An Expository Commentary

on the

Book of Isaiah

[A Work in Progress]

The translation used is the author’s own unless otherwise indicated.

James E. Smith
January 2005
INTRODUCTION
GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH ISAIAH

He has been called “the Prince of the OT Prophets” (Copass), “the Saint Paul of the OT” (Robinson) and “the greatest prophet” (Eusebius). Isaiah son of Amoz was a theologian, reformer, statesman, historian, poet, orator, prince, and patriot. He was “prophet of the gospel before the Gospel” (Robinson), the fifth evangelist. Naegelsbach refers to him as “the great central-prophet.” His ministry was central in time. He walked across the stage of history roughly half way between Moses and Christ. Isaiah was central in the events of history. He lived during the days of the mighty Assyrian Empire. He anticipated the downfall of that empire and the rise of its two successors, viz., the Chaldean and the Persian empires. This prophet was central in theological emphasis. He drove home the great principles of salvation through faith, substitutionary atonement, the kingdom and resurrection.

Isaiah was also central among the prophetic books. According to Payne, he ranks third to Ezekiel and Jeremiah in the most predictions (734 vv), first in the greatest number of separate predictions (111) and second in the amount of material directly anticipatory of Jesus Christ (59 vv). While other prophets were called to illustrate single parts of the near or distant future, Isaiah let the light of his prophetic word fall on the great wide circumference of the entire future of salvation.

MINISTRY OF ISAIAH

The message of Isaiah was heralded by his name which means “Yahweh is salvation.” The name Joshua has the same two components in reverse order. Isaiah is the only person in Scripture to wear this name. Some English versions in NT references to him Anglicize the Greek and Latin spelling of his name as Esaias or Isaias.

Personal information about this prophet is scanty. His father was Amoz, not to be confused with the prophet Amos. According to tradition, Isaiah was from the tribe of Judah. He was a citizen, if not a native, of Jerusalem. Isaiah was married, but the name of his wife is not known. She is simply called “the prophetess” (8:3). His sons were given symbolic names that encapsulated prophecies. The first, Shear-jashub (7:3), means a remnant shall return. The second son has the longest name to appear in the English Bible—Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1). Roughly translated this name means swift is the booty, speedy is the prey.

Prior to his call to the prophetic ministry, Isaiah served in the royal court as historiographer. He recorded the acts of King Uzziah “from beginning to end” (2 Chr 26:22). Concerning King Hezekiah the record states: The other events of Hezekiah’s reign and his acts of devotion are written in the vision of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah (2 Chr 32:32).

Isaiah was called to the prophetic ministry in the year that king Uzziah died (6:1). Scholars compute that year to have been 739 BC. His ministry extended for some sixty years through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. According to tradition Isaiah died a martyr’s death about 680 BC, early in the reign of the wicked King Manasseh. Legend has it that he was sawed asunder by this king (cf. Heb 11:37).

Among the Major Prophets, Isaiah was the preacher par excellence. He exhibits a vocabulary considerably larger than either Jeremiah or Ezekiel. He was a masterful writer as well as an orator. Isaianic expressions have found their way into the speech of many who have never read his book.

---

3. A seal of Amoz the Scribe dating to the eighth century BC has been found. This seal may have belonged to the father of Isaiah.
4. The last dated event in the book is the fourteenth year of Hezekiah (701 BC). The Assyrian King Esarhaddon (681-699 BC) is, however, mentioned in 37:38.
Sarcasm and irony were tools he used with skill. His words reveal great earnestness, boldness and spirituality. He was a man of deep reverence.

Insert

Chart No. 1: Chronology of Isaiah’s Ministry

Though Isaiah was known more for what he said than for what he did, action parables are not lacking in his ministry. Once he removed his outer garment and shoes and walked about the streets of Jerusalem in the long linen tunic worn next to the skin (ch 20). He thus played the role of one who had been taken captive to warn the citizens of Jerusalem against an alliance with Egypt. When Hezekiah was sick unto death Isaiah ordered a clump of figs to be placed on his “boil” to symbolize the beginning of healing (ch 38). On another occasion he wrote the name of his second son on a large scroll that was serving as a kind of billboard (ch 8).

Valeton evaluated the ministry of Isaiah in these poignant words: “Never perhaps has there been another prophet like Isaiah, who stood with his head in the clouds and his feet on the solid earth, with his heart in things of eternity and with mouth and hand in the things of time, with his spirit in the eternal counsel of God and his body in a very definite moment of history.”

BOOK OF ISAIAH

The Book of Isaiah has been called “the Mount Everest of prophetic literature.” The intrinsic grandeur of this book attracts those who are connoisseurs of great literature. Students of theology find here sublime revelations of God’s character. The evangelical emphasis of the book has made it a favorite of Christian preachers through the ages. Those who defend biblical revelation find in these prophecies abundant evidence of supernatural revelation. Simple believers rejoice in a treasure trove of passages that encourage them in their Christian pilgrimage.

SIZE AND POSITION

Although the Book of Isaiah has more chs than either Jeremiah or Ezekiel, by word count it ranks third in size. The Book of Isaiah contains sixty-six chs that are a microcosm of the Bible. The first thirty-nine chs, like the thirty-nine books of the , speak mainly of condemnation. The last twenty-seven chs, like the twenty-seven books of the NT, speak mainly of redemption.

Because of the respective sizes of the books, ancient Jewish tradition listed Jeremiah and Ezekiel before Isaiah. The placement of the Book of Isaiah as first among the Major Prophets can be justified, however, on chronological grounds. Isaiah’s ministry ended about seventy-five years before the call of Jeremiah. The pre-Christian Greek Septuagint was guided by the chronological principle in the arrangement of the Major Prophets. The English translators have followed the lead of the Latin Vulgate, which in turn was based on the Septuagint. The Septuagint, however, had the twelve Minor Prophets before the Major Prophets.

UNITY OF THE BOOK

The majority of OT scholars are convinced that the Book of Isaiah is not the product of a single author. According to these critics, chs 40-66 (and several chs in the first half of the book as well) were written by some anonymous prophet living a century and a half after Isaiah. This anonymous prophet is called “Deutero-Isaiah.” Some critics have gone so far as to designate Isaiah as a library of prophetic books compiled by any number of authors over several centuries. One writer refers to the Book of Isaiah as “the garbage can of prophecy.”

On what grounds do the critics deny that Isaiah was the author of the entire book that bears his name? An anti-supernatural bias permeates the writers who advocate the multiple authorship

---

5Valeton cited by G.L. Robinson, BI, 22.

6Jeremiah contains fifty-two chapters, 42,659 words; Ezekiel has forty-eight chapters, 39,407 words; Isaiah is organized into sixty-six chapter, but contains only 37,044 words.

7Edwin M. Good, I, 115.
theory. They simply do not believe in pinpoint predictive prophecy. Their bias is camouflaged in the following dictum: circumstances reflected in a book are evidence of the time of composition. The biblical view, however, is that God on occasion revealed to a prophet the circumstances of the future. The multiple authorship theory undercuts the powerful evidence of prediction found in this book.

Critics point to linguistic and stylistic differences between the two halves of Isaiah that they believe support their multiple authorship theory. Yet a writer’s vocabulary and style may vary depending on his age at the time of writing, the subject matter involved, and the audience for whom he is writing. Without question the last chs of Isaiah were written late in the prophet’s life. In these chs he is addressing new subjects.

Again critics point out that certain theological concepts appear in the latter half of the book that are not attested in the days of Isaiah. Yet this argument begs the question. If Isa 40-66 is the product of Isaiah, then the theology found in those chs would in fact be attested in the days of Isaiah.

Sometimes critics argue that Isaiah’s name is not found in the last twenty-seven chs of the book. While this is true, it is not decisive in determining the authorship of these chs. A book is presumed to be the product of the person whose name it bears unless overwhelming evidence to the contrary can be produced. Furthermore, most critics who deny that Isaiah wrote chs 40-66 also deny that he wrote ch 13, and that ch does contain his name.

The following factors support the traditional view that Isaiah the son of Amoz authored this book.

1. The heading of the book and at least thirteen other places within the book claim Isaiah as the speaker/writer.
2. Jewish and Christian tradition is uniform in attributing this book to Isaiah.
3. The Septuagint, translated about 250 BC, shows no distinction between the two halves of the book.
4. Ben Sirach, writing at about 280 BC, knew of one Isaiah.
5. The two complete Isaiah manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate no break at the end of ch 39. These manuscripts date to about a century and a half before Christ.
6. Josephus attributes the Cyrus prophecy of 44:28 and 45:1— the most controversial prophecy in the book—to Isaiah the son of Amoz. 8
7. Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth read from Isa 61 and attributed it to Isaiah (Lk 4:16ff).
8. In the NT several passages from “Deutero-Isaiah” are quoted and attributed simply to Isaiah.
9. The literary style of the second half of Isaiah is so similar to the first that even critics admit that “Deutero-Isaiah” must have been a disciple of Isaiah who tried to imitate his master.
10. A certain circle of ideas appears throughout the book binding it together as the work of one author. The concepts of a highway, Zion, the holy one of Israel, and pangs of a woman in travail are but a few of the many that might be listed.
11. Many of the passages found in “Deutero-Isaiah” are totally unsuitable to the period of the exile of Judah where they are placed by the critics, but totally appropriate to the days of Isaiah son of Amoz.

MESSAGE OF THE BOOK

The theme of Isaiah is the same as the meaning of this prophet’s name: Yahweh is salvation. The immediate purpose of the book was to teach the truth that salvation is by grace. 9 The long-range purpose was to demonstrate the role of Judah in the plan of God as the vehicle through which Messiah would come into the world.

The book consists of two major divisions. Chs 1-35 are concerned primarily with two invasions of Judah. The first invasion was by the combined armies of Syria and Ephraim in 734 BC. This invasion had as its purpose the removal of the reigning representative of the royal house of David. During this crisis Isaiah urged King Ahaz to trust in the Lord. This invasion was to come to nothing (Isa 7). A second invasion, however, will be far

8Josephus, Antiquities 11.1.2.
9E.J. Young, I, 225.
more devastating. The Assyrians were coming like a flood that will reach all the way to the neck of Judah. The tiny nation will all but be swallowed up by that imperialistic giant. After God had used these foreigners to punish his wayward people he would punish the Assyrians for their brutality, idolatry and pride.

Chs 36-39 form an historical connecting link between the two major divisions of Isaiah. Chs 36-37 document the invasion by King Sennacherib in 701 BC and the dramatic, last-minute rescue of Jerusalem by divine intervention. The judgment predictions of chs 1-35 find fulfillment in these two chs. Chs 38-39, however, lay the foundation for the predictions of the last twenty-seven chs. Here Isaiah announced to King Hezekiah that in years to come his descendants would be carried away to Babylon. Thus the first two chs of this narrative section look backward to the threats pertaining to Assyria. The last two chs of the connecting link look forward to the captivity of Judah in the land of Babylon. Furthermore, a careful study of chs 36-39 indicates that the material is presented in reverse chronological order. The episode recorded in chs 38-39 occurred before the Assyrian invasion of chs 36-37. The author apparently sacrificed chronological considerations in the interest of literary structure. By this arrangement of material Isaiah intended to demonstrate how his entire book fits together logically and theologically.

Chs 40-66 assume that the threat of Babylonian captivity made in chs 38-39 had come to pass. These chs were designed to give comfort to the Jews once they had been deported from their homeland. This comfort took the form of (1) explanations of why that terrible judgment was necessary; and (2) anticipations of a complete restoration of God’s people which will set the stage for the golden age of Messiah.

Ten major units have been identified in the book. These units or “books” are the basis for the commentary that follows.

1. Book of Mingled Rebukes and Promises (chs 1-6).
2. Book of Immanuel (chs 7-12).

**IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK**

For the Christian the Book of Isaiah is extremely important. Forty-seven chs of this book were directly quoted or alluded to by Christ or the Apostles. With more than four hundred allusions, Isaiah stands second only to Psalms as the most cited book in the NT.

According to Payne the book of Isaiah contains 111 separate predictions. Of the 1,292 vv in the book, 754 (59%) deal with future events. Among the more important messianic prophecies in this book are the following:

1. Future temple that attracts Gentiles (2:2-4).
2. Glorious Branch (4:2-6).
4. Dawning of a new day in the birth of a child (9:1-7).
5. Shoot of the stem of Jesse (11:1-10).
10. Servant as a light to the Gentiles (49:1-13).
13. Promises made to David to be fulfilled (55:1-5).

**HEADING**

Isaiah 1:1

In the light of the headings of the books of Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zephaniah the first v is probably best regarded as the heading of the whole book, and not just the first unit in the book. This heading contains three elements.

---

10 Adapted from B.A. Copass, *IPP*.

A. Title (1:1a): *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz...* Vision is a technical term for revelation received from Yahweh. It does not necessarily indicate the mode by which that revelation was received (cf. Obad 1; Nah 1:1). On Isaiah and his family, see introductory notes.

B. Subject (1:1b): *that he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem...* Isaiah’s prophecies take in Ephraim (Northern Kingdom) and several nations that surrounded Judah. The focus of his revelation, however, is on the Judeans and their capital.

C. Date (1:1c): *in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah kings of Judah.* The call of the prophet is dated to the year that King *Uzziah* died. That Isaiah prophesied prior to his call to be a prophet is unlikely. Therefore, chs 1-6 contain materials that can be dated immediately after the death of Uzziah in 739 BC. The ruler during this period was *Jotham*, the son of Uzziah. Jotham had actually been serving as co-regent from as early as 750 BC when Uzziah was forced to live in isolation because of an outbreak of leprosy.

Altogether Jotham reigned sixteen years (2 Kgs 15:33). The sacred historian declares he did what was right in the sight of the Lord (2 Kgs 15:34). The Chronicler adds that he grew powerful because he walked steadfastly before the Lord (2 Chr 27:2). Several military campaigns were waged, including a notable one against the Ammonites (2 Chr 27:3-5). These were the times in which Isaiah began his ministry. The economic boom of the preceding reign continued. Major building projects were completed. The rich were getting richer. The poor, however, were being oppressed. The temple was overflowing with worshipers, but the worship was a sham. Pagan customs were influencing their religious rituals.

**BOOK ONE**

**MINGLED REBUKES AND PROMISES**

Isaiah 1-6

The key to the chronological placement of Isa 1-6 is found in 6:1. In the year that King Uzziah died God called a member of the royal court into the prophetic ministry (6:1). The report of his call is delayed until ch 6. Apparently Isaiah desired to first offer examples of his preaching, and then to present his credentials for delivering such stinging condemnation and such glorious predictions. The material in this first division of the book falls into the reign of Jotham, son of Uzziah. See under v 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chart 3</th>
<th>BOOK OF MINGLED REBUKES AND PROMISES</th>
<th>A Prologue</th>
<th>A Sermon</th>
<th>A Song</th>
<th>A Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Nation Indicted</td>
<td>A People Humbled</td>
<td>A Vineyard Destroyed</td>
<td>A Prophet Called</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch 1</td>
<td>Chs 2-4</td>
<td>Ch 5</td>
<td>Ch 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER 1**

**A NATION INDICTED**

1:2-31

The first ch of Isaiah serves as a prologue to the entire book. It stresses four concepts which permeate the message of Isaiah: (1) accusation of sin; (2) invitation to repentance; (3) lamentation over disaster; and (4) purgation through judgment.

**ACCUSATION OF SIN**

1:2-15

Isaiah’s “vision” begins with an accusation. The prophet took his auditors to court, as it were, and entered against them a three-count indictment.

A. Base Ingratitude (1:2-3):
1. Public forum (1:2a): *Hear O heavens, and give ear O earth, for Yahweh has spoken...* Isaiah paints a picture of a court scene. The heavenly prosecutor presents his charges against Israel. The impartial heavens and earth are the witnesses who hear the charges against the people.
2. Pictures of ingratitude (1:2b-3):
   a. Rebellious sons (1:2b): *Sons I have reared and brought up, but as for them, they have transgressed against me.* God likened his people to rebellious children. They had experienced the
loving care of the heavenly Father, yet they had rebelled.

b. Ignorant animals (1:3): An ox knows his owner, and a donkey its master’s stable. As for Israel, he does not know; as for my people, they do not understand. Dumb animals have greater loyalty to their masters than did Israel to her God. The lowly ox and donkey are used to rebuke Israel’s ingratitude. These people may know about God, but they no longer know him, i.e., they do not possess experiential knowledge of him.

B. Moral Depravity (1:4): Alas, O sinning nation, people burdened with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly. Count two is introduced by Alas. The word comes from funeral vocabulary. It expresses great sadness over the current situation. Count two is a charge of corruption. Four phrases paint the picture of the moral depravity of Judah. Judah was a sinning nation, i.e., a nation that went on sinning. As such Judah was burdened (loaded down) with iniquity (guilt). They were the offspring of evildoers in that their fathers before them were corrupt. They were sons (children) who chose deal corruptly, i.e., they walked in the path of their fathers. They wanted no part of the holy one of Israel who demanded that his people reflect his holiness. They had snubbed their God, had given him the cold shoulder.

C. Incorrigibleness (1:5-9): Count three indicted Judah for incorrigibleness.
1. Illustration of the battered person (1:5-6):
   a. Past efforts at national discipline (1:5a): Upon what will you be smitten again as you continue rebellion? The children of God had been severely disciplined by their Father.
   b. Result of national discipline (1:5b-6): The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is weak. (6) From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, [only] wounds, bruises, and fresh welts; they are not pressed out or bandaged, or softened with oil. The discipline is first described figuratively. They were covered from head to toe with bruises, wounds and welts. God has disciplined them time and again. There was no place left on the body for Yahweh to administer another blow. Furthermore, the wounds had been completely neglected: (1) the pus had not been pressed out; (2) the wounds had not been bandaged; and (3) the hardened scabs had not been mollified with oil.

2. Explanation (1:7-9): The prophet now explains the grotesque figure of the battered person.
   a. Land is desolate (1:7): Your land is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; as for your ground, before you strangers devour it; it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. Cities had been burned, fields devoured by foreigners.
   b. Jerusalem is destitute (1:8): The daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a hut in a cucumber patch, like a city besieged. The population of Jerusalem is described as the daughter of Zion. Three figures paint the picture of the destitution of Jerusalem. Isaiah describes the capital as (1) a booth in a vineyard; (2) a hut in a cucumber field; and (3) a besieged city cut off from all others.
   c. Population is diminished (1:9): Except Yahweh of Hosts had left a few survivors, like Sodom we would be, we would become like Gomorrah. Only the grace of God prevented Israel from becoming totally desolate like the once-proud cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. This is the first of fifty-four occurrences of Yahweh of Hosts in the book. The title represents Yahweh as the commander of all the hosts of earth and heaven (stars and angels). Thus this title underscores his power (cf NIV LORD Almighty).

D. Superficial Commitment (1:10-15):
1. Isaiah’s bold metaphor (1:10): Hear the word of Yahweh O leaders of Sodom. Give ear to the law of our God, O people of Gomorrah. The mention of Sodom and Gomorrah led to the fourth indictment that focused on hypocrisy. To call Jerusalem Sodom/Gomorrah was shocking and deeply insulting. These two cities epitomize Gentile sin at its worst. Yet the rulers and people of Israel were so wicked that their counterparts could only be found in those notoriously wicked cities.
2. Judah’s worthless worship (1:11-15): The ostentatious religious performance only aggravated the sin of the Jerusalemites. Leupold calls this paragraph “the most scathing indictment of formalistic worship to be found anywhere in Sacred Writ.”

a. Their sacrifices have no value (1:11): (1) Although ridiculously numerous (1:11a): Why to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says Yahweh. I have had enough… The words multitude and to me suggest that the Judeans were offering an abundance of sacrifices in excess of the requirements of Mosaic Law. Perhaps the Judeans had adopted the notion that Yahweh needed to be fed with sacrifices like the pagan deities. I have had enough suggests the image of divine nausea over the amount offered. (2) Although legally appropriate (1:11b): of your burnt offerings of rams, the fat of your fattened cattle. In the blood of bulls, lambs and goats I have no pleasure. God takes no delight when the Judeans offer to him the blood of animals. This is not a repudiation of the Mosaic sacrificial system. It is an acknowledgement that rituals without a committed heart have no value.

b. Their large assemblies have no value (1:12): When you come to appear before me, who seeks this from your hand, trampling upon my courts? The temple throngs were mere a nuisance as they trampled under foot Yahweh's courts. Trampling suggests desecration. Holy ground is desecrated by hypocritical worship.

c. Their incense has no value (1:13a): Do not bring any more a worthless offering. The incense of abomination it is to me. Incense was offered before Yahweh in the holy place of the temple on a daily basis. Such expensive offerings might just as well stop. Offerings of the uncommitted are an abomination to Yahweh.

d. Their holy holidays have no value (1:13b-14): New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assembly—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. (14) Your new moons and your solemn assemblies my soul hates. They are upon me for a burden; I weary bearing [them]. The strongest possible language is used to show the divine displeasure in the observance of holy days. Yahweh cannot endure them. He hates these feasts. They are a burden to him. In v 4 iniquity was a burden to the people; here hypocritical worship is a burden to Yahweh.

e. Their prayers have no value (1:15): So when you spread out your hands, I will hide my face from you. Also when you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands with blood are filled. God hides his eyes from their prayer gestures, viz., the spreading out of the hands. He refuses to hear the words of their prayers. They were treating Yahweh like an idol; he would respond to them like an idol!

INVITATION TO REPENTANCE
1:16-20

A. Path to Repentance (1:16-17):
1. Negative side of repentance (1:16): Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. The situation was not hopeless, but the citizens of Judah must respond quickly. Since their hands where stained with the blood of abused people, God commanded them to wash themselves. The figure is immediately explained, first negatively, and then positively. Three strong imperatives call upon them to stop doing wrong.

2. The positive side of repentance (1:17): Learn to do good. Seek justice. Set right the oppressor. Defend the orphan. Plead the case of the widow. The sinners of Judah must replace previous wrong with positive action. They must seek justice for the most helpless segments of society—the fatherless and the widow. The term translated oppressor can refer either to the one who perpetrates oppression, or to the victim of oppression.

B. Incentives for Repentance (1:18-20): Repentance is reasonable. Yahweh wants to settle his differences with his people. The loving Father held out to his beloved children three incentives to lead them to repentance.

1. Incentive of pardon (1:18): Come now and let us reason together, says Yahweh. Though your
sins be like crimson, like snow they shall be made white; though they are red like scarlet, like wool they shall become. Scarlet sin, i.e., the sin of murder itself, can become as white as snow. Listening (i.e., obeying) God's call for repentance makes possible such forgiveness.

2. Incentive of provision (1:19): If you are willing and you hear, the good of the land you shall eat. God’s bountiful provision is illustrated by the giving of food to those who are hungry. The forgiven sinner will be able to enjoy life and the blessing of God. He eats the good of the land. This figure of speech points to both material and spiritual blessing.

3. Incentive of judgment (1:20): But if you refuse and rebel, by the sword you shall be devoured; for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken. Isaiah pictures the fate of one who refused God’s mercy and rebelled against him. That individual will be devoured by the sword. The sword refers to any hostile power brought against Judah in judgment.

LAMENTATION OVER DISASTER
1:21-23

A. Striking Pictures of Jerusalem (1:21-22):
1. Jerusalem like a harlot (1:21): How sad that the faithful city has become a harlot, she who was filled with justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Isaiah utilized the technique of rhetorical lamentation to underscore the terrible condition of the nation and its need for repentance. Jerusalem had once been the faithful city, i.e., she had been faithful to the principles of God's law. That place that was once the very embodiment of righteousness now harbored murderers. Failure to execute murderers was the ultimate injustice under God's law. Isaiah likened once-faithful Jerusalem to a harlot, i.e., a fallen woman.
2. Jerusalem like worthless things (1:22): Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water. Isaiah further compares Judah (or her leaders) to silver that had become worthless, and to wine diluted by water (cf. Jer 6:28, 30; Ezek 22:18). These, like the harlot in the previous v, are figures of something valuable that now had become worthless. There is no glory in lawless society.

B. Explanation of the Pictures (1:23): The figure of the worthless silver and diluted wine is now explained.
1. What the rulers were (1:23a): Your rulers are rebels, associates of thieves. The root of the problem in Jerusalem was the rulers. They rebelled against the law of God (cf. Hos 9:15). They were associates of thieves, i.e., they were a gang who stopped at nothing to seize what belonged to others.
2. What the rulers loved (1:23b): Every one loves a bribe, and pursues gifts. The rulers made whatever rulings they were paid to make. The rich and powerful manipulated the legal machinery to their advantage.
3. What the rulers neglected to do (1:23c): The orphan they do not defend, and the widow's cause does not come unto them. The leaders should have been forceful advocates for the less fortunate; but they gave no aid to those who could not pay the required bribes.

PURGATION THROUGH JUDGMENT
1:24-31

A. Announcement of Judgment (1:24-25):
1. Judge (1:24a): Therefore (oracle of the Lord Yahweh of Hosts, Mighty One of Israel)...

The Judge now pronounces a solemn sentence against Jerusalem. An oracle (núm) is a direct poetic utterance of Yahweh. The first person pronoun refers to Yahweh, not to the prophet.

To enhance the solemnity of what is about to be uttered, three titles are used. First, the Judge is the Lord (hāʾādôn) or master.13 In Isaiah this title always introduces a note of judgment (cf. 3:1; 10:16, 33). Second, the Judge is Yahweh of Hosts. See on v 9. Third, the Judge is Mighty One (tábbīr)

---

13The title hāʾādôn is used eight times in the OT, five of those times by Isaiah, and always (except Mal 3:1) in conjunction with the tetragrammaton. See Ex 23:17; 34:23; Isa 3:1; 10:16, 33; 19:4; Mal 3:1.
of Israel, a title used four t in Isaiah. This old, poetic name for God can be traced back to Jacob's blessing (Gn 49:24). The title is suggestive of bull-like strength.

2. Judge’s personal decision (1:24b): alas, I will ease myself from my adversaries that I may avenge myself from my enemies. Alas is part of the vocabulary of lamentation. It is a sad outcome that God must now announce. The sins of Judah had become a burden upon Yahweh. He will now ease himself, i.e., he will no longer bear the burden of their sin. God will execute vengeance (just recompense for crimes committed) against those whose behavior made them his enemies. The enemies and adversaries are the people in general.

3. Judge’s public announcement (1:25): I will turn my hand against you. I will burn away as with lye your dross, and remove all your alloy. The hand is a symbol of God's power. The divine hand that had protected Israel in the past will now be turned against them to effect national destruction. The dross and alloy are the leaders (cf. v 22). Refining silver is a radical process. Anything that corrupted the pure silver had to be removed. Like worthless dross the leaders will be swept away.

B. Benefits of Judgment (1:26-27): Three positive consequences of the judgment on Jerusalem are identified.

1. New rulers (1:26a): Then I will restore your judges as at the beginning, and your counselors as at the first. The corrupt leadership will be replaced with dedicated judges like those who served in the early days of Israel’s history. The phrase as at the beginning probably refers back to the Davidic age (or earlier).

2. New reputation (1:26b): Afterwards you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. The reputation of Jerusalem will be restored. The v offers a brief glimpse of the ideal or messianic future. In that day true righteousness and justice will be found in the city of God. The future Jerusalem will be known as a righteous and faithful city because of her cheerful submission to the will of God.

3. New righteousness (1:27): Zion in judgment will be redeemed, and her converts in righteousness. In judgment, i.e., by the judicial removal of all undesirable elements, Zion will be redeemed, i.e., saved or delivered. The reference is to the messianic Zion of Heb 12:22. The converts (lit., they that return of her) refer to those who return to Yahweh through true repentance. The citizens of Zion are those who have been redeemed from judgment, bondage, sin and death. In righteousness points to justification or salvation. Zion consists of all sinners saved by the grace of God when they submit in repentance to the will of the Lord.


1. Judgment results in the crushing of sinners (1:28): But transgressors and sinners shall be shattered together, and backsliders shall come to an end. Transgressors are those who willfully break God's law. Sinners are those who live a lifestyle far short of the divine standard. Backsliders are lit., those who forsake Yahweh.

2. Judgment results in embarrassment (1:29): For they shall be ashamed because of the oaks that you desired, and you shall blush because of the gardens that you have chosen. Crushed by God's wrath, the sinners come to regard their pagan places of worship—the sacred oaks and gardens—with disgust. Deciduous trees like the oaks may well have symbolized to the pagans the death and rebirth of the god. The gardens (also mentioned in 65:3; 66:17) may be groves of these trees.

3. Judgment brings spiritual dismay (1:30): For you shall become like an oak whose leaf fades away, and like a garden with no water. Their gods give no support in the day of trial. The sinners wither under the pressure like vegetation without adequate moisture.

---

14 Mighty One of Jacob/Israel appears in 1:24; 30:29; 49:26; 60:16.
15 The name 'abîr appears used only in the construct, usually linked to Jacob (Gn 49:24; Ps 132:2; 5; Isa 49:26; 60:16. Only in Isa 1:24 does the name appear in construct with Israel.

16 Others suggest (esp. in the light of v 30) that the gardens were places of sacred springs or wells.
4. Judgment results in removal of idolatry (1:31): The strong man shall become tinder, and his work a spark. The two of them shall burn together, and there will be no extinguisher. The strong man is a ruler who introduced idolatry. His work is the idol that he made or introduced. The idol becomes like a spark destroying its most enthusiastic supporter. Both the idol and its worshiper are consumed in the unquenchable fires of God’s judgment. Tinder (NIV tow) is highly combustible. After the exile to Babylon, the remnant of Israel was essentially free of the taint of idolatry.

CHAPTER 2
ZION’S GLORY AND SHAME

HEADING
2:1

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Except for the reference to the kings, this heading virtually repeats 1:1. This heading marks the beginning of a new unit of the book. Originally this may have been the heading of a small message like chs 2-4 that may have been published separately by the prophet. Here is recorded a sermon that begins and ends with promise. Sandwiched between are a series of indictments against the values, leadership, men and women of the nation. Isaiah literally saw the word (haddābār). This suggests that the revelation contained both visionary and verbal elements.

PROMISE: A GLORIOUS CITY
2:2-5

A. Zion’s Exaltation (2:2):
1. Timeframe (2:2a): It shall come to pass in the last days... Isaiah looked beyond the temporal judgment on Jerusalem to the last days (lit., the last parts of the days),17 i.e., the messianic age. The passage is virtually identical to Mic 4:1-4. Scholars debate which passage is the original.18

2. Focal point (2:2b): the mountain of Yahweh’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it will be lifted up above the hills. The mountain of Yahweh’s house is the mountain occupied by God’s temple. Isaiah sees that mountain exalted above all others. Mountains often symbolize kingdoms in prophecy. The temple mount here indicates that God’s kingdom is spiritual. The v stresses the spiritual preeminence of Mount Zion. It is the sole source of divine teaching for the nations. Elevation of Mount Zion is portrayed also in other prophecies (Ezek 40:2; Zech 14:10; cf. Isa 68:15-18). The verb established connotes security and permanence.

3. Action (2:2c): All nations shall flow unto it. The prominent position of Mount Zion attracts other nations. Gentiles will stream to that holy mount, just as they streamed into Babylon in Jeremiah’s day (Jer 51:44). The verb suggests the movement of a mighty river. That river, however, is flowing up hill. It will not be without difficulty that Gentiles embrace the God of the Bible. The prophets compared the major oppressors of OT Jerusalem to great rivers (cf. 8:6-8). Here the river flowing into Jerusalem is a stream of Gentile converts.

B. Zion’s Attractiveness (2:3a):
1. Enthusiasm (2:3a): Many peoples will come and say, Come, let us go up unto Yahweh’s mountain, unto the house of the God of Jacob... The language conveys enthusiasm. Many peoples—various nationalities and languages—will eagerly encourage one another to go up to Yahweh’s mountain (Mount Zion), the house (temple) of God. The reference is to the messianic Mount Zion (Heb 12:22) and to the NT temple, the church of Christ.

2. Explanation (2:3b): that he may teach us some of his ways and that we may walk in his paths. In applies to that time after the first advent. Acts 2:17; Heb 1:2; Jas 5:3; 1 Pet 1:5, 20; 2 Pet 3:3; 1 Jn 2:18.

---

17The last parts of the days began with the first coming of Christ (Heb 9:26; 1 Cor 10:11). This period will end with Christ's second coming. The phrase is used in the OT for the time when messianic salvation would be accomplished. In the NT the phrase clearly applies to that time after the first advent. Acts 2:17; Heb 1:2; Jas 5:3; 1 Pet 1:5, 20; 2 Pet 3:3; 1 Jn 2:18.

18These vv are abrupt here, but fit well in Micah where they are introduced by a vow. Probably Isaiah borrowed these words from Micah.
OT times foreigners usually approached Jerusalem intent on plunder and subjugation. Isaiah pictures them coming in the messianic age because they know that in Mount Zion their spiritual hunger will be satisfied. The passage says nothing about the messianic King, but earlier prophecies spoke of his installation on Mount Zion (Ps 2:6). Zion is the source of spiritual truth. Gentiles hunger to know even some of the ways of Israel’s God. They desire to walk in his paths, i.e., live their lives by his precepts. In 1:10 Israelites rebel against Yahweh’s word; here Gentiles eagerly seek it out.

C. Zion’s Mission (2:3b): For from Zion instruction shall go out, and Yahweh’s word from Jerusalem. Gentile interest in Zion is stimulated by the evangelistic ministry of those who already reside there. Zion will be the center of religious instruction for the whole world. From messianic Zion the instruction (tôrâh) and word of Yahweh go forth. Someone must carry forth that message. The reference is to those preachers who carry the message of the gospel into the world.

D. Zion’s Tranquility (2:4):
1. A place of arbitration (2:4a): He will judge between the nations, and adjudicate for many peoples. Zion’s Ruler arbitrates the disputes that divide the peoples of the earth. Once converted, Gentiles make the word of God the standard for settling differences. The hostility between nations ceases within the kingdom of Messiah.

2. A place of peace (2:4b, c):
   a. Weapons transformed (2:4b): They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Mount Zion—Messiah’s kingdom—is a peaceful kingdom. Weapons of war (sword/spear) will not be needed. Instruments of war are transformed into instruments of commerce (plowshares/pruning hooks).
   b. Hostilities cease (2:4c): Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and neither shall they learn war any more. Those who have learned the principles of Mount Zion no longer engage in conflict with each other.

Isaiah’s prediction regarding Zion’s future has received two very different interpretations. Some see this as a description of the millennial reign of Christ—a thousand years of peace with Christ ruling from the throne of David in Jerusalem. Others see in these predictions a picture of the NT Zion, the church of Christ (Heb 12:22).

In so far as people bow in submission to the Prince of Peace, and seek to apply in their lives the principles of his government, this prophecy finds fulfillment. The gospel brings peace with God; and peace with God makes possible peace between antagonistic parties.

---

19 Historically, the gospel was first preached in Jerusalem. From that city the gospel message spread to the far corners of the earth. The reference here, however, is to the on-going mission of the church.

20 See Acts 10:36; Rom 5:1; Eph 2:14, 15, 17.

---

INDICTMENT: AN ABANDONED PEOPLE

2:5-9

From Zion’s glorious future, Isaiah returns to Zion’s inglorious present.

A. Exhortation: (2:5): O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of Yahweh. Isaiah used the exciting picture of Zion’s future attractiveness to encourage his contemporaries to walk in the light of Yahweh. God’s people were walking in darkness, i.e., they were ignoring God’s word. If in the future the Gentiles come to Yahweh, how much the more ought Israel to walk in that light that is her heritage.

---

20 See Acts 10:36; Rom 5:1; Eph 2:14, 15, 17.
B. Explanation (2:6a): *For you have abandoned your people, the house of Jacob*… Because they were not walking in his light, Yahweh had abandoned his people, i.e., had withdrawn his protective grace. This abandonment explains the reason why Isaiah urges his countrymen to walk in the light of Yahweh. The trials that will come upon Judah will be proof positive of this abandonment, which, however, is not permanent.

C. Further Explanation (2:6b-9): Conditions in the land of Judah cry out for abandonment to disciplinary judgment.

1. Land filled with worldly influence (2:6b): *because they are filled with the east, and soothsayers like the Philistines, and with the offspring of strangers they strike hands.* Judah was filled with the east, i.e., they had imported pagan customs from Assyria. Instead of influencing other peoples, they were being influenced by their customs. Soothsayers were as numerous in Judah as they were among the Philistines to the west. To strike hands with means to associate with someone, perhaps make agreements with them. The people were seeking economic self-sufficiency, so that they need not depend on their God.

2. Land filled with worldly things (2:7): *His land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to his treasures; his land is full of horses, and there is no end to their chariots.* Divine abandonment of Israel was also necessary because of misplaced trust. The people trusted in their abundant silver and gold and in their horses and chariots i.e., military might (cf. Dt 17:16).

3. Land filled with idols (2:8): *His land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their fingers have made.* God abandoned Israel because of the penchant of the people for idolatry. The land was full of idols and the people unashamedly bowed before these man-made objects. The violation of the first and second commandments was a transgression that God could not continue to overlook.

C. Punishment (2:9): *So a common man is humbled, and the important man falls, and you do not forgive them.* The abandonment of Israel results in the humbling of the entire population, both the common man (’ādām) and those of higher standing (Ŷô). Because their sin was so great, God could not forgive them.\(^{21}\)

**WARNING: GOD’S DAY**

2:10-22

A. A Fearful Day (2:10): *Enter the rock, and hide in the dust from before the terror of Yahweh and the glory of his majesty.* The coming of Yahweh in judgment is awesome. Men will be inclined to hide themselves from his glorious presence. To enter the rock suggests a cave; to hide in the dust suggests a hole in the ground. Isaiah is describing what elsewhere is called the day of Yahweh. The last part of this v is repeated in vv 19 and 21 for emphasis.

B. A Humbling Day (2:11-17):

1. Proud men humbled (2:11-12):
   a. Reason man will be humbled (2:11): *The eyes of prideful men will fall, and the pride of men will be humbled. Yahweh alone will be exalted in that day.* In the day of Yahweh, proud men are humbled, and Yahweh is exalted. Prideful men have a look about them. They radiate pride from their eyes. Humble eyes gaze downward. The execution of judgment against sinners vindicates God in the eyes of his critics. He is thereby exalted. Proud men are those who by attitude and action deny the role of God in the world.
   b. Time man will be humbled (2:12): *For Yahweh of Hosts has a day against the proud and lofty, and against all who are lifted up that he may fall.* When sinners confront Yahweh of Hosts, i.e., the God of infinite authority and infinite resources, they must reduce their opinions of their own power. In that day of reckoning, those who

---

\(^{21}\)KJV, RSV, NIV, and NASB render this clause as an imperative, i.e., a request by Israel that God not forgive the sinners. This is a possible translation.
arrogantly elevate their will over that of the Creator are cut down to size.

2. Symbols of pride humbled (2:13-14):
   a. Trees (2:13): [It will be against] all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan... In Yahweh's day, every symbol and object of man's pride is laid low. The cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan are symbols of what is lofty and proud. Lebanon is the mountain range to the north of the Promised Land. Bashan is the region east of the Sea of Galilee.
   b. Hills (2:14): and against all the high mountains, and against all the lofty hills... The high mountains and lofty hills likewise symbolize that which is haughty (v 14).

3. Structures of pride humbled (2:15): and against every high tower, and against every fortified wall... A high tower and a fortified wall symbolize military strength. Fortifications cannot withstand the armies that God brings in judgment.

4. Ventures of pride humbled (2:16): and against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft... The large ships bound for Tarshish on the coast of Spain and other beautiful ships (lit., ships of pleasure) symbolize the world of commerce. International trade is devastated by Yahweh's judgment (v 16).

5. Proud men humbled (2:17): and the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the loftiness of men shall fall. Yahweh alone will be exalted in that day. The unit closes as it opened with an allusion the humiliation of proud men, and the exaltation of Yahweh.

Whether Isaiah was describing the forthcoming judgment upon Judah, or the final judgment is a matter of debate. The prophets apparently regarded every temporal judgment as a day of Yahweh that betokened that final day when God's judgment will be poured out on the entire world.

C. A Day of Abandonment (2:18-21):
   1. Description of the abandonment (2:18-19):
      a. Men abandon idols (2:18): But the idols shall completely disappear. In Yahweh's day idols will afford no comfort or support. They will not even be found in the land of Israel, having been found worthless.
      b. Men abandon the land (2:19): Men shall go into caves of the rocks, and into holes of the ground from before the terror of Yahweh, and the splendor of his majesty, when he arises to make the earth tremble. What was urged in v 10 is predicted in this v. In that day Yahweh will arise from his throne to shake the earth. From his dreadful majesty men will flee to the caverns in the rocks.

2. Explanation of the abandonment (2:20-21): In that day men will cast away to the moles and the bats their idols of silver and their idols of gold, that they have made for themselves to worship, (21) in order to go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of Yahweh and the splendor of his majesty, when he arises to make the earth tremble. So as not to be impeded in their flight, terrified men will cast away their worthless idols. From God's awesome judgment, however, no escape is possible. The caves of the mountains and holes in the ground will afford no protection. Since idols cannot avert God's judgment, trusting in them was senseless.

CHAPTER 3
WARNING FOR JUDAH
JUDGMENT ON LEADERS
2:22-3:15

A. Failure of Present Leaders (2:22-3:3):
   1. Leaders are mortal (2:22): Cease from [trusting] man, in whose nostrils is the breath [of life], for why should he be esteemed? Trusting in man is as senseless as trusting in idols. Man is mortal. He survives only as long as he has within his nostrils the breath of life (n’šāmâ) given to him by his Creator (cf. Gn 2:7). In view of this fact, Isaiah asks rhetorically why should man be esteemed, i.e., regarded worthy of trust? Perhaps the allusion to breath intends to suggest that they were worshiping gods they had made instead of the God who made them!

   2. Leaders to be removed (3:1-3):
a. Leaders figuratively described (3:1): For behold, Adonay Yahweh of Hosts is about to remove from Jerusalem and from Judah supply and support, the whole supply of food and the whole supply of water... God’s judgment will remove every supply and support—every crutch—of Judah. The figure is equivalent to the modern “pillars of the community.” This included material necessities like food (lit., bread) and water.
b. Leaders of first rank (3:2): the mighty man and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder... Six types of leaders of first rank are named. Heading the list are the warriors—the mighty man and the man of war. The former appears to be of higher rank or valor than the latter. Clearly Judah was putting its trust in the military. The judge not only presided over legal disputes, he also was a government functionary. Removal of judges would mean the total breakdown of civil authority. Removal of the prophet would mean a blackout on hearing God’s word. The diviner was an illegitimate prognosticator who depended on external objects (e.g., livers; stars) to predict the future. Divine judgment removes the illegitimate as well as legitimate “supports” of the nation. The elder was one qualified by age and experience to guide public policy.
c. Leaders of secondary rank (3:3): the captain of fifty and the honorable man, counselor and expert artisan and skilled enchanter. Five types of leaders of secondary rank upon whom the nation depends are now listed. The captain of fifty was the remnant of a decimal system of military organization dating back to the time of Moses (Ex 18:25; cf. 1 Sam 8:12). Probably in the military of Isaiah’s day the basic military unit consisted of fifty men. Removal of the captain of fifty hints of decimation of military organization. The honorable man was one favored by the crown. Such people probably occupied positions of responsibility in the government. The counselor was an adviser to the king in public policy. The expert artisan or craftsman was the foundation of the national economy. At the time of the exile the craftsmen were deported to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:14ff.). The skilled enchanter (lit. one who knows whispering) was one who produced magical formulas to use against ones enemies. The point of vv 2-3 is that Yahweh will remove from Judah all the great men whether military, political, religious or business leaders.

B. Installation of Worse Leaders (3:4-7):
1. Immature leaders (3:4): I will make boys their commanders, and children will rule over them. With the removal of the leadership establishment, naive, inexperienced and immature men—mere children in disposition and ability—assume the leadership roles in Judah. These leaders will be incompetent and capricious. I will make understands these bad rulers as a punishment that Yahweh will inflict upon the Judeans.
2. Ineffective leaders (3:5): The people will be oppressed, a man by a man, even a man by his neighbor. The boy will be insolent in respect to an elder, and the inferior against the honorable. Such leaders are capricious and inept. Without strong central government, anarchy prevails.
2. Drafted leaders (3:6): When a man takes hold of his brother in his father's house, [saying], you have a cloak, you will be a ruler for us, and this stumbling-block will be under your authority. So desperate will that hour be that men will seize anyone with the trappings of leadership and draft him for office. In the coming hunger and poverty, one who possessed even a cloak is considered to be suitable to take over the reigns of government. Stumbling-block (maKHEl‰) is used figuratively for ruination of the kingdom. It suggests a pile of ruins over which one might trip.
3. Reluctant leaders (3:7): In that day he will object, saying, I will not be a healer, for in my house there is neither bread nor cloak. Do not appoint me as a ruler of people. No one wants to tackle the problems that the nation faces in that day of judgment. The most likely candidate will lift up his voice in protest (nAW‰í) against any movement to draft him for leadership. The wounds of state are so great that no one can be a healer (xOBEH), i.e., solve the woes of the nation.

C. Explanation (3:8-9):
1. Weakened national condition (3:8): For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen, because their tongue and their deeds are against Yahweh to rebel against the eyes of his glory. The chaotic conditions depicted in the preceding vv are the result of the moral and spiritual decline of Israel. In Isaiah’s view, Jerusalem is staggering to destruction. In word and deed these people fight against God; they rebel against the eyes of his glory, i.e., they are involved in activities that are offensive to the holiness of God. Their sin is blatant, open and defiant.

2. Wicked defiance (3:9a): The expression of their face testifies against them. Their sin like Sodom they proclaim; they do not hide it. Guilt is written all over their faces. Like the citizens of ancient Sodom, they parade their sins before God and man. Perhaps the reference to Sodom might cause some to recall how Abraham prayed for the “righteous” in that wicked place, and how God responded to that plea by delivering Lot and his family (Gen 18-19).

3. Woe and blessing (3:9b-11):
   a. Warning to society (3:9b): Woe to them, for they have brought evil to themselves. The people of Judah have brought themselves under a prophetic woe. Disaster awaits them.
   b. Reward for a righteous person (3:10): Say to the righteous one that [it will go] well [with him], for the fruit of their deeds they shall eat. Isaiah sees playing out in Judah the age-old principle of sowing and reaping. God’s judgment distinguishes between the wicked and the righteous. One who lives by the standards of God’s word is blessed by God. He enjoys the fruit of his deeds, i.e., he is rewarded for his godly commitment.
   c. Warning to a wicked person (3:11): Woe to the wicked one! [It will go] bad [for him], because the deed of his hands will be done to him. The wicked person is under God’s woe, i.e., his threat of destructive judgment. He too reaps what he sows. The deed of his hands will be done to him, i.e., he will be treated as he has treated others.

D. Application (3:12-15): Isaiah applies the principles just enunciated to the leaders of Judah. He points out the sins of these leaders, and the judgment they will face for those sins.

1. Description of the leaders (3:12): Twice Isaiah expresses sympathy for his people with a vocative O my people! They deserve his sympathy. The phrase is a reminder of Israel’s ancient covenant relation with Yahweh.
   a. Incompetent oppressors (3:12a): O my people! Their oppressors are children, and women rule over them. Their rulers were as inexperienced in government as women, and as oppressively selfish as spoiled children.
   b. Deceptive guides (3:12b): O my people! Your guides cause you to go astray, and the way of your paths they devour. God accused the leaders of causing his people to go astray from the path of obedience to God. To devour (engulf, swallow) the path is a figure for destruction and ruin. The misdirection was deliberate, and the motive was personal enrichment.

2. Judgment on the leaders (3:13-14a):
   a. General threat (3:13): Yahweh arises to enter into judgment, and [he is] standing to judge peoples. Yahweh arises from his throne when he is about to enter into judgment (lit., a case, a controversy, a lawsuit). That his judgment is near is indicated by the fact that he is in a judgment mode.
   b. Specific threat (3:14a): As for Yahweh, he enters into judgment with the elders of his people and their princes. Specifically, Yahweh comes to enter judgment with the elders (those honored for their wisdom and seniority) and princes (members of the royal family) of the land.

3. Reprimand of the leaders (3:14b-15):
   a. Charge (3:14b): And as for you, you have devoured the vineyard. In direct address to the defendants, Yahweh accuses the elders and princes of dereliction of duty and worse. Instead of protecting God’s vineyard (the nation), they had devoured it, i.e., used it for their own selfish purposes.
   b. Evidence (3:14c): The plunder of the poor is in your houses. The charge of malfeasance the leaders cannot deny. They had furnished their
homes with spoils taken illegally from the poor of
the land.
c. Outrage (3:15a): *What do you mean by
crushing my people, and grinding down the face
of the poor?* The audacity of the leaders’ behavior
is indicated by a rhetorical question: How could
you beat down and crush my people so? Surely
they must realize that they will have to give an
account to Yahweh for the way they have treated
their people.
d. Signature (3:15b): *(oracle of Adonay Yahweh
of Hosts).* The unit closes with a combination of
divine names designed to stress that God has the
right (Adonay) and the power (Yahweh of Hosts) to
carry out the judgment on the national leaders.

**JUDGMENT ON THE WOMEN**

3:16-4:1

A. Pride of the Women (3:16): *Yahweh said:*
Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and
walk with outstretched necks and seductive eyes,
and go along with dainty steps, and on their feet
they tinkle [bangles]… The daughters of Zion, i.e.,
women of Jerusalem, fell under divine
condemnation as well as the men. The arrogant
pride seen in the rulers of Judah was just as evident
in its women. With cutting sarcasm Isaiah
described the haughty walk and look of the leading
ladies of the land.

B. Punishment of the Women (3:17-23): The
daughters of Zion face four ugly outcomes.
1. Disease (3:17a): *Therefore Adonay will smite
with scab the heads of the daughters of Zion…*
First, the women face disease, as reflected in the
scabs on their bare heads.
2. Degradation (3:17b): *and Yahweh will make
bare their secret parts.* Second, the women will
have their secret parts (pōt), i.e., cardo femina,
made bare by Yahweh. The text does not say how
Yahweh will do this. It is likely that it is to take
place at the hands of the ruthless soldiers when
they crash into Jerusalem. Young comments:
"Those who delight in immodest exposure will be
rewarded with immodest exposure at the hands of
vile men."
3. Deprivation (3:18-23): *In that day Adonay will
remove the beauty of [their] anklets, headbands
and crescents. (19) pendants, bracelets, scarves,
(20) headaddresses, the armlets, the sashes, perfume
boxes, amulets, (21) finger rings, and nose rings,
(22) festal robes, mantles, cloaks, purses, (23) hand
mirrors, fine linen, turbans, and veils.* Third, the punishment of the women involves
deprivation. They lose all they hold dear, all the
symbols of their proud station. In God’s judgment
the women are stripped of all their finery. Those
depicted here are clearly the wealthy. Their finery
probably had been bought by the plunder taken by
their husbands from the poor in v 14.
4. Deportation (3:24): *It shall be that instead of
perfume there will be stench, instead of a belt,
rope; instead of a hair-do, baldness, and instead
of a robe, donning of sackcloth; branding instead
of beauty.* Fourth, the daughters of Zion face
deporation. The battered band of former Jerusalem
socialites is a pathetic lot. The word *instead*
appears five times. It signals their radical change in
circumstances. The pleasant odor of *perfume*
or ointment (balsam oil) is replaced by the stench like
that emitted by a rotting corpse. Beautiful *belts*
are replaced by the ropes of captivity. Their beautiful
hairdos give way to *baldness.* The cause of this
baldness, whether because of disease, the loss of a
wig, or the cruelty of the captors, is not stated.*
*Sackcloth* is a coarse cloth made of goats’ hair.
Wearing sackcloth symbolized mourning. The
beautiful dresses, so prized by these women,
probably had been seized by the captors. Finally, a
slave brand now disfigured the once lovely skin of
these ladies.

1. Devastation of male population (3:25-26):
a. Decimation by war (3:25): *Your men by the
sword will fall, and your mighty ones in battle.*

---

23 *NASB renders* their foreheads.
24 *NASB* renders a plucked-out scalp, implying some kind of torture.
25 Following the word beauty (v 18) are twenty-one nouns with the
definite article. Much difference of opinion exists among scholars
regarding the meaning of some of these articles of jewelry.

---
b. Lamentation by Zion (3:26): And her gates will lament and mourn; and emptied she will sit on the ground. War will devastate the male population of Jerusalem. Zion, as a destitute widow, will lament the slaughter of all men of war. The emptied city of Jerusalem will sit on the ground in mourning over her destitute condition.

2. Desperate search for mates (4:1): For seven women shall seize one man in that day, saying, Our bread we will eat, and our [own] garments we will wear, only let your name be called over us; take away our reproach. The women who survive the devastation at Jerusalem compete with one another for husbands. Desperate to avoid the reproach of childlessness and/or widowhood (cf. Gn 19:30-38), they shamelessly throw themselves at the surviving men. They are willing to eat their own bread, i.e., pay their own way, if only they might have a husband.

CHAPTER 4
A BETTER DAY

The judgment of which Isaiah has been speaking is not the final curtain of the divine drama. In that day is repeated from v 1. Though basically judgmental, the day of Yahweh introduces the salvation that is the result of judgmental cleansing. Three great blessings await those who in that day.

A GLORIOUS LEADER APPEARS

4:2

In the previous ch Isaiah lashed out against bad rulers (3:12-15). In his vision for the future, however, the prophet saw the Ruler par excellence. The famine and devastation of the previous ch indicated that the near future was grim. Yahweh, however, is the God of new life. There is renewal beyond the ruin. That renewal begins with the appearance of a wonderful leader. He is introduced under two botanical figures.

A. Shoot of Yahweh (4:2a): In that day the shoot of Yahweh will become beauty and glory... In the first figure Isaiah compares the future leader to a glorious plant. Even in pre-Christian times the shoot was recognized as a messianic title.\(^{26}\) The term shoot (tsemach) occurs in four verses (Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12) as a technical messianic designation. This title may have originated in the reflections of David about the blessings Yahweh had bestowed on his house.\(^{27}\) The title points to the divine origin of Messiah. Like a tender shoot, Yahweh would plant him in the soil of human history. Those who are saved from God’s wrath—the remnant—readily embrace him. The spiritual transformation of the remnant is indicated in the fact that they find in this leader beauty and glory. The saved focus on the loveliness and magnificence of Yahweh’s plant, not the false beauty of material things.

B. Fruit of the Land (4:2b): and the fruit of the land [will become] the pride and adornment of the survivors of Israel. Fruit of the land is parallel to shoot of Yahweh; the expression refers to the same leader. This title, unique to Isaiah, suggests the leader’s humanity.\(^{28}\) He comes from the land (or earth) as well as from Yahweh. He is of lowly birth. Unlike the haughty Judean women who dote on trinkets and garments, this leader becomes the pride and adornment of the survivors of Israel, i.e., the spiritual remnant. No more are they enamored with the trinkets and trappings of this world.

PURIFIED ZION EMERGES

4:3-4

Have spoken of Messiah, Isaiah now speaks of Messiah’s people. They were introduced in the previous v as those who find the shoot of Yahweh to be the most precious and beautiful thing in the world.

A. Their State (4:3):

\(^{26}\)The Targum substitutes the Messiah for the shoot.

\(^{27}\)In his praise for Yahweh’s blessing on his house, David used the cognate verb (r. smch; bring to fruition) in 2 Sam 23:5. Cf. Ps 132:17.

\(^{28}\)The expression fruit of the land is taken from Nm 13:26 and Dt 1:25; but as a title for a person it expression occurs only here.
1. Character (4:3a): It will come about that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem holy shall be called... It will come about points to the consequences of the acceptance of the messianic Shoot. He who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem further describes the survivors of Israel of the previous v. The reference is to those who have escaped the judgments of God. What survives of physical Zion/Jerusalem is a people of faith, a people that continues to bear the name of the physical city. Citizens of new Zion are called holy. They can be regarded as holy because by faith they embrace that divinely appointed leader, the Shoot of Yahweh. To be holy is to be separated from all that brings on judgment, and to be set apart for the purposes of God. National Israel was called to be a holy nation; but it failed to live up to its calling. Through faith in the Shoot of Yahweh that ideal is achieved in the NT Israel.

2. Destiny (4:3b): everyone who has been written for life in Jerusalem. The holy citizens of messianic Jerusalem are written or registered as were the citizens of most ancient cities. Each citizen has a stake in the destiny of the city. Messianic Jerusalem is destined for life, i.e., life more abundant, and life eternal. What a contrast to the Jerusalem of the previous ch that was destined for judgment and destruction! Cf. Lk 10:20; Rev 13:8; 21:27.

B. Their Salvation (4:4): Something must transpire before Yahweh can execute the wonderful promises of vv 5-6. Before messianic Zion can emerge there must be judgment on the proud and the violent. This much is clear; but the connection between v 4 and vv 2-3 is less obvious. Isaiah has described the coming of Yahweh’s Shoot (v 2) and a people who will love and prize him (v 3). This implies on the part of this people faith in the Shoot, and a radical change of priorities (repentance). In this faith process these people have their sins forgiven or purged.

1. Divine washing (4:4a): When Adonay has washed away... Isaiah had called on the Judeans to wash themselves (1:16), but the nation paid no heed. Judah saw no need for such washing; the nation regarded itself as pure. Adonay is the name for God that emphasizes his sovereign will. God himself will take the necessary actions that will produce cleansing and give birth to the holy people of the previous v.

2. Needful washing (4:4b): the filth of the daughters of Zion and the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst... The daughters of Jerusalem in Isaiah’s time regarded themselves as anything but filthy. The arrogance and moral corruption of the women of Jerusalem detailed in 3:16ff. are referenced here. Their finery was really filth. The bloodstains (lit., bloods) of Jerusalem references the violent deeds of the men of Jerusalem (3:14f) that often resulted in bloodshed (1:15). From its midst suggests that the bloodstains deface Jerusalem until Yahweh takes action. For sins so horrific only God can effect the cleansing. The egregious filth of the daughters and the violent deeds of the men are together representative of all the sins of Jerusalem.

3. Agent of washing (4:4c): by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning... The Holy Spirit is the agent of cleansing or judgment (cf. 28:6). He is the spirit of judgment or justice in that he discerns between evil and good. He is the spirit of burning in that he purges the impurities from his people as a seraph burned away the impurities of Isaiah’s lips (6:7).

The general principle in v 4 is that judgment results in purging finds application in any judgment. Certainly the Babylonian Exile purged Israel of idolatry. The context here, however, suggests that this judgmental cleansing has something to do with the appearance of Yahweh’s Shoot. Zechariah makes clear that it is through the Shoot that guilt is removed (3:8, 9) and a fountain for cleansing is opened (Zech 13:1). Isaiah himself stresses that only through the suffering of Yahweh’s Servant can there be atonement and cleaning (53:4, 5, 12). Malachi compares Messiah to a refiner’s fire that purifies his people like a refiner purifies silver (3:2-3). Thus the washing

29Others understand spirit here to be a reference to a stormy wind; still others take spirit to be equivalent to the abstract concept of process.
that cleanses women and men, filth and violence, is the shed blood of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that brings that message home to the heart of those who hear the gospel.

GLORIOUS PRESENCE PROVIDED

4:5-6

A. Provider (4:5a): Then Yahweh will create…
The name Yahweh is associated with redemption, and the subject of this v is provision for the redeemed. Create is the verb used in Gen 1:1. The redemption envisioned by Isaiah is a work of Yahweh no less magnificent than the creation of the heavens and earth. With the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, Yahweh initiated the new creation.

B. Recipients (4:5b): over the whole of Mount Zion and over all her assemblies… In the new creation initiated by Yahweh Mount Zion plays a role (Heb 12:22). It is the seat of residence of the messianic King (Ps 2:6) and capital of a worldwide kingdom. Messianic Mount Zion incorporates the redeemed of earth and the hosts of heaven. Physical Zion was vulnerable to attack, but not messianic Zion. Her protection is complete. It covers the whole of Mount Zion and all her worship assemblies, i.e., the entire kingdom of God and its local manifestations.

C. Provisions (4:5c-6): In 2:4 Isaiah depicted messianic Mount Zion elevated above the surrounding hills. Now he depicts it protected by divine symbols reminiscent of the Exodus (Ex 13:21; 14:19-20). The protective symbols do not move, as they did during the Exodus; for the messianic Mount Zion is the final destination for all the people of God.

1. Cloud (4:5c):
   a. By day (4:5c): a cloud by day and smoke… What protects Messianic Zion is a special cloud created by Yahweh. The cloud represents the guiding and protective presence of Yahweh. This cloud is not restricted to the tabernacle/temple area as it was throughout most of OT history. The newly created cloud covers the whole of Mount Zion. Smoke often accompanied the presence of deity in OT times. So the cloud/smoke represents the presence of Yahweh among his people.
   b. By night (4:5d): and the brightness of a flaming fire by night… By night the cloud becomes the brightness of a flaming fire. AS the fiery cloud protected the Israelites from a night attack by Pharaoh (Ex 14:19-20), so Yahweh’s special presence protects the NT Zion from sneak attack. The same fire that purged sin in judgment now settles over the people of God to protect them from enemies.

2. Glory (4:5e): for over all the glory… Ezekiel saw the glory of Yahweh depart from the old temple, and return to reside in the messianic temple (10:18-19; 43:1-4). That temple and Mount Zion are one and the same. All who worship on that mount do so in the glory of the Lord (Ezek 39:25-29; Jn 17:10, 22, 24).

3. Canopy (4:5f): there will be a canopy… Over all the glory of that messianic mount there will be a marriage canopy (chuppāh). The bridal connotations of the term suggest that Mount Zion is Yahweh’s bride. This canopy is glory on top of glory. The figure suggests that the glory of God permanently resides on Mount Zion. The canopy protects the city from the natural elements (v 6; cf. 32:2) as well as the missiles of the enemy. For the second time the v emphasizes that all of Mount Zion enjoys the same heavenly protection.

4. Booth (4:6a):
   a. Providing shade (4:6a): and a booth shall become a shade by day from the heat… In 1:8 Judah had become nothing but a booth (sukkāh). Here the booth is sufficient to provide protection. The figure is taken from the booths that shepherds used while watching the sheep. Because of the size

30 True places of worship are to be found at Zion. The language supports the view that Zion here is the spiritual Zion of Heb 12:22.
31 In the old dispensation, the cloud was confined to the Tabernacle (Ex 40:34). Clearly Isaiah means to display the greater glory of the messianic dispensation.
32 For an example of the protection provided by the cloud at the time of the exodus, see Ex 14:20.
33 The idea may be that the canopy is the crowning glory of that messianic mount. In Jewish weddings the chuppāh symbolizes divine protection over the marriage that takes place there.
of a booth, this figure tends to individualize the general promise of provision for Mount Zion in the previous v. The booth provides a shade (shadow) by day. In the hot semi-desert regions of the Middle East no sight is more welcome during the day than a shadow. The heat (chōrebh) is that produced by the burning sun. Here the heat symbolizes the daily pressures and hardships that beat down upon a believer.

b. Providing sanctuary (4:6b): and a refuge and a protection from the storm and the rain. The booth also protects from the driving rain storm. The heat and driving rain storm are extreme opposites. They probably intended to include everything in between. The point is that those who dwell in the shadow of the Almighty (Ps 91:1) have nothing to fear from the forces of nature, or the gods that those forces represented in heathen theology. Isaiah is saying the same thing as Paul said in Rom 8:38; Eph 1:21, 22.

CHAPTER 5
A VINEYARD DESTROYED

In ch 5 Isaiah sings, perhaps playing the role of a folk singer. The song parable concerning a vineyard that represents Israel. He then delineates some of the sour grapes produced by that vineyard.

CHOICE VINEYARD
5:1-7

A. Disappointment in the Vineyard (5:1-4):
1. Position of the vineyard (5:1): Let me sing now for my friend a song of my beloved concerning his vineyard. My beloved has a vineyard on a fertile hill. Isaiah referred to God in the most affectionate way. To this prophet Yahweh was friend and beloved acquaintance. Isaiah directs his song to his heavenly friend. The song concerns Yahweh's vineyard, i.e., Israel. Yahweh devoted constant care to his vineyard. He placed it in an advantageous location, on an isolated fertile hill (lit., on a horn, a son of oil).
2. Provision for the vineyard (5:2): He dug it, and removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also hewed out a vat in it. Then he looked for it to produce grapes, but it produced sour grapes. Yahweh prepared the site by turning up the hard soil. He cleared the field of stones, and piled them up to form walls on which the vines might climb. He planted the choicest vine (sōrqēq). He built a tower from which he might guard against intrusion on his vineyard. In anticipation of an abundant harvest, a wine vat was constructed near the vineyard. The vineyard, however, produced nothing but bad fruit.
3. Failure of the vineyard (5:3-4):
   a. Court scene (5:3): And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge now between me and my vineyard. The scene shifts to a courtroom (cf. 1:2-17; 3:14-15). The Judeans are called upon to weigh the evidence in the case of Yahweh vs. his vineyard. Clearly the vineyard is regarded as morally accountable.
   b. Accusatory questions (5:4): What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have done in it? When I expected [it] to produce grapes, why did it produce sour grapes? God appealed to the inhabitants of Jerusalem to judge the situation for themselves. What more could have been done for the vineyard? Why did that well-tended vineyard yield only bad grapes? Whatever the reason, it was no fault of God.

B. Declaration Concerning the Vineyard (5:5-6):
The vineyard owner announced his intentions regarding his fruitless possession.
1. Dismantling barriers (5:5): And now let me tell you what I am about to do to my vineyard. [I will] remove its hedge, and it will be devoured. [I will] break down its wall and it will become a trampling place. Abandonment of the unprofitable vineyard was to be expected. No thoughtful property owner would waste further energy, time, and money on such a vineyard. The owner in the parable, however, shows his anger over the unprofitable vineyard by direct action. The hedge and wall that protected the vineyard are removed. The plot where that vineyard once grew becomes a trampling place of man and beast.
2. Abandonment (5:6a): I will make it a waste; it will not be pruned or hoed, but briers and thorns will come up. After dismantling the protective barriers the owner abandoned the vineyard. No more effort was expended cultivating the vines. In the absence of the positive labors of the vinedresser thorn bushes soon choke out the vines.

3. Drought (5:6b): Over the clouds I will command to rain no rain upon it. So far Isaiah has refrained from naming the vineyard owner. Here there is a clue. Rain will be withheld. Who but the Creator can control the weather patterns with but a single command?

C. Interpretation of the Parable (5:7): One can assume that the audience agreed with the actions of the vineyard owner. They may have indicated their agreement by nodding heads or verbal comments. Then, however, Isaiah dropped the figures and announced the meaning of his parable.

1. Vine and vineyard (5:7a): For the vineyard of Yahweh of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his delightful plant. As the parabolic trappings are dropped, the Judeans stand exposed as those who have failed Yahweh and therefore deserve his judgment. The vineyard of Yahweh of Hosts represented the house of Israel, and the inhabitants of Judah in particular.

2. Expected fruit (5:7b): So he looked for justice, and behold bloodshed, for righteousness and behold a cry. The fruit that Yahweh anticipated was justice and righteousness. All he saw, however, was violent bloodshed; all he heard was the cry of people in great distress. The Hebrew contains powerful word plays that are impossible to convey in English.34

ROTTEN FRUIT
5:8-23

The parable of the vineyard is followed by six woes that the prophet probably intended to be examples of the sour grapes produced by God’s vineyard.

34G.H. Box, BI, makes this effort: For measures He looked--but lo massacres! For right--and lo riot!

A. Woe on Land Grabbers (5:8-10):
1. Description of the sinners (5:8): Woe to those who join house to house, and field to field attach until there is no more room and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land. The first woe points to the insatiable greed of the powerful land barons. They could never acquire enough land. The opposition of the prophets to land-grabbing goes back to a principle articulated in Lv 25:23, viz., The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. Yahweh had made allocations of his land to the various tribes and families; they were stewards of it in perpetuity. So land-grabbing was not only a sin against the powerless; it was also an attack on the magisterial government of Yahweh.

2. Judgment on the sinners (5:9-10):
a. Their houses (5:9): In my ears is Yahweh of Hosts: Surely many houses will become desolate, large and beautiful ones without inhabitant. Isaiah testifies that Yahweh of Hosts had spoken in his ears. What the prophet heard was a divine oath as indicated by the structure of the second half of the v. The oath threatens God empty their beautiful mansions. Desolate in this v means without inhabitant.

b. Their crops (5:10): For ten acres of vineyard will yield [but] one bath, and a homer of seed shall produce [but] an ephah. It is not clear whether the crop reduction is antecedent to the desertion of the houses in the previous v, or a result of the houses being desolate. The reference is to ravishes of war. An acre (tsemed) is as much as one yoke of oxen could plow in one day. A bath is a liquid measure roughly equivalent to six gallons. A homer is a dry measure of about six bushels, an ephah about half a bushel. Not all authorities agree on these equivalents. The main point, however, is clear: there will be a minimal return for enormous outlay investment in labor.

1. Description of the drunkards (5:11-12):
a. Eager for drink (5:11): Woe to those who rise up early in the morning to chase after strong drink, who stay up late that wine might inflame them. The v stresses that the wealthy were imbibing any time (early in the morning; stay up late) and any intoxicant (strong drink; wine). Strong drink refers to intoxicating beverages made from grains or fruit like dates. Early morning drinking is a mark of moral degeneracy in most societies. A person who thinks first of drink when he awakes has surrendered his will to booze. He is incapable of pulling his weight in the workplace (cf. Eccl 10:16; Acts 2:13-15). The verb chase after indicates that drinking was the all-absorbing passion of the wealthy. That wine might inflame them indicates that these men set out with the intention of getting drunk at their night time parties.

b. Given to revelry (5:12a): They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their drinking feasts... The day that started with drink ended in drinking feasts where partiers were entertained by a variety of musical instruments. The association of drinking feasts and music was also made by Amos (6:5-6).

c. Oblivious to Yahweh’s word (5:12b): but the deed of Yahweh they do not consider, and the work of his hands they do not see. All concern for God’s word and work has been quenched by their revelry. The deed of Yahweh is the on-coming judgment. As in the case of Belshazzar (Dan 5) preoccupation with riotous living stifled any concern about personal accountability. Sinners generally cannot see the hand of Yahweh in this world.

2. Doom of the drunkards (5:13-17):

a. Exile (5:13a): Therefore, my people will go into exile for their lack of knowledge... As in the previous woe, the penalty is appropriate to the offense. Exile removes the drunkards from the land to which they were inordinately attached. There would be no feasting or drinking in that foreign land. Lack of understanding results when people as in v 12 are too preoccupied with worldly pursuits to give attention to the word of God (cf. Hos 4:6).

b. Painful death (5:13b): their honored men are dying of hunger, and their multitude are parched with thirst. Even the wealthy will suffer deprivation of food and water in the forthcoming attack upon Jerusalem.

c. Huge mortality (5:14): Therefore, Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth without limit; and her glory, and her multitude go down into it, her throng and the one who exalts in her. The drunkards open their mouths to guzzle more booze; but Sheol (abode of the dead), opens its mouth to devour them like a voracious monster. Jerusalem's glory is swallowed up by Sheol.

d. Humiliation (5:15): [A common] man is humbled, and [an important] man has fallen, and the eyes of the proud will be brought low. All the inhabitants of Judah—the common man ('ādām) as well as the more important man ('îš)—will be humbled in that dreadful day. The insatiable afterlife will consume the elite and the noisy throngs as well as the arrogant. All will suffer the consequences of the sins of the wealthy.

e. Exaltation of Yahweh (5:16): But Yahweh of Hosts will be exalted in judgment, and the holy God shows himself holy in righteousness. While sinful men are humbled in judgment, Yahweh is exalted. Righteous judgment is one manifestation of divine holiness that even sinners are forced to acknowledge.

f. Abandonment (5:17): Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture, and strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy. The picture seems to be of animals taking over the ruins left behind by the decimation of human population. Flocks graze in once populated areas. Strangers—those who do not make the land their permanent residence—overrun the ruins left by the wealthy.

C. Woe to Slaves of Sin (5:18-19):

1. Their burden (5:18): Woe to those who drag iniquity with cords of falsehood, and draw] sin with cart ropes... In the third woe Isaiah condemns Judah’s daring defiance of Yahweh. These men willingly had hitched themselves to a load of sin. By that load ultimately they will be crushed. The
picture here is similar in import to that of the burden-bearer that occurs elsewhere in the book.35

2. Their brazenness (5:19): those who say, Let him make haste, let him hasten his work, that we may see it; let the purpose of the holy one of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it. The Judeans showed willful contempt for all the prophetic denunciations. They brazenly challenged God to do his work of judgment. Only when they saw it would they believe it. Later Isaiah himself used this same taunt against pagan deities (41:21-24). In this challenge to Isaiah’s theology the title the Holy One of Israel was probably uttered contemptuously.

D. Additional Woes (5:20-23): Three brief hammer-like blows completed the series of six woes. They are followed by an implied woe.

1. On corrupt pride (5:20): Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. The skepticism of the third woe evolves into outright moral confusion in the fourth. A wrong perspective on God inevitably leads to a warped sense of values. These people launched a semantic attack on all righteous deeds. They bestowed upon the most despicable acts terms of approbation.

2. On corrupt pride (5:21): Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight! In the fifth woe, Isaiah denounces Judah’s arrogant self-conceit. The Judeans were wise in their own eyes. There may be a link with the preceding woe in that those who turn morality upside down often come to regard themselves as intellectually superior to those who hold to traditional values.

3. On corrupt courage (5:22): Woe to heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink. The fifth woe condemned those who touted the “new morality.” They thought they were wise and courageous. The sixth woe mockingly berates Judah’s corrupted courage. They were heroes at consuming wine, but they had no moral courage to champion the cause of the innocent. Their blubbering nonsense came from a brain clouded by alcohol. Their audacity in challenging Yahweh (v 19) was the false courage of drunkards.

4. On corrupt judges (5:23): Woe to those who declare the wicked innocent in exchange for a bribe, and the right of the innocent they remove from him. Those whose moral confusion, theological ignorance, and false courage were condemned in previous woes occupied positions that required clear-headed decisions and firm moral conviction. The implied woe is aimed at corrupt judges. For a price they set free the most reprehensible persons, or deprive the innocent of legal rights.

BITTER CONSEQUENCES 5:24-30

The series of "woes" is over. The last of them was pronounced against evil judges; now the supreme Judge declares sentence employing four word pictures.

A. First Judgment Picture (5:24):

1. Withered Vineyard (5:24a): Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes stubble, and as dry grass sinks down into the flame, their root will become like rot, and their blossom like dust will go up… The burning wrath of Yahweh unleashed against sinners spreads rapidly like a grass fire in all directions. The stubble/dry grass is figurative of all flesh (40:6-8); here the figures represent what is vulnerable to combustion. Fire emphasizes that the judgment against Jerusalem will be terrible. The phrase root and blossom stresses that the judgment is complete.

2. Justification (5:24b): for they have rejected the instruction of Yahweh of Hosts, and the word of the holy one of Israel they have despised. Having spelled out the justification for judgment in the previous “woes” Isaiah here summarizes the case. The Judeans have rejected God’s word. Instruction (tôrâh) includes both the written Law and the ongoing guidance of prophets.

B. Second Judgment Picture (5:25):
1. Cause of the blow (5:25a): On this account the anger of Yahweh has burned against his people, and he has stretched out his hand upon them and has smitten them. In the picture of the upraised hand Isaiah depicted God striking down his people with his mighty hand. The v seems to refer to a specific event, one that manifested Yahweh’s continuing anger against this wayward nation.

2. Result of the blow (5:25b): The mountains shook, and their carcass was like refuse in the midst of the streets. Mountains shake from the blows. Corpses pile up in the streets. Isaiah may be referring to the recent earthquake in the days of King Uzziah (Amos 1:1; Zech 14:5).

3. Ominous warning (5:25c): In all this his anger did not turn away, and his hand is yet outstretched. Stubborn refusal to repent causes God’s hand to remain poised for further blows.

C. Third Judgment Picture (5:26-29): The third judgment picture is that of an approaching army.

1. A summoned force (5:26): So he will raise up an ensign for a distant nation, and he will whistle for it from the end of the earth; and behold swiftly, speedily it comes. Yahweh erects, as it were, a banner (cf. 11:10, 12 and esp. 13:2) as a rallying-point for his judgment army. He will whistle to summon them (cf. 7:18). End of the earth is hyperbole to stress the great distance the army travels. The Assyrian army is in view, an army that had contingents from lands far distant from Judah. The army speedily responds to Yahweh’s summons.

2. Relentless force (5:27): None is weary, none stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps. The belt of his waist is not loosed, nor a sandal strap broken. Although coming a long way, the attackers are not weary. No soldier stumbles due to fatigue. No one naps or sleeps. There are no stragglers. The unidentified enemy soldiers are alert. The belt of his waist refers to the belt that bound together the cloak and provided a hold for the sword. The invaders have their swords strapped on. They are ready for the business at hand. They will not be delayed by equipment malfunction of even such a small item as the strap of a sandal.

3. Armed force (5:28): His arrows are sharpened, all his bows are bent. The hoofs of his horses seem like flint, and his wheels like the whirlwind. Sharpened arrows and bent bows are weapons ready for use. The unshod hoofs of the invaders horses are so strong (like flint) they are impervious to sharp stones. The two-wheeled chariots of the invaders stirred up dust that resembled a whirlwind.

4. Overpowering force (5:29): His roaring is like a lion, and [his] growl like young lions; he growls and seizes the prey, they carry it off and there is none to deliver. The invading army is as irresistible as a roaring lion. Isaiah is describing the approach of the Assyrian army.

D. Fourth Judgment Picture (5:30): He growls over it in that day like the roar of the sea. When he looks to the land, then behold darkness and distress, and light is darkened by its clouds. In the fourth picture, Judah is compared to a storm-tossed ship. The growl of the lion brings to Isaiah’s mind the roar of the sea. Judah is like a battered ship whose crew is searching for a safe landing spot. No matter in which direction the leaders look there is only darkness and distress, i.e., no hopeful prospect can be seen. The cloud of Assyrian judgment blots out any light that might indicate safe landfall.

CHAPTER 6
A PROPHET CALLED

At the conclusion of the Book of Mingled Rebukes and Promises, Isaiah presents his credentials for preaching. Placement of the call narrative here underscores the truth that the message is more important than the messenger. Isaiah indicates the importance of what is recorded here by his precise dating: the year that King Uzziah died (c. 739 BC). The vision that is described here has four components.

VISION OF GOD
6:1-4
A. Throne of the King (6:1): *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw Adonay sitting upon a throne high and exalted; and his train was filling the temple.* Uzziah had reign fifty years. His passing signaled the end of an era for Judah. Isaiah, however, saw Adonay (the sovereign) as an exalted king on the throne of his heavenly temple. His train (robes) filled the whole place. No physical eye can see God. It is a manifestation of the glory of God in human form, adapted to the capabilities of the finite creature, which he beheld. He saw Adonay in vision. The Apostle John quotes Isa 6:1 and then declares that Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him.

B. Attendants of the King (6:2-4):

1. Their reverent posture (6:2): Seraphim were standing above him, each having six wings. With one pair he covered his face, and with a pair he covered his feet, and with a pair he flew. Seraphim (flame-like angelic beings) stood about the heavenly throne waiting to do the bidding of the King. Just as earth contains a great variety of created beings, so also does heaven. The seraphim each had six pairs of wings. One pair shielded the face of the burning ones from the great glory of God; one pair covered the feet, i.e., the lower body parts, in modesty; and one pair was used to hover.

2. Their fervent praise (6:3-4):
   a. It was antiphonal (6:3): And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of Hosts, the entire earth is filled with his glory. In their antiphonal singing the seraphim praised God for his holiness and his omnipotence. They extolled him for manifesting his glory throughout all the earth. What fills the whole earth constitutes the glory of Yahweh. Yahweh’s holiness is one of the major themes of this book. Glory (kāḇōd) is used of God in his manifestations to his creatures. Some of his glory can be seen if God is pleased to disclose it (Ex 33:17-23; Ezek 1:28).
   b. It was powerful (6:4): And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of the one who called out, while the house was filled with smoke. The heavenly temple shook with the mighty strains of the hymn of these angels. Smoky clouds of incense filled the entire temple and shielded the eyes of the prophet from looking directly upon the glory of deity. God’s power is sometimes manifested in a physical tremor (cf. Ex 19:18; Acts 4:31) and his presence in a cloud of smoke (cf. Isa 4:5; Ex 33:9). Smoke is sometimes an index of the wrath of God (cf. Ps 18:8).

Isaiah sees God here as (1) the ruling one (v 1), (2) the holy one (vv 2-3a), (3) the glorious one (vv 3b-4a); and (4) the angry one (v 4b).

VISION OF SELF

6:5-7

A. Contamination of the Prophet (6:5):

1. His exclamation (6:5a): Then I said, Woe is me, for I am ruined! Isaiah let his audience know that before he pronounced his woes on others, he had first pronounced a woe upon himself. Having become aware of the holiness of God, he knew that his own sinfulness meant doom. He cried I am ruined, i.e., cut off, doomed.

2. His trepidation (6:5b): Because a man of unclean lips am I, and in the midst of a people of unclean lips I am living… Isaiah had just heard holy lips praise God; he now became aware of the uncleanness of his own lips. He was unfit to preach, or even to praise God in his wretched condition.

3. His explanation (6:5b): for the king, Yahweh of Hosts, my eyes have seen. OT people always felt a deep apprehension at the prospect of seeing God (Gn 32:20; Ex 33:20, Judg 6:22; 13:21-22). This apprehension must have been doubly present in Isaiah since he had just seen heavenly seraphim...

---

Some think the earthly temple is in view. Isaiah was supposed in the earthly temple when he had this vision.

This is the only vision recorded in the Book of Isaiah.

Some think that feet is a euphemism for sexual organs; but in the light of Mt 22:30 it is best to take the word in its ordinary sense. Covering the feet suggests humility.

The word translated woe here (ôy) is different from that used five times in ch 5 (hôy), though they are similar in form, pronunciation, and meaning. They are, in fact, synonyms, each possessing various nuances ranging from the threat to the sigh. Some think this woe may have been viewed as the climax of the series that began at 5:8 (EB in loc).
shielding their faces in the presence of divine glory.

B. Cleansing of the Prophet (6:6-7):
1. Heavenly action (6:6-7a): Then one of the seraphim flew unto me and in his hand was a hot coal [which] with tongs he had taken from upon the altar. (7) He touched my mouth [with it]... A symbolic action is performed by one of the seraphim. He touched Isaiah’s lips with a hot coal from the altar of incense. The imagery of the heavenly temple is borrowed from the earthly temple. Fire is associated with purification in several OT passages (e.g., Nm 31:22-23; Mal 3:2).
2. Heavenly explanation (6:7b): and said, Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is removed, and your sin is covered. The angelic action was followed by a solemn declaration that explained its significance. In this visional and symbolic gesture, the young man received assurance that his sins had been purged. God does not want and will not use unclean instruments in his service.

VISION OF SERVICE
6:8-10

A. Question and Response (6:8): And I heard the voice of Adonay saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? And I said, Here am I. Send me! Isaiah heard the voice of the Sovereign saying, Who will go for us? The plural pronoun seems to point to the pluralistic unity of the Godhead. One God speaks, but three distinct persons in the Godhead are involved. Reverence compels Isaiah to say as little as possible. Two words in the Hebrew give his positive answer (v 8). The woe of confession (v 5) is followed by the lo (behold) of cleaning (v 7), and that in turn by the go of commission (v 9).

B. Commission (6:9): And he said, Go and tell this people: Keep on listening, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not know. The idea is not that Isaiah is to preach so as to cause the people to fail to understand. This is irony, and therefore warning. The same message that brings repentance to one, bring to another hardness of heart. This people (as opposed to my people) sometimes has connotations of contempt, but not always.

C. Explanation (6:10): Make the heart of this people fat, their ears heavy, and their eyes blind, lest they see with their eyes and with their ears hear, and their heart discern, and they turn and be healed. Those who refuse God’s word become ever more hardened to its influence. Isaiah was warned at the outset that his preaching will make the heart of this people fat, i.e., their understanding will become dull and sluggish. His auditors will become spiritually blind and deaf.

VISION OF SUFFERING
6:11-13

A. Question and Response (6:11-12):
1. Isaiah’s despairing question (6:11a): And I said, How long? The pessimistic forecast provoked a despairing question from the fledgling prophet. How long must he continue to preach a message that will cause his people to entrench themselves ever deeper in sin? The tone of the question is one of lament.
2. Yahweh’s gloomy response (6:11b-12): And he said, Until such time as cities are desolate without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the ground is utterly desolate, (12) And Yahweh has

40 Martin, ISJ, 35.
41 Most designate this pronoun as an example of the plural of majesty. The use of the plural pronoun by the deity is an unusual phenomenon, found elsewhere only in Gn 1:26; 11:7.
42 Martin, ISJ, 35.
43 Another possibility: Translate the imperatives in vv 9-10 as strong futures.
44 Cf. Pss 13:2; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 94:3; Hab 1:2; Zech 1:12.
removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. God’s initial answer did not bring much consolation to Isaiah. He must continue to preach until his predictions of devastation and deportation had been completely fulfilled. Then only will he be relieved of the responsibility to preach.

B. Glimmer of Hope (6:13):
1. Declaration (6:13a): And yet in it will be a tenth part, and again it shall become for a burning… One slight glimmer of hope penetrated the dark outlook for Judah. A tithe of the population will survive the judgment. Even that remnant, however, will experience burning, i.e., severe persecution.
2. Illustration (6:13b): like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump. Those who listened to the prophet and embraced God’s holiness will be like a stump in the land. From that stump a new Israel will emerge. In the plant world what appears to be total destruction can be deceptive. Life of the plant is not totally extinguished. So Yahweh will spare the life of his people even though to outward appearances the nation was totally destroyed. The word seed suggests a link with the promise given to Abraham that his seed ultimately would be a blessing to the whole earth (Gn 17:18; cf. Isa 51:2).

CHAPTER 7
Promise of Immanuel

When the ominous intentions of the Assyrians under Tiglath-pileser III became evident, the states of Syria and Palestine began to band together in a defensive league. Leaders of this anti-Assyrian coalition were King Pekah of Israel (740-732 BC) and King Rezin of Damascus (750-732 BC). King Ahaz of Judah (735-720 BC) chose the path of neutrality.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROMISE
7:1-9

A. Invasion of Judah (7:1):
1. Date of the invasion (7:1a): Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah… Jotham may be mentioned because the anti-Assyrian coalition began before Jotham died (2 Kgs 15:37). Thus early in his reign King Ahaz faced this challenge to his faith. Enormous pressure was brought to bear on Ahaz to join the anti-Assyrian coalition because Jerusalem was geographically strategic to the defensive league. Tracing the lineage of Ahaz back two generations may be a reminder of how low Judah had sunk in the five years since the death of the great Uzziah. Ahaz was not even able to defend his own borders.

BOOK TWO
BOOK OF IMMANUEL
Isaiah 7-12

MAP 1: SYRO-EPHRAIMITIC INVASION

The entire unit dates to the years 734-732 BC during the reign of King Ahaz. The Book of Immanuel contains what Delitzsch calls “the great trilogy of messianic prophecies.” In ch 7 Messiah is about to be born; in ch 9 he is depicted as already having been born; and in ch 11 he is pictured reigning over his kingdom. Since the days of Delitzsch the ranks of those who believe that Isa 7 contains personal messianic prophecy have dwindled. To see the virgin birth of Christ in Isa 7:14 is no longer popular. Modern scholarship notwithstanding, the interpretation that identifies Immanuel as Messiah is superior to those that regard him as a child born in the days of Isaiah.46

For a defense of the messianic interpretation of Isa 7:14, see James E. Smith, PM, 249-55.

46For a defense of the messianic interpretation of Isa 7:14, see James E. Smith, PM, 249-55.
2. Invaders (7:1b): that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up against Jerusalem to wage war against it… Syria and Ephraim (Israel) attacked Judah with a view to replacing Ahaz with a king who would join the coalition.

3. Success of the invasion (7:1c): but they were not able to fight against it. While thousands of captives were taken in this Syro-Ephraimitic invasion (2 Chr 28:6-8), the attack fell short of its intended purpose. King Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-pileser the Assyrian for assistance.

Tiglath-pileser dealt swiftly with the Syro-Ephraimitic coalition. (2 Kgs 16:5-8). On a campaign in 732 BC the Assyrians captured Damascus and many towns in Israel. Thousands were deported. A vassal king (Hoshea) was put on the throne of Israel (2 Kgs 15:29).

B. Consternation in Judah (7:2): Having hinted at the outcome of the invasion in v 1, Isaiah scrolls back to the initial days of the invasion when the outcome was far from certain.

1. Reason for consternation (7:2a): When it was reported to the house of David saying, Aram is camped alongside Ephraim… Fear gripped the royal family of Judah when news arrived of the impending invasion by the forces of Rezin and Pekah. The designation of Ahaz as the house of David serves two purposes. First, it explains why Isaiah was commissioned to bring hope to a worthless king. Second, the phrase underscores the inappropriateness of the king’s fear; for the security of David's house was guaranteed by the divine oath (2 Sam 7). This is the first of eleven references to Ephraim in the book. Ephraim was the largest of the ten northern tribes. Often, as here, the name was applied to the entire Northern Kingdom. Camped alongside suggests that the two allied forces were in the field preparing to march on Jerusalem.

2. Description of consternation (7:2b): his heart and the hearts of his people shook like the trees of the woods shake before a wind. King and subject were alike in their attitude. Forests can feel the wind's power without being in serious danger. So the picture painted here of the hearts of king and subjects shaking like trees may hint that the concern about the invasion was overdone.

C. Encouragement for Judah (7:3-6): Though Ahaz was no paragon of virtue he was the legitimate representative of the house of David. For this reason Yahweh dispatched Isaiah to approach the king with a word of encouragement in this moment of national crisis. The encouragement took several forms.

1. Encouragement through a presence (7:3):
   a. Purpose of a meeting (7:3a): Now Yahweh said to Isaiah, Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shearjashub your son… At the time of the invasion, Isaiah had been preaching for about five years. The very presence of the prophet and his son’s symbolic name Shear-jashub (a remnant shall return) was intended to be a sign of hope.
   b. Place of meeting (7:3b): unto the end of the conduit of the upper pool, unto the highway of the fuller's field. Isaiah is very precise about the location of the meeting between king and prophet. Unfortunately, it cannot now be located with certainty. What is clear is that in anticipation of a siege, King Ahaz was inspecting his defenses, especially his water supply system.

2. Encouragement through exhortation (7:4a): You shall say unto him, Be on guard. Be calm. Do not fear. Your heart do not permit to faint...

Encouragement also came through four commands.

3. Encouragement through metaphor (7:4b): because of these two stubs of smoking firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. Isaiah compared the firebrands of Aram and Ephraim to the two stubs of fire which signify the fierce anger they are about to bring against Judah. The name could also be taken as a warning, i.e., only a remnant shall return. But the context calls for encouragement not threat. The name is also ambiguous as to whether a physical return from exile or a spiritual return to Yahweh is in view.
fierce anger of Pekah and Rezin to *smoking firebrands*, i.e., a lot of smoke, but no destructive fire. In his direct conversation to the king Isaiah refers contemptuously to the invader from Ephraim by omitting his personal name, calling him only the *son of Remaliah*.48

4. Encouragement through implication (7:5): *Because Aram has planned evil against you, along with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah...* Isaiah characterized the invasion as the result of an *evil* plan. The implication is that Yahweh cannot allow evil to triumph over his people. The contemptuous reference to the *son of Remaliah* is repeated from v. 4.

5. Encouragement through information (7:6): saying, (6) *Let us go up against Judah that we may harass it that we may make a breach [in its walls] for ourselves, and set up as king, the son of Tabeel in its midst.* Isaiah revealed the true intent of the invaders. Whatever propaganda had been put forward to justify the invasion, Yahweh reveals that Rezin and Pekah aim at replacement of Ahaz with a party (presumably) more sympathetic to the anti-Assyrian effort. Nothing is further is known of the *son of Tabeel*. Some think that Rezin himself is intended.

D. Prediction of Deliverance (7:7-9): The encouragement for King Ahaz continues in these vv.

1. Failure of the invasion (7:7, 8a 9a):
   a. Authoritative declaration (7:7): *Thus says Adonay Yahweh: It will not stand, and it will not come to pass.* Isaiah declared that the plot to overthrow the Davidic dynasty will not succeed. This promise is enhanced by being labeled as a message directly from Yahweh. The double statement of the promise (will not stand; will not come to pass) further strengthens it.
   b. Comforting explanation (7:8a; 9a): *For the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin, ... (9) and the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.* Isaiah offered an encouraging analysis of the situation. The rulers of the two small kingdoms to the north were but human beings; they could not stand against the decree of the sovereign Lord. *Rezin* will remain king only of Damascus, which will remain capital only of Syria, not Judah (v 8). Likewise, *the son of Remaliah* (Pekah) will remain king only of Samaria, which will remain capital only of Ephraim, not Judah (v 9). The third use of the contemptuous *son of Remaliah* should be noted.

2. Fall of Ephraim (7:8b): *(and in yet sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, so that it will no longer be a people)* A long-range prediction also brought encouragement to Ahaz. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will cease to be a people. Political existence of the Northern Kingdom ceased in 722 BC with the fall of Samaria.49 When Esarhaddon sent foreign colonists to occupy Samaria about 669 BC (2 Kgs 17:24; Ezra 4:2; 2 Chr 33:11), he entirely destroyed the nationality of Israel.

3. Faith in the crisis (7:9b): *If you do not believe, surely you will not be established.* Finally, the prophet offered a simple plan by which Ahaz might escape the dangers posed by the Syro-Ephraimitic invasion. All the king had to do was to *believe* the promise and he would be established on the throne. The NIV captures the assonance of the two verbs in this clause by this appealing translation: *If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.* This catchy sentence summarized Isaiah’s position and provided the Judeans a slogan they could rally around, if they chose.

SIGN AND PROMISE

7:10-16

*Again Yahweh spoke to Ahaz, saying...* (7:10): This oracle probably should be assigned to the same time and place as the previous one, for it is related to the same situation. Apparently the earlier

48Saul refused to refer to David by his personal name, calling him only *the son of Jesse* seven times in 1 Sam 20 and 22.
49Slotki (SBB, 34) thinks that the sixty-five years are counted from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah when Amos had declared Israel will surely go captive (Amos 1:1; 7:17). The earthquake can be dated to about 750 BC, so the 65 years ended in 685 BC.
prophecy has been rejected or at least treated with indifference by the king.

A. Rejected Offer (7:11-13):
1. Gracious offer (7:11): Ask for yourself a sign from Yahweh your God. Make it deep as Sheol or make it high as heaven. If there were even a modicum of faith in the king’s heart, Yahweh aimed to stir it by this offer. Isaiah invited (commanded?) Ahaz to ask for a sign. The king, however, had the freedom to name whatever spectacular event in the height (heavens) or in the depth (Sheol) that might convince him of the truth of God’s Word.
2. Firm refusal (7:12):
   a. It was arrogant (7:12a): But Ahaz said, I will not ask... Ahaz was not interested in signs and such. He had made his plans, and they did not include God. Ahaz had resolved to pursue a political solution to his problem. He planned to send to Tiglath-pileser, the Assyrian tyrant, for aid against Rezin and Pekah.
   b. It was hypocritical (7:12b): nor will I test Yahweh. Ahaz’s rebellion against the prophet’s command was couched in pious jargon. In refusing to test Yahweh the king was feigning obedience to Dt 6:16. If these words were the resolve of a godly man, they would be admirable. In the present circumstances, however, they mask stubborn unbelief and hypocrisy.
3. Stern rebuke (7:13): Then he said, Hear now, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men that you weary my God as well? In response to the refusal of Ahaz, Isaiah addressed this response to the entire royal family. (The second person pronouns are plural). House of David (as in v 2) has connotations of special divine choice and permanence (2 Sam 7), both of which suggest an obligation to listen to prophetic guidance.

There are at least four reasons why it was wrong for Ahaz to refuse to ask for a sign from Yahweh. (1) A prophet of God had commanded him to ask. (2) It was an act of God’s grace that a sign was offered. (3) Ahaz’s refusal indicates a complete lack of trust in the power and faithfulness of God. The king was simply too busy for Yahweh. (4) The royal family of late had tried the patience of God’s men (the prophets) again and again. Ahaz’s defiant rejection of the gracious offer of a sign was now trying the patience of God himself.

B. Unsolicited Sign (7:14-16):
1. Divinely appointed sign (7:14a): Therefore Adonay himself will give to you a sign: Ahaz personally had refused a sign; but Adonay, the God of sovereign decision, will give a sign of his own choosing. The sign is given to you (plural), i.e., the house of David. The context requires that the sign to be stupendous, something equivalent to the miracle in Sheol or the heavens of v 11.
2. Birth of a child (7:14b):
   a. Mother of the child (7:14b): Behold the virgin is with child and will bring forth a son... The importance and unexpectedness of what is about to be announced as a sign is indicated by the interjection behold. The announcement to follow is of supreme importance.

The miracle of the birth is indicated in the words the virgin (’almāh) is with child. The definite article points to a special virgin, preeminent above all others. The word ’almāh is never used of a married woman. Strictly speaking the word means a young woman of marriageable age. Logic demands one of two options. The ’almāh must be either (1) an unmarried immoral woman; or (2) a virgin. The birth of a child by an unmarried woman is so common it could not be a sign. For this reason the Greek translators, long before the time of Christ, correctly determined that only the word parthenos (virgin) was a suitable translation for ’almā in this context.

---

50Isaiah is using an ancient announcement formula that was used to signal births of unusual significance. See Gn 16:11; Judg 13:3. The use of this formula has been attested in the closely related Ugaritic language. See Young, NIC, 1:285, n. 32.
51Rawlinson, PC, 1:128.
52The term 'almāh appears nine times in the OT, five times in the plural, and four times in the singular. Without dispute the word refers to an unmarried woman. That it can be applied to a virgin is proved conclusively by Gn 24:43 where Rebekah is called an 'almāh and the context clearly indicates that she had not known a man (24:16). In Prov 30:19, however, the word 'almāh may indicate an immoral woman.
Who is the ‘almāh in Isa 7:14? Among the more common modern views are these: (1) Isaiah’s wife or wife-to-be; or (2) Ahaz’s wife, the mother of Hezekiah. The traditional view of the church is that the ‘almāh is the virgin Mary. The Apostle Matthew saw in this v a direct prediction of the birth of Jesus (Mt 1:22f).

b. Name of the child (7:14c): and she will call his name Immanuel. The virgin will name her son Immanuel (God with us). The name reflects her belief that God (El, the all-powerful one) was with his people in a special way. No one else in the OT has this name. According to 8:8, Immanuel is the name of the one who owns the land of Canaan. This fact hints that the child is more than mere humanity.

c. Infancy of the child (7:15): Butter and honey will he eat until he knows to reject the evil and choose the good. Isaiah next sees the child in his infancy. He focuses attention on the child's diet: butter and honey will he eat. This humble diet points to the lowly circumstances of the child's family. Such is the child's diet until the time when he knows to reject the evil and choose the good. A child learns to distinguish between what is physically helpful or harmful at an early age, perhaps as early as two. A very few years later a child begins to make moral decisions between good and evil. It is not clear in which sense Isaiah was using the terms good and evil. The basic thrust of the v is unchanged in either case. The promised son experiences the normal course of growth like any other little boy.

3. Chronological note (7:16): For before the lad knows to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you are destroying will be forsaken of its two kings. The prophecy concludes with a note regarding the time of the virgin birth. Before the birth of the virgin’s child, the land, i.e., Israel, will be forsaken of its two kings. The land is further described as the land that you are destroying. The Hebrew participle is derived from the root qāš, to cut off. By his political and religious policies, Ahaz was cutting off Judah from God, and thus preparing the way for national destruction. The two kings are the king of Israel (Ephraim) and the king of Judah. The v threatens the end of the monarchy. "Messiah would replace once and for all the merely human kings of Ahaz's house and character." The coming of Immanuel is presented in the context of threat to Ahaz and not promise. This is made clear by the tone of the context from v 13 through the end of the ch.

PUNISHMENT OF UNBELIEVERS

7:17-25

A. Coming Invasion (7:17-20):

1. Identity of the invader (7:17): Yahweh will bring against you and against your people, and against your father's house such days as have not come since Ephraim departed from Judah, the king of Assyria. Ahaz's alliance with Assyria will eventually backfire and bring Judah into a state of humiliation unequaled since the revolt of the northern tribes in 931 BC. This is the first of twenty-four references to the king of Assyria in the book. The Assyrians were exceeding ruthless. Whatever fears the house of David had concerning Rezin and Pekah would pale into insignificance in the face of threats from the king of Assyria.

2. Summons of the invader (7:18):

a. Means of the summons (7:18a): It shall come to pass in that day that Yahweh will whistle... Whistling or hissing for insects is referenced in a number of classical texts. To create a universe, God had only to speak; to gather his instruments of punishment, he had only to whistle.

b. Figures for the invaders (7:18b): for the fly that is in the remote parts of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. Isaiah

54Most English versions take the participle to be from the root qāš, to dread, fear. They take the reference to be to Ahaz's fear of the two invading kings.

55It is unnatural to force the land to refer to north Israel and Syria. Isaiah thought in terms of two houses (dynasties) living in one land (cf. 8:14).

56Payne, EBP, 292.

57For documentation, see Young, NICOT 1:296.
likened the invaders to a fly and a bee. The former comes from deep within the land of Egypt. The killer-bees come from beyond the River, i.e., the Euphrates. From Ahaz’s time to the Exile the kings of Judah looked to Egypt or Mesopotamia for military assistance. Isaiah warns that great dangers attend the policy alignment with either of these powers. In the vv that follow Egypt drops from the picture. The focus is on the coming Assyrian invasion.

3. Dominance of the invader (7:19): They will all come and settle in the desolate valleys, and in the clefts of the rocks, and in all the thornbushes and in all the pastures. The Assyrian killer-bees settle in places that were not their normal habitat. The point is that the Assyrian invasion will overrun the entire land. The Assyrian judgment on Judah will be indiscriminate rather than targeted.

3. Devastation by the invader (7:20):
   a. Shaving figure (7:20a, c): In that day Adonay will shave … the head and the hair of the feet, and also the beard it will sweep away. Removal of hair and particularly the beard was a sign of deep humiliation and a way of inflicting shame on a defeated foe (cf. 2 Sam 10:4-5). The barber is Adonay, the sovereign Lord. The one who is shaved is personified Judah. Hair of the feet may be euphemistic for pubic hair; or the figure may simply mean all hair is shaved from head to feet.
   b. Razor figure (7:20b): with a razor, hired beyond the River (with the king of Assyria)... To implement the shaving Adonay will employ a razor, a figure for the enemy of Judah. The king of Assyria, hired by Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:7-8), will be used by Adonay to shave Judah. Hired may also allude to the booty that the Assyrian would receive for invading Judah.

B. Pictures of Devastation (7:21-25):
1. Survivors (7:21): And it will come to pass in that day a man will keep alive a young cow and two sheep. This v offers a hint of hope. The forthcoming Assyrian invasion will devastate the land; but sufficient livestock resources will remain to enable a remnant to survive.

2. Scarcity of food (7:22 And because of the abundance of the milk that they give, he will eat curds, for curds and honey everyone left in the midst of the land will eat. The surviving livestock will produce an abundance of milk. If Isaiah was not being sarcastic, this would be an evidence of God’s grace to the remnant. They will be able to survive on the curds made from the milk and honey found here and there in the land. That everyone left in the land will partake of this diet indicates that grain and fruit crops have been seized or destroyed by the Assyrians. Curds and honey here, as in v 15, indicate a diet resulting from extreme poverty.

3. Economic repercussions (7:23-25): The devastation and depopulation of the country caused by the Assyrians will profoundly affect the Judean economy. All three vv stress how the land will be overtaken with brambles.
   a. Vineyards lost (7:23): And it will come to pass in that day that everywhere where there used to be a thousand vines [valued] at a thousand pieces of silver, briers and thorns it shall become. Grape production was one of the major industries of Judah. A good-sized vineyard probably contained a thousand vines. The value of a thousand pieces of silver is difficult to compute. The point of the v, however, is to stress an economic catastrophe. Threat of invasion and military obligations left the prize vineyards untended long enough for briers and thorns to take over.
   b. Protection required (7:24): With arrow and bow he will come there, for briers and thorns all the land shall become... Only with arrow and bow will a man venture into the tangled brush that covers the once well-manicured vineyards. The weapon is needed, not only for hunting, but for protection from wild beasts that are there.
   c. Land use change (7:25): and all the mountains that used to be hoed with a hoe, you will not come there for fear of briers and thorns; but it shall become a place where cattle are loosed and sheep tread. For the most part the mountains of Judah could not be cultivated with the plow. The terraced hills were, however, cultivated with the hoe. Because of the enemy invasion those carefully cultivated areas will be so overrun with brush that
farmers no longer attempt to farm there. They loose
their cattle and sheep to graze where once they
raised crops.

CHAPTER 8
ATTACK ON IMMANUEL’S LAND

Ch 8 further develops the theme of ch 7. The
chronological placement of the two chs is the same,
viz., 734 BC. The Syro-Ephraimitic invasion will fail. Because Judah, however, had not put her trust
in Yahweh, she would be faced with even a greater
threat, viz., the Assyrian superpower. In the light of
these developments, Isaiah urged his people to
focus on God alone as the only source of
deliverance. The key doctrine taught in this ch is
capsulated in the name Immanuel—God is with
us!

PROPHETIC SYMBOLS
8:1-4

A. A Symbolic Act (8:1): Yahweh said unto me,
Take for yourself a large tablet. Write on it in
common script: Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-
baz. During the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis of 734 BC,
Isaiah received a four-word revelation that spelled
relief for Judah, but doom for the invaders. He
made known that revelation in two ways. First, on
a large “billboard” Isaiah wrote the four-word
revelation: maher-shalal-hash-baz (plunder speeds,
spoil hastens). The Assyrians were soon to
confront both Aram and Ephraim. They will march
away with the spoils of victory.

B. Designation of Witnesses (8:2): I will secure
reliable witnesses for myself, Uriah the priest and
Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. Yahweh is
speaking. Two reliable witnesses are men whose
testimony could not be gainsaid. They would need
to be people of standing in the city. Nothing further
is known of Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.

C. Birth and Naming of a Son (8:3):
1. Birth (8:3a): So I approached the prophetess,
and she conceived, and brought forth a son. The
prophetess is Isaiah’s wife. She is so designated
because she was the wife of a prophet. The
conception, birth and infancy of the child alluded
to in v 4 covered a period of about two years.
2. Naming (8:3b): Then Yahweh said unto me,
Call his name Mahar-shalal-hash-baz... The
prophet, under direction from Yahweh, turned his
four-word revelation (v 1) into a personal name.
Isaiah named his son Maher-shalal-hash-baz. This
unusual name conveyed a prophecy concerning the
fate of Syria and Ephraim.

D. Significance of the Name (8:4): for before the
lad knows to cry out, My father, my mother, the
wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will
be carried away before the king of Assyria. In this
v Isaiah explains the meaning of his four-word
revelation. Before Isaiah’s son could utter his first
words (my father, my mother) the king of Assyria
will have carried away the spoil of Samaria and
Damascus. Stated plainly, within about two years
Damascus and Samaria will be sacked and
humbled. Tiglath-pileser fulfilled this prediction in
732 BC (2 Kgs 15:29).

REVELATION FOR COMING CRISIS
8:5-10

A. A Clear Prediction (8:5-8): Yahweh again
spoke unto me further, saying...
1. Reason for the prediction (8:6):
a. Ill-advised rejection (8:6a): Because this people
refuse the waters of Shiloah that flow gently...
These waters were familiar to the Jerusalemites.
The reference may be to the channel that conveyed
water from the Gihon spring. What is clear is that

58The word gillayôn is broad enough to include both a scroll
(NIV) and a tablet (RSV). It can refer to a flat piece of wood (Ezek
37:16) or metal (Isa 3:23). Thus the word is appropriate to refer to
posting as a sort of placard.

59There is no evidence that Isaiah’s wife delivered prophetic oracles.
Some have suggested that she is called the prophetess because, as
the one who bore children with prophetic names, she became
involved in the communication of the message of God.
these gently flowing waters are symbolic of trust in Yahweh. The figure may have been suggested by the location of Isaiah’s meeting with King Ahaz (cf. 7:3). In spite of being challenged to put his trust in Yahweh, King Ahaz was committed to a course of trust in Assyria, not in God.

b. Ill-advised rejoicing (8:6b): and rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah… The plot of Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria to remove Ahaz from the throne had popular support in Judah.60

2. Coming flood of judgment (8:7-8a):
a. Source (8:7a): therefore behold, Adonay is about to bring up against them the waters of the River, mighty and abundant… Behold introduces focuses attention on the reason there should be no rejoicing over Rezin and Pekah. Adonay is God in his sovereign might. The participle (about to bring up) suggests imminent action. God will bring against Judah the mighty waters of the River, i.e., the Euphrates.
b. Explanation (8:7b): the king of Assyria and all his glory… The flood from the north symbolizes the imperialistic adventures of the Assyrians.
c. Description (8:7c-8): and it will rise up over all its channels, and go over all its banks; (8) and it will sweep into Judah, overflowing and passing on, it will reach even the neck… The raging waters of the Assyrian flood will reach to the very neck of Judah, i.e., the capital Jerusalem. Assyria will come very close to extinguishing the political life in Judah. The country will just barely survive.

3. Coming bird of prey (8:8b): and the spread of its wings will fill up the breadth of your land, O Immanuel. Like a giant bird of prey the Assyrian king will spread his wings over Judah (cf. Ezek 18; Hos 8:1).61 The enemy does not belong there, for the land of Judah belongs to Immanuel. O Immanuel is direct address implying prayer. Isaiah in narrative prayer is describing the disaster facing Judah at the hands of the Assyrians.

B. Consoling Prediction (8:9-10): Be broken, you peoples, and be shattered; give ear all you distant places of the earth. Gird yourselves, [yet] be shattered; gird yourselves and be shattered. (10) Take counsel, but it will be thwarted; speak a word, but it will not stand, because God is with us. In these vv Isaiah gives reassurance to the faithful. The designs of the king of Assyria will not succeed because Judah is really Immanuel’s land. In prophetic sarcasm Isaiah addressed all potential enemies of God’s people. Whether the invader is from Syria (734 BC) or Assyria (701 BC), he was doomed to defeat. For the sake of Immanuel, God will stand by his people. Every enemy ultimately will be broken to pieces.

REVELATION FOR ANY CRISIS 8:11-22

A. Facing Opposition (8:11-15):
1. Special revelation (8:11a): For thus said Yahweh unto me with his strong hand. At some point Yahweh spoke to Isaiah with his strong hand, i.e., his power. The prophet may have become discouraged at the increasing hostility of the people and their rejection of his message.
2. Special instructions to Isaiah (8:11b): He taught me not to walk in the way of this people, saying… The special revelation that Isaiah was commissioned to deliver to the remnant taught him personally as well. He concluded that he was not to waver in his position just because the people regarded him as a conspirator.
3. Instructions to Isaiah’s disciples (8:12-13): The plural imperatives in this v are addressed to the disciples of Isaiah.
   a. Don’t be misled (8:12a): Do not call a conspiracy all that this people call conspiracy… This people in general regarded Isaiah as part of a conspiracy with Syria/Ephraim because he rejected Ahaz’s plan to summon Assyria to his aid. Believers were not to regard the position of Isaiah as a result of political calculation.
   b. Don’t be afraid (8:12b): and do not fear what they fear or be in dread. The people feared the
Syro-Ephraimitic coalition. But believers were to manifest fearless faith.

c. Fear Yahweh (8:13): Yahweh of Hosts—him you shall sanctify. He shall be your fear, and he shall be your dread. Isaiah and his followers were to fear God to such a degree that they did not fear Rezin and Pekah, Assyria or any opposition to him that might arise in Judah. Christians are encouraged with the language of vv 12-13 to exercise courageous faith in Christ during times of persecution (1 Pet 3:14-15).

4. Promise to believers (8:14a): Then he shall become a sanctuary… Those who trusted in God will find in him a mighty sanctuary (miqdāš). The word comes from the same root as the verb sanctify in the previous v. For Yahweh as a sanctuary in the midst of his people see Ex 40:34-38; Jn 1:14; Rev 21:3. The NT teaches that in Christ the sanctuary of God is among his people (Jn 1:14; 2:19-21; Eph 2:21-22).

