

Isaiah: God's Highway of Holiness

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Chapter 1: Isaiah and His Times (Isaiah 1-5)

Isaiah the Prophet (1:1)

The book of Isaiah begins with a statement affirming Isaiah's prophetic ministry. "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" (1:1). "The vision" was one of the primary means which God used to communicate to and through Isaiah. Since much of God's prophetic revelation came through visions, the term "*seer*" is used interchangeably in the Old Testament with the word "*prophet*" (1 Sam. 9:9). Prophecy in the Bible falls into two categories: declaring what the Lord God has said, and revealing what the Lord God will bring to pass. We have prophecy of both kinds in the book of Isaiah. Jesus Christ is the main subject of the book of Isaiah (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

We find the name of Isaiah here in the very first verse. The book bearing his name is the account and testimony of the revelation of God through Isaiah. Isaiah is the first of a group of Old Testament prophets commonly called '*the Major Prophets*' because of the length and prominence of their writings. The other men of God in this category are Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The name Isaiah means "salvation of the Lord." Even the name itself is prophetic, as much of the content in the book of Isaiah speaks of this great theme. We learn that Isaiah was the "son of Amoz." This is not Amos the prophet and shepherd. Jewish tradition holds that Isaiah's father was either the brother or son of Amaziah the King of Judah.

Isaiah's prophetic ministry was chiefly "concerning Judah and Jerusalem." Israel had been divided into two kingdoms known as *the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom* back in the days of Rehoboam (1 Kings 12). Having been in a state of constant rebellion since that day, the northern kingdom would go into captivity to the nation of Assyria in 722 BC, during Isaiah's ministry. The southern kingdom, referred to in our text by its prominent tribe and city "Judah and Jerusalem." was headed for a similar fate. In 586 BC, Babylon would take her into captivity. Isaiah, whose ministry extended some sixty years, from 739-680 BC, warned the nation of the consequences of turning her back on the true and living God. Even so, there was hope of salvation for those who repented and turned back to the Lord. God's Messiah, His Christ, was coming to accomplish victory over sin and death in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4). Today, you and I can look back upon the finished work of Jesus Christ and find that same hope of salvation. The God of the Bible still cries out today as He did in Old Testament days: "Look to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (45:22).

According to tradition, Isaiah died for his faith, being "sawn in two" and found among the number of the faithful martyrs "of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb. 11:37-38). The truth of God's word stands in stark opposition to the lies of the world. It exposes the sins of men and calls them to account. Christian, do not be surprised if the world opposes you because of your message. Rather, follow the advice of the apostle Paul. "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season" (1 Tim. 4:2). God has not given up on you. Do not give up on Him. After the manner of Isaiah, "be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (1 Tim. 4:5).

The Wickedness of Judah (1:2-31)

Have you ever had the experience of trying to communicate a message to someone, but the message is only falling on deaf ears? If so, you can understand in a small way the frustration that God experiences when His people refuse to listen to Him. The Almighty cries, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth" (1:2). Even the dumbest animals such as oxen and donkeys have natural instincts (1:3). Why then do men who possess spiritual as well as natural instincts not respond to the call of their Maker? The problem is stated in the text. Those who do not respond to the voice of the Lord have sick and rebellious hearts (1:4-6).

Here in the first chapter, we are introduced to a major theme throughout Isaiah, that of *the remnant* (1:9). The biblical definition of a remnant is "the people who remain faithful to the true God no matter what." God always preserves His people and His word in difficult times through a remnant. There are many specific examples of the remnant theme in Scripture. The godly line from Adam was preserved through Seth, the human race was preserved through Noah, the seed of Abraham was preserved through Isaac and Jacob, and the Jews were preserved through Esther and Mordecai. Isaiah is replete with references to the faithful remnant, and we will follow that theme throughout our study.

We then find a description of the spiritual state of Judah. The nation is offering the sacrifices commanded by God in the law, but they are useless without a heart commitment to Him. Well did David say, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise" (Ps. 51:17). Let us learn this lesson: Religion without reality is useless. Before we come to worship the Lord, let us examine our motives that our communion with Him might be real and our prayers effective (Matt. 6:1-4, 16-18; James 4:3). The one who seeks to follow Christ then receives nine instructions. "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" (1:16-17). Those who have gone spiritually astray in their hearts are counseled to first seek spiritual cleansing. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (1:18). The agent of spiritual cleansing is nothing but the blood of Jesus, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission", or forgiveness, of sin (Heb. 9:22). We must first come to Christ for spiritual cleansing. Then and only then can we properly understand and obey the other seven injunctions.

In the close of the chapter, we find a dire warning. Apparently many people in the nation of Judah were practicing blatant idolatry. The terebinth tree was at the center of many idolatrous practices and rituals in Old Testament times. Those who participate in such false worship are warned that they are in danger of hellfire. Today, our idolatry is "more sophisticated." We put material things, our jobs, celebrities, and even our children ahead of God. For the believer to place any or all of these things ahead of God is a violation of the First Commandment (Exod. 20:3). Trusting in these things for one's salvation brings us to the same end as those who trusted in the ancient rituals associated with the terebinth tree.

The Future House of God (2:1-4)

This section begins Isaiah's second vision, which is also described by the prophet Micah (Mic. 4:1-5). As we move through Isaiah, we find that the times referred to frequently jump from the

near future to the distant future and back. In this case, we depart from the near prophecy of Isaiah chapter 1 to what is known as the millennial kingdom. The millennial kingdom is a literal period of one thousand years following the tribulation and second coming of Jesus Christ. Its duration is made absolutely clear in Scripture (Revelation 20). Its details are also made clear, primarily through the writings of the Old Testament prophets.

Although the terrain of the earth will be made level following the second coming of Christ, we know that the Lord's temple where Jesus Christ Himself will reign will be set on a hill. This is why Isaiah calls it "the mountain of the LORD's house" (2:2b). A fuller description of this temple can be found in Ezekiel 40-48. "All nations" will come to this amazing place to see the Lord (2:2e). This means that both Jews and Gentiles will populate the millennial kingdom.

In that day, it is clear that God's word will be hallowed as the final authority on all matters both temporal and spiritual. This is the way that it should be in the lives of Christians today, but sadly this is not so. In western culture today, we are very good at compartmentalizing things. That is, we have a tendency to leave spiritual things at the door following our church services, to be picked up again the following week. It should not be so with you! When we fail to bring Jesus into our daily lives, we are failing in our duty to reflect His light to a lost world (Matt.5:16).

Isaiah speaks of the millennial kingdom as the day when war will cease. This Scripture has been misapplied by many who believe that it is possible for men alone to eliminate warfare. Such a mission is doomed to fail, for the Bible teaches that there will always be human warfare until Jesus Christ is reigning on His throne (Matt. 24:6). Only Jesus can bring peace on earth, and only Jesus can bring peace to the heart of man. Let us simplify the principle: Only Jesus can bring peace.

The Day of the Lord (2:5-22)

The *day of the Lord* is a title commonly used in Scripture to refer to the second coming of Jesus Christ, and it usually carries with it overtones of God's just judgment and wrath towards unbelievers (2:12). A vivid description of the day of the Lord is found in Revelation 19:11-21. Lucifer's sin of pride resulted in original sin, the fall of man, and the introduction of death. It will be judged in God's time, and rebellious men and women will experience the terror of guilty fear when this judgment comes upon them. All earthly things that men put their trust in will pass away, for they have no power to save in the day of the Lord.

Judgment against Judah and Jerusalem (Isaiah 3:1-4:1)

Isaiah now turns his attention back to the relatively near prophecy of the judgment against Judah and Jerusalem. This would occur in 586 BC at the hands of Babylon. "For Jerusalem stumbled, and Judah is fallen, because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD, to provoke the eyes of His glory. 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" (3:8-9). Sin provokes judgment, both on individuals and on nations. We also have a description of the progression of sin. Secret sin gives way to open sin. Finally, sin is openly celebrated. This pattern is still operational today in the lives of individuals and nations. Well did Solomon say, "There is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9).

One of the manifestations of such an ungodly culture is the vanity of the ladies. We find them described as "haughty," with "wanton eyes," and "making a jingling with their feet" (3:16). This

is the exact opposite description of the virtuous woman described in Proverbs 31. What was the result of such behavior? "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...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'" (3:24, 4:1). God will humble the proud, and this is exactly what happened in Isaiah's day. Here we have an illustration of the truth that physical beauty is passing, but spiritual beauty is lasting (1 Pet. 3:3-4).

The Branch of the LORD (Isaiah 4:2-6)

Again, Isaiah moves from near prophecy to distant prophecy. We are introduced to the "Branch of the LORD" (4:2). This is a title applied to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, in several places in the Old Testament (11:1; Jer. 23:5, 33:15; Zech. 3:8, 6:12). The timing is following the second coming of the Branch of the Lord, and the institution of the millennial kingdom. "He who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem" is a reference to the remnant of God; those who are faithful to Him (4:3). We learn another detail about Christ's kingdom. The *shekinah glory*, or the manifestation of the visible presence of God, which left the temple in times past, returns to His new temple (Ezek. 9-10; Isa. 4:5).

The Parable of the Vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7)

Now we receive spiritual instruction through a *parable*. A parable in the Bible is a story which illustrates spiritual truth. In this parable, God is the vinedresser, and owner of the vineyard, and the nation of Israel is the vineyard (5:7). Although God did everything perfectly, at great sacrifice to Himself, Israel did not take care of His vineyard. Despite God's provisions, His people acted unfaithfully and ungratefully. All too often, we neglect to thank and praise God for His wonderful provision for us. "Are the consolations of God too small for you," that you count them as a common thing (Job 15:11)?

There is a similar parable in the New Testament (Matt. 21:33-46). The parties are the same, but we find reference to "other vinedressers," who represent the church. The church would have the vineyard "leased" to them for the duration of the church age. The church does not replace Israel; rather it is grafted into God's plan pending the future restoration of Israel (Rom. 11:26-27).

Woes Regarding Excesses (Isaiah 5:8-30)

Six woes are pronounced against those who practice excesses.

1. There is the excess of material greed, in which accumulation of goods becomes an end in itself (5:8).
2. There is the excess of wine, in which the consumption of it becomes the most important thing in one's daily existence (5:11).
3. There is the excess of sin, which is the continual devising and carrying out of evil plans (5:18).

4. There is the excess of condoning sin. "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil" (5:20). It is the tendency of the human sin nature to attempt to justify sinful thoughts and sinful behavior. However, this is an exercise in futility. When you are tempted to fall into this trap, call upon the Lord to give you the strength and conviction to achieve the victory over the temptation.
5. There is the excess of human pride, which causes men to trust in their own wisdom while disregarding the wise counsel of the Lord (5:21).
6. There is the excess of drink, which results in unjust judgment and treatment of others (5:22-23). Those whose lives are characterized by one or more of these excesses are running swiftly to judgment.

"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" (5:25). God's judgment takes the form of eternal damnation for those who persist in their rebellion until the end, and it takes the form of temporal divine discipline for those who have received salvation by God's grace but are walking disobediently. Let us heed the words of the apostle John. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10). When we go astray, let us seek to quickly settle accounts with our Maker, that we might move from the place of judgment to the place of grace and mercy.

Chapter 2: A Vision of God's Glory (Isaiah 6)

The Living God (Isaiah 6:1a)

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord...” (6:1). Although the earthly king had come to the end of his days, the heavenly king lives on forevermore. “Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish...the LORD shall reign forever...” (Ps. 146:3-4, 10). The hope of the Christian is in the eternal God. Jesus Himself promised those who trust in Him: “Because I live, you will live also” (John 14:19). Oh, blessed truth!

God's Throne (Isaiah 6:1b)

This was an awesome sight that Isaiah was privileged to see. Isaiah was given a glimpse into the Holy of Holies of heaven. The heavenly courts were filled with the glory of God who sits on His throne. When we begin to travel down the road of despair in our lives because of circumstances that are beyond our control, we would do well to consider this passage. God was seated on His throne in Isaiah's day, and He is still seated there today. The throne of God is also a “throne of grace” that believers may approach in order to “obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

The Seraphim (Isaiah 6:2)

Seraphim are created heavenly beings, probably angels, whose function it is to stand before the Lord in His throne room and glorify His name. The word ‘seraphim’ is the plural of the Hebrew root word meaning ‘to burn’. We might translate it ‘burning ones’. This may be a reference to their zeal for God's holiness, to the fact that their ministry was performed near the altar which contained hot coals, or both. The primary purpose in our lives is essentially the same as that of the seraphim, although we are called to different ministries. It is to glorify God. “For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor. 6:20).

God's Holiness (Isaiah 6:3)

The holiness of God is repeatedly declared by His servants in the throne room. “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts”, cry the seraphim (6:3). We also find these same words “holy, holy, holy” echoing through the heavenly chamber elsewhere in Scripture (Rev. 4:8). To repeat a word or phrase three times in the Hebrew signifies the greatest measure of the thing uttered. Holiness is one of God's attributes, or characteristics. These attributes include love, mercy, justice, wrath, wisdom, and so forth. God, and only God, possesses them all perfectly and all at once. As it is written of the Lord, “For you alone are holy” (Rev. 15:4). Holiness is the characteristic of being set apart. When used in the context of the living God in Scripture, it speaks of His being set apart from and above all created things by virtue of the fact that He is the Creator God. This should inspire created beings to worship Him. Men and women throughout history have sought something or someone to worship. The true God had revealed Himself through His creation, the setting of eternity in hearts of men and women, and finally through Jesus Christ God's Son (Heb.

1:1-3). Who or what is it that you worship? Is it money, possessions, a politician, a spouse or child, a job, or the true God? The degree to which you are worshiping the Lord to the exclusion of all else is the degree to which you are fulfilling your purpose on earth.

Meeting the Lord (Isaiah 6:4-8)

The holiness of the Lord caused Isaiah to realize the depths of his own unworthiness. Isaiah's response from being in the presence of God is: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips" (6:5). The perfection of God magnifies our imperfections. The Lord uses this to bring us to an understanding that we are unworthy to be in His presence, which ought to cause us to seek the One who is worthy. All men and women are guilty of sin, but we need not remain under that sentence forever. Through the work of Jesus Christ the Son of God, it is possible for sinful men and women to dwell in heaven. "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

When God reveals Himself to us, we have a decision to make. We can either respond in selfless and reverent humility, or we can respond in rebellious pride. Isaiah responds in a humble manner. Notice that before he is commissioned for service, his heart first had to be right before God. Perhaps you have set out to serve the Lord in a particular way, and have been frustrated at every turn. Before going any further in inquiring the reason for this, you would do well to check your heart and your motives, to see whether they are characterized by humility or pride. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Prov. 16:18-19).

