He *“will direct their work in truth.”* How wonderful and how vital. It is essential that the work of restoration, of repair, of bringing in many to the gospel and God's rule, be done both truly and also *“in truth.”* We cannot stress this enough in our time because not only has truth *“fallen in the street,”* it is being actively replaced for lies and evil.²⁸⁰⁷ Given that Isaiah records such a situation only two chapters previously, we can take great comfort in what we read here for our day. When truth has fallen, and when lies abound, the Lord will still govern and stimulate the work He is doing through His servants *“in truth.”* Does this not energise you to seek the Lord and His truth? Is there not encouragement that despite all the lies that swirl around the airwaves and in our communities, truth will prevail? The Lord will direct His work *“in truth.”* This is also a sharp reminder to those who call themselves “Christian” but who dispense with truth or think that doctrine is not important.

Then next we discover that the the Lord will make with the people who are referenced throughout this passage (*“the planting of the Lord”*) an *“everlasting covenant.”* There are only two covenants when viewed eternally. The covenant of works which Adam failed to keep but which Christ succeeded in, and the covenant of grace whose foundation and origin was from eternity but was ushered in by Christ at Calvary and promised immediately after the fall. This second covenant is an eternal one. The stipulations and requirements have all been met by the Lord Himself and our part is simply to *“receive”* and *“believe”* the one sent.²⁸⁰⁸

61:9.

The descendants of those who truly believe and receive Christ will come from among the Gentiles, verse 9 informs us. This indicates the universal spread of the gospel to all the families of the earth. No longer will there be a people, one nation, with which God has dealings, but peoples all over the world will be those upon whom the Lord has set His seal. These will be visibly apparent as God's people. They may not have a distinct passport or national accent as the Israelites of old did, but they will be easily recognised among the peoples who will readily *“acknowledge them”* as those whom *“the Lord has blessed.”* We get a glimpse of this recognition from Christ's statement shortly after He washed the disciples' feet when He said:

2806 Isaiah 61:3.

2807 Isaiah 59:14.

2808 John 1:12; 6:29.

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By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.²⁸⁰⁹

The love amongst Christians – true believers – is something to behold. This makes the church truly visible. It is not hierarchy, systems, institutions, synods, confessions, leaders, or denominations which make the church visible but the love of those whom Christ has called and saved.

[4] In praise of Christ's ministry – being clothed and fruitful. (Isaiah 61:10,11).

In the last two verses of Isaiah 61 we have what appears to be a hymn or prayer, but whom is speaking? Some suggest that it is the Suffering Servant who opened the chapter, whilst many argue for it being prophetic of the New Testament church. It seems to me that these words are from the prophet Isaiah himself. This does not stop them being prophetic of Christ or of the church. However, in the first instance we shall consider them as Isaiah's response to what has been revealed.

61:10.

As a consequence of the ministry of the Suffering Servant and the outcome of His work, there is nothing left to do but praise. And so Isaiah declares his will to *“greatly rejoice in the Lord.”* This superlative comes from the same Hebrew word: שׂוֹשׂ שׂוֹשׂ, (which means “to be glad”), being used twice. We might put it like this: “rejoicing I will rejoice in the Lord.”²⁸¹⁰ The second statement *“My soul shall be joyful in my God”* uses a different word for joy, namely: גִּיל גִּיל, which has the root meaning, “to spin around” (usually under the influence of great emotion). The idea then is an extreme form of happiness to the point of energetic motion. It is as though Isaiah wants to leap with joy from his seat and exclaim His devotion to the Lord. The western expression of worship rarely sees this exuberance. There is often forced or manipulated whipped-up rabble-rousing, or prim and proper sobriety, but rarely spontaneous effusive worship from the heart.²⁸¹¹ Well we ought to consider our worship and response to the gospel. It ought to be something that is spontaneous, true, deep, exuberant, effusive and honest.

The reason for this worship is given next. There are two statements made concerning what

2809 John 13:35.

2810 Perhaps the apostle Paul was inspired by this text to write: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”* (Philippians 4:4).

2811 As an example of the latter I would like to recall an especial meeting I once attended. This was at a very formal “reformed” gathering receiving teaching from the book of Revelation. The speaker was wonderful so much so that when he finished his address over 100 men in attendance at this very sober meeting broke out in a spontaneous burst of applause. It was astonishing! The applause was sustained, loud and lasted for several minutes. The applause was not for the speaker but for a collective sense that we had been taught by God Himself. The speaker was embarrassed by the expression of joy and requested that we did not repeat the act when he was due to speak in the afternoon.

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the Lord God has done for us, but these are basically one action of the Lord God which is expressed in two ways. In the first statement we are reminded of what the Lord did for Adam and the Woman in Genesis 3 after the fall:

*Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.*²⁸¹²

Nakedness is a sign of shame. To be clothed is to be given dignity. Fallen man is in a state of shame and is naked, unclothed. The essential garments are described for us here as *“the garments of salvation”* and as *“the robe of righteousness.”* We are in need of being clothed because we need saving or rescuing, and the chief garment of need is righteousness. We, in our lost state, have no righteousness. We shall learn latter in Isaiah that:

*And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.*²⁸¹³

Thus we are in need of new, clean garments. We are in need of another's righteousness, namely, Christ's.

It is to be noted in these descriptions that Isaiah (or any believer or the church) is in need of being clothed. It is the Lord who clothed both Adam and the Woman, and it is the Lord who clothed Isaiah. Further clothing includes the idea of covering. Isaiah then goes on to explain that this clothing and covering is similar in effect to a *“bridegroom”* or a *“bride”* who dress in splendour. It would appear from the NKJV that the two statements are reinforcing one main point. However the Hebrew tells a more detailed story. With regard to the bridegroom the language is priestly. The word rendered *“decks himself”* in the NKJV is from the Hebrew word: כָּהֵן *kāhan*, most often used to represent the office of a priest, or a priest as he ministers.²⁸¹⁴ This verb occurs in an intensive active form. Thus the bridegroom is one who en-robes himself with his (priestly) garments. The word *“ornaments”* is actually the word used for a priest's turban. In contrast, the bride also dresses herself but the verb is not in the intensive active form. Further, the word given as *“jewels”* is the Hebrew word: כִּלִּי *kēliy*, which signifies that which has been prepared, made, or completed. The bride then dresses with that which she has been given, or had prepared for her (i.e. her dress). It would seem then that we have the bridegroom who dresses intensively acting as a priest, whereas

2812 Genesis 3:21.

2813 Isaiah 64:6.

2814 See, for example, Exodus 28:1,3,4 etc.

Studies in Isaiah.

the bride is dressed with that which has been provided for her. We ought to see here also the idea that there is a part to play by the believer. The need for clothing and to be dressed is something we all face as fallen sinners. However there must be an acceptance, a receiving of that which has been provided and given. Perhaps we ought to view this in terms of little children being dressed by their parents.

61:11.

In verse 11 we have the conclusion. We remind ourselves that creation is not an autonomous organism (as modern minds conceive of it – “mother nature”). God is ever over, and ruling in creation. So when we read that the earth brings forth its “*bud*” and the things “*sown,*” we are not to suppose this is automatic or “natural.” Yes indeed we can study these things because God is an ordered and organised God. But unless the Lord govern and guide, no bud would blossom and no seed would germinate. Nevertheless, we recognise that the earth does bring forth its plants and vegetation (as God wills) in a very regular fashion. This is, as we have said, only because God is good, ordered, and not capricious. Now in the same way that the plants grow, so also the Lord “*will cause righteousness and praise*” to come forth in the sight of all nations. We have seen this in Isaiah, and we can see it when any come to true faith and appreciate the wonderful ministry of the Suffering Servant, but it will be a theme repeated time without number until Christ returns.

Chapter 74.

Isaiah 62:1-12.

Zion restored. The Church of God.

Textual analysis.

#62 1 For Zion's sake

I will not hold My peace,
and for Jerusalem's sake

I will not rest,
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
and her salvation as a lamp *that* burns.

2 The Gentiles shall see your righteousness,
and all kings your glory.

You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name.

3 You shall also be

a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

4 You shall no longer be termed Forsaken,
nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate;
but you shall be called Hephzibah,
and your land Beulah;

for the Lord delights in you,
and your land shall be married.

5 For *as* a young man marries a virgin,
so shall your sons marry you;
and *as* the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.

6 I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem;
they shall never hold their peace day or night.

You who make mention of the Lord,
do not keep silent,

7 And give Him no rest
till He establishes
and till He makes

Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

8 The Lord has sworn

by His right hand
and by the arm of His strength:

"surely I will no longer give your grain *as* food for your enemies;
and the sons of the foreigner shall not drink your new wine, for which you have laboured.

9 But those who have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the Lord;
those who have brought it together shall drink it in My holy courts."

10 Go through,

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go through
the gates!
Prepare the way for the people;
build up,
build up
the highway!
Take out the stones,
lift up a banner for the peoples!
11 Indeed the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the world:
“say to the daughter of Zion,
‘surely your salvation is coming;
behold,
His reward *is* with Him,
and His work before Him.’”
12 And they shall call them
the Holy People,
the Redeemed of the Lord;
and you shall be called
Sought Out,
a City Not Forsaken.

Some commentators connect the last two verses of Isaiah 61 with the opening verses of Isaiah 62. However the mention of “*Zion*” and “*Jerusalem*” seems to suggest a new subject. The focus appears to be the land of Israel with its focus: Zion and Jerusalem.²⁸¹⁵ This city is seen in its future rescued state. As such it points us first to the return from exile, which stands in the future as far as Isaiah is concerned, but primarily it points us to the nature and status of the church. The apostle Paul demonstrates for us the idea that the New Testament church (universal) is depicted by Zion in his letter to the Hebrews:

18 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest ... **22** But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, **23** to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven.²⁸¹⁶

And thus we are encouraged to consider the prophecy of Isaiah in terms of what it says about the church.

Our text comes in three unequal parts as follows:

2815 Isaiah 62:1,4,6,10,11,12.

2816 Hebrews 12:18a,22,23a.

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[1] The Lord declares His intentions to establish Zion's salvation. (Isaiah 62:1).

[2] The outward witness of Zion in this present world age. (Isaiah 62:2-9).

[a] You (Zion) shall be ... (Isaiah 62:2-5).

[b] God's watchmen. (Isaiah 62:6-9).

[3] The declaration of coming salvation to Zion (twofold application). (Isaiah 62:10-12).

[1] The Lord declares His intentions to establish Zion's salvation (Isaiah 62:1).

62:1.

We start with something of a curiosity. Normally we might expect that something would be done for the Lord's sake and glory because He is perfect and good utterly. However the Lord says here twice that He will act for the “*sake*” of Zion and Jerusalem. Thus what the Lord intends to do is purely for the benefit and purpose of Zion, Jerusalem or, in other words, the church of the firstborn.

What then will the Lord do? Twice we read “*I will*” signifying the Lord's intentions. Remember that God is more than able and that which He speaks He will always accomplish because His word never returns to Him void always accomplishing what He intends.²⁸¹⁷

The word given as “*peace*” here indicates silence or inactivity, and the word “*rest*” signifies to lie down or to be tranquil. In other words the Lord is about to act. He will not sit idly by, but will be active and ready to act. This is incredibly encouraging. The Lord is not like us but He condescends to speak in a way that we can understand. The Lord is always at work doing His perfect will and performing His wonderful plans. However here He puts it in human terms. Many may be idle and may rest in their tranquillity whilst difficulties and horrors abound. As a trivial and simple example, think of the shopkeeper or official who keeps you waiting as they are lounging in the back supping their coffee! But perish the thought when you consider God. If He were a man He would not sit idly by and neither would He rest whilst others are in need.

So what is His intention? It is given to us as a couplet – two statements – which reinforce one another:

until her righteousness goes forth as brightness
and her salvation as a lamp *that* burns

2817 Isaiah 55:10,11.

Studies in Isaiah.

The Lord intends that Zion would be a true light unto the world. There is no other purpose for a light except that it shines outwards illuminating and irradiating others who are nearby. The light is the brightness of the sun and the burning of a consuming fire. In these images we see that Zion is to be like the Lord. He is light par excellence. He is the brightness of the glory of God and He dwells in light unapproachable.²⁸¹⁸ He is also a consuming fire who burns the dross and removes the filth of Zion.²⁸¹⁹ But what is being shone forth as illuminating and cleansing? It is Zion's "*righteousness*" and Zion's "*salvation*." Remember that by nature no one is righteous and so this righteousness cannot be Zion's by right nor by nature. It must have been imputed to them. Now we have seen these two terms ("*righteousness*" and "*salvation*") mentioned together on repeated occasions in Isaiah.²⁸²⁰ They are the two key aspects of the one unified work of God. He has come to save, to rescue, to deliver. And in doing so He has come to make right and to make righteous. We understand from our New Testament that Christ lived the life we could not, and He offered His life up for us on the cross. In this singular act of life and death He took our sin in exchange for His righteousness. Thus His work of salvation brings in righteousness for those whom He is actively saving. The righteousness is now expressed in and through the life of a believer consecrated to God and can thus be considered as the righteousness (given or imputed by God) of the believer. It is not the believer's by right but it is the believer's by grace.

Thus Zion, the church of the firstborn, does this incredible work of shining forth both the Lord's work of rescue and deliverance from sin and disaster, and His righteousness. It is so important to have the two together. If we emphasise righteousness alone we are in danger of becoming Pharisaical acting as though all we care about is being right. If we emphasise salvation alone we are in danger of becoming lawless and reckless acting as though all we are doing is saving people from sin and disaster. Both are needed. Grace has come to deliver and to save, but it has come to bring in a righteous way of life.

[2] The outward witness of Zion in this present world age (Isaiah 62:2-9).

We are still thinking about Zion (Jerusalem) being a depiction of the church of the firstborn as indicated by reference to "*you*" and "*your*" throughout verses 2 to 9, pointing back to Zion and Jerusalem as mentioned in verse 1. The picture drawn here is of someone looking at Zion from outside showing forth what it would be like to those who might want to observe her. The whole

2818 1Timothy 6:16; Hebrews 1:3.

2819 Isaiah 4:4; Hebrews 12:29.

2820 Isaiah 45:8; 46:13; 51:5,6,8; 56:1; 59:16,17; 61:10; 62:1; 63:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

passage can be (loosely) divided into two parts. In the first we have statements about what the Lord is doing or will do to and for Zion. This runs up to the end of verse 5. In the second the emphasis changes slightly with the Lord's intention to establish His *"watchmen."*

[a] You (Zion) shall be ... (Isaiah 62:2-5).

62:2.

In verse 2 we discover that the *"Gentiles"* and *"all kings,"* or those not contained within her walls, those not registered in her records, will be able to see Zion's *"righteousness."* Her light is brightly shining as a witness to the world. In other texts we know that the Gentiles are to be included in the new Jerusalem (Zion, the church of the firstborn), but here the term is used of all those who are yet to be saved and who stand outside the city of the redeemed. The church is made up from all sorts, from all families found upon the earth, but those who stand outside are the unredeemed and so are called *"Gentiles"* in this text.

Those outside will see not only Zion's *"righteousness,"* but also her *"glory."* They will see the risen Christ – who is the church's glory and righteousness. This reminds us that whatever we do, think, or say, all must be to the glory of our God and must be done in wholehearted devotion to Him.²⁸²¹ Our glory, our boast, is none other than Christ and Him crucified.²⁸²²

The Lord will call this Zion, this church of the firstborn, by a new name which He will speak. The giving of names signifies ownership and authority. It also speaks of the love of a parent. When a baby is born in the family the parents give it a name of their choosing for its adornment. They usually choose a name they delight in which they feel would suit their new arrival. Thus when a person is born again of the Holy Spirit and becomes an adopted son of God, the Lord gives them a new name which He alone chooses. In Isaiah 44 we hear the Lord saying that He will *"pour water on him who is thirsty"* and will pour out the Spirit on Jacob's descendants so that they will *"spring up among the grass like willows by the watercourses."*²⁸²³ The result of all this blessing is that each one so saved and redeemed would begin to call themselves by new names:

2821 1Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17,23.

2822 Galatians 6:14; 1Corinthians 2:2.

2823 Isaiah 44:3,4.

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One will say, 'I *am* the Lord's'; another will call *himself* by the name of Jacob; another will write *with* his hand, 'The Lord's,' and name *himself* by the name of Israel.²⁸²⁴

In this former case the ones being rescued and given the righteousness of Christ seek to identify with the people of God, and so they name themselves with Zion. But here in Isaiah 62:2 the name is given by the Lord. To give one a new name is to change their character. Jacob was named Israel after he wrestled with the Lord at Peniel.²⁸²⁵ He was the "supplanter" (a deceitful person) but now he is the one who wrestled with God and prevailed! In Revelation we discover that those who "overcome" will be given a new name and will also have the name of God and of the city of God written upon them.²⁸²⁶ These speak of a new identity and a change of ownership.

62:3.

This new Jerusalem, Zion, (of which all born again believers are a part), will also be royal in nature as shown by the two parallel statements recorded in verse 3. They shall be:

a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God

Although the two statements are synonymous and essentially speak of one thing, they do reinforce each other and give depth to the overall meaning. A "*crown of glory*" and "*a royal diadem*" are two images for the same thing, and the two titles of deity speak of the One True God. A crown and a diadem is usually placed on the head to adorn and decorate, or to show authority. The one who wears the crown is the king! Now the idea expressed here in Isaiah 62:3 is that Zion will be for the Lord God "*a crown of glory*" and "*a royal diadem.*" Such an idea is also seen in the New Testament expressed by Paul:

Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.²⁸²⁷

2824 Isaiah 44:5.

2825 Genesis 32:28-30.

2826 Revelation 2:17; 3:12.

2827 Philippians 4:1.

Studies in Isaiah.

For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?²⁸²⁸

The believers at Philippi and Thessalonica were for Paul his crowning achievement in the Lord. In this way then, Zion will be the Lord God's crowning achievement. All the spoils and treasures gained through the work of the Suffering Servant will be for His crown.

Earlier in Isaiah we noted that the believing remnant would be given a new crown which would be in opposition to the *“crown of pride”* worn by drunken Ephraim:

In that day the Lord of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people.²⁸²⁹

The Lord Himself is the believer's crown given in exchange for the *“crown of pride.”*²⁸³⁰ No longer to be ruled by self and pride, the believer is now governed by the Lord. Such rule and governance includes the *“spirit of justice”* to convict of sin, and *“for strength”* to fight the fight of faith.²⁸³¹

But here in Isaiah 62:3 our attention is focused on the victory spoils that the Lord has won. Curiously the crown is not worn by the Lord but is *“in the hand”* of the Lord God. Perhaps the idea here, then, is that in winning the victory over His enemies the Lord has retrieved the crown that ruled over the people. Just as a victorious king who defeats an enemy can claim the crown of that land he has defeated, so the Lord also gathers the authority and rule over the people of God.

62:4.

We noted in verse 2 that the Lord will give them a new name, and now in verse 4 we come to this very point. They are no longer to be *“termed Forsaken,”* and their land is no more to be *“termed Desolate.”* Another way of expressing this opening two phrases would be:

It shall not again be said to you “forsaken,” and it shall not again be said to your land “desolate.”

This reminds us of the promise God gave to Noah and his sons concerning the waters of the flood. Zion and the land (which are types of the true believing people of God – the remnant) will never be

2828 1Thessalonians 2:19.

2829 Isaiah 28:5.

2830 Isaiah 28:1,3.

2831 Isaiah 28:6.

Studies in Isaiah.

forsaken nor desolate. In other words, Zion is never to be loosened, abandoned, and thereby to become a wonder and an astonishment – without hope. Instead Zion would be called “*Hephzibah*” and the land would be called “*Beulah*.” The meaning of these two names are then explained for us in the final sentence. “*Hephzibah*” means “to be delighted in,” or “to take pleasure in,” whilst “*Beulah*” means “married.” The forsaken, abandoned, desolate, and forlorn nation and people are now something that the Lord delights in, takes pleasure in, and wills to be united with!

62:5.

In verse 5 the imagery changes to bring our thoughts to the individuals of Zion and the land. Up to now the focus has been on Zion and the land of the people of God in general. Thus, just as a young man takes for himself a young virgin and marries her, so the people of God as individuals will be individually espoused to Zion and the land. They will each be determined and eager to be a part of the new Zion, in the same way that a young man is earnest about being married to his young bride. They will be *for* Zion, and they will cherish it and seek its best. In this way individuals will be pleased to be a part of Zion and will be wedded to it, just as the young man delights in the bride he has chosen.

But then the imagery changes somewhat again as we consider now the Lord's view point. In the same way that a bridegroom rejoices over the bride, the Lord God rejoices over Zion. Now we are viewing Zion (and the land) in a collective sense as the bride of God. Before this we considered individuals in their devotion to being a part of Zion – God's bride, but now our perspective changes as we see God – the bridegroom – delighting in His bride who is Zion – the new-born people of God.

[b] God's watchmen. (Isaiah 62:6-9).

62:6.

From verse 6 we see a slight change in emphasis in the text. We are now introduced to a category of people whom we met earlier at Isaiah 52:8 and 56:10. Watchmen, of course, were a group of men who stood looking out for approaching danger or any approaching emissaries or visitors. They would be there to warn the inhabitants of the city of whom was coming so that adequate preparations could be made. In Isaiah 52:8 we have the watchmen rejoicing because good news was approaching – the coming of the Saviour. In Isaiah 56:10 we discover a situation in which

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the watchmen had failed to do their job of warning the city dwellers and so were blind and dumb. But now we have something new. Previously we read of *“your watchmen”* and of the blind and dumb watchmen who were ill-prepared.²⁸³² Now we read that the Lord Himself was to *“set watchmen”* on the walls of Jerusalem. These men are first described in terms of what they will do (because God has appointed them), and then we read of the instructions that the Lord gives to them. Thus after the appointment, in the opening sentence of verse 6, (*“I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem”*), we discover the Lord's assessment of these folk: *“they shall never hold their peace day or night.”* These men are always on the lookout. They will issue a running commentary. They will utter their reports regularly throughout both day and night. The Lord appoints watchmen who will indeed do the job expected of them. Then we are informed of the Lord's address and instruction to these folk. They are termed here in the NKJV as those *“who make mention of the Lord.”* This is not the best translation as it simply follows the AKJV. The ESV and YLT offer better renditions:

You who put the Lord in remembrance. [ESV]

Ye remembrancers of Jehovah. [YLT]

The word here is literally “recorders” signifying those watchmen of God who are noting those things down for the Lord to view. These who remind God are not to *“keep silent.”* The Hebrew rather signifies that these folk are by nature (literally) “not silent to you” (i.e. the Lord).

62:7.

These watchmen are to continually update the Lord giving Him no rest for as long as it takes for Him to make *“Jerusalem a praise in the earth.”* Interestingly the text uses two verbs here rendered as *“establishes,”* and *“makes.”* The first signifies the idea of standing firm, or being erect, whilst the second suggests the idea of being placed or set. We are not, therefore, to expect (I believe) that the new Jerusalem (the church of the firstborn) are established and appointed in any worldly sense as, for example, the Roman Catholic church may like to hold. Rather the idea is of the Lord making the people of God able to stand and be appointed to His tasks in a world that is constantly antagonistic to the Lord and His gospel. The question is: whom will consider Jerusalem a praise? Surely the world will not because it disdains and repudiates all that is godly? I rather think

²⁸³² Isaiah 52:8.

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that Jerusalem (the church of the firstborn) will be a praise to heaven and to all who own the Lord. Perhaps also the sense is that the true people of God will be known in all the earth. There will not be a location where the true church is not known. They will be renowned and known of, but truly only a praise to the heavenly host who will give God the glory for such wonders wrought in the earth.

62:8,9.

This section concludes with the Lord issuing a promise in verse 8 (*“the lord has sworn”*), the contents of which are given in four statements at the end of verse 8 and in verse 9. Before we consider these it is worth noting that the Lord has only *“sworn”* in such a manner on five other occasions. He swore that He would have war with *“Amalek”* throughout the generations, and He swore that He would *“never forget”* Jacob's proud unrepentant works.²⁸³³ All who harden themselves against the Lord and who refuse to come to repentance will always be at war with God and their unrighteous deeds will never be ignored nor forgotten. He swore also that He would most certainly cause the Israelites to inherit the land promised to the fathers.²⁸³⁴ And we read in the Old Testament history that this promise was fully kept.²⁸³⁵ Then further we discover that the Lord swore to David that one would come from him to sit on the throne in eternity, of which promise we see fulfilment in Christ Jesus the true Son of David.²⁸³⁶ Finally, we note that the Father promised the Son that He would be an eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek.²⁸³⁷ Thus the Lord has made it a matter of firm promise that He will by no means acquit the guilty, that He will fulfil the promise of an inheritance, and, that there will be an everlasting king to rule, and an eternal priest to intercede. Here in Isaiah we get the firm promise to those who are of the church of the firstborn – the true Zion, the new Jerusalem.

We are to note that this promise has come both *“by His right hand,”* and *“by the arm of His strength.”* Again we have two figures which speak of the same thing but give us different views or aspects to it. The Lord is more than able, and has more than enough strength to keep this promise. But by what means? What does *“His right hand”* and *“the arm of His strength”* indicate? There are a number of texts which show conclusively that this is a figure or title for the Messiah, the Lord Jesus our Saviour. We begin our proof for this assertion by bringing attention to Psalm 110, the first verse of which reads:

2833 Exodus 17:16; Amos 8:7.

2834 Deuteronomy 31:7.

2835 Joshua 23:14; 1 Kings 8:56.

2836 Psalm 132:11. See also 2 Samuel 3:9.

2837 Psalm 110:4. See also Hebrews 7:21.

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The Lord said to my Lord, “sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”²⁸³⁸

The second person of the Holy Trinity is being addressed by the first and is afforded the greatest honour of being seated at the right hand of God. None will argue, I think, with this fact that the Son is the Father's “right-hand-Man.” Now it is clear that this Scripture (which is quoted five times in the New Testament) speaks of Christ's ascension.²⁸³⁹ However I think we can assume that this place of honour was not simply established for the risen Christ. The Father and the Son lived in perfect harmony from all eternity. In John's gospel we are given repeated statements which describe the Son being the Father's “right-hand-Man” so-to-speak. Take for example, the following:

19 Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. **20** For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.”²⁸⁴⁰

30 I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.²⁸⁴¹

... for I am not alone, but I *am* with the Father who sent Me.²⁸⁴²

And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.²⁸⁴³

It is clear that the Father sent the Son, and that the Son whilst on earth was not left alone, but worked in constant union and agreement with the Father. Now in other texts we discover that the “*right hand*” takes on personality. For example in Exodus we discover that the “*right hand*” of the Lord acts to destroy the enemy.

Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces.²⁸⁴⁴

2838 Psalm 110:1.

2839 Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13.

2840 John 5:19,20.

2841 John 5:30.

2842 John 8:16b.

2843 John 8:29.

2844 Exodus 15:6.

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In the Psalms we discover further that the “*right hand*” of God gained “*the victory*” for the Lord, is “*exalted,*” because He “*does valiantly.*”

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvellous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory.²⁸⁴⁵

The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted; The right hand of the Lord does valiantly.²⁸⁴⁶

Thus the “*right hand*” speaks of God's action of salvation and redemption which is supremely accomplished in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice that this is by the “*arm of His strength.*” Christ our Redeemer is strong! He is infinitely strong!

So what then does the Lord promise with an oath? This comes at the end of verse 8 and in verse 9 in four statements centred around the gathering and consuming of grain and wine. Grain, of course, was used to make flour and hence bread. These two emblems our Saviour has set for this gospel age as representative of the New Covenant. The bread signifying His body and the wine His blood. Now in old Israel the grain and wine were cultivated in the land in accord with God's good provision. For all the while the people honoured the Lord and did His will, the grain and wine would continually flow. Whenever they departed from the Lord and His will, there would be drought and blight, famine and war to despoil. But the Lord now promises (with an oath) that their food and wine would “*no longer*” be given over to “*enemies,*” or “*sons of the foreigner.*”²⁸⁴⁷ Rather it would be for those who “*laboured*” for it, and for those have “*gathered*” it. As they gather and consume, they will “*praise the Lord,*” and will do so “*together*” and in the Lord's “*holy courts.*”²⁸⁴⁸ All would be done in the right way and their fellowship both with God and one another would be renewed. Whenever we do things for self, or in opposition to one another and despite God, by ignoring His word and ways, the outcome is always dis-fellowship and disharmony.

[3] The declaration of coming salvation to Zion (twofold application) (Isaiah 62:10-12).

The last three verses which end the chapter may be applied in a number of senses. In verse 11 the main focus is the announcing of “*salvation*” to the “*daughter of Zion.*” We should first apply

2845 Psalm 98:1.

2846 Psalm 118:15,16.

2847 Isaiah 62:8.

2848 Isaiah 62:9.

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these words to the return from exile (still yet future for Isaiah). Then also we could apply these words to the coming of Christ, the Messiah, at the incarnation, death and resurrection. Finally we must reckon that these words also pertain to the return of the Lord Jesus at His second coming. Of course, in the life of the church these words have come true many times in revivals.

62:10.

To understand the import of the words of verse 10, we must first recall the fact that the Lord has sworn by His *“right hand”* to bring blessing in the form of abundant provision (signified by bread and wine). It is the *“right hand”* of the Lord who will come and make a *“way for the people”* and will raise the *“banner.”* The *“right hand”* of the Lord, the Messiah, is coming as a pioneer enabling a path for the peoples. The words we read here are reminiscent of words which come in Psalms 15 and 24 where the question is asked *“who may ascend (or dwell)”* in the Lord's *“holy hill?”*²⁸⁴⁹ Of course only the pure may enter in, but in psalm 24 we read further that the *“gates,”* or *“everlasting doors”* of the city are commanded to be open for the *“King of glory,”* (the Messiah), to enter in.²⁸⁵⁰

Thus approach and entrance of the Lord – the Messiah (the *“right hand”* of the Lord) – is given to us in reverse order. The announcement to *“go through”* is repeated for emphasis. The Lord has a double right to enter. He is Creator and hence owner, and He is Redeemer as well. The entrance into the city is so that preparation can be made *“for the people.”* In these words we are also reminded of our Saviour's words to the disciples the night before He died:

1 “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. **2** In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. **3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.”²⁸⁵¹

The Lord went to prepare a place for His people.

But then following on from the call to enter through the gates there is next a call to *“build up”* (which statement is again repeated) *“the highway.”* The highway is to be constructed by the removal of *“stones”* and the erection of *“a banner.”* It would appear, then, that the vantage point offered is from the perspective of the city looking back in time. Whereas we might expect the order

2849 Psalm 15:1; 24:3.

2850 Psalm 24:4-10.

2851 John 14:1-3.

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to be reversed so that the highway would be constructed first followed by the entrance in through the gates, we have one looking back and seeing the entrance as a culmination of what went before – the building of the highway. We have already come across the figure or illustration of the highway. In Isaiah 35:8, for example, we heard of the *“highway of holiness”* which was the way of return to Jerusalem. To effect the repair and construction there needed to be removal of stones. That is, stones which might have caused people to stumble. Obstacles in the way of righteousness. Thus the Lord in His ministry on earth paved the way and showed what was required, namely the righteous life of the Saviour. And to cap the highway there must be the *“banner.”* Again we have come across this figure several times in Isaiah. It was a rallying place and essentially points us to the substitutionary atoning death of Christ at Calvary.