4. Warning to unbelievers (8:14b-15):

a. Yahweh the stone (8:14b): and a stone of smiting, and a rock of stumbling to the two houses of Israel… God is frequently described as a Rock to his people in a positive sense (e.g., Dt 32:4, 15, 18; Pss 18:2; 71:3). Isaiah turns that figure against the unbelievers in Israel. A stone of smiting is one that falls upon sinners in judgment; a rock of stumbling is one that a sinner stumbles over in the darkness. Isaiah regarded the division of the kingdom as a tragedy of divine judgment (7:17). Both houses, however, will face further judgment from him because of their attitude in the present crisis. The stone of smiting is mentioned in several NT passages (e.g., Lk 20:18; Rom 9:32; 1 Pet 2:8).

b. Yahweh the snare (8:14c): a trap and a snare to the inhabitant of Jerusalem. Yahweh is compared to a trap (pach), i.e., a bird-trap. Snare (mōqēš) is the bait that triggers the spring-trap. Those who cannot trust in Yahweh will find themselves caught up in snare of their own unbelief. Whereas the warning in v 14 is to the two houses of Israel, the inhabitant of Jerusalem is particularly in view. The Jerusalemites have rejected the path of faith advocated by Isaiah; they will not be caught up in the consequences of their unbelief.

c. Result (8:15): Many shall stumble on them, and they shall fall and be shattered; they shall be ensnared and captured. Isaiah made Yahweh himself the major issue in the crisis of 734 BC. Many will stumble over that stone or be ensnared in that trap. Royal policy called for summoning the Assyrians to smash the Syro-Ephraimitic coalition. Jerusalem will face smothering onslaught from those same Assyrians, an onslaught that will all but destroy Judah.

B. Facing Rejection (8:16-18):

1. Messiah’s mandate (8:16): Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples. Isaiah had a ministry to the faithful remnant—here called my disciples—as well as to the nation as a whole. He was to bind up and seal the word of God within them, i.e., close it in spiritually and leave it there. As one preserves something precious in a purse, so Isaiah deposited his treasure of warnings and teachings with Yahweh’s disciples. The reference specifically is to the entire preceding message of this ch. That the Messiah is the speaker in these vv is indicated in Heb 2:13. The command in effect caused Isaiah to turn from public ministry for a while to concentrate on those who had accepted his message. After the Syro-Ephraimitic invasion fizzled Isaiah probably resumed his public ministry. At that point events would have confirmed the word of God through Isaiah.

2. Messiah’s wait (8:17): I will wait for Yahweh, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, yes I will look for him. The speaker in v 16 is Messiah. There is no change of speaker in v 17. Messiah announced that he will wait expectantly while God is hiding his face. This refers (1) to withdrawal of God’s protective care and (2) withholding of divine illumination. For a time when the face of God is concealed, the meaning of the promises is hidden from the many and known.

---

62Some think testimony and teaching refer to an actual document, the written record of the prophet’s message.
63Hab 1:13; cf. Nm 6:25-26; Pss 31:16; 80:3, 7, 19.
only to the few. During this time, Messiah will patiently wait.

3. Messiah’s wonders (8:18): Behold, I and the children that Yahweh gave me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from Yahweh of Hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion. After the period of patient waiting, Messiah comes. Like Isaiah and his sons, Messiah and his children (disciples\(^{64}\)) will be signs and wonders, i.e., pledges and tokens of future events.\(^{65}\)

C. Facing Apostasy (8:19-22):

1. Temptation to apostasy (8:19):
   a. Essence of temptation (8:19a): And when they say unto you, Seek the mediums and the wizards who whisper and mutter… The speaker continues to be Messiah. During the period when God hides his face, some openly advocate consultation with mediums and wizards. The former claimed the power to contact the spirit world; the latter claimed the power to "read the future" in various objects. Practitioners of the occult only whisper and mutter. In contrast to God’s prophets they speak in low tones, convey secret information, and give forth no clear-cut information. The Mosaic Law strictly forbade the occult practices mentioned here (Lv 19:31; 20:6-7; Dt 18:9-14).
   b. Response to temptation (8:19b): should not a people seek their God? On behalf of the living [should they seek] the dead? A believer’s response to the temptation to seek out the occult comes in the form of two rhetorical questions. What sense does it make to consult the dead about the affairs of the living? A rhetorical question underscores that a people--any people--should consult their God, not charlatans and con artists.

2. Rejection of apostasy (8:20):
   a. Standard of authority (8:20a): To law and testimony! Until that day when Messiah appears, God’s people should stand steadfastly by the law and the testimony, i.e., the OT revelation. Law refers in particular to that portion of God's revelation that expresses his will for man's obedience. Testimony refers to that portion of the revelation that expresses his will regarding man's belief system.
   b. Explanation of apostasy (8:20b): If they do not speak according to this word it is because they have no dawn. Apostates have no dawn in them, i.e., they are still living in the darkness. God’s word is the true source of light, for God himself is light (1 Jn 1:5). The dawn of God’s word in the heart leaves rays of evidence in the words and walk of people.

3. Results of apostasy (8:21-22):
   a. Distress (8:21a): They will pass through in it greatly distressed and hungry… The Assyrian invasions would bring an acute food shortage (cf. 3:1; 7:23-25). Since apostates walk in darkness, they experience misery and hardship.
   b. Anger (8:21b): and it will be that when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God… Destitute and hungry, the apostates lash out in rage against government and God. Cursing king or God was a capital crime under Mosaic Law.
   c. Anguish (8:21b-22a): as they turn [their faces] upward. (22) Then to the earth they will look, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish… Apostates look upward toward heaven and down toward earth, but all they see is further anguish. Their life becomes one of total misery. Those who reject God's revelation have a most distressing future of gloom, anguish and fruitless searching for guidance.
   d. Darkness (8:22b): and to thick darkness [they] will be driven. Apostates have chosen darkness over light. Their path leads them to every-increasing darkness (\(^{\text{ezpēlā}}\)).

CHAPTER 9
APPEARANCE OF IMMANUEL

Ch 8 concluded with Messiah patiently waiting until the indignation against Judah was past. Now the second member of the great messianic trilogy
sets forth the dawn of a new day, the birth of a wonderful child, and the rule of a glorious king.

DAWN OF A NEW DAY
9:1-5

Though Yahweh hid his face from his people during the Assyrian crisis (8:17), he planned in the latter time to bring them light.

A. Darkness before the Dawn (9:1-2):
1. Region of darkness (9:1a): But there will be no gloom for her who is in anguish. In former time he treated with contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. The gloom of God’s judgment upon his people is not permanent. The words former time indicate that Isaiah first glances backward. Throughout OT history, the northern tribal territories of Zebulun and Naphtali had suffered first, and suffered most, in times of war. These territories were also the most despised in Israel because of their larger Gentile population.

2. Illumination of darkness (9:1b-2):
   a. Time and place (9:1b): In the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The words latter time look forward to the messianic age when gloom is replaced by glory. Specifically, Isaiah refers to three areas. (1) The way of the sea is the road that passed from the northeast along the western side of the Sea of Galilee. (2) Beyond the Jordan refers to the area immediately to the east of the Sea of Galilee. (3) Galilee of the Gentiles refers to the area north of the Sea of Galilee, an area with a disproportionately large Gentile population.
   b. Result (9:2): The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who live in the land of deep darkness, a light shined upon them. The people in the Galilee region are the first of those who walk in darkness to see the dawn of a new day of great light, i.e., a new revelation from God. The words land of deep darkness are lit., land of the shadow of death. Their darkness is deep and of death. Only the light of life can dispel such darkness. The passage forecasts the great work of Christ and all the blessings that he brings (cf. Mt 4:13ff).

B. Glory after the Dawn (9:3-4): The coming day of messianic illumination results in four wonderful blessings.
1. Multiplication (9:3a): You will multiply the nation... The day of Messiah is a day of expansion. God will multiply (enlarge) the nation. The reference probably is to the incorporation of Gentiles into the new Israel of God, the church of Christ.

2. Joy (9:3b): you will increase their gladness; they will be glad before you as in the gladness of the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. Messiah will increase their gladness. The extent of the joy is compared to the joy that follows a successful harvest or to the joy of dividing the spoils of the enemy after a successful battle.

3. Liberation (9:4): For the burdensome yoke and the rod of his shoulder, the staff of the oppressor you have shattered as in the day of Midian. Messiah’s coming ushers in a day of deliverance. God’s people are liberated from (1) the burdensome yoke, i.e., servitude like an ox might be forced to render; (2) the rod of his shoulder, i.e., the rod that the oppressive master might bring down upon his back from time to time; and (3) the staff of the oppressor, i.e., his government or authority. In this messianic context, the oppressor is probably Satan. This oppressor will be shattered by Messiah. The victory is compared Gideon's total crushing of the hordes of Midian (cf. Judg 7).

4. Peace (9:5): For every boot of the booted warrior in the tumult and garment rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire. The messianic day is a day of peace. The picture is that of the clean-up after war. Warrior’s boots and blood-stained garments are consigned to fire. First comes the battle to destroy the oppressor, after that comes peace. This is a concrete way of depicting the reconciliation between God and man by the death of Christ on the cross. To the extent that men
embrace the teaching of Christ, and model his lifestyle, peace is possible between them as well.

**A MIRACLE CHILD**

9:6

A. Birth of the Child (9:6a): *For a child is born to us, a son is given to us.* The glorious day described in the opening vv of the ch is ushered in by the birth of a male child. The fact that he is born, points to his humanity. The fact that he is a son who has been given points to his deity, i.e., he is God's Son (cf. Ps 2:7b; Jn 3:16).

B. Office of the Child (9:6b): *The government shall be upon his shoulder.* Previously mentioned as a sign (7:14), he is now portrayed as a savior and sovereign. The weight of government rests on the shoulders of this son. That this son is the virgin's Immanuel of Isa 7:14 there can be little doubt.

C. Names of the Child (9:6c, d, e, f): Four titles appropriate to his nature and work are bestowed on the great messianic ruler.

1. Wonderful Counselor (9:6c): *His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor.* Lit., wonder of a counselor. This is an attribute of Yahweh of Hosts in Isa 28:29. Messiah possesses all the wisdom and knowledge essential to redeem and rule his people. He has no need to consult a multitude of advisors. His wisdom is such that men can only marvel at it. The first title points to Messiah's omniscience. *Wonderful (pele')* has overtones of deity.

2. Mighty God (9:6d): Lit., heroic God. This title is used of Yahweh of Hosts in Isa 10:21. Yahweh is compared to a warrior/hero in Isa 42:13. The term hero (gibbôr) may be used of men, but never the term God ('êl). The point of the title is that here is a hero whose chief characteristic is that he is God. This title points to the omnipotence of Messiah, especially in his role as the champion of his people against all enemies.

3. Eternal Father (9:6e): The first two names stressed the wisdom and power of the child. The last two indicate the accomplishments of the child as a result of those attributes. *Eternal Father* (lit., father of eternity) points to the fatherly care of his people. The son who is given to God's people is the same one who has been eternally a father to his people.

4. Prince of Peace (9:6f): The second result of the wisdom and power of the child is that he will bring to his people peace with all of its attendant blessings. The Bethlehem angels heralded the birth of this one who makes possible peace with God, and true peace with men as well (Lk 2:14).

**REIGN OF A GLORIOUS KING**

9:7

A. Expanding Kingdom (9:7a): *To the increase of his government and to peace there shall be no end.* The government of the ruler is perpetual and progressive, i.e., it is ever expanding. As under David, Messiah's government (kingdom) will increase; as under Solomon it will prosper. Unlike the kingdoms of this world his kingdom expands by peaceful means.

B. Davidic Kingdom (9:7b): *upon the throne of David and over his kingdom.* As a descendant of David, Messiah sits on David's throne and rules David's kingdom. This fulfills the ancient promises of the Nathan oracle (2 Sam 7:12-17). Since David sat on God's throne (1 Chr 29:23) and ruled God's kingdom, these terms are not to be interpreted in a narrow, physical and earthly sense. The NT testifies that Christ, the son of David, is now seated on the throne of God in heaven.
C. Ideal Kingdom (9:7c): To build it and to establish it in justice and in righteousness from now even unto eternity. Justice and righteousness are established and maintained throughout his realm. His kingdom endures forever. The linkage between peace and righteousness in the reign of the child recalls the reign of Melchizedek, a type of Christ (Heb 7:2).

D. Postscript (9:7d): The zeal of Yahweh of Hosts will accomplish this. The wonderful promises of the coming child-ruler may raise questions as to how this will come to be. That question is now answered. Only through the zeal of the almighty Yahweh of Hosts for his people are these glorious promises to be implemented.

DElIVERANCE FOR IMMANUEL’S PEOPLE
Isaiah 9:8-21

A word Adonay has sent against Jacob, and it has fallen on Israel (9:8): Adonay sent through Isaiah a word, i.e., threat, against Jacob, the northern kingdom. That the word is a threat is indicated by the fact that it has fallen on Israel.

The name Immanuel (God with us) captures the theme of this unit. Though Judah will suffer terribly at the hands of her enemies, ultimately neither Ephraim nor Assyria will be able to crush God’s people.

In the midst of the Syro-Ephraimitic invasion Isaiah offered his people a message of hope. Ephraim’s fate as a nation was sealed. The point of the unit is that Judah has nothing to fear from Ephraim since Ephraim had troubles of its own. In three artistic strophes Isaiah described Ephraim’s impending confrontation with the God of judgment. Each strophe concludes with the thunderous warning, In spite of all this his anger does not turn away, and his hand is still outstretched (9:12, 17, 21; cf. 10:4).

A. Pride Punished (9:9-12):
1. Arrogance of Ephraim (9:9-10):

a. Assertion (9:9): All the people know, [that] Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, in pride and in arrogance of heart, [are] saying… All the people, i.e., the entire nation, know of the pride and arrogance of Ephraim, and the inhabitants of the capital Samaria in particular. Prior invasions by the Assyrians had done nothing to humble the hearts of Samaria’s citizens. They regarded the fall of the northern provinces to the Assyrians (cf. 9:1) as nothing but a temporary setback to the nation.

b. Manifestation (9:10): The bricks have fallen, but we will rebuild with dressed stones; the sycamores have been cut down, but with cedars we will replace them. The Ephraimites were confident that they could rebuild after any judgment that God might bring upon them. In fact, they vowed to use better materials (cedars instead of sycamores) when they rebuild.

2. Adversaries of Ephraim (9:11-12b):

a. Identity of the adversaries (9:11): So Yahweh exalts the adversaries of Rezin over them, and their enemies he arouses… The downside of Ephraim’s alliance with King Rezin is that his adversaries now became their enemies. Yahweh takes credit for exalting these adversaries. The verb (r. sgb) means to set securely on high; to exalt in effective hostility. It is he who arouses, i.e., brings on the scene, these enemies. The major adversaries of Rezin were the Assyrians.

b. Menace of the adversaries (9:12a): Arameans on the east and the Philistines on the west. The Arameans and Philistines may have been allies of the Assyrians for a time. The politics of the period were complex, with alliances shifting frequently. The exact background of these attacks on Ephraim from the east and west cannot be determined. They seem to have been before the fall of Damascus and death of Rezin in 732 BC. Rezin was an Aramean; but not all Arameans were under his sovereignty.75

75Commentaries struggle with the reference to Aram as an enemy of Ephraim since it is known that the two countries were allies as early as 734 BC. Ridderbos dates this oracle prior to the Syro-Ephraimitic alliance. Oswalt takes Aram as symbolic of enemies to the east counterbalancing the mention of Philistines. Watts surmises that the action taken was against Rezin who controlled Samaria. Another view is that Ephraim was weakened by Assyria to such a degree that incursion on their territory by the Arameans and Philistines was encouraged.
c. Success of the adversaries (9:12b): *They will devour Israel with open mouth.* As by a ferocious beast, Israel will be devoured with open mouth. The figure of judgment by eating appears also in (5:14; 9:20).

3. Warning refrain (9:12c): *In spite of all this, his anger does not turn away, and his hand is still outstretched.* This refrain is used also in 9:17, 21; 10:4; 5:25. The judgment already described does not exhaust the manifestation of God's wrath against his sinful people. Invasions were in the offing that would be worse than the annoying incursions by Arameans and Philistines.

B. Impenitence Punished (9:13-17):

1. Accusation of impenitence (9:13): *Yet the people do not turn unto him who smote them, and Yahweh of Hosts they do not seek.* Ephraim remained impenitent in spite of the disasters God brought upon the nation. Previous judgments were designed to bring Israel back into a positive relationship with Yahweh. To *turn back* to Yahweh is to repent. This repentance is manifested when sinners *seek* God, i.e., seek his wisdom, his forgiveness, and his guidance.

2. Jeopardy of Ephraim’s leaders (9:14-16):
   a. Figuratively presented (9:14): *So Yahweh cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and rush in one day.* The second encounter with God leaves Ephraim leaderless. The Northern Kingdom faced devastating military defeats in which head and tail would be cut off, i.e., either killed or carried off into exile. All society from top (palm branch) to bottom (rush) will be cut off. In *one day* indicates that the judgment will be swift.
   b. Clearly explained (9:15): *The elder and the honorable man is the head, and the prophet and teacher of falsehood is the tail.* Two of the figures of the previous v are explained. The head is the elder and honorable man. Isaiah's visceral dislike for the false prophets is indicated by assigning them the position of tail. The implication is that the government leaders are wagging the tail, i.e., telling the religious teachers what to teach.
   c. Explanation of the judgment (9:16): *So those who lead this people cause them to err, and those who are guided by them are swallowed up.* The reason for the cutting off of the national leaders is now stated. These corrupt leaders had caused the entire nation to err. The people, however, were not without blame. They willingly followed their corrupt leaders. Both leaders and followers will be swallowed up by the coming judgment.

3. Jeopardy of Ephraim’s populace (9:17):
   a. No mercy (9:17a): *Therefore over their young men Adonay does not rejoice, and their orphans and widows he does not pity...* In the hour of judgment God will not *rejoice over their young men,* i.e., they will not be exempt from judgment. Even orphans and widows, normally protected by divine law, will not escape. There is no mercy for Ephraim (cf. Hos 1:6). Temporal judgments of necessity do not discriminate between sinners and the innocent.
   b. Explanation (9:17b): *for everyone is profane and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks foolishness.* All classes of society were profane. In thought and heart they were irreligious and alienated from God. Every mouth spoke foolishness, i.e., wicked speech directed against God. For this reason, God the entire society is in jeopardy.

4. Warning refrain (9:17c): *In spite of all this, his anger does not turn away, and his hand is still outstretched.* This unit closes, as did the previous one, with the sad refrain that God's anger is still focused on Israel, and his powerful hand is still outstretched, i.e., active in the punishment of Ephraim.

C. Wickedness Punished (9:18-21):

1. Consuming fire (9:18-19a):
   a. Description (9:18): *For wickedness burns like a fire; briars and thorns it consumes; it kindles the thickets of the forest, and they roll together upward as smoke.* When God's restraining hand is withdrawn, wickedness, like a fire, devours Ephraim. The land is highly combustible. Briars, thorns and thickets are symbols of something that is worthless and easily consumed. The country was going up in smoke. Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any nation. Briars/thorns
are a word pair that Isaiah employs (5:6; 7:23-25; 10:17; 27:4) for different purposes. His usage, however, suggests that in Isaiah’s mind briars/thorns were associated with the consequences of sin (Gn 3:18).

b. Explanation (9:19a): In the fury of Yahweh of Hosts, the land is burned, and the people are like fuel for the fire… The fire that is consuming the land of Ephraim is the result of the fury of Yahweh of Hosts. God is permitting Ephraim to experience social deterioration as a punishment for years of turning a deaf ear to the pleading of prophets. The briars, thorns and thickets of the preceding v are the citizens of the Northern Kingdom (v 19).

2. Civil war (9:19b-21):
   a. Metaphor (9:19b-20): no man spares his brother. (20) They slice off on the right, but they are still hungry; they eat [what is on] the left, and they are not satisfied; each the flesh of his arm eats. Anarchy sweeps through the land like a raging forest fire. The violent anarchy is compared to cannibalism. Men turn on each other. Isaiah pictures them recklessly slicing, dicing and consuming human flesh. Each will eat the flesh of his arm, i.e., his strength. Perhaps the reference is to his offspring, those who represent his strength in old age. The cannibalism refers to the terrible conditions in Ephraim following the days of King Jeroboam II.
   b. Explained (9:21a): Manasseh [devours] Ephraim, and Ephraim [devours] Manasseh. Together they are against Judah. The major northern tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh) traced their ancestry back to Joseph. The two tribes should have been close. Yet at various times in OT history these two tribes warred against each other (cf. Judg 12:1-6). This internecine strife is only suppressed as the northern tribes vent their mutual animosity on Judah to the south as in the Syro-Ephraimitic invasion of 734 BC.

3. Warning refrain (9:21b): In spite of all this, his anger does not turn away, and his hand is still outstretched. Though the entire covenant people were being torn to pieces by competing interests, still there was worse to come. God's powerful hand was still outstretched against them.

CHAPTER 10
WOES ON ADVERSARIES

Both of Judah’s adversaries—Ephraim and Assyria—provoked Yahweh’s woe because of their pride (10:1, 5). After describing God’s judgment on Ephraim, the immediate threat, Isaiah described in more detail God’s dealings with Assyria.

WOE ON OPPRESSORS
10:1-4

A. Description of Oppression (10:1-2): Isaiah points out the corruption in the judicial system of Ephraim.

1. Means of oppression (10:1): Woe to those who enact statutes of iniquity, and those who keep writing oppression… Statutes of iniquity are set forth, probably by royal decree. Those who keep writing oppression are probably the judges who establish precedent by their legal opinions. Woe is an ominous word of warning. Those who have abused their governmental powers stand in jeopardy.

2. Effects of oppression (10:2): By their judicial activism the powerful take advantage of those who were powerless to defend themselves. Four concrete accusations under gird the general accusation of v 1.
   a. On the poor (10:2a): to turn aside from justice the poor… The leaders sometimes refuse to hear the just complaints of those who cannot afford to bribe them. Some may have viewed the system as so corrupt that they did not even bother to take their cases to court.
   b. On the needy (10:2b): and to rob the justice of the needy of my people… The leaders steal rights of the needy away by their crooked rulings. The needy are victimized again by the legal system that was designed to address their grievances.
   c. On the widows (10:2c): in order that widows may be their spoil… The leaders take advantage of women who did not have a male defender.
Confiscation of property is probably the crime most commonly committed against widows.

d. On orphans (10:2d): and orphans they may plunder. The leaders plunder orphans by taking from them their rightful inheritance.

B. Desolation for the Oppressors (10:3-4): The corrupt judges are about to come face to face with the God of judgment.

1. Ominous questions (10:3): Now what will you do in the day of visitation, in the desolation that comes from afar? To whom will you flee for help? Where will you leave your wealth? Isaiah asks three rhetorical questions designed to demonstrate how helpless and hopeless they will be in that day of visitation, i.e., judgment visitation. The desolation that comes from afar suggests that nothing they could do will divert the disaster. The second question (To whom will you flee for help?) Implies that no idol or king will be able to deliver them from what was coming. The third question (Where will you leave your wealth?) points to the ultimate concern of these officials. They will know of no place where their wealth could be preserved for them during the judgment days.

2. Ominous future (10:4a): Nothing [remains] but to crouch among the prisoners, and among the slain to fall. In this encounter with the God of judgment, the oppressors become the oppressed. Captivity or death awaited those who had misused their office by abusing the disadvantaged. Crouch among the prisoners pictures these powerful leaders cringing en route into exile, or trying to hide behind others to avoid detection and death.

3. Warning Refrain (10:4b): In spite of all this, his anger does not turn away, and his hand is still outstretched. Even the judgment on the judges does not mean the end of God's anger Ephraim. His hand of judgment is still outstretched. This is not the end but the prelude to greater judgment.

WOE ON ASSYRIA
10:5-19

A. Commission of Assyria (10:5-11):

1. Plan for Assyria (10:5-6):

a. Figuratively described (10:5): Woe to Assyria, rod of my anger, the staff in whose hand is my indignation. To this point Isaiah had depicted Assyria as a mighty power, dependence upon which would lead to disaster. Now he begins to represent Assyria as an instrument of God’s wrath, a rod through which God will administer judgment.

b. Literally described (10:6): Against a godless nation I dispatch it, and against the people of my fury I command him, to take spoil and to seize plunder, and to trample them like mud in the streets. Against a godless nation, i.e., Ephraim, God will dispatch the Assyrian. The Assyrian will trample Ephraim into the mud. He will enrich himself at the expense of his fallen victim.

2. Pride of Assyria (10:7-11):

a. Assyria’s intentions (10:7): Yet he does not so intend, and his heart does not so think; but it is to keep in his own heart, and to cut off nations not a few. God had given to Assyria a limited commission within his eternal plan, i.e., to punish his wayward people. The proud Assyrian, however, had much more grandiose ambitions. His barbarous lust for plunder drove him to destroy many nations, including Judah. His intentions were to cut off nations not a few, i.e., become an imperialistic power.

b. Assyria’s boasts (10:8-11): Isaiah depicts the boasting of the arrogant Assyrian.

(1) About his subordinates (10:8): For he says, Are not my princes all kings? The Assyrian boasts that his vassals were full-fledged kings. His subordinates were equal to the kings who yet remained independent.

(2) About his conquests (10:9): Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus? Arpad, an Aramean town in the general vicinity of Damascus, offered only token resistance to the Assyrians in 740 BC. Calno, a Babylonian town about fifty miles southwest of Carchemish, fell before Assyria about 738 BC. Damascus of Aram and Samaria of Israel could not stand up to Assyria, falling respectively in 732 and 722 BC. Hamath, another Aramean city, fell in 720 BC. Carchemish, the chief city of the Hittites had
been incorporated into the Assyrian Empire about 717 BC.

(3) About his power over gods (10:10-11): As my hand has found the kingdoms of idols whose graven images were greater than Jerusalem and Samaria, (11) as I have done to Samaria and its idols, shall I not do to Jerusalem and its images? The Assyrian boasts that great gods (idols) had failed to protect their people from him. To the Assyrians, Yahweh is but another idol—and not a very grand one at that—who failed to protect his people in Samaria.

He will fail again to protect his people in Jerusalem from the hand (power) of the Assyrians. Such arrogance cried out for heaven’s judgment.

B. Condemnation of the Assyrian (10:12-19):

1. Time of his judgment (10:12): It shall come to pass when Adonay has finished all his work on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the proud heart of the king of Assyria and the haughty look in his eyes. The sovereign Adonay announces his decision to punish the proud Assyrian, but the punishment is delayed. It will take place after Adonay has finished (lit., cut off) his work of judgment at Mount Zion/Jerusalem. The fruit of the proud heart of the Assyrian king points to his words and his deeds. The haughty look in his eyes refers to that outward demeanor that betrays an arrogant attitude.

2. Justification of judgment (10:13-14): Isaiah makes clear to the world the need for divine judgment on the king of Assyria by setting forth the boastfulness and presumptuousness of the king.

a. Assyrian's arrogant boasts (10:13-14):

(1) Invincibility (10:13a): For he has said, By the power of my hand I have done [it], and by my wisdom, for I have understanding… Isaiah simply let the arrogant Assyrian speak, and thereby create the noose by which he hangs himself. First, the Assyrian claimed for himself invincibility. He regarded his wisdom as irresistible and his might (power of my hand) as invincible. Power and wisdom were viewed by the ancients as vital qualities for a king.

b. Assyrian's presumptuous attitude (10:15): Will the axe boast itself over the hewer, or the saw magnify itself against the sawyer? [That is] as if a rod should brandish the one who raised it up, [or] as if a staff should lift up [him who is] not of wood. Isaiah submits the argument that the Assyrian was but a tool in the hand of God. Boastfulness on his part was inappropriate and audacious. Therefore, Yahweh will bring judgment upon him.

(2) Lawless deeds (10:13b): I have removed boundaries of peoples, and their treasures I have plundered… Second, the Assyrian admitted to lawless deeds. By his own admission, he had removed boundaries. In the ancient Near East there was, in theory, a great respect for boundaries, whether national or private. To violate them was to violate something God had ordained. Yahweh had established the boundaries of all peoples (Dt 32:8). He had arranged the borders of the whole earth (Ps 74:17; 104:9). Removal of boundaries may be an allusion to the distinctive Assyrian policy of mass deportation and mixing of subject people. (cf. 2 Kings 17:6, 24). Like a common brigand, the Assyrian had plundered treasures.

(3) Reckless rage (10:13c): and I have brought down inhabitants like a mighty one. Third, the Assyrian boasted of reckless rage. He had brought down (i.e., to the dust) the peaceful inhabitants of various countries. The term inhabitants, as in Amos 1:5, 8, refers to those who occupy thrones (cf. ASV). The Assyrian compares himself to a mighty one (‘abbîr). The term is used to denote strength a man, angel or animal, especially a horse or bull. The latter is probably in view here.

(4) Belittling victims (10:14): My hand reached like a nest the wealth of the peoples, and like one who gathers abandoned eggs, all the earth I will gather; and there was not one that moved a wing or opened the mouth or chirped. The Assyrian belittled those he victimized. He gathered the spoils of nations as easily as men gather abandoned eggs. No one dared to oppose him.

b. Assyrian's presumptuous attitude (10:15): Will the axe boast itself over the hewer, or the saw magnify itself against the sawyer? [That is] as if a rod should brandish the one who raised it up, [or] as if a staff should lift up [him who is] not of wood. Isaiah submits the argument that the Assyrian was but a tool in the hand of God. Boastfulness on his part was inappropriate and audacious. Therefore, Yahweh will bring judgment upon him.

---

76Both the northern nor southern kingdom had idols (cf. 2:8, 20).

77TW, 1:147.

78NRSV; NEB; BV like a bull; CEV like a wild bull; NASB like a mighty man; ASV like a valiant man.

a. Debilitating disease (10:16a): Therefore, Adonay, Yahweh of Hosts, will send among his fat ones leanness, and it will become like a sick man who wastes away. A debilitating disease causes the fat ones, i.e., stalwart warriors, to waste away. Assyria’s enemies wore down her resistance over a period of some years.

b. A consuming fire (10:16b-19):

(1) Kindled (10:16b): Under his glory a fire will be kindled, like the burning of fire. A fire consumes all the glory of Assyria. In 6:3 Isaiah saw the glory of God. Compared to the divine glory all earthly glory is pathetically dreary and of passing duration. In the presence of the fire of Yahweh’s judgment human glory is highly combustible.

(2) Consuming quickly (10:17): The Light of Israel shall become a fire, and his holy one like a flame, and it will burn and consume his briers and his thorns in one day. The consumptive fire is said to be the Light of Israel and his holy one. Both are titles for Yahweh. Though Yahweh uses Assyria as an instrument of judgment, he also will bring the judgment upon his rod at the appropriate time. A torch provides both heat and light. So Yahweh is a light to those who choose him as such (2:1-5; 60:1-3), and a judgment fire to those who lift themselves up against him. Thorns and briers point to the lower levels of Assyrian society; they also indicate that the Assyrians will easily be consumed by the fire of God’s judgment. In one day points to the decisive moment in the demise of Assyria, viz., the downfall of her capital, Nineveh, in 612 BC.

(3) Consuming permanently (10:18): The glory of his forest and his fruitful land both soul and body he will destroy. The upper classes of Assyrian society (forest/fruitful land) are likewise consumed by the judgment fire of Yahweh. As in v 16 the passing of earthly glory should be noted.

(4) Consuming almost completely (10:19): The rest of the trees of his forest shall become so few that a lad can write them down. The glorious Assyrian forest is reduced to but a few trees. So few are they that a child is able to count them! Thus it becomes clear that Yahweh is not just another idol, but the Living God.

In the few trees that survive in the Assyrian forest there is a slight hint of hope. Just as a remnant will survive Yahweh’s judgment on Israel, so a remnant will survive the Assyrian judgment. So Isaiah prepares the way for the astonishing prophecy in 19:23-25.

CONSEQUENCES FOR JUDAH
10:20-27

God’s use of the Assyrian at Jerusalem will have both negative and positive results.

A. Preservation of a Remnant (10:20-22a): On the positive side, the Judeans learned two great lessons during the Assyrian crisis.

1. Lesson of faith (10:20): It shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel and escapees of the house of Jacob will no more lean upon the one who struck them, but will lean upon Yahweh, the holy one of Israel, in truth. Those who escape with their lives from the Assyrian invasion—the remnant—learn truly to lean upon Yahweh. Never again will they lean on the one who struck them, i.e., Assyria, or any other power like Assyria. This phrase translates a single Hebrew word (makkēhû) which in 9:13 was used of God. Here the word denotes the human instrument of God’s wrath (Assyria) rather than God himself.

2. Lesson of repentance (10:21-22a):

a. A prediction stated (10:21): A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. A remnant shall return is the same in the Hebrew as the name of Isaiah’s first son. The emphasis in this v (as distinct from v. 22) is

79The Assyrian Empire was dealt a decisive blow by the Chaldeans and Medes in 612 BC when Nineveh was captured. The remnant of the Assyrian army was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC.
positive. God will not utterly destroy his people. The remnant will return to the mighty God (‘êl gibbôr), the same name used of Messiah in 9:6. The word return has the connotation go back to where one got off the track. The remnant consists of those who hunger for the intimate relationship with the Living God.

b. A promise shaken (10:22a): For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant shall return. To make his point more effectively, Isaiah addresses the nation directly (O Israel). While a remnant will return (good news) only a remnant will return (bad news). Presently the population was numerous (as the sand of the sea), a reminder of the promise made to the Patriarchs (Gn 22:17; 32:12). Coming depopulation will threaten that promise and challenge the faith of those who clung to it.

B. Punishment of the Nation (10:22b-23):
1. Announcement (10:22b): Destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness. Even though Judah (barely) will be delivered from the Assyrians, the nation still faces an ominous future. God had determined destruction for the land of Judah. That destruction was overflowing with righteousness, i.e., it was justly deserved by the rebellious people. Judah’s final destroyer is not named, but the word overflowing hints that the power will be Mesopotamian. This is the same Hebrew word used in 8:8 to describe the flood of judgment through the Assyrian. Though the Assyrians (and Babylonians) were wicked nations, God still used them as instruments of his righteousness, i.e., his righteous purposes.
2. Explanation (10:23): For an end, and that determined, Adonay Yahweh of Hosts is about to make in the midst of all the earth. Isaiah underscores his point by repeating it. An end has been determined for Judah. From that end there will be no escape, because it was ordained by the sovereign Adonay. For the twenty-first time, Isaiah identifies Adonay Yahweh of Hosts, the God who has at his disposal omnipotent power. A participle (is about to make) connotes imminent action. In the midst of the earth suggests that what God is about to do will be plain to all surrounding nations.

The point of vv 22b-23 is that Judah's end will indeed come, but not at the hands of the Assyrians. The end of the kingdom of Judah is planned and executed by Yahweh.

C. Promise to God's People (10:24-27): Since Yahweh himself, not the Assyrian king, will determine the day of Judah's end, Isaiah had a positive word for his audience. He sets forth five wonderful promises under the verbal signature of the sovereign Adonay Yahweh of Hosts.
1. Judah need not fear (10:24): Therefore, thus says Adonay Yahweh of Hosts: Do not fear, O my people who dwell in Zion, from the Assyrian when with the rod he smites, and he lifts up his staff against you, in the manner of Egypt. The divine titles (Adonay Yahweh of Hosts) are repeated from v 23. Here, however, Yahweh uses his sovereign power for salvation rather than judgment. The blow by Assyria, though painful, is not fatal. For this reason, those who dwell in Zion should not fear. Unfaithful though they have been, God still claims them as his own (O my people). He will see his people through the ruthless chastening administered by the rod of the Assyrian taskmaster just as he earlier delivered them from the taskmasters in Egypt.
2. God’s indignation short (10:25): For yet a very little while my indignation will come to an end, and my anger [will be directed] toward their destruction. Divine indignation against Judah was real, but it does not last long. It will come to an end in a very little. Then God’s anger will be directed toward the destruction of the Assyrian adversary.
3. Deliverance will be complete (10:26): To stress the completeness of the victory over the Assyrians Isaiah compares it to earlier deliveries from oppression.
   a. As at the rock (10:26a): Yahweh of Hosts will wield against him a scourge, as when he smote Midian at the rock of Oreb... Through Gideôn Yahweh had beaten the Midianites into submission in the days of the judges. The decisive moment in that victory came when two Midianite leaders were
captured and executed, one at the rock of Oreb (Judg 7:25) and the other nearby. The leaderless Midianites were not able to regroup. They were crushed by the Israelites.

b. As at the sea (10:26b): and his staff will be over the sea and he will lift it up as he did in Egypt. Through Moses at the Red Sea Yahweh had parted the waters to allow Israel to escape from Egyptian bondage (Ex 14:16). The Egyptian army was destroyed and the sea. The Israelites were completely free of Egyptian bondage.

4. Deliverance will be welcomed (10:27a): So it will come to pass in that day that he will remove his burden from upon your shoulder, and his yoke from upon your neck... Isaiah uses two illustrations from everyday life to make this point. Deliverance will be as (1) when a heavy burden is lifted from the shoulders of a slave, or (2) when a yoke is removed from the neck of a beast of burden. God exercises compassion on his people in the midst of the servitude to the Assyrians. One of Isaiah’s favorite figures is that of the removal of a heavy burden.

5. Survival is certain (10:27b): and the yoke will be destroyed because of fatness. Israel is so fat, i.e., stout, his fatness (strength) breaks the Assyrian yoke. Israel cannot be permanently enslaved by Assyria.

COME OF THE ASSYRIAN
10:28-34

A. Approach of the Assyrians (10:28-32):
1. Description of the advance (10:28-29):
   a. A singular army (10:28): He has come against Aiath, he has passed to Migron; at Michmash he deposited his baggage. Isaiah envisioned the Assyrian army advancing from the north against Jerusalem. Each obstacle or outpost is passed. Aiath was about thirty miles northeast of Jerusalem. At this point the enemy has entered the Kingdom of Judah. The exact location of Migron is unknown, but it must have been north of Michmash (7.5 miles north of Jerusalem). There the invader left his baggage so that he might not be encumbered as he marched through the pass of Michmash (1 Sam 13:23).

   b. A mass of warriors (10:29a): They have gone through the pass [saying] at Geba there is a lodging place for us; As the army makes its way through the pass the ranks of the marching units have been broken. Now Isaiah envisions, not a unified army, but a host of individual warriors emerging from the pass at Geba about six miles north of Jerusalem. The weary climbers anticipate making camp at Geba.

2. Reaction to the advance (10:29b-31):
   a. Fear and flight (10:29b): Ramah is terrified, and Gibeah of Saul has fled away. Towns near Geba shake with terror at the host camping in their area. Ramah, about a mile due west of Geba, was terrified. Gibeah of Saul, about two miles south of Ramah, already had evacuated.

   b. Lament and complaint (10:30): Cry aloud with your voice, O daughter of Gallim! Pay attention, O Laishah! Answer her, O Anathoth! The language of description changes to direct address. Isaiah hears desperate cries from the villages that stood between Geba and Jerusalem. An exhortation to cry aloud (i.e., shrilly) is addressed to the daughter (population) of Gallim. Laishah was urged to pay attention, i.e., take heed from the cries of Gallim. Anathoth (3 miles from Jerusalem) was urged to respond in kind to the cries from Laishah and Gallim, villages within earshot of Anathoth.

   b. Flight (10:31): Madmenah has fled. The inhabitants of Gebim have sought refuge. Before the conqueror there is terror and flight. Madmenah and Gebim, villages near Anathoth, are deserted as the Assyrian marches unopposed toward the capital.

3. Threatening gesture (10:32): Yet today in Nob he will halt; His hand he shakes toward the mountain of the daughter of Zion, the hill of

80The contention that Sennacherib actually advanced on Jerusalem from the south is based on 36:2. Commentators generally see the description here as the “ideal” approach of the enemy, having the purpose of merely underscoring the rapid advance of the Assyrians. It may well be, however, that for some tactical reason the Assyrian army dispatched from Lachish made a circuit and did in fact advance on Jerusalem from the north. Too few details of the campaign are known to rule out this possibility.
Jerusalem. The Assyrian intended for the village of Nob, within sight of Jerusalem, to be the staging area for the assault against the capital. There he shook his fist menacingly toward the daughter of Zion, i.e., the citizens of Jerusalem.

B. Action of Yahweh (10:33-34):
1. Lofty trees felled (10:33): Behold, Adonay Yahweh of Hosts is about to cut off the branches with a terrible noise; the great in stature will be hewn down, and the lofty will be brought low. Making threatening gestures was all the Assyrian will be permitted to do. The word behold invites the reader to visualize an unexpected turn of events. For the fifth time in this ch, Isaiah refers to the actions of the sovereign Adonay Yahweh of Hosts. The supreme commander of all armies leads the counterattack on behalf of his people against the previously invincible army of Assyria. The Assyrian army in attack formation on the outskirts of Jerusalem looked like a great forest. Like a mighty Paul Bunyan, Yahweh takes his axe to that forest of men. The tall trees come crashing to the ground.
2. Forest thickets hewn (10:34): He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an iron [axe], and Lebanon by the Mighty One will fall. Isaiah amplifies the points made in v 33. The lofty trees now become the thickets of the forest to signify the vast size of this forest of men. The means by which the forest is felled is an iron axe, the most efficient tool for that purpose. Lebanon refers to the great forests of cedar to the north that represent Assyria. The one who cuts down the forest is called the Mighty One to remove any doubt of his ability to carry through on this promise. In its primary reference this prediction pertains to the slaughter of Sennacherib’s army. Ultimately, however, the prophet is pointing to the fall of the entire Assyrian Empire.

CHAPTER 11
PROGRAM OF IMMANUEL

Assyria was doomed, but Judah had a future. Out of the devastation inflicted by powers like Assyria, a great Ruler will arise from the house of David. In this third member of the great messianic trilogy Isaiah speaks of the appearance of the Ruler. He then describes the subjects of his kingdom and the nature of his rule.

APPEARANCE OF THE RULER
11:1-5

From the earliest times God’s people anticipated the coming of one who is Savior, Prophet, Priest and King. Isaiah stressed four points concerning this Coming One.

A. His Attributes (11:1-2):
1. His humble origins (11:1): Then a shoot shall spring from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. At the time of the Ruler’s appearing the royal family of Judah—the house of David son of Jesse—has been reduced to stump-like stature in the world. The mention of Jesse, who was of course never king, rather than to David indicates the absence of royal status in the house of David at the time of Messiah’s appearing. The house of David, however, still had life in it. Out of that stump comes forth a fragile shoot (chōter). That shoot becomes a branch (nētser) that ultimately bears much fruit. The term fruit refers to spiritual rather than physical prosperity. The reference is to Christ. At the time of his birth the house of David was but an ordinary family in a country under foreign domination.
2. His supernatural endowment (11:2a): The Spirit of Yahweh will rest upon him... The fullness of the Spirit of Yahweh (the Holy Spirit) rests upon him, i.e., he has the gift of the Spirit without measure. Messiah also possesses gifts from the Spirit.
3. His spiritual gifts (11:2b, c, d): Three pairs of often-antagonistic attributes are marvelously combined in him.
   a. Intellectual realm (11:2b): the spirit of wisdom and understanding... Wisdom is the ability to render right decisions. Understanding is insight into the true nature of things. Messiah’s Spirit-
given wisdom stands in stark contrast to the pseudo-wisdom claimed by the king of Assyria (cf. 10:13).  

b. Practical realm (11:2c): the spirit of counsel and might... Messiah possesses the administrative attributes of counsel (ability to devise an adequate plan for any situation) and power (ability to implement his decisions). Counsel/might are a link to 9:6 where these are attributes of the divine King.

c. Spiritual realm (11:2d): the spirit of knowledge and fear of Yahweh. Messiah possesses knowledge (of Yahweh; Prov 1:7; Mt 11:27b) and the fear of Yahweh (true piety and devotion). He is well equipped for leadership.

Messiah’s basic endowment with the Spirit of Yahweh followed by three pairs of qualities attributed to the Spirit adds up to a perfect seven. Messiah will have the Spirit without measure; he therefore will fully be endowed for a reign of perfection (cf. Jn 3:34; Rev 5:6).

B. His Work (11:3-5): Isaiah indicates four dimensions of the work of the coming Davidic king.

1. Focus of his work (11:3a): His delight shall be in the fear of Yahweh... Messiah delights in the pious (those who possess fear of Yahweh). Since this same humble reverence is a characteristic of Messiah (cf. v 2), he takes special pleasure in seeing this piety in his followers.

2. Equity of his work (11:3b-4a):
   a. Described negatively (11:3b): and he will not judge by what his eyes see, nor decide by what his ears hear. Pronouncing wise judgments was the measuring stick of effective rule in the biblical prophets. Messiah decides issues with fairness, not by what his eyes see (outward appearance) or by what his ears hear (hearsay). The king will not ignore obvious evidence; but his abilities of discernment provide him with a “sixth sense” when it comes to getting to the bottom of thorny issues (cf. John 2:25; 7:24).
   b. Described positively (11:4): But with righteousness he will judge the poor, and with uprightness he will decide for the poor of the land. To judge has negative overtones in many cases. When the poor, however, are the ones being judged the term connotes fair judgments. For the poor judgment is almost a synonym for salvation (Pss 72:2; 82:2-4). In a corrupt legal system it is the poor who yearn for a judge committed to righteous judgment.

3. End of his work (11:4b): He will smite the land with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. The word of the Ruler is swift and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb 4:12). His word of judgment is instantly and thoroughly executed (cf. Jn 12:48; Rev 19:13-15). Earth’s blustering rulers often issue impotent edicts that cannot be enforced and are ignored with impunity. This Ruler, however, dispatches those who oppose him with but a word. Land (‘erets) could be earth here and in v 9. Both the narrow and the broad sense of the word are appropriate in this context. Messiah defeats all his foes.

4. Standard of his work (11:5): Righteousness shall be the belt of his loins, and truth the belt about his waist. In the dress of the day the belt (sash) was the final component. It gave definition to the loose-flowing robes and held them in place. To gird the loins (KJV) means to prepare for action. Messiah is girded about with righteousness and faithfulness. So Messiah’s character prepares him for his work of judgment.

KINGDOM OF THE RULER
11:6-9

A. Description (11:6-8):

1. Picture of tranquility (11:6): The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard with the kid shall lie down, the calf, the young lion and the fatling together; and a small lad shall lead them. Isaiah paints a striking picture of the tranquility that will characterize the kingdom of the coming Davidic ruler. He depicts Messiah’s kingdom in terms of

---

82 On the wisdom of Christ, see Jn 2:25; Lk 2:52.
83 Kgs 18:46; 2 Kgs 4:29; 1 Pet 1:13
84 The background of this v may be ancient belt wrestling. The object was to wrest the belt from the opponent. According to this view wearing the belt is figurative for facing a foe.
Paradise restored. Vicious beasts are docile. Wolf, leopard and lion coexist with flocks and herds. Even the most vulnerable (lamb/kid/calf) and the most desirable (fatling) lie down alongside the worst predators. So gentle are these once dreadful beasts that a small lad can lead them about like a shepherd boy might lead his flock.

2. Picture of transformation (11:7): The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion like the ox will eat straw.

The tranquility depicted in v 6 is possible because the very nature of the wild beasts will change. The carnivorous bear and lion will become herbivorous. They will adopt the eating habits of cattle.

3. Picture of restraint (11:8): A nursing child shall play upon the hole of a cobra, and upon the den of the adder the weaned child will put his hand.

The picture of peace, trust and harmony in the messianic kingdom is further developed by portraying a new relationship between the most deadly of animal kind, and the most vulnerable of human-kind. Venomous snakes will not harm children even when they might have reason to feel threatened. The self-preservation instinct is very strong; but in the messianic age the natural tendency of creatures to lash out against perceived threats is restrained. In effect Isaiah depicts even the deadly reptiles as harmless playthings for little children.

B. Location (11:9a): They will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain...

Some look for the word pictures of vv 6-8 to find fulfillment in a renovated creation after the resurrection of the sons of God (Rom 8:19-23). Probably, however, these pictures are Isaiah’s way of emphasizing the transformation that will occur in the citizens of Messiah’s kingdom. Former enemies co-exist harmoniously in his kingdom. Paradise-like conditions will exist, not throughout the globe, but in all God’s holy mountain (i.e., Zion, God’s kingdom).

C. Explanation (11:9b): for the land will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea.

The tranquil state in Messiah’s kingdom is the result of the dissemination of the knowledge of Yahweh throughout the land\textsuperscript{85} or kingdom. Thus the explanation of the amazing tranquility depicted in the preceding vv is the result of the preaching of the gospel through which people come to know Christ as Lord and Savior.

SUBJECTS OF THE RULER
11:10-14

Isaiah follows his usual pattern of radical imagery (vv 6-9) followed by forthright explanation of that imagery. The peaceful co-existence of carnivores, herbivores, reptiles and human-kind is poetic description of the harmonious relationship that will exist between former enemies following gospel transformation.

A. Gathering of his People (11:10-12):

1. Means of gathering (11:10a): It will come to pass in that day that the root of Jesse will stand as an ensign of peoples...

Context indicates that day refers to the time of the coming Davidic ruler. The root of Jesse (cf. 11:1) becomes an ensign (signal, banner) under which peoples, i.e., Gentiles, can rally. The means of gathering the remnant is through the preaching of the gospel.

2. Success of gathering (11:10b): unto him Gentiles will resort; and his resting place will be glorious.

Two things attract these Gentiles to the Davidic Ruler (Messiah). First, the ruler's character attracts them, as does his resting place, i.e., the place where he settles down to rule and live. Since the ruler is clearly Messiah, his resting place must be the NT Zion. That resting place is a glorious attraction to the Gentiles (cf. Isa 2:2-4).

3. Object of gathering (11:11a): It will come to pass in that day that Adonay will again a second time [extend] his hand to acquire the remnant of his people...

In the messianic age Yahweh will reclaim the remnant of his OT people from the lands of their captivity. This will be the second such gathering, the first being when God brought his people out of Pharaoh's bondage. By definition,\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{85}While the term 'eretz can clearly mean earth (cf. Gn 1:1), the first half of v 9 suggests that here the term is used in its restricted sense.
the remnant of Israel was that portion of Jews/Israelites who recognized Jesus as Messiah and rallied to his standard.


In the listing of the nations from which God gathers his people, apparently Isaiah is attempting to specify the four directions of the compass: north (Assyria), south (Egypt, Pathros, Cush), east (Elam and Shinar), and west (islands of the Mediterranean Sea). Such a widespread dispersion of Israelites in Isaiah's day is not attested. The passage assumes, however, that at the time the Davidic ruler appeared, God's old covenant people will be found throughout the Near East.

5. People who are gathered (11:12): He will raise up an ensign for the Gentiles, and will gather the outcasts of Israel, and the dispersed of Judah he will gather from the corners of the earth.

Messianic kingdom citizens are marked by great diversity. Isaiah reiterates and amplifies the announcement of vv 11-12. Again he emphasizes the ensign that Yahweh will erect, viz., the root of David, Messiah (cf. v 10). It is the intention of Yahweh to gather under that ensign three groups: (1) Gentiles, (2) outcasts of Israel the northern kingdom, perhaps equivalent to the Samaritans of the NT, and (3) the dispersed of Judah, i.e., Jews who will become scattered to the four corners of the earth. In the church of Christ God has demonstrated how this bold concept played out in history (cf. Hos 1:11; Ezek 37:15ff).

B. Unity of his People (11:13-14):

1. Reason for the unity (11:13): The jealousy of Ephraim will depart, and those who harass Judah will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, and Judah will not harass Ephraim.

Given the former attitudes of the northern and southern kingdoms, the gathering together of Ephraim and Judah in one body appeared very unlikely. Isaiah anticipates that objection. He explains that the former jealousy and constant agitation between the two former rivals will be a thing of the past. The gospel transforms attitudes, squelches pride, and opens hearts.

2. Result of the unity (11:14): They will swoop down on the Philistines on the west, together they will plunder the sons of the east. Against Edom and Moab, their hand is put forth, and the sons of Ammon will obey them.

The messianic relationship between Ephraim and Judah goes beyond peaceful coexistence. The two former rivals actually will become allies in advancing the frontiers of Messiah's kingdom. Like a giant bird of prey, they will swoop down upon former enemies, viz., the Philistines on the west, and Edom, Moab and Ammon to the east. This conquest must be spiritual, not physical because (1) the context is messianic, and (2) the peaceful character of Messiah's kingdom already has been stressed in vv 6-9. The prophet foresaw ultimate victory for Christ's kingdom. In OT battle language the expansion of Messiah’s kingdom is depicted.

WORK OF THE RULER
11:15-16

A. Barriers Removed (11:15):

1. Egyptian sea (11:15a): Yahweh will utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea… The barriers standing between people and the promised land of redemption will be removed. The Egyptian (Red) Sea and the (Euphrates) River are symbols of whatever impedes the movement of enslaved people to the Land of Promise. At the exodus under Moses, God had made a way through the Red Sea. Under Messiah God removes the tongue of the Egyptian Sea, i.e., he makes possible a greater deliverance than that of Moses.

2. The River (11:15b): and he will wave his hand over the River with his scorching wind, and smite it into seven channels that men can cross dry-shod. The Euphrates River, which seemed unfordable, will be broken up into rivulets through which pilgrims are able to walk dry shod. The point is that nothing can prevent those whom God

---

86Several lands are mentioned to which God's people already had been scattered in Isaiah's day. See Hos 9:3, 6; Isa 7:18; 18:1ff; Joel 3:6ff.
gathers through the gospel from enjoying the glories of the promised kingdom.

**B. Highway Built (11:16):** There will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of his people who are left as there was for Israel in the day he went up from the land of Egypt. Those in Assyria, the land of captivity, will have a highway to travel upon to the Land of Promise. That replicates what took place when Israel left Egypt in the days of Moses (Ex 13:18). The highway concept, which is common in Isaiah, also appears in the NT. A highway is that way that is clearly marked, a way in which God is leading. Though many mysterious passages may perplex believers, the way out of the bondage of sin, through the wilderness of hardship and temptation, across Jordan and home to heavenly Canaan has been clearly revealed in the word!

**CHAPTER 12**

**PRAISE FOR IMMANUEL**

The short ch 12 contains the praise of the redeemed in that day, i.e., the messianic age, together with one additional precious promise from Yahweh. The theme of the praise is salvation (mentioned three times), a fitting climax to the Book of Immanuel.

**INDIVIDUAL PRAISE**

**12:1-2**

**A. Thanksgiving Declared (12:1):** Then you will say in that day, I will give thanks to you, O Yahweh, because, though you were angry with me, your anger turned aside, and you comforted me. This song of the redeemed is the counterpart to the song of Moses (Ex 15) that the Israelites sung after being delivered from Pharaoh. The pronouns in vv 1-2 are singular, indicating that a redeemed individual is in view. This individual breaks forth into praise because he has personally experienced the change from divine condemnation to divine comfort. Yahweh is angry with those who rebel against him; he comforts those who turn to him with penitent heart.

**B. Trust Declared (12:2):** Behold, O God of my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid, for my strength and my song is Adonay Yahweh, and he has become my salvation. The penitent sinner addresses Yahweh as God of my salvation, i.e., my saving God. The comfort of the preceding v is now defined as salvation or deliverance. Behold introduces something shocking or at least unexpected. The faith that brings salvation is described as trust. The penitent soul no longer is afraid of God, or of the future. Whereas there once was sadness, now there is a song. The penitent proclaims God as his song, now that Yahweh has become his savior.

**CORPORATE PRAISE**

**12:3-6**

**A. Reason for Praise (12:3):** So you will draw water with joy from the wells of salvation. The pronoun now is plural. In response to the praise of the penitent soul, Yahweh adds another wonderful messianic promise. His people in that day will continue to drink the water of life from wells of salvation. Earlier Isaiah used the waters of Shiloah to symbolize divine supplies that are trustworthy (cf. 8:6). Those waters will be replaced by wells of salvation from which believers may keep on drawing. The figure suggests both constant need on the part of the people, and inexhaustible supply of deliverance on the part of Yahweh.

**B. Exhortation to Praise (12:4):**

1. To give thanks (12:4a): You will say in that day, Give thanks to Yahweh, call upon his name. This v opens with the same words as v 1 except that the pronoun here is plural. Individual members of the body of Christ give thanks as well as the body collectively. The added promise stimulated even more vigorous praise, this time on the part of all of God’s people. They encourage one another to give
thanks unto Yahweh, i.e., live a life of gratitude to the Savior. They urge one another to call upon his name, i.e., the name of the Savior. Prayer is the outward demonstration of the faith and confidence of one who has been saved.

2. To proclaim his praise (12:4b): Make known among the peoples his deeds, proclaim that his name is exalted. Those who have been saved urge one another to make known among the peoples (Gentiles) Yahweh's saving deeds. They are urged to tell all who will listen that Yahweh's name (person, nature, character) is exalted, i.e., he is to receive all the glory and honor that is due the Creator.

C. Direction of Praise (12:5): Sing praises to Yahweh because he has done gloriously; let this be made known throughout all the earth. The community of the redeemed is urged to direct songs of praise to Yahweh. They are to celebrate the fact that he has done gloriously, i.e., all that Yahweh has done to make salvation possible is glorious. Those who experience his salvation want all the earth to hear of the mighty deeds of Yahweh.

D. Vigor of Praise (12:6): Shout and cry out for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the holy one of Israel. The praise directed to Yahweh is both vigorous (shout and cry out) and joyful. Every inhabitant of messianic Zion is called upon to make this praise the priority of his life. The reason for such joyous praise is the assurance that the holy one of Israel (Yahweh) dwelled in their midst, i.e., in the midst of messianic Zion.

BOOK THREE
BOOK OF BURDENS
Isaiah 13-23

The third major division of the Book of Isaiah consists of a series of prophetic oracles most of which concern Gentile peoples. Similar oracles (against Damascus and Assyria) have appeared previously; other such oracles are found in subsequent chs. Collections of this type of material are also found at the conclusion of Jeremiah and the middle of Ezekiel. Isaiah placed this largely negative section immediately following the song of thanksgiving for a glorious future. The prophet clearly saw that the new day celebrated in ch 12 could come only after every adversary of God's people had been brought low.

The Book of Burdens derives its name from the recurrence of the Hebrew word massā’, translated burden (KJV). Studies have indicated two possible meanings: (1) load, or burden; and (2) utterance. The former meaning suggests that the consequences of sin are a burden that must be borne by the guilty. Since, however, the folk prophets are said to have seen burdens (Lam 2:14b) the more neutral is probably the original meaning of the term. Thus a massā’ is an oracle (NIV) or utterance.

The chronological placement of the foreign nation oracles is difficult. The only clue is in 14:28, which refers to the year King Ahaz died in 715 BC. Assuming this date applies to all the oracles of this section, then the collection was composed comparatively late in the prophet’s ministry.

The section bristles with difficulties. In some cases the nation being addressed is uncertain. Documenting the fulfillment of some of these prophecies is not possible. While the majority of the material concerns the fate of foreign nations, some passages are addressed to Judah. Why are two woe oracles included (17:12-14; 18:1-7)? What principle accounts for the order in which the nations are mentioned? These are but some of the problems associated with the Book of Burdens.

89 In the Greek manuscripts of Jeremiah the foreign nation oracles also have been placed in the middle of the book.
90 Copass, IPP, p. 51.
91 The term massā’ appears in 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1,
11, 13; 22:1; 23:1; and 30:6. Elsewhere in the OT the term appears in Jer 23:33ff.; Ezek 12:10; Nah 1:1; Hab 1:1; Zech 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1; Lam 2:14; Prov 30:1; 2 Kgs 9:25; and 2 Chr 24:27.
93 Judah is addressed in 14:1-4a; 17:4-11; and apparently in 22:1-25.
The most important consideration is the purpose of this unit within the overall argument of the book. Isaiah had condemned placing trust in anything or anyone other than God. Ultimately the nations could provide no salvation for Judah. They themselves stood condemned before God. Thus this section underscores the complete folly of trusting in doomed nations. In this respect the unit builds on themes already introduced in the Book of Immanuel. Secondarily, the Book of Burdens serves to stress (1) the disastrous results of pride; (2) the absolute sovereignty of God in the affairs of men; and (3) the ability of God to make good on his promise of a trans-national kingdom headed by a descendant of David.

Judgment is the major theme of the Book of Burdens. Here Isaiah pronounced God’s verdict against every worldly attribute that might form a basis of confidence for any people. Isaiah drove toward the conclusion that all that the world has to offer in the way of culture, wealth, wisdom and power adds up to zero in the final analysis. Overlap between the sub-sections of this unit is apparent. Nevertheless, these oracles have been grouped in such a way as to stress God’s judgment against: worldly (1) glory: Babylon (13:1-14:27); (2) alliances: near neighbors (14:28-18:7); (3) wisdom: Egypt (chs 19-20); (4) Schemes: conspiring nations (chs 21-22); and (5) wealth: Tyre (ch 23).

The menacing shadow of Assyria can be discerned throughout this section. The nations mentioned are precisely those which have either already been defeated by Assyria or are about to be defeated, or else they are nations that participated in anti-Assyrian coalitions. Just as Ahaz had looked to Assyria for help against the Syro-Ephraimitic coalition, his successors were tempted to turn to Babylon for aid against Assyria. Finally, Isaiah aimed to reinforce his contention that Yahweh alone was sufficient for the security of Jerusalem. Babylon would not be able to extricate Judah from the grip of Assyria.

Though the title is burden of Babylon, prophecies of the overthrow of Assyria by Yahweh are also found herein. In this respect this first burden is similar to the burden of Damascus in 17:1-11.

Most commentators connect the burden of Babylon with Cyrus’ invasion of Babylon in 539 BC. In 13:2-18, however, those who are under attack are designated in ways that fit as well or better the Assyrians. The destruction of Babylon is described in 13:19-22, but in language that fits better the Assyrian destruction of the city in 689 BC rather than that of Cyrus in 539 BC. The entire burden is summarized in a first-person epilogue (14:22-27) that speaks of the destruction of the city Babylon and the smashing of the Assyrian Empire.

WORLDLY GLORY: BABYLON

The burden of Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw. The burden of Babylon stands first in the collection of Gentile oracles. Why this position of prominence for a place not yet mentioned in the book? First, this oracle is the most comprehensive and most important in the foreign nation collection. Second, culturally Babylon dominated the world of Isaiah’s day. Powerful Assyrian kings recognized the importance of also being crowned king of Babylon. Third, this ancient city epitomized worldly glory. Fourth, because of its prominence, Babylon was well suited to symbolize the world in general and Mesopotamia in particular. Fifth, Babylon was involved at every opportunity in fomenting rebellion against Assyria. Just as Ahaz had looked to Assyria for help against the Syro-Ephraimitic coalition, his successors were tempted to turn to Babylon for aid against Assyria. Finally, Isaiah aimed to reinforce his contention that Yahweh alone was sufficient for the security of Jerusalem. Babylon would not be able to extricate Judah from the grip of Assyria.

Though the title is burden of Babylon, prophecies of the overthrow of Assyria by Yahweh are also found herein. In this respect this first burden is similar to the burden of Damascus in 17:1-11.

Most commentators connect the burden of Babylon with Cyrus’ invasion of Babylon in 539 BC. In 13:2-18, however, those who are under attack are designated in ways that fit as well or better the Assyrians. The destruction of Babylon is described in 13:19-22, but in language that fits better the Assyrian destruction of the city in 689 BC rather than that of Cyrus in 539 BC. The entire burden is summarized in a first-person epilogue (14:22-27) that speaks of the destruction of the city Babylon and the smashing of the Assyrian Empire.

YAHWEH’S PREPARATIONS

From Gn 11:9 onward to Rev 14:8, Babylon becomes virtually synonymous with wickedness and hostile pride. Babylon represents civilization as the stronghold of darkness.

In the treatment of chs 13-14 Erlandsson, _BB_, has been closely followed.
The opening vv of this unit establish a general principle. God hates human pride, and he will bring it to the ground. The judgments on Assyria and Babylon are manifestations of the day of Yahweh. All proud nations will one day share her fate.

A. Attacking Army (13:2-5):

1. Assembling of the army (13:2): Upon the bare mountain lift up an ensign, raise a voice to them; wave a hand that they may enter the gates of nobles. Isaiah first described the preparation for God’s day against the proud sinners. Probably it is Yahweh himself who issues the commands of v 2 to his agents (the prophets). Through their prophetic oracles, they are to summon, as it were, a great army. Bare mountain indicates the remote and comparatively unpopulated area where the attackers assemble. An ensign (signal flag) on a bare mountain could be seen at a distance. It directed troop movements toward the objective. A voice (command, shout) arouses those nearer the scene. The wave of a hand points to the urgency of the matter and the direction of the attack. The destination of the attackers is the gates of nobles does not necessarily imply that a particular city is in view at this point. The borders of a land were sometimes designated as gates (Jer 15:7; Nah 3:13).

2. Components of the army (13:3): As for me, I commanded my consecrated ones, also I have called my mighty men for my anger, even my proudly exulting ones. By placing the first person pronoun in an emphatic position, Yahweh indicates that he is responsible for the gathering of troops depicted in the previous v. These troops are called my consecrated ones because they are engaged in a holy war against the enemies of Yahweh. That they are skillful and powerful in war is indicated by the designation my mighty men. The purpose of this army is to serve as an instrument for my anger, i.e., to execute God’s wrath on proud sinners. That these warriors are cocky as well as competent is indicated by the designation my proudly exulting ones (lit., the exalters of my pride).

3. Approach of the army (13:4):

a. A great host (13:4a): The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like that of a great people! The prophet first hears the noise of a multitude. The noise sounds to Isaiah like a mass of people. The use of bare mountain in v 2, mountains here and Medes in v 17 suggest that the army originated on the great Iranian plateau.

b. A unified host (13:4b): The sound of tumult of kingdoms, of nations gathered together. The attacking host is a great people consisting of representatives of several kingdoms and nations. The emphasis here is on the unity of the attacking army. It is made up of units of various kingdoms all gathered together for one purpose.

c. A divinely led host (13:4b): Yahweh of Hosts is mustering the battle host. Isaiah removes any possible hint of hope for proud sinners. Not only is this vast army assembled by divine order, it is lead by Yahweh of Hosts himself.

4. Origin of the army (13:5a): [They] are coming from a distant land, from the end of the heavens...

Having stressed the size of the attacking force, Isaiah now accents the origin and purpose of that army. He does not identify the army's precise point of origin. Instead he indicates that the attackers are coming from a distant land. The end of the heavens indicates where the horizon seems to touch the earth.

5. Purpose of the army (13:5b): Yahweh and the instruments of his indignation, to ruin the entire earth. Again Isaiah stresses that it is Yahweh who leads forth from that distant land the instruments of his indignation, i.e., the army through which he will execute his wrath against the proud sinners. The purpose of this force is to ruin the entire earth. Earth probably refers to the entire empire of Assyria (or Babylon).

Thus far nothing has been said about the destination of Yahweh’s army. Obviously the army attacks some nation that Yahweh considers hostile.

100Ensign (nes) is a favorite word of Isaiah: 5:26; 11:12; 18:3; 33:23 [sail]; 62:10.

101The Medes are designated time and again in the Assyrian royal inscriptions as “the distant-dwelling Medes.” In 5:26, however, Isaiah uses the same language for Assyria.
to his people. Nothing in the text thus far supports the notion that the attacking army is that of Cyrus, and the object of the attack is sixth century Babylon.

PICTURES OF YAHWEH’S DAY
13:6-13

A. Terrors of Yahweh’s Day (13:6-8):
1. Exhortation in advance (13:6): Howl! for the day of Yahweh draws near, like destruction from Shaddai it comes. The opening exhortation is appropriate. Yahweh’s intervention on the stage of history brings devastation. The destruction administered by Yahweh’s army is the day of Yahweh, i.e., the day of Yahweh’s vindication. That day draws near. For sinners the day of Yahweh is always at hand. Contemplating the implications of Yahweh’s judgment visitation should produce agonizing wails from those destined to be affected by it. Yahweh’s day involves destruction such as only Shaddai\(^{102}\) (the Almighty) can produce.

2. Description of results (13:7-8): Isaiah now describes the effect that the day of Yahweh will have on humanity.
   a. Flagging courage (13:7): Therefore all hands will droop, and every man’s heart will melt. Because of the overwhelming destruction that is coming, the hands of the sinners will droop, i.e., they are helpless to defend themselves. Every man’s heart will melt, i.e., they have no will to resist.
   b. Mounting consternation (13:8a): They will become dismayed; pangs and sorrows they will seize; like a woman in labor they will writhe. Sinners offer no resistance in the day of Yahweh because they are dismayed. Pangs and sorrows they will seize, i.e., they choose to respond to the crisis with panic and paralyzing regret. They write in pain like a woman in childbirth.
   c. Final embarrassment (13:8b): They shall look in amazement one at another; their faces shall be faces of flame. The sinners are confused and perplexed by the events. Their faces are flushed with embarrassment over having no response to the crisis.

B. Darkness of Yahweh’s Day (13:9-10): The horror of Yahweh’s day is underlined even more strongly in these vv.
1. A cruel day (13:9a): Behold the day of Yahweh comes! It is cruel, with wrath and fierce anger. Behold is used whenever Isaiah announces something of tremendous significance. Announcements such as this warn sinners and encourage repentance. They also encourage those who suffer at the hands of wicked men to realize that they live in a moral universe where eventually righteousness triumphs. Yahweh’s day is a manifestation of his wrath and fierce anger. That day is cruel in the sense that the day of grace and mercy is over.
2. A judgment day (13:9b): [It comes] to make the land a waste, and its sinners it shall destroy out of it. Yahweh’s day makes the land (or earth or empire) a waste. The purpose of Yahweh’s intervention is religious, not political. He will destroy sinners out of it, i.e., out of their earthly habitation. In these vv Isaiah seems to use language that transcends judgment of any particular people. What he says certainly applies to final judgment. Local judgments, however, are meant to stir recognition of final accountability.
3. A gloom day (13:10): For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark in is going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. Yahweh’s day is a day of gloom for sinners. The stars refuse to give their light. The sun is extinguished. That means that even the pale reflected light of the moon cannot be seen. In the

---

\(^{102}\) The day of Yahweh can mean judgment for Israel (Amos 5:18-20; Isa 2:12f; Ezek 5; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; Zeph 1:7, 14) or for other nations (Jer 46:10; Obad 15). All lesser interventions come to a head in the actual coming of Yahweh himself at the end of time.

\(^{103}\) Shaddai as a divine title is used forty-eight times in the Old Testament, thirty-one of those times in the Book of Job. Seven times it is prefaced by 'El. The translation Almighty goes back at least to the time of the LXX. Rabbinic analysis of the term suggests the meaning self-sufficient one. Modern scholars have suggested the term goes back to a root meaning to destroy, hence Shaddai = my destroyer. More popular is the view that Shaddai is derived from an Akkadian word meaning mountain, hence Shaddai = (God) of the mountain.
creation account the sun was made to rule the day, and the moon to rule the night. In terms of celestial light, sun and moon are rulers. Extinguishing those luminaries signals the fall of earthly rulers great and small.

C. Significance of Yahweh’s Day (13:11-13):
1. A day of punishment (13:11):
   a. For wickedness (13:11a): I will punish the world for [its] evil, and the wicked for their iniquity... Yahweh now speaks personally to announce what he will do in the coming judgment day. He will punish (lit., visit) the evil done on earth.104 World (tebel) implies that this judgment embraced a kingdom of world-wide influence. Those under attack are called wicked because they have committed iniquity in Yahweh’s eyes.
   b. For pride (13:11b): I will make to cease the pride of the arrogant, and the boasting of the violent I will lay low. The nature of the evil and iniquity being punished is now indicated. Key words from the pride-motif are used. The wicked are those who are arrogant, boastful and violent. Such are brought down, i.e., humbled, in Yahweh’s day. Violent (‘ārîtsîm) is used of the Assyrians in 29:5 (cf. 29:20). There is reason for all haughty people to fear Yahweh’s day.

2. A day of death (13:12): I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, even a man than the pure gold of Ophir. In Yahweh’s day the population is radically thinned. In the destruction men become so scarce that they cannot even be bought or redeemed with the most precious gold. Thus, only a remnant survives. Ophir was a district, probably in southern Arabia, which was known for its fine gold.

3. An earth-shaking day (13:13): Therefore the heavens I will cause to tremble, and the earth will shake from its place in the burning anger of Yahweh of Hosts and in the day of his fierce anger. Before the fierce anger of Yahweh of Hosts, heavens and earth tremble and shake. The God who created the universe has the power to rattle it at will. Such language is not necessarily fulfilled in the physical realm. The shaking of heavens and earth in biblical prophecy signals the fall of a great power. The language, however, is applied to the final judgment as well. The darkness of heavenly bodies (v 10), and the shaking of heavens and earth (v 13) are concrete ways of describing the gloom and upheaval that results from the overthrow of a proud and powerful nation.

As in the first unit of the burden, there is nothing in the second unit to identify specifically those who are under attack by Yahweh’s army. They are called wicked, evil, arrogant and violent in v 11. They appear to be a world power. The language could just as easily be applied to eighth century Assyria as to sixth century Babylon.

YAHWEH’S ARMY 13:14-18

A. Focus on Yahweh’s Enemy (13:14-16):
1. Flight (13:14): It shall be as a hunted gazelle or as a flock that no one gathers, each will turn to his own people, and everyone will flee to his land. Those who are fleeing are not identified, nor does the v indicate directly the reason for the flight. Yahweh’s army, however, is on the march. That appears to be the reason for the flight. Two pictures are introduced to emphasize the plight of Yahweh’s enemies. The wicked are like a hunted gazelle.

This shy animal can only elude its pursuers by darting away. Sheep without a shepherd are quickly dispersed and lost. Under attack by Yahweh’s army the enemy is as helpless to defend itself as the gazelle and the sheep. The many mercenaries serving in the enemy force will flee to their own lands to escape the onslaught of Yahweh’s army.

2. Slaughter (13:15): Everyone who is found will be thrust through, and anyone captured will fall by the sword. Those who cannot flee will hide from Yahweh’s agents. Every one of them is found and thrust through. Those who are caught in flight likewise fall by the sword.

3. Atrocities (13:16): Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be looted, and their wives ravished. War is brutal. The third person plural possessive pronouns here,
and in the following v, refer back to the proud and godless tyrants of v 11. The violent men are treated as they have treated others. Even infants do not escape. They are dashed to pieces before the eyes of their helpless parents. Houses are looted. Women are ravished, i.e., raped. Clearly those who punish violent men are themselves ruthless.

B. Focus on Yahweh’s Agents (13:17-18):
1. Their ethnic identity (13:17a): Behold, I am about to raise up against them the Medes… Behold introduces the unexpected. As in the preceding v those under attack are identified only by a third plural suffix. Yahweh intends to arouse the Medes against those enemies.
   In Isaiah’s day the Medes battled the Assyrians during the reigns of Shalmaneser (727-722 BC) and Sargon (722-705 BC). During Sennacherib’s reign (705-681 BC) the Medes were actively supporting Babylon and Elam against the Assyrians. In 612 BC the Medes were instrumental in conquering Assyrian Asshur and Nineveh. In the sixth century the Medes were junior partners in a coalition with the Persians that conquered Babylon. The history of the Medes outlined above makes it highly likely that the proud sinners who were the object of their attack in the previous vv were the Assyrians.
   2. Their dedication (13:17b): who do not delight in silver or desire gold. Booty and wealth did not interest the Medes. The proud sinners will not be able to buy off this foe.
   3. Their ferocity (13:18): Bows will dash to pieces young men; they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb; their eye will not spare children. The Medes were noted for their prowess with the bow. Their arrows will rip the proud sinners to pieces. Upon infants they will show no mercy.

BABYLON’S DESTRUCTION
13:19-22

A. Sudden Destruction (13:19):
1. Glory of Babylon (13:19a): Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride… For the first time in the oracle Babylon is mentioned. No longer does the prophet speak of a population ravished by warfare; he speaks now of the destruction of a city. In Isaiah’s day Babylon emerged as the cultural and economic superior to the Assyrian cities to the north. Babylon was the most serious rival to Assyrian political dominance.
   2. Babylon’s overthrow (13:19b): will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. Isaiah saw Babylon’s fall as a supernatural judgment, like the judgment that befell Sodom and Gomorrah. The point is not the manner of Babylon’s fall, but the suddenness and thoroughness of it.

B. Ultimate Desolation (13:20-22): Isaiah uses traditional language of devastation to describe what will become of Babylon. Similar language is found in Assyrian annals describing the ruination of Elam, as well as in treaty curses.
   1. No permanent occupation (13:20a): It shall never be inhabited, nor shall it be occupied from generation to generation. The site of Babylon is deserted. In 689 BC Sennacherib totally demolished the city; but it was restored by Esarhaddon about eleven years later. The city suffered much damage when Cyrus conquered the place in 539 BC. Over time, however, the city declined and eventually ceased to be inhabited.
   2. No transient residents (13:20b): The Arabian shall not pitch his tent there, nor shepherds cause [their flocks] to lie down there. Transitory desert travelers do not settle in Babylon’s ruins. Shepherds do not use her ruins for bedding down the flock.

105Writers after the fifth century used the term Medes to refer to the Persians. But it is hardly likely that any writer earlier than the fifth century would have designated the Persians by the name of their bitter rivals the Medes.
106According to the Greek historian Xenophon, Cyrus acknowledged that the Medes had served his cause without thought of monetary reward.
107Other Babylon prophecies are found in Isa 21:1-10; 46:1f; 47:1-5; and Jer 51-52.
109For a convenient survey of the various stages in the decline of Babylon, see James E. Smith, "The Fall of Babylon in History and Prophecy," Seminary Review 17(Fall, 1970).
3. Occupied by desert creatures (13:21-22a):
   a. Houses (13:21): The wild desert beasts will lie there, and their houses will be full of howling creatures; the ostriches will live there, and the shaggy goats will dance about. Babylon will not utterly be abandoned. Instead of sheep lying in its ruins, wild desert creatures (ṣîyîyîm) will lie there. Babylon's houses will be occupied by howling creatures (ʾōchîm). Context seems to require this term to refer to some animal. Owls (bʾnōt yaʾnāh) and shaggy goats (ṣîʾûrîm) make their homes there.
   b. Palaces (13:22a): Hyenas will howl within their castles and jackals in her luxurious palaces... Babylon's palaces were once known for song and merriment. As a result of Yahweh's judgment, they will be filled with mournful shrieks of desert creatures. Hyenas and jackals will howl there.

C. Certain Judgment (13:22b): her time has nearly come, and her days will not be prolonged. Babylon's days are numbered. In prophetic vision, her judgment is near at hand. Babylon is not a reliable ally in the uprising against the Assyrians. Without repentance her doom is inevitable.

CHAPTER 14

GOD’S PEOPLE AND GENTILES

FUTURE OF ISRAEL

A. Election (14:1a): For Yahweh will show compassion to Jacob, and he will yet choose Israel. The fall of the oppressor poetically described in the previous ch, demonstrated Yahweh's justice; it also revealed his compassion for his people. The (Assyrian) oppressor must fall so God's people can be free. Yahweh will choose Israel anew as his people, the vehicle through which he will implement his plan for the world. Isaiah prophetically outlines the future of Israel after the fall of the oppressor. The verb choose is used of the original election of Israel (Ex 19:3b-8); it is also used, especially in Psalms, of Yahweh’s choice of David and Zion (Ps 89:3, 19; 132:13).

B. Restoration (14:1b): He will cause them to rest upon their land. In the overthrow of the oppressor Yahweh will cause his people to rest upon their land. They, however, did not receive rest in the fullest sense of that word. They were still subject to foreign powers for many years to come. Only with the arrival of the rest-bringer (Mt 11:28) did Israel come to know the rest here promised. Rest refers to the total well-being of chosen ones who are brought into Messiah’s kingdom through obedience to the gospel.

C. Enlargement (14:1c): The stranger will be joined unto them, and they will be attached unto the house of Jacob. Strangers (i.e., foreigners; Gentiles) will be part of the chosen people. Resident aliens formed a distinct class in ancient Israel with specified legal rights and privileges. Isaiah anticipates a day when these people will be totally assimilated into Israel, i.e., the body of the elect. The Israel of this passage is constitutionally different from Israel prior to exile. Clearly through the gospel Gentiles have become part of the Israel of God, the holy nation of 1 Pet 2:9.

---

110Essentially NKJV; BV; NRSV. NEB render: marmots. The term sîyîyîm refers to inhabitants of the sîyîd (dry steppes) either human (Isa 23:13; Ps 72:9), or animals (Isa 34:14; Jer 50:39). The reference is not to any specific animal.
111So NRSV; BV; and essentially ASV. Other renderings: Owls (JB; NIV; NASB); hooded owls (CEV); jackals (NIV); porcupines (NEB).
112This terminology appears eight times in the Bible and is properly rendered owls by KJV; NEB; NIV. Other English versions render ostriches. G.R. Driver identified the bird as the scops owl. This species is a summer visitor to Palestine. The small bird (7.5 inches long) is seldom seen, but is well-known from its monotonous single whistle note. “Birds in the Old Testament; I Birds in the Law,” PEQ (1955): 5-20.
113In four passages KJV has rendered this term satyr or demon (Lv 17:7; 2 Chr 11:15; Isa 13:21; 34:14). Here the LXX, Syriac and Targum understand the term to refer to demons. Isaiah did not believe in the superstition of demons in goat-form. But he may be employing poetic accommodation to that superstition. The meaning then is that the ruins of Babylon will be regarded as haunted.
114So most English versions. Other renderings: wolves (ASV); jackals (NIV; NEB).
115So most English versions. Other renderings: wolves (NEB; CEV); dragons (NIV).
D. Assistance (14:2a): Peoples will take them and bring them unto their place. Peoples (i.e., Gentiles) will extend a helping hand to Israel (God's people). An example of that helping hand was Cyrus who liberated physical Israel from exile. Throughout history, however, others in positions of power, wittingly or unwittingly, have rendered assistance to God's people.

E. Role Reversal (14:2b): The house of Israel shall take possession of them upon the land of Yahweh for male and female servants. They will be captors of their captors. They shall rule over their oppressors. The relation between captors and captives will be reversed. Isaiah foresaw a day when those once hostile to God's people (their oppressors; captors) become slaves to the house of Israel upon the land of Yahweh, i.e., within the kingdom of God. This is best taken as a reference to the new Israel of God—the church of Christ—conquering the nations through the power of the gospel. Those who dedicate their lives to the furtherance of the gospel have volunteered to be slaves in perpetuity to Christ and his kingdom.

F. Boldness (14:3-4a):
1. Time of boldness (14:3): It will come to pass when Yahweh causes you to rest from your toil, distress, and hard service that he imposed upon you... Isaiah speaks to Israel in direct address. Israel will mock the former oppressor. The toil, distress and hard service imposed on them by Yahweh are over. The terminology here is similar to that used to describe Israel's suffering under the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus (Ex 1:14). Yahweh will now give them rest, i.e., relief from that wretched condition. Isaiah underscores how complete Israel's deliverance is.
2. Expression of boldness (14:4a): that you will lift up this proverb over the king of Babylon. Collectively and boldly the oppressed address a taunt song to the tyrant. They fear him no longer. From 729 BC the kings of Assyria assumed the title king of Babylon. They submitted themselves to the priests of Marduk and adopted the gods of Babylon. The death of Sargon, king of Assyria and Babylon, enabled Marduk-apal-iddina (biblical Merodach-Baladan) to seize power in Babylon and orchestrate an empire-wide rebellion against the Assyrians. It is to the Assyrian king that the taunt song is addressed, not to the successors of Nebuchadnezzar in sixth-century Babylon as most commentators assume.

FALL OF THE TYRANT
14:4b-21

The taunt song over the tyrant is one of the most remarkable poems in the OT. It contains four stanzas each describing a different scene.

A. Tranquility on Earth (14:4b-8):
1. Tyrant’s judgment is complete (14:4b-5):
   a. Identity of the fallen (14:4b): How has the oppressor ceased, the proud city ceased. The poem begins with a word (’êk) that expresses astonishment and feigns lamentation. The surprise is understandable. The oppressor of the world had disappeared from the scene. His proud city, the cultural and political capital of the world, had come to an end. That such a rapid and unforeseen turn of events was even possible amazed former oppressed peoples.
   b. Assignment of responsibility (14:5): Yahweh has shattered the rod of the wicked, the staff of rulers. Isaiah explains how it was possible for such a great empire to collapse, virtually over night. Yahweh gets the credit. By means of rod and staff the wicked tyrant had exercised power. Striking and smiting were the means that the tyrant had used to keep subject peoples in line. Yahweh, however, has now shattered these symbols of the tyrant’s power.
2. Tyrant’s judgment is just (14:6): He who smites peoples in wrath, who smites without turning aside, ruling nations in anger, with a persecution that none restrained. Yahweh's action against the tyrant is justified. The tyrant was always smiting people in his anger, i.e., without restraint of any kind. The tyrant smote without turning aside, i.e., the blows were unrelenting. He hunted or persecuted people without restraint in order to bring them under the rule of his iron fist.
3. Tyrant’s judgment is joyous (14:7-8):
   a. Joy among peoples (14:7): The whole earth is at rest, is quiet. They burst forth with singing. Now that the ruthless tyrant is dead, the earth is again at rest and quiet (šāq’tāh), a word that is used in Judg 3:30 for the rest that Israel enjoyed after deliverance. People burst forth in songs of celebration.
   b. Joy in the forest (14:8): Also the cypresses rejoice for you, the cedars of Lebanon [saying] Now that you have lain down, the feller will not come up against us. Nature joins Israel in exultation over the fall of the tyrant. The trees had reason to rejoice, for the tyrant had denuded great stretches of forest for his building projects and military machine. The great trees in the Lebanon Mountains were highly valued in the ancient world from the earliest times. Compare the boast of Sennacherib that he had ascended to the heights of Lebanon to cut down cedars and cypresses (37:24). Poetically those same cedars and cypresses are envisioned celebrating the death of the tyrant. No more will that feller (woodcutter) come their way.

B. Commotion in Sheol (14:9-11):
   1. Stirring of Sheol (14:9):
      a. General stir (14:9a): Sheol from beneath is stirred for you to meet you when you come down… The scene shifts from earth to Sheol, the abode of the dead. The tyrant, though dead, still exists, but now in a different sphere. Isaiah imagines how it will be when the tyrant enters that realm. Life in Sheol is depicted along the lines of life on earth.
      b. Royal stir (14:9b): it rouses for you the spirits, all the he-goats of the earth. It rouses from their thrones all kings of nations. Former kings arise from their thrones in surprise and mock homage. The spirits (r̲ph̲ā’îm) are the inhabitants of Sheol. The particular spirits who are mentioned are the he-goats, i.e., the princes, and all kings.
   2. Taunt of the spirits (14:10-11):
      a. Taunt of weakness (14:10): All of them answer and say unto you: Also you have become weak like us; you can be compared to us. The royal figures in Sheol mocked the tyrant as he entered the domain of the dead. From the pinnacle of power he had descended into the shadowy abyss where all are equally powerless.
      b. Taunt of humiliation (14:11): Your pride is brought down to Sheol, the music of your harps. Under you the worm is spread, your covering is maggots. Again Isaiah focuses on the cause of the downfall of the tyrant, viz., his pride. The proud culture of Mesopotamia manifested itself in many ways, not the least of which was in music. Now the music of the harps is silent. No longer is there spread under the king a luxurious carpet, only the worm. Once he was covered with rich and varied garments, but now his covering is maggots. This is a poetic picture of bodily decomposition in the grave.

C. Frustration in Aspiration (14:12-15):
   1. Tyrant’s fall (14:12): Like the first stanza of this poem, this one begins with how, a term that indicates lamentation and perhaps amazement. Both the suddenness and completeness of the tyrant’s fall produce wonder in the poet’s heart.
      a. A falling star (14:12a): How you have fallen from heaven O day star, son of the morning! The tyrant’s demise is compared first to a falling star. From the height of the political heavens, where he had shone in glory and splendor, the king has plummeted in disgrace into Sheol. From the height of the political heavens, where he had shone in glory and splendor, the king has plummeted in disgrace into Sheol.116 The comparison of a king to a star also occurs in Nm 24:17. Lucifer (KJV)—Light Bearer—clearly is the Mesopotamian tyrant, not Satan. The view that this passage refers to the fall of Satan in Lk 10:18 can be traced back to Tertullian (c. AD 180). No other scripture, however, indicates that when Satan fell he entered Sheol.
   b. A felled tree (14:12b): You have been cut down to earth, you who brought down the nations! Second, the tyrant’s fall is compared to the felling of a great tree. Once tall, powerful, and towering over the other trees in the political forest, he now lies prostrate and dead.
   2. Tyrant’s frustrated ambitions (14:13-14):
      a. His inflated ambitions (14:13): As for you, you said in your heart, To the heavens I will ascend! Above the stars of God I will set my throne that I may sit in the mount of meeting in the furthest parts of the north. The contrast between what the tyrant intended and what he experienced is now
brought out. He had not planned to fall from heaven. In fact, this ruler had five grandiose aspirations. First, he aspired to ascend into *the heavens*, figurative of the political domain. Second, the tyrant planned to set his throne above *the stars of God*, i.e., other luminaries who had been placed in position by God and who served at his pleasure. Third, having achieved mastery over the other luminaries (kings), he intended to *sit in the mount of meeting* with the gods, i.e., he aspired to deity. Obviously the king is speaking as a heathen. Pagan mythology postulated a mountain far to the north where a council of deities met to decide the fate of earth. Fourth, the tyrant intended to ascend above *the high places of the clouds*. Since Yahweh is said to ride upon the clouds (e.g., Ps 104:3), this king intends to exalt himself above God. This he does by attempting to thwart the plan of God for his people. When human plans displace God's plan, arrogance has mounted above the clouds. Finally, the tyrant aspired to be compared to the *Most High*, i.e., Yahweh. The name designates the ultimate authority, the most exalted of rulers. Babylon's king, by attitude and action, sought to be yet more exalted (v 14).

In trying to be equal with God human-kind are never less like him. The Eternal left heaven to take upon himself the form of a servant (Phil 2:5-8). It is in servanthood that men most emulate their maker.

3. Tyrant's ultimate humiliation (14:15): *But unto Sheol you are brought down, unto the furthest parts of the pit.* An adversative particle introduces again (cf. vv 8-9; 14-15) the contrast between the fate of the tyrant, and the audacious aspirations that he had for himself: The king was not permitted by God to ascend to the heavens, i.e., his plans for himself and his kingdom did not succeed. Instead, he was *brought down* to Sheol. The passive form of the verb points to the action of the unseen Most High. The *pit* is sometimes used as a synonym for Sheol. The phrase *furthest parts of the pit* suggests degrees of disgrace in Sheol.

D. Astonishment of Earth (14:16-21):

1. Observation (14:16-19): *Those who look at you will gaze, they will consider you [saying]…* While the king’s spirit had descended to Sheol, his body on earth remained unburied. There is astonishment on earth over this ultimate disgrace. The onlookers could not believe the terrible fate that the king of Babylon had experienced. The astonishment focuses on two conditions.

a. Tyrant’s helplessness (14:16-17): The observers are astonished over the king's helplessness.

(1) He can cause no terror (14:16b): *Is this the man who caused the earth to tremble, who caused kingdoms to shake?* A sarcastic question calls attention to the fact that he who was once master of the world now lies on the ground a fallen corpse. Once he had commanded vast armies. People were cautious about venturing far beyond the walls of their cities.

(2) He can cause no destruction (14:17a): *Who placed the world a wilderness, and its cities overthrew…* The tyrant’s troop movements disrupted commerce and international travel. The tyrant overthrew the great cities of earth. In comparison to what it had been, the world became a wilderness.

(3) He can cause no oppression (14:17b): *that did not release his prisoners to go home?* The tyrant took thousands of prisoners and deported them to distant places. That oppression, however, was at an end. Now the tyrant can do nothing. He terrifies no one. The tyrant is a pitiful, shriveled, lifeless corpse!

b. Tyrant’s humiliation (14:18-19):

(1) How other kings had been treated (14:18): *All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie down in glory, each in his house.* The observers are astonished over the king's humiliation. The ancient world stressed proper burial. Kings were given grand funerals and magnificent sepulchers. Isaiah says other kings received honorable burials. They lie in state, surrounded by the trappings of royalty, each in his own *house*, i.e., tomb. Again

---

118 *Stars of God* may also be a figure for the people of God as in Dan 8:10 and 12:3.
using emphasis, Isaiah states that the tyrant is an exception to what generally happens to royalty after death. He had been thrown out in a direction away from his grave. He had been left unburied.

(2) How the tyrant had been treated (14:19): But as for you, you have been cast forth from your grave like an abominable branch, like a corpse trampled under foot, clothed with the slain, those pierced through by the sword, who go down to the stones of the pit. Isaiah portrays what happened to the corpse of the tyrant in some detail. He had been treated like an abominable branch, i.e., one that is torn from a tree because it is injurious to the growth of the tree. He is like a corpse trampled under foot. Such a corpse is clothed with the slain, i.e., lying among the multitude of other bodies on the battlefield. The slain are those who have been pierced through by the sword. Stones of the pit picture Sheol as in the deepest rocks of the inner earth.

2. Explanation by the prophet (14:20): You will not be joined with them in burial because your land you destroyed, your people you slew. The seed of evil-doers will not be named forever. Isaiah explains the unusual treatment of the deceased tyrant. Other kings received typical royal burial because, though evil, they had not come close to the wickedness of the tyrant. He was cruel. The tyrant destroyed his own land and people as well as the nations against whom he warred. For him there is no monument to cause his name to be remembered through the years.

3. An exhortation by God (14:21): Prepare for his sons a place of slaughter, because of the iniquity of their fathers, that they do not arise and possess the land, and fill the face of the earth with cities. Apparently God is speaking here. Probably this is a rhetorical imperative addressed to no one in particular. It expresses the idea that the tyrant’s dynasty must not continue. The sons are as guilty, or at least will become as guilty, as their fathers. Should they arise the sons of the tyrant will fill the earth with cities. By this means the tyrant will try to spread worldly spirit and culture. All of that must cease. The earth belongs to those whom God has chosen (Mt 5:5), not to the likes of the tyrant.

EPILOGUE: YAHWEH’S PROMISE
14:22-27

The burden of Babylon concludes with an first-person epilogue that states God’s intention regarding the two great Mesopotamian powers, Babylon (vv 22-23) and Assyria (vv 24-27). This epilogue sums up the contents of the previous forty-two vv of the burden of Babylon.

A. Intention Regarding Babylon (14:22-23):
1. Opposition to the tyrant’s sons (14:22a): And I will rise up against them (oracle of Yahweh of Hosts)... This line forms a transition from the subject of the (Assyrian) tyrant to Babylon. Once fallen the tyrant will not rise again. Yahweh, however, will rise up against them, viz., the sons of the tyrant from the previous v. The subject of the (Assyrian) tyrant concludes with a solemn assurance that it is Yahweh of Hosts who is pledging this opposition.

2. What Babylon will not have (14:22b): and I will cut off to Babylon name and remnant, offspring and descendants (oracle of Yahweh). The thought of the utter destruction of Babylon from 13:19-22 is repeated. Just as Yahweh opposes the sons of the (Assyrian) tyrant, so he will cut off the sons of Babylon. The last four nouns express most completely the idea of posterity. Since a new subject has been introduced, the v asserts for the second time the solemn origin of the threat. It is an oracle of Yahweh himself.

3. What Babylon will have (14:23a): And I will make it a dwelling place of porcupines and watery swamps. The once proud city of Babylon will be possessed by porcupines rather than by posterity. The duration of this condition is not stated.

4. Yahweh’s action (14:23b): And I will sweep it with the broom of destruction (oracle of Yahweh

---

119The meaning is not that the king once had been interred properly, but was removed. He never had been buried.

120Others think the reference is to a makeshift burial ditch covered with stones.

121NASB hedgehogs; NIV owls.
of Hosts). All the might and majesty of Babylon in God’s eyes is but rubbish that must be swept from the planet. The announcement is not wishful thinking or lame prognostication; it is a solemn oracle of Yahweh himself.

The language here is similar to Sennacherib’s own account of what he did to Babylon in 689 BC.

I made its destruction more complete than that by a flood. That in days to come the site of that city, and (its) temples and gods, might not be remembered, I completely blotted it out with (floods of) water and made it like a meadow.122

B. Intention Regarding Assyria (14:24-27): Since Babylon planned to become the power upon which Judah leaned, these vv are also an indirect prophecy against Babylon. God will take care of Assyria, thus leaving frustrated for the moment Babylon’s aspirations to become master of the Near East.

1. Yahweh’s oath regarding his counsel (14:24): Yahweh of Hosts has sworn, saying, Surely just as I have planned, thus has it come to pass, and just as I have counseled, so it will stand… Three times in vv 22-23 the prophecy against Babylon has been called an oracle (n’um) of Yahweh. That trio of solemn documentation now climaxes in an oath by Yahweh—the first of three divine oaths in the book (cf. 45:23; 62:8). What Yahweh had his own plans regarding Assyria. The Hebrew verb is perfect. The overthrow of Assyria was so certain that Isaiah could speak of it as accomplished already.

The nations of Isaiah’s day aimed to counter the Assyrian threat through a policy of confederation. Isaiah resisted all attacks upon the concept of Yahweh as the guarantor of Zion’s security whether from the confederates, or from the Assyrians. No one could nullify Yahweh’s plans for Zion. He founded Zion; he guarantees Zion’s security.

2. Yahweh’s counsel regarding Assyria (14:25):
   a. Assyria’s trampling (14:25a): to break Assyria in my land, and upon my mountains I will trample him. Yahweh’s unalterable purpose was to break and trample Assyria upon the mountains of Judah. These mountains are called my mountains, for the ultimate owner of Canaan land was Yahweh. Isaiah lived to see this prediction fulfilled when the armies of Sennacherib were destroyed while attempting to subdue Judah (Isa 37).

   b. Results of Assyria’s trampling (14:25b): His yoke will be removed from upon them, and his burden from his shoulder will be removed. The oracle against Assyria concerns Judah as well. Pronouncements addressed to foreign nations are intended primarily for the ears of the Judeans. The blow against Assyria results in liberation for the Judeans. Isaiah uses the figure of a yoke being removed from a work animal to illustrate this deliverance. The yoke is further described as a burden placed upon the shoulder of the animal.

3. Yahweh’s counsel regarding the earth (14:26): This is the counsel planned concerning the entire earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. The smashing of Assyria in the mountains of Judah is a part of the larger picture of God’s counsel. All powers hostile to God and his people are doomed for similar overthrow. The hand stretched out here is a threatening gesture.

4. Yahweh’s counsel irresistible (14:27): For Yahweh of Hosts has counseled and who can frustrate it, and his hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? The question needs no answer. Many try to withstand the purposes of Yahweh; but they cannot succeed.

WORLDLY ALLIANCES: PHILISTIA
Isaiah 14:28-32

Isaiah now addresses the nations with whom Judah might be tempted to enter into a defensive pact in an effort to extricate herself from the Mesopotamian powers. These oracles underscore the folly of trusting in military alliance with any nation whose own future is precarious.

Isaiah now took up the burdens of three neighboring nations: Philistia, Moab and Damascus. The first of these oracles is dated in
year that Ahaz died (v 28). Ahaz died about 715 BC). 123

In the four vv of the Philistine oracle, Isaiah makes a two-fold contrast between what the rebellious Philistines were facing, and what the people of God will face during the Assyrian crisis.

**FIRST PHILISTIA/JUDAH CONTRAST**

14:29-30

A. **Warning (14:29):**

1. **Admonition (14:29a):** Do not rejoice, O Philistia, all of you, because the rod that struck you has been shattered... Announcement of the impending trampling of Assyria might cause oppressed nations to rejoice. Philistia, however, was warned not to rejoice over some recent Assyrian setback. *All of you* may be an allusion to various cities that made up the Philistine confederacy. The *rod that struck you* refers to an Assyrian king. Uprisings were suppressed in Philistia by Tiglath-pileser (734 BC) and Sargon (720 and 711 BC). After Sargon’s death in 705 BC the Philistines, encouraged by the promise of Egyptian aid, were again scheming with other city-states and nations of the region.

2. **Explanation (14:29b):** For from the serpent’s root an adder shall go out, and its fruit shall be a flying serpent. A worse serpent—another Assyrian king—was about to arise. The reference could be either to Sargon or Sennacherib, both of whom dealt harshly with the Philistines. The prophet employs a double figure here. The Assyrian monarchs are compared to a series of reptiles, which in turn is compared to the succession of root, shoot, and fruit in a plant.

B. **Contrast (14:30):** While the rebellious Philistines face a still worse tyrant, the citizens of Judah will have security.

1. **Tranquility in Judah (14:30a):** And the firstborn sons of the poor shall eat, and needy ones shall lie down in safety. Firstborn sons of the poor is a way of expressing the superlative *poorest of the poor*. Presumably the poor of Judah are in view. They will be as calm in the Assyrian crisis as sheep grazing peacefully in a pasture.

2. **Death in Philistia (14:30b):** I will put to death your root with famine, and it shall slay your survivors. The mighty ones of Philistia will be destroyed. Yahweh will smite Philistia with famine, a possible reference to the starvation that resulted from sieges of cities. Philistine leaders will be so thoroughly exterminated that nothing will remain of them to spring up again.

**SECOND PHILISTIA/JUDAH CONTRAST**

14:31-32

A. **Warning (14:31):**

1. **Exhortation (14:31a):** Wail O gate, cry out O city! Melt away, O Philistia, all of you! In Philistia mourning should replace the premature rejoicing. Isaiah calls upon the gates and city to raise a cry of lamentation because they will be overpowered by the attack of an enemy.

2. **Explanation (14:31b):** For from the north a cloud comes and there is no straggler in his ranks. The cloud that comes from the north could be watch-fires, signal fires, smoke billowing from burning cities left in the wake of the Assyrian advance. On the other hand, the cloud could be a figure for the Assyrian army. The allusion to no straggler paints a picture of a well-disciplined, focused, and determined army.

B. **Contrast (14:32):**

1. **Philistine’s appeal (14:32a):** How shall one answer the messengers of the nation? During the period when the Philistines were rebelling against the Assyrians, an embassy of Philistines came to Jerusalem. They probably were trying to urge the Judeans to join the coalition of states who were rebelling against Assyrian hegemony. Philistine overtures to Judah can be document in 711 BC during Sargon’s reign, or in 705 BC after Sargon’s death.

2. **Zion’s answer (14:32b):** That Yahweh has founded Zion and in it shall the afflicted of his
people take refuge. Isaiah was opposed to alliances such as the Philistines were proposing. In the prophet’s view, Yahweh was the foundation of Zion’s security. In Zion (Jerusalem) the remnant of Israel--here identified as the afflicted of his people--could find a secure refuge.

CHAPTER 15
WORLDLY ALLIANCES: MOAB

The burden of Moab. Having threatened Philistia, Judah’s nearest neighbor to the west, Isaiah turns to Moab, the nearest neighbor to the east. Moab will not be able to offer security to God’s people in the coming crisis. Isaiah underscored this point in six movements within the Moab oracle.

The Assyrian annals furnish considerable information about Moab in the eighth century. Moab sent tribute to Tiglath-pileser in 732 BC. Moab was among the states that rebelled against Assyria in 720 BC. Moab also took part in the western revolts against Assyria after the death of Sargon in 705 BC. After Sennacherib quelled the revolt in 701 BC Moab is listed among the states forced to pay tribute. So the evidence is that Moab was in the thick of anti-Assyrian efforts in Syria-Palestine. Probably the Moab oracle dates to the same time as the preceding Philistine oracle.

A LAMENT
15:1-9

A. Moab’s Desperate Situation (15:1-4):
1. Destruction by night (15:1): Surely in one night Ar of Moab is devastated, is ruined; surely in one night Kir of Moab is devastated, is ruined. The lament begins with the repetition of the same words (in a night . . . is devastated) over the two chief cities of Moab. Ar was on the Arnon Gorge and Kir, the central fortress, was farther south. The two cities are used to convey the thought of total national disaster. One night is not to be taken literally, but is poetic for the swiftness of the overthrow.

2. Description of lamentation (15:2-3):
   a. Places of lamentation (15:2a): They have gone up to the house and to Dibon, to the high places to weep. On Nebo and on Medeba Moab wails. The first response to the disaster was flight to the house, i.e., temple, and to high places. Four Moabite worship centers are named. Dibon was located three miles north of the Arnon. A high place to the Moabite god Chemosh was located there. The lamentation at the sanctuary suggests that Chemosh cannot save his own adherents. Nebo is the mountain from which Moses viewed the Promised Land. Medeba is about five miles southeast of Nebo. The point is that no weeping before idols can prevent and soften the blow against Moab.
   b. Signs of lamentation (15:2c-3): On all his heads is baldness, every beard is cut off. (3) In its streets they gird on sackcloth, on their housetops and in her squares everyone wails, going down in weeping. Shaving head and beard was an outward demonstration of extreme agony, as was also the donning of sackcloth. While some lamented at religious shrines, others joined in corporate displays of weeping in public places. The exact import of going down in weeping is unclear.

3. Extent of lamentation (15:4): Heshbon cries out and Elealeh; unto Jahaz their voice is heard; therefore, the armed men of Moab cry out, their soul trembles within him. Three additional locations in Moab are named, making a total of eight in the first four vv. Throughout the land from the northernmost cities of Heshbon and Elealeh to Jahz ten miles to the south the wailing can be heard. As a result of the wailing in these three cities, Moab’s warriors are demoralized and paralyzed by fear.

B. Flight but no Safety (15:5-9):
1. Isaiah’s compassion (15:5): My heart for Moab cries out, fugitives unto Zoar, Eglath-shelishyah. For to the ascent of Luhith, weeping he goes up on it. Surely on the way to Horonaim a cry of distress over their breaking they raise up. Yahweh or Isaiah expressed sympathy with the plight of the Moabites. Zoar was located at the southern end of
the Dead Sea. So the Moabite fugitives were fleeing southward toward Edom to escape the conflict further north. Eglath-shelishyah, Luhith and Horonaim have not been located, but probably were in the vicinity of Zoar.

2. Reasons for Isaiah’s compassion (15:6): For the waters of Nimrim are utterly devastated. Surely the grass has withered, the vegetation has been consumed; there is no green thing. Apparently a drought accompanied the military invasion of Moab. The oasis at Nimrim has been affected by the drought. Vegetation there has dried up.

3. Flight to neighbors (15:7): Therefore the abundance they have made and their provisions they carryover the Wadi Abarim. The Moabites seem to have abandoned their livestock and continued on with what minimal provisions that they can carry. Wadi Abarim may be the Zered River, which formed the border with Edom.

4. Howling of fugitives (15:8-9):
   a. Extent of howling (15:8): For the distressful cry has gone around the border of Moab, unto Eglaim is her wail, and to Beer-elim her wailing. From one end of the land to the other--Zered in the south to Eglaim and Beer-elim in the north--the fugitives fill the land with their wailing.
   b. Reason for howling (15:9): For the waters of Dimon are full of blood, but I will bring upon Dimon additional (woes), to the fugitive of Moab a lion, and to the remnant of Admah. Although the Moabites flee, they will not escape the slaughter. The waters of Dimon will become full of blood, but that will merely be the beginning of the trouble for this important city. Fleeing across the wilderness may bring escape from the warfare, but the fugitive of Moab and the remnant of the land will then only encounter a lion, i.e., a worse calamity or adversary.

---

125 Another possibility is that the fugitives passed the waters of Nimrim during the dry season and saw its withered vegetation as a symbol of their own condition.
126 Dimon may be a deliberate corruption of the name of one of Moab’s most prominent towns, Dibon. The substitute of the m for b may be wordplay on the Hebrew dām (blood).
127 The reference to the enemy as a lion recalls the reference to Assyria in Amos 3:12, where the ultimate lion of judgment is God himself (cf. Amos 3:4, 8).
experiencing. In the shadow of that mighty fortress of Mount Zion the fugitives and outcasts of Moab hope to find shelter and a hiding place from the oppressor.

MOAB’S CONFIDENCE
16:4b-5

A. Confidence Oppression will End (16:4b): When the violent has come to an end, destruction has ceased, the oppressor will vanish from the land... Isaiah puts words of prophetic hope on the lips of the Moabite messenger. He expresses confidence that one day the oppression that drove the Moabites from their homeland will be suppressed.

B. Confidence a Savior will Arise (16:5): A throne will be established in lovingkindness, and he shall sit upon it in faithfulness in the tent of David, judging and seeking justice and hastens to righteousness. Moab’s hope, like Judah’s, is in a future king from the house of David. Because of the lovingkindness or covenant faithfulness (chesed) of Yahweh that throne will be established. The Ruler envisioned will be an ideal ruler whose reign is characterized by justice and righteousness. Thus the Moab oracle depicts a specific example of Gentile nations coming to Mount Zion to become part of the Israel of God under the reign of Messiah (cf. 2:1-4; 9:1-6). Messiah’s righteous government will encompass Moab as well as Judah.128 Cf. 11:1-9.

MOAB’S PRIDE
6:6

We have heard of the pride of Moab, his excessive pride and arrogance, his conceit and his insolence his boasts are empty. Isaiah begins to reflect on the reason for Moab’s predicament. He piles up various forms of the word for pride, that affliction for which there is no cure except calamity. Pride of heart manifests itself in empty boasts. The experience of Moab demonstrated that all national claims to superiority can be removed overnight (cf. 15:1).

MOAB’S LAMENT
16:7-11

A. Lamentation in Moab (16:7-8):
1. Lament for raisin cakes (16:7): Therefore, Moab wails, they wail together for Moab, for the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth they mourn, completely devastated. Moab is compared to a luxurious grapevine that had spread out over the entire region. Again the lamentation of the Moabites comes to the fore. Raisin cakes are small cakes of pressed raisins that were considered a delicacy (cf. 2 Sam 6:19; Song 2:5; Hos 3:1). When one as proud as Moab falls, the associated grief is all the worse.
2. Lament for vines (16:8): For the fields of Heshbon wither, the vines of Sibmah. The lords of the nations have trampled down its choice vines that reached as far as Jazer wandered to the desert. Its shoots spread out; they went over the sea. Isaiah zeroes in on one specific area, that of Heshbon and its suburb Sibmah. The area has been devastated by drought. Furthermore, the lords of the nations have trampled down the vines. The plural may suggest multiple invasions. The choice vines are depicted spreading out in all directions: toward Jazer on the northern border, to the edge of the eastern desert, and even across the Dead Sea. This latter expression may indicate Moabite influence in Judah if not exports of wines and grapes to Judah.

B. Lamentation by Isaiah (16:9-11):
1. Lament for the fruitful land (16:9): Therefore, I will weep with the weeping of Jazer for the vines of Sibmah. I will drench you with my tears O Heshbon, O Elealeh because over your summer fruit and over your harvest the shout [of joy] have fallen [away]. Isaiah is reduced to tears by the thought of the devastation of such a fruitful land as Moab. Is this mockery, or is it genuine grief that

128Moab and Midian were traditional adversaries of Israel (Nm 22:4, 25:1-18). Isaiah depicts Messiah's rule extending over both Midian (9:4-7) and Moab (as here).
the prophet feels? There is no reason to think that Isaiah was not genuinely moved by what he foresaw for Moab. Judgment for proud Moab was necessary, but nonetheless sad.

2. Lament for the failed harvest (16:10): *Joy and gladness have been gathered from the fruitful field, and in the vineyards no one sings or shouts. The wine in the wine vats the treader does not tread out; the shouting I have made to cease.* Harvest time for the grapes and the production of the new wine were occasions for great joy. But because the Moabitite vine was broken and withered all expressions of joy were silenced. Instead of grapes, joy and gladness had been harvested, i.e., removed from the scene.

3. Lament from deep within (16:11): *Therefore, my bowels moan for Moab like a harp, my inner parts for Kir-hares.* Again Isaiah expresses sympathy for Moab. Bowels for the Hebrews were considered the seat of emotion, based on that sick feeling one gets in the pit of his stomach when he hears shocking news.

**MOAB’S BANKRUPT FAITH**

16:12

*And it shall come to pass that when Moab appears on the high place he will become weary. When he comes unto his sanctuary to pray, he will not be able.* In the day of calamity Moab’s trust in the god Chemosh will prove misguided. Moabites go to the *high place* (shrine) and go through all manner of gyrations and mindless incantation. The result of all this effort is only weariness. *He will not be able* could refer either to the worshiper (he will not be able to break through to his god), or to Chemosh who will not be able to help.