We have a beautiful picture of spiritual refinement in our passage. One of the seraphim touched the mouth of Isaiah with a live coal from the altar in heaven. Having done this, an amazing blessing is pronounced upon the prophet. "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged" (6:7). What an awesome thing it is for the Lord to pronounce one's sins removed! Yet, that is precisely what God did through the work of His Son for all who believe upon His name. "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). Therefore it is written of believers: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12). Although Christians retain the human sin nature for their time on earth, the salvation of God is already complete, for He already sees those who belong to Him at the finish line.

Our passage is one of several Old Testament passages which speak of plurality within the godhead. Notice that the voice of the Lord is heard saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us" (6:8). In the book of Genesis, we have two similar passages. In the creation narrative we read: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'" (Genesis 1:26). In response to the pride of the people in building the Tower of Babel we read the words of God: "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (Gen. 11:7). In these passages, we have at least two Persons in the godhead. In other passages we have all three, and we will make note of them later in this study (42:1).

Having prepared his heart and received his commission from the Lord, Isaiah responds to the call willingly: "Here am I! Send me" (6:8). May all of the saints of the living God respond after this manner! Sadly, too many people understand their own depravity, call upon the Lord for salvation, find the Savior in Jesus, receive a commission, and stop there. Christian friend, the world, the flesh, and the devil will seek to rob you of the joy and reward of faithful service to Christ. Fear and feelings of inadequacy will set in at times. During those times, consider what the Lord has done for you already. Surely He who is able to cleanse you from sin is also able to empower you to perform your ministry effectively. "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). Maybe you do not know exactly what God is calling you to do. Then do what you can where you are. You can preach the gospel and make disciples (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). But you say, 'I cannot speak well, and I do not know the Bible well enough'. Friend, Jesus would not have commanded you to do these things if you were not able. Isaiah did not yet know what he would be sent to do, but he resolved to preach what God said to anyone who would listen, that they might repent and find hope and salvation through placing their trust in Messiah, the Christ, who was to come.

The Message (Isaiah 6:9-13)

Following Isaiah's willing response to the call of the Lord, he receives a message to preach from God. This message was faithfully preached by Isaiah in his day, and was also applied by the apostle John to the generation that rejected Jesus Christ the King more than seven centuries later. "But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him... 'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.' These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him" (John 12:37, 40-41). Not only does the Word of God have the effect of bringing those who believe the message to the point of salvation, but it also stands in judgment against those who willfully reject it. All are accountable for what they do with the truth that is revealed to them (Ezek. 18; Luke 12:48).

Isaiah then asks, "Lord, how long" (6:11)? The Almighty proclaims that the desolation of the land and the captivity of its people must first take place. This saw its final stage of fulfillment in 586 BC when Judah and Jerusalem went into captivity to Babylon. A similar thing occurred as a result of the New Testament application of the prophecy to the rejection of Christ in 70 AD when Jerusalem was sacked by the Romans. The Lord will see to it that the centers of idolatry will be removed, and idolaters will be judged (6:12; Ezek. 6:13).

Even in the direst of circumstances, God promises to preserve His remnant of true believers. "But yet a tenth will be in it, and will return..." refers to the remnant of the true worshippers of God, who are always in the minority (6:13). Whether this means exactly ten percent or is an expression meaning a small percentage, the meaning is the same. The "holy seed" was preserved in Old Testament times primarily through the remnant of the nation of Israel, and it is preserved in New Testament times primarily through the church (6:13, Matt. 16:16-18).

Chapter 3: Prophecy, Near and Far (Isaiah 7-12)

Isaiah Sent to King Ahaz (Isaiah 7:1-9)

We are now transported from the throne room of God in heaven to the throne room of King Ahaz on earth. Ahaz was in fear of the coalition of men that had allied against him. Pekah who was the King of Israel (the northern kingdom) had come together for the purpose of making war against Jerusalem (7:1-2). Isaiah is sent to speak comfort to Ahaz, for God will deliver Judah from defeat at their hands. Although earthly forces may come against the people of God, they will never succeed unless the Lord allows them to.

Within this narrative, we are introduced to Isaiah's first son, Shear-Jashub (7:3). His name means *'a remnant shall return'*. In the Bible, names of people and places are very important and are also sometimes prophetic, as in this case. The fact that the remnant of faithful believers will one day return to the land from captivity is prophesied in the name of the child.

Immanuel (Isaiah 7:10-16)

The context of this amazing prophetic passage is the Lord's challenge to Ahaz to ask for a sign confirming the fact that he was about to be delivered from the invading army. Apparently Ahaz did not believe the prophecy given through Isaiah, a fact that he was afraid to admit. However, God graciously gives a sign not only to the unbelieving king, but also to the lost dark world in general.

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (7:14; Matt. 1:23). This is a great prophecy of the nature of the birth of Jesus Christ at His first advent, the doctrine of the virgin birth. The Hebrew word translated virgin is *'almah'* which refers to a woman who has never known a man intimately. This is reaffirmed by Matthew who states that Joseph “did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son” (Matt. 1:25). The seed provided for the Incarnation was that of God the Holy Spirit, for it was necessary that the Incarnation of the Son of God not be tainted by the sin nature of a man (Matt. 1:18; Rom. 5:12). This Child prophesied of here would be called Immanuel, which means ‘God with us’.

It is the contention of this author that verses 15 and 16 do not refer to the Christ child. Rather, they refer back to Shear-Jashub the son of Isaiah (7:3). The translators of many English versions of the Bible have done us a disservice by capitalizing ‘child’ in verse 16. Apparently, Shear-Jashub was still an infant at this time, without the capacity to “refuse the evil and choose the good” (7:15-16; Deut. 1:39). Shear-Jashub and not Jesus Christ is the child being referred to in verse 16. There are two lines of evidence which support this view. First, Jesus Christ as God can only choose the good and will always refuse the evil by virtue of His nature. Second, verse 16 mentions the fact that “the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings”. This statement makes perfect sense in the context of the King of Israel and the King of Syria coming down to attack Jerusalem, and is the near fulfillment of the promise of a sign to King Ahaz.

Assyria: God's Instrument of Judgment (Isaiah 7:17-8:10)

The focus of the chapter now turns to the imminent judgment of Judah. The reason for this judgment was that Ahaz "sent to the kings of Assyria to help him" instead of sending to the Lord in prayer (2 Chron. 28:16). The result was that Tiglath Pileser king of Assyria exacted tribute from but did not assist Judah. The people living in the land fell into great material poverty, which reflected the great spiritual poverty of that day.

Isaiah's second son is born, and his name is called Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, which means '*speed the spoil, hasten the booty*' (8:1). His name speaks of the nature of the coming invasion by Assyria. This child is said to be the son of the "*prophetess*" (8:3). It may be true that Isaiah's wife exercised a prophetic ministry of her own although Scripture is silent on this. If so, there is biblical precedence for it. Miriam and Deborah were both Old Testament prophetesses. We also may translate the Hebrew as '*wife of the prophet*', which seems to fit the context better. Suffice it to say, there are neither prophets nor prophetesses in the biblical sense today because their function is no longer needed. Prophetic ministry was foundational, and since we now have the complete revelation of God, there is no longer a need for modern day prophetic ministry in the same sense as that of the biblical writers (Eph. 2:20; Rev. 22:18-19).

Although the Lord would use the invading Assyrian hordes to discipline His people, He does not exit the scene. God will make sure that the plans of evil men ultimately fail, and He will not forsake those who are joined to Him. We find "Immanuel", which is translated 'God with us' twice in the eighth chapter (8:8, 10). There is a lesson in this for us today. Let us not fear men, for "if God is for us, who can be against us" (Rom. 8:31).

To the Law and to the Testimony! (Isaiah 8:11-22)

"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? 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." (8:19-20). In Isaiah's day, people were seeking answers to life's issues from sources and practices other than the true God. Divination, magic, mediums, necromancy (calling up of the dead), sorcery, and witchcraft/wizardry are forbidden by Almighty God. There are a great many references to and warnings regarding these practices throughout Scripture (Lev. 19:31, 20:6, 20:27; Deut. 18:10-14; Acts 13:8-10; Rev 21:8). Things have not changed through the centuries, so we would do well to gain knowledge in order to better understand the biblical record, and to also apply it to our own circumstances. What does the Bible say about these sources and practices? Our text gives us the answer. "*To the Law and to the Testimony*" should be the rallying cry of Christians everywhere (8:20a)! In other words, we are to seek authoritative answers from God's Word, and live by them. God's Word is light, and the things that line up against it are darkness. Whether the practitioners of such evil are really doing these things or are simply charlatan deceivers is irrelevant, for both further the demonic plan whether they know it or not.

Two types of people are addressed specifically in our text; mediums and wizards. Both mediums and wizards are condemned on the basis of their practices. A medium is someone who claims to be able to contact supernatural beings or deceased human beings. Seances, Ouija boards, and necromancy fall into this category. Necromancy is the English term that arises out of

the two words in the Greek 'nekros manteia' meaning 'dead body divination'. This is the specific practice of mediums of raising up the 'spirit of the deceased' in either 'ghost form' or bodily form. The second category of people and practices warned against in our text is wizards. Under this heading, we will include sorcery, black magic, and witchcraft. All of these things are ways in which someone tries to influence people, things, or events through occult means.

In closing this section, let us review the Christian response to these things. "*To the Law and to the Testimony*" (8:20a)! Your God and His Word to you is the authority for all matters pertaining to Christian faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16). If you are mixed up with any of these sinful practices, forsake them. They are not harmless. Although many of the practices we have covered are simple human foolishness, there are powers at work that you do not want to expose yourself to. Do not play games with them. Again I say, forsake evil! Warn others of the danger as well, that they may not fall into, or further into, the trap of occult practice. The best defense against the wiles of evil is to live close to the Lord Jesus Christ and cultivate your relationship with Him. Focus on Christ, and do not focus on evil—evil will find you anyhow. May you be found continually "*looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith*" (Heb. 12:2a)!

The Coming of God's Christ (Isaiah 9:1-7)

God promises peace and joy, even in the midst of affliction. One of the ways He does this throughout Isaiah is by speaking of the Christ who would come several centuries later. The reference to the ministry of Jesus in "the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali" anticipates His earthly Galilean ministry which was based in the town of Capernaum by the sea (9:1; Matt. 4:13-16). Those who had spiritual eyes to see would see "a great light" in that day (9:2). Luke identifies this light as "the Dayspring from on high", connecting this prophecy to the Lord's first advent (Luke 1:78-79). The result of the intrusion of God the Son into human history is that the yoke of sin would be broken, for Christ would bear our burdens for us (9:4; Matt. 11:28-30).

Verse 6 teaches us much about the nature of God's Christ—great truths that ought to make every believer stand in awe of Him. Notice that the "Child is born", but the "Son is given". Jesus was born into the world in human flesh as a baby, and in that sense was born. However, He had already existed since eternity past, and in that sense He was given. Jesus Christ is the greatest gift that God the Father could give, and He did not withhold Him from us! In the Bible, a name is often descriptive of the character of a person, and this is one of those times. Jesus is Wonderful, for He does marvelous things (Mark 7:37). He is our Counselor, offering truth seasoned with grace in love (John 14:1-6). Jesus is Mighty God, for He is able to do all things (Mark 10:27). He is Everlasting Father, eternal in existence and one in essence with God the Father (John 10:30). Jesus is Prince of Peace, for the peace that He offers is shared with all of the subjects of His kingdom in abundant measure (John 14:27).

The sovereignty of Jesus Christ is eternal and without limit because He is God. We are transported forward in time once again to the millennial kingdom, over which Christ will literally reign with perfect justice and order for one thousand years (9:7; Rev. 20:4-6). There was no beginning to the reign of God the Son and "there will be no end" to it either (9:7). Christian, be comforted by this fact in your hour of need.

God's Outstretched Hand (Isaiah 9:8-10:34)

“For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still” (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4). These words are repeated four times in our passage, causing us to focus in on their meaning. The context of this passage is God's judgments upon Samaria, Israel, Syria, and Assyria. The measure of God's judgment against unrighteous nations is exercised to the full. Jesus put this truth this way to the wicked leaders of Israel in His day: “Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt” (Matt. 23:32). God is not the author of sin, but His perfect justice demands that He judge sin. Lest the remnant of Israel despair, the Lord reaffirms His love for and protection of His faithful people (10:20-34). While God's anger rests upon those who rebel against Him, it is His mercy that rests upon those who love Him.

The Branch (Isaiah 11:1-3)

Verse 1 speaks of the lineage of Jesus Christ in His humanity. He was a descendant of Jesse the father of David (Matt. 1:6). It also speaks of the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, in which God promised David that he would always have a descendant reigning as king (1 Chron. 17:14). This promise, of course, was fulfilled in Christ Jesus. All four gospel writers record the baptism of the Lord, and the fact that God the Holy Spirit was visibly present at that event (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32). This was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that “the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him” (11:2). In fact, all three Persons of the Godhead were present at that event, as God the Father was also heard speaking at the same time. Having received the commission to begin His public ministry, Jesus went forth exercising discernment (John 2:25).

The Millennial Kingdom (Isaiah 11:4-16)

Again, we shift from near prophecy to far prophecy rather abruptly. Having spoken of things relating to Messiah's first advent, Isaiah speaks of His second coming and the institution of the millennial kingdom. The second coming will be characterized in part by righteous judgment of the wicked (11:4-5; Rev. 19:11-21). The millennial kingdom will be characterized by peace. The enmity that was introduced into creation by sin will be removed (11:6-9; Rom. 8:18-23). Notice that here it is written: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb” (11:6). Popular art and music often illustrate a lion and a lamb, but the Bible presents the picture of a wolf and a lamb. After the second coming and before the institution of Christ's earthly millennial reign, there is a seventy-five day interval known theologically as ‘the regathering’ (Compare Dan. 9:27 with Dan. 12:11-12). During this brief time period, the Lord will gather the believing remnant of Jews who are alive at this time to Israel “from the four corners of the earth” (11:12). “There will be a highway for the remnant of His people” in that day (11:16).

A Thanksgiving Song (Isaiah 12:1-6)

The redeemed of Israel will sing for joy on the day that Jesus Christ, their Messiah, inaugurates His kingdom. They will sing a song of thanksgiving for the wonderful mercies of God just as they did in the days of Moses (Ex. 15). “In that day” is a reference to a specific event in context, but why should the believer wait until some future day of the loving kindness of the Lord? The church, and the Christian, often falls short in time spent in the blessed communion of

praise. This is to our shame, for neglecting praise due the Lord is neglecting worship. *YAH* is declared to be the strength of the believer. This name for God is simply a shortened form of the personal name of God (*YHVH, or YHWH*), which is translated "*LORD*" in all caps in most English Bibles. Joy is promised to those who are partakers of God's salvation. God's salvation comes only one way, which is through Christ Jesus (Acts 4:12). Believers are told that they will "draw water from the wells of salvation" (12:3). Jesus spoke of this water of life to the woman at the well. "But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). In summary, we learn two things. First, praise is an important part of prayer. Second, prayer should be a time when we reflect upon the great things that the Lord has done for us.