62:11.

When we come to verse 11 we come across a feature of the good news which is repeated throughout Scripture, and which answers all those hypothetical questions posed by those who cannot accept the exclusive nature of Christ's work. The gospel has gone out into all the world!²⁸⁵² Does this mean we sit back and give up missions? Of course not! But the gospel has spread throughout the world in all ages and is not dependent upon us. We are commanded to go and preach to every creature, but how dare we think that the work depends on us and will not proceed unless we take it!²⁸⁵³ Now here in Isaiah 62 we discover that *“the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the world.”* If we are of the opinion that the work depends on us we do well to take these words to heart. We have had cause to note that God has not been silent from the foundation of the world but has spoken openly, freely, and publicly about His great work.²⁸⁵⁴ Now we have this tremendous statement that He has *“proclaimed to the end of the world.”* We take this to indicate that in every place God's proclamation has gone forth, but it could also be taken to indicate to the end of the world in time. In other words, the Lord has spoken to the world. We see this in the incarnation. When Christ entered the world the news was proclaimed to the whole world! And it is being continually proclaimed whether we do our job of preaching and teaching or not. Never think that the Lord will fail in the work He has decided.

The announcement is to be proclaimed to the whole world, as the opening words of verse 11 inform us, but the message is directed to *“the daughter of Zion.”* In this we learn that the Lord is

2852 For evidence of this see: Romans 1:8; 10:18; Colossians 1:6,23; 1Thessalonians 1:8.

2853 Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15.

2854 See Isaiah 40:21; 48:16 for example.

Studies in Isaiah.

primarily concerned about His people, the church of the firstborn, the new Zion. Whereas the world promotes the great names, the high up wealthy ones, and those who have achieved man's great accolades, the Lord announces to the entire world that He has brought salvation for His people. There is no mention of those the world esteems. These may be lauded and worshipped in the world today but ultimately their elevation is fleeting, and their rewards are meagre and temporal. The proclamation made is of a certain salvation for it is stated: *"surely your salvation is coming."* As we noted earlier this can be applied to the return from exile, the coming of Christ and especially in His work at Calvary, and to His final return when salvation will be fully secured. In all cases the salvation the Lord brings is absolutely certain. Of that there can be no doubt.

The coming salvation is then further explained by these words: *"His reward is with Him, and His work before Him."* The Lord is coming with a *"reward"* and a set *"work"* which is to be accomplished. That work we now know has been accomplished! The Saviour has His rewards and these will accompany His salvation.

62:12.

The passage concludes in verse 12 with some wonderful statements about the people of God uttered by others (*"they"*). The saved ones are to be called *"the Holy people"* by which we recognise the important truth that salvation is *unto* holiness. We often hear people talk about being saved from sin and disaster, or from an old ruined way of life, which is truly wonderful! But we rarely hear people speak with much enthusiasm about coming to a life of holiness. Be assured reader that *"without holiness"* it is impossible to see the Lord or to enter heaven's glory.²⁸⁵⁵ Holiness, being set apart, expressing godliness and righteousness is by no means dreary or lifeless as many think. Why ever there is this idea that godly people have no fun and go about dressed in black mourning and wailing I shall never understand. Can the unrepentant worldly person truly rejoice or have happiness? Well in the great and good grace of God there is some happiness and joy in the world, but the joy of the redeemed is without variation and is abundant! These people are also known as *"the Redeemed of the Lord,"* or, in other words, the ones purchased again by the Lord. Like freed slaves whose lives were once set in squalor and depravity but have now been rescued by a benefactor who sets them free, *"the Redeemed of the Lord,"* are freed from sin and death, and given new life!

The city where these *"Holy People"* and *"Redeemed of the Lord"* are found is one that will

2855 Hebrews 12:14.

Studies in Isaiah.

be *"Sought Out,"* because it is a *"City Not Forsaken."* The Lord has set His blessing upon the church of the firstborn. Be it realised that this does not guarantee physical safety and blessing for any known as a Christian church. Neither are we to assume that a church that does have blessing is a true church. The true Christian church is known by its people who are given unto the Lord in word and deed. The true church is loved and blessed by the Lord even though it will suffer persecution and tribulation. But these things are for its blessing and benefit – ultimately. The Lord will never forsake His people. And the church – the true church of the firstborn – will be like a magnet attracting all those whom the Lord calls. Those being saved will seek out such a place where the true God is proclaimed.

Chapter 75.

Isaiah 63:1-6.

The Victor over Edom!

Textual analysis.

#63 1 Who *is*

this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah,
this *One who is* glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength?—

“I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.”

2 Why *is*

Your apparel red,
and Your garments like one who treads in the wine press?

3 “I have trodden the wine press alone,
and from the peoples no one *was* with Me.

For I have
trodden them in My anger,
and trampled them in My fury;
their blood is sprinkled upon My garments,
and I have
stained all My robes.

4 For

the day of vengeance *is* in My heart,
and the year of My redeemed has come.

5 I looked, but *there was* no one to help,
and I wondered that *there was* no one to uphold;
therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me;
and My own fury, it sustained Me.

6 I have

trodden down the peoples in My anger,
made them drunk in My fury,
and brought down their strength to the earth.”

General comments.

These six verses may seem awkward at first reading but they form an extremely important part of the revelation of God concerning the Servant King. There is much debate amongst commentators concerning the main import of these few words. Does it speak of some particular historical event concerning Edom? Or is it rather to be taken as a picture of Christ's return and

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vengeance on all His enemies? It would seem that like many prophecies the image is pregnant with deep meaning. On the surface we have a conversation between Isaiah the prophet who asks two questions of the Servant as He approaches Jerusalem from Edom (which lay to the south). There are repeated uses of terms we would connect with judgement ("*anger*," "*fury*,") and a reference to "*the day of vengeance*."²⁸⁵⁶ However the Servant describes Himself as one "*mighty to save*," He speaks of the time of the "*redeemed*," and declares that He has by Himself "*brought salvation*" for Him.²⁸⁵⁷ The image depicted is of one person alone treading a wine press. As this Mighty One has done so in strength and solitude, His garments have become stained with the fruit of His labours. The image is explained as being the treading down of peoples in His anger so that their strength may be brought down to the earth.²⁸⁵⁸ Two names are mentioned in these verses, namely, "*Edom*," and "*Bozrah*." Edom, of course, is another name for Esau, the brother of Jacob by Isaac and Rebekah. His name means "red" and he was a worldly hunter who lived for this world and its pleasures. The name "*Bozrah*" means either a sheepfold or a fortress, from the root meaning of fortified enclosure, or (possibly) from the idea of to separate and protect. We have already come across "*Bozrah*" in chapter 34 where we discovered that this was the site of a sacrifice of God.²⁸⁵⁹ We noted there that Bozrah was, by its name, a "place of protected bondage to sensuality and worldliness" which was "ripe for sacrifice" (judgement).²⁸⁶⁰ And we suggested that all who emulate Edom (Esau) by indulging only in this world and its pleasures would suffer the same fate as did Edom and Bozrah of old. These sites and their destruction are thus a fitting illustration of final judgement. But it is vital to recognise that what is being judged is sin, worldliness, sensuality, and the indulgence of sinful desires in this world. Thus whilst the main reference is to the final judgement in the verses we are considering (Isaiah 63:1-6) we must not ignore the fact that Christ's sacrifice at Calvary was essentially a judgement on all world and fleshly sins. In effect God judged the sins of believers by trampling them down in the sacrifice of His Son at Calvary. This was effected too by the Son for all three persons of the Godhead always work in concert and harmony.

Looking a little closer at the text we are struck first of all by the repeated use of the personal pronouns ("*I*," "*Me*," "*My*").²⁸⁶¹ This passage is an expression of the Servant's work of judgement upon sensual sin. We understand the main reference to when Christ returns, but cannot ignore the

2856 The word "*anger*" occurs at Isaiah 63:3,6, whilst "*fury*" occurs at 63:3,5,6, and "*vengeance*" is found at: Isaiah 63:4.

2857 Isaiah 63:1,4,5.

2858 Isaiah 63:3,6.

2859 Isaiah 34:5,6.

2860 See comments on Isaiah 34:5,6.

2861 Isaiah 63:1,3,4,5,6.

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fact that what Christ achieved at Calvary was also judgement on the flesh.

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.²⁸⁶²

63:1.

The passage begins with a description of the Servant arriving from Edom and Bozrah, after the work of judgement (treading the wine press) has been done.²⁸⁶³ The words seem to be those of the prophet asking the question whom this might be, and there is a response from the One coming, which also gives us information about the nature of this Victor over Edom (sin in the flesh). The prophet notices the stained garments first, but then gives us some delightfully incredible statements which are enhanced by the approaching One. This One is:

- [1] glorious in His apparel,
- [2] travelling in the greatness of His strength.
- [3] One who speaks in righteousness.
- [4] One who is mighty to save.

Now whilst the “*garments*” of the approaching One were observed to be “*dyed*,” His “*apparel*” is described as being “*glorious*.” The first term is the Hebrew: בָּגֵד *begeg*, which most often signifies the outer covering of a person. The second term is the Hebrew: לְבוּשׁ *lebûš* which simply means “clothing” but can have the signification of clothing which is in some way splendid.²⁸⁶⁴ Now in this case we are told that the clothes of the approaching Victor are “*glorious*,” which word has the sense of “swollen,” or indicative of being “broad,” “wide,” and “high.” In other words adorned, conspicuous and readily seen. Clothing is indicative of a person's character or disposition as illustrated, for example, by the bride of Christ:

And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.²⁸⁶⁵

2862 Romans 8:3.
2863 Isaiah 63:1.
2864 Esther 6:8,9,10,11.
2865 Revelation 19:8.

Studies in Isaiah.

The glorious apparel of the approaching Victor displays His righteousness in all its beauty. But not only is He beautiful, He is also of unsurpassed strength, for He comes *“travelling in the greatness of His strength.”* The ESV and the NASB suggest *“marching”* where the NKJV offers *“travelling.”* The word employed here is unusual as its primary meaning is “to incline,” “to tip,” or “to bend.” The idea seems to be of one coming in victory bending his head in acknowledgement of his great achievements. The word rendered *“greatness”* is really abundance signifying that this One has more than enough and much left over. In other words His strength and power is hardly taxed at all. The term used here (כֹּחַ *kōah*) signifies “to be firm” and can apply to strength, power, ability or wealth. It leads us to think of the Lord as *“The Rock”* who is immovable, sure and firm able to do all that is necessary and more.

Now the Victor comes and tells us whom He is, namely, *“I who speak in righteousness.”* The personal pronoun comes first reminding us of the self-existent one (the *“I AM”*) who alone can claim existence that is by no means contingent nor dependent. But note that His main purpose now is to *“speak,”* and furthermore that what He utters is *“in righteousness.”* The work of judgement is done. Now the Victor comes to speak. It is for this reason that we must see this passage as referring *both* to Christ's work of salvation at Calvary where He trod the wine press and destroyed the works of the flesh and of the devil, and to His final victory when He returns. He comes now to speak *“in righteousness”* to us. Taking the passage as referring to Christ's victory at Calvary, to some (those being saved) His speech is unto salvation, but to others it is a warning of judgement to come.²⁸⁶⁶ Linking the passage to the final judgement then the Lord speaks in righteousness to those who are entering heaven because their faith has been credited to them as righteousness, but to the damned God's righteous justice is being finally meted out.

Then also we hear that this One is *“mighty to save.”* Again such language indicates that what the Victor has done is to bring judgement to bear upon sin, the flesh and the devil, for the purpose of salvation. Again we can apply this to the Lord's offer of salvation to those who trust and repent following the work at Calvary, or we may apply it to that point in time when the Lord returns and welcomes home His faithful ones who have trusted Him. He is *“mighty to save”* all who turn to Him in true faith and repentance, and He is *“mighty to save” finally* (by welcoming them home) all those who have trusted in the present age. The prophet Zephaniah may have been influenced by this passage in his writing (under inspiration) of these words we find in his last chapter:

2866 1Corinthians 1:18.

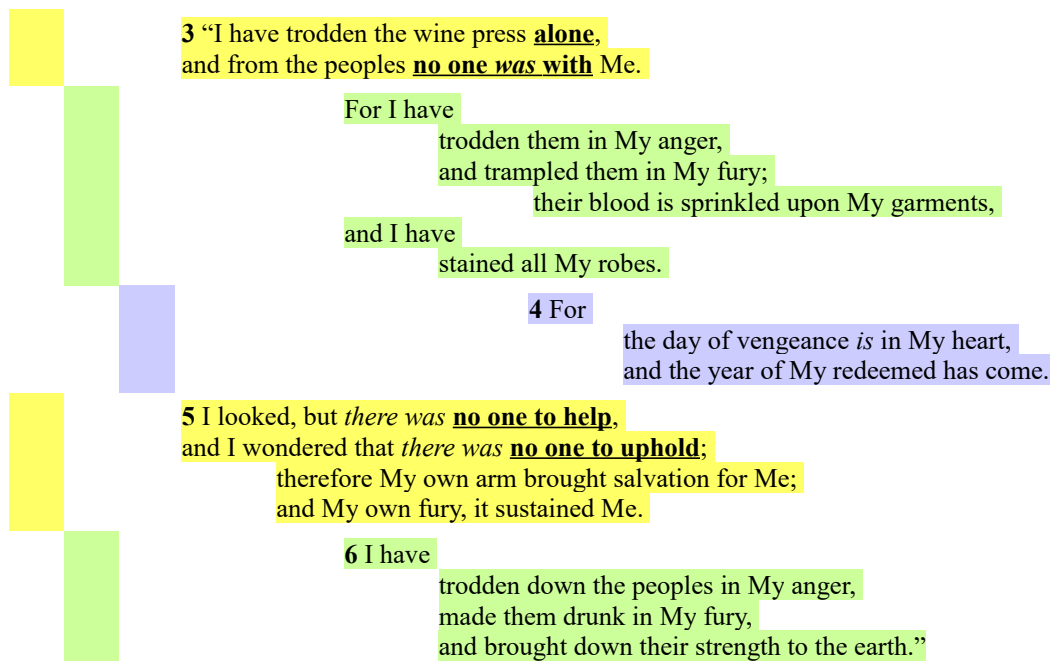
Studies in Isaiah.

The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save.²⁸⁶⁷

What a glorious introduction to the Victor over Edom (the flesh)! He has won the victory over sin fully, because of His glorious nature and His abundant power, ability, and strength. He speaks to us in righteousness and is more than able to rescue and deliver. What more could we ask? Isn't this the greatest thing and so needful for today? People scrabble for solutions looking to the experts, the scientists and so on but what can they offer? Not much I can tell you! But this One has defeated the fallen sinful human nature (the flesh) completely, and comes in His strength and righteousness – He is true!

63:2-6. General considerations.

The prophet then asks his second question (*“Why is Your apparel red and Your garments like one who treads in the wine press?”*) which draws our attention to the work of this One now completed (as indicated by the past tense in this NKJV translation). The Lord takes up the metaphor used by the prophet, however the form of His response is rather complex. Verse 3a is enlarged upon in verse 5, and verse 3b is closely connected with verse 6. This leaves verse 4 in the centre as the focal point. The analysis would look like this:



2867 Zephaniah 3:17.

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It is to be noted, however that the first line is also connected with verse 3b and 5 because of the idea of treading the wine press. What is more, there are elements in verses 5 and 6 which take the idea further than their counterparts (verses 3a and 3b).

63:4. *The day of vengeance ... the year of My redeemed ...*

The central idea of this passage is contained in verse 4 which gives us the reason for this great work. The reason is twofold. First it is because in His very heart lies the need to deal with all that is wrong and out-of-true. All sin must be dealt with justly. Vengeance is something that belongs to God alone.²⁸⁶⁸ There is a “*day*” coming on which all must be accounted for. This is referred to often as “*the day of the Lord*” but is here termed “*the day of vengeance*” to point to the fact that the justice of God will be meted out.²⁸⁶⁹ Now in our poor human understanding we often think of vengeance as simply tit-for-tat and just a means of getting back at someone for some unfathomable reason. Here, however, there is only purity and beauty in view. God is never capricious and only does good. He will not acquit the guilty or, as the NASB puts it: “*He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.*”²⁸⁷⁰ He has provided mercy and grace! In fact the Scriptures where we read that the Lord will not let the guilty go free, open with statements about the loving kindness and mercy of God. Take, for example, the occasion where the Lord reveals Himself to Moses a second time on Mount Sinai:

5 Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. **6** And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, **7** keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.”²⁸⁷¹

Out of the Lord's abundant mercy and goodness we discover that He is the One who will preserve mercy “*for thousands*” and is more than willing to forgive “*iniquity and transgression and sin.*” This forgiveness is all explained by the gospel of which we have been reading much of in Isaiah. However, for those who refuse to receive the good news and will rebel continually then there is nothing left for them but punishment. All sin must be dealt with and it is either dealt with by the

2868 Deuteronomy 32:35; Psalm 94:1; Romans 12:19.

2869 Isaiah 2:12; 13:6,9; 34:8; 58:13.

2870 Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18, NASB.

2871 Exodus 34:5-7.

Studies in Isaiah.

substitute (Christ Jesus), or it is dealt with personally. Hence the Lord will never clear the guilty or let them go unpunished. The second reason for this action and work concerns the “redeemed.” Those who have called upon the Lord for rescue and forgiveness are also in the Lord's heart and whilst there is a “day” for vengeance, there will be a “year” for His “redeemed.” We are not, of course, to take this literally so that the redeemed will only have a year. The idea is that the time of redemption is much greater.

63:3,5. The One mighty to save.

The second main theme is that this Victor who is “mighty to save” has done the work entirely on His own. We are not thereby to consider that the Father and the Holy Spirit are not anywhere in view. Rather what is being affirmed is that considered from the point of view of humanity, this glorious One was utterly alone:

He trod the wine press “alone.” (Verse 3).

From the realm of the peoples (i.e. humanity) “no one was with” Him. (Verse 3).

Even though He looked there was “no one to help.” (Verse 5).

He was astonished that there was “no one to uphold.” (Verse 5).

Has anyone ever been so alone? Loneliness is a difficult thing to grasp. In many ways we are all somewhat isolated because none truly share our thoughts and experiences. For all the talk of “soulmates” in modern culture yet the following truth still stands:

The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy.²⁸⁷²

And yet God knows us from beginning to end and from head to toe!²⁸⁷³ But Christ was all alone amongst humanity. Consider those whom He called to be His disciples. They did love Him but they struggled greatly to understand Him and where He was coming from. Their comprehension was dim. (I know mine would have been dimmer). Now as the Saviour, the sinless Son of Man looked around Him what did He see? There was none truly “with” Him, there was “no one to help,” and “no one to uphold.” He was truly and supremely all “alone.” Consider the night before His death. Who was with Him? Were the disciples there when He prayed to His Father? No! They were all

2872 Proverbs 14:10.

2873 Psalm 139:1-6.

Studies in Isaiah.

asleep.²⁸⁷⁴ In His most needful hour Christ was alone humanly speaking. But more than this we note from these statements that there was none other than Christ who could achieve this victory. He trod the wine press alone because no one else was capable of doing so. All others from Adam to the last person on earth born at the moment when Christ returns would not be guiltless and therefore would all be utterly disqualified for such a task.

63:5.

Verse 5 bears further study. The NKJV is not perfect partially because it renders the same Hebrew word in different ways and also because the choice of preposition in one instance is rather confusing. To help I have shown four translations side-by-side below in table 75.1 and it will be helpful to consider these in some detail.

Table 75.1: Different translations of Isaiah 63:5.

NKJV	ESV	NASB	YLT
I looked	I looked	I looked	And I look attentively
but <i>there was</i> no one to help	but there was no one to help	but there was no one to help	and there is none helping
and I wondered	I was appalled	and I was astonished	and I am astonished
that <i>there was</i> no one to uphold	but there was no one to uphold	and there was no one to uphold	that there is none supporting
therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me	so my own arm brought me salvation	so My own arm brought salvation to Me	and give salvation to me doth mine own arm
and My own fury, it sustained Me	and my wrath upheld me	and My wrath upheld Me	And my wrath -- it hath supported me

To begin, we note that the YLT brings out the idea of looking with attention. This was no mere casual glance or scan of the situation, but a detailed perusal and investigation. There was a serious search. Was anyone to be found who could help? After careful investigation the answer is that there was none. The choice of the word “*wondered*” in the NKJV is rather misleading for the intention is to show that the lack of finding anyone to help is astonishing or appalling, as the other three versions render it. The same type of thought comes in the first chapter where there is utter amazement that Israel did not know God despite all that he had done for them as His own dear

2874 Matthew 26:40,43,45.

Studies in Isaiah.

children.²⁸⁷⁵ There was no one who could “*uphold*,” or support this One. There was no companion or aid. The same Hebrew word used in this middle part of verse 5 is also used at the end, so it is unhelpful of the NKJV to use a different word (“*sustained*”). All the other versions use the same English word in both cases. Now the Victor single-handedly brings salvation *to* Himself by the strength and power of His “*own arm*.” The NKJV has “*for Me*” rather than “to Me” which is allowable, but since the Victor is not Himself in need of salvation, it is better to see this as Him bringing about salvation for His use to confer on whom He wishes. The last clause “*and My own fury, it sustained Me*,” suggests the idea of making a complete end of the work. He continued in this great work until His fury was fully exhausted. No sin, iniquity, evil, transgression, nor error will be allowed to go unnoticed for all must be dealt with.

63:3b,6. Judgement upon all.

The third main theme comes in verses 3b and 6. The word “*peoples*” is not the word used of the (Gentile) “*nations*” but signifies any group, tribe or nation and so may include the people of God.²⁸⁷⁶ In verse 3 we read that the Victor has “*trodden them*” and has “*trampled them*,” but these are translations of the same Hebrew word: דָּרַךְ *dārak* “to tread.” In verse 6 another Hebrew word is used: בָּטַס *bûs*, which signifies “to trample in pieces,” or “to stamp on.” This action of treading on and stamping on is well illustrated by the idea of treading grapes in the wine press. The end result is that the peoples' blood is now spattered upon the Victor's garments so that it “*stained*” all His robes. This is not an image we like to consider. But think carefully here. The Victor is the righteous holy One who only does good and who has come with salvation! His judgement upon sin and rebellion is fully deserving. Although we shudder and recoil from such images because we know that no man could do such in righteousness, God is not like us and He can only do that which is good and wholly righteous. Thus when the Victor treads down and stamps on the people it is because they are fully deserving of such action. The last phrase in verse 6 hints at their deserving such. The peoples have exercised their strength in complete opposition to God. therefore the Lord brings down their strength and renders it of no account. There is a stark change in the imagery in the penultimate phrase of verse 6. The Lord has “*made them drunk*” in His anger and wrath. The idea here is that the people have been made to sup the just deserts of their rebellion and sin and this has rendered them utterly incapable so that their strength is reduced to nothing.

²⁸⁷⁵ Isaiah 1:3. See also Jeremiah 2:12,13.

²⁸⁷⁶ Isaiah 63:3,6.

Studies in Isaiah.

We note further the terms used to express the wrath of God in these two verses. Two terms are used and each is used twice. The first used in each instance ("*anger*") is from the Hebrew: אַף *'ap*, which actually means the "nostril" but is used of a person whose anger causes their nostrils to flare. The second ("*fury*") is from the Hebrew: חֵמָה *hēmāh*, which has the idea of "heat," or "hot displeasure." We remind ourselves that God is not capricious nor is He one to lose control. When human beings display anger they turn red with heat and their nostrils flare up. These terms are used of God here so that we understand the depths and the extent of His anger. But God is never out of control. His anger is the settled displeasure and righteous rejection of all that is unholy and sinful. Such wrath against sin as expressed in the image of treading grapes in a wine press is one which fits both the judgement enacted at Calvary, and also the final expression of His wrath on that last day.

Chapter 76.

Isaiah 63:7-64:12.

A prayer and a plea!

Textual analysis.

7 I will mention

the loving kindnesses of the Lord

and the praises of the Lord,

according to

all that the Lord has bestowed on us,

and the great goodness toward the house of Israel,

which He has bestowed on them

according to

His mercies,

according to

the multitude of His loving kindnesses.

8 For He said,

“surely they *are* My people, children *who* will not lie.”

So He became their Saviour.

9 In all their affliction He was afflicted,

and the Angel of His Presence saved them;

in His love and in His pity He redeemed them;

and He bore them and carried them all the days of old.

10 But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit;

so

He turned Himself against them as an enemy,

and He fought against them.

11 Then he remembered the days of old, Moses *and* his people, *saying*:

“where *is* He

who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock?

Where *is* He

who put His Holy Spirit within them,

12 Who led *them* by the right hand of Moses, with His glorious arm, dividing the water before them to make for Himself an everlasting name,

13 Who led them through the deep,

as a horse in the wilderness, *that* they might not stumble?”

14 As a beast goes down into the valley, *and* the Spirit of the Lord causes him to rest, so You lead Your people, to make Yourself a glorious name.

15 Look down from heaven, and see from Your habitation, holy and glorious.

Where *are*

Your zeal

and Your strength,

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the yearning of Your heart
and Your mercies toward me?
Are they restrained?

16 Doubtless

You *are* our Father,
though Abraham was ignorant of us,
and Israel does not acknowledge us.
You, O Lord, *are*
our Father;
our Redeemer from Everlasting *is* Your name.

17 O Lord, why have You

made us stray from Your ways,
and hardened our heart from Your fear?

Return for Your servants' sake, the tribes of Your inheritance.

18 Your holy people have possessed *it* but a little while;
our adversaries have trodden down Your sanctuary.

19 We have become *like*
those of old, over whom You never ruled,
those who were never called by Your name.

#64 1 Oh,

that You would rend the heavens!
That You would come down!
That the mountains might shake at Your presence—
2As fire burns brushwood,
as fire causes water to boil—
to make Your name known to Your adversaries,
that the nations may tremble at Your presence!

3 When You did awesome things *for which* we did not look,
You came down,
the mountains shook at Your presence.

4 For since the beginning of the world *men* have
not heard

nor perceived by the ear,
nor has the eye seen any God besides You,
who acts for the one who waits for Him.

5 You meet him
who rejoices and does righteousness,
who remembers You in Your ways.

You are indeed angry,
for we have sinned—
in these ways we continue;
and we need to be saved.

6 But

we are all like an unclean *thing*,
and all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags;
we all fade as a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

7 And *there is* no one
who calls on Your name,
who stirs himself up to take hold of You;
for
You have hidden Your face from us,
and have consumed us because of our iniquities.

8 But now, O Lord,
You *are* our Father;

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we *are* the clay,
and You our potter;
and all we *are* the work of Your hand.

9 Do not be furious, O Lord,
nor remember iniquity forever;
indeed, please look—we all *are* Your people!

10 Your holy cities are a wilderness,
Zion is a wilderness,
Jerusalem a desolation.

11 Our holy and beautiful temple, where our fathers praised You, is burned up with fire;
and all our pleasant things are laid waste.

12 Will You restrain Yourself because of these *things*, O Lord?
Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?

This rather long passage forms a unit because of the petitioning nature of its contents. There are statements of truth, recollections of past history, and pleas for the Lord to bless and forgive. When we come to Isaiah 65 we are back to what the Lord has to say as shown by the repeated use of the phrase “*says the Lord.*” Although my analysis is by no means perfect it seems to me that there are three main petitions in this meditation and prayer. I have organised the contents as follows but this suggestion is certainly open to correction.

[1] A recollection of God's goodness and Israel's past variable history. (Isaiah 63:7-14).

Translation issues. (Isaiah 63:11,12).

[2] Petition 1: Look down! Where are You? (Isaiah 63:15).

[3] Recollection of their adoption. (Isaiah 63:16).

[4] Petition 2: Why have you made us stray? Oh that You would come down! (Isaiah 63:17-64:3).

[5] Recollection of God's favour to men and man's failures. (Isaiah 64:4-8).

[a] One who waits for God.

[b] One who rejoices and does righteousness.

[c] One who remembers You in Your ways.

[6] Petition 3: Do not be furious! (Isaiah 64:9-12).

[1] A recollection of God's goodness and Israel's past variable history. (Isaiah 63:7-14).

General comments.

We begin by noting that three times in verse 7 we have the title “*Lord,*” whilst in verses 8 and 9 we have mention of the “*Saviour,*” and “*the Angel of His Presence,*” which titles point us toward the second person of the Holy Trinity. Then in the last four verses of this passage from verse 10 to 14 we have the “*Holy Spirit*” identified twice and the “*Spirit of the Lord*” in the last verse. These titles show us that the Trinity is in full view, but they also serve to indicate aspects of the particular work attributable to each, remembering at once that the three work in concert and harmony. It is noteworthy that the “*Saviour*” is featured at the height of redemption in verses 8 and 9, whilst the “*Holy Spirit*” is the focus in the journey of the people from Egypt through the Red Sea.

63:7.

The first word in the Hebrew of verse 7 is “*loving kindness,*” and this serves to indicate the central feature, namely, that the prophet is concerned to remember those things he is sure about concerning the Lord. The idea within the word given as “*mention*” here is essentially “to call to mind” or “to remember.” And so Isaiah is rehearsing his theology. Such a task is not simply an intellectual exercise because (as we shall see) the theology recalled is rooted in history and experience. Nevertheless it is vital to recall and remember those things we truly know about the Lord. Verse 7 begins and ends with the word “*loving kindness.*” To begin with Isaiah links this attribute of the Lord with His “*praises.*” In other words, this attribute is one which leads to true praise and worship. But he ends this introductory sentence by affirming that the Lord's loving kindness is abundant or multitudinous. His mercy is never ending. In the midst of verse 7 another Hebrew word is rendered by the NKJV as “*mercies.*” This word is: **רחם** *raḥam*, which really means “compassion” or “to love tenderly.” The word is also used to indicate the womb as the seat of a mother's tender love and care. Now Isaiah recalls the Lord's **great** loving kindness to Israel in accordance with their experiences here in a general sense. Specifics will come later on, but for now Isaiah simply states that there were a great many blessings that Israel had “*bestowed*” upon them. This word “*bestowed*” is used of weaning a child or of giving to someone bountifully. It was not just that they had received a few benefits from God. No! They were treated with an abundance as shown by the phrases used (“*all that the Lord has bestowed,*” God's “*great goodness,*” and the

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“multitude of His loving kindnesses”). God's goodness to Israel was *“great”* in the sense of abundance or of a multitude. Thus in these opening ideas the prophet is keen to recall the incredible goodness, mercy, and compassion of the Lord. It is utterly impossible to overstate how marvellous, kind, generous, and merciful the Lord is. But we must continue to remind ourselves that the Lord is equally holy and angry with all sin.

63:8.