**MOAB’S REMNANT**

16:13-14

A. Certainty of Moab’s Fall (16:13-14a): *This is the word that Yahweh has spoken concerning Moab. (14) But now Yahweh has said, saying, In three years, according to the years of a hired man, Moab’s glory in respect to her many people shall be despised…* The Moab oracle concludes with a note naming the exact time for the fulfillment of the threat. Within exactly three years Moab’s glory will be despised. He who is all glorious will destroy all those things in which Moab took pride. The prediction finds fulfillment in 715 BC when Sargon directed a campaign against the Arabians. To reach his destination, Sargon swept through the length of Moab from north to south murdering and plundering as he went.

B. A Ray of Hope (16:14b): *A remnant from his seed will be small and not mighty.* The Moab oracle ends on a slight note of hope. There will be a remnant, but it will be small and insignificant in comparison Moab’s population prior to the invasion. This remnant may refer to those who earlier in the oracle are depicted entreatng Zion’s future king (Messiah) for deliverance (cf. vv 3-5).

Summary: In the day of Yahweh’s judgment Moab learns the hard lesson that possessions, military might, pride, flight, or religious exercises can give no security. Only those who trust in Yahweh will know peace and deliverance.

**CHAPTER 17**

**WORLDLY ALLIANCES: NEIGHBORS**

**BURDEN OF DAMASCUS**

17:1-11

Having addressed Judah’s two southern neighbors, Isaiah now addressed two neighbors to the north. Damascus and Ephraim were allies in 734 BC. Many in Judah—perhaps most—would have joined this coalition had not King Ahaz refused. Again Isaiah made the point that God’s people should not put their trust in alliances. The oracle is entitled, *Burden of Damascus* probably because Damascus was the real power in the coalition. But most of the vv speak of Ephraim, the northern kingdom of Israel.

129The NIV rendering is: *Within three years as a servant bound by a contract would count them.*
A. Devastation for the Allies (17:1-3):  
1. Damascus (17:1): Behold Damascus is about to be removed from being a city, and it shall become a heap of ruins. On burden, see on 13:1. Because of its strategic location on the main north-south caravan route, Damascus was one of the most important cities in the ancient world. Isaiah announced that the great city will become a ruin. The prophecy was fulfilled with the fall of Damascus to the Assyrians in 732 BC.  
2. Transjordan (17:2): Forsaken are the cities of Aroer. For flocks they shall be; they shall lie down there and none will make them afraid. The phrase cities of Aroer refers to two fortresses by that name, one on the rim of Arnon Gorge (Josh 12:2) and the other east of Rabbah in Ammon (Josh 13:25). These fortresses, once the centers for military activity, will be used by shepherds.  
3. Ephraim and Aram (17:3): The fortified city shall cease from Ephraim, and dominion from Damascus, and the remnant of Aram shall become like the glory of the sons of Israel (oracle of Yahweh of hosts). When Ephraimitic territory east of the Jordan was overrun by Tiglath-pileser, Ephraim was deprived of eastern fortresses. At the same time, Damascus lost the status of being a kingdom. Remnant of Aram intimates that the remaining Aramean states were either already under the Assyrian yoke or in ruins. Those in Aram (Damascus) who survived the Assyrian calamity will share the fate of the Israelites. Their glory will fall into enemy hands. The concept of glory in Hebrew carries with it connotations of wealth, permanence and significance.  

B. Devastation for Ephraim (17:4-11): Three in that day phrases mark what Ephraim was about to face. The expression occurs forty-two times in Isaiah. The expression primarily serves as an emphatic temporal adverb. As such it serves as a connective formula. It means that the preceding things and those following must be regarded as a unity.  

1. Gradual decline (17:4-6): Isaiah uses three figures of speech to illustrate the gradual decline of Ephraim.  
   a. Wasting disease (17:4): And it shall come to pass in that day that the glory of Jacob will fade, and the fatness of his flesh shall become lean. First, Isaiah pictures a once healthy man who has become nothing but skin and bones.  
   b. Grain harvesting (17:5): It will be as when the reaper gathers standing grain, and his arm harvests the heads of grain; as one gathers heads of grain in the Valley of Rephaim. Second, Ephraim will resemble the Valley of Rephaim southwest of Jerusalem after a rich crop has been harvested. Only a few stalks of grain that have fallen from the arms of the workmen remain in the field.  
   c. Olive gleanings (17:6): Gleanings will be left in it as when an olive tree is beaten: two or three olives on the top branch, four or five on its fruitful branches (oracle of Yahweh God of Israel). The third picture is that of an olive tree that has been beaten with sticks to shake off the ripe olives. Only a few olives remain in an inaccessible location on the tree.  
2. Return to Yahweh (17:7-8): Judgment on Ephraim will be thorough, but not total.  
   a. Look to Yahweh (17:7): In that day man will look to his Maker, and unto the holy one of Israel his eyes will look. In that day of judgment a remnant in desperation will turn to Yahweh, repudiating any attraction to pagan paraphernalia. The concept of Yahweh as Maker can be traced back to Hos 8:14. Isaiah loves to put the Creator in juxtaposition with gods created by men (cf. 44:9-18).  
   b. Look away from Yahweh (17:8): He will not look unto the altars that are the work of his hands; that which his fingers have made he will not look to, even the Asherim and the incense altars. Those who look to Yahweh take the Second Commandment seriously. The altars may be those of the apostate Yahweh-shrines with their forbidden bull-images at Bethel and Dan. Asherim are sacred trees or poles standing near altars. In Canaanite theology Asherah was the consort of  

---

130See Erlandsson (BB, 71-73) for a balanced discussion of this phrase.
Baal. One positive result of desperate times is that men reestablish a relationship with their Creator. This prediction of the conversion of a remnant from Ephraim finds fulfillment in the presence of northern Israelites at Hezekiah's celebration of the Passover (2 Chr 30).

3. Forsaken cities (17:9): In that day his strong cities will become like a forsaken place in a forest or treetop that they abandoned before the sons of Israel; and it shall become a desolation. Israel's new relationship with Yahweh will come only after devastating judgment. Israel's strong cities will be abandoned like the Canaanite cities were abandoned before the marching armies of Joshua.

4. Explanation of the calamity (17:10-11):
   a. Forgetting Yahweh (17:10a): For you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and your fortress Rock you have not remembered. Forgetting God is more than a mental lapse; it is abandonment of all that God stands for.
   b. Embracing paganism (17:11): Therefore, you plant pleasant plants and set out strange shoots. (11) On the day you plant you will make them grow, and on the morning you sow you will make it bud; but it will be a heap in a day of sickness and perpetual pain. Because they had abandoned God, Israel became involved in planting pleasant plants and strange shoots. This may be a reference to some practice associated with the fertility cult. Others suggest the reference is to alliances with Damascus; still others think they are symbols for Canaanite religion. Whatever the meaning, this much is clear: human efforts to achieve success in life will fail if God is left out of the equation. Heap points to harvest time. In God's judgment life's great achievements are cut down and withered as if by some dreadful disease. Whatever a man sows that he will reap.

WOE ON PLUNDERERS
17:12-14

Two woes conclude the second major division of the Book of Burdens (cf. ch 18). Both oracles say essentially the same thing in different words.

A. A Mighty Attack (17:12): Woe, the raging of many nations like the raging of seas they rage; the tumult of peoples like the tumult of mighty waters they roar. The first woe is pronounced against any who might attack God's people. It sets forth this principle: God will not permit his promises to his people to fail no matter what difficulties they might encounter. Woe points to a hopeless situation. A terrible foe is approaching us, i.e., Jerusalem. Many nations refers to the Assyrian army to which the many conquered peoples were compelled to contribute. Infantry pounding the ground and chariot wheels rumbling along sound like the surf crashing against rocks or a flood of water. The God who restricts the movement of waters across the face of the earth (Gn 1:9; Ps 104:5-9) will not permit a floodtide of adversaries to sweep aside his people.

B. A Mighty Rebuke (17:13): Although the peoples roar like the roar of many waters, he will rebuke them and they will flee far away, pursued like chaff of the hills before the wind, like tumbleweed before the storm. The fearful sounds of the mighty Assyrian juggernaut are an illusion. Yahweh will rebuke those waves as Jesus rebuked the winds and sea (Mt 8:26). The mighty Assyrian ocean is really insignificant, harmless chaff or tumbleweed. Yahweh will disperse the attackers like chaff before a storm.

C. General Application (17:14): At evening, behold terror! before morning, he is not! This is the portion of those who plunder us, the inheritance of those who loot us. The Assyrian attackers will disappear quickly. At sunset the situation may appear hopeless; by sunrise the enemy will be gone. The same fate awaits any others who may target God's people for attack (v 14).

CHAPTER 18
WORLDLY ALLIANCES: ETHIOPIA
The second woe (NASB alas) was pronounced against those who might tempt God’s people to depart from the path of faith.

ARRIVAL OF ENVOYS
18:1-2a

Woe, land of whirring wings that is beyond the rivers of Cush, (2) which sends envoys by sea, and in papyrus vessels over the surface of the water. Envoys arrive from a land of whirring wings, i.e., a land noted for its insects. Cush embraces present-day Ethiopia, the Sudan and Somalia. The envoys travel in light, swift vessels made of papyrus reeds. The lightness of their vessels made it possible for them to be carried past unnavigable stretches of rivers.

In 715 BC a Nubian or Cushite dynasty came to power in Egypt. This dynasty may have sent envoys to the Palestinian states in an effort to foment rebellion against the Assyrians. The sea may refer to the Mediterranean Sea, or be poetic for the Nile River. Some place the visit of the ambassadors during the Philistine revolt against Assyria (ca. 712 BC), others place it in the period of restlessness after the death of Sargon in 705 BC.

DIRECTIVE TO THE ENVOYS
18:2b

Go, swift messengers, unto a nation tall and smooth, unto a people feared from it and beyond a powerful and oppressive nation whose land the rivers divide. Isaiah issues a directive to the Ethiopian envoys. They are to go with a message to a tall and smooth people, the powerful and oppressive nation, i.e., the Ethiopian people.

CALL OF WITNESSES
18:3

All you inhabitants of the world, those who dwell in the earth when an ensign is raised on the mountains, look; when a trumpet is sounded, hear. Earth’s inhabitants are invited to witness the evidence of Yahweh’s lordship. They should watch for signs—an ensign addressing the eye, a trumpet addressing the ear—that God is about to act decisively. Only those who are looking for signs of God’s involvement in the world will see it.

YAHWEH’S INTERVENTION
18:4-6

A. God’s Watching (18:4): For thus said Yahweh unto me: I will be quiet and look from my dwelling place like shimmering heat on account of the sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest. While armies march and empires build God quietly looks on from his heavenly abode waiting for the proper moment for intervention. Yahweh makes his presence felt gradually, just like morning heat that builds up during the day, or clouds of midst that drift up the valleys from the coastal region during harvest season.

B. God’s Working (18:5): For before the harvest, as soon as the bud is finished, and the flower becomes a ripening grape then he will cut off the shoots with pruning knives, and the young shoots he took away, he struck off. Yahweh observes the developing situation on earth, like a farmer watches growth of his vines. At just the right moment the farmer prunes the vines, cuts off the unproductive shoots, so as to enhance the growth of the rest of the vine. Isaiah is figuratively describing what God will do to the Assyrians in 701 BC when, at the last possible minute, he cut down Sennacherib’s army. The Ethiopian envoys that seek to build an alliance against Assyria need to know that Yahweh will deal with the likes of Assyria without the assistance of international coalitions.

---

131It seems unlikely, though not impossible, that the envoys would have ventured across the Mediterranean Sea in papyrus vessels.

132Because the directive is to go, not return, some think Isaiah speaks poetically of anonymous envoys who are summoned from distant lands to carry a message to the ends of the earth.

133Others think envoys are sent to the Assyrians, or to the Medes, who will be used as God’s agents to destroy Assyria. A third view is that no particular nation is intended, but rather the envoys were to go to the mightiest people imaginable.
C. God’s Winning (18:6): Together they shall be forsaken to the vulture of the mountains and to the beasts of the earth. The vulture will summer upon him, and every beast of the earth will winter upon him. The branches of the previous v that have no value are left to the local birds and animals that put them to their own use. The metaphor may intimate that the Assyrians ultimately become the prey of others. Alternatively, the metaphor may point to the rotting corpses of slain soldiers strewn about on the ground. Such vast numbers cannot be buried. They become a meal for bird and beast alike for an entire year. The magnitude of Sennacherib’s loss of 185,000 men in one night made burial impossible. This prophecy of Isaiah was literally fulfilled.

GENTILE HOMAGE TO YAHWEH

18:7

In that time a gift will be brought to Yahweh of hosts by a people tall and smooth and from a people feared from it and beyond, a nation powerful and oppressive whose land the rivers divide unto the place of the name of Yahweh of hosts, Mount Zion. The second woe concludes with a picture of the conversion of the Ethiopians. The very people who sent to Judah to secure a military alliance will come again with gifts for the true God in Zion. This is a specific example of the vision that Zion will one day be the religious center of the whole world (2:1-4; 60:1-14). Mount Zion is the place of the name, i.e., character, reputation, of Yahweh. The Mount Zion of prophecy often refers to that spiritual city, the New Jerusalem, in which every Christian is a citizen (Heb 12:22). This prediction probably finds fulfillment in the conversion of Ethiopia to Christianity in the early centuries of Church history. Thus the section concludes with this thought: Why turn to worldly alliances when Gentile nations one day will turn to you and to your God?

CHAPTER 19

WORLDLY WISDOM: EGYPT

In the Egyptian oracle Isaiah followed a pattern that was common in foreign nation oracles. He spoke first negatively of Egypt’s confrontation with Yahweh, then positively of Egypt’s conversion to the worship of the Living God.

EGYPT CONFOUNDED

19:1-15

The burden of Egypt. As the threat of Assyria loomed larger and larger, the leaders of Judah looked south to Egypt for assistance. Isaiah first indicated how God will expose the total weakness of all that the world held to be great about Egypt. The land of the Pharaohs will be shown to be bankrupt.

A. Religiously Bankrupt (19:1-4):

1. Initial fear (19:1):

   a. Coming of Yahweh (19:1a): Behold Yahweh rides upon a swift cloud and comes to Egypt. The God of creation employs a cloud as his chariot. This figure conveys the ideas of swift movement, transcendence, omniscience, and power.

   b. Reaction of Egyptians (19:1b): The gods of Egypt quiver before him, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them. Since Yahweh once before had humiliated the gods of Egypt in the time of Moses, those gods are figuratively depicted as trembling before his presence. If the gods of Egypt quiver before Yahweh, those who worship those gods will quiver all the more. The melting heart indicates failure of nerve and consequent ineffectual resistance.

2. Disunity and anarchy (19:2): And I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, and a man will fight with his brother, a man with his neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom. The demise of Egypt will result from inner discord. The

134 Other prophetic passages concerning Egypt are found in Jer 46 and Ezek 29-32.

135 Grogan (EBC, in loc.) suggests a contrast to the swiftness of the Cushite envoys traveling by water in 18:2 and the even greater swiftness of Yahweh traveling by air.
multiplicity of Egyptian gods contributed to the recurring disunity in the land of the Pharaohs as the history of that land attests. A land religiously divided lacks cohesion. Wars between rival religious partisans destroy a nation’s ability to resist invasion from without.

3. Despondency and desperation (19:3):
   a. Worthless wisdom (19:3a): The spirit of the Egyptians will be emptied out from within, and his counsel I will swallow up. Faced with the dissolution of their nation, the Egyptians grow despondent. Any counsel, i.e. plan to save the nation and restore its might, is swallowed up by Yahweh.
   b. Worthless worship (19:3b): They will resort unto their idols and spirits of the dead, and unto mediums and spiritists. In their despondency the Egyptians seek oracles from their idolatrous priests. Many turn away from traditional religion to embrace the occult. See on 8:19 for a discussion of the different terms of spiritism. Isaiah’s main point is that a nation that is religiously bankrupt is ripe for a tyrant.

4. Oppression (19:4): I will shut up Egypt in the hand of a harsh master, and a strong king shall rule over them (oracle of Adonay Yahweh of Hosts). The cruel king into whose hand the Egyptians are delivered may be Shabaka (c. 711-699 BC) the founder of the twenty-fifth or Ethiopian dynasty, or a foreign king like the Assyrians’ Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal who conquered Egypt in 672 BC and 662 BC respectively, or perhaps some later Persian or Greek king. The name Adonay Yahweh of Hosts emphasizes that the God of Israel has the authority and the power to hand over mighty Egypt to another mighty nation.

B. Economically Bankrupt (19:5-10): Great natural disasters will accompany Yahweh’s intervention in Egypt. The land will become bankrupt. The annual inundation of the Nile will fail, resulting in a collapse of the basic industries: agriculture, fishing and textiles.

1. Immediate result of Nile failure (19:5-7).
   a. Failing waters (19:5): The waters from the sea will be dried up, and the riverbed will be parched and dry. Egypt is essentially a desert that depends on the annual flooding of the Nile for economic security.
   b. Rotting marine life (19:6): The Nile branches will stink, the rivers of Egypt will fail and be dry; reed and rush will wither. The immediate result of the failure of that flooding will be the withering of the lush and valuable vegetation (papyrus) that grew along its banks. Marine life will die as well, and the rotting fish will raise a stench in the land.
   c. Withering plants (19:7): The bulrushes beside the Nile, along the bank of the Nile, and every sown field of the Nile will dry up, blow away, cease to exist. The fields that made Egypt the breadbasket of the ancient world will shortly thereafter revert to desert.

2. Economic result of Nile failure (19:8-10):
   a. Fishing (19:8): The fishermen will wail and lament, all who cast a hook into the Nile; those who spread a net on the surface of the waters will languish. Egypt’s fishing industry will be devastated by the failure of the Nile.
   b. Linen (19:9): Those who work with flax will be ashamed, the weavers of white cloth will be totally humiliated. Production of fine linen from the fibers of flax will cease.
   c. Population (19:10): Its pillars will be crushed, all hired workers will be sad of soul. All Egyptian society from its pillars (wealthy citizens) to the lowly day laborers will be affected by the economic disaster resulting from the failure of the Nile. The architectural metaphor pillars points to leaders who are the supports of society. When the pillars collapse, the entire structure of society disappears.

C. Intellectually Bankrupt (19:11-15): Unable to explain rationally the series of national calamities, the vaunted Egyptian wisdom will collapse.

1. False boasts (19:11):

---

136The ferocity of all the Assyrian monarchs was legendary. The downfall of Egypt to Esarhaddon meant the virtual end of Egyptian independence.
a. Worthless counsel (19:11a): The princes of Zoan are nothing but fools, the wise men, counselors of Pharaoh senseless counsel. Zoan (Tanis) was chief city of northern Egypt. This is the first major city encountered by any attacking army from the north. Pharaoh himself or a top-ranking prince resided there. The most astute Egyptian advisers in that city offer to their ruler senseless, (lit., brutish or animal like) counsel.

b. Worthless claims (19:11b): How can you say unto Pharaoh, A son of wise men am I, a son of ancient kings? By their misguided advice the Egyptian state department has forfeited any right to be considered a son (disciple) of the renowned wise men and rulers of the distant past.

2. Crucial test (19:12): Where are your wise men? Let them declare now to you and make known what Yahweh of hosts has counseled concerning Egypt. Addressing Pharaoh, Isaiah asks how Pharaoh can expect to learn the plans of Yahweh from men who do not view events through the lens of faith.

3. Deceptive advice (19:13): The princes of Zoan have become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived. The cornerstone of her tribes have made Egypt go astray. The very men who should have guided Egyptian policy properly are themselves deceived. They are the blind leading the blind, hence they lead Egypt astray. Noph (Memphis) was the second great city in Lower Egypt. Sarcastically Isaiah refers to Pharaoh’s officials as the cornerstone of Egyptian society; but that cornerstone was unreliable. Without reverence for Yahweh there is no true wisdom.

4. Confused policy (19:14): Yahweh has mixed in its midst a spirit of distortion, and they have led Egypt astray in all it does, like a drunkard staggers about in his vomit. The confusion among Egypt’s counselors is no accident. Yahweh has confounded the brilliance of Egyptian culture. The spirit of distortion may refer to the dominant disposition (cf. Nm 5:14) of Egypt, or it can refer to a demon that God permitted to deceive the Egyptians (cf. 1 Kgs 22:21-23). Under the influence of the spirit of distortion, Egypt’s counselors have misled their nation. Egypt staggers around like a confused drunkard.

5. Hopeless condition (19:15): There is nothing Egypt can do, whether head or tail, branch or reed. Isaiah viewed the situation in Egypt as hopeless. From top to bottom (head/tail; branch/reed) Egyptian society was doomed.

In these vv Isaiah foresaw the political history of Egypt down to the time of Christ. The Assyrian Esarhaddon ravished Egypt in 672 BC as did Ashurbanipal ten years later. Egypt subsequently was invaded by the Chaldean Nebuchadnezzar, by the Persians Cambyses and Xerxes, and by Alexander the Macedonian. The Romans secured a foothold in Egypt when Pompey came to the aid of Ptolemy XI in 58 BC.

**EGYPT CONVERTED**

19:16-25

One principle of arranging prophetic material was to alternate between predictions of a time of adversity and a time of salvation, between doom and hope. In one of the most amazing prophecies in the book, Isaiah depicted the ultimate conversion of the land of Egypt in five paragraphs, each of which begins with the words in that day.

A. Spiritual Perception (19:16-17):

1. Fear of Yahweh (19:16): In that day Egypt will become like women. He will tremble and be in dread before the waving of the hand of Yahweh of hosts when he begins to wave it over him. In that day (cf. 18, 19, 23, 24) focuses attention on the messianic age. In the face of Yahweh’s judgment the Egyptians become like defenseless women. They cower in fear before the inevitable. The waving of the hand is a threatening gesture. Isaiah knows that it is Yahweh who brings blow after blow against Egypt, and each successive blow executes Yahweh’s plan to incapacitate the Egyptians. The Exodus account frequently refers to

137 Isaiah uses the expression in that day forty-two times. This represents a quarter of the instances of its use in the OT and nearly half of its occurrences in the prophets. It lays special emphasis on the time that is in view, and it is often used in messianic contexts, as here.
the hand of the Lord pounding Egypt. Because of Yahweh’s actions on behalf of Israel, her very name became a terror to the Egyptians.

2. Fear of Yahweh’s land (19:17): The land of Judah will become to Egypt a terror. Everyone who reminds him of her shall tremble from before the counsel of Yahweh of Hosts that he is counseling concerning him. As in the days of Moses Judah becomes a terror to Egypt. This is not because of the military power of Judah, but because Yahweh will reveal his power once again on behalf of his people. The background for such a notion probably was the divine deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 BC. The Egyptians would have seen this as a triumph for Yahweh over the mighty gods of Assyria.

The fear of Yahweh is beginning of wisdom, and of conversion. The prophecy is not to be explained in some literalistic manner. God’s actions on behalf of his people involve all that happened at Calvary and the empty tomb. The reports of these mighty works of God have caused many Gentiles through the centuries to fear or reverence Yahweh.

B. Genuine Repentance (19:18):
1. General picture (19:18a): In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt speaking the language of Canaan and taking oaths to Yahweh of Hosts. This v frequently is taken to refer to Judean immigration to Egypt. The text, however, suggests that this is the start of the conversion of Egypt to Yahweh. Fear of Yahweh leads to genuine repentance on the part of several of the Egyptians. The conversion will be so complete that the converts adopt the language of Canaan, i.e., Hebrew, the language in which Yahweh was worshiped. They will speak truth, not falsehood. They will swear allegiance to Yahweh. They will become citizens in God’s kingdom.

Five is sometimes used in the non-arithmetic sense of several. On the other hand the five cities may be an allusion to the original conquest of Canaan by the Israelites. Joshua’s conquest of the five cities of the southern Canaanite coalition (Josh 10) led to the conquest of the whole country. So the spiritual conquest of Egypt outlined in vv 19-22 starts with the conversion of the five cities mentioned here.

2. Specific illustration (19:18b): One will be called the City of Destruction. One of the five cities is called the city of destruction. Some take this to mean that one Egyptian city will remain hardened in sin. Others think the one city represents a percent of all the cities, i.e., one-fifth of the cities will remain unconverted; but the city of destruction is one of the five cities that turns to Yahweh. About fifteen manuscripts, including one from Qumran, read cheres (sun) instead of heres (destruction). The city of the sun was Heliopolis, (biblical On), the center of the worship of the sun god Re. Either there has been a slight textual corruption of the term in the centuries of copying, or Isaiah is deliberately making a play on words. The point is that one of the five (i.e., several) cities that turn to Yahweh is the great religious center of Heliopolis. It was the obedience of the sun to Joshua’s command that led to the destruction of the five-city coalition. So in the spiritual conquest of Egypt the very center of sun adoration will submit to the authority of Yahweh.

C. Experiential Faith (19:19-22):
1. They experience God in witness (19:19-20a): Egyptians bear witness to their conversion by placing an altar in the midst of their land, and a pillar at the border.
   a. Altar (19:19a): In that day there will be an altar to Yahweh of Hosts in the midst of the land of Egypt... When the Patriarchs wished to express

---

138 E.g., Ex 8:19; 9:15; 13:3, 9, 16; Dt 4:34.
139 Cf. Ex 12:33; 15:16; Ps 105:38.
140 This is especially the case since Egypt had sent an army into Palestine in 701 and had been defeated. Since they themselves had been humiliated, the Egyptians could claim no share in the humiliation of the Assyrians.
141 Lv 26:8; cf. also Gn 43:34; 1 Sam 17:40; 2 Kgs 7:13; Isa 30:17; 1 Cor 14:19.
142 Kissane, BI, I, 219.
143 Cf. the substitution of Beth Aven (House of Nothing) for Bethel (House of God) in Hos 4:15; 5:8; 10:5, 14. Also the frequent substitution of Bosheth (shame) for Baal in proper names in the Samuel books.
Gratitude, they built an altar to Yahweh (Gn 12:8). Altars also marked spots where God’s revelation had been experienced. The action of building the altar, however, may be a further reflection of the Conquest period. Joshua and Israel went north to Shechem in the midst of the land and erected an altar (Josh 8:30). There a covenant renewal ceremony was conducted. The altar erected in the midst of Egypt may symbolize the establishment of a covenant with the Egyptians.

b. Pillar (19:19b): **and a pillar to Yahweh at its border.** Jacob erected a pillar or monument to formalize his acceptance of God’s covenant offer (Gn 28:16-22). Various stones and pillars of witness were erected in the days of Joshua. The pillar here bears witness to Yahweh’s activity in Egypt. It virtually claims Egypt for Yahweh.

b. Explanation (19:20): **And it shall be for a sign and witness to Yahweh of Hosts in the land of Egypt.** The altar and the pillar in Egypt express gratitude, realization that God has made himself known to them; they also point to cheerful acceptance of covenant obligations. Isaiah used OT language to depict the establishment of the worship of the true God in Egypt that will result from the preaching of the gospel.

2. They experience God in deliverance (19:20b): **When they cry out unto Yahweh on account of oppressors, then he will send to them a Savior and Mighty One, and he will deliver them.** As true believers, the Egyptians will experience oppression by the enemies of Yahweh (cf. Jn 15:19); but their cries for help will not go unheeded in heaven. God will send a Savior and a Mighty One (NIV defender; NASB Champion) to deliver them. In this context such titles must point to Messiah. The language of this verse reflects Israel’s experience in the days of the Judges. The point is that the Egyptians will have the same experience of God as did the Israelites during the Conquest and Judges periods.

3. They experience God in worship (19:21): a. Reason for worship (19:21a): **And Yahweh will make himself known to Egypt, that the Egyptians may know Yahweh in that day.** The experience of God’s great deliverance leads the Egyptians to worship. In true worship God makes himself known to the Egyptians, just as he did to the Israelites.

b. Means of worship (19:21b): **And they will worship with sacrifices and offerings and they will make a vow to Yahweh and will perform it.** The terms sacrifice and offerings refer to the spiritual worship (cf. Heb 13:15-16) in the kingdom of Christ. Genuine worship leads to personal commitments to Yahweh, represented here by freewill vows. Performing or paying a vow admits that a prayer has been answered (Dt 23:21-23), and it expresses gratitude for what God has done (e.g., Ps 50:14; 56:12).

4. They experience God in discipline (19:22): **Yahweh will smite Egypt, striking and healing and they will return unto Yahweh, and he will respond to them and heal them.** As members of the family of God, the Egyptians will receive divine correction when they tend to stray (Heb 12:3-17). These converted Gentiles will accept the correction, and return to Yahweh. Turning to Yahweh leads to healing, i.e., forgiveness. In the days of Moses, the Egyptian pleas for the lifting of the plagues were heard only through Moses’ intercession. Isaiah envisions a day when the Egyptians are fully God’s children; their petitions will be addressed by the Father.

D. Spiritual Transformation (19:23): **In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come to Egypt, and Egypt to Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve [Yahweh] with Assyria.** One of the great blessings of Egypt’s conversion is peace. In Messiah’s kingdom former enemies will join together in service to

---

144Grogan (EB, in *loc.* ) points out the following: See Josh 4:3, 20-22; 7:26; 8:29, 10:27; cf. also the altar of witness of Josh 22:34 and the great stone of witness in Josh 24:26-27.

145In 160 BC the high priest Onias IV was forced to flee from Judea to Egypt. He referred King Ptolemy to this passage for justification for erecting a Jewish temple in Egypt. Some think that these verses find their fulfillment in the thousands of Jews who resided in Egypt during the intertestamental period.

146The clause could be read: *the Egyptians will serve Assyria*, an understanding that has the support of the ancient versions. The context, however, requires the prepositional reading of *et.*
Yahweh. Egypt (an old enemy) and Assyria (the new enemy), which stood at opposite poles geographically and politically, will experience a new relationship. These ancient enemies will be joined by a highway—a connecting link—by which Isaiah refers to their worship of Yahweh. Serve often has the connotation of worship in the OT. The gospel unites men of all nations. Those who project the fulfillment of this prophecy into the future—the millennium—demonstrate their lack of sensitivity to spiritual realities of the present age.

E. Kingdom Standing (19:24-25):
1. Dimensions of the kingdom (19:24): In that day Israel shall be a third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth... Isaiah foresees the day when Egypt will be part of a great spiritual kingdom. Israel, Assyria and Egypt will stand on equal footing before Yahweh. This triple alliance—the NT people of God—will be a blessing to the whole earth. Thus the blessing promised to Abram some two thousand years before Christ (Gn 12:3) finds fulfillment.
2. Description of the kingdom (19:25): when Yahweh of Hosts has blessed them, saying, Blessed is my people Egypt, and the work of my hands Assyria, and my inheritance Israel. In this remarkable v terms elsewhere restricted to Israel are applied two representative Gentile nations. So ch 19 provides an amazing example of the general picture of ch 2 that Gentiles will flow into spiritual Zion to learn the ways of Yahweh.

CHAPTER 20
AN ACTION PARABLE

The climax of the Egypt oracle is an action parable that dramatically illustrated Isaiah’s opinion about trusting in Egypt. This is the only action parable attributed to Isaiah, but such antics became frequent in the ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

INSTRUCTION
20:1-2

A. Specific Date (20:1): In the year when Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him and he fought against Ashdod and captured it—... During the reign of the Assyrian King Sargon, Isaiah acted out a parable. This action parable is dated to the year that Tartan (one of three chief officers of the Assyrian Empire) captured the Philistine city of Ashdod (c. 711 BC), northernmost of the five great Philistine cities.

B. Strange Directions (20:2): at that time Yahweh spoke by the hand of Isaiah son of Amoz saying, Go, take off the sackcloth from your loins and your sandals loose from upon your feet. And he had done this walking naked and barefoot. At that time does not allude to the occupation of Ashdod, but is a more general temporal indication to point out parenthetically that Isaiah in 713 BC already had begun to appear naked and barefoot to dramatize that rebellion against Assyria would prove ineffectual. Normally Isaiah wore a sackcloth garment as a sign of mourning. Yahweh told his prophet to remove his garment and his sandals. For three years, prior to the siege of Ashdod. Isaiah went about barefoot and naked, i.e., without his outer garment, but not

---

147 Isaiah uses a highway as a metaphor for the removal of alienation and separation. See 11:16; 33:8; 35:8; 40:3; 49:11; 62:10.
148 For excellent comments on this v, see Butler, BSTS, 1:276-77.
149 Israel is called my people in Isa 10:24; 43:6,7; Hos 1:10; 2:23; Jer 11:4; work of my hand in Isa 60:21; 64:8; Ps 119:73; 138:8. The designation my inheritance, however, is used only of Israel.
150 In his annals Sargon claims to have led this campaign, but Assyrian kings frequently took credit for the accomplishments of their subordinates.
151 Ashdod was located about thirty-three miles west of Jerusalem and about two or three miles inland.
152 Sackcloth may have been the customary dress of prophets. Cf. 2 Kgs 1:8; Mt 3:4; Zech 13:4). On the other hand, Isaiah may have been experiencing some personal bereavement; or he may have been illustrating lamentation over the fall of Ephraim, or the impending judgment on Judah.
153 In Hebrew time reckoning, parts of three years are cited as three years. The minimum time required for three years by this reckoning is fourteen months.
154 Gottwald, AKE, 167.
nude.\textsuperscript{155} And he had done this indicates that Isaiah carried out the instructions long before he announced what his actions meant.

**INTERPRETATION**

**20:3-4**

**A. A Sign Concerning Egypt** (20:3): Then Yahweh said, As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years as a sign and token concerning Egypt and concerning Cush... Isaiah’s state of undress was to be a sign—evidence that Yahweh was worthy of trust. The thrust of this oracle is the fate of Egypt/Cush, the fomenter of the rebellion at Ashdod.

**B. A Sign of Captivity** (20:4): so shall the king of Assyria lead away the captive of Egypt and the exile of Cush: young men and elders, naked and barefoot with buttocks bare—to the shame of Egypt. Isaiah was acting out the fate of war captives. Assyrian artwork amply illustrates that captives were frequently stripped. This was done to (1) demoralize the captives and subject peoples; and (2) render escape more difficult. Isaiah’s removal of outer garb underscored the humiliation inflicted on the armies of Egypt-Ethiopia by the Assyrians. The prophecy began to be fulfilled when the Egyptian army sent to the help of Judah in 701 was defeated at Eltekeh. This was the first of a series of disastrous defeats by Assyria in the next few decades culminating in Esarhaddon’s invasion of Egypt in 671 BC.

**CONSTERNATION**

**20:5-6**

**A. Among the Leaders of Judah** (20:5): They shall be dismayed and ashamed because of Cush their hope and because of Egypt their boast. Probably the leaders of Judah are chiefly in view. Hopes of rescue from Assyria from the Cushite/Egyptian forces was an illusion.

**B. Among the Leaders of Philistia** (20:6): The inhabitant of this coast shall say in that day, Behold, so is our hope to which we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria. How then can we escape? Other nations besides Judah were looking to Egypt for assistance against the Assyrians. The inhabitants of this coast are the Philistines, including the citizens of Ashdod. There may even be a hint that regions further to the north in Phoenicia will also suffer defeat by the Assyrians. They will be despondent over the failure of the Egyptians to come to their assistance. The fate of Ashdod constitutes an admonition to the Judeans against a continued policy of confederation.

**CHAPTER 21**

**WORLDLY SCHEMES:**

The four burdens in chs 21-22 are extremely difficult to interpret. These oracles share a visionary character. The nations addressed manifested a defiant attitude toward impending calamity. These four oracles seem to come from the same historical context. Until ca. 700 BC Babylon was the main gadfly to the Assyrian imperial machine. Apparently Dumah, Arabia and Judah were involved in one of the numerous Babylonian conspiracies that characterized the period from 732-700 BC. Isaiah, then, desired for his people to avoid putting their trust in worldly schemes.

**DEFEAT FOR BABYLON**

**21:1-10**

**Burden on the wilderness of the sea.** The cryptic reference appears to be to Babylonia either because of that land’s many irrigation canals, or because of its proximity to the Persian Gulf. In the late eighth century Babylon was encouraging rebellion against the Assyrian overlords. This oracle warns the Judeans not to put their trust in Babylon.

**A. Nature of the Vision** (21:1-4):

\textsuperscript{155}Hebrew ḫărōm can mean nude (Gn 2:25), but also is used in situations where only partial disrobing is intended (Isa 58:7; 1 Sam 19:24; Mic 1:8).
1. A sudden vision (21:1): Like whirlwinds from the Negev it comes sweeping from the desert, from a land of terror. What it is sweeps in from the desert like whirlwinds from the Negev south of Judah is not identified. Some think that the subject is judgment. More likely it is the vision itself that sweeps over the prophet like a storm. The desert is the Arabian Desert that lies between Babylonia and Palestine. This desert is so desolate that it was dangerous to man and beast, and hence is called a land of terror.

2. A harsh vision (21:2a): A harsh vision has been declared to me: the treacherous act treacherously, and the spoiler spoils. The vision was harsh or grim, i.e., hard to bear. Isaiah does not delight in preaching bad news. The vision is harsh because it deals with the treacherous and the spoiler. These terms are usually applied to the Babylonians or their attackers. But this pair of terms is used of the Assyrians in 33:1 and it may have the same meaning here. The paramount challenge to the nations of the Near East in Isaiah’s day was the treacherous Assyrian Empire.

3. A judgment vision (21:2b): Go up, O Elam; lay siege, O Media. All her groaning I will stop. An attack is being urged, but by whom, and against whom? The exhortations are not likely to come from Yahweh or from Isaiah. Rather in his vision Isaiah hears three short war-cries. In Isaiah’s day Elam and Media (nations within the boundaries of modern Iran) were allies of Babylon against Assyria. Given the historical situation of Isaiah’s day the attack envisioned here is most likely against Assyria. The groaning then refers to ruthless oppression of the Assyrians. The leader of the anti-Assyrian allies (Marduk-apal-iddina (biblical Merodach-baladan) assures his allies (the Medes, Elamites and possibly the Judeans) that he will end the Assyrian oppression of the region.156

4. A disturbing vision (21:3-4): Therefore, my loins are full of anguish; pains have seized me like the pains of a woman in labor. I am doubled up from hearing, dismayed from seeing. (4) My heart went astray; shuddering overwhelmed me. The twilight I desired put me to trembling. The harsh vision caused Isaiah abdominal cramps, anguish and confusion. Twilight may have been the time when Isaiah normally received visions. Thus to desire twilight is to long for a brighter vision;157 but instead the mental impression he received from Yahweh became more traumatic.

B. Depiction of the Scene (21:5-6a):

1. What the princes are doing (21:5a): Arranging tables, spreading the cloth, eating, drinking… While the prophet agonizes, there is carefree banqueting going on in Jerusalem.158

2. What the princes should be doing (21:5b): a. They should prepare for war (21:5b): rise up O princes, anoint the shield. Under the influence of his vision Isaiah cannot look on silently while Judean leaders feast. He knows what is going to happen. He wants to prepare his people for a major blow to their political maneuverings. The princes are told to get ready for battle. Oiling the shield was a practice designed to (1) make the blow of swords glance off ineffectively, or (2) prevent the leather covering of shields from cracking or being easily penetrated when struck.159 Here the phrase is used metaphorically for battle preparation.

b. They should post a watch (21:6a): For thus says Adonay unto me, Go, post the watchman. Isaiah’s directive to the banqueters is reinforced with assurance that it comes from Adonay the Sovereign who rules over the affairs of nations. Posting sentries was a normal precaution in times of hostility.

---

156 The usual understanding is that Isaiah could foresee the day when Babylon’s allies would turn on her. The Medo-Persian coalition brought down Babylon in 539 BC. The groaning is usually taken to refer to the suffering under Babylonian oppression once she became a world power after 605 BC. But elsewhere Isaiah regarded the fall of Babylon to Cyrus as an occasion for joy, while here the prophet is gripped by terror as he contemplates the vision.

157 Alternatively, Isaiah hoped for rest at the end of the day of disturbing revelation.

158 Those who hold that this oracle predicts the fall of Babylon to Cyrus point out that a banquet was in progress when the city was taken. See Dan 5; Xenophon (431-350 BC), Cyropaedia, 7.5.15.

159 Others think those posted on sentry duty in v 6 use their idle time to anoint their shields.
C. Instructions for the Watchmen (21:6-9):

1. Duty of the watchman (21:6b-7): What he sees, he shall report. (7) When he sees chariots, pairs of horsemen, riders on donkeys, riders on camels, then let him pay attention, close attention. Isaiah anticipates what the watchman will see, namely a caravan of horsemen and chariots, donkeys and camels. Whether this is a military expedition or a caravan of another sort is not disclosed. The text only emphasizes that the watchman should pay very careful attention to what he sees on the horizon.

2. Response of the watchmen (21:8-9): The watchman speaks. He reports three things.
   a. He reports his obedience (21:8): Then as a lion he cried out, On my watchtower, O Sovereign, I stand continually by day. Upon my guard post every night I am stationed. The watchman remained at his post day and night. He cries like a lion, i.e., loudly and boldly, to his superiors.
   b. He reports what he saw (21:9a): And behold, this is coming: manned chariotry, horsemen in pairs. Finally and abruptly (behold!) there was something to report. The watchman saw manned chariotry, i.e., chariots with armed warriors as well as drivers, or as Young prefers, wagons full of men. Then he saw horsemen in pairs, or perhaps a couple of horsemen. This appears to be a small mobile military unit that brings news from the eastern front. They appear to be approaching Jerusalem, not Babylon.
   c. He reports Babylon’s fall (21:9b): And he answered and said, Fallen, fallen is Babylon! All the images of her gods he has shattered to the earth. The speaker may be the leader of the approaching unit; alternatively, the speaker may be the watchman. He interrupts his own description of what he saw with the announcement that Babylon had fallen. Her images have not even been able to save themselves from destruction. He (Yahweh) or his agent has shattered the images of Babylon’s gods.

Babylon was besieged a number of times in the lifetime of Isaiah.161 Does the announcement refer to any one of the sieges of Babylon, or to all of them collectively? The culmination of a series of bloody encounters between Assyrian and the eastern coalition (Babylon/Elam/Media) came in December 689 BC. Sennacherib reports how he destroyed Babylon. His records indicate that he annihilated the inhabitants, smashed the gods, destroyed the city from its foundation to its top and burned it. Then he released huge volumes of water over the ruins in order to obliterate every trace of the city that had been in constant revolt against him.162 Probably it is to this fall of Babylon that Isaiah refers in this oracle.163

D. Isaiah’s Concluding Word (21:10): O my threshed one and son of a threshing floor, what I have heard from Yahweh of Hosts, God of Israel I have declared to you. The Judeans had suffered much at the hands of the Assyrians. They are depicted as prostrate on the threshing floor after the thresher has battered their nation severely. Yet Isaiah must tell them the truth. There is no relief on the horizon from an alliance with Babylon.

Threshing was the process of removing kernels of grain from the stalks. This was accomplished by having animals pull a sled with spikes for teeth over stalks of grain. The residue was then tossed into the air so that the wind could blow away the worthless chaff, and the grain could fall back to the ground. Isaiah uses this process as a metaphor for the violent treatment that God’s people had received from the Assyrians.

The image underlining the helpless condition of the Judeans may convey a note of hope. Judah was not chaff but grain. Yahweh who had used Assyria to thresh Judah would fulfill his purposes for them.

161Babylon was besieged no fewer than three times in the lifetime of Isaiah, viz., in 710 BC by Sargon, in 703 and 691 by Sennacherib.
162For details see Erlandsson, BB, 86-92.
163A more traditional approach is to suggest that the fall of Babylon occurred over time, beginning with the conquest by Cyrus in 539 BC. Cyrus himself did not shatter Babylon’s gods in any physical sense, but rather honored them. But in successive conquests over the centuries Babylon’s gods were literally shattered.
Their main human hope had gone, but this would leave them free to put their trust in the Lord.

DARKNESS FOR DUMAH
21:11-12

**Burden on Dumah.** Dumah (silence) is probably a name for Edom. In the Assyrian annals of Tiglath-pileser, Sargon and Sennacherib reference is made to Edom under the name *Udumu*. The Assyrians put down at least three revolts by Edom during the years 734-701 BC.165

**A. Desperate Inquiry (21:11):** Unto me one is calling from Seir, Watchman, what of the night; watchman, what of the night? Isaiah heard, as it were, someone asking him as prophetic night watchman about the duration of darkness and oppression. On rare occasions Gentiles did seek the counsel of Israelite prophets (2 Kgs 5:9f; 8:7ff). What of the night, i.e., what is left of the night, is the cry of someone who because of sickness, sleeplessness or fear considers the night interminable. Could the prophet yet see any indication of light (deliverance)?

**B. Prophetic Response (21:12):** The guard says, Morning comes, and also night. If you would inquire, inquire. Return, come. Isaiah’s response was purposely ambiguous: morning comes but also the night. Isaiah cannot offer unequivocal hope. Morning (relief) will come eventually; but morning will be followed by another night. The meaning perhaps is that the oppressive Assyrian tyrant will be replaced by another black night, the rule of Babylon. In any case, further inquiry (return, come) at a later time might elicit a clear answer. The evasive nature of this reply to Gentile inquiry is virtually equivalent to no answer at all. Dumah means silence. In times of crisis the non-believer has no assurance, no light of divine revelation.

**DEVASTATION FOR ARABIA**166
21:13-17

**Burden on Arabia.** Arabian commercial caravans were extremely important in the international commerce of Isaiah’s day. Historically the Arabs were commercial trading partners of the Babylonians and their military allies. Assyrian texts contain several references to confrontations with Aribi. Again the warning to the Judeans is: Do not trust in any political scheme instigated by Babylon.

**A. Condition of Arabian Caravans (21:13-14):**
1. In the thickets (21:13): In the thickets of Arabia the caravans of Dedan camp. Thickets (ya’ar) is lit., forest. But there are no forests in Arabia. Probably here the word means something like the modern expression off the beaten path. Dedan168 was in northern Arabia near the Edomites (Jer 49:8).
2. In need of sustenance (21:14): To meet the thirsty, bring water. Oh inhabitants of the land of Tema, with bread meet the fugitive. Tema is the name of one of the tribes of the Ishmaelites (Gn 25:15). Both Dedan and Tema are in a region of the northwestern Arabian Desert known as Kedar. The picture is of the caravans of Dedan heading southward having been forced to abandon the main caravan routes. The people of Tema are urged to assist with water and bread the stragglers as they stagger into town.

**B. Explanation of the Condition (21:15):** For before swords they have fled, from before the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from before the pressure of war. Warfare has forced refugees to flee deep into the Arabian Desert for security. Pressure (kōbed) is lit., weight. The word is related to the word glory that appears in the following v.

---

164 The Septuagint regards Dumah as another name for Edom. Others think Dumah was an oasis in northern Arabia. On this interpretation, the inhabitants of Mount Seir (Edomites) were expressing great interest in the fate of Dumah. Were that region to fall to the Assyrians, Edomite eastern trade connections would be cut off.

165 See details in Erlandsson, *BB*, 93.

166 Another prophetic oracle against Arabia appears in Jer 49:28-33.

167 Sennacherib boasts of defeating an Arabian force on his first expedition against Babylon. He tells of a campaign against the Arabs in 691 BC. For details, see Erlandsson, *BB*, 94f.

168 Dedanites were descendants of Keturah (Gn 25:3).
C. Decree of Adonay (21:16-17):
1. Precise (21:16): For thus said Adonay unto me: Within a year, as a hired man counts it, all the glory of Kedar will terminate. Yahweh is Adonay, i.e., the Sovereign. He asserts his authority over all nations. Within a year it will be clear to all who looked to Arabia for support that no help will be forthcoming. As a hired man counts means exactly one year, for a hired man does not work one day longer than his contract stipulates. Within that timeframe all the glory of Arabia will collapse. Glory includes all acquisitions and accomplishments.

2. Ominous (21:17): And the remnant of the number of the bows of the mighty men of the sons of Kedar will be few, for Yahweh God of Israel has spoken. The future of Kedar (Arabia) is bleak. Only a remnant of the Arabian fighters will survive their confrontation with the Assyrians. Bows were the chief weapon of the Arabian fighters. At the battle of Halule in 691 BC Sennacherib reports a smashing victory over the Aribi. It is interesting that Herodotus gives to Sennacherib the title “King of the Arabians and the Assyrians.”

CHAPTER 22
CONSPIRACIES CLOSER HOME

VALLEY OF VISION
22:1-14

Burden of the valley of vision. Though Jerusalem is situated on mountains, the capital is here designated the valley because it was surrounded by mountains. Valley of vision refers to Jerusalem as the place where so many prophetic visions had been given to the people. That an oracle against Jerusalem is found among the oracles concerning foreign nations is very suggestive. Jerusalem was like Babylon, Dumah, and Arabia spiritually. Her citizens acted like the heathen and must share the fate of the heathen.

The setting of this oracle seems to be 701 BC just after the miraculous deliverance from the invasion of the Assyrian King Sennacherib (cf. ch 37).

A. Misguided Jubilation (22:1b-4):
1. City-wide celebration (22:1b-2a):
   a. Location (22:1b): What is it to you now that you go up, all of you, to the rooftops? What is it to you is a rebuke, suggesting that the activity described is unwarranted. The Jerusalemites have gone up to the rooftops to (1) watch the enemy retreat and (2) engage in partying. The flat roofs of houses in those days were ideal in the cool of the day for family and social gatherings.
   b. Jubilation (22:2a): You who were full of noise, tumultuous city, exultant town… The overnight decimation of the Assyrian in 701 BC is probably the occasion of this jubilation.

2. City-wide humiliation (22:2b-3):
   a. Slain (22:2b): Your slain were not slain with a sword, not dead in battle. (3) All your rulers have fled together without a bow they have been tied up. All your found ones have been bound together; from afar they fled. Isaiah regarded the celebration as inappropriate. He foresaw a siege of Jerusalem in which soldiers will die of starvation in the city. Such were the conditions in Jerusalem during the Babylonian siege (Lam 4:9). Leaders will desert the place only to be captured by the enemy.
   b. Private lamentation (22:4): Therefore, I said, Look away from me. Let me weep bitterly. Do not hasten to comfort me over the destruction of the daughter of my people. Knowing through God’s revelation that Jerusalem will be destroyed, Isaiah wept while others laughed. He wants to be left alone to express his sorrow over the future destruction of the daughter of Jerusalem, i.e., Jerusalem’s population.

B. Yahweh’s Day of Calamity (22:5-8a): The prophet received a very definite mental picture of what will take place in the terrible day of Jerusalem’s calamity.

1. Distress of the people (22:5): For Adonay Yahweh of Hosts has a day of panic, trampling, and confusion in the valley of vision, a breaking down of walls, a crying out to the mountains. Adonay--the Sovereign Lord--has scheduled a day for Jerusalem’s destruction. The people are
trampled by the invaders. They are in a panic and daze. Fortifications are battered down. Fearful shrieks echo from surrounding mountains.

2. Description of the attackers (22:6): Elam lifted up the quiver with manned chariots and horsemen; Kir uncovered the shield. Isaiah saw contingents of a foreign army—units from distant Elam and Kir—besieging Jerusalem. Elamite troops formed important contingents of the armies of Assyria and Babylon. These are the same troops that destroy Babylon (21:2). Elam was located east of Babylonia. Kir is a distant land (location unknown) to which the Assyrians deported captives (2 Kgs 16:9; Amos 1:5). On manned chariots, see 21:9. The enemy uncovered the shield, i.e., removed the protective covers from their shields, in preparation for battle.

3. Imminence of the attack (22:7-8a): It came to pass that the choicest of your valleys were full of chariots; and horsemen are stationed at the city gates. (8) He removed the screen of Judah. Archers, chariots, infantry and cavalry are arrayed against Jerusalem. All avenues of escape are cut off. Bands of horsemen are lined up at the gates ready to make the final charge into the city. The enemy had removed the screen of Judah, i.e., the outlying fortresses that guarded the approaches to Jerusalem.

C. Misplaced Trust (22:8b-11): Isaiah returns to the situation in Jerusalem just before the Assyrian invasion. The Judeans made it very clear that their trust was in human resources rather than in Yahweh.

1. Preparing for attack (22:8b-11a): Isaiah outlines the preparations Jerusalem made for the attack (cf. 2 Chr 32:3ff).
   a. Arsenal inventory (22:8b): You looked in that day to the weaponry of the House of the Forest… Isaiah foresaw the desperate efforts of Jerusalem’s defenders to prepare for siege. First, they checked their arsenals. House of the Forest was built by Solomon on Mount Zion. It served as an arsenal for weapons (cf. 1 Kgs 7:2ff; 10:16-17).
   b. Damage assessment (22:9a): and the breaches in the walls of the city of David you observed, that they were many. Second, they surveyed the walls and noted the many weak areas of the city’s defenses. City David is a fortress on Mount Zion, the best-fortified area of Jerusalem.
   c. Water supply planning (22:9b): Then you gathered the waters of the lower pool… The lower pool was probably one that had been constructed by Ahaz at the foot of the Tyropoean Valley.
   d. Refortification of walls (22:10): and the houses of Jerusalem you counted. And you tore down the houses to fortify the wall. Fourth, they checked the city’s houses to see which ones might be dismantled in order to further fortify the wall.169 There was not sufficient time to get stone from the Judean quarries. Any house that was not really needed would have to go. The rubble from the houses would be used to fill the interior of casement walls and to repair any breaches noted in v 9.
   e. Reservoir construction (22:11): A reservoir you made between the two walls for the waters of the old pool. Fifth, they built a new reservoir. This probably refers to work of Hezekiah that incorporated the work of Ahaz (v 9b) into a larger construction that created the Pool of Siloam.170 The old pool that had been outside the walls was brought within. Between the two walls has been taken three ways: (1) the space between the double walls of the city; (2) a special reservoir within a casement wall; and (3) an area where a new wall coming off the western hill intersected the older wall of David’s City that extended up the Tyropoean Valley.

2. Ignoring Yahweh (22:11b): But you did not look unto its Maker; the One who formed it long ago you did not see. Isaiah did not oppose the efforts by Jerusalem’s citizens to prepare for attack His concern was that in the recent crisis they had not thought to look to Yahweh. Maker is part of Isaiah’s creation vocabulary. The Creator had ordained the attack on Jerusalem long before. He is

---

169 During peace time squatters built houses between the two walls. These are probably the houses that were dismantled. Following the demolishing of the houses, the area may have been flooded.

170 So Oswalt (NICOT 1:413).
the Maker of history as well as the Maker of the universe.

D. Iniquity of Judah (22:12-14):
1. Judah’s failure to repent (22:12-13):
a. Yahweh’s call (22:12): And Adonay Yahweh of Hosts called on that day for weeping and for lamentation, and for tearing out hair, and for girding on sackcloth. The near disaster of 701 BC called for national lamentation. People should have demonstrated all the signs of mourning over sin and petition for Yahweh’s forgiveness and intervention.
b. Judeans’ response (22:13): But behold rejoicing and gladness, killing bulls and slaughtering sheep, eating meat and drinking wine, [saying] Eat and drink for tomorrow we die. The streets of Jerusalem were filled, not with the penitent, but with merrymakers. The carefree attitude of Jerusalem’s inhabitants (let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die) was a grim prediction of their fate. Having made as much preparation as they could make, they gathered for pre-destruction parties. Faced with death and captivity, the citizens showed no signs of getting serious about Yahweh.
2. Judah’s perilous state (22:14): It was uncovered in my ears [by] Yahweh of Hosts, Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven to you until you are dead, says Adonay Yahweh of Hosts. Because they were unrepentant, they remained unforgiven. They lived under the divine death sentence of the Sovereign, Yahweh of Hosts. The threat against Jerusalem was fulfilled when the armies of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC.

A CONSPIRATOR REPLACED
22:15-25

The prophecy against Shebna is the only instance of the denunciation of an individual by name in Isaiah. In this oracle Isaiah cited a particular example of the attitude expressed by Jerusalem’s citizens in general. The spotlight of judgment is now directed toward one man. This oracle has its setting during the period 711-701 BC. That this oracle is found within a special collection of oracles against foreign nations suggests that Shebna was the architect of the anti-Assyrian confederation policy within Judah.

A. Instructions to Isaiah (22:15): Thus says Adonay Yahweh of Hosts: Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the house. Judah’s Sovereign (Adonay) dispatched his prophet to confront a high-ranking government official. This steward expresses contempt for someone whose opinion of himself was inflated. Based on the unusual form of the name Shebna many believe that he was a foreigner—most likely an Aramean. As steward he was the ranking officer of the king’s court. The term steward (sōkēn) appears only here, and its precise meaning is unclear. Related words, however, occur in other Semitic languages indicating that this man held a high office. Over the house indicates a position akin to prime minister.

B. Failure in Office (22:16): What have you here, and whom have you here, that you have hewn here a grave for yourself, hewing his grave in the height, chiseling a resting place for himself in the rock? The challenge formula (what have you here, and whom have you here) might be paraphrased: What are you doing here and who sent you here? Obviously Isaiah thought the prime minister should have been elsewhere tending to the business of state. At the time of his confrontation with Isaiah, Shebna was preparing a rock sepulcher for himself. This man had betrayed his trust as a public official. He was more interested in building lasting monuments to himself than in helping his people face the national crisis that awaited them. This man’s priorities were all wrong. The actual tomb of

---

**Footnotes:**

171. The feminine form of this noun appears in 1 Kgs 1:2, 4 where it has traditionally been translated nurse. Usage here and in cognate languages suggests that deputy might be a more appropriate translation. On usage in the Amarna Letters and Ugaritic texts, see Oswalt, NIC, 1:418.

172. Others who are said to be over the house: Ahishar in Solomon’s court (1 Kgs 4:6), Arza under Elah (1 Kgs 16:9), Obadiah under Ahab (1 Kgs 18:3), and Jotham, son of Uzziah, when his father contracted leprosy (2 Kgs 15:5).
Shebna may have been found.\textsuperscript{173} The shift to the third person in the second half of the v suggests that Isaiah is addressing on-lookers to whom Shebna was showing his proud work.

C. Punishment of Shebna (22:17-19):

1. His ultimate fate (22:17-18):
   a. Violent deportation (22:17-18a): \textit{Behold, Yahweh is about to hurl you with a hurling, O mighty man, and wrapping you with a wrapping; (18) he will thoroughly wind you with a winding, with a rolling like a ball into a broad land.} The Hebrew is difficult, but the sense is clear. \textit{O mighty man} reflects Shebna’s inflated view of himself. This powerful, influential man will be hurled like a ball. To hurl with a hurling is to hurl violently. \textit{Wind you with a winding}, i.e., wind you tightly like a ball repeats for emphasis or clarification the same thought. The picture is something like loose yarn wound into a ball, then hurled away. \textit{Broad land} (lit., \textit{broad of two hands})\textsuperscript{174} probably refers to Assyria with its broad plains.
   
   b. Shameful death (22:18b): \textit{There you will die and there will be your glorious chariots, disgrace of the house of your lord!} The Hebrew emphasizes \textit{there}, as opposed to 	extit{here} in Jerusalem. Shebna will die in the land to which he had been expelled. Perhaps the steward had come to the site of his tomb in one of his splendid state chariots. Those chariots, of which Shebna was so proud, will be there with him in the land of his captivity, i.e., Assyria. This terrible fate awaits Shebna because, by his misplaced priorities, this man was a disgrace to his lord, i.e., the king.
   
   2. His immediate fate (22:19): \textit{I will depose you from your office, and I will pull you down from your station.} Shebna was about to lose his office of steward, i.e., prime minister. The next time Shebna is mentioned he holds the position of secretary, a prestigious office, but not with the authority of steward (36:3). The demotion of Shebna had taken place by 701 BC. There is no way of knowing what internal Judean politics kept Shebna in the royal administration in the capacity of secretary.

D. Replacement in Office (22:20-24):

1. Identity of the replacement (22:20): \textit{And it will come to pass in that day that I will call my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiah...} Shebna’s replacement as steward will be Eliakim. He is called my servant because he was sympathetic to the message of Isaiah.\textsuperscript{175} The title connotes both obligation and privilege. By 701 BC Eliakim had in fact replaced Shebna in office (cf. 36:3; 37:2).

2. Uniform of Eliakim (22:21a): \textit{and I will clothe him with your robe, and fasten his sash on him, and your authority I will place in his hand...} The prime minister apparently wore identifying dress. \textit{Robe} and \textit{sash} are used elsewhere only of priestly garb. They must be standard terms for ceremonial clothing.

3. Attitude of Eliakim (22:21b): \textit{and he will be a father to the inhabitant of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.} Eliakim will perform his duties with genuine concern for his people. The word \textit{father} suggests his authority over the people of Jerusalem; it also suggests the service he would render for them through his office. Eliakim’s self-sacrificing service provided a glimmer of hope that someday the ruler of God’s people will be the Everlasting Father (9:6).

4. Rewards of Eliakim (22:22-23):
   a. Davidic key (22:22): \textit{And I will put the key to the house of David upon his shoulder; he will open and none will close; he will close and none will open.} There may have been a literal large key carried on the shoulder of the prime minister;\textsuperscript{176} but more likely the expression is figurative. The authority to admit petitioners or debar them from King Hezekiah’s presence will reside in Eliakim as the one who was over the house. To put \textit{on the shoulder} is a figure meaning to invest in or confer upon (cf. 9:6). Similar words are applied to Jesus in Rev 3:7 and to the apostles in Mt 16:19; 18:18.

---

\textsuperscript{173}A tomb found in 1871 east of David’s City in the area of the modern village of Silwan was identified as belonging to someone who was over the house. The tomb dates to ca. 700 BC.

\textsuperscript{174}The idiom \textit{broad of two hands} is used of the region around Shechem (Gn 34:21) and the region around Dan (Judg 18:10).

\textsuperscript{175}The title \textit{servant} is applied to Isaiah (20:3), to Israel (chs 40-55, 65-66) and the Suffering Servant (esp. ch 53).

\textsuperscript{176}Keys in the Near East were large and made of wood. Ridderbos (BSC, 193) thinks that the key opened the doors to all the royal buildings and treasuries.
b. Firm peg (22:23a): And I will drive him like a peg in a firm place... God will give Eliakim the strength to withstand the pressures of his office. A peg driven into a firm place is a figure for what is strong, unbending, and unbreakable. Eliakim will be able to bear prodigious weight without strain. Furthermore, his wise and spiritual counsel would give stability to the kingdom.

c. Glorious throne (22:23b): and he will become a glorious throne for the house of his father. The idea is that Eliakim will not disgrace his office as Shebna had done. He will be a glorious throne His family will take pride in his eminence and find security in his firmly entrenched position. The house of his father may be Eliakim’s immediate family or perhaps the royal house. If the former, the meaning is that Eliakim will bring honor to his whole family, probably by elevating them to positions of prominence. If the latter, then the royal family can be confident that Eliakim will bring them nothing but glory.

5. Confidence in Eliakim (22:24): So they will hang on him all the glory of the house of his father, the offspring and offshoots, all the small vessels, from the bowls to all the jugs. The picture of the firm peg is expanded. Some take this v as condemnation for nepotism; others take it to be commendation. Eliakim is dependable. The pronoun (they) appears to point to the members of the house of his father. To hang all the glory means that his whole family comes to look to him for economic support, perks and favors. Offspring are direct descendants and offshoots are more distant relatives. The small vessels are insignificant people who can also depend on Eliakim.

E. Final Warning (22:25): In that day (oracle of Yahweh of Hosts) the peg driven into a firm place will be removed. It will be hewn off and fall. And the burden that was upon it will be cut off, for Yahweh has spoken. Though he was a compassionate and capable leader, Eliakim was only human. The nation dare not put its trust in him.

Like a peg broken from the wall, all that depended on him will be cut off. King Hezekiah was followed by his ruthless son Manasseh. Eliakim was probably removed during his reign.

CHAPTER 23
WORLDLY WEALTH: TYRE

Burden on Tyre. The Book of Burdens opened with a warning against trusting in worldly glory as illustrated by Babylon on the eastern side of Isaiah’s world. Now Isaiah looked to the western side of his world to Tyre. He saw that city as the epitome of worldly wealth in which God’s people might be tempted to put their trust.

Phoenicia was commercial capital of the Mediterranean world. Tyre was a key member of the anti-Assyrian block of nations in the west. For that reason Tyre endured a long siege under Sennacherib, and the rest of Phoenicia was devastated. The Tyrian commercial empire was stymied for a number of years.

The Tyre oracle consists of three main divisions that may be designated by the words lamentation, explanation and restoration.

REGIONAL LAMENTATION
23:1-7

Isaiah traces the movement of the news of Tyre’s fall among those most affected.

A. Ships of Tarshish (23:1): Howl, ships of Tarshish, for it has been destroyed, without house or harbor. From the land of Kittim it is revealed to them. Ships of Tarshish are large trading ships able to travel on the open sea. The name was originally given to ships that were able to make the long voyage to Tarshish on the coast of Spain. Phoenician colonies existed in that region three hundred years before Isaiah’s day. Tarshish ships are heading home to Tyre when they make port at

177Some think the figure is that of a tent peg in firm ground.

178On 22:25 following Oswalt (NIC, 1:423f.). Other commentators think that it is Shebna who is the unreliable peg.

1791 Kgs 10:22; 22:48; Ps 48:7; Isa 2:16; 60:9; Ezek 27:25; Jon 1:3.
Kittim (Cyprus) and learn that their home port no longer exists.

B. Phoenician Homeland (23:2-4):
1. Silence (23:2): Be silent, O inhabitants of the coast, merchants of Sidon; those who have gone over the sea have filled you. Be silent is rendered by some mourn. Sidon, the other great Phoenician city, represents the response of the rest of Phoenicia (the coast) to the news of Tyre’s fall. Those who have gone over in the Hebrew is singular, but the verb (have filled you) that follows is plural. This singular/plural combination may be intended to point to a unified effort that had a multiplicity of implications.\(^{180}\) Those who have gone over the sea refers to merchant marines from Tyre. Have filled you could be taken to be the merchants from Tyre, or to the goods which those merchants brought to Sidon.
2. Significance (23:3): And on the great waters the grain of Shihor, the harvest of the River was brought to her. She became the market of nations. This v underscores the former glory of Tyre and her economic importance to the world. The great waters are the Mediterranean Sea. The Shihor is the Nile River. Phoenician vessels brought and sold the grain of Egypt. Tyre was the market of the nations,\(^ {181}\) i.e., the hub of commercial activity.
3. Shame (23:4): Be ashamed, O Sidon, for Yam speaks, the mighty one of the sea, saying, I have not labored nor have I brought forth; I have not reared young men, nor raised virgins. Sidon is told to be ashamed, for the trust placed in Tyre has been misplaced. Yam (sea) with no article is a proper name, viz., the Canaanite god of the sea, or the sea personified. Yam laments in the words of a mother who has lost her children. The agony of birth and the struggle to raise the child have been for nothing. Tyre is no more! Phoenician sailors will become so few that the sea will deny that she ever had any such children.

C. Trading Partners (23:5-6):
1. Egypt (23:5): Upon a report to Egypt, they will howl at the report of Tyre. A messenger carries the news of Tyre’s demise to Egypt where it creates great dismay. Egypt’s longstanding commercial ties with the north have now been disrupted. Beyond the economic impact, Egypt had to anticipate that if the wealthy and influential city of Tyre had been destroyed, surely Egypt must face the same fate.
2. Tarshish (23:6): Pass over to Tarshish, howl, O inhabitants of the coast. News of Tyre’s fall now spreads around the Mediterranean ports even as far as Tarshish on the coast of Spain.
3. General reaction (23:7): Did this happen to you, O exultant one, whose origin is from days of old, whose feet have carried her to far-off places to sojourn. Along the trade routes all who hear the news of Tyre’s fall are incredulous. Could such a thing have happened to a city like Tyre? There are three reasons why the news of Tyre’s fall was so hard to believe. First, Tyre was exultant, i.e., a thriving city known for its excitement, its vitality, its fun and games. Second, Tyre was an ancient city; its origin is from days of old. The city always had been there as a hub of day-to-day life in the region. Third, Tyre had exerted great effort in establishing far-flung colonies for which the mother city was the lifeline. The collapse of Tyre shocked the world because it made other cities face up to their municipal mortality.

ISAIAH’S EXPLANATION
23:8-14

A. Plan of Yahweh (23:8-9):
1. Plan for Tyre’s fall (23:8): Who has planned this against Tyre, the giver of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traders are the honored of the earth? Tyre’s demise is no accident. Isaiah saw the hand of Yahweh behind the disaster. The once impressive status of Tyre is indicated in three phrases: (1) giver of crowns, (2) merchants are princes, (3) traders are honored. These three phrases indicate that the ordinary people who traveled the sea as Tyre’s

\(^{180}\) Cf. Hag 2:7. The Dead Sea Scroll (1QIs) reads the verb (mil'\( \dot{\text{a}} \)k) they filled you as mal'\( \dot{\text{a}} \)k\( \dot{\text{a}} \)w his messengers.

\(^{181}\) Lit., the traffic of the nations, i.e., the gain derived from traveling about buying and selling.
representatives were treated like royalty because everyone wanted to do business with Tyre.

2. Purpose of Tyre’s fall (23:9): **Yahweh of Hosts has counseled it, to profane the pride of all beauty, to bring down all the honored of earth.** It was God’s purpose in the destruction of Tyre to reveal his own character as **Yahweh of Hosts.** At the same time it was his purpose to **profane the pride of all beauty,** to show the emptiness of human glory, and the foolishness of relying on earthly wealth and power. To **bring down the honored** is to humiliate all those individuals who are idolized and glamorized by earthly society.

**B. Power of Yahweh (23:10-11):**

1. **Yahweh rules history (23:10):** **Pass over your land like the Nile, daughter of Tarshish, there is no restraint anymore.** The daughter of Tarshish is the population of the distant Phoenician colony on the coast of Spain. Isaiah uses the annual flooding of the Nile to illustrate expansion. Tarshish will now be able to develop independently, unrestrained by the motherland. Perhaps this υ is intended to point out a silver lining in the dark cloud of Tyre’s doom.

2. **Yahweh rules the sea (23:11a):** **His hand is stretched out over the sea, he caused kingdoms to tremble.** Again Isaiah emphasizes the reason for the upheaval in the commercial status quo around the Mediterranean world. Yahweh, not Tyre or Yam, controls what happens on the sea. His hand, symbol of power, is **stretched out over the sea.**

3. **Yahweh rules on land (23:11b):** **Yahweh commanded concerning Canaan to destroy her strongholds.** Yahweh controls the land as well. It was he who gave the order to demolish the strongholds of Canaan. Isaiah is using Canaan in the restricted sense of Phoenicia.

**C. Pronouncement of Yahweh (23:12-14):**

1. **Implications for Sidon (23:12):** **And he said, You shall not again exalt, O crushed virgin daughter of Sidon. To Kittim arise, pass over; even there you will find no rest.** On the basis of the fact that Yahweh controls both sea and land, he singles out the most important remaining stronghold of Phoenicia for a doom announcement. The population of Sidon is called a **virgin daughter** because they had not yet experienced conquest. That vibrant, joyous, untouched young girl eventually will be **crushed.** For the Sidonians there will be no escape. Even if they were to flee to Kittim (Cyprus), still they would not escape the mighty hand of Yahweh’s judgment.

2. **Proof of the implications (23:13):** **Behold the land of the Chaldeans—this is the people that is not. Assyria appointed it for desert creatures. They raised up their siege towers, they stripped her palaces, they made it ruins.** Lest any in Phoenicia should doubt the fate that Isaiah had announced, they have only to look at another commercial giant to the east. Sargon attacked Babylon in 710 BC. When Sargon was crowned king of Babylon, seven kings from Cyprus in the Tyrian commercial sphere voluntarily paid tribute to him. Sennacherib decimated the Chaldean capital in 689 BC. See discussion on 21:1-10. Isaiah may be alluding to either one or both of these attacks. Sidon cannot escape destruction any more than Babylon. The Assyrians almost had exterminated the Chaldeans. They had built siege towers against Babylon and smashed through her walls, and conquered the place. The Assyrians had no plans to resettle Babylon, and thus left it for the desert creatures to inhabit.

3. **Implications for Tarshish (23:14):** **Howl, O ships of Tarshish, for a stronghold is destroyed.** Isaiah concludes this section of the Tyre oracle with thought of υ 1. **Ships of Tarshish** again are called upon to join in the lament over Tyre’s fall for they now have no place where they can go for safe harbor.

In Sennacherib’s records of his western campaign in 701 BC he mentions first of all the subjugation of the kingdom of Tyre. The city itself endured a long and severe siege while the rest of the land was devastated. For at least five years the citizens of Tyre holed up in their island fortress off shore, totally cut off from the mainland.  

---

182 See Erlandsson (*BB*, 100) for details.
183 Later Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre for thirteen years (598-585 BC). In the process he completely destroyed the mainland city.
TYRE’S RESTORATION
23:15-18

A. Political Restoration (23:15):
1. Tyre forgotten (23:15a): And it shall come to pass in that day that Tyre will be forgotten seventy years like the days of one king. Seventy years seems to be an idiom of the day that stands for fullness or completeness. Like the days of one king takes seventy years as the ideal royal reign, to which no kings of Israel or Judah had achieved. Between the years 700 and 630 BC Tyre's trade was crippled. Assyria did not permit Tyre to engage in any business activity.
2. Tyre restored (23:15b): At the end of seventy years it will be to Tyre as the song of the prostitute... After the seventy years Tyre will recover. When Assyria's hold over Palestine came to an end around 630 BC, the western states began to flourish again, especially Judah and Tyre. Isaiah then likens what happened to what is recounted in the song of the prostitute. This is apparently the title for the poem that follows.

B. Commercial Restoration (23:16-17):
1. Tyre’s efforts at restoration (23:16): Take a harp, go about the city, O forgotten harlot. Play well, multiply songs so that you may be remembered. The song of the prostitute mocks an old prostitute trying to revive interest in herself by making music throughout the city. The song itself consists of six two-word lines that are lost in forcing the inhabitants again to take refuge on their island fortress. Alexander the Great actually destroyed Tyre in 332 BC. Tyre came under attack five times between the days of Isaiah and 332 BC.
2. Tyre’s restoration (23:17): And it will come to pass at the end of seventy years, Yahweh will visit Tyre and she will return to her wages, and she will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the earth on the face of the earth. The old harlot will have a measure of success. After seventy years of being ignored, Tyre will again become a player in the commerce of the region. Yahweh will visit Tyre, i.e., her restoration is an act of his grace. God’s grace, however, does not always guarantee a positive response. Again Tyre will prostitute herself. The prophets frequently used the prostitution metaphor to describe international commerce, probably because of the religious compromise, corruption, hypocrisy and avarice that characterized such commerce. Foreign trade was intercourse for financial gain. All kingdoms of the earth on the face of the earth stresses the universality of Tyre’s trading ventures.

C. Spiritual Restoration (23:18):
1. Dedication of her income (23:18a): And it will be that her income and her wages will be holy to Yahweh. At some point after her restoration, Tyre’s income will be dedicated to Yahweh.
2. Use of her income (23:18b): They will not be stored up; they will not be hoarded; but to those who dwell before Yahweh shall her income be, for abundant food and for choice clothing. No longer will Tyre amass wealth for her own aggrandizement, security, and prestige. The Tyrians will view their wealth as a stewardship from Yahweh. In the days of Solomon material from Tyre had been used in the service of the Jerusalem temple (cf. 1 Kgs 5:1-12); and this will happen again. Funds from Tyre will be sent to Jerusalem to subsidize the servants of Yahweh. Using their wealth for the benefit of those who serve Yahweh implies that the Tyrians will experience genuine conviction. The v is another way of anticipating the conversion of Gentiles.

English translation: (1) take a harp; (2) go about the city; (3) O forgotten harlot; (4) play well; (5) multiply songs; (6) so that you may be remembered. Perhaps some prostitutes of the time were entertainers as well as sexual partners.
The theme of Gentile temple worship is prominent in Isaiah (2:1-5; 49:6-7; 60:1). So also is the theme of the dedication of Gentile wealth to Yahweh (45:14; 49:22-23; 60:9-14). God’s ultimate plan for Tyre as for Ethiopia (18:7), Egypt, and Assyria (19:18-25) was salvation.

Some of the building materials for the second temple came from Tyre (Ezra 3:7). Josephus and Jerome relate how many in the area of Phoenicia were converted and supported the work of Yahweh. Paul found godly souls there in NT times (Acts 21:3f). By the second century Tyre had become an important Christian center.

Summary: The Book of Burdens admonishes God’s people not to put their trust in worldly glory (chs 13-14), alliances (chs 14-18), wisdom (chs 19-20), schemes (chs 21-22), and wealth (ch 23).

BOOK FOUR
FIRST BOOK OF GENERAL JUDGMENT
Isaiah 24-27

Two sections of the book (chs 24-27; 34-35) focus on the final outcome of the flow of history. The dominant theme in these units is the coming day of Yahweh.

The chronological placement of the books of general judgment within the ministry of Isaiah is uncertain. The literary placement, however, in both cases is appropriate. Locating the First Book of General Judgment immediately following the oracles concerning foreign nations was brilliant. These chs are like a grand finale such as may close a major musical composition. Here a number of preceding themes are re-echoed and blend into one harmonious whole. G.A. Smith characterized the language of these chs as “imaginative, enigmatic and paradoxical.”

In the First Book of General Judgment Isaiah oscillates between his own times and the distant future. Judgment on national Israel and the overthrow of world powers will be the prelude to the emergence of the new Israel. Isaiah pictured purified Jews and converted Gentiles joining together in worship on Mount Zion. What Isaiah saw was, to his mind, certain of fulfillment. Consequently he often described what he saw in vision as accomplished fact.

The First Book of General Judgment has four main units: (1) the judgment of the world (ch 24); (2) praise for Yahweh’s triumph (ch 25); (3) trust in Yahweh’s protection (ch 26); and (4) the future of Israel (ch 27).

CHAPTER 24
JUDGMENT OF THE WORLD

This chapter lays the foundation for the three that follow. It speaks of a universal judgment. There is no reference to particular nations or specific historical events. The judgment is not even restricted to the earth. The judgments on particular nations in chs 13-23 points forward to the judgment here. In ch 24 the entire earth (repeated seventeen times) experiences the judgment of God.

Four aspects of the world judgment are set forth in Isa 24.

UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT
24:1-6

A. Description (24:1-4):
1. Face of the earth (24:1): Behold, Yahweh is about to empty the earth and devastate it. He will distort its face and scatter its inhabitants. Isaiah made a shocking announcement (behold!). The Hebrew sentence structure stresses immediacy. Yahweh will empty out the earth as a man might empty out a vessel full of garbage. The earth will experience the results of the sins of its inhabitants. The face of the earth will be distorted and devastated. Perhaps Isaiah has an earthquake in mind. As at the tower of Babel, Yahweh will scatter earth’s inhabitants.

2. Inhabitants of earth (24:2): It shall be like people, like priest; like servant, like his master; like the handmaid, like her mistress; like the

---

186 Delitzsch, KDC, 5:79-81.
buyer, like the seller; like the lender, like the borrower; like the debtor, like the one who gives credit to him. Judgment on Earth men is indiscriminate. All classes and ranks throughout the world will be affected. Rank, wealth, power and station are no protection from God’s judgment.

3. Emptying of earth (24:3): The earth will completely be emptied; it is surely plundered, for Yahweh has spoken this word. The earth will be completely emptied (KJV) or laid waste (NASB; NIV). Plundered suggests that the end of the world will not be natural. Warfare, oppression and greed are part of the picture. Isaiah is not just crying “wolf.” The Hebrew syntax stresses the totality of the destruction envisioned. He has heard a word from Yahweh. The prophet (and we) can be certain that the world will come to an end in catastrophes that Yahweh will orchestrate.

4. Lament of earth (24:4): The earth mourns and withers; the world fades and withers; the highest of earth’s people fade. The material world along with its most prominent citizens will wilt before the hot blast of God’s wrath. Wither suggests that drought plays a role in the last days. In that universal drought, even the high and mighty will be brought low.

B. Explanation (24:5-6):
1. Pollution (24:5): The earth is polluted beneath its inhabitants, for they have transgressed laws, overstepped a statute, broken the everlasting covenant. Judgment on earthmen is well-deserved. Men pollute the earth by transgressing God’s laws and breaking God’s everlasting covenant (cf. Gn 9:16). Sin soils and contaminates. Environmental pollution is but one manifestation of that selfish spirit that leads to all sin. The land is said to be polluted (r. chnp) by blood (Ps 106:38), idolatry (2 Chr 36:14), and sexual misbehavior (Jer 3:1).
2. Curse (24:6): Therefore, a curse has devoured earth, and its inhabitants have become guilty. A curse is the outward consequence for having violated the terms of a sacred covenant (Gn 3:17-19; Dt 27). Guilt is the inward response to habitually breaking God’s law. The inhabitants of earth have become guilty, i.e., they stand condemned. Therefore, few will survive the fire of God’s judgment.

DEVASTATING JUDGMENT
24:7-13

Throughout the earth the impact of judgment is felt, in the rural areas as well as in cities. These verses deal with the same judgment as vv 1-6, but in more detail and perhaps in its first stages.

A. Devastated Countryside (24:7-9):
1. Withered vine (24:7): The new wine mourns, the vine withers; all the merry-hearted sigh. New wine is the unfermented juice from newly crushed grapes. For the new wine to mourn is a poetic way of saying that the grapes will yield a pathetic juice. The reason for the bad production is that the vine has withered in drought. The usual laughter that accompanied grape harvest will be replaced by groans of disappointment.
2. Silenced song (24:8): The gaiety of the tambourines has ceased, the noise of the revelers has stopped; the gaiety of the lyre has ceased. The mirth associated with the grape harvest will cease. Tambourines (toph) were used to accompany music and dancing. The lyre (kinnor) was a portable, rectangular or trapezoid-shaped instrument with two arms, often of unequal length and curved, joined at the top by a crosspiece; the strings were of roughly the same length (unlike a harp). This instrument was popular throughout the ancient Near East. It was an instrument of joyful celebration, generally used to accompany singing. The loud work songs associated with pressing out the juice (Jer 25:30; 48:33) are heard no more.
3. Bitter drink (24:9): With song they will not drink wine; the strong drink will be bitter to those who drink it. What drinking there is takes place without joy. Trying to forget their disappointment, the drinkers find their drink unpleasant.

B. Devastated City (24:10-13):
1. A ruined city (24:10): The city of chaos is broken down; every house is closed to entry. City of chaos might describe conditions after Yahweh’s
judgment. On the other hand, Isaiah may be making the point that civilization (here viewed as one city) is always in a state of chaos. The world is a place of disorder, confusion, and revolt against God. That chaotic city will be *broken down*, i.e., become desolate. Rubble blocks access to buildings. The rubble may be the result of the judgment itself, or it may have been deliberately placed in front of houses to fortify them once citywide defenses collapsed.

2. **A joyless city (24:11): There is an outcry over the wine in the streets. All joy turns to gloom; all earth's gaiety has been banished.** Gloom will hang over the once tumultuous city. Where the booze once flowed freely, now there is none. A cry of despair arises among those who depend on alcohol for gaiety. Joy is darkened by gloom.

3. **A desolate city (24:12): Desolation is left in the city; to ruins the gate is beaten.** The gate of the city was a complex of buildings that was the hub of government and commerce. The gate of Earth City will be battered down. Desolation will follow.

4. **Illustrations (24:13): For thus it shall be in the midst of the earth, among the peoples: as the striking of an olive tree, as gleanings when the grape harvest is over.** Some will survive, but they will be few. They will be comparable in number to olives left on the tree (cf. 17:6) or grapes left on the vine after the professional harvesters finish their work.

**RESPONSE OF THE OPPRESSED**

24:14-16

As in Revelation, scenes of judgment are interspersed with songs of thanksgiving in chs 24-27. The first of these occurs at this point. Some will be saved out of the tribulation of the last days.

A. **Future Recognition of Yahweh (24:14-16a):**

1. **In the west (24:14): They lift up their voice, they shout; the majesty of Yahweh they shout in the west.** They is emphatic in Hebrew; but the antecedent of the pronoun is not clear. The pronoun may refer to the remnant alluded to in the previous v. But it may be that no definite subjects are intended. In this case the message is more important than the messengers. *Lift up their voice* implies that the speakers want their message to be heard. Furthermore, *they shout*, to make sure they are heard. These anonymous shouters proclaim the majesty of Yahweh. Majesty (gāʿôn) is condemned in humanity188 because it is inappropriate. Only Yahweh is truly exalted. The shout comes from the west, lit., the sea. The reference is to the region of the Mediterranean Sea.

2. **In the east (24:15): Therefore, in the east glorify Yahweh, in the islands of the sea, the name of Yahweh, God of Israel.** What began as a factual statement (v 14) becomes an exhortation. In the east is lit., in the lights. Isaiah calls for similar praise from those who live in the distant east and in the islands of the sea. The whole world is called upon to join in the loud praise. The content of the songs is the name, i.e., character, of God. That Yahweh is Creator, Judge, Redeemer and Sovereign is worthy of universal recognition.

3. **From distant lands (24:16a): From the ends of the earth songs we hear, Glory to the Righteous One.** The affirmation of this v implies that the exhortation of the previous v has been heeded. With the song from the east blending with the song from the west, the earth is filled with Yahweh’s praise. This is another picture of the world-wide conversion of Gentiles forecast in ch 2. The celebration of the majesty of Yahweh extends to the ends (lit., wing) of the earth. The Righteous One is Yahweh. His absolute righteousness was demonstrated in the destruction of Earth City, i.e., final judgment.

B. **Present Intolerable Scene (24:16b):**

1. **Isaiah’s personal agony (24:16b): But I say, Wasting is mine, wasting is mine! Woe is me!** What Isaiah has to say differs in tone from the jubilant praise for Yahweh emanating from distant lands. Isaiah could not join in that jubilation. Wasting implies physical repercussions. He grows thin and weak. Woe expresses lamentation. This preacher had a burden for his lost generation.

---

2. Reason for Isaiah’s agony (24:16c): The treacherous act treacherously; with treachery the treacherous commit treachery! Isaiah knew that in his own day the threat of judgment will have no corrective effect on most sinners. The five words following Woe is me all come from the root bgd. These words all have the connotation of plunder through deceit. These sinners will not survive God’s judgment.

INESCAPABLE JUDGMENT
24:17-20

Some day men throughout the world will recognize Yahweh (vv 14-15); but before that day there must be terrible judgment.

A. Earthly Cataclysms (24:17-20): Three metaphors depict the inescapable nature of final judgment.
1. Hunting metaphor (24:17-18a):
   a. Announcement (24:17): Terror, and pit and snare, they are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth. Like terrified animals fleeing from a relentless hunter the sinners attempt to escape. Both pit and snare awaited them.
   b. Result (24:18a): And it will be that the one who flees from the sound of the terror will fall into the pit; and the one who goes up from the midst of the pit shall be captured in the snare. Those who escaped the one danger will be trapped by the other. For the wicked life is a series of traps from which ultimately there is no escape. God is the divine Hunter who pursues his guilty prey inexorably to a kill. There is no escape from the judgment of God.
2. Flood metaphor (24:18b): For the windows on high shall be opened, and the foundations of the earth shall shake. Isaiah depicted this judgment as being like a terrible deluge. The image of the windows on high opened is taken from Gn 7:11 except that Isaiah has substituted on high for sky/heavens. Used in conjunction with foundations of the earth Isaiah is depicting the complete overthrow of the world that now exists. Destruction hits the world from above and below, i.e., from all sides.
3. Earthquake metaphor (24:19-20):
   a. Announcement (24:19): The earth shall surely be broken; earth is split through; earth shakes itself violently. Earthly order is unstable. It ultimately crumbles. The Hebrew consists of three couplets of three similar sounding words to emphasize Isaiah’s point. Final judgment is depicted as a violent earthquake. The earth will shake violently and break open. Clearly the world as it exists today is not of eternal duration. (cf. Rev 6:12; 21:1).
   b. Result (24:20): Earth staggers about like a drunk, it totters like a hut, for its transgressions are heavy upon it; and it falls but does not rise again. The earth totters like a drunkard and like a hut on trembling ground. The earth will reel under the weight of its transgression (deliberate disobedience). This old order of things passes away, never to rise again (cf. Heb 12:26-29).

B. Heavenly Cataclysms (24:21-23):
1. Progression of judgment (24:21):
   a. Heavenly hosts (24:21a): And it shall come about in that day that Yahweh will visit upon the host on high in the heights… In that day embraces the entire Christian age. At that time God will be vindicated in reward for his people and punishment for his enemies. First to taste of divine wrath will be the host on high, i.e., those angels who rebelled against God at some point in the distant past. They are so-called because they originally dwelt in heaven and are linked in Scripture with heaven or with the regions above the earth (Lk 19:18; Eph 6:12).
   b. Earthly kings (24:21b): and upon the kings of the earth upon the earth. When judgment is completed on high, God will turn his attention to the kings of the earth who have been influenced by these demonic creatures to make war against the people of God. Kings of the earth are

189 Paul Butler (BSTS, 2:12) thinks that the opening of the windows of heaven could be a reference to God's sending his Son.

190 The term seba’ is sometimes used of the heavenly bodies (34:4; 40:26; 45:12) and sometimes of the angelic armies (1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 18:18).
representatives of sinful humanity, especially that part of humanity that exalts itself against God (cf. Rev 19:19-21; 20:7-10).

2. Intermediate confinement (24:22): They will be gathered into a pit, and they shall be shut up in a prison; and after many days they will be visited. Judgment comes in two installments. All of God’s enemies, however powerful, will be brought down to the lowest part of the earth. After many days they will be punished. The picture is of a rebellion being put down, with the rebels being incarcerated one by one while the conflict continues to rage. When the conflict is over, God will deal with these rebels. The v alludes to the initial judgment at Christ’s first coming (Jn 12:31) and a final judgment at his second coming. During the period of Messiah’s reign (between the first and second comings) both the heavenly and earthly rebels are confined in some kind of prison to await final disposition of their cases (cf. Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4; Rev 20:1-3).

3. Ultimate triumph (24:23): The moon shall be embarrassed, the sun ashamed; for Yahweh of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his elders in glory. Once his foes have been subdued, the reign of God will be seen in all of its fullness and wondrous power. He will reign unchallenged on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem. Isaiah already has described the destruction of the physical earth. The reference must be to the heavenly Mount Zion (Heb 12:22) and the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1f). That city will be so bright that it will have no need of the sun (lit., the Hot One) or moon (lit., the Silver One). Cf. Rev 21:23. In his throne room God will sit in glory before his elders—twenty-four of them according to the Book of Revelation (Rev 4). Thus God’s people—here represented by the elders—will share in the glory of that day (2 Thess 1:10).

CHAPTER 25

PRaise FOR YAHWEH’S triUMPH

In response to the predictions of the ultimate victory of God over his adversaries, Isaiah (representing the people of God) burst forth into a song of praise.

SONG OF THANKSGIVING

25:1-5

A. Praise for Yahweh’s Faithfulness (25:1): O Yahweh, you are my God, I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have worked wonders, things planned long ago, with perfect faithfulness. In place of the raucous drinking songs mentioned in the previous ch, Isaiah, speaking for the remnant, raises up a song of devotion. By crushing the forces of evil God had worked wonders. It is the power of God displayed in mighty deliverance that excites wonder in the hearts of his people. These wondrous acts are not spur of the moment interventions, much less are they merely responses to the pathetic state of his people. They are part of God’s grand design. Idols have no plans. People make plans, but often cannot carry them out. God, however, has the wisdom to formulate plans and the power to execute them. This God can be trusted. He is faithful to carry out his promises.

B. Praise for Overthrow of the City (25:2-3):

1. Fall of a wicked city (25:2): For you have made from a city to a heap, a fortified city to a ruin, a citadel of strangers from [being] a city. It will not be built again. The particular plan of God that Isaiah celebrates in v 1 is now identified. All the forces of evil are compared to a proud, fortified city that opposes Zion, the city of God. No specific city is intended. Isaiah’s city of strangers had many permutations throughout history. Again and again God turned cities (like Nineveh and Babylon) into heaps of ruins. Once destroyed those symbols of pride, power and oppression will not be built again.

2. Result of the fall (25:3): Therefore, a strong people will glorify you; a town of ruthless nations will fear you. When God destroys a powerful enemy there is a positive result. A strong people--those who previously resisted Yahweh--recognize the Lord by praise and reverence. Ruthless nations are those who have harassed God’s people. Many a Saul of Tarsus has been brought to his knees by mighty revelations of God’s power.
C. Praise for Deliverance (25:4-5): Isaiah expands upon the reason for praising God.
1. Availability of protection (25:4a): For you are a stronghold for the poor, a stronghold for the needy in distress... The poor and needy (representing God’s people) are in stark contrast to the strong people and ruthless nations of v 3. Before during and after the destruction of the citadels of the oppressor Yahweh is a defense, a refuge, for humble believers.
2. Adequacy of protection (25:4b-5): Two weather extremes are used to symbolize the deliverance that God provides for his people.
   a. From raging storm (25:4b): a refuge from storm, a shade from heat, for the breath of the ruthless is like storm against a wall. A thunderstorm can arise quickly and come with devastating power. The ruthless pursue the weak; they can feel the heat of the hot breath of the beast. Yet the stormy rage of ruthless armies will not destroy those who take Yahweh as their refuge. Their attacks will bounce off the wall of the believer’s stronghold like rain off a solid wall.
   b. From oppressive heat (25:4c-5): Like heat in drought (5) you subdue the roar of strangers, [like] heat by the shadow of a cloud, the song of the ruthless is humbled. Sometimes the pressures against believers mount, like heat growing more intense throughout the day. Like the shadow of a cloud that brings relief on a hot day, so God will deliver his people from the oppressive heat of persecution. He will silence the boisterous demands, victory songs and arrogant boasts of the enemy.

REWARDS FOR GOD’S PEOPLE
25:6-9

A. A Glorious Banquet (25:6):
1. Prepared by God (25:6a): Yahweh of Hosts will prepare... The coronation of a new king was celebrated with a banquet. It was a time when the king lavished favors upon his subjects. Isaiah now pictures such a feast in honor of the coronation of Yahweh.
2. Prepared for all peoples (25:6b): Gentiles as well as Jews are welcome to attend Yahweh’s coronation banquet. Jesus spoke about those who will come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and will sit down in the kingdom of God (Lk 13:29). A lavish banquet has been prepared for all peoples who accept his invitation.
3. Prepared on this mountain (25:6c): The feast is to be held on Mount Zion, the same mountain to which all nations come for instruction in the last days (2:1-4). Mount Zion is understood in the NT to represent the kingdom of God, the church of the Lord (Heb 12:22).
4. Prepared in abundance (25:6d): a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, fat pieces with marrow, with wine refined on the lees. Isaiah stressed God’s provision for his people. The fat portions of the meat were considered the most desirable. For this reason the Mosaic code required that the fat portions of sacrifices were reserved for Yahweh (Lv 3:3; 4:8, 9). A feast of wine on the lees refers to wine that had been allowed to strengthen by leaving the dregs in the wine after the fermentation process. This wine was then strained before drinking. It was clear and strong--the best wine imaginable. God does not spare the fatted calf when prodigal Gentiles come home to him.

B. Defeat of Death (25:7-8):
1. Figuratively depicted (25:7): And he will swallow up on this mountain the face of the covering, the covering over all the peoples, even the veil that is woven over all the nations. The banquet is particularly joyous because God will remove the veil that hangs over all nations. Some think the veil/covering is ignorance (cf. 2 Cor 3:12-18); more likely it is the veil of mourning. Before the banquet can be fully enjoyed, that veil must be removed. Death must be conquered.
2. Clearly promised (25:8):
   a. Death removed (25:8a): He will swallow up death forever... Isaiah foresaw the day when God

191See 1 Sam 11:15; 1 Kgs 1:9, 19, 25.
will swallow up, i.e., totally destroy, death. The NT proclaims that God has done just that by raising Jesus from the dead.  

b. Tears removed (25:8b): and the Sovereign Yahweh will wipe away tears from all faces... With this touching figure Isaiah announces the removal of the sorrow associated with death, and all that leads to death. The figure connotes compassion, like the compassion of a mother for a child who hurts. This removal of all that causes pain and death is something man cannot do. Yahweh, however, demonstrates his sovereignty decisively by conquering sorrow.

c. Reproach removed (25:8c): the reproach of his people he will remove from upon all the earth; for Yahweh has spoken. Because of Israel’s sin the people of God experienced humiliating verbal and physical abuse from surrounding peoples. Eventually their temple and capital were destroyed, and thousands of them were deported to foreign lands. Isaiah foresees a day when God’s people—the true Israel of God—will be honored, respected, even admired (cf. Zech 8:23).

D. Defeat of the Wicked (25:10b-12): In contrast to what awaited the true Israel of God on Mount Zion, Isaiah speaks of the punishment that awaited the enemies of Zion. The physical proximity of Mount Zion and the mountains of Moab made such comparison inevitable. The Moabite plateau can be clearly seen from Jerusalem. If the saved gather on Mount Zion (ch 2) than all outside of Mount Zion must be the rebellious and lost.

1. A humiliating picture (25:10b-11):

   a. His destination (25:10b): And Moab will be trampled down in his place as straw is trodden down in the water of a manure pile. Moab symbolizes all those implacable enemies that withstand God and his people. While Yahweh’s hand rests on Mount Zion in blessing, his feet trample down Moab in judgment. The destination of such people is the manure pile. Unbelievers are eventually trodden down in the judgment of God. They have nothing for which to look forward. A barnyard can become a quagmire in the winter rains. Straw might be thrown on the ground to give animals some footing or bedding only to be trampled into the smelly muck. The future of Moab (unbelievers) is compared to that straw.

   b. His futile efforts (25:11a): And he will spread out his hands in the midst of it like as the swimmer spreads out [his hands] to swim. From the filthy barnyard quagmire Moab will never escape. He tries to swim out of the mess, but he finds himself only treading water in the sewage.

   c. Explanation (25:11b): He will bring down his pride with the trickery of his hands. The subject of the sentence must be Yahweh. Two reasons are given for the fate of Moab. First, Moab’s pride brings forth this terrible sentence. Yahweh is in the business of bringing proud nations down to earth. Second, the trickery of his hands brought forth the judgment. The word translated trickery (‘orbôṯ) is

---

of uncertain meaning. Treachery toward God’s people is probably intended.

2. A devastating picture (25:12): The fortifications, the secure heights of your walls he will bring down, he will lay low. He will level [them] to the ground, even to the dust.

The shift to second person suggests that Isaiah is reverting to his address to Earth City of which Moab is but one illustration. Earth City cannot build fortifications secure enough or walls high enough to avert ultimate judgment. Like the walls of Jericho, those fortifications will come tumbling down. The subject of the verbs in this v may be Yahweh. Another alternative is to read the verbs as passives: will be brought down, etc.

CHAPTER 26
TRUST IN YAHWEH’S PROTECTION

Ch 26 is a hymn of trust in God’s protection of his people.

THANKSGIVING FOR ZION
26:1-6

A. Description of Zion (26:1-2):
1. Its strength (26:1): In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah, We have a strong city; salvation he has made a wall and ramparts. The world is a glitzy, tumultuous, oppressive city. But there is a rival city established by God himself. It is a strong city, for salvation is its wall and ramparts. Man-made walls of stone (or anything else) cannot protect one from the dangers of life, and the inevitability of death and judgment. So the city of God is a spiritual city. It symbolizes a relationship with the Almighty. Cf. Zech 2:5.
2. Its accessibility (26:2): Open the gates that a righteous nation may enter, one who keeps faithfulness. Zion’s gates were open to a faithful and righteous nation. No one can live in this city that is not committed to Yahweh. Open gates symbolize acceptance, even welcome. The NT teaches that the righteousness that gains admission to that city is not man’s righteousness, but that of Christ (Rom 3:20-26; Phil 3:9; Gal 3:10-14).

B. Explanation (26:3):
[A person of] steadfast purpose you will keep in perfect peace, for in you he trusts. The nation that keeps faith is made up of individuals who trust in the Lord. James warned about a double-minded man (Jam 1:6-8), and Jesus spoke about a person serving two masters (Mt 6:24). The people of God (citizens of Zion) must have a steadfast purpose of trusting in God. Perfect peace is that wholeness, that spiritual and mental wellness, for which people yearn. It implies confidence and direction in life.

C. Exhortation to Trust (26:4-6):
1. Because of whom God is (26:4): Trust in Yahweh forever, for in Yah, Yahweh, is an everlasting Rock. In view of the benefits of trustful commitment to Yahweh, Isaiah urged his readers to trust in God forever. Yahweh is worthy of everlasting trust because he is eternal. Yahweh is the everlasting Rock. Repetition of the divine name is not common in Israelite poetry, but it does occur (cf. 12:2). Rock is a favorite description of Yahweh. The term pictures God as a rocky crag to which one could flee to find protection in one of its crannies. From that higher ground the believer can beat off all attackers.

2. Because of what God does (26:5): For he has brought down those who dwell on high, the fortified city, he will lay it low, he will lay it low unto earth; he strikes it to dust. Those who dwell on high are the inhabitants of Earth City. The imagery comes from the custom of building ancient on elevated ground. In view of what God does to Earth City, it is foolish to take refuge there. Earth City represents humanistic civilization. It is a spiritual condition just as much as the City of God, i.e., Zion. There is no peace, no security, no salvation in atheism, or even nominal theism for that matter. The God who strikes Earth City to the dust is the only one in whom man should put his trust.

---

194 Various translations: spoils (KJV); cleverness (RSV; NIV); trickery (NASB) emblems (NJB).
195 Dt 32:4; 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam 22:2, 32; Ps 19:14; 61:2; Isa 30:29.
3. Because of what God promises (26:6): Feet will trample it, feet of the afflicted, steps of the poor. In 25:10 the feet of Yahweh trample Moab; here it is the afflicted and poor (people of God) that will walk across the rubble of Earth City. The meek shall inherit the earth (Mt 5:1-12). Therefore, it is best in the present distress to be counted among the humble that are committed to Yahweh.

REFLECTIONS BY ZION
26:7-11

Isaiah entered into reflective prayer as he contemplated the benefits of God’s judgments.

A. Path of the Righteous (26:7-8): As in Ps 1 the way of the righteous and the path of the wicked are contrasted.

1. Making the path (26:7): The path of the righteous is straight. O Straight One, the track of the righteous you make level. The reference to the feet of the poor and needy in v 6 leads to this reflection on the path upon they walk. Isaiah noted that the way the righteous travel through life becomes straight/level, as a result of the just judgments of Yahweh. Obstacles and dangers are removed from the path. The path of the righteous is the way it is because the one who established that path is the ultimate Straight One.196 He is not twisted and crooked; he is constant, steady, without highs and lows, pitfalls and barriers.

2. Walking the path (26:8): Indeed, in the path of your law we wait for you, O Yahweh. For your name and for your memory is the desire of [our] soul. The righteous patiently walk in the path of Yahweh’s laws (mišpāt). OT saints longed for the coming of a day when God's name would be honored fittingly. The words we wait for you show Isaiah’s conviction that such a day would come by intervention of Yahweh himself.

B. Value of Judgments (26:9-11):

1. Desire for intervention (26:9): My soul desires you in the night, indeed with my spirit within me I seek you early. For as earth has your judgments, dwellers of earth learn righteousness. In the nighttime of affliction the soul of the righteous man longs for divine intervention. By such judgments God’s people are delivered from oppression. At the same time, the wicked have the opportunity to learn righteousness. Only divine chastisement will cause a wicked man to abandon his folly.

2. Shock of intervention (26:10): A wicked man is shown favor, he does not learn righteousness; in a land of uprightness he acts wickedly and he does not see the majesty of Yahweh. Only through divine judgment are men jarred loose from their hold on unrighteousness. Wicked men tend to view grace as weakness, and they take advantage of it. If wicked men receive only kind treatment from Yahweh, they will not learn righteousness. Their own pride prevents them from seeing the majesty of God.

3. Request for intervention (26:11): O Yahweh, your hand is lifted up, but they do not see. Let them see (and be ashamed) a zeal of people. Indeed, the fire of your enemies shall consume them. Though the hand (power) of God is poised over the head of the wicked, they do not see the impending danger that Isaiah saw. Dropped hands indicate capitulation. The uplifted hand points to God’s authority and imminent judgment. Zeal for a people points to divine intervention on behalf of the faithful. Ashamed should be the response of those who have put their trust in anything or anyone other than Yahweh when they witnessed God’s zeal for Israel. Fire of your enemies means fire (judgment) reserved for God’s enemies. One day the wicked will see God’s zeal for his true saints and his fiery wrath as well.

CONFIDENCE IN YAHWEH
26:12-15

A. Ultimate Outcome (26:12): O Yahweh, you will establish peace for us, for indeed all of our works you have done for us. Turbulent times did
not dismay Isaiah. He was confident of how things will work out. Judgment upon the wicked means peace (wholeness/well-being) for the righteous. This is not wishful thinking. It is hope grounded in what God had done for his people in the past. All of Israel’s accomplishments had come from God. The divine hand was displayed again and again in the history of Israel. God had not brought them that far only to cut them off.

B. An Objection Addressed (26:13-14):
1. Past foreign domination (26:13a): O Yahweh our God, other lords other than you, have lorded it over us... Isaiah acknowledges that Israel had faced times of foreign domination. Some might conclude that Yahweh was impotent, or at least uncommitted to Israel’s well-being. To this objection, however, Isaiah gives two answers.
2. Objection answered (26:13b-15):
   a. Israel remained faithful (26:13b): but your name alone have we remembered. In periods of foreign oppression (other lords), Israel realized the more clearly that she had only one Lord. True believers did not embrace the gods of the conquerors. Your name is all that Yahweh has revealed about himself. Remembered is equivalent to worshiped, served, and entreated. Through the strength which God supplied, God’s people continued to confess allegiance to Yahweh even in adverse times.
   b. Israel continued to exist (26:14): They are dead, they shall not live, departed spirits, they will not arise. Therefore you punished and destroyed them and you have caused all memory of them to perish. Oppressors are dead; Israel lives on. Having experienced the retribution of Yahweh, previous oppressors were dead and forgotten. The removal of these tyrants was a punishment administered by Yahweh.
   c. Israel expanded (26:15): You have added to the nation, O Yahweh; you have added to the nation and you are honored. You have extended all the borders of the land. Oppressors have not been able to wipe out Israel. In fact, Israel had been strengthened numerically and, at times, geographically as a result of the destruction of adversaries. This v is not so much a description of what had happened prior to Isaiah’s day, but his certainty of what must happen. Prophets anticipated a day when Israel includes Gentiles from around the world (cf. 9:3; 54:1-3).

EXPECTATION OF ZION
26:16-19

A. Past Discipline (26:16-18):
1. It caused people to seek God (26:16): O Yahweh, in the distress they sought you; they poured out a whisper with your discipline upon them. God had been the hope of Israel in past distress. At times the nation had been so beaten down by divine chastisement that all the faithful could do was to whisper a prayer of desperation to Yahweh.
2. It was unpleasant (26:17): Like a pregnant woman about to deliver she writhes, she cries out in her pains, so were we because of your presence, O Yahweh. The figure of a woman in labor depicts Israel’s situation. Disciplinary disasters have caused God’s people to twist and groan. The presence (lit., face) of God points to the manifestation of his wrath.
3. Its futility (26:18): We were pregnant, we writhed as though we brought forth wind. Deliverances we did not bring on earth, and the inhabitants of earth did not fall. Though Israel had planned and agonized she could not produce deliverance for herself, much less any other nation (the inhabitants of the earth). She was like a woman travailing in labor who brought forth only wind, i.e., nothing. In the context of this prayer, these words underscore the absolute futility of man-made attempts to produce salvation. Did not fall is a reference to birth.

B. Future Resurrection (26:19):
1. Stupendous announcement (26:19a): Your dead will live, my corpses will arise. Probably the speaker is God. Many had died in the disciplinary disasters that Yahweh permitted to come on Israel. These people will not miss out on the glorious
future that Isaiah envisioned for the people of God in 25:6. The dead had not been abandoned.

2. Joyous exhortation (26:19b): *Awake and shout for joy, sleepers of dust!* Isaiah addresses the dead in the light of his faith in the declaration that God just made. He argued that Yahweh was the hope of Israel’s future. He anticipated the dawn of a glorious new day—a day of light and life, a day of shouting and joy. *Sleepers of dust* is poetic metaphor for the dead.

3. Metaphorical depiction (26:19c): *For the dew of lights is your dew, and earth will let fall departed spirits.* Isaiah envisioned a heavenly dew gently but powerfully causing the earth to give forth her dead.

Some think that Isaiah was predicting the final resurrection. Others think that the prophet depicted in poetic language the life-giving power of the gospel (Dan 12:2; Eph 5:14; Jn 5:25). Still others think the reference is to the national restoration of Israel following the captivity (cf. Hos 6:2; Ezek 37:1-14).

**EXHORTATION TO ZION**

26:20-21

A. Confident Waiting (26:20):

1. Place of hiding (26:20a): *Come my people, enter into your rooms, and shut your doors behind you.* In his compassion God offers to all who will accept it a way of escape from judgment. *My people* expresses endearment. It is a reference to the true Israel of God that had not bowed down to foreign overlords in v 13. Just as the people of Israel found refuge within the blood-sprinkled doors of their homes (Ex 12), till the wrath of God against Egypt had passed, so Israel is told to hide for a while. Shutting the doors suggests not only safety from danger but also separation from the surrounding pagans, who were under judgment. During times of tribulation Israel is called upon to be a holy people.

2. Duration of hiding (26:20b): *Hide for a little while until the indignation has passed by.* In the light of their future hope, Isaiah urged God’s people to continue a little longer in the solitude of prayer until *indignation* runs its course. The *period of indignation* or Jacob’s trouble (Jer 30:7; Dan 8:19) began when the Assyrians deported the Northern Kingdom (beginning 745 BC). This period seems to conclude with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Others think the reference is to what the NT calls the great tribulation (Rev 2:22; 7:14). The exhortation of the prophet is appropriate during any period in which God exercises judgment. The basic idea is that believers must be patient in times of turbulence and prayerfully wait for God’s better day.

B. Final Victory (26:21):

1. What Yahweh will do (26:21a, b):
   a. He comes forth (26:21a): *For behold Yahweh is going forth from his place...* The righteous live in expectation that God is about to come out from his place (heaven) to intervene in human affairs. *Behold* expresses imminence.
   b. He punishes (26:21b): *to punish the iniquity of the inhabitants of the earth.* Punish (r. *pqd*) connotes personal visitation. Divine justice demands that God punish the inhabitants of the earth, i.e., wicked men, especially powerful empires.

2. What earth does (26:21c): *The earth will uncover her bloodshed, and will no longer cover her slain.* The earth receives the blood of those unjustly slain. At Yahweh’s final intervention earth gives an accounting for this blood. Earth will no longer cover her slain because they will rise from the dead (cf. v 14).

**CHAPTER 27**

**FUTURE OF ISRAEL**

In ch 27 Isaiah looks beyond judgment to the glorious future that God had in store for his people.
slay the monster that is in the sea. Isaiah depicted Yahweh the might Warrior slaying those ugly beasts (governments) that had oppressed his people. The prophet used Leviathan, the mythological sea monster, as a symbol for the world powers of that day. Leviathan the fleeing or gliding serpent probably represented Assyria, which was situated on the swift flowing Tigris River. Leviathan the twisted serpent probably symbolized Babylon situated on the winding, relatively slow moving Euphrates River. The monster that lives in the sea most likely is Egypt. 197

A DAY OF BLESSING
27:2-6

A. God’s Vineyard (27:2-3):
1. Celebration for the vineyard (27:2): In that day a vineyard of wine, sing of it! The vineyard here, as in ch 5, is Israel. In the previous figure the vineyard was abandoned to the wild. Here, however, the setting is following the judgment. The vineyard is fully productive. It is something to celebrate.
2. Protection for the vineyard (27:3): I Yahweh am its keeper; each moment I water it, lest someone should punish it, I guard it night and day. Israel’s keeper is Yahweh. In ch 5 the rain and dew were withheld from the vineyard. Here Yahweh provides his vineyard with the water of life whenever there is a need. In ch 5 Yahweh abandoned the vineyard. Here he guards it night and day from any who might intend to pillage it. The point: after judgment Israel will experience a glorious future.

B. God’s Enemies (27:4-5):
1. First alternative (27:4): I have no wrath. Who will give me thorns, briers. In war I will march against it; I will burn them completely. Following judgment God will no longer be angry with Israel. The good news of the gospel is that God has provided a way for us to escape his wrath, since he poured out sin’s judgment on Jesus. In ch 5 thorns and briers overran the vineyard. Here Yahweh challenges Israel’s enemies (the thorns and biers) to a showdown. Yahweh threatens to march against those enemies and consume them completely in the fire of his wrath.
2. Second alternative (27:5): Or let them take hold of my stronghold, let them make peace with me, let them make peace with me. God graciously invites the enemies of his people to seek refuge in my stronghold. The verb take hold suggests the image of the guilty clasping the horns of the altar (1 Kgs 1:50). Yahweh does not desire war; he wants to be reconciled to those who have enmity toward him and his people. A double invitation for reconciliation (peace) reveals the heart of Israel’s God. By choosing the path of peace, these enemies became part of Israel, the people of God.