Chapter 4: The Remnant and the Rebellion (Isaiah 13-25)

Woe unto Babylon (13:1-22)

This is the first of several judgments pronounced by God against the nations. Although all Israel will eventually find itself subjected to Babylon, this does not mean that God will turn a blind eye to the sins of Babylon. Just as the Lord would use Babylon to discipline Judah, He would eventually use the Kingdom of the Medes and Persians to discipline Babylon. Although the kings of the earth believe that they are orchestrating human events according to their own plans and power, “the LORD of hosts musters the army for battle” (13:4).

“Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand” (13:6). The phrase “*day of the Lord*” refers to the imminence of judgment upon Babylon in the context of this chapter, but it also speaks of the time of God's judgment which occurs at the second coming of Jesus Christ. The fact that distant prophecy is also in view here is evidenced by the parallels between Isaiah's description of specific events such as the sun, moon, and stars no longer giving their light, and those described by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse (13:10; Matt. 24:29). Babylon has been the seat of humanism and its efforts to reach heaven apart from God since ancient times. She has undergone two major judgments in times past, one of confusion which was accomplished directly by the hand of God, and the second at the hand of the Medo-Persian Empire, but its final judgment is yet to come (Gen. 11:1-9; Dan. 5:30-31; Rev. 18).

Chapter 13 poses particular difficulties because it contains both near prophecy and far prophecy. A casual reading of verses 17-22 has brought many readers to incorrect conclusions that lead them to believe there is a mistake in the Bible. Verse 17 begins: “Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them” (Babylon), but the near prophecy only goes through verse 18. Without any specific break in the text, the verses that follow affirm that Babylon “will never be inhabited” (13:19-22). The latter four verses cannot refer to the near judgment of Babylon by the Medes. Rather, they refer to the ultimate destruction of Babylon by God in Revelation 18 yet future. Every Bible student ought to be diligent to observe both the immediate context of Scripture passages as well as how it fits within the context of Scripture.

Restoration of Israel (14:1-11)

This section speaks of what many refer to as the ‘*Second Exodus of Israel*’. This event is the turning of the captivity of the Jews in the land of Babylon. Although God disciplines the children of Israel throughout the Bible, He stands at the ready to mercifully deliver them. Here we have an instance of God's mercy, justice, grace, and wrath all working together to accomplish God's perfect purpose in His perfect time. The Lord will indeed preserve His remnant and bring them into the place of His “rest” (14:3). The fall of the King of Babylon, Belshazzar, is reminiscent of the fall of Lucifer, the event to which Isaiah now turns (14:3-11; Dan. 5:30-31).

The Fall of Lucifer (14:12-15)

We now arrive at one of two prominent Old Testament passages which give us some details about the fall of Lucifer. The name Lucifer means “*morning star*” or “*day star*”. Lucifer is

called the "son of the morning" (14:12). Since Lucifer, also known as Satan, the Dragon, and the Devil, is already present in the Garden of Eden, his fall must have occurred prior to that (Gen. 3:1). The parallel passage in Ezekiel concerning the fall of Lucifer describes an earth in line with that described in Genesis: "The earth was without form, and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2; Cf. Ezek. 28:11-19). Isaiah, speaking of the creation, states that God "did not create it in vain", and that He "formed it to be inhabited" (45:18). All of these passages taken together point to a cataclysmic event in time, before the fall of man, which involved the fall of Lucifer and one third of the angels of heaven (Rev. 12:4). Since Lucifer is an angelic being, and the creation of angels is not specifically attested to in the Genesis account of the days of creation, some scholars believe that the fall of Lucifer occurred between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. This is known as the "gap theory". The traditional view, and the more likely view in this author's opinion, is to place the fall of the sinning angels at another place in the creation days, possibly on the second creation day. The scriptural evidence for the traditional view takes a more literal interpretation of Genesis chapter one (Cf. Gen. 2:1; Exod. 20:11; Job 38:1-7; Neh. 9:6).

The sin of Lucifer that led to his downfall was pride. This is clearly evident in the things that he asserted in his heart. Lucifer makes five "*I will*" assertions:

1. "I will ascend into heaven" (14:13).
2. "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God" (14:13).
3. "I will also sit on the mount of the congregation" (14:13).
4. "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds" (14:14).
5. "I will be like the Most High" (14:14).

Lucifer sought to usurp the rightful place of God as the King of the universe and all creation. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Great was his fall. Since there is no provision for the salvation of sinning angels, the lake of fire will be his inheritance (Rev. 20:10). It was not enough for Lucifer to lift up his head against the Most High, so he fomented rebellion within the angelic realm, taking one third of the angels with him to the same destination (Rev. 12:4). The devil is still active today, "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). He especially enjoys taking those in the professing church and turning them aside from the faith. To this, your best defense is the knowledge of God's Word and sound doctrine.

Judgment of Rebellious Nations (14:16-24:23)

The Lord through his prophet now pronounces judgments to come against Judah and the nations surrounding her. These have been fulfilled, or will be fulfilled, in history, just as the Lord said through Isaiah. The oracles are pronounced against Babylon, Assyria, and Philistia (14), Moab (15-16), Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel (17), Ethiopia (18), Egypt (19), Egypt and Ethiopia (20), Babylon (21), Jerusalem and Judah (22), Tyre (23), and the whole earth in general in its rebellious state (24).

We have many examples of the ruin of nations that do not honor the true God. Why then do nations operate in a state of rebellion against Him? This is explained by the human sin nature, and the human propensity for acting prideful. Earthly nations are ruled by earthly men, and they

come and go. Praise God that He offers citizenship in heaven to believers through His Son Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 11:13-16)!

The rise and fall of nations is according to God's sovereign plan, which cannot be overridden by human power or ingenuity. "For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back" (14:27).

Praise to God (25:1-5)

Those nations which rebelled against the God of heaven after the manner of Lucifer will surely be judged, but the righteous will praise God for His faithfulness. The chapter, which is in the form of a poem, begins: "O LORD, You are my God" (25:1a). The personal name of God "YHVH" is used here to affirm the greatness of the living God in heaven as opposed to all other 'gods', which are mere idols. The true God is chosen, exalted in praise, and honored by those who worship Him. His power is evidenced by His works (25:1b). The attributes of "faithfulness and truth" of the Lord are specifically and clearly affirmed (25:1c). Other attributes of God which inform the poetic prayer of praise are His immutability (or unchangeableness), His justice, and His wrath against unrighteousness. For the believer, the Lord is a "strength", "refuge", and "shade". The divine protection of the Lord God abides with the believer, even in the midst of the most ungodly times and circumstances.

The Feast of God (25:6-12)

"And in this mountain" is reminiscent of the millennial kingdom described earlier in the book (25:6; 2:1-4). While the actual events spoken of here speak of the thousand year kingdom and the eternal state, we can certainly apply them to the Old Testament saints as well as the church today because they are positional truths. God sees the end from the beginning, offering an eternal perspective on events.

A spiritual feast is available to you and I today. We can feast upon our blessed communion with the Savior. Jesus said: "I am the bread of life... This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die" (John 6:35, 50). We can feast upon the Word of God. "Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:3).

The basis for the feast which the Lord's people celebrate is the certain hope that death will be destroyed and sorrow removed. Jesus Christ defeated death and freed men and women from its power through His work at the cross and His resurrection power (Rom. 6:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:20-28). There will be a day (in the eternal state) when the believer, as a heavenly inhabitant, will be separated from sorrow and death. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). Whether or not the saints of God are vindicated now in this life, they will be perfectly vindicated in the next, and blessed beyond human comprehension. "And it will be said in that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us'" (25:9). Believers will partake of the great feast described by Isaiah with Christ in a literal sense in the future.

Chapter 5: The Laying of the Foundation (Isaiah 26-28)

A Song of Salvation (26:1-27:1)

Isaiah records the words of a song to be sung “in that day” (26:1). To which day is Isaiah referring to? In context, it is best understood as a reference to the millennial kingdom. The believers who returned from the Babylonian captivity experienced a foretaste of this. Likewise, the Christian experiences a foretaste of these truths the moment he or she is released from spiritual captivity and has a spiritual birth. “The righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in” to Judah in that day (26:1-2). The apostle Peter identifies this nation as comprised of those who believe the gospel of God, and addresses them in his first epistle. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

This song of salvation affirms the “perfect peace” which only the Lord can give (26:3). Such great peace will be enjoyed because the millennial kingdom is ruled by the “Prince of Peace”, who is Christ Jesus (9:6). There will not only be an abiding peace in the hearts of those who populate God's kingdom on earth, but all of nature will be at peace (11:6-9). You too can experience a measure of this peace today if you heed the words of Solomon to “trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3:5-6).

“For in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength” (26:4). Here we have a shortened version of the divine name followed by the divine name preceded by the definite article. The oneness and sufficiency of God alone to meet our every need is stressed here. The Lord is the “*Rock of Ages*” upon which the faithful of all ages stand.

The way of the righteous is contrasted with the way of the wicked. The way of the righteous is found by maintaining fellowship in prayer with He who is perfectly upright. Isaiah applies the title “Most Upright” to God Himself (26:7). The child of God who has an appreciation of the presence of God seeks Him day and night (26:9). In contrast, the wicked blatantly ignore or reject the grace of God which is universally shown to all men. These things remind us of the words of Jesus. “Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

The believer is compared to a pregnant woman. “As a woman with child is in pain and cries out with her pangs, when she draws near the time of her delivery, so have we been in Your sight, O LORD” (26:17). Just as a pregnant woman experiences pain and discomfort because she looks forward to the joy that follows, the children of God endure hardships on earth because there is a greater hope to follow. Some will see deliverance on earth, and others will not. Those who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel under the Assyrian yoke in the days of Isaiah were among those who did not. However, all of the saved of God of all generations will see deliverance in the life to come. The Old Testament saints received this hope by having faith in the Messiah, or

Christ, to come. The New Testament saints receive this hope by having faith in Messiah who came (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17).

Those in Isaiah's day who heard the words of this song were strengthened not only in hope of future deliverance by God, but were told and called to affirm the resurrection of the dead, which is the basis for that hope. Many people have argued that the resurrection of the dead is not clearly taught in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Sadducees in Jesus' day believed and taught such an error (Matt. 22:23). But Isaiah pens one of the greatest Old Testament proof texts in support of the fact that the dead rise. "Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall rise. 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" (26:19).

The people who have thus far persisted in their rebellion against God are warned to take refuge in Him in order to avoid the wrath to come. Those who refuse the gracious offer of salvation by the Lord are destined to spend an eternity apart from Him. To illustrate the point, Isaiah borrows an illustration from the book of Job of God's power over "Leviathan" (27:1). Leviathan has been identified as the dragon like challenger to God from mythology, the crocodile, a kind of dinosaur, an ancient shark like creature, and so on. We cannot say for sure who or what is being referenced here, but the point is the fact that the true God of heaven is omnipotent, or all powerful. Nobody can hope to defeat Him or avert His judgment.

The Restoration of Israel (27:2-13)

God had previously pronounced judgment through Isaiah upon His vineyard, which was the nation of Israel (5:1-7). However, this judgment does not mean the final end of Israel. The Lord promises to preserve her through her faithful remnant, and there will come a day when God will abundantly bless Israel with peace. The timing of the fulfillment of this prophecy best fits that of the inauguration of the dispensation of the millennial kingdom. It has been well said that one of the best proofs of the existence and sovereignty of God is the fact that the Jewish people have been preserved throughout human history despite persecution and genocidal campaigns.

Isaiah speaks of the "*regathering*" of Israel. "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; and you will be gathered one by one, O you children of Israel" (27:12). This event of the regathering will occur over the course of the seventy-five days following the "*tribulation period*". The tribulation period is the seven year period during which God will judge sin on earth with a view towards bringing sinners to repentance. The tribulation period is broken up into two parts, known as the tribulation and the great tribulation, each of which will last 3 ½ (360-day) years, for a total of 7 (360-day) years (Dan. 9:27; Rev. 11:3, 12:6). Each of these time periods is 1,260 days. "Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days" (Dan. 12:12). In this author's view, this is not a continuation of the previous verse (Dan. 12:11) which speaks of the events at the midpoint of the seven years, because that would place the events in the Great Tribulation, which will be a time of intensified judgment on earth and not blessing and peace. Rather, it is a reference to the amount of time (seventy-five days) from the midpoint of the tribulation to the day when God will accomplish His work of gathering the believing Jewish remnant "from the four corners of the earth" (11:12).

Woe to the Crown of Pride (28:1-8)

This chapter begins: "Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim" (28:1). Thus begins the oracle against the northern kingdom of Israel, of which Ephraim was the most prominent tribe. The leaders of the nation were often found physically drunk, and justice was perverted as a result (28:7). However, the greater sin was that they were drunk with their own pride, which was causing them to leave God out of their lives. As things were done in the days of the judges of Israel, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 21:25). One of the characteristics of this culture that was leaving God out was a focus on human beauty and a disregard for spiritual beauty. "And the glorious beauty is a fading flower...the LORD of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people" (28:4-5).

Spiritual Deafness and Deadness (28:9-15)

As a result of the pride of the leaders of Israel and the people who followed after their ways, spiritual deafness and deadness ensued. "Yet they would not hear...that they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught" (28:12-13). Those who are dead in their sin travel the road of God's judgment (Eph. 2:1; Rom 1:32).

In context, this passage speaks of the Lord using judgment to teach spiritual truths. God had pronounced judgment upon the nation of Israel in Isaiah's day, and the leaders and the people would not heed the warning. Having chosen spiritual bondage to sin for themselves, they are given over to temporal bondage, and the Assyrian yoke would remain upon them for a time.

It is with this background of the national judgment of Israel for rejection of the Lord that Paul applies this passage as a basis for the origin of and proper use of the spiritual gift of tongues in the New Testament. "Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes but in understanding be mature. In the law it is written: 'With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, they will not hear Me', says the Lord. Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers" (1 Cor. 14:20-22; Isa. 28:11-12). In quoting this passage from Isaiah, Paul is equating those in Israel who would not heed the word of the Lord in Old Testament times to those in Israel who would not heed the gospel of Jesus Christ in New Testament times. In other words, the gift of tongues was given as a temporary sign gift for the purposes of calling out a remnant of Israel to God and providing a basis for the national judgment of Israel for their rejection of their Messiah. The gift of tongues was no longer normatively given within a generation of Pentecost, its purposes having been fulfilled (Heb. 2:2-4).

The Cornerstone (28:1)

"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' (28:1). This verse is quoted and/or alluded to several times in the New Testament, for it speaks of Jesus Christ (Matt. 21:42; 1 Pet. 2:6-8). We will take it phrase by phrase.