When we reach verse 8 the prophet turns his thoughts to some specific instances of God's great goodness and His multitudinous loving kindnesses. Isaiah recalls a statement made by the Lord which is rendered in the NKJV as:

*surely they are My people, children who will not lie.*²⁸⁷⁷

Other translations follow this type of rendition closely but a serious problem presents itself from such translations, for the sense seems to be that of the Lord's expectation and hope that His sons *“will not lie,”* (or *“deal falsely”* in the NASB and the ESV). The opening word in the sentence is more usually translated as “only.” My translation of this phrase would be as follows:

only they are My people, sons who must not lie.

In other words, Israel alone amongst all the nations were the ones that the Lord had chosen, and these were to be sons that would not lie. This latter part leads us to consider the ten commandments and the whole sense brings us to Israel's origins as recorded in the book of Exodus. Israel was chosen and was commanded to keep the law of which the command not to lie was but one aspect put here as an example. At the end of verse 8 we have another fact intimated about the Lord in connection with Israel. The phrase ought not to be translated as the Lord *“became their Saviour,”* but rather that He *“was their Saviour,”* because this is in fact how they became His chosen and only people.²⁸⁷⁸

2877 Isaiah 63:8.

2878 Exodus 4:22.

63:9.

In verse 9 we get a tremendous series of statements about the Lord's actions towards Israel in their past history. No particular event is highlighted because there are too many to recount, but there are nevertheless 'echoes' of the rescue from Egypt (*“saved them,” “redeemed them”*) and the Lord's leading them through the wilderness (*“He bore them and carried them”*). These statements are as follows:

In all their affliction He was afflicted.

The Angel of His presence saved them.

In His love and in His pity He redeemed them.

He bore them and carried them all the days of old.

In the first statement there is an issue of translation to consider. The text reads as follows:

← Hebrew reads from the right

בְּכָל-צָרָתָם לֹא (לוֹ) צָר

in all their affliction

It can be observed that we have one word in brackets (לוֹ). This has been supplied as an alternative to the word present in the text, namely לֹא. Both of these words sound the same, (לֹא is: *lō'* whilst לוֹ is: *lō*). There is thus a dispute as to whether the word should be לֹא which means “no” or “not” or לוֹ meaning “to/for him.” It is easy to see how this could have arisen due to the two words being very close in sound. Using each of these words would yield the following translations:

With לֹא: In all their affliction, not afflicted (or no affliction).

With לוֹ: In all their affliction, affliction to Him.

In the first option we would have to supply the verb “to be” and some form a pronoun. The obvious choice for the latter would be “He” because in what follows we have “His” and “He” repeatedly, making the sense something like this:

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In all their affliction *was He* not afflicted?

Italics are used simply to highlight the fact that these words are not in the original and have been supplied to make sense in English. Now there is no indication in the text that a question is being asked. However if we remove the question the statement would yield a contradiction with what follows (i.e. we would have something like this: In all their affliction *He was* not afflicted). Since such a statement seems totally impossible the two alternatives suggested seem to be the only options to consider. Now in point of fact it is fairly obvious that the two are virtually synonymous. The essential meaning is that when Israel suffered and were afflicted, then He too endured the same.

This first statement shows just how much the Lord was willing to do. It speaks first of the Lord's willingness to be identified with Israel. To be willing to share in another's afflictions means that you are not ashamed to call those whom you share with your brethren.²⁸⁷⁹ When we consider Israel's origins from a deceitful man (Jacob) tricked into polygamy and whose family can only be described as “dysfunctional,” we are at once amazed and also greatly encouraged.²⁸⁸⁰ If God choose Jacob then why not us? But this statement does more, for it leads us to consider His act of substitution. If the Passover be referenced here we recall the fact that the blood of a lamb without blemish must have be daubed on the door posts and lintels for those who partook of the sacrifice inside the house to escape destruction.²⁸⁸¹ Christ is our Passover, the lamb slain from the foundation of the world whose blood was shed for us and whose flesh we have imbibed by faith.²⁸⁸² Can we not see here in this incredible statement a word picture of the suffering of the Saviour both in His life on earth and on the cross? He was truly afflicted for us!

The second statement (“*and the angel of His Presence saved them*”) leads us to consider a number of incidents where the Lord's very presence saved Israel. For example, consider the Israelites hard pressed on all sides at the Red Sea with Egypt in pursuit as recorded in Exodus 14. You may recall that it was the Lord who brought them to this position where they were hemmed in on all sides.²⁸⁸³ The people were terribly afraid and began to moan, but Moses called for them to fear not and to be still so that they would see the salvation that God would bring about.²⁸⁸⁴ Then we discover that the Lord's plan was to lead the Israelites on dry ground through the parted waters of

2879 Hebrews 2:11.

2880 Genesis 29 & 30.

2881 Exodus 12:6-13.

2882 Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; John 6:51-56; 1Corinthians 5:7; Revelation 13:8.

2883 Exodus 14:1-4.

2884 Exodus 14:13,14.

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the Red Sea but first He made a separation between the Egyptians and Israel:

19 And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. **20** So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness *to the one*, and it gave light by night *to the other*, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.²⁸⁸⁵

And so the Angel of God's Presence saved Israel again! Heed the words of the Psalmist:

6 This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard *him*, and saved him out of all his troubles. **7** The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.²⁸⁸⁶

How supremely marvellous! We know, of course, that the Lord does not promise a trouble-free life, but nothing whatsoever can separate us from Christ's love and mercy.²⁸⁸⁷

In the third statement (*"in His love and in His pity He redeemed them"*) we learn that He was so merciful and loving to come and purchase a people who had nothing whatsoever worthy of redemption! The Lord did not choose them and have pity on them for any other reason than that He loved them.²⁸⁸⁸ Now the form of this word rendered here as *"pity"* is also found in Genesis 19:16 where we read of the Lord's mercy towards Lot:

And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.²⁸⁸⁹

Lot vacillated (*"lingered"*) and in his wavering the angels grabbed hold of him forcefully at the Lord's direction and command. In mentioning redemption we are reminded again of the idea of the 'kinsman' who acts on behalf of a relative to restore and repurchase what they had forfeited. This theme is a major one in Isaiah with the word coming 27 times in the book which is only beaten for frequency by the book of Leviticus with 28 occurrences, whilst the next nearest, the book of Psalms, has 23.²⁸⁹⁰

2885 Exodus 14:19,20.

2886 Psalm 34:6,7. See also Psalm 35:5,6.

2887 Romans 8:35,38.

2888 Deuteronomy 7:7,8.

2889 Genesis 19:16.

2890 Leviticus 19:20; 25:25(x3),26(x2),29(x2),30,31,32,48(x2),49(x3),54; 27:13,15,19,20(x2),27(x2),28,29,31,33.

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The final statement (*“and He bore them and carried them all the days of old”*) concludes this general overview of God's love and care towards Israel. That the statement is a general one is indicated by the phrase *“all the days of old.”* The sense is, throughout their history. Two words are used to suggest the idea of “lifting up” partly because of their sound as shown here by a transliteration of the Hebrew:

way^enaṭ^elēm way^enaś^eēm

and He bore them and He carried them

It can be seen from this that there is only a little difference between the two words and this alliteration serves to emphasise the point that the Lord most certainly carried them and bore them throughout their history. That such was the case is shown by the following references one of which we came across earlier in Isaiah 46:

*And in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.*²⁸⁹¹

10 He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. **11** As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, **12** So the Lord alone led him, and *there was* no foreign god with him.²⁸⁹²

*Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been upheld by Me from birth, who have been carried from the womb.*²⁸⁹³

There is clearly, therefore, this sense that the Lord carried Israel as a father carries a son.

Psalm 19:14; 25:22; 26:11; 31:5; 34:22; 44:26; 49:7,15; 55:18; 69:18; 71:23; 72:14; 74:2; 77:15; 78:35,42; 103:4; 106:10; 107:2(x2); 119:134,154; 130:8. Isaiah 1:27; 29:22; 35:9; 41:14; 43:1,14; 44:6,22,23,24; 47:4; 48:17,20; 49:7,26; 50:2; 51:10; 52:3,9; 54:5,8; 59:20; 60:16; 62:12; 63:4,9,16.

2891 Deuteronomy 1:31.

2892 Deuteronomy 32:10-12.

2893 Isaiah 46:3.

63:10.

The text then moves astonishingly in verse 10 to record Israel's unfaithfulness and rebellion despite the Lord's incredible care and mercy. This is the great problem and wonder of humanity. God is good. Beautifully and righteously good. There is no evil, no wickedness, no error, no taint of anything corrupt at all in the Lord God. His doings toward mankind is always only good and right. And yet mankind consistently and repeatedly rebels and turns against Him! This fact is so obvious today and at whatever period one chooses to look, or in any place one considers worthy of investigation. Mankind rebels and departs from God even though He is always good and right towards us. Thus Israel “*rebelled*” acting as a disobedient son, and this “*grieved*” the Holy Spirit. It is noteworthy that almost from the moment that Israel were rescued they were rebellious and a grief to God. Hardly had they rejoiced at crossing through the Red Sea parted miraculously by the Lord, when we find them complaining to Moses for lack of drinkable water at Marah, the site of bitter water.²⁸⁹⁴ Even after a short period at Elim where there was plenty of water we find the people complaining again to Moses.²⁸⁹⁵ This is how the people responded to their situation in the wilderness of Sin having left the oasis at Elim:

Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat *and* when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.²⁸⁹⁶

This repeated complaining by the people as they faced different and new circumstances came to such a head that the Lord would have destroyed them but for Moses' intercession. The story of Israel's first approach to the promised land where they sent out spies is recorded in Numbers 13 and 14. After the spies made their first report concerning the land and ten of the twelve gave a bad report, we discover the people are once again in fear bewailing their poor existence, wishing they were in Egypt or had died along the way.²⁸⁹⁷ There then follows a pathetic attempt at a coup to make a return to Egypt at which point Aaron and Moses fall prostrate before the assembly, and Joshua and Caleb the other two spies call the people to hear their faithful report and not to fear the people of Canaan.²⁸⁹⁸ Despite their valiant attempt to plead with the people, all the congregation prepared to

2894 Exodus 15:1-21,24.

2895 Exodus 16:2.

2896 Exodus 16:3.

2897 Numbers 13:32; 14:2,3.

2898 Numbers 14:4-9.

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stone Moses and Aaron at which juncture the Lord appears to the people, but speaks to Moses.²⁸⁹⁹

11 Then the Lord said to Moses: “How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? **12** I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.”²⁹⁰⁰

Moses replies in an utterly amazing way, reminding the Lord of His grace and mercy, and interceding for the people requesting pardon for their rebellion.²⁹⁰¹ The Lord grants this request for pardon, but there are new conditions, and in His response we learn more of Israel's rebellion up to this time which is no more than a year since departing from Egypt. The Lord responds:

20 ... I have pardoned, according to your word; **21** but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord— **22** because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice.²⁹⁰²

The people had put the Lord to the test “*ten times,*” one of which was the making of an idol under Aaron's lead!²⁹⁰³

Every time that people rebel against the Lord, they place themselves outside of His care and set themselves in opposition to Him. There is grace and mercy for those who believe but only wrath and condemnation for those who do not.²⁹⁰⁴ And thus the rebellious find God as an enemy. This is truly frightening! The Lord “*turned Himself against*” the people becoming their “*enemy*” so that “*He fought against them.*” We struggle to understand such thoughts *only* because we have such a poor view of sin, truth, and righteousness. The Lord is “*valiant for the truth*” and will never let sin and rebellion go without correction and punishment, because sin and rebellion are unrighteous and evil.²⁹⁰⁵ Consider how many times the rebellion of Israel yielded difficulties and troubles. Pharaoh who would not let the people go had to endure the plagues God sent before finally losing his life in the Red Sea. Israel too faced God's attacks as is clear from their history and from reading the prophets.

2899 Numbers 14:10.

2900 Numbers 14:11,12.

2901 Numbers 14:13-19.

2902 Numbers 14:20b-22.

2903 Exodus 32:1f.

2904 John 3:16,18,36.

2905 Jeremiah 9:3.

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Translation issues. (Isaiah 63:11,12).

Before we continue in our comments on the text, verses 11 and 12 require a little attention with regard to translation. There is some debate as to whom the subject of verse 11 might be, and another sticking point is verse 12 which is translated in a variety of ways.

First in connection with verse 11, I offer the following translation which have put beside the NKJV and four others for comparison (table 76.1).

Table 76.1: Translation of Isaiah 63:11.

My trans.	NKJV	YLT	NASB	ESV	HCSB
Then He remembered the days of old, Moses, His people.	Then he remembered the days of old, Moses <i>and</i> his people, <i>saying</i> :	And He remembereth the days of old, Moses -- his people.	Then His people remembered the days of old, of Moses.	Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people.	Then He remembered the days of the past, the days of Moses and his people.
Where [is] the one causing them to go from the sea with the shepherds of His flock?	“Where <i>is</i> He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock?	Where [is] He who is bringing them up from the sea, the shepherd of his flock?	Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock?	Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock?	Where is He who brought them out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock?
Where [is] the one placing in within Him His Holy Spirit?	Where <i>is</i> He who put His Holy Spirit within them , ?	Where [is] He who is putting in its midst His Holy Spirit?	Where is He who put His Holy Spirit in the midst of them , ?	Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, ?	Where is He who put His Holy Spirit among the flock?

The first clause is fairly straightforward and there is really no need to add words as the NKJV and other versions do (indicated in the NKJV by the italicised words). The statement seems to be that the Lord remembered “*the days of old*” (which phrase we have already seen in verse 9). The NASB translation suggests that it was the people who remembered the past but this cannot be because the verb (זָכַר *zākar*) is in the third person singular masculine. There then follows simply two words: “*Moses,*” and “*His people,*” so these form the essence of His remembrance. The second clause occasions little problem, except to say that the NKJV and YLT version have “*shepherd*” in the singular rather than plural, despite the fact that the Hebrew word we have in our text is in the plural.

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In the final clause there is a marked difference between my translation and all the others. The Hebrew word in question is: **בְּקִרְבּוֹ**. This word has a prefix preposition which is usually translated as “in,” “with,” or “by,” and also has the third person singular masculine suffix (i.e. “he” or “him”). The word itself means “the inward part, (heart)” “the middle,” or “the midst.” It would seem that the second clause which speaks of “*them*” is in connection with “*His people*” of the first clause, whilst the third clause speaks of “*him*” and this is in connection with “*Moses*” from the first part of verse 11. Thus rather than the construction offered by the NKJV:

Where is He who brought **them** up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock?
Where is He who put His Holy Spirit within **them**?

I have suggest the NKJV ought to read like this:

Where is He who brought **them** up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock?
Where is He who put His Holy Spirit within **him**?

In other words whilst the first question concerns “*His people*,” the second refers to “*Moses*.” With regard to verse 12 the translation issue centres around the first part of the verse.

Table 76.2: Translation of Isaiah 63:12.

My trans.	NKJV	YLT	NASB	ESV	HCSB
One causing to go to the right hand of Moses, the arm of His beauty,	Who led <i>them by the right hand</i> of Moses, with His glorious arm,	Leading <i>by the right hand</i> of Moses, the arm of His glory,	Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses,	who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses,	He sent His glorious arm to be at Moses’ right hand,
dividing the waters in front of them	dividing the water before them	cleaving waters from before them,	who divided the waters before them	who divided the waters before them	divided the waters before them
to make Himself an everlasting name.	to make for Himself an everlasting name,	to make to Himself a name age-during.	to make for Himself an everlasting name,	to make for himself an everlasting name,	to obtain eternal fame for Himself,

My attempt agrees broadly with the NASB, ESV and HCSB. The NKJV and YLT suggest that the leading was “*by the right hand of Moses*,” but the preposition “by” is nowhere to be found in the

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text. The sense of this opening part seems to be that there is One who caused to come to the right hand of Moses another who is described as *“the arm of His beauty”* (my trans.), *“the arm of His glory”* (YLT), *“his/His glorious arm”* (NASB, ESV and HCSB). Perhaps the NASB rendition is closest to what I believe the Hebrew demands.

63:11.

Returning to commenting, in verse 11 we find that it is the Lord who now remembers *“the days of old”* and, in particular, He recalls both *“Moses,”* and *“His people.”* Many commentators then suggest that the questions which follow are ones posed by the people. But it seems more likely that these questions are spoken by the Lord as if He were amongst them in order to provoke the people to come to their senses. The first question focuses on the One who brought the people *“up out of the sea”* by which we understand a reference to the Red Sea, and then speaks of the *“shepherds of His flock.”* This later reference to shepherds of the Lord's flock speaks of leaders over the people, which must have come from each tribe and notable family. Later on in their journeys in the wilderness, Moses would be told by the Lord to choose seventy men *“of the elders of Israel,”* whom he knew were already *“elders of the people,”* so that these could bear the heavy burden Moses was carrying. The Lord said that He would *“take of the Spirit”* that was on Moses and would *“put the same upon”* these seventy so that they could *“bear the burden of the people with you [Moses].”*²⁹⁰⁶ The final part of verse 11 in the NKJV (*“who put His Holy Spirit within them”*) seems to fit in well with this account. However as we noted earlier the text really ought to be rendered:

Where is He who put within him His Holy Spirit?²⁹⁰⁷

by which is to be understood a reference to Moses.

63:12.

Verse 12 continues the essence of this questioning by describing further aspects of His great work. As was discussed earlier the NKJV translation of this verse is not correct. Whilst what is offered there is perfectly true, the sense would actually seem to focus on the One who leads both Moses and the people. The translation I suggested earlier:

²⁹⁰⁶ Numbers 11:16,17.

²⁹⁰⁷ Isaiah 63:11 NKJV modified by my translation.

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One causing to go to the right hand of Moses, the arm of His beauty, dividing the waters in front of them, to make Himself an everlasting name.

Might be used to modify the NKJV version so that it would read as follows:

Who caused the arm of His beauty (glory) to go to the right hand of Moses, dividing the water before them to make for Himself an everlasting name.

Thus it was *“the arm of His beauty”* (or *“His glorious arm”* as other versions put it) which divided the waters and made *“for Himself an everlasting name.”* This glorious arm of beauty went to Moses' right hand to lead him and to use him in God's glorious work of salvation and deliverance. It was Moses who raised the staff over the Red Sea, but it was the Lord God who parted the waters. This intimate connection between the actions of Moses commanded by the Lord and the Lord's work can be seen by comparing statements in Exodus 14. First we read of the Lord exhorting Moses not to cry out to Him concerning the situation but to inform the people to move forward. The Lord says to Moses:

*But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.*²⁹⁰⁸

However a few verse later we read these words:

*Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided.*²⁹⁰⁹

Now such action on the part of the Lord was *“to make for Himself an everlasting name.”* Modern ears struggle with such self-promotion but we need to understand that God is perfect, infinitely so, and so it stands to reason that such a good person would want His ways and character displayed as the pinnacle of all that is good. In the world people laud achievement and talent in sport or science or whatever, so why not exalt that which is pure and good bar none and par excellence.

2908 Exodus 14:16.

2909 Exodus 14:21.

Studies in Isaiah.

63:13.

In verse 13 we discover that it was indeed the Lord *“who led them through the deep,”* by which we understand the divided waters of the Red Sea. It is noteworthy that the word used here and rendered as *“deep”* is the same as that found in Genesis 1:2 and that it means water in a turbulent sense, as waters within which there are waves and commotion. There is no sense of it being evil or bad in Genesis 1:2 for in the opening passage of Scripture we have God's creation which is described throughout as *“good.”* Here there is a sense in which the waters were troubled and full of commotion and disturbance, but which have now been divided and heaped up so that they are held at bay by the action of God. From this we cannot fail to see an image of God's good guidance and leading of believers through the troubled waters of this world. How good is the God we adore!

But there is more here, for we get two similes, one at the end of verse 13 and another in verse 14. The Lord's leading is like the leading of *“a horse in the wilderness,”* in order that *“they might not stumble.”* The sense is that in parting the waters there was free course with nothing there to make them stumble. It is difficult leading a horse through rubble or even through water, but here there is a free pathway available.

63:14.

In verse 14 the second illustration moves to consideration of cattle being taken down to fertile regions for pasture. Elements of Psalm 23 come to mind here. It is the Spirit of the Lord (the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity) who is guiding the people as a shepherd would his treasured beast (cattle used for ploughing or carrying burdens). And the purpose? This is twofold. It is in order that this beast may rest (again Psalm 23 comes to mind), and it is so that God would make for Himself *“a glorious name.”* A name which shows forth its true nature – glorious – so that all may know that He (and He alone) is God.

[2] Petition 1: Look down! Where are You? (Isaiah 63:15).

63:15.

After spending some time reflecting on God's wonderful goodness and His work of rescue and deliverance, and the displaying of His *“everlasting”* and *“glorious”* name in bringing them through the Red Sea, the prophet now brings forth the first of his three petitions.

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The prophet appeals to the Lord who is in heaven which he describes as a “*habitation*” which is “*holy and glorious.*” The latter word signifies beauty, splendour, and ornament. Now the prophet asks where the Lord is and why His work is somehow “*restrained.*” The prophet asks this question as to why the Lord restrains Himself from him as an individual who represents the whole nation. In the next verse we have plural references (“*our,*” “*us*”). He appeals to the Lord using four themes as follows:

Your **zeal.**

Your **strength.**

The yearning of Your heart.

Your **mercies.**

The first word is also translated frequently as “*jealousy.*”²⁹¹⁰ The phrase “*the yearning of Your heart,*” is literally “the sound of Your bowels,” indicating a depth of feeling that churns the stomach. The word given as “*mercies,*” is the word for “compassion,” and which is used for the “womb.” In all these words and phrases the intention is to ask: where is your love and compassion for us?

[3] *Recollection of their adoption. (Isaiah 63:16).*

63:16.

At this point the prophet recollects that the people are in fact adopted into the family of God. There is a certainty in these assertions as though he was recalling them for assurance. Twice he asserts that the Lord was their “*Father,*” and once that He was also their “*Redeemer from Everlasting.*” Reference to God as “*Father*” is only found in a few places in the Old Testament.²⁹¹¹ The concept of Israel as God's son is also found in a number of places so the idea of God being Father is far from being absent in the Old Testament.²⁹¹² Yet this concept is far more readily apparent in the New Testament.²⁹¹³

The reference to Abraham's ignorance and Israel's failure to acknowledge them points away

2910 Psalm 79:5; Ezekiel 8:3,5; Zephaniah 1:18; Zechariah 1:14.

2911 See Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 3:4; 31:9.

2912 Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 14:1; Isaiah 1:2; Jeremiah 3:19; 31:20; Hosea 11:1.

2913 Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2; Romans 1:7; 1Corinthians 1:3; 2Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1Thessalonians 1:1; 2Thessalonians 1:1,2; Philemon 1:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

from the need to prove genealogical lineage. These words seem to emphasise the distance both in time and in family lineage between the people of Isaiah's time and the founders of the nation. Abraham as the father of Isaac, the father of Jacob who became Israel, and Israel who was the father of the twelve tribes. Both Abraham and Israel not only had no knowledge of Isaiah and his contemporaries but also the connection between them was (through the passage of time) becoming weaker and less certain. The idea that people of our time can trace lineage back to the patriarchs is stretched. Of course we are all born from Adam, and from Noah and his three sons, so the entire world is related as one humanity. But the concept of a pure tribe of Israelites becomes more and more unlikely because of inter-marriage and adoption of others from beyond the tribe. The fact is that adoption into the family of God is not dependent upon blood relationships but upon faith.

The mention of the Lord here as the “*Redeemer from Everlasting*” points us back first to the Lord's redemption at the Passover in Egypt and the salvation at the Red Sea. But the reference to eternity surely reminds us that God has been our Redeemer since before creation.²⁹¹⁴

[4] Petition 2: Why have you made us stray? Oh that You would come down! (Isaiah 63:17-64:3).

63:17.

This second petition is heartfelt. The opening word is the interrogative with a prefix which could be translated as “for what ...?” The question is forceful. The prophet is seeking to grasp and grapple as to why things were as they were. One thing is in his mind – their departure from true faith – but he expresses it in two clauses which serve also to indicate the way in which sin has its terrible effect. So first he asks why has the Lord made them “*stray from Your ways*”? The verb can be rendered as “to err” and the idea is a veering off course. The verb is an active causative form so the prophet is asking, what was the purpose of causing the people to deviate from His paths? But then the second clause asks about the depths that causes such deviation, and highlights the problem, namely the heart. Why is it that the Lord has hardened their hearts so that they leave off fearing Him? The word that is used here to speak of hardness is used only twice in Scripture. The other occasion is found in Job where the word is given as “*harshly*”:

*She treats her young harshly, as though they were not hers; her labour is in vain, without concern.*²⁹¹⁵

2914 Revelation 13:8.

2915 Job 39:16.

Studies in Isaiah.

It is a strong word. Now it is never the case that God merely hardens peoples' hearts so that they would go astray and wander from the paths of wickedness, so what is behind this question? Well we need to recall the fact that the Lord had spoken to Isaiah about this effect of his words and message at the beginning of his ministry. After Isaiah saw the Lord in the temple and heard His call, the Lord said to Isaiah the following words:

9 And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' **10** "Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed." **11** Then I said, "Lord, how long?" and He answered: "until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate, **12** The Lord has removed men far away, and the forsaken places *are* many in the midst of the land. **13** But yet a tenth *will be* in it, and will return and be for consuming, as a terebinth tree or as an oak, whose stump *remains* when it is cut down. So the holy seed *shall be* its stump."²⁹¹⁶

And so it would seem that the preaching of the word of God which is always in truth and righteousness, and which is designed and intended to bring life and health and peace by repentance and faith, yields hardness of heart. Why so? It is not because of any defect in the word or the message, but rather the defect is in man. Despite all that the Saviour did as He ministered to thousands whilst He walked the promised land, how many were with Him at Calvary? As Paul wrote to the Corinthian church:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.²⁹¹⁷

Next Isaiah makes his urgent request of God to "*return.*"²⁹¹⁸ Earlier in Isaiah chapter 6 he had asked the question "*how long,*" to which the Lord had replied until the cities were destroyed and the land would become desolate.²⁹¹⁹ But now the prophet pleads for the Lord's help before the tribes become extinct.

2916 Isaiah 6:9-13.

2917 1Corinthians 1:18.

2918 Isaiah 63:17.

2919 Isaiah 6:11.

Studies in Isaiah.

63:18.

In verse 18 the prophet states that the people of God had “*possessed*” the land for only a short time. From the entrance into the land until the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (yet in the future as far as Isaiah is concerned) spans more than eight centuries. Up to Isaiah's time the length of time would still measure around seven and half centuries so what is meant here? Homer Hailey makes a very good suggestion:

The following is offered as a probable explanation. In the beginning of Israel's history, Jehovah had said that when they “have been long in the land” and have fully corrupted themselves with idolatry, “ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land” that you go over Jordan to possess (Deut. 4:25-26). The land was woefully corrupted by Manasseh (2Kings 21:1-18); after him there was only one good king, Josiah, who attempted but failed to reform Judah. He was succeeded by four wicked kings, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the Babylonian exile. Could this not be the fulfilment of Isaiah's words that *Thy holy people possessed it (the land) but a little while, for a short time?*²⁹²⁰

The second part of verse 18 would then be a prophetic statement about Nebuchadnezzar's destruction which would come in 586 BC. As a result of this prophetic vision Isaiah comes to describe the people in verse 19 as a people of ancient times who had not been governed by the Lord (“*those of old, over whom You never ruled*”) and who were not known by the name of the Lord (“*those who were never called by Your name*”). It would be as if they had never existed.

Now such statements and questions amount to an expression of the hopelessness of any system that required human effort. The Lord had given Israel every privilege and blessing that it was possible to give to ensure that they could be God's completely. However it all depended upon their obedience. Despite the fact that Israel had the law revealed to them via Moses, and then had all the prophets who received God's word to point the people back to God's ways, they still repeatedly fail. Whatever could work following this?

64:1.

And so in Isaiah 64:1 we hear the prophet issue an impassioned appeal for the Lord to come down and do wonders to make things right and to make His glory known. This is a prayer that all believers resonate with. Oh that the Lord would be near! Now from the expressions used in Isaiah 64 it would seem that Isaiah has in view the Lord's earlier descent at Mount Sinai where “*the whole*

²⁹²⁰ **Homer Hailey.** *A Commentary on Isaiah.* Baker Book House. 1985. P507,508.

Studies in Isaiah.

mountain quaked greatly” and there was *“fire,” “smoke,”* and *“thunderings and lightnings.”*²⁹²¹ The phrase *“Your presence”* is literally “from Your face.” Thus at the very appearance of the Lord the mountains would shake and flow or be as nothing. The word given in the NKJV as *“shake”* is rendered as *“flow down”* in the AKJV. The idea then, is that the solid strong and mighty mountains would lose their substance and their wherewithal and would simply crumble or flow so as to become nothing! There is obvious recognition here that the Lord inhabits a 'place' beyond creation, so that in order to enter it He would need to break it open to make His entrance. We cannot help but see a reference also to the incarnation where the second person of the Holy Trinity did step down and became Immanuel “God with us.” Now also we need to acknowledge that when Christ returns it will be a time of terror for the lost as Isaiah has already spoken of in the second chapter. The return of the Lord will be accompanied by fire such that even the base elements of the world will be destroyed.²⁹²²

64:2.

Thus in verse 2 of Isaiah 64 we read of *“fire”* which will burn *“brushwood,”* and will make *“water to boil.”* The word given in the NKJV as *“brushwood”* is only used this once in all of Scripture. The AKJV supplies *“melting”* here. Wilson comments that:

This confessedly difficult word may be deduced from a root which imports that light noise which is made by persons walking; or by small boughs or brushwood, thrown together and breaking with a crackling sound; or by stubble, when trodden on or burnt.²⁹²³

Whatever the precise meaning of the word the implication is very clear. In the same way that fire causes water to boil and causes things to melt or brushwood to burn, so the very presence of the Lord will melt or cause the nations to tremble and shake. The same word is used at the end of verse 2 as was given at the end of verse 1 which can be translated literally as “from Your face.” Thus at the sight of the Lord's face – His presence – there will be quaking and fire. Now, at this time, it is still possible for us to receive the smile of the Lord, a favourable countenance as was given in the Aaronic blessing:

2921 Exodus 19:16-18.

2922 2Thessalonians 1:8; 2Peter 3:7,12.

2923 W. Wilson. *OT Word*. P272.

Studies in Isaiah.

The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you.²⁹²⁴

It would appear that the emphasis in verse 2 is “*fire,*” as this is mentioned twice, first immediately after the opening verb “*burns,*” and then at the end of the clause. The impression is of a sudden burning like when water hits a pan with heated oil it suddenly boils, or when brushwood catches a spark and it flames up in a trice. This is an awesome situation.

64:3.

The plea concludes in verse 3 with a reflection on the past. Isaiah is praying for a repeat of what occurred at former occasions at which times the Lord “*did awesome things*” and things for which no one looked. Undoubtedly the main recollection, as we have noted, was the Lord's appearing at Sinai when the mountain shook at the presence of God. Once again we have the same word “*presence*” as noted twice before in verses 1 and 2 of Isaiah 64, so we are lead to consider the Trinity.