C. God’s Promise (27:6): In the coming [days] Jacob will take root, Israel will blossom and bud and they will fill the face of the world with fruit. When former enemies are reconciled, the vineyard (God’s people) will flourish so gloriously that the whole earth is blessed with its fruit. Messiah, the supreme Israelite is himself the true Vine (Jn 15:1-8) and his disciples the fruit-bearing branches. Thus the fulfillment of these predictions has been realized in the messianic people of God, the church of Christ, whose influence gradually touches the whole earth.

A DAY OF JUDGMENT
27:7-8

A. Comparatively Lighter (27:7): Has he struck him as he struck the one who struck him? Like the slaying of his slain ones has he slain? God’s chastisements of his people were much less severe than the judgments he brought upon heathen peoples. His purpose in the former was punitive; in the latter, remedial. Nineveh and Babylon, together with the civilization they represented have disappeared from the earth. Jerusalem, however, physically lives on, and more importantly,
Spiritually lives on in the church of Christ (Heb 12:22).

B. Nevertheless Severe (27:8): *In exact measure* you contended with her by driving them away. With his fierce wind he has expelled [her] on the day of the east wind. Israel’s punishment was carefully measured to accomplish God’s purposes. It was not God’s purpose to destroy them as a people, but to purify them. *Driving her away* (r. šlch) is used of divorce (e.g., Dt 22:19). While heathen nations were annihilated, Israel was sifted by being banished to foreign lands. *Fierce wind/east wind* speaks of the severity of the judgment. Painful though it might be, the destruction of the land of Judah was a necessary step in God’s reclamation program for Israel. The east wind is the searing wind that blows in off the desert. It is frequently used as a symbol of judgment in the OT.

**DAY OF REDEMPTION**

27:9-11

A. Pardon for Israel (27:9): *Therefore, in this the iniquity of Jacob is atoned for, and this will be the fruit of the removal of his sin. When he makes all the altar stones like smashed chalk, Asherahs and incense altars will not stand.* Forgiveness became possible when Jacob (Israel) in exile renounced idolatry. Atonement (covering) will be the result of the removal of that sin. Israel will demonstrate repentance by pulverizing altar stones and dismantling pagan paraphernalia like Asherahs and incense altars. On Asherah see on 17:8.

B. Only after Punishment (27:10-11):

1. Description (27:10-11a): *For a fortified city is left desolate, a pasture deserted and abandoned like the wilderness. There the calf will graze, and there it lies down and consumes its branches. (11) In dryness its branches are broken; women come and make fire with them...* Isaiah focuses on the ruins of the once proud, fortified city (Samaria? or Jerusalem?). Those ruins have become a place for cattle to graze and women to gather firewood.

2. Explanation (27:11b): *For they are not a people of discernment. Therefore, their Maker will not have compassion on them, and their Creator will not be gracious to them.* This devastation of Israel was necessary because Israel was a people without spiritual discernment. Their Creator could show no compassion on them until they had been purged through the fires of judgment.

**A DAY OF GATHERING**

27:12-13

A. Act of Gathering (27:12): *And it shall come to pass in that day that Yahweh will thresh from the flowing streams of the River to the Brook of Egypt, and you will be gathered one by one, O sons of Israel.* In that day points to the messianic age. *Thresh* points to harvesting or the ingathering of grain. The River is the Euphrates; the brook of Egypt is the Wadi el-Arish south of the Philistine Plain. These were the traditional northern and southern boundaries of the Promised Land. Here they represent the areas from which God will gather his people, viz., Mesopotamia and Egypt. Like kernels in a threshing, God’s people will be gathered. *One by one* dispels the notion of a national restoration. Those who embrace the gospel of Jesus are gathered into his kingdom. The thrust of this v is on separation, purification and gathering of God’s people.

B. Purpose of Gathering (27:13): This v repeats the thought of the previous v under a different figure.

1. Means of gathering (27:13a): *And it shall come to pass in that day that a great trumpet will be blown...* The great trumpet is not to be taken

---

198 The exact meaning of the term (sa’sš’āh) used here is uncertain.

199 Others understand the fortified city in 27.

200 Others think the picture is that of beating an olive tree with sticks so as to shake down every last olive. Whether threshing grain or harvesting olives is intended the v has the same meaning.
literally, but points to something that arrests attention and calls forth action. The trumpet is “the gospel proclamation which gathered (and is still gathering, collecting, picking) the true Israel of God from the far reaches of the world.”

2. Places of gathering (27:13b): and those who are perishing in Assyria in the land of Assyria and who are banished in the land of Egypt... Assyria and Egypt represent distant lands, wherever they may be, where God has people who belong to him. Those who respond to the trumpet previously were perishing and were banished from God’s presence.

3. Result of gathering (27:13c): even they will come and worship Yahweh in the holy mountain in Jerusalem. The trumpet calls the perishing outcasts to unite in worship at the holy mountain (Mount Zion) in Jerusalem. This gathering, then, is not political and national, but personal and spiritual. Mount Zion is kingdom of Christ of which the physical Mount Zion was a type (Heb 12:22).

BOOK FIVE
BOOK OF WOES
Isaiah 28-33

The Book of Woes derives its name from the fact that almost every ch in this unit begins with the funeral cry woe. Because the thought here centers about the glorious future of Mount Zion, von Orelli proposes the more positive title Book of Zion. The unit appears to have been composed during the reign of good King Hezekiah sometime between the fall of Samaria in 722 BC and the Assyrian invasion of Judah in 701 BC. During this period Judah faced the ever-increasing temptation to enter into an alliance with Egypt. The theme of the folly of false trust continues from the preceding two divisions of the book.

CHAPTER 28
WOE TO WANTON RULERS

Ch 28 points out the problem that existed in the leadership of God’s people. Isaiah likened the leaders of Ephraim to drunkards. Then he portrayed the scoffing of the leaders of Judah and the disastrous consequences of the current national policy.

DRUNKARDS OF EPHRAIM
28:1-6

A. A Fading Flower (28:1): Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is at the head of the fertile valley of those overcome with wine. Situated as it was at the head of a fertile valley, Samaria was the queen city of the northern kingdom, the proud crown of the rulers of that realm. To Isaiah, however, Samaria was like a once-beautiful flower in the irreversible process of wilting. The rulers there were so intoxicated with their power they could not perceive the disaster that Isaiah so clearly saw.

B. A Mighty Storm (28:2-4):
1. Power of the storm (28:2): Behold, Adonay has one who is strong and mighty, like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of water, mighty and overflowing, he will make it lie on the earth with his hand. Isaiah uses the figure of a gathering storm to depict the emerging power of Assyria. Torrential rain, devastating wind, pounding hail, and flash floods are part of the imagery. The oppressor will flatten everything under his hand.
2. Result of the storm (28:3-4):
   a. Samaria totally crushed (28:3): The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trampled under foot. By means of the powerful storm (Assyria), God will destroy the proud crown of Ephraim’s drunkards, i.e., Samaria. The city will be leveled and trodden under foot.
   b. Samaria easily consumed (28:4): And the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is at the head of the fertile valley shall become like a

201 Butler, BSTS, 2:54.
202 Previous woes in Isaiah: 3:9-11; 5:8-11, 20, 22; 10:1; 17:12; 18:1.
203 Cited by Leupold, EI, 1:433.
first-ripe fig prior to summer. One who sees it swallows it while it is yet in his hand. The enemy eagerly will snatch and devour Samaria like it was a first ripe fig. The first figs appeared in June well before the fig harvest in September. These first-ripe figs were noted for being large and sweet. People devoured them on sight.  

C. A Glorious Day (28:5-6):  
1. A new focus (28:5): In that day Yahweh of hosts will become a beautiful crown, a lovely diadem to the remnant of his people... Samaria’s demise will have one positive result. That national tragedy will cause some men to focus their attention on the true crown of Israel, viz., God himself. This beauty does not fade; it cannot be defeated. The idea is that Yahweh will be the true king of the remnant, i.e., those who turn to God after the judgment.  
2. A new people (28:6): a spirit of justice to one who sits in judgment, and strength to those who turn back war at the gates. Among the surviving remnant God will bring a spirit of justice to those in the judiciary; he will provide strength to those in the military. Spirit in Isaiah implies, not merely a change in environment, but an empowerment to created that new environment. Focusing on the God whose character is just (Dt 17:8-12; 2 Chr 19:5-8), motivates his followers to pursue justice. Realizing that the all-powerful Creator is on their side, the remnant can fight with courage to defend the gates of the city. The point is that a remnant will survive the national catastrophe, and that remnant will experience genuine conversion.  

SCOFFERS OF JUDAH 205  
28:7-29  

A. Confused Leadership (28:7-8):  
1. Leaders were drunk (28:7): And these stagger with wine; and with strong drink they reel. Priest and prophet stagger with strong drink; they are consumed by wine, they reel from strong drink, they stagger in a vision; they totter in a decision. The spiritual leaders of Judah share the confusion of the political leaders of the north. The v suggests that the religious leaders engaged in debauchery. Consumed by wine suggests people who have become slaves to their own self-indulgence. The drunkenness affected the official duties of these spiritual leaders. Intoxication prevented the prophets from having a correct perspective on the forthcoming horrors of siege. Priests were unable to render accurate legal decisions because their minds were in an alcoholic fog. The visions announced by the prophets and the judgments rendered by priests were as irrational as the babblings of a drunk.  
2. Leaders were sick (28:8): Indeed, all the tables are full of filthy vomit; there is no [clean] place. The leaders were sick as well as drunk. Isaiah pictured the tables where these drunken policy makers sat as full of vomit. In this v Isaiah’s disgust toward the religious leaders reaches its height. Those who should have been leading the nation in commitment to God wallow in their filth and find it amusing. This is the ultimate picture of degradation.  

B. Countering Mockery (28:9-13):  
1. Charge against Isaiah (28:9-10):  
   a. He was simplistic (28:9): To whom shall he teach knowledge; whom shall he make to understand a message? Those weaned from milk? those removed from the breasts? The leaders responded to Isaiah’s unflattering depiction by attacking the prophet for being simplistic and repetitious. They resented being treated like infants or toddlers. They do not need Isaiah to continue harping on their sins. “The more correction we need, the less we think we need it.”  
   b. He spoke non-sense (28:10): For it is command upon command, command upon command; line on line, line on line, a little there, a little there. To make sense out of the Hebrew of this v is a challenge. It probably was never intended to make sense (NIV margin). The drunk listeners picked up a few stray syllables of what Isaiah said, and hurled

204See Hos 9:10; Mic 7:1; Nah 3:12; Jer 24:2.  
205Oswalt (NICOT, 1:508) thinks the description of Ephraim’s leaders continues through v 13 because Jerusalem is mentioned for the first time in v 14.  
206Oswalt (NICOT, 1:511).
them back at the prophet. The result was gibberish or baby talk. Such is their mocking caricature of the prophet’s preaching. “The Hebrew original sounds like the mocking of nursery rhymes or the stammering of drunkards.”

207 Line refers to a measuring line used to determine whether a damaged building could be repaired, or had to be demolished.

208 2. Response of Isaiah (28:11-13):
   a. God will speak harshly (28:11): Indeed, with mocking lips and with another tongue he shall speak unto this people... Isaiah parried the gibe of his critics with a threat. Indeed God will speak to these people through a foreign tongue that will sound like the gibberish of their mockery. The reference is to the tongue of the Assyrians, the agents of judgment. This people stresses the distance that has come between Yahweh and his people.
   b. God has spoken clearly (28:12): to whom he said, This is rest, give rest to the weary, and this is repose, but they were not willing to hear. By rejecting Isaiah, the leaders had rejected God’s direction to rest in his word of promise and to trust him for deliverance from national foes. Rest (political and personal tranquility) was not to be found in alliances, schemes, and military equipment (30:15; 31:1-3).
   c. Result (28:13): And the word of Yahweh will become to them command upon command, command upon command, line upon line, line upon line, a little there, a little there that they may go and stumble backward and be broken, ensnared, and captured. The Judeans will have to face the harsh realities of foreign domination. To drive home his point, Isaiah repeated their mocking syllables and imparted to them a sinister significance. These leaders will stumble backward, be broken, ensnared and taken captive. This emphasis by enumeration of synonyms is characteristic of Isaiah. Unwise children are destined to learn the hard realities of life through experience. So it will be with the leadership of Judah.

C. Countering False Security (28:14-19):
   1. Cynicism of the leaders (28:14-15):
      a. Charge of cynicism (28:14): Therefore, hear the word of Yahweh, O scoffers, rulers of this people who are in Jerusalem. Because the rulers of Jerusalem mocked him and his message, Isaiah had a word from Yahweh for them. Scoffers, lit., men of scorning (lātsôn), is the strongest negative term that the OT uses to describe the wicked. A scoffer is one who not only rejects the path of the righteous, but mocks those who choose it. Scoffing is the exact opposite of faith and wisdom.
      b. Boasts of cynicism (28:15):
         (1) Their covenant (28:15a): We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have made a pact. The leaders had negotiated an agreement that Isaiah sarcastically called a covenant with death and a pact with Sheol. By rejecting the path of life, they had chosen the path of death. Most likely the prophet is referring to a death-do-us-die treaty with Egypt (cf. ch 31).
         (2) Their confidence (28:15b): The overflowing scourge, when it passes by, will not reach us... Assyria is called the overflowing scourge. This is a mixed figure combining elements from 8:7f (flood) and 10:26 (whip). Faced with the threat of Assyrian invasion the leaders in Jerusalem felt secure.
         (3) Their self-deception (28:15c): for we have made falsehood our refuge, and in deception we have hidden ourselves. The agreement with Egypt was utterly deceptive. Obviously the princes did not believe that their covenant was with falsehood/deception. By putting these words in the mouths of the leaders, Isaiah indicates the worthlessness of the treaties that they had negotiated in the face of the Assyrian onslaught.

207 Slotki, SBB, 128.
208 2 Kgs 21:13; Isa 28:17; 34:11; Lam 2:8; Amos 7:7-9.
209 The threat establishes a principle: when men reject the plan, God employs the unusual to warn them of impending destruction. Thus the Apostle Paul said that the speaking in tongues of the first century was a sign, not to believers but to unbelievers, especially Jewish unbelievers.

210 Oswalt, NICOT, 1:516.
211 Ps 1:1, 2; Prov 15:12; 21:24; 22:10; 29:8; Hos 7:5.
212 Others think the princes engaged in sorcery and had entered into an agreement with the gods of the underworld.
No military assistance from Egypt would be forthcoming.

2. Cornerstone of Yahweh (28:16):
   a. Divine provision necessary (28:16a): Therefore, thus says Adonay Yahweh: Behold I will lay in Zion a stone... Because the leaders have not been able to find any source of security for the nation, God himself steps in. The imagery of laying a foundation for a building is used to depict what God will do for his people. In 8:14 Yahweh himself is the sanctuary and stone. Here, however, the stone is laid by Yahweh. Building on that earlier passage, Isaiah foresees the coming of one who is both God and yet is distinct from God. Clearly this must be Messiah as 9:6 (cf. 7:14) shows. That this stone is Messiah is made clear by Rom 9:33 and 1 Pet 2:2f.

   b. Description of the provision (28:16b): a stone of testing, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation. True security is found only in the stone foundation that God provides. That stone—tested in every way —was the cornerstone, the stone that is at the junction of two walls. He is precious because of his superlative value in the divine plan. The messianic sanctuary will find its foundation in him. In the NT God's great temple is the church which is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20).

   c. Potential of the provision (28:16c): He who believes will not be disturbed. Anyone who places his faith in that stone will not be disturbed, (lit., be in a hurry), whatever judgments might unfold. The thought is that a believer can face any adversity with calmness since by faith he is anchored to the unmovable Rock.

   a. Standard of judgment (28:17a): And I will make justice a line and righteousness a plumb line... The architectural language continues. This line can be taken with what precedes. The messianic temple will be built on the principles of justice and righteousness. The line can also be taken with what follows. Judah will shortly need the security of faith in the messianic stone. With the measuring line of justice and the plummet of righteousness God will judge the sinners of that land.

   b. Power of judgment (28:17b): then hail will sweep away the refuge of falsehood, and the secret place the waters shall overflow. Those who build on the solid Rock will stand the test, but sinners will be swept away. The line of justice and the plummet line of righteousness will expose the flimsy structures in which men seek to evade the storms of judgment. Hail and flood will sweep away those man-made structures. Jesus also presented a picture of two buildings, one that stands under judgment, and one that falls (Lk 6:46-49).

   c. Demonstration of judgment (28:18a): And your covenant with death will be covered over, and your pact with Sheol shall not stand. The flood tide of judgment will sweep away their man-made refuge. Their secret alliances will not spare them in that day. For covenant of death see v 15. Covered over (r. kpr) continues the picture of a flood. NASB renders canceled; NIV annulled.

   d. Result of judgment (28:18b): As for the overflowing scourge, indeed it will pass by and you will become for it a trampling place. The mixed metaphor of overflowing scourge combines the picture of a flood and a rod. The end result is that Judah will be trampled under foot by the Assyrian armies.

   e. Repetition of judgment (28:19): Each time it passes through it will take you; surely morning by morning it will pass through, in the day and in the night and it will be only terror to understand the report. The Assyrian armies will again and again come down upon them. Anytime, day or night, troops will march through their land. Each visitation produces terror. Assyrian policies, revealed in their national annals, called for return to the same areas time after time.

D. Countering Presumptuous Faith (28:20-22):
   1. A popular proverb (28:20): For the bed is too short to stretch out on, and the cover too narrow to wrap up in. Some might be inclined to argue that God would come to their rescue against Assyria. The presumption that God owed them
deliverance, however, will provide no comfort in that day. That doctrine was like a bed too short for comfortable sleep, like covers too narrow to give warmth to an exposed body.

2. A shocking prediction (28:21): Surely as at Mount Perazim Yahweh will arise, as at the valley of Gibeon he will stir to perform his task, his strange task, and to work his work, his unusual work. Isaiah called the Assyrian judgment a strange work (NIV) of God. It was strange in that Yahweh will use foreigners to fight against his own people. Yahweh will display the same zeal in attacking the Judeans that he had displayed against the Philistines in the battle of Mount Perazim (2 Sam 5:19-21) and against the Canaanites in the valley of Gibeon (Josh 10:12). Possibly false prophets were using these stories to bolster their promises of divine intervention for Israel. There will be divine intervention all right, but it will be against Israel. The implication is that now the Judeans have become God’s enemies.

3. A stern warning (28:22): So now do not carry on as scoffers lest your bonds be made stronger, for concerning an end, and that determined, I have heard from Adonay Yahweh of Hosts over all the earth. Isaiah warned those who took his threats lightly that their indifference will only make their bonds stronger. The bonds are subordination to Assyria and/or the fetters of sinful rebellion against God. On scoffers, see v 14. Scoff though they may, Isaiah reaffirmed the divine origin of his message and the ominous thrust thereof. Adonay the Sovereign had decreed an end for the land (cf. 10:23). That end (destruction) was determined (necherātsāh), i.e., fixed, unalterable. Yet there was hope even now for individuals who pay attention to Isaiah’s warnings.

E. Countering Theological Error (28:23-29):
1. Call for attention (28:3): Give ear and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I have to say. Isaiah used two parables to refute the notion that God’s justice will prevent him from bringing judgment upon the entire land. Parables call for close listening and discernment. Give ear/hear my voice is the language of the royal counselors, now turned back against them by the prophet whom they regard as a simpleton.

2. First farming parable (28:24-26):
   a. Preparing the soil (28:24): Does the plowman plow continually to plant seed? Does he [continue] to open and harrow his ground? Plowing was done with a metal-pointed stick pulled by an ox. Once the ground was opened to a depth of about three inches, a harrow (a couple of logs with spikes sticking out) was drawn over the ground. This leveled and smoothed the ground. The rhetorical questions require agreement even from a hostile audience. Agriculture requires the farmer to change his activity from time to time. So God's purposes require him to act differently at different seasons. He spared Jerusalem in 701 BC; he destroyed the city in 586 BC.
   b. Sowing the seed (28:25): Does he not level its surface, and scatter dill and sow cummin, put wheat in rows, barley in its place, and spelt at its borders? In due time plowing and harrowing give way to sowing. Each seed must be planted according to its own character. Some seed is scattered; other seed is planted in rows and plots. Spelt may have been planted at the borders of the field to mark off one plot from the next. The point: A farmer does not normally sow all his fields with only one crop. Space is found for a variety of plants. The illustration underscores the variety of God's ways with people.
   c. Source of knowledge (28:26): He will instruct him according to right principle, his God will teach him. The farmer works his fields according to certain principles that he has learned from the Creator. God is the true counselor. His counsel is simple, straightforward, and time-tested, like those principles employed by farmers. Policies followed by the national leaders are as stupid as a farmer who ignores the basic principles of plowing and sowing.

   a. Methods of threshing (28:27): For dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is the cartwheel driven upon the cummin, but with a stick dill is beaten, and cummin with a staff. In
the harvest time, threshing takes different forms depending on the type of crop harvested. The same method cannot be applied to both small and large grains. Grains like wheat or barley were threshed by tying an ox to a pole. The ox was made to pull a wagon or sled with “teeth” in a circle over the piles of grain. This process separated the kernels from the husks. For smaller grains a stick or flail had to be used (cf. Judg 6:11; Ruth 2:17).

b. Duration of threshing (28:28): Bread is ground, but not forever. It will surely be threshed, the wheels of his cart will rumble over it, but his horses will not crush it. Plowing, sowing, threshing, and grinding have one goal in view, viz. to produce edible food. Bread (wheat) is ground (threshed) only until the kernels have been separated from the husks. Threshing is only a means to an end, not the end in itself. God will not discipline his people beyond what is appropriate. For the sake of the righteous remnant, judgment will be tempered with mercy. Horses were not normally used in threshing. Perhaps Isaiah refers to them here to suggest that Judah’s “threshing” will come by military force.

c. Source of knowledge (28:29): This too has gone forth from Yahweh of Hosts, wonderful in counsel, great in wisdom. As the Creator was responsible for the principles of plowing and sowing, so he also is responsible for the principles of threshing. The counsel of Yahweh in the spiritual realm is every bit as wonderful and wise as his counsel in the physical realm of farming. So why do the intellectuals in Jerusalem scoff at the message of Isaiah? God has his purposes in history. Just as in farming, through a sequence of events God brings his ultimate purpose to fruition.

CHAPTER 29
TWO MORE WOES

WOE TO WORTHLESS WORSHIP
29:1-14

Isaiah’s second woe was pronounced against Ariel, the hearth of God. This symbolic name refers to Jerusalem, the sacrificial center of the nation.

A. Warning to Jerusalem (29:1):
1. An ominous “woe” (29:1a): Woe to Ariel, Ariel, city where David camped. Ariel means something like altar hearth. Being the sacrificial center of the nation was no doubt a source of Jerusalem’s pride. The fact that this was the city where David camped was no doubt another source of pride. But being at the heart of Yahweh worship, and being associated with a man after God’s own heart was not sufficient to spare Jerusalem from judgment. God who had enabled David to take Jerusalem would now besiege this city himself, through its enemies. Furthermore, the city would be destroyed by fire just as if the whole city had become an extension of the altar hearth within its temple.

2. A sarcastic directive (29:1b): Add year upon year, let the festivals complete the cycle. Isaiah invites the Jerusalemites to continue with their joyous round of feast days. None of that ritual activity will change what Jerusalem was to experience.

B. Distress of Jerusalem (29:2-8):
1. Siege announced (29:2): But I will besiege Ariel and she will become lamentation and mourning; and she will become like Ariel to me. Perhaps using the great bronze temple altar as an object lesson, Isaiah announced that Jerusalem will become an Ariel, a sacrificial altar. The Judeans themselves will be the sacrifice on that altar-hearth. The joyous songs of Jerusalem’s festivals will turn to lamentation/mourning.

2. Siege operations (29:3): I will encamp like a circle against you, and I will encircle you with siege-works. Three times Yahweh declares that he has now become the enemy of Jerusalem. David once camped within the city (v 1); God will camp against Jerusalem. God will direct an enemy (Assyrians) to launch an attack against Jerusalem. They will come to that place with the intent to kill the inhabitants and burn the city. Towers and siege-works will prevent escape from the city. In attacking cities the Assyrians used great mobile towers with battering rams mounted below, and
spaces above for archers. These were pushed up to the city walls on ramps of earth and debris.
3. Siege result (29:4): When you fall, from the ground you will speak, and from the dust your utterance will be bowed down. Your voice will be like a ghost from the earth and from the dust your utterance will chirp. In the coming ordeal proud Jerusalem will be humbled to the dust. Instead of pompous boasting (cf. 28:15), their speech would sound like ghostlike whisper from the ground where they lie prostrate. The high and mighty have been brought down to the dust.

C. Redemption of Jerusalem (29:5-8): The God of judgment is also the God of salvation. He is Sovereign. For his own purposes he will intervene on behalf of Jerusalem at the proper time.
1. Unexpectedness of it (29:5): The crowd of your strangers will become like fine dust, and the crowd of the ruthless like the blown chaff. From the distress of the preceding vv God miraculously will rescue Jerusalem. Suddenly Yahweh will disperse those ruthless enemies as wind scatters the chaff of the threshing floor. Powerful nations are no more substantial before Yahweh than fine dust or chaff before a blast of wind. For this reason man’s hope must always be in God, not human devices.
2. Explanation of it (29:6): Suddenly, in an instant (6) you will be visited by Yahweh of Hosts with thunder and with earthquake and a loud sound, whirlwind and tempest and a consuming fiery flame. Yahweh will visit his people when they cry out to him for mercy. Yahweh of Hosts, commander of all the hosts of heaven and earth, has more then enough power to deal with those who have wronged his people. He will unleash against the Assyrians the full force of his omnipotent power, symbolized by the devastating forces of nature. Biblical writers saw the natural manifestations as evidence of the approach of the invisible God.
3. Illustration of it (29:7-8):
   a. A nightmare end (29:7): And it will be like a dream, a vision of the night, the crowd of all the nations that war against Ariel, all who make war against her and her strongholds, who oppress her. Those who assault Ariel will disappear as suddenly as a nightmare when one awakes. When Sennacherib’s forces outside Jerusalem suddenly disappeared there must have been relief in the city akin to that experienced by a sleeper who has been terrified by a nightmare (37:36f).
   b. An expectation frustrated (29:8): And it shall be as when a hungry man dreams, and behold, eating; and he wakes up and his soul is empty. Or as when a thirsty man dreams, and behold drinking, and he wakes up, behold, he is faint. Thus will be the crowd of all the nations who are warring against Mount Zion. The dreamers now are the Assyrians. They will be disappointed in their aspirations of devouring Jerusalem like a man who dreams of food or drink only to awake and have none.

D. Disbelief of Jerusalem (29:9-14): Isaiah now explains why it is that God must bring Jerusalem to its knees before he intervenes to deliver them.
1. Description of confusion (29:9): Restrain yourselves and be astonished; blind yourselves and be blind. Be drunk, but not with wine; stagger, but not with strong drink. Using sarcastic imperatives, Isaiah describes the confusion of Judah’s leaders. The people of Judah are stunned (NIV) by this message. Those who trust in political schemes and alliances find Isaiah’s concept of trusting in Yahweh to be ludicrous. Talk of finding salvation only after devastating humiliation is foolishness to them. Their confusion is likened to the staggering about of one who is blind or drunk.
2. Explanation of confusion (29:10): For Yahweh has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep; he has shut your eyes, the prophets, and your heads, the seers he has covered. God had permitted a deep sleep to fall upon the unbelieving rulers so that they perceived no danger. Their spiritual leaders (prophets/seers) can offer no guidance, for God had shut their eyes. God is said to shut the eyes of spiritual leaders when they have rejected the truth of his word. He permits those who do not love the truth to believe a lie. Blindness, drunkenness, and
sleep paint the picture of the total failure of Jerusalem’s spiritual leadership.

3. Illustration of confusion (29:11-12):
   a. The educated (29:11): *And the entire vision shall be to you like words of a sealed book which, if it is given to one who knows how to read saying, Read this please, he will say, I cannot because it is sealed.* The entire vision (lit., the vision of the all) refers to Isaiah’s message. The leaders of Judah were educated. They could read. But they regarded what Isaiah announced as a sealed book. They could have opened that scroll and learned from it. But they put forth no effort to open the scroll. They brushed Isaiah’s message aside as a private revelation that was of no concern to them. The point is that if the word of God is to make sense, one must approach it with humble heart and spiritual discernment.
   b. The uneducated (29:12): *And if the book is given to one who does not know how to read, saying, Read this please, then he will say, I do not know how to read.* If the spiritual leaders were not interested in receiving Isaiah’s message, the uneducated could not read the scroll even it was opened. The common people looked to the “prophets” for spiritual understanding. Their reluctance to accept Isaiah’s message made the common people feel that they certainly could not read it, i.e., embrace it.

   a. Nature of the problem (29:13): *Then Adonay said, Because this people draws near with their mouth and honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me, and their fear of me is a learned commandment of men.* Isaiah now explains why the Judeans were so out of tune with the word of God. The fault was in their approach to worship. Their devotion was insincere, formal and traditional. They said the right words, but their words did not come from the heart, i.e., the seat of personality. They recited the proper ritual, but fear of Yahweh did not govern their life. A learned commandment of men refers to the way the leaders had applied the sacred law. This v is quoted by Jesus in reference to the Pharisees (Mt 15:9).
   b. Announcement of intervention (29:14a): *Therefore, behold I will again deal wondrously with this people, wonder upon wonder.* Conventional human wisdom desires to confine God to predictable actions. God, however, specializes in surprises in human history, both in judgment and in salvation.
   c. Result of intervention (29:14b): *And the wisdom of its wise men will perish, and the discernment of his discerning ones will be hidden.* Since Judah was hopelessly out of touch with Yahweh, neither they nor their wise men will be able to fathom the wondrously marvelous thing that God was about to do in their midst. Both the distress into which Judah will fall at the hands of the Assyrians, and the miraculous deliverance from it, are inexplicable by political logic or historical precedent. The apostle Paul quoted this v in 1 Cor 1:19.

**WOE TO WILY SCHEMERS**

29:15-24

The third woe fell on those who challenged the omniscience of God by nefarious schemes. Their secret plans were based on the premise that God could not save. The unit begins with condemnation and concludes with a positive word about future redemption.

A. Condemnation (29:15-16):
   1. Secretive schemes (29:15): *Woe to those who go deep from Yahweh to hide counsel; whose deeds are done in a dark place and who say, Who sees us or knows us?* The focus here seems to be on the pro-Egyptian party that was attempting to conceal their proposed alliance from Isaiah and from God.
   2. Audacious schemes (29:16): *You turn things upside down! Should the potter be regarded like the clay? Should that which is made say to its maker, He does not understand?* Things are topsy-turvy when people tell God what do rather than listening to what he says he is going to do. Their secretive plans denied the sovereignty of God. The creature must always recognize himself to be inferior to the Creator. Man cannot outsmart God.
The potter/clay illustration is further developed in 45:9; 64:8. See also Jer 18:1-6; Rom 9:19-21.

B. Redemption (29:17-24):
1. Reversal of fortunes (29:17): *Is it not but a little while till Lebanon becomes a field, and the field be considered a forest.* The day of redemption brings about the humbling of the high and mighty (Lebanon) and the exaltation of the lowly (the field). Isaiah pictures the Lebanon forest cut down to become an ordinary stand of vegetation (a field). On the other hand, the field (God’s people) was destined to become a mighty forest. The reference must be to the messianic kingdom to which Isaiah has referred repeatedly.

2. Restored faculties (29:18): *In that day the deaf shall hear words of a book, and out of deep darkness the eyes of the blind will see.* In that messianic day the people of God will be receptive to the divine word. The deaf will hear the words of a book, the blind will see. The kingdom of God will consist of those who want to hear and see the truths of God’s word. The former spiritual insensitivity of the people will be a thing of the past (cf. 35:5-6).

3. Renewed joy (29:19): *The downtrodden also will rejoice in Yahweh, and the poorest of mankind will exalt in the holy one of Israel.* Isaiah frequently expresses his concern for the godly poor (cf. 3:14; 11:4; 25:4). In the messianic age the downtrodden and poorest—God-fearing men—will experience fresh joy in the holy one of Israel, i.e., Yahweh. Coming deliverance will result in new praise. Those considered poor by worldly standards will regard themselves as rich. They will find their joy in Yahweh.

   a. Categories of undesirables (29:20): *For the ruthless shall cease, and the scoffer will be finished, and all who watch to do evil will be cut off...* The powerful ones who had oppressed the helpless will be removed from the land in that day. Three classes of undesirables are mentioned with synonymous verbs (cease/finished/cut off) used of all three. The kingdom of Messiah will be a kingdom that excludes these kinds of people. The ruthless (tāriṣ) are those who squeeze the helpless to extract whatever they can out of them. The scoffer (lēṣ) mocks the word and ways of God, and all those who try to follow them. Those who watch to do evil (šōqāḏē) are businessmen and politicians who are anxious to get involved in every crooked scheme to prey upon the innocent.

b. Conduct of undesirables (29:21): *who make a man a sinner with a word, and lay a trap for the one who seeks justice in the gate, and turn aside a righteous man with emptiness.* Three wrongs are charged to those enumerated in the preceding v. First, they make a man a sinner with a word, i.e., their false testimony makes an innocent man appear to be guilty. Second, they lay a trap for the one who seeks justice. The trap might be some legal loophole, or some inadvertent admission that might be prosecutable. The gate was a complex of buildings at the entrance to the city where legal business was transacted. Third, they turn aside a righteous man with emptiness. By verbose platitudes they postpone, stall, and delay legal intervention. They talk around issues rather than address issues. Thus a righteous or innocent person is never given a fair hearing.

5. Reverence for God (29:22-24):
   a. Jacob unashamed (29:22): *Therefore, thus says Yahweh, the Redeemer of Abraham, to the house Jacob, No longer will Jacob be ashamed; no longer will his face be pale.* This intervention of God will silence the scoffer. Beaten down by oppressors within and without, the true Israel of God may have had occasion in the past to be embarrassed. But in the messianic day, the demonstration of God’s power will enable the true Israel to walk confidently and joyfully.

b. Jacob’s children (29:23-24):
   (1) Expanded (29:23a): *For when he sees it, his children, the work of my hands in his midst they will sanctify my name.* Jacob is depicted looking over his “house” in the messianic age. He will have no reason to be ashamed. He will observe his

---

213 Robinson, BI, 112.
children the work of my hands in his midst. By the
divine adoptive process Gentiles will become part
of the family of God, the house of Jacob. To
sanctify Yahweh’s name is to proudly proclaim
him as the only God.
(2) Devout (29:23b): And they will sanctify the
holy one of Jacob, and stand in awe of the God of
Israel. The expanded family of Jacob is a spiritual
concept. All the true members of the house of
Jacob will stand in awe of the Holy one of Jacob as
they witnessed this marvelous expansion of the
family of redeemed. Only Yahweh is holy, truely
set apart from this world. To regard him as holy is
to recognize him as perfect, untainted by any defect
that characterizes this world. Such holiness
requires that those who stand before him in
worship be filled with awe, reverence and respect.
(3) Taught (29:24): Those who err in spirit will
know understanding, and those who murmur will
learn knowledge. The sequence of events in vv 22-
24 is instructive: redemption (v 22), worship (v 23)
and now understanding/knowledge, i.e., an
experiential embracing of the truth. Since the
previous v focused on the expansion of “Israel” by
the inclusion of Gentiles, this v may refer
specifically to converted Jews. In the messianic
day they will come to know the truth.

CHAPTER 30
WOE TO WILLFUL CHILDREN

Chs 28-29 contained three general “woes” that
are designed to illustrate the problem faced by
Judah. In chs 30-31 Isaiah became more specific.
The fourth woe concerned God’s rebellious
children who were determined to forge an alliance
with Egypt. In these chs Isaiah continued the
denunciation/promise pattern that he employed in
ch 29.

DENUNCIATION
30:1-17

Isaiah demonstrated the folly of reliance on
Egypt in several ways. Though he makes his point
through repetition in vv 1-17, some development in
his thought can be detected. The alliance stood
condemned because it was man-made, futile,
rebellious and ultimately unnecessary.

A. Man-made Alliance (30:1-5):
1. Contrary to God’s will (30:1-2):
a. Formulation of a plan (30:1): Woe to rebellious
sons (oracle of Yahweh), executing a plan, but
not from me, and pouring out a drink offering,
but not of my Spirit in order to add sin upon sin.
Since alliance with Egypt was forbidden in God’s
law (Ex 13:17; Dt 17:16), pursuit of such an
alliance was considered an act of rebellion against
God. The leaders of Judah had not taken counsel of
God. Their planned alliance with Egypt was not in
harmony with the divine Spirit that through Isaiah
had warned of such political entanglements.
Pouring out a drink offering was part of
ceremonies that celebrated the pact between two
nations. Inevitably a treaty with a foreign nation
required recognition of the gods of that nation. To
the sin of trusting in Pharaoh they were adding the
sin of mistrusting Yahweh!
b. Execution of the plan (30:2): Who set out to go
down to Egypt but did not inquire at my mouth,
taking refuge in Pharaoh’s stronghold, seeking
shelter in the shadow of Pharaoh. The plans that
were formulated in rebellion were executed
without any consultation with God’s prophet. The
terms stronghold and shadow appear throughout
the Psalms in reference to Yahweh. Seeking
protection from Assyria by alliance with Egypt was
a tacit rejection of Yahweh. The Almighty casts a
much larger shadow than any pipsqueak Pharaoh.
2. Destined to fail (30:3-5):
a. Ultimate shame (30:3): But the stronghold of
Pharaoh will become your shame, and the shelter
in the shade of Egypt [your] humiliation. Since
alliance with Egypt was contrary to God’s purpose,
the plan will fail. Judah will experience national
embarrassment by trusting in the stronghold of
Pharaoh.
b. Wasted effort (30:4): For his princes are in
Zoan, and his messengers have reached Tahpanhes. Envoys from Judah already had

214 Others think the reference is to Pharaoh’s princes and messengers.
gone to Tahpanhes and Zoan at the extreme limits of Lower Egypt. Their efforts, however, were wasted. The negotiations went well. Outward appearances suggested that Judah was now safe. Outward appearances, however, are deceiving.

c. Final disappointment (30:5): Everyone will be ashamed on account of a people not able to benefit them. Egypt will prove to be a totally unreliable ally. Egyptians will be no help during the coming Assyrian crisis. Judean leaders will appear foolish for having put their trust in foreign alliance.

B. Futile Alliance (30:6-8):
1. Difficult undertaking (30:6): A burden on the beasts of the Negev: In a land of distress and hardship, of lion and noisy lion, viper and fiery serpent. They carry their riches upon a donkey’s shoulder, their treasures upon a camel’s hump for the sake of a people who are of no benefit. In the burden on the beasts of the Negev Isaiah elaborated on the trip to Egypt by the envoys of Judah. That trip was difficult, dangerous, expensive, and ultimately futile.

2. Disappointing undertaking (30:7): As for Egypt, their help is vain and empty. Therefore, I have called this one: Rahab are they, sitting. The Judean messengers to Egypt were in more danger from the beasts of the desert than Assyria would be from Egypt. Rahab was the name of a mythological sea monster, here used as a symbol of Egypt. The once powerful monster, feared throughout the world, by this time had become a blustering blowhard. Egypt always boasted of more than she could deliver. Her help was vain and empty. If Assyria was to be shattered, it would be done by Yahweh (v 31), not Egypt. Egypt rightly deserved the nickname Rahab the Do-Nothing (NIV).

3. Documentation (30:8): Now go write it upon a tablet with them and on a scroll inscribe it, that it may be for another day for a witness forever. Isaiah was told to write something on a tablet. This may refer only to Isaiah’s symbolic name for Egypt (cf. 8:1). But the reference to a scroll suggests that Isaiah was directed to record a more substantial portion of the Egyptian diatribe. The purpose for the inscription/writing was to make possible verification of Isaiah’s prediction after the fulfillment. The written record was intended to be an eternal witness to the folly of trusting in man, and the faithfulness of God to fulfill his word.

C. Rebellious Alliance (30:9-14):
1. Charge of rebellion (30:9): For this is a rebellious people, false sons, sons who are not willing to listen to the instruction of Yahweh... This v explains the need for the eternal witness of the previous v. Rebellious people are those who have thrown off the obligations to an overlord. False sons are sons who are untrue to what a son should be. True sons listen to fathers; but the Judeans were not willing to listen to the heavenly Father. The instruction of Yahweh refers both to the written law, and to guidance provided by the prophets like Isaiah.

2. Manifestation of rebellion (30:10-11):
   a. What they forbid (30:10a): who say to the seers, Do not see, and to the visionaries, Do not set forth for us visions of right things...

   Seers/visionaries are earlier names for prophets, names that by the time of Isaiah may have carried derogatory connotations (1 Sam 9:9; Amos 7:12). It is not likely that Isaiah is actually quoting the words of the leaders. He is epitomizing their attitude. They really did not want to know the truth about the future. They wanted prophetic endorsement of the course of action that they already had determined was best for the nation. They were so confident about their decisions that they knew Isaiah had to be wrong.

   b. What they encourage (30:10b): speak to us smooth things, set forth visions of deception. Men prefer the easy path, the course of least resistance. Lies are often more easily digested than truth. By badgering Isaiah for prophetic utterances that were less offensive, they were really asking for him to falsify what Yahweh had showed him. The leaders wanted the prophets to alter their message, to stop
meddling in the affairs of state. They wanted their spiritual leaders to speak more positively about the immediate prospects of the nation.

c. What they ultimately want (30:11): Turn aside from the way, turn off the path; make the holy one of Israel cease from before us. Isaiah’s vision of the future was grounded in his doctrine of the holiness of God. Yahweh was transcendent, above and beyond worldly schemes. The Judeans wanted a God who was warm and fuzzy, non-threatening, non-judgmental, non-demanding. They wanted a God they could manipulate. That was not the God Isaiah knew. These rebellious sons wanted to hear no more of the theology of God’s holiness. They wanted the prophets like Isaiah to turn aside from the narrow path of conviction. Isaiah must quit harping on the same old themes. He needed to be more broadminded, more open to newer concepts of God.

3. Consequences of rebellion (30:12-14):
   a. Sin of misplaced trust (30:12): Therefore, thus says the holy one of Israel, Because you have rejected this word and have trusted in oppression and crookedness, and have leaned on it... The Judeans wanted to hear nothing more about the holy one, but the holy one has something to say to them. The leaders had rejected this word, i.e., the message of Isaiah. They had replaced the security of following God’s word with man-made schemes. The reason for the misguided political policy of Judah now is articulated. The men who formulated that policy always had misplaced their trust. In their leadership they trusted in oppression and crookedness, the politics of coercion and deception. With such men at the helm of the ship of state it is no wonder that she sails into dangerous waters.

b. Penalty for misplaced trust (30:13-14): Judgment for those who preferred political alliance to God’s word was set forth in two striking figures. (1) Sudden collapse (30:13): therefore, this iniquity will be to you like a break about to fall, a bulge on a high wall, whose collapse comes suddenly in an instant. A wall with a crack inevitably falls, and its fall comes suddenly. The foreign policy of Judah is a cracked wall. Whatever protection it affords is illusionary and temporary. The same principle applies to individuals as well as nations. Jesus likened a man who will not obey God’s word to a foolish builder whose house collapses under testing (Mt 7:26).

   (2) Complete shattering (30:14): And its breaking will be like the breaking of a potter’s jar; crushed, it will not be spared and a sherd will not be found among its pieces to snatch up fire from a hearth, or to scoop water from a reservoir. The collapse of Judah will not only be sudden, it will be complete. When Judah’s foreign policy wall collapses it will be like a potter’s vessel that has been smashed totally. There will be no fragment large enough to use for any purpose, not even to snatch up fire from a hearth. In a period before matches, people would rake through the ashes to find a glowing ember in order to light a new fire. Reservoir (gebe’) could refer to a storage tank or puddles. People desperate for water might turn to puddles.

D. Arrogant Alliance (30:15-18):
   1. Principle of salvation (30:15): For thus says Adonay Yahweh the holy one of Israel: In returning and rest you will be saved; in quietness and trust will be your strength. But you were not willing. For indicates that Isaiah is now explaining why judgment will come with such suddenness. As an alternative to reliance upon Egypt, Isaiah advocated calm neutrality in international politics, restful trust in God. He proposed reliance, not alliance. He urged returning with respect to obedience to God’s direction. For men to entrust their deliverance to Yahweh is hard, because it forces them to admit human limitations.

   2. Penalty for rejecting the principle (30:16-17):
      a. Flight of leaders (30:16): You said: No, for we will flee on horses. Therefore you will flee. On swift [horses] we will ride. Therefore, your pursuers will be swift. Trusting God for salvation was far too simple for these arrogant leaders. God

218 Grogan (EB, in loc.) thinks that the reliance on oppression and deceit is a reference to Egypt. “For Israel Egypt was the oppressor par eminence, and at this time her promises of aid were worthless and so must be considered deceitful.”
graciously offered himself; they chose horses instead. They spurned God’s grace and tried to manufacture their own salvation. The strategists in Jerusalem thought that cavalry was the equalizer in the confrontation with Assyria. On the contrary, declared the prophet, those horses will only aid them in fleeing from their enemy. The Assyrian cavalry will be every bit as swift as any horses they might employ. Those who rely on strength or speed to deliver them from an enemy will someday find an enemy that is swifter and stronger.

b. Collapse of forces (30:17a): One thousand shall flee before the threat of one, at the threat of five you will flee... Salvation is not found in numbers any more than in horses. A handful of enemy soldiers will put to flight thousands. This threat is a reversal of the promise made in Dt 32:30 and Josh 23:10. The quick collapse of Judean infantry is poetically depicted. Merely a threatening gesture from a single Assyrian will send the brave warriors of Judah fleeing in all directions.

c. Isolation of Jerusalem (30:17b): until you are left like a pole upon the mountaintop, and like an ensign on a hill. Their disgraceful dispersal will leave Jerusalem alone, undefended, like an ensign, a signal pole on a barren hill. This was the situation when Sennacherib invaded in 701 BC.

3. Patience of Yahweh (30:18):

a. He waits on his people (30:18a): Therefore, Yahweh waits to be gracious to you... Judah does not wait on Yahweh (26:8), but he waits for his people to come to their senses. He wants to be gracious and show compassion, for that is his nature.

b. He is on high (30:18b): and therefore he is on high to show compassion to you. For God to be on high has both positive and negative connotations. On the positive side, the expression emphasizes that God is there. Though he is invisible to the eye of flesh, he is real. He has a heavenly perspective on life in this world. He is not bound by the limitations of time and space. On the negative side, the expression suggests that God has disengaged from involvement in earth’s problems. He waits to come down to intervene on behalf of his people at the appropriate moment.

c. He is just (30:18c): For Yahweh is a God of justice... In this context justice probably underscores that God’s judgment on nations is measured and purposeful. He does not arbitrarily blast nations, nor does he fly off into a rage and exterminate whole peoples. For this reason there is hope even in judgment.

d. He blesses (30:18d): blessed are all who wait for him. God cannot bless his people until they are in a position to receive the blessing. Therefore, repentance on their part must precede any change of action on his part. Those who did put their trust in Yahweh will be most blessed. To wait on Yahweh means to depend on him, to be patient with circumstances, and to be confident that divine promises will ultimately find fulfillment.

**PROMISE**

30:19-33

Judah’s failure to trust God will lead to destruction. Nonetheless, in the midst of judgment God will display his grace. In the long run, and in the short run God had glorious plans for his people.

**A. A Glorious Teacher** (30:19-26):

1. Prayers answered (30:19): For a people shall dwell in Zion, even in Jerusalem. You will not weep any longer. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. When he hears it, he will answer you. Isaiah predicted that the great cities of his day would become ruins (13:19-22; 34:10-17), Jerusalem will continue to be inhabited. Judgment did fall on Jerusalem, but that judgment was tempered with mercy. While it is true that physical Jerusalem continues to exist, the reference here is probably to the New Jerusalem, the Jerusalem that is from above (Heb 12:22; Gal 4:26). The people who dwell in that Jerusalem are those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. For

---

219 Less likely is the idea that God’s grace must await the outpouring of his judgment because he is just.

220 Following KJV and NKJV. Most versions make this line a vocative, but this involves a slight modification of the standard Hebrew text and ignores the opening kl (for).
them the tears caused by sin and separation from God have been removed. Channels of grace are open. One day God will hear the cry of the people of Zion—the remnant—and he will respond.

2. A visible Teacher (30:20): Adonay will give you as bread—affliction, and as water—adversity. But your Teacher will no longer hide himself, and your eyes will see your Teacher. In the past Yahweh often had given his people only bread and water. Those who were imprisoned were fed only bread and water (1 Kgs 22:27). Isaiah makes clear that bread and water symbolize affliction and adversity. Since the Judeans had refused to learn from God’s spoken word, he will teach them through the horrendous experience of siege. Subsequent to that experience, however, they will actually see their Teacher. Judgment will open their blind eyes. Perhaps Isaiah is saying nothing more then they will see their divine Teacher with the eye of faith, i.e., realize his presence in their experience. The promise, however, probably refers to the appearance of the Teacher par excellence, i.e., Messiah. Cf. Joel 2:23.

3. Divine guidance (30:21): And your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way; walk in it, whether you turn to the right or to the left. The Teacher will be near to his people. They will attune to his direction. A beast must be prodded into moving in a certain direction. An obedient child, however, responds to verbal directives. This is an picture of the indwelling presence of the Spirit. People are prone to deviate from the path of righteousness. The divine Teacher, however, will provide daily guidance to keep his people on the right path.

4. Response to God’s grace (30:22): And you will defile your graven images plated with silver and your molten images plated with gold. You will scatter them like an unclean thing: Be gone! you will say to them. Under the influence of the Teacher, God’s people will develop an absolute abhorrence for all things connected with idolatry. Defile goes beyond abandonment. The word suggests specific acts of desecration and destruction (2 Kgs 23:4-14). Images of wood or less valuable metal were plated with gold and silver so as to convey a sense of worth and respect. The people of God, however, will regard such objects as unclean, the very opposite of holy. They will be disavowed and cast aside by those who formerly worshiped them.

   a. Abundance of rain (30:23a): Then he will give you rain for your seed which you will sow in the ground… Through idolatry the Judeans had attempted to secure agricultural prosperity. Once pagans repudiate idols and listen to the Teacher, Yahweh will bless them with unimaginable abundance. In that parched region rain was the water of life, the best of all blessings.
   b. Quality production (30:23b): and bread from the produce of the ground, and it will be fatness and oil. The rain makes possible bread (grain crops). Fatness and oil speak to the abundance and quality of the meal. The language in these vv makes it clear that Isaiah is speaking of more than mere physical blessings. He speaks of spiritual blessings that are showered down upon those who are citizens of the New Jerusalem.
   c. Pastoral prosperity (30:23c): In that day your cattle will graze in a wide area. Wide pastures speak of idyllic pastoral conditions.
   d. Extent of prosperity (30:24-25a):
      (1) Lowly animals benefit (30:24) Also the oxen and the donkeys that work the ground will eat seasoned fodder, winnowed with fork and shovel. So abundant will be grain production that even work animals will be fed a mixture of seasoned food grains. The v may also hint of the changed hearts of the owners of the animals, for treating work animals in such a lavish manner is not usual among farmers.
      (2) High mountains flow (30:25a): And it will be upon every lofty mountain, and upon every high hill channels of water... Springs do not naturally break forth on mountaintops. This line stresses the extent of the prosperity envisioned for the

221 See 28:9-13; 29:11, 12; 30:15.
222 The word teacher (m’r’ykâ) can be either singular or plural according to the best authorities (§ GKC, 93ss). The singular verb argues that the noun should be considered singular. Most commentators understand the word as a plural and take the reference to be to the prophets.
messianic age, and the nature of that prosperity. Only God can bring forth streams of water in barren mountains. In concrete physical terms Isaiah is depicting the dramatic and miraculous nature of gospel salvation.

e. Time of prosperity (30:25b): **in the day of great slaughter when the towers fall.** The great prosperity that Isaiah envisions can come about only after humiliation, symbolized by slaughter (war) and falling towers. Judah must be smashed before the new era can emerge. Towers were symbols of pride. Pride must be smashed before unbelievable fruitfulness emerges.

6. Great light (30:26a): *And the light of the moon shall be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven times, like the light of seven days...* Obviously the line does not speak of physical changes on the planet. Life in this world would be uncomfortable if not impossible should the light of the sun be magnified seven times over. The point is this: darkness is associated with despair, uncertainty, sin, confusion and death. In the coming age confusion is dispelled and death is vanquished by the one who called him the light of the world (Jn 8:12; cf. Mal 4:2).

7. Healing (30:26b): **in the day when Yahweh binds up the breaking of his people and heals the bruise of his smiting.** Yahweh is depicted as the great healer. Israel was smitten by God in judgment; but that sick and broken Israel is healed, bandaged and made whole by the divine healer. The healing metaphor is used to portray the emergence of the new Israel of God under the leadership of Messiah.

B. A Marvelous Deliverance (30:27-33): The promise of Israel’s transformation is now followed by a promise of Assyria’s destruction. The people of God will experience a wonderful deliverance. Alliance with Egypt was unnecessary because God himself will crush the adversary.

1. Yahweh’s approach (30:27-28): There are four illustrations of the wrath of God in these vv.

a. Fire figure (30:27): **Behold the name of Yahweh comes from a distant place; burning is his anger, and heavy the burden. His lips are full of indignation and his tongue like a consuming fire.** To the enemy Yahweh will be a consuming fire. The language of this v is similar to other judgment theophanies.²²³ Behold points to the unexpected. The name of Yahweh is all that God has revealed about himself. He comes from a great distance (heaven?) like a firestorm. Heavy the burden probably refers to the weighty judgment Yahweh is bringing against Assyria. Lips/tongue speak of God’s word of judgment. God has merely to speak and his enemies are consumed as if by fire.

b. Flood figure (30:28a): **His breath is like an overflowing torrent, until it reaches the neck...** Yahweh will be a torrent of water as well as a fiery blast. Wadis (gulches) in Palestine are dry most of the year; but miles away in the hills a cloudburst can turn those wadis into raging torrents in minutes. The flashflood of divine judgment soon becomes neck deep on the Assyrian invaders. In 8:7-8 the prophet pictured the Assyrian invasion of Judah like the waters of the Euphrates overflowing and reaching even to the neck. Now he uses the same imagery to depict the destruction of Assyria.

c. Sieve figure (30:28b): **to shake nations with a sieve of nothingness...** Yahweh’s actions will shake and sift the political world. Again the picture is one of violence over a prolonged period. Judgment separates what has worth from what is worthless.

d. Bridle figure (30:28c): **and a bridle of error upon the jaws of peoples.** An unbroken horse is jerked about by a bridle, and ultimately is led to his death. Hostile peoples will be led away, as with a bridle, to their ruin.

2. Judah’s song (30:29): **You will have a song like a night of sanctifying a feast; and gladness of heart like going with a flute to come to the mountain of Yahweh, unto the Rock of Israel.** Israel celebrated deliverance from Egyptian bondage in the Passover feast. Similarly, the people of Judah will rejoice with great exuberance over their deliverance from the domination of Assyria. Feasts were times of great celebration in Israel. The mountain of God was the temple mount. Through

²²³Ps 18:7-15; 50:3; Nah 1:3b-8; Hab 3:3-15.
the judgment on Assyria and consequent deliverance of Jerusalem the Judeans will learn the truth that Yahweh alone is the Rock of Israel. He is the only one on whom his people can depend.

3. Assyria’s destruction (30:30-33):

a. Yahweh’s voice and arm (30:30-31a): And Yahweh will cause his majestic voice to be heard, and the falling of his arm he will display, with storming anger and devouring flames of fire; windstorm, rainstorm, and hailstones. So that his message could not be misunderstood, Isaiah became more specific. God will unleash a furious storm against the Assyrians. His majestic voice (thunder\(^{224}\)) will be heard, and the falling of his arm (lightning) will be seen. Assyria will tremble at this voice of God. Windstorm, rainstorm, and hailstones are not to be taken literally, but are figures for the power of God’s judgment blast against the Assyrians.

b. Yahweh’s staff (30:31b-32): with the staff he will smite. (32) Every blow of the appointed staff that Yahweh will bring down upon him, will be with tambourines and lyres; and in battles waving, he makes war on them. As the rod of divine judgment had fallen on Judah (1:3-9; 30:26) so now Yahweh will inflict on Assyria one mighty blow after another. Appointed staff indicates that judgment on Assyria is predetermined. God’s people rejoice in each act of deliverance for they perceive that Yahweh is fighting against their enemies. With battles waving is obscure. Perhaps it is the picture of a warrior plunging into battle waving his weapon overhead.

c. Yahweh’s breath (30:33): For Topheth has been prepared from of old, even it, for the king it has been established. He has made it deep and wide, its pyre of fire and plenty of wood; the breath of Yahweh is like a torrent of brimstone kindling it. Isaiah repeated his main point as an exclamation mark to the entire ch. For some time Yahweh had been gathering wood at Topheth (fireplace) for the funeral-pyre of the king of Assyria and his armies. Shortly the breath of God will kindle the fire for the cremation of the corpses.

---

\(^{224}\)Ps 18:13; 29:3-9; 77:18-20.

---

CHAPTER 31
WOE TO WORLDLY TRUST

The fifth woe falls upon those who proposed alliance with Egypt as the solution to Judah’s national plight. Isaiah explained why that policy will not work. The denunciation/promise pattern of the previous two chs is followed here as well.

DENUNCIATION
31:1-3

A. Rationale for Trusting Egypt (31:1a): Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help; upon horses they lean. They trust in chariots because they are many, and upon horsemen because they are very strong... The alliance with Egypt was doomed. From the standpoint of political strategy, perhaps the move toward Egypt could be defended. Egypt offered horses, chariots and skilled cavalry that appeared to the infantry-dependent Judeans to be invincible.

B. Wisdom of Trusting Yahweh (31:1b-2):

1. Because of his association with Israel (31:1b): and do not look unto the holy one of Israel, and Yahweh they do not seek. The names of God stress his relationship with Israel. He is the holy one, transcendent, apart from this world of sin. At the same time he is the holy one of Israel. The Judeans, however, ignored their relationship to Yahweh. They sought deliverance from national danger by political strategies. The policy of seeking help from Egypt was not of God.

2. Because of his character (31:2):

(1) Incomparable wisdom (31:2a): Yet he is wise... False political wisdom ruled in the courts of Judah. Royal counselors viewed Yahweh’s wisdom, as revealed by Isaiah, with scorn (5:19; 29:15). Isaiah believed that divine wisdom ultimately would prove superior to the political maneuvers of the royal court. What folly it is to ignore the wisdom of the All Wise One.

(2) Irresistible power (31:2b): and he will bring calamity... God’s wisdom is such that he can engineer events that will demonstrate the folly of
ignoring him. *Calamity* (lit., evil) refers to those
turns of event that from man’s point of view are
misfortunes. Cf. NIV, RSV disaster. The idols are
impotent; they can do nothing, either good or bad.
Yahweh, however, can and does active decisively
in human history. Yahweh is not swept along in the
movements of history; he orchestrates those
movements. If God determines to frustrate any help
coming from Egypt, there is nothing the Judeans
can do about it.

(3) Irrevocable word (31:2c): *he does not take
back his words.* When men change their
relationship to God through repentance, God will
be merciful to them. The prime example is the
cancellation (or postponement) of the announced
judgment on Nineveh. Without repentance,
however, there is no means by which men can
avert the announced judgments of God.

(4) Inexorable justice (31:2b): *He will rise up
against the house of evildoers, and against the
help of those who work iniquity.* *House of
evildoers* refers to the Judeans. Failing to trust in
God puts one in the family of the Evil One. These
words make three points. First, God rises up off his
heavenly throne to intervene in human affairs.
Second, the targets of his intervention are those
members of the human family who band together
in evil schemes. Third, any who might help the
Judeans also face the wrath of Yahweh. There is
moral purpose to his interventions.

**C. Folly of Trusting in Egypt (31:3):**

1. Principle articulated (31:3a): *But Egypt is man,
not God, and their horses flesh and not spirit.* The
Egyptians, being mere men, cannot resist the power
of the one who is Spirit. All the horses and super
weapons of mankind cannot withstand his power.

2. Power displayed (31:3b): *When Yahweh shall
stretch out his hand, the helper will stumble, and
the one helped will fall; all of them together will
come to an end.* To *stretch out his hand* indicates
opposition and a threatening gesture. The words
are ominous for they recall the Exodus, when
Yahweh overthrew all the power of Egypt (Dt
4:34; 7:19).

**B. An Appeal (31:6-7):** Verses 6-7 are in prose.
They serve as an interlude in the poetry of this ch.

---

**PROMISE 31:4-9**

**A. Yahweh’s Intervention Announced (31:4-5):**

1. First intervention metaphor (31:4):

a. *Fearlessness of his coming (31:4a):* *For thus
says Yahweh unto me: As the lion growls, even
the young lion over his prey when a full group of
shepherds are called out against him, from their
voice he is not frightened and by their clamor he
is not disturbed...* God will be as strong and
determined in defending Mount Zion as a *lion* that
had found the prey. The Lion of Judah will not be
intimidated by a loud and noisy crowd *shepherds*
who come to take what is rightfully his.

b. *Condescension of his coming (31:4b):* *so
Yahweh of Hosts will descend to fight upon
Mount Zion, upon its hill.* *Yahweh of hosts*
underscores the supreme power of Yahweh. Cf.
*NIV the LORD Almighty.* In order to fight on Mount
Zion Yahweh must *descend* from his heavenly
throne.

2. Second intervention metaphor (31:5): *Like
hovering birds, thus will Yahweh of Hosts put a
shield over Jerusalem; shielding he will deliver,
passing over he will rescue.* The second metaphor
is a bit warmer. God is personally attached to his
people like a mother bird is attached to her young.
Just as a bird circles over her nest to protect the
helpless chicks from ravenous birds of prey, so
Yahweh will not permit the total destruction of his
people.

While Yahweh is fierce, strong, and
resolute (the lion of previous v), he is also gentle,
caring, and attached to his people. *Passing over*
recalls the protection that Yahweh afforded Israel
on the night when Egyptian firstborn were smitten
(Ex 12:13, 23, 27).

---

225 Another interpretation is that the lion is Assyria and the shepherds
the Egyptians who will not succeed in liberating Judah from
Assyrian control.

226 Most commentators interpret 31:4 as a threat against Jerusalem.
God will fight against Jerusalem. The Hebrew can be translated to
permit, and the context seems to demand, a promise here, not a
threat. See Oswalt, NICOT, 1:574.
1. Appeal for repentance (31:6): Turn to the One they have gone so deep turning away, O sons of Israel. God’s intervention on behalf of Judah demonstrates his love and calls for repentance. The apostasy has been grievous. Judeans have not only turned away from God, they deepened that turning away. Isaiah regarded the current foreign alliances, secretly hammered out, to be a level of apostasy never before reached in Judah.

2. Anticipation of renunciation (31:7): For in that day each man will reject his idols of silver and his idols of gold that your hands sinfully have made. Idolatry results in a judgment that will demonstrate the impotence of idols. In the crisis of the attack against Jerusalem, idols will be abandoned. So if that is the case then, casting away those idols now in response to God’s word will demonstrate repentance.

C. Yahweh’s Intervention Described (31:8-9):

1. Yahweh will handle Assyria (31:8):
   a. Assyria will fall by the divine sword (31:8a): Then Assyria will fall by the sword that is not of man, and a sword that is not of man shall devour him. More details are now added about Yahweh’s glorious deliverance on Mount Zion. The Assyrians will fall miraculously, not by the sword of man, but by the sword of divine justice. Zion’s attackers are no match for Yahweh. The Assyrians are spoken of collectively as if they are a single person; or perhaps the third person pronoun refers specifically to the king. The prophecy began to be fulfilled in the overnight destruction of Sennacherib’s army in 701 BC.
   b. Assyria will be overcome by the divine sword (31:8b): He will flee from before the sword, and his chosen young men will be put to forced labor. The Assyrian will flee from Yahweh’s powerful sword. At some point captive Assyrians will be put to forced labor. In the century following the decimation of 701 BC the Assyrians faced the divine sword again and again. Nineveh finally fell in 612 BC. The last remnants of the Assyrian army were destroyed in the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. In those closing years of the seventh century without doubt Assyrians were pressed into forced labor.
   c. Assyria will collapse with fear (31:9a): His rock will pass away because of fear; and his princes will tremble because of the ensign. The rock of the Assyrian army will pass away during the panic of the moment. This could refer to the king, an idol or perhaps to the strength of the army. In any case, panic will seize the leaders of the army when they have to face the sword of Yahweh. The ensign is the signal flag directing enemy troop movements.

2. Zion will survive (31:9b): Oracle of Yahweh whose fire is in Zion, whose furnace is in Jerusalem. Zion will be the furnace of God’s wrath. Those who attacked her will meet their doom.

CHAPTER 32
INTERLUDE: FUTURE PROSPECTS

While the prospects for Assyria were bleak, those of the people of God were quite different. In ch 32 Isaiah speaks in two units of the glories of the messianic age. Sandwiched between these bright foreglimpses is a unit describing the future of the nation before the golden age.

RENEWAL PROMISED
32:1-8

In the midst of a desert of “woe” oracles Isaiah has inserted this oasis of hope. He wishes to encourage his listeners to put their hope in God and believe in the ultimate triumph of his kingdom. This passage develops the themes of ch 11. The new emphasis here is on the association of others with the messianic king in his righteous reign.

A. Future Leaders (32:1-4):
1. Righteous reign (32:1): Behold! According to righteousness a king will reign, and princes according to justice will rule. Behold underscores the contrast with what precedes in chs 30-31. Leaders in Isaiah’s day were not following the path that Yahweh would have them follow. A king, however, was coming who would perfectly
maintain a right relationship with God. Isaiah anticipates the coming of an ideal king—Messiah. No human king could ever measure up to the standard of absolute righteousness. The righteous reign of Messiah translates into a kingdom of justice, i.e., fair dealings with every citizen of the kingdom. Those who serve under Messiah in leadership positions will reflect in their administration the priorities and godly values of their superior. To belong to such an ideal kingdom is a privilege beyond description. That kingdom has its visible manifestation on earth in the church of Christ.

2. Protective reign (32:2): A man will be like a shelter from the wind, and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in a dry place, like a shadow of a great rock in a weary land. A man is coming who will not be a predator that strikes fear into the hearts of God’s people (29:20, 21). This man must be the king mentioned in the previous v, i.e., Messiah. Four vivid similes are used to describe what Messiah will be to his people. (1) Messiah exposes himself to destructive winds so as to provide a shelter for his people (cf. Jn 10:11). (2) He is a refuge to which people can flee in the storms of life. (3) Messiah is like streams of water in a barren land. He provides refreshment to his people. (4) He provides a shade from the blistering sun in the heat of day to those who seek relief in him.

3. Transformed subjects (32:3-4): Under Messiah and his subordinates a wonderful spiritual transformation takes place both in the leaders and the people.
   a. Perception (32:3): Then the eyes of those who see will not be blurred, and the ears of those who hear will listen. This is a dramatic reversal of the situation that existed in Isaiah’s day (6:10).
   b. Discernment (32:4a): The heart of the impetuous will discern knowledge... Those who submit to God’s word come to have keen discernment between good and evil. Those spiritually blind and deaf will come to understand God’s truth.
   c. Proclamation (32:4b): and the tongue of the stammerer will be quick to speak fluently. Having heard God’s word, and understood it, the transformed citizens of Messiah’s kingdom will not hesitate to proclaim that word to others.

B. Future Values (32:5-8):
1. General picture (32:5): No longer will the fool be called a noble, or the scoundrel be called a person of standing. True values will be recovered in that future kingdom. Absorbing God’s word enables one to evaluate others on the basis of character, not social standing. In Hebrew the words fool (nbl) and noble (ndb) sound alike. One easily can confuse these two words. Under Messiah, however, a clear distinction will be made between fools and nobles. Sometimes the powerful and wealthy are treated with deference without regard to their true character.
      a. Identification of a fool (32:6a): Fool is one of the strongest negative words. It is used of a person who consciously rejects God’s word and ways. Isaiah identifies four marks of a fool.
         (1) His speech (32:6a): For a fool speaks foolishness... In his foolish speech a fool openly questions what God has said. He challenges people of faith, mocks them, and makes light of their lifestyle. Today such a person is appropriately designated as a skeptic.
         (2) His focus (32:6b): and his heart works iniquity... A fool has a mind dedicated to wickedness. In his heart (mind) he is always contemplating his next scheme to defraud and swindle.
         (3) His lifestyle (32:6c): in order to practice ungodliness... A fool is marked by an ungodly lifestyle. His conduct matches his reckless speech. He shows no hesitation in carrying out those schemes. Ungodliness offends God because it is contrary to the divine nature.
         (4) His heresy (32:6d): and to speak toward Yahweh falsely... By denying God’s word, questioning God’s prophets, mocking God’s law the fool is involved in outright heresy.

227 NIV each man interprets the reference to be to the princes who serve with the ideal king.
b. Oppression by a fool (32:6b): to make the soul of the hungry empty and a drink to the thirsty he withholds. The bottom line is that a fool is selfish. He fills his own pocket at the expense of the needy. A fool in leadership does not have the long-range interests of his nation in view. He makes no provision for those who cannot care for themselves. Environmental issues are of no concern to him. His reckless spending bankrupts a nation. He does not manage the water resources that were so precious in that part of the world. Under the leadership of a fool the people suffer untold misery.

3. A scoundrel (32:7): As for the scoundrel, his tools are evil; he counsels false plans to destroy the poor with lying words even when the speech of the needy is just. The scoundrel (kēlay) has much in common with the fool. While the fool is incompetent because of his bumbling lack of focus, the scoundrel knows better. His tools (devices?) are evil, i.e., he deliberately chooses means that are evil. He plots to defraud the poor by means of lies and misrepresentations. Even when the less fortunate are in the right, the scoundrel can figure out a means by which he can confiscate even what little the needy have left.

4. A contrast (32:8): But the noble counsels nobility, and as for him, upon noble things he stands. The noble man (nādîb) will also be recognized clearly in that day as one who devised noble plans and stood by them. He is a principled leader, not a power-hungry politician. His plans are not dictated by personal interests. He is oblivious to the pressure of special interest groups. Noble things are plans that help, encourage and build up those who are in need.

RENEWAL PRECEDED BY DISASTER
32:9-14

A. Complacent Shaken (32:9-13):
1. A call for attention (32:9-10):

---

228The word appears only here, so its precise meaning cannot be determined. It appears to come from the root nkl that means to scheme, connive.

---

b. Destruction of Judah’s harvest (32:10): Days upon a year you trusting ones will tremble; the grape harvest will fail, the harvest will not come. One example of the misplaced trust of the daughters of Jerusalem is cited. They concluded that bountiful harvests will continue indefinitely. Isaiah, however, insists that in just over a year the supply of grapes (and consequently wine) will be cut off. Days refers to the length of time until the harvest will be devastated. Upon a year defines the number of days that will elapse before the judgment. Harvests will fail within a year. Circumstances change. One cannot assume that present blessings will continue indefinitely. Probably the crop failure is due to the invasion of Assyrian army in 701 BC.

2. A call for lamentation (32:11-13):

a. Demeanor of lamentation (32:11): Shake complacent ones, tremble trusting ones. Strip and go naked, sackcloth upon your waist. The women are urged to enter into bitter lamentation over the terrible fate that will befall their land. The scorched earth policy of the Assyrians is reflected here. Shaking, stripping off garments and donning sackcloth were all part of the mourning process.

b. Direction of lamentation (32:12-13): Upon breasts, mourning over the pleasant fields, over the fruitful vines, (13) over the land of my people, grown up with thorn and thistle, yes upon all the houses of rejoicing, the city of wealth. The women are urged to enter into bitter lamentation over the terrible fate that will befall their land. The scorched earth policy of the Assyrians is reflected here. Shaking, stripping off garments and donning sackcloth were all part of the mourning process.
in the lamentation? The verb is translated *beat* in the ancient versions (followed by NIV; NASB), but Hebrew usage suggests that *moaning*, or *mourning* is the usual meaning.

The lamentation is to be over the *pleasant fields* with their *fruitful vines*. The land of Canaan belonged to God’s people; but that did not mean their land was except from the penalties of unfaithfulness. Isaiah predicted the complete abandonment of Judah. Thorns and briers will take over the land.  

The word *yes* (*ki*) has intensive force. What follows goes beyond what has already been stated. It probably points to a later, more intense phase of judgment under the Babylonians. The banquet halls will be abandoned. The *city of wealth* is Jerusalem. Good times were about to end.

**B. Land Abandoned (32:14): For the palace is abandoned, the tumult of the city forsaken. Hill and watchtower will become caves forever, a delight of wild donkeys, a pasture for flocks.**

Ultimately Jerusalem will be deserted, the palace abandoned. *Hill* (*‘ophel*) is the spur of the hill upon which the temple was built. *Watchtower* (*bachan*) appears only here. Its meaning is uncertain. The verb root means to *try* or *test*; hence *Watchtower* is a good guess. Both terms (hill/watchtower) may be used figuratively for the high and mighty in Jerusalem. *Caves* could refer to the ruins of the city, or could be a symbol for the humiliation of the high and mighty. Animals will find refuge in the ruins of the city.

The divine sentence against Jerusalem began to be executed by the Assyrians in 701 BC. For the sake of good King Hezekiah, however, the city was given a reprieve. The threatened destruction was finally effected by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

**RENEWAL ACCOMPLISHED BY THE SPIRIT**

32:15-20

---

229Some think that the condition of the land described here is the result of the Assyrian invasion of 701 BC.

230The pouring out of God’s Spirit is mentioned in Isa 44:3; 54:13; 60:21; Ezek 36:26; 39:29; Joel 2:28; Zech 12:10.
into a fertile field (Jn 7:38). Justice is right relationship between man and his fellows. Righteousness refers to right relationship between man and God.

**B. Populace Secure (32:17-20):**

1. Explanation of security (32:17): *And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.* The abundant righteousness resulting from the outpouring of God’s Spirit will produce genuine peace. The NT speaks of the peace that passes understanding that results from the work of Jesus on the cross and in the heart (Phil 4:7). Quietness and confidence are key words in Isaiah. They point to a life that relies completely on Yahweh, a life free of anxiety. Righteousness produces such an effect in the lives of those who experience what God has done for mankind through Christ.

2. Description of security (32:18): *Then my people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, and in secure dwellings, and in undisturbed resting places.* The previous v depicts the work of God’s Spirit within individuals. Collectively redeemed people, refreshed and renewed by God’s Spirit, enjoy the company of others within the kingdom of Christ. This society of the redeemed will experience peace, rest and safety.

3. Means of security (32:19): *There will be hail when the forest falls, and the city will be brought utterly low.* Enemies will still be present in the messianic age. Isaiah likened them to a forest (cf. 10:18, 33f.) and a city (cf. 24:10; 25:2f; 26:5). As in the ancient holy war, God will use hailstones to beat down these enemies.

4. Result of security (32:20): *Blessed are you: sowing your seed beside every water, sending out oxen and donkey.* The picture of abundant blessing is taken up from 30:23-26. Crops planted by streams are crops that grow profusely. The crops will be so abundant that a farmer will not have to exercise care in where he allowed his stock to feed. Those who are citizens in Messiah’s kingdom will enjoy blessing in abundance. Again Isaiah uses agricultural figures to describe the blessings of the NT age.

### CHAPTER 33

**WOE TO WICKED OPPRESSORS**

Following the messianic interlude (ch 32) the sixth and final woe brings to a conclusion the Book of Woes. This oracle is the only one of the woe oracles that directed against a foreign power. So the Book of Woes reaches the grand conclusion that the oppressor will be destroyed and Yahweh will be exalted.

The first six vv constitute an introduction to the major themes of the ch. The remainder of the ch may be divided into two major units that speak of the exaltation and reign of Yahweh.

### INTRODUCTION

33:1-6

**A. A Woe (33:1):** Unlike the previous five woes, the sixth did not fall upon God’s people.

1. Assyria’s current situation (33:1a): *Woe to the destroyer, and you are not destroyed, Betrayer, and you have not been betrayed.* The ominous word woe is used here in regard to the destroyer/betrayer, Assyria. For a time by war and stealth this ruthless power had dominated the ancient Near East. Assyria is the Betrayer in that she made agreements with nations only to break them. Those who broke agreements with Assyria, however, were ruthlessly punished.

2. Assyria’s future situation (33:1b): *When you stop destroying, you will be destroyed; when you have finished betraying, you will be betrayed.* The period of oppression is not interminable. When it ended Assyria will experience what she had inflicted upon others.

---

231On peace, rest and safety of Messiah’s kingdom see Mt 11:25-30; Jn 14:27; 15:11; Eph 1:14; 2:11-12.

232On the abundant blessing of Messiah’s kingdom see Jn 10:10; 1 Cor 3:21-23; Eph 1:3; Rom 8:17-18, 32; 2 Cor 4:16-18.

B. A Prayer (33:2): The pronouncement of the woe against the oppressor was followed by a prayer of the faithful. The implication is that the oppressor meets his doom because God’s people began to pray.

1. Petition (33:2): O Yahweh, be gracious to us, for we wait for you. Be our strength every morning; yes, our salvation in the time of distress.

The Assyrian army was at the gates. At last the Jerusalemites realized their total dependence on Yahweh. The prayer begins with petition that God will be gracious to his people, that he will be their strength and salvation in the time of distress. This reflects a dramatic turnabout from the attitude expressed in chs 29-30 where the people were doing everything other than turn to Yahweh (30:15; 31:6). Isaiah had anticipated the day when the people find that their schemes had failed. They will be forced to turn to Yahweh (30:18-19; 32:14-15).

That day has now arrived. Our strength is lit., our arm. Morning is plural suggesting that the reference is to any morning. Normally the morning hours were used to launch assaults on cities. The prayer calls on Yahweh to bare his mighty arm in the defense of his people whenever they come under attack.

2. Confidence (33:3-4):
   a. Enemies scatter (33:3): From the roaring voice, peoples flee; from your exaltation nations scatter.

The prophet was confident of the outcome of this prayer. Roaring voice refers to thunder, which was considered the voice of God. Yahweh has only to speak, as it were, and the most powerful enemies flee. By his roaring voice Yahweh is exalted as Gentiles come to recognize his awesome power.

   b. Enemies plundered (33:4): Your plunder is gathered as the young locusts gather; as locusts leap, so men pounce on it. Your plunder refers to what the enemies leave behind as they flee. When Yahweh has driven off the enemies, the plunder is left for the taking. That plunder will be as quickly and completely stripped as locusts stripping a grain field. Isaiah foresaw the army of the tyrant fleeing and the men of Judah, jumping around like grasshoppers, gathering up the spoil.

3. Glory (33:5-6): Yahweh is exalted for he dwells on high. He fills Zion with justice and righteousness. (6) He will be the foundation of your times, an abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge. The fear of Yahweh, it is his treasure. By his victory over the Assyrians Yahweh will acquire new glory. Once the tyrant was gone, the attributes of the true king will be displayed in Jerusalem, i.e., righteousness and justice. The saved of Zion will come to look upon God as their source of stability and as a veritable treasure trove of salvation, wisdom and knowledge. In response God will bestow upon his people the fear of Yahweh, i.e., complete devotion to him.

DAY OF EXALTATION
33:7-16

Isaiah now expanded on the theme of God’s exaltation.

A. Desperate Need for Deliverance (33:7-9):
1. Impact on men (33:7): Behold, their brave men cry out in the streets; messengers of peace weep bitterly.

   Behold introduces a shocking, unexpected scene. Brave men are lit., lion of God, i.e., men of lion-like courage. Before deliverance, Jerusalem will be reduced to a pitiful state. Even valiant men will weep. Weeping negotiators return from parley with the enemy. There is no hope for peaceful resolution.

2. Impact on society (33:8): The highways are deserted; the one who travels a path has ceased.

   Covenant is broken, witnesses despised, mankind is given no thought. Isaiah frequently refers to highways. Merchant caravans cannot travel through the land because of the Assyrian military operations. Individual travelers will also not be found. The Assyrians will renege on solemn covenants. Witnesses to the solemn treaty ceremonies are despised, i.e., ignored. The reference may be to the deities who were thought to bear witness to covenant ceremonies. Mankind is

23530:30; 1 Sam 2:10; 7:10; and especially Ps 29:3.

given no thought perhaps refers to the cruelties of warfare.

3. Impact on land (33:9): Land mourns, wastes away. Lebanon is ashamed, Sharon becomes like the Arabah and Bashan and Carmel drop their leaves. The land will mourn because of the scorched earth policy of the invaders. The place names are generally mentioned from north to south, suggesting again the Assyrian advance. Lebanon, Sharon, Bashan and Carmel are the most fruitful areas of the region. These areas become barren. The condition of those regions to the north were a preview of what Jerusalem was about to face. Some see in this v symbolism. Fruitfulness symbolizes trusting in Yahweh; barrenness symbolizes self-reliance. Those who rely on schemes and allies will find their plans to be unfruitful and barren.

B. Dramatic Moment of Deliverance (33:10-12):
1. Yahweh’s promise to Israel (33:10): Now I will arise, says Yahweh. Now I will be exalted, now I will be lifted up. The threefold now alerts the readers to a decisive moment of intervention. Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity. In the darkest hour, God will arise, i.e., intervene. This intervention on behalf of his people will result in praise to Yahweh for his greatness and graciousness.

2. Yahweh’s rebuke of Assyria (33:11): You conceive chaff, and give birth to stubble. Your breath is a fire that will consume you. Yahweh addresses, as it were, the Assyrian invaders. Their plans regarding Judah are futile. The struggle to subdue Judah is likened to a painful pregnancy that results in no birth. The Assyrian’s own breath (huffing and puffing) that rages to devour the foe will ignite the fire of judgment that brings about the demise of Assyria (cf. 9:18). What happened to Sennacherib in 701 BC was but a token of the complete demise of the mighty Assyrian Empire.

3. Yahweh’s threat to all people (33:12): Peoples will be a burning of lime; cut-down thornbushes, they will be set ablaze. Peoples is used throughout the book to refer to the nations around Judah. Assyria’s angry snorting against Jerusalem came back against them like a consuming fire. The invaders quickly (like thorns) and totally (to lime) will be burned in God’s wrath.

C. Implications of Deliverance (33:13-16):
1. Implications for Gentiles (33:13): Hear O distant ones what I have done, and you who are near know my power. Isaiah pictured Yahweh calling upon those far and near to acknowledge his might after the crushing defeat of the Assyrians. Distant ones are Gentiles living far removed from Palestine. Yahweh intends that some day they will hear of his greatness. But those near at hand—the Judeans—need also a new understanding of God’s might.

2. Implications for sinners (33:14):
   a. Their quaking (33:14a): In Zion sinners are terrified, trembling grips the godless. People with a correct view of God’s nature have a profound reverence for him. Mighty acts of Yahweh impress on sinners how fragile they are, how vulnerable they are to forces beyond their control. Sinners within Jerusalem will be moved to repentance by the divine display of power against Assyria. The sinners see immediately that they are no more able to withstand the might of Yahweh then were their enemies.

   b. Their question (33:14b): Who among us can sojourn in consuming fire? Who among us can sojourn in an eternal burning mass? Sinners will be, and should be, concerned about what kind of person could reside in the presence of this God of consuming fire (cf. 10:17). Sojourn conveys the idea of being a guest. For the sinner the presence of Yahweh is a hostile environment. It is not safe for the sinner to visit the divine presence even for a moment. The fire of God’s wrath against sin does not flare up from time to time. It is eternal. It is part of his divine nature to bring judgment on sin. Sin is a highly flammable commodity!

3. Implications for saints (33:15): To sojourn in God’s presence one must undergo a character change. Isaiah provides a six-fold description of the righteous man.

---

237 See 2:3; 8:9; 11:10; 17:12; 25:3, 6, 7 etc.

238 When limestone is burned it is reduced to dust.
a. Positive requirements (33:15a): *He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly...* On the positive side the righteous man (1) walks righteously and (2) speaks uprightly, i.e., with sincerity.
b. Negative requirements (33:15b-16):
   (1) Rejects unjust gain (33:15b): *who rejects gain from extortion,* i.e., oppression and intimidation.
   (2) Rejects bribes (33:15c): *who shakes his hands from seizing a bribe,* i.e., graft of any kind. To shake the hands is to emphasize verbal refusal with a gesture.
   (3) Rejects murderous thoughts (33:15d): *who prevents his ears from hearing bloodshed...* A saint does not become part of any plot to mistreat or abuse another person.
   (4) Rejects evil of any kind (33:15e): *and closes his eyes from seeing evil.* He does not ignore social evil, but he refuses to be part of it.
4. Blessings for saints (33:16):
a. Unassailable protection (33:16a): *He will dwell in high places; fortresses of the crags will be his refuge.* The person described in v 15 will enjoy security in the day of judgment, for his refuge is the impregnable Rock. He is no longer a victim of circumstances.
b. Abundant provision (33:16b): *His bread will be given, his water is unfailing.* God provides the daily bread to meet the physical needs and spiritual needs of those who seek to emulate his character.

GLORIOUS REIGN
33:17-24

A. Focus on the King (33:17-19):
1. What they will see (33:17): *A King in his beauty your eyes will see; you will behold a distant land.*
   Those who survived the temporal judgment (i.e., righteous men) will look forward with the eye of faith to see the king in his beauty, i.e., Messiah.\(^{239}\)
   They will behold a far-distant land, lit., a land of distances. The land Isaiah envisions is part of God’s plan for the distant future. That the Messiah and his kingdom are the focus of this anticipation seems clear. Isaiah is using the deliverance from the Sennacherib invasion as a springboard to discuss the coming of the messianic kingdom.
2. What they will not see (33:18-19): The glorious King will appear long after the Assyrian threat is over.
a. Rhetorical questions (33:18): *Your heart will ponder the terror. Where is the scribe, where is the weigher? Where is the officer in charge of the towers?* In the crisis surrounding 701 BC the Judeans had seen their king pay attribute to Sennacherib in an attempt to maintain his throne (2 Kgs 18:13-16). Assyrian officials had been seen in the streets of Jerusalem, the financial agents (scribe/weigher) of the Great King. In messianic days, however, those who tallied the tribute would be but a distant memory.
b. Direct prediction (33:19): *An arrogant people you will see no more, a people deep of lip beyond hearing, a mocking tongue that is not understood.* The arrogant people are the Assyrians. A people deep of lip are those who speak a foreign language. The earlier prophecy had proved true. God had spoken to the Judeans, in judgment, through men of strange speech (cf. 28:11). The Assyrian speech sounded like gibberish to the Judeans, but they could tell by body language, tone and gesture that the Assyrians were mocking them. Caught up as they were in the terror of the Assyrian invasion the Judeans needed to be reminded that this moment of humiliation will pass. Zion had a future beyond Assyria; and that future revolved around an ideal King.

B. Focus on Zion (33:20-21):
1. A peaceful city (33:20): *Look on Zion, city of our appointments. Your eyes will see Jerusalem a peaceful habitation, a tent not moved; its stakes not pulled up forever, and none of its cords severed.* Zion is the city of our appointments, i.e., the appointed place of meeting with Yahweh. The faithful will see the future Zion as a peaceful and permanent habitation. The tent not moved may refer to the tabernacle, i.e., messianic Zion is the permanent place where people can meet Yahweh.

---
\(^{239}\)Because the same language is used of God in v 22, many think that the king in v 17 is Yahweh rather than Messiah. But the Book of Isaiah moves swiftly from a vision of the heavenly King in ch 6 to predictions of the coming messianic King in chs 7 to 11. Here the sequence is reversed.
2. A well-watered city (33:21): Instead there Yahweh will be mighty for us; a place of rivers and broad streams. No ship with oars will travel to it, no mighty ship will pass over it. There is no need to flee from messianic Zion because Yahweh will provide the defense of the city. Assyria might be mighty ('addîr), but Yahweh is mightier still (cf. 10:34). Unlike historic Jerusalem, this Zion is a place of broad rivers. As great rivers contributed to the defense of Nineveh and Babylon, so Yahweh will be a protection for Zion. These rivers, being spiritual in nature, will not be used for naval assaults on Jerusalem. Messianic Jerusalem has all the advantages of abundant water, but none of the liabilities. The Zion of which Isaiah speaks is that mentioned in Heb 12:28.

C. Focus on Yahweh (33:22-24):
1. Divine deliverer (33:22): For Yahweh is our judge; Yahweh is our lawgiver; Yahweh is our king; he will deliver us. The presence of Yahweh will make future Zion all that Isaiah said it would be. The v recalls earlier periods when the deliverer of God’s people was a judge (like Deborah or Gibeon), a lawgiver (Moses) or a king (David). In messianic Jerusalem Yahweh will function in all three capacities: as judge he delivers from ruthless oppressors; as lawgiver he regulates life through his instruction; and as king he exercises absolute sovereignty over all the inhabitants of the place.

2. Need for deliverance (33:23a): Your cords are abandoned, mast is not firm, sail is not spread. In Isaiah’s day Jerusalem looked like a big ship, totally unprepared for the rough waters of Assyrian invasion.240 Whatever deliverance from Assyria comes will not be due to any effort by the Judeans, for they are utterly unable to fend off the Assyrians. God’s people must always recognize their total dependence on Yahweh.

3. Result of deliverance (33:23b-24): From the miserable present Isaiah returns to his glorious promises regarding the messianic future. He points out three results of the future deliverance.
   a. Enrichment (33:23b): Then abundant spoil will be divided, lame men will carry off the plunder. In spite of the pathetic, helpless condition of Jerusalem, the city will experience a mighty deliverance. The result will be an abundance of enemy spoils left for the taking. Even the physically handicapped will be able to partake of the spoils of the invader. Messianic prophecy frequently depicts the spoils of enemies coming into Zion. The fulfillment is to be found in the conversion of Gentiles who subsequently devote their wealth to the cause of Zion.
   b. Wellness (33:24a): No inhabitant will say, I am sick. The coming King will heal diseases. Isaiah uses healing of diseases as a metaphor for forgiveness of sins as the second part of this v indicates. With his stripes men are healed (Isa 53:5).
   c. Forgiveness (33:24b): Those who live in it will have iniquity forgiven. God will forgive the iniquity of those who dwell in Zion. This makes clear that the deliverance spoken of in this unit is spiritual in nature. The goal of all Yahweh does for Zion is forgiveness and consequent reconciliation.

BOOK SIX
SECOND BOOK OF GENERAL JUDGMENT

Book Six forms an appropriate conclusion to the first half of Isaiah, the dominant theme of which is the futility of trusting in any earthly entity. The Second Book of General Judgment stresses God’s sovereignty as manifested in judgment and in salvation.

JUDGMENT ON GOD’S ENEMIES
34:1-17

240 Others think the ship here is Assyria.
Ch 34 presents two pictures of judgment. Isaiah first predicted a worldwide catastrophe; then he focused on one specific victim of that judgment.

A. Judgment Generalized (34:1-4):
1. A call for attention (34:1): Draw near, O nations, to hear and listen, O peoples. Let the earth and its fullness hear, the world and all its hosts. Isaiah called upon all the inhabitants of the earth and nature itself to listen to the divine sentence against them. Hosts of the world are its population. The world with its pomp and glory stands under the condemnation of God. No one, then, can afford to put his confidence in the power and genius of mankind.

2. Announcement (34:2): For Yahweh's wrath is upon all the nations, and his anger is upon all their host. He has devoted them, he has given them over to slaughter. God's wrath could no longer be restrained. Like the Canaanites of old, all armies of mankind had been put under the sentence of complete destruction. Devoted (r. chrm) is part of holy war vocabulary. When a city was devoted or put under the ban, all inhabitants were slain, and all spoils were destroyed or devoted to God. The nations have offended Yahweh by refusing to accept his Lordship. Yahweh will conquer the nations and thereby demonstrate his Lordship.

3. Result (34:3-4):
   a. On earth (34:3): Their slain ones will be cast aside, and their corpses will send up their stench; mountains will melt with their blood. With gruesome figures Isaiah depicted the results of world judgment. Rotting corpses will be strewn across the ground. Mountains will be drenched with blood. Unburied corpses escalated the shame associated with defeat. Mountains melting with blood cannot be taken literally. The idea is that rains and streams will wash the blood from the surface of the mountains.
   b. In heaven (34:4): All the host of the heavens will molder away, and the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll; all of their host will drop like a weathered leaf from the vine, and like unripe figs from a fig tree. Host of heaven refers not only to the heavenly bodies, but to the numerous gods that they were thought to represent in pagan theology. The heavenly bodies will molder away (lit., rot), and wither like a leaf on a tree. Thus the world will be plunged into darkness. The prophets used such language to depict the collapse of nations. The thought is that when a nation is destroyed, its heavens collapse.

B. Judgment Particularized (34:5-15): With unexpected suddenness the Judge who calls the world to account and even the heavens brings down the sword of justice on one of the smallest nations of the biblical world. The message is that not even the least of the nations in rebellion against Yahweh can escape judgment.

1. Sequence of judgment (34:5):
   a. It begins in the heavens (34:5a): When my sword is sated in the heavens... Yahweh goes to war in the heavenly places. A sword that is sated is one that is covered with blood, i.e., it has fulfilled its purpose. The sword of divine justice first is sated in the heavens, i.e., it accomplishes its purpose in the heavens. Yahweh is making war on the supposed deities represented by sun, moon, and stars.
   b. It concludes on earth (34:5b): behold upon Edom it will descend, even upon my devoted people for judgment. Having dispatched the pagan deities, Yahweh’s sword will fall on Edom.

   Behold indicates a move that is unexpected and shocking. Because of Edom’s history of hostility toward the people of God, Isaiah uses that country to represent of all the powers that have been hostile to God’s people. Yahweh will place these people under the ban (chērem), i.e., will sentence them to utter destruction. Isaiah painted three word pictures of the awful fate to befall Edom.

2. Picture #1: bloody judgment (34:6-8):
   a. Metaphor (34:6a): The sword of Yahweh is full of blood, greased with fat—the blood of lambs and goats, from fat of the kidneys of rams. The destruction of Edom (representing the nations) is
compared to a sacrifice.242 In a sense, all sin must end in sacrifice. The wages of sin are death. Isaiah compared the inhabitants of Edom to various kinds of sacrificial animals whose fate was death. The lambs, goats and rams seem to represent the common people.

b. Application (34:6b): For Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom. Bozrah, chief city of Edom, will be the scene of one huge sacrifice, as it were. Bozrah was about twenty miles southeast of the lower end of the Dead Sea. Either sinners offer up a sacrifice to Yahweh, or Yahweh will make a sacrifice of sinners. The decimation of Sennacherib’s army was a token that one day all the Edomites of the world will fall.

c. Amplification (34:7): And the wild oxen will go down with them, and bulls along with strong ones. Their land will be drunk with blood, and their dust will be saturated with fat. The figure changes from somewhat docile sacrificial animals to wild oxen. Such animals must have roamed regions of Edom. The wild oxen, young bulls and strong ones represent the powerful members of society. God’s sword of judgment will be directed against them all. The soil of the land will be drenched with the blood of the slain just like the ground upon which the altar was erected was saturated with blood. The point of the picture is that human pride and rebellion lead to destruction.

d. Implication (34:8): For Yahweh has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion. One of the ways that the nations show hostility toward Yahweh is to persecute his people. The slaughter of Edom is Yahweh’s day of vengeance! This was a time for the just recompense of countless hostile acts inflicted by the wicked upon the people of God over the years. The word pair day/year points to a definite time. Those who put their trust in Yahweh must believe that according to his own timetable God will intervene against the enemies of his people.

3. Picture #2: complete destruction (34:9-10): Her streams will be turned to pitch, and her dust to brimstone; her land will become burning pitch. (10) By night and by day it will not be quenched; forever her smoke will ascend, from generation to generation it will lie desolate; eternally no one will pass through it. Edom will become like Sodom and Gomorrah after Yahweh destroyed those cities. Burning pitch and brimstone will cover the land. The fire will be unquenchable. Smoke will ascend forever. Isaiah himself explained the meaning of this picture. The land of Edom will be desolate forever. None will ever again pass through it. That these vv are poetic hyperbole is indicated by the following vv that describe those who inhabit Edom after judgment. The point is that those who rebel against Yahweh live a barren, empty, desolate existence in an environment unable to nourish meaningful life.

4. Picture #3: permanent desolation (34:11-15):

a. God’s work (34:11): Pelican and porcupine will possess it; owl and raven will dwell in it. And he will stretch over it the line of desolation and the plummet of emptiness. Exact identification of the animals mentioned in this passage is impossible. A pelican (NIV desert owl) has the habit of nesting in solitary places. Porcupine is also rendered great owl (NIV) and hedgehog (NASB). Raven is the rendering of both NASB and NIV. God will hold over that land, as it were, the plummet of desolation, i.e., God will not finish his work there until the land was a complete desolation. He will measure Edom by the standard of absolute righteousness and has decreed its demolition.

b. Edom’s leaders (34:12): Its nobles—there is no one there to be called royalty; all of her princes are nothing. Such human population as might be found in the territory of Edom will be lowly and disorganized. The translation of the first clause in RSV is appealing: They shall name it No Kingdom There. A leaderless nation is one that is experiencing chaos.

c. Edom’s fortresses (34:13): Thorns go up in its fortresses, brambles and biers in its strongholds.

242Other references comparing slaughter to sacrifice: 25:6; 30:32; Jer 46:10; 51:40; Ezek 39:17; Zeph 1:7-9.
It will become a habitation of jackals, a haunt for ostriches. The busiest and most important parts of the land grow up in thorns and thistles. The cries of jackals and ostriches are notoriously mournful.

d. Edom’s inhabitants (34:14-15): Desert creatures will meet with wolves, and the he-goat will call to its kind; yes, night-bird will rest there and she will find a resting place for herself. (15) There the owl will make its nest and lay eggs; and it will hatch and gather them in its shadow. Yes, vultures gather, each one with its mate. Edom becomes fit habitation only for the wild creatures of the desert.

C. Judgment Emphasized (34:16-17): The passage closes by emphasizing the certainty of the judgment against Edom.

1. God’s book (34:16a): Seek from the book of Yahweh, and read. Not one of these will be missing; none will lack its mate. Some think that the book of Yahweh refers to this very collection of prophecies. People are challenged to compare the actual circumstances of Edom with the predictions made in God’s book. Every animal named in this prophecy will be found within the precincts of ancient Edom. Others think that the reference is to a heavenly book of destiny. According to this view Isaiah was saying that everything he has predicted was foreordained, i.e., it was part of God’s calendar for the future.

2. God’s word (34:16b): For a mouth has commanded it, and his Spirit has gathered (them). The Sovereign of the universe ordained the fate of Edom, and he will bring that desolation to fruition.

3. God’s work (34:17): He is the one who casts the lot for them, and his hand has divided it by line. Forever they will possess it, for all generations they will dwell in it. Yahweh divides up the land of Edom and apportions it to the creatures named above. Those desert creatures will possess the bleak land forever.

Edom as a political entity has long ago ceased to exist. The territory once occupied by that proud nation consists of bleak mountain heights and barren tablelands. The area swarms with snakes and various desert creatures. Yet these “prefillments” are but a pledge of the doom of all that Edom represented to the prophet’s mind. Fulfillment of the prophecy is still future and will be realized when judgment falls upon the abode of all enemies of Yahweh (cf. 1 Cor 15:24-28, 50).

SALVATION FOR GOD’S PEOPLE
35:1-10

While the fate of God’s adversaries is bleak indeed, that of God’s people is glorious to contemplate.

A. God’s Glory (35:1-4): In the previous ch a productive land became a barren waste under God’s judgment. In ch 35 a desert blossoms to symbolize the joy of salvation.

1. Transformation (35:1-2a): The wilderness and the desert will be glad; the Arabah shall exult and blossom. (2) Like the crocus it will blossom profusely and rejoice with rejoicing and shouting aloud. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the honor of Carmel and Sharon. The Arabah is the deep cleft on the Jordan valley that runs down through the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. This very barren region will exult and blossom. Isaiah used Lebanon (noted for its cedars), Carmel (noted for its oaks), and Sharon (noted for its flowers) as examples of what will happen to the rest of the land. The point is that to imagine the dimensions of God’s promises one must think of a desert transformed into a garden place.

2. Explanation (35:2b): As for them, they will see the glory of Yahweh, the honor of our God. Why will the wilderness blossom and shout for joy? Because they will see the glory of Yahweh. Israel had seen God’s glory during the exodus (Ex 16:7) and at Mount Sinai (Ex 24:16f.). God’s glory filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34f.) and the temple (1 Kgs 8:11). Thus the glory of Yahweh refers to a visible appearance by God—a theophany—that usually was accompanied by miraculous signs. That Jesus of Nazareth was the embodiment of God’s glory is the teaching of the NT (Jn 1:14; 2:11; 17:5). Thus

243The third person plural pronoun refers either to the people of God, or to the geographical landmarks enumerated in the previous v.
the prophecy announces the beginning of a new age, the age of Messiah.

3. Exhortation (35:3-4): Strengthen drooping hands, and steady shaking knees. (4) Say to those with anxious heart, Be strong, do not be afraid. Behold, your God! With vengeance he comes, the recompense of God; he will come that he may save you. Isaiah urged those who were spiritually perceptive and understood the implications of the preceding prophecy to encourage the people who had drooping hands, i.e., were discouraged and fearful. Shaking knees/anxious heart symbolize the same thing. Such was the reaction of many in Judah in the face of the mighty Assyrian threat. Oppressors, however, cannot continue indefinitely. In the messianic age God will come to (1) execute vengeance on those who oppose him and his people; and (2) save his people. The latter receives the emphasis here.

B. God’s Work (35:3-7): Two figures are used by Isaiah to illustrate how God gives abundant life to the lifeless.

1. Healing of infirm (35:5-6a): Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be opened. (6) Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout aloud. The physically infirm are viewed as being held in the grip of death (2 Sam 9:8). The work of salvation will begin with a healing ministry. Blindness and deafness have been used frequently in this book to symbolize a negative spiritual condition. Such infirmities, along with dumbness and lameness, will be corrected. Jesus cited these vv when he responded to John’s question regarding his identity (Mt 11:4f). By so doing Jesus was claiming to be deity as well as Messiah for it is the coming of God that effects these physical transformations. The lame leaping like a deer is illustrated by the lame man healed by Peter (Acts 3:8).

2. Refreshing water (35:6b-7): For waters will break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the Arabah. (7) And the parched land will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water. In the haunt of jackals its resting place, grass becomes reeds and rushes. The theme of streams in the desert is a favorite one in Isaiah. In a parched land like Israel water is an appropriate symbol of salvation. In that day waters will break forth in the wilderness bringing life to barren land. Haunt of jackals serves to show the relationship between chs 34 and 35. What has been made desolate by sinful mankind (Edom, the world) is renewed, refreshed and revived by the power of God. Isaiah was using concrete imagery to depict the refreshment that Messiah, the water of life, will bring to a spiritual wasteland (Jn 4:11-14).

C. God’s Way (35:8-10): The reason God comes to his people is so that the people can come to him in his holy abode in Zion. Coming to Zion is a major theme in this book. These vv stress that Zion-lion (God’s country) differs radically from Satan’s land (kingdom).

1. A holy way (35:8a): And there shall be a highway there, and a way: it will be called the way of holiness. Travel is easy in God’s country. Division and hostility characterize Satan’s kingdom; but righteousness unites peoples. Isaiah depicted the life of the redeemed in the messianic age as a pilgrimage along a special way. This is a raised way—a masl˚l, i.e., something built up above the surface, obvious to all who are looking for it. This is a holy way restricted to those who have been cleansed and who desire to live a life of holiness. Holiness means apartness from the world. It results from the cleansing of Yahweh, such as Isaiah himself experienced in ch 6.

2. A restricted way (35:8b): No unclean person will pass over it. It is for the one who walks a way. No fools will wander on it. God’s holiness way is for the one who walks a way, i.e., it is defined by the character of those who walk there. Neither unclean persons nor fools can walk that way. Fools are perverse people who knowingly choose to disobey God.

3. A safe way (35:9): No lion will be there; no vicious beast will go up on it, they will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there.

---


Yahweh’s way is a safe way, for no ferocious beast will harm those who stay in the way. It is the freedom way, for those redeemed from bondage, ransomed by payment of a price, find deliverance from bondage through this way.

4. A joyous way (35:10): The ransomed of Yahweh shall return, and they shall come to Zion with shouts, eternal gladness upon their head. Joy and gladness will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee. Yahweh’s way is a straight way, for it has as its sole destination Zion, the city of God. It is a sure way, for those who travel it will reach their destination. It is a joyous way, for they will enter Zion with singing. A lifetime of fighting pain and grief is over. It is the glory way, for those who arrive in Zion will receive an everlasting crown of joy. Only the redeemed, those ransomed by Yahweh, may walk in that way. In this grand conclusion to books Five and Six Isaiah stresses that it is God who brings his people through to glory. The v is repeated in 51:11 and part of it in 61:7.

BOOK SEVEN
BOOK OF HEZEKIAH
Isaiah 36-39

In 703 BC the Assyrian King Sennacherib subdued his perpetual antagonist, Merodach-Baladan of Babylon. The following year he conquered Armenia. In 701 BC Sennacherib invaded Palestine.

Book Seven consists largely of historical narrative. Most of this material appears almost verbatim in 2 Kgs 18:13-20:20. Chs 38-39 speak of events prior to the Assyrian invasion; chs 36-37 narrate events during and after the Assyrian invasion. Isaiah deliberately reversed the order of this material for a literary purpose. Chs 36-37 form a fitting climax to all that the prophet had been saying about the Assyrian ordeal. These chs document the fulfillment of the several predictions made in chs 1-35 regarding the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem. On the other hand, chs 38-39 form the background of all that Isaiah will say about deliverance from Babylonian exile.

At issue in this unit is whether men will continue to trust in God regardless of circumstances. Sennacherib’s campaign in Judah forced the issue in the political arena. Would the king, the army and the citizens of Jerusalem continue to believe the predictions of a miraculous deliverance from this menace? A health crisis in the life of King Hezekiah raised the same issue at the individual level in chs 38-39.

CHAPTER 36
CHALLENGE FROM ASSYRIA

In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah (701 BC) a massive Assyrian army swept into Palestine. Hezekiah met the initial tribute demands of King Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:14-16). Jerusalem should have been given immunity. The Assyrian, however, changed his mind and decided to press for total capitulation. In this crisis King Hezekiah chose the path of reliance upon God. This king demonstrated the attitude and actions for which Isaiah had pressed in chs 7-8 in which prideful and headstrong King Ahaz in a similar crisis chose to place his trust in man.

RABSHAKEH’S ULTIMATUM
36:1-20

A. Setting (36:1-3):
I. Sennacherib’s invasion (36:1): And it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria went up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them. Fourteenth year refers to the sole reign of Hezekiah that began in 715 BC. Counting from that date, the fourteenth year of Hezekiah was 701 BC, the year the Assyrians invaded Judah. This invasion was part of a broader strategy during the early years of Sennacherib to put down rebellions.

246Hezekiah shared the throne with his father in some sense as early as 728 BC. He reigned a total of forty-four years, twenty-nine of them as sole monarch (2 Kgs 18:1).
that had broken out in various parts of the empire upon the death of his father Sargon (ca. 705 BC). Sennacherib had little difficulty conquering all the fortified cities of Judah. By his count there were forty-six such cities.\(^{247}\) The Assyrian had his headquarters at Lachish, about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. Lachish was an important fortress city of Judah guarding the road to Egypt. The siege of Lachish is depicted on an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum. The location of the main Assyrian army at Lachish precluded any possible hope of Egyptian help to Hezekiah.

2. Assyrian mission (36:2):
   a. Intimidation (32:2a): The king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem unto King Hezekiah with an imposing force. While Sennacherib remained at Lachish wrapping up the attack against Philistia, he dispatched three of his top officers, Rabshakeh,\(^{248}\) Tartan and Rabsaris (2 Kgs 18:17) with enough troops to intimidate Hezekiah.
   b. Location (32:2b): He stood by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway of the washer’s field. Isaiah emphasized the irony that the Rabshakeh (NIV field commander) challenged the Judeans in the very spot where some thirty-three years earlier Isaiah had challenged King Ahaz to commit himself to a policy of trusting Yahweh (ch 7). Now the son of Ahaz (Hezekiah) is faced with a similar challenge. Location of the washers’ field is unknown. The upper pool seems to have been connected to the Gihon spring at the southern extremity of the city. Perhaps the Assyrians assembled there to point to the vulnerability of the city’s water supply.

3. Hezekiah’s representatives (36:3): Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, who was over the house, and Shebna, the scribe, and Joah, son of Asaph, the reporter, went out to him. Outside the walls Rabshakeh met with a high-level delegation from Hezekiah’s court.

247See Pritchard, \textit{ANET}, 287f. Sennacherib also claims to have taken 200,105 citizens of Judah captive.

248Rabshakeh is treated as a proper name even though technically it is a title. Tartan was second to the king in command of the army. The exact position of the Rabsaris is uncertain. Rabshakeh means something like chief cupbearer. He probably was the king’s personal advisor.

2. Assyrian mission (36:2):
   a. Intimidation (32:2a): The king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem unto King Hezekiah with an imposing force. While Sennacherib remained at Lachish wrapping up the attack against Philistia, he dispatched three of his top officers, Rabshakeh, Tartan and Rabsaris (2 Kgs 18:17) with enough troops to intimidate Hezekiah.
   b. Location (32:2b): He stood by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway of the washer’s field. Isaiah emphasized the irony that the Rabshakeh (NIV field commander) challenged the Judeans in the very spot where some thirty-three years earlier Isaiah had challenged King Ahaz to commit himself to a policy of trusting Yahweh (ch 7). Now the son of Ahaz (Hezekiah) is faced with a similar challenge. Location of the washers’ field is unknown. The upper pool seems to have been connected to the Gihon spring at the southern extremity of the city. Perhaps the Assyrians assembled there to point to the vulnerability of the city’s water supply.

3. Hezekiah’s representatives (36:3): Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, who was over the house, and Shebna, the scribe, and Joah, son of Asaph, the reporter, went out to him. Outside the walls Rabshakeh met with a high-level delegation from Hezekiah’s court. The king of Assyria had sent three top-ranking officers (2 Kgs 18:17); Hezekiah did the same. The three were not military officers, perhaps sending a signal that Hezekiah wanted to negotiate. Eliakim has replaced Shebna in the position of prime minister just as Isaiah had predicted (22:20-23). Shebna has been demoted to the position of scribe. Joah the reporter seems to have served in the capacity of the king’s public relations expert.

Rabshakeh issued two challenges, one to the King Hezekiah and one to the defenders of Jerusalem. The Assyrian’s argument is eight-pronged.