“Behold, I lay.” Notice that it is through the initiative of God the Father that the plan of salvation for mankind is laid out. Nothing of spiritual value is ever accomplished unless God is involved in establishing it. He is both sovereign and active in human events with regard to nations and individuals.

“In Zion”, that is, in Israel. It is through her that the plan of the ages will be accomplished. It is through the prophets of Israel that it will be revealed to men and women everywhere (Rom. 3:2). It is through her descendants that the Savior of the world would arrive on the scene as Immanuel, God with us (Matt. 1:1-17, 23; Isa. 7:14).

“A stone for a foundation” in Christ Jesus was laid in fulfillment of this prophetic word. The Son of God Himself would be the foundation of the faith of God's people in the days to come (1 Cor. 3:11).

“A tried stone” would be provided for us, that we might have greater proof and confidence of God's power to save. “For 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” (Heb. 4:15) .

“A precious cornerstone; a sure foundation” would be given upon which our faith may be built. The cornerstone was the largest stone on a structure, without which the building could not stand. While the saint in Isaiah's day was required to build his or her faith upon the promises of God which would be fulfilled in the future, the believer today is required to build his or her faith upon the cornerstone who came, Jesus Christ. It is upon acceptance of this truth that one's spiritual house stands or falls (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). With this in view, we can better understand the teaching of Christ about the two builders. “Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall” (Matt. 7:24-27).

“Whoever believes will not act hastily.” Here we have a reference to the universal call of the gospel. A faith response is required to the gospel, which is what the Bible means by belief unto salvation (compare with John 3:16 and Eph. 2:8-9). The phrase “will not act hastily” refers to the careful thought which the true seeker gives to the things of God. The Christian faith is an intelligent faith, based upon proofs and facts from nature, history, and Scripture, and informed by the guidance of God the Holy Spirit.

An exhortation to Hear and Heed (28:17-29)

The line of demarcation of judgment has been set. Believers are justified, and unbelievers are still in their sins (28:17; John 3:17-18). There is a great gap between the two that cannot be bridged in the next life, so the reader of this prophecy is exhorted to respond in this life (Luke 16:26). The illustrations given of the bed being “too short to stretch out on, and the covering so narrow that one cannot wrap himself in it” refer to the inability of those who persist in their rebellion against God to hide from Him and somehow avert His judgment (28:20). Because

sinner cannot hide from God's wrath, they are encouraged to seek His mercy. God will bring appropriate pressure to bear upon the reprobate in order to encourage them to repent of their evil deeds and reach up in faith. To make this point, the Lord offers an illustration from farming. Just as a threshing sledge would be 'too much tool for the job' of beating out cummin, God does not bring any more pressure than is required to bring us to faith and repentance (28:27; 1 Cor. 10:13). Moreover, although cummin must be beaten out and wheat must be ground, these processes are only temporary. Eventually, the purpose in the work is accomplished (28:23-29). So too the Lord God will not always threaten and discipline, but His works of wrath and mercy will be accomplished and completed in time. Take heed that you be found on the side of mercy and not of wrath.

Chapter 6: The Highway of Holiness (Isaiah 29-35)

Woe to Jerusalem (29:1-16)

“Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt” (29:1). Ariel means “Lion of God” in Hebrew. This name is applied to the city where King David dwelt, which was Jerusalem. What once was a city where the man chosen by God to be king reigned had now become a spiritually desolate place. The repetition of the word “Ariel” seems to indicate God’s sorrow over having to judge the city. We have a similar situation occurring in the same city in Jesus’ day, and the divine response is along the same lines. “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!” (Luke 23:37).

The lack of spiritual vitality in Judah is seen in the lack of spiritual understanding by the prophets and priests in Jerusalem. One of these blind guides is handed a book, and asked to “read this, please” (29:11a). This leader of Jerusalem complains that the book “is sealed” (29:11b). The problem is not that he cannot read, but that he is spiritually dead and unable to understand God’s truth (Eph. 2:1). Then the book is handed to an illiterate person, who cannot read (29:12). This represents one who has grown up in a culture that does not value God and His truth. In context, a large part of the problem is that such a one is following the teachings of men as a result. This is a case of the blind leading the blind. There is a book which is widely available in most countries. It is called the Bible, and it is the inspired word of God. Yet it is too often neglected by the public, in the pulpits, and even in the homes of Bible believing Christians. Is it neglected by you?

Although the prophets and priests were spiritually blind, they did say pious things. Everything they said and did was a hypocritical façade, and God who sees all things and knows the hearts of all men saw right through this (29:13). Jesus quotes Isaiah on these points, and applies the prophecy to the scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem in His day (15:1-9). The religious leaders were zealous to create and protect a man made system of laws which would allow them to circumvent God’s commandments. The specific instance that Jesus addressed was the man made law of “*Corban*”, which allowed children of elderly or infirm parents to give their resources to the temple instead of caring for their parents. This man made law was a clear violation of the commandment to “honor your father and your mother” (Exod. 20:12). It would seem noble for someone to give to the work of God, yet the almsgiving was done to be seen by men, and at the expense of mercy, love, and justice.

The Restoration of Israel (29:17-24)

“Is it not yet a very little while?” (29:17). We as finite human beings live in time, and decades and centuries seem like long periods of time indeed. However, God exists eternally and offers an eternal perspective. In light of eternity, such time spans are quite short. “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8). The Israelites were under the yoke of both spiritual and physical bondage. Yet the Lord will not forget His people in their time of distress. Rather, He will deliver them. All that is required is for them to humbly repent before Him.

Spiritual enlightenment is promised to those in Israel who experience personal spiritual revival, and are found submitting themselves to God (29:24a). The believer is commanded to “do all things without complaining and disputing” (Phil 2:14). According to Isaiah, this was one of the characteristics of the people who were not honoring God. A complaining spirit is a reflection of dissatisfaction with God's plans and purposes. The antidote is the knowledge of doctrine. Through theology, which is the study of God, we understand things as they really are. We see them from God's perspective. People are saved by God's grace through faith when they accept the gospel message. However, children of God only grow to the extent that they understand and apply biblical doctrine correctly (John 7:16-18; 2 Tim. 3:16, 4:3).

False Confidence in Egypt (30:1-7, 31:1-9)

The children of Israel often sought help from other nations instead of seeking help from the living God. In this “woe” declared by the Lord, they are rebuked for putting their confidence in Egypt to deliver them (30:1, 31:1). “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man” (Ps. 118:8). We can certainly apply this lesson to our own lives. How often do we seek earthly solutions through earthly methods instead of seeking God's help and peace in difficult situations!

Smooth Words (30:8-17)

“Speak to us smooth things” was the request of the rebellious Israelites (30:10). They desired to have the Almighty without accountability. The itching ears of the people wished to hear things from the prophets that were palatable to them. Any man of God who preached the need for repentance and the need to avoid the wrath to come would be rejected. So it was with Isaiah, and so it was with the greatest Prophet, Jesus Christ (Deut. 18:18). This request of the reprobate to hear only smooth things from the mouth of God and those who preach His message is the same today as it was aforesaid. Many people today want Christ without cost. They are not interested in forsaking their sin and traveling the difficult road of discipleship (Luke 9:23). Sadly, there are far too many so-called ‘churches’ that will cater to such a person. These ‘seeker-friendly’ places will only preach on love, grace, and mercy, but will never speak on repentance, wrath, and judgment. As a result of the whole counsel of God not being preached, many are affirmed in their sins and miss the gospel message entirely. Further, accommodation is often sought with worldly thinking and worldly institutions, which is contrary to the biblical principle of separation. The mission of the church is to influence the world, not to seek its place and identity within it (John 17:14-19)

Patience, Grace, Mercy, and Justice (30:18-22)

Four attributes of God are mentioned in a single verse; patience, grace, mercy, and justice (30:18). These are all applied to the case of those who trust in the Lord. These believers will seek godly counsel and follow it (30:20-21). It is greatly pleasing to the minister of God when others respond to God's truth through his ministry, and increases his boldness in proclaiming the counsel of the Lord (30:20).

Judgment on Assyria (30:23-33)

We have a reference to “the day of the great slaughter” (30:25). Although it is possible that this may refer to the second coming of Christ, it is more likely a reference to the coming defeat of the Assyrians by the hand of the “angel of the LORD” (2 Kin. 19:35) in the days of Hezekiah the King of Judah. Not only did a “great slaughter” occur, but the verses that follow speak of the judgment of God upon Assyria.

A Reign of Righteousness (32:1-8, 16-20)

This is one of the more difficult passages to interpret in the book of Isaiah. If one takes the short view with an emphasis on the prior two chapters, this passage seems to speak of King Hezekiah. Hezekiah's reign was characterized by removal of idolatry, trust in God against the Assyrian invasion, and subsequent peace in his day because of his relatively righteous rule (2 Kin. 18:4; 2 Chron. 32:5-9; Isa. 38-39). We will get into more detail of this in the next chapter of this study.

However, there is another way to interpret this passage, which is the long view, preferred by this author. That is, it is a prophecy of the rule of Christ the King in the millennial kingdom.

There are five lines of evidence supporting this interpretation:

- 1) The king that will “reign in righteousness” is identified as the Messiah elsewhere in Scripture (32:1; Jer. 23:5).
- 2) The “man” referred to in verse 2 is described as a “hiding place”, which is something that God is said to be (Ps. 32:7).
- 3) The time described is one in which God's Word will no longer be perceived as idle babbling, but it will be plainly understood (28:11-13, 32:3-4).
- 4) The time spoken of here is one characterized by universal justice, with a clear definition and understanding of good and evil (32:5-8).
- 5) There is a contextual correlation between 32:1-8 and 32:16-20. The latter passage speaks of a righteousness and peace being ushered in that will last forever.

The Perils of Complacency (32:9-15)

Those who are “at ease” incorrectly think that they are doing just fine (32:9-11). The divine advice is: “Be troubled, you complacent ones” (32:11). The wicked are warned to consider their spiritual condition and come to God before it is too late. “Behold, now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). I suppose that there are more procrastinators in hell than all other manner of sinners combined!

Divine Justice Accomplished (33:1-34:17)

The prophet Isaiah prays on behalf of the faithful remnant of God, among which people he is included: “O LORD, be gracious to us; we have waited for you” (33:2). In His prayer, He remembers the majesty of God. “The LORD is exalted, for He dwells on high” (6:1, 33:5). Isaiah also prays fully expecting the Lord's help in the day of distress. “Wisdom and knowledge will be

the stability of your times, and the strength of salvation” (33:6). God is indeed both able and willing to accomplish the salvation of all who patiently trust in Him.

This attitude of holy reverence exemplified by Isaiah is contrasted with the attitude of the hypocritical leaders of Jerusalem, who will face impending judgment because of their self-righteousness (33:10-16). There are two kinds of people, the ‘God-righteous’ and the ‘self-righteous’. Those who trust in God’s righteousness will partake of the living water, but those who trust in their own righteousness will partake of the lake of fire (30:16, 14).

A picture of the beauty of Christ’s kingdom is supplied to further encourage the saints (33:17-24). The beauty of God will be seen by all of His saints. Spiritual understanding will be the order of each day. Perfect justice will prevail. There will be an absence of illness and disease, and an abundance of spiritual pardon.

Divine judgment against the rebellious nations is reaffirmed by the prophet (34:1-17, 24:1-23). The faithful will be vindicated, for God who is on their side is all-powerful. “The sword of the LORD” will come down in judgment in the “day of the LORD’s vengeance” (34:6, 8). The context of this is the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16-21). This judgment spoken of here will be final. “It’s smoke shall ascend forever” (34:10).

God’s Highway of Holiness (35:1-10)

We now come to what is arguably the high water mark of the book of Isaiah. The future glory of Jerusalem in the messianic kingdom is described in vivid terms. Nature will sing the praises of God with its beautiful splendor (35:1). There will be great spiritual joy and an absence of fear (35:2-4). The earth will be characterized by continual spiritual revival (35:5-7).

“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” (35:8). This is God’s highway of holiness. Though it will exist as a literal road in the messianic kingdom, it is an all too seldom traveled spiritual road that existed in Isaiah’s day, and it exists today. The Lord sets His highway of holiness before you today, saying, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16). The world sets up its own highway, several lanes wide, to trap the unwary soul. Isaiah was declared clean by the touching of the live coal to his lips (6:5-6). The Christian today has been declared clean by the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:16-10:18). If you are a blood bought believer reading this study, you are positionally declared clean in the sight of the Lord, and God’s highway of holiness is available for you to travel on. Take heed to stay on that road, for walking in God’s righteousness will be to your spiritual benefit. “Whoever walks the road...shall not go astray.” That is, God will never steer you wrong.

Chapter 7: Hezekiah, Man of Prayer (Isaiah 36-39)

Also see the parallel accounts in 2 Kings 18:13-20:19, and 2 Chronicles 32:1-26.

Sennacherib Boasts Against the Lord (36:1-10)

We now turn to the longest narrative section of the book of Isaiah. Emboldened by his military victories against the surrounding nations, including Israel, Sennacherib king of Assyria orders an invasion and siege against Judah and Jerusalem. This would turn out to be the biggest mistake of his military career. He sends the *'Rabshakeh'*, which is a title for the man holding the office of 'Chief of Staff' or 'Governor' in ancient Assyria, to subjugate and exact tribute from Judah.

The challenge of the Rabshakeh to Hezekiah the king of Judah is: "What confidence is this in which you trust" (36:4)? Judah had all too often trusted in Egypt throughout history, and that had resulted in disaster and defeat for the nation time and time again. This fact is not lost on the Rabshakeh, and he points out that history may well repeat itself if Judah does not accept the demands of her invaders (36:6, 9). To further discourage Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem, the Rabshakeh actually invokes the divine name, claiming that God has ordained an Assyrian victory. "The LORD said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it'" (36:10). What would Hezekiah and the people do? Would they trust in Egypt, surrender in despair, or trust in the living God. The fate of millions would hang in the balance.