[5] Recollection of God's favour to men and man's failures. (Isaiah 64:4-8).

Isaiah's prayer now turns to recollection of truths that bear upon the situation. In this we observe how vitally important it is to keep thinking theologically, by which I really mean thinking Biblically. Many in our day would advocate theological reflection which has more to do with what mere men have speculated upon. The theology I mean is a consideration of what **God** has said throughout His revealed word. Whether we think of Biblical Theology, where we trace a particular theme or idea through the Scriptures, or Systematic Theology, where we gather all of the data pertinent to a particular theme or subject, it is so important to think God's thoughts after Him. We need to be immersed in what God has to say. It is also important to consider what is often termed Historical Theology which is that study of what other true believers have understood from God's word. Now in this we need to exercise caution. Here you are, dear reader, reading those things which I have studied and gleaned from Scripture. You must be guided by Scripture. However it is always possible to be deceived. R. Letham makes the point that one group of people who decided to make Scripture alone their only consideration ended up denying one of the central tenets of the faith, namely the divine nature of the Son of God.²⁹²⁵ To avoid the danger of being misled by our own pride, we ought to learn alongside other true believers. One way is to read godly works which

2924 Numbers 6:25.

2925 R. Letham. *Systematic Theology*. Crossway 2019. P221.

Studies in Isaiah.

have borne the test of time. Another is to be part of a fellowship where brothers and sisters can mull and meditate together over God's precious word. We need to test all things but we should never think we have reached a point where we have learned enough!

64:4.

And so in verse 4 Isaiah begins at the beginning (*“the beginning of the world”*). We have already noted that Isaiah has spoken of God's revelation to mankind from the very beginning, but here the word employed is different.²⁹²⁶ The word used is most often given as “everlasting” or “eternal,” the basic meaning of which is “to veil from sight,” “to conceal.”²⁹²⁷ It speaks of the vanishing point which is the beginning or origin of things. If we were to render this literally we might put it like this: “and from eternity (or everlasting) ...” There is no subject offered except as contained in the verbs used where the third person plural is employed, so the word *“men”* is put in italics. Now, from this distant past there have been people around – because God created mankind on day 6 of creation week. And since that time there has never been any *“God besides”* the One true God of Scripture. No one has heard, been attentive to, nor has anyone seen anything other than the true God whose main work and delight is *“for the one who waits for Him.”*

64:5.

In verse 5 we are given further blessings which attend those who wait for God, for we discover that those who wait for the Lord are to be met by Him (*“You meet him”*). This is truly wonderful. There is much teaching about waiting on God in Scripture, but here we are encouraged to know that God will *“meet”* with such a trusting person. What a wonderful promise! We ought to pause here and consider these statements which focus attention on those whose trust is in God. We have three statements which describe the true follower. He or she is:

[a] One who waits for God.

[b] One who rejoices and does righteousness.

[c] One who remembers You in Your ways.

2926 In Isaiah 40:21; 41:4,26; 48:16 the word used for *“beginning”* is the same as found in Genesis 1:1.

2927 Isaiah 24:5; 26:4; 33:14; 35:10; 40:28; 45:17; 51:11; 54:8; 55:3,13; 56:5; 60:19,20; 61:7,8; 63:13,16.

[a] One who waits for God.

What is meant by this idea of waiting upon God? Well I think first and foremost the essential notion is that of trust, reliance or dependence. A second thought in connection with this theme is: service. A servant *waits* on their master. They are ready and attentive to their master's every wish.²⁹²⁸ This leads us to recall that Paul frequently referred to himself as a “*bondservant*” of Christ.²⁹²⁹ He also spoke of himself as an “*ambassador*.”²⁹³⁰ An ambassador waits upon the sovereign ruler of his country before making representations in the land he has been posted to. A third and vital aspect to this word is not to hasten and act or do from self-trust and reliance. The believer distrusts his own strength and ability. He recognises that in his redemption he has been saved from disaster, so he dare not presume to think or act from his own starting point. Now, of course, all believers fail in this regard on occasion, but essentially a believer is one who waits for God. He relies and trust in God and will not be hasty to act. After all, the Master knows what is best and we are His servants or ambassadors (because we are away from our home nation – heaven).²⁹³¹

[b] One who rejoices and does righteousness.

The second statement has two features to it and often in modern times these are (sadly) set in opposition. A believer is one who can be characterised by these two characteristics. First, a true follower of Christ is one who “*rejoices*.” How can such a one who has been saved and redeemed not rejoice? Think about this. A person who is rescued and delivered from their lost condition cannot but rejoice and be overjoyed at what the Lord has done. They have had their eyes opened not just to the depths of their lost nature but to the remedy which is freely given. There are many human analogies by which we can illustrate why a believer is a rejoicer. Imagine the man on death row in some prison in the USA being pardoned and set free completely! Or imagine someone who has run up debts to such an enormous amount that they have no means nor any likelihood of paying off a mere fraction of what they owe. And then someone pays their debt in full. What a relief! The burden has been lifted! Such a one would be forever grateful to their benefactor. Now multiply these poor analogies by infinity and that is the situation a true believer finds themselves in. Why would they not rejoice? But the second part of this leads on from the joy a believer experiences in being

2928 Psalm 123:2.

2929 Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1.

2930 2Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 6:20.

2931 The following references speak of waiting on God: Genesis 49:18; Psalm 25:3,5,11; 27:14; 33:20; 37:7,9,34; 40:1; 52:9; 59:9; 62:1,5; 69:3,6; 104:27; 106:13; 130:5,6; Proverbs 20:22; 27:18; Isaiah 8:17; 25:9; 26:8; 30:18; 33:2; 40:31; 42:4; 49:23; 51:5; 60:9; 64:4.

Studies in Isaiah.

relieved of their debt and burden. They now are concerned to live righteously. One who has been relieved of their debt by a benefactor will be keen to do all he can to honour his *saviour*. In the same way the rescued man is keen to cling to his Saviour – Christ Jesus – and is eager to do all He asks. Jesus said the night before He was betrayed, arrested, and lead to His death: *“If you love Me, keep My commandments ... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word.”*²⁹³² Such is not a burden to the truly rescued soul.

[c] One who remembers You in Your ways.

The third statement follows on from the first two. A believer is one who brings to mind all that the Lord has said and commanded. To this one, the Lord's *“ways”* are precious.²⁹³³ They must follow their Master. They are keen to get on the path and follow Him. It is because they have been blessed by His grace, His mercy, His love, His faithfulness, that they too want to traverse the same paths. They *“hunger and thirst for righteousness”* because they know that this is what the Lord has done for them.²⁹³⁴ Their cry is the same as the Psalmist's who wrote these words:

10 With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! **11** Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. **12** Blessed are You, O Lord! teach me Your statutes. **13** With my lips I have declared all the judgments of Your mouth. **14** I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as *much as* in all riches. **15** I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. **16** I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.²⁹³⁵

Having recalled the essence of what it is to believe, the prophet now comes sharply to the point at issue. There was (and there still is) no other God besides God – this is a theme we have come across often in Isaiah.²⁹³⁶ He is so gracious and merciful that He is willing to *“meet”* those who truly believe. The trouble is that with all the privileges God had bestowed upon the people of God as a nation, they still sinned and continued to sin. The record of the prophets is (in this respect) a sorry tale. But when we view it with gospel eyes how we are truly blessed!

One of the key points all must come to is that God is *“indeed angry,”* and He is righteously

2932 John 14:21,23.

2933 Psalm 119:97,113,163,165.

2934 Matthew 5:6.

2935 Psalm 119:10-16.

2936 Isaiah 44:8; 45:5,18.

Studies in Isaiah.

so.²⁹³⁷ We find this very difficult to understand. We, as human beings, find anger is often mixed in with bitterness, pride, jealousy, and sometimes violence. But God's anger is that settled, pure and perfect righteous indignation against all that is evil and wicked. All of us, no matter whom we may be, must come to the point of saying "*we have sinned,*" and not only on the odd occasion, but "*in these ways we continue.*" The unbeliever practices sin. He indulges in that which is contrary to God and thus contrary to God's law. We only need to look at society today in all its production and enterprise viewing it with the ten commandments as our standard, and we will see all forms of error and evil. Corruption in government and big business. Greed and vice in the city centres. Selfishness and lethargy in family life. A true and fair reflection of reality concerning the world within which we find ourselves will surely show the horror of mankind's wicked heart and the desperate need we all have of salvation ("*we need to be saved*").

64:6.

Then in verses 6 and 7 we get a more detailed description of what it means to be a human being after the fall – sinful human nature. First, in verse 6, we get a fourfold description which comes in two pairs. First we have this couplet:

We are all like an unclean *thing*
and all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags.

Notice throughout these four statements the word "*all.*" None, no matter what age, what condition, what privilege, or what station in life are exempt. Everyone is guilty. But what is mankind like? The description is far from flattering. Mankind is foul, festering, impure, dirty, polluted, and impure. The consequences of being such works its way out in life and action, so that whatever we do is tainted by sin and evil. The text states that "*all our righteousnesses,*" by which is meant all our actions which ought to be right, and it describes these as "*filthy rags.*" This is a sanitized translation of the phrase: **וּכְבֵּד עֲדִים** which could be rendered in the following way: "and as a garment of menstruation." When the Lord God looks upon all of humanity and their actions, all He sees (which is what is true and real) is a discarded, rotting, polluted, menstrual cloth. The picture is far from flattering but it is the reality. Now we need to add here that all actions are tainted by sin. There are no exceptions. We cannot think that it only applies to our wills or our emotions only, so that the

²⁹³⁷ Isaiah 64:5.

Studies in Isaiah.

rational mind is untainted and free to continue. No! All our faculties, all of our being must be described by this picture. This does not mean that we are as evil and wicked as it is possible to be. But what it does demand from us, is that no matter what we do, no matter how we think, all is seen by the Lord God as a polluted, blood-stained rag which is only fit for burning. What then of man's mind and his ingenuity? It is "*filthy rags.*" What of his humanity and his altruism? It is a polluted menstrual cloth. What of his humanitarian acts and his benevolence? It is polluted and evil. Now I dare say that many would object and say that man is capable of doing good and is capable of gleaning truth. And yet the text we are looking at paints a very different picture. The truth is that if we are not in step with the Lord and walking in His paths, doing His ways, we are walking in error, sin, and evil. The Lord is capable of turning our wickedness into good – as the Cross of Christ wonderfully teaches us – but the good that is done is all the Lord's.

The second couplet looks at the fruit and value of mankind whose righteousness is nothing but "*filthy rags.*"

We all fade as a leaf

and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away

The sense in this second set of statements is of vanity or vacuity, emptiness. The word given as "*fade*" comes from a word meaning *fool* and was the name of the foolish man (Nabal) who refused to help David, although his wife (Abigail) intervened to prevent disaster!²⁹³⁸ Thus like a thing of folly which has no substance, we drop and come to nothing just as the leaves fall in autumn from the trees. What is it that has lead to such a condition? It is our "*iniquities*" which word comes from the root meaning distortion, to be bent, or perverted. It is those things which are not true and right but which are twisted and out of shape which lead to us being carried by the wind. We do not fit in properly, and, because we are not substantial but empty, we are blown by the wind and fade into nothing like the grass which withers and dies.

64:7.

In verse 7 the focus turns from that which we do positively speaking, to that which we fail to do. Just as "*all*" were included in the description of man in sin in verse 6, here we discover that there are no exceptions, for "*there is no one*" who does what we all ought to. There are none who

2938 1Samuel 25.

Studies in Isaiah.

“calls on Your name.” This expression came first in Genesis 4:26 where, after the birth of Enosh, men began to do this. It has two essential ingredients or features. First it is a recognition of great need and help. To call upon someone is to arrest their attention for help and aid. The second feature is the *“name”* of God, by which we must think of God's very character. We ought to trust *“on”* the name of the Lord, by which is indicated reliance and trust. The sense, then, is that of a person who is in great need and sees in God's name all that he (or she) needs. This idea is then paralleled by the next phrase where we find that there are none who rouse themselves and take themselves in tow to get hold of the Lord. Consider Jacob who met a *“Man”* on his return to Canaan and wrestled with him.²⁹³⁹ Jacob would not let the *“Man”* (who was the Lord) go until He blessed him.²⁹⁴⁰ But none do this from their own impetus or motivation. Jacob had to be brought to this over some twenty or more years of the Lord's dealing with him. Consider: who anywhere has roused himself and stirred himself up to seek God and to deal with the filth of their own nature in coming to God? If we look at human history or culture there are countless who seek alternatives to the living God. of that we can be certain. Many may have some passing resemblance to the truth, or counterfeit it, but always they fall far, far short. If we consider science and the pursuit of truth, or philosophy and the search for wisdom, or religions and the search for peace, all flounder and all are running in the opposite direction diametrically opposed to all that God is and does.

At the end of verse 7 we discover something quite remarkable. We might have expected some reprimand or rebuke for mankind's failure to seek God. Now such is, in fact, true. We ought to seek Him but we don't. That is reprehensible. But what we do find here is that the reason none call upon the Lord or stir themselves up to take hold of Him, is that the Lord has *“hidden”* His face from us. Cast your mind back to the events concerning Cain and Abel in Genesis 4. On a certain day when the two men came to present their offering and worship of the Lord, Cain brought of the fruit of the ground but Abel brought of the best and the first of the flock. Now the Lord respected Abel's offering but not Cain's.²⁹⁴¹ A better translation of the end of Genesis 4:4 and the beginning of Genesis 4:5 would be like this:

2939 Genesis 32:24.

2940 Genesis 32:26.

2941 Genesis 4:4,5.

Studies in Isaiah.

And the Lord
looked with favour
unto Abel and his gift
But unto Cain and his gift
He did not look with favour.

The verb which I have translated *“look with favour,”* and which the NKJV renders as *“respected,”* really has the force of “to turn the eyes towards or away from,” or “to gaze upon.” Thus the Lord turned His eyes towards Abel's offering but He turned His eyes away from Cain's offering. In doing such the Lord indicated an acceptance of Abel but a rejection of Cain. Now here in Isaiah the same thought is expressed. The Lord has turned away His face, as He did with regard to Cain's offering. Next we discover that the Lord has *“hidden”* His face *“because of our iniquities.”* The Lord simply will not tolerate sin in any way at all. For those who recognise their sinful state and run to the Lord for help, rescue and aid will be accepted in Christ. But those who continue in their sin will never know the shining face of the Lord looking towards them.

Now these thoughts are far removed from the generally accepted idea that God will readily accept all and everyone! Make no mistake. He will not. He will only accept those who receive Christ, or those who have come to Him in desperate need having forsaken all sin.²⁹⁴² It is not that a person must remove themselves from sin in order to come to God. No! It is that a person must flee from all, from self, from sin, from the world so as to embrace the Lord. Those who remain in sin and continue in it will be *“consumed”* by the Lord. This word *“consumed”* means *to melt* or *to dissolve*. The awesome God of all is fearsome, for He is a consuming fire.²⁹⁴³ We dare not approach Him who is light and fire without the right covering and protection. The only thing that enables us to approach is to be clothed in Christ who has gone before and has dealt with our sin fully in His body on the tree. Those who think that they may approach God on that final day and present themselves as ones deserving of a place in heaven are in for a terrible shock. We must recognise our lost state, or filthiness, our lack and apathy and come to Him with haste to receive all He has done in Christ. But this means we need to forsake entirely that which if we keep would cause us to be fully *“consumed,”* namely, our iniquities.

To conclude this statement of truths concerning the Lord and mankind's sinful state, the prophet returns to the basic original relationship between God and mankind (verse 8). In Genesis 2:7 we learn that God made Adam from the dust of the ground, from the clay of earth, which fact is

2942 Matthew 11:28-30; John 1:12,13.

2943 Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29.

Studies in Isaiah.

rehearsed throughout the Scriptures.²⁹⁴⁴ But to begin, the prophet reminds us of the truth that God is *“Father.”* As we noted earlier when commenting on Isaiah 63:16, there are few references to God in this way. But it is one which is extremely comforting. Fathers in the Old Testament are presented as being providers and leaders or guides. They are to be caring and to train their children, and to love their wives as the helper that God has made to be with them. The Lord is the real and true *“Father,”* and He is the one who has made us of the dust of the ground, of the clay of earth. This reminder of our origin is one that is desperately needed today, but we note here that it comes frequently in the Scriptures. We are not our own, we have not come about through chance nor by accident, for we are *“all ... the work”* of God's hand.

[6] Petition 3: Do not be furious! (Isaiah 64:9-12).

64:9.

And so having outlined the nature of man's sinful state and the fact that the thrice holy God simply cannot accept sin and sinful man, and having recalled the fact that God is Creator, the prophet next pleads with the Lord to *“not be furious”* in verse 9. There are three statements of pleading here. First is the plea to avoid the wrath of God. Now God is angry with sin, righteously so, and because He is holy He simply cannot sidestep or ignore it, so how can the prophet's plea be heard? The answer, of course, is only through the intervention of the substitute, Jesus Christ our Lord who took the punishment due to sins. His death appeased the wrath of God:

*24 ... the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood.*²⁹⁴⁵

*And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*²⁹⁴⁶

*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*²⁹⁴⁷

Then also the prophet pleads that the Lord would not *“remember iniquity forever.”* How is it possible for the infinite God who knows all things to forget? Well, thankfully, this is not wishful

2944 See, for example, Job 4:19; 10:9; 33:6; Isaiah 29:16; 45:9; Jeremiah 18:1f; Romans 9:20,21.

2945 Romans 3:24b,25a.

2946 1John 2:2.

2947 1John 4:10.

Studies in Isaiah.

thinking because the Lord Himself has declared that He will “*blot out*” and will “*remember no more*” our sins.

I, *even I, am* He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.²⁹⁴⁸

No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.²⁹⁴⁹

And then finally in verse 9 the prophet calls upon the Lord to “*please look*” as though He was unaware! What can the prophet hope to say to the Lord to make Him act favourably? Is he trying to twist the Lord's arm as-it-were? Perish the thought! The point he makes is to remind the Lord that these are His “*people*” and all the land and all it contains lays destroyed and a wilderness. He then goes on to makes four statements regarding the condition of the land.

64:10.

Consider how the prophet describes these localities. First he refers to the cities of the land as “*Your holy cities.*” These were the places God gave to Israel but now they “*are a wilderness.*” It is the same with all mankind. God made man upright and holy but after the fall we are all like a wilderness, dry, and without water. Who amongst men can say they are fully satisfied in heart, mind, and soul? None! We are as a wilderness! But God made us in His image! The prophet pleads with the Lord to look upon the “*people,*” and we can say along with him, “Lord look upon us with mercy!” Then the prophet mentions “*Zion,*” and “*Jerusalem*” as the centrepiece of the land in verse 10. The former is dry and without water, the later is a dry desert of astonishment. It is remarkable and astonishing that man who was made in the image of God should be in such a state! God is an abundant provider and a gracious and incredibly loving Father, so why does man continue in his desperately foolish quest away from truth and all that is good? Well the prophet is one who calls upon the Lord and asks Him to look with mercy upon their fallen and woeful state. In the same way we can do no other than to plead with God and say: “Look upon us in our sorry and fallen state! You made us and we have ruined ourselves! Help Lord!”

2948 Isaiah 43:25.

2949 Jeremiah 31:34.

Studies in Isaiah.

64:11.

The prophet next moves on in verse 11 to consider the *“holy and beautiful temple.”* This was built under the guide of God through David and then under his son, Solomon. It was a place that showed in pictorial form the Lord Jesus and the gospel. It was truly a holy and beautiful place as it set forth all the details of what the Lord Jesus would accomplish by His life and death at Calvary. It was not just the temple but *“all our pleasant things”* by which we understand all the blessings and benefits which poured forth from that which God had provided.

64:12.

Finally, the prophet rounds off his impassioned appeal in verse 12. Is it really possible that the Lord would not come to the rescue? Surely not! Will their Father *“restrain”* Himself from them? Will the Lord not bring His peace to them and so continue their affliction? These questions presuppose the goodness and mercy of God. The prophet is reliant on the fact that it would be unthinkable for the Lord to simply walk on by. And so ends the prayer of the prophet!

Chapter 77.

Isaiah 65:1-16.

The Lord's answer to the prayer – part 1.

The saving of the remnant.

Textual analysis.

#65 1 “I was sought by *those who* did not ask for Me;

I was found by *those who* did not seek Me.

I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation *that* was not called by My name.

2 I have stretched out My hands all day long to

a rebellious people,

who walk in a way *that is* not good, according to their own thoughts;

3 A people

who provoke Me to anger continually to My face;

who sacrifice in gardens, and burn incense on altars of brick;

4 who sit among the graves, and spend the night in the tombs;

who eat swine’s flesh, and the broth of abominable things is *in* their vessels;

5 who say, ‘keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am holier than you!’

These *are* smoke in My nostrils, a fire that burns all the day.

6 “Behold, *it is* written before Me:

I will not keep silence,

but will repay— even repay into their bosom—

7 your iniquities

and the iniquities

of your fathers together,”

says the Lord,

“who have

burned incense on the mountains

and blasphemed Me on the hills;

therefore I will measure their former work into their bosom.”

8 Thus says the Lord:

“as the new wine is found in the cluster, and *one* says,

‘do not destroy it, for a blessing *is* in it,’

so will I do for **My servants**’ sake, that I may not destroy them all.

9 I will bring forth

descendants from Jacob,

and from Judah an heir of My mountains;

My elect shall inherit it,

and **My servants** shall dwell there.

10 Sharon shall be a fold of flocks,

and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down,

for My people who have sought Me.

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11 “But you *are* those
who forsake the Lord,
who forget My holy mountain,
who prepare a table for Gad,
and who furnish a drink offering for Meni.

12 Therefore

I will number you for the sword,
and you shall all bow down to the slaughter;
because,
when I called,
you did not answer;
when I spoke,
you did not hear,
but did evil before My eyes,
and chose *that* in which I do not delight.”

13 Therefore thus says the Lord God:

“behold,
My servants shall eat,
but you shall be hungry;
behold,
My servants shall drink,
but you shall be thirsty;
behold,
My servants shall rejoice,
but you shall be ashamed;

14 Behold,

My servants shall sing for joy of heart,
but
you shall

cry for sorrow of heart,
and wail for grief of spirit.

15 You shall leave your name as a curse to My chosen;
for the Lord God will slay you,
and call His servants by another name;

16 So that

he who blesses himself in the earth
shall bless himself in the God of truth;
and he who swears in the earth
shall swear by the God of truth;

because the former troubles are
forgotten,
and because they are hidden from My
eyes.

What characterises the remaining words in Isaiah from this point onwards (Isaiah 65:1f) is the repeated phrase “*says the Lord*” which comes 14 times.²⁹⁵⁰ Before this, the phrase was last encountered at the end of chapter 59, and so does not occur at all in the five chapters from Isaiah 60 to 64.²⁹⁵¹ We can call these last words in the book of Isaiah the Lord's response to the prayer of Isaiah 63:7-64:12. It seems to fall into three distinct sections. The first concerns the saving of the

2950 Isaiah 65:7,8,13,25; 66:1,2,9(x2),12,17,20,21,22,23.

2951 Isaiah 59:20,21.

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remnant and is found in the first 16 verses of Isaiah 65. We shall consider these verses in this chapter. The second focuses on the new heaven and earth which forms the remaining 9 verses of Isaiah 65. This will be dealt with in the next chapter (chapter 77). The last part of the Lord's response found in Isaiah 66 deals with what we might term the favour or delusion to be experienced by people at the very end of time. This will be considered in our last chapter (chapter 78). It is to be noted, however, that there are many themes interwoven throughout these last two chapters in the book of Isaiah, and it is important to remember that really the whole forms a seamless revelation of God concerning salvation and judgement.

Isaiah 65:1-16 can be divided into three parts but the whole section forms a unit concerned with the true Israel within the national Israel. The first (Isaiah 65:1-7) compares the nation whom God had chosen with Gentiles who sought Him without being called. In this part the Lord describes their iniquity and demands payment. The Second (Isaiah 65:8-10) speaks of a remnant being saved. The third (Isaiah 65:11-16) contrasts the rebellious people of God with those whom He calls His *“servants.”*

[1] The privileged and the outcast (Isaiah 65:1-7).

[2] The remnant (Isaiah 65:8-10).

[3] The rebels versus God's servants (Isaiah 65:11-16).

[1] The privileged and the outcast (Isaiah 65:1-7).

If we were to give a summary statement for these verses we might offer something like this:

“The complacency of the privileged and the earnestness of the outcast.”

In saying this it brings to mind the reception that our Saviour received on coming to earth. Whilst the authorities and leaders rejected Him, the sinners and outcasts seemingly welcomed Him.

65:1.

In verse 1 we find remarkably that there were others apart from Israel who appear to 'find' God. Paul quotes this first verse in Romans 10:20 to demonstrate the idea that God provoked Israel into jealousy by the attentions received from God of other nations, and this is seen in fulfilment in the early days of the gospel as recorded in Acts. The opening phrase *“I was sought by those who*

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did not ask for Me” has two phrases in italics (underlined) whilst the second phrase: *“I was found by those who did not seek Me”* has one, and these have been supplied by the translator to make sense in English translation. Literally we have:

I was sought to not they ask

I am found to not they seek Me

The idea seems to be that there were those who had not asked nor sought but now they are seeking and inquiring. The verbs “sought” and “seek” indicate a diligent inquiry concerning the Lord, and not simply a passing interest.²⁹⁵² The verb rendered as *“ask”* signifies prayer unto the Lord. The Lord responds to such seeking inquiry with earnest haste. I would translate the last part of Isaiah 65:1 like this:

And I said “Behold I, behold I” unto a nation not called by My name.

The intention is clear. The Lord is by no means unwilling to receive those who do truly and earnestly seek Him, including those from outside the recognised fold of God, which in this case is Israel. The Holy Spirit is not hampered by our lack. Neither is He beholden to our limited denominations and outlook. By all means we ought to stick close to the truth and ensure that true doctrine is upheld, but let it never be said that our group or corner of God's Kingdom has a monopoly. Rejoice when you see others seeking wherever they may be situated at the time. If they truly know the risen Lord Jesus they will not be able to speak ill of Him and His work.

65:2.

And then in verse 2 we have the great contrast and how this makes us tremble. Whilst there are many outside of Israel seeking and inquiring concerning the Lord, what are those who are blessed of God doing? God had *“stretched out”* His hands in loving kindness to the people of God not just for a time or for a one-off show of affection, but *“all day long”*! How we must tremble here. Israel of old were blessed of God and the Lord opened up to them stretching out His hand in fellowship but Israel rebelled! They chose to traverse a path that was *“not good,”* and it was so because it was *“according to their own thoughts.”* The Scriptures are very clear that man left to his

²⁹⁵² 2Chronicles 14:4; Psalm 34:4; Jeremiah 37:7.

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own devices and his own thoughts is always disastrous. Unless we get this clear we will always stumble. Thinking, devising plans and schemes, planning and developing strategies without God at the helm is always disastrous. It is so because we naturally (because of sin) walk in ways opposed to God. It is a remarkable thing that mankind does not get into terrible difficulties, but this owes more to the grace of God and His kindness than to any human ingenuity or skill. Those who built the tower of Babel after the flood were confused by God to prevent greater disasters than they were already pursuing!

64:3-5. General thoughts.

This is the great problem. A man (or woman) comes to Christ in repentance and faith and is blessed wonderfully by the Lord. Their eyes are open and they see all things new. But then after a short while they begin to operate and proceed on the basis of their usual ways. They choose their career, their life partner, or their options for any course of action, using good old common sense or from the sources they have always used. They ought to have sought the Lord! But then trouble arises and they then turn to the Lord and it becomes clear that the path they had travelled down was one of their own making. And so now they repent again and seek the Lord, hopefully wiser than before. But when a person is taught and trained by God to rely only upon Him and then they rebel and refuse to hear what God has said, that is entirely another matter. In this case, however, the Lord had opened to the people continually but they refused. Their refusal is described in detail in verses 3 to 5a, with a concluding summary statement of how God saw this rebellion in verse 5b. These rebels were ones who:

- ☐ Provoked the Lord God to *“anger continually”* to His very face (v3a).
- ☐ Sacrificed in places of human devising (*“gardens”* and *“altars of brick”*) (v3b).
- ☐ Sat amongst the tombs and graves by day and night (v4a).
- ☐ Indulged in unclean foods (v4b).
- ☐ Considered themselves to be holy and sacred because of their own ingenuity (v5a).

Taking these themes together we can observe the idea of man-made religion which cuts right across the stipulations and commands that God had given the people. Their actions were thus ones that made God angry because they were done before Him, in front of Him, and in His sight. In other words, they were offered to God as though He ought to accept them! God is very jealous. He is also

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good and right, and so He has given wise and right commands. To ignore these and to offer man-made ideas in their place is doubly sinful. It disregards what God has revealed, and it presents an inferior alternative in its place. By doing what we want in worship and life we provoke God to anger and wrath. How we ought to tremble here! How dare we offer sacrifice and worship using man-made ideas! We ought to offer the worship and sacrifice which God has shown to us is the right way. What does this mean? Well to start with the only sacrifice for sin that is acceptable is Christ's death at Calvary. Nothing else will do. We cannot come to God in any way other than by Christ and His death. But this has further implications. Many may formally acknowledge Christ's sacrifice but then proceed to worship God in ways of their own choosing and design. I do not know what was in Cain's mind but it is clear that when God accepted Abel's sacrifice the New Testament makes plain that it was because it was the right form – a blood sacrifice. We are exhorted to come to God boldly, but we are called to come to His throne of grace and we are exhorted to make worship and obeisance through Christ and in Christ. This means our lives ought to be wholly Christ-centred.

65:3.

Now these rebels were sacrificing in “*gardens*” and were offering their prayers (“*burn incense*”) on man-made altars (“*altars of brick*”). It is clear from a reading of the Old Testament that the original altars where sacrifices were offered were on uncut stones or simply on mounds of earth.²⁹⁵³ The reason for this was to avoid the elaborate nature and design of such things which would divert glory from the sacrifice to the offerer or worshipper. When the Lord revealed Himself to Moses on the mountain and showed the people how to build the tabernacle, He was very careful to insist that it was to be made exactly after the pattern that God had shown.²⁹⁵⁴ There was to be no man-made ingenuity and skill displayed here, because otherwise glory would come to man rather than to God. How does this impact mankind's creativity? How are we to respond when a skilled artist paints or sculpts, or an ingenious inventor creates a new device? Well for starters we note that in these cases the emphasis is not upon the worship of God. However, we should celebrate the skill and talents of man by glorifying God who gave such talents and skill.

2953 Exodus 20:24,25.

2954 Exodus 25:9,40.

65:4.