B. Challenge to Hezekiah (36:4-10):
1. Attack on Hezekiah’s motives (36:4-6):
   a. Belittling question (36:4): Rabshakeh said to them, Say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Great King, king of Assyria: What is this trust in which you trust?
   b. Belittling the king’s arguments (36:5): I say, Only a word of the lips is (your) counsel and might for war. Now on whom do you rely, that you have rebelled against me?
   c. Belittling the king’s policy (36:6): Behold, you trust in this staff of a broken reed, in Egypt, which, if a person leans upon it, it will go into his hand and pierce it. Thus is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who put their trust in him.
The same figure was also used by Ezekiel (29:6f). [Assyrian Argument #2]

2. Attack on religious faith (36:7): And if you say unto me, In Yahweh our God we trust, is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, he who said to Judah and Jerusalem, Before this altar you shall worship? Rabshakeh argued that reliance on Yahweh could not be the basis for rebellion against Assyria. As an idolater and polytheist he could not understand how Yahweh could be pleased with Hezekiah’s removal of the rural high places. Though Hezekiah’s efforts at worship centralization were in perfect accord with the Law and the prophets, no doubt many citizens of Judah agreed with Rabshakeh’s perspective. The Assyrian intended to exploit the popular discontent created by Hezekiah’s religious reforms. The v indicates that the Assyrian secret service kept close tabs on all the happenings in their client states. [Assyrian Argument #3]

3. Attack on military strength (36:8-9):
   a. A military weakness (36:8): Now make a bargain with my lord the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able to put riders upon them. The Assyrian pointed out the obvious military weakness of Judah, viz., lack of cavalry. Sarcastically he argued that even if the Assyrians donated two thousand horses to the rebels they were not able to put riders on them. This bogus offer underscores the tremendous power of the Assyrian army. The point is that they had enough power that they could donate the surplus to Judah. What good will horses from Egypt do if the Judeans have no trained riders to put on them?
   b. Implications (36:9): So how can you turn aside the face of one governor of the least of the servants of my lord that you trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen? Hezekiah’s strength was not equal to that of one of the lowest officials of the Assyrian Empire, so how could he be brazen enough to defy the Great King? [Assyrian Argument #4]

4. Claim of divine sanction (36:10): Now is it without Yahweh that I have come against this land and destroy it? Yahweh himself said to me, Go against this land and destroy it. In the climax of his argument Rabshakeh claimed to be operating under a commission of Yahweh to destroy the land of Judah. Did he make this claim on the basis of having heard of some of Isaiah’s predictions? Was he arguing from a general theological principle that whatever happened Yahweh was responsible? The evidence is that invaders frequently presented themselves as agents of the god of the nation they chose to attack. 249 Whatever the source of this claim, Rabshakeh was employing an argument that was designed to have maximum effect on the Judean rebels. [Assyrian Argument #5]

C. Language Negotiations (36:11-12):
1. Request by the Judeans (36:11): Then Eliakim and Shebna and Joah said to Rabshakeh, Speak please unto your servants in Aramaic, for we understand. Do not speak unto us in Judean in the ears of the people who are upon the wall. Hezekiah’s representatives interrupted the Assyrian to make a request, viz., that the negotiations be conducted in the international language (Aramaic), not in the language of the Jews (Hebrew). They worried about the effect that these surrender demands might have on the defenders sitting on the walls nearby.

2. Response by Rabshakeh (36:12): Rabshakeh said, Is it unto your lord and unto you that my lord sent me to speak these words? Does it not concern the men who sit on the wall to eat their dung and drink urine along with you? With even greater bluster, Rabshakeh rejected this demand. He wanted Judah’s soldiers to realize the terrible deprivations that they would experience if their king refused to surrender the city. This Assyrian had not come to negotiate but to undermine Jerusalem’s will to resist. His crude language is exactly what one would expect from a pagan propagandist attempting to have maximum impact on the Judean eavesdroppers.

D. Challenge to Defenders (36:13-20):
1. Belittling Hezekiah (36:13-16a):
a. Messenger formula (36:13): And Rabshakeh stood and called in a great voice in Judean and said, Hear the words of the great king, king of Assyria. The Rabshakeh raised his voice and addressed in the name of his king all the citizens in Jerusalem within earshot. His argument consisted of five points.

b. Belittling Hezekiah personally (36:14): Thus says the king: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he is not able to deliver you. First, Hezekiah will not be able to save his capital from the Assyrians. Again Rabshakeh speaks of Hezekiah as a nobody without rank or title.

c. Belittling Hezekiah’s faith (36:15-16a): Do not let Hezekiah cause you to trust in Yahweh saying, Yahweh will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. (16) Do not listen to Hezekiah... Second, Hezekiah’s promises that Yahweh will not allow the city to fall to the enemy were vain. Hezekiah had accepted Isaiah’s thesis that the only hope of deliverance was to lean totally on Yahweh. Apparently he had some success in convincing his countrymen to follow this course. [Assyrian Argument #6]

2. Grand promises (36:16b-17):

a. Immediate peace (36:16b): for thus says the king of Assyria: Make with me a blessing and come out unto me and eat each man from his vine and from his fig tree, and drink each man the water of his well... Third, surrender will mean immediate peace. Make a blessing is an idiom meaning, make peace by surrender.²⁵⁰ Perhaps it refers to a treaty/covenant that ordinarily concluded with blessings on those who kept the covenant. Jews will be permitted to return to their farms and homes outside the walls. The implication of this statement is that Sennacherib is more trustworthy than Yahweh.

b. Easy deportation (36:17): until I come and take you unto a land like your land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards. Rabshakeh’s fourth argument was that deportation will not be that bad. The Judeans will find themselves in a land of abundance similar to their own. The v reflects the Assyrian imperial policy of deporting the major elements of a population, relocating them in another area of the empire. Rabshakeh could not ignore this policy or his appeal would have had no credibility. So he attempts to paint this policy in the best possible light. [Assyrian Argument #7]

3. Historical warnings (36:18-20):

a. General warning (36:18): [Watch out] lest Hezekiah incite you, saying, Yahweh will deliver us! Has any of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Finally, the Assyrian argued that no other gods had delivered their cities from the mighty king.²⁵¹ The first sentence is an ellipsis requiring the addition of the insertion to make sense in English.

b. Specific examples (36:19): Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim--that they rescue Samaria from my hand? Hamath was a Syrian city located on the Orontes River about 275 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Most recently this city had been conquered by Sargon II, Sennacherib’s father. Arpad was an Syrian city-state situated about eighty-five miles north of Hamath. Sepharvaim is probably another Syrian city-state, but it has not yet been located. Even Samaria, which also worshiped Yahweh albeit in a perverted form, had fallen. Why should the outcome be any different at Jerusalem? Rabshakeh does not seem to be aware that Samaria worshiped the same deity as the Judeans.

c. Final dagger (36:20): Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their land from my hand that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem from my hand? Rabshakeh’s speech comes to a climax in this v. The Judeans should surrender to Sennacherib because he is stronger than Yahweh! Believers through the ages face this challenge in one form another almost daily. The world cannot fathom a believer’s trust in Yahweh. [Assyrian Argument #8]

²⁵⁰Cf. the admonition to bless Yahweh, i.e., demonstrate submission to him (Ps 103:1, 2, 20, 21, 22).

²⁵¹The Assyrian conquests mentioned in ch 36 were: Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Samaria, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, Telassar, Hena and Ivvah.
E. Reaction to the Challenge (36:21-22):
1. Immediate silence (36:21): They were silent and did not answer him a word because the command of the king had been, Do not answer him. Hezekiah’s negotiating team was under orders not to engage in debate with Rabshakeh. Even had the king not ordered this silence, these believers probably would have found it difficult verbally to respond to such overt blasphemy.

2. Subsequent mourning (36:22): So Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, who was over the house, went, along with Shebna the scribe and Joah, son of Asaph, the recorder, to Hezekiah with their garments torn and they told him the words of Rabshakeh. Upon reentering the palace complex the three Judean officials tore their garments in distress. They then reported to Hezekiah the unconditional surrender demands of the adversary.

CHAPTER 37
CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

The supreme moment in the drama had now arrived. Would Judah bow to the logic of the Rabshakeh? Or would she renounce all other objects of trust and cast herself on Yahweh?

REACTIONS TO THE CHALLENGE
37:1-7

Isaiah described the reaction to the challenge of the Rabshakeh on two levels.

A. Reaction of the King (37:1-5): According to 2 Kgs Hezekiah first paid tribute to Sennacherib. The Assyrian then sent his representatives to demand total surrender. At this point Hezekiah has nowhere else to turn but to Yahweh.

1. Temple visitation (37:1): And it came to pass when King Hezekiah heard that he tore his garments, put on sackcloth and went to the house of Yahweh. Hezekiah was in great distress when he heard the new demands of the Rabshakeh. He tore his clothes, and put on coarse sackcloth to symbolize his agony. Torn clothes and sackcloth were traditional signs of mourning and repentance.

Hezekiah senses that his nation is under the judgment of Yahweh. As king he seems to have assumed personal responsibility for the errors of his nation. Hezekiah then went to the house of Yahweh that was just next to the palace.

2. Messengers dispatched (37:2): And he sent Eliakim who was over the house and Sheba the scribe and the elders of the priests, clothed in sackcloth, unto Isaiah, son of Amoz, the prophet. Several senior officials, dressed in signs of mourning, were dispatched to Isaiah. Eliakim and Sheba were the highest government officials. The elders of the priests were the most senior religious officials. Sending such a high-ranking delegation to the prophet rather than summoning the prophet to the palace demonstrates profound respect for the man of God.

3. Message of the king (37:3-4):
   a. Plight described (37:3): Thus says Hezekiah: A day of distress, and rebuke and contempt is this day. For children have come to the place of parting of the womb, but there is no strength to deliver.
   b. Hope expressed (37:4a): Perhaps Yahweh your God has heard the words of Rabshakeh whom the king of Assyria his lord sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke him for the word that Yahweh your God has heard. Rabshakeh had reproached the living God by comparing him to the idols worshiped elsewhere. Perhaps—they presumed nothing—Yahweh will rebuke those words by taking action against the invading army. Hezekiah’s greatest concern was for the honor of God. He makes no demands. Hezekiah did not doubt that Yahweh was aware of what the Assyrian
had said. He uses the word hear in the sense of take action. Hezekiah’s chief concern was for the honor of his God. Yahweh your God suggests that Hezekiah (as representative of the people) feels estranged from Yahweh. At the same time the expression recognizes that Isaiah had a special relationship with Yahweh. Living God stresses the reality of God over against the idols that were non-entities. The title appears fifteen times in the OT, with first occurrence in Dt 5:26.
c. Petition requested (37:4b): Now lift up a prayer on behalf of the remnant to be found [here]. The emissaries urged the prophet to pray for the terrified remnant that was holed up in Jerusalem. The Assyrians had captured all the outlying areas. Hezekiah seems to realize that even with Yahweh’s intervention, only a shell of the former nation will remain after the ordeal. The use of remnant reveals faith and evokes sympathy.

4. Execution of the mission (37:5): And the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. If Shebna had any hard feelings over Isaiah’s previous negative prophecy about him (22:15-19), there is no indication of it in the text. Perhaps he, and other government officials, now realized that Isaiah had been right all along. Only in Yahweh could the nation find deliverance. How far the delegation had to travel to reach the prophet’s domicile is not indicated. Probably Isaiah lived near the palace.

B. Reaction of the Prophet (37:6-7):
1. Prescription for the present (37:6): And Isaiah said unto them, Thus you shall say unto your lord: Thus says Yahweh: Do not fear from before the words that you heard with which the errand boys of the king Assyria blasphemed me. He does not gloat or indulge in “I told you so.” The prophet did not honor the request for intercession, but only because already he had received divine revelation regarding this crisis. Isaiah directed the dignitaries to take a short reply back to Hezekiah. Do not fear is the same message Isaiah had for Hezekiah’s father in an earlier crisis (7:4). The king should not be afraid of the words that had been spoken by Rabshakeh. Those words blasphemed. God will respond appropriately. Errand boys (lit., lads) shows Yahweh’s contempt for the blustering Assyrian officers.

2. Prediction for the future (37:7): Behold, I am about to put in him a spirit, and it will surely be heard and he shall return unto his land. And I will make him fall by the sword in his land. Isaiah stated the reason Hezekiah did not need to fear. Yahweh will put a spirit within Sennacherib, a spirit of fear. Spirit refers to an internal disposition or feeling. The Assyrian will hear certain unspecified tidings that will cause him to return to his own country. There he will be assassinated. At this point no explicit mention is made regarding the destruction of the Assyrian army. The focus is on the fate of the king who had dared to blaspheme God. Hezekiah had nothing more to fear from Sennacherib. He should reject the demand for unconditional surrender. This simple prediction suggests that the Assyrian invasion is no big deal for the God of Israel.

INTENSIFIED CHALLENGE
37:8-38

A. Background (37:8-9):
1. New Assyrian operations (37:8): Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, because heard that he had left Lachish. Rabshakeh returned to his master for further instructions. He caught up with Sennacherib at Libnah, about ten miles from Lachish, where the Assyrian army was completing siege operations.

2. New Assyrian concerns (37:9): And he heard concerning Tirhakah, king of Cush, saying, He has gone out to fight with you. Hearing of the rumored advance of Tirhakah, the Ethiopian ruler of Egypt, Sennacherib became concerned about fighting a war on two fronts.252 He

252Tirhakah did not become king of Egypt before 689 BC. Some see this as evidence that Sennacherib made a second invasion in Judah after 689 BC that resulted in the decimation of his troops. However, the mention of Tirhakah may be proleptic, i.e., he is identified by a position that he later would hold.
determined to make one last effort to secure the total capitulation of Hezekiah. Messengers were dispatched to Jerusalem carrying a letter from the Great King. This letter represented an intensified challenge to the faith policy of Hezekiah in two respects. First, the written form was taken far more seriously than the oral form in ancient times. Second, whereas Rabshakeh’s attack had been upon Hezekiah, the letter was an attack upon the God of Israel.

B. Sennacherib’s Letter (37:10-13):
1. Accusation of deception (37:10): Thus you shall say to Hezekiah, king of Judah, saying, Do not let your god in whom you are trusting deceive you, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. As was the custom in the ancient Near East, the envoys first recited the contents of the letter before handing it over to Hezekiah. The letter urged Hezekiah not to be deceived by his God into thinking that Jerusalem could not fall to him. Sennacherib aimed to discredit Yahweh in the eyes of Hezekiah.

2. Account of prior conquests (37:11-13):
   a. A general description (37:11): Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands to destroy them—and will you be saved? In this instance, behold indicates that the Assyrian regarded the facts about to be narrated as indisputable. Judah’s king was surely not ignorant of the many conquests of Assyrian forces. In the eyes of the king, there was nothing special about Judah or Judah’s God. So why, in the light of the overwhelming historical record, does Hezekiah cling to the vain hope of survival?
   b. Examples of fallen cities (37:12): Did the gods of the nations that my fathers destroyed deliver Gozan and Haran, Rezeph and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? Sennacherib cited several examples of Assyrian conquests. Then he asked why the gods of these peoples had not delivered them from the might of Assyria. The Great King obviously regarded Yahweh as an inferior god of an inferior kingdom. The cities mentioned were located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. They are named from east to west, with Gozan on the Habur river being the most distant in the east.
   c. Examples of fallen kings (37:13): Where is the king of Hamath and the king of Arpad and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Henah, and Ivvah? Sennacherib closed his letter with an ominous threat against the person of Hezekiah. He obliquely reminded Hezekiah of what had become of the kings of those Syrian nations conquered most recently by Assyria. The king of Judah was all too familiar with the terrible tortures that the Assyrians inflicted on the rebellious kings. Thus Sennacherib made the issue crystal clear for Hezekiah. Would he continue to trust in Yahweh his God when his life—and the lives of his family members—was on the line? Self-preservation puts one’s faith to the ultimate test.

C. Hezekiah’s Response (37:14-20): Again the narrative reveals the reaction of both the king and the prophet to the challenge of Sennacherib’s letter. Hezekiah’s response indicated an even deeper commitment to the policy of trust. He was determined more than ever to place both his own fate and that of his city in the hands of Yahweh. Corresponding to this intensity of commitment, the Yahweh’s response through Isaiah was much more detailed and forceful than the initial response.

1. His visit to the temple (37:14): And Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of Yahweh and Hezekiah spread it out before Yahweh. After reading Sennacherib’s letter, Hezekiah went up to the temple and spread it before Yahweh. The letter was an outrage. The spreading of the letter scroll is an action prayer. Surely Yahweh could not ignore such a direct challenge to his sovereignty!

2. His prayer (37:15-20):
   a. Opening praise (37:15-16): And Hezekiah prayed unto Yahweh, saying, (16) O Yahweh of Hosts, God of Israel who sits over the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made the heavens and the earth.

---

253 The word letter is plural, but Hezekiah spread it (sing.). Perhaps the singular letter had multiple pages.
The address of this prayer is a marvelous testimony of the faith of the king. Hezekiah addressed God as Yahweh of Hosts, i.e., armies. Though enthroned on Mount Zion above the cherubim, he was the God of all kingdoms of the earth. His divine sovereignty over all peoples was derived from the fact that he was the Creator of heavens and earth. This invocation provides the foundation for the petition that follows. The petitioner grounds his petition in the character of God, not in his personal goodness or the election of Israel.

b. Opening petition (37:17): Incline, O Yahweh, your ear and hear; open, O Yahweh, your eyes and see. Hear all the words of Sennacherib that he sent to reproach the living God. Hezekiah knew that the real issues were the honor of God and his sovereignty over all nations. He called upon Yahweh to see the situation as it was unfolding and to hear, i.e., take note of the words of reproach contained in the letter of Sennacherib. The idols can neither see nor hear (Isa 43:8). Reference to the ear and eyes of Yahweh is anthropomorphic language that underscores the concept of the living God. Hezekiah views the statements of the Assyrian as an affront to God of such magnitude that Yahweh must punish them.

c. Narrative (37:18-19a): To be sure, O Yahweh, the kings of Assyria have decimated all the lands and their land, (19) even to put their gods in the fire... That the Assyrians had compiled a terrifying record of conquests could not be denied. That they had shown their superiority over the gods of those conquered nations was equally true. The Assyrians contemptuously had thrown the idols of conquered nations into the fire. Hezekiah’s faith in Yahweh is not based on ignorance of history.

d. Explanation (37:19b): --for they are not gods, but are the work of the hands of man, wood and stone--so they destroyed them. How can Hezekiah cling to faith in Yahweh’s power to deliver in the face of the historical evidence that the Assyrians had shown themselves to be superior to all other deities? The answer is now given. Those idols were not really gods, but only the work of men’s hands. They were material objects that could easily be destroyed by fire. Yahweh, however, is in a class by himself. He alone is God.

e. Final petition (37:20): And now O Yahweh our God save us from his hand that all kingdoms of the earth may know that you are Yahweh, you alone. Hezekiah concluded his prayer by calling upon Yahweh to demonstrate his commitment to Judah and his omnipotent power by delivering Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib. Again the king’s concern is primarily for the honor of Yahweh, not the pathetic plight of Judah. Deliverance from Sennacherib will demonstrate to the kingdoms of the earth that Yahweh alone is God.

D. Isaiah’s Response (37:21-35): Sennacherib had spoken against Yahweh; Hezekiah had spoken to Yahweh; now at last God spoke. In response to the prayer of the king, Yahweh spoke a word of encouragement. Just as Hezekiah’s prayer revealed a greater commitment to God than his former words to the prophet, so the prophetic oracle that responded to his prayer was more complete than the initial oracle in 37:5-7.

1. Reason for the response (37:21-22a): Isaiah, son of Amoz, sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus says Yahweh God of Israel: Because you prayed unto me concerning Sennacherib, king of Assyria, (22) this is the word that Yahweh has spoken concerning him... Apparently the author or editor of the book thought it important to recognize that the same prophet whose words have been recorded in the previous chs is the spokesman for God in this brief narrative. This full title for Isaiah appears here for the fifth time in the book. The answer to Hezekiah’s prayer came at once.

2. Mockery by the daughter of Zion (37:22b): She despises you, she mocks you--the virgin daughter of Zion; behind you she wags her head--the daughter of Jerusalem. Sennacherib and his servants had reproached the holy one of Israel. Shortly the virgin (unsubdued) daughter of Zion will mock the impotence of the retreating Assyrians. Isaiah sees the intended victim empowered, and the swaggering conqueror humiliated. The tables have been turned.

a. Belittling of the Assyrian (37:23-24b): Whom have you reproached and ridiculed? Against whom have you raised up a voice and lifted on high your eyes? Against the holy one of Israel!

(24) By the hand of your servants you have reproached Adonay. In attacking Jerusalem the arrogant Assyrian had bitten off more than he could chew. His mocking words outside the walls of Jerusalem belittled not only the Judeans, but the God of the Judeans. The virgin daughter of Zion is able to mock her attacker because the Assyrian proudly had mocked the holy one of Israel, i.e., Yahweh. That was bad enough, but Sennacherib had done worse. He had sent his servants--his errand boys--to articulate his arrogance against Yahweh. Adonay stresses that Yahweh is Sovereign. He is king of all kings.

b. Boasts of the Assyrian (37:24b-25): You have said, With the multitude of my chariots I will go up the heights of the mountains, the furthest reaches of Lebanon that I may cut down the tallest cedars, the choicest of its pines that I may come to the end of its heights, the forest of its garden land. (25) I have dug and drunk water. I have dried up with the sole of my feet all the streams of Egypt. Yahweh was aware of how the Assyrian had boasted of his exploits against the nations of the world. The language employed here sounds very much like the boasts recorded in official Assyrian annals. The Assyrian had taken his chariots into the mountains of Lebanon, as it were. He had chopped down tall and choice trees (nations). Sennacherib’s imperial ambition would not be satisfied until he had reached the highest peak of Lebanon, i.e., conquered the most remote nations. Dug and drunk water suggests expeditions into desert regions. Nothing stopped his advance—not mountain, or dense forest, desert region or the swamps of the Nile delta. Yahweh knew all this, and more.

4. Control of Yahweh (37:26-29):

a. Control over Assyrian conquests (37:26-27):

(1) Yahweh’s claims (37:26): Have you not heard from long ago? It I have done! From ancient days I formed it. Now I bring it to pass that you should cause fortified cities to crash into ruinous heaps. Isaiah had shocking news for Sennacherib. The very God he had charged with impotence was the one who controlled the entire Assyrian operation. Sennacherib was a mere actor in a drama written and directed by Yahweh.

(2) Assyria’s aims (37:27): Their inhabitants are short of hand; they are shattered and ashamed. They are like vegetation of the field, green shoots, grass of roofs, blasted by the east wind. The divine plan was to bring cities to ruins, and to render peoples as helpless to resist Sennacherib as vegetation is powerless before the unrelenting rays of the summer sun.

b. Control in current crisis (37:28-29): But your resting place, and your going and your coming, I know, and your raging against me. (29) Because of your raging against me, and because your arrogance has come up in my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth and turn you back on the way by which you came. God kept the Assyrian under constant surveillance. Because of his raging arrogance God will treat the Assyrian like an animal. A hook in his nose and a bridle in his mouth will force him to turn about at the time appointed by God. Sennacherib will do his master’s bidding whether he likes it or not.

5. Promises of deliverance (37:30-35):

Isaiah addressed a personal word to King Hezekiah.

a. A sign (37:30): And this for you is the sign: eating this year what grows by itself and in the second year what comes up from the roots, but in the third year sow and harvest and plant vineyards and eat their fruit. The prophet gave Hezekiah what his father Ahaz so contemptuously had rejected in ch 7, viz., a sign. For two harvests the regular operations of agriculture will be suspended. The only food will be what comes up naturally in the field. Then in the third year normal harvest will be experienced again. Through this word the king learned how long the effects of the Assyrian invasion were to last. The verb sow,

254Oswalt (NICOT 1:664) points out that this sign “is not of the sort which comes before the event in order to create faith for the event, but rather after the fact to demonstrate that God was indeed at work.”
harvest, plant and eat are imperatives, suggesting the certainty of the prediction. Given the Hebrew way of counting parts of years as whole years, three complete calendar years are not necessarily involved.

b. Application of a metaphor (37:31-32): Those who escape from the house of Judah, the remnant, will again take root downward and produce fruit upward. (32) For from Jerusalem a remnant will go forth and an escaped one from Mount Zion. The zeal of Yahweh of Hosts will make this happen. Hezekiah was reassured of this: Judah did have a future following the Assyrian devastation. The remnant of Judah, presently holed up in Jerusalem, will go forth from the city. They will take root like a plant and produce fruit. Once again Judah will become a prosperous nation. This dramatic change of fortunes will be due to the zeal of Yahweh of Hosts. This repeats the thought found in 9:7 where Isaiah was announcing the establishment of the messianic kingdom. The temporal deliverance predicted in this passage is a down payment on the greater deliverance and restoration under Messiah.

c. Concerning the Assyrian king (37:33-34): From the long-range prospects of Judah, Isaiah returned to the immediate crisis in his concluding words.

(1) Siege averted (37:33): Therefore, thus says Yahweh concerning the king of Assyria: he shall not come unto this city, nor shall he shoot an arrow nor bring a shield before it, nor shall he cast a siege-mound against it. The Assyrian king will not even come against Jerusalem. Not one arrow will be shot into the city. Siege mounds were required in offensive warfare because cities were built on hills. A besieging army had to build ramps to enable them to move battering-rams, siege towers, and the like up close enough to the walls to be effective. Interlocked shields were used to protect those who had to press the siege operations near the walls (cf. Nah 2:5).

(2) Army departs (37:34): By the way on which he came, he shall return, and unto this city he will not come (oracle of Yahweh). Sennacherib will return home by the same road that he used to enter Judah. He will return, however, without a major part of his army, and without his swagger and bluster. In his annals Sennacherib never claims to have captured Jerusalem. He says only that he shut Hezekiah up like a bird in a cage (ANET, 287-88).

(3) Explanation (37:35): I will defend this city to deliver it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant. This v reaffirms that an attack upon Jerusalem was an attack on Yahweh. God will defend Jerusalem for his own sake (i.e., for the sake of his reputation). Thus Yahweh will demonstrate his enduring love for David, the founder of the dynasty that ruled Judah. It is Yahweh’s faithfulness, not Judah’s righteousness that will trigger this deliverance. Hezekiah was the current representative of the house of David. But more than that is involved. Isaiah’s messianic promises are linked to the house of David. In the interest of the long-range messianic hope, a remnant must be preserved. Deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyrian assault was a step in that process of preserving the remnant.

E. Prediction Fulfilled (37:36-38): With marvelous restraint Isaiah described in only three vv what must be regarded as one of the most dramatic moments in the history of Israel. Since ch 7 Isaiah had been arguing that the only way for Judah to cope with crisis was to trust Yahweh. These three vv provide the vindication for that advice. The several predictions of the miraculous defeat of Assyria at Jerusalem find their fulfillment here.

1. Decimation of the army (37:36): The angel of Yahweh went out and smote in the Assyrian camp 185,000; and they rose up early in the morning and beheld, all of them were dead corpses. The angel of Yahweh is a divine figure. In other passages he is both distinguished from God and yet identified with him. For this reason many see him as a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Logos. The

---

255The prediction may have been made in the fall. Deliverance will not come in time for the fall planting the following year. By the third fall normal agricultural life will resume.

256Predictions of Assyria’s defeat at Jerusalem are found in the following passages: 10:5-19, 24-34; 14:24-27; 17:12-14; 18:3-6; 29:7-8; 30:31-33; 31:4-9.
angel of Yahweh visited the Assyrian camp that night and smote 185,000 of the enemy. The Greek historian Herodotus reports a reference to a plague of mice that ate up the bowstrings of Sennacherib’s army (History, 2:141). Since rodents often carry bubonic plague, some speculate that God used such a plague to destroy the Assyrian army. Herodotus got his information from some Egyptian source that supports the biblical account of a sudden decimation of Assyrian forces.

2. Departure of Sennacherib (37:37): And Sennacherib, king of Assyria, departed and went and returned and dwelled in Nineveh. With his army decimated, Sennacherib had no alternative but to return home. Rabshakeh had referred to Sennacherib as the great king (36:4); God will reduce him to being merely the king of Assyria. The cluster of verbs (departed, went, returned, dwelled) underscore the fact of Sennacherib’s withdrawal.

3. Death of Sennacherib (37:38): And it came to pass while he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god that Adram-melek and Sharezer, his sons, struck him with the sword. But as for them, they escaped to the land of Ararat, and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place. Sennacherib was never again a threat to Judah. Some twenty years after his humiliation in Palestine (681 BC), while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, Sennacherib was assassinated. This v obliquely underscores the main thesis of the chs 36-37 that pagan gods are lifeless and impotent.

CHAPTER 38
A PERSONAL CRISIS

That chs 38-39 narrate events that were chronologically prior to Assyrian invasion of 701 BC is made clear in 38:6. Deliverance from Assyria was narrated in the previous ch as an accomplished fact; but in ch 38 that deliverance is still future. Furthermore, in 39:2 Hezekiah still had sufficient treasures to impress foreign envoys. That the royal treasury would have had that much wealth after the invasion of Sennacherib is difficult to imagine.

In ch 38 Hezekiah modeled the lifestyle of faith advocated by Isaiah. Yet even here an undertone of warning was evident. As good a man as he was, Hezekiah was a mere man. God’s people should not put their trust in men of faith, nor even in faith itself. God alone must be the object of trust. Ch 38 focuses on Hezekiah’s prayer and poem during a crisis in his life.

HEZEKIAH’S PRAYER
38:1-8

A. Occasion of the Prayer (38:1-2):
1. Announcement by Isaiah (38:1): In those days Hezekiah became sick unto death, and Isaiah son of Amoz the prophet came unto him and said unto him: Thus says Yahweh: Give charge to your house, for you will die and not live. In those days refers to the mid-point of Hezekiah’s twenty-nine year reign, i.e., ca. 701 BC. Hezekiah became mortally ill earlier in the same year that Sennacherib invaded the land. Isaiah urged Hezekiah to give charge to his house, i.e., make his final will known. God’s command suggests that Hezekiah had a duty to make arrangements for his family and kingdom following his death. You will die and not live sounds like God’s intractable will. But Hezekiah, like other godly men before him, knew that God is merciful and anxious to come to the aid of his people. This announcement to the king was designed to humble him.

2. Response by Hezekiah (38:2): And Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed unto Yahweh. The sick man responded by turning his face toward the wall (for privacy) and by praying as he had never prayed before in his life. He burst into tears. The king was a relatively young man at this time. Depending on the chronology of Hezekiah’s reign, he may have had no heir at this
time (cf. v 5 with 2 Kgs 21:1). Furthermore, Hezekiah must have realized that he had steered a political course that would lead eventually to a showdown with the Assyrians. For all these reasons, Hezekiah turned to his God in this personal crisis. He does not manifest so much bitterness toward God as he reveals his broken heart.

**B. Summary of the Prayer (38:3):** *And he said: O Yahweh, remember please how I walked before you in truth and in wholehearted devotion, and have done good in your eyes. And Hezekiah wept greatly.* Weeping shamelessly, Hezekiah asked Yahweh to consider his walk and his work. His heart had been totally committed to God throughout his life. He had always attempted to do what was pleasing in the sight of Yahweh. His personal walk with God was based on the truth of God’s word. Wholehearted devotion is equivalent to sincerity. Hezekiah’s statements about himself are confirmed by 2 Kgs 18:5-6. He had accomplished much good in his reign. But it was not this recitation of his attitude and actions that stirred the heart of Yahweh. It was his tears. The heavenly Father is moved by the tears of his children.

**C. Response to the Prayer (38:4-8):**

1. **Further revelation (38:4):** *And the word of Yahweh came unto Isaiah, saying...* According to 2 Kgs 20:4, Isaiah had not gone beyond the palace complex when God gave him a new revelation. The threat of Hezekiah’s imminent death must have been one prediction that Isaiah was glad to reverse.

2. **Promise of extra years (38:5):** *Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says Yahweh God of David your father: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears. Behold I will add unto your days fifteen years.* Yahweh speaks of himself as the *God of David your father.* This recalls promises made to David centuries earlier, promises that were in jeopardy with the pre-mature death of Hezekiah. So one of the reasons God heard Hezekiah’s prayer was because the promises made to David in 2 Sam 7. *I have heard/I have seen* underscore that Yahweh is the living God. Those words were the most beautiful words a believer can ever hear. God heard the prayer of Hezekiah. He was moved by the king’s tears. *Behold* introduces an unexpected development. *Fifteen years* will be added to Hezekiah’s life. That was more than enough time for him to deal with the Assyrian crisis, continue the religious reforms for which he was famous, and sire an heir to follow him on the throne.

3. **Promise of deliverance from Assyria (38:6):** *And from the hand of the king of Assyria I will deliver you and this city I will shield.* In addition to the extra years of life, God promised to deliver the king and his capital from the hand of the king of Assyria. This promise requires that Hezekiah’s personal crisis took place prior to Sennacherib’s invasion.

4. **Promise of a sign (38:7-8):** *And this is the sign to you from Yahweh that Yahweh will perform this thing that he has spoken: (8) Behold I am going to make the shadow on the steps, which went down on the steps of Ahaz by the sun, go backward ten steps.* Isaiah offered the king a sign involving the stairway that was used as a sundial to measure time. Hezekiah was given the choice of seeing the shadow go forward or backward on the steps (2 Kgs 20:9f). At the request of the king, the sun’s shadow went back on the stairway ten steps. How much time each step represented is not indicated. Speculation as to how God performed this miracle is useless.

**HEZEKIAH’S POEM**

38:9-20

---

259Hezekiah’s son Manasseh came to the throne at the age of twelve.

260Some suggest that Hezekiah became ill after Sennacherib returned home in defeat. The meaning of this promise would then be that Judah had nothing more to fear from Sennacherib. But the verb *shield* is the same verb used in reference to protection from the Assyrian attack in 701 BC (37:35). It seems likely that the prediction in 38:6 and the prediction in 37:35 refer to the same historical event.

261Some kind of refraction of light was probably involved, rather than a reversal of the earth’s rotation. The shadow reversing its position on the steps appears to have been a local phenomenon. See 2 Chr 32:31.
Introduction (38:9): A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah when he was sick and became well. After he recovered from his dreadful disease, Hezekiah composed a poem. This composition interrupts the prose story of the healing of the king because in it Hezekiah reflected upon his thoughts during his illness. For this reason the poem is a lament rather than a thanksgiving psalm. It emphasizes the mortality of the flesh rather than the miraculous healing.

A. Hezekiah’s Condition (38:10-14):
1. King’s complaint (38:10-11): The poem begins with the complaint of the dying man.
   a. When death comes (38:10): As for me, I said: In the quiet time of my days I must go into the gates of Sheol; I am judged with respect to the remainder of my days. In the quiet time most likely refers to the prime of life (cf. NIV). The announcement of his impending death came to him like a bolt out of a blue sky. He faced death before his life and work had achieved any sense of closure. He will be unable to carry out his plans and fulfill his dreams. Hezekiah was about to be consigned to Sheol, the abode of the dead. The reference to gates depicts Sheol as a city of the dead.
   b. What death entails (38:11):
      (1) End of divine fellowship (38:11a): I said: I will not see Yah, Yah in the land of the living. Seeing Yahweh in the land of the living refers to worship in the here and now (cf., e.g., 1:12; Ps 42:2; 63:2). The fine fellowship that Hezekiah experienced with Yahweh in worship in the temple will come to an end in his death. The sentiment is similar to that expressed by the hymn writer who pictured a saint passing through the air to heaven bidding farewell to the sweet hour of prayer.
      (2) End of human fellowship (38:11b): I will not gaze again on man, with the inhabitants of cessation. In death Hezekiah anticipates being cut off from fellowship with his friends. Cessation seems to be a metaphor for the world. At some point everything that lives dies, i.e., ceases its earthly existence. Death ushers a person into an environment that he has never before experienced.

Saying good-by to friends is still one of the hardest consequences of death to accept.

2. King’s reflection (38:12): Hezekiah uses three metaphors to reflect on the brevity of life.
   a. Metaphor of the shepherd’s tent (38:12a): My generation is pulled up and rolled from me like a shepherd’s tent. Earthly existence is like a movable Bedouin’s tent. For a time it remains stationary in a spot. But soon the grass disappears, and the tent must be moved.
   b. Metaphor of the weaver’s loom (38:12b): I have rolled up my life like a weaver; from the loom he cuts me loose... Hezekiah compares life to a piece of cloth cut from the loom. Day after day the weaver works on some fabric on the loom. But when that fabric reaches the appropriate size, the weaver quickly removes it from the loom. Like that weaver, death quickly takes away what appears to others to be permanent.
   c. Metaphor of daily transition (38:12c): from day unto night you have finished me. The exact connotation of this sentence is obscure. Perhaps Hezekiah is using a third metaphor. Life comes to an end as quickly as day passes into night.

3. King’s wait (38:13-14):
   a. His disposition (38:13a): I waited patiently unto morning... I waited patiently is lit., I quieted myself. Hezekiah waited for the inevitable through the night.
   b. His fate (38:13b): like a lion, thus he has shattered all my bones, from day unto night you have finished me. No deliverance came in the morning. Hezekiah likened his impending death to the attack of a lion that breaks all the bones of its prey. Throughout the day he anticipated his bones being crushed. By nightfall his life will be utterly finished.
   c. His anguish (38:14a): Like a swallow [or] a thrush thus I chirp; I moan like a dove. Faced with the final crushing by death, Hezekiah gave expression to his anguish through moaning like a dove. This is a dramatic portrayal of the helplessness Hezekiah felt as he faced the powerful beast of death.
   d. His petition (38:14b): My eyes grow weak looking upward. Adonay, oppression is mine; be
my pledge. Hezekiah never gave up on God. He continued to look to God to take action on his behalf even though his petitions appeared futile. He knew that Yahweh was Adonay, the Sovereign. Oppression is the burden of the pain of dying, and the knowledge that he will not survive. For Yahweh to be his pledge or surety is a figure taken from business customs. To give a pledge is to put up collateral, to stand behind people who have taken on debt in case they do not pay debt. So the metaphor asks Yahweh to take Hezekiah’s part, to intervene on his behalf, to make Hezekiah’s plight his concern (cf. Ps 119:122). Hence NIV renders come to my aid.

B. Hezekiah’s Recovery (38:15-17): The tone of the hymn changes in v 15. God had promised to spare Hezekiah’s life. He had kept his word. Yet Hezekiah acknowledged that his near brush with death had produced five positive results.

1. Recognized a need for humility (38:15): What shall I speak? He has spoken concerning me and he has done it. I will walk softly all of my years because of this bitterness of my soul. The first positive result of Hezekiah’s brush with death is that he had been humbled by the experience. He vowed that he would be humble the rest of his days. What shall I speak? suggests that Hezekiah was not quite sure how to respond to the graciousness of God in bringing about his healing. He has spoken concerning me recognizes the sovereign, almighty word of Yahweh. He has done it, i.e., brought about the healing of Hezekiah. Walk softly suggests that Hezekiah was resolved to use his extra fifteen years better than those that preceded. He will not take life for granted. He will live humbly. He will be grateful for every breath of life. This bitterness of my soul refers to the recent experience of illness unto death.262

2. Recognized God’s power (38:16a): O Adonay, because of them they live and by all that is in them my spirit lives. Second, Hezekiah came to realize anew that the words of God have the power to create and sustain life. Adonay stresses the sovereignty of God. The pronoun them appears to refer to the words and acts of Yahweh. Hezekiah knows that his spirit lives within his body because of the sovereign will of Yahweh, i.e., he has been restored to health by divine intervention.

3. Recognized need for continued improvement (38:16b): You restore me. Cause me to live. Third, Hezekiah realized his total dependence on God. Thus he continued to pray that his recovery might be complete. The verb restore is imperfect; the action is not complete. The verb live is imperative. In his recovery mode, Hezekiah longed for fullness of life.

4. Recognized God’s grace (38:17a): Behold, for well-being my bitterness was bitter. But you loved my soul from the pit of destruction... Fourth, Hezekiah came to have a greater appreciation for God’s grace, mercy and love. Behold again introduces a remarkable development. Through his bitterness, i.e., his bitter near-death experience, Hezekiah experienced well-being, i.e., he emerged a better man than he was before. The pit of destruction is Sheol. The shear force of God’s love for him had pulled Hezekiah back from the precipice as it were.

5. Recognized God’s pardon (38:17b): for you have put behind your back all my sins. Finally, Hezekiah perceived in the prolongation of his life that God also had pardoned him of all his sins. Perhaps the king felt that had he died in his pride he would not have been prepared to face his Maker. He sensed that he needed God’s forgiveness. Certainly the king’s logic is sound. It is not likely that God will heal the body without dealing with the deeper malady of the soul. Wholeness and well-being involve experiencing God’s forgiveness as well as his physical blessings. One could also say that a sense of spiritual wellness (forgiveness) contributes to physical healing.

C. Hezekiah’s Views (38:18-20):

1. What is missing in Sheol (38:18): Hezekiah’s comments on the nature of death have stirred much controversy.

---

262 Others interpret v 15 as saying that Hezekiah is resigned to whatever fate his illness may bring. No healing had yet been experienced.
a. Praise (38:18a): For Sheol does not thank you, death does not praise you. Hezekiah did not believe that there is thanksgiving to Yahweh in Sheol (abode of the dead) or praise for him among the dead. Those who embrace the doctrine of soul sleeping muster poetic vv such as this to bolster their view that there is no conscious existence after death until the day of resurrection.

In the light of the total teaching of the Bible on the state of the dead in the afterlife, how are Hezekiah’s words to be understood? Some think that the king is only reflecting the inadequate concepts of his day, concepts that were shown to be erroneous by the light of the NT. Others think he is referring only to sinners, those who have not received forgiveness such as he has experienced in the previous v are forever separated from God. In essence, those who die the second death will never praise God. Another view is that he is referring strictly to the corpse in the tomb. Obviously a corpse cannot thank or praise God. Hezekiah is saying nothing more than that fleshly praise as he knew it would cease with death.

b. Hope (38:18b): Those who go down to the Pit do not hope in your faithfulness. The Pit is synonymous with Sheol, the abode of the dead. Once one has entered the realm of the dead he cannot hope to experience the faithfulness of Yahweh. It will be too late for healing, too late for forgiveness, too late for repentance and reformation. Those who hope are those who have something for which to hope. They hope for abundant life here, and bliss throughout eternity. The promises of God are for the living. Once a person dies it is too late to claim those promises.

2. Presence of praise in life (38:19): The living, the living, he is the one who praises you as I do today; a father makes known to sons your faithfulness. It is the joyful privilege of the believer to praise God in this life and to teach his children to do the same. If it is correct that Hezekiah had no heir at this time (cf. 38:3), then he is expressing appreciation for an additional blessing that will be his during his additional fifteen years.

3. Commitment to praise (38:20):
   a. Reason for praise (38:20a): Yahweh is near to save me... Hezekiah’s hymn ends with confident declaration: Yahweh is near to save me. This declaration asserts a fundamental conviction. Yahweh is a God of salvation who is available to his people in every crisis.
   b. Nature of praise (38:20b): and my music we will play all the days of our lives in the house of Yahweh. For the rest of their days, Hezekiah and his associates will continue to sing songs of praise to Yahweh in the temple. It is natural for the believer to express his praise in music. Deliverance triggers outbursts of musical expressions of thanksgiving and praise. All the days of our lives emphasizes that believers can never run out of ways and reasons to praise God’s name. Praise is a lifestyle, and a life-long vocation. Although God is omnipresent, the house of Yahweh was the designated place for public assembly and worship. Thus the v is referring primarily to corporate praise rather than private praise.

   In spite of this triumphant conclusion, the major thrust of the poem cannot be escaped. Every human being, no matter how often he may be healed, is still mortal.

EXPLANATORY NOTES
38:21-22

Two notes are appended to the account of Hezekiah’s illness. These notes may have been copied from the royal annals of Hezekiah’s reign.

A. The Poultice (38:21): Isaiah had said: Let them take a poultice of figs and apply it to the boil, and he will live. The first note indicates that one of the symptoms of Hezekiah’s disease was a boil. Isaiah ordered a poultice of figs to be applied to the boil. Some hold that the poultice was medicinal and instrumental to Hezekiah’s healing. Others believe that the poultice was symbolic of the fact that the healing process began the moment the poultice was applied. In either case, the note

---

263 Other Scriptures stating the absence of praise in Sheol: Job 10:21-22; Ps 6:5; 30:9; 88:10-12; 115:17.
underscores the fact that divine healing is not always instantaneous.

B. The Sign (38:22): And Hezekiah had said: What is the sign that I will go up to the house of God? The second note explains why God gave Hezekiah a sign in v 7. Isaiah had promised the king that he would be in the temple praising God within three days (2 Kgs 20:5). When Hezekiah asked for a sign, the shadow went backward on the stairs. For scoffers to ask for signs is considered sinful in the OT. When one, however, does believe, but needs support for his faith, God takes no offense at the request for a sign. It is also possible that Hezekiah was seeking clarification of the contradictory predictions about him in vv 1 and 5 rather than confirmation.

CHAPTER 39

FAILURE OF FOCUS

The major theme of chs 7-38 has been trusting Yahweh, not nations or idols or anything else. How appropriate, then, that the first half of the Book of Isaiah closes with a warning against misplaced trust. Even such a godly man as Hezekiah can be lured into accepting the world’s values. Every human ruler, no matter how many times he may have trusted in God, is still prone to self-reliance. Believers are hereby warned that “trust must be a way of life and not merely a one-time affair.” Hezekiah seems to be trusting in the accumulation of wealth and perhaps in an alliance with Babylon. Furthermore, the account warns that the believer’s trust must be in God himself, not in men of God. Ch 39 should dispel any idea that Hezekiah was the glorious king promised by Isaiah here and there in the first thirty-eight chs of the book. This brief ch plays an important role in the structure of the book. It sets the scene for all the chs that follow.

A. Arrival of a Delegation (39:1): In that time Merodach-baladan, son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, having heard that Hezekiah had been sick. Merodach-baladan of Babylon was one of the chief gadflies of Assyrian imperialism in the last two decades of the eighth century BC. He was constantly rebelling and encouraging others to rebel against the world rulers. He used the occasion of Hezekiah’s recovery to initiate contact with one he perceived to be in sympathy with his anti-Assyrian stance. Merodach-baladan dispatched envoys with letters and a gift for the king of Judah.

B. Reception of the Delegation (39:2): And Hezekiah rejoiced over them, and he showed them the treasure house: the silver, the gold, the balsam, the precious oil, and all the house of his vessels. The Chronicler relates that in this situation God left Hezekiah alone to test him that he might know all that was in his heart (2 Chr 32:31). The king failed the test. Pride returned to his heart. He rejoiced over the arrival of the delegation. Apart from being flattered by the attention of Babylon, Hezekiah rejoiced to have an ally in the on-going struggle for independence from the Assyrians. In a somewhat boastful way Hezekiah put on display before the ambassadors all the wealth and weaponry of his kingdom. Nothing was held back. Showed them the treasure house indicates that the delegation was more than a mere courtesy call.

INVESTIGATION

A. Isaiah’s Initial Questions (39:3): And Isaiah the prophet came unto King Hezekiah and said unto him: What did these men say? From what place did they come unto you. And Hezekiah said: From a distant land they came unto me, from

---

264 On the sin of asking for a sign see Dt 6:16; Mal 3:15; Mt 4:7; 12:39; and Jn 6:30.
265 Gideon asked for a sign (Judg 6:36-40). In Mal 3:10 God challenges believers to test him by means of tithing.
266 Oswalt, NICOT, 1:673.
267 The Chronicler mentions the excitement created by the astronomical phenomena involving the sundial as one of the reasons the delegation came to Jerusalem (2 Chr 32:31).
Babylon. As close advisor to the king, Isaiah must have felt apprehensive about not being part of the discussions with the foreign dignitaries. When the envoys had departed, he interrogated Hezekiah about them. What did these men say? Where did they come from? The king answered the second question but not the first. He knew Isaiah’s position about alliances with foreign powers. That subject surely must have been discussed during the visit. Hezekiah defended himself by pretending that he was motivated by considerations of hospitality.

B. Hezekiah’s Self-condemnation (39:4): And he said: What have they seen in your house? And Hezekiah said: All that in my house they have seen. There is nothing that I did not show them in my treasuries. Isaiah refused to accept Hezekiah’s hospitality defense. The prophet continued to probe. The third question of the prophet concerned what these ambassadors saw in the capital. Hezekiah, perhaps with some embarrassment, responded, that he had shown them all he had.\(^{268}\)

ANNOUNCEMENT

39:5-7

A. Treasuries Deported (39:5-6): And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah: Hear the word of Yahweh of Hosts. (6) Behold, days are coming when all that is in your house and that your fathers treasured until this day will be carried away to Babylon. Not a thing will remain, says Yahweh. Isaiah made a dramatic announcement. Assyria will not be the power to conquer Jerusalem and carry off all the treasures of the city. That will be the work of Babylon. Those currently posing as Judah’s friends will turn out to be Judah’s conquerors. The reference to his fathers was a rebuke to his lack of royal stewardship. The treasure amassed by his predecessors would be lost.

B. Descendants Deported (39:7): And some of your sons descended from you, born of you, will be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

Hezekiah’s conduct had been irresponsible not only in terms of his ancestors, but also in terms of his descendants. Members of the royal family—Hezekiah’s descendants—will be carried off to become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. Emperors frequently required those in the royal service to be emasculated so that they would be no threat to the royal harem, and have no thoughts of their descendants. Yet even in this dark cloud there was a silver lining of divine grace. The presently childless king would have descendants. Even so, Hezekiah lived out his years realizing that his arrogant display of royal wealth might be one factor that would make some future Babylonian king target Jerusalem for conquest.

REACTION

39:8

Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, Good is the word of Yahweh that you have spoken. And he said, For there will be peace and security in my days. Hezekiah accepted the prophetic sentence with humility. The judgment he called good because it was less severe than he deserved. The exile was not to occur in his days. Some have accused Hezekiah of being selfish for thinking that he considered the judgment good as long as it did not happen during his reign.

BOOK EIGHT

BOOK OF CYRUS

Isaiah 40-48

At the beginning of the seventh century BC a large part of Judah and all of the northern kingdom of Israel were in exile in various parts of the Assyrian Empire. In interpreting chs 40-48 one need not assume that all of Judah was in captivity, or that the author was among those carried away. The 150 year gap between the writing of chs 39 and 40, which is postulated by nearly all modern interpreters, is unnecessary. Sennacherib had stripped Judah bare, had captured all of the fortified cities of the land, and

\(^{268}\)Others interpret the king’s response as being defiant and brazen as if he were trying to bluff the prophet by his forthrightness.
had almost captured Jerusalem in 701 BC. Isaiah, as was his custom, looked to the future for comfort in the present. He could see on the distant horizon a great deliverance from exile, and beyond that, an even greater deliverance from sin.

Deliverance from Babylon is the focus of chs 40-48. This section has been designated “The Book of Cyrus” because of the several references to that Persian conqueror. The direct mentions of Cyrus (44:28; 45:1) are sandwiched between triads of allusions to him.269

CHAPTER 40
COMFORT FOR GOD’S PEOPLE

GOD’S INCOMPARABLE WORD
40:1-11

Isaiah heard, as it were, four voices that set the tone for what he will say in chs 40-66. Each voice stressed an aspect of God’s message to man that makes his communication superior to anything attributed to idols.

A. First Comfort Voice (40:1-2): As the message of Ezekiel took a radical turn in a positive direction after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, so the tone of Isaiah’s ministry takes a similar turn after the near disaster of 701 BC. The discouraging commission of 6:9-13 is now augmented by a new commission, one that must have delighted the heart of Isaiah.

1. New directive (40:1):

   Comfort, comfort my people your God shall say.

   First, Isaiah heard a voice that directed the prophets to announce a message of comfort to Jerusalem. The repetition of the plural imperative points to the quality of the comfort anticipated. Judgment is no longer in the forefront; redemption is God’s ultimate aim. The word comfort is used to suggest compassion for those who grieve. My people/your God serves to underscore a new relationship with Yahweh.

2. New tone (40:2a):

   Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and call unto her...

   To speak tenderly is lit. to speak to the heart. The language suggests words of encouragement, whether spoken in affection (Ruth 2:13) or admonition (2 Chr 30:22). God’s saving work in Babylon was destined to make possible a new Jerusalem that would arise from the ruins of the old.

3. New message (40:2):

   that her difficult service has been completed, that her iniquity [penalty] has been satisfied, that she has received from the hand of Yahweh double for all her sins.

   Isaiah hears a threefold summary of the new message, each third introduced by the Hebrew that (kî). First, Jerusalem’s difficult service (tsābā’) or warfare was over. The reference is to the exile that Isaiah had predicted at the close of the previous ch. Second, Jerusalem’s iniquity had been satisfied. The exile was punishment for Israel’s sin. The end of the exile signaled that in his grace God extended pardon. Third, Jerusalem had paid double for her transgression. According to Ex 22:9 a man had to pay double for any trespass. Once appropriate punishment has been meted out, God is ready to pardon.

B. Second Comfort Voice (40:3-5):

1. Aim of the work (40:3):

   A voice is crying out, In the desert prepare the way of Yahweh, in the Arabah make a highway straight for our God.

   The second voice announced the coming of one to prepare the way of Yahweh. The Evangelists identified this preparatory messenger as John the Baptist. The reason for the comfort of v 1 is that Yahweh himself was about to visit his people. Yahweh comes out of the Arabah (wilderness) to aid his people. The imperatives prepare/make are plural. The people cannot deliver themselves; but they can prepare the way for the great Deliverer. The verb prepare (r. pnh) introduces the idea of the removal of obstructions. As in 35:8-10 the highway represents God’s purpose for his people.

2. Description of the work (40:4):

   Every valley will be lifted up, and every mountain and hill will be made low; rough places will be made smooth, and high places to a valley.

   The figure used is that of royal road builders who smooth the way for the

269Allusions to Cyrus are found in 41:2-5; 41:25; 43:14; 45:13; 46:11; and 48:14f.

270See Mt 3:3; Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4; Jn 1:23.
king that his journey might be somewhat easier. The people do not yet see the King; but they prepare the way for him. Thus this work of preparation is a work of faith. Fear and discouragement are pushed aside as workers busily prepare for the coming of the King. Nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of the triumphant march of the Great King.

3. Result of the work (40:5): *And the glory of Yahweh will be revealed: all flesh together will see it; for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.* As a result of the work of the preparatory messenger the glory of Yahweh, a visible manifestation of the presence of God, will be revealed. The revelation of divine glory is one of the major themes in this book.271 The glory of Yahweh appeared to Israel in the wilderness (Ex 16:10) and at Mount Sinai (Ex 24:16). It filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:35) and the temple (1 Kgs 8:11), and the visionairy temple seen by Ezekiel (Ezek 43:5). In Christ believers experience the glory of God (Jn 17:22-24). All flesh suggests that the prophecy pertains to the messianic age when Gentiles as well as Jews recognize the true nature of God. *For the mouth of Yahweh has spoken* underscores the certainty of the promise.272

C. Third Comfort Voice (40:6-8): The third voice stressed the eternality of God’s word.

1. What is temporal (40:6-7):
   a. Declaration (40:6): *A voice saying, Cry out! and I said, What shall I cry out? All flesh is grass and all his dependability is like the flower of the field.* From the eternal and all powerful King, Isaiah turns to the weakness and powerlessness of man. In v 3 a voice cried out; here an anonymous voice tells someone else to cry out. Isaiah volunteers to accept the mission, if only he is given a message. All flesh (humanity) is like grass compared to God. Grass represents what is frail, temporal, and undependable. Dependability (hesed)273 usually refers to covenant loyalty. Men give their word only to break it. Man-made agreements last about as long as the field flowers of Palestine.
   b. Application (40:7): *The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of Yahweh blows on it. Surely the people are grass.* Grass grows up, it withers, and it is blown away. Humanity can never survive a confrontation with Yahweh. Desert winds can wither grass and crops in less than two days. Men are like that. They cannot long survive the winds of God’s judgment. Overnight decimation of the mighty army of Assyria in 701 BC was perhaps fresh in Isaiah’s mind as he penned these words. The people refers to Israel as elsewhere in the book. The oppressed as well as the oppressors are all grass before Yahweh.

2. What is eternal (40:8): *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever.* Flesh is temporal, but God’s word endures forever. These words were quoted by Peter (1 Pet 1:24f). Generations of Israelites come and go, but the promises of God remain through the ages. Nothing man can do can overturn the word of the Creator. There is comfort indeed in this assurance.

D. Fourth Comfort Voice (40:9-11):

1. Identity of the voice (40:9): *Go up on a high mountain Zion, bearer of good news; raise up your voice with strength, Jerusalem bearer of good news. Raise [it] up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God.* The fourth voice is that of Isaiah himself. He exhorted Zion/Jerusalem to make an announcement to the cities of Judah. The task of proclaiming the good news of God’s coming begins in Jerusalem and with the Jews. Do not fear, a frequent admonition in chs 40-66, bids God’s people never to think for a moment that God has cast them off. God’s people are always to assume a posture of boldness in announcing that God is coming. God can only bring salvation to his people by coming to them, by personally becoming involved in their plight. It is the testimony of the Christian community that in

---

271 Words for glory occur thirty-seven times in the book.
272 This statement appears three times in the book. In 1:20 it speaks of the certainty of judgment after disobedience; in 58:14 it speaks of the certainty of blessing after obedience. In the present passage it points to the certainty of the final revelation of God’s glory to those who prepare by faith to receive it.
273 The LXX rendered the word glory, but nowhere else does hesed have this connotation.
the person of Christ, God in fact has come to bring salvation to his people.

2. Yahweh’s coming (40:10-11): Behold, repeated twice more in v 10, stresses the suddenness and joyousness of Yahweh’s coming. Two pictures of his coming are presented.

a. He comes with strength (40:10): Behold Adonay Yahweh with strength will come, and his arm will rule for him. Behold, his reward is with him and his recompense is before him. Isaiah pictured Yahweh coming as a conquering hero. He depends, not on armies, but on his own strength/arm to win the battle. He will conquer his enemies and force them into submission. The spoils of that victory are then distributed to his people. The words refer to the blessings of Christ’s victory over the forces of evil at the cross and resurrection.

b. He comes with tenderness (40:11): As a shepherd shepherds his flock in his arm he shall gather lambs and in his bosom he will carry [them]. He will lead the nursing ewes. Yahweh also comes as a gentle shepherd. Some take this to mean that the conqueror of the previous v received as his reward the sheep that he carried in his arm. In the previous v the arm of Yahweh is raised in battle and triumph; here it is lowered in tenderness and mercy. While he is a God of judgment, he is also a God of compassion. Some of his people need to be carried; some need to be led. He knows the needs of each. A stark contrast is painted between those outside the fold (v 10) and those who are his flock (v 11).

A. Compared to Created World (40:12-14): Isaiah uses a series of rhetorical questions to establish that God is God, and man is not.

1. Superior to nature (40:12): Who has measured the waters in his palm, or marked off the heavens with his span? Who has held the dust of the earth in a bucket, and weighed mountains in a balance, and hills in a scales? The greatness of God is indicated by the vastness of his creation. Isaiah asked a series of questions designed to put man in his proper place. One is reminded of the series of questions that God put to Job (chs 38-41). Isaiah intends the answer to these questions to be, “None by Yahweh.” Isaiah does not intend in this v to depict Yahweh at work in creation. He simply wants to underscore what in his day was a revolutionary thought, that God is infinitely greater than the created world. All that impresses man about the universe is but putty in hands of the Creator.

2. Superior in wisdom (40:13-14): Who measures the spirit of Yahweh, or what man has taught him his counsel? (14) Whom did he consult to give him understanding? Who taught him the right path? Who taught him knowledge? Who made him to know the way of understanding? In the previous v man is incapable of taking the measure of the universe. Even less is man capable of measuring the spirit of Yahweh. Spirit here is not the Holy Spirit per se, but the total being of the God who is spirit. God is self-sufficient and independent. He did not solicit advice when he created the world. Yahweh does not need man or angel to instruct him about the right course of action. These vv effectively refute the common idea in the ancient Near East that a council of coequal deities ruled the universe.

B. Compared to the Nations (40:15-17):

1. Pictures of national greatness (40:15): Behold, nations are like a drop from a bucket, and like dust on the scales they are regarded; islands he lifts up as fine dust. Three figures are used to stress the inconsequential nature of the greatness of the greatest nations. A bucket of water pulled from the well might lose a drop or two. So what? It is

274This according to E.J. Young, NICOT, 2:36-41.
nothing. A speck of dust on scales is so insignificant that its presence does not even register. A drop and a speck—that is God’s estimate of human greatness. Islands is used by Isaiah as a parallel term for nations. The meaning of the last verb is uncertain. Lifts up is NASB, NJPS, and NKJV; NIV renders it weighs.

2. Picture of divine greatness (40:16): Lebanon is not enough for burning, and its animals are not enough for burnt offerings. A great God must be honored with the greatest sacrifice possible. But if one were to build an altar fire with all the cedars of Lebanon, and sacrifice every beast in those forests, he still would not have made a sacrifice worthy of such a great God. The vastness of the world’s natural resources is as nothing before the great Yahweh. In the ancient world Lebanon was famous for its vast forests. Cedars from Lebanon were shipped all over the Near East to be used in building enterprises.

3. Application (40:17): All the nations are as nothing before him, they are considered by him less than non-existent and emptiness. Figures are replaced by blunt statements. Nothing (‘ayin), non-existent (‘epes), emptiness (tōhû) are three powerful words that establish a comparison to Yahweh. Compared to God the greatest empire amounts to nothing. Nations come and go; they live, and they die. But Yahweh is eternal.

C. Compared to Idols (40:18-20):
1. Impossibility of idolatry (40:18): So unto whom will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? Idols are representations created by man. No matter how beautiful the craftsmanship, no matter how precious the materials, idols cannot capture the essence of God. The word for God (‘ēl) is a term that points to God’s absolute superiority. Any likeness of God must of necessity be inadequate and misleading. Furthermore, making images tends to foster the illusion that man can manipulate God.

2. Stupidity of idolatry (40:19-20):

a. Molten images (40:19): As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a metalworker covers it with gold and fashions silver chains [for it]. Four times in the Book of Cyrus Isaiah sarcastically mocks idolatry.276 The word idol stands first in the Hebrew sentence for emphasis, in pale contrast to the incomparable Creator of the preceding vv. Three steps in producing a molten image are mentioned: the casting, the gold plating, and the fashioning of silver chains to stabilize the idols.

b. Craved images (40:20): He who is impoverished for such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He seeks for himself a wise craftsman to set up an idol that will not totter. The word impoverished (m’sukān) occurs only here in the OT. Its meaning is uncertain. NIV and NASB both follow the tradition reflected in this translation. Apparently molten (metal) idols were more expensive than one of wood. Someone who could not afford the more expensive molten image would seek out an appropriate piece of hardwood. He then hired a craftsman (wood carver) to make the image. When the image was finished, the craftsman had to nail it down so it did not topple over. The point is that if idols have difficulty standing erect, how will they be able to support those who worship them?

D. Compared to Rulers (40:21-24):
1. Heaven’s Ruler (40:21-22):

a. A timeless truth (40:21): Do you not know? Have you not heard? Was it not declared to you from the beginning? Did you not discern from the foundations of the earth? In four rhetorical questions Isaiah takes his readers back to the beginning/the foundations of the earth, i.e., the creation. From that time forward men should have been able to perceive that behind creation is a Creator. Even if they had not been able to perceive this fundamental truth on their own, they should have heard that truth proclaimed by those who did perceive it.

b. A transcendent Creator (40:22): He is the one who sits above the circle of the earth, whose inhabitants are like grasshoppers. He is the one

275This is one of Isaiah’s favorite words. Of twenty occurrences in the OT, eleven are in Isaiah.

276Mockery of idolatry also appears in 41:6-7; 44:9-20; and 46:5-7.
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent for dwelling. This v expresses what people should have known about God. He is above this world, not part of it. Circle of the earth reflects the idea that the earth is round. From his vantage point above the earth those who dwell on this planet are as small as grasshoppers (cf. Nm 13:33), i.e., weak and powerless creatures. On his throne Yahweh is providentially upholding and maintaining all that exists. Like a curtain stresses the ease with which God created the heavens. The heavens cover the earth like a tent. For dwelling could refer to Yahweh’s dwelling, or to those who dwell on the earth under the tent that God has spread out.

2. Earth’s rulers (40:23-24):
   a. A plain statement (40:23): The one who appoints princes to nothing; the judges of the earth he has made like emptiness. God did not abandon the world after he created it. He is very much involved in the affairs of this life. Men may appoint their fellows as rulers by heredity, election, or submission. But in the final analysis it is God who does the appointing. Princes (rōz’rûm) are earth’s mightiest rulers, i.e., potentates. Eventually Yahweh brings princes to nothing, i.e., removes them from power, either by death or by overthrow. Judges (šōp’rûm) are those in a position both to rule and to render decisions. Emptiness (tōhû) is used in Gn 1:2 to describe an uninhabited, dysfunctional world. Judges that have been made emptiness are no longer able to function in their role.
   b. A figurative statement (40:24): Not even planted were they, not even sown, not even rooted in the ground their stock when he blows on them and they wither, and a storm carries them away like chaff. This v carries forward the thought of the previous one by stressing the suddenness with which God can neutralize the world’s greatest leaders. Even before the princes and judges have been established in their positions they can be removed. Isaiah compares these powerful men to a sapling that has not yet implanted its roots firmly in the ground. Not even sown changes the figure to that of seed planted in the ground. Both figures imply that rulers do not ascend to power on their own. A tree must be planted, and seed must be sown. So rulers must be placed in their positions.

   Removal of powerful men from office requires no major exertion on Yahweh’s part. He merely blows on them and they wither like a plant. They are blown off the scene of history like worthless chaff from a threshing floor.

E. Compared to Stars (40:25-26):

1. Challenging questions (40:25-26a):
   a. Comparison challenge (40:25): So to whom will you liken me, who is my equal? says the holy one. This v is similar to v 18 but with some notable differences. There Isaiah issued the challenge; here it is God himself. There God is called ‘ēl; here his name is holy one. From the time of his call the concept of God’s holiness has permeated Isaiah’s mind. What Isaiah has said in the previous v reinforces the idea that the Creator is no one’s creature. The Uncreated is distinct from all that is created.
   b. Creation challenge (40:26a): Lift your eyes on high and see who created these? Having challenged his people to make a comparison, Isaiah now, as he did in v 19, offers a possible comparison. On high refers to the heavens. These could refer to the heavens as a whole, or to the luminaries in particular. In the pagan religions of the time the sun, moon and stars were the visible representation of astral deities. Isaiah asks the teleological question. How did these physical objects come into being? His question implies that the heavenly bodies are not self-existent. Created (r. br’) is the term used in Gn 1:1 and forty-seven other places in the OT, twenty-one times in Isaiah.

2. Challenging assertions (40:26b): He is the one who brings forth their hosts by number; all of them he calls by name. Because of the abundance of power and strength, not one of them is missing. Heavenly bodies should not be deified as they were in Mesopotamia. Worship belongs only to the holy one who created the stars. Isaiah likened God to a mighty general who leads his hosts (troops) across the heavens. By number suggests that the stars are not numberless as indeed they appear to be from
the human standpoint. The phrase has a military connotation. God calls all of the stars by name. A name indicates the essential nature of a being or object. To call something by name implies (1) that God has assigned each of the heavenly bodies its characteristics and functions; and (2) that he is superior to all the heavenly bodies that he names. The heavenly bodies do not fail in their functions because they are upheld by the abundance of power and strength of the Creator. The word strength in Hebrew is plural to express intensity. Every star is in the exact place God has placed it. Implicit in these vv is an attack against the major tenets of astrology and mythology.

ISAIAH’S INCOMPARABLE PROMISE
40:27-31

A. Israel’s Discouragement (40:27): Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak O Israel, My way is hidden from Yahweh, and from my God my justice passes away? The verb say is imperfect, suggesting that the discouragement displayed by the Israelites was ongoing. Jacob/Israel is the covenant name for the people of God. The name Jacob is used for Israel about twenty-seven times in chs 40-66. It recalls the experience of the man Jacob who spent twenty years in exile in Mesopotamia due to his own folly. Isaiah envisions a time when his descendants will likewise experience a Mesopotamian exile. The term way (derek) recalls the earlier promises concerning the way on which Yahweh will lead his people.277 The remaining chs of the book reference this way several times.278 Justice (mišpat) is used forty-three times in Isaiah. The term refers to God’s upright administration of affairs. So the complaint of Israel is that Yahweh either does not know or does not care about their situation. Discouragement weakens faith, and leads to such doubt as is here expressed. But Israel’s faith has not yet led to abandonment of Yahweh, for he is still referenced as my God.

B. Response to Discouragement (40:28-31): God is greater than discouragement.

1. Yahweh’s nature (40:28): Do you not know, have you not heard? Despondent Israelites must never forget who their God is. The first two verbs in this v are in the perfect form, suggesting that what he is about to affirm is old information that should have been grasp long before.

   a. His strength is tireless (40:28b): Yahweh is the eternal God, Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not become tired or weary. In these concise sentences some heavy theology is expressed. Yahweh is (1) eternal, (2) omnipotent, (3) omnipresent, and (4) constantly alert. He can intervene for the benefit of Israel wherever and whenever he chooses. One must not assume that because he does not act in accord with timetables imposed by perceived human necessity that he is incapable of intervention.

   b. His wisdom is unfathomable (40:28c): There is no searching out his understanding. Yahweh is omniscient. He knows what is in the best interest of his people at any given time. God has revealed some of his attributes and intentions to mankind, but not all. By the limitations of human perspective no man can discern why Yahweh acts, or does not act, as he does.

2. Yahweh’s empowerment (40:29): He is the one who gives strength to the weary, and to the one who lacks strength, he multiplies power. Yahweh is the very opposite of tired. He has strength to dispense to the weary. He lacks for nothing, but rather he supplies what is lacking in mankind. Gives is a participle, indicating that the giving is ongoing. Giving is his habit. But the giving is not automatic. The more men sense their need and helplessness, the more God gives to them the strength to cope. The weary are those who have been beaten down by adversity. Multiplies is imperfect, suggesting a future outpouring of power. So the v declares, not only that Yahweh gives strength (kōāh) to the weary, he has even more dramatic assistance to give to those who feel that this regular outpouring of strength is insufficient to deal with life’s realities. To those who lack God-

278 The term appears seventeen times in the following chs, e.g., 42:16; 43:16, 19; 48:17.
given abundance of strength (‘ônîm; cf. v 26) he multiplies power (‘ôšmâh).

3. Yahweh’s promise (40:30-31):
   a. Need for a promise (40:30): As for young men, they may become weary and tired; even choice young men will surely fall. While God does not become weary, men do. Even those in the prime of life and the best physical condition become weary at times. Because they get tired, they stumble. Human life at any stage is transitory and uncertain. Idolizing people because of physical prowess is therefore stupid.
   b. Recipients of the promise (40:31a): But those who wait on Yahweh... What may happen to the vigorous youth, need not happen to any of God’s faithful. Those who wait on Yahweh are completely dependent on him. Such individuals have confidence that Yahweh will act for the good in his own good time.
   c. Essence of the promise (40:31b):
      (1) Summarized (40:31b): will renew their strength... Renew (r. ḫlp) means to replace or exchange. Worn out strength (kōaḥ) will be replaced with God-given, real strength. (2) Illustrated (40:31c): they will stretch out their wings like eagles. They will run and not become weary, they will walk and not get tired. Those who experience renewal of strength will not stumble, but will grow stronger. The infusion of spiritual power makes believers like (1) an eagle in flight, (2) a runner in competition, and (3) a hiker on a long trek.

CHAPTER 41
ISRAEL’S DIVINE HELPER

Isaiah quoted the words of Yahweh throughout ch 41. Yahweh addressed first the nations, then Israel, and finally the idols. The first and third units are cast in the form of a confrontation.

CONFRONTATION WITH THE NATIONS
41:1-7

In ch 40 Yahweh spoke directly to the idols; now he addresses those who worship those idols.

A. Address to Nations (41:1): Keep silence before me, O islands, and the peoples, let them renew strength. Let them draw near, then let them speak. Together for judgment let us draw near. Yahweh ordered distant nations--especially the coastlands and islands of the Mediterranean--to listen, then to muster their strength so that they might enter the court of public opinion with him. Yahweh asserts his authority over the Gentiles by ordering them to keep silence. Only when people are silent can they hear the voice of Yahweh. For renew strength, see on 40:31. The Gentiles should draw near to Yahweh. He does not go to them; they must come to him. Having obeyed this command, they are told to speak, i.e., present their case in defense of the idols.

B. Announcement to Nations (41:2-4):
   1. Announcement as a question (41:2a): Who roused one from the east? God announced to the nations his intention to rouse, awaken, or activate one from the east. This is the first allusion to the role of Cyrus the Persian who would not gain world power for yet 150 years. The verb is in the perfect, pointing to an action so certain to happen that it can be said already to have happened. On roused (‘ūr) see on 13:17 where Yahweh stirs up the Medes against Babylon.
   2. Success of the conqueror (41:2b-3):
      a. He pursues the righteousness purposes of God (41:2b): Righteousness has summoned him to its feet... Righteousness refers to God’s providential purposes. Summoned him refers to Cyrus. Personified righteousness called Cyrus into action. Cyrus is to line up with God’s world purposes.
      b. He subdues nations (41:2c): he gives before him the nations, that kings he might subdue. His sword, gives [them] over as dust, his bow [gives them over] as chaff that is driven. The subject is either Yahweh or righteousness personified. He gives or places before the one from the east the nations and their rulers. Providentially Yahweh places the nations in the path of Cyrus so that he might conquer them. Cyrus makes use of sword and bow to dispatch nations like dust/chaff.
c. He pursues enemies (41:3): *He will pursue them, he will pass by in peace; he will not go on a path with his feet.* Cyrus goes after all his enemies. On the other hand, *Cyrus will pass by in peace, i.e., he will be unmolested. He will not go on a path with his feet* may be a way of stressing the swiftness of his movements. It will be as if his feet do not even touch the ground (cf. Dan 8:5).

3. Identity of the orchestrator (41:4):
   a. Question (41:4a): *Who has worked and done [this], calling the generations from the beginning?* By means of a rhetorical question Isaiah changes the focus from the conqueror to the Creator who called him. *Worked* and *done* are not redundant. The words stress that God started the project of bringing Cyrus from the east, and he will finish that work. *Calling the generations* refers to Yahweh as the one who summonses the nations to the stage of world history. He has been doing this from the beginning. The point is that no nation exists that does not owe its origin to Yahweh. Raising up a conqueror is not difficult for Yahweh, for he has brought forth generation after generation from the very beginning.
   b. Answer (41:4b): *I am Yahweh, the first, and with the last, I am he.* The one who brings forth the generations is Yahweh. He is the first, i.e., he existed before all else. He is with the last, i.e., with the last generation to stand on the earth. Yahweh is eternal; he is present throughout history until the very end;

C. Reaction of the Nations (41:5-7):
   1. Fear (41:5): *The islands have seen and they are afraid, the ends of the earth tremble; they have approached and come.* The approach of the one from the east (Cyrus) will produce panic in the kingdom of Lydia and in the more distant coastal regions. *Approached and come* is hendiadys meaning they came together. The nations are pictured holding a conclave in which they discuss the plight they face from the approaching conqueror from the east.
   2. Mutual encouragement (41:6): *Each of them will help his neighbor, and to his brother one will say, Be strong!* From the fear of the nations in general, Isaiah turns to individuals. They will be encouraging one another to be strong in the face of the new historical development.
   3. Preparation of idols (41:7): *The molder will strengthen the smelter, he who flattens with a hammer, he who strikes on the anvil, who says of the joining, It is good, then strengthens it with nails [so that] it cannot be moved.* In the international crisis the Gentiles turn to their gods. Craftsmen of all types will work in consort to produce new idols that might spare them from the eastern conqueror. No man-made god, however, will be able to detect his advance. This v makes the point that idolatry requires much hard work, but is ultimately futile. Idols are totally dependent on men. They must even be nailed down so they do not totter. How can such impotent objects protect anyone from the conqueror from the east?

**COMMITMENT TO ISRAEL**

41:8-20

Confronted with the rise of the conqueror from the east, the nations made idols. But Israel need not do this, for Israel’s God is the one who is controlling events. In spite of Israel’s disappointing dalliance with idolatry, God remained faithful to his commitment to be their God. He reassured his people of love and support in four areas.

A. Assurance of Standing (41:8-10):
   1. Israel is addressed (41:8a): *And as for you, O Israel my servant, Jacob... And as for you shifts attention to Israel, and draws a sharp distinction between Israel and the nations previously mentioned. You (singular) addresses Israel as an individual. In spite of all that had happened (judgment on Jerusalem) or will happen (rise of Cyrus), the descendants of Abraham still enjoyed a unique relationship with God. My servant is a title of honor in the OT. It points to one to whom an important task has been assigned. It is used of Abraham (Gn 26:23), Moses (Nm 12:7) and David (2 Sam 3:17). Jacob is another name for the nation Israel.*
2. Israel is chosen (41:8b): *it is you that I have chosen, seed of Abraham my friend.* Israel was a chosen nation, chosen for servanthood, chosen as a witness to the Gentiles, chosen by Yahweh. This choice extended back beyond Jacob/Israel for whom the nation was named. God chose Abraham, called him from his home, brought him to Canaan, and then bestowed wonderful promises upon him. So Israel was Yahweh’s chosen servant because Israel was the seed (descendant) of Abraham. Yahweh warmly refers to Abraham as *my friend* (cf. 2 Chr 20:7; Jam 2:23). This designation is even more honorific than *my servant* (cf. Jn 15:14, 15).

3. Israel is called (41:9): *[You] whom I have grasp from the ends of the earth, and from its remote parts I have called you, and said to you, My servant you are! I chose you, and I did not reject you.* Whom refers to the nation Jacob/Israel. Grasp (r. הָצֶּק) suggests that Yahweh has taken a strong hold on Israel. Through Israel may be scattered to remote lands, they will never be beyond the grasp of their God. In the person of Abraham God had called Israel from the ends of the earth (i.e., Ur of Chaldees, Acts 7:2f). Called/chosen is equivalent to commissioned. Other nations were rejected, i.e., passed over, when God chose Israel. The point of the v is that Israel had a heritage of servanthood.

4. Israel can be confident (41:10):
   a. Exhortation (41:10a): *Do not fear, for with you am I! Do not be dismayed, for I am your God.* God’s servant need not fear the rise of Cyrus. But the directive has wider application. God’s people are not to fear at all. By not fearing whatever arises on the earth God’s people demonstrate that they are walking by faith. *Do not be dismayed* is lit., *do not gaze about in anxiety.* Yahweh had chosen to identify with Israel as their God. *With you am I* is commitment that was made to Moses (Ex 3:12); Joshua (1:5), Gideon (Jud 6:16), Solomon (1 Kgs 11:38), and the postexilic community (Hag 1:13).

   b. Explanation (41:10b): *I have strengthened you, yes I have helped you; surely I have upheld you by my righteous right hand.* God explains the manner in which he shows himself to be with his people. He has strengthened/helped them, i.e., given them the strength and courage to face whatever crises were ahead. Uphold points to Yahweh’s sustaining power. Right hand is the symbol of powerful action. All of God’s actions are righteous.

B. Assurance of Deliverance (41:11-14):

1. Adversaries humiliated (41:11): *Behold, they will be as ashamed and humiliated, all who are enraged against you. They shall be as nothing, and will perish, the men who strive with you.* The rise of Cyrus will mean the deliverance of Israel. *Behold* introduces an unexpected change in circumstances. Israel’s enemies will be ashamed and humiliated as a result of Yahweh’s intervention on behalf of Israel. Shame will result from the realization that they are enemies of God. They will experience humiliation when they find their gods unable to intervene on their behalf.

2. Adversaries smashed (41:12): *You shall seek them, and not find them, those who fight against you. They shall be as nothing and like dust, men who fight, make war with you.* Those who fight against you is lit., *the men of your struggle.* Again Isaiah repeats the thought of v 11 that those warlike enemies will come to nothing. The thought is expanded by the phrase *like dust,* i.e., those enemies will be ground to fine power. Israel’s enemies finally will disappear from the scene of history.

3. Appeal for courage (41:13-14):
   a. Because Yahweh upholds them (41:13a): *For I am Yahweh your God who grasps your right hand, who says to you, Do not be afraid; as for me, I have helped you! I am Yahweh your God*
echoes the opening words of the Decalogue (Ex 20:2). In v 10 Yahweh uses his powerful right hand in defense of his people. Here he holds Israel’s right hand, by implication with his left hand. This is a beautiful father/child picture. In the battles of life Yahweh will not let go of his people. He holds their hand. They can count on him. He has helped them in the past. His reassuring touch tells them that they can count on him to help in the future.

b. Because of Israel lowly state (41:14a): Do not be afraid, O worm of Jacob, you men of Israel! Worm connotes not disrespect, but rather stresses the plight of the people. Only the power of the Almighty can help them. Men of Israel is a common designation in the historical books, but is used here for the only time in the prophetic books. Used in apposition with worm of Jacob suggests that the once powerful and numerous host of Israel is but a pale reflection of what it had been. They desperately need Yahweh’s help.

c. Because Yahweh is their redeemer (41:14b): I have helped you (oracle of Yahweh), and your redeemer is the holy one of Israel. Yahweh states the reasons why Israel should not fear. First, he reiterates what he said in the previous v. He has helped her (the pronoun is feminine). Second, this assertion is emphasized and underscored by the phrase oracle of Yahweh. This means that Yahweh himself, personally and directly, has affirmed his help for them. Whether or not Israel perceives that assistance, it has in fact taken place. The results of that help would become more and more evident as time went on.

Third, Yahweh is their redeemer (gō’ēl). This is Exodus language (Ex 6:6; 15:13). The word signifies a near kinsman who has an obligation to a relative (Lv 25:24, 25). The term and related verb are most frequently used in association with Yahweh delivering Israel from the bondage of Egypt. This is the first of thirteen uses of the title by Isaiah. This prophet envisioned redemption from a far greater bondage than that of Egypt. He envisioned deliverance from sin’s bondage.

Fourth, this is the first of six times in the book where the connection is made between the title redeemer and holy one of Israel. The point of the connection is to stress that Yahweh is strong enough, righteousness enough, and compassionate enough to bring about the promised redemption. In fact redemption is the evidence of the unique holiness of Yahweh. He does not act capriciously toward his people. His interventions are principled; they reflect his character. Since he is completely holy (separate from the world) he is free to act unimpeded by the forces of history or nature.

C. Assurance of Victory (41:15-16):

1. A picture of power (41:15):

   a. A powerful tool (41:15a): Behold, I have placed you as a threshing sledge, sharp, new, possessed of teeth... Behold again introduces an unexpected turn of events. After deliverance through the agency of Cyrus, Israel will become a threshing sledge. This instrument consisted of heavy timbers with stones or pieces of metal driven into the underside. It was pulled by oxen over the threshing floor in order to break loose the kernels of grain from the husk. Israel is likened to a new threshing sledge, one whose sharp teeth have not been worn down by use.

   b. An effective tool (41:15b): you shall thresh mountains and beat them fine; and hills you shall place like chaff. Mountains/hills represent powerful kingdoms of the world. The new Israel will thresh mountains. Israel will beat those mountains fine, i.e., pulverize them so they become harmless chaff. The point is that no people, however great and powerful, will be able to withstand the advance of the worm-turned--threshing sledge.

2. A picture of peace (41:16): You will fan them and wind shall carry them away, a whirlwind will scatter them; and you shall rejoice in Yahweh, in the holy one of Israel you shall boast. The figure continues from the previous v. The mountains/hills, having been threshed, will be winnowed. This process involved throwing the pulverized grain into the air to allow the wind to blow away the worthless chaff or husks. So Isaiah envisions the pulverized nations as blown away, removed from the scene. The thoroughness and violence of that removal is indicated by the word whirlwind. The
sudden and violent sweeping away of the invincible Babylonian Empire by Cyrus may be an illustration of what Isaiah has in mind.

While the wind blows these worthless husks away, Israel emerges victorious. But Israel knows that her deliverance from adversaries has not been due to any effort on her own part. Whatever role she may play, it is Yahweh who gives the victory. Therefore, Israel rejoices in Yahweh. She will not boast in herself, but in her God.

The pictures are vivid, but what do they mean? Isaiah may be predicting the crushing victories of the Maccabees during the intertestamental period. On the other hand, he may be referring to the conquests in the spiritual realm by the new Israel of God. While the focus here is on removal of adversaries and obstacles, one cannot help but see in the winnowing imagery the idea of some among the Gentiles being saved. Winnowing separates grain from chaff, and removes the latter. What is left after the process is useful. Certainly Isaiah makes abundantly clear elsewhere: Gentiles will come to know Yahweh.

D. Assurance of Provision (41:17-20):
1. Need for provision (41:17a): The poor and the needy are seeking water, but there is none; their tongue with thirst is parched. Again Isaiah paints the picture of a people in need. Needy/poor are words that stress poverty and affliction. These words often depict the righteous who survive on hope during times of persecution. Israel in exile is like a person in a desert without water.

2. Pledge of provision (41:17b): I, Yahweh, I will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. When his people are in the condition of need depicted by the thirst, Yahweh will respond to their need. Answer to their prayers is implied in these words. God does not abandon his people in their times of need.

3. Abundance of provision (41:18-19):
   a. Abundant water (41:18): I will open on the bare heights rivers, and in the midst of valleys springs. I will make the wilderness into a pond of water, and the dry land into pools. Four geographical terms underscore the need for God’s provision:

   - bare heights, valleys, wilderness, dry land. Yahweh answers the needs of his thirsty people by providing abundant water. Isaiah uses radical land transformations to symbolize the limitless power of Yahweh to transform the barren circumstances of his people. Rivers, springs, ponds and pools appear where thirst is raging and all is dying. Abundant water in prophetic literature is a figure for life and spiritual blessing.

   - b. Luxuriant forests (41:19): I will give in the wilderness cedar, acacia, myrtle and wild olive; I will put in the Arabah cypress, elm, and pine together... As a result of the abundant water trees will grow where they never grew before. Their deserts will be turned into shady woods. Shade from scorching heat symbolizes relief from the suffering of persecution. The seven trees mentioned are native to Syria and Palestine. It is possible that the number seven points to the perfection of God’s provision. Isaiah loved the outdoors. He made frequent use of trees in his sermons. Here trees make the point that God is in the business of turning what is barren into what is productive and beneficial.

4. Result of provision (41:20): so that they may see and know and consider and understand together, for the hand of Yahweh has done this; and the holy one of Israel, he has created it. Isaiah now states the reason God responds to the needs of his people. Four verbs underscore how God wants men to respond to his interventions. He wants them to recognize what he has done, and then to meditate on the significance of his actions. Four is the universal number. The use of four verbs of discernment may suggest that God wants all men to come to know him. God loves to answer the prayers of his people because in so doing men give honor to him.

What is it that Isaiah wants all men to discern? He wants them to recognize the hand of Yahweh, i.e., his power, at work in the blessings of his people. Beyond that, he wants them to recognize that Yahweh is the holy one of Israel. He is unlike the idols that men make and manipulate. He is holy, i.e., separate from this world. Create is the same word used in Genesis. This use of this word
suggests that what God is going to do for his people is so radically new and marvelous that it can be likened to a new creation.

**CONFRONTATION WITH THE IDOLS**  
41:21-29

**A. Challenge to the Idols** (41:21-23): Yahweh has declared what he was about to do in the short run and in the long run. Now the idols are given the opportunity to show what they plan to do.

1. **Challenge presented** (41:21): *Bring near your case, says Yahweh; bring forward your defenses, says the King of Jacob.* The idols (or their defenders) are directly addressed. Yahweh is the King of Jacob, i.e., he is a God worthy of the title king, a God who can do what a king ought to do for his subjects. Jacob may be a lowly, helpless worm (v 14); but Jacob has a mighty King!

2. **Challenge explained** (41:22-23):
   a. In general (41:22a): *Let them bring forward and declare to us the things that will happen...* Isaiah explains what he wants to happen when the gods bring forth (r. ngš) their defenses. He wants them to declare (r. ngd) the things that will happen. They are not even required to control the future, merely to describe it.
   b. Former things (41:22b): *the former things, what they were, declare, that we may set our heart, and know their outcome...* Some take former things to be a sub-category of things that will happen, i.e., events of the near future, perhaps within the lifetime of the immediate audience. But elsewhere in the book the former things refers to events of the past. In that case, God is asking either for an explanation of past events, or documentation that those past events had been predicted. The repetition of the verb declare underscores the muteness of the idols. Speaking for believers, Isaiah indicates a willingness to review any interpretations of the past that might be used as keys to future events. The reliability of such interpretations is the outcome of events.
   c. Future things (41:22c): *or cause us to hear the coming things.* Isaiah gave his opponents an option. If idolaters cannot explain unfolding present events in the light of past events, then let them outline events of the distant future.
   d. Further stipulations (41:23):
      1. **Timeframe for the predictions** (41:23a): *Declare the things coming hereafter, that we may know that you are gods.* To remove all ambiguity, Isaiah further specifies that he is referring to events hereafter, i.e., future from the standpoint Isaiah’s generation. The point is, predict something or else forfeit your right to be considered a deity. The verb declare is repeated for the third time.
      2. **Content of the predictions** (41:23b): *Yes, do good or do evil that we may see and be afraid together.* This line seems to expand the challenge of prediction. The extremes of good and evil express the totality of action. Yahweh claims that he can do both (44:7). If the idols are incapable of declaring the future, let them so something--anything--that will establish their deity. Evil here is not moral evil, but natural disasters. The expression be afraid suggests that the challenge is to do something so amazing and spectacular that all observers will be frightened. Together in the Hebrew can refer to the subject (we together can see) or to the object (we can see good and evil together).

**B. Disparagement of Idols** (41:24):

1. **As to origin** (41:24a): *Behold, you are from nothing...* Behold draws attention to the conclusion of the argument thus far. The conclusion is more dramatic because it is spoken directly to the idols. Idols are from nothing, i.e., nothing beyond this world. No invisible deity fills them and empowers them.

2. **As to performance** (41:24b): *and your work is less than nothing...* The work of idols is less than nothing, i.e., they cannot do anything. They are impotent objects of wood or metal. Nothing comes from nothing. The silence of the idols in response to Yahweh’s challenge proves the point.

---

279 Oswalt (NICOT, 2:101) understands the challenge to be to explain the present on the basis of their interpretation of the past, i.e., to show some pattern of the future that somehow corresponds to the very nature of things.
3. As to devotees (41:24c): **an abomination is he who chooses you.** Those who choose to worship an idol are not just foolish and deceived; they are an abomination. They are as loathsome as the idol itself because they suppress all reason and engage in a wicked and despicable practice. To render homage to the created rather than the Creator is a perversion so monstrous that it can only be labeled abomination. Only the most wicked and perverted heart could make that choice (cf. Rom 1:18-23).

C. **Yahweh’s Work** (41:25-28):
1. He brings forth a conqueror (41:25):
   a. Geography of his coming (41:25a): I have stirred [one] from the north, and he comes... In contrast to the silence of the idols, Yahweh announced what he was about to do. He will arouse one from the north. Yahweh responds to his own question in v 2. North is the direction from which invaders of Palestine frequently came. It was natural for Isaiah, living in Palestine, to use this language to describe any invader. But Cyrus, who is the one in view, did in fact attack Babylon from the north as well.
   b. Theology of his coming (41:25b): from the rising of the sun he will call upon my name. The rising of the sun is the east. In respect to Babylon, Cyrus’ place of origin was to the east. Cyrus’ conquests moved from the east to the north, and then south to Babylon. This Persian called upon God’s name in the decree that he issued allowing the Jews to return to their land (cf. Ezra 1:3). The language does not require that Cyrus be a worshiper of Yahweh.
   c. Power of his coming (41:25c): And he will come on princes as mortar, and as a potter he will tread the clay. The conqueror will come ruthlessly. Princes will have no more power to resist him than street mortar has to resist trampling. Changing the figure, the conqueror is likened to a potter who treads on the clay that he will later shape. The point: the coming conqueror will quickly and easily trample under foot all who opposed him.
2. He declared in advance his work (41:26-27): a. Importance of prediction (41:26a): Who has declared from the first that we may know, and from before that we can say, It is right? Who means who among the idols? From the first refers to the beginning of the course of history that was about to unfold. Had any idol announced in advance the rise of Cyrus then believers would know that the idols were intelligent, omniscient and articulate. As history unfolds predictions can be verified by observers. The question implies that the idols have not made any predictions about Cyrus, but Yahweh has.
   b. Absence of prediction among idols (41:26b): Yes, none makes known; yes, none causes [us] to hear; yes, no one hears your words. Isaiah uses a strong Hebrew construction to deny that any idol produces predictions equivalent to the Cyrus prediction. None of them makes known (reveals) the future with such specificity. None of them causes people to hear, i.e., publicly announces predictions. People strain their ears listening for some sound from the idols, but no one hears your words. The idols are speechless!
   c. Presence of prediction in Zion (41:27): First to Zion, Behold! behold them! and to Jerusalem a messenger of good tidings I will give. The first announcement of the coming conqueror came to Zion/Jerusalem. It came through a messenger, Isaiah himself. The message was one of good tidings because the coming conqueror will liberate the Jews from bondage in Babylon. The double behold draws attention to the unexpected, shocking prediction. Them probably refers to the words of the prediction, or to the manifold aspects of the prediction. What the gods could not do, Yahweh has done.
   d. Absence of prediction among men (41:28): And I will look, but there is no man, and of these but there was no counselor, that I may ask them and they could return a word. God continues to speak. Yahweh looks for a man who is able to announce with pinpoint accuracy unforeseeable events. Of these idols there was no one who could step forward and serve as a counselor or advisor to men. If men cannot announce the future, perhaps the idols they worship will be able to do so. The v is pungent with sarcasm. The point: neither men nor their idols know anything about the distant future.
Both are in the dark about future events. Only Yahweh is omniscient.

**D. Grand Conclusion (41:29)**: *Behold, all of them are nothing, less than nothing are their works, wind and emptiness are their images.* Since idols cannot foretell future events Isaiah again presses the conclusion that they are empty and vain. *Behold* directs attention to this bold conclusion. *All of them* stands first in the sentence for emphasis. There are no exceptions to Isaiah’s conclusion regarding the gods. It is not that some gods are superior to others; all are equally worthless. *Their works* refers to the things that the idols are supposed to do. Their molten images are supposedly representations of the gods. They too are worthless. Isaiah dips into his verbal arsenal to come up with two new words for nonexistence: *wind and emptiness* (תֹּהַוּ). The latter term is used in Gn 1:2 to describe the earth before God began to fill it.

**CHAPTER 42 GOD’S SERVANTS**

In the last twenty-seven chs of the book Isaiah introduces two servants of God. One is obedient, the other disobedient. The first is an individual; the second represented the entire nation.

**MESSIANIC SERVANT**

42:1-9

Ch 42 begins with the first of five poems in which the spotlight is upon one who is called God’s Servant. The language is personalized, leading to the conclusion that the prophet was predicting the rise of a unique individual. These five poems are best explained messianically.

**A. Description of Servant (42:1a):**

1. *He is my Servant (42:1a): Behold my Servant, I will hold him fast...* Behold serves to draw attention away from the empty idols to the one who can bring salvation. Isaiah identified Israel as his servant in 41:8. Since the passage is addressed to Israel, it is unlikely that this servant is the nation. The Targum identifies the servant here as Messiah.

   The servant belongs to Yahweh. He is *my servant.* Yahweh willingly acknowledges him. The title is one of honor. *Hold him fast* indicates that the servant is sustained in his work by Yahweh.

2. *He is my chosen one (42:1b): my chosen one in whom I delight...* The title implies that not just anyone can do the work of the Servant. Only one chosen by Yahweh can perform that work. *In whom I delight* suggests the reason the Servant has been chosen. All that he says and does is pleasing to Yahweh. The NT uses this same expression of Jesus (Mt 3:17; 17:5).

   c. *He has been endowed for his work (42:1c): I will put my Spirit upon him.* The Servant is prepared for his work because he receives an endowment from Yahweh. *My Spirit* is the Holy Spirit (cf. 11:2-4). Those who possess God’s Spirit are equipped supernaturally to perform their work. At his baptism the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus (Mt 3:16). Later the Servant will acknowledge that the Spirit of Yahweh is upon him (61:1).

**B. Work of Servant (42:1b-4):**

1. *His success (42:1b): Judgment to the nations he will bring forth.* The Servant shall *bring forth,* probably from Zion, the *judgment to the nations,* i.e., the Gentiles. The Servant is a missionary. *Judgment* (מִשְׁפָּט) has many nuances. The term embraces all functions of government. The Servant makes known to pagans those principles of life and spiritual laws that have been set forth by the heavenly Judge or Ruler. The fact that he needs an endowment of the Spirit to carry out this task suggests that this work is attended by difficulties.

2. *His method (42:2-3):* Five negative verbs indicate the method of the Servant’s work. Three describe his public ministry, two his private ministry. These negatives are followed by a positive description of his work.

   a. *His public ministry (42:2): He will not cry out, nor will he lift up his voice, nor will he cause to be heard his voice in the street.* First, he will not *cry out.* Matthew gives the meaning intended here when he renders this verb *strive* (Mt 12:19). Thus
in the fulfillment of his mission the Servant will not cry out in strife. Second, he will not *lift up his voice*. This verb is parallel to the previous one. The Servant speaks calmly, quietly, and confidently. Third, *he will not cause to be heard his voice in the street*. He does not accomplish his work with bombastic oratory and flamboyant antics that call attention to himself.

b. His private ministry (42:3a): *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoking wick he will not extinguish*. Fourth, *a bruised reed he will not break*. This is a figure for people who are battered and broken by the storms of life. Bruised reeds are weak people, discouraged people, and those who struggle with faith. They are the oppressed and mistreated. On such the Servant takes pity. He encourages them; he lifts them up. Fifth, *a smoking wick he will not extinguish*. This represents the person whose light of witness has been extinguished. Only the smoke remains to indicate that one time this person was spiritually useful and productive. Even this useless and possibly obnoxious person the Servant does not drive away.

c. The positive of his method (42:3b): *According to truth he will bring out judgment*. Though the Servant is gentle in dealing with society’s wounded souls, yet he does not compromise the absolute principles of truth. These words are applied to Jesus in the NT.280 He *will bring out judgment* is repeated from v 1 in order to emphasize the Servant’s successful mission. It is truth that ultimately wins the day, not violence and oppression. His judgment or government is founded on truth. Cf. 11:3, 4.

3. His disposition (42:4): *He will not be disheartened or crushed until he has set judgment on the earth*. For *his teaching the islands wait*. The first two verbs are related to the verbs used to describe the *bruised* (rāṣūṣ) reed and the *smoking* (kēhāh) wick in the previous v. *Disheartened* (r. khh) is lit., *grow dim*. He will not grow weak or get faint. *Crushed* (r. ṣṣ) indicates that he will not be so psychologically devastated that he cannot finish his work. *Until he has set judgment on the earth* again underscores the success of his mission. The verb is no longer he will *bring forth* (as in vv 1, 3), but he will *place*, i.e., establish, *judgment* (government) on the earth. *Earth* should be given its broadest connotation. The government of this Servant is world-wide in scope.

Through occasions of discouragement, the Servant shows no signs of weakness until he fulfills his objective, viz., the establishment of his government in the earth. Isaiah hints that the Servant will suffer for his cause, apparently at the hands of his own people.

The last line of v 4 links the Servant’s *judgment* (government) to *his teaching* (tôrâh). His kingdom is not of this world. Though he will have a hard time with his own people, his *instruction* (NASB margin) is eagerly awaited by distant nations. The spiritual hunger of all mankind is fully satisfied by his teaching. The Servant’s teaching is the gospel. Throughout the Roman Empire Gentiles eagerly listened to Paul. Thousands of them embraced the gospel, and entered into the kingdom of Christ.

C. Commitment of Servant (42:5-7):

1. Yahweh’s power (42:5): *Thus says God, Yahweh, the one who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes out of it, who gives breath to people upon it, and spirit to those who walk on it: To carry out his mission to bring judgment (government) to the world, the Servant needs Yahweh’s support. Yahweh is the Creator of the heavens and earth. God (ʾêl) is the title that stresses the absolute power of God. Created is the same verb used in Gn 1:1. Isaiah adds the words *stretched them out* to underscore the vastness of the heavens. Spread out the earth makes the same point. What comes out of it (the earth) refers to vegetation. Breath (nāṣāmāh) refers to the animating force that God placed in the nostrils of the first man (Gn 2:7). Spirit is synonymous with breath. Walk pictures people going about their business on the earth.

2. Yahweh’s assurance (42:6): Because he experiences difficulties in his ministry, the Creator
addressed words of reassurance to the Servant personally.

a. Preparation of the Servant (42:6a, b, c):

(1) His call (42:6a): *I am Yahweh! I have called you in righteousness...* The speaker in the previous v now identifies himself. *Yahweh* is the covenant name for God. If Yahweh empowers the work of the Servant, then the work of the Servant is not in opposition to the Sinai covenant, but rather a fulfillment of it.

The work of the Servant is rooted in Yahweh’s *righteousness*. The term means conformity to an established standard. To act in righteousness is to act in accordance with what is right and just. God is absolutely righteous and just. Thus righteousness points to the sovereign will of God. The Servant’s call to service accords with the sovereign will of the Creator.

(2) His sustaining power (42:6b): *and I will hold your hand.* The Servant’s task is difficult. All the forces of hell rally against him. Isaiah repeats the thought of v 1 that Yahweh holds the Servant’s hand throughout his mission.

(3) His protective presence (42:6c): *I will keep you...* Yahweh protects the Servant so that he can accomplish his mission.

b. Purpose of the Servant (2:6d, e):

(1) Covenant (2:6d): *and will make you for a covenant of (the) people...* Yahweh’s purpose is to make the Servant a *covenant of* (belonging to) *the people*. People may point particularly to Jews. The Servant becomes for them a covenant that replaces the old Sinai covenant. Context makes it clear that *covenant* is not referring to an agreement between two parties, but a bestowal of grace and blessing from God to his people. To say that the Servant is the covenant is to say that all covenant blessings are dispensed through him and because of him.

(2) Light (2:6e): *for a light to the Gentiles...* Light is figurative for salvation. Light is parallel to covenant in the previous expression. The point is that it is God’s purpose through the Servant to bring salvation and covenant blessings to Jews and Gentiles alike. Gentiles were regarded as being in a state of darkness. They are lost. They need salvation. The Servant will bring salvation to them.

3. Yahweh’s agenda (42:7):

a. Opening eyes (42:7a): *to open blind eyes...* Sinners are blind in that they cannot see reality. Christ spoke of himself as the light of the world. He brings the light to those who are living in darkness.

b. Liberating prisoners (42:7b): *to bring out a prisoner from prison, from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.* The sinner’s need of salvation is compared to a prisoner’s need for liberation from a dungeon. Only God’s Servant can truly set men free from sin’s bondage. Having come out of that prison the victims of sin’s bondage can enjoy the light of salvation and revelation.

D. Certainty of Servant (42:8-9):

1. Proof in the nature of God (42:8): *I am Yahweh; that is my name! My glory to another I will not give, nor my praise to graven images.* God announces his name again, because his name points to him as the God of redemption and covenant faithfulness. The name indicates God’s nature. The promised redemption for Jews and Gentiles is but a further expression of Yahweh’s customary work of redemption. The glory of Yahweh is that he always lives up to his name. No one can take that glory from Yahweh, i.e., make it impossible for him to keep his word. Nor will Yahweh give his glory to any other, certainly not to any idol. Therefore, the name Yahweh is a pledge of the wonderful redemption anticipated in the previous vv.

2. Proof in the predictions of God (42:9): *As for the former things, behold they have come to pass, and new things I am about to declare; before they spring forth I will announce them.* The speaker is probably Isaiah rather than Yahweh. Former things are earlier prophecies. New things are the things Yahweh is announcing about the Servant. These new things are compared to plants whose seeds are still in the ground. Even before those world events begin to take shape on the stage of history Isaiah announces them. The point is this: Other

---

281 The strongest argument to support the antithesis between *people* and *Gentiles* in this v is the use made of the v by Paul in Acts 26:17, 18.
prophecies made by Yahweh had come to pass. God’s people could have every assurance that these new things of the distant future will also come to pass.

MESSIANIC CELEBRATION
42:10-12

A. Praise on the Sea (42:10): Sing to Yahweh a new song, his praise from the end of the earth, you who go down to the sea and all that is in it, islands and all who live in them. The announcement of the new things that will bless Gentiles as well as Jews calls forth praise throughout the world. The command is addressed to all who read and believe these promises. The song is to be directed to Yahweh, the one who orchestrates the future. The song is to be new, because these songs have never before been sung on the earth. It is to be a song of praise. From the end of the earth means the praise is worldwide. Those who go down to the sea are sailors. If sailors are praising Yahweh, then the word of his praise will be spread far and wide. Even the creatures of the sea are called upon to join the praise. The islands refer to distant lands. Thus all the world is told to praise Yahweh.

B. Praise in the Wilderness (42:11): Let the wilderness and its cities shout, the settlements that Kedar inhabits; Let the inhabitants of Sela sing; let them shout from the top of mountains. The call for worldwide praise to Yahweh for the new things continues. Wilderness contrasts with the sea in the previous v. Although the Servant does not shout (v 2), those who hear of his mission do. Cities/settlements calls for praise in all population centers regardless of size. Kedar represent the wandering Bedouins of the desert. Sela is the Edomite capital, later known as Petra. Shout from the top of the mountains indicates the importance of the praise.

C. Praise to Yahweh Alone (42:12): Let them give glory to Yahweh, and announce his praise in the islands. The exhortation for worldwide praise reaches his climax. Yahweh will not give glory to another (v 8); neither should men. He alone is worthy of praise. Such praise recognizes Yahweh as the only God. Even the distant islands should hear the praise for the Living God.

MESSIANIC WORK
42:14-17

Isaiah used four word pictures to describe what God’s new work involves.

A. Military Picture (42:13): First, Isaiah used military language to describe God’s furious and successful attack against his enemies.
1. Yahweh goes forth (42:13a): Yahweh like a mighty man will go out, like a man of war he will stir up zeal... In order to make good on his promises, Yahweh goes out of his heavenly dwelling. His zeal to fulfill his promises is likened to a man of war who zealously marches forth to battle. His zeal is for his own honor and for the welfare of his people. Yahweh’s work is likened to a battle.
2. Yahweh fights the battle (42:13b): he will raise the battle cry, yes he will shout and he will triumph over his enemies. A battle commenced when the attacking forces shouted the battle cry. The battle concluded with a shout of triumph over the defeated foe. Yahweh not only goes to war on behalf of his people, he actually engages in the battle. Through the Servant Yahweh’s victory over sin is assured.

B. Birth Picture (42:14):
1. A period of silence (42:14a): I have kept silent for a long time [saying] I will hold my peace, I will restrain myself. In the second picture the speaker changes. Yahweh speaks. He admits that he been silent with respect to his people. This silence had lasted a long time, back to time of Moses and Yahweh’s revelation at Mount Sinai. The silence was not absolute; he had been comparatively silent. This silence was not due to lack of interest or impotence on his part; it was part of a deliberate strategy. Yahweh had determined
after Sinai to hold his peace, to restrain his actions respecting the on-going drama of redemption. Hebrew grammar suggests that the word saying must be inserted in the English translation to make sense of the v.

b. An outburst of energy (42:14b): Like a travailing woman I will groan, I will pant, I will gasp together. In contrast to the long period of comparative silence, Yahweh was about to initiate something new, so new that one can only go back to Sinai to find a parallel action of Yahweh. God compares himself to a woman in labor. With the work of the Servant Yahweh labors like a woman in travail to give birth to something new. When the period of comparative silence (inactivity) concluded, God spoke again through his Servant (Heb 1:1-2). One might say that the sending of the Servant was a labor of love, a labor that was painful to Yahweh. The verbs pant and gasp suggest eagerness in initiating a saving work for his people.

C. Road-builder Picture (42:15): I will lay waste mountains and hills, and all their vegetation I will dry up. I will turn streams into islands, and pools will I dry up. In the third picture Isaiah compared God to a trailblazer who removes all obstacles from the path of his people. Others see in this picture a transformation of nature that symbolizes the radically new work of the Servant.

D. Guide Picture (42:16): And I will make the blind to walk in a way they do not know; in paths they do not know I will make them tread; I will set darkness before them for light, rough places for straight. These are the things I have done, and I have not forsaken them. Finally, Isaiah portrayed Yahweh as the guide of his people. The v presents a threefold depiction of the condition of an unsaved man. (1) He does not know the right way, (2) he is blind, and (3) it is dark. Through the Servant a radical change comes about. The blind will be lead along a way that is unfamiliar to them. The darkness is replaced by light. Rough places are smoothed out. Yahweh alone is the one who can make these changes.

E. Warning (42:17): But they will be thwarted and be greatly ashamed who trust in graven images; those who say to a molten image, You are our gods. God’s people can look forward to the active intervention of Yahweh on their behalf. Those who cling to idols, however, are utterly put to shame. Judgment brings with it a sense of shame.

NATIONAL SERVANT 42:18-25

Isaiah now addresses the people and commands them to repent. God’s national servant Israel was quite a contrast to the messianic Servant. In this unit Isaiah describes the present condition of Israel; then he discusses the future prospects of the nation.

A. Failure of National Israel (42:18-19):
1. Unflattering address (42:18): O deaf ones listen! and you blind, look to see! Deafness and blindness point to the lostness of Israel. In the physical realm a deaf person cannot listen, nor a blind person see. But turning a deaf ear to the word of God is a matter of choice, and so is listening to that word. The national servant cannot see the will of God because his eyes are closed. The v implies that lost men are not so depraved that they cannot possibly turn to God without divine assistance.
2. Justified address (42:19): Who is blind but my servant? and deaf as my messenger whom I shall send? Who is blind like the one at peace with me? and blind like the servant of Yahweh? The four questions underscore the depths of the deafness and blindness of Israel. The first question emphatically makes the point that in comparison to Israel’s blindness, no other people were blind. Yet Israel is still Yahweh’s servant. No other people were as willfully deaf to Yahweh’s word as Israel. Yet, Israel had been chosen to be my messenger. Israel’s blindness and deafness made it impossible for the national servant to fulfill its mission as God’s messenger. One at peace with me (mšullām) is of uncertain meaning.
B. Privileges of National Israel (42:20-22):
1. Past advantages of Israel (42:20): You have seen many things but you will not keep them; to open ears, but you did not hear. Israel had seen many wonderful things in their history. They were witnesses to the mighty acts of God. But Israel did not keep those things before their mind. Israel had heard the great truths of God’s law, yet they did not truly hear, i.e., implement that word.

2. Intervention for Israel (42:21): Yahweh is willing for the sake of his righteousness; he will magnify the law that it may be glorious. The hands of Yahweh are not tied because his messenger/servant (Israel) is blind and deaf. He will intervene in history for the sake of his righteousness, i.e., in the interest of his eternal plan to bestow blessing on mankind through the Servant. In so doing he will magnify the law that it may be glorious. This he will do through the perfect obedience of the Servant to the law, and the perfect fulfillment of the demands of the law in the atoning sacrifice of the Servant.

3. Present plight of Israel (42:22):
   a. Plundered (42:22a): And it is a people spoiled and plundered... Clearly Israel needs divine intervention. They are compared to a caravan that has been robbed and plundered by bandits.
   b. Trapped (42:22b): all of them trapped in holes, and in prison houses hidden away. The second picture is of Israel hiding from enemies in holes. Others waste away in prison houses.
   c. Without deliverer (42:22c): They have become a spoil and there is no deliverer; a prey, and there is none saying, Restore. From their wretched condition there is no one to deliver them, no one except Yahweh. No one steps forward to order that these cowering prisoners be given their freedom. While the language of this v certainly fits the period of the Babylonian captivity, it is broad enough to depict the condition of all mankind under the bondage of sin.

C. Appeal to National Israel (42:23-25):
1. Appeal for attention (42:23): Who among you gives ear to this, will hearken that he may hear for time to come? Yahweh appeals for someone to listen to these predictions so that they can be documented in time to come.
2. Explanation of Israel’s plight (42:24-25):
   a. They sinned against Yahweh (42:24):
      (1) A focusing question (42:24a): Who has given Jacob for booty, and Israel to spoilers? Again Isaiah employed a question to force Israel into self-examination. Jacob is another name for Israel. How did it come about that the covenant people came to the condition of being treated like a commodity?
      (2) An informing question (42:24b): Has not Yahweh against whom we have sinned? It was not the gods of Babylon that brought on Israel’s plight. It was Yahweh, the God whose actions always are part of his long-range program redemption. The pronoun (we) indicates that Isaiah included himself among the sinners of his nation.
      (3) A clarifying statement (42:24c): and they were not willing in his ways to walk, and did not hearken to his law. Isaiah longed that Israel might take stock of her situation, that she might realize that her devastation was just punishment for a history of rebellion against God. To walk in Yahweh’s ways is parallel to hearken to his law.
   b. They refused corrective discipline (42:25): And he poured out upon them the wrath of his anger and the strength of war; and it set him on fire round about, but he did not know; and it burned him, and he did not take it to heart. The nation was scorched by the flame of God’s judgment over the centuries. The wrath of God is compared to liquid fire that is poured out upon the sinners. This wrath of Yahweh received concrete expression in the strength of war. Judgment fire burned on all sides of the nation, i.e., the land was encompassed by war. This judgment by the fire of war reached its climax in the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The nation Jacob was burned up, but still the significance of what had happened was not evident to them.