The Rabshakeh raises the Ante (36:11-22)

The Jewish government officials make a request that the Assyrian governor speak to them in Aramaic (36:11). The reason for this is that by speaking in Hebrew, the common people in the city of Jerusalem are also hearing the threats of the invaders (36:12-15). The Rabshakeh refuses to do so, for speaking the common language of the people was the common and preferred tactic of the Assyrians. Its purpose was to strike fear into the common people and create dissension within the ranks, further weakening the opposition by eroding public support for its leadership—in this case Hezekiah and his representatives. The Rabshakeh further argues that things will be better for the common people of Jerusalem if his terms are accepted. Although many of the people will be removed from the land, he argues, they will actually be better off in captivity (36:16-17). It was the strategy of Assyria to remove many people from conquered lands, resettling the people elsewhere and resettling the land with other people of various nationalities. At the time of these events recorded in the book of Isaiah, Assyria had already subjugated the northern kingdom of Israel. In resettling the land of Samaria, they were largely 'successful' in destroying the cultural and religious unity of that land. We see this evidenced by the false system of worship practiced by the Samaritans in Jesus' day (John 4). The Rabshakeh rightly points out the inability of the false gods of the surrounding nations to deliver them from invasion, but makes the mistake of classifying the true God as being in the same category (36:18-20). Hezekiah's commandment to his officials, "Do not answer him" (36:21), was a wise one. It is best to seek the Lord's will on any matter before proceeding with a course of action. Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah, the king's officials, come to Hezekiah "with their clothes torn" (36:22). Tearing of clothes was symbolic of sorrow or blasphemy according to the ancient customs. In this case, it was a symbol of both.

The Promise of Deliverance (37:1-13)

The reaction of Hezekiah was commendable. "He tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD" (37:1). How many times do we Christians despair in the midst of our trials! All too often, seeking God is a last resort and not a first response. Filled with godly sorrow, the king beseeches the Lord for divine mercy and deliverance. Then he sends a delegation to Isaiah the prophet of God to seek his counsel in the matter. Isaiah assures them that God will deliver Jerusalem and Judah from the hand of the Assyrian invaders. The Rabshakeh had gone too far. By his blasphemy, the living God had been aroused in His anger and brought into the battle to defend His honor and His people (37:6). The judgment upon the Rabshakeh and Sennacherib king of Assyria who he represented would certainly be a return to Assyria in response to a rumor, and death in their own land (37:7). Even as the first part of this prophecy was being fulfilled, the Assyrians persisted in their demands for surrender on the part of Jerusalem and Judah (37:8-14). The Assyrian leadership failed to take the word of God seriously, a practice which always leads to divine displeasure and eventual judgment if not repented of. Although the ungodly person may seem to have success for a time, and may seem to avert judgment for a season, the end will come suddenly and with finality.

Hezekiah's Prayer (37:14-20)

Having received the demand letter with essentially the same content as the words the Rabshakeh had spoken, Hezekiah once again goes up to the house of God to pray (37:14). The words of this prayer are instructive, and we would do well to learn them and draw application from them. There are four clear principles in the text.

- 1) The basis of Hezekiah's plea is a genuine desire to see God glorified and not blasphemed (37:16-17).
- 2) There is the reference to the living God, as being sovereign and having power over all things (37:17).
- 3) There is a renunciation of the dead idols worshipped by other nations (37:18-19).
- 4) Salvation is to be sought in and through God alone (37:20).

Answered Prayer Concerning Sennacherib (37:21-35)

The word of the Lord comes to Hezekiah through Isaiah in the form of a promise of answered prayer. All four points noted above are answered by God.

- 1) God will be glorified and not reproached (37:23-24).
- 2) The Lord is sovereign and all-powerful, and He will intervene (37:26-27).
- 3) The fact that Hezekiah's prayer was to the true God and not dead idols was honored (37:21).
- 4) The deliverance of Jerusalem will be accomplished (37:35).

Sennacherib's Defeat and Death (37:36-38)

We now see how all these things are accomplished. The defeat of the Assyrian army is accomplished by “the angel of the LORD” (37:36). Some believe this *‘angel’* to be none other than the second Person of the Trinity Jesus Christ. The evidence for that view is textual; that the usage of the word ‘angel’ followed by the definite article often identifies him as God (see Judges 6:22-23 for an example of this). However, there is not enough evidence in the text to prove it in this case. In any case, “one hundred and eighty five thousand” men fall overnight, smitten by God (37:36). Sennacherib, having been humbled by this event, returns to his native land of Assyria. Two of his sons murder him, and a third son assumes the throne in his place (37:38). The word of the Lord, as it always does, would come to pass.

Hezekiah's Life Extended (38:1-8, 21-22)

Having seen the salvation of the Lord on earth, Hezekiah now falls “sick and near death” (38:1). “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’” (38:1). The meaning of a king setting his house in order was twofold. Hezekiah was to complete any unfinished business, and he was also to name an heir to the throne so that the transition could be made without turmoil. Implicit in God's command is that the heir ought to be godly. In this, Hezekiah would err in judgment. His son Manasseh perpetrated much evil in the 55 years of his reign, although he did repent of his evil at the end of his life (2 Ki. 20:21-21:18; 2 Chron. 33:1-20).

Hezekiah, being accustomed to a life of prayer, takes to his prayer room yet again, requesting healing from his sickness and a lengthening of his days (38:3). His truthfulness and loyal heart are honored by yet another answered prayer in the affirmative from the Almighty. Sometimes God will honor our prayers by meeting our requests on earth, and sometimes he will not. Surely, however, a life lived after God's heart will be honored one way or another, both in this life and the life to come. In our text, we read that fifteen years are added to Hezekiah's life. God is not obligated to give Hezekiah, or anyone else, a sign (Matt. 12:38-39; Luke 16:19-31). However, he performs a miracle by temporarily reversing a sunset to confirm His promise in this particular case (38:8, 22).

Praise for Answered Prayer (38:9-20)

Praising God for answered (or unanswered) prayer in our lives is all too often neglected. In the account of Jesus' cleansing of the lepers, only one out of ten return to Him to glorify God for the miracle (Luke 17:11-19). Hezekiah was found among the minority who return to thank and praise God for His blessings. Having been given fifteen more years, it is his desire that they be characterized by personal spiritual revival. Perhaps several more years have been decreed for you, friend. How do you wish to have them lived out?

The king proclaims this truth: “The LORD was ready to save me” (38:20). He was ready to deliver Hezekiah from the Assyrians, and he was ready to deliver him from the jaws of death. We too have such a Savior. He is Christ Jesus. He delivers us through so many trials in our lives, and he has delivered us from the power of death by His perfect sacrifice for our sins (1 John 2:1; 1 Cor. 15). The Lord God is ready to save us at any moment. The question is, ‘Are we ready to receive His salvation?’

The Babylonian Ambassadors (39:1-8)

Ambassadors are now sent from Babylon to bring a present to Hezekiah in celebration of his being healed of his sickness (39:1). This courtesy of kings and heads of state towards one another is observed even to this day. Rather than sharing and bringing the focus on the spiritual riches that he had experienced, Hezekiah makes the mistake of showing off all of his earthly riches to the Babylonian envoys (39:2).

Following this visit, Isaiah comes to the king with a word from the Lord (39:3-5). The result of Hezekiah boasting in worldly wealth would be the loss of it. Riches are fleeting, "they make themselves wings" (Prov. 23:5). Hezekiah quickly repents of his mistake. He apprehends the truth that "riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death" (Prov. 11:4). Isaiah also adds the prophecy that Judah and Jerusalem will go into captivity to Babylon. As unpleasant to his hearing that the consequences of his sin and the future judgment of the nation may be, Hezekiah accepts the word and the will of the Lord without questioning or complaining (39:8). In doing so, he proves himself to be a spiritually mature man.

Chapter 8: Supernatural Comfort (Isaiah 40-45)

God's Commission of Comfort (40:1-2)

It has been pointed out that the first 39 chapters in the book of Isaiah correspond to the number of books of the Old Testament, and the last 27 chapters correspond to the number of books in the New Testament. Although this is an oversimplification, it is not without merit as a way to understand the book of Isaiah as a whole. Chapter 40 begins with a message of comfort and forgiveness for God's people.

The commission given to Isaiah, and to all of God's ministers, is to comfort His people with His truth. The message of comfort has both advents of Christ in view here. The Lord declares "that her iniquity is pardoned", which is the heart of the Christian gospel (40:2). Jesus Christ came down in order to pay the penalty for sin by His blood, making reconciliation with and forgiveness by God possible (Heb. 9:22; Rom. 5:11). In context, however, that promise is spoken to Jerusalem specifically (40:2). There will come a day when the hand of God will no longer be against that city in judgment, but she will be restored in peace. That day will come when Christ appears "a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Heb. 9:28). In that day, perfect justice will prevail. Those who have accepted God and His Christ will receive blessing, and those who have willfully rejected them will receive their due punishment.

Prepare the Way of the Lord (40:3-5)

These words are quoted in the New Testament and applied to the ministry of John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Jesus Christ with regard to His earthly ministry (Luke 3:4-6). John was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" both literally and symbolically (40:3). Not only was his ministry in a desert place but his message was preached against the backdrop of a barren spiritual climate. This was particularly true of the Jewish 'establishment' in John's day. The circumstances were very similar in that regard to those to whom Isaiah ministered. Although many hearts were prepared for the Lord to enter in, this prophecy did not see its literal fulfillment in the first advent days. However, it will in the days to come. The terrain of the earth will one day be leveled, and "the glory of the LORD shall be revealed" in a fuller sense when Christ reigns on His throne on earth in His millennial kingdom (40:4-5). All men and women will see it, and each will be subject either to His grace or to His wrath.

The Frailty of Man (40:6-8)

The life of all men and women is compared to the grass of the field. It grows up quickly, and it dies just as quickly (40:6-8). Life on this earth is temporary, and each of us is only here for as long as the Lord gives us breath (40:7). In light of eternity, we are here one minute and gone the next. This truth is contrasted with the eternality of God and His counsels. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (40:8). We find it affirmed that God's word is both sure and enduring. If you have been privileged to have a copy of God's written revelation to you—the Holy Bible—in your possession, then the eternal truth of God is available to you. The answers to life are not temporary, to be found on earth in the land of men. Rather, the answers are found in God's eternal and unchangeable truth. As it is written in another place,

“Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness endures to all generations” (Ps. 119:89-90). The apostle Paul puts it this way to give application to and to encourage the believer. “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

The Arrival of the Shepherd (40:9-11)

We arrive at yet another prophecy which speaks of both advents of Christ. “He will feed His flock like a shepherd” (40:11). The shepherding work of God the Son is the topic in view here. A shepherd leads and protects the flock. Jesus Christ is the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:14). Not only did the Son of God reveal Himself in this way in His first advent, He will also function as a shepherd when He returns to rule on earth in His future kingdom (40:10).

The Greatness of God (40:12-26)

Before us lies one of the most powerful affirmations of the greatness of God in Scripture. God by definition cannot be measured or understood. A series of unanswerable questions are asked to challenge the reader to meditate upon the great power of Almighty God. Such things as God's power in creation, over nature, and over world events serve to silence the creature who would question His sovereignty (40:12-26; Job 39, 41).

God “sits above the circle of the earth” (40:22). We know this to be scientifically true, but the actual fact of it was not known in Isaiah's day, when everybody believed the earth to be flat. We must, however, be very cautious in applying Scripture to science. The Bible is not, and is not intended to be, a science book. Rather, it is a love letter from God to men and women given to reveal spiritual truth. There are times when the Bible speaks of things as they appear to be, but not as they are. For instance, it speaks of the sun rising and setting, not of the rotation of the earth and its distance from the sun and moon. God is more concerned that we understand His word and its essential truths than about pinpoint scientific accuracy. Moreover, we must be careful to interpret science in light of Scripture, and not the other way around. For years, scoffers attacked the Bible as historically inaccurate because the people of the Hittites were not ‘discovered’ by archaeology, but they since have been. Today, many who profess to be wise attack the biblical record and the seven literal days of creation (Gen. 1). They too will be confounded in the future. Ultimately, the word of the Lord will be vindicated in every case in which it clearly affirms or clearly denies certain facts (Rom. 3:4).

Reliance upon God's Power (40:27-41:1)

This closing section of chapter 40 has been the subject of numerous Christian hymns and devotionals. Although these words were written to “Israel”, the application of them is trans-dispensational (40:27). That is, the Christian finds as much comfort in them as the Old Testament Jew. God is a just rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (40:27-29; Heb. 11:6). Although the faithful undergo tribulation, the Lord God is ready, willing, and able to be the

source of spiritual renewal for His children. Human weakness is sure to beset each of us, "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" (40:31). There were no chapter breaks in the original manuscripts of the Bible, so the reader often misses the first verse of chapter 41, which finishes the thought at the close of chapter 40. Those who trust in God are called to rush to spiritual renewal. The people are to be silent in their approach, beholding the majesty of God and apprehending His awesome power (41:1).

The Providence of God (41:2-4, 44:28-45:4)

We will now take two prophetic passages together even though they appear chapters apart. The Lord asks, "Who has raised up one from the east?" "Who gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings" (41:2). Then the Almighty answers His own question for the benefit of those who are ignorant, and for the condemnation of those who willfully deny His power. "I, the LORD, am the first; and with the last I am He" (41:4). This one from the east is named later in the book of Isaiah. The human king who would be used by God to subdue Babylon and order the rebuilding of Jerusalem in times to come would be named "*Cyrus*" (44:28, 45:1). This prophecy is an amazing proof of the perfect accuracy of the Word of God in every detail. At the time of Isaiah's writing these words, it was towards the end of his ministry which was around 681 B.C. This Cyrus spoken of here did not reign on the Persian throne until about 559 B.C., and his decree to rebuild Jerusalem was written about 539 B.C., well over a century later (Ezra 1:1-2)! In order to attempt to disprove the Bible, some modern day 'scholars' have postulated that these chapters were written much later, a position which has no support whatsoever from either the text of the book itself or the ancient sources. It is amazing that in the face of such proof of the inerrancy of Scripture that "the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing" (Psalm 2:1). In these passages we have one of many examples of how the Lord in His sovereignty superintends both large and small details and events of human history.

Cooperation in the Pagan Community (41:5-7, 21-29)

This section describes the unity of the pagan community when it comes to idolatry. Although they may succeed in building an idol, it is a futile endeavor (41:7, 29). In reading these passages, we cannot help but wonder what would happen if those who worship the true God would work in such harmony with such unity of purpose.

Servant, Chosen, Friend (41:8-20)

The children of Israel, called by their representative names Israel, Jacob, and Abraham, are honored with three titles.

- 1) *Servant*: To be a servant of the Most High is a great honor. Jesus Christ Himself is called the "*Servant*" of God the Father, the apostles aspired to this position, and we would do well to imitate them (42:1; Rom 1:1).
- 2) *Chosen*: To be chosen by God is indicative of God's favor. Here the nation of Israel is chosen, and in the New Testament individual believers are said to be chosen "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4)

3) Friend: Abraham was called a friend of God in Scripture (Gen. 18:17-18; Jas. 2:23). Those who are of the household of faith are no longer enemies estranged from God by their sin, but friends of God through Christ's righteousness (John 15:15).

Those who are servants of God, chosen by God, and friends of God, have no reason to fear. It is impossible that anyone or anything can conquer God's house, so we are safe as long as we dwell in His household. "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God, I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you...says the LORD and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (41:10, 14).