What then is suggested by them sitting “*among the graves*” and “*tombs*”? Perhaps this indicates a level of superstitious reliance on ancestors. The strength and power of ancestors is still strong in some cultures. To be sure, we ought to give due regard to our elders and parents but only so far as they honour and show forth the greatness, goodness, and glory of God. If we insist that certain men or women who have gone before are those we must emulate and esteem, and they offer wisdom or knowledge counter to the word of God we are not only being foolish, we are being downright rebellious. Consider who are deemed to be the great thinkers and leading lights in our culture. I dare not suggest possible names, but I hazard a guess that none would be godly among them. Long gone are the days when godly men and women were honoured for their faith in the Lord and their lives dedicated to Him. You may be thinking at this point that it is quite alright to remember famous people with fondness and I agree. But the world goes much further. When a person becomes famous how often are they solicited for their views on the current cultural issues as if by virtue of being famous they suddenly accrue wisdom into the bargain? When such people pass away, their legacies are vaunted as being great and worthy of study. Now consider the great thinkers of the last few hundred years. You will not find Whitfield, Wesley, Spurgeon or Martyn Lloyd-Jones amongst those considered. Instead you will find Hobbes, Kant, Hume, Darwin, Newton, Hawking among them. These all had something to say about philosophy and science, but to a man they were not believers.²⁹⁵⁵ How we laud these men! How we esteem them! And yet their legacy has been the ruination of mankind.²⁹⁵⁶

When we consider foods we are caught in the horns of a dilemma. When Noah left the ark the Lord God initiated the eating of animal flesh and there were no prohibitions given at that time. When Israel were called to become a nation and given the law, the Lord stipulated what was clean and unclean, what could be eaten and what not. The reason for these stipulations is not easy to discern. Some say it was a matter of hygiene. Pork, for example, was a meat easily contaminated by parasites. Others suggest it was simply a test. Certain animals were prohibited to see if the people of God would obey. Still others indicate that it may simply have been to preserve certain kinds of animal or to show a distinct difference between Israel and the surrounding nations. Another possibility suggests that certain animals had certain spiritual significance. In the New Testament,

²⁹⁵⁵ Isaac Newton did not believe in the Trinity and was a proto-deist.

²⁹⁵⁶ Time will not permit me to work out the godless influence of these and other (so-called) great thinkers of by gone ages. This is the subject for another book!

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however, we are taught clearly that there are again no prohibitions to what may be eaten.²⁹⁵⁷ Whatever the case, we can see here that the people ignored the direct commands of God pertaining to what they could eat. In the same way we might be disobeying the Lord when we contravene any direct command that relates to our daily activities. For example, we would be directly going against God's commands if we ate our food thinking it was brought about by our own efforts and ingenuity, rather than the gracious provision of God who gave us the ability to earn! Such people who invent their own ways of doing things may be thinking that their careful lives are fine and “holy” but their self-righteousness is an abomination to the Lord. These are described by the Lord as “*smoke*” in His nostrils, or something that causes Him to choke and cough and splutter. When smoke gets into your nostrils the only thing you want to do is get away because it is not a nice experience. These are those who are like the fire that never goes out. Their raging and contention continue unabated. They offer no peace but just heat.

65:6,7.

In verses 6 and 7 those who have thus rebelled are to be judged. We note to begin with, that the judgment is not something that God makes up on the spot, nor is it something mankind has no knowledge of. This is something which has been “*written before Me,*” so that there is a record of what God would do for rebels, and this written record is both in full view of God and for the benefit of man to warn him of the danger he faced. God cannot stay silent when error and wrongdoing go unnoticed or unchallenged. But the judgement comes from God. His word is **His** word, so when it pronounces judgement be assured that this is God's decision and will. These rebels have followed their fathers' rebellious ways. Elsewhere we note that God does not punish the sons for the father's sins. The soul that sins shall die.²⁹⁵⁸ Here the point is that the fathers have trained their sons who have continued their fathers' rebellious ways and so the fruit of their wickedness will come back into their own bosoms. This rebellion centres on their false worship. They “*burned incense on the mountains*” and they “*blasphemed Me on the hills.*” This high place worship in gardens, under every green tree, on altars made of brick, in groves and other places devised by man was a recurring problem in Israel and Judah. It was time for this act of continued rebellion to be dealt with.

2957 Mark 7:19; Acts 10:11f; 11:5f.

2958 Ezekiel 18:4,20.

[2] The remnant (Isaiah 65:8-10).

65:8.

In this section and the next we discover what the Lord thinks of His servants. Whilst the nation had failed and had rebelled, nevertheless there were those who were God's true "*servants*," that is, they were truly the Lord's people. Thus we are told of a "*cluster*" of grapes and within this there were some that were capable of producing new wine which contained a "*blessing*." In the same way that some grapes are rescued because they can bring forth "*new wine*," so the Lord will do for His "*servants' sake*," so that they will not all be destroyed. Therefore a remnant is to be rescued.

65:9.

In verse 9 we are informed of something that the Lord would do and we cannot help but see immediately a New Testament flavour. My translation of verse 9 is as follows:

← Hebrew reads from the right

וְהוֹצֵאתִים יַעֲקֹב זֶרְעוֹ מִיְּהוּדָה יוֹרֵשׁ

and I will bring forth from Jacob a seed* and from Judah an heir *

הָרִי וְיִרְשׁוּהָ בְּחֵירִי וְעַבְדֵּי יִשְׁכְּנוּ-שָׁמָּה

of My mountains and shall inherit it My chosen** and My servants** shall dwell there

* masculine singular.

** masculine plural.

There are two things the Lord will "*bring forth*." This phrase speaks of new birth. This is enhanced by talk of "*new wine*" in verse 8. Later in the New Testament we hear the Lord speaking about this fresh "*new wine*" which stands in contrast to the old which was tasteless and fit for nothing.²⁹⁵⁹ And so the Lord would bring forth:

[1] Descendants from Jacob.

[2] And from Judah an heir of My mountains.

2959 Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37,38.

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Descendants from Jacob! Now Jacob has been long dead! How then will Jacob have any descendants? Well in an obvious sense the term “*Jacob*” is one used to represent Israel the nation. But the word used rendered as “*descendants*” is actually the masculine singular noun which should be translated as “*seed*.” This word is set alongside the word “*heir*” which is also singular. We can put the text like this:

← Hebrew reads from the right

וְהוֹצֵאתִי

and I will bring forth:

מִיַּעֲקֹב זֶרַע

from Jacob a seed

וּמִיְהוּדָה יוֹרֵשׁ

and from Judah an heir

The parallel is clear. From Jacob, representing the nation in their sin (for Jacob was the deceiver), shall come “*a seed*” (“*descendants*”), and from Judah the nation that then existed there would come “*an heir*.” These are thus prophecies of the coming Messiah, the seed of the woman who would be The Heir! Now in that it would be from “*Jacob*” that there was to be a seed, we see in Matthew 1 the apostle detailing the genealogy of Christ Jesus within which are all sorts of sinful people both men and women. The Lord is not ashamed to call these His brethren. The “*heir*” is put here as an “*heir of My mountains*.” Which mountains were these? Sinai/Horeb was the mountain where the Lord gave the law, and Mount Moriah was the mountain upon which Abraham offered his son, Isaac. Then we have Mount Zion the city of David.

Now obviously the mention of a seed and an heir does not only refer to the coming of the Messiah, for it also shows forth the coming of a multitude as well. We can see this in the next statement where we are informed that “*My elect shall inherit it and My servants shall dwell there*.” The text seems to suggest that the Messiah would come as a “Pioneer” and that He would lead many who follow after. The “*descendants*” (i.e. the Seed) and “*heir of My mountains*” would come (both words are masculine singular) and thence, as a direct result, the Lord's “*elect*” will inherit,

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and His “*servants*” will dwell there (both words are masculine plurals).

65:10.

In verse 10 we have two locations mentioned (see map). First, “*Sharon*” where there will be “*folds of flocks,*” and then the “*Valley of Achor*” where the cattle might “*lie down.*” Then the text adds “*for My people who have sought Me*” which rather suggests that these descriptions are partly metaphorical. The Lord as

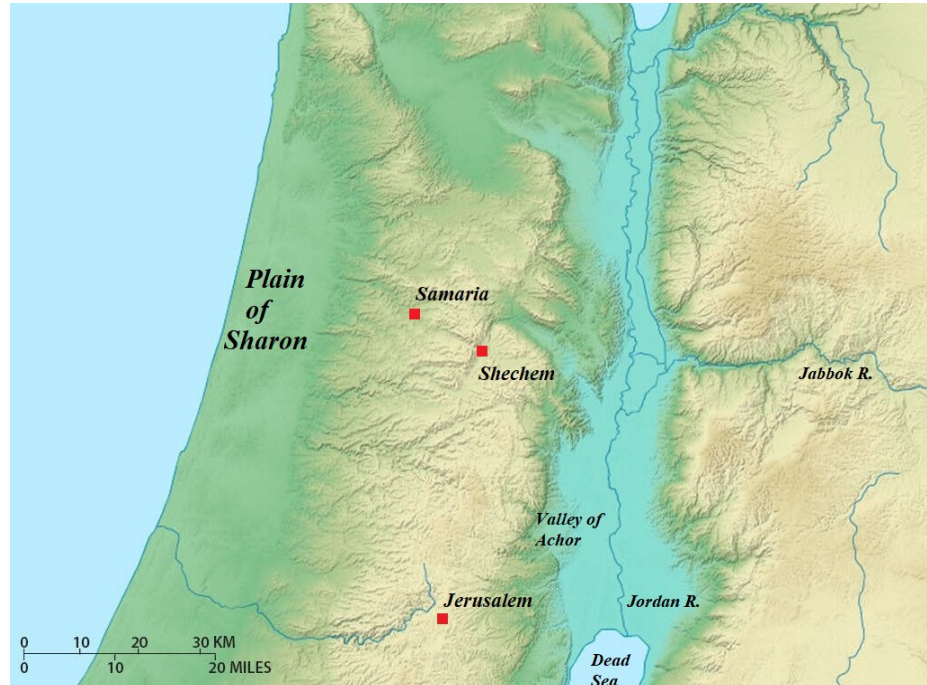


Figure 5: Locations of the Plain of Sharon and the Valley of Achor.

Shepherd would lead His people, the flock of His care both in the plain of Sharon and in the Valley of Achor.

But why “*Sharon*” and the “*Valley of Achor*”? The name “*Sharon*” simply means “a great plain.” During the reign of David there were various responsibilities and leaders set up to oversee everything from, praise and worship in the temple, to military organisation, and in amongst these were also those who had jurisdiction over the land both with regard to crops and herbs.

*And Shitrai the Sharonite was over the herds that fed in Sharon, and Shaphat the son of Adlai was over the herds that were in the valleys.*²⁹⁶⁰

The Sharon valley was, according to the Song of Solomon, a beautiful place rich in flowers.²⁹⁶¹ In an earlier prophecy Isaiah spoke of Sharon becoming “*like a wilderness*” as a result of the coming

²⁹⁶⁰ 1Chronicles 27:29.

²⁹⁶¹ Song of Solomon 6:3.

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judgement on Judah.²⁹⁶² But then Isaiah also prophesied that Sharon would once again be restored to “*excellence*” when the Lord made His entrance.²⁹⁶³ We can see some fulfilment of this in a statement made in the Acts of the apostles:

32 Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all *parts of the country*, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. **33** There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. **34** And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.” Then he arose immediately. **35** So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.²⁹⁶⁴

We are introduced to the “*Valley of Achor*” in the account of the defeat at Ai shortly after entering the promised land. Achan had kept some of the spoil from the defeat of Jericho despite the Lord's severe warnings against doing so. Joshua sought to discover why they had failed at Ai and Achan's sin was revealed. And then we read:

24 Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. **25** And Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.” So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. **26** Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day.²⁹⁶⁵

Achan brought trouble on Israel and he along with all he owned was stoned and burned with fire at the “*Valley of Achor*” which name means “valley of trouble.” If we learn anything from this incident, it surely must be that we should run from this world's goods and honour God's word. In Hosea we also learn that just as there will be a restoration for Sharon, so too would there be one for the Valley of Achor:

I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt.²⁹⁶⁶

2962 Isaiah 33:9.

2963 Isaiah 35:2,4.

2964 Acts 9:32-35.

2965 Joshua 7:24-26.

2966 Hosea 2:15.

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These are glorious things! The Lord is truly the One who brings restoration and healing. Where there would be wilderness and desert because of sin and wickedness there will once again be verdant pasture and excellent growth. Where there was nothing but trouble and error there will be an entrance way to hope – the sure and certain hope only found in Christ Jesus!

[3] *The rebels versus God's servants (Isaiah 65:11-16).*

We come now to a stark contrast. There were those who sought the Lord whom no one would have expected to do so, whilst those who had known of God were (surprisingly) apathetic and disinterested (Isaiah 65:1-7). But within the nation that had largely been apathetic and disinterested there were a cluster of grapes, “*new wine*” whom the Lord would bring forth and bless (Isaiah 65:8-10). Now (Isaiah 65:11-16) we are brought to a comparison between God's true servants and those who were servants of God but by name only.

65:11.

The first thing we need to establish is whom are the “*you*” referred to in verse 11. It seems clear that these are the rebellious mentioned from verse 1, (although they are termed such only in verse 2). We have already discussed their essential characteristics in our earlier comments but reproduce a list of these here to refresh our memories. These rebellious ones:

- [] Provoked the Lord God to “*anger continually*” to His very face (v3a).
- [] Sacrificed in places of human devising (“*gardens*” and “*altars of brick*”) (v3b).
- [] Sat amongst the tombs and graves by day and night (v4a).
- [] Indulged in unclean foods (v4b).
- [] Considered themselves to be holy and sacred because of their own ingenuity (v5a).

Now in verse 11 we can add the sin of forsaking and forgetting the Lord. The word “*forsake*” indicates a loosening of bonds and bands as though you let go of the reins and allow an animal to roam freely. This reminds us that there is no coercion with God. He does not act tyrannically and despotically. He draws us with the cords of love.²⁹⁶⁷ At any time we can loosen those bonds as the Ephesian church did when it “*left [their] first love.*”²⁹⁶⁸ How vital it is to cherish God and to

2967 Hosea 11:4.

2968 Revelation 2:4.

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cultivate love. As Jude reminds us (among other important things):

keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ
unto eternal life.²⁹⁶⁹

Forsaking or loosening the bonds of attachment to the Lord inevitably leads to forgetfulness. These statements bring us back to the opening chapter of Isaiah where the Lord lamented the fact that Israel did not know Him and where we read:

Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who
are corrupters! they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy
One of Israel, they have turned away backward.²⁹⁷⁰

Now in contrast to being yoked to the Lord and in following Him in love, these rebellious ones now give their strength and devotion to “*Gad*,” and “*Mani*.”²⁹⁷¹ Those who forsake and thence forget God never cease to prepare and furnish! It is not that they stop doing something which may be deemed a form of worship and trust – they continue in such – but instead of going to the Lord, they go to others. We are constituted to offer worship. If not to God then to someone or something else. The Hebrew of the last part of verse 11 is as follows:

← Hebrew reads from the right

הַעֲרִכִים לְגַד שֶׁלִּחֹן

who prepare unto Gad (god of fortune) a table

וְהַמְמַלְאִים לְמָנִי מִמֶּסֶךְ

and who furnish unto Mani (god of fate) a drink offering

Modern translations identify “*Gad*” with fortune or luck, and “*Meni*” with destiny or fate. The name “*Meni*” is similar to the word for “number” which we come across in Daniel on the occasion of the prophecy concerning Belshazzar and the writing on the wall.²⁹⁷² Now if we reject God, the

2969 Jude 1:21.

2970 Isaiah 1:4.

2971 Matthew 11:28-30.

2972 Daniel 5:25.

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supreme sovereign Creator, what else is left? Only whatever a man may invent or dream up, and so we come across the various human oriented pantheons of various nations ancient and modern. Alternatively we are left with ideas, abstract or concrete. Here, having forsaken God and forgotten Him, the people resort to the rather nebulous ideas of fortune and fate, of luck and destiny. How many trust to luck as they spend fortunes on lottery tickets? It is no different. We must reckon very clearly with this truth. If we reject God in any way, either by walking away or by simply neglect, we will resort to some form of fate and fortune.

Notice that there is no sense of simply falling into this. The people were *“those ... who prepare a table”* for fortune. They do not simply hope in an aimless way, but arrange in order and organise things in connection with fortune. In other words they put effort and thought into what they are doing. There are those who spend great energy in their hope that fortune, be it the lottery, the horoscope, the stock exchange, or any other vehicle will come up with the goods. They are also those *“who furnish a drink offering”* to the god of fate. The idea is of a full cup. The drink offering was substantial and usually comprised strong wine. To whom did they pour out this drink offering? It would appear that unlike Jacob of old and later worshippers who poured it out on the ground, they imbibed the drink themselves. Even in our modern times we have the custom of raising a drink to something. Perhaps this custom is the left over fragments of this earlier idea of offering to God our drink offering in whole-hearted worship? Drinking to someone or something might be offering a drink offering to Meni or fate.

65:12.

Now as a result of this analysis of their condition, that they have left God and followed fate and fortune, we next read of the consequences for them in verse 12. This will be contrasted with how the Lord will treat His true servants in verses 13 to 16. The emphasis is upon what these rebellious ones will face rather than on the blessings the Lord's servants will gain because this is effectively a judicial warning. Such a passage might be presented to someone who is about to fall away to rouse within them a call to repentance. Look at what you are doing and will face! Consider how you will end up and how you will miss the blessings of God!

First in verse 12 we discover that the rebellious will be destined for the sword (*“I will number you for the sword”*). Such as trust to fate and fortune will thus be recorded for death and slaughter. We really cannot complain here. Consider this. God created us. We are alive and breathe every breath at the hand of God. We did not make ourselves, neither did we organise life, nor did we

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set out our days. God has given to us life, a place to dwell, and all the blessings we regularly enjoy. What do we do in return? Well, just like Adam, we leave Him, and we forget Him, despite the fact that we know that the Lord said that in doing so we would die. This is what God told Adam in the garden of Eden. If he ate of the forbidden tree he would most certainly die and that is what happened.²⁹⁷³ Each and every one of us who walk away from God get (and fully deserve) death because: *“the wages of sin is death.”*²⁹⁷⁴ So when we read that those who leave God and forsake Him are to be destined for the sword we ought not to be surprised. It is the same teaching we see all through Scripture. Looking at this positively we note that God alone is the giver of life. If we want life truly, we ought to rush to Him and seek Him for all we are worth. And isn't this the teaching everywhere too?²⁹⁷⁵

But the Lord also gives us His reasons in verse 12 for why death and slaughter is the inevitable result from rebellion and forsaking Him. It is because:

when I called,
you did not answer;

when I spoke,
you did not hear,
but did evil before My eyes,
and chose *that* in which I do not delight.”

Such statements are remarkable! How many times do we hear people say that God does not speak to them and is not interested? How often do we hear complaints of some who say that they called upon God. and in their trouble and difficulty He did not respond? The arrogance of such things. How dare we demand from Him that He hear us and do our bidding! But that is what we do. And yet the Lord in His grace, mercy, and kindness has *“called”* and has *“spoken”*! You say when, where, how? Well He has spoken from the beginning as we have already noted.²⁹⁷⁶ He has spoken through the prophets, in creation, and supremely by the sending of His only Son, Jesus Christ. What more could He say than He has already said in the sending of His precious Son? He has spoken whenever you have been under the gospel through someone who lives out the faith or who has preached in your hearing. He has spoken through His creation and through the judgements we observe in providence and throughout history. Who cannot hear these thundering statements? Oh how wicked we are in

2973 Genesis 2:17; 3:1f.

2974 Romans 6:23.

2975 Matthew 6:33; 11:28-30; John 1:12,13; 10:10; Romans 6:23.

2976 Isaiah 48:16.

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trying to explain away the flood of Noah's day by our cleverly devised tales of evolution and geological magic! Look at the rocks and the mountains all around you and you will see clearly that God judged this world for its wickedness by the waters of a universal global flood. Or what of the great judgment on Israel as they were taken captive and then returned in readiness to receive the Messiah Jesus Christ? What more could be said? God has spoken and mankind has suppressed the truth.²⁹⁷⁷

Now even though God has spoken and called, the rebellious ones have not answered and have not listened. Have you ever spoken to someone and they have 'blanked' you and simply walked away? How did you feel? Well this is precisely what is spoken of here. God has spoken to you. He has called you. You did not hear? Well you were otherwise engaged. You were distracted. You were set on a different course of life and action. Yes, but God has called you. God has spoken out to you. Why do you not hear? Well it is clear from our text here that these rebellious ones were truly engaged elsewhere. What with? Well the rebellious ones had done "*evil*" in front of God and had rather chosen to do those things in which God does "*not delight*." Now think carefully about this. God is superb, beautiful, glorious, perfect, right, true, holy, without equal, better by far than all and anything else. Isn't what God says therefore the best, of greatest value, beyond what we could wish for? Consider these statements:

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.²⁹⁷⁸

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.²⁹⁷⁹

His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.²⁹⁸⁰

These are just a few of the countless that could be offered to demonstrate how good God is. We have not even begun to consider the giving of Christ – what glories and beauties there are in His giving of Himself – but even just thinking about the historical record of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 ought to be enough! If what God is and does is perfect, good ... why choose anything else? We, in our rebellion, choose that which is other than God. and so by definition it will be "*evil*" and that in

2977 Romans 1:18.

2978 Philippians 4:19.

2979 James 1:17.

2980 2Peter 1:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

which God does not *“delight.”* Our trouble often is that we think we are equal with God. We think we can choose independent of Him and that our choice is of equal value to that which God chooses. This is not just wrong but a terrible evil. We can only go two ways. The way of God – which is perfect and good, or, the way of self – which is opposed to God and is always evil and bad.

65:13.

And so in verses 13 to 16 we see the great contrasts between the rebellious and God's servants. Note here that what the rebellious face is by their own choice. God never acts tyrannically nor despotically. For example, in the first contrast, the rebellious *“shall be hungry”* but this is not because God has withheld from them or taken their food away. No! It is because like rebellious children they refuse to eat the food offered them. Consider Psalm 1. Those who devour the law of God and delight in it are like the tree that grows and bears fruit, but those who pour scorn on such things will become as the chaff, destitute of nourishment and health, and only fit to be blown away by the wind.

In verse 13 we have three contrasts given which centre around what we term the normal details of life, eating, drinking, and making merry. This triad of things is what the unbeliever set their heart on exclusively.²⁹⁸¹ But ironically the very things unbelievers set their hearts on exclusively are the things that do not satisfy! But these very things are freely given to the true servants of God! Our Lord Himself said this about seeking:

31 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ **32** For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. **34** Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.”²⁹⁸²

And so the servants of God will *“eat,”* will *“drink,”* and will *“rejoice,”* but the rebellious will *“be hungry,”* will *“be thirsty,”* and will *“be ashamed.”* If we reject the source, the fountain of living waters, why complain if we go hungry, thirsty and are sad?²⁹⁸³ Our God gives good things. He is a good Father!²⁹⁸⁴

2981 See, for example, Genesis 4:16-24; Ecclesiastes 8:15; Matthew 24:38; Luke 12:19.

2982 Matthew 6:31-34.

2983 Jeremiah 2:13.

2984 Luke 11:9-13.

65:14.

In verse 14 the Lord continues with the theme of joy and rejoicing, for they will be those who “*sing for joy of heart.*” Whereas in verse 13 we discover that the rebellious will “*be ashamed,*” this is further elaborated on in verse 14, for such as forsake and forget God will have “*sorrow of heart*” and will have “*grief of spirit*” and will “*cry*” and “*wail*” in their misery. Once again if you are offered life, health, peace, joy and so on in Christ and choose to reject it, surely the only alternative is their polar opposites? The heart of man, his soul, his spirit, is a very mysterious thing. Sadly the modern age limits this to mere grey cells, neurons and hormones. How foolish! We are so much more, and yet we cannot ever fathom what the mind, the heart, the soul, the spirit is. Scripture tells us a great deal about this aspect of humans, but do not get the idea that you can ever understand it as though you might grasp the workings of a motor car or of a computer! The heart devoid of God will always be sub-standard and will always lack. Consider these words of the first ever recorded philosopher:

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, **17** then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover *it*, yet he will not find *it*; moreover, though a wise *man* attempts to know *it*, he will not be able to find *it*.²⁹⁸⁵

Such a statement made out of a view of the world we could refer to as “deist” (i.e. God is transcendent only and not with us immanently), highlights the clear fact that left to ourselves we simply cannot fill our lives. Even if we continue day and night on this grand quest of discovery (as modern science expresses it) we will never reach the end, and we will always be left grasping for more. Or consider these words of the same writer whom the Lord Jesus made use of when He pointed out that gaining the whole world will end up with a man losing his own soul:

What profit has a man from all his labour in which he toils under the sun?²⁹⁸⁶

9 What profit has the worker from that in which he labours? **10** I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. **11** He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.²⁹⁸⁷

2985 Ecclesiastes 8:15,16.

2986 Ecclesiastes 1:3.

2987 Ecclesiastes 3:9-11.

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Here is what our Saviour says perhaps influenced by these statements of Solomon:

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?²⁹⁸⁸

This idea is something we need to ponder with eagerness. It is demonstrated time and time again in the world. Those who have reached the pinnacle of achievement in money, power, or fame end up with the thought: is this all there is? Only God can fill the gap of the soul as Augustine once famously said (“Our heart is restless until it rests in you”).

65:15.

The text then goes on to give further information about what will be faced by the rebellious. The name of these rebellious ones will become *“a curse”* to God's elect. The Lord has set His heart on slaying those who are continually rebellious. We have attempted to show thus far the reasonableness of God's intentions, and here again we note that anything other than what God does and provides is always sub-standard, evil, and of no real value. Thus all of this will eventually be destroyed. As a result the chosen have *“another name.”*

65:16.

The details of this new name are revealed in verse 16. Anyone who would bless *“himself in the earth,”* or, in other words, would do what is right and good, must home in on *“truth”* and, in particular, on the *“God of truth.”* This phrase is repeated for emphasis. If anyone wants real and true blessing then they must find it exclusively in *“the God of truth.”* Thus when the Lord Jesus met with the woman at Samaria He pointed her to God who wants people to worship Him *“in Spirit and truth”* and not in any particular location such as Jerusalem or Samaria.²⁹⁸⁹ He who wants to be certain and sure of anything must do so in *“the God of truth.”* But what is the reason for such? It is because the Lord has *“forgotten”* all former troubles and it is also because He has *“hidden”* them from His sight. Such a contrast. The people of God who rebelled had forsaken and forgotten God, and now we learn that for those who are His chosen, the Lord will forget and forsake their sin which has caused such trouble. Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

2988 Matthew 16:26. See also: Mark 8:36,37 and Luke 9:25.

2989 John 4:23,24.

Chapter 78.

Isaiah 65:17-25.

The Lord's answer to the prayer – part 2.

A new heaven and earth.

Textual analysis.

- 17 “For behold, I create
new heavens
and a new earth;
and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.
- 18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;
for behold, I create
Jerusalem *as* a rejoicing,
and her people a joy.
- 19 I will
rejoice in Jerusalem,
and joy in My people;
the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying.
- 20 “No more shall an infant from there *live but a few* days,
nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days;
for the child shall die one hundred years old,
but the sinner *being* one hundred years old shall be accursed.
- 21 They shall build houses and inhabit *them*;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
- 22 They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for as the days of a tree, *so shall be* the days of My people,
and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
- 23 They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble;
for they *shall be* the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.
- 24 “It shall come to pass that
before they call, I will answer;
and while they are still speaking, I will hear.
- 25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
and dust *shall be* the serpent’s food.
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,”
- says the Lord.

Studies in Isaiah.

Although we have separated these verses (17-25) from the former in Isaiah 65 (1-16), there is a sense in which what we have here follows on from what went before. The Lord had put a series of contrasts between the rebellious and His true servants culminating in the call to focus on the *“God of truth”* (v16) and now we read the word *“for”* which leads us to the thought of what the Lord would do.

65:17.

Verse 17 begins with the phrase *“for behold”* which signals something important. The word *“behold”* calls for the reader to pay attention. Listen up! What then is being announced? Well it is nothing other than the new creation. The word *“create”* is the Hebrew word: בָּרָא *bārā*, which occurs three times in verses 17 and 18. It is the word we find three time in Genesis 1.²⁹⁹⁰ It is the word which speaks of divine creation, and here we are being directed to consider the new creation of which all believers are the first fruits, the Lord Himself being the Pioneer. There are three statements made in verse 17 two of which speak of what the Lord would create, and then also a statement concerning our current creation. The Lord will create a new heavens and a new earth. The term *“new”* is the Hebrew: הָדָשׁ *hādāš*, which often means “fresh of this year,” or in relation to a new moon. According to Wilson it signifies: “new; fresh, unheard of; new moon ... ; new king.”²⁹⁹¹ There is a clear sense in which this new thing will be distinct from the old, and yet there is no total disconnection with what went before, as though the new is of a different kind and system altogether. However, what went before (*“the former”* heavens and earth) of which we are now a part, will be forgotten completely (*“shall not be remembered or come to mind”*). We might think of this as a replacement for the old. Although we are not to think that the former was defective in its original condition. Rather it became defective as a result of sin and was made futile by the One who created it for good reason. But now the new is fresh and the old will be forgotten completely.

65:18.

In verse 18 we learn something more about this new creation. We hear the lord instructing us to *“be glad,”* and to *“rejoice”* in what He will make. This indicates that it is free from sin and evil. It will be a place of paradise and of great beauty and pleasure. Whenever we think of these terms (pleasure and beauty) we must always add that they are such on account of God and His presence.

2990 Genesis 1:1,21,27.

2991 W. Wilson. *OT Word*. P287.

Studies in Isaiah.

We must always be wary of thinking about pleasures and beauty as far as this world is concerned. That is certainly not to say that there is no beauty nor pleasure in this world – for there is – but that it is always marred by sin and attended by a degree of sorrow. But in this new creation joy and delight are the essential experiences of those who are blessed to be there. We discover that *“Jerusalem,”* the place where God places His name, will be intimately connected with *“rejoicing.”* It is not just that there will be rejoicing in Jerusalem, (there will be), but that Jerusalem itself will be joyful (*“I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing”*). The very place itself will be buzzing with joy – a joyous place. And this thought extends to the inhabitants, for they themselves will be *“a joy,”* and so joyfully making joy for others too, Then further we learn that this new creation is not temporal but eternal (*“forever”*). We can rest assured that there will be no second fall. When God recreates or creates anew then there will be no more need for any subsequent creations.

65:19.

Having created Jerusalem and its people in this new creation as a joy and as rejoicing, the Lord Himself will then *“rejoice in Jerusalem,”* and He will *“joy”* in His people. This is the height of glory. The new creation will not simply be joyful, it will be infectiously joyful, and the Lord Himself will come to rejoice in what He has made. Then negatively we learn that there will no longer be any tears, nor will there be any sorrow in this newly created place.

Up to this point we have been instructed about the essential nature of this new creation. It is new and fresh, eternal, and one which yields joy and the joy of the Lord. As such these revelations all suit the description of what will come after this old order is finally destroyed.

65:20.