CHAPTER 43
ISRAEL’S MERCIFUL SAVIOR

FUTURE PROSPECTS
43:1-13

A. Protection for Israel (43:1-4):

1. Protector (43:1):
   a. Speaker (43:1a): But now thus says Yahweh, your Creator, O Jacob, and your Former, O Israel... But now introduces a contrast to Israel’s present dismal condition. Two names designate the special people of God, Jacob/Israel. This double name appears thirteen times in chs 40-49. The deceiver Jacob had his name changed to Israel when he underwent a spiritual transformation. Isaiah may be hinting that the nation must pass through its Jacob phase to become truly Israel. The pronoun you in this v is singular, conveying tenderness and intimacy.

   In relation to Jacob/Israel Yahweh calls himself Creator/Former. Like the creation of the heavens and earth in Gn 1-2, the creation of Israel reflects Yahweh’s sovereign will, his supreme power, and his wise purpose.

   b. Encouragement (43:1b): Do not fear because I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine. Do not fear does not mean that Israel will experience no suffering. The idea is that Israel’s redemption will come in spite of appearances to the contrary. Israel should never fear that Yahweh has lost control of things. I have redeemed you states the reason Israel need not fear. Yahweh redeemed Israel from Egypt. But here the perfect form of the verb refers, not to that past event, but to the certainty of the future redemption from captivity. Israel still figured in Yahweh’s plan. Redemption from Babylonian captivity was a sign and a first step in the greater redemption from sin’s captivity that led to the establishment of the new Israel of God.

   I have called you by name states the reason that redemption is certain. The phrase points to election, mission, a call to obedience and service. Yahweh makes a claim upon them; he calls upon them to respond to that claim by acting like his people. You are mine points to the result of redemption and calling.

2. Protection (43:2): Redemption, calling and special relationship with Yahweh will not prevent trials to come. No matter what the danger, Israel will survive. Isaiah pictured the nation on a journey.

   a. First picture (43:2a): When you pass through the waters, with you am I, and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. As God brought Noah through the waters of the Flood, so Yahweh will bring Israel through waters of adversity. As he brought Israel across the raging Jordan under Joshua, so Yahweh will hold back raging rivers that threaten the existence of the people of God.

   b. Second picture (43:2b): When you walk through the fire you will not be burned, and a flame will not be kindled against you. Wild prairie fires will not destroy God’s people. They will not even be singed by a flame (cf. Dan 3).

   In context Yahweh is speaking about Israel as a nation. There is no promise here to be claimed by individual believers. It is the collective witness of Israel that cannot be destroyed by adversity.

3. Assurance (43:3): For I am Yahweh your God, the holy one of Israel your Savior. The divine title echoes the opening of Ex 20 where the same title is connected with the Exodus. Israel’s safety was guaranteed by God’s presence. Yahweh uses three epithets of himself. First, he is your God. He is the God who delivered them from Egypt and entered into a covenant with them at Sinai. Israel can count on Yahweh to intervene at the appropriate time. Second, he is the holy one of Israel. He exists independently of Israel, and thus is not subject to the vicissitudes that may befall them. He is capable of coming to Israel’s aid because he is not in the same pathetic condition as the nation. Third, Yahweh refers to himself as your Savior. He saved them many times throughout their history; he will again intervene to rescue Israel from present and future oppressors.

4. Redemption (43:3b-4):
   a. Price of redemption (43:3b): I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba instead of you. Other nations will be given over to the conqueror
as ransom to secure the redemption of Israel. Egypt, Cush and Seba are in North Africa. The Persians were reimbursed, as it were, for the release of Israel by being permitted to conquer North Africa.

b. Reason for redemption (43:4a): Since you are precious in my eyes and you are honored, and as for me, I have loved you. Three reasons are given for Yahweh’s redemption of Israel. First, in God’s eyes Israel was precious. Second, God had honored Israel, i.e., shown them an esteem that he did not show to other peoples. Third, Yahweh declares his love for Israel. “Love involves choice and exclusion” (Young).

c. Price of redemption (43:4b): I will give a man instead of you, and nations instead of your soul. The principle of redemptive substitution is clearly set forth. A man probably is a collective; it is parallel to nations. Presumably the reference is to the three nations mentioned in the previous v.

B. Gathering of God’s People (43:5-9):
1. Encouragement (43:5a): Do not fear, for with you am I. Israel’s circumstances are very difficult, and promised redemption so unbelievable that Yahweh repeats the encouragement of v 1. With you am I consists of two words in the Hebrew text, the most precious two words that the people of God could ever hope to hear.

2. Universal gathering (43:5b-7a):
   a. Location of the gathering (43:5b-6): From the east I will bring your seed, and from the west I will gather you. (6) I will say to the north, Give, and to the south, Do not hold back! Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth.
      Two hints indicate that Isaiah was looked well beyond the eighth century. First, your seed suggests that the prediction applies to generations yet to come. Second, those who will be gathered by Yahweh are dispersed all over the world, north, south, east and west. In OT times national Israel was never so geographically dispersed. The prediction reaches down to messianic times. It refers to the gathering of sinners throughout the world through the preaching of the gospel. Those who respond to that gospel call become children of God. The restoration of Jews from Babylon was a sign, an illustration and a pledge of this greater gathering envisioned by Isaiah. The words from the ends of the earth and from afar suggest the great distance that separates people from their God prior to the gathering by Yahweh.
   b. Those who are gathered (43:7a): Everyone who is called by my name... These words further describe the sons and daughters of the previous v. Conquered cities were called by the name of the conqueror. So those who are called by God’s name are those that he has conquered through the gospel. Amos spoke of Gentiles nations that were called by Yahweh’s name, i.e., they belonged to him (Amos 9:12). So Isaiah’s gathering includes all God’s children, i.e., those who belong to Yahweh throughout the world whether Jew or Gentile.
3. Unified body (43:7b): and for my glory I have created him: I have formed him, yes I have made him. Those who are gathered throughout the world will become one body—a new Israel, or perhaps a metamorphosis of old Israel. Just as the gathering of the preceding vv was future, so the verbs in this sentence must be regarded as prophetic perfect. The new Israel is a new creation of God. The terms created/formed/made suggest that emergence of the new Israel is a work of God on a par with the creation of the universe in the beginning. The new Israel will be created for Yahweh’s glory. The NT makes clear that the new Israel is the church of Christ (Gal 6:16; Jam 1:1). The church reflects God’s glory (Eph 3:21; 5:27).
4. Transformed people (43:8-9):
   a. Once blind and deaf (43:8): Bring forth a blind people and they have eyes, and deaf ones, and they have ears. Yahweh has brought forth a blind people that have eyes. The reference is to the new Israel of God. The new Israel will consist of those who have been transformed by the power of the gospel. Those blind to the purposes and works of God are enlightened. They are given eyes. Those deaf to the word of God are given ears to hear. They now listen to his voice and obey his directives. Both Jews and Gentiles will be transformed by the power of the gospel when they
are created into the one body of Christ. The verb bring forth suggests that these once blind and deaf people are in bondage from which they must be delivered.

5. Challenge to idolaters (43:9):
   a. A picture of a trial (43:9a): All the nations are gathered together, and the peoples are being assembled. The nations are depicted as having gathered and as continuing to gathering for a trial.
   b. Failure to anticipate the future (43:9b): Who among them shall declare this... This refers to what Isaiah has just been describing, viz., the gathering of God’s people from all over the world into one body. Them refers to the nations themselves or to their gods. Neither Gentiles nor spiritually obtuse Israelites could have forecasted the creation of the new Israel. Yahweh alone revealed this tremendous development.
   c. Failure to explain former things (43:9c): and causes us to hear the former things? No one could point to past instances of equivalent foretelling.
   d. Appeal (43:9d): Let them give their witnesses that they may be justified, and let them hear and say, It is true. The Gentiles (or their gods) are given the opportunity to justify themselves in their past conduct. Yahweh is calling for defense witnesses to come forth and testify that they have anticipated the glorious work of God announced in the previous vv, or at least that they have explained past events. If such witnesses are not forthcoming, let the nations (and their gods) hear what Yahweh is saying, and let them acknowledge that what he is saying is true.

C. Testimony of Israel (43:10-13):
   1. Choice of Israel (43:10a): You are my witnesses (oracle of Yahweh), and my servant whom I have chosen... Isaiah is addressing the redeemed people. The words witnesses, servant and chosen set forth the special role of Israel in the plan of God. The plural witnesses suggests the responsibility of every Israelite to bear testimony to the Living God. The singular servant views the people of God collectively. National Israel failed in this high calling. But God’s program was not deterred. He brought forth in the fullness of time a new Israel (Messiah and the people who followed him).
   2. Training of Israel (43:10b-11): in order that you might know and believe in me, and understand that I am he. Israel was chosen for special training. Israel is given knowledge of God’s ways through prophets and apostles. To know God, however, also includes an experiential walk with him. Israel was chosen to be the custodian of faith in the true God.
      a. Yahweh is the only God (43:10c): Before me no God was formed, and after me there shall not be. In the OT age national Israel more often than not embraced false gods. But the new Israel will recognize that Yahweh alone is the true God. Before me no God was formed. The verb suggests that idols are primarily in view. No idols pre-date Yahweh. Since Yahweh lives forever, no idol can be formed after Yahweh no longer exists.
      b. Yahweh is the only Savior (43:11): I, even I am Yahweh, and there is no Savior besides me. The name Yahweh means he who is, and therefore stresses the eternality of God. But this name is always associated with deliverance and salvation. Since he is the only true God, he is the only one who is powerful enough to bring deliverance to his people.
   3. Superiority of Yahweh (43:12-13):
      a. His revelation (43:12a): As for me, I have declared... Yahweh foretold the future. This was a demonstration of his omniscience and sovereign power.
      b. His salvation (43:12b):
         (1) Yahweh had performed what he predicted (43:12b): I have saved, and I have caused to hear... No one can interfere with Yahweh’s announced salvation. He announces it before it occurs, and explains its significance after it occurs.
         (2) Yahweh performed the saving work alone (43:12c): and there is no stranger among you. Yahweh performed his saving work in the absence of any other god. In the call of Abraham, the deliverance from Egypt, and the covenant at Sinai there was no stranger, i.e., strange god, present. He will likewise effect the future salvation of Israel without any assistance of some other deity.
(3) Israel must bear witness to what Yahweh has done (43:12d): And you are my witnesses (oracle of Yahweh), and I am God. Israel’s responsibility was to bear witness to the saving work of Yahweh. The very existence of Israel is a testimony to the saving work of Yahweh. Jesus used these same words of his disciples (Acts 1:8).

c. His eternality (43:13a): Also from the day I am he, and there is no one from my hand delivering; I will work, and who will cause it to return? From the day refers to the very first day. From the beginning of time Yahweh alone has been God. He has not changed, and will not change. No one is his equal; no one can take anything out of the hand of Yahweh. No god can turn back or frustrate any work of God.

UNDESERVED PROMISES 43:14-21

Isaiah next placed in juxtaposition the unfailing goodness of God and the unworthy recipients of his goodness. In the category of undeserved blessing, Isaiah lists two promises that God had made to his people.

A. Downfall of Babylon (43:14-15):
1. Yahweh’s titles (43:14a): Thus says Yahweh your Redeemer, the holy one of Israel... Your Redeemer is common in the second half of the book, for these chs emphasize the work of Yahweh. The overthrow of Babylon is another manifestation of the work of Yahweh as redeemer of his people. Holy one of Israel is a title that is found throughout the book.
2. Yahweh’s judgment on Babylon (43:14b): For your sake I will send to Babylon and I will send them all down as fugitives, all of them, even the Chaldeans in the ships of their shout. First, God promised the overthrow of Babylon. Yahweh controlled the fortunes of other nations, even those of mighty empires. For your sake indicates that Cyrus will overthrow Babylon for the sake of the redemption of God’s people (cf. 45:4). I will send probably refers to Yahweh’s dispatching Cyrus against Babylon. The fugitives are identified as the Chaldeans or Babylonians. The ships of their shout refers to the ships about which the Chaldeans shout or boast. These were the smaller ships that sailed the Euphrates and the Persian Gulf. The picture then is one of the Chaldeans attempting to escape from the onslaught of the forces of Cyrus.

B. A New Exodus (43:16-21):
1. Old things (43:16-17):
   a. He divided the sea (43:16): Thus says Yahweh who gives a way in the sea, and in mighty waters a path. As an example of Yahweh’s redemption in past time Isaiah cites the crossing of the Red Sea. In as much as God had done the impossible for his people in the past, he can be trusted to do an even greater act of deliverance in the future.
   b. He destroyed armies (43:17):
      (1) Need for the overthrow (43:17a): Who brings out chariot and horse, the army and the mighty...
      This v references the destruction of the chariots of Pharaoh at the Red Sea. Four terms are used to describe that hostile force. Who brings out suggests that the movement of the hostile force is under the power of Yahweh.
      (2) Result of the overthrow (43:17b): together they will lie, and they shall not rise; they are extinct...
      Together points to the thoroughness of the destruction of Pharaoh’s army. The result of this action is indicated in the words they will lie, i.e., they will sleep the sleep of death. They have passed from the stage of human history, and they shall never return. As a threat to God’s people that army is extinct.
      (3) Ease of the overthrow (43:17c): like a wick they are quenched. The comparison points to the ease with which Yahweh dispatches this attacking force.
2. New things (43:18-21):
a. Greater than the former things (43:18): Do not remember former things, and the ancient things do not consider. The exodus from Egypt, great as it was, paled to insignificance compared to what Yahweh was planning to do for his people in the future. The negative here is 'al (temporary prohibition) not lō' (permanent prohibition). They are not forbidden to reflect on the exodus, but for the moment to put that aside and listen to what God is promising for the future.

2. Focus on the future (43:19a): Behold, I am about to do a new thing; now it will sprout, do you not know it? Behold emphasizes that what Yahweh is about to do is unexpected, even shocking. God was about to intervene in human affairs again to carry forward his plan for the ages. What he is about to do is called a new thing, i.e., a new development. Context makes it clear that this development supersedes in importance the exodus from Egypt. Whereas in 42:9 the new thing had not yet sprouted; now it will sprout, i.e., the new thing was materializing. To strengthen the notion that the new thing is sprouting, Yahweh asks a rhetorical question. The implication is that if they did not know what was starting to happen, they should have known it.

In the Spirit of prophecy Isaiah is addressing those that he predicted would be taken away to Babylon. Their redemption from captivity was drawing nigh. For this prophet the earlier stage of that grand redemption started with the rise of Cyrus and the deliverance of the remnant of Israel from captivity. But the new thing in its fullness is the greater redemption from the bondage of sin and the formation of the new Israel of grace, not race.

3. Nature of the new thing (43:19b-21): Radical changes in nature symbolize the radical nature of the changes that Israel will experience when the new thing is in full bloom.

a. Wilderness way (43:19b): Yes, I shall place in the wilderness a way... Yahweh makes a way in a trackless wilderness for his liberated people to walk.

b. Desert rivers (43:19c): in the desert rivers. Rivers spring forth in the desert, a miracle far eclipsing the water from the rock episodes that were part of national Israel’s wilderness trek. Wilderness and desert are no longer formidable obstacles for God’s people.

c. Transformed beasts (43:20a): The beast of the field will honor me, jackals and ostriches... When God delivered the Israelites from Egypt, animals suffered and died in the plagues. But in the coming age the beast of the field renders praise to Yahweh. The beast of the field is distinguished from cattle or livestock in Gn 2:20. The term field, however, points to pasture land, unfrequented country exposed to violence or wild beasts, land containing flora and fauna, open country outside a walled city, and an expanse of country in contrast to mountains. It is not clear whether jackals and ostriches are offered as examples of the beast of the field, or whether there are two categories of wild animals: viz., the beast of the field on the one hand, and the jackals/ostriches on the other. If the latter is the case, then the point is that all of the wild animals will honor Yahweh.

How does Isaiah imagine wild animals honoring God? Is it merely their survival in hostile circumstances that honors God? Or are the beasts symbolic of Gentiles. The verb honor with God as the object is always elsewhere used with men as the subject. Perhaps Isaiah is suggesting that the inhabitants of lifeless regions (Gentiles) will come to praise and honor Yahweh.

d. Life-giving water (43:20b): for I have placed water in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert to give drink to my people, my chosen. God’s new thing is figuratively described as bringing the water of life in abundance to barren regions. This may explain the honor bestowed upon Yahweh by the beast of the field in the first half of the v. Those who partake of this water of life are called my people, my chosen. Cf. Jn 4:10-14; 7:38.

b. Formation of a witnessing people (43:21): A people that I have formed for myself, my praise they shall recount. The new Israel of God is formed out of Jews and Gentiles who put their faith in Jesus. This holy nation has been formed for the purpose of setting forth my praise, i.e., the praise of Yahweh. Cf. 1 Pet 2:9.

282 See references in TW, 2:871.
UNWORTHY PEOPLE
43:22-28

Eight times in this unit Isaiah uses the negative not. In order to make clear the basis upon which Yahweh will bring about the redemption promised above, Isaiah lists the factors that did not have any bearing on God’s actions.

A. Basis of Yahweh’s Intervention (43:22-24):
1. No call of God (43:22): But it was not me that you called, O Jacob, but you were wearied because of me, O Israel. Israel did not call God, rather God called Israel to be his chosen people. In fact the opposite was true. National Jacob/Israel actually had become weary with Yahweh.

2. What Israel had not brought to God (43:23-24a):
   a. No burnt offerings (43:23a): You did not bring to me the sheep of your burnt offerings... Burnt offerings were voluntary offerings expressing total consecration to Yahweh. Perhaps the Judeans were opting for the much less expensive doves or pigeons that could be substituted for sheep in the burnt offering. Or perhaps the burnt offerings had lost all significance, and hence did not impress Yahweh.

   b. No God-honoring sacrifices (43:23b): and with your sacrifices you did not honor me. National Jacob/Israel did not give honor to Yahweh through their sacrifices. What offerings that were brought were not brought for the right purpose or presented in the right spirit. In effect, those sacrifices were not real sacrifices.

   c. No enthusiasm (43:23c): I have not made you to serve with a gift, and I have not wearied you with incense. The v implies worship weariness on the part of the Judeans. They viewed the sacrificial ritual as a burden, as irksome, and boring. They were showing no enthusiasm in their worship. Yahweh had not imposed an unreasonable, burdensome sacrificial system upon Israel. He had not forced them to serve (worship) him by presenting gifts to him. Yahweh did not require inordinate amounts of incense.

   d. No sweet cane (43:24a): You did not buy for me sweet cane with silver... Sweet cane was used in the production of incense. Israel’s lack of enthusiasm for Yahweh was indicated by the fact that they used cheap incense. Obviously worship was not important to them. Worship, therefore, certainly did not influence Yahweh in their favor.

   e. No effective peace offerings (43:24b): and with the fat of your sacrifices you did not drench me. To drench Yahweh with fat means to bring him joy through the fat of the peace offerings that they offered. Their sacrifices got them nowhere with God. Again, they either were offering no peace offerings, insufficient numbers of peace offerings, or else the manner in which they offered them rendered the excise futile.

3. What Israel brought Yahweh (43:24b):
   Rather you made me serve with your sins and wearied me with your iniquities. Yahweh had not burdened Israel with demands for sacrifice; but Israel had burdened Yahweh with their sins. The Judeans may have become worship weary; but God was wearied by their iniquities.

4. What Yahweh does for Israel (43:25): I, even I, am he that blots out your transgression for my own sake, and your sins I shall not remember. Though Israel did not call Yahweh, and did not worship him appropriately still he chose to blot out their transgression. This he did for my own sake, i.e., not because Israel deserved forgiveness. Israel’s forgiveness was a result of the unmerited favor of Yahweh. The verb blots figuratively depicts mankind’s transgressions as recorded in a book of remembrance. The blotting out was not an arbitrary action of Yahweh’s part; it was made possible because the debt for those transgressions was paid by him who knew no sin. Once sins are blotted out they can no longer be seen, hence are said no longer to be remembered.

B. Sin of the People (43:26-28):

The point of v 23 is that there was nothing in the way national Israel approached Yahweh in worship that might motivate him to orchestrate the grand redemption envisioned in this ch.
1. Summons to trial (43:26): Cause me to remember and let us enter into judgment together; recount yourself so that you may be justified. So that they might appreciate this pure act of grace, Israel was summoned to trial. Isaiah urged the nation to speak up in her own defense if she had anything to say.

2. Israel’s record (43:27): Your first father sinned, and your interpreters transgressed against me. Jacob, the first father of the nation, was a sinner. Throughout history all the interpreters or mediators—priests, prophets, kings—were sinners.

3. Judgment (43:28): So I will profane your holy princes, and I will give Jacob to the ban, and Israel to reproaches. The sin Israel had forced God to permit the defilement of holy princes, the interpreters of the previous v. They will be removed from the holy offices they held. No longer will they be able to function as the leaders of God’s people. Jacob (the nation itself) will be given to the ban (ḥārem), i.e., devoted to destruction. This is the same term that was used to describe the fate of the inhabitants of Canaan in the days of Joshua. Israel will thereafter become reproaches, i.e., other nations will mock the fate of Judah.

   The concluding vv of ch 43 emphasize that the future salvation of Israel is undeserved. At the same time that salvation is a stupendous miracle. Israel, once devoted to the ban, becomes the chief nation of the earth. God worked that miracle when he created the new Israel of God, the church of Christ, that holy nation of which Peter speaks (1 Pet 2:9).

CHAPTER 44
REDEMPTION BEGINS

REDEMPTION TRANSFORMATION
44:1-5

A. Introduction (44:1-2):
1. Addressee (44:1): And now hear O Jacob my servant, and Israel whom I have chosen. And now indicates the shift from the threat with which the previous ch concluded, and the bright promises of this unit. Judgment must surely come, but Jacob/Israel (the nation) is still God’s chosen servant. They need to hear the good news about what Yahweh has in store for them.

2. Speaker (44:2): Thus says Yahweh your Maker, and the one who formed you from the womb, he will help you. This v is similar to 43:1, but the phrase from the womb adds to the thought. Elsewhere Isaiah makes the point that Yahweh is Creator of heavens and earth; but here the focus is different. Yahweh is the Creator of the nation Israel. He took a ragtag group of slaves and forged them into a nation at Mount Sinai. From the womb suggests that even before the Israel’s birthday at Sinai Yahweh was shaping the nation. Israel’s prenatal period included the period of the Patriarchs and the four centuries in Egypt. From the womb has maternal connotation. Yahweh is comparing himself to a mother who brought forth the infant nation Israel at Mount Sinai. It is Israel’s Maker/Former who now pledges intervention to help his people.

3. Addressee (44:2b): Fear not, my servant Jacob, and Jeshurun whom I have chosen. The pledge of help from their national Maker/Former should banish all fear from the hearts of his people as the events of the future unfold. Three phrases underscore how precious these people are to Yahweh. First, they are my servant Jacob. As such they have a mission to perform. Second, they are Jeshurun. This is a term of endearment meaning righteous. By God’s grace Jacob (deceiver; heel grabber) is regarded as righteous. Third, they have been chosen. This choice was not based on merit, but on grace. Since Israel still means so much to God there is no need for fear on their part.

B. Promised Outpouring (44:3-4):
1. Illustration (44:3a): For I will pour out water upon the thirsty, and flowing waters on dry ground. Here is another reason God’s people should not fear. God promises to change their circumstances. Water in abundance symbolizes the spiritual blessings that await Israel. Thirsty is

---

283 Jacob/Israel are used forty-nine times as alternative names for the people of God.

284 Jeshurun is used as a term of endearment in Dt 32:15; 33:5, 26.
masculine; it probably refers to an individual rather than to the land, which is feminine. *Dry ground* represents the status of people in exile from God and from their homeland.

2. **Explanation (44:3b): I will pour out my Spirit upon your seed and my blessing upon your offspring.** The pouring out of water is now explained to represent the pouring out of God’s *Spirit*. This refers to the divine power that creates and animates. The language recalls Joel 2:29, with its fulfillment at Pentecost. *Your seed/your offspring* refers to descendents of Jacob. The result of the outpouring of God’s Spirit is *blessing*. This promise bolsters the exhortation not to fear.

3. **Result (44:4-5):**
   a. **Abundant growth (44:4):** *And they shall spring up in the midst grass, as poplars beside streams of water.* Abundant grass and tree growth symbolize the growth of God’s people as a result of the outpouring of God’s Spirit.
   b. **Alignment of Gentiles (44:5):** *This one will say, To Yahweh I belong, and this one will call by name of Jacob; and this one will write with his hand, To Yahweh, and by the name of Israel he will be titled.* Outsiders (Gentiles) one by one will take pride in becoming affiliated with the rejuvenated Israel. The first individual announces his conversion by proclaiming his allegiance to Yahweh. The second will *call by name Jacob*, i.e., he will call upon God in worship by referring to himself as Jacob. To identify with Jacob is to identify with Jacob’s God. So again, conversion is implied. The third individual will write the phrase *To Yahweh*, i.e., he writes a sign of ownership. He professes that he belongs to Yahweh. These converted Gentiles will be *titled by the name of Israel*. The title *Israel* is a title of honor, a designation for those who know Yahweh and are in covenant with him.

**SUPERIORITY OF YAHWEH**

44:6-9

A. **Yahweh Alone is God (44:6):** *Thus says Yahweh King of Israel, and his Redeemer, Yahweh of Hosts: I am the first and I am the last,* and apart from me there is no God. The true King of Israel was Yahweh. Judah’s rulers were but earthly representatives of Yahweh. Yahweh is Israel’s Redeemer who brought his people forth from the bondage of Egypt. Yahweh rules all the *hosts* of heaven and earth. He, therefore, is Almighty. Yahweh is the first in that he is prior to all creation. He is the last in that he is there at the end of human history. First/last asserts Yahweh’s eternality. Yahweh is the only God.

B. **Yahweh Predicts the Future (44:7):** *And who like me will call and declare it and set it before me, since my placing an ancient people, and coming things and those that come they will make known to them.* Again the idols are challenged. If any among the idols can be compared to Yahweh, let them *call* (announce) and *declare* the course of things to come. Let them *arrange* (their case) before me. The verb arrange (r. ‘rk) refers to the logical and systematic arrangement of a legal case. *Since my placing an ancient people* refers to the very beginning of time. Since the garden of Eden Yahweh has been announcing remarkable prophecies. *Coming things* points to the future. *Those that come* may refer to things soon to come to pass. So the challenge to the idols is that they predict either the remote or even the near future. If there are any among the idols like Yahweh they should be able to make such things known.

C. **Israel is God’s Witness (44:8):**
   1. **Exhortation (44:8a):** *Do not tremble, do not fear.* In view of whom Yahweh is, Israel need not fear whatever might tend to erode confidence in God.
   2. **Ancient testimony (44:8b):** *Have I not made you hear from of old and declared to you?* Isaiah is not setting forth a new truth about Yahweh. From the time of the founding of the nation at Sinai, Yahweh has made them hear the truth that he is the only God.
   3. **Public testimony (44:8c):** *You are my witnesses. Is there a God without me? And there is no Rock, none that I know.* Because they were beneficiaries of God’s grace and revelation Israel had a moral
obligation to be Yahweh’s witnesses. Their testimony should be clear and unequivocal: There is no God besides Yahweh. There is no Rock, i.e., no unchangeable support and refuge, besides Yahweh.

FOLLY OF IDOLATRY
44:9-17

A. Value of Idols (44:9):
1. Idols are worthless (44:10a): As for formers of images, all of them are emptiness and their desirable things do not profit. Idols are emptiness (tōhû), void of all life and power. The desirable things are the idols themselves. They do not profit, i.e., they cannot bring any blessing to worshipers.

2. Idolaters are blind (44:9b): Their witnesses they are; they do not see, and they do not know so that they may be ashamed. Their witnesses are those who worship idols. Idolaters cannot see the obvious. Their minds are so clouded and confused or else they would be ashamed of advocating such nonsense.

B. Production of Idols (44:10-17):
1. Man-made products (44:10-11):
   a. Men cannot make a god (44:10): Who has formed a god and poured out an image? It is for no profit. Yahweh created man; but no man can create a god. Yet that is exactly what idolaters try to do. They labor tirelessly, working with molten metal, in order to produce an image. Such effort profits nothing.
   b. Idol makers are mere men (44:11): Behold, all his associates will be ashamed; and the craftsmen, they are of men. Let them assemble, all of them, let them stand up, let them tremble, let them be ashamed together. Associates of an idol are those who worship it. These associates will be ashamed when they realize that their idols are helpless to aid their worshipers in a time of need. Those who make idols are merely men. They are unable to make anything stronger than men. Both the associates and the craftsmen come together in assembly. None of them has the courage to stand up and speak in defense of their idols.

2. Perishable material (44:12-17): In order to mock the whole concept of idolatry, Isaiah describes how idols are made. Some of the details of the process are unclear.
   a. Iron tools (44:12): One has fashioned iron with a tool, he has worked in the coals, and with hammers he shaped it, and worked it with a strong arm. Also he was hungry and has no strength, he has not drunk water and is faint. Idol production starts with a lump of iron. It is worked with an appropriate tool. The worker beats out the iron upon the anvil. He works with hot coals. He beats the iron into the proper shape. The craftsman demonstrates great strength in this effort. The last sentence either stresses that the craftsman is a mere man; or it exhibits the tremendous effort that the craftsman puts forth in the production of his idol.285
   b. Wooden images (44:13): The woodworker stretches out a line; he draws on it with a stylus; he works it with chisels, and with the compass he marks it. And he will make it like the figure of a man, like the beauty of mankind to dwell in a house. The craftsman sketches the image on a block of wood. He chisels out the rough shape, and traces the finer details with a compass. The idol takes the shape of a man. It is made beautiful and given a house or temple in which to dwell.
   c. Source of the wood (44:14): In order to cut for himself cedars; he has taken cypress and oak, and has strengthened it for himself among the trees of the forest, he planted a laurel and the rain makes it grow. The wood of the idol originates in the trees of the forest. The cutter cuts the tree for his own purposes. The wood could come from cedars, cypress, oak or laurel. Even before that he must grow the trees. He strengthened it by taking care of it. He depends on the rain from the God of heaven to make his special tree grow.
   d. Use of the wood (44:15-17): And it will be for a man to burn, so he took some of them and warmed himself; yes, he will kindle and bake bread; yes, he will form a god and worship; he made it into an image and bowed down to it. (16)

285Some think v 12 refers to a metal image, and v 13 to a wooden idol. But v 12 seems to start with the tools needed in the production of idols, and v 13 with the wooden image itself.
Half of it he burned in the fire, over the half he eats meat; he will roast a roast and be satisfied. (17) And the rest of it he made into a god, for his graven image; he will bow down to it and say, Save me, for my god are you. From the same tree that he secures material for the idol, a man will take firewood for warmth and cooking. From the remaining wood of the tree the man forms his idol, and then worships before it in gratitude. One would think that the gratitude should flow in the opposite direction since it was only by chance that wood of the idol had not been burned in the fire. In vv 16-17 Isaiah reinforces the point of v 15 and paints his picture in more vivid detail.

**DELUSION OF IDOLATERS**

44:18-20

**A. Source of Delusion** (44:18): They do not know and they do not understand, for he has smeared their eyes from seeing, and their hearts from acting wisely. Idolaters do not recognize the foolishness of their practices. He (Yahweh) has smeared their eyes from seeing, i.e., he has permitted the delusion that blinds the eyes of idolaters. The smearing is not literal but refers to spiritual blindness. Blindness of eyes and hearts kept them from acting wisely, i.e., to reject idolatry and embrace the worship of the Living God. As men refuse to see the obvious in creation, and embrace the created rather than the Creator, God permits their hearts to become increasingly hardened.

**B. Result of Delusion** (44:19): So he does not make it return unto his heart, and there is no knowledge or understanding to say, Half of it I have burned in the fire, and also I have baked bread upon its coals; I will roast meat and eat. Then its remainder I will make into an abomination, to the trunk of a tree I will bow down. This v makes clear that the smearing of the eyes in the previous v is not an arbitrary act by God. The idolater never gives any serious thought to his actions. He has control of his thoughts, but he will not permit himself to think about how ridiculous his conduct is. The idolater does not rehearse in his mind the fact that the same wood that was burned in the fire for cooking fuel is the wood that was made into his idol. Were he to bring this absurdity to mind, the idolater would realize that his idol was an abomination.

**C. Implications of Delusion** (44:20):

1. **Further reason for delusion** (44:20a): Feeding on ashes, a deluded heart has led him astray. The idolater has allowed himself to be deluded because he is feeding on ashes. He does not take into his heart and mind worthwhile material. He only hears or reads what agrees with his predilections. God will permit one who does not love the truth to believe a lie (2 Thess 2:11). The deluded heart will lead a person even further away from God.

2. **Further result of the delusion** (44:20b): He cannot deliver himself, and he will not say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? When the judgment of God falls upon the land the deluded idolater cannot deliver himself. But even then his mind is so warped that he cannot believe that the idol he holds in his right hand is a worthless hoax. The idol is a lie because it professes to be what it is not, viz., a representation of a deity that is powerful enough to intervene in human affairs.

**ROLE OF ISRAEL**

44:21-23

**A. God’s Servant** (44:21):

1. **Obligation of God’s servant** (44:21a): Remember these, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant. Israel must ever remember their calling as God’s servant. As in 40:27 the nation is called by the dual name Jacob/Israel. If the nation remembers their role as Yahweh’s servant they will not be seduced by the foolishness of idolatry. As Yahweh’s servant the nation should always be ready to do his bidding.

2. **Forming of God’s servant** (44:21b): I formed you, a servant to me are you... While the heathen fashioned their gods, Yahweh fashioned his people. Formed refers to the creation of the nation at Sinai. The very reason that Israel exists as a nation is to
function as Yahweh’s servant, i.e., to do his biding in the world.

3. Result of being God’s servant (44:21c): **Israel, you will not be forgotten by me.** As God’s servant, Israel is not going to be forgotten, i.e., abandoned, by Yahweh.

**B. Redeemed People** (44:22-23):

1. What God had done (44:22a): **I have wiped away your transgression like a thick cloud, your sins like a cloud.** God had not forgotten his people. In his grace he had wiped away, lit., blotted out, their sins. The verb is prophetic perfect. The sins are presumably blotted out of book of remembrance. Those sins are wiped away as easily and quickly as the wind dissipates a thick cloud. The cloud may have been chosen for this illustration because it symbolizes a barrier between heaven and earth.

2. What God asks Israel to do (44:22b): **Return unto me, for I have redeemed you.** Removal of the burden of sin meant that there was no longer any barrier between Yahweh and his people. God invites his people to respond to his grace by returning to him with all their heart. Redeemed implies that a price has been paid for their forgiveness. God paid the redemption price for the sins of mankind; for this reason he can command men to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38).

   a. Call for celebration (44:23a): **Sing O heavens, for Yahweh has done it; shout depths of the earth; break forth O mountains in joyous shouts, O forest, and every tree in it!** The undeserved redemption of Israel called forth universal praise to Yahweh. For Yahweh has done it repeats the grand declaration at the conclusion of Ps 22. The reference is to the redemption of Israel. The heavens are to sing; the depths of the earth are to shout. The former includes sun, moon, stars, and perhaps angels. The latter refers to Sheol (the abode of the dead), and possibly caves and the like. Mountains and forests as well are to join the celebration over redemption. The ancients went to the mountains to feel close to their gods, and to the forests to find the materials to construct their gods.

   But both mountains and forests praise Yahweh for the redemption that he has brought to earth.

b. Reason for celebration (44:23b): **for Yahweh has redeemed Jacob and in Israel he glorifies himself.** All creation testifies to the power of God; but the presence on earth of a redeemed people testifies to his grace. In both creation and redemption God brings glory to himself.

**SUPERIORITY OF YAHWEH**

44:24-28

God had announced three times thus far his intention to raise up a Gentile deliverer for his people (41:2-5; 41:25; 43:14). In one of the most amazing predictions in the Bible, Isaiah now named that emancipator 150 years before he appeared on the scene of history.

**A. Creation** (44:24):

1. Creator (44:24a): **Thus says Yahweh your Redeemer, the one who formed you from the womb...** Thus says Yahweh underscores the solemnity of the message. Yahweh is preeminently the Redeemer. He redeemed Israel from bondage in Egypt; he will redeem them from bondage in Babylon. The prophets anticipated that an even greater redemption from the bondage of sin was part of the future God had planned for the earth.

   After Yahweh redeemed the descendants of Jacob from Egypt, he formed them into a nation. The birth of that nation took place at Sinai; but Yahweh was forming them in the womb even prior to the birthday. On this expression from the womb, see on v 2.

2. Declaration (44:24b): **I am Yahweh the Maker of everything, who stretches out the heavens by myself, who spreads out the earth— who was with me?** Israel’s Redeemer is the Maker of everything. He is the Creator. The phrase stretches out the heavens is repeated from 40:22. By myself eliminates any helper. Unlike paganism that parcels out the various components of the created order to different gods, Yahweh takes all the credit for himself. Spreads out the earth stresses the vastness of the earth. Who was with me is parallel to by
myself. The question anticipates a negative answer. Nobody was there when the Creator created the earth. NT theology teaches that Christ was the agent of creation (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16). But if no one was with Yahweh when he created the heavens and earth, then Christ the Son must be one with the Father.

B. Frustration (44:25): who breaks the signs of boasters, and makes fools of diviners; who turns back the wise, and their knowledge he makes foolish. The secrets of the future belong solely to Yahweh (Dt 29:29). He frustrates the effort of all those who try to penetrate the future apart from his revelation. Signs are lying wonders performed by false prophets to credential their messages. Boasters (baddîm) are those who babble about the future. It appears to refer to false prophets. Yahweh can thwart those signs, reverse the prophecies, and thereby make those who utter them to appear foolish. Diviners are those who attempt to ascertain the future by means of external objects. The wise are political advisers who by human wisdom and analysis attempt to chart the future of the nation. The advice of these counselors is made to look foolish by Yahweh.

C. Confirmation (44:26a): Who makes the word of his servant stand, and the counsel of his messengers he fulfills... Yahweh confirms the word of his servant, i.e., those like Isaiah who announce his word. Because he is omnipotent he can implement the counsel that his accredited messages recommend. Stand (r. qûm) is the same verb used in 40:8 for the word of God.

D. Restoration (44:26b): the one who says to Jerusalem, You shall be inhabited, and to the cities of Judah, You shall be built, and her ruins I will raise up. This v anticipates the restoration of Jerusalem after the exile in Babylon over two and a half centuries after the days of Isaiah. After a period of depopulation, the cities of Judah will once again be inhabited. Her ruins I will raise up suggests the physical rebuilding.

E. Liberation (44:27-28):
1. He removes obstacles (44:27): The one who says to the deep, Be dry, and your rivers I will make dry. The language is based on what Yahweh did at the Red Sea. But here the rivers and deep symbolize the barriers that stand between the exiles and their return to their homeland. Just as Yahweh made a way through the Red Sea, so God will provide a way through the barriers preventing Israel’s return. Some think that this v alludes to the moat that protected Babylon from attack. That watery barrier did not prevent Cyrus from conquering the city.
2. He raises up Cyrus (44:28a): The one who says to Cyrus, My shepherd; and all my desire he will fulfill... The human agent through whom promises of restoration will be fulfilled is specifically named. Cyrus will be the one who makes possible the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple. On behalf of Yahweh he will shepherd God’s people back to the Promised Land. In his capacity of Yahweh’s shepherd Cyrus will fulfill all the desire of the Lord respecting his people Israel.
3. He restores Jerusalem (44:28b): and saying to Jerusalem, You shall be built, and the temple shall be founded. The prophecy ends with a direct address to Jerusalem and the temple. Cyrus will make possible the return of the Judeans to Palestine, the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 45
CYRUS AND GOD’S PLAN

SUCCESS OF CYRUS
45:1-7

A. Reason for his Success (45:1-3):
1. Addressee (45:1a): Thus says Yahweh to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I hold fast... A solemn introduction indicates that the words that follow are Yahweh’s message. He addresses his agent Cyrus, who is now named for the second time. Anointed is used of prophets (Ps 105:15), priests and kings (numerous passages) and the Messiah (e.g., Ps 2:7). The term is parallel to my
shepherd of the previous v. One whose anointing is recognized by Yahweh is one who has received a special measure of God’s Spirit to enable him to perform a God-given task. Whose right hand I hold fast suggests that Yahweh gives to his anointed his full support. At the same time, the expression indicates that Cyrus is under the control of Yahweh. He does the bidding of Yahweh.

2. Purposes of Cyrus (45:1b): to tread down before him nations, and the loins of kings I will loosen, to open before him doors, and gates will not be shut. Nation after nation will fall before Cyrus. This is made possible because Yahweh will loosen the loins of kings. He will undo the binding girdle so that they will be unable to fight. The Lord of history makes kingdoms so weak that they readily fall before Cyrus. The open doors/gates may refer specifically to Babylon. Cyrus claims that the citizens of Babylon opened the gates of the city to him and welcomed him as a liberator.

3. Promises to Cyrus (45:2-3a):
   a. General promise (45:2a): As for me, I will go before you... Yahweh begins to speak directly to Cyrus. Because Yahweh says he will lead Cyrus to victory is assured.
   b. Obstacles removed (45:2b): and heights I will level; doors of bronze I will break, and bars of iron I will cut. Three symbols of obstacles that might stand in the path of Cyrus are named: heights, doors of bronze, bars of iron. The precise meaning of the word translated heights is not known. Clearly, however, the clause is affirming that Yahweh will remove obstacles from the path of Cyrus. The doors and bars of metal probably refer to the actual gates and doors of Babylon.
   c. Treasuries confiscated (45:3a): And I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hidden treasures of secret places... Easy access to cities will cause unspeakable treasures of gold, silver and precious stones to fall into his hands.

4. Enlightenment of Cyrus (45:3b): so that you may know that I Yahweh, who calls you by name, am the God of Israel. Through this success Cyrus will come to know God better. Jewish tradition reported by Josephus records that the great Persian king was shown these prophecies after he conquered Babylon in 539 BC. The statements made here by Isaiah do not require that Cyrus embrace the worship of Yahweh. As a matter of fact he did not. In the Cyrus Cylinder he attributed his success to the god Marduk.

B. Mission of Cyrus (45:4-8): All that will be done for and through Cyrus is done for two reasons.

1. Deliverance for Israel (45:4-5):
   a. Israel’s sake (45:4): For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen that I call you by name, I title you, although you do not know me. God will use this pagan king to bring about deliverance for Jacob my servant/my chosen. To call him by name is to set Cyrus apart from other rulers. Titles of honor (anointed, shepherd, my servant) are bestowed on Cyrus for the sake of Israel. Yahweh did this for Cyrus even through at the time Yahweh called him, Cyrus was immersed in idolatry and had never heard of Yahweh.
   b. Israel’s God (45:5): I am Yahweh, and there is no other; except for me there is no God: I will gird you, although you do not know me... Israel’s deliverer is actually Yahweh, the God who has delivered Israel on so many previous occasions. Only Yahweh could announce in advance the rise of Cyrus and orchestrate his conquests because Yahweh alone is God. It is Yahweh who girds Cyrus. He endues him with strength, invests kingship in him, all for Israel’s sake.

2. Evidence for the world (45:6-8):
   a. Breadth of recognition (45:6): so that they may know from the rising of the sun unto the place of its setting, that there is none besides me; I am Yahweh, and there is no other. The work that Cyrus will do is designed to convince all people that Yahweh alone is God. The return of the Judeans from Babylon was the first link in a chain of events that culminated in the coming of Messiah and preaching of the gospel. Gentiles throughout the world will eventually come to recognize Yahweh alone as God.
   b. Depth of recognition (45:7): Who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates calamity; I am Yahweh who does all these
**PERFECTION OF GOD’S PLAN**

45:8-25

The remaining vv of ch 45 defend God’s plan to utilize Cyrus. The call of that Persian king is the first step in a long program to bring all men into submission to his lordship. Five points are made with regard to God’s plan.

A. **Unchallengeable in Origin** (45:8-10):

1. **Two commands** (45:8):
   a. **To the heavens** (45:8a): *Drop, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds pour out righteousness...* The Creator of light and darkness calls upon the heavens he controls to rain down righteousness. The verbs paint a picture of the abundance of righteousness. The term applies to an action that demonstrates that God is right in all his works and ways. It also applies to conditions when men are in the right relationship with God, and thereby with one another.
   b. **To the earth** (45:8b): *let the earth open, and let salvation and righteousness grow, let her bring them forth together, I Yahweh have created it.* Yahweh can give commands to the earth as well as to the heavens. Let the earth open to receive the rain from heaven. Yahweh calls for salvation and righteousness to grow out of the earth together. The deliverance from Babylonian captivity is seen to be a righteous intervention by Yahweh. This righteous deliverance is created by Yahweh. The some mighty power and sovereign will that brought into being the heavens and the earth in the beginning will bring about the overthrow of Babylon and the deliverance of Israel.

   The cooperation of heaven and earth in v 8 may be a metaphor for the divine/human involvement in the deliverance from Babylon.

2. **Two woes** (45:9-10): What audacity to question God about anything! He is, after all, the master designer of all that exists. A double woe is pronounced on those who dare question the Creator.

   a. **First woe** (45:9): *Woe to the one who strives with his Maker, a potsherd with potsherds of the ground. Woe comes from the vocabulary of lament. Strives in this context refers to argument, especially argument designed to discount the promises man’s Maker has given. A potsherd with potsherds means an ordinary piece of clay.

   b. **Probing questions** (45:9b): Shall clay say to its Maker, What are you doing? and the work, You have no hands. The question underscores the absurdity of a man arguing with his Maker. A piece of clay does not question the potter by demanding an explanation of what the potter intends to do with the lump. Neither does a man question God by asking, “What is your purpose in this?” The work is parallel to clay. When the potter’s hands are busily shaping the clay, it would be ludicrous for the object to allege that the potter has no hands. So also with God’s hand active in the affairs of men, what sense does it make for mere creatures to allege that he is not shaping events.

   c. **Second woe** (45:10): *Woe to the one who says to a father, What will you beget? and to a woman, What will you bring forth?* The thought of v 9 is repeated under a different figure. The use of father (rather than his father) and woman (rather than his mother) suggests the speaker’s disrespect for his parents. What an absurdity for an unborn child to question his father and mother about his forthcoming birth. It is equally absurd for anyone to question God about what he is in the process of bringing forth in the world.

   This passage is a rebuke to those in Israel who question whether Yahweh should or would use Cyrus to deliver his people.
B. Consistent in Direction (45:11-13):
1. Challenge to ask (45:11): Thus says Yahweh, the holy one of Israel and his Maker: Ask me things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command me Yahweh begins his reply to those who question him by reminding them about who he is. He is the holy one of Israel, and the Maker of the nation. The tone of the imperative (ask) is probably sarcastic: Go ahead and ask me about things to come. My sons refers to Israel. If they have a better plan for how Yahweh should perform his work, let them play God and give the orders.
2. Yahweh’s powerful hand (45:12): As for me, I have made the earth, and man upon it have I created. I by my hands have stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded. If they are going to question God and give him orders they should remember who it is that they are addressing. Yahweh is the creator of earth and of man. He stretched out the vast heavens and gives orders to all the starry host that occupies those heavens.
3. Yahweh’s righteous plan (45:13):
   a. Stirring of Cyrus (45:13a): As for me, I have stirred him up in righteousness... Although he does not mention Cyrus by name, clearly he is in view. Cyrus’ appearance on the stage of history was not an accident; it was not the result of Cyrus’ doing. Yahweh raised him up. In righteousness indicates that the rise of Cyrus has to do with Yahweh’s saving purpose for his people. The righteousness of God is revealed in Cyrus through the judgment on Babylon, and the deliverance of Israel. God is true to his word; he is faithful to his promises.
   b. Ways of Cyrus (45:13b): and all of his ways I will make straight. The thought is similar to 40:3. Not only will Yahweh raise up Cyrus, he will make his ways smooth before him. No obstacle will stand in the path of this king accomplishing Yahweh’s purpose for his people.
   c. Deeds of Cyrus (45:13c): He shall build my city and my captivity he will send away... My captivity is the spiritual remnant that was held in Babylon throughout the period of Babylonian supremacy.

Cyrus has a twofold mission with respect to Yahweh’s people, here stated in reverse chronological order. Cyrus’ decree allowing captive Judeans to return home ultimately made possible the rebuilding of my city, i.e., Jerusalem. It turned out to be almost a century after the return from Babylon before Nehemiah was finally able to get Jerusalem’s wall rebuilt and repopulate the city.

d. Recompense for Cyrus (45:13d): not for reward, and not for money, says Yahweh of hosts. Without thought of compensation Cyrus will liberate the Jewish captives and permit Jerusalem to be rebuilt. Though Cyrus was enriched by his conquests, there was no tangible reward when he terminated the captivity of the Jews. In fact, it could be argued, that it actually cost the Persians to send back the captives. Over five thousand valuable temple treasures were surrendered to the captives to be transported back to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:7-11). Some of the financing for the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple came from the Persian treasuries (Ezra 6:4; cf. 7:15).

C. Universal in Scope (45:14):
1. Enrichment of Zion (45:14a): Thus says Yahweh: The toil of Egypt and the gain of Cush, and the Sabeans, men of measure, unto you will pass over, and to you they will belong. After the restoration under Cyrus, Zion will enjoy a glorious future. Gifts from distant lands come to the place. The three peoples mentioned are representative of the entire heathen world. The toil of Egypt and gain of Cush point to the material wealth of those Gentiles. The Sabeans were a people who lived south of Egypt. Men of measure refers to tall men. The wealth of these Gentiles passes over to Israel when these peoples are converted to true faith.
2. Enlargement of Zion (45:14b): After you they will walk, in chains they will pass over, and unto you they will bow down, and to you they will pray. Converts from afar will cheerfully bind themselves as though with chains to Zion. After you they shall walk points to a voluntary decision on the part of the Gentiles. Gentiles come to Zion when they embrace the gospel of Christ. In chains they shall pass over means that Gentiles become
bondservants of Zion. They voluntarily devote their energies to the interests of Zion. Bow down/pray is not worship, but reverence growing out of the recognition that only in Zion is the true God present.

3. Reason Gentiles come (45:14c): Only in you is God, and there is none beside, gods do not exist. The Gentiles attribute their conversion to a realization that Yahweh is the only God. Gods do not exist indicates that these Gentiles have turned from idols to serve the Living God (1 Thess 1:9). Depicted here is NT conversion through which men come to Mount Zion (Heb 12:22) and become part of the new Israel of God (Gal 6:16).

D. Certain in Results (45:15-17):
1. God’s hiding (45:15): Surely you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior. Isaiah burst forth into a prayer of adoration for God’s mysterious dealings with his people. God hides himself when he allows his people to experience judgment. In the murky circumstances of life God keeps his purposes hidden. Only when he chooses to reveal his plans can mankind grasp what he is doing. The Creator has revealed himself to be the God of Israel and their Savior. The light of that truth can penetrate the darkest night of human discouragement.
2. Idolaters’ shame (45:16): They are ashamed, and also humiliated, all of them; together they walk in humiliation, craftsmen of images. While Israel experiences God’s hiding, in the end the idolaters will be put to shame. Their shame and humiliation can be attributed to the overthrow of mighty Babylon, and the exaltation of Israel. Those who make images will be totally confounded by the manifest impotence of idols.
3. Israel’s salvation (45:17): Israel is saved in Yahweh with everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed, and you will not be humiliated forever. Idolaters are eventually put to shame; but those who trust in Yahweh experience everlasting salvation. Israel here is not the nation, but the spiritual remnant. It is the true Israel that experiences everlasting salvation. This salvation is found in Yahweh, i.e., through an intimate union with him. Everlasting salvation indicates that Isaiah is not speaking of temporal deliverance, but one that endures through ages to come. Those who experience this salvation never experience a shame like those who venerate idols.

D. Rational in Design (45:18-21):
1. Acknowledging Yahweh is rational (45:18):
   a. Evidence of creation (45:18): For thus says Yahweh, Creator of the heavens, he is God, Former of the earth and its Maker; he established it, not an emptiness did he create it, for dwelling he formed it. I am Yahweh, and there is none other. Israel will experience everlasting salvation because Yahweh is the Creator of the heavens and earth. He did not create the heavens and earth for emptiness, i.e., for no purpose. He created the earth to be inhabited. If that is true of the earth in general, it is also true for the Promised Land. Sin brings about the desolation of a land; salvation deals with the sin issue, thus makes possible habitation of the land. The author of this great pronouncement is Yahweh, the only real God.
   b. Evidence of revelation (45:19): Not in secret have I spoken, in a dark place of the earth, I have not spoken to the seed of Jacob, Seek me in emptiness. I am Yahweh, speaking righteousness, declaring right things. Yahweh’s clear revelations to Israel show him to be the one true God. Not in secret have I spoken indicates that Yahweh has made his revelations public through his prophets. Men do not have to go searching for God’s revelation in some dark place of the earth. The descendants of Jacob were never told to seek me in emptiness (tōhû), i.e., in vain. Yahweh has never encouraged any religious exercise that does not bring worshippers into a personal relationship with him. In his revelation Yahweh is speaking righteousness, declaring right things, i.e., he always speaks the truth.
2. Venerating idols is irrational (45:20-21):
   a. Invitation to Gentiles (45:20a): Gather yourselves and come, draw near together, escaped of the nations. The invitation is addressed to the escaped of the nations, i.e., those Gentiles who escaped the judgment of God. These Gentiles are to
gather so that they might hear what Yahweh has to say.

b. Ignorance of the Gentiles (45:20b): They do not know, those carrying the wood, their image, and praying to a god that does not save. Those who trust in idols do not stop to reflect on how silly their position is. Idols should support their worshipers in time of need. But the idolaters must carry their wooden images about. They foolishly pray to a god who is incapable of bringing them salvation.

3. Idols cannot reveal the future (45:21):
   a. A challenge to the nations (45:21a): Declare and draw near! Yes, let them consult together. Let idolaters state their case in the court of public opinion. Let the idols put their heads together to come up with a unified position.
   b. A question for the nations (45:21b): Who has made this known of old, since then has declared it? Yahweh introduces his own defense with a question. His question exposes the ignorance of the gods concerning the future.
   c. A declaration to the nations (45:21c): Have not I, Yahweh? and there is no other God besides me; a righteous and saving God, there is none besides me. Only Yahweh predicted the fall of Jerusalem, the exile to Babylon, and the deliverance by Cyrus decades before any of these events materialized. Since no other god could duplicate this revelation, Yahweh declares that he alone is God. He has shown himself to be a righteous God in the judgment that he metes out; he is a saving God because he delivers those who turn to him from bondage. The point is that Yahweh not only forecasts the future, he orchestrates it.

E. Evangelistic in Aim (45:22-25):
   1. An appeal (45:22): Turn unto me and be saved, all ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other. Those who worship idols are invited to turn to Yahweh. By so doing Gentiles can be saved. This appeal is universal in scope. Those in the most distant lands are encouraged to embrace Yahweh. There is no other God beside Yahweh. Sooner or later all Gentiles will come to acknowledge his sole divinity. That this invitation is couched in the imperative suggests the responsibility of individuals to submit themselves.
      a. Prediction of conversion (45:23): By myself I have sworn; a word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and it will not return, that to me every knee will bow, and every tongue shall employ the name of Yahweh in oaths. Cf. Phil 2:10. Yahweh swears by himself because there is no higher being by whom he could swear. The word that has gone out of Yahweh’s mouth is the oath he has sworn. The mouth of God speaks only in righteousness, i.e., he speaks only what is right. The world of mankind will submit to its Creator. Some submit voluntarily in conversion; others will be forced by final events to acknowledge that God is God.
      b. Testimony of conversion (45:24): Only in Yahweh do I have, he says, righteousness and strength; unto him shall he come, and all who were angry with him shall be ashamed. Here is the testimony of those who voluntarily submit to Yahweh in conversion. First, the convert acknowledges that only in a relationship with Yahweh can one find righteousness and strength. The word righteousness is plural reflecting abundance. Only in Yahweh himself can any person be declared righteous. Strength refers to empowerment to live a righteous life in this godless world. Those who refuse to come to Yahweh are those who hate him. They will not experience salvation. In the final day they will be ashamed of their stubborn rebellion against their Creator.
      c. Declaration of salvation (45:25): In Yahweh they will be justified and make their praise, all the descendants of Israel. The climatic declaration is that true Israel will enjoy Yahweh’s salvation. Only in Yahweh will all the offspring of Israel find salvation. In their relationship with him the true Israel will be justified. In this context justified is virtually equivalent to salvation. As a result of their
salvation all the descendants of Israel join in the praise of Yahweh. The reference is not to the Israel according to the flesh, but to the spiritual remnant, the true Israel of God. This true Israel consists of all who put their faith in Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile.

CHAPTER 46
YAHWEH’S VINDICATION

Chs 46-47 of the Book of Cyrus focus on the judgment of Babylon. Here Isaiah placed in contrast the vindication of Yahweh and the humiliation of Babylon.

INFERIORITY OF IDOLS
46:1-7

The overthrow of Babylon has tremendous theological as well as political consequences.

1. Idols carried away (46:1): Bel bows, Nebo stoops; their images are for the beasts and the cattle. Your burdens are packed up as a load for the weary. Isaiah depicted Bel and Nebo, two chief gods of Babylon, being carried away into captivity as trophies of war. They will not be able to save themselves, not to mention the people who worshiped them. Bel is short for Bel-Marduk, chief god in the Babylonian pantheon. Bel bows or crouches, as if knocked from his pedestal by the judgment of Yahweh. Nebo, god of writing and divine interpretation, was regarded as the son of Bel-Marduk. The center of the worship of Nebo was Borsippa, three miles south of Babylon. Isaiah probably used these two deities as representatives of the whole Babylonian pantheon.

Their images distinguishes between the gods themselves and the idols that represented them, a distinction which in the popular mind was often ignored. Humiliation of the images, however, implies the impotence of the gods they represented. In the ancient world the standing of gods rose or fell with the condition of their adherents. The fall of Babylon meant the total humiliation of Babylon’s deities.

The statues of Bel and Nebo were annually put on display in proud process through the streets of Babylon. Now they are carried away by tired beasts. The massive images have become nothing but a burden to their adherents and to the beasts that carry them. Isaiah does not say why the images have been loaded on beasts. Perhaps the Babylonians are attempting to move them quickly out of danger as the enemy approaches.

2. Idols captured (46:2): They stoop, they bow together, they are not able to deliver the burden; but their soul goes into captivity. The verbs of v 1 are repeated but in reverse order. Presumably the antecedent of the thrice-used pronoun they is Bel and Nebo. The great gods cannot deliver the burden (their own images) from the enemy. In a sense when these images were removed from the scene of history, the gods who supposedly indwelt those images were likewise removed. Their soul points to the essence of the gods. The idea is that the pagan gods, body and soul, are removed from the scene.

B. Yahweh’s Sustaining Power (46:3-5):
1. He carried his people from the womb (46:3): Listen to me, house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, those who have been carried from the belly, borne from the womb. Yahweh commands the house of Jacob/Israel to give ear to him. The house of Jacob, once a powerful nation, will become but a remnant when the Judeans were deported to Babylon. In the previous v the idols are carried on beasts of burden; but Yahweh had carried his people throughout their history, even before their birth as a nation at Sinai.

2. He will carry his people to the end (46:4): Even until old age I am he, and unto gray hair I will bear [you]; I made, and I will carry; I will bear, and I will deliver. Unlike a mother who at some point carries her young no more, Yahweh continued to carry his people throughout their history. Even in old age Yahweh continues to carry them. The verb bear (r. sbl) means to carry a heavy burden. The gods cannot deliver their own idols
from enemies; but Yahweh will deliver his people whenever there is a need. The first person pronoun is repeated five times in v 4, in addition to five first person verbs. Yahweh wants his people to know that he alone acts in their behalf.

3. He is in a class by himself (46:5): To whom will you liken me and compare me and make me similar that we may be alike? Israel’s God is incomparable. Again Isaiah stressed what he had emphasized so often in the Book of Cyrus. Yahweh was in a class by himself. Cf. 41:10, 20; 43:7.

C. Impotence of Idols in General (46:6-7): For the fourth time the making of idols is described. Cf. 40:19; 41:7; 44:9-17.

1. Material works (46:6): Some pour out gold from the purse, and silver with the rod of the balance they weigh; they hire a goldsmith and make it a god. Then they bow down, yes, they worship. Idols were merely the products of human ingenuity. Idolatry was expensive. Gold and silver had to be provided before the god could be fashioned. A goldsmith had to be hired. When the image was finished, the worshipers committed the ultimate act of folly in bowing down before them.

2. Immobile objects (46:7a): They lift it on the shoulder and carry it; they put it down and there it stands; it does not move from its place. The lifeless idol must be lifted up and carried on the shoulder to its permanent location. There the image remains immovable, lifeless, and mute.

3. Helpless to save (46:7b): Then he cries unto it, but it does not answer; from his trouble it cannot deliver him. The idols were immobile and mute. In time of distress idols could provide no deliverance even to a single individual, not to mention an entire nation.

SUPERIORITY OF YAHWEH
46:8-13

A. Predictions of Deliverance (46:8-10):
1. Command to memory (46:8): Remember this and make yourselves firm, bring it back to mind, O rebels. Israelites were commanded to remember the impotence of idols. Reminding themselves of the foolishness of idolatry will cause the Israelites to stand firm in their faith in Yahweh. The Israelites are called rebels because they have violated God’s commands against making and worshipping idols. Bring it back to mind is lit., cause to return upon the heart. The expression points to serious meditation on the worthlessness of idolatry.

2. Focus of memory (46:9):
   a. Former things (46:9): Remember the former things from olden times, for I am God and there is not another, God, and there is none beside me...

   In addition to remembering the impotence of idols, the Israelites are commanded to remember the former things from olden times, i.e., the early events of their national history. That early history demonstrates that Yahweh is God (‘êl). In Israel’s experience no other entity showed himself to be God. There is none beside me offers the answer to the question asked in v 5.

   b. Latter things (46:10): declaring from the first from the beginning the latter things, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and all my desire I will do... Yahweh, and no other, can clearly outline the course of events from beginning to end. Declaring refers to the process of communicating the future through the prophets. My counsel is Yahweh’s plan for the future. His counsel shall stand, i.e., be unchanged, for there is no one who can rescind it or transcend it. My desire stresses that Yahweh’s counsel is what he delights to do. Omnipotence requires sovereignty. Therefore, God’s people must remember that when God sets his purpose, nothing can thwart it. The course of events announced by Yahweh will unfold because Yahweh himself will bring it about.

B. Predictions of Cyrus (46:11): calling from the east a bird of prey, from a distant land the man of his counsel; I have both spoken, and I will bring it to pass, I have formed and I will also do it. A specific example of Yahweh’s omniscience is cited. Long before his birth Yahweh had revealed the rise of Cyrus. He comes from the east, the distant land of Persia. Cyrus is likened to a bird of
prey. The figure stresses the swiftness and fierceness of the conqueror. He is the man of my counsel, i.e., the man who plays an important role in Yahweh’s plans. Yahweh declares that he has formulated the plan to use Cyrus; he will also exercise the power to bring that plan to fruition.

C. Appeal and Reassurance (46:12-13):
1. Command to hear (46:12): Listen to me, O mighty of heart, who are far from righteousness. As in v 3 Yahweh demands a hearing. Mighty of heart are those who have hardened their heart to the influence of Yahweh. These are far from righteousness, i.e., they are not in the right relationship with God.
2. God’s righteousness is near (46:13): I have brought near my righteousness, it shall not be far off, and my salvation, it is not far away; and I will put glory in Zion, and for Israel my glory. Those who are mighty of heart may be far removed from righteousness; but Yahweh will bring his righteousness near. God manifests his righteousness in the salvation of his people, which always entails the destruction of the wicked. Because of this salvation Yahweh can claim that he will put glory in Zion and for Israel my glory. Hence the glory of Israel is my glory, i.e., the glory of Yahweh.

CHAPTER 47
BABYLON’S HUMILIATION

The focus in ch 47 is on the humiliation that Babylon experiences as a result of the judgment initiated by Cyrus. In the previous ch the downfall of Babylon’s gods was predicted. Now Isaiah proclaims the fall of Babylon itself. The ch consists of four sub-sections each beginning with a sarcastic imperative addressed to Babylon. In each Babylon is depicted as a once proud, but now humiliated, female.

A. Enslaved Daughter (47:1-4):

1. Removal from the throne (47:1): Come down, sit on the dust, O virgin daughter Babylon, sit on the earth, there is no throne, O daughter Chaldeans; for they will not again call you delicate and dainty. The command of this v is issued by the Living God. Come down implies demotion from a higher position. Sit on the dust suggests the humiliation of a beggar. Babylon is called a virgin daughter because the Chaldean capital had been immune from ransacking by foreign invaders. The second command to sit on the earth has an explanation attached, viz., there is no throne. Babylon has lost her sovereignty. Parallel to the daughter Babylon is the daughter Chaldeans. They are one and the same. It is not just the capital, the entire Chaldean kingdom loses sovereignty. Delicate and dainty paint a picture of a pampered mistress. As a result of what happens to Babylon, no one ever again will refer to her by these terms. Babylon’s luxury is gone forever.
2. Hard labor (47:2-3a): Take millstones and grind flour; uncover your veil, remove your skirt, uncover the leg, cross over streams. (3) Your nakedness shall be uncovered, also your shame shall be seen. The dainty daughter that once sat enthroned over an empire is not permitted to sit idly in the dust. She now must grind flour like a common maidservant. Millstones are the two stones that formed the hand mill for grinding grain. In order to accomplish this hard labor, the daughter must remove her veil (tsammāh). Some think the reference is to the flowing tresses of the daughter. So to engage in hard labor the daughter will have to lift her skirt and expose her leg.

Translated into prosaic reality, Babylon will be stripped of all her outward glitz and glamour. The true nature of the city will be exposed to the world.
3. Source of the humiliation (47:3b): Vengeance I will take, and I will not encounter a man. The shameful exposure of the daughter Babylon and role reversal are all the more humiliating because they were engineered by the God of the Judean captives. Vengeance in the OT is just retribution for crimes committed against God and his people.
will not encounter a man seems to mean that no person will be able to stop Yahweh from bringing about the downfall of Babylon.

4. Praise for Yahweh (47:4): Our Redeemer, Yahweh of Hosts is his name, the holy one of Israel. As a response to the announcement of Babylon’s fall, the people of God break forth in praise. He who takes vengeance on Babylon is Israel’s Redeemer. They understand that Babylon’s fall means their liberation from captivity. Israel’s Redeemer is Yahweh of hosts, the all-powerful commander of the hosts of heaven and earth. The title is particularly important given the veneration for astral deities in Babylon (cf. 40:26). The judgment on Babylon and consequent redemption of Israel reflect the holiness of Yahweh.

B. Dethroned Queen (47:5-7):
1. Degradation (47:5): Sit in silence and go in darkness, daughter of the Chaldeans, for you will no longer be called Mistress of Kingdoms. The command to sit is repeated from v 1. The silence and darkness depict the despondency of one who has been humiliated before the world. Some think the darkness depicts prison; certainly the two terms (silence/darkness) depict obscurity. The gaudy lights and joyous sounds of Babylon come to an end. She who once ruled kingdoms of men now becomes obscure. Babylon is no longer the queen of kingdoms.
2. Explanation (47:6): Two reasons are cited for the judgment on Babylon.
   a. Lack of mercy (47:6a): I broke forth against my people, I profaned my inheritance, and I gave them into your hand: you did not extend to them mercy; upon the aged you made heavy your yoke exceedingly. Babylon must lose her crown because she abused her role as God’s agent in the punishment of Judah. God broke forth in anger against the rebellious Judah. By allowing the Babylonians to overrun Judah, Yahweh profaned his inheritance. It was Yahweh who orchestrated the fall of Jerusalem into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon was but a tool in the hands of God to bring about his purposes. Babylon, however, had her own selfish agenda. Babylon did not exercise any mercy in dealing with God’s heritage. A specific example of Babylonian cruelty is cited. The yoke of oppression was particularly heavy against the aged men.
   b. Pride (47:7): And you said, Forever I will be mistress; until you did not put these things upon your heart, you did not remember its latter end. Babylon’s pride is cited as the second reason for her downfall. Never once did the proud queen give any thought to her accountability before God. She gave no thought to her latter end, i.e., the possibility of her demise as a kingdom.

C. Childless Widow (47:8-11):
1. Address to the haughty mistress (47:8): And now hear this O dainty one, the one sitting in security, the one saying in her heart, I am, and there is no other; I shall not sit as a widow, and know the loss of children. Dainty one (NIV wanton creature) depicts Babylon as a wealthy and self-indulgent city. Once she had been a sensual and carefree woman. Her numerous children (satellite states) gave her a sense of security. I am, and there is no other is elsewhere the way Yahweh refers to himself (45:6). On the lips of Babylon these words suggest self-deification. What Babylon had witnessed happening to other kingdoms will never happen to her! The two greatest tragedies that can come on a married woman are loss of husband and loss of children. In the ancient world widows were helpless victims in society, especially without sons to give proper care. So Babylon will lose her status, her sense of well-being, her position among the kingdoms of man.
2. Warning to the haughty mistress (47:9): But the two of these shall come to you suddenly in one day, loss of children and widowhood, altogether they have come upon you in the multitude of your sorceries, in the abundance of your spells exceedingly. In one day Babylon will experience what she thought could never happen, i.e., loss of children (satellite cities) and widowhood. Without husband or children she is utterly destitute. Come upon is military language, as if the calamities named were adversaries pouncing upon the haughty mistress.
The calamities befall Babylon in spite of the multitude of her sorceries and spells. All the well-documented magical practices of the Babylonians cannot avert disaster. Exceedingly describes how the calamities will come upon Babylon.

3. Explanation to the haughty mistress (47:10): Could such an extreme judgment be justified? Isaiah points to the arrogant pride of this woman that manifests itself in several ways.

a. False security (47:10a): And you trusted in your evil... Babylon considered herself secure to continue her wicked ways. She gave no thought to abandoning her ways. Evil or wickedness covers the whole range of Babylonian sin from cruelty to licentiousness to haughtiness.

b. Godless attitude (47:10b): you said, No one sees me. Babylon did not imagine that her wickedness went unnoticed. What they are expressing is the attitude that no one sees who is powerful enough to do anything about it. No one sees who matters. In effect this is a denial of the existence of God, as Young perceptively has noted.

c. Self-deception (47:10c): Your wisdom and your knowledge, it has seduced you... Wisdom and knowledge are regarded as one entity, for the pronoun it and the verb are singular. Wisdom/knowledge refers to all intellectual pursuits that enabled the Babylonians to rise from obscurity to a world power. Included are political sagacity, military strategy, as well as the practices of astrologers and magicians. Seduced means the Babylonians have been turned aside from the way. They have been traveling along the wrong path.

d. Self-deification (47:10d): and you said in your heart, I am, and there is no one else. Babylon’s pride bordered on self-deification. She used language that elsewhere in the book only God uses of himself (cf. 45:6).


a. Calamity (47:11a): And evil shall come upon you, and you shall not know how to charm it... In the previous v Babylon was secure in her evil. But her evil will be repaid by evil. No one will be able to come up with a magic spell that will charm away this evil (calamity). Babylon’s magicians will prove to be impotent in the face of the coming disaster.

b. Disaster (47:11b): Disaster will fall upon you, and you will not be able to atone for it... The verb fall suggests that the disaster comes from above, i.e., from heaven. The verb atone suggests that Babylon cannot pay the price that is required to relieve the disaster.

c. Desolation (47:11c): and devastation shall come upon you suddenly, and you will not know. Devastation goes a step beyond disaster. Suddenly indicates that Babylon does not see the disaster coming. You will not know indicates that Babylon had never experienced anything like the devastation that awaited them.

D. Powerless Sorceress (47:12-15):

1. Sarcastic challenge (47:12-13):

a. To magic (47:12): Stand now in your spells and in the abundance of your sorceries in which you have wearied yourself from your youth; perhaps you will be able to profit, perhaps you will terrify. Throughout her history Babylon had trafficked in fortune telling. Highly developed occult "sciences," however, will not save Babylon. Isaiah uses sarcasm to urge Babylon to avert the forthcoming disaster by her age-old reliance on magic. Let Babylon stand in the face of the disaster, if she can. Despite the multitude of sorceries there will be no help from that quarter. The Babylonians had been engaged in magic since the nation was young. Perhaps all her magical enchantments will be some benefit. Babylon will be able to frighten off the impending calamity.

b. To counsels (47:13): You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels; let them stand now and save you, the astrologers, the star gazers making known new moons, from these things that will come upon you. Counsels are all the plans of Babylon for her defense. Isaiah challenges the counsels to stand up to the coming calamity and to bring deliverance. Specifically, let the famed astrologers of Babylon save the city. Let those who

286Young, NICOT, 3:239.
can forecast new moons try their hand at putting a halt to these things that will come upon you (Babylon).

2. Worthless astrologers (47:14-15a): Behold! they are as stubble, a fire has burned them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame; it not a coal for warming oneself, a fire to sit before. (15) Thus are they to you, those among whom you toiled... By means of the interjection Isaiah invites his readers to witness the future of the astrologers. They are worthless stubble, easily consumed in the fire of God’s judgment. They cannot even save themselves from the flame of judgment. How much less can they save Babylon. The fire/flame will not be a cozy little fire around which people may warm themselves. It will be a raging fire that devastates Babylon. Thus are they (the astrologers) to you, i.e., this is how they will meet their doom. Those among whom you toiled points to the economic burden of the astrologers on the Babylonian economy.

3. Worthless merchants (47:15b): your merchants from your youth; each to his own region will wander; none will be your savior. Babylon was a great commercial center. From the earliest days of the nation the merchants of the world did business with Babylon. At the first sign of trouble they will wander off each to his own region. There is no concern for Babylon. Their wealth will not be able to forestall the disaster at Babylon. Among the merchants there is no savior for Babylon.

CHAPTER 48
EPIL OG E:
GOD’S INCOMPARABLE WORD

Ch 48 closes the Book of Cyrus as it began, with a reminder of the incomparable character of the word of God. Isaiah repeats a number of themes from the previous chs of this unit. The emphasis, however, is on what God had said. The ch begins with a call for the house of Jacob to hear God’s word. The same appeal in similar words appears three other times in the ch (vv 12, 14, 16). The contrast throughout is that of a God who speaks clearly and repeatedly on the one hand, and a people who refused to listen on the other.

WORD OF GOD
48:1-11

1. Command to listen (48:1a): Hear this, O house of Jacob... The Book of Cyrus concludes with a command to hear. The word this refers to the entire argument that has been developed regarding the superiority of Yahweh to all other alleged deities.

2. Addressees (48:1b):

a. Their name (48:1b): who are called by the name of Israel... The command to hear is addressed to those who wear the name of Israel (Jacob) the father of the twelve tribes. Israel was the covenant name of God’s people. The wording suggests that the people were not living up to their honorable name.

b. Their progenitor (48:1c): and from the waters of Judah they have gone out... The addressees are the Judeans, those who trace their ancestry back to Judah, the fourth son of Jacob. Judah is the fountain head from which the stream of his descendants flows.

c. Their oaths (48:1d): who swear by the name of Yahweh... The Judeans showed superficial allegiance to Yahweh by using his name in their oaths. People swear by the deity that they deem supreme.

d. Their worship (48:1e): and by the God of Israel they make mention, but not in truth, and not in righteousness. They made mention of Yahweh, i.e., remembered him, in their formal acts of worship. Unfortunately, those acts of worship were not in truth, i.e., they were not sincere. Those who performed those acts were not righteous. Therefore, all the formal worship of the Judeans was a sham.

e. Their designation (48:2a): For from the holy city they are called... The Judeans were citizens of the holy city of Jerusalem. They therefore had the reputation of being a holy people. Yet their hypocritical conduct made them unworthy of such a designation.
f. Their crutch (48:2b): and upon the God of Israel they lean; Yahweh of Hosts is his name. In spite of all of their failings as Yahweh’s people, in times of emergency the Judeans leaned on Yahweh for support and sustenance. They recognized that their God was Yahweh of Hosts, supreme commander of all the hosts of heaven and earth, hence the all-powerful.

B. Former Things (48:3-5):
1. Announcement and fulfillment (48:3): The former things from time past I have declared, and from my mouth they went out, and I caused them to be heard; suddenly I do them, and they come to pass. Former things are those events of the past that Yahweh announced in advance. Events like the exodus from Egypt and the division of the kingdom, and the fall of the northern kingdom might be in view. From my mouth refers to the manner of God’s revelation. He revealed these events to the prophets, and they in turn became his mouthpiece to convey that information to Israel. Though men may learn of events years before they unfold, yet those events always seem to come upon them suddenly. The point is that Yahweh in the past demonstrated his ability, not only to announce the future, but to bring that announced future to fruition.

2. An explanation (48:4-6b):
   a. Hardness of heart (48:4): From my knowing that you are hard; and an iron sinew of iron is your neck, and your forehead is bronze. Dramatic announcements of future events and sudden interventions in the affairs of men were necessary because Yahweh knows how hard his people are. Sinew of iron paints a picture of a neck that is unbending and unyielding. Forehead of bronze points to shamelessness in sin.
   b. Inclination toward idolatry (48:5): Therefore, I declared to you from time past, before it come to pass, I caused you to hear it; lest you say, My idol has done them and my image and my molten idol have commanded them. The hardness of the people of Israel toward Yahweh was manifested in a tendency to give idols the credit for what Yahweh did. This is why Yahweh announced so far in advance the things that were to unfold in Jerusalem. He announced those things to you, i.e., to Judah directly through the prophets. The Judeans, then, could not attribute the exodus from Egypt or the fall of Jerusalem to some idol.
   c. A command (48:6a): You have heard, see all of it. Israel heard the prediction of what will come to pass. Now Israel is commanded to observe the entire fulfillment unfold. By carefully noting the unfolding events they will be able to have greater appreciation for Yahweh’s ability to forecast the future.
   d. An obligation (48:6b): And as for you, will you not declare it? Once they have satisfied their own minds by observation, then Israel should proclaim to all the wonderful foresight of Yahweh, and his power to fulfill what he has predicted.

1. New things revealed (48:6c-7):
   a. Announcement of the revelation (48:6c): I have made you to hear new things from now, and things kept, and you have not known them. From now means starting right now. The new things Yahweh is revealing are created now, and not before today (lit., from then). It is the prophecy itself that now has been created. The v underscores the newness of what is being announced. As in the announcement of the former things, Yahweh’s purpose in announcing the new things in advance is to remove the possibility that Israel could claim already to know the information being revealed. When events begin to unfold, human pride tends to claim, “I knew it would happen.”
   b. Reason for the revelation (48:7): Now they are created, and not in time past, and before today, and you have not heard them lest you say, Behold! I knew them. The new things Yahweh is revealing are things kept, i.e., formerly kept secret. For this reason, these things were not previously known to Israel.
   c. An obligation (48:6b): And as for you, will you not declare it? Now Israel is commanded to observe the entire fulfillment unfold. By carefully noting the unfolding events they will be able to have greater appreciation for Yahweh’s ability to forecast the future.

The new things are not to be limited to the work of Cyrus and deliverance from Babylon. The reference is to the work of the messianic Servant that is explained in detail in chs 49-53.
2. Reason for present revelation (48:8): Neither did you hear, nor did you know, nor from of old your ear did not open; for I know you will surely deal treacherously, a transgressor from the womb you were called. Three expressions are used to emphasize that Israel previously had not known of the new things: hear, know, ear did not open. The reason Israel had not previously heard of these new things is because Yahweh knew the character of his people. Their record from the day of national birth at Mount Sinai was one of transgression and misrepresentation. He withheld his revelation until the appropriate time because he knew that perverse Israel would attribute that revelation (and the fulfillment thereof) to idols or other sources other than Yahweh.

3. Actions of God (48:9-10):
   a. Motivation for restraint (48:9): For the sake of my name I will delay my anger, and as to my praise I will restrain it toward you, so as not to cut you off. God acts for the sake of his reputation among men, not because the transgressor Israel deserved his intervention. Delay my anger means to defer its outpouring, or cause it to tarry. God is angry with his people, but he will not unleash the full measure of his wrath. My praise is parallel to my name. For the sake of his praise Yahweh restrains his wrath against Israel. So as not to cut you off indicates the results should Yahweh completely pour out his wrath. Israel would cease to exist. God’s promised salvation through the seed of Abraham would then never materialize. There would be no people to praise Yahweh for fulfilling his promises.
   b. Purpose in adversity (48:10): Behold! I have refined you, but not with silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction. Rather than cut off his people completely, Yahweh chose to refine them through the affliction of exile. Judgment on the Judeans and Jerusalem was remedial and redemptive. The refinement process was not with silver as the outcome. Israel never becomes pure silver as the result of affliction. Yahweh must always extend grace and mercy. When Yahweh chose Israel the people were in the furnace of affliction, a symbol of dire need. Three times Egypt is referred to as an iron furnace (Dt 4:20; 1 Kgs 8:51; Jer 11:4).
   c. Yahweh’s reputation (48:11): For my sake, for my sake I shall do it, for how will it be profaned; and my glory to another I will not give. Twice in succession Yahweh stresses the reason why he intervenes on behalf of Israel. Divine intervention is an act of pure grace. Yahweh’s own interests are at stake in the well-being of Israel. Should Israel be utterly destroyed, Yahweh’s name would be profaned, i.e., spoken of in derogatory ways. God will not allow his name to be profaned. He will not give his glory (honor) to another as he would be doing if his purposes should fail.

APPEAL FOR ATTENTION
48:12-22

A. Yahweh Deserves a Hearing (48:12-16):
1. A call for Israel’s attention (48:12-13):
   a. Object of the call (48:12a): Hearken unto me O Jacob, and Israel my called. God again commands his people to listen to him. For too long they have been listening to the representatives of idols. Jacob is one of Isaiah’s favorite names for the nation. My called is a unique title for the nation, but cf. 43:1. The title either refers to Israel’s call to be a nation, or to the fact that this was a people called by Yahweh’s name.
   b. Stature of the caller (48:12b-13): I am he, I am the first, also I am the last. (13) Also my hand has founded the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens. I am calling unto them; let them stand together. Yahweh identifies himself as the one who exists (in contrast to the idols that are non-existent). First and last point to Yahweh’s eternality and independence from the created world. In addition, Yahweh is the Creator. My hand/my right hand points to God’s power. As in 51:13 the founding of the earth and the spreading out of the heavens are linked. Spread out points to the vastness of the heavens. The Creator has absolute power over his creation. When he calls the heavenly bodies, they snap to attention like an elite military unit.
2. Call for Gentile attention (48:14a): *Be gathered together all of you and hearken, who among them has declared these things?* The heathen are commanded to gather themselves together to hear Yahweh’s challenge. *Who among them* refers to the idols. No idol has made known the things that Yahweh has revealed.

   a. What Isaiah says about Cyrus (48:14b): *Yahweh loves him, he will do his pleasure in Babylon, and his arm [will be upon] the Chaldeans.* Yahweh declares his love for him, i.e., Cyrus. This conqueror will do Yahweh’s pleasure in Babylon. Cyrus will be the arm of Yahweh to smite the Chaldeans.
   b. What Yahweh says to Cyrus (48:15): *I, I have spoken, surely I have called you; I have brought him, and he causes his way to prosper.* The double first person pronouns call attention to the speaker. Long before Cyrus appeared, Yahweh had spoken about him through Isaiah. Yahweh has called Cyrus to do his bidding, and has brought him on the scene of history. Yahweh causes the way of Cyrus to prosper. The conquests of Cyrus were to succeed because he was an instrument in the hands of Yahweh.

4. Final appeal for hearing (48:16): *Draw near unto me, hear this; not from the beginning in secret have I spoken; from the time of its happening there I am; and now, Adonay Yahweh has sent me, and his Spirit.* Yahweh tenderly invites all to hear this, i.e., what follows in this v. From the beginning of their national existence Yahweh has not spoken to his people in secret, i.e., in dark, hidden mysteries, and ambiguous omens. He always had communicated with his people through prophets in public places and in plain words. When the things spoken of in advance start to happen, Yahweh will be there—guiding, directing and orchestrating events.

And now introduces a radical change in timeframe. The speaker comes from the new dispensation. The speaker is the Servant *par excellence* who was introduced in 42:1ff. This Servant will be the leading figure in the next major division of the book. The Servant claims to have been sent by Adonay Yahweh, the sovereign Lord. The Servant does not come alone. He is accompanied and empowered by Yahweh’s *Spirit*, i.e., the Holy Spirit.

B. Penalty for not Hearing (48:17-19).
   1. Speaker (48:17): *Thus says Yahweh your Redeemer, the holy one of Israel: I am Yahweh your God who teaches you for profit, causing you to tread on the way you shall go. Redeemer and holy one of Israel are familiar titles for Yahweh in Isaiah. Yahweh is also Israel’s Teacher. He teaches his people for profit, i.e., the things that are in their best interest. He guides Israel in the way they should travel to fulfill their national destiny. This guidance comes through the written word and through the living voices of the prophets.*
   2. What might have been (48:18-19):
      a. Well-being (48:18): *Oh that you had hearkened to my commandments; then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.* Israel’s stubbornness and disobedience led to constant invasions and natural disasters. Ultimately their disobedience led to the destruction of the temple and the exile. Had they only listened to Yahweh they would have enjoyed tranquility. This peace is compared to a river overflowing its banks. Righteousness in this context probably refers to salvation. Mighty waves come rolling in over the beach in endless succession. Had Israel been obedient they would have experienced never-ending blessing.
      b. Growth (48:19): *then your seed would have been like the sand, and the issues of your bowels like its grains; his name will not be cut off, and it will not be destroyed from before me.* Sand is the symbol of innumerable offspring. The nation had not reached its potential because of disobedience. In the end the northern tribes were cast off as not God’s people (Hos 1:9). They were carried off to Assyria. Isaiah had indicated that the Judeans also will be carried away. Only a remnant of the once proud nation will survive.

Israel’s name as the holy people of God would not have been cut off had they been obedient. They would not have been destroyed from before me in
terms of their standing as the theocracy had they only listened. Isaiah is alluding to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, and the exile to Babylon. Ultimately Israel’s standing before God was revoked when the nation rejected its Messiah (Mt 21:43).

**EXHORTATION AND WARNING**  
**48:20-22**

1. **Exhortation to leave Babylon (48:20):**
   a. **Go out in haste (48:20a):** *Go out from Babylon, flee from the Chaldeans...* Even though Israel’s descendants are not to be cut off before Yahweh, still there is a command to the spiritual remnant to make an absolute break with Babylon. *Flee from the Chaldeans* repeats the thought for emphasis but stresses urgency. Exiting Babylon is the first step in preparing for the coming of Messiah. God’s people must never permit themselves to become entangled in the things of this world. All whom God brings to salvation are in some sense in Babylon when God first appeals to them (cf. Rev 18:4f).
   b. **Go out with a shout (48:20b):** *with the voice of a cry, declare it, cause this to be heard, bring it out unto the ends of the earth, saying, Yahweh has redeemed his servant Jacob.* After leaving Babylon, the redeemed must proclaim their redemption. This proclamation is to be worldwide, even to the ends of the earth. Those who are redeemed are the spiritual remnant, the true servant Jacob (Israel).

2. **New redemption (48:21):** *And they did not thirst when he caused them to go through deserts, water from a rock he made to flow for them; and he clave the rock, and a rock and waters gushed out.* The redemption that follows the return from Babylonian exile is described in terms of the exodus from Egypt. Under Moses God provided for the physical needs of his redeemed people as they made their way through the wilderness of Sinai. When the people were thirsty Yahweh made water to flow from a rock for them. The prophet is not describing a literal return from physical Babylon. Rather he is describing that great redemption for which the return from Babylon set the stage. He is describing the redemption from the bondage of sin under Messiah. He is the water of life that quenches every thirst that his redeemed people may have.

5. **Warning (48:22): There is no peace, says Yahweh, to the wicked.** While the redeemed of Yahweh are blessed, the wicked do not enjoy peace with God. Consequently they cannot know peace with one another. The wicked are those who continue to live in Babylon (the world) and who never experience God’s redemption. Every great declaration of salvation must acknowledge that not all men will be saved. The warning is this: the wonderful peace people possess who listen to God stands in sharp contrast to the restlessness of those who rebel against God.

**PART NINE**

**BOOK OF THE SERVANT**  
Isaiah 49-57

The major themes of chs 40-48 are now laid aside; but one of the secondary themes introduced there is developed in chs 49-57. In the previous unit two servants of Yahweh were introduced. The first servant—the nation Israel—was deaf, dumb and disobedient to its heavenly calling. The second was an individual who walked in perfect harmony with Yahweh, and who brings God’s justice to the Gentiles (42:1-9). This same individual appears in four other poems in the book, three of which are located in chs 49-57. The classic explanation of the servant concept in Isaiah was formulated by Delitzsch. He suggested that the concept of the servant could be symbolized by a pyramid. “The base was Israel as a whole; the central section was that Israel, which was not merely Israel according to the flesh, but according to the spirit also; the apex is the person of the Mediator of salvation springing out of Israel.”

**CHAPTER FORTY-NINE**

COMFORT THROUGH THE SERVANT

Two speeches are attributed to the Servant in chs 49-50. The first is addressed to the nations; the second is a soliloquy. Sandwiched between these two speeches is a unit describing the despondency of Zion during the time of her captivity. The doctrine of the coming Servant was God’s answer to Zion’s discouragement.

WORK OF THE SERVANT
49:1-13

The second Servant poem focuses on the work and success of God’s Servant. That the Servant is an individual with a worldwide mission of redemption is made quite clear.

A. Task of the Servant (49:1-6).
1. A call for attention (49:1a): Listen, O islands, unto me, hear this you people from afar... The language is similar to the words of Yahweh in 41:1. The Servant speaks with authority equal to that of Yahweh. With missionary-like zeal, the Servant calls upon the whole world to hear what he had to say about his work. Islands includes the coastlands of the Mediterranean Sea.
2. Servant’s testimony (49:1b-3):
   a. His call (49:1b): Yahweh from the womb has called me, from the loins of my mother he has made mention of my name. The Servant emphasizes that it is Yahweh who is responsible for his appearance. From the womb/my mother supports the fact that the Servant is an individual. Similar language is used of the call of Jeremiah (1:5). The Servant had a sense of vocation. He sensed he had been called before he was born, and named by God (i.e., claimed by him) immediately after his birth.
   b. His work (49:2): He has made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he has hidden me; he has made me a polished arrow and has hidden me in his quiver. The primary instrument for accomplishing the work of the Servant is the spoken word. His mouth is like a sharp sword (cf. Mt 10:34). His ministry is a polished arrow when it needed to be “to wound men for their own good.” The Servant is protected throughout his ministry by the shadow of the Almighty’s hand. Until the day of his revelation he remains hidden away in God’s quiver (cf. Gal 4:4).
   c. His standing (49:3): He said to me, You are my Servant, Israel, in whom I will glorify myself. Yahweh acknowledges that the Servant belongs to him. The title reflects total commitment to the will of God. He is a new Israel, the head of a new nation of redeemed people. All that he does reflects glory on God.
3. Servant’s discouragement (49:4):
   a. Servant’s assessment (49:4a): And as for me, I said, To no purpose I have labored; for nothing and in vain have I spent my strength. The Servant surveys his work and is overcome with disappointment. He had toiled, but saw little fruit of his labor. The Servant had expended his strength, but it all seemed in vain. The particular work in view is identified in v 5.
   b. Servant’s confidence (49:4b): Yet surely my judgment is with Yahweh, and my reward is with my God. Though the Servant anticipated rejection, yet he left the entire matter in God’s hands. He expected his faithful work to be rewarded. In spite of his rejection by Jacob, Yahweh did not release the Servant from his task.
4. Servant’s mission (49:5): Yahweh responds to the Servant’s disappointment in v 6; but that word of encouragement is preceded by words underscoring the relationship between the Servant and Yahweh.
   a. His preparation for mission (49:5): And now said Yahweh, who formed me from the womb for his Servant... The Servant is aware that Yahweh has prepared him for the very mission in which he

---

288 Homer Hailey (CI, 406) thinks the mother and womb represent the spiritual remnant that returned from Babylon. Cf. Isa 66:7-8; Mic 4:10; 5:2; Rev 12:1-6.
289 Leupold, EI, 2:177f.
290 The name Israel symbolizes conquest by faith. It was first given to Jacob, then to his descendants. Messiah is also called David (Hos 3:5).
feels disappointed in the previous v. In v 1 the Servant was called from the womb; here he is formed from the womb. Yahweh shaped the personality and skills of the Servant to succeed in his mission. He equipped the Servant with all the tools he needed to fulfill his mission.

b. His mission to Israel (49:5b): to bring Jacob back to him (but as for Israel, he will not be gathered to him)... The Servant’s mission was to bring Jacob (Israel) back to Yahweh. Sin separates people from God; the Servant effects reconciliation. Freedom of choice, however, makes it possible for Israel to reject the Servant’s efforts to gather people.

c. His mission to be honored (49:5c): that I may be honored in the eyes of Yahweh... A second purpose for the Servant being formed is that he should be honored in the eyes of Yahweh, i.e., honored by Yahweh.

d. His strength for mission (49:5d): and my God is my strength. The Servant utters a new expression of confidence. Though weary and disappointed in his labor, he is confidence that Yahweh will give him the strength or power to accomplish his mission.

5. Servant’s expanded mission (49:6): 

a. His mission to Israel (49:6a): And he said, It is too light a thing for you to be my Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel. Yahweh begins to speak, following the parenthesis of v 5. To restore Jacob was a big task; but the task was not big enough for the Servant. To raise up the tribes of Jacob means to give them a dignity and status from which they had fallen. The preserved of Israel are those who have been spared from calamity. Restoration of Israel started with the return from captivity; but physical restoration only prepared the way for the greater restoration accomplished by Christ (cf. v 5). Israel is raised up and restored by accepting their Messiah.

b. His mission to Gentiles (49:6b): I will give you for a light for Gentiles to be my salvation to the end of the earth. In spite of rejection by national Israel the Servant’s task was broadened. Not only was the Servant to bring Israel back to God, he also was to be a light to the nations. Gentiles are viewed as living in spiritual darkness that can only be lifted by embracing Christ. But the Servant also embodies Yahweh’s salvation. The light that Christ gives shows the way to forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. This text is cited in the NT as justification for preaching the gospel throughout the world.291

B. Triumph of the Servant (49:7-13):

1. Initial rejection (49:7a, b):

a. Speaker (49:7a): Thus says Yahweh the Redeemer of Israel and his holy one... Yahweh responds to the utterance of the Servant. In view of the great redemptive work of the Servant, Yahweh refers to himself as the Redeemer of Israel. The work of the Servant is to be the culminating act of redemption by this Redeemer. That redemption is in full harmony with the holiness of Yahweh, reflecting both his justice and the mercy.

b. Servant (49:7b): to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to a servant of rulers... Yahweh addresses the Servant. The Servant was despised and abhorred by the nation Israel. The words convey active hostility, not just passive neglect. Clearly the Servant is distinguished from the nation. The Servant is further designed as a servant of kings. Great as he was, he came as a subject, not only of God himself, but of earthly rulers such as Augustus, Tiberius, and Herod. Evil rulers looked upon him with disdain as one far inferior to themselves. They treated him with the indignities to which slaves were accustomed.

2. Ultimate recognition (49:7c): Kings will see and arise, princes, and they shall bow down because of Yahweh who is faithful, the holy one of Israel who has chosen you. Eventually men will see the true character of the Servant. When kings and princes realize who the Servant really is, they will arise in respect and amazement. Even more appropriately, great ones will bow low in worship and submission to the Servant. This radical change of fortune will be brought about because Yahweh is faithful to his Servant. The holy one of Israel

291Simeon cited these words in reference to Jesus (Lk 2:32). Paul and Barnabas used them to prove that they were to go to Gentiles as well as Jews (Acts 13:47).
chose the Servant, equipped him, and empowered him. Ultimately his mission cannot fail.

3. Unparalleled accomplishments (49:8-10):
   a. Promise to Servant (49:8a): Thus says Yahweh, In the time of favor I have answered you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you that I may keep you... Time of favor is defined as day of salvation. The language reflects the year of Jubilee (Lv 25:8ff). The coming of the Servant will introduce a time when God shows favor to people. He will show his favor by making salvation available to them. In that day Yahweh will respond to the Servant’s discouragement; he will help him in his hour of need. There may be a hint here of the resurrection in which Christ was vindicated following his humiliating death. In the light of Paul’s use of this passage (2 Cor 6:2), the time of God’s favor is the gospel age.

b. Position of Servant (49:8b-9): and give you to be a covenant for people... Here is the heart of the mission of God’s Servant. The reference is to the new covenant announced frequently by the prophets (e.g., Jer 31:31). That covenant (and all the blessings that flow from it) is embodied in the Servant.

   1. Restored land (49:8b): to establish a land, and to re-inhabit desolate inheritances. Restoration of a devastated land here is a symbol for the salvation that the Servant brings to mankind. The Servant will establish (NASB mar) the land, the messianic kingdom. Under the Servant the Davidic kingdom is re-established. Every true child of Abraham (believers in Christ) has his portion in that Holy Land (the kingdom of Christ).

   2. Released prisoners (49:9a): saying to the prisoners, Go forth, and to those in darkness, Reveal yourselves. Those who come to inhabit the restored Davidic kingdom are described as prisoners brought out of the darkness of prison. That release is effected by the liberating gospel of Christ. The prison house is the bondage of sin. The commands of this v imply that sinners can exercise their will to accept the liberation made possible by the Servant.

   c. Provision of Servant (49:9b-10):
      1. Provides pasture (49:9b-10a): Along roads they shall feed, and on every barren hill shall be their pasture. (10) They shall neither hunger, nor thirst... Those who come out of the bondage and darkness of sin will be blessed. In highly poetic language, Isaiah describes that blessedness. The redeemed are depicted as a flock moving along roads heading toward the Promised Land. They are grazing in areas where pasture is normally absent. Rich pasture means that the flock neither hungers nor thirsts. These vv are applied to Christ in Rev 7:16-17.

      2. He provides shelter (49:10b): neither desert heat nor sun will smite them. The flock will be shielded from the burning heat. God’s people will not be destroyed by adversity.

      3. He provides guidance (49:10c): He who has compassion upon them will guide them, even beside springs of water will he lead them. The flock is not left to stumble along aimlessly in the wilderness. This fortunate flock is guided by Yahweh. This guidance is a reflection of his compassion. He leads them near abundant streams where their thirst is always quenched. Followers of Jesus are the sheep. Springs of water symbolize that God provides for all the needs of his people, even in the most unlikely circumstances.

   4. Massive movement (49:11-13): The figure now changes to that of a group of pilgrims marching to Zion.

a. Obstacles removed (49:11): And I will set all of my mountains for the highway, and all of my paths shall be high. The pastoral imagery is replaced by a travel advisory. There will be a suitable highway for those who turn to Zion (cf. 35:8; 40:3-4; 42:16; 43:5-7). Mountains symbolize obstacles standing in the path of those who are marching to Zion. Yahweh reduces the height of those mountains so that the pilgrims can travel right over them. On the other hand, Yahweh raises up the low places for the same reason. The point is that God makes a smooth way for his people to reach their destination.

b. Massive movement (49:12): Behold these shall come from afar! Behold these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Sinim.
People flow into the Servant’s kingdom from all regions, even distant Sinim (Syene), modern Aswan in southern Egypt. The language cannot be limited to the Babylonian captivity. West (lit., sea) refers to those in the islands and coastlands of the Mediterranean Sea. Afar probably refers to the distant east. Sinim appears to refer to the south; but others think the reference is to China. The movement toward Zion is universal. All over the world the gospel of the Servant calls people out of bondage to become part of the Way, the destination of which is the Celestial City.

c. Abundant comfort (49:13): Shout O heavens, rejoice O earth! Let the mountains burst into song! For Yahweh will comfort his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. Heavens, earth and mountains are called upon to join in the celebration of the salvation made possible by the Servant. The salvation of the Servant is characterized by the word comfort. This corresponds to the words of Jesus when he called his salvation rest (Mt 11:28). His people refers to the true Israel, those who have put their faith in Christ. Those who receive God’s comfort are his afflicted ones. God’s people are always the poor in spirit, the humble, and the persecuted.

DESPONDENCY OF ZION
49:14-26

The Servant’s initial work was to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the preserved ones of Israel (v 6). The spiritual and psychological state of God’s people following the exile to Babylon are depicted in the last half of ch 49. While the return from Babylon mitigated to some extent their sense of abandonment by God, the despondency described here was that which could only be relieved by the coming of Messiah.

A. Complaint/Response (49:14-20):

1. Complaint (49:14): Yet Zion said, Yahweh has forsaken me, and Adonay has forgotten me. In spite of the glorious promises of the coming Messiah and his kingdom, Zion—the true Israel of God—complains that God has forsaken her. The cry reflects the doubt that arises when people try to hold God to a schedule that he has not imposed upon himself. This despondent feeling of abandonment was particularly evident among the exiles in Babylon.

2. A pledge to remember (49:15-16):

a. Mother-love figure (49:15): Will a woman forget her suckling, from having mercy on the son of her womb? Even these shall forget, but as for me, I will not forget you. Yahweh can no more forget his people than a mother can forget a nursing child. Sometimes in fact mothers do abandon their children; but Yahweh never does.

b. Engraving figure (49:16): Behold! on my palms I have engraved you; your walls are before me continually. It is as though God had graven the name Zion and her walls upon his hand. This v may have tattooing in view; but see Lv 19:28. The Jerusalem to which the exiles returned had no walls; likewise messianic Zion has no walls. It consists of people. So the message is that God does not forget anyone who is a citizen of Zion.

3. A pledge of restoration (49:17-20):

a. Destroyers depart (49:17): Your sons hasten; your destroyers and those who laid you waste from you shall go out. When in the course of God’s providence construction on the walls of spiritual Zion began, the children of Zion will hasten to that place. Those responsible for the destruction of physical Zion—the unbelievers and disobedient—will leave the place as the children of God by faith draw near.

b. Sons come (49:18):

(1) Admonition to Zion (49:18a): Lift up your eyes round about and see... Dejected Mother Zion is commanded to lift up her eyes to behold her sons returning to her. Round about suggests that she should look in all directions.

(2) Zion’s sons gathered (49:18b): all of them will be gathered together, they will come to you... All of Zion’s sons will be gathered together. The gathering together is made possible because the sons of Zion choose to come to Zion.

(3) Zion’s adornment (49:18c): as I live (oracle of Yahweh) [I swear] that all of them like an ornament you shall wear, and you shall bind them
**like a bride.** So there will be no doubt as to the truthfulness of the promise about Zion’s sons, Yahweh takes an oath. As certain as Yahweh lives so certain is the promise. The great number of children who come to Zion will serve as ornaments enhancing her beauty. Zion’s true glory is found in the transformed lives of those who are her citizens. Zion will resemble a bride adorned for her husband. In Christ believers have come to the Zion of this prophecy.\(^{292}\)

c. Ruins built up (49:19): For your ruins and your waste places and your desolate places and the land of your destructions; for now you will be too small for an inhabitant, and far distant from your devourers. The v implies that at some point Zion will lie in ruins. That was certainly true of the physical Mount Zion after the Babylonian destruction of 586 BC. But the v sets forth three predictions. First, Zion will be restored. Second, restored Zion will be too small to contain all those who choose to be citizens of the city. Third, those enemies who have devoured Zion will be far removed from the scene. The enemies who had carried them off into captivity will be far distant geographically and psychologically.

d. Increased numbers (49:20): Still they shall say in your ears, the sons of your childlessness: Too small for me is the place, draw near to me that I may dwell. The returning sons of Zion are speaking words of encouragement to Mother Zion. Zion is pictured as a mother who has been violently deprived of her children. The reference is to the deportation of the citizens of Jerusalem to Babylon. Sons of your childlessness underscores the fact that though Zion was rendered childless through judgment, she will yet have sons. The sons of Zion comment to one another about how Zion is too small for their numbers. The old physical land of Canaan, which had been destroyed by enemies, will not be large enough to hold the burgeoning population in that new day.

**B. Bewilderment/Commitment (49:21-23).**

1. Zion’s amazement (49:21): And you shall say in your heart, Who has begotten these for me, because I was bereaved and barren, exiled, and turned aside, and these, who has brought them up; behold! I was left alone; these, where are they? Zion is bewildered by her greatly increased population. Begotten is masculine. Zion is inquiring about the father of the children that come to her. Zion’s bereavement of her children and her present barren condition are the factors contributing to her shock. Furthermore, Zion describes herself as exiled and turned aside or forsaken. But in spite of her condition, sons were speaking in Zion’s ears. Who has brought them up, i.e., who provided for their upbringing? Behold introduces a shocking fact. I was left alone, i.e., Zion had no husband. Where were these sons during the period of her bereavement? Mother Israel produced no children during the exile. So how can her population grow?

2. Yahweh’s summons (49:22): Thus says Adonay Yahweh: Behold! I shall lift up to the nations my hand, and unto the peoples shall I lift up my ensign, and they will bring your sons in the bosom and your daughters on the shoulder will be lifted up. Yahweh responds to the amazement of Zion with a dramatic announcement. God will lift up his had to the nations himself to beckon with his hand to Gentiles. For those Gentiles who are further away, Yahweh will raise an ensign for a rallying point (cf. 13:2). The Gentiles respond to Yahweh’s summons by gently bringing Zion’s sons and daughters to her. These sons and daughters seem to be in addition to those sons of Zion who speak in Zion’s ears in v 20. The v should be interpreted spiritually. It refers to converted Gentiles bringing converted Jews into the Zion of Heb 12:22.

3. Gentile response (49:23a): And kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; faces to the ground they will bow down to you, and the dust of your feet they will lick... Kings and queens represent the highest and most powerful of the Gentiles. The picture is a bit different from the previous v, but the main point is the same. Powerful Gentiles come to love and...

---

\(^{292}\)On believers having coming to Zion see Heb 12:22ff; 1 Pet 2:5-6; and Rev 14:1-5.
cherish Zion. They even show Zion the ultimate respect by doing obeisance before her. By this action they are indicating complete submission to Zion as queen of superior rank. Licking the dust of the feet makes the same point. Only servants washed dirty feet. Gentile royalty will be slaves of Zion.

4. Implications (49:23b): and you shall know that I am Yahweh; those who wait for me are not disgraced. When the Gentiles begin treating Zion with respect, Zion will know for certain that Yahweh is God. Those who continue to wait on Yahweh will not ultimately be put to shame. Those who trust in the promises of God will never have occasion to be embarrassed.

C. Incredulity/Assurance (49:24-26):
1. Zion’s incredulity (49:24): Will there be taken from the mighty man the prey? and shall the captivity of the righteous be delivered? The one who holds Zion captive is a mighty man. Who, then, can take his prey (Zion) away from him? It is difficult enough to snatch the prey away from a righteous conqueror, how much less those taken by a ruthless warrior. Zion simply cannot believe that her captives can be liberated from a mighty tyrant like Babylon.

2. Yahweh’s assurance (49:25-26):
   a. Yahweh delivers his people (49:25): For thus says Yahweh: Even the captivity of the mighty man will be taken, and the prey of the ruthless shall be delivered, and those who strive with you I will engage, and your sons I will save. A direct utterance of Yahweh responds to the incredulity of Zion. Yahweh assures Zion that he himself will effect the rescue. No mighty man (foreign power) or ruthless conqueror is powerful enough to withstand the great power of Yahweh. Yahweh will engage all who strive with Zion.
   b. Yahweh destroys oppressors (49:26a): And I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and as with new wine with their blood they will become drunk... The divine strategy is to set the oppressors against one another. Instead of consuming Zion, the oppressors will eat their own flesh, i.e., turn on one another. This is a graphic and gruesome way of indicating the utter desperation of the enemies of God’s people, in contrast to the abundance God supplies to the faithful (vv 9-11). The enemies will become drunk on the blood of their neighbors. They will become so confused they will not be able to execute any consistent policy regarding Zion. The background of this promise is the many occasions in OT history when Israel’s enemies destroyed one another (e.g., 2 Chr 16:23).
   c. Implications (49:26b): and all flesh will know that I am Yahweh your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. The release of Israel from Babylon calls all flesh, i.e., both Jew and Gentile, to know that Yahweh is a Savior and Redeemer. The Mighty One of Jacob is powerful enough to liberate his people from any oppressor. Israel learns that lesson through deliverance; the Gentiles learn it through defeat.

CHAPTER FIFTY
ISRAEL’S SIN AND SERVANT’S OBEDIENCE

ZION’S LACK OF CONFIDENCE
50:1-3

A. Zion’s Misunderstanding (50:1):
1. What Zion thought (50:1a):
   a. Divorced by Yahweh (50:1a): Thus says Yahweh, Where is the writing of the divorce of your mother, whom I sent away... In 49:14 Zion blamed Yahweh for withdrawing from her. That thought is now addressed. Yahweh addresses Zion’s children, i.e., individual Israelites. Zion’s children felt that their mother had been divorced from Yahweh. For this, however, no proof could be produced. The writing of divorce has reference to Dt 24:1-4 where a man was required to give a woman a divorce document before sending her away. A separation had taken place, but no divorce.
   b. Sold into slavery (50:1b): or which one of my creditors is it to whom I sold you? Zion believed her children had been sold to creditors, here symbolic of foreign powers. In the OT world, if a man could not pay his debts, the creditor might
take either the debtor himself, his wife, or his children in payment of the debt. But that was not true either. Yahweh has no debts, and therefore no creditors.

2. True explanation (50:1b-2a):

a. Sin (50:1b): Behold! Because of your iniquities you were sold, and because of your transgressions your mother was sent away. The separation of God and his people took place because Israel had transgressed against Yahweh.
b. Failure to repent (50:2a): Why did I come, and there is no man, I called and there was no answer? Yahweh cannot be blamed for Israel’s captivity. No one had responded when he lovingly spoke by the mouth of his prophets.

B. Yahweh’s Power (50:2b-3):

1. Doubt challenged (50:2b): Is my hand surely cut short from redemption? Is there not with me power to deliver? Zion’s depression grew out of a sense of helplessness. She did not have confidence that Yahweh could deliver her. By means of questions Yahweh affirms his power to save his people. Merely asking such questions rebukes any doubt that men may have about God’s power to save. Shortness of hand is a common figure for weakness or inability to accomplish a task.

2. Illustrations of Yahweh’s power (50:2c-3):

Behold! Because of my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make rivers a wilderness; let their fish stink from lack of water and die of thirst. (3) I clothe the heavens in blackness, and sackcloth I will make their covering. The verb rebuke is used to assert Yahweh’s control over the elements of nature. The word indicates how easy it is for Yahweh to bring about deliverance for his people. God had demonstrated his power in nature by drying up water-courses and shrouding the heavens with blackness by causing the eclipse of heavenly bodies.

CONFIDENCE OF THE SERVANT

If Zion lacked confidence in God’s program, the Servant did not. The third of the Servant poems is a soliloquy in which the Servant proclaims his confidence in three areas.

A. Preparation by God (50:4-5a):

1. Confident in his gifts (50:4a): Adonay Yahweh has given to me the tongue of learned ones... First, the Servant was confident of his ability to communicate the divine word. Four times in this speech the Servant refers to God as Adonay Yahweh. He who has all authority over men and nations is Adonay, the Sovereign. Yahweh is the covenant name of redemption.

The Servant had been equipped with the tongue of learned ones, i.e., a tongue such as learned men possess. The reference is to the Servant’s teaching ministry. He knows what he is talking about and he knows how to communicate it. Here the Servant is pictured as a prophet (cf. Jn 8:26, 28).

2. Confident of his effectiveness (50:4b): to know to help the weary with a word... The purpose of the Servant’s divine gift is that he might know how to help the weary with a word. The weary are those who have been beaten down by life and by Satan. Such broken people are encouraged by a timely word of hope and promise. Jesus was the ultimate Rest Bringer (Mt 11:28).

3. Confident of the source of his teaching (50:4c): he will arouse in the mourning... The Servant-teacher is also a student. Daily he awakens to hear new revelation from God. The message of the Servant comes from heaven. From time to time God had revealed himself to OT prophets by dreams and visions. But the Servant-Prophet never experiences a time when God is not whispering in his ear. At no time did the Father leave his Son without guidance (Jn 8:29).

4. Confident that he had correctly apprehended the divine revelation (50:4d-5a): in the morning he will awaken for me the ear to hear like learned ones. (5) Adonay Yahweh has opened for me the ear... The Servant is able to hear God’s daily revelation as a good student might hear, i.e.,

293 Cf. 2 Kgs 4:1; Neh 5:1-5; Mt 18:25.
294 According to Kenneth Jones (WBC 3:132), the distinction here is between a divorce that was final and one that was only a separation, and between a sale that was final and one that was revocable.
attentively, respectfully, obediently, anxiously. *Yahweh has opened for me the ear* paints a contrast between this Servant and the professed servant of God, viz., national Israel. While the Servant kept his ear attuned to Yahweh’s word, national Israel refused to listen (48:8).