The Servant of the Lord (42:1-4)

This passage begins with "Behold!" (42:1). In other words, the speaker, in this case God the Father, is telling the reader not to miss what He is about to say. The content of the message is that God the Son has been commissioned to bring the gospel to all peoples of the earth with authority and with power.

We find here evidence of the trinity. The doctrine of the trinity cannot be perfectly understood by men, but the Bible clearly teaches it. Therefore, all orthodox Christians affirm it. There are three distinct 'personalities' within the godhead, and all appear together in one verse (42:1). God the Father is speaking about God the Son (His Servant) and mentions the fact that He placing God the Holy Spirit (His Spirit) upon the Son. One prominent place where all three are present at the same time occurs at Jesus' baptism. This refutes modalism, or ancient Sabellianism, which denies the trinity. This heresy, or false doctrinal teaching, states that God can only be present as Father or Son or Spirit, and not all three at once. It was condemned outright in the early church but has been revived today in some Pentecostal circles.

These four verses are quoted together in the New Testament, and applied to Christ Jesus, so we can be sure of whom they speak (Matt. 12:18-21). It is affirmed that the Lord will not reject based upon degree of faith, but will instead compassionately stoke the spiritual fire of the tried believer (42:3). There is no chance that Christ will fail in His mission as the mediator of the New Covenant, nor is there a chance that He will ever be overcome (42:4)

The Sustaining Hand of God (42:5-9)

As surely as God created all things by His mighty power, He will sustain all things by His mighty power. If He can sustain all things, then He can sustain even you (42:5-6). The Lord is also ready and able to help the helpless. Those with "blind eyes" will receive spiritual sight, and those who "sit in darkness" will find their prison doors opened for them and the Son of God at the ready to lead them out (42:7).

Praise, Promise, and Plunder (42:10-25)

The command goes out for all people to burst forth in praise "Sing to the LORD a new song, and His praise from the ends of the earth" (42:10). God has held His "peace a long time", but the fulfillment of His promise to save is near (42:14). This promise can be understood as the turning

of the Babylonian captivity yet future, or relating to the first advent of His Christ. Nevertheless, we can be sure that every promise of God will stand (Matt. 5:18; 2 Cor. 1:20). The plunder is a reference to the utter defeat of all of the enemies of God, and the vindication of the Lord and the execution of His justice against unrepentant sinners (42:21-22).

Fear Not, God is with you (43:1-7)

The believer is told twice in these verses to “fear not” (43:1, 5). The reason we should cast aside our anxieties is that the Lord promises not only to redeem those who come to Him in faith, but also to be present with them in life and in death (43:1-7; 1 Pet. 5:7). The call is a personal call. As a loving Father, God calls each of His children by name (43:1; Luke 19:6). To them the Lord says, “You are mine” (43:1). The believer has been spiritually adopted and grafted into the household of God at the point of salvation (John 14:18; Rom. 8:14-17). Since the passage itself is addressed to Israel particularly, the reference to the gathering in of the people is best understood as a reference to the regathering of Israel at the institution of the thousand year reign (43:5-6). There are two applications to believers today. First, God will not forget any of His people, and will surely gather them to Himself. Second, the believer can never travel so far from the Lord that he or she cannot be reached by Him.

You are My Witnesses (43:8-21)

Many who are afflicted on earth are blessed in the spiritual sense, for their hope is in the Lord (43:8). The followers of God are said to be His “witnesses” (43:9, 10, 12). A witness is someone who sees and testifies to “truth” (43:9). In context, the salvation of God is that thing which is seen and spoken of. There is one God, and one Savior. “I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior” (43:11). His glory will not be shared with another. Neither is there any way to salvation apart from the true God. Jesus affirms these same truths in the New Testament, saying, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

God Forgives and Forgets (43:22-28)

The context of this section is God's plea to unfaithful Israel. The Lord puts her on trial and finds them guilty (43:22-24). Nevertheless, He offers unconditional forgiveness. Not only does God freely forgive sin in His great mercy, He also forgets sin. The reader would do well to memorize this gem of a verse and be encouraged. “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (43:25). Notice the reason given is for His “own sake”. In His merciful work of acquitting sinners, the Lord is glorified. There is also another reason why He must act thus; His holiness demands it. Since the Holy One of Israel cannot look upon sin, even the thought of it must be removed from the divine mind. This enables those who believe in Him in faith to stand in His presence. Those who choose to remain in their sin and not cry out for God's mercy will be given over to “reproaches” (43:28).

Identification with the Lord (44:1-5)

Israel is affirmed to be the chosen nation of the Lord, conceived by Him (44:1-2). This process began with the call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). Individual believers are likewise said to be chosen by the Lord, and a spiritual birth is conceived in them (2 Thes. 2:13; John 3:3). Those who experience the great love and grace of God no longer wish to be called "*the world's*". Rather, they cry out to anyone who will listen, "I am the LORD's" (44:5)! The Christian ought to be clear in affirming the goodness of Jesus Christ, and identifying with other believers through His universal church and the local assembly.

No Other God (44:6-20)

The living God affirms the fact that there is no other 'god' besides Him (44:6-8). In light of this, He argues through the pen of Isaiah the folly of trusting in idols. Turning to the Lord will profit much, but turning to anyone or anything else "will not profit" (44:9). Although men and women may go to great lengths to create a god in their own image, such an idol has no power to deliver the soul (44:20). Only the true God can do that.

God has not Forgotten You (44:21-28)

This passage is addressed to Israel in general, and Judah and Jerusalem in particular. The message is clear. God has not forgotten His people, and He longs for them to come back. He has not utterly cast His people Israel aside, nor has He forgotten His promises to them. This theme is applied to individual believers by Jesus in the 'Parable of the Lost Son' (Luke 15:11-32). You would do well to make it even more personal than that. God has not forgotten you.

The General Gospel Invitation (45:5-22)

We close this section with a protracted appeal by the Almighty for everyone, everywhere, to come to Him and find rest for their weary souls. These words are a clear general gospel presentation. The Lord God appeals to His general revelation through nature as evidence of His power (45:6). He appeals to the obvious principle that any created the things is responsible to its creator (45:9). God appeals to His sovereignty in human events, a point that He will further develop in the next chapter (45:13). The Lord points to the futile prayers of those who trust in idols (45:20). His argument culminates in a verse that has been responsible for the salvation of a great many souls, the eminent preacher of old, Charles Spurgeon among them. "Look to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (45:22).

Chapter 9: The Wicked and the Weary (Isaiah 46-51)

The Deadness of Idolatry (46:1-7)

Bel and Nebo, representative of the gods of Babylon, are affirmed to be mere dead idols (46:1). They stoop and bow before the Lord, and are themselves taken into captivity (46:2). This imagery reminds us of the image of Dagon the 'god' of the Philistines falling on his face before the God of Israel (1 Sam. 5:1-5). While such idols cannot help anyone for even a moment, the living God provides cradle to grave care (46:4, 7).

God's Foreknowledge and Sovereignty (46:8-13)

The general context of this passage speaks of God's foreknowledge and unlimited sovereignty. "I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done" (46:9-10). "Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (46:11b). The specific context of this passage is that Cyrus, "a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes my counsel", will be used of God to bring the nation of Israel back to their own land in times to come (46:11a). The unlimited sovereignty and unconditional grace of the Almighty is clearly affirmed in these verses, as it is throughout the Bible.

The Humiliation of Babylon (47:1-15)

Babylon will surely experience great humility in times to come as a result of placing too much trust in earthly power. They will be judged because they acted as if they themselves were gods. The Lord could clearly hear the thoughts of their hearts which were: "I am, and there is no one else besides Me" (47:8). This is the default position of the unredeemed man or woman; an attempt to be one's own god. The heritage of all people of all times who trust in themselves for salvation is sudden desolation (47:11).

A litany of forbidden pagan practices is mentioned. These practices were used by the Babylonians, and are still in use today, in lieu of seeking the word and will of God. They are enchantments, sorceries, astrology, stargazing, and monthly prognostications (47:12-13).

Refining and Redeeming Israel (48:1-22)

No nation, or individual, suffers divine chastisement without a purpose. Such chastisement is an act of God's mercy. The nation of Israel is no exception to this. He cares enough to refine His people through tribulation; that wayward children and nations will fall to their knees and glorify the King of Heaven (48:11).

The redemption of Israel will be accomplished through God's eternal power and ancient plan. The following evidences are given for the Lord's sovereignty:

- 1) God is Himself eternal (48:12).
- 2) God is the creator of all things (48:13).

3) God is the sustainer of all things (48:14).

God the Son addresses the reader along the same lines in the middle of the chapter (48:16, compare with 42:1). Jesus also shares in the sovereignty over all things with God the Father because He shares the divine nature (John 10:30). The Lord promises an endless sea of peace and righteousness for those who respond to His love with faithful obedience (48:14, 18).

The Light to the Gentiles (49:1-7)

The emphasis of this chapter is the revelation of Jesus Christ to call both Gentiles and Jews to Himself (49:1, 5). The Son of God is speaking here, and He affirms His call to do the will of the Father. His entrance into the world in His incarnation "from the matrix of My mother" and "from the womb" is prophesied (49:1, 5). The mouth of the coming Christ would be "like a sharp sword" (49:2). This refers to two things: the convicting power of the gospel and His authority to judge. Such imagery is used of Jesus in the New Testament as well (Heb. 4:12; Rev. 1:16, 19:15). God will be glorified through the successful ministry of His Son (49:3). He will not fail in all the work set before Him. Believers would do well to apply this principle today. Glorifying God is the purpose of our existence, and is not optional in the life of God's children (1 Cor. 6:20). Although many may reject God's word, this does not nullify its power, truth, and effect (49:4). His Christ may be rejected now, but there will come a day when He is universally worshipped (49:7).

God the Father hears God the Son (49:8-10)

The response of God the father to the words of God the Son is recorded in these verses and those which follow. God will hear His Son, help His Son, and establish a covenant through His Son. The writer of Hebrews refers to the fulfillment of this prophecy after these things were accomplished in time. "In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Heb. 5:7-9).

As a result of the work of the Son of God, believers receive the promises of spiritual liberty, spiritual light, spiritual food, and living water (49:9-10). All of these promises, and the fact that Jesus is the author of them, are all reaffirmed and further developed in the New Testament gospel accounts, most notably in John's gospel (John 8:36, 8:12, 6:27, 4:14).

God Remembers You (49:11-26)

All of the things already mentioned in this chapter should encourage men and women of faith to rejoice in the promises of the Lord. However, God further affirms His loving care for His people Israel, and we can be sure that these promises stand for all who have faith in all ages. "Yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands" (49:15b-16a). God could no more forget the nation of Israel than a mother could forget a child whom she has nursed (49:15a). If the Lord has 'nursed you' in regard to your spiritual birth, how then will He

forget you? Do not despair! Weary sinner, take heart, for God has not forgotten you, and He will not forsake you even in your darkest hour (Heb. 13:8).

Blaming God (50:1)

The Lord speaks His response to those in Israel who blame Him for their sin and hardship. God has been a faithful husband to her. However, she has not always been a faithful bride, for she has greatly offended Him with her sin and spiritual adultery. The Lord is not the author of sin—His people are. Indeed, all men and women are “like sheep going astray”, being “sold under sin”, which has the effect of separation from God (1 Pet. 2:25; Rom. 7:14; Isa. 59:1-2). There is a parallel to this in the New Testament. The bride of Christ (the church) is not always faithful to her bridegroom. Nevertheless, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). Let the person after God's own heart look in the mirror before blaming the Almighty for trouble and misfortune.

God Came Through His Prophets (50:2-3)

God indeed had come to His people throughout history through His prophets, yet the people would not hear Him (50:2). He had proven the truth of His message and the legitimacy of his message by great miracles. He appeals to the miracles performed as acts of judgment against Egypt and acts of mercy on behalf of Israel (50:2-3; Exod. 4-14). All of these things were precursors of Immanuel, who would come at a later point in history.

God Himself Came (50:4-11)

The speaker is now God the Son. His ministry would be characterized by spiritual knowledge, graceful speech, and constant communion with the Father (50:4-5). God the Father awakened His Son “morning by morning” during His earthly ministry (50:4). Blessed is the redeemed saint who also meets Him after this manner each day!

The Lord of Glory would also experience humiliation at the hands of the men whom He came to save. He would be smitten and spit upon (50:6; Matt. 27:30, 26:67). Knowing the sufferings which awaited Him, the Son of God knew His mission and faithfully performed it. Relying upon the strength of God the Father to uphold and to vindicate Him, Jesus set His “face like a flint” towards Jerusalem to die for the sins of the world (50:7; Luke 9:51). In this, He gave us an example of steadfastness, stability, and endurance; that we might also walk in it. “If anyone desires to come after Me, let Him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me (Luke 9:23).

Jesus achieved the victory over sin and death, and has the authority to judge. The wise are called to avoid the end of the wicked. He who is without the salvation that God brings is called out of darkness and into light. The divine advice is this: “Let him trust in the LORD and rely upon his God” (50:10; Prov. 1:7).

Active Discipleship (51:1a)

Three actions that the active disciple of the Lord takes are given here. The true disciple of God listens to the word of God, follows after His righteousness, and seeks Him regularly. This may be further simplified to: '*Listen, Obey, Seek, (Repeat)*'. If any of these things is missing from the life of the believer, the full blessing of discipleship will not be found. If the cycle is broken, communion with the Lord will also be broken.

Remember Where You Came From (51:1b-2)

The nation of Israel is told to look to its humble beginnings. God had called Abraham from "the rock" and "the hole" from which he had been dug out. In context, the reference is to the call of Abraham to leave his native land of Ur and go to the land to which the Lord had called him. Because of his obedient response, blessings and promises came to him and his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3). In remembering her humble beginnings, perhaps Israel would respond with thanksgiving for God's activity on her behalf. The theme of remembrance is common throughout the Bible, for God knows the human tendency to forget Him and become spiritual drifters (Heb. 2:1). The Old Testament saints are often called to remember the providential care of the Lord throughout history. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus gives us the regular ordinance of Holy Communion, saying "Do this in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:24).

Fear God, Not Men (51:3-23)

The wicked will experience "desolation and destruction, famine and the sword" as a result of placing too much trust in man and worldly means and ends. The weary sinner is called to seek out the comfort of God in all situations. "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 man who will be made like grass" (51:12)? The same God said the same thing to New Testament believers. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

Chapter 10: The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52-53)

Awake, awake! (52:1)

The people in Jerusalem had called for the Lord to “awake” (51:9). Now the Lord calls for the people to: “Awake, awake!” (52:1). Scripture gives us a great many reasons to awake. In our text, the people of God are told to awake and separate themselves from unholy people and unholy things. Elsewhere, the Lord's people are exhorted to wake up because there is little time, and because God has given a stewardship and a commission (Rom. 13:11; 1 Cor. 15:34). The call to “awake” resounds throughout the ages to all men and women everywhere and in all times.