But when we reach verse 20 there are statements which cannot be attributed to the future glorious state that follows the destruction of the old. The idea that life will be extended to a greater length than had been experienced of late is not illustrative of being in the eternal state where death no longer exists or is experienced. Where the eternal is, the temporal has been banished. So what are we to make of verse 20? It would seem that the prophet is speaking of the gospel age. After Pentecost when the gospel spread abroad, new creation was being made, but not yet in its fullest form. Newly regenerated peoples born again of the Spirit have been translated from the old order which is ripe for judgement, and have been translated into the the Kingdom of the Son of His love

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(the new creation).²⁹⁹² But the redemption of the physical body is still in the future, as also is the place and space the resurrected new creation are to dwell in. But this does not stop the new creation as demonstrated by regenerated hearts bringing in temporal benefits besides. As a result of the gospel, life spans will be elongated. People will live up to one hundred years of age and will still thought to be “*accursed*” if they die at such an age. Moses declared long ago that a normal life span was seventy years or possibly, given strength, eighty years, but here life spans are indicated as being longer still.²⁹⁹³ Now is this not the case with regard to the effects of gospel preaching and witness the world over? Where the gospel has its beautifying effect there are not simply newly regenerated peoples, but better lives, more sanitary lives, more healthy lives, and consequently longer lives. Thus we see in these verses (verse 17f), a co-mingling of things that have come to pass in the gospel age (regeneration and the blessings in the wake of the Spirit's great move), and those things which are truly part of the new creation in eternity.

65:21.

And so in verse 21 we read of people building houses and planting vineyards and benefiting by them. Where the gospel has its true effect, life may proceed without interference and harm. Where the gospel has not had any course in a place, or where the gospel is forgotten, then there in that place will exist vice, oppression, harm, and (as a consequence) shortened lives. People wrongly claim that modern science and humanism has enabled man's life span to increase. This is not so. It is where there have been *godly* Christians, for there have arisen hospitals, schools, care-homes and all manner of kindnesses.

65:22.

In verse 22 the thought of extending the life is likened to the length of life of a tree. The righteous (“*elect*”) will build and not be oppressed or evicted, and will not grow crops for others to consume, but will be blessed by the very work of their hands. This statement, “*My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands,*” stands as a reversal of the curse. Whereas Adam was condemned to toil and labour in the sweat of his brow for his food, now the work of men's hands would reap better blessings for them.²⁹⁹⁴ Does this indicate that the curse is undone for those who are new and who are now regenerate? I think not. It is the case that where the gospel has a full reign, great blessings are

2992 Colossians 1:13.

2993 Psalm 90:10.

2994 Genesis 3:17-20.

Studies in Isaiah.

seen. This is particularly true at times of revival. But Christians (those truly regenerate) are not excused the effects of the curse. They will still grow old, and they will still suffer under the curse as they earn their daily bread. But because of the gospel their lot is greatly improved. I do not think we really appreciate the level of oppression and depression experienced in pre-gospel days or where darkness has descended upon a land.

65:23.

Now when we look at this spiritually, the work of the gospel servant, of the church, of pastors and so on will greatly flourish. Thus any *spiritual* work done will by no means be “*in vain*.” The regenerate person who labours as a servant of the Lord will not carry out their labour for emptiness and futility. Further, such will not “*bring forth children for trouble*.” We have to hope that this is true in a temporal sense (although we cannot guarantee this), but it is certainly true spiritually. What I am saying is that the regenerate man who marries and has a family, if he seeks God truly and in wisdom, and if he (as a consequence of his seeking God) seeks to lead his family wisely and in the ways of the Lord, will by no means “*bring forth children for trouble*.” But this is eminently true for the pastor or evangelist who is sent to seek souls. Let such know that the Lord is on their side:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.²⁹⁹⁵

We can be confident of this fact because such will be “*the descendants of the blessed of the Lord*.” Where the blessing of God abounds, those privileged to be born at such a time reap great benefit. This is why there is such a time-lag in history. Where the people of God are no more and gospel witness dies out or wanes, the blessings still live on for a time. The children and grandchildren of those blessed by revival see great benefits and blessings, even though they may not themselves be a part of the new generation. We see such an experience repeated in the history recorded in the book of Judges. When the Lord raised up a “judge” to bring victory, the generations following dwelt in the blessings God brought to the earth, but then as a result of falling away and deepening sin the blessings departed and terrors arose.²⁹⁹⁶

2995 1Corinthians 15:58.

2996 See the book of Judges.

Studies in Isaiah.

65:24.

Now such as benefit from the gospel truly, (i.e. those regenerated) will be greatly loved by the Lord. We discover that even before such a new creature calls upon the Lord He *“will answer,”* and even whilst they utter their prayers and requests the Lord will *“hear.”* Such language clearly points to this being a prophecy of the gospel age and not a description of the final state in glory.

65:25.

Then finally we learn that there will be a change amongst the animal kingdom where the *“wolf and the lamb”* will sit together, and the lion will no longer seek prey but will *“eat straw like an ox.”* Now this speaks of a reversal of the curse. Predation will end. Created animals which were originally made to dwell harmoniously will be restored to such a relationship. Instead of creatures destroying one another through predation and parasitism, they will cohabit and live in peace. Notwithstanding this reversal the serpent will still languish in the dust. This last thought points to the fact that for Satan, there can be no redemption. He will forever dwell in the dryness and death of the dust. And none will be able any more to *“hurt”* nor will they be able to *“destroy”* in all that is named God's *“holy mountain.”* This speaks of the final state when death is destroyed and Satan cast into the lake of fire for eternity.

We are to be sure of these things, and we can be sure, because the passage ends with those most important and glorious words *“says the Lord.”* Let none challenge what God has spoken! I may make mistakes. I know that I do. But what God has shown forth through Isaiah will all come to pass.

Chapter 79.

Isaiah 66:1-24.

The Lord's answer to the prayer – part 3.

Favour and delusion.

Textual analysis.

#66 1 Thus **says** the **Lord**:

“heaven *is* My throne,
and earth *is* My footstool.
Where *is* the house that you will build Me?
And where *is* the place of My rest?
2 For all those *things* My hand has made,
and all those *things* exist,”

says the **Lord**.

“But on this *one* will I look:

on *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.

3 “He who kills a bull *is as if* he slays a man;
he who sacrifices a lamb, *as if* he breaks a dog’s neck;
he who offers a grain offering, *as if he offers* swine’s blood;
he who burns incense, *as if* he blesses an idol.
Just as they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations,
4 so will I choose their delusions, and bring their fears on them;
because,
when I called, no one answered,
when I spoke they did not hear;
but they did evil before My eyes,
and chose *that* in which I do not delight.”

5 Hear the word of the **Lord**, you who tremble at His word:

“your brethren
who hated you,
who cast you out for My name’s sake, said,
‘let the **Lord** be glorified, that we may see your joy.’
But they shall be ashamed.”

6 The sound of noise from the city!

A voice from the temple!

The voice of the **Lord**, who fully repays His enemies!

7 “Before she was in labour, she gave birth;
before her pain came, she delivered a male child.

8 Who has heard such a thing?

Who has seen such things?

Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day?

Or shall a nation be born at once?

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For as soon as Zion was in labour, she gave birth to her children.

9 Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery?"

says the Lord.

"shall I who cause delivery shut up *the womb*?"

says your God.

10 "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her;

11 That you may feed and be satisfied with the consolation of her bosom, that you may drink deeply and be delighted with the abundance of her glory."

12 For thus says the Lord:

"behold, I will extend

peace to her like a river,

and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream.

Then you shall feed; on *her* sides shall you be carried, and be dandled on *her* knees.

13 As one whom his mother comforts,

so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

14 When you see *this*,

your heart shall rejoice,

and your bones shall flourish like grass;

the hand of the Lord shall be known to His servants, and

His indignation to His enemies.

15 For behold, the Lord will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire.

16 For by fire and by His sword the Lord will judge all flesh; and the slain of the Lord shall be many.

17 "Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves, *to go* to the gardens after an *idol* in the midst, eating swine's flesh and the abomination and the mouse, shall be consumed together,"

says the Lord.

18 "For I *know* their works and their thoughts.

It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory.

19 I will set a sign among them; and those among them who escape I will send to the nations: *to* Tarshish and Pul and Lud, who draw the bow, and Tubal and Javan, *to* the *coastlands* afar off who have not heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles.

20 Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the Lord out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem,"

says the Lord,

"as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord. 21 And I will also take some of them for priests *and* Levites,"

says the Lord.

22 "for as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,"

says the Lord,

"so shall your descendants and your name remain. 23 And it shall come to pass *that* from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,"

says the Lord.

24 "And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

We have had three responses from the Lord to Isaiah's series of prayer requests. In the first part the Lord makes a distinction between those who are truly called, and those who are called but do not hear. He remonstrates with the many in Judah and Jerusalem who having heard, refused to follow whilst there were those who had not got the privileges Israel had and yet were willing to truly seek. Notwithstanding such rebellion there would still be a remnant who would be truly God's

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servants. Then in the second part the Lord speaks of the new creation which will come both in terms of regeneration of souls and attendant blessings, and in terms of the final new order – a new heavens and a new earth. And now comes the final response of the Lord. In these verses we find a rousing series of nine “*says the Lord*” statements (and one “*says your God*” statement) which bring encouragement to those who fear the Lord but make clear that judgement will be faced by all else.²⁹⁹⁷

From our brief analysis it would seem that the Lord, through Isaiah wants to conclude with a series of definitive statements. The phrase “*thus says the Lord*” comes twice in the chapter at verses 1 and 12 and so may indicate two separate parts, but all the way through this last chapter the phrase “*says the Lord,*” or “*says your God*” is seen reaffirming the importance of these words as coming from the Lord God. Table 79.1 shows the Hebrew and my translation of these phrases.

Table 79.1: Key verses in Isaiah 66.

Text.	Hebrew.	My translation.
66:1	כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה	Thus says the Lord.
66:2	נִאֵם-יְהוָה	Reveals the Lord.
66:9	יֹאמַר יְהוָה	Says the Lord.
66:9	אָמַר אֱלֹהֶיךָ	Says your God.
66:12	כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה	Thus says the Lord.
66:17	נִאֵם-יְהוָה	Reveals the Lord.
66:20	אָמַר יְהוָה	Says the Lord.
66:21	אָמַר יְהוָה	Says the Lord.
66:22	נִאֵם-יְהוָה	Reveals the Lord.
66:23	אָמַר יְהוָה	Says the Lord.

It will be observed from this table that we have two titles for the Lord, namely, אֱלֹהִים *’ēlōhîm* rendered as “*God*” which occurs once, and יְהוָה *yehōwāh* translated as “*Lord,*” which is found nine times.

The divine title אֱלֹהִים *’ēlōhîm* and rendered as “*God*” is a plural noun (pointing to the Trinity) which takes singular verbs and has the meaning of strength, might, and power. It is the title used exclusively by the Lord to refer to Himself in His description of creation in Genesis 1, and so

²⁹⁹⁷ There are 4 “*says the Lord*” statements in Isaiah 65 (Isaiah 65:7,8,13,25) but 9 in Isaiah 66 (Isaiah 66:1,2,9,12,17,20,21,22,23).

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clearly intimates the idea of His Creator-ship. In contrast, the divine title יהוה *yehōwāh* rendered as “*Lord*” is connected to the verb “to be,” and has the basic meaning of “the self-existent one” as indicated by Exodus 3:14. It is also used as the relational and covenantal name of God. It is the name by which those who are in relationship with God should hold clear in their minds. Thus we find God using this title when the creation of Adam and Woman is described in Genesis 2. It is the name used for the second part of Psalm 19 (“*the law of the Lord*”) which speaks of the Bible as a revelation to man, in contrast to the title ’*ēl* which is used in the first part of the same Psalm to depict general revelation via creation.²⁹⁹⁸ Thus whilst ’*ēlōhîm* and the singular form ’*ēl* both signify the Creator, *yehōwāh* indicates the sovereign ruler and the one who relates to us. He is thus “*Lord*” and master to be obeyed. The ten references to God as either “*God*” or “*Lord*” serve to reinforce both creation where God spoke ten times and the giving of the law at Mount Sinai where the Lord issued His ten commands.

Apart from this difference in the use of divine titles, there is also variation in use of Hebrew verbs indicating the idea of speech or declaration. Thus seven times we have the verb: אָמַר *’āmar*, and three times we get the verb: נָאֵם *ne’um*. The former word (אָמַר *’āmar*) has the following meaning:

To say or speak with the greatest assurance of the truth of what is spoken. It is a term generally used by prophets speaking in God's name and behalf, importing a divine commission and inspiration.²⁹⁹⁹

The second verb (נָאֵם *ne’um*) has this meaning:

The primary idea is to bear forth, to bring out to light, hence to utter, to say; it differs from דָּבַר (*dābar*) to speak, in that דָּבַר is put absolutely, while אָמַר is followed by the words spoken.³⁰⁰⁰

It will be seen in the table above that I have opted for the word “*reveals*” rather than “*says*” to show forth this illuminating power of this word. From these definitions we get the idea that what is spoken of here by the Lord God is both authoritative and truthful, but it is also intended to lead a person to understanding (or to see the light). Consequently, the passage is an authoritative, truthful statement from the Creator and Redeemer which is meant to bring wisdom and understanding.

2998 Psalm 19:1,7.

2999 W. Wilson. *OT Word*. P368.

3000 W. Wilson. *OT Word*. P368.

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The difficulty of splitting up this chapter into clearly defined parts can be shown by looking at the various headings chosen by four different translations (table 79.2). The only agreement is between the NKJV and ISV regarding the opening four verses. What should we make of this difficulty?

Table 79.2: Headings used by various translations in Isaiah 66.

NKJV	NASB	ESV	ISV
True worship and false (1-4)	Heaven is God's throne (1-2)	The humble and contrite spirit (1-6)	The worship that God commends (1-4)
The Lord vindicates Zion (5-13)	Hypocrisy rebuked (3-9)	Rejoice with Jerusalem (7-14)	The Lord vindicates Zion (5-11)
The reign and indignation of God (14-24)	Joy in Jerusalem's future (10-24)	Final judgement and glory of the Lord (15-24)	The rule of God (12-24)

As we have observed there is a thread or affirming nature running through the whole as indicated by the frequent references to this being from God, so we shall consider the text simply as a whole unit and make our comments verse by verse, or, as the need arises, in connection with associated verses.

66:1,2.

The passage opens with a declaration from the Lord concerning His Being and shows how He must now be worshipped, contrasting the temple with individuals who have been converted. In verse 1 we hear the Lord make the obvious statement that heaven and earth are vastly inferior spatially to His Being so that the place or location for *“the house”* that Israel (or the world) would build for Him is an absurdity.³⁰⁰¹ Heaven and earth designate the entirety of the universe and whereas one is His *“throne”* the other (earth) is simply His *“footstool,”* and so His infinity is being depicted in a simple graphic way.³⁰⁰² Now in that God had guided Israel to build a tabernacle first and then later a temple, we are not to see here a contradiction. The emphasis here is on the perpetuation of what was intended to be merely temporal. The Lord inaugurated the tabernacle and temple as temporary means to point to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. The various parts and sacrifices all depicted aspects of Christ's great saving ministry. To perpetuate and rebuild such

3001 Isaiah 66:1.

3002 Isaiah 66:1.

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would be to go backwards. We can see this thought exemplified by Peter's call to build tabernacles on the mount of transfiguration.³⁰⁰³ Christ met with Elijah and Moses to speak about His coming Exodus or death at Calvary. Peter wanted to make what he experienced more permanent and so received a rebuke. And so the Lord is pointing out that the idea of rebuilding a place for His dwelling and for His rest is absurd. The tabernacle and temple were never intended to be such. Indeed this was clear even as Solomon dedicated the newly built temple. In his great prayer we hear him declaring the following:

27 But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! 28 Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today.³⁰⁰⁴

Are we guilty of bringing God down to earth and locating Him in some place where we can control Him or have rule over Him? Some might do this by limiting their view of the Christian faith to a building or an organisation (e.g. the Roman Catholic Organisation). But some do it in an abstract sense by limiting God to their formulations of truth and doctrines. Please do not misunderstand me here. We must be clear on doctrine concerning God and His great works, but as soon as we confine Him to our system or our understanding we have run aground and made shipwreck of our faith.

Now as to the questions at the end of verse 1, we can see a faint hint towards the theme of God providing the Son of God a human body, that is, the incarnation.³⁰⁰⁵ God is Creator so what could mankind do in order to house God and give Him rest?³⁰⁰⁶ The idea is absurd. Even if all mankind at all times worked together to make a house for God the result would be pitifully pathetic in the extreme. Mankind is always attempting to make a system, a theory, an understanding from which he can derive peace and life but will always fail. In many ways mankind's attempts at making his own way is like the building of a house for God. even though most people today are atheists and do not believe in God, their quest at a unified world view is an attempt at building a house for their god which they have conjured up in their own minds. Now that verse 1 hints slightly towards the amazing thing God would do in sending His Only Begotten Son, is reinforced by the abrupt change of subject in verse 2. After affirming the fact that He alone is Creator and has made all that exists so that none could build Him a place of rest, the Lord then speaks of a certain type of person. This

3003 Matthew 17:4; Mark 9:5; Luke 9:33.

3004 1Kings 8:27,28.

3005 Hebrews 10:5.

3006 Isaiah 66:2.

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person is described as one that the Lord would “*look*” upon, or, in other words, would view in fellowship and delight by His incredible grace. Such a person is identified in two ways. This person is one who:

*is poor and of a contrite spirit,
trembles at My word.*

To be “*poor*” and to be “*of a contrite spirit,*” signifies one who is lacking any spiritual base and who mourns over their state and condition. It is to have no resources to live in any spiritual sense, and to be utterly sorry and remorseful that they are in such a woeful state. In short it is the attitude of heart of one who is being saved. When we come to the end of our own efforts at making things right and displaying what righteousness we think we have, and when we weep for our inability to be right, knowing that we ought to be so, we can be described by these phrases. But this is only half the story, for the Lord looks to such who not only mourn for their sinful state knowing that they ought to be right, but also they are those who take what God has to say very seriously indeed. They hang on every word. They listen to the censures and rebukes and agree with them. When they hear words such as:

*But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;
we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*³⁰⁰⁷

*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*³⁰⁰⁸

They respond with an acceptance that such describes them fully. But then also they hear and accept the great offers of salvation too. They hear the Lord saying:

*Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*³⁰⁰⁹

And they respond with eagerness because they are ones who respect and stand in awe of the Lord Jesus.

Now such a description depicts the true believer. But it is vital to see here also, that such an one upon whom the Lord looks is not such by their own efforts or ingenuity. There has been the

3007 Isaiah 64:6.

3008 Romans 3:23.

3009 Matthew 11:28.

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Pioneer who has gone before. We come on account of His first coming. He humbled Himself to enter our plane:

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, **6** who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, **7** but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient *to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*³⁰¹⁰

Not only was he humble and lowly, but He honoured and greatly respected the Father's will and word:

Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”³⁰¹¹

Now the Father looked upon the Saviour (Jesus Christ) and loved Him because with Him He was well pleased.³⁰¹² As a result the Lord Jesus reaped great rewards through His great act of sacrifice at Calvary and as a consequence those who have received of Christ are ones upon whom the Lord looks with favour. In other words, the Lord God looks only to those who display such characteristics as here described in Isaiah 66:2, and those who display such traits are only those who have put their faith in Christ who alone is the One upon whom the Father looks with pleasure for all that He has done. Psalms 15 and 24 speak about who may enter God's holy presence as being those who are clean in life. Again only the Lord Jesus fits the requirements outlined in these Psalms, but those who follow Christ must be like Him by faith. In other words, it really does matter how a person lives. We cannot muster righteousness by ourselves, but we can live in the righteousness which Christ provides. On a positive note, one who looks to the Lord with a contrite heart, who knows their poverty spiritually speaking, and who clings to God's word to believe it, receive it, and do it is one upon whom God's favour rests.

3010 Philippians 2:5-8.

3011 John 5:19. See also John 5:30; 6:38.

3012 Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22.

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66:3,4.

These two verses seem to go together. Verse 5 returns to those who *“tremble at His word”* picking up from the character described in verse 2. In verses 3 and 4 we have a contrast to such as are contrite, poor and who tremble at God's word and then also what God will do to such.

Verse 3 offers us four actions of a person who must be contrasted with the contrite man. First we have a statement about a man who *“kills a bull”* in the same way that he *“slays a man.”* The killing of the bull is, of course, referring to the offering of a sacrifice. But this man is simply committing murder, for to slay a person is simply to murder them. In other words, the sacrifice of a bull was simply murder. There was no thought of sorrow for sin, nor of seeking to make things right, nor of worship of God. The offering was something that had lost its essential meaning. This idea is made plainer by the second statement, for such a person who *“sacrifices a lamb”* was simply ending the life of the lamb just as you would end the life of a dog by breaking its neck. All we have in these two statements is the ending of an animal's life for no apparent reason, and so is illustrative of murder.

But there were also other types of offerings in the temple that did not involve animals, namely, the *“grain offering,”* and the burning of *“incense.”* Such who were not contrite and poor made such offerings with disdain, for the essential meanings and principles for which these sacrifices and offerings were at first given (i.e. to point to Christ) was utterly ignored. It was as though the one bringing the grain offering may just as well have offered *“swine's blood”* (considered abominable to the Lord) in place of the proper drink offering. Their worship, although done in the prescribed manner as laid down by Moses, was, in effect, base idolatry. They had no real thought of God, His majesty and holiness, nor of their own need and sinful state. And so just as they had forgotten the essential meaning and principles of their worship and had thus fallen into gross idolatry, the way they had chosen for themselves was a way of their own devising (*“chosen their own ways”*). It was not obedience to God and His ways, even though it may have looked genuine because of the practical similarity to godly worship in these Old Testament times. What this means is that worship is *of the heart*. If the heart is not right, or if the heart does not believe, then the carrying out of rituals is nothing short of idolatry and a way of one's own devising. We can go to the right church, read the right copy of Scripture, consult the best and most faithful commentators on Scripture, say many wonderful prayers, sing great and glorious hymns and songs with gusto, but unless our hearts are truly believing and seeking the Lord, unless we are contrite in spirit and poor in spirit, we are doing what we want to do, and we are not being obedient to the Lord. Notice that

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such hypocrisy is an abomination in God's eyes as the end of verse 3 informs us.

Thus just as such a person is bent on doing what they want in their own hearts, delighting in what God calls “*their abominations,*” so the Lord will bring forth and choose for them “*their delusions*” (or vexations) and He will bring upon them “*their fears.*”³⁰¹³ Now what God delights in is always good, not just in and of itself, but for us in reality. Consequently to choose one's own way is to choose that which is not good but which will be a vexation and will be something that results in fear. Think of the man, for example, who chooses riches as his god, his aim in life. Once he has gathered much he has the great worry of keeping hold of it all. What does he do? He makes a fortress, pays for insurance, and hires those who will guard his hoard. Is he content? Not at all! He fears that his own helpers might be siphoning off the riches he has gathered. What benefit does he gather from all these possessions? Can they comfort him when he struggles in his mind and heart about death or illness? Not at all. And so such a man who chooses riches as his god ends up with delusions and vexations and becomes fearful of those who might want to impoverish him.

Now why does the Lord “*choose their delusions,*” and why does He “*bring their fears upon them*” if these are simply the inevitable consequences of wrong choices?³⁰¹⁴ Well we understand the sovereignty of God here. The Lord confirms the outcome by His sovereign choice. If we seek money as our God, well then God will determine the vexations and fears for us that will result from such a choice. God could have withheld these for a time. In fact it appears that sometimes this is the case, for the wicked do not always come to grief in their sin straight away.³⁰¹⁵ The reason for the Lord's choice for such wicked folk here is that no one listened to Him when He called. In fact twice we read that God had spoken but no one listened:

when I called, no one answered

when I spoke they did not hear

Such a thing is incredible. Can we imagine anyone not listening nor hearing something the Queen might say or someone with authority and power? Imagine you are sent a tax demand which is due and you ignore it. What do you think will happen? The God of the universe, the Creator all things, the One who is perfect and completely good, speaks and declares and no one takes any notice or even bothers to hear what He has to say! Such is unbelievably preposterous but it is something we

3013 Isaiah 66:3,4.

3014 Isaiah 66:4.

3015 See Psalm 73 and Jeremiah 12:1f.

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are all too familiar with in our own day. The question we must ask ourselves is whether we fail to heed what the Lord has spoken? The outcome of not hearing God's spoken word, or of not listening to what He has to say is the propagation of evil and that in which the great good God cannot delight. Time and time again we are presented with the truth that to reject God, to fail to hear what He has to say, and to dishonour His word, is to choose evil, to go one's own way, and to end up in unmitigated disaster.

66:5.

This verse seems to be the concluding thought to what precedes in verses 3 and 4. What we observe here is the great contrast between those who truly trust God and who *“tremble at His word,”* and those who choose their own ways in which God does not delight. What we have, then, is a word of encouragement for those who seek God and who hold Him in great esteem. It would appear that those who were acting hypocritically, that is, who were carrying out the prescribed worship but not in truth and with their hearts, actually *“hated”* those who trembled at the Lord's word. It may be understood that the world who know nothing of God's special revelation in Scripture would naturally hate those who proclaim God's truth, but here it is those who claim to be God's people who are doing the hating. Is this not the case today too? There are very many who claim the label “Christian” but who roundly reject and ridicule the true believers. For example, when a person declares that Christ is the only way and that no one can be truly saved apart from justification by faith, what do we find among those who claim to be the Lord's? All too often we hear objections of all kinds because the gospel is so narrow. Can we not broaden it just a little bit? Surely those who do good like Mother Theresa, or those who perform great miracles, or those whose life displays goodness despite their rejection of Biblical doctrines (e.g. creation which they replace with evolution) should be counted in with the righteous? When we reply that only those who accept all that God has said, that is, those who *“tremble at His word”* ought to be considered true Christians, we are termed bigoted and narrow-minded. Our response to this is to love and stay with the truth. We ought to be so winsome and Christlike but with a firmness of the prophets which declares *“thus says the Lord”*!

Now in verse 5 it appears that those who had accepted what God had declared and who trembled at His word were also *“cast out”* and not just hated. They were outside what was the visible representation of God's holy people. How remarkable! These haters taunted the godly by saying such things as: well if you believe in such a narrow gospel lets see where that gets you! They

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make the suggestion that it would be impossible to imagine that God would be truly “*glorified*” in what they affirmed, and they ridicule the godly by homing in on their sorrow and lowliness asking: where is your joy? In fact the statement: “*let the Lord be glorified, that we may see your joy*” amounts to a wager. These haters were so confident against the godly that they served up what they were saying as a challenge. If you really believe in such a God who demands that we honour Him to the exclusion of all else, then you are foolish! Now the Lord responds to these taunters by stating that they will “*be ashamed,*” and so gives assurance to the godly.

66:6.

In verse 6 we have a series of three statements which speak of God's actions as a result of His voice and speaking from the very temple whereby the hypocrites were in operation. This verse seems to be a follow on from verse 5 and acts as the means by which the haters and the godless would become ashamed. They were worshipping God by ritual, and not in heart nor in truth. The very place where they were worshipping would be the site whereby their shame would be revealed. This verse has been rendered slightly differently by some translators. Compare the following three versions:

The **sound** of noise from the city!
A **voice** from the temple!
The **voice** of the Lord, who fully repays His enemies!³⁰¹⁶

The **sound** of an uproar from the city!
A **sound** from the temple!
The **sound** of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies!³⁰¹⁷

Hark! an uproar from the city,
Hark! it cometh from the temple,
Hark! the LORD rendereth recompense to His enemies.³⁰¹⁸

The three words in bold are all translations of the same Hebrew word: קוֹל *qûl*, which is most often translated as “a voice” or “sound.” Notice the progression here. First comes the “*sound*” of a tumult or a noise which is indistinguishable or has no explanation (as yet). And then second we learn that this noise comes from the temple in the city. Finally we are told that it is “*the voice of the Lord*” which is sounding from the temple. What does the voice of the Lord say? We are not told that, but

3016 Isaiah 66:6, NKJV.

3017 Isaiah 66:6, ESV.

3018 Mechon-Mamre website: <https://mechon-mamre.org/about.htm>

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we read that the Lord *“fully repays His enemies.”* Translations other than the NKJV lean towards the idea of the sound being something other than a distinct voice, perhaps some action or event. It would appear, then, that the noise and tumult which at first is unclear as to its origin is then identified as coming from the temple, and finally seems to be the Lord acting (or possibly speaking) in some way. However, on account of the opening words of verse 5 where we are exhorted to *“hear the word of the Lord,”* it seems best to understand this voice or sound as being the Lord speaking. From this we understand that what seems at first to be an indistinct noise to those who are not among those who tremble at God's word, then becomes identifiable as to its origin and finally comprehensible as something (most probably a message) from the Lord.

66:7-9

These three verses form the introduction of a speech concerning that which the Lord will do for Jerusalem and so must be considered along with what follows after in verses 10 and 11. The whole series of statements of verses 7 to 9 is given to demonstrate that despite the fact that things do not look good, nevertheless what God was doing was for the best.

It begins with an absurdity in verse 7 which is expressed twice. We are asked to imagine a pregnant woman who manages to give birth and deliver a child but without any *“labour,”* and without any *“pain.”* The Lord then declares the obvious truth that such a scenario is an impossibility. Pregnancy leads to pain in childbirth. This is something which has been clear ever since the fall of mankind.³⁰¹⁹ None has ever seen nor heard of such a situation as a woman bringing forth a son without labour and pain. Then the Lord changes the imagery to focus on *“the earth”* and also *“a nation”* in verse 8. Is it possible that the earth should bring forth that which God intends for it in a single day? We note here that this statement does not negate Genesis 1 which speaks of creation in a literal six day period, for the whole point here is of renewal and redemption, not initial creation. Other translations offer the word *“land”* in place of *“earth”* found in the NKJV. This fits in better with the next statement which speaks of the nation.³⁰²⁰ The sense then is that a nation and a country takes a great deal of time to form and the end point (the process of birth), just like labour at the end of pregnancy, is painful.

The last statement of verse 8 is puzzling. It would seem that Zion at the time of the prophets was in the habit of being impatient. Just as soon as Zion came to the point of labour, the children were born with great speed as if to rule out any pain or difficulty. What seems to be the sense of

3019 Genesis 3:16.

3020 The ESV and NASB have *“land,”* whilst the NIV has *“country,”* at Isaiah 66:8 for example.

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verses 7 and 8 then, is the idea of impatience and an unwillingness to go through the pain associated with labour in bringing about anything new.

But there is no need to worry. The Lord who brought the people through such a long process will bring them into being finally. It is impossible to imagine that a pregnancy would not result in a birth.³⁰²¹ The Lord who is the cause of this process will not suddenly stop it or seal the womb as-it-were. From these thoughts we note that the coming of Zion and the formation of the true nation of God (of which Israel was simply the shadow and type) was not yet. It was still to be. Further, we learn that this nation which God is bringing to birth would go through the process of labour with its associated pains, but the Lord would not fail in ushering in the newborn one. What is this nation and land? Was it Israel of old or Israel after the (yet future) exile? I think not. I suggest that the nation the Lord is talking about is the one featured in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of Daniel 2 and the prophecy of Daniel 7. There we read of *"a stone ... cut out without hands"* which crushed the kingdoms of this world and became a great mountain which is described as: *"a kingdom which shall never be destroyed."*³⁰²² These prophecies speak of the church which is the culmination of all the prophecies about the Lord's true believing people. I hasten to add that all that may call itself "church" in our day is certainly not the true church. The true church is easy to see if you have the word of God in your heart and are able to see with God's eyes (i.e. through what He has revealed in His word).