**B. Plan of God** (50:5b-6):
1. Servant’s submission (50:5b): *and as for me, I did not resist; backward I did not turn.* Second, the Servant was confident in God’s plan. Thus he willingly submits his heart and mind to obedience. He did not turn *backward*. The word stands first in the clause for emphasis. In him there was no apostasy, no rebellion, or unfaithfulness.
2. Servant’s suffering (50:6):
   a. His back (50:6a): *My back I gave to smiters...* The Servant now offers a specific example of his submissive mindset. He was not a victim; he willingly chose the path of suffering. He offered his back to the *smiters*, i.e., those who were charged with flogging a criminal. He permitted himself to be treated as a common criminal.
   b. His cheeks (50:6b): *and my cheeks to those who yank out the hair...* The beard in the Near East is considered the mark of manhood. Those who yank out the facial hair are those who show utter contempt for a man. There is no record of such abusive action being taken against Jesus. But pulling out facial hair is frequently depicted on Assyrian monuments and among the Jews as well (Neh 13:25).
   c. His face (50:6c): *my face I did not hide from shame and spitting.* Isaiah may have intended this clause to explain the meaning of the picture of the plucked beard. The Servant did not hide his face from shame. The term embraces verbal insults. Spitting is the most degrading of insults, and Scripture documents that the soldiers did spit in Jesus’ face (Mt 26:67).

C. Help of God (50:7-9): The Servant makes three strong assertions of confidence in his mission in these vv.
1. First assertion of confidence (50:7):
   a. Confidence of help (50:7a): *And Adonay Yahweh will help me...* Even in the midst of his intense suffering, the Servant asserts his faith in the power of God to help him. God is *Adonay*, absolute Lord; he is *Yahweh*, the God of covenant faithfulness. The Father will honor his commitment to the Servant.
   b. His determination (50:7b, c):
      1) Composure (50:7b): *therefore I have not been put to shame...* Because of his confidence in Yahweh, the Servant will not be confounded, confused or dismayed. Through the pressures of indescribable physical pain and ridicule he maintained his composure.
      2) Purpose (50:7c): *therefore I have set my face like flint...* His face is set *like flint* so that he does not look to the right or left. With the Father’s help he knew he could face whatever awaited him in Jerusalem. Luke may have had this passage in mind when he penned: *He set his face steadfastly toward Jerusalem* (Lk 9:51).
      3) Confidence (50:7d): *and I know that I shall not be ashamed.* The Servant knows that he will never have cause to be ashamed of his actions or decisions. Though others questioned his decisions and actions, he knew that he was doing the will of the Father.
2. Second assertion of confidence (50:8)
   a. Nearness of Vindicator (50:8a): *Near is my Vindicator...* The Servant knew that his God was near. He will not have to wait long for the anticipated divine intervention. On the cross he felt forsaken by his Father. That terrible valley of loneliness was a short, albeit necessary, part of the divine wrath that the Servant-Substitute absorbed on the cross. Apart from those moments of separation the Father stood near at hand throughout the redemption ordeal.
   b. Challenge to detractors (50:8b): Bolstered by the confidence in the help of God, the Servant hurls a double challenge at his adversaries:

---

295 Jesus chose to travel to Jerusalem knowing that the Roman scourge awaited him (Mt 26:67; 27:27-30; Jn 19:1).
who will enter into a lawsuit with me? let us stand together (50:8b): The Servant fears no legal challenge. His defense will silence any opponent who attempts to show that he is not who he claims to be.

(2) who is the master of my judgment, let him come near to me... (50:8c): The Servant challenges any who would dare to assume the role of a prosecutor to come near and begin his work. No prosecutor can be successful in destroying the credibility of this Servant.

3. Third assertion of confidence (50:9):
   a. Assertion (50:9a): Behold! Adonay Yahweh will help me... The assertion of v 7 is repeated for emphasis.
   b. Challenge (50:9b): who is the one who would do me harm? This challenging question is stronger than those in v 8. The Servant is affirming that no one can do him harm, i.e., pronounce sentence against him or condemn him. The implication is that the Servant has been pronounced innocent by no less than God himself. Therefore, to be critical of the Servant is a direct challenge to God’s omniscience.
   c. Prediction (50:9c): Behold! All of them like a garment become old; a moth shall consume them. The speech of the Servant concludes with a prophecy of the demise of those who oppose him. Behold underscores the shocking nature of what is about to be announced. Clothing becomes old gradually. Moths consume cloth slowly. The figure is one of gradual demise for the enemies of the Servant.

EXHORTATION TO THE REMNANT 50:10-11

Four exhortations to Zion follow the third Servant poem. Each is accompanied by promises designed to lift the spirits of God’s people during the period of their captivity. Ch 50 concludes with the first of those exhortations.

A. Exhortation to Trust (50:10):
   1. Address (50:10a): Whoever among you fears Yahweh, hearkens to the voice of his Servant, who walks in darkness and there is no light to him... The concluding vv of the ch are addressed to one who fears Yahweh, i.e., is a God-fearing person. The addressee is further described as one who hearkens to the voice of his Servant who has just spoken in the preceding vv, and who spoke so forcefully in ch 49. Listening to the Servant is a manifestation of fearing God. The Servant’s mouth speaks God’s word (49:2; cf. Mt 17:5).

   The God-fearing people whom Isaiah was addressing were walking in the darkness of gloom and despair. No light of hope was penetrating that darkness for the moment. Just like the Servant, the faithful will sometimes find themselves in the valley of the shadow.

   2. Appeal (50:10b): let him trust in the name of Yahweh and lean upon his God. Isaiah exhorted believers to trust in God during periods of darkness. In the name of Yahweh refers to Yahweh as he has revealed himself to man. Even stronger words are used in the last clause. Lean upon points to the essential nature of faith, viz., reliance, depending. For the faithful who are in darkness the Servant provides an example and encouragement.

B. Promise Regarding Adversaries (50:11):
   1. Addressees (50:11a): Behold! All of you who kindle a fire, who are girded with sparks... Isaiah concludes with a word of warning to those who do not believe in the Servant. Behold underscores the solemnity of the utterance. Unbelievers seek to find their way through the darkness of despair with light of a fire they themselves have made. Girded has military connotations. With sparks suggests that the unbeliever takes bits and pieces of the light of his own making to use as weapons when he confronts the monsters of life’s darkness.

   2. Sarcastic imperative (50:11b): walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled. Unbelievers have rejected the Servant; all they can do is to grope through the darkness using such light as their pathetic fires have created. The line emphasizes that the fire/sparks are of the unbeliever’s making.

   3. Judgment (50:11c): From my hand this was your lot; at the place of sorrow you shall lie down.
Those who walk in man-made light face a future that has been decreed by Yahweh. From my hand makes clear this future is unavoidable for it is orchestrated by Yahweh himself. This was your lot refers to the final punishment of the wicked detailed in the final clause. Those who kindle a fire by which to light their own way will be set on fire by their own sparks. They shall lie down in their grave in torment.296

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE
ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ZION

Encouragement for the spiritual remnant continues throughout ch 51. This section is characterized by imperatives. There is a call to listen (51:1, 4, 7, 21; 52:8), to awake (51:9; 52:1; cf. 51:17), to look (51:1-2, 6), and, finally to depart (52:11). Some of these commands occur in immediately doubled form (always an indication of emotion in a writer or speaker); and once the imperative is threefold, though in this case it is addressed to God, not man (51:9). Rhetorical questions and wonderful affirmations about God are designed to stir emotions and bolster confidence in discouraged people.

EXHORTATIONS FOR ZION 51:1-8

The first of four exhortations to Zion in a row appeared in 49:10. The remaining three appear in the vv of this unit.

A. Exhortation to Look Back (51:1-3):
1. Addressees (51:1a): Hearken unto me, O pursuers of righteousness, seekers of Yahweh: Yahweh turns from the unbelievers, and appeals to the faithful to listen to him. The faithful are described as pursuers of righteousness. They actively and vigorously seek to be on the right terms with God and their fellowman. The faithful are seekers of Yahweh. They long for a more intimate relationship with Yahweh. They understand that they cannot achieve righteousness apart from a work of Yahweh in their hearts and lives.
2. Confirmation of Yahweh’s word (51:1b-2):
   a. Exhortation (51:1b): Look unto the rock whence you were hewn, and unto the hole of the pit whence you were dug. To look unto is to remember, to consider. The rock is a metaphor for Abraham, as the next v indicates. The metaphor is similar to the modern “chip off the old block.” The hole of the pit from which Israel was dug is Sarah. In simple terms, the faithful are ask to consider their origin.
   b. Explanation (51:2): Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah [that] bare you; for as one I called him, and I blessed him, and I caused him to increase. The metaphors of the previous v are explained. Abraham is the Father of the faithful. The faithful are urged to look back (i.e., recall) Abraham and his wife Sarah. Yahweh called Abraham to leave Ur of Chaldees when he was but a single individual. God blessed him and promised him descendants as numerous as the stars of the heaven, even though at the time he and his wife were childless (Gn 15:5). God kept his word. Isaac, the child of promise, was born after twenty-five years. Isaac’s descendants truly had become numerous. The point is that Abraham believed God in spite of all indications to the contrary; his faith was eventually rewarded. So if the faithful look back to Abraham they will learn patience and faith in the promises of God.
3. Implication for the faithful (51:3):
   a. Comfort for Zion (51:3a): For Yahweh has comforted Zion... History will repeat itself. Though few in number God will comfort Zion, i.e., bless the remnant.
   b. Comfort for waste places (51:3b): has comforted all her waste places, and he has set her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of Yahweh... The devastated land once occupied by the faithful will be comforted. As Sarah was given innumerable children, so Zion with her waste places will thrive with a multitude of believers. The new Zion is compared to the garden of Yahweh, i.e., the garden of Eden. The

---

296On the torment of the wicked after death compare Mt 25:41.
point is that the future salvation will bring forgiveness to the citizens of Zion, forgiveness that results in justification or innocence like that of Adam and Eve before their sin.

c. Result (51:3c): joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of praise. The reference again is to that spiritual, antitypical Land of Promise built up through the efforts of the Servant (51:1-3; cf. 49:8). As the garden of Eden was a place of joy, so the new Eden, the Kingdom of Christ will be filled with joyous song.

B. Exhortation to Listen (51:4-6):

1. Addressees (51:4a): Hearken unto me my people, and my nation, unto me give ear... The faithful remnant is again addressed. They are asked to hearken. The faithful are called my nation. The emphasis of this v falls on the first person pronouns which stress Yahweh’s active involvement with his people.

2. Yahweh’s influence (51:4b): for the law from me shall go out, and my judgment for a light of peoples I cause to rest. The Mosaic Law is not in view. Law (torah) means instruction. The instruction that goes forth from the new Zion is the gospel. The gospel goes forth directly from Yahweh. The law of justice that will go forth from Zion (2:3) under the Servant (42:1-4) is the law of faith (Rom 3:27), the law of the Spirit of life (Rom 8:1-2). My judgment is parallel to the law. The gospel is the standard of right in the new Zion. It is not just Jews who will benefit from the gospel law/judgment; the gospel will be a light for Gentile peoples as well. From the gospel law/judgment Gentiles will learn how to walk so as to please Yahweh. I will cause to rest means I will establish. The language underscores the divine origin of the gospel.

3. Yahweh’s salvation (51:5):

a. It is near (51:5):

(1) Yahweh’s righteous salvation (51:5a): Near is my righteousness, my salvation has gone out... Emphasis is upon the word near. The context is messianic, hence the fulfillment is found, not in the release from Babylonian captivity, but in forgiveness of sin (cf. Acts 3:24-26). Deliverance from Babylon was a foretaste of the great deliverance of God’s people envisioned in these chs of Isaiah. My righteousness points to God’s intervention in history to set things right. His righteousness is made manifest in salvation. God’s gospel salvation is righteous because it fulfills God’s promises and satisfies the requirements of divine justice. In gospel salvation Yahweh bestows his righteousness on sinful men.

(2) Yahweh’s righteous judgment (51:5b): and my arms peoples will judge. Yahweh’s arms are symbols of his power. Yahweh will exert his power to judge peoples (Gentiles) who refuse gospel salvation. The flip side of righteous salvation is the punishment of those who reject God’s gracious offer.

(3) Hopeful wait (51:5c): Unto me islands wait, and unto my arm they will hope. The islands are the distant lands of the earth (cf. 41:1). In those places are people who wait for the arm (power) of Yahweh to be revealed. The revelation of God’s power will bring light and salvation to the islands. The gospel reveals God’s mighty power to enlighten and to save.

b. It is eternal (51:6): Lift up to the heavens your eyes, and look unto the earth beneath, for the heavens like smoke will be dissolved, and the earth like a garment will grow old, and its inhabitants likewise will die; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will not be broken. The remnant (or those Gentiles who are longing for salvation) is invited to look to the heavens that seem to be so permanent. Those heavens will vanish as smoke. The earth eventually will wear out. The created universe is temporal. God’s salvation, however, is eternal. The righteousness that is manifested in that salvation cannot be broken. God must uphold his word throughout eternity (cf. Lk 21:33). The righteous salvation of God does not exist in the abstract. So the implication is that a righteous people, saved by through the gospel, will exist for eternity.

C. Exhortation to be Bold (51:7-8):

1. Address (51:7a): Hearken to me, you who know righteousness, a people with my law in your
heart... As in v 1 the remnant is exhorted to listen to Yahweh. In v 1 the remnant is described as pursuers of righteousness; here they are those who know righteousness. Those who know righteousness are those who have experienced it and who practice it. In v 1 the remnant are said to be seekers of Yahweh; here they are a people with Yahweh’s law upon their hearts. The true Israel consists of those who eagerly have embraced the teaching of Yahweh as the rule of their lives.

2. Exhortation (51:7b): do not fear the reproach of men, and from their rebukes do not be afraid. The saints of God experience reproach from the world. The term can refer to something as mild as snubbiness or it can refer to overt mockery. Rebukes are stronger still. The faithful often have their faith challenged, their motives impugned, and their rights abused. The word men (‘ênôš) points to the frailty of humankind. Those who fear God enough, fear man little (Mt 10:28).

3. Explanation (51:8):
   a. Men are temporary (51:8a): For like a garment a moth devours them, and like wool a worm eats them... Two figures are used to stress how transitory man (‘ênôš) is. A moth consumes a garment slowly; so man slowly deteriorates with age. Wool that is worm infested is good for nothing and must be destroyed. Men, like fine cloth, are also temporal.
   b. Salvation is eternal (51:8b): but my righteousness will be forever, and my salvation from generation to generation. In v 6 it was Yahweh’s salvation that will be forever; here it is his righteousness. The two concepts are insuperably connected. While the reproach of the world is temporary, the blessings that God has in store for his people (salvation/righteousness) are eternal (cf. Rom 8:18).

WAKE-UP PRAYER TO GOD
51:9-16

A reveille prayer directed toward heaven is answered by two blasts designed to wake up an indifferent and slumbering people on earth. The prayer itself consists of two parts: a focus on what God has done, and a focus on who God is.

A. What God has Done (51:9-11):
1. Call to Yahweh (51:9a): Awake, awake, clothe yourself with strength, O arm of Yahweh; awake as in days of old, the generations of eternity. Isaiah called on the personified arm of God (his power) to act on behalf of his people. The threefold call for the arm of Yahweh to awake implies that the arm recently has been inactive, figuratively asleep. Isaiah calls upon the arm to clothe itself with strength, i.e., manifest the strength necessary to accomplish what needs to be done for God’s people. Battle preparation may be behind this figure. Isaiah prays that the arm of Yahweh will awake on behalf of God’s people as it had done on previous occasions.
2. Accomplishments (51:9b-10): By means of two questions the prophet expressed his faith in what God had done in the past.
   a. Figuratively affirmed (51:9b): Are you not she that hewed Rahab, piercing through the monster? Rahab is a symbol for Egypt (30:7; Ps 87:4). Monster (tannîm) is likewise a symbol for Egypt (27:1; Ezek 29:3; 32:2). The monster may be a crocodile. A previous manifestation of the mighty arm of God was in the account of the exodus when Yahweh smashed the power of Pharaoh. The feminine pronouns in this and the following v refer to arm, which is feminine in Hebrew.
   b. Historically affirmed (51:10): Are you not she who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who place the deep places of the sea as a way for the crossing of the redeemed. After smashing the power of Egypt, Yahweh brought his people through the Red Sea. The great deep was an insurmountable obstacle from man’s perspective, but it was no barrier at all to Yahweh. The very depths of the sea were made a passageway for his redeemed people. The historical account is recorded in Ex 15.
3. Implications (51:11): What God had done in the past was taken by Isaiah as a pledge of what he will do in the future. Hence the prayer anticipated a positive response.
a. Return of the ransomed (51:11a): And the ransomed of Yahweh will return, and they will come to Zion... This v repeats 35:10. The return of the exiles from Babylon was the initial step and the pledge of the greater march of the redeemed into the spiritual Zion of Heb 12:22.
b. Restoration of joy (51:11b): with singing, and everlasting joy upon their head; rejoicing and joy will overtake them, sorrow and sighing will flee away. Because of God’s glorious redemption, joy was to be the overriding characteristic of new covenant Zion.

B. Who God Is (51:12-15): God here begins to answer his people’s cry, expressed through the prophet in the previous three vv.
1. Yahweh the Comforter (51:12):
   a. Declaration (51:12a): I, I am he that comforts you... Yahweh draws attention to himself by repeating the personal pronoun. He is the only source of comfort for his people. The theme of comfort was introduced in 40:1; it continues to dominate this section of the book. True comfort must include action, not words. It embraces deliverance from oppression.
   b. Implication (51:12b): who are you that you fear from man who shall die, and from the son of man who like grass will be given. If Yahweh is the ultimate Comforter/Deliverer, who is Israel that it should fear man? Israel’s unbelief is being denounced. It is presumptuous to doubt God’s promises, and deny his essential character. Believers do not have the right to fear men when they profess to believe the promises of God. Man (‘enōš) is frail. He is temporal. He shall die. Like grass will be given seems to be an incomplete sentence. Perhaps the words to the fire give the sense. Grass is here today; tomorrow it is gathered and burned (cf. Mt 6:30).
2. Yahweh the Creator (51:13-14):
   a. Israel has forgotten Yahweh (51:13a): But you have forgotten Yahweh your Maker, who stretches out the heavens and founds the earth... When believers fear their fellowman they have forgotten who God is. You is masculine, referring to Israel. Yahweh is the Maker of Israel as a nation.
   Yet the one who created Israel is also the one who stretches out the heavens and founds the earth.
   b. Results of forgetting Yahweh (51:13b): and have trembled continually all the day from before the oppressor as he prepared to destroy. Those who forget who God is are doomed to a life of fear. They fear the oppressor as he was about to attack and destroy his enemies. The oppressor is probably the Babylonians; but doubting Yahweh leads to fear in any historical context.
3. Yahweh of Hosts (51:15): And I am Yahweh your God, rousing the sea, and its waves roar; Yahweh of Hosts is his name. Deliverance for God’s people is no idle wish. Yahweh who controls the winds and waves—Yahweh who has authority over all the hosts of heaven and earth—has ordered Israel’s deliverance.
4. Yahweh the Revelator (51:16):
   a. Servant’s message (51:16a): And I have placed my words in your mouth... Some think that the prophets collectively are being addressed; others think that Yahweh places his words in the mouth of Servant/Messiah. The words he is to speak come from above. They are of divine origin.
   b. Servant’s protection (51:16b): and in the shadow of my hand I will hide you... As in 49:2 Yahweh protects his Servant in anticipation of the day that he will undertake his work.
c. Servant’s task (51:16c): to plant the heavens and to found the earth... Just as the removal of heavens and earth speaks of the passing of the old order of things, so these words allude to the ushering in of the new. The reference must be to the new heavens and earth (Isa 65:16-17), the messianic age when spiritual Zion becomes the center of the divine program. God’s word established the original creation. The Servant’s word will usher in the new heavens and earth.

d. Servant’s people (51:16d): and saying to Zion, You are my people. God’s people inhabit the new heavens and earth--the new world--created by the Servant. His people are called Zion. Those who are citizens of the kingdom of Christ are the Zion of the new world (Heb 12:22).

GOD’S REVEILLE FOR ZION  
51:17-23

A. Need of Zion (51:17-20):
1. In a stupor (51:17):
   a. Effort to arouse (51:17a): Arouse yourself, arouse yourself; arise, Jerusalem... The repeated imperative addressed to Jerusalem is Yahweh’s response to the call of the prophet to God in v 9. Yahweh did not need to be awakened (cf. 51:9), but Zion did. The people of God were in a pitiful state, like a woman in a drunken stupor whose children are unable to stir her. The double imperative makes this a stronger exhortation than in v 9. It is probably Yahweh himself who attempts to awaken Zion.
   b. Need to arouse (51:17b): who has drunk from the hand of Yahweh, the cup of his wrath; the bowl of the cup of reeling you have drunk, you have wrung it out. Zion had drunk from a cup that comes from the hand of Yahweh. It is the cup of his wrath, i.e., the cup that contains his wrath. The figure conveys a measured amount of God’s judgment. This cup brings about reeling and drunkenness to those who sip of it. Bowl of the cup may refer to what today is called a goblet. Wrung it out means that Jerusalem has drained every last drop of that cup.

2. Leaderless (51:18): There is none leading her from all the sons she has brought forth, and no one grasping her hand from all the sons she raised. Drunken Zion has no one to lead her. No one among all her sons (citizens) is able to guide Zion through the confusion created by drinking the cup of Yahweh’s wrath.

3. Comfortless (51:19): Both these are about to befall you: who will mourn for you? wasting and ruin and famine and sword: who [but I] will comfort you? Both these is lit., these two, referring to the two things lacking in the previous v, viz., not being led by children she has borne and not being seized by the hand by the children whom she has brought up.297 Who will mourn (Lit., nod) for you. Nodding the head was a gesture of sympathy as in Job 2:11; 42:11. Wasting, ruin, famine and sword are disasters that befall Jerusalem. For that reason, each of these nouns has a definite article in the Hebrew. The first two refer to the structures of the city; the second two depict how judgment will impact those who live in the city. No one, except Yahweh himself, can comfort Jerusalem in the midst of such an accumulation of disasters. Comfort in this context implies deliverance and hope.

4. Defenseless (51:20): Your sons were faint; they lie down at the head of all the streets, like an antelope in a net; filled with the wrath of Yahweh, the rebuke of your God. Zion’s sons cannot help her because they have fainted away. This is not the sleep of fatigue but the slumber of drunkenness. The sons lie down at the head of all the streets, i.e., in plain view. The point is that Jerusalem sees her streets filled with lethargic citizens incapable of offering any resistance to the enemy. An antelope caught in a net is immobilized; so the defenders of Jerusalem will be unable to protect her. Zion’s sons are filled with the wrath/rebuke of Yahweh, and they have thereby become incapacitated.

B. Promise to Zion (51:21-23):
1. Addressee (51:21): Therefore, hear now this, afflicted one, and drunken, but not with wine... Therefore introduces the promise of Yahweh. The

297 So Young, NICOT, 3:321.
thought is that since there is no other who can assist Zion, Yahweh intervenes on Zion’s behalf. Having consumed the cup of Yahweh’s wrath, Zion is addressed as the afflicted one. She is in misery. Drunken, but not with wine further describes the distressful condition of Zion.

2. **Speaker (51:22a): Thus says your Adonay, Yahweh and your God...** The term Adonay (plural) is elsewhere used in Israel for human masters. Here it is used of Yahweh, probably because he is regarded as the master par excellence (husband?) of Zion. Two further titles (Yahweh, your God) further enforce the certainty of the promise.

3. **Promises (51:22b-23):** What news could possibly arouse Zion from her state of self-pity and depression?
   a. **He contends for Zion (51:22b): he will strive for his people.** Strive or contend is part of the vocabulary of the law court. In 45:9; 49:25; 50:8 Yahweh goes to court with Israel; here he strives in court on her behalf. Israel has in Yahweh a Defender.
   b. **He removes the cup (51:22c): Behold! I have taken from your hand the cup of reeling, the bowl of the cup of my fury; you shall not again drink it.** Behold introduces an unexpected announcement. Yahweh promises to remove the cup that has resulted in Zion’s reeling and drunkenness. This is further defined as the cup of my fury. You shall not again drink is lit., you shall not add to drinking of it. Yahweh alone decides when Zion must drink; he alone decides when Zion’s drinking of the cup shall end.
   c. **He gives the cup to oppressors (51:23): But I shall place it in the hands of those that afflict you, who said to your soul, Bow down that we may pass over; and you put your back like the ground, and like the street for those who pass over.** Yahweh promises to shift the cup of wrath from Zion’s hand to the hands of those that afflict you. Those oppressors treated Zion with contempt. They said to Zion, as it were, Bow down that we may pass over. The last two comparisons (like the ground/like the street) convey the picture of captives lying helplessly on the ground to be trampled by enemy soldiers and equipment (cf. Josh 10:24; Amos 1:3). Sometimes such cruel treatment was actually administered by conquerors as the Assyrian monuments amply illustrate.

**CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO**

**ZION’S HOPE**

**ZION’S WAKE-UP CALL**

52:1-6

1. **A. Invitation to Zion (52:1-2):**
   1. **Wake up (52:1a): Awake! Awake! Put on your strength, O Zion...** Yahweh gives Zion the same exhortation (cf. 51:17) that Zion addressed to the arm of Yahweh in 51:9. Yahweh invited Zion to come up from slave status to become a queen (cf. 47:1ff). The exhortation assumes that Zion is in sufficient control of her faculties to respond to the exhortation. The drunken stupor depicted in ch 51 has passed.
   2. **Dress up (52:1b):**
      a. **Exhortation (52:1b): put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city...** Zion is urged to put on beautiful garments, i.e., garments of holiness (cf. Ps 110:3; Isa 61:10), or priestly garments. The new garments are appropriate, because messianic Jerusalem will be a holy city.
      b. **Explanation (52:1c): for henceforth there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean.** Messianic Jerusalem can be called a holy city because it will no longer be desecrated by the presence of the unholy. No uncircumcised or unclean person will be permitted to enter messianic Zion. See Ezek 44:9; Joel 3:17; Zech 9:8-10. All who enter spiritual Zion have received a circumcision not made with hands (Col 2:11; Rom 2:28f; Gal 6:5).
   3. **Sit up (52:2a): Shake yourself from the dust, arise, sit, O Jerusalem!** Zion had been groveling in the dust of mourning and humiliation. Jerusalem is urged to shake off that dust. She should arise from that prostrate condition and sit on a chair (throne?). In ch 47 Babylon is told to leave her throne and sit in the dust; here Zion is told to arise from the dust to sit in queenly splendor as a free and flourishing city.
4. Cast off (52:2b): *Loose the bands of your neck, O captive, daughter of Zion.* Zion was groveling in the dust as a captive woman. A band about her neck restricted her freedom. Yahweh, however, calls on Zion to begin acting with the dignity of a free woman.

B. Explanation to Zion (52:3-6):
1. Price of liberation (52:3): *For thus says Yahweh: For nothing you were sold, and not for silver shall you be redeemed.* Yahweh is the absolute owner of Israel. He never had sold them to others; they still belonged to him. For this reason, Yahweh does not need to pay silver to redeem his people from captors. He merely needs to decree their release, and they will be released. Those who hold them captive are as much under the authority of Yahweh as are the captives themselves. It is grace that effects their redemption from bondage. *Redeemed* suggests a legitimate and legal transaction initiated by a third party. In this case the third party is Yahweh.

2. Illustration of past captivity (52:4): *For thus says Adonay Yahweh: To Egypt my people went down at the first to sojourn there; and Assyria oppressed them for nothing.* The speaker is identified as *Adonay Yahweh.* The first name underscores his authority to redeem; the latter name underscores his positive desire to redeem. Yahweh alludes to two prior captivities of God’s people. Originally God’s people voluntarily chose to reside in Egypt. As time went on they became slaves in that land. About seven hundred years later Assyria oppressed God’s people *for nothing,* i.e., without right. The Assyrians arrogated to themselves the right to oppress God’s people. The reference is probably not to the destruction of north Israel, which was declared not to be God’s people (Hos 1:8); but to Judah, which experienced oppression by Assyria during the days of good King Hezekiah.

3. Babylonian captivity (52:5-6):
   a. Occasion of captivity (52:5a): *And now, what is it to me here (oracle of Yahweh) that my people be taken for nothing...* As Yahweh had twice before delivered his people from hostile powers, so now he must intervene again. Israel is pictured as *taken into captivity for nothing.* Babylon had not paid anything to acquire Judah. Therefore the people of God could be freed without the payment of a special price, simply on the strength of a divine order. Just as the Egyptians and the Assyrians had no rightful claim upon Israel, neither did the Babylonians.

   b. Results of captivity (52:5b): *its rulers howl (oracle of Yahweh), and continually, all the day my name is blasphemed.* All the while God’s people are in captivity those who rule over the captives are howling like wild animals. As long as God’s people are in captivity the name of Yahweh is *blasphemed* by the oppressors who despise him as a deity of no consequence. Yahweh, therefore, had every right to demand the release of his people.

   c. Assurance of divine action (52:6): *Therefore, my people will know my name; therefore, in that day, for I am he who speaks, behold me!* The heathen blaspheme Yahweh’s name because of the captivity of his people. But in the great deliverance from Babylon Yahweh will teach his people the true meaning of his name. *My people will know my name,* i.e., know through personal experience what the name Yahweh implies. In this deliverance Israel will have a truer and deeper knowledge of God. *For I am he who speaks* underscores the certainty of the promise. *Behold me* is equivalent to *here I am* (cf. 1 Sam 3:6).

GOOD NEWS
52:7-12

God had two dispatches of the best sort of news for the people who live in Jerusalem and for those who were exiles in Babylon. In this unit Yahweh makes good on his *Behold me* with which the previous verse concluded.

A. Good News for Zion’s Citizens (52:7-8):
1. Messenger (52:7a): *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of one who brings good news...* Isaiah depicted a messenger racing over the hills of Judah toward the capital (cf. Nah 1:15). Beautiful *feet* represent the messenger as a whole.
It is a beautiful sight to see such a messenger approaching. The mountains are those around Jerusalem.

2. Message (52:7b): Isaiah uses three descriptors for the message, then summarizes the message itself.

a. Peace (52:7b): who publishes peace... First, the good news being conveyed to Zion focuses on peace. This peace is not merely the cessation of hostilities between nations; it includes reconciliation to Yahweh.

b. Good (52:7c): who brings good news of good... Second, the good news focuses on good. All that is truly good comes from above as a blessing of God.

c. Salvation (52:7d): that publishes salvation... Third, the messenger publishes salvation, i.e., deliverance from all those things that incur the wrath of God. God’s salvation is far more comprehensive than merely deliverance from Babylonian captivity.

d. Reign (52:7e): that says to Zion, Your God reigns. Fourth, the entire message is summarized in the announcement that Your God reigns. This declaration is often repeated in the NT in a slightly different format: the kingdom of heaven is at hand.298 Yahweh has won a great victory. This means peace, happiness, and salvation to Zion’s citizens. The good news may include the report that the exiles are returning, but it cannot be limited to that event. Paul rightly applies the v to the apostolic preaching of the gospel (Rom 10:15).

2. Watchmen (52:8): The voice of your watchmen, they raise the voice, together will they shout; for eye-to-eye will they see when Yahweh returns to Zion. Zion’s watchmen had been looking for the messenger. Seeing the messenger, and hearing the proclamation of peace, the watchmen break forth in unison into loud cries of joy. These cries no doubt echo what the messenger has proclaimed. The watchmen of Zion will see clearly (eye-to-eye) when Yahweh returns to reign in Zion.

3. Response (52:9-10):

a. Exhortation (52:9a): Break forth, shout together, O waste places of Jerusalem... Isaiah supplied a victory hymn worthy of the occasion. In the Spirit Isaiah sees the day when Jerusalem will become desolate places. He called upon all the waste places of Jerusalem to break forth in joyous song. They are to break forth/shout together, i.e., all at once.

b. Explanation (52:9b-10): The joyous song is appropriate to celebrate three marvelous things that Yahweh has done.

(1) Comfort (52:9b): for Yahweh has comforted his people... Yahweh’s long-promised comfort has become a reality. The dark days of disturbing doubt and despondency are over. God’s people have been comforted by the deeds of Yahweh on their behalf.

(2) Redemption (52:9c): he has redeemed Jerusalem. Yahweh has comforted his people by redeeming Jerusalem, i.e., liberating Jerusalem. Jerusalem can be said to be redeemed when Jerusalem’s citizens are set free from enslavement. Physical Jerusalem was still under foreign domination even after the return from captivity, and for the greater part of the intertestamental period. Isaiah envisions the redemption of the citizens of that heavenly Jerusalem established by Christ when he ascended into heaven (Heb 12:22).

(3) Salvation (52:10): Yahweh has laid bare his holy arm to the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. The arm of Yahweh is the symbol of his power. His arm is holy in that Yahweh’s power is always executed in accord with his righteous character. The arm laid bare indicates that Yahweh’s power has been openly manifested. To the eyes of all the nations indicates that the manifestation of Yahweh’s power will be discernable by Gentiles. The action envisioned by this v has universal implications. All the ends of the earth refers to the most remote parts of the planet. Gentiles in those regions will see the salvation of Yahweh. The verb can mean that the Gentiles will witness what Yahweh does for his people; it can also mean that they will experience that salvation first-hand.

B. Good News for Captives (52:11-12):

298 Young, NICOT, 3:330.
1. Exhortation (52:11): Those who have heard the good news of Yahweh’s salvation are called upon to demonstrate their faith.

a. Turn (52:11a): *Turn, turn...* The sense of this double imperative is to *turn back*. Most take the command to be addressed to the captives in Babylon to renounce Babylon. Curiously, however, Babylon is not mentioned in this unit. Perhaps the citizens of redeemed Jerusalem, who have come out of the world, are told to turn back to the world with the good news.

b. Depart (52:11b): *go out from there; an unclean thing do not touch.* The imperative (*r. yš’) urges a departure from someplace. The term is frequently used in a technical military sense meaning *go forth to battle*. From there may indicate that the writer was not located in the place from which the addressees were to go out. On the other hand, from there may point back to the immediate antecedent, viz., redeemed Jerusalem.

The common interpretation is that the captives are being urged to go out of Babylon. The last location named, however, was redeemed Jerusalem. Perhaps the redeemed citizens of Jerusalem are being sent out into the world in a holy war to share the good news. An unclean thing do not touch is thought by most to mean they are not to take spoil Babylon as they spoiled Egypt (Ex 12:35f) when Moses brought them out of that country. But if the reference is to the redeemed citizens of Jerusalem the meaning is that they are to be in the world but not of the world. Paul uses the language of this v to enjoin the sanctification of Christians (2 Cor 6:17-7:1).

c. Sanctify (52:11c): *Go out from her midst, be clean, you bearers of the vessels of Yahweh.* Again the common understanding is that Babylon and all she stood for had to be renounced by the liberated captives. But perhaps redeemed citizens of Zion are being warned about maintaining their purity as they carry the good news into the world. Those who engage in a holy war for Yahweh must be sanctified.

Those to whom all of the imperatives in vv 10-11 are addressed are called *you bearers of the vessels of Yahweh*. The terminology vessels of Yahweh is used only here. These vessels are probably equivalent to vessels of the sanctuary (Nm 3:31); vessels of ministry (Nm 4:12); and vessels of the altar (Nm 4:14). Perhaps this refers to the vessels of the house of Yahweh that Cyrus brought out of his treasure houses to put under the charge of Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:7), leader of those who returned from Babylon in 538 BC. By law the bearers of such vessels were to be priests. In redeemed Jerusalem all the citizens are priests (2 Pet 2:9). As these priests go out to holy war, they must keep themselves pure and unspotted from the world.

2. Promise (52:12): *For not in haste will you go out, and in flight you shall not walk; for going before you is Yahweh, and your rearguard is the God of Israel.* Israel had left Egypt in haste (Dt 16:3). The common interpretation is that the remnant will not leave Babylon in haste as once they left Egypt (Dt 16:3). But perhaps Isaiah’s point is that redeemed Jerusalem will go out to the gospel holy war in an organized, purposeful manner. In fact, his point may be that the going out of which he has now spoken three times in vv 11-12 is not a hasty withdrawal from an unacceptable location such as Babylon. As in the exodus from Egypt, Yahweh will lead the way in the holy crusade. At the same time he will be their rearguard. Believers can be assured of a successful mission when God is both their vanguard and their rearguard!

SUCCESS OF THE SERVANT
52:13-15

The fourth (and greatest) of the Servant poems focuses on the suffering and triumph of the Servant. It is through the work of the Servant that Zion’s salvation becomes possible. The poem begins in the last three vv of ch 52 and continues through the following ch. In this first stanza of the poem the messianic Servant is portrayed as triumphant.
A. Ultimate Triumph (52:13): Behold! My Servant will prosper; he will arise, and be exalted, and be very high. The interjection behold directs the reader again to focus on Yahweh’s servant. Prosper (r. skl) means to act in such a way as to bring one’s task to a successful conclusion. His every action will be intelligent and effective. Whatever humiliation he might suffer will not result from thoughtless mistakes on his part.

The consequences of the Servant’s wise dealings are set forth in three verbs: arise (r. rûm), be exalted (ns’ in Niph), and be high (gbh). The same expressions are used of Yahweh himself in 6:1 and 57:15. From obscurity and humiliation the Servant will be exalted high above all others (cf. Phil 2:9-11; Acts 2:33; 3:13, 26). No person save Messiah is conceived of in the OT as dealing so wisely that he will experience unparalleled exaltation.

300 Young, NICOT, 3:336.

B. Prior Humiliation (52:14):
1. Extent of it (52:14): Just as many were astonished over you (so was his appearance disfigured more than men, and his form more than the sons of men)...

Before the Servant experiences the exaltation of v 13 he will experience humiliation. That matter is taken up in this v and is further developed through the next ch.

So deep will be his degradation that observers at least initially experience a paralyzing astonishment over him. He will be disfigured to the extent that he no longer appears to be a man. The allusion may be to the battered body of the Servant and to the physical contortions that marked his hours of agony. It is as though the prophet is sitting at the foot of Calvary. He sees the Servant hanging on the tree after he had been buffeted, crowned with thorns, smitten, and scourged. His face was covered with bruises and blood.

2. Purpose of it (52:15a): so shall he sprinkle many nations...

The disfigurement of the Servant is not without purpose. Through his suffering the Servant is able to perform a priestly act of purification. It is taken for granted that one who performs such purification must himself be pure.

Because of his disfigurement others will regard the Servant as impure, a sinner above all men. But the shocking result of his sufferings is the provision of cleansing not only for Israelites according to the flesh, but for all nations, i.e., Gentiles as well.

3. Result of it (52:15b):
   a. Respectful silence (52:15b): and kings will shut their mouths because of him. Kings of the Gentile nations will show silent respect for the Servant. In contrast to the many—presumably Israelites—who were shocked to stupefaction by his suffering, these Gentile kings will pay silent homage to him for the salvation that the Servant makes available to the nations.

b. Unprecedented revelation (52:15c): For what had not been told them they shall see and what they have not heard they will comprehend. The Gentile kings had never heard the OT prophecies of a coming Savior. They did not have the advantage of centuries of religious ritual pointing to the necessity of vicarious suffering of a perfect Lamb. But in the proclamation of the gospel they could come to see (perceive) the glorious truth about the suffering of the Servant, viz., that he had died for their sins. Paul applies this v to the preaching of the gospel in largely Gentile regions (Rom 15:21).

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE
SUFFERING SERVANT

This poem consists of five three-verse paragraphs. The first (52:13-15) and fifth (53:10-12) paragraphs are in the future (imperfect) tense. Paragraphs two through four are in the prophetic perfect of assured prediction. For a Christian, reading through these vv is a pilgrimage down the Via Dolorosa. That this Servant is Jesus of Nazareth is settled for the believer by NT authority.

SLIGHTING OF THE SERVANT
53:1-3

301 Acts 8:26-35. Jesus is called Servant (Gk pais) in Mt 12:18; Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30.)
A. Servant Rejected (53:1): Who has believed our message, and the arm of Yahweh, upon whom has it been revealed? By means of a rhetorical question Isaiah calls attention to the few among his own generation who will believe on the Servant. Two good reasons are given why they should have believed. They should have acknowledged the Servant because of our message. Isaiah speaks as representative of the company of OT prophets. In the life of the Servant predictions of the prophets were being fulfilled almost daily, yet the people, for the most part, did not believe. These same people were eyewitnesses of the actions of the arm of Yahweh, i.e., the power of God. They witnessed the mighty miracles performed by the Servant in their midst, yet they did not believe. The Evangelist links this v with 6:10 in describing the rejection of Jesus by the Jews of the first century.

B. Reasons for Rejection (53:2-3):
1. His origin (53:2a): Two figures underscore the humble human origins of the Servant.
   a. Shoot (52:2a): Now he grew up like a tender shoot before him... The Servant is rejected superficially. Most refused to believe on him because of his humble origins. His appearance is likened to a tender shoot (yônēq), i.e., like a “sucker” that grows on a tree or plant. Messiah will be a fresh sprout from the stump of the fallen Davidic dynasty. Men regard suckers as useless. They are pruned and cast away. Yet his appearance was before him, i.e., before God. The Servant’s birth and childhood were under the watchful eye of the Father.
   b. Root (52:2b): and like a root from dry ground. This second figure also underscores the unpromising and unpretentious character of the Servant’s appearance on earth. He is likened to a root growing in dry and barren soil that must struggle to maintain its existence. An obscure village, a lowly stable, poor parents, a humble trade, a despised region, a corrupt age and nation--

these conditions constitute the dry ground out of which the root emerged. Men of great power and prominence are compared to tall cedars in the OT; but in the eyes of most of his contemporaries the Servant was a lowly root.

2. His appearance (53:2c): He had no form or splendor that we should see him, and no appearance that we should desire him. Nothing about the outward appearance of the Servant attracted men to his cause. The nouns form (tō’r), splendor (hādār) and appearance (mar’ēh) refer to all the obvious qualities that men look for in their leaders. Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel by his handsome physique, flashy showmanship and cunning flattery. The Servant will be the exact opposite--quiet, humble, unassuming. He has no regal pomp or splendor. Only the eye of faith can behold the true glory of the Servant.

C. Result of Rejection (53:3):
1. Sorrows (53:3a): He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows... The Servant was painfully rejected. He was not just ignored; he was despised, i.e., treated with contempt. Their contempt for him was shown in the verbal challenges they hurled at him, the paltry sum they paid for his betrayal, and the treatment they accorded him during the last hours. He was rejected or forsaken. Only a little flock surrounded him. After his incisive sermon on the Bread of Life, many of these went back and walked no more with him (Jn 6:66). In the end even the apostles forsook him and fled (Mt 26:56).

The phrase man of sorrows may indicate either the subjective result of the rejection of the Servant, or it may suggest an additional reason for his rejection. Perhaps both ideas are involved. Rejection produced sorrow that only led to further rejection. The Servant is a man in the noblest sense of that word. Yet the life of this man is filled with sorrow. This term embraces bodily suffering,

302L.Grogan (EB in loc.) understands the speakers in v 1 to be the Gentile kings and nations from 52:15.

303The word šemu’ātēnû is used technically for a prophetic revelation. See Isa 28:9, 19; Jer 49:14.

304The word is used of the attitude of Esau toward his birthright (Gn 25:34), the people toward Saul’s reign (1 Sam 10:27), Michal toward David (2 Sam 6:16), and Goliath toward the armies of Israel (1 Sam 17:42).
mental anguish, and spiritual discouragement. The sorrows of Christ appear on almost every page of the four Gospels.

2. Suffering (53:3b): *acquainted with sickness...* As with the previous expression, this one may also indicate both the result of the Servant’s rejection and at the same time add an additional reason for that rejection. Isaiah uses *sickness* (ḥōlī) as a metaphor for *sin* (cf. 1:5b, 6). On the cross the Servant experienced the penalty for sin (1 Pet 2:24). That cross because a stumbling block for the Jews, i.e., a further reason for the rejection of the Servant (1 Cor 1:23).

3. Contempt (53:3c): *and as a hiding of faces from him, he was despised so that we did not esteem him.* Men hid their faces from the Servant because the griefs and sorrows he bore made him unattractive. They treated him as though he had some repulsive disease. The repetition of *despised* in v 3 underscores the contempt with which the Servant was rejected. The prophet adds to the sad picture the thought that for a time no one recognized him for who he truly was.

SUFFERING OF THE SERVANT
53:4-6

The speakers in this unit are likely the astonished onlookers of the first stanza, who appear from 52:15 to be predominantly, if not exclusively, Gentiles.

A. Reason for his Suffering (53:4):

1. Vicarious (53:4a): *Surely, our sicknesses he carried and our griefs he bore...* The Servant suffered on behalf of others. At least twelve times in this and the next three vv Isaiah emphasizes that the Servant’s sufferings were vicarious. He suffered to save men from the terrible consequences of sin. The terms *our sicknesses* (cholāyēnû) and *our griefs* (mak’ōbēnû) depict the awful consequences of human sin. The Servant is not a sinner; he does not become a sinner in order to remove sin. Rather, he removes the consequences of sin. The verbs *carried* (r. ns’) and *bore* (r. sbl) are strong words indicating that he is able to remove the consequences from us only by himself bearing *our sicknesses* and *griefs*. He, the Righteous One, must pay the price for sins he did not commit. Peter may have had this v in mind when he wrote, *Our sins he himself has borne in his body upon the tree* (1 Pet 2:24).  

2. Misunderstood (53:4b): *but as for us, we regarded him as plagued, smitten by God and afflicted.* The Servant’s suffering was misinterpreted even by those who were sympathetic to him. The first person plural pronoun is emphatic. *We* (of all people) regarded him as *plagued* (nāgū’a). The term suggests the infliction of some loathsome disease. The sense may be paraphrased: He died for *us* but we treated him like he had the plague. Following the popular theology that he who suffers most has sinned most, *we* reached the erroneous conclusion that God had *smitten* (mukēh) and *afflicted* (me’unneh) this man (cf. Mt 27:39, 44).

B. Extent of his Suffering (53:5a): *He was pierced through because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquity...* The third person masculine pronoun is emphatic. The suffering was fatal. Two strong participles describe the extent of his suffering. He was *pierced through* (mechōlāl) by the thorns, by the nails, and by the spear of the soldier. The participle “expresses a fact that has become completely accomplished.” The second participle, *crushed* (medukā’), denotes being shattered, broken in pieces. “No stronger expression could be found in Hebrew to denote severity of suffering--suffering unto death.” Though most attributed his suffering to other causes, his suffering was actually substitutionary. *Our transgression* (pešā’ēnû) and *our iniquities* (‘avōnōtênû) demanded the death penalty from the eternal Judge. He absorbed the punishment rightfully due us.

C. Result of his Suffering (53:5b):

Matthew (8:16f) applied these words to the healing ministry of Jesus. For a discussion of the implications of Matthew’s interpretation see Smith, *PM*, 312f.  

Young, *NICOT*, 3:347.  

1. **Chastisement (53:5b): the discipline of peace was upon him...** The suffering of the Servant was redemptive. Discipline or chastisement (מֻסָר mûsar) refers to remedial correction. God can only be at peace with sinful man after sin has been chastened. Divine justice was satisfied, for the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). The death of the Servant was in fact a chastisement designed to enable God and sinful humanity to be reconciled (Eph 2:15-17; Col 1:20).

2. **Healing (53:5c): and with his wounds we are healed.** The Servant’s wounds are marks that result from blows inflicted on him by the hand (Mt 26:67), the reed (Mt 27:30), and the scourge (Mt 27:26). This wounding procured healing for the sin-sick sons of Adam. Peter alludes to this healing: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed* (NIV 1 Pet 2:24).

D. **Need for his Suffering (53:6):**
1. **Figuratively depicted (53:6a): All we like sheep have strayed, we have each turned to his own way...** The suffering of the Servant was essential. Collectively, like a stupid flock of sheep, the human race had wandered away from the Good Shepherd. Straying sheep are in grave danger. Since the straying here is a metaphor for iniquity, the danger to them comes from God himself. He must punish sin.

2. **Theologically explained (53:6b): and Yahweh has caused to fall on him the iniquity of us all.** Human need triggers divine action. Yahweh (the Father) laid upon him (the Servant) the iniquity (i.e., the punishment for iniquity) of us all. The provision of redemption is potentially as universal as the predicament of man. God took the initiative in human redemption (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Jn 4:10). *Caused to fall (הָיפָגְתָּא) can mean to hit, to strike violently.* The Servant absorbs the blow that justly belongs to the straying sheep. The absorption of the punishment by the Servant has as its ultimate aim the restoration of fellowship with the Father (1 Pet 2:25).

Only through the Servant’s suffering could all the straying sheep be recovered. The *our* and *his* contrast in these vv is striking and moving.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chart 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OUR EXPERIENCE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorrows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iniquities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SUBMISSION OF THE SERVANT 53:7-9**

A. **Affliction (53:7):**
1. **Endured voluntarily (53:7a): He was oppressed and he permitted himself to be afflicted...** The normal inclination is to flee oppression, to resist it, to fight it. But the Servant permitted himself to be afflicted (Niphal of r. ‘nh). He made no effort to escape.

2. **Endured resolutely (53:7b): but he did not open his mouth...** What provocation he experienced! If one cannot escape oppression his natural inclination is to cry out to God for help, to plead with the oppressor for relief, to protest his innocence, and to defend his actions. But not the Servant. In Pilate’s judgment hall he answered not a word (Mt 27:12-14; 1 Pet 2:23).

3. **Endured innocently (53:7c): like a sheep to the slaughter he was led...** The lamb being led to the slaughter is a picture of innocence. Most likely it is the slaughter of the Paschal lamb that is intended. It is not the ignorance of the lamb awaiting slaughter that is the point of comparison but the innocence. When John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29) he probably based his language on this v (cf. 1 Pet 1:18-19). Philip began at this same Scripture to preach Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:32-35).

4. **Endured patiently (53:7d): and like a ewe before her shearsers is silent...** A ewe that had been sheared many times stands patiently while the process is repeated. The Servant’s patient
endurance was possible because he knew the cruel oppression was not without purpose.

5. Endured silently (53:7e): so he did not open his mouth. For the second time in this passage Isaiah mentions the amazing restraint of the Servant in this ordeal. How easily he could have refuted every charge and thereby confound his accusers! His silence was interpreted as an admission of guilt. That made his tormentors all the more confident in their foul deeds.

B. Death (53:8):
1. Path to his death (53:8a): By arrest and judgment he was taken away... Because of arrest and judgment he was taken away by death. The noun arrest (‘ōtser) only occurs four times, each with the idea of restraint or coercion. The related verb has the idea of restraining, shutting up, imprisoning (2 Kgs 17:4; Jer 33:1; 39:15).

2. Disregard of his death (53:8b): and among his generation who took thought that he was cut off from the land of the living... Among the Servant’s contemporaries few gave any serious thought to the significance of his death. The verb cut off (r. gzr) is used of a violent and premature death. Land of the living is a poetic reference to life.

3. Significance of his death (53:8c): because of the transgression of my people he was smitten. In v 5 it was the suffering only that was substitutionary; here it is the death itself. In his death the Servant received the stroke or blow due transgressors. Potentially he was the substitution for all transgressors; but in reality his death is only efficacious for my people, i.e., those who submit to God in faith and obedience.

C. Burial (53:9):
1. Circumstances of his burial (53:9a): And with the wicked ones his grave was appointed, and with a rich one in his death... The original intention of the Servant’s enemies was to assign his grave to be with the wicked. They intended his burial to be one of dishonor. But that was not to be. As a matter of fact he will be with a rich one in his state of death.

Christ died on Golgotha, the common execution ground for Judea. His adversaries intended that he should be buried with the criminals who died with him on that day. Such would have been his fate were it not for the intervention of Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man (Mt 27:57-60).

2. Explanation of his burial (53:9b): because he had committed no violent act, nor was deceit found in his mouth. The Servant was given an honorable burial because he had committed no violent act (chāmās), i.e., he was not a lawbreaker. Peter translated this word by the Gk. hamartia, sin (1 Pet 2:22). The v thus becomes an affirmation that Christ was sinless in word and deed.

SATISFACTION OF THE SERVANT
53:10-12

A. Success (53:10):
1. Pleasure of Yahweh (53:10a): And Yahweh was pleased to crush him, cause him to suffer... The suffering of the Servant was in God’s hands, i.e., under his control. It was part of the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23). The Servant’s enemies were only doing what God permitted them to do. Crush is further defined by the verb cause him to suffer, lit. make him sick. He was crushed to the point of being made sick. These two verbs taken together depict the whole range of the suffering of the Servant.

2. Provision of an offering (53:10b): when his soul shall place a guilt offering... God was pleased with the suffering of the Servant because a guilt

---

309 The verb is best taken impersonally and therefore is properly rendered in English by a passive. Cf. the rendering in NIV.
310 The word translated wicked in the previous clause is plural, but rich is singular.
311 Rawlinson (PC, 2:297) points out that crucified persons were buried with their crosses near the scene of execution.
312 Christ affirmed his own sinlessness. It was also attested by Paul, John and the author of Hebrews. See 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Jn 3:5; Heb 7:26-28.
offering 313 thereby had been offered before God. This guilt offering made possible the redemption of the fallen sons of Adam. In v 5 he was a sin offering; here a guilt offering. His soul shall place this offering before God. This may mean no more than that he himself offers the offering. But others think his soul indicates that his very life is to be the oblation. 314

3. Survival of death (53:10c): he will see a seed, he will prolong days... See a seed points to the resurrection. The only way a dead man could see his disciples is to return from the dead. The term seed is used here in a spiritual sense. The seed of a teacher or prophet were his disciples (Jn 13:33; 21:4). 315 The passage is reminiscent of Ps 22:30 where the prophet promised, a seed will serve him. Prolong his days suggests that the Servant will live forever. Paul wrote: For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him (Rom 6:9 NIV). This theme of the eternity of the Servant should probably be linked to the promise made to David that his throne will endure forever. 316

3. Continuing mission (53:10c): and the pleasure of Yahweh will prosper in his hand. The Servant will be successful in his mission. The pleasure of Yahweh is God’s ultimate aim for his creation. Under the administration of the resurrected Servant and through his instrumentality 317 this program will prosper, i.e., succeed.

B. Satisfaction (53:11):
1. Servant’s observation (53:11a): From the travail of his soul he will see and be satisfied... During (or perhaps after) the experience of his suffering the Servant will see. The object of the verb is omitted. The reference is most likely to the fact that he will see the fruits and rewards of his ministry. With great satisfaction he will look on the results of his expiatory suffering—the formation of his church that will live with him forever in heaven (Rev 7:4-17). First the cross, then the crown! The foreknowledge of this triumphant conclusion sustained Christ throughout the ordeal (Heb 12:2).

2. Servant’s salvation (53:11b): through the knowledge of him shall my righteous servant justify the many, and he will bear their iniquities. Because the Servant is righteous he is in a position to provide salvation. He will justify the many, i.e., he declares that they stand in the right relationship with God. From the standpoint of the guilty sinner the justification is made possible through knowledge of the Servant. 318 Intimate knowledge of the Servant involves faith and obedience.

C. Exaltation (53:12):
1. Recognition (53:12a): Therefore I will give him a portion with the great... A portion with the great is a status alongside the greatest men who ever lived. The Servant will be given permanent recognition. Inasmuch as he so willingly and nobly fulfilled his mission, therefore God acted on his behalf. Paul expanded on this theme by affirming that God has given him a name that is above every name (Phil 2:9).

2. Spoils (53:12b): and with the strong he shall divide the spoil... Some take this clause in a general and metaphorical sense. The Servant is a great conqueror. The dividing of the spoil serves to underscore the greatness of his victory. It is possible, however, that by the strong Isaiah means the Servant’s disciples. If this is the case, they will share in the spoils of his victory over sin and death. Perhaps a link should be made to Ps 68:18 and the gifts distributed by Christ at his enthronement.

3. Reasons for exaltation (53:12c): Ch 53 closes with a restatement of the reasons for the Servant’s exaltation.

a. Died willingly (53:12c): because he poured out his soul to death... The Servant took the initiative in offering up himself. Poured out recalls sacrificial ritual. Poured out his soul (lit., laid bare his soul) is a metaphor for surrendering his life.

313 The essential idea of ‘āšām is the payment of restitution. Sin is robbery of God. The sinner owes a debt that must be paid. In Mt 20:28 Jesus said that he came to give his life a ransom for many.

314 Young, NICOT 3:354.

315 The use of children in a spiritual sense of disciples is frequent in the NT. See Phil 10; 1 Cor 4:15; Gal 4:19; 1 Jn 2:1.

316 2 Sam 7:13, 16; Ps 21:4; 89:4; 132:12.

317 The word hand may denote ministry as in Nm 36:13; Hag 1:3.

318 It is not the Servant’s own knowledge, but rather the sinner’s knowledge of the Servant that is the condition of justification.
b. Died submissively (53:12d): and with transgressors he was numbered... The Servant permitted himself to be numbered with transgressors. Jesus quoted this verse and announced that its fulfillment was near not long before his arrest in the garden (Lk 22:37).

c. Died vicariously (53:12e): yet he bore the sins of many... Though counted as a sinner by some, yet his ultimate purpose was to pay the price of the sin debt of all who would embrace him.

d. Died victoriously (53:12f): and for transgressors he made intercession. The priestly ministry of the Servant is in view. The basis of his intercession is the sacrifice that he himself provided.\textsuperscript{319}

\textbf{CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR}
\textbf{IMPERATIVES FOR BELIEVERS}

The agony and grief of ch 53 give way in ch 54 to singing and assurance. The sacrificial work of the Servant will redeem and transform. Zion/Jerusalem is not mentioned by name through the rest of the Book of the Servant. Isaiah, however, continues to speak of the glories of the people of God under the Servant.

\textbf{IMPERATIVE OF ENLARGEMENT}
\textbf{54:1-3}

\textbf{A. First Exhortation (54:1):}
1. \textbf{Express joy (54:1a): Sing, O barren, she that did not bear; break forth into a cry and cry aloud, she that did not writhe...} The people of God are personified as a barren woman. This woman had borne no children during the exile (cf. 49:14-23). Barrenness was a condition that was widely lamented in the ancient world. Yet this barren woman is exhorted to burst forth into song and shouts of triumph. \textit{She that did not writhe} refers to the labor of childbirth. The phrase is parallel to \textit{she that did not bear}. Barrenness and widowhood are pictures of God’s people in bondage, enduring the penalty for sin. As long as the barren woman was in bondage under sin she could not bear children or prosper.

2. \textbf{Explanation (54:1b): for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman, says Yahweh.} Yahweh had not divorced his people (50:1). After the temporary separation of the Exile, Israel would bear more children than in earlier days. Because the Servant has died for sin, and risen triumphantlty, a change is envisioned for the barren woman (God’s people). Once redeemed from the bondage of sin the now desolate woman will bring forth more children than when she was the married wife of Yahweh (prior to the exile). The birth of these many children signals the dawn of a new age of blessing for true believers. Paul applied this promise to the Jerusalem that is above (Gal 4:27) and so to the church.

\textbf{B. Second Exhortation (54:2-3):}
1. \textbf{Enlarge tent (54:2): Enlarge the place of your tent, and the curtains of your dwellings, let them stretch out, do not hinder it; lengthen your cords and your stakes strengthen.} Isaiah seems to have in mind the promises made to Abraham and his nomadic family (e.g., Gn 12:1-3; 28:13-14). The barren woman (God’s people) is urged to prepare accommodations for the large influx of children. Four steps are needed. First, she needs to enlarge the place of your tent, i.e., the ground upon which the tent is pitched. Second, she needs to stretch out the curtains that actually created the dwelling places for nomad children. Third, to accommodate the larger tent, the woman must lengthen the ropes that hold the tent up. Finally, larger, stronger stakes need to be used in order to insure stability. That God’s people are pictured living in a tent may hint at the truth that believers are always pilgrims just temporarily dwelling in this world.

2. \textbf{Explanation (54:3):}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{a. Growth (54:3a): For right and left you will break forth.} No longer will God’s people be confined to a small country like Canaan. Scripture indicates that the kingdom of Messiah will be worldwide in scope (cf. Zech 9:10). The verb \textit{break forth}... \end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{319}On the intercessory ministry of Jesus see Rom 8:34; Heb 9:24; 1 Jn 2:1.
forth or spread out (r. prtz) is the same used of the multiplication of Jacob’s seed in Gn 28:14.

b. Conquest (54:3b): and your seed will possess nations, and cause desolate cities to be inhabited. Your seed refers to the children of God collectively. God’s people will possess, i.e., conquer, the nations (Gentiles) with the sword of God’s Spirit. The phrase possess (NIV dispossess) nations is used elsewhere in the OT only in Dt and always in reference to the conquest of Canaan by Israel. These Gentiles then become part of the growing family. Under Joshua Israel came into Canaan and took over deserted Canaanite cities. So cause desolate cities to be inhabited is parallel to possess nations. Desolate cities are those that show the effects of sin. The fulfillment goes beyond the re-peopling of Judean cities after the exile. Isaiah envisioned a new Conquest by the messianic Israel. James interpreted a similar conquest passage (Amos 9:12) as referring to the inclusion of Gentiles in the church of Christ (Acts 15:17).


b. Reproach of widowhood (54:4c): and the reproach of your widowhood you will not remember any more. Widowhood is a metaphor for the Exile, when it appeared for a time that Yahweh had abandoned his people permanently. The point is that all past sins and their consequences are forgotten in the light of the glorious redemption that Yahweh has provided.

3. Explanation (54:5):

a. Israel has a husband (54:5a): For your husband is your Maker, Yahweh of hosts is his name... The reason God’s people need not be fearful or ashamed is because she (the people personified) has a husband. She has not in fact been widowed. Furthermore, her husband is her Maker, the all-powerful Creator who not only created the heavens and earth, but who created Israel as a people as well.

b. Israel has a Redeemer (54:5b): and your Redeemer is the holy one of Israel... Yahweh became Israel’s husband/maker by virtue of redemption, i.e., delivering his people from bondage. But the Redeemer is the holy one of Israel, and this implies that the bride must also be holy. All impurity must be removed.

c. Israel God is everyone’s God (54:5c): the God of all the earth shall he be called. Because of the great redemption made possible through the Servant, the time will come when men will recognize Yahweh as God of the whole earth.

4. Illustration #1 (54:6-7):

a. Forsaken wife (54:6): For as a wife is forsaken and grieved of spirit has Yahweh called you; and as a wife of youth, for she shall be rejected, said your God. The picture here is of a woman married in her youth who, because of sin, is forsaken, i.e., rejected by her husband (Yahweh). This casting off led to her being grieved of spirit. This woman is called, i.e., recalled or re-instated. The wife of youth is Israel. Redeemed Israel (God’s people) becomes the bride of Christ.

b. Gathered people (54:7): In a little moment I forsook you, and in great mercies I shall gather you. In a little moment I forsook you describes the exile as a brief interlude in the relationship between Yahweh and his bride. The forsaking of...
the spiritual Israel was short-lived. But in great mercies Yahweh will gather the scattered members of the true Israel. The plural mercies underscores the abundant measure of grace that is exercised in the gathering process.

5. Illustration #2 (54:8-9): a. Overflowing flood (54:8): In an overflow of wrath I hid my face from you, and in everlasting kindness I have had mercy on you, said your Redeemer Yahweh. Overflow of wrath compares the adversities of Israel to a flash flood. I hid my face from you indicates that God withdrew his protective watch care. This is equivalent to the forsaking of the previous v. The flood of wrath was not of long duration. Now the true Israel of God can experience the everlasting kindness of Yahweh. His kindness and mercy is revealed in redemption or deliverance from bondage, hence the emphasis on your Redeemer Yahweh.
b. Never repeated flood (54:9): For the waters of Noah are this to me, what I swear from the waters of Noah passing over the earth again; thus I have sworn from being angry against you and from rebuking you. This v underscores the truth set forth in the preceding v. There can no more be a replication of that outpouring of wrath than there can be another world-wide deluge. The waters of Noah are this to me, i.e., I regard the outpouring of wrath like I regard Noah’s flood. Yahweh took an oath that the waters of Noah will never again pass over the earth. So now Yahweh has sworn that he can never again be angry and rebuke Israel as he had done.

6. Illustration #3 (54:10): For the mountains will move, and the hills will shake; but my mercy from you will not move, and the covenant of my peace will not shake, said the one who showed mercy, Yahweh. Mountains and hills symbolize what is most permanent on this earth. Even these symbols of permanence can sometimes shake and move. But Yahweh’s mercy (covenant faithfulness) and covenant of peace cannot shake or move. The covenant of peace is a covenant that brings peace to man. It is Yahweh’s mercy that makes possible reconciliation with the offended deity. Isaiah refers to the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus and proclaimed by the apostles. It is the God who showed mercy who speaks these words of assurance.

B. Future Glory Assured (54:11-17):
1. Current conditions (54:11a): Oppressed, storm-tossed, without comfort! Yahweh addresses Jerusalem in a way that depicts her woeful state. Jerusalem is oppressed or afflicted. Storm-tossed depicts Jerusalem blown about by winds of judgment. She is without comfort or mercy under the judgment of Yahweh.

2. Outward glory (54:11b-12): Behold! I am about to lay your stones in antimony, and I will found you in sapphires. (12) And I shall place your battlements as jasper, and your gates sparkling stones, and all your border stones of delight. Behold introduces a shocking, unexpected promise. Yahweh himself will build Jerusalem. He will lay the stones of the city in antimony. This was a black mineral powder that was probably mixed with water to make a cement or paste designed to enhance the beauty of the stones. Yahweh will use sapphires, jasper and sparkling stones as building materials. Border is probably poetic for walls, with stones of delight, i.e., stones whose appearance brings delight. The entire description is figurative. The new Zion will be a beautiful city constructed by Yahweh himself for the enjoyment of his redeemed people.

3. Inward glory (54:13): And all your sons, disciples of Yahweh; and great will be the peace of your sons. Zion’s sons are all disciples of Yahweh, i.e., they have been taught by Yahweh. This v was quoted by Jesus in reference to those who came to him (Jn 6:45). These sons/disciples may be the beautiful stones of the preceding vv. As a result of being taught the word of Yahweh, these sons/disciples will enjoy an abundance of peace, i.e., blessing.

4. Permanence (54:14): a. Lasting foundation (54:14a): In righteousness shall you be established... Righteousness has a twofold meaning. God’s righteousness is manifested in the salvation of his people and the defeat of their enemies. Righteousness is also
reflected in the inward lives of God’s people as they faithfully obey Yahweh. Established means founded. It was the righteousness of God that made possible the founding of new covenant Zion.

b. Result (54:14b): be far from oppression, for you will not fear, and from destruction, for it will not come near to you. Because Zion is founded in the righteousness of God, she will be far removed from oppression by the enemy. New covenant Zion will have no cause to fear men, Satan, or judgment. Zion is told to be far from destruction because Zion (God’s people collectively) cannot be destroyed.

5. Deliverance (54:15-17):
   a. Description (54:15): Behold, they shall surely gather, not at my sign. Who has gathered against you? He shall fall. Behold introduces yet another aspect of grand promises to God’s people. Here Yahweh clarifies the previous v. Enemies shall gather against Zion from time to time, but they will not come at my sign, i.e., at my bidding. The question, Who has gathered against you? challenges those who dare to attack Zion. He shall fall is probably an idiom meaning that the attacker will fall away or defect to Zion, i.e., those he came to attack.
   b. Certainty (54:16-17):
      (1) Yahweh’s power (54:16): Behold! I have created the craftsman, blowing into the fire of coal, and bringing out a weapon for his work; and I have created the destroyer to ravage. Promise of deliverance is certain because Yahweh is omnipotent. He created the men who made the attack weapons, and the destroyer who used them. Even those who assault Zion are under the control Yahweh.
      (2) Yahweh’s assurance (54:17a): Every instrument that is formed against you will not prosper, and every tongue that will rise up with you to the judgment you shall condemn. Every instrument that is formed against you indicates that enemies will plot the demise of Zion. They form weapons to accomplish that purpose. The creator of both craftsman and destroyer assures his people that no such weapon prosper (succeed) in destroying Zion. Every tongue that shall rise up with you to the judgment conveys a courtroom scene. The tongue represents accusers. Enemies go to court, as it were, to condemn Zion. But Zion will arise to condemn those accusations as false. The point is that God’s new covenant people will be victorious over all opposition.
   6. Concluding note (54:17b): This is the inheritance of the servants of Yahweh, and their righteousness from me (oracle of Yahweh). This refers to the security of Zion. The servants of Yahweh are the sons/disciples of v 13, i.e., new covenant believers. Security is their inheritance. Their righteousness (salvation) comes to them from God. Opposition to Zion does not come from God (cf. v 15); but inheritance and righteousness do come from him.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE
MORE IMPERATIVES FOR BELIEVERS

IMPERATIVE OF SUSTENANCE
55:1-5

A. An Invitation (55:1-3a):
1. Extended (55:1): Ho all who thirst, come to the waters, and he who has no money; come, buy and eat. Come buy without money and without price wine and milk. Having set forth the blessings of messianic salvation in the preceding ch, Yahweh invites people to enjoy the blessings of salvation. The invitation is addressed to all who thirst, but who cannot satisfy their thirst. Some see in these words an echo of the Middle Eastern water vendor. Yahweh, however, offers more than water. Water, wine and milk—symbols of spiritual blessings—are free to all who might desire them (cf. Jn 7:7). The v contains six imperatives. Come is used twice to suggest that one must make a move. Buy is also used twice. But the wine and milk are obtained without money or price. The blessings are costly; they cost Jesus his life. But to sinful mankind these blessings are a free gift (Rom 6:23). If the specific

---

521 The singular servant appears twenty times in chs 41-53; but following the supreme revelation of the suffering Servant the singular is not used again. The plural servants is frequent in chs 54-66.
items have any significance it might be this: water = refreshment; milk = nourishment; wine = exhilaration and enjoyment.

2. Encouragement (55:2):
a. Reasoning (55:2a): Why do you weigh out silver for what is not bread, and your toil for what does not satisfy? The question appeals to the reason of those who recognize their hunger and thirst. Why does anyone prefer to work for their salvation when they can receive it as a free gift? Weigh out silver refers to the common method of that time (before coined money) of making a purchase. The needy souls are pictured weighing out what they had earned by their labors. They think they are buying bread, but it is not bread. It will not satisfy their spiritual longings.

b. Urgent appeal (54:2b): Hearken, Hearken unto me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight itself in fatness. The double imperative connotes urgency. Purchasing the wine and milk without money is now defined as hearkening unto me, i.e., Yahweh. To listen to the word of Yahweh is to eat what is good, i.e., genuinely good. Your soul is equivalent to yourself. Those who choose to eat (take in, digest) what they hear will delight in fatness. In that part of the world the fat of a meat cut was considered the choice part. So fatness symbolizes luxuriant food. The world offers leanness; God offers fatness to hungry people.

c. Urgent appeal repeated (54:3a): Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and let your soul live. To incline or stretch out the ear is to focus on hearing what Yahweh has to say, and at the same time shutting out competing voices. To incline one’s ear to Yahweh one must come within hearing distance. Worldly preconceptions and priorities place a human heart outside hearing distance. God promised that those who come unto him will live, i.e., have life more abundant.

B. An Interpretation (55:3b-5):
1. New covenant (55:3b): For your sake I will make for you an eternal covenant, the faithful mercies of David. The focus of the opening vv of ch 55 is on a new covenant. Isaiah has alluded to this covenant several times. There can be little doubt that the Christian covenant is intended (Heb 9:15). Six features of this new covenant are indicated. First, the covenant is divine in its origin and certain in its prospect. God will make a covenant. Second, the covenant is made primarily for the benefit of God’s people, for it is made for your sake. Third, the covenant is eternal. The context here of spiritual salvation demands that ōlām be given this limitless meaning. The Sinai covenant was meant to be provisional; this covenant is permanent. Fourth, this covenant is gracious. It employs the mercies of God promised long before. Fifth, the covenant reflects God’s faithfulness to all of his promises, hence the reference to the sure or faithful mercies. Sixth, the covenant pertains to the house of David. That is to say, the eternal covenant will center in a descendant of David.

The sure mercies of David, then, are the loving and merciful promises that God made to David of an eternal throne. “The promises to David, rightly understood, involve all the essential points of the Christian covenant.” This passage is quoted by Paul in Acts 13:34 with reference to the resurrection of Christ. In the reign of the risen Christ the promises of the Davidic covenant receive their eternal and therefore their final fulfillment.

2. New leader (55:4): Behold! I have given him for your sake as a Witness of peoples, a Prince and a Commander of peoples. On the basis of the application of the previous v to Christ in the NT, v 4 should be applied to Messiah. Four specifics concerning Messiah are taught. First, Messiah is a gift of God, for he says, I have given him, i.e., the Messiah. Second, Messiah is a Witness (‘ēd). He bears witness through his life and words to the truth of God (Jn 18:37). He witnessed a good confession before Pilate (1 Tim 6:13). In a special way he bears witness to Gentiles who have not heard of the sure mercies of David. The Apostle

---

322 Young, NICOT, 3:375.
324 Rawlinson, PC, 2:329. These promises were that David’s seed will sit on an everlasting throne (Ps 89:2-5, 19-37), triumph over death (Ps 16:9, 10), give peace to Israel (Ps 132:15-18), and build a house of God (2 Sam 7:13).
John called him the Faithful Witness (Rev 1:5). Third, Messiah is a Prince (nāgîd). This title is also applied to Messiah in Daniel 9:25. The term stresses his position and authority. Fourth, Messiah is the Commander (metsavvēh). This title stresses his function. He is the captain of Yahweh’s host (Josh 5:14), the Captain of our Salvation (Heb 2:10), the leader under whose banner Christians serve (2 Tim 2:3-4).

3. New growth (55:5): Behold! A nation that you do not know, you shall call, and a nation that does not know you shall run to you, for the sake of Yahweh your God, the holy one of Israel, for he has glorified you. This v is a promise addressed to the seed of David of the preceding v. Messiah will call a nation that heretofore he had not known as his people. This is a way of emphasizing the universality of the future Davidic (messianic) kingdom. Obviously the seed of David will rule the people of Israel; but other nations as well will own him as their king. This is not accomplished through military endeavor but by a call, the gospel call. Thus God’s kingdom will be enlarged. Israel’s glory will be increased. God has glorified Messiah (Jn 17:1; Acts 3:13) in his resurrection, ascension and enthronement.

IMPERATIVE OF PARDON
55:6-13

A. Invitation (55:6-7):
1. Urgency (55:6): Seek Yahweh while he may be found, call upon him when he is near. Only those who are pardoned will be able to take part in the glorious age anticipated by Isaiah. Thus the prophet called upon both Jews and Gentiles to seek Yahweh. This must be done while he may be found and when he is near, i.e., before the expiration of the grace period. To seek Yahweh is to approach him with a mind to learning and obeying his will. To call upon him suggests petition for mercy and forgiveness.

2. Involvements (55:7a):
   a. Negative aspect (55:7a): Let the wicked forsake his way and the man of iniquity his thoughts...
      The invitation is addressed to the wicked and the man of iniquity. A wicked man is one who is guilt of sin against God. The man of iniquity may reflect someone whose entire lifestyle is devoted to evil. Such a person cannot seek Yahweh and call upon him until he forsakes his way (outer conduct) and his thoughts, i.e., evil designs, purposes and plans that fill his heart. This is an excellent description of repentance: a change of mind that is reflected in a change of conduct.
   
   b. Positive aspect (55:7b): and let him return unto Yahweh... The verb suggests that the wicked man and the man of iniquity had once had a relationship with Yahweh. Once they were innocent of guilt and willful transgression. At some point they had chosen to abandon Yahweh and pursue the enticements of evil.

3. Incentive (55:7c): that he may have mercy upon him, and unto our God for he will multiply pardon. Yahweh offers mercy to sinners who return. He has never yet slammed the door in the face of those penitent hearts that call out to him. Mercy is withholding punishment that is justly deserved. The mercy expresses itself in pardon or forgiveness. That pardon Yahweh will multiply to take care of man’s sin problem however enormous that problem may be. Our God reminds sinners that whether or not they acknowledge him, he still is God. He yearns for an intimate relationship with all those that he created.

B. Explanation (55:8-13): Three reasons are given for seeking Yahweh.

1. Person of God (55:8-9):
   a. He is different from man (55:8): For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways (oracle of Yahweh). The previous v indicated that man’s thoughts and ways are wicked. If men are going to seek a relationship with God they must first understand that God’s thoughts and ways are different. There are two implications. First, God is eternal and unchangeable. Reconciliation requires inward and outward changes on man’s part. Second, man cannot evaluate his own spiritual condition or dictate the terms of his acceptance before Yahweh.
b. He is superior to man (55:9): For as the heavens are higher than the earth thus are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts from your thoughts. God’s ways and thoughts are higher than those of man because he is absolutely holy and righteous. That God can be both merciful and just at the same time is an example of how his thoughts transcend man’s thoughts. In the cross the mercy and justice of God converged and made possible eternal salvation for all sinners.

   a. Illustration (55:10): For as the rain comes down and the snow from the heavens and does not return there but waters the earth and causes it to bring forth and to sprout, and gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater. The rain and snow come from heaven to earth. They each accomplish the purpose for which God sends them. Rain and snow illustrate the power of God to accomplish his purposes in nature. Neither rain nor snow returns to heaven without having accomplished their divinely intended purpose.
   b. Application (55:11): So will my word that goes out from me not return unto me empty but it will do what I please and it will prosper in respect to that which I have sent it. As moisture accomplishes its purpose in the physical realm, so the word of God will fulfill God’s purpose in the hearts of those who humble themselves before him. My word refers to any utterance of God, not any one particular prophecy. God’s word will accomplish his purpose; it will succeed in the mission God assigns to it.

3. Prospect of a better life (55:12-13):
   a. Deliverance (55:12):
      (1) Joyous departure (55:12a): For in joy you shall go out... Those who answer God’s invitation will go out with joy. Deliverance has come; there will be no more fear. It is the bondage of sin from which the penitent go out. The v is similar to Hos 1:11.
      (2) Peaceful procession (55:12b): and in peace you shall be led... they will be led forth with peace. Peace connotes the condition of being undisturbed by enemies; it also points to complete trust, confidence, and satisfaction in the one who is leading, viz., Messiah.
   b. Transformation (55:13): Instead of the thorn bush will come up the cypress, instead of the brier will come up the myrtle... The transformation of nature is used to describe the radical change experienced in the life of the redeemed. The beautiful replaces the ugly; the valuable replaces the worthless; the helpful replaces the harmful. Happiness and contentment (cypress and myrtle) replace bitterness and sorrow (thorn bush and brier) in the lives of obedient believers.
   c. Testimony to Yahweh (55:13): and it shall be to Yahweh a name, for an eternal sign that shall not be cut off. Transformed lives will be an everlasting testimony to the name of Yahweh, i.e., his reputation for power and compassion. Those transformed lives will be an eternal sign pointing to the success of Yahweh in implementing his plan for human redemption. The sign will not be cut off, i.e., destroyed. Inscriptions lauding the achievements of kings fade with time or are destroyed by successors. The King of Kings, however, has a monument in each individual who lives for him here and with him for eternity.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

SALVATION FOR HERS

In chs 40-55 people are being encouraged to return from Babylonian captivity. Beginning in ch 56 there is a change in geographical perspective. Now Isaiah depicts the people living in Canaan. These chs make clear that the grand promises of a new land and a righteous people were not to be fulfilled in the postexilic community.

IMPERATIVE OF SERVICE
A. Nearness of Salvation (56:1-2):
1. Exhortation (56:1a): Thus says Yahweh: Keep judgment and do righteousness... The introductory formula is used with decreasing frequency in the last three sections of Isaiah.\(^{325}\) The linking of judgment and righteousness is frequent throughout the book. The former term is virtually equivalent to torah or law (51:4). A person who keeps judgment is trying to follow Yahweh’s revealed will. Do righteousness means to do what is right in the eyes of Yahweh. Heeding the exhortation of this v manifests repentance and puts people in a frame of mind to receive God’s salvation when it is manifested.

2. Explanation (56:1b): for near is my salvation to come and my righteousness to be revealed. As in 51:5 the nearness of Yahweh’s salvation/righteousness is offered as the grounds for the preceding exhortation. The reference is to messianic deliverance. Yahweh’s righteousness is revealed in this salvation (Rom 1:18). Near is a relative term. Is Isaiah measuring the nearness from his own day? from the anticipated day of Israel’s deliverance from exile? or from the appearance of the Servant?

3. Beatitude (56:2):
   a. General (56:2a): Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds fast to it... As a further encouragement to repentance, Isaiah pronounces a blessing on the individual who does this, i.e., keeps judgment and does righteousness. Man (^nôš) signifies man in his frailty and weakness. Son of man is parallel to man. Holds fast to it means persevering in judgment and righteousness.
   b. Specific (56:2b):
      (1) Sabbath observance (56:2b): who keeps the Sabbath from profaning it... The first specific example of what is involved in keeping judgment and doing righteousness is Sabbath observation. For the Israelites keeping the Sabbath as a day of rest was a testimony to their trust in the provisions of the Creator. Weekly Sabbath observance also celebrated the deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Sabbath observance was one of the badges of membership in the covenant people. One who keeps the Sabbath does not profane it, i.e., treat the Sabbath as if it were an ordinary day of work.
      (2) Moral purity (56:2c): and keeps his hand from doing all evil. Merely refraining from work on the Sabbath was not sufficient. His hand is a metaphor for involvement in something. From all evil points to sinlessness. God held up before his people the ideal of living a sinless life. Perfection is the goal for all those who embrace the salvation of Yahweh.

B. Inclusiveness of Salvation (56:3-7): Those excluded from worship assembly under the old law (Dt 23:1-6) were free to participate in the public services of the messianic era.

1. Discouraged believers (56:3):
   a. Foreigners (56:3a): And let not the foreigner say, who has joined himself to Yahweh, saying, Yahweh will surely separate me from his people... The foreigner is lit., the son of foreignness. One who has joined himself to Yahweh is one who has professed faith in the sole divinity of Yahweh, and who has committed to worship and serve him. The OT contains several examples of such foreigners who had embraced Yahweh as their God. The committed foreigner do not need to worry that in the coming salvation Yahweh will surely separate me from his people. There are no second class citizens in the kingdom of God.
   b. Eunuchs (56:3b): and let not the eunuch say, Behold I am a withered tree. According to Dt 23:1 eunuchs were excluded from God’s assembly. But Isaiah encourages eunuchs who were committed to Yahweh not to be discouraged. I am a withered tree is an idiom meaning that the eunuch cannot produce offspring.

2. Inclusion of eunuchs (56:4-5):
   a. Commitment of eunuchs (56:4): For thus says Yahweh to the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths and who choose that in which I have delighted; and take hold of my covenant. The particular kind of eunuch that will have a part in the coming salvation is described. He keeps my sabbaths, i.e.,

\(^{325}\)Thus says Yahweh occurs eleven times in chs 40-48; nine times in 49-57; and four times in chs 58-66.
the weekly Sabbath and all the sabbatical institutions that Yahweh instituted. He chooses that in which I have delighted. This points to obedience to the commands of God. He takes hold of my covenant, i.e., he carries out the responsibilities that were stipulated for all those who were under the Sinai covenant.

b. Promise to eunuchs (56:5): That I shall give to them in my house and in my walls a hand and a name, better than sons and daughters; an eternal name I will give to him that shall not be cut off. Faithful eunuchs will have an honorable reputation in the future house of God. My house and my walls do not refer to the physical temple, but to the household of faith, i.e., the family of God. A hand is a monument as in 1 Sam 15:12; 2 Sam 18:18. A name is a reputation. The eunuch has no sons and daughters to perpetuate his name. In the family of God, however, the eunuch will have an eternal name that will never be cut off, i.e., disappear. The NT knows of a book of life in which names of the redeemed are written. Those who overcome are promised that their names will not be blotted out of that book (Lk 10:20; Rev 3:5).

3. Inclusion of Gentiles (56:6-7):

a. Commitment of foreigners (56:6): And the foreigners who join themselves to Yahweh to serve him and to love the name of Yahweh to become his servants; everyone keeping the Sabbath from profaning it and who hold fast to my covenant. Foreigners who join themselves to Yahweh are now mentioned for the second time (cf. v 3). These foreigners are committed to serve Yahweh. The term is used of the ministries of priest and Levite, suggesting that these foreigners engage in priestly ministry. They love the name of Yahweh, i.e., all that has been revealed in God’s word about the nature of God. They have become his servants. NIV understands this phrase to refer to worship. Like the eunuchs in v 4 they keep his sabbaths and hold fast to my covenant.

b. Promises to foreigners (56:7-8): (1) Joyful presence (56:7a): Then I shall bring them unto my holy mountain and I shall make them rejoice in my house of prayer... In the NT age all strangers who sincerely wish to serve God are welcome in his house. I shall bring them suggests that these Gentiles are far removed from the household of faith (Eph 2:12, 13, 17). My holy mountain is equivalent to my house/my walls in v 5. The reference is to the spiritual Mount Zion of Heb 12:22.

(2) Acceptable participation (56:7b): their burnt offerings and their sacrifices are for acceptance upon my altar... NT worship is described in OT language. The sacrifices of committed foreigners and eunuchs will be accepted. In the new covenant age my altar is Christ himself (Heb 13:10). Through Christ believers offer up sacrifices that are acceptable to the Father. 326

c. Explanation (56:7c-8): (1) Purpose of God’s house (56:7c): for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the peoples. At the time Isaiah wrote the temple was not yet a house of prayer for all people. But at the time when eunuchs and foreigners come into the kingdom of God the wall that separated ethnic Israel from Gentiles had been broken down (Eph 2:14).

(2) Work of God (57:8): (oracle of Yahweh) who gathers the dispersed of Israel, Yet shall I gather upon him to his gathered ones. This is the only v in the book that begins with the oracular formula oracle of Yahweh. The declaration could not be more solemn and certain. Yahweh gathers the dispersed of Israel. That gathering process began when he brought the exiles home from Babylon; it continues to this day as God gathers the ethnic sons of Israel through the gospel. But in addition to the Israelites, Yahweh promises that he will gather upon him. These are the other sheep to which Christ alluded in Jn 10:16. Upon him underscores the great accumulation of those gathered. The phrase to his gathered ones is awkward in English, but appears to say that the more recently gathered are added to those that already had been gathered.

WARNINGS TO THE WICKED

56:9-12

---

326 Rom 12:1; 15:16; Phil 4:18; 1 Pet 2:5.
From surveying the distant peaks of messianic prophecy, Isaiah returned to his own day momentarily to describe the leaders of Judah.

A. Invitation to the Beasts (56:9): **All you beasts of my fields: come to eat, every beast in the forest.**

The coming of vicious enemies against Judah is predicted in this rhetorical command. The enemies are cataloged under **beasts of my fields** and **every beast in the forest**. Apparently the command that separates these two classes applies to both. Similar pictures of beasts devouring God’s flock are found in Jer 12:9 and Ezek 34:5, 8.

B. Ineffectual Leaders (56:10):
1. Blind watchmen (56:10a): **Its watchmen are blind, all of them do not know...**

The wild beasts (enemies) will be able to enter the fold and destroy the sheep because the watchmen do not sound the alarm. They do not, because they cannot. They are spiritually **blind**. They do not perceive the danger to the nation. The watchmen are prophets. All of the prophets at the time did not know, i.e., perceive the national danger.

2. Dumb dogs (56:10b): **all of them are dumb dogs, they are not able to bark; dreaming, lying down, lovers of slumber.**

The figure changes from watchmen to watch dogs. Dumb dogs are those that are not able to bark. When vicious beasts approached the flock they could not sound the alarm. Three participles describe the condition of Israel’s watch dogs. Dreaming appears only here. Its meaning is derived from a cognate word in Arabic. The reference may be to daydreaming; on the other hand, the dreaming may simply indicate inattentiveness. Lying down suggests laziness. Lovers of slumber suggests those who were focused on enjoyment and comfort rather than serving Yahweh.

3. Hungry dogs (56:11a): **And the dogs have strong appetites, they do not know satiety...**

The dogs were worthless as watchdogs, but they had hardy appetites. They have such enormous appetites that they do not know satiety, i.e., they cannot get enough to satisfy themselves.

4. Selfish shepherds (56:11b): **and they are shepherds, they do not know to understand; all of them have turned to their way, each to his gain from his end.**

As shepherds the leaders do not have the spiritual insight to fulfill their function. They are completely self-centered, for they have turned to their way. They are after all the monetary gain that they can accumulate. From its end means that they pursue gain to the extreme.

5. Self-indulgent shepherds (56:12): **Come, let me take wine and we shall get drunk on liquor; and like today shall be tomorrow, great, very excessive.**

One of the shepherds speaks up to invite the others to partake of his wine so they all could get drunk. By this means they will numb their brains so that the facts about national jeopardy cannot bother them. Such is the lifestyle of the leaders virtually every day. Like today shall be tomorrow suggests that the debauchery is to continue over an extended period. Great, very excessive describe the magnitude of the binge that they planned.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN
WARNING AND COMFORT

FATE OF THE RIGHTEOUS

57:1-2

A. Description (57:1a): **The righteous one has perished, and there is no man who takes it to heart, and men of covenant faithfulness are taken away...**

God was slowly removing the righteous from the midst of Jerusalem. A righteous man is one who is faithful to covenant obligations. While the wicked are given over to debauchery, the righteous man has perished, i.e., died a premature death. Men of covenant faithfulness further defines righteous. Taken away (lit., gathered) is a term used elsewhere of being gathered to one’s fathers in death. Again the reference is to being taken away before one’s time.

B. Explanation (57:1b-2):
1. Rescued from calamity (57:1b): **and no one perceives that from the face of evil the righteous
one is taken away. The premature deaths of righteous men is not noticed, or if noticed, not understood by the unbelievers. God in his goodness sometimes takes the righteous to himself in order to deliver them from a fate worse than death. From the face of evil refers to the prevailing corruption in Judah and the impending calamity.

2. Entered into rest (57:2): He shall come in peace; they shall rest upon their couches--walking straight before him. By means of death those who had lived upright lives entered into peace (Rev 14:13). They rested upon their couches, i.e., their deathbeds. Walking straight before him is a further description of the righteous soul.

DESCRIPTION OF JUDAH’S SIN
57:3-10

A. General Picture of the Wicked (57:3-4):
1. Summons (57:3a): As for you, draw near hither... In stark contrast to the righteous (vv 1-2) the wicked are now addressed. The wicked are commanded to draw near, i.e., approach. The language points to a courtroom scene in which the defendant is told to arise so as to hear the sentence against him.
2. Address (57:3b): O sons of the soothsaying woman; seed of the adulteress, and [one who] has committed harlotry. The wicked are addressed with two designations. Sons and seed are to be understood spiritually. Soothsaying refers to all manner of occult practices. Adultery/harlotry are common metaphors for idolatry. A son of a mother is one who manifests the characteristics of the mother. So those being addressed are idolaters.

B. Mockery by the Wicked (57:4): Against whom do you amuse yourselves? At whom do you open wide the mouth, lengthen the tongue? Are you not children of rebellion, a seed of falsehood? The godly of vv 1-2 are victims of the mockery by the wicked. Amuse suggests heaping abuse on someone, or making merry at someone’s expense. Enlarging the mouth and sticking out the tongue are gestures of derision. Such conduct revealed the true character of those who are being addressed.

They are children of rebellion, i.e., rebellious children; lawless men who fear neither God nor man. They are a seed of falsehood, i.e., they are not true children of God.

C. Quest for Other Gods (57:5-10):
1. They went to the trees (57:5a): [Those] who inflame themselves among the terebinths, under every green tree... Isaiah continues to use participles in v 5 to describe the wicked. Inflame themselves refers to arousal of sexual desire. The degree to which the term should be interpreted in its physical connotation rather than as a metaphor for idol lust is unclear. The rites of the fertility gods and goddesses often took place among the shady terebinth trees. The fertility rites were accompanied by drunkenness and sexual immorality.
2. They went to the valleys (57:5b): who sacrifice children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks. The worst of the Canaanite rites was the sacrifice of children. This took place in the valleys, i.e., the wadis of Palestine. Under clefts of the rocks suggests that these rites were often conducted in secret. Under Manasseh and Jehoiakim child sacrifice was performed publicly in the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem (Jer 32:35; Ezek 20:26-31).
3. They went to the wadis (57:6):
   a. Attachment to idols (57:6a): Among the smooth things of the wadi is your portion; they, they are your lot... Obviously smooth things are a designation for some objects of worship. The exact connotation of the term is not yet known. That the smooth things come from the wadi (watercourse) suggests that they were stones worn smooth by water. The double pronoun they emphasizes the stupid choice the Judeans had made. These smooth things were the lot of the Judeans rather than Yahweh (Ps 16:5; 119:57).
   d. Worship of idols (57:6b): also to them you pour our drink offerings, you have brought up a meal offering. On account of these should I be comforted? The smooth things were more than objects of superstition or fetishes. Also to them emphasizes that the Judeans took these objects to
the next level. They poured out drink offerings and brought a meal offering to the smooth things. The rhetorical question could be taken in two ways. It could mean, Should I (Yahweh) be pleased that these people are so religious in the light of the nature of their religious activity? But be comforted is Niphal and probably has a technical meaning. It means to be comforted by taking vengeance (cf. 1:24). The righteous anger of Yahweh is aroused by their conduct and that anger can only be assuaged by executing just punishment upon the guilty.

4. They went to the heights (57:7-8):
   a. Public rites (57:7): Upon a high and elevated mountain you have placed your bed; also there you have gone up to offer a sacrifice. The reference is to the worship of the fertility gods (Baal/Asherah) in hilltop shrines. Hilltop worship was borrowed from the Canaanites. Probably the hilltop suggested nearness to the deity. Place your bed suggests deliberate choice. The words give a hint of the immoral rites connected with the fertility cult. These sexual rites were generally accompanied by sacrifices. To ascend the mountain to engage in such rites required effort. So one must conclude that the Judeans were thoroughly committed to the fertility gods.
   b. Private rites (57:8): Behind the door and the doorpost you have placed your memorial; far away from me you have uncovered and gone up; you have stretched out your bed and you have cut from them; you loved their bed, gazed on a hand. The memorial is probably some pagan object. Behind the door suggests secrecy. The object could not be seen by one looking into an open door from without, but was very prominent to those within once the door was shut. It is not clear whether the reference is to the door of a private dwelling, or to the door of a shrine on the hilltop.

   The memorial was set up because the people had gone away from me (Yahweh). Uncovered (your nakedness) and gone up (to bed) depicts idolatry as adultery. The memorial that was secretly set up was a manifestation of the spiritual adultery of the nation. Stretched out your bed means to prepare it for the act of adultery. You have cut from them is unclear. Perhaps some pagan rite of mutilation is intended. Though the language is strained, some think that making a covenant with a pagan deity is in view. You loved their bed continues the sexual imagery. Gazed on a hand is difficult. The use of hand as a euphemism for the penis is well attested in the ancient world327 (cf. Ezek 23:20). The reference may be to the vulgarity of the image that they worshiped.

5. They went to distant lands (57:9):
   a. Expense no issue (57:9a): And you have traveled to the king in oil, and have multiplied your perfumes... The king probably refers to various Assyrian and Babylonian rulers with whom Judah had to deal. Foreign alliances often involved recognition of foreign gods. Oil and perfumes could be bribes for political favors; or could be adornment for the adulteress Judah seeking new lovers (cf. Ezek 23:41). For an example of an approach to a foreign ruler see 2 Kgs 16:7ff.
   b. Distance no issue (57:9b): and you have sent your envoys to far-off places; and you have descended even to Sheol. Local Canaanite gods were not enough for harlot Judah. She imported deities from afar. She descended even to Sheol (abode of the dead) seems to be an idiomatic expression indicating extreme distance (cf. Amos 9:2).

6. They wearied themselves in idolatrous pursuit (57:10): In the multitude of your ways you became weary; [but] you have not said, It is useless. Life in your hand you found; therefore you did not become weak. In the expression your ways the pronoun is singular. It is probably to be taken as a collective. The harlot Judah was leaving no avenue into idolatry unexplored. Became weary indicates that Judah expended every effort to serve foreign gods. At no time did they say, It is useless, i.e., become discouraged with all the energy they had put into their pagan pursuits. Life in your hand you found is an enigmatic expression. Probably the idea is that the Judeans found life for their hand (strength) in idolatry. The new forms of idolatry gave the harlot renewed energy so that she never became weak in her devotion to worthless gods.

327See Oswalt, NICOT, 2:480.
DESCRIPTION OF JUDAH’S JUDGMENT
57:11-13

A. Judah’s Condition (57:11):
1. Feared men (57:11a): Of whom were you terrified and afraid that you should lie? The Jews were driven to idolatry through fear of men. The result is that they lied to themselves, to others, and to God about their relationship to Yahweh.
2. Forgot Yahweh (57:11b): and me you have not remembered, and you did not take it to heart. The religious falsehood was manifested in that the people had not remembered Yahweh. The first person pronoun stands first in the clause for emphasis. Yahweh was not in the minds and hearts of these people who professed a special relationship to him. Judah was totally indifferent about the things of God.
3. Explanation (57:11c): Am I not the one keeping silent, even from ancient times, and me you did not fear? This rhetorical question indicates the reason the Judeans did not fear Yahweh. For a long time he had remained silent, i.e., he had not intervened to punish sinners.

B. Yahweh’s Declaration (57:12): As for me, I will declare your righteousness; and your works, and they will not profit you. Speaking ironically, God threatened to bring to light Judah’s righteousness. The word must be used ironically. That righteousness is shown to be phony. All works righteousness is worthless, filthy rags in God’s sight. Your works explains your righteousness. All of their involvements in idolatry tainted everything the Judeans did; so their works are worthless, even detrimental, in the day of Yahweh’s judgment. A

C. Judah’s Desperation (57:13):
1. Their idols will not save them (57:13a): When you cry out, let your collection save you! Unfortunately for the Judeans, their deeds were such that no further delay in the judgment could be permitted. In that day all the idols collected together will not avail. Your collection may be a reference to their pantheon.

2. Their idols will disappear (57:13b): And let the wind lift up all of them, let them be taken by a breath... The collection of gods is so dead and worthless a wind, even a breath, will blow them away. They cannot save themselves; how can they save their adherents.
3. Note of hope (57:13c): and the one trusting in me shall inherit the land and possess my holy mountain. Individuals who put their trust in Yahweh will survive the judgment. They will inherit the land as promised by Yahweh in ancient times. The land/my holy mountain are symbols for God’s kingdom (Heb 12:22).

DESCRIPTION OF JUDAH’S HOPE
57:14-19

A. Preparation (57:14): And one will say, Cast up, cast up, clear the way; pick up the stumbling block from the way of my people. An order is given to prepare for the faithful a road that will lead to the achievement of divine purposes. Similar commands appear in the last three major sections of Isaiah (40:3, 4; 57:14; 62:10). One will say is deliberately vague. Stumbling block refers to any obstacle that might cause God’s people to fail in their journey. This passage should not be limited to the return from Babylonian exile. The context of these chs suggests that movement of people includes also the great gospel gathering from all over the world in these last days.

B. Declaration (57:15):
1. Person of the speaker (57:15a): This v explains why believers can trust the promise under girding the previous commands.
   a. Exalted (57:15a): For thus says the one high and lifted up... Those commands come from one high and lifted up (cf. 6:2), i.e., exalted in position. Since Yahweh is transcendent, he cannot be hindered by the contingencies of earth.
   b. Eternal (57:15b): the one who dwells forever... The commands come from the Eternal. He cannot be limited by the restrictions ravages of time.
c. Holy (57:15c): and holy is his name... Yahweh is apart from this world, hence not subject to any limitations of this world.

2. Condescension of the speaker (57:15d): On high and holy I dwell; and with the broken and humble of spirit... The God who occupies a high and holy place (heaven) at the same time dwells with the broken and humble. The former are those crushed by the burdens of life. Humble (low) of spirit describes the psychological and spiritual results of being broken.

3. Purpose of the speaker (57:15e): to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the broken ones. Revival of spirit and heart is the result of the exalted God dwelling with the downtrodden. This is the OT equivalent of the more abundant life promised by Jesus (Jn 10:10).

C. Explanation (57:16-17):
1. Yahweh’s wrath temporary (57:16a): For not forever will I contend, and not to eternity will I be angry... Contend is a legal term referring to the presentation of public charges against a criminal. Angry refers to the inner feeling of hostility. In times of temporal judgment Yahweh contends with sinners and burns with anger. But those times do not last forever.

2. Reason Yahweh’s wrath is temporary (57:16b): for the spirit from before me will faint, and the souls that I have made. Man is frail. Should Yahweh not restrain manifestations of his wrath the spirit (רְאָעָה) of man would faint before him. Souls (ניֵּשָׁמְׂmites) is parallel to spirit. Yahweh fashioned the inner being of man. He knows man’s creaturely weakness and deals with him accordingly.

3. Yahweh’s wrath is necessary (57:17): In the iniquity of his unjust gain I am angry and will smite him, hiding while I was angry, and he went astray in the way of his heart. God’s anger against Judah was appropriate because of iniquity and unjust gain, i.e., wealth achieved by violence, physical or otherwise. Because covetousness victimizes others, Yahweh became angry. Judah had turned away from God’s call to repentance again and again. So finally God hid, as it were, from him. Yahweh struck Judah with the rod of correction. Yahweh, however, will not contend with them forever. Should he do so man’s spirit would be crushed by hopeless despair.

D. Promise (57:18-19):
1. Healing (57:18a): His ways I have seen, and I will heal him... Though God knows the ways of his people how they walk after the stubbornness of their own heart. Yahweh views such conduct as sick. Yet he will heal, i.e., forgive his people.

2. Leading (57:18b): and I will lead him... Leading involves providential guidance and prophetic guidance, as well as the general leading provided in God’s law. Safety and adequate provision are implications of Yahweh’s leading.

3. Restoration (57:18c): and restore comforts to him, even to his mourners. Restore implies return to a prior condition. The plural comforts may be a plural of abundance; on the other hand it may point to a variety of comforts. Sins ways are harsh and unrelenting; God’s ways result in productivity, certainty, and joy. It is not clear whether mourners are those among the Judeans who feel most keenly the loss of fellowship with Yahweh, or whether the entire people are so described. In any case they would be mourning loss of land, temple, priesthood and standing before Yahweh.

4. Peace (57:19): Creating the fruit of the lips; Peace; peace to those afar and those near, says Yahweh, and I heal him. By the restoration promised in the previous v Yahweh is creating the fruit of the lips, i.e., he causes lips to speak. Using the participle creating suggests that the fruit of the lips is totally new. The lips are those of Yahweh’s messengers. They deliver the message of peace to those who are afar (Gentiles) as well as those who are near (Jews). I heal him reiterates the promise in v 18, but in a larger context. Peace (reconciliation) is available to Gentiles because Yahweh heals (forgives) their sins.

FINAL WARNING

57:20-21
A. Figuratively Depicted (57:20): The wicked are like the troubled sea; for it is unable to rest, and its waters toss up muck and mire. The wonderful peace that passes all understanding is not the lot of everyone. The wicked are the Judeans who willfully transgress the law of Yahweh. They are like the troubled sea that is never at rest, like the tumultuous sea the wicked churn up mire and dirt (evil thoughts and deeds) constantly.

B. Forcefully Declared (57:21): There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked. In heart, mind and soul the wicked can no more achieve a peaceful state than the turbulent sea. They have no peace here, or hereafter. My God expresses the prophet’s close relationship with Yahweh, a relationship that is not shared by the wicked.

BOOK TEN
BOOK OF FUTURE GLORY
Isaiah 58-66

Three enneads (nine ch units) comprise the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah. The first and second enneads concluded with the divine declaration that there is no peace for the wicked (48:22; 57:21). The major themes of these eighteen chs have been (1) the captivity to come, (2) the return of a remnant, (3) the work of the Servant, and (4) the glory of Zion. Though a new unit clearly begins in ch 58, a close relationship exists between chs 58-59 and the previous ch. The sins that are condemned here are those that were prevalent in Isaiah’s day, the eighth century BC. These chs serve to remind Isaiah’s readers of the reasons for the recent humiliating invasion by Sennacherib (ch 37) and the prophetic threat of Babylonian exile (ch 39). After describing the present gloom, Isaiah soars again into the heights of prophetic expectation regarding the glorious plans that God had for his people on the other side of captivity.

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT
HINDRANCES TO SALVATION

God wanted to do wonderful things for his people. Difficulties, however, stood in the way. The prophet first identified these obstacles and then predicted their removal.

A. Introduction (58:1):
1. Summons to proclamation (58:1a): Cry out with your throat, do not hold back. Like the trumpet lift up your voice. God commanded Isaiah to cry out, to make a declaration to the Judeans. Three phrases emphasize the volume and clarity of the prophet’s declaration. With your throat means to cry out as loudly as possible. Do not hold back directs Isaiah to hold nothing back. Like the trumpet makes the same point.
2. Subject of proclamation (58:1b): Declare to my people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sin. Isaiah was to make clear to the Judeans their transgressions, i.e., willful acts of disobedience. My people are defined as house of Jacob because the Israelites descended from that great Patriarch. Their sin refers to acts in which they may have inadvertently missed the mark of acceptable conduct.

In response the prophet cried out against three specific sins that were impediments to heavenly blessing.

B. Hypocritical Fasting (58:2-12):
1. Pretense of the Judeans (58:2):
a. Pretending to seek Yahweh (58:2a): Me daily they will seek… Judah was guilty of gross hypocrisy. While deliberately disobeying God’s commands, they pretended to seek Yahweh daily, i.e., seek to please him, commune with him. The emphatic position of the pronoun me underscores the audacity of the hypocrisy of the Judeans. Their religious efforts only insulted him. Daily is lit. day, day, i.e., every day.
b. Pretending to delight in Yahweh’s will (58:2b): and the knowledge of my ways they will desire… The Judeans feigned desire in knowing Yahweh’s will. The strong verb may even express delight. They appeared to listen intently to prophetic sermons and religious instruction by priests.
c. Pretending to follow Yahweh’s law (58:2c): as a nation that does righteousness and the justice of his God does not forsake. Does righteousness falls short of being righteous. Perhaps the idea is that in the face of oppression by foreigners the Judeans were doing some things right. On the basis of these few righteous acts they presented themselves as a righteous nation.

d. Pretending to desire Yahweh’s judgments (58:2d): They will ask me for righteous judgments, the approach of God they will desire. The Judeans thought they were deserving of God’s justice, for justice in their mind would mean the destruction of their enemies. Little did the Judeans realize that by asking for Yahweh’s righteous judgments, they were asking for their own national destruction.

Having exposed the general hypocrisy of the nation, Isaiah focused on one example, viz., fasting.

2. Perplexity of the Judeans (58:3a): Why have we fasted and you have not seen, afflicted our souls and you will not know? The Judean hypocrites did not understand why Yahweh seemed to pay no heed to their fasting. They expected that he would notice, that he would intervene against their enemies. They are accusing Yahweh of being indifferent to their religious fervor. Afflicted our souls is an idiom for fasting. In the Mosaic system only the day of Atonement was designated as a day of fasting (Lv 16:29ff; 23:17ff; Nm 29:7). Israelites, however, often fasted during personal and national crises (e.g., Judg 20:26). Faced with the crisis of the Assyrian invasion, fast days were appointed.

3. Priorities of the Judeans (58:3b-5): The Judeans could not understand why God did not seem to take note of their self-denial. The explanation was simple. They were trusting in ritual, but not in Yahweh. The prophet spells out why Yahweh did not view with favor their fasting.

a. Self-indulgence (58:3b): Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure… Weeping, confession of sins, and prayer were appropriate accompaniments of effective fasting. On fast days, however, these citizens were doing what they pleased. Fasting did not get in the way of their pursuit of pleasure.

b. Mistreatment of laborers (58:3c): and all your laborers you drive on. While in the very act of fasting the Judeans were oppressing their employees. The fast day was an ordinary day of labor for the hired hands. The verb drive on (r. ngs) is used of the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt.

c. Anger and violence (58:4): Behold, for strife and debate and to smite with the fist of wickedness; you shall not fast today to cause your voice to be heard on high. Behold introduces the shocking aftermath of the fasting. Fasting should humble the heart and prepare the mind for prayer. Among the Judeans, however, there was selfish strife and argument that sometimes escalated into fistfights. Such sham fasting will never cause one’s petition to be heard on high, i.e., by Yahweh in heaven.

d. False piety (58:5): Shall it be like this, the fast that I choose? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow his head like a bulrush, and sackcloth and ashes spread out? Will you call this a fast, an acceptable day to Yahweh? A series of questions make the point that what passed for fasting in Judah was not proper worship. Their fasting is not what Yahweh wanted. On afflict his soul, see on v 3. A bulrush, straight by nature, is easily bent. So the Judeans easily slide into the posture for fasting. Like the exaggerated bowing, the sackcloth and ashes were part of the act. Judean fasts were really religious sideshows designed to impress men. Such “fasting” may be acceptable to men, but it had no impact of Yahweh.

4. Picture of true fasting (58:6-7): While Yahweh rejected the current concept of fasting, there is a fast that he chooses or encourages. Proper fasting must be accompanied by an obedient life.

a. True fasting requires liberation (58:6): Is this not a fast I will choose, to loosen the bands of wickedness, to untie of the cords of the yoke, and to send forth crushed as free men, and every yoke you will break? What God wanted was not so much the denial of food for the body, but freeing those illegally enslaved. Mosaic law required the release of slaves after six years of labor; but this
law was being violated in Jerusalem (cf. 34:8-22). Forced servitude after the mandatory release date is referred to as the bands of wickedness. The yoke is also a symbol of unjust oppression. Those illegally held in servitude are called crushed for slavery strips an individual of basic human dignity. Not only does Yahweh expect the oppressed to be set free, he expects that you will break every yoke, i.e., get rid of every instrument of oppression.

b. True fasting requires generosity (58:7): Is it not to break to the hungry your bread, and the afflicted, and those cast down you bring home? For you shall see one naked and cover him, and from your flesh do not hide yourself. True fasting requires feeding the hungry, sheltering the afflicted (homeless), and clothing the naked. Your flesh may refer to one’s own relatives, or more generally, to all fellow beings. These positive acts of compassion were much more important in God’s eyes than denying oneself physical sustenance.

5. First condition/promise statement (58:8-9): This kind of fasting would be blessed by God to an extraordinary measure.

a. Light (58:8a): Then will your light break forth... Light here is a metaphor for salvation and blessing. Gloom dissipates when people get back on track with their Creator.

b. Healing (58:8b): and your healing will hasten to spring up... Hasty recovery from all national ailments is a result of true fasting. Spring up is taken from horticulture. The verb compares the rapidity of the national healing to that of a plant bursting forth from the soil.

c. Protection (58:8c): then your righteousness will go before you, the glory of Yahweh will be your rearguard. Righteousness will be their vanguard, and God himself their rearguard. This means that the faithful have protection in their walk. Righteousness is parallel to glory of Yahweh, hence the thought. The righteousness of the people is Yahweh himself (cf. Jer 23:6; 33:16). Glory of Yahweh is equivalent to a glorious manifestation of Yahweh. The expression appears some thirty-four times in the OT, especially in the narratives of the Exodus.

d. Answered prayer (58:9a): Then you shall call, and Yahweh will answer; you shall cry and he shall say, Behold me! The divine indifference of vv 2-3 are reversed when people engage in true worship. Then indicates that Yahweh will only hear their prayers after they have forsaken their hypocritical ways. Call/cry suggests earnest prayer in a time of emergency. Will answer/behold me connote divine willingness and intention to intervene for the sake of the petitioners.

e. Promise conditions (58:9b): If you remove from your midst the yoke, putting forth the finger, and the speaking of vanity. The condition upon which Yahweh makes the preceding promises is now stated figuratively. The yoke symbolizes oppression as in v 6. Putting forth the figure is a gesture of contempt. Speaking vanity is speaking falsehood.


a. Condition (58:10a): And if you will release your soul to the hungry, and the afflicted soul you satisfy... In essence the promise repeats the condition of v 7, but goes further. Release your soul to the hungry indicates the manner in which a godly person is to help others. Assistance must go beyond merely providing what is lacking materially. Assisting the needy must not be done in a condescending manner. A godly person must give of himself.

b. Light (58:10b): then will your light arise in the darkness, and your utter darkness shall be as noon. The promise of v 8 is repeated. Light symbolizes blessings and joy that will follow national gloom and despair.

c. Guidance (58:11a): And Yahweh will guide you continually... This v specifies the nature of the light (blessing) of the previous v. As in 57:18 Yahweh will lead his people as he did when they came out of Egypt so many centuries before.

d. Provision (58:11b): and in drought satisfy your soul, and your bones make fat, and you will be a well-watered garden, and like a spring of water whose water does not fail. In the day of blessing abundant provision will meet every need of the godly. Yahweh promises in drought to satisfy your soul. At times when other faint, the godly enjoy
fullness. **You bones make fat** carries the promise a step further. While others waste away, Yahweh rejuvenates his own.