A Short History of Israel (52:2-6)

The children of Israel are called to “arise” and “sit down” in the place of God's blessing (52:2). “You have sold yourselves for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money” (52:3). They had degraded themselves long enough, freely serving the sin nature and receiving the just reward of being placed in captivity to foreigners. Nevertheless, the free gift of God's salvation would be made available to them. Despite her oppression at the hands of Egypt and Assyria, God preserved Israel through difficult times, and delivered Israel for His own sake (52:4-6). This is the manner after which the Lord will always act on behalf of His people.

Blessings of Evangelism (52:7-8)

A special recognition by God is given to those who proclaim His good news of peace and salvation to a lost world. The imagery used is that of the runner who proclaims a message of victory to the watchmen of the city. Verse 7 is expounded in the New Testament by the apostle Paul and applied to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the responsibility of every recipient of God's salvation to proclaim the life saving message to others. Otherwise, many may never hear the good news and die in their sins (Rom. 10:14-15). The mantra of those who are afraid of the responses of others is that “*lifestyle evangelism*” without words is all that is required. While living a holy life is a vital part of our Christian testimony, it cannot in and of itself save anybody. The gospel must be clearly presented by the spoken word. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

Before and Behind (52:9-12)

Israel is further encouraged as God reaffirms His promises. She need not fear, and this will leave her nothing to do but to praise the Lord her Redeemer (42:9). The God of Israel promises to go before Israel and be her rear guard (52:12). The reader is hearkened back to the presence of God during the exodus from Egypt in which He was manifested in the form of cloud and fire. “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” (Exod. 14:19).

God's Prudent Servant (52:13)

The remainder of chapter 52 and all of chapter 53 will be taken verse by verse, as they are loaded with prophecy relating to the first advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus will be "exalted" in His resurrection and ascension (Rom. 1:4; Acts 1:9-11). The Servant of God will be "extolled" by all for His great work before all creation (Phil. 2:9-11).

Astonished at His Appearance (52:14)

People would be astonished at Jesus' appearance following His mistreatment. His appearance would be drastically altered as a result of the beatings and abuse that He endured. "His visage was marred more than any man." This is true of Christ in the literal sense. The degree to which His appearance did not match His glory is most amazing. He allowed it to be so for you and me.

Startled by Christ (52:15)

The New King James text reads: "So shall He sprinkle many nations." The Hebrew word translated "sprinkle" can also be translated "startle". The translation depends on the context, and both words make sense in the context of the verse. Perhaps God in His infinite wisdom chose that particular word to be written that we might examine both translations. If "sprinkle" is the correct translation, then the priestly work of Jesus Christ is in view here (Heb. 10). If "startle" is the correct translation, then the far reaching power of the gospel is in view. The fact that the latter part of this verse is quoted in Romans 15:21 argues in support of this view.

Who has believed our Report? (53:1)

This verse is directly quoted twice in the New Testament. It has been well said that "the Old Testament is Christ concealed and the New Testament is Christ revealed." Since this is so, we do well to interpret Old Testament texts in light of New Testament application. John quotes this verse in relation to the rejection of Jesus the Messiah during His first advent ministry (John 12:38). Paul quotes this verse in relation to the rejection of the gospel in general because of lack of faith on the part of the hearer (Rom. 10:16).

The Root (53:2)

The reference to Jesus as a "root" harkens us back to the prophecies of the Davidic covenant, which affirm the kingship of David's descendants (2 Sam. 7:16; Isa. 11:1). Jesus Christ's appearance is described as nondescript. In His incarnation, He would appear to be an "average" Galilean as far as His outward appearance. He came to be a draw to men's spiritual senses, and not their physical senses. Christian leaders, and Christians in general, should be careful not to adorn themselves with pomp and circumstance, rich robes, special headwear, and the like lest we detract from the attention due our Lord.

Man of Sorrows (53:3)

The suffering Servant would be "despised" and "rejected" on earth (Matt. 13:55, 27:21). He would be a "Man of sorrows", for great is His sadness over the fact that so many people reject Him and in so doing, lose their souls (2 Pet. 3:9). The Savior's acquaintance with grief is vividly

seen at the tomb of His friend Lazarus, where “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). His grief over sin in general is seen by His intense prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46). It is necessary that these things be so. “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18). “We hid our faces” is best understood within a distinctly Jewish context, since this is the way the gospel portrays it. “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11).

The Grief Bearer (53:4)

“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” “Griefs” and “sorrows” are more accurately translated “*sicknesses*” and “*pains*”. This Scripture is applied to Christ in His earthly healing ministry (Matt. 8:14-17). Jesus proved His ability to deal with all of our physical, mental, and emotional sicknesses, and grant us healing if that is according to His will. In the face of such obvious power, those in His generation nevertheless “esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.” Notice that this Scripture points to Jesus alone as the One who can do these things. Modern day ‘faith healers’ and their ilk blaspheme His name and His work when they apply this prophecy unto themselves.

By His Stripes we are Healed (53:5)

The Lord prophesies through the pen of Isaiah that the Servant would be “wounded”, and indeed He was pierced through (Ps. 22:16). The reason for this is that it was necessary that this be done “for our transgressions” to be forgiven. In fact, a blood atonement would be required to appease the wrath of the Holy God (Rom. 4:25; Heb. 9:22). “He was bruised for our iniquities”, the righteous paying the penalty for the unrighteous (2 Cor. 5:21). Such was the only way that men and women might be reconciled to and be at peace with God (2 Cor. 5:18). Christ is pictured as the bringer of spiritual healing. He did it generally and universally in His first advent (Luke 4:18). He does it in response to prayer and confession of sin (Ps. 41:4; 1 John 1:9). Where Christ is, healing comes (Rev. 22:2). Notice the past tense verb “healed”. This is the spiritual position of believers in the sight of God—*healed already!* Let us take a moment to marvel at the power of Christ's blood and the permanence of God's salvation.

All Have Gone Astray (53:6)

Such is the depravity of the human heart (Jer. 17:9). “There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside” (Rom. 3:11-12). Yet all of the fiery darts of God's wrath were “laid on Him”, God's only Son. Men and women cannot fully comprehend the horror of experiencing separation from God, but the Son of God does. Sin separates us from God, and when the suffering Savior had all of the sins of the world laid upon Him, Jesus experienced the only break of fellowship with the Father that He would ever experience, and it terrified Him (Matt. 27:46). The reality of the separation from God that sin causes ought to remind us not to linger long in an unrepentant state.

Calmness through Trials (53:7)

The calmness and composure of the Christ through His darkest night is spoken of here. This prophecy was fulfilled literally during the phases of Jesus' trials before the Sanhedrin and before King Herod (Matt. 26:62-63, 27:12-14; Luke 23:8-9).

The Messiah Cut Off (53:8)

Jesus would be "cut off from the land of the living." This means that He would experience a literal physical bodily death. This event was also prophesied by Daniel and presented as a pivotal event in redemptive history (Dan. 9:26). This statement refutes the claims of some who teach that Jesus staged His own death or did not die a literal death such as men do. The reason that physical death had to occur is that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). In taking the penalty "for the transgressions" of others, Jesus 'paid the wages' of sinners for them, which is death. For all of this, "Who will declare His generation?" Jesus is risen from the dead to live forevermore (Matt. 28:6)!

Prophecies Surrounding Christ's Death (53:9)

"They made His grave with the wicked." We can take this in one of three ways. First, we can understand this quite literally in the sense that He was crucified alongside two guilty criminals on the cross. Second, we can read into the passage that the intent of those who called for His death was to disgrace Him even in His burial. Third, and preferred by this author, we can understand this in light of the Hebrew poetic association of the wicked with the rich, and the full context of the verse. The prophecy that the Christ would be buried with the rich was fulfilled through the actions of Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:57-60). This verse also teaches the sinlessness of the Servant, a doctrine which is reaffirmed throughout the Bible (1 Pet. 3:22; 1 John 3:3-5). Christ was the only sinless person who ever lived, uniquely qualified to be the Savior of the world and the Mediator of the New Covenant (1 Tim. 2:5; Rev. 5:9).

The Sin Offering (53:10)

God was "pleased" with the work of His Son, for in it His perfect will was accomplished. Christ Jesus is called "an offering for sin." According to the Levitical law, the sin offering required both death and the shedding of blood (Lev. 4:13-15; Heb. 7:26-27). The sin offering was also to be taken outside the camp (Lev. 4:21; Matt. 27:32; Heb. 13:11-13). In His death, Jesus' blood was shed outside the city of Jerusalem, thereby fulfilling the law. "His seed" is a reference to the spiritual seed of Christ, those who would come to God through Him (1 Cor. 15:23; Gal. 3:26-29).

Justified by the Righteous Servant (53:11)

The work on the cross is enough to make possible the salvation of sinners. The Lord is "satisfied", for the work is complete (John 19:30). Christ's "knowledge" is a perfect knowledge. Not only is His perfect plan of salvation for mankind understood and carried out perfectly, He knows all of those who are His (John 10:14). The Servant will "justify many", but not all. It is clear that "universalism" which teaches that God will accept everybody unconditionally is refuted here and in other places in the Bible. There is one and only one condition. That condition

is belief through faith in the work of God's Son Jesus Christ (John 3:16, 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Eph. 2:8-9). Although the death of Christ was sufficient to pay for the salvation of all, only those who accept the gospel will actually receive salvation unto eternal life (Matt. 20:28; 1 John 2:2). In other words, the offer is only good for those who redeem it. To illustrate the point, let me give you an example. If I were to mail out a coupon for a free can of soup to everyone in the country, the coupon itself would only have any value for those who actually went to the supermarket, put the can of soup in the shopping carriage, and presented the coupon to the clerk at the register. Although there were enough coupons for all of the people to redeem the coupon, not everyone would do so. The subject we speak of is infinitely more important. Only those who accept the gospel receive the benefit of having their sins paid for, and the rest do not and die in their sins.

The Exaltation of the Suffering Servant (53:12)

Following his time on earth in the office of "suffering Savior", Jesus Christ is exalted. He would rise from the dead, ascend into heaven, and receive all things under His authority. His dominion will be over all the earth and over all people, places, and things (Ps. 2:8; Phil. 2:9-11). "He was numbered with the transgressors" by the decree of unjust men, but He was rightfully declared innocent by the just Judge in heaven. The sin-bearer completed the intercessory work appointed for Him in His first advent. Today, this same Jesus "always lives to make intercession" for those who trust in Him in faith.

Chapter 11: The Heritage of the Saints (Isaiah 54-55)

Sing, O Barren (54:1-3)

The command goes out from the Lord for the barren woman to “sing” (54:1a). Some apply this prophecy to the Jews who returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity as a result of the decree of Cyrus. However, this text speaks more to the rise and spread of Christendom, which would first be preached by the Hebrews. The apostle Paul quotes verse 1 in the context of the availability of the gospel of Christ and its innate power to bring spiritual freedom to those who accept it (Gal. 4:27). The type of barrenness referred to here is *spiritual* barrenness. Spiritual barrenness was the order of the day in Isaiah's time, but it will not always be so. We have here a picture of awakening and spiritual revival.

“For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman’, says the LORD” (54:1c). Israel is frequently pictured in the Old Testament as the wife of the Lord. The entire Book of Hosea, for example, presents this illustration. The “married woman” is therefore best understood to represent Israel, and the “desolate” woman who is contrasted with her is best understood as representing the Gentiles. As partakers of the gospel, some of both people groups are a part of the universal church (Gal. 3:28).

Understood as a prophecy of the rise and spread of Christendom, we find two things prophesied, which surely did come true. First, Gentiles would outnumber Jews in the church—there are “more” of them. Second, we find a prediction of kingdom growth. “For you shall expand to the right and the left” (54:3). This agrees with the teaching of the Lord Jesus regarding the kingdom of heaven in the church age (Matt. 13:31-32).

Five Titles of God (54:4-5)

God is called by a great many names in the Bible. These names describe His attributes, character, and/or specific aspects of His work. Five titles are given in verse five for the purpose of reassuring Israel that He will ever be active on her behalf. Here is a list of the five titles given the Lord with a brief description of how they may be understood.

- 1) God is called “Maker”. He has created all of us for a purpose, not for no reason at all.
- 2) God is called “LORD of hosts”. This can be translated “Lord of the armies”. His power is greater than that of all men combined. With Him on your side, victory in the battles of life is assured.
- 3) God is called “Redeemer”. He is mighty to save from the power of sin and death.
- 4) God is called “Holy One of Israel”. The perfect One has chosen the nation of Israel from all the nations of the earth. In this, she is uniquely blessed.
- 5) God is called “the God of the whole earth”. He is not limited in His authority. Moreover, the grace and mercy of God is available to all people of all nations.

Wrath and Mercy Working Together (54:6-10)

God is perfect in all of His attributes. Some of them, however, seem to us to be mutually exclusive. The way in which God's wrath works together with His mercy is one of those cases. Here we have an example of how this is possible. This passage is spoken to Israel in context, but its principles can be applied to individual believers as well without difficulty. Let us follow the progression of events described. The Lord calls, the call is refused, and then the Lord's wrath enters in to gain the attention of she whom He has called. Having reached her bottom, she finally responds to the Lord's call and receives mercy. Few people accept the Lord's call the first time. Most of us need to experience the consequences of sin before we realize that we are utterly without hope apart from the divine mercy.

Comfort in the Midst of Tribulation (54:11-17)

The Lord makes four promises to the children of Israel specifically, which we can apply to believers of all time. The purpose of these promises is to stress the fact that God has "a future and a hope" for those of all dispensations who trust in His name (Jer. 29:11).

The Lord promises to lay a foundation in heaven for those who come to Him (54:11-12). The "*new Jerusalem*" will be a beautiful sight to behold (54:11-12; Rev. 21:18-21). More importantly, it will be a place of perfect comfort because God is there.

Life in God's kingdom will be characterized by divine teaching and guidance (54:13). As a result of this, believers will receive much understanding, peace, and righteousness. Today, the faithful receive these things through allowing God the Holy Spirit to guide their lives (John 16:13). How much more so will this be true when God literally lives among His people!

Eternal security is promised to God's people. "In righteousness you shall be established" (54:14). Notice this is written in the past tense. It is already so. The one whom the Lord establishes cannot be lost. As Jesus Himself said: "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). Freedom from terror and oppression is found only in the Lord God.

The Lord of hosts is the divine defense of the saints. Those who come against the people of God are coming against God Himself, and their efforts are doomed to failure (54:15-17). The defense comes the same way that righteousness does; from above. "This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is from Me", says the LORD" (54:17).