66:10,11.

In these verses the focus is on Jerusalem, but not simply the location in Israel which would undergo siege, destruction, captivity, rebuilding, and continued contention right up to the present day. What is in view here is the *"new Jerusalem"* spoken of in Revelation.³⁰²³ In other words we are focusing on the finished work of redemption. The church (the true church that is) is also indicated by this term, although it is still being sanctified in the present time. Paul writing the letter to the Hebrews sums up this understanding of the new Jerusalem and Zion to come wonderfully. He declares that we have not come to Mount Sinai as Israel of old did.³⁰²⁴ Then he states:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and

3021 Isaiah 66:9.

3022 Daniel 2:34,44. See also Daniel 7:13,14.

3023 Revelation 21:2.

3024 Hebrews 12:18-21.

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church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, **24** to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of Abel*.³⁰²⁵

All true believers when they meet are a part of this new *“heavenly Jerusalem”* which comprises all those who have gone before together with the angels who worship God and the *“general assembly”* of believers the world over. It is this Jerusalem that is intended here. We are to *“rejoice with Jerusalem”* and we are also to *“be glad with her,”* for she is the final completed redeemed gathering of all God's truly adopted ones wherein great joy and gladness resides. The call to rejoice is given three times:

Rejoice with Jerusalem.

Be glad with her.

Rejoice for joy with her.

These three calls are addressed to two sets of people (who may be one and the same but expressing different emotions). First the call to rejoice and be glad comes to *“all you who love her.”*³⁰²⁶ That is all who look forward to the day when the true church, (the true Zion and the new Jerusalem), will come as a bride to be wed to her Husband, (the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world). But then also, the call to rejoice also comes to *“all you who mourn for her.”*³⁰²⁷ Those who mourn for the new Jerusalem are weeping for the state she is currently in, assailed by enemies, stumbling and struggling as she fights her threefold enemy (sin, Satan and the world).

To what purpose ought those (who love her and mourn for her) rejoice with her?³⁰²⁸ It is that the people may be satisfied and satiated. This new Jerusalem will be pure and holy. It will be a place of satisfaction and delight. We are told that it would not only be a place to feed, but also a place where satisfaction is experienced. What this new Jerusalem has to offer is fully satiating. Such is not the experience in this world. Nothing truly satisfies, but in the new Jerusalem we will be fully satisfied. Further we will be enabled to *“drink deeply,”* that is, we will be enabled to draw water at great length, a full and copious draft such as will fully satisfy.³⁰²⁹ It is not just a sip or a taste but a quenching of the inner thirst. The new Jerusalem will be such as to truly quench the thirst to such an

3025 Hebrews 12:22-24.

3026 Isaiah 66:10.

3027 Isaiah 66:10.

3028 Isaiah 66:11.

3029 Isaiah 66:11.

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extent that they will *“be delighted with the abundance of her glory.”*³⁰³⁰ This will be a place of *“glory”* and so does not indicate a temporal state or affair. Notice further that in this new Jerusalem there will not just be enough, but an *“abundance”* of this glory. The Lord is a truly generous giver.³⁰³¹

66:12,13.

In verse 12 we have the second *“thus says the Lord”* phrase which serves to emphasise the importance that what we are reading comes from the very heart and mouth of God. As we noted earlier in the introduction to this section it is not easy to see any sub-divisions in the text, for all seems to run in one long sequence. That this verse is a continuation of what went before is shown by the fact that the Lord is still speaking of the city, Jerusalem (*“her”*).

We have, in verse 12, a description of what the Lord will most certainly do (*“behold I will ...”*) and then a consequence to such an action that the Lord has done (*“then you shall feed ...”*). So, the Lord will bring peace to Jerusalem and in such a way as it will be *“like a river.”* What does this suggest? Well it seems that this peace is something that continually flows. Apart from continued peace (a theme which is repeated in Isaiah 26:3), the Lord would also grant to Jerusalem *“the glory of the Gentiles”* which will also be *“like a flowing stream.”*³⁰³² This thought reiterates the idea expressed in Isaiah 2:

2 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *that* the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. **3** Many people shall come and say, “come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.³⁰³³

From these words in verse 12 we can see that the description fits the time period of the gospel age. However what is being viewed is the future new Jerusalem being brought about in and during the gospel age. In other words, the gospel age is a continued advance of the kingdom of God which is the new creation of God that will only be finally concluded at the return of the Saviour. By the term *“glory”* here (*“the glory of the Gentiles”*) is meant strength. However, it is not that the Gentiles

3030 Isaiah 66:11.

3031 Isaiah 66:11. See John 10:10.

3032 Isaiah 66:12.

3033 Isaiah 2:2,3.

Studies in Isaiah.

have anything to offer or add to the Lord. The thought is rather similar to that expressed in Psalm 29:1,2:

1 Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, give unto the LORD glory and strength. 2 Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.³⁰³⁴

The use of one's powers in the service of the Lord.

The consequences of this grant of peace, and of a flowing of the Gentiles to Jerusalem, is now spelt out at the end of verse 12, and further discussed in verse 13. They shall *"feed,"* they shall be *"carried,"* they shall be *"dandled,"* and they shall be *"comforted."* There is a great sense of compassion and intimacy here. It is not simply that they shall be catered for and looked after as far as their needs were concerned, but that they would be truly cherished and loved. In verse 13 it is put as the comfort and love that a mother has for her child. Not all mothers truly love their children, but in general a mother's love for her offspring is instinctive and maternal. And this is but an analogy, for the Lord will love and comfort His people in such a way as though it would be like our mother loving us, the comfort and strength of the one who bore us. Remember that we are born again through what Christ has done and that the church flows from the wounds and death of Christ. Christ demonstrated such maternal love for His people when He walked this earth.³⁰³⁵

66:14.

Verse 14 speaks of how those so privileged to observe and experience what the Lord was doing in the gospel age would feel. So when such saw what was going on, the outcome would be fourfold:

1. your heart shall rejoice,
2. and your bones shall flourish like grass;
3. the hand of the Lord shall be known to His servants,
4. and *His* indignation to His enemies.

Any believer who sees the gospel advancing, or who sees an unbeliever drawn into the kingdom

3034 Psalm 29:1,2.

3035 Deuteronomy 32:11; Psalm 91:4; Matthew 11:28-30; 23:37.

Studies in Isaiah.

cannot but be excited and feel joy (*“your heart shall rejoice”*). As our Lord said

*I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.*³⁰³⁶

Such joy includes the spiritual growth of the church as well as its increase in numbers. When believers deepen in the faith, when fellowship is truly sweet such that we can see the Lord in one another, then joy abounds. Conversely, if we find that we have no interest in the work of the gospel and of missions, or if we are not moved by stories of redemption in other parts of the world, then surely such is an indication that we had better examine ourselves to see if we are truly saved? So the first fruit for the believers and inhabitants of the new Jerusalem is that they rejoice over the newborns and over the comfort and love that comes from the Lord to His people.

The second thing to be observed is growth. We read that *“your bones shall flourish like grass.”* Grass, of course, grows rapidly and remorselessly! But why the reference to bones? Well I think two thoughts are implied. First it relates to stature. When a baby is born they are fully formed with all their organs and systems fully functioning, but their development and growth is most obviously seen in the way in which their bones grow and they become taller. But then secondly I think we are meant also to see new growth here. In other words the formation of new believers. To increase in bones means to have more bodies. So the idea that *“your bones shall flourish like grass”* would indicate an increase in number amongst the people of God. This particular second sentence speaks volumes concerning evangelism. In the modern age we are more concerned with procedure, activity, schedule, programme and so on. But what is seen here is that when the Lord brings peace amongst His people, He also draws the Gentiles to them, and consequently there is growth (numerical and spiritual). It all really depends on us being the Lord's, knowing Him, and dwelling in His goodness.

The third statement (*“the hand of the Lord shall be known to His servants,”*) can be taken in two ways. First it may simply indicate that the Lord was with His people in the same way as a parent might hold the hand of their child. It suggests the action and doings of God. In other words the people of the Lord in knowing the Lord would also know His hand or His help and aid. But the sentence may also be taken in a spiritual sense, for the phrase *“the hand of the Lord”* is, as I have already made clear elsewhere, a title of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is clearly intimated in Psalm 118

3036 Luke 15:7.

Studies in Isaiah.

which is thought to be a Psalm of David.³⁰³⁷

15 ... The right hand of the LORD does valiantly. 16 The right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.³⁰³⁸

Three times we have mention of *“the right hand of the Lord.”* Twice it is described as doing *“valiantly”* and one that it is *“exalted.”* It is difficult not to see here a personal reflection of the Messiah, for what or who else can be described in such exalted terms?³⁰³⁹ Or take, for example, the following prophecy in Ezekiel:

The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it *was* full of bones.³⁰⁴⁰

It is ludicrous to imagine this in terms of a literal hand. Much better to see this as a Christophany. Thus the pre-incarnate Lord comes and brings Ezekiel out by the Spirit of the Lord in the valley of dry bones. Seen in such a way we observe further that we have reference to the Trinity again. We have *“the hand of Lord,” “the Spirit,”* (spoken of as *“of the Lord”*), and *“the Lord”* here.

And so the *“the hand of the Lord shall be known to His servants”* is a phrase which speaks not simply of the servants experiencing God's good hand of favour, (it does convey this idea too), but in actually knowing the Lord Jesus.³⁰⁴¹

The last statement (*“and His indignation to His enemies”*) speaks of the effect upon those who reject the Lord and the gospel. This is readily understandable because the Lord's wrath rests on all sin and evil. If we accept the gospel then the wrath of God has been taken on our behalf by the One True sacrifice for sins, namely the Lord Jesus who was prophesied of in all the Old Testament and seen in the flesh in the New Testament. If however, we reject the gospel then the wrath of God remains or abides upon us:

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.³⁰⁴²

3037 See Ezra 3:10f.

3038 Psalm 118:15b,16. See also Isaiah 25:10; 41:20;

3039 See also those references to the Lord being at the right hand of the Father: Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; 16:19; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1Peter 3:33.

3040 Ezekiel 37:1.

3041 Jeremiah 9:23,24; John 17:3; 2Peter 1:2-4.

3042 John 3:36.

Studies in Isaiah.

And rightly so! All that is sinful and evil must be dealt with. The idea that sin may be left unpunished, or that evil may be allowed free course is repugnant. The thrice holy God will have all things made right. The rebellious who reject the offer of the gospel must pay the full price for their sin. Everlasting hell is the just payment for the sinners have offended an infinite God who is infinitely holy and pure.

66:15-17.

In verses 15 and 16 we have two statements which begin with the explanatory word *“for.”* These give the reasons and the outworking of the Lord's actions. The Lord's indignation, His wrath, upon His enemies will come in a certain and specified way as shown below by our further analysis:

15 For behold, the Lord will come
with fire and
with His chariots,
like a whirlwind,
to render
His anger with fury, and
His rebuke with flames of fire.

16 For
by fire and
by His sword
the Lord will judge all flesh; and
the slain of the Lord shall be many.

The first thing to note here is that we have the Lord's second coming. The mention of *“fire,”* and *“flames of fire,”* is one clear indication of this, but we are in no doubt about this because in verse 16 we read of the Lord coming to *“judge all flesh.”* The second coming of Christ is mentioned in connection with fire on at least two occasions:

... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, **8** in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, **10** when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.³⁰⁴³

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the

3043 2Thessalonians 1:7b-10.

Studies in Isaiah.

earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. **11** Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **12** looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? **13** Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.³⁰⁴⁴

It would seem clear from the New Testament references that the fire connected with Christ's return is not simply a metaphor, but something that will really be observed, and of such an horrendous extent so as to make the very fundamental parts of creation melt. But what are we to make of the Lord's "*chariots*"? We know that Ezekiel would see the Lord revealed in a kind of chariot, and we note that when Elijah was taken up to heaven it involved "*a chariot of fire,*" and "*horses of fire,*" which took Elijah and "*went up by a whirlwind into heaven.*"³⁰⁴⁵ We also learn from Psalm 68, a Psalm of David, that:

The chariots of God *are* twenty thousand, *even* thousands of thousands; the Lord is among them *as in* Sinai, in the Holy Place.³⁰⁴⁶

But these references to "*chariots*" of the Lord must clearly be figures, that is, metaphorical. What then do they suggest? We are, of course, many, many years before Ezekiel's visions, and yet the purpose of such a revelation was to show that the Lord came with His angels in attendance and these were awesome and unrestricted as far as movement and speed was concerned. In the ancient world of the Bible a chariot was a vehicle of honour and a mode of transport that was swift.³⁰⁴⁷

The reference to "*a whirlwind*" is also something we see in Ezekiel's vision. At the beginning we read these words:

Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness *was* all around it and radiating out of its midst like the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.³⁰⁴⁸

Again the whirlwind was in attendance when Elijah was taken up into heaven.³⁰⁴⁹ The Lord spoke to

3044 2Peter 3:10-13.

3045 2Kings 2:11.

3046 Psalm 68:17.

3047 Genesis 41:43; 50:9; Jeremiah 4:13; Micah 1:13.

3048 Ezekiel 1:4.

3049 2Kings 2:1,11.

Studies in Isaiah.

the patriarch Job twice from a whirlwind.³⁰⁵⁰ In both cases it was to bring a much needed rebuke to Job. We discover also that the voice of the Lord's thunder and lighting comes "*in the whirlwind,*" so that the earth might tremble and quake.³⁰⁵¹ The connection between the whirlwind and the Lord's judgment is also seen in the book of Proverbs:

When your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind,
When distress and anguish come upon you.³⁰⁵²

When the whirlwind passes by, the wicked *is no more*, but the righteous *has an everlasting foundation*.³⁰⁵³

But the theme of judgment connected with the whirlwind is also seen particularly in Isaiah.³⁰⁵⁴ For example, in the burden against Damascus we read that the nations will be dispersed as chaff and will be chased away "*like a rolling thing before the whirlwind.*"³⁰⁵⁵ Then also we discover that the "*the princes*" and the "*judges of the earth,*" will also be dealt with in judgement so that when the Lord blows upon them, "*the whirlwind will take them away like stubble.*"³⁰⁵⁶ Thus far we find that the Lord has come for the express purpose of bringing judgement, and this is what we observe at the end of verse 16. The Lord comes with fire, chariots, and whirlwind in order to "*render His anger.*" Now the Lord's anger is not capricious nor is it arbitrary. John Stott made the following assessment in his book *The Cross of Christ* on the nature of God's wrath:

The reason why a propitiation is necessary is that sin arouses the wrath of God. This does not mean (as animists fear) that he is likely to fly off the handle at the most trivial provocation, still less that he loses his temper for no apparent reason at all. For there is nothing capricious or arbitrary about the holy God. Nor is he ever irascible, malicious, spiteful or vindictive. His anger is neither mysterious nor irrational. It is never unpredictable, but always predictable, because it is provoked by evil and evil alone. **The wrath of God ... is his steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations.** In short, God's anger is poles apart from ours. What provokes our anger (injured vanity) never provokes his; what provokes his anger (evil) seldom provokes ours.³⁰⁵⁷

3050 Job 38:1; 40:6.

3051 Psalm 78:18.

3052 Proverbs 1:27.

3053 Proverbs 10:25.

3054 See Isaiah 5:28; 17:13; 21:1; 40:24; 41:16; 66:15.

3055 Isaiah 17:13.

3056 Isaiah 40:24.

3057 **John Stott.** *The Cross of Christ*. IVP. 1986. P202.

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The highlighted section shows the constancy and purity of God's wrath. It is so unlike human anger in that there is no loss of temper or vindictiveness. When God punishes and brings judgement to bear it is in full accord with His justice, His holiness, and His love.

In verse 16 the fire theme is continued but judgement *“by His sword”* is also added alongside. In this verse we discover that *“the Lord will judge all flesh”* which means that none escape. The idea that there is an alternative way out as suggested by Roman Catholicism (i.e. purgatory), or that the Lord will simply allow some through unnoticed is preposterous in the extreme. We read further that the Lord will strike with His sword so that *“the slain of the Lord shall be many.”* A sword, of course, is a cutting or slicing implement. It is used to separate things that were seamlessly joined. In Hebrews 4:12 we learn how the Lord's very word is like a sword that divides even the soul and spirit and judges the innermost being of man. In this case there is no escape for the judged by their inner motives will be exposed and uncovered. What they have harboured in secret will be uncovered by the sword of the Lord's judgement.

The general statements of judgement by fire and sword are then particularised in verse 17. Those who separate themselves and arrange their lives so that they can worship idols in *“the gardens”* and who eat *“swine's flesh and the abomination and the mouse,”* contrary to God's wishes will end up *“consumed.”* There really is no escape. This singular example is set for all the rebellious options chosen by those who favour eastern ways.³⁰⁵⁸ Verse 17 ends with one of the *“says the Lord”* statements reinforcing the point that such statements are ones made by God.

66:18.

The particularising example of verse 17 is expanded by the statement at the beginning of verse 18. Thus by stating *“for I know their works and their thoughts”* the Lord includes all types of rebellion not singled out here. God knows our hearts and can see our actions, whatever they may be. The fact that He mentions one set of misdemeanours in verse 17 does not mean that other sins and iniquities are not going to be treated in the same way. Notice also that the Lord tells us here that He knows both our actions (*“works”*) and what we are thinking inside (*“thoughts”*). Any division of works or deeds from thoughts is ludicrous. The modern obsession with being able to do as one pleases for it has no consequence upon others, or the idea that we can think one way and act in another is hopeless hogwash. As a man thinks in his heart so is he.³⁰⁵⁹

3058 Isaiah 2:6.

3059 Proverbs 23:7. See also: Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:45.

Studies in Isaiah.

As we progress in verse 18 the sense and context alters once again. In verses 12 to 14 the emphasis has been upon the work of God in the church during the gospel age. Verses 15, 16 and 17 focus attention on the second coming and the final judgement. Then in verse 18 the first phrase follows on from verse 17 and then we have a statement which is clearly ambiguous, namely:

It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory.³⁰⁶⁰

On the one hand we could take this in a gospel sense. The Lord is gathering His people from the four corners of the world in order that they may join with Him wondrously and see the glory of the Lord. But on the other hand we might also see these words as the final gathering of the nations at that point when the Lord returns in order that those who have rebelled may see the Lord in all His awesome power and majesty. The latter sense fits in with what has gone before in verses 15 to 17, but the former gospel sense seems to fit in with what follows on. Perhaps the ambiguity is intended. Remember that Christ's work on the cross which brought salvation is also a great judgment on sin, whilst Christ's return which is for judgement of the world will also bring in final salvation for the elect. It is not really possible to divorce Christ's first and second comings in essence because the Lord is the same and does not vary, even though the two are distinct both in a temporal sense and in terms of the outcomes.

66:19.

We stipulate a gospel application for the statement at the end of verse 18 because of what we read here in verses 19 and 20, where there is mention of those *“who escape.”* The finality of judgement as expressed in verses 15 to 17 admit of no exceptions, so mention of escapees must have reference to the gospel era. Those gathered from among the nations will have a *“sign”* placed among them. To what does this sign refer? Some suggest the sign is Christ.³⁰⁶¹ Others suggest that it must be some distinguishing mark or symbol by which the true remnant may be observed.³⁰⁶² In this connection it is worth recalling that the Israelites were to daub the blood of the lamb slain on the door-posts and lintels of their houses at the Passover, as *“a sign”* for the people that the Lord would pass by when He saw the blood.³⁰⁶³ The same Hebrew word (אֹת *’ôṭ*) is used in this Exodus passage

3060 Isaiah 66:18b.

3061 Luke 2:34.

3062 Ezekiel 9:4,6.

3063 Exodus 12:7,13.

Studies in Isaiah.

as found in Isaiah 66:19. Paul speaks of the sealing of believers by the Spirit given to us in our hearts as a guarantee.³⁰⁶⁴ Hence it would seem to indicate that all who are the true remnant have the Spirit of God within not only as a guarantee and deposit, but also a mark of ownership, the very stamp of God.

The above line of reasoning seems sound when we come to look at the Hebrew text. I have attempted a translation for verse 19 which I share below:

← Hebrew reads from the right

וְשִׂמְתִּי בָהֶם אֹת

and I will place in them a token

וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי מֵהֶם פְּלִיטִים אֶל-הַגּוֹיִם

and I will send from them escapees to the nations,

תַּרְשִׁישׁ פּוּל וְלֹד מִשְׁכֵּי קִשֶּׁת--תּוּבַל וִיָּוֶן הָאֵיִם הַרְחֻקִּים

Tarshish, Pul, and Lud who draw the bow, Tubal and Javan the coastlands afar off

אֲשֶׁר לֹא-שָׁמְעוּ אֶת-שְׁמִיעִי וְלֹא-רָאוּ אֶת-כְּבוֹדִי

who have not heard (namely) My name and have not seen (namely) My glory

וְהִגִּידוּ אֶת-כְּבוֹדִי בַּגּוֹיִם

and they shall declare (namely) My glory in the nations.

From the above translation we would offer the following analysis

3064 2Corinthians 1:22.

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and I will place in them a token
and I will send from them escapees to the nations,
Tarshish, Pul, and Lud who draw the bow,
Tubal and Javan the coastlands afar off
who have not heard
(namely) My name and
have not seen
(namely) My glory
and they shall declare
(namely) My glory in the nations.

The essential teaching of verse 19 seems to be that the Lord would bring people into the kingdom from all over the world, and in each would be placed a *“token”* (*“sign”*) so that these could go to the nations, to those who had not heard about the Lord or known of His glory, so that these too could declare the glory of the Lord. I have used the word *“token”* in my translation to point to the idea that this is the deposit of the Holy Spirit in a believer. Most translations speak of a sign placed *among* the people, but the Hebrew word (בָּתָּם) has the prefixed preposition usually translated as “by,” “with” or “in,” followed by the third masculine plural pronoun (*“them”*) so the natural translation of *“in them”* seems to be indicated. As a consequence of this token being within, these *“escapees”* (or the remnant who would survive) are now to be sent *“to the nations.”* Here we cannot escape the New Testament idea of the Great Commission.³⁰⁶⁵

Concerning the representative nations listed, *“Tarshish”* was probably a city in southern Spain, north of the island of Gibraltar.³⁰⁶⁶ It was an ancient Phoenician colony and a centre of trade. Being so far west it was probably used to indicate all the far distant lands west of Israel. The name *“Pul”* probably indicates an African tribe near to Ethiopia, and the name *“Lud”* indicates another African country probably sited nearby modern day Libya. These three nations are described as being those *“who draw the bow,”* and so indicate all the military or warring nations. They are so noted to remind us that the world (in general) is at war, and especially with God. The name *“Tubal”* indicates a northern nation possibly (originally) in Asia Minor, but more likely further north in the region of Russia. The name *“Javan”* indicates Greece. These two nations are then spoken of as *“the coastlands afar off.”* Javan (Greece) is made up of many islands, but the point is that far distant lands are being indicated. Hence both descriptive statements serve to indicate the far and wide nature of those to whom the gospel is to be spread, and their general enmity (they are those *“who draw the bow”* and so are warlike and enemies). If we think of the nation of Israel bordered

3065 Matthew 28:18-20.

3066 We have noted elsewhere that some consider Cornwall as a possible location for Tarshish.

Studies in Isaiah.

on the west by the Mediterranean and on the east by the Arabian desert, the names we have here indicate as far south and as far north as one could go. These are put as representatives of the entire world for they designate distant lands that had no knowledge of God, His name, and His glory, and they signify the fact that the world is not predisposed to hear the gospel message.

Whom is to be sent to these far distant and opposing peoples? It is those who have escaped, (*“escapees”*), or, in other words, the remnant. When they go with the token or sign into these distant and enemy lands, the outcome will be that now these will be enabled to *“declare”* the great goodness and glory of God. The text skips over the point that conversion is occurring, but that is the essential teaching here. The Name and glory of God spreads from one land to another by means of these *“escapees”* who are blessed with this especial *“token.”* Hence we have here a prophetic description of the history we can read in the book of Acts.

66:20,21.

We can arrange verse 20 as follows:

Then they shall bring
 all your brethren
 for an offering to the Lord
 out of all nations,
 on horses and
 in chariots and
 in litters,
 on mules and
 on camels,
 to My holy mountain Jerusalem,

Verse 20 ought not to be disconnected from verse 19 as we have done here simply to help in our exposition. The *“they”* which opens verse 20 is the ones who get to *“declare”* the glory of the Lord who were enabled to do so by the spread of the message far and wide. In other words, verse 19 seems to speak of the message going out far and wide to distant and opposing lands, and now verse 20 speaks of the return journey so-to-speak. Remember the prophecy of Isaiah is couched in Old Testament terms, so Jerusalem and the Lord's *“holy mountain”* are always central features, but we are not to take these literally. What is intended is, however, is the idea of being drawn into the kingdom of God. Note to start with that these distant (once hostile) ones will bring *“brethren”* to the Lord, so that we are talking about the true and real family of God. Furthermore, note also that it

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is not just *“brethren,”* but *“all your brethren”* signalling a complete complement of those whom the Lord wills to save, (i.e. the elect). In that it is also *“your brethren,”* we note that every new believer is part of the one true family and so in a very real sense the unity of faith is clearly portrayed.³⁰⁶⁷

Now such new believers are brought as *“an offering to the Lord.”* What is meant by this statement? Well we have one instance in the New Testament which helps us here. The apostle Paul speaks of his ministry of working amongst the Gentiles as an *“offering”* to the Lord.

*That I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*³⁰⁶⁸

It would seem then that our (true) ministry is an offering of worship unto the Lord. We dare not suggest that we offer anything in order to be accepted for the only offering we may bring in that sense is the offering of Christ on the cross freely made for us. No! Instead we must bring an offering of worship and dedication to the Lord. As we follow Christ and obey His word and voice, we bring in the sheaves from the harvest as-it-were. It is the Lord who saves, and it is the Lord who gathers, but He uses us as His wheelbarrows and pitchforks!

The universal nature of the Lord's promise to Abraham that in him *“all the families of the earth shall be blessed”* is shown here in these words *“out of all nations.”*³⁰⁶⁹ It is surely a truism, but none the less remarkable, that the gospel knows no boundaries and observes no distinction in person or status. And then we discover, more remarkably, how it will be that such will be brought (as *“an offering”*) to Jerusalem. Once again remember that Isaiah has been guided by the Lord to prophesy in such a way as to be understandable and graspable by his contemporaries, so that coming to Jerusalem is uppermost in the text. A New Testament understanding must be brought to bear here. The apostle Paul speaks of the church as the *“heavenly Jerusalem.”*³⁰⁷⁰ We discover that the people so saved will come in the following manner:

on horses and
in chariots and

3067 Isaiah 66:20.
3068 Romans 15:16.
3069 Genesis 12:3.
3070 Hebrews 12:22.

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in litters,
on mules and
on camels,

There are five modes of transport listed here.³⁰⁷¹ The number five speaks of grace, so that coming to Jerusalem (the church) is always a matter of grace, God's free gift, and never a question of works. Now all of these modes of transport indicate the better style of travelling and especially for long distances. Horses were used mainly by military men or by the prominent. Chariots were for those of honour and for those greatly esteemed. Litters signifies luxurious sedans carried by slaves. Mules and camels were beasts that carried large burdens long distances. So we have here a series of transport modes which convey the idea of being brought into the land by the best possible and most safe way. When the Lord brings His people into the kingdom He does not trifle. He works all things well. We can apply this thought with the following Scripture in mind:

*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.*³⁰⁷²

When the Lord conveys a person from the kingdom of this world into the kingdom of His Son, He does it in the most wonderful and perfect way. In the same way we note that when a person is ushered into heaven the Lord is attendant with His special presence:

*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.*³⁰⁷³

Where then are these to be conveyed? It is: *"to My holy mountain Jerusalem."*³⁰⁷⁴ There is frequent reference to the Lord's *"holy mountain"* in Isaiah, and a number of other pertinent references to the mountain of the Lord.³⁰⁷⁵ What is clearly intended by this phrase is the place where the Lord has brought about deliverance and salvation. This is seen clearly in Isaiah 25 which speaks of Christ's work on the cross.³⁰⁷⁶

3071 Zechariah 14:15.

3072 Colossians 1:13.

3073 Psalm 116:15.

3074 Isaiah 66:20.

3075 The phrase: *"holy mountain"* comes at: Isaiah 11:9; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11,25; 66:20. The phrase *"mountain of the Lord"* comes at Isaiah 2:2,3; 30:29. The phrase *"My mountain"* comes at Isaiah 14:25; 49:11; 65:9. Significantly the important phrase *"this mountain"* comes at Isaiah 25:6,7,10.

3076 See earlier comments made on this chapter.

Studies in Isaiah.

Verse 20 is broken up by the affirmation (*“says the Lord”*), indicating that what has been delivered was indeed that which the Lord has spoken. The verse continues by intimating that the offering brought will be *“in a clean vessel”* and will be brought *“into the house of the Lord.”* Again we should not take this literally, for it speaks of the gospel age where the heavenly Jerusalem is the church and where Christ is the temple. The clean vessel was one used for honourable use. Households distinguished between pots or vessels used for honourable (clean water) and dishonourable (water used for cleansing).³⁰⁷⁷ And so this offering brought in a *“clean vessel”* signifies the sanctified nature of the believer.

In verse 21 we learn that the Lord will most definitely take some of these offered *“for priests and Levites.”* Once again we must remember that we are being given gospel truths here, but set in an Old Testament culture. In the New Testament all believers are priests unto the Lord.³⁰⁷⁸ But here some will be afforded the incredible privilege of becoming priests so as to minister in the temple. How should we understand this? Well in the Old Testament economy it was only the Levites – that is, those who were descended from Levi – who could officiate in the service of the temple. People from other tribes had no place in such service. In the New Testament only certain men are called to be pastors of the church. Now in these words we discover that the Lord is indicating a change to the Old Testament order. It is not apparent at all that when the exiles returned in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah that any apart from Levites were afforded official positions in the temple. So the fulfilment of this prophecy can only be seen in the current gospel age. We note here that this surprising statement indicating a dramatic change is concluded by the affirming statement *“says the Lord,”* and so has the stamp of divine authority appended.

66:22-24.

In the introduction to our comments on Isaiah 66 I stated that it is difficult to see any clear divisions in the text. However the last three verses stand apart from the previous ones on account of the fact that they appear to be speaking only of the eternal state. One of the difficult things about reading Old Testament prophecy is that often there is commingling of first and second advent references. The *“day of the Lord”* is spoken of in connection with the Lord's first coming and His second. We repeat the fact that when Christ died on the cross His mission of salvation was accomplished at the appeasing of the wrath of God. Thus salvation comes through judgment. When

3077 2Timothy 2:22.