The result of Yahweh’s abundant blessing is expressed in a two-fold metaphor. Those who meet the condition of true godliness will be a well-watered garden, the very antithesis of drought. This garden depicts the abundant life that the truly godly experience. The second figure expresses a similar notion. The godly are like a perennial spring of water. Not only does the believer himself enjoy life abundant, he is a source of refreshment to all who come in contact with him.

e. **Restoration (58:12)**: And from you they will build the ruins of old, foundations of many generations you will raise up; and you will be called Repairer of the breach, Restorer of paths for dwelling. This v contains yet another figure for salvation, viz., rebuilding dilapidated buildings. The thought is similar to that of Amos 9:11ff. From you refers to descendants of the present generation of Judeans. Ruins of old are those that have existed for a long time, through multiple generations. Sin tears down, destroys; the gospel builds up. Others will take note of the restoration project and give the people of God collectively the title Repairer of the breach. A breach is a gap in the protective wall of a city, usually put there by the battering by enemy forces. So the gospel builds up vulnerable areas of people’s lives so as to make more difficult further inroads by the spiritual enemy. The title recognizes the role of God’s people in building up ruined lives through the preaching of the gospel.

Restorer of paths for dwelling suggests another figure. The paths are what Jeremiah called the old paths that bring rest to the soul (Jer 6:16; 18:15). Paths lead somewhere. The restored paths are for dwelling. They lead to an eternal inheritance that awaits the godly. The paths are restored through the faithful teaching of the word of God.

7. **Third condition/promise statement (58:13-14):**

a. **Condition (58:13): If you turn away from the Sabbath your feet, doing your pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy [day] of Yahweh, honored, and will honor it by not doing your own ways, by not finding your own pleasure, and speaking a word.** The Sabbath was Yahweh’s holy ground. The Judeans had been guilty of trampling under foot that holy ground by seeking their own pleasure on that holy day. i.e., what pleases them rather than God. They needed a new attitude toward the Sabbath. They need to call (regard) the Sabbath a delight, i.e., look forward to it. They need to honor the Sabbath as the holy day of Yahweh.

The Judeans can honor the Sabbath by doing three things: (1) by not doing your own ways, i.e., all courses of action that men choose rather than the ways of God; (2) by not finding your own pleasure, i.e., they are not to do what they desired on the holy day; and (3) speaking a word. The reference probably is to idle chatter that tended to divert attention from the things of God.

b. **Promise of delight (58:14a): Then you will delight yourself upon Yahweh...** Calloused disregard for the fourth commandment was a hindrance to divine blessing. Proper observance of the Sabbath will enable the Judeans to delight upon Yahweh. i.e., they will come to enjoy their relationship with God. Redeemed hearts delight in doing the will of Yahweh. Faithful observance of the Sabbath will lead to a new level of fellowship with God.

c. **Promise of victory (58:14b): and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth...** High places (mountains) point to power, to kingdoms of this world. He who rides the clouds (Ps 104:3) elevates his people over all the powers of this earth. They will overcome all difficulties and obstacles.

d. **Promise of inheritance (58:14c): and I will cause you to eat the inheritance of Jacob your father...** Jacob was the father of Israel. He was promised an inheritance in Canaan land. Those who are true worshipers enter the antetypical Canaan land (Christ’s kingdom) and eat the abundance of that land.

---

328 The garden figure is common in Isaiah: 30:25; 33:21; 35:6f; 41:17; 43:20; 44:4; 48:21.
e. Guarantee (58:14d): for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken. The conditional promises of the ch are guaranteed by the mouth of Yahweh.

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE
Hindrances Removed

After listing yet another hindrance to salvation (vv 1-8), Isaiah describes how those hindrances will be removed.

SOCIAL INJUSTICE
59:1-8

A. Jacob’s Savior (59:1): Behold! Yahweh’s hand is not cut off from saving, and his ear is not heavy from hearing. The figure of the short arm was introduced in 50:2. Behold introduces a fact in evidence to all who will see. Some questioned God’s ability to make good on his promises. They wondered whether he really did listen to their prayers. The lack of divine intervention, however, had nothing to do with God’s abilities. His arm, i.e., power, was not too short to reach down and help. He was not hard of hearing. There must be some other explanation for the lack of intervention on Yahweh’s part.

B. Jacob’s Sin (59:2-4):
1. Result of their sin (59:2): But your iniquities have caused a separation between you and your God, and your sins have covered a face from you from hearing. Judah’s iniquity caused God to turn away from them. The sin barrier prevented him from hearing their prayers. CAUSED A SEPARATION is a participle, indicating continuous action. COVERED A FACE indicates that Judah’s sins are a thick cloud that obscures the face of God. FACE is anthropomorphic. To see God’s face is to experience his presence. The covering of the face is figurative way of depicting the fact that Yahweh pays no heed to the petitions of the Judeans.
2. Completeness of their sin (59:3-4a): All manner of unrighteousness was practiced in Judah. Isaiah presented a head-to-toe evaluation of the sickness of this nation.

a. Their hands (59:3a): For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity... Men are to extend holy hands to God in prayer (Ps 28:2; 63:4). But the hands of the Judeans were defiled with blood, lit., the blood. The reference is probably to child sacrifice (Ps 106:38), although other types of violence are not excluded. Fingers is parallel to hands, and iniquity (lit. the crookedness) probably points to the same bloody actions.

b. Their mouths (59:3b-4b):
1) Lies (59:3b): your lips speak a lie, your tongue perversity has uttered. Lips/tongue are parallel, referring to the mouth. Lie/perversity are both referring to falsehood.
2) Hypocrisy (59:4a): No one calls in righteousness, no one pleads in truth, trusting in emptiness and speaking vanity... Calls and pleads are participles, indicating customary action. The simplest explanation is that no one prays in righteousness. They did pray (v 1), but when they did so they were not living righteous lives. They were hypocrites. The same thought is conveyed by the expression pleads in truth. The verb pleads (r. špt in Niph.) means to enter into controversy with either God or men. Truth points to sincerity.

Instead of approaching Yahweh in righteousness and sincerity, the Judeans were trusting in emptiness and speaking vanity. Emptiness (tōhû) is what is good for nothing, useless, worthless. The term is used of idols (41:29) of idol-makers (44:9), and of groundless arguments or considerations (29:21). There can be no real prayer when the trust of men is in anything other than God. In their faithless condition in their prayers they were speaking vanity. They are wasting their time.

3. Metaphors for their sin (59:4b-6):
a. Pregnancy (59:4b): conceiving mischief and bringing forth iniquity. With their minds they constantly conceived deadly schemes. They are pregnant with mischief, i.e., evil plans. Once those plans reach maturity in their minds, they bring forth (give birth to) iniquity. This metaphor appears to be borrowed from Ps 7:14.

329 Others understand the sentence in a legal sense: no one righteously summons another into court.
b. Snakes and spiders (59:5): *Eggs of adders they have hatched, and the webs of spiders they weave. The one eating of their eggs will die, and the crushed (egg) will break forth a viper.* The treachery of the Judeans is compared to the poison of adders.330 Eggs point to plots in the embryo stage. When the eggs hatch, more poisonous snakes appear. Evil works bring forth more evil works. Those who get involved with these plots at any stage place their lives in jeopardy. *Webs of spiders* has the same meaning as the eggs, with the additional implication of entanglement.

c. Clothing (59:6): *Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works. Their works are works of iniquity, and doing violence is in their hands.* The spider web metaphor now blends into the metaphor of garments. Spider webs will not serve for clothing. The second line of the v indicates what the prophet means by the word webs. *Works of iniquity and doing violence* afford no covering in the day of Yahweh’s wrath.

4. Path of their sin (59:7-8):
   a. Running feet (59:7a): *Their feet to evil run, that they may hasten to shed innocent blood...* God’s people should be running from evil, not to it. Evil men, however, are anxious to participate in evil deeds. The path that they have chosen to tread plummets steadily downward toward violence and the most heinous of crimes, to *shed innocent blood.*
   b. Twisted minds (59:7b): *their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, wasting and destruction are in their paths.* Their thoughts (plans; intentions) were thoughts of iniquity. Wasting and destruction could refer to the destination of their paths, i.e., their way of life. Alternatively, the two terms may describe how the lives of wicked men affect all around them. Like an army following a scorched earth policy, they leave only destruction behind them. Wicked men do not build up; they only destroy.

c. Perverted justice (59:8): *The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their tracks; their paths they have twisted for themselves, one who walks in it does not know peace.* Peace refers to total well-being. Wicked men are strangers to the *way of peace,* for total well-being is a gift that comes from God. Because they have no peace with God the wicked are at war with their fellowman. One can follow their tracks (i.e., track them) but they will find no evidence of justice. The paths on which just men walk are straight; but injustice is twisted, circuitous, entangled, complicated. The wicked have twisted their paths for themselves, i.e., for their own benefit. By obfuscating the obvious, twisting the straight, complicating the simple, falsifying the facts, and/or by simply dragging their feet the wicked subvert justice. Isaiah closes the v by reiterating that men who walk along such path do not know peace. Such conduct produces enmity with God, retaliation from one’s neighbors, and a troubled conscience.

HINDRANCES REMOVED

59:9-21

Eliminating the sin barrier must begin with sincere acknowledgment of sin. Only then can God intervene to rescue his people from humiliating circumstances.

A. Result of Sin (59:9-11): Conduct such as is described in the previous vv led to terrible results for the Judeans.

1. Their sense of estrangement (59:9a): *Therefore, far distant is judgment from us, and righteousness shall not overtake us.* Therefore suggests that the condition described in the following vv resulted from the evil conduct outlined in the previous vv. For those who once walked with Yahweh, spiritual estrangement is a miserable experience. *Judgment* refers to divine intervention to save God’s people from oppressors. *Righteousness* generally refers to a right

---

330Following NRSV; NJPS; NASB. At least thirty-three different species of snakes are found in Palestine. Translators use various terms to translate the eight Hebrew terms that refer to these animals. The precise identity of the poisonous serpent intended by *tsiph’ônî* is not known. Other translations: cockatrice (KJV); vipers (NIV); but vipers do not lay eggs. The reptile is mentioned also in Isa 11:8; 14:29; and Jer 8:17.
relationship to God; but in this context probably is equivalent to salvation. Lack of divine intervention had continued for so long that some had given up hope that it would happen (shall not overtake us).

2. Their sense of disappointment (59:9b): We hoped for light, and behold, darkness; for illumination and in the darkness we walk. Light/illumination again refers to deliverance from present oppression. The people hoped for light (salvation); but the darkness of oppression continued unabated. Things were dark and gloomy. Following paths of wickedness leads to the darkness of despair.

3. Their experience of darkness (59:10): We grope like blind men for a wall, and like those without eyes we grope. We stumble at noon as in the twilight, among the healthy like dead men. Rather than turning to Yahweh, for awhile the Judeans tried to cope with their confusion. They groped about, like blind men searching for a wall to give them orientation. The Judeans had groped about, looking for any possible way of escape from their predicament. Even when the light was the brightest (noon) they still were stumbling about in darkness. Among the healthy like dead men is another figure describing the condition of the Judeans. They were physically alive and healthy, but spiritually dead. The figure underscores the hopelessness of sinners as along as they refuse to turn to Yahweh.

4. Their feeling of bitterness (59:11): We growl like bears, all of us, and like doves we moan continually; we wait for judgment and there is none, for salvation (and it is) far from us. Men grumbled like bears, they moaned like doves. Both figures depict frustration, disappointment, and bitterness. That which they longed for most—judgment (against their oppressors) and salvation (deliverance from their oppressors)—seem more remote than ever. Salvation here explains righteousness in v 9.

B. Confession of Sin (59:12-15): Isaiah intercedes for his people in their hopeless condition.

1. General picture (59:12): For our transgressions have increased before you, our sins have answered against us, for our transgressions are with us, and our iniquities we know. Transgressions are deliberate acts of rebellion against Yahweh. Over the years Judah’s acts of rebellion had increased, i.e., they had become more numerous and more heinous. Before you connotes flagrant, open, in-your-face rebellion. Sins have answered against us personifies their sins. The sins bear testimony against the Judeans as in a court of law. The people are aware of their transgressions and iniquities for they are with us, i.e., all around, obvious to all. To know their iniquities is to recognize them for what they are.

2. Catalog of sins (59:13-15): The remnant recognized that their problems stemmed from their numerous sins, transgressions and iniquities.

a. Sins of the heart (59:13a): Transgressing and lying against Yahweh, and turning away from our God... Topping the list of Judah sins was transgressing, i.e., rebelling against Yahweh. Lying against Yahweh points to hypocritical worship. The Judeans feigned allegiance to Yahweh while embracing idols in the heart. Turning away from Yahweh in the OT always entailed embracing some form of idolatry.

b. Sins of the lips (59:13b): speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. Speaking oppression and revolt refers to speech that resulted in oppression of the powerless or acts of rebellion against proper authority. Conceiving uses the imagery of procreation. Falsehood (lies of all kinds) is conceived in the heart, and birthed by the lips in the form of words.

c. Social injustice (59:14-15a): Judgment is turned back, and righteousness stands afar; for truth stumbles in the street, and uprightness is not able to enter. (15) And truth is left behind; and he that turns aside from evil is plundered. Here judgment refers to equitable judicial decisions. People who turn back from Yahweh (v 13) will turn back justice in the courts. Righteousness (here the right relations between men) stands afar, i.e., it exists in theory but not in practice. Justice and righteousness demand truthful deals; but in Jerusalem truth (personified) stumbles in the street, falls to the ground and is trampled under foot.
Uprightness is not able to enter into the marketplace or the courts.

Truth is left behind suggest the picture of the nation running ahead of the time-tested, Sinai-revealed principles of morality and justice. Absolute truth for the Judeans had become an outdated concept. The result is that he that turns aside from evil is plundered, i.e., disadvantaged. Those who try to play by the rules are penalized. In the interest of survival everyone had to be unscrupulous.

C. Intervention by God (59:15b-21):

1. Yahweh’s astonishment (59:15b-16a):
   a. No justice (59:15b): Then Yahweh saw and it was evil in his eyes that there was no justice. God was aware of the condition of Israel. He regarded the fact that there was social injustice as evil.
   b. No intercessor (59:16a): And he saw that there was no man, and he was astonished that there was no intercessor. Yahweh expressed amazement that no one in Judah who would stand for truth and justice (cf. Jer 5:1). An intercessor is a go-between. The term can refer to someone who represents the nation before the throne of grace; it can also refer to someone who represents Yahweh’s interests to the people. No man is an obvious hyperbole, for Isaiah and Micah were on the scene proclaiming Yahweh’s truth.
   c. Response (59:16b): And his arm saved for him, and his righteousness, it sustained him. Since his people were obviously in need, Yahweh determined that he must intervene. His arm is anthropomorphic; it symbolizes his power. Yahweh saved the people for him, i.e., for himself, for his own purposes. His own righteousness sustained him, i.e., he relied on it alone. Yahweh was motivated by no other consideration than doing what was right, i.e., what was in harmony with his own righteous plans. Certainly Judah did not deserve intervention; it was an act of pure grace.

2. Yahweh’s judgment (59:17-19):
   a. Clothed for battle (59:17): And he put on righteousness like a breastplate, and as a helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on garments of vengeance as clothing, and put on zeal like a mantle. Isaiah depicted God preparing for the battle against injustice and transgression. He put on righteousness, salvation, vengeance and zeal. The first two words speak positively of the deliverance of God’s people; the last two words speak to the flip side of that deliverance, i.e., the judgment on the oppressors.
   b. Recompense of his enemies (59:18): According to their deeds accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies; to the islands recompense he will repay. Yahweh will bring recompense to his enemies both inside and outside Judah. The basis of the recompense is their deeds. Fury/recompense are parallel as are adversaries/enemies. Islands represent distant Gentile nations.
   c. Defeat of Jacob’s enemies (59:19): And they shall fear from the west the name of Yahweh, and from the rising of the sun his glory. For the enemy shall come like a river, the Spirit of Yahweh lifts up a standard in it. When they see the irresistible power of Yahweh’s judgment, men in both the west and the east (i.e., all over the world) will come to fear (i.e., have reverence for) Yahweh. The name of Yahweh is all that he has revealed about himself. His glory refers to Yahweh’s manifestations throughout history in theophanies and in events.

The second half of the v indicates the reason for the reverence of the nations. The enemy shall come refers to an assault on God’s people. Like a river depicts the surging, pounding, raging water of a stream flowing down a dry wadi bed, sweeping everything before it (cf. 8:7). The Spirit of Yahweh is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit lifts up a standard in it, i.e., in the midst of the raging river. The standard is a signal that Yahweh is present; it is a rallying point for all those forces Yahweh will use to turn back the floodtide of the enemy.

   a. Coming redeemer (59:20): And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to them that turn from transgression in Jacob (oracle of Yahweh). The

---

331Others take ruach of Yahweh to refer to a mighty wind driving on the raging river.
Redeemer is Messiah. Zion is defined as those that turn from transgression, i.e., converts, the pious, the godly. The implication is that those who turn from transgression will recognize the redeemer.

Paul cites the Septuagint version of this v as the basis of his argument about the salvation of Israel: the deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob (Rom 11:26 NASB). The LXX apparently took the twice-used Hebrew preposition lamed (to) in the sense of in respect to, a meaning that the preposition certainly can have. Another possibility is that Paul is blending several messianic passages in his citation. The important thing is that (1) Paul never claims to be quoting Isa 59:20; and (2) both propositions affirmed in Rom 11:26 are true; and (3) are part of OT messianic expectation.

b. Coming covenant (59:21): As for me, this is my covenant with them, says Yahweh. Associated with the coming Redeemer is a new covenant. This refers to those who turn from transgression. This refers to the contents of Yahweh’s covenant the main focus of which is implied in the previous v. At the heart of the new covenant is the forgiveness of sins (Jer 31:31f). The double use of says Yahweh makes the promise in this v even more emphatic.

c. Concluding promise (59:21b): My Spirit that is upon you and my words that I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your seed’s seed, says Yahweh, from now and forever. The singular pronoun indicates that these words are not addressed to redeemed Israel (them) but to an individual. The Redeemer (Christ) who is coming for the sake of Zion seems to be addressed. The promises are similar to those made to the Servant in earlier passages. First, Yahweh promises that his Spirit will be upon the Redeemer (cf. 42:1). Second, he promises to put his words in the Redeemer’s mouth

332 The term redeemer (go’el) is used thirteen times by Isaiah, all in the last twenty-seven chs of the book. This technical term refers to the person who had the right and obligation to purchase the freedom of a relative who had fallen into slavery. Yahweh is the go’el who will ransom his people from bondage.

333 The covenant in view here is the sure mercies of David (55:3). This covenant was established in the Servant (42:6; 49:8) and will never be revoked (54:10).

334 After citing the first line of v 21 (And this is my covenant with them) Paul cites Jer 31:31f (Rom 11:26).

335 Others think the promise is made to redeemed Israel.

CHAPTER SIXTY
ZION’S FUTURE GLORY

Chs 60-62 are the most optimistic in the book. The Redeemer (59:20) will lead Zion to the heights of glory. What a contrast between the lowly conditions of the inhabitants of physical Zion (chs 58-59) and lofty blessings enjoyed by those who would live in the Redeemer’s Zion!

In six masterful paragraphs Isaiah depicts the transformation in Zion after the appearance of the Redeemer.

A. Dawn of Light (60:1-2):

1. Greeting for the dawn (60:1): Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh upon you has arisen. The feminine singular imperatives are addressed to Zion, the spiritual remnant of God’s people. Arise implies that Zion is sitting in some lowly position, perhaps in the dust of shame and repentance. The command implies that forgiveness has taken place or is taking place. The command to shine describes the responsibility of those who have been forgiven to reflect divine glory. They are to reflect the light of Christ in joyous active and passive testimony of their deliverance. Your light has come indicates that Zion has been redeemed. Glory of Yahweh is parallel to light. On the comparison of the coming day of salvation to sunrise of a new day see Mal 4:2. The great work of salvation is the true glory of Yahweh. The day of salvation has dawned. Zion has work to do.

2. Result of the dawn (60:2): For, behold, the darkness covers the earth, and impenetrable darkness the peoples; but upon you will Yahweh arise, and his glory upon you will be seen. For introduces substantiation and amplification of the general promise of light in the previous v. Behold
serves to rivet attention on an unexpected, shocking statement. Darkness symbolizes sin, ignorance, death, sorrow, and confusion. Such darkness covers the earth and its peoples. In the midst of that moral and spiritual darkness Yahweh will arise, i.e., intervene on behalf of Zion (cf. 9:1f; Mal 4:2). The glory of Yahweh here, as in the previous v, speaks of his work of salvation. While the world gropes in darkness, Zion has abundant light. Zion’s light will be seen by all who do not close their eyes to it.\(^336\)

**B. Zion’s Attraction (60:3-5a):**

1. **Gentiles come (60:3):** And Gentiles will walk to your light, and kings to your brightness of your rising. Some Gentiles will be attracted by the light emanating from Zion. They will walk to your light, i.e., in respect to your light. Gentiles embrace the salvation being proclaimed from Zion (the new Israel of God). Even kings—those of high rank—will embrace the brightness of your rising. Messianic Zion is depicted as rising in a dark world and shedding bright beams of light across the horizon. The glorious rays of Zion’s light burst forth on the day of Pentecost AD 30.

2. **Penitent children come (60:4):** Lift up round about your eyes and see: all of them gather themselves, they come to you, your sons from afar shall come, and your daughters at your side shall be borne. The opening command repeats 49:18. Mother Zion is encouraged to look about in tender love to see the spectacle of converted Gentiles and their kings coming to her. Gather themselves suggests that the movement toward Zion is encouraged and organized by Gentiles. Because they walk in respect to Zion’s light, the Gentile converts are now regarded as sons and daughters of Zion. Daughters at your side shall be borne probably alludes to the custom of carrying children on the hip. The picture here of Gentiles coming from afar to Zion is essentially the same picture painted in 2:2-4.

3. **Reaction of Zion (60:5a):** Then you shall see, and beam, and your heart will tremble and be enlarged. At the sight of Gentiles turning to her in faith, Zion will beam with joy. Tremble (with fear) and be enlarged depict the emotion that Zion experiences at the sight of the influx of new citizens.

**C. Zion’s Wealth (60:5b-9):**

1. **General statement (60:5b-7):** For the abundance of the sea will be turned upon you, the strength of nations will come to you. For introduces an explanation for Zion’s emotion. She receives a blessing that she could hardly have imagined. The sea here is a symbol for the nations (cf. Dan 7:1ff). Abundance (hamôn) and strength (chêl) refer to the wealth of the Gentiles. Zion will be enriched by resources contributed by the new converts.

2. **Wealth from nearer nations (60:6-7):**

   a. Camel caravans (60:6): A multitude of camels will cover you, young camels from Midian and Ephah; all of them from Sheba will come; gold and incense they will bear, and the praises of Yahweh they will proclaim. Isaiah envisions camel caravans from distant nations bringing treasure to Yahweh. The camels come from three distant lands. The OT mentions the Midianites in widely scattered geographical locations, but their main homeland seems to be east of the Jordan and south of Edom. Ephah was the son of Midian (Gn 25:4), and apparently a region within Midian. Sheba is a district in Arabia, probably in the area of modern Yemen. The camel caravans from Midian, Ephah and Sheba are loaded with precious cargo of gold and incense. New converts express their love and devotion for Yahweh by investing their best in Zion’s work. The camel caravans proclaim Yahweh’s praises by bringing their cargos to Zion.

   b. Sacrificial animals (60:7): All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth will minister unto you; they will ascend acceptably upon my altar, and the house of my beauty I will beautify. Converted Gentiles devote their animals to the service of Yahweh. The descendants of Kedar, a son of Ishmael, settled in the desert between Syria and Mesopotamia. Nebaioth is always mentioned in connection with

---

\(^{336}\)In Christ the glory and majesty of Yahweh are revealed. See Jn 1:14, 16; 1 Jn 1:2ff; Mt 17:2; 2 Pet 1:16ff.
Kedar. *Flocks* and *rams* represent the wealth of these nomadic tribes. *Are gathered* suggests that Kedar’s flocks are a free-will offering. These animals serve as resources to maintain the temple and provide adequate sacrifices.337

*They* (the animals) *will ascend upon* Yahweh’s *altar* as burnt offerings. The animals represent the entire wealth of the areas that bring them. Therefore, the sacrifice of these animals point to the complete dedication of these converted Gentiles. The offerings are presented *acceptably*, i.e., from worshipers fully committed to Yahweh. *The house of my beauty* is the messianic temple. God’s present-day temple is inherently beautiful; but it is further beautified by the worship of converted Gentiles. *I will beautify* gives the credit for Gentile conversion and worship to Yahweh.

3. Wealth from distant nations (60:8–9):

a. First sighting (60:8): *Who are these that fly as a cloud, and like doves to their windows?* Isaiah looks out over the Mediterranean Sea and sees white specks flying like a cloud. A moment later it becomes clear that the single white blob is really a number of white specks that look like *doves that fly into their windows*. The question format arouses interest and directs attention to more distant land. The tribes mentioned in vv 6-7 traced their ancestry back to Abraham;338 they were distant cousins of Israel. To the west, however, were Gentiles that had no ethnic/religious ties with Israel.

b. Background (60:9a): *Because for me the islands wait...* Zion should not to be astonished that objects appear approaching rapidly. The distant islands were waiting in expectation to embrace Yahweh’s salvation.

c. Dedicated wealth (60:9b): *and the ships of Tarshish first to bring your sons from afar, their silver and their gold with them for the name of Yahweh your God, and for the holy one of Israel, because he has glorified you.* The white objects on the distant horizon are now identified as *ships of Tarshish*. Tarshish was located on the coasts of Spain. *Ships of Tarshish* came to have the connotation of large, ocean-going vessels. *First* implies that the ships are leading a wider movement to bring converts and wealth to Zion. The ships are loaded with more converts (*your sons*) and additional wealth (*silver/gold*). All these people have come to know Yahweh; therefore, they dedicate their wealth and effort to the well-being of Zion. *Because he has glorified you* (*Zion*) gives the reason the Gentiles pour converts and wealth into the messianic city. OT (physical) Zion was corrupted by sin, and destroyed by enemies. NT Zion is made glorious by the presence of Messiah himself.

D. Zion’s Construction (60:10–14):

1. Builders (60:10): *And the sons of strangers will build your walls, and their kings will minister unto you; for in my anger I smote you, but in my favor I have had mercy on you.* Zion’s construction came before the prophet’s eye. Foreigners dismantled the walls of physical Jerusalem; foreigners will join in building the walls of the spiritual Zion.339 The kings who come to Zion in v 3 are now said to *minister unto* (serve) Zion. The second part of the v gives the reason for the blessing announced in the first part. Yahweh’s *anger* has turned away from Zion; now Zion will benefit from Yahweh’s *mercy*. Actions by the Persian kings assisted the Judeans in returning and rebuilding their land; but that help was only the prelude to the announced help in this v. The fulfillment of this prophecy is post-Pentecost.

2. Prosperity (60:11–12): *And your gates shall be open always; day and night they shall not be shut to bring unto you the strength of the nations, and their kings be led.* (12) *For the nation and the kingdom that will not serve you will perish, and the nations will be utterly desolate.* The gates of NT Zion never close because there is a continual flow of people into the place (cf. Rev 21:25). Kings will be lead into Zion, suggesting that they will be

---

337 Isaiah did not mean to suggest that animal sacrifice would be practiced in the messianic age. He uses the familiar forms of OT worship to describe the spiritual sacrifice of NT worship.

338 *Midian* was a son of Abraham by Keturah (Gn 25:2), and *Sheba* was part of the same line (Gn 25:3); *Kedar* was a son of Ishmael (Gn 25:13).

339 Salvation will be appointed for walls and bulwarks (26:1). See also 60:18.
escorted into the city willingly. They understand that nations that do not serve Zion (and its heavenly king) perish and become utterly desolate. Any question that the fulfillment of these promises reach beyond the period of restoration from Babylon is removed by the language of v 12. On strength of the nations see v 5.

3. Materials (60:13): The glory of Lebanon will come unto you, the cypress, elm and pine to beautify my holy place, and the place of my feet I will glorify. The glory of Lebanon is her forests. This bountiful and beautiful supply of timber, the envy of various empires in the ancient world, will come unto Zion, i.e., become Zion’s possession. Presumably this wood will come the same way the gold, silver and flocks earlier in the ch come to Zion. It will be brought to Zion by converted Gentiles. The three types of trees named here were mentioned earlier in a list of seven trees (41:19). The timber will serve to beautify my holy place, i.e., God’s temple, the place of my feet (1 Chr 28:2). The thought is that NT Zion is beautified by the action of converts devoting their possessions to the kingdom.

4. Homage (60:14): The sons of them that afflicted you shall come unto you bending; and all those that despise you will bow down at the soles of your feet, and they will call you, the city of Yahweh, Zion of the holy one of Israel. OT Zion had more than her share of oppressors. In the messianic age Those that despise you is parallel to them that afflict you. Descendants of those who had treated God’s people so cruelly will humbly bow and submit themselves to Zion and her King. The true conversion of these Gentiles is indicated in the way they address Zion. They will recognize Zion to be uniquely the city of the holy one of Israel.

E. Zion’s Prosperity (60:15-18):

1. General statement (60:15): Instead of your being forsaken and hated and with no one passing (through), I will set you for an eternal excellence, a joy of many generations. In the time of Yahweh’s anger OT Zion was forsaken by Yahweh and hated by surrounding nations. There is no one passing suggests an unoccupied city. This was the condition of Jerusalem during the period of exile. Yahweh will make the future of Zion, however, one of eternal excellence, i.e., blessing and everlasting joy. Many generations is lit., generation and generation. One generation after another will experience the joy of being part of the holy city.

2. Source of prosperity (60:16): You will suck the milk of Gentiles, and suck the breast of kings; that you may know that I am Yahweh your Savior and your Redeemer, Mighty One of Jacob. The nursing figure is taken from Dt 33:19. Converts will give of the substance and energy like a mother gives her milk to an infant. Kings are mentioned for the third time in this ch. In v 3 they come to Zion; in v 10 they minister to Zion. Here the picture is more intimate. Breast of kings emphasizes the richness and bounty of the nourishment Zion receives from converts. By experience and through revelation Zion comes to know Yahweh in his role of Savior and Redeemer. On the title Mighty One of Jacob see 1:24 and 49:26.

3. Illustrations of prosperity (60:17a): Instead of bronze I will bring gold, and instead of iron I will bring silver, and instead of wood bronze, and instead of stones, iron… Everything about NT Zion is upgraded. What was good is made better; what is common is made valuable. Yahweh will beautiful Zion by replacing bronze with gold, iron with silver. Yahweh will enhance the security of Zion by replacing wood with bronze, stones with iron. This is Isaiah’s way of saying what the writer of Hebrews stressed. Everything about spiritual Zion is better than her physical namesake.

4. Accompaniments of prosperity (60:17b-18):

a. New government (60:17b): and I will set your government peace, and your rulers righteousness. OT Zion was ruled by kings from the line of David. Isaiah has made clear that NT Zion is also ruled by a King from the line of David. Here he figuratively says that peace will be Zion’s government. This goes beyond saying that Zion’s government will be peaceful. Peace personified will be the government; righteousness personified will be rulers of the city. The reference must be to the one
who is Prince of Peace (9:6) and Yahweh our Righteousness (Jer 23:6).  

b. Peaceful conditions (60:18): There will no more be heard violence in your land, desolation and ruin in your borders; but you will call your walls salvation, and your gates praise. Under the administration of peace and righteousness, violence will no more be heard, i.e., it is unheard of because it is non-existent. Desolation and ruin, accompaniments of violence, will also be absent. Zion will be without a criminal element. Isaiah envisions Zion having land and borders, but these are no more to be taken physically than her walls and gates. NT Zion will call (i.e., regard) her walls as salvation. The walls of NT Zion are strong enough to withstand any attack. The certainty of salvation is the security of the believer. NT Zion’s gates are praise. At the very least this means that Zion’s gates are the occasion for praise. The language suggests, however, that it is through praise that one enters the security of the city. The point is that peace, righteousness, salvation, and praise are the identifying marks of NT Zion.

F. Zion’s Crowning Glories (60:19-22):

1. Special light (60:19-20): The theme of Zion’s light with which ch 60 began is taken up an amplified. Isaiah sees the whole scope of the messianic Zion from the church age to eternity.

a. Non-physical (60:19): You shall no longer have the sun for a light by day, and for brightness the moon shall not give light to you… In messianic Zion created light (sun/moon) will no longer provide light. The v does not state that sun and moon will no longer exist, only that they will not be the source of light for messianic Zion. This is the case because messianic Zion is not a physical entity. You shall no longer have is the language of the First Commandment, perhaps signaling that in the Zion to come any other light is idolatry.

b. Eternal (60:19b): but Yahweh will be to you an eternal light, and your God your glory. God dwells in the midst of his people. He is their light (cf. Rev 21:23; 22:5). Light symbolizes the presence of God, salvation, illumination and consequent joy. Messiah proclaimed himself to be the light of the world. The present-day Zion basks in his light. At the final revelation of Christ (second coming) the present light will be intensified many fold. Believers will see him in all his glory. Glory and parallels light. It is the presence of Yahweh in messianic Zion that gives glorious light to the city.

c. Uninterrupted (60:20): Your sun will not again go down, and your moon will not be withdrawn: for Yahweh will be to you for an eternal light, and the days of your mourning will be completed. By divine decree day and night alternate in the physical world. In the messianic Zion, however, the light is constant; there is no darkness. Since the light is the presence of Yahweh, and the light never ceases, the meaning is that Yahweh never again withdraws from the midst of his people. Days of your mourning will be complete refers to times past when physical Zion experienced the gloom of abandonment by Yahweh.

2. Special people (60:21-22): Having spoken about Zion, the habitation of the redeemed, Isaiah now speaks of the individuals of that holy city.

a. Totally righteous (60:21): And your people, all of them, shall be righteous… All of those who inhabit messianic Zion are righteous, because they have been made so by Christ’s work of salvation (Rom 5:19). They possess the righteousness of God that is by faith (Rom 3:22).

b. Fully endowed (60:21b): forever they shall possess a land… The righteous citizens of Zion will forever possess a land. They inherit the eternal Promised Land—the kingdom of God—of which ancient Canaan was but a type.

c. Divinely planted (60:21c): the sprout of my planting… In that land the righteous will be like the sprout of my planting, i.e., a tender shoot planted by God himself. The figure of a plant that God himself has planted occurs several times in Scripture. The figure brings out these thoughts: (1) messianic Zion is of divine origin; and (2) Yahweh maintains and nurtures the growth of his people.

---

340 Others understand that Zion will have no human rulers, but peace and righteousness will serve as vice-regents under the Davidic King.

341 Ps 92:14; Mt 15:13; Jn 15:1ff; Isa 4:1; 5:1ff; 6:13; 11:1; 53:2.
d. Purposefully formed (60:21d): the work of my hands, to glorify myself. Assyria, symbolic of Gentiles in the messianic age, is said to be the work of my hands in 19:25 (cf. 45:11). The noun work comes from a root used in reference to people making. It is used of the creation of the first man (Gn 1:26-28), and the making a great nation of the seed of Abraham (Gn 12:1-3; cf. Nm 14:12). Messianic Zion represents the final chapter in the story of Yahweh’s on-going efforts to shape a people (Jer 18:3). Similar language is used of the church by Paul (Eph 2:10; cf. 1 Cor 9:1).342 His purpose in this work is clearly stated: to glorify myself. The messianic Zion exists to give glory to God by proclaiming his praises, by exemplifying his holiness, and by reflecting his love (e.g., Mt 5:16; 1 Cor 6:20). Ultimately Christ returns to be glorified in his saints (1 Thess 1:10).

e. Disproportionately powerful (60:22a): The small will be a thousand, and the little one a strong nation… The point is not so much the numerical growth of God’s people (although that is a prominent messianic theme), but their powerful impact—an impact disproportionate their size. The small/the little one refers to an individual within Zion. Such seemingly insignificant people will have the influence of a thousand, indeed of a strong nation. The line is a reversal of the threat found in 30:17. One thinks of the impact that twelve Galilean apostles have had on the world (cf. 1 Cor 1:26-31).

3. Concluding guarantee (60:22b): I Yahweh in its time will hasten it. The spectacular promises of ch 60 have a guarantee attached. Yahweh, who brought the Israelites out of Egypt and formed them into a nation at Sinai, puts his reputation on the line with these promises. In its time suggests that the remnant must wait in hope for the glorious days anticipated in the preceding vv. Paul may have had this v in mind when he spoke about Christ being born in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4). In his own time Yahweh will hasten it, i.e., the promises will burst forth on the scene of history suddenly and swiftly when God is ready.

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE
ZION’S SAVIOR AND GLORIES

In the previous ch Isaiah discussed the future blessings of Zion. Now he brings center stage again the one who will bestow those blessings.

ZION’S WONDERFUL SAVIOR
61:1-3

The speaker in the opening vv of ch 61 is not identified, but one can hardly doubt that it is the Servant-Redeemer. These vv should therefore be considered the fifth and last of the Servant poems. These words were read by Jesus in the Nazareth synagogue. When he sat down, the master declared: Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing (Lk 4:21 NIV).

A. Credentials of the Servant (61:1a): The Spirit of Adonay Yahweh was upon me because Yahweh has anointed me … The Servant fills the role of a prophet. For that office he is well equipped. What was promised in earlier passages (11:2; 42:1; 49:8; 50:4f) has now occurred. The Trinitarian thrust of this sentence cannot be ignored. Here is Yahweh, the Spirit and me (Messiah).

The Spirit of Yahweh is upon the speaker because Yahweh has anointed me. The double use of the first person pronoun suggests that the speaker is a person of unusual significance. The selection of the word anoint supports the idea that the speaker is Messiah. OT priests and kings were anointed with oil; but the Servant is anointed with the Spirit. Jesus was anointed with God’s Spirit at the time of his baptism (Lk 3:22; Acts 4:27; 10:38).

B. Mission of the Servant (61:1b-3a): The speaker claims to have been anointed with the Spirit for the purpose of being God’s herald. Announces good tidings (61:1b): to announce good tidings to the afflicted… The good tidings are that deliverance from the bondage of sin has

342Other vv that might have implications on the church as a divine work include 1 Cor 15:58; 16:10 (work of the Lord); Eph 4:12 (work of ministry); Phil 2:30 (work of Christ).
become possible. The afflicted are those who have been oppressed, beaten down by satanic forces both physically and spiritually.

2. Heals the broken (61:1c): he has sent me to bind up those with broken hearts... Sin breaks hearts and shatters lives. The Wonderful Counselor speaks words of forgiveness and hope that lift the heart burden. Messiah is the Great Physician.

3. Liberates the imprisoned (61:1d): to proclaim liberty to captives and to prisoners, release... Every fiftieth year—the year of jubilee—all slaves were released (Lv 25:10, 13; 27:24). The captivity of national Israel in Babylon was a result of sin. That experience was a type of the bondage that is sin and that results from sin. Messiah is the ultimate liberator. It is not from physical prison that Christ delivers men, but from imprisonment in spiritual darkness. The truth he speaks sets men free from the delusions of Satan and the tangled web of sin.

4. Reveals Yahweh’s plan (61:2a): to proclaim a year of Yahweh’s favor, and a day of vengeance for our God... The gospel age is the antitypical year of jubilee. The messianic age is the age of grace. All the blessings that God has created for his people are now available.

It was at this point in his synagogue reading when Jesus returned the scroll of Isaiah to the minister and sat down. He then remarked, Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing (Lk 4:21 NIV). The age envisioned had arrived. The prophecy began to be fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus. Under his direction believers continue to proclaim the gospel of liberation.

The Servant’s mission was to proclaim a day of vengeance for our God. This he did not do in the Nazareth synagogue, but in other contexts he spoke about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world (Mt 24-25). While the period of God’s grace lasts for a year, his wrath would last but for a day. Part of the Christian proclamation is that a day of vengeance is coming upon all who oppose God and his people.

5. Comforts the sorrowing (61:2b-3): to comfort all mourners... Jesus said, Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted (Mt 5:4 NIV).

The gospel proclamation outlined in vv 1-2 is the means by which the Servant comforts those who mourn over their personal circumstances and the condition of God’s people. Isaiah emphasizes the change that will come upon Zion’s mourners by pointing out three gifts that God bestows on his people.

a. Crown (61:3a): to appoint to those who mourn in Zion, to give to them a headdress in place of ashes... The headdress or turban, symbolizing joy and victory, replaces the ashes that Jews threw over their heads to demonstrate sorrow.

b. Joy (61:3b): the oil of gladness in place of mourning... Fragrant oils were used on festive occasions to anoint celebrants (Song 4:10; 2 Sam 12:20; 14:2; Ps 23:5). Because of the Servant mourning over sin and circumstances are replaced with the joyous celebration of salvation.

c. Praise (61:3c): a garment of praise in place of a faint spirit... The Servant will clothe his people with praise. Such vocal praise is the exact opposite of the faint spirit that characterizes men who are beaten down and oppressed. Those of faint spirit are the weak, those too depressed or fearful to express any public commitment to Yahweh.

d. Reputation (61:3d): and they shall be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Yahweh, that he might glorify himself. The signs of joy bring about a change in the designation of God’s people. Oaks are symbols of strength. Through the righteousness of God, believers will be recognized as towers of strength. These oaks are recognized as the planting of Yahweh, i.e., he has planted these durable trees. Yahweh has made this planting that he might glorify himself. Men praise God when they see the mighty work he does in the lives of his people.

ZION’S WONDERFUL WORK

61:4

And they will build up the ancient wastes, the former desolations they shall raise up, and they shall restore the waste cities, the desolations of past generations. The previous three vv speak of the positive results of the Servant’s (Messiah’s) prophetic ministry. The plural subject of this v
must refer to those who have been restored by gospel message. The restored become restorers. They build up the ancient wastes, former desolations, waste cities and desolations of past generations. There is no mention of Jerusalem or of Judah. These terms are symbols of the ravishes of sin in the world. Sin destroys; the gospel restores. Sin tears down; the gospel builds up. That the poet could use the concrete imagery of restoration to depict spiritual transformation is established by several passages. Peter may have been referring to passages like this when he said: He [Christ] must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets (Acts 3:21 NIV).

ZION’S WONDERFUL FUTURE
61:5-7

The second person pronoun is plural in these vv. Isaiah is addressing Zion’s citizens.

A. Enlargement of Citizenship (61:5): And strangers will stand and feed your flock, and the sons of strangers will be your plowmen and vinedressers. Strangers are Gentiles. Isaiah pictures these former oppressors serving Zion (God’s kingdom) in the most menial tasks: shepherds, husbandmen and vinedressers. Those who once elevated themselves over Israel are now reduced to the level of farmhands. The main point of the v is that Zion has nothing to fear from these former oppressors. Nothing in the v indicates that the labor is forced. Former enemies serve Zion voluntarily. This dedicated labor suggests the conversion of the Gentiles (cf. 56:3).

B. Enlargement of Ministry (61:6a): But you the priests of Yahweh will be called, and you will be named ministers of God... The Aaronic priesthood will pass from the scene. All the inhabitants of Zion, including the Gentile converts of the previous v, will be known as priests/ministers of God. OT Israel had a priestly ministry in the world prior to the coming of Christ (Ex 19:6; Dt 33:10). NT Zion, the new Israel of God, also has a priestly ministry. It is the mission of Zion to act as the mediator between sinful man and the Creator, assisting men to worship God, and teaching men his ways. Peter records the fulfillment: But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Pet 2:9).

C. Enlargement of Riches (61:6b): the strength of Gentiles you will eat, and in their glory you will boast. Priestly Zion is nourished by her converts. Priests were entitled under the Law to remuneration for the ministry that they rendered. So messianic Zion is sustained through the generosity of Gentile converts. The strength/glory of the nations refers to the material contributions of Gentiles. Since mid-first century AD Zion (church of Christ) has been materially undergirded largely through the gifts of converted Gentiles. Boast (lit., say to yourselves) is not arrogance, but recognition that contributions of former Gentiles constitute the largest share of Zion’s resources.

D. Enlargement of Honor (61:7): Instead of your shame (you will have) double, and (instead of) their reproach they will rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they will possess double; they will possess everlasting joy. The series of contrasts introduced in 60:17. The condition of Zion in Isaiah’s day is described by the words shame and confusion. In the days of the Servant Zion receives double honor. Reproach gives way to celebration as citizens of Zion rejoice in their portion, their privilege in being part of the kingdom of God. They will have the honor of a double portion, the portion of a firstborn son. A double portion of Elijah’s spirit identified Elisha as the rightful successor of his master (2 Kgs 2:9).

343 The phrase restore the fortunes appears to refer to conversion of Gentiles in Jer 48:47 (Moab); 49:6 (Ammon), 49:39 (Elam) and Ezek 16:53 (Sodom).

344 It may be that shame and confusion describe the condition of God’s people during the exile to Babylon that Isaiah presupposes in chs 40-66.
Perhaps there is a hint here that a double portion identifies NT Zion as the rightful successor of her OT namesake. Their land is the OT way of referring to the kingdom of God. Because of their double portion (blessing) status in the kingdom of God, citizens of Zion will possess everlasting joy.

EXPLANATION OF BLESSINGS
61:8-9

A. Nature of Yahweh (61:8): For I, Yahweh am a lover of justice, a despiser of robbery in iniquity ... This is the last of eleven times that self-identification formula I, Yahweh, appears in the book. In this case Yahweh describes himself as a lover of justice, and a despiser (hater) of robbery (injustice). Robbery in iniquity is violence perpetrated in the interest of iniquity, i.e., unjust violence. The implication is that Yahweh cannot continue to look the other way as enemies continue to abuse his people. God’s absolute justice requires that he destroy his enemies and deliver the remnant.

B. Recompense of Yahweh (61:8b): Yahweh will recompense his people for the mistreatment accorded them by oppressors.
1. Stated generally (61:8b): and I will give their reward in truth... Reward (p’ullāh) seems to always carry the connotation of just wage, rather than the negative pay back. In truth suggests a just reward (so LXX).
2. Stated specifically (61:8c): and I will make an everlasting covenant for them. Yahweh will voluntarily enter into a new and everlasting covenant with his people. All other blessings enumerated by Isaiah in this section are found in the package of this covenant (cf. Jer 31:31f). This covenant is the result of the Servant’s (Messiah’s) work. His death on the cross satisfied the old covenant and ratified the new.

C. Blessing of Yahweh (61:9): And their seed will be known among the Gentiles, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them will recognize them that they are a seed that Yahweh has blessed. The seed (descendants) of new covenant Israel will be known among the Gentiles (unbelievers), i.e., they will easily be identified as Yahweh’s distinct people. This new covenant group will be recognized by all the nations as a people blessed of God. Salvation’s blessings are not merely privately experienced, they are publicly recognized in changed lives, godly lifestyles, and joyous faces.

RESPONSE TO BLESSING PROMISES
61:10-11

A. Joy of Salvation (61:10): I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh, my soul will exalt in my God because he has clothed me in garments of salvation; with a robe of righteousness he will cover me, like a bridegroom who acts like a priest in respect to his headdress, and like a bride adorns herself with her jewels. Isaiah pictured Zion rejoicing over her good fortune. The joy centers, not so much in gifts received, as in Yahweh, i.e., in the person of the gift giver. My soul suggests that the joy was inward and substantial as opposed to outward and superficial. The joy centers on Yahweh’s work of salvation/righteousness, which is compared to a beautiful garment. The two terms are closely related, because the work of salvation reveals Yahweh’s righteousness. The joy is underscored by introducing a marriage scene. Isaiah likened these beautiful garments to the attire of a bride and bridegroom. The headdress (p’ēr) was first mentioned 3:20 among the garb of women of wealth. In v 3 Yahweh gives his people this headdress in place of the ashes of mourning. This turban was worn by people of rank like priests (Ex 39:28). On his wedding day a bridegroom was adorned the honor of a bride also adorns

345 Following NIV (iniquity) or NRSV (wrongdoing). MT vocalization reads in burnt offerings (b’ōlāh). This reading is (followed by KJV; NASB; NJPS) introduce a condemnation of Israel’s worship practices (as in 1:13; Mal 1:17; 3:8) into a promise of hope. Probably the consonants should be re-vocalized to read b’āvālāh = injustice, unrighteousness, wrong.

346 See 27:3; 41:4, 17; 42:6; 45:7, 8, 19, 21; 49:26; 60:16.

347 The term p’ullāh is used also in 40:10; 49:4; 62:11; and 65:7.

348 Oswalt, NICOT, 2:573.
herself with her jewels. The couple wears the nuptial garb with pride and joy. So believers regard the gifts of salvation and righteousness as precious and beautiful as the finest wedding attire (cf. Mt 22:11-12).

B. Certainty of Salvation (61:11):
1. Figuratively presented (61:11a): For as the earth brings forth her bud and as a garden causes what is sown to spring forth… Two closely related figures are used in this v. As the earth brings forth her bud references the creation account (Gn 1:11f). The comparison is to the appearance of salvation without human intervention. The second figure compares salvation to a garden that is the result of what was sown. The figure implies purposeful planting. The garden plot, however, causes what is sown to spring forth, i.e., appear suddenly. So the two figures point to what appears to come into being spontaneously, but is really the long-term result of purposeful planning and planting.

2. Theologically presented (61:11b): thus will Adonay Yahweh cause righteousness to spring forth, and praise before all the Gentiles. The Creator of the earth and the Garden of Eden is the one who sows the seed righteousness. Adonay stresses the sovereignty of God; Yahweh stresses his redemptive compassion. The verb spring forth (r. tsmch) is the same word translated sprout or shoot in the first part of this v. The only other place this word appears in Isaiah is 4:2 where it refers to Messiah. The implication here is that the coming righteousness/salvation is associated with the coming of Messiah. Praise is the response to God’s righteousness. The praise to Yahweh is lifted up before all the Gentiles. In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed (Rom 1:17). So by preaching the gospel throughout the world the Zion of God proclaims God’s praises to the nations.

CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO
PREPARATION FOR SALVATION

Many of the themes of the previous two chs reappear in ch 62. The purpose of the ch is to assure the Judeans that the glorious promises of the previous chs can be trusted.

A. Zion’s Transformation (62:1-5):
1. Light (62:1): For Zion’s sake I will not hold back, and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not rest until her righteousness goes out like brightness, and her salvation like a lamp shall burn. God promised that he will not hold back or rest, i.e., be inactive, until he had accomplished his purposes for Zion/Jerusalem. Those purposes are summed up in the words righteousness, i.e., vindication, and salvation. Isaiah likened this work of God on behalf of Zion to the steady beam of a lamp. Yahweh’s work of righteousness/salvation will be obvious and glorious, not mysterious and hidden.

2. Recognition (62:2-4):
   a. New prominence (62:2a): And nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory… The Gentiles will take note of Zion’s righteousness, i.e., vindication or change of fortunes. All kings will see the glory of Zion. They will realize that their own glory pales in comparison.

   b. New name (62:2b): and you will be called by a new name, which the mouth of Yahweh will designate. Yahweh will commemorate the new circumstances for Zion by bestowing a special name on his people. Designate is lit., will pierce. The new name that Yahweh gives is not indicated. Some regard this as a prediction of the introduction of the name Christian (Acts 11:26), although the NT never makes this claim.

   c. New figure (62:3): And you will be a beautiful crown in the hand of Yahweh, and a turban of royalty in the palm of your God. Beautiful crown is a new figure to describe the glory of redeemed Zion. Earlier (28:1) Samaria was called the proud crown of the drunkards, a crown fading in beauty (tiph’eret). Here messianic Zion is called a beautiful (tiph’eret) crown. The glitzy crowns of worldly men ultimately fade. Only the things of God remain untarnished through time. A crown (’ateret) during the monarchy was usually made of

349 On the “new name” concept see Isa 1:26; Jer 3:17; 33:16; Ezek 48:35; Rev 2:17; 3:12.
gold (2 Sam 12:30; Ps 21:3). The turban is said to be a turban of royalty to distinguish it from the turbans worn by society women (3:23) and high priests (Zech 3:5). The crown/turban depicts messianic Zion as a monarchy. In the hand/palm of Yahweh indicates that this messianic monarchy is divinely sustained and protected.

d. New status (62:4):
1. Present (62:4a): No longer will it be said to you, Forsaken, and to your land no longer will it be said, Desolate… The theme of the wife, separated from her husband because of her sin often appears in this book from ch 49 onward. Because Yahweh ultimately abandoned OT Zion the city might properly be called ‘azubah (Forsaken). OT Zion’s land (Canaan) might properly be called shemamah (Desolate) since her inhabitants were deported to foreign lands. In the age to come, however, such designations will be inappropriate.

2. Future (62:4b): but you will be called Hephzibah, and your land, Beulah. Spiritual Zion will be called hephzibah (My Delight is in Her). Because Yahweh’s delight is in Zion, she can appropriately be called beulah (Married). Both names connote the great transformation of Zion. These may be the new name promised in v 2.

3. Explanation (62:4c-5): Two reasons are given for the delightful names just mentioned.
   a. Yahweh’s delight (62:4c): For Yahweh delights in you, Nothing that Zion does will bring about the transformation indicated in the names. Zion’s glorious future is due to Yahweh’s favor.
   b. Zion’s “marriage” (62:4d-5a): and your land will be married. (5) For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you… A land is said to be married when it is occupied, possessed, and loved. Zion’s sons (her inhabitants) affectionately and joyously “married” (possessed; occupied) the land with the zeal of a young man marrying a virgin. Canaan land here is the OT way of speaking about the kingdom of Christ. The return of exiles from Babylonian exile was a pledge and down payment on the fulfillment of this promise.
   c. Yahweh’s affection (62:5b): and as a bridegroom over his bride rejoices your God will rejoice over you. God will deal with Zion out of affection like that of a bridegroom for his bride. Zion (NT kingdom/church) is the bride of Christ. The joy of newly weds is used to illustrate the pleasure God takes in Zion, his beloved people.

B. Zion’s Security (62:6-9):
1. Appointment of watchmen (62:6a): Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I will appoint watchmen. The walls of spiritual Jerusalem have been mentioned four times previously (49:16; 56:5; 60:10, 18). Watchmen were the guardians of ancient cities. Yahweh promises to appoint watchmen for the walls of spiritual Jerusalem. These watchmen cannot be OT prophets, for the Jerusalem in view here is messianic Zion (Heb 12:22). The watchmen must be pastors and evangelists who warn the church of error, and protect it from the inroads of dangerous enemies.

2. Work of watchmen (62:6b-7):
   a. Sound the alarm (62:6b): All the day and all the night they will not hold back. The watchmen are vigilant at all times (day/night). They do not hold back sounding the alarm when danger approaches.
   b. Intercede (62:6c-7): You who cause Yahweh to remember, do not keep silent. (7) And may you give no rest to him, until he establishes, and until he puts Jerusalem a praise in the land. Again the watchmen are addressed. Causing Yahweh to remember is a reference to prayer. Isaiah urges the watchmen not to keep silent in their prayers. The watchmen are to intercede constantly with Yahweh—to give no rest to him. The prayers must continue until Yahweh establishes the NT Jerusalem and makes that holy city a praise in the land, i.e., an object of praise by all the redeemed.

3. Yahweh’s oath (62:8-9):
   a. Reason for the oath (62:8a): Yahweh has sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength… Yahweh offers an oath to confirm the promises he has made to his people. Right hand and arm are both symbols of Yahweh’s power. All
the might and strength of Israel’s Creator and Redeemer are behind the promises made in these chs.

b. What will never happen again (62:8b): Surely I will not give your grain anymore as food to your enemies, and surely the sons of strangers shall not drink your wine in which you have labored. In time past Yahweh had given Israel’s grain into the hands of enemies (e.g., Judg 6:1-8). To give your grain to your enemies is to permit the grain to fall into the hands of the enemies by failing to intervene on behalf of Israel. The verb give stresses that even the actions of enemies ultimately were under the control of Yahweh. Such temporal punishments, however, will be a thing of the past in the days of messianic Zion.

c. What will take place in the future (62:9): But they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise Yahweh, and they that have collected it will drink in the courts of my holiness. Gathered it and eat it refers to the grain and wine of the previous v. The fruit of Zion’s labor and Yahweh’s blessing will be enjoyed only by those who have a right to it. In a messianic context grain and wine point, not to salvation, but to what sustains the saved. The reference is to that food that abides unto eternal life (Jn 6:27). That food can never be taken away from messianic Zion.

The sustaining food, like the manna of the Wilderness, must be gathered and eaten by the redeemed. The eating of it is accompanied by praise, for the believer knows that his ever-deepening relationship with the Lord is nurtured by that food. Praise is the natural response to a satisfying meal (Dt 8:9). The drinking (and presumably the eating as well) takes place in the courts of my holiness. This is the area where the Aaronic priests ate holy food. So the priests of messianic Zion (all believers) will recognize partaking of spiritual food as both a temple duty and a joyous privilege. We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat (Heb 13:10).

C. Zion’s Preparation (62:10-12): These vv form a fitting conclusion to chs 60-62.

1. Exhortation to Zion (62:10):

a. Make the way known (62:10a): Pass through, pass through the gates; prepare the way of the people... The imperatives in this v are plural. The addressees are not named. Does he speak to the Judeans of his own day? The exiles in Babylon? Those outside Zion, whether Jews or Gentiles? If the remainder of the v expresses the reason for passing through the gates, then the addressees must be the citizens of Zion. The gates are those of messianic Zion—the gates that once are opened (26:2) will never be closed (60:11)—the gates of praise (60:18) made of sparkling jewels (54:12). Those who reside behind walls of salvation must proclaim Zion’s message to those without.

Citizens of Zion are to prepare the way of the people. The language is reminiscent of 40:3, except there the remnant is to prepare the way of Yahweh. The people is parallel to nations in the last line of the v. Zion’s citizens prepare the way for non-believers to enter the city by preaching the gospel. This v is the OT equivalent of the Great Commission.

b. Make the way smooth (62:10b): build up, build up the highway; gather out the stones... The double plural imperative stresses the importance and urgency of the action. This is the last of nine uses of highway (m’sillāh; maslūl) in the book. The term is used of a public thoroughfare, especially an interstate freeway, never a city street. In 40:3 a highway symbolizes Yahweh’s approach to his people. Use of the definite article connects this highway to prior vv where the word

352Young (VICOT, 3:472) thinks the reference is to the gates of the cities of the world. Even if this were the case, the evangelistic implications of the v would remain.

353Hailey (CI, 499). Others think the idea is that the captives must leave the world city to claim for themselves the salvation that God supplies.

354Another possibility is that the people refers to Jews, and nations refers to Gentiles. ‘am appears with the definite article nineteen times in Isaiah, and at least sixteen times refers to Jews in their state of sinful rebellion and darkness.

355Three times Isaiah uses the word in its literal sense (7:3; 33:8; 36:2).
symbolizes how estranged people can approach Yahweh (11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 49:11). To build up the highway means to smooth it out (cf. Isa 40:4). Gather out the stones means to remove all obstacles from the highway that approaches Zion.

C. Make the way clear (62:10c): raise up an ensign over the nations. Outside the gates citizens of messianic Zion are to raise up an ensign (nēš). The term is used by Isaiah for a signal flag that summoned troops and directed troop movements (5:26; 13:2; 31:9) or a standard that served as a rallying point that drew people together for some important purpose. The ensign is raised over (‘al) the nations, i.e., high enough that it might be seen by them all. Earlier in the book an ensign summoned nations to attack Jerusalem; now an ensign summons them to become part of the city. The ensign raised by messianic Zion has previously been identified as the Root of Jesse, Messiah (11:10), which God himself will provide (49:22). The messianic King (Messiah) is to be lifted up that all men might rally around him (cf. Jn 3:14; Phil 2:9).

2. Announcement to Zion (62:11): A triple behold in this v underscores the wonderment of messianic salvation.

A. Yahweh’s proclamation (62:11a): Behold, Yahweh has proclaimed unto the ends of the earth… Throughout the world Yahweh will proclaim a glorious truth. The preaching of the gospel is geographically universal.

b. Yahweh’s commission (62:11b): Say to the daughter of Zion… Yahweh’s proclamation is to be delivered by his messengers (plural imperative) to the daughter of Zion, i.e., the collective inhabitants of messianic Zion.

c. Yahweh’s message (62:11c, d, e):

1) His salvation (62:11c): Behold, your salvation comes… The daughter of Zion is to be assured that her salvation comes. The suffix on the following noun suggests that salvation here refers to the Savior himself. The citizens of messianic Zion have been saved; but salvation in its completeness awaits the coming Savior, i.e., his second coming.

2) His reward (62:11d): behold, his reward is with him… The Savior’s reward is probably intended to be given to the daughter of Zion. The reward may be equivalent to his work in the following line.

3) His work (62:11e): and his work before him. The Savior’s work is the company of redeemed men, the result of his work on the cross. They are his personal reward, and the reward for Zion, for by this constantly enlarging company of the redeemed Zion is enlarged.

3. Recognition of Zion (62:12): Isaiah indicates the recognition that will be given to Zion, certainly by those within the city, and possibly even some outside the city.

a. Designations for her citizens (62:12a, b):

1) Holy people (62:12a): And they will be called the people of holiness… The verb is impersonal, and best rendered in English as a passive. Yahweh intended OT Israel to be a holy people (Ex 19:6); but NT Israel is created as a holy people. They reflect the character of the Savior. They are set apart from the world, devoted to the things of God.

2) Redeemed people (62:12b): redeemed of Yahweh… This is the thirteenth and final time that the word redeemed (gā’ûl) appears in the book. Those who reflect holiness previously have been delivered from a condition of slavery into a condition of freedom.

b. Designations for Zion herself (62:12c, d):

1) Sought (62:12c): and you will be called, Sought out… The citizens of Zion have been sought out by gospel evangelism. In Scripture men do not grope after God; Yahweh seeks out and saves what is lost.

2) Not forsaken (62:12d): a city that has not been forsaken. With a vast throng of the saved as her inhabitants, Zion never again will be forsaken.

CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

PRAYER FOR SALVATION
ENEMIES REMOVED

63:1-6

Zion’s enemies (typified by Edom) must be destroyed before the glorious promises made in the preceding chs can be fulfilled.

A. Aftermath of Battle (63:1-2):

1. Identity question (63:1a): Who is this coming from Edom, red of garments from Bozrah? This one adorned in his apparel, bending under his great strength? In a vision Isaiah saw a mysterious person striding toward Zion. The prophet himself, or a watchmen on Zion’s walls, asks the identity of the stranger. He comes from the direction of Edom. Bozrah was the chief city of Edom. This traditional enemy of God’s people is representative of all the enemies of God’s people. This approaching one is dressed in garments stained with red, the import of which is brought out in the following v. Adorned (םְדָר) suggests that his reddish apparel is glorious. Bending under his great strength is a metaphor difficult to decipher. Some see here the swagger of a mighty conqueror. Another possibility is that he is weighed down beneath the spoils of his victory.

2. Response (63:1b): I am speaking in righteousness, mighty to save. The one who approaches responds to the question in two ways. With the first person pronoun followed by a participle the speaker identifies himself as Yahweh. Speaking points to Yahweh as the God of revelation. In righteousness indicates the manner in which Yahweh speaks. All that he says— all that he declares to his people—is both right (accurate) and upright. That he is mighty to save indicates that he can fulfill his promises of salvation. The emphasis of the passages is not on the destruction of worldly Edoms, but on the deliverance of God’s people.

3. Garment question (63:2): Why is there red to your apparel, and your garments like trampling in a wine press? In vision the Conqueror draws near enough to the prophet to be personally addressed. The prophet observes that his garments are not naturally red; they have been stained red. He looks as if he has been trampling a wine press and thereby spattered his garments with grape juice.

B. Explanation of Battle (63:3-6):

1. Nature of intervention (63:3):

a. Solitary (63:3a): A press I have trodden alone, and from peoples there was no man with me... The Conqueror takes up the metaphor of the prophet’s question. Yahweh had trodden the wine press of judgment. Not grapes, but Israel’s enemies were in that press. Alone the great Deliverer crushed the enemies of his people, for he alone is able to save and deliver.

b. Severe (63:3b): and I tread them in my anger, and trample them in my wrath... The verb forms seem to indicate that the judgment is on-going. In meting out judgment Yahweh is not an impassionate Judge. He is a Father whose children have been wounded. He is a beneficent King whose subjects have rebelled against him. The righteous anger/wrath of Yahweh is unleashed against those who oppose him and his people. The verbs tread/trample depict actions taken over time that result in the utter crushing of the wicked. Yahweh is slow to anger; but the outpouring of his wrath is fearful. The twice used pronoun them refers to the nations—the Gentiles—non Israel, i.e., the irredeemably lost.

c. Gruesome (63:3c): and their juice spatters upon my garments, and all my apparel I have stained. His garments are stained red by the juice (blood) of his enemies. The stains on his garments, then, are not due to the shedding of his own blood as imagined by some of the Church Fathers.

2. Time for intervention (63:4): For the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed ones has come. The outpouring of Yahweh’s wrath upon the nations is not some spontaneous eruption by a capricious Creator. There is a day of vengeance in my heart, i.e., in my plans and on my calendar. This day comes only after exhausting efforts to win over the rebellious. Vengeance is vindication, not selfish rage, and bitter revenge. The parallel phrase year of my redeemed ones explains what vengeance is all about. Yahweh destroys evil in the interest of making the redemption of his people complete.
3. Need for intervention (63:5): And I look and there was no helper; and I am astonished that there was no sustainer; and my own arm saves for me, and my fury it sustains me. This v is similar to 59:16. Yahweh must intervene to crush wickedness because there is no other who is capable of so doing. In this work he is assisted by no one and sustained by no one. My own arm saves for me, i.e., he saves by his power alone. He is sustained in the battle against evil by his own fury against wickedness. Salvation and fury are opposite sides of the same coin. Both are administered by the arm (power) of Yahweh. All men will experience either the one or the other.

4. Result of intervention (63:6): And I trample peoples in my anger, and make them drunk in my wrath, and I bring down to the earth their juice. The wine vat metaphor comes to a climax with this blunt explanation of what the previous vv have been depicting. Trample (bûs) is a word that most frequently occurs in military contexts. Thus trampling in the wine press is a metaphor for a holy war against enemies. Peoples are Gentiles—non Israel, enemies of God and his people. A new metaphor is introduced, that of the wine cup of God’s wrath. To make them drunk is to render them unable to defend themselves or evade judgment. To bring down to the earth their juice is to cause their blood to flow upon the ground.

**PRAYER FOR SALVATION 63:7-19**

Encouraged by the promises of salvation and future glory, the captives pray for deliverance. Isaiah first set forth his reflections about God. Then he verbalized to God the feelings that he anticipated would fill the hearts of the captives. Finally, Isaiah recorded God’s answer to the captives’ prayer.

A. Prelude to Prayer (63:7-14a): An historical retrospect establishes the setting for the prayer to follow. These vv contain thankful reflection regarding the grace of God, and painful reflection regarding the response of Israel.

1. Thankful reflection (63:7-9): Gratitude and praise should always precede petition.
   a. Yahweh’s disposition (63:7): The kindnesses of Yahweh I will mention, the praises of Yahweh, according to all that Yahweh has done for us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel with which he has done them, according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his kindnesses. The twice used kindnesses refers to Yahweh’s numerous acts of undeserved mercy that he has performed on behalf of his covenant people. I will mention indicates to bring to mind. Recounting such gracious acts of intervention constitutes the praises of Yahweh. These praises are to be in proportion to all that Yahweh has done for us. The praise should reflect the great goodness that Yahweh’s deeds reflect, i.e., it should match in quantity and quality the multitude of his kindnesses.
   b. Yahweh’s declaration (63:8a): And he said, Only they are my people, children that will not lie… Out of all the nations on the earth Yahweh entered into a special relationship with Israel alone. He adopted Israel as his people, his very children. As his children (sons), Israel was not to lie, i.e., deal falsely with him or with one another.
   c. Yahweh’s intervention (63:8b): and he became a Savior for them. The language reflects Ex 15:2. Deliverance from Egypt is in view.
   d. Yahweh’s empathy (63:9a): In all their affliction there was affliction to him… God feels the sufferings of his people as his own suffering.
   e. Yahweh’s redemption (63:9b): and the angel of his face saved them in his love, and in his pity he redeemed them… The angel or messenger of his face is the special angel who appears throughout the OT. He is a manifestation of Yahweh himself.

He reflects the face, i.e., the presence, of Yahweh. In his love and in his pity reflects the manner in which Yahweh redeemed Israel from Egypt.

f. Yahweh’s support (63:9c): and he took them up and carried them all the days of old. Yahweh took them up and carried them through the wilderness wandering as a father might carry his child through dangerous terrain. What marvelous love! All the days of old refers to the days of Moses and the period of settlement in Canaan.

2. Painful rebellion (63:10): But as for them, they rebelled, and grieved the Spirit of his holiness; and he was turned in respect to them into an enemy, and as for him, he fought against them. Unfortunately Israel rebelled against God. They grieved his Holy Spirit (NIV) by their iniquity (cf. Acts 7:51; Eph 4:30). He, therefore, became their adversary and fought against them through the agency of foreign powers.

3. Perplexing recollection (63:11): a. Focus on the past (63:11a): And the days of old were remembered, even Moses [and] his people. Israel’s adversity triggered the memory of what God had done for them in days of old, i.e., the days of Moses.

b. Focus on the present (63:11b): Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he that put within him the Spirit of his holiness? In exile the people had doubts about their God. Why did God help his people during the Egyptian enslavement, but not now? Where introduces a lament. Brought them up out of the sea refers to the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 15). Shepherd of his flock is a title for Moses. Put in his midst (Israel) the Spirit of his holiness (i.e., Holy Spirit) with all the manifestations of the Spirit’s presence. Moses, Aaron, Miriam, the seventy (Nm 11) all had a measure of the Spirit, as did the prophets who appeared later.

c. Focus on Yahweh (63:12-14): The recollection of Yahweh’s past interventions continues. These lines stress the leadership of Yahweh in the initial redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

(1) Means of his leadership (63:12a): that led them by the right hand of Moses… The right hand of Moses refers to the power of that man of God, especially as manifested in the rod that he wielded. Yahweh chose Moses and equipped him to be the ideal leader of his people.

(2) Power of his leadership (63:12b): with his glorious arm, cleaving the waters before them… His glorious arm refers to the manifestations of Yahweh’s power throughout the days of Moses’ leadership. Cleaving the waters before them is another reference to the Red Sea crossing (Ex 14:16, 21ff.), a magnificent illustration of the exercise of Yahweh’s glorious arm of strength.

(3) Result of his leadership (63:12c): to make for himself an everlasting name. The sea crossing was a defining moment in Yahweh’s self-identification. In that act of deliverance Yahweh revealed to his people his fundamental nature as Redeemer.

(4) Method of his leadership (63:13): The one who led them through the deep like a horse in the wilderness, without stumbling. The one who led them is lit., their one who caused to go. The verb evokes the picture of a shepherd leading his flock. Through the deep probably refers again to the Red Sea crossing. In the wilderness depicts a horse moving along terrain swiftly without worry of obstacles. Thus the passage through the sea was swift and unimpeded.

(5) Success of his leadership (63:14): As the cattle into the valley go down, the Spirit of Yahweh caused him to rest. The Spirit of Yahweh (Holy Spirit) brought Israel into the rest (Dt 12:9f; Ps 95:11) of the Promised Land. This the Spirit did by guiding Israel’s leaders. As the cattle into the valley depicts the natural inclination of beasts to seek out promising pasture. After forty years in the desert of Sinai the green valleys and shady trees of Canaan brought rest and refreshment to God’s people.

e. Conclusion (63:14b): Thus you led your people to make for yourself a glorious name. Everything connected with Yahweh’s ancient leadership of Israel resulted in achieving for him a glorious...
name, i.e., a reputation as a deliverer, as the champion of Israel. So the implied question on the minds of captives is, Why does Yahweh not live up to his reputation now?

**B. Captives’ Prayer (63:15-19):** Isaiah envisioned the prayer that would be on the lips of the penitent captives. The prayer consists of five movements. Four of these are petitions, one is a frank confession of sin.

1. Petition for acknowledgement (63:15-16):
   a. Direct (63:15a): **Look down from heaven and see from the habitation of your holiness, and of your glory!** The verbs *look down* and *see* are synonymous. Heaven is described as the habitation of your holiness and of your glory, i.e., the holy and glorious habitation. It seems to the captives that Yahweh had withdrawn into his heavenly abode and totally disengaged from involvement with his people.
   b. Indirect (63:15b): **Where is your zeal and your strength?** Only God could be their deliverer. He had led his people in the past and had earned a wonderful reputation. *Where* expresses perplexity about the lack of current divine intervention on behalf of Israel. This is the sixth and final reference to the zeal (*qināh*) of Yahweh. The term often is used in conjunction with battle scenes. Strength (*gāḇūrāh*) also occurs six times in Isaiah, usually with military connotations.
   c. Complaint (63:15c): **As for the murmuring of your bowels and of your mercies, unto me have restrained themselves.** To easterners the bowels are the center of emotion, rather than the heart as in western culture. The murmuring of your bowels points to tokens of Yahweh’s kindness. Mercies is the plural of intensity. The prophet speaks as the representative of the exiles. Yahweh seems to have restrained his compassion for his people so that their bondage goes on unabated.
   d. Rationale (63:16): **For you are our Father, for Abraham, he has not known us, and Israel, he has not recognized us; you, O Yahweh, are our Father, our Redeemer of old is your name.** The basis of the petition for acknowledgement is now stated. Twice over the petitioner affirms that *you are our Father.* Yahweh is Israel’s *Father* because he brought the nation into existence (cf. Dt 32:6). This title is the logical reverse of the designation of Israel as Yahweh’s *children* or *sons* in v 8. The exiles are not known or recognized by their fathers in the flesh. A father will come to the aid of his own child. Abraham and Israel, however, cannot or will not come to the aid of the captives. The point is that the Israelites are not entitled to deliverance because of physical ancestry. Only Yahweh is and can be the Father of the spiritual remnant. Only Yahweh can rescue them, and that only because of his mercy and compassion. Yahweh’s *name* expresses his true nature. He has been Israel’s *Redeemer from of old,* i.e., he has always been Israel’s Redeemer.

2. Petition for rapprochement (63:17):
   a. Present predicament (63:17a): **Why do you cause us to wander, O Yahweh, from your ways; why do you harden our heart from fearing you?** The question acknowledges that Yahweh has withdrawn from his people. The lack of divine intervention had driven many to despair, hardness and unbelief. By withholding his blessings, Yahweh, in a sense, had caused these people to wander away from Yahweh’s ways. Taken in isolation, this v puts the blame for Israel’s waywardness on Yahweh. The rest of the book, however, makes clear that blessings had been withheld because their own sinful choices. *Fearing* Yahweh means rendering true devotion to him. Those whose hearts are hardened wander away from obedient paths and genuine piety.
   b. Plea (63:17b): **Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your inheritance.** The imperative suggests a prolonged absence. Return may suggest the return of the shekinah glory to the temple as the symbol of God’s dwelling among his people (cf. Ezek 43:6-12). On the other hand, Yahweh can be said to have returned when his blessings again become evident. For the sake of your servants evokes the sympathy of Yahweh for his people. Tribes of your inheritance means tribes that belong to Yahweh.

---

3. Rationale for intervention (63:18-19a):
   a. Condition of Yahweh’s people (63:18a): For a little while the people of your holiness were dispossessed… For a little is probably temporal, hence the translation proposed above. The people of your holiness are Yahweh’s holy people, i.e., Israel. The first verb (r. yrḥ) can have either the meaning possessed, or dispossessed. The verb is impersonal; it can be rendered in English as a passive. Either God’s people have possessed something (sanctuary? land?) for a short while, or they have been dispossessed of same for a short while at the time envisioned in the petition. The latter interpretation seems best to fit the context.
   b. Condition of Yahweh’s sanctuary (63:18b): our enemies have trampled down your sanctuary. Those who have dispossessed the holy people are called our enemies. At the time they dispossessed the holy people, the enemies trampled down Yahweh’s sanctuary (temple). The treading down of the sanctuary could be anticipatory of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.
   c. Status of Yahweh’s people (63:19a): We have been from of old, you did not rule over them; your name was not called upon them. The v develops a contrast between Yahweh’s holy people and their enemies. We have been from of old stresses the long history of Israel, dating back to Moses and Sinai. The implication may be that the enemies have only recently arise on the stage of history. During that period Yahweh had been the ruler of Israel. You did not rule over them indicates that the enemies were not part of the theocracy. For Yahweh’s name to be called upon a people means that the nation has been spiritually conquered by him. Only Israel had this standing with Yahweh throughout history. Events have caused many to doubt Israel’s claim of a special relationship with Yahweh.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

364Ross Price (BBC, 4:278) understands the phrase to say “the holy people possessed Yahweh’s sanctuary for a little while,” i.e., during the godly reign of Hezekiah. All that suddenly changed when Manasseh ascended the throne.
365Young, NICOT, 3:490.

PRAYER CONTINUED

PETITION FOR INTERVENTION
64:1-5a

A. Elements of the Petition (64:1-3): The kind of intervention for which the petitioner asks has four characteristics.
1. Dramatic intervention (64:1a): Oh! That you would rend the heavens and come down… Oh (l˚í) expresses the wish that something expected in the future had already happened. The thought of v 15 is carried forward. Not only does the petitioner want Yahweh to looked down from heaven; he wants Yahweh to rend the heavens and come down, i.e., burst forth in a mighty manifestation or theophany.
2. Powerful intervention (64:1b-2): Three figures are used to underscore the powerful intervention that the petitioner desires.
   a. Bursting mountains (64:1b): that from before you mountains may flow down… In the presence of the God of judgment, mountains will flow down, i.e., quake, break apart, appear to melt. The shaking experienced at Sinai may be in the background (Ex 19:18-20).
   b. Burning brush (64:2a): as fire kindles brush… The fire quickly and completely consumes the brush. So may Yahweh do to his enemies.
   c. Boiling water (64:2b): and fire boils water… The second use of fire in connection with the intervention underscores that the petitioner had judgment in mind. Boiling water quickly evaporates. So may Yahweh cause his enemies to disappear in mist.
3. Convincing intervention (64:2c): to make your name known to your enemies; from before you Gentiles tremble… Only a powerful intervention can serve the purpose that the petitioner has in mind. In coming down Yahweh makes his name (attributes; nature) known to his enemies, i.e., all who oppose him. The Holy One of Israel brings salvation to his people, but judgment to his

366Similar depictions of divine intervention are found in Judg 5; Ps 18; Mic 1:3-4; Hab 3.
enemies. Yahweh’s powerful intervention will cause *Gentiles* to tremble. Bursting mountains, burning brush and boiling water are figures for the agitation and overpowering influence that Yahweh’s intervention brings to non-believers.

4. **Wondrous Intervention (64:3): when you did fearful things that we did not expect, you came down, from your presence mountains shook.** The petition wants an intervention similar to what happened in the past. Yahweh did *fearful things*, i.e., wondrous, awe-inspiring deeds. These were deeds that Israel never could *expect*, i.e., imagine. The verb expect is imperfect, denoting continuous action in past time. Yahweh is always the God of surprises. These past occasions when Yahweh *came down* are a model for what the petitioner is asking. On *mountains shaking*, see on v 1.

**B. Explanation of the Petition (64:4-5):**

1. **Uniqueness of Yahweh (64:4a): And from of old they have not heard, they have not given ear; eye has not seen any God except you…** Yahweh can come down and do fearful things because there is no god like him. *From of old* indicates that the petitioner has in view the whole range of history prior to his day. No one has inadvertently *heard* of such divine interventions. No one has *given ear*, i.e., actively sought out, and thereby discovered accounts of such interventions. No *eye* has seen evidence of the interventions of any God except Yahweh.

2. **Faithfulness of Yahweh (64:4b-5):**

   a. *He acts in behalf of trusting people (64:4b): [who] acts for the one who waits for him.* Yahweh’s interventions come as a reward to the faithful. The verb waits (r. *chkh*) combines elements of faith, hope, patience and confidence. Yahweh does not disappoint people who put their trust in him. Paul used the words of this v to teach that God still acts on behalf of those who wait on him (1 Cor 2:9).

   b. *He acts in behalf of righteous people (64:5): You have met with the one rejoicing and executing righteousness; in your ways they remember you.* You have met (r. *pg*) connotes here met with favor. Yahweh intervenes for the purpose of aiding his people. *The one rejoicing and executing righteousness* refers to one who delights in doing what Yahweh has indicated is right conduct. *In your ways* refers to God’s interventions past and future. *They remember you* refers to praise that is lifted up because of the aid that Yahweh has rendered for his people. Righteous people do not forget the kindnesses of Yahweh.

### CONFESSION OF TRANSGRESSION

64:5-7

**A. Recognition of their Condition (64:5b):**

1. **Under Yahweh’s wrath (64:5b): Behold, you yourself were angry…** Behold directs the attention to what is about to be stated. There is good reason why Yahweh, the God of past interventions, was now angry with his people.

2. **Justly punished (64:5c): we having sinned…** Divine wrath is not capricious and mysterious. His anger was triggered by the fact that the remnant had *sinned*. The first step in reconciliation with an angry God is the admission that grievous sin has been committed.

3. **Totally dependent on grace (64:5d): in them forever we shall be saved.** In them refers to the ways of Yahweh mentioned earlier in the v. *Forever* indicates that Yahweh is the same yesterday, today and forever. *We shall be saved* recognizes that only by intervention by Yahweh is salvation possible. Men cannot save themselves from sin; only action by the Redeemer can make salvation possible.

**B. Description of their Condition (64:6-7):** The petitioners acknowledge the depth of their sin with several metaphors.

1. **Unclean (64:6a): And we were like something unclean, all of us…** They felt untouchable (like a leper).
2. Defiling (64:6b): *and like a garment of times are all our righteousnesses…* A garment of times is one worn by a woman during her menstrual period. Such a garment was unclean, and it rendered everything that it touched unclean. *All of our righteousnesses* refers to the best deeds that sinful men can perform. The point is that people cannot rid themselves of sin by performing “righteous” acts, i.e., acts that men view as righteous. All that man touches even in his most noble moments is tainted by sin.

3. Lifeless (64:6c): *and we faded like the leaf, all of us…* The comparison depicts spiritual deadness, perhaps a despondent and depressed state of mind.

4. Rootless (64:6d): *and our iniquities, like the wind, carry us away.* The penitents compared the blighting effects of sin to the wind carrying away a leaf. *Iniquities* produce unstableness. The figure points to the final consequences of unforgiven sin, viz., judgment.

5. Prayerless (64:7a): *And there is no one who calls on your name, rousing himself to take hold of you…* In their sinfulness the people had forgotten Yahweh. So unworthy did they feel, the sinners did not believe they could take hold of God in prayer. No one was calling on him in prayer. *Rousing himself* suggests that sin leads to a state of lethargy from which some effort must be expended even to engage in prayer. *Take hold of you* means to pray with importunity.

6. Hopeless (64:7b): *for you have hidden your face from us, you have melted us in the hand of our iniquities.* Yahweh was no longer easily approached because he had *hidden his face* (presence) from the people. *Melted* suggests the image of wax under flame. *Iniquity* (crookedness) leads to individual and national meltdown.

**PETITION FOR SYMPATHY**

64:8-12

In spite of the fact that prayer seemed useless, yet they prayed.

A. Appeal of Relationship (64:8-9):

1. Our Father (64:8a): *But now, O Yahweh, our Father are you…* With the words *but now* the thought turns. In spite of Israel’s sin and feelings of worthlessness, still the remnant addresses Yahweh as our *Father.* He brought Israel into existence at Sinai. The remnant knows that they are still precious to the Father. He has, as it were, filial love for them that cannot be quenched by their waywardness.

2. Our Maker (64:8b): *we are the clay, and you are the one who shaped us; the work of your hand are we all.* The remnant compares itself to clay, what is inherently worthless and lowly. Yahweh is the divine Potter who shaped and designed Israel at the beginning of their history. He has invested time, energy and thought into shaping this people. Yahweh has much invested in them. The remnant sees itself as being *the work of your hand.* They are precious to him. *We all* refers to all who are part of the spiritual remnant.

3. Your people (64:9): *Do not be angry, O Yahweh, excessively; do not forever remember iniquity; behold, look, we pray; all of us are your people.* Because Yahweh is their Father and their Maker, the petitioners view themselves as Yahweh’s people. For this reason the remnant asks for restraint in the outpouring of divine anger. They understand full well that should Yahweh pour out the full extent of his wrath they would be extinguished as a people. *Do not forever remember iniquity* is a plea for forgiveness and cessation of punishment. Yahweh remembers iniquity when he punishes it. *Behold* calls attention to the fact that whereas in the past no one called out to Yahweh, now at least some are doing so. *All of us* (the remnant) *are your people* is both a grounds for petition and a profession of loyalty to Yahweh.

B. Appeal of Ruination (64:10-11):

1. Holy cities (64:10): *Your holy cities are a wilderness; Zion a wilderness has become, Jerusalem a desolation.* Your *holy cities* refers to cities of Judah, the holy land belonging to Yahweh. The verb (*hāyāh*) is perfect, referring to a past condition that continues into the present. *Zion/Jerusalem* is the most prominent example of
one of those holy cities. *Holy* indicates something set apart for the purposes of God. *Wilderness/desolation* suggests that the punishment leaves the land uninhabited.

2. **Sanctuary (64:11):** The house of our holiness and our beauty where our fathers praised you has become a burning of fire, and all of our precious things are ruined. House of our holiness and our beauty means our holy and beautiful house. The reference is to the Jerusalem temple. A burning of fire means that the sanctuary has been burned. Precious things may be the objects associated with worship, or the dedicatory gifts of devotees given to decorate the temple facilities. The tragedy of the temple situation is underscored by the phrase where our fathers praised you. No longer can the facility be used for praise and worship.

The language of vv 9-10 may be figurative to describe a land in which proper governance and worship have been dysfunctional. Others see in these vv a prediction of Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem.

**C. Final Appeal (64:12):** On account of these will you restrain yourself, O Yahweh? Will you keep silent and afflict us excessively? The culminating appeal is formulated in two questions. On account of these refers to the conditions just enumerated. In the light of conditions in the holy land, will Yahweh continue to restrain himself, i.e., withhold merciful intervention? Keep silent points to refusal to hear the prayers of the penitent. Afflict us excessively reflects a sense that the misery of God’s people had lasted too long and been too intense. The two questions anticipate a negative answer. Only when God’s people are reduced to unabated misery do they pray with the fervency that reflects acknowledgement of sin and total trust in Yahweh.

**CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE GOD’S ANSWER TO PRAYER**

---

367Cf. Jer 25:18 where similar language is used in reference to conditions of the land prior to the Babylonian destruction.

368Illustrations of those not accustomed to seeking Yahweh having petitions answered: Rahab (Josh 2); Benhadad (2 Kgs 8:7-10); Naaman (2 Kgs 5), the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17).
will of Yahweh. Israel did not inadvertently deviate from the path of faithfulness. Their waywardness was intentional. The irony here is obvious. Gentiles had not sought God, but find him easily; God sought Israel, but had been constantly rejected. Paul saw this phenomena being dramatically reenacted with the preaching of the gospel in his own day (Rom 10:20-21).

B. Provocation by Sinners (65:3-5): In a series of participles Isaiah presents a detailed picture of *the way not good* and the *thoughts* mentioned in v 2. The Judeans are called *the people*, not *my people*.

1. It was flagrant (65:3a): *The people provoking me unto my face continually…* Far from accepting God’s appeal, the sinners were provoking—virtually taunting—him with their sinful deeds. Provoking is a participle, indicating an on-going lifestyle. The verb (r. k’s) means *to vex, to incite to anger* with the connotation of deliberate intention. No particular segment of the population is singled out. Provocation characterized the entire population of Judah. The provocation was bold and public in that it was done *unto my face*. Those actions that disturbed Yahweh were not done secretly or with shame. The people were openly defiant of Yahweh’s law. *Continually* indicates that the provocation incessant. There was never any let-up.

2. It was pagan (65:3b): *sacrificing in gardens and offering incense upon the bricks*. The acts that were provoking Yahweh were religious in nature. Sacrificing in gardens refers to some Canaanite form of worship. Israelites had been attracted to such worship from the day they entered Canaan. Offering incense upon the bricks is a pagan custom, but the exact significance of it is not known. It may refer to a practice performed on the tiled roofs of their houses.369

3. It was bizarre (65:4): *Who sit in the graves and in the holes they lodge, who eat the flesh of swine, and the fragments of filthy things are in their vessels.* Sit in the graves probably refers the practice of necromancy. Consulting the dead is forbidden in Mosaic Law (Dt 18:11; 1 Sam 28:3; Isa 57:9). *In the holes they lodge* may refer to spending the night in secret places in order to gain wisdom from past worthies. *Eating the flesh of swine* was also forbidden in the law (Lv 11:7ff; Dt 14:8). *Filthy things (piggulîm)* refers to meat that is unclean and rotten (Ezek 4:14; Lv 7:18; 19:7). Some pagan sacramental meal is in view.

4. It was arrogant (65:5a): *who say, Draw near unto yourself; do not come near to me, for I am holy to you.* Draw near unto yourself means *Keep apart from me* as the next clause indicates. Apostate Judeans had no desire for nearness to Yahweh. Essentially they are telling Yahweh to withdraw from them, leave them alone. With convoluted logic the apostates individually saw themselves as *holy* (set apart) by their pagan activity, and therefore off limits to Yahweh. They were holy; Yahweh was profane! Sin surely perverts man’s perspective.

5. It was offensive (65:5b): *These are smoke in my nose, a fire burning all the day.* Some take these words to mean that the sinners were a constant irritation to God. More likely, however, the activities of the apostles have caused the wrath of Yahweh to burn like a fire *all the day*, i.e., continually.

C. Recompense of Sinners (65:6-7):

1. Recompense is certain (65:6): *Behold, it is written before me: I will not keep silent, but I have recompensed, and I will recompense into their bosom.* Behold underscores the certainty and magnitude of the prediction about to be made. *It is written before me* refers to the sinful conduct of the Judeans. The conduct of the Judeans as outlined above is documented, as it were, it heaven.370 Because Yahweh is aware of their provocations, he *will not keep silent*. He already has acted to address the challenge from his subjects in the past; he will continue to recompense unto the infractions have been punished appropriately. *Into their bosom* means that the recompense (judgment) will come

369Others take the bricks to be a brick altar; still others suggest some Babylonian custom, since bricks were so common in Babylon.

370Another interpretation takes written before me to refer to the custom of judges in writing out their legal decisions.
up close and personal to the nation; it will strike to the heart of the apostasy.

2. Recompense is cumulative (65:7): Your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together, says Yahweh, for they burned incense upon the mountains and upon the hills they reproached me; and I will measure their work first into their bosom. The sudden change of person (their bosom to your iniquities) underscores that Yahweh has not been only setting forth abstract principles. Rather, the sins of the fathers have continued into the present generation. Two iniquities have been cross-generational. They (the fathers) burned incense upon the mountains. Under Mosaic Law burning incense was a priestly function confined to the tabernacle/temple. So an outlawed, pagan practice is in view. Such pagan rites reproached Yahweh by insinuating that he alone was not sufficient, or his prescribed worship system was not adequate.

The function of the word first (riʿšōnāh) in the v is disputed. It is the word often rendered former things in Isaiah. So the meaning is that Yahweh will recompense former work. Others have proposed a more attractive alternative, taking first to be adverbial, i.e., Yahweh must first recompense before he can do anything else. Yahweh will measure out to them the recompense they deserve.

PROMISE FOR THE FUTURE
65:8-16

A. A Remnant Spared (65:8-10):
1. Promise (65:8): Thus says Yahweh, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, Do not destroy it, for a blessing is in it; thus I will do for the sake of my servants, in order not to destroy the whole. New wine (tîrôš) was the best. It is brought forth from a cluster of grapes that is crushed in the process of extracting the wine. Do not destroy it refers to the cluster. For the sake of the new wine that can be extracted from the cluster, the cluster should not be totally destroyed. Apparently a value judgment was rendered during the harvest about the various clusters as to the promise they showed for producing new wine. For the sake of a few good grapes a cluster might be preserved. A blessing in it refers to the joy and refreshment that the potential new wine can bring to those who extract it. So Yahweh will preserve those within the nation that showed some small promise of producing a spiritual remnant. Thus I will do pledges Yahweh to preserve at least a cluster from the vine of Israel for the sake of my servants, i.e., the spiritual remnant.

2. Plan (65:9a): And I will bring out of Jacob a seed, and from Judah an heir for my mountains... Preservation of Israel requires divine action. The verb suggests a rock-solid commitment to save a remnant. Jacob is a designation for the people of Israel that connotes waywardness. Seed refers to descendants. From the present wayward people Yahweh will bring forth a seed. The term can be a collective referring to descendants in general; or it can be an individual. Because of the parallel heir, the term here is best taken as a singular. The seed from Jacob is said to be an heir from Judah. Yahweh will produce one who will inherit my mountains, i.e., who will have the mountainous land of Palestine as his inheritance. From Judah the future Ruler of God’s people comes (Mic 5:2). The seed, the heir and the Ruler are probably one and the same person, viz., Messiah.

3. Possession (65:9b): and my chosen ones shall inherit my mountains, and my servants shall dwell there. The chosen ones who are my servants are those who are subjects of the coming Ruler, i.e., Christians. Clearly no physical return of ethnic Jews to Canaan is in view, for v 1 makes clear that the chosen ones consist of Gentiles as well as Jews. To inherit the land is a geographical metaphor for being part of the kingdom of God. For the NT concept of inheritance see Acts 20:32; Eph 1:14, 18; 5:5; Col 1:12; 3:24; Heb 9:15; 1 Pet 1:4.

4. Prosperity (65:10): And Sharon shall become a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought

371It is not clear here whether the vine is preserved for the sake of the cluster, or the cluster is preserved for the sake of a few good grapes. In either case the point is that Yahweh will bring forth some good out of a bad situation.
me. Sharon is a valley extending from Mount Carmel southward. Achor was a lush valley near Jericho in the larger Jordan Valley. The two areas represent the western and eastern extremes of Canaan. For this reason they symbolize spiritual Canaan, Messiah’s kingdom. Flocks and herds were measures of prosperity in biblical times. The point is that Yahweh has rich blessings for those who inherit the land (kingdom of God). Those who enjoy this blessing are my people who have sought me, i.e., those who come to him in faith. The old hymn writer had it right: “I’ve reached the land of corn and wine, and all its riches freely mine.”

B. Apostates Punished (65:11-12):
1. Description of apostates (65:11): But you who forsake Yahweh, who forget my holy mountain, who prepare for Fortune a table, and who fill for Fate a mixed drink. But you introduces a change in subject and a strong contrast to the chosen ones and my servants of the previous v. The ones now addressed are those who forsake Yahweh by indulging in pagan rituals. They forget my holy mountain (Mount Zion) and seek out pagan shrines. The god Fortune (Gad) is attested in the area of Syria. The LXX rendered the first word by daimoniō (demon) suggesting that it refers to bad fortune. Fate (m’ni) may be the Hebrew name for the Arabian god Manat. The LXX rendered the term tychē, which refers to good luck. So the two deities may have been worshiped as a pair. Knowing and controlling the future is the haunting obsession of pagans. But Yahweh alone determines destinies. Preparing a table and filling a mixed drink probably refer to the ritual meals offered to the gods throughout the pagan world.

2. Fate of apostates (65:12a): And I number you to the sword, and all of you to the slaughter shall bow down… I will number (manîtî) is a play on the name of the god Fate (m’ni) in the preceding v. Various numberings are recorded in OT times that were designed to identify those capable of carrying a sword. Here sinners are identified one by one to the sword, i.e., to be put to the sword. The sword was the symbol of military power by which Judah would be devoured (1:20). The sword serves the same purpose of the surgeon’s scalpel that removes malignancy so that healthy tissue may live. Bow down to the slaughter depicts the posture in which prisoners of war were often executed.

3. Explanation (65:12b): because I have called but you did not answer, I have spoken, but you did not hear; and you did evil in my eyes, and that in which I did not delight you have chosen. The excising of sinners from Jacob/Judah by sword and slaughter is justified. Through his prophets Yahweh had called upon these people countless times to turn from their wicked ways. The sinners, however, did not hear, i.e., rejected every overture. Repeated they did the things Yahweh regarded as evil. They exercised their freedom of choice, but made terrible decisions. Choosing conduct in which Yahweh does not delight is ultimately disastrous.

C. Contrasting Destinies (65:13-15): In the previous vv Yahweh has sketched the destiny of the faithful and the fate of the apostates. Therefore brings that discussion to a conclusion and introduces a summary of the contrast between the two groups. The solemnity of the pronouncement is underscored by use of the messenger formula: thus says Adonay Yahweh. Adonay (Sovereign) depicts Yahweh as having the right to render the following decision, and the power to enforce that decision. The fourfold use of behold in the pronouncement introduces the shocking contrasts in the destinies of my servants and you, the wicked. Clearly the spiritual Israel is being distinguished from national, physical Israel. The bread of heaven, the water of life and the joy of the gospel are in view in this v.

1. First contrast (65:13b): Behold, my servants will eat, and as for you, you will be hungry… Eating is a symbol for the satisfaction of spiritual hunger. Those who walk in paths contrary to the desires of Yahweh are forever hungry, i.e., unsatisfied.

2. Second contrast (65:13c): behold, my servants will drink, but as for you, you will be thirsty… Drinking, like eating, is a symbol of what brings true satisfaction. Those who sit at the table of Fate
and Fortune (v 11) will forever thirst for spiritual truth that truly satisfies.

3. Third contrast (65:13d): behold, my servants will rejoice, but as for you, you will be ashamed. Joy is the result of the satisfaction of spiritual hunger and thirst. This joy exudes confidence. My servants know who they are; they know where they are going. Their confidence is in Yahweh; they know he will carry them through. On the other hand, the arrogant wicked that have been brazen in their defiance of God’s will, will come to be ashamed of the choices they have made. There is nothing like God’s judgment to change the perspective of sinners!

4. Fourth contrast (65:14): Behold, my servants will shout from goodness of heart; but as for you, you will cry out from grief of heart, and from brokenness of spirit you shall howl. Shouting is the natural expression of news so good that it bursts forth from within. Goodness of heart refers to gladness resulting from an inner sense of well-being and confidence. Grief of heart (pain, anguish) is the opposite of the believer’s gladness. Brokenness of spirit depicts the sinner’s despair. Crying out and howling are the outward expressions of the condition of the heart. While the focus here is on judgment day, there are token manifestations of the sinner’s agony en route to judgment.

5. Fifth contrast (65:15):
   a. Old name sullied (65:15a): And you will leave your name for an oath for my chosen ones; for Adonay Yahweh will slay you… National Israel will leave its name behind for an oath, i.e., for a name that could be employed in oaths or curses. The idea is that no worse fate could be wished for others than what befell national Israel. Those who might so use that name are my chosen ones, the elect of Yahweh, believers. The text does not say they will use the name of national Israel in curses, but only that they could. The chosen ones will survive and thrive after apostate Israel has come to an end. The name of national Israel might justifiably be so employed because Adonay (Sovereign) Yahweh will slay national Israel. Thus national Israel experiences the worst imaginable fate—to be slain by the God the nation professed to worship.
   b. New name given (65:15b): and he will call his servants by another name… Yahweh will take the initiative in giving to his servants a new name. This signifies that there will be a complete change in the nature and character of the remnant. The newness of the new covenant requires a new name for those who are blessed by that covenant. The spiritual remnant of national Israel becomes the new Israel. On this new name see 64:2-4.

D. Recognition of Yahweh (65:16):

1. His name used in blessings (65:16a): He who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth… In the coming age one who wishes a blessing upon himself will do so in the name of Yahweh. He will be recognized as the God of truth (lit., the God of Amen) because both his threats to apostate Israel and his promises to the spiritual remnant will have been fulfilled.

2. His name used in oaths (65:16b): and he that swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth… Men swear oaths in the name of the God they venerate and regard as supreme. Because he has seen to fulfill his promises and threats one who takes an oath in the coming age will do so in the name of the God of truth, i.e., Yahweh.

3. Explanation (65:16c): because the former troubles shall be forgotten, and because they are hidden from my eyes. For the chosen ones the proof that Yahweh is the God of truth is found in the fact that the former troubles shall be forgotten. Radical change for the better causes men to forget past difficulties. Troubles that are forgotten have been completely removed. They have been hidden from Yahweh’s eyes, i.e., put aside by him. These troubles are not natural misfortunes but are disciplinary punishments. Forgiveness of sin brings removal of those troubles that sin brings on.

| Chart 6 |
| CONTRASTING DESTINIES |
| Isaiah 65:13-15 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God’s Servants</th>
<th>The Wicked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Shall drink.</td>
<td>2. Shall be thirsty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NEW CREATION
65:17-25

Isaiah now expands upon the thought that the former troubles will be forgotten. An entire new era is in the offing.

A. Divine Work (65:17):
1. Nearness of the work (65:17a): For behold I am creating a new heavens and a new earth… These seven words in Hebrew have staggering implications. Behold focuses attention on Yahweh. It also introduces a statement substantiating all that has been said from 56:1 forward. Creating is a participle, probably here carrying the sense of about to create. To describe the radical change that Yahweh will initiate the verb bara’ (create) is borrowed from Gen 1. Only Yahweh creates. The word implies effortlessness, newness, and instantaneous production. The phrase new heavens and the new earth refers to the age of messianic blessings. This spiritual era is as much “created” by God as was the material universe. The point is that the one who created the physical cosmos out of nothing certainly has the power to initiate something entirely new in the spiritual realm. According to the NT, the new creation began with the work of Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). The completion of that new creation will follow the final judgment (2 Pet 3:3-13; Rev 20:11-15).
2. Result of the work (65:17b): and the former things will not be remembered, and they will not come up upon a heart. The era of the new heavens and the new earth is a time of radical newness. The former things will not be remembered with fondness or wistfulness. This goes beyond the statement of v 16 that past troubles will be forgotten. Former things includes all the elements of the Mosaic worship system.

B. Joyous Work (65:18-19):
1. Joyous prospect (65:18a): But rejoice and be glad unto eternity in what I am about to create… In their state of depression the people are commanded to rejoice over the prospect of a glorious future. This disposition of joy is an obligation of believers unto eternity, i.e., throughout the years until the new creation becomes a reality. OT saints looked with joy toward the revelation of Messiah and the NT age. Christians are to look with joy toward the final consummation.
2. Joyous city (65:18b): for behold, I am about to create Jerusalem a joy, and her people a rejoicing. Behold focuses attention on Jerusalem, the focal point of the new creation. Messianic Jerusalem—the kingdom of Christ—will become an object of joy for God’s people. Her people (messianic Jerusalem’s citizens) will be an occasion of rejoicing.
3. Joyous God (65:19a): And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people… OT Jerusalem was too often a source of grief to Yahweh. He grieves over sin and necessary discipline; but he rejoices in forgiveness and blessings. God delights in pouring out blessings on his people. Jerusalem here is explained to mean my people. There is a natural inclination for one to rejoice in the joy of those he holds dearest.
4. Joy unparalleled (65:19b): and there shall not be heard in her again the voice of weeping and the voice of a cry. Weeping and crying over the wretched condition of the city will not be heard.

C. Idyllic Work (65:20-25): These vv give examples of the things that caused sorrow in OT Israel. The point of the unit is that all these conditions will be removed from the new heavens and earth—the messianic kingdom.
1. Premature death removed (65:20): Death will not stalk messianic Jerusalem.

---

373This Qal stem of this verb is used only with God as the subject.
374Homer Hailey (CI, 518f) limits the reference to “the dispensation of the fullness of time” (Eph 1:10) when the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new (2 Cor 5:17). Young (NICOT, 3:513f), however, comments: “The reference is not...to be restricted to the first advent but includes the entire reign of Christ, including the second advent and the eternal state.”
a. Illustrations (65:20a): There shall be no more from there an infant of days, and an old man who shall not fulfill his days... From there refers to messianic Jerusalem. An infant of days is a baby that dies after only a few days of life. Infant mortality spread pallor over life in the ancient world. When a man did not fulfill his days the ancient world viewed his death as a terrible tragedy, perhaps even a divine stroke. In messianic Jerusalem—the city of life—such events will not interrupt the joy.
b. Explanation (65:20b): for the young man as the son of a hundred years will die, and the one missing the mark of a son of hundred years shall be accursed. Those who die at a hundred years will be considered young man. The implication is that a centenarian had many more years to live. In fact, a person who died at only a hundred will be considered under a curse. These vv do not contradict 26:6-9 that speaks of the destruction of death. Longevity for the ancients meant divine approval. Pre-mature death was viewed as divine judgment. So here eternal life and life more abundant are depicted in terms of people living enormously long lives. The fulfillment of this v is even more wonderful than the promise (Jn 3:15; 6:54).

2. Futility curse removed (65:21-23):
a. Illustration (65:21-22a): And they shall build houses and dwell; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. (22) They will not build and another dwell, they shall not plant and another eat... The Mosaic Law pronounced a futility curse upon the disobedient. They would not be able to enjoy the houses they built or be able to enjoy the fruit of their labor in vineyards (Dt 28:30). Messianic Jerusalem is a spiritual city, not a city of stone and mortar. Invaders will not be able to frustrate the labors of those who live in it. Having pictured the tranquility of messianic Jerusalem in positive assurances, Isaiah strengthened those assurances with a denial of the opposite. These vv contain concrete images depicting the life more abundant of the messianic era.
b. Explanation (65:22b): for as the days of the tree are the days of my people... The ancients viewed a tree as the symbol of permanence and endurance. OT poets frequently compared the righteous to a well-watered tree, and the wicked to shriveled desert bushes or swirling chaff (e.g., Ps 1:3f). So the citizens of Messiah’s kingdom will be stable, productive and long-lived like a tree.
c. Implication (65:22c): and the work of their hands my chosen ones will use to the full. The long lives of the redeemed will be meaningful and productive. Yahweh’s chosen ones will enjoy to the full the work of their hands. No effort put forward for the Lord is vain. Because of their longevity and the absence of war and calamity, God’s people will not be subject to the frustration of not living to enjoy the fruit of their labor.
d. Further illustration (65:23): They will not labor in vain, and they will not bring forth for terror; for the seed of the blessed of Yahweh are they, and their offspring with them. The verb labor (r. yg’) does not elsewhere refer to childbirth; but here the context demands such an interpretation. Bring forth refers to delivering children. For terror refers to any circumstance (e.g., disease; war) that might send a child to the grave before his parents. The ultimate futility is to go through the pain and dangers of childbirth only to lose the child in some tragedy. The children that come forth are the seed of the blessed, i.e., the descendants of those Yahweh has blessed. So the picture is of the redeemed of Yahweh with their children living together in a tranquil environment.

3. Complaint of unanswered prayer removed (65:24): And it will be, before they call, then for me, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, and I will hear. In the messianic age God will answer their prayers before they are even uttered. The complaint of unanswered prayer (ch 64) will no longer be heard. The v underscores Yahweh’s involvement with the interests of his

---

375 This translation of the participle chōē’ is followed essentially by NIV, NASB, NIP, and NRSV. The KJV renders sinner, and this rendering is followed by Oswalt, Young and others. The rendering sinner needlessly introduces connotations into the passage that detract from the main point, viz., that premature death as a cause of sorrow will not exist in the new heavens and earth.

376 On the answering of the prayer before it is even uttered, see Mt 6:8.
people. He is aware of their needs before they are. Yahweh’s readiness to meet the needs of his people before they even ask for assistance manifests his love for his own. Emphatic pronouns in this v indicate that it is Yahweh and no other who responds to their prayers.

4. Violence/death removed (65:25): The wolf and the lamb will feed as one, and a lion like an ox will eat straw, and a serpent dust for his food. They will not hurt and they will not destroy in all my holy mountain, says Yahweh. Messianic Zion will be a safe place. Former enemies will peacefully coexist. Isaiah emphasized this in the picture of meat-eating predators grazing peacefully with domesticated animals. Messiah is not specifically mentioned here; but in 11:6-9 these idyllic conditions are associated with Messiah’s reign. The tranquility is not world-wide; it is not limited to some thousand-year millennial kingdom. The tranquility here depicted is restricted to my holy mountain, i.e., Mount Zion, the kingdom of God (Heb 12:22).

The reference to dust as the serpent’s food reiterates the promise of Gn 3:15. The evil spirit called Serpent is the ultimate cause of all pain, suffering and death. His complete defeat is the guarantee that the kingdom conditions so beautifully depicted in this ch can become a reality. The glorious messianic promises of the ch conclude and are strengthened by the final says Yahweh.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX
FINAL MESSAGES

In the final ch of the book Isaiah addressed the formalists, the remnant and the wicked.

FINAL WORDS FOR FORMALISTS
66:1-4

A. Their Temples are Inadequate (66:1-2):

1. Yahweh’s greatness (66:1): Thus says Yahweh: The heavens are my throne and the earth is the stool of my feet; what is the house that you will build for me, and what is the place of my rest? Yahweh is so great that even the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. He reigns over earth. The earth is but his footstool. The heavens are God’s throne, i.e., he reigns from heaven. The earth is his footstool, i.e., he reigns over all the earth. He cannot be confined to a house of worship. What is the house suggests that disobedient men can never build a temple that is acceptable to Yahweh. A resting place is a place of permanent abode. Solomon knew that his temple was but a symbol of the resting place of Yahweh. But men of small faith try to confine the infinite Creator to buildings made of stone.

2. Yahweh’s handiwork (66:2a): And all of these my hand made, and all of these things have come into being, says Yahweh... All of these refers to all that is contained in the heavens and the earth. Have come into being recalls the language used in Gn 1. Yahweh created all the materials from which a temple could be built. Men cannot build from such materials a building worthy of his greatness. One does not show appreciation to an artist by dedicating to him one of his own paintings. Much less can men construct fancy temples from materials Yahweh created and automatically expect him to take pleasure in them.

3. Yahweh’s condescension (66:2b): but unto this person I will look, unto the afflicted and contrite of spirit trembling over my word. Yahweh is a people God, not a temple God. He looks with favor and affection on those afflicted. He thinks not so much of those experiencing physical afflictions as those contrite of spirit. Such individuals are further describes as those trembling over my word, i.e., those who take God seriously, and deal with him reverently. The Formalists play at church; they try to manipulate God by their rituals. The humble, however, are those who truly enjoy the presence of Yahweh.

377 Hailey (Cl, 521) comments: “The defeat of Satan by Christ (Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8) guarantees the victory of the saints (Rom 16:20).”
B. Their Worship was Offensive (66:3): Those who focused on temple construction are not contrite, humble, and attune to Yahweh’s word.

1. Litany of offensive acts (66:3a): Four similar phrases depict the hypocrisy of their worship.
   a. Slaughtering an ox, smiting a man… Their worship is so unacceptable that in God’s sight the one slaughtering an ox for worship (a legitimate Mosaic action) was regarded as someone who smites a man, i.e., he was regarded as a murderer. The point is that formal acts of worship apart from wholehearted obedience are as much an abomination to God as murder.
   b. Sacrificing a sheep, breaking the neck of a dog… Sacrificing a sheep was a legitimate act of Mosaic ritual. But to the sacrifice of the hypocrites was no more advantageous for approaching Yahweh than breaking the neck of a dog. The Law required that an unclean animal not redeemed from consecration to Yahweh was to have its neck broken, i.e., it was not to be used for any other purpose (Ex 13:13; Dt 21:4). Thus their sacrifices had no value.
   c. Offering an oblation, the blood of swine… An oblation (minchāh) was a non-bloody offering. Hypocritical worshipers might as well break a dog’s neck as offer a sacrificial lamb for all the good it would do them.
   d. Making a memorial of incense, blessing vanity. Incense was viewed as ascending from the altar to bring the needs of the people to the attention of Yahweh (cf. Lv 24:7). Instead of bringing the worshiper to the attention of Yahweh