An Open Invitation (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" (55:1). This is an open invitation to feast upon God's goodness and salvation. Notice who it is that is invited—everyone. Notice what kind of people come—those who thirst; that is, those who recognize that they have a need. The place of feasting is at the waters. The waters represent a place of spiritual refreshment in the presence of God (John 4:13-14). The fact that salvation unto eternal life is a free gift is stressed. Believers are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). To reiterate what we said before in this study, Old Testament saints living in Isaiah's day received salvation by believing in God's promises which were yet to come, while

New Testament saints receive salvation by believing in Christ who came (Rom. 4:3, 23-25). The reader is told to “buy wine and milk”. In the Bible, wine often symbolizes joy, and milk is symbolic of nourishment (Ps. 104:15; Deut. 32:14). Spiritual joy and nourishment is available to the one who lives comes to and lives close to the Lord.

Real Satisfaction (55:2)

Sin is unprofitable, and satisfaction cannot be found in the world. Yet so many pour out their strength in worldly pursuits. In glorifying God and putting our energies into godly endeavors, we are able to find purpose in life and true fulfillment. While the end of sin is disappointment, we will be pleasantly surprised by the “abundance” of spiritual blessing we receive when we trust in the Lord and follow His paths.

Christ a Witness (55:3-5)

The invitation to come to the Lord is extended once again. It is interesting to note that refusing an invitation in eastern culture in Isaiah's day is not only bad manners, but also a personal affront to the one who offered the invitation. To refuse a second time is a terrible dishonor to the host. This is what men and women do when they refuse the divine invitation to come—they dishonor God.

“And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David” (55:3b). God had already made the covenant with David, but it will be applied to others called “you”. These others are those who accept the Lord's gracious invitation. In accepting it, these have the promises related to the Davidic covenant applied to themselves. The greatest of these promises is that of a Savior, Redeemer, and Messiah—Jesus Christ.

Verses 4 and 5 speak of Christ a “witness”. There are four lines of evidence to support this interpretation. First, God gave Jesus as a witness to the world. Second, this witness is a leader and commander. Third, Gentile believers flock to this witness. Fourth, God glorified this witness. Jesus Christ is the divine witness.

Return to the Lord Today (55:6-7)

The command goes out for all to “seek the LORD” (55:6). This should be done “while He may be found” (55:6). No man is promised tomorrow, and those who fail to seek him before the day of physical death will not be able to find the Lord in hell, for He is not there as a source of comfort. Tomorrow may be too late. Those who have backslidden in their faith are exhorted to “return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him” (55:7). Let the one who is afraid to return to the Lord for fear of being shamed consider the fact that the fountain of the mercy of God is unending, “for He will abundantly pardon” (55:7).

The Thoughts and Ways of the Lord (55:8-9)

The perfect knowledge and wisdom of God is such that we cannot even come close to understanding. The finite mind cannot understand the infinite mind. This is obviously so by

definition, yet some refuse to come to Him because they cannot understand some aspect of His deity. Such a one is exhibiting self-righteous pride, thinking that he or she is on the same level as the Lord of the universe. There are certain truths that we simply will not understand this side of heaven. How is it that God chooses beforehand and yet human beings exhibit free will? How is He one God existing in three divine Persons? This is where faith comes in. We are called to trust that the Lord God is in charge, acting in the best interest of His people, and doing all things perfectly.

Praiseworthy Purposes (55:10-13)

God's revelation through nature and God's revelation through the written word both serve praiseworthy purposes. Psalm 147 proclaims this very same theme. Just as rainfall waters the earth and brings forth food for the body, God's Word waters the earth and brings forth fruit for the soul. Both God's natural revelation and God's written revelation bring great glory to their Author.

“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” (55:11). This statement strongly affirms the power of the words of God. God does not speak for nothing, and He has not given us His written revelation—the Bible—so that it can collect dust on a shelf. Every single word of God carries with it divine power. Scripture has the power to save souls, and offers perfectly wise instructions for holy living (He. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16). No words of men, however spiritual they may be, can approach the power of Scripture to change lives. Not one of God's revealed purposes will be thwarted. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

Chapter 12: The Changing of the Times (Isaiah 56-66)

A Response Expected (56:1-8)

A response of obedience is expected from those who hope in God's salvation (56:1-2). Those who respond positively are called "blessed" (56:2). Those who respond negatively are often found making excuses. The Lord anticipates this, and addresses a eunuch who is using his condition as an excuse for not obeying the Lord (56:3-5). Physical disease is rarely albeit occasionally a specific judgment of the Lord upon a sinner. Regardless of the case, the sinner is called not to wallow in self pity but instead to 'wallow in God's grace'. The Lord also addresses the foreigner who feels estranged from the true God because he or she was born outside the covenant community. Even they are welcome to worship in the Lord's holy temple. The Holy One of Israel Himself says: "For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (56:7). This verse is quoted in the New Testament by Jesus in the context of the second cleansing of the temple (Matt. 21:13). The Son of God was righteously angry because the activities going on there were held in the Court of the Gentiles, and were a distraction to their worship.

Irresponsible Leadership (56:9-12)

The leadership of Israel in Isaiah's day is condemned by the Lord for their lack of diligence and vigilance. "His watchmen are blind", for they do not watch out for the people in their charge (56:10). These are irresponsible shepherds (56:11; Ezek. 34:1-10). If the leaders among God's people are not paying attention, who is? These leaders are also called "ignorant" (56:10). They are devoid of understanding of the Word of God, and therefore they cannot understand the will of God. The result is a case of the 'blind leading the blind'. The leaders spoken of here suppose that their sin will never catch up to them, so they 'live the life now'. Little do they know or care that an account will be required of them by their Maker (56:12).

The Death of the Righteous (57:1-2)

The righteous pass from this life to the next with much fanfare in heaven, but little fanfare on earth. The death of unrighteous celebrities seems to garner much more attention. There are three significant rewards received by the righteous in death that are mentioned in our text. Upon promotion to heaven, the saints are taken away from evil, enter into peace, and enter into rest in the presence of God (57:1-2; Luke 16:19-31; Psalm 23). Balaam probably did not fully understand his prophetic utterance, but it rings true of the desire of the pure heart. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his" (Num. 23:10).

Judgment for Idolaters (57:3-13)

Idolaters will not have peace or rest, but judgment. Not only will such blessings be absent in the spiritual sense in this life, they will also be absent in the next. The tragedy is that such people believe that they themselves can achieve their own salvation through human means and/or a false system of worship. These folks do not see a reason to turn to the true God, their spiritual eyes being blinded (57:10). Their "collection of idols" will not be able to deliver them in the day of God's judgment and wrath (57:13).

Prepare the Way of the Heart (57:14-21)

The reader of this prophecy is enjoined to “prepare the way” of the heart for personal spiritual revival (57:14). God's patience with men and women who wander from the straight path is emphasized in the text (57:16). The Lord calls the “backsliding” soul back into His fold (57:17). Peace is proclaimed to all people both “near” and “far” (57:19). Throughout Scripture, this terminology is used; Jews are spoken of as near and Gentiles are spoken of as far. See Ephesians 2:17-18 for a New Testament example of this. Distance does not inhibit God's willingness and power to save (Ps. 139:7-12).

Hypocritical Versus Real Religion (58:1-14)

In Isaiah's day, the religious leaders of Israel were guilty of hypocritical religion. They thought that they could curry favor with the Lord by their outward behavior. Yet the Lord saw right through their outward behavior and directly into their hearts (1 Sam. 16:7). The fasting they were doing neither glorified God nor profited others (58:3-5). The fast that God calls His people to is one characterized by inward and outward righteousness (58:6-14).

Separation from God (59:1-7)

Sin separates us from God (59:2). The human tendency is for us to blame people, places, and things for our sin. Believers are called to ‘unlearn’ that behavior and admit their sin to God. They will find in doing so that the Lord is merciful to forgive (59:1).

Sin has a life of its own. The life of a sin begins at conception and will continue to wreak havoc, tangling an ugly web of destruction, as long as it is allowed to live in the life of a man or woman (59:5). Isaiah lists five specific categories of sin in order that those who wish to live godly lives can avoid them.

- 1) Murder, the root cause of which is anger and hatred, is a sin which separates us from God (59:3).
- 2) Lying, either by deliberate commission, omission, or embellishment of facts, is a sin which separates us from God (59:3).
- 3) Devising evil plans is a sin which separates us from God (59:4).
- 4) Carrying out evil activity is a sin which separates us from God (59:7).
- 5) An evil thought life is a sin which separates us from God (59:7).

The Intercessor (59:8-21)

The fact that sin is confessed and righteousness is earnestly sought is not enough in of itself to merit salvation (59:8-15a). People were trying to get right with the Lord, but could not do so of their own accord. “Then the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. 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” (59:15b-16). Without a divine intercessor, communion between God and men would be impossible. Therefore, God

determined to provide Himself as an intercessor. Zion, which refers generally to all Israel and specifically to Jerusalem, could not come to the Redeemer. Therefore God decreed that "the Redeemer will come to Zion" (59:20).

The Changing of the Times (60:1-22)

Israel was in dire straits both temporally and spiritually as a nation in those days. Isaiah described the sad condition of things at the beginning of his book. However, lest the people despair, Isaiah drives home the point that God promises that there will surely be a changing of the times. The glory of God will one day return to Israel (60:1-2). The Gentiles will come and partake of her blessings, in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (60:3-14; Gen. 12:1-3). While the state of the nation in Isaiah's day was temporary, she will one day be made "an eternal excellence" (60:15). A beautiful description of the New Jerusalem is given, which is very similar to that in the book of Revelation (60:19-20; Rev. 21:1, 23, 22:5). The sun and moon will no longer be needed because Jesus Christ the "light of the world" will be there (John 8:12).

It is prophesied that "a little one shall become a thousand" (60:22). This blessing is pronounced upon God's remnant of faithful believers and can be applied to all ages. Israel was multiplied from one family to millions of people in the land of Goshen. The Jewish population was multiplied when they returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity. A few dozen faithful believers in the resurrection of Jesus Christ were multiplied exponentially throughout the world in their day, and continue to be throughout the entire church age even to our day.

The Mission of the Messiah (61:1-3)

The mission statement of the Messiah is given here in the first three verses. The difficulty in interpreting these verses arises from the fact that they blend both His first coming and second coming together. We need to look no further than the New Testament for clarification. When Jesus was reading in the synagogue, He read verse 1 and half of verse 2, applying them to Himself, and then He "sat down" (61:1-2a; Luke 4:17-20). The reason is that the purposes of His first advent were to bring about spiritual healing for the "poor" and "brokenhearted", and also to bring about spiritual "liberty" by defeating the power of sin and death. The rest of verse 2 and all of verse 3 are applicable to His second coming, not the first. When Christ returns, He will execute judgment against the enemies of God and accomplish salvation in time for His redeemed. "To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Heb. 9:28). I often present this truth in colloquial layman's terms to those who are near to accepting Jesus in the following way. The first time He came, we was 'playing nice in the sandbox', but the second time it will not be so. You had best take Him seriously now, or you will face the consequences. It is better to face the grace of the Lord than the vengeance of the Lord.

Salvation for Zion and Her People (61:4-62:12, 63:15-64:12)

The promise of the restoration of Israel continues to be reaffirmed, that it might motivation her people to greater faith and hope in God's promises. Two types of coverings will be provided for the redeemed; "the garments of salvation" and "the robe of righteousness" (61:10). "We need to be saved" is the cry of the humble penitent sinner, and a garment of salvation is provided (64:5).

The Bible teaches us that “all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags”, but the Lord is gracious to provide a robe of righteousness in exchange for filthy rags that men and women might be able to stand in His presence (64:6; Zech. 3:1-5).

Christ Takes Vengeance upon His Enemies (63:1-6)

This passage expounds verse 61:2b, giving details regarding “the day of vengeance of our God”. Isaiah speaks of the second coming of Christ and the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16, 19:11-16). Jesus is said to be coming to the mountainous area of Megiddo from Bozrah in Edom (63:1). There are varying opinions on the meaning of this passage; we will look at two of them. The first is that since Bozrah was famous for its dyed garments and wine making in the ancient world, then it follows that the passage should be understood figuratively. The second interpretation is a quite literal one; that Jesus will literally come from Bozrah with His saints to the battle. Further support of this is found in the book of Micah, where the word translated “fold” is in Hebrew “Bozrah” (Mic. 2:12-13). If this second interpretation is correct, which it is in this author's view, it is likely that Bozrah in Edom will be the location of Jesus Christ's second coming.

The Lord Jesus will make short work of His adversaries, and He will do it “alone”, and without human help (63:3). The Battle of Armageddon will be the bloodiest slaughter in human history. The flow of blood will extend as a river almost 200 miles long (Rev. 14:14-20).

Remembering God's Mercy (63:7-14)

That God will accomplish salvation in the future is established by the fact that He has done so many times in the past. Israel is reminded of her redemption from Egypt, and the mercy of the Lord. When we doubt the fact that the Lord has the power to work in our lives, all we need to do is look to how He has worked in our lives in times past. With regard to the unchangeable God, past performance is truly indicative of present and future results.

The Perfect Judgment of God (65:1-65:16)

The righteous judgment of God is affirmed. The people of God will ultimately be comprised of Gentile as well as Jewish believers (65:1). The New Testament Scripture calls these people who comprise the universal church a “holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9). The “rebellious people” are apostate Jews who reject the offer of God's mercy (65:2-16).

The Millennial Kingdom Described (65:17-25)

This is one of the most descriptive passages of the millennial kingdom in the Bible. We learn several facts relating to the literal thousand year reign of Christ on earth (Rev. 20:1-6).

- 1) New heavens and a new earth will be created prior to it (65:17).
- 2) King Jesus will reign in Jerusalem (65:18-19).
- 3) The kingdom will be characterized by the presence of joy and the absence of sorrow (65:19).

- 4) Life spans will increase, although there will still be physical death (65:20).
- 5) Physical death will often, but not necessarily always, be the result of personal sin (65:20).
- 6) Kingdom subjects will own private property and work their own land (65:21-23).
- 7) Prayer will be answered before it is spoken (65:24).
- 8) The animal kingdom will be at peace within itself (65:25).

Choose the Way Carefully (66:1-24)

The reader of the book of Isaiah today is left with a decision to make, and it is the same decision that the reader had to make in Isaiah's day. The book of Isaiah contains much about judgment, and it also contains a great many promises of blessings which the Lord has prepared for "him who is poor and of a contrite spirit" (66:2). God promises of Israel through Isaiah that He "will extend peace to her like a river" (66:11). Zion will declare God's "glory among the Gentiles", who will follow after her to the true God "like a flowing stream" (66:11, 19). Every man and woman will have a heritage. For some it will be hellfire, where the "fire is not quenched" (66:24). For those who travel God's highway of holiness, the heritage will be an eternity of worship before the Lord (66:23).