3078 1Peter 2:5,9.

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the Lord returns to judge the living and the dead He will also return to bring His people to glorious safety. So again judgement comes with salvation, (although not for all). So sometimes when we read a passage in Isaiah we can see elements of both advents and it is not always straight forward on first reading which parts speak of which advent. A similar thing can be said of Christ's teaching on His return. Sometimes He speaks of the final day, and at other times of a temporal judgement that was to be faced by Jerusalem.

Verse 22 informs us of the new creation. It is the Lord who *"will make"* this new creation (*"the new heavens and the new earth"*) and this will be eternal (*"shall remain before Me"*). We are brought to reflect on Genesis 1:1 where the original heavens and earth were brought into being. Here a new thing is happening. However the point is not so much to speak of this new creation of the new heavens and the new earth, but rather to speak of the state and condition of those who are the subjects and citizens of this new creation. What we have is a contrast, for the phrase *"for as ... so shall"* indicates that just as one thing is true and certain so will the other thing be equally true and certain. The Lord is going to make all things new. The new creation *"shall remain before"* the Lord. This phrase is literally "shall stand before My face." In other words, the new creation cannot be subject to variation nor to alteration. It stands forever. I think we are also justified in suggesting that to stand indicates uprightness. The new creation will be a place and state of righteousness wherein no sin can ever be found. Thus, just as the new creation will stand and will be upright and righteous, so equally will *"your descendants and your name remain."* Now, the literal rendition of this phrase would be: "so shall your seed and your name stand." Thus we learn that the inhabitants of this new creation will stand and will be upright or righteous, with no taint of evil or sin.

Verse 23 continues with the idea that *"all flesh"* is set to worship before the Lord. This serves to reinforce the notion that there is no sin, nor error, nor evil in the new creation. The basic statement here is that worship will occur *"from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another."* What does this suggest? Does it indicate that worship will only occur at New Moons and on Sabbaths? I think not. I believe these expressions indicate one continual state of worship. Now some might baulk at this because their understanding of worship is jaded by their (poor) church experience. True worship is exhilarating. True worship is true life. True worship is a walk with the Lord. This verse ends with the affirming statement *"says the Lord,"* indicating the certainty of these things.

In verse 24 we have a statement which speaks about hell. First we note that the *"they"* of verse 24 must refer to the *"all flesh"* who stand before the Lord in continual worship. So the

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righteous saved in the new creation are those who will *“look upon the corpses”* of sinners against God, (that is, those who refused to repent and continued in their rebellion). This is somewhat surprising. We might not have expected the righteous in heaven to have any knowledge of the damned in hell. At this point it is worth considering the parable that the Lord taught concerning the rich man and the beggar as recorded in Luke chapter 16.

19 “There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. **20** But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, **21** desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. **22** So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. **23** And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. **24** “Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ **25** But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. **26** And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’ **27** “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, **28** for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ **29** Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ **30** And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ **31** But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’”³⁰⁷⁹

From this parable it is clear that although there is a *“great gulf fixed”* between the place of rest and the place of torment, nevertheless it is possible for some observation one to the other. Now this is a parable so we cannot press the details too far. In Isaiah 66 we discover that the righteous can see the damned in hell. Now what they see is that *“their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched.”* In other words the damned are observed in their torment. Is this something we expected? I think the point here is that justice is seen to be done. Now this phrase: *“for their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched”* is one picked up by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ:

42 “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. **43** If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— **44** where **‘their worm does not die and the fire is not**

3079 Luke 16:19-31.

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quenched.’ 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— **46** where **‘their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’ 47** And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire— **48** where **‘their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’**³⁰⁸⁰

Modern translations omit the first and second mentions of this phrase in verses 44 and 46, but this is a mistake. The point of this statement is to make it absolutely clear that the damned are damned eternally. There is no possibility of reprieve nor of annihilation. To be in a state where the worms which eat your body are never going to die, or to be in such a situation where the flames, which would normally burn the fuel to nothing, go on and on forever is a terrifying thing to contemplate. But this is what Isaiah and the Lord Jesus state with clarity. The damned are judged righteously by a righteous God and their life and their existence is *“an abhorrence to all flesh.”* The damned are abhorrent utterly so. If we harbour thoughts of them in any state of innocence, or of being unjustly treated, or as victims, we are woefully misguided and in serious error. If we think such things, we need to have our understanding and vision of the perfect holy God elevated. We will never comprehend this justice unless we see the immense beauty and glory of the Lord. For to rebel and to reject what this beautiful One has done and offered is unbelievably sinful and wicked.

3080 Mark 9:42-48.

Appendix: Synopsis of the reigns of Judah's kings during the ministry of Isaiah.

In this appendix our sole focus is upon organising for the reader the essential details of those kings and their reigns which appear in the book of Isaiah. Our only source of information for this is the books of Kings and Chronicles.

Uzziah.

We get only a brief account of Uzziah in 2Kings but a much fuller story in 2Chronicles.³⁰⁸¹ Uzziah (called Azariah in 2Kings), began his reign at the age of sixteen in the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, reigning fifty-two years in Jerusalem in total.³⁰⁸² He is recorded as one who *“did what was right in the sight of the Lord”* and yet there are two caveats to this general description.³⁰⁸³ First he did not remove the high places so that the people still offered sacrifices and burnt incense on this pagan sites.³⁰⁸⁴ Second he became a leper which fact is only fully explained in the account of 2Chronicles.³⁰⁸⁵

Now the good things he had done are recorded in more detail in 2Chronicles. We discover that he *“sought God in the days of Zechariah”* and that *“as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper.”*³⁰⁸⁶ His success under God's careful watch included victories against the Philistines, among whom he built cities, against some Arabians of Gul Baal, and against the Meunites.³⁰⁸⁷ The Ammonites brought him tribute and his fame and strength reached as far as *“the entrance of Egypt.”*³⁰⁸⁸ He reinforced Jerusalem, and succeeded in improving both the water supply and agriculture in general extending his concerns as far as Carmel in the north, *“for he loved the soil.”*³⁰⁸⁹ He greatly improved the army and had engines of war built in Jerusalem becoming strong and, in consequence, famous.³⁰⁹⁰ However his fame and strength were his downfall because he became presumptuous, forgetting his position before the Lord. In his pride he entered the temple and attempted to burn incense.³⁰⁹¹ When he was confronted by the priests for such a transgression he

3081 2Kings 15:1-7; 2Chronicles 26:1-23.

3082 2Kings 15:1,2; 2Chronicles 26:3.

3083 2Kings 15:3; 2Chronicles 26:4.

3084 2Kings 15:4.

3085 2Kings 15:5; 2Chronicles 26:19.

3086 2Chronicles 26:5.

3087 2Chronicles 26:6,7.

3088 2Chronicles 26:8.

3089 2Chronicles 28:9,10.

3090 2Chronicles 26:11-15.

3091 2Chronicles 26:16.

became furious with them and then suddenly he became leprous and was forcibly removed, leaving as *“a leper to the day of his death.”*³⁰⁹²

Jotham.

Jotham's reign is recorded as beginning in *“the second year of Pekah, the son of Remaliah, king of Israel.”*³⁰⁹³ It would seem, however, that he took over responsibility as ruler when Uzziah his father became leprous.³⁰⁹⁴ Jotham was twenty-five years old at the beginning of his reign and ruled for sixteen years.³⁰⁹⁵ Jotham is described as a king who *“did what was right in the sight of the Lord”* following in his father's footsteps, and yet once again we are told that the high places were not removed and the people still worshipped there.³⁰⁹⁶ In 2Chronicles the writer pointedly remarks that Jotham *“did not enter the temple of the Lord,”* and further that the people still *“acted corruptly.”*³⁰⁹⁷ Although not as extensive in his achievements as his father, nevertheless he defeated the Ammonites who paid him tribute for three years, and he built in Jerusalem near the temple, and in *“the mountains of Judah.”*³⁰⁹⁸ The Chronicler tells us that Jotham's might was as a result of him having *“prepared his ways before the Lord his God.”*³⁰⁹⁹ At the end of the account in 2Kings we discover that the king of Syria (Rezin by name) and the king of Israel (Pekah the son of Remaliah) began to trouble Judah. It is noteworthy that whilst Rezin is described as *“king of Syria,”* Pekah is not identified as king of Israel, and this probably signals Rezin as the leader of the two.³¹⁰⁰ This confederacy against Judah would be a problem for Jotham's son Ahaz.³¹⁰¹

Ahaz.

Ahaz became king of Judah in the seventeenth year of Pekah king of Israel.³¹⁰² He was twenty years old and reigned for sixteen years, being described as one who *“did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord.”*³¹⁰³ This summary statement is then elaborated on in both accounts. First he is described as a king who *“walked in the way of the kings of Israel,”* by which designation

3092 2Chronicles 26:17-21.

3093 2Kings 15:32.

3094 2Chronicles 26:21.

3095 2Kings 15:33; 2Chronicles 27:1,8.

3096 2Kings 15:34,35.

3097 2Chronicles 27:2.

3098 2Kings 15:35; 2Chronicles 27:4,5.

3099 2Chronicles 27:6.

3100 2Kings 15:37.

3101 2Kings 16:5

3102 2Kings 16:1.

3103 2Kings 16:2; 2Chronicles 28:1.

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he is clearly being marked out as a wicked king, and one to be distinguished from those who preceded him.³¹⁰⁴ The Chronicler also informs us that he went as far as making idols (*“moulded images for the Baals”*).³¹⁰⁵ Then second he is described as a king who engaged in the wicked practices of the pagan surrounding nations. Whereas in Kings we read that *“he made his son pass through the fire,”* the Chronicler tells us that *“he burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom and burned his children in the fire.”*³¹⁰⁶ In Greek the name of this place was translated as “Gehenna” which is associated in the New Testament with the fires of hell. Then, third, he indulged in sacrificial worship and burnt incense *“on all the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.”*³¹⁰⁷ The Chronicler tells us that Ahaz carried out this idolatrous worship in *“every single city of Judah”* and thus *“provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers.”*³¹⁰⁸

The account in 2Kings then proceeds to inform the reader of the troubles Ahaz faced from the Syrian-Israel confederacy. However the Chronicler tells us that it was the Lord who *“delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria.”*³¹⁰⁹

The two accounts we have in 2Kings 16 and 2Chronicles 28 are complimentary and comprehensive, but they need to be examined with care. In 2Kings we are given an overall assessment that whilst the Syrian-Israel confederacy made war with Ahaz, they *“could not overcome him.”*³¹¹⁰ We discover though that Rezin captured Elath which was a port that lay at the tip of the gulf of Aqaba (the north-east arm of the Red Sea).³¹¹¹ Those who were of Judah were removed and the Edomites took over the place from that time onwards. After this, the account in 2Kings moves to Ahaz's reliance and trust on the Assyrians and describes his worship of the the gods of Damascus, the capital of Syria, despite the fact that Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria had defeated the Syrians!³¹¹² The account in 2Chronicles is much more detailed. First Ahaz was *“delivered ... into the hand of the king of Syria”* who defeated him taking a *“great multitude of them as captives”* bringing them to Damascus.³¹¹³ Ahaz was also *“delivered into the hand of the king of Israel”* and suffered a *“great slaughter.”* Pekah, king of Israel, killed one hundred and

3104 2Kings 16:3; 2Chronicles 28:2.

3105 2Chronicles 28:2.

3106 2Kings 16:3; 2Chronicles 28:3.

3107 2Kings 16:4; 2Chronicles 28:4.

3108 2Chronicles 28:25.

3109 2Kings 16:5; 2Chronicles 28:5.

3110 2Kings 16:5.

3111 2Kings 16:6.

3112 2Kings 16:7-18.

3113 2Chronicles 28:5.

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twenty thousand Judean soldiers on a single day *“because they had forsaken the Lord.”*³¹¹⁴ We are also told of a prominent warrior of Ephraim in Israel (Zichri) who killed Ahaz's son and other officials in his court.³¹¹⁵ Two hundred thousand people were deported to Samaria but Oded, a prophet of God, spoke to them about their guilt in such an act and told them to return the captives because *“the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you.”*³¹¹⁶ Leaders in Ephraim also spoke in similar manner because they knew that they had *“already offended the Lord,”* that in this act their guilt was great, and there was now *“fierce wrath against Israel.”*³¹¹⁷ As a direct result of these pleas from Oded and the leaders in Ephraim, the captives were clothed, fed and sent back to Jericho in Judah.³¹¹⁸ It was at this time that Ahaz requested help from the Assyrians. He had suffered serious humiliation but he was not overcome as the account in 2Kings informed us.³¹¹⁹

Apart from this trouble from the north on account of Syria and Israel, Ahaz also suffered attacks from the Edomites who took away some captives, and the Philistines who succeeded in invading cities of Judah and had taken a number of cities.³¹²⁰ The Chronicler informs us that it was because Ahaz *“had encouraged moral decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the Lord,”* that the Lord *“brought Judah low.”*³¹²¹

During his great distress Ahaz sent to Assyria for help. His request appears to be desperate for he subordinated himself under Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying *“I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me ..”*³¹²² Ahaz also sent gifts of treasure from the house of the Lord and from his own possessions along with his message to Tiglath-Pileser to curry his favour.³¹²³ The king of Assyria seems to have answered this request, defeating Syria, killing Rezin, and taking many captive.³¹²⁴ This account so far from 2Kings gives us the overview, the big picture. Ahaz was desperate for help and so appealed to the king of Assyria who eventually defeats Syria. But much more detail is provided in 2Chronicles. In this account we read that Ahaz requested help after the humiliation inflicted upon them from Israel, all the while the Edomites were attacking them from the south, and the Philistines from the west.³¹²⁵ But although Tiglath-Pileser came to Ahaz he

3114 2Chronicles 28:5,6.

3115 2Chronicles 28:7.

3116 2Chronicles 28:8-11.

3117 2Chronicles 28:12,13.

3118 2Chronicles 28:14,15.

3119 2Kings 16:5; 2Chronicles 28: 16.

3120 2Chronicles 28:17,18.

3121 2Chronicles 28:19.

3122 2Kings 16:7.

3123 2Kings 16:8.

3124 2Kings 16:9.

3125 2Chronicles 28:16-18.

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*“distressed him, and did not help him.”*³¹²⁶ Ahaz had given some of the treasures of the land to Tiglath-Pileser but these, it appears, were not sufficient and the king of Assyria *“did not help”* Ahaz.³¹²⁷ It would seem that Ahaz must then have sent the message recorded in 2Kings in which he subordinated himself to the rule of Tiglath-Pileser, who then (presumably for his own dominance) defeated Syria.³¹²⁸ There is no conflict between accounts here because even though Syria were defeated, Assyria now took their place and Ahaz would be no better off. If you hire a bully to get rid of another bully all you do is swap bullies.

Following the defeat of Syria, Ahaz meets up with Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria in Damascus.³¹²⁹ It is at this point that Ahaz's deplorable state becomes even worse. Whilst he was in Dmascus Ahaz *“saw an altar that was at Damascus,”* and taking a liking to it instructed Urijah the priest to make a copy of it for him.³¹³⁰ When he returned to Jerusalem Ahaz began to offer sacrifices on this new altar that Urijah had made.³¹³¹ But this was not all. Ahaz then sets about constructing a completely new set of rituals and order of worship, and took the bronze altar of the Lord's for his own personal use (*“the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by”*).³¹³² The Sabbath pavilion and the king's outer entrance to the house of the Lord were removed *“on account of”* the king of Assyria.³¹³³ The Chronicler describes this decline as *“the time of his distress”* in which the king *“became increasingly unfaithful to the Lord.”*³¹³⁴ Surprisingly, Ahaz's new order of worship was not to the Lord God, but to *“the gods of Damascus which,”* the Chronicler tells us, *“had defeated him.”*³¹³⁵ In sheer madness Ahaz declared: *“Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help us.”*³¹³⁶ He may have suffered terribly at the hands of Rezin and Syria, (although this really was at the hand of the Lord because of his great apostasy), but to conclude that the gods of Syria may help him now in the face of the Assyrians who defeated Syria, is surely one of the most illogical examples of reasoning that can be seen. The Chronicler concludes with these sad words: *“but they were the ruin of him and of all Israel.”*³¹³⁷ The people were still acting corruptly by worshipping on the high places, and Ahaz's rapid departures must surely have

3126 2Chronicles 28:20.

3127 2Chronicles 28:21.

3128 2Kings 16:7.

3129 2Kings 16:10.

3130 2Kings 16:10

3131 2Kings 16:11,12.

3132 2Chronicles 28:13-18.

3133 2Kings 16:17,18.

3134 2Chronicles 28:22.

3135 2Chronicles 28:23.

3136 2Chronicles 28:23.

3137 2Chronicles 28:23.

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spurred such godlessness in an accelerated way. Ahaz compounded his felonies by cutting up the “*articles of the house of the Lord*” and closing the doors of the temple. Not content with formulating a new religion which was to be spread throughout Judah, he ensures the old (and true) ways are barred to all.³¹³⁸

Interlude.

Before we get to Hezekiah, it is worthwhile pointing out here that 2Kings 17 records the final days of the northern kingdom of Israel, which were brought to an end under the reign of Shalmaneser king of Assyria in the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, who had become king in the twelfth year of Ahaz.³¹³⁹ Since Ahaz only reigned for sixteen years the end would then have been in the sixth year of Hezekiah's sole reign.³¹⁴⁰ The account in 2Kings gives a summary of why Israel were destroyed. It was because of their idolatry and their departure from the Lord despite repeated warnings. The litany of departures is woeful. The children of Israel had:

1. Sinned against the Lord their God (who had delivered them from Egypt).³¹⁴¹
2. Walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out.³¹⁴²
3. Secretly done against the Lord things that were not right.³¹⁴³
4. Built for themselves high places in all their cities.³¹⁴⁴
5. Set up for themselves *sacred* pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree.³¹⁴⁵
6. Burned incense on all the high places, (like the surrounding nations).³¹⁴⁶
7. Done wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger by serving idols.³¹⁴⁷
8. Rejected the prophets and the statutes and the law which God had given them.³¹⁴⁸
9. Followed idols, became idolaters, and *went* after the surrounding nations.³¹⁴⁹

3138 2Chronicles 28:24,25.

3139 2Kings 17:6.

3140 2Kings 18:10. Note that since the reigns of kings never begin on the same date overlaps occur.

3141 2Kings 17:7.

3142 2Kings 17:8.

3143 2Kings 17:9.

3144 2Kings 17:9.

3145 2Kings 17:10.

3146 2Kings 17:11.

3147 2Kings 17:11,12.

3148 2Kings 17:9,13-15.

3149 2Kings 17:15.

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10. Left the commandments of the Lord and made images of two calves.³¹⁵⁰
11. Made a wooden image and worshipped all the host of heaven and served Baal.³¹⁵¹
12. Caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire.³¹⁵²
13. Practised witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger.³¹⁵³

As a result of this catalogue of rebellion we read that:

Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone.³¹⁵⁴

In what follows we discover that Judah too were unfaithful because they failed to keep the commandments of the Lord and walked instead in the way of Israel's laws.³¹⁵⁵ The writer then returns to Israel and describes their history from the time of the division of the kingdom unto the day of their demise, when the land would become mixed and would give rise to what would later be known as the Samaritans.³¹⁵⁶

Hezekiah.

The account of Hezekiah covers three chapters in 2Kings and four chapters in 2Chronicles.³¹⁵⁷ Some of what is recorded in 2Kings also appears in the book of Isaiah.³¹⁵⁸ Hezekiah begins his reign (ruling as co-regent along with Ahaz) in Hoshea king of Israel's third year.³¹⁵⁹ Hezekiah was twenty-five years old at the start of his reign and he ruled for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem.³¹⁶⁰ The summary statement for Hezekiah shows a marked change and a vast improvement. He is described as a king who *"did what was right in the sight of the Lord,"* which is similar to the statements made about Uzziah and Jotham, but then also we are told that he did *"according to all that his father David had done."*³¹⁶¹

3150 2Kings 17:16.

3151 2Kings 17:16.

3152 2Kings 17:17.

3153 2Kings 17:17.

3154 2Kings 17:18.

3155 2Kings 17:19.

3156 2Kings 17:20-41.

3157 2Kings 18,19,20; 2Chronicles 29,30,31,32.

3158 Consult: Isaiah 36-39.

3159 2Kings 18:1.

3160 2Kings 18:2.

3161 2Kings 18:3.

Studies in Isaiah.

Hezekiah got rid of a whole series of idolatrous places and shrines including the *“high places,”* the *“sacred pillars,”* and the *“wooden image.”*³¹⁶² He also destroyed the *“bronze serpent”* which Moses had made whilst they were in the desert because they had made it into an idol.³¹⁶³ Positively, he put his trust in God and clung to the Lord keeping His commandments, and he did this to such an extent that he is described as a singularly special king: *“after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him.”*³¹⁶⁴ As a consequence of his trust in the Lord he was prosperous and did not come under the rule or influence of the Assyrians and was successful in overcoming the the Philistines.³¹⁶⁵ The details of Hezekiah's reforms are spelt out much more in the book of 2Chronicles chapter 29 and following. In 2Chronicles 29 we get an outline of how they sanctified themselves and the temple, offering the prescribed sacrifices in obedience to the Lord..³¹⁶⁶ In the next chapter we read of the restoration of the feast of Passover, and of invitations sent out to all in the northern lands of Israel to join in worship.³¹⁶⁷ The celebration that happened in Jerusalem for this Passover feast included the removal of false shrines which were cast into the Brook Kidron.³¹⁶⁸ Such was the success of this call to repentance and renewal, that they *“agreed to keep the feast another seven days,”* and they did so *“with gladness.”*³¹⁶⁹ This celebration was so extensive and joyful that it was likened to those celebrated at *“the time of Solomon.”*³¹⁷⁰ After this feast the people went and broke up the pillars and wooden images and destroyed all the high places, and then Hezekiah set about restoring the order of priests so that they could do their work properly.³¹⁷¹ The people responded positively to this command of Hezekiah so that a great deal of provision was made available for the priests as the Lord had intended.³¹⁷² And so Hezekiah was encouraged to make the house of the Lord work according to its intended scheme and order, and he did this in faith doing it *“with all his heart.”*³¹⁷³

It was during Hezekiah's reign that the northern kingdom of Israel finally fell. Shalmanasser (king of Assyria) came to Samaria and besieged it in Hezekiah's fourth year and by his sixth year

3162 2Kings 18:4.

3163 2Kings 18:4.

3164 2Kings 18:5,6.

3165 2Kings 18:7,8.

3166 2Chronicles 29:1-36.

3167 2Chronicles 30:1-12.

3168 2Chronicles 30:13,14.

3169 2Chronicles 30:14-23.

3170 2Chronicles 30:26.

3171 2Chronicles 31:1-4.

3172 2Chronicles 31:5-10.

3173 2Chronicles 31:11-21.

Studies in Isaiah.

Samaria fell.³¹⁷⁴ This was the year 722 BC.³¹⁷⁵ Ten years after the beginning of the siege against Samaria, in Hezekiah's fourteenth year, a new king of Assyria (Sennacherib) came against *“all the fortified cities of Judah”* and captured them.³¹⁷⁶ This was after all Hezekiah's reforms (*“these deeds of faithfulness”*).³¹⁷⁷ As a result Hezekiah took measures to defend Jerusalem by stopping up water springs outside the city, and fortified the city encouraging the people in the Lord.³¹⁷⁸ Hezekiah also sought to appease Sennacherib and paid tribute to him, stripping silver and gold from the temple to make payment.³¹⁷⁹ After this the king of Assyria sent his army against Jerusalem and the details of this momentous event are also recorded in Isaiah 36 and 37. Sennacherib remained in Lachish but sent his commanders to Jerusalem to taunt them and to warn them of the Assyrians coming in power.³¹⁸⁰ The story begins with the commander of the Assyrian army speaking to Judean officials at the outskirts of Jerusalem.³¹⁸¹ Thus, after a successful campaign at Lachish the leaders of the Assyrian army came to Jerusalem to taunt Hezekiah saying that his trust in Egypt was misplaced and his removal of the high places was tantamount to a rejection of the Lord.³¹⁸² The Assyrian commanders continue their taunt and declare their ability to take Jerusalem at any time they chose, saying that Hezekiah's trust in the Lord would not succeed. There is an appeal for them to become vassals to Assyria, but essentially the whole event serves to show the (apparent) dominance of Assyria over little Judah, for what other lands had not also succumbed to Assyrian rule which defeated all the gods of the land?³¹⁸³

No one responded to this taunt from Assyria but instead the details were passed on to Hezekiah.³¹⁸⁴ In 2Kings chapter 19 we read of Hezekiah's godly response to this taunt and threat to dominate by Assyria. Hezekiah went into the house of the Lord and sent to Isaiah to hear what God had to say on this very troubling situation.³¹⁸⁵ Hezekiah recognises that God was sovereign and so He might *“hear all the words”* of the Assyrian, but requests of Isaiah *“a prayer for the remnant that is left.”*³¹⁸⁶ Isaiah responds immediately with a word from the Lord telling Hezekiah and the nation not

3174 2Kings 18:9-12.

3175 The king in Israel at the time was Hoshea and it was in his ninth year as king that Samaria fell.

3176 2Kings 18:13.

3177 2Chronicles 32:1.

3178 2Chronicles 32:2-8.

3179 2Kings 18:13-16.

3180 2Chronicles 32:9-19.

3181 2Kings 18:17.

3182 2Kings 18:17-22.

3183 2Kings 18:23-35.

3184 2Kings 18:36,37.

3185 2Kings 19:1,2.

3186 2Kings 19:3-5.

Studies in Isaiah.

to fear for a great deliverance would be provided.³¹⁸⁷ Following this the threat decreased because there were other matters of war which the Assyrians had to deal with, but the king of Assyria warned Hezekiah that he should not trust to God and repeats the earlier statement about how they had defeated many lands and their gods.³¹⁸⁸ On receiving the letter from the Assyrians Hezekiah took it into the house of the Lord and *“spread it before the Lord,”* praying for God's help and intervention.³¹⁸⁹ Following this humble approach of Hezekiah to the Lord for His aid, Isaiah sent the message he received from God to him. In this message the Lord identifies with His people and charges the Assyrians with attacking Him, rather like the rebuke Saul received as he was on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians.³¹⁹⁰ Within this word there is a clear statement to the effect that the king of Assyria would not come to Jerusalem, for the Lord would defend it bringing about His salvation.³¹⁹¹ And thus the Assyrians were thoroughly routed and Sennacherib himself came to an ignominious end.³¹⁹²

Following all the deliverance from the Assyrian threat Hezekiah became sick to the point of death. Hezekiah pleads with the Lord for healing, and the Lord responded favourably giving the king a sign that he would be restored to health.³¹⁹³ After this we find that Hezekiah makes a terrible mistake by showing all his treasures to some visiting Babylonians who had come to inquire of him in his sickness.³¹⁹⁴ In 2Chronicles it is clear that Hezekiah was at fault, for the Lord withdrew from him to test him, and we there read that: *“Hezekiah did not repay according to the favour shown him, for his heart was lifted up.”*³¹⁹⁵ In 2Kings we are informed that Isaiah then remonstrated with Hezekiah and informs him that there will be judgement in the future at the hand of the Babylonians.³¹⁹⁶ As a result, Hezekiah humbled himself *“so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.”*³¹⁹⁷ The history that includes Hezekiah ends with a concluding statement about his reign (which was largely good), and that his son Manasseh reigned in his place.³¹⁹⁸

3187 2Kings 19:6,7.

3188 2Kings 19:8-13.

3189 2Kings 19:14-19.

3190 2Kings 19:21,22; Acts 9:1f,4.

3191 2Kings 19:32-34.

3192 2Kings 19:35-27; 2Chronicles 32:20-23.

3193 2Kings 20:1-11.

3194 2Kings 20:12,13.

3195 2Chronicles 32:24,25.

3196 2Kings 20:14-18.

3197 2Chronicles 32:26.

3198 2Kings 20:19-21; 2Chronicles 32:27-33.

Manasseh.

Although we have no mention of Manasseh in the book of Isaiah, it seems clear that much of the second part of Isaiah's prophecy was probably delivered during this wicked king's reign. Manasseh began his reign aged twelve probably as co-regent with his father Hezekiah. However his reign lasted for fifty-five years and was characterised by wickedness and evil of the worst possible kind.³¹⁹⁹ He rebuilt the high places his father had destroyed, he made altars for the Baals, he worshipped the host of heaven setting up altars to these in the temple, he offered his own son in sacrifice in the fire, he set a *“carved image of Asherah”* in the temple, and he consulted spiritists and mediums, so that *“he did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger,”*³²⁰⁰ and, he *“seduced them [the people] to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed.”*³²⁰¹ He is recorded also as one who *“shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another,”* and this was apart from all his other sins.³²⁰² As a result of Manasseh's gross wickedness that went above and beyond what the pagan Canaanites had done, the Lord declared that *“calamity”* would befall *“Jerusalem and Judah,”* and they would be wiped *“as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.”*³²⁰³ The people under Manasseh had departed to such an extent that this reign eventually signals the end for Judah.³²⁰⁴

Remarkably, we also read that Manasseh, towards the end of his reign, repented of his wickedness. This event is recorded only in 2 Chronicles 33. We are informed that *“the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people,”* but neither he nor the people paid any attention.³²⁰⁵ As a result, Manasseh was taken by the Babylonians into captivity where he humbled himself and called out to the Lord in repentance.³²⁰⁶ We are told in the account that Manasseh *“knew that the Lord was God,”* and so he was restored to Jerusalem whereupon he sought to make restitution for all the evil he had done.³²⁰⁷ This included repairing the city and its walls, removal of foreign gods and idols from the house of the Lord, repairing the true altar, and commanding the people to worship God alone.³²⁰⁸ Although he showed his true faith and repentance in these ways his reforms were limited because the high places were not destroyed, (*“the people still sacrificed on the high places, but only to the*

3199 2Kings 21:1,2; 2Chronicles 33:1,2.

3200 2Kings 21:3-8; 2Chronicles 33:3-8.

3201 2Kings 21:9; 2Chronicles 33:9.

3202 2Kings 21:16.

3203 2Kings 21:10-13.

3204 2Kings 21:14,15.

3205 2Chronicles 33:10.

3206 2Chronicles 33:11-13.

3207 2Chronicles 33:13-16.

3208 2Chronicles 33:14-16.

Studies in Isaiah.

LORD their God”).³²⁰⁹ The account of Manasseh ends with statements about his repentance and his burial before telling us that his son Amon reigned in his place.³²¹⁰ Amon was twenty two years old when he began to rule, but he only reigned for two years and his reign appears to be worse and more evil than his father's, so that his own *“servants conspired against him and killed him,”* making Josiah king in his place.³²¹¹ Josiah was a godly king who ruled during the time of the ministry of Jeremiah.

3209 2Chronicles 33:17.

3210 2Kings 21:17,18; 2Chronicles 33:18-20.

3211 2Kings 21:19-26; 2Chronicles 33:21-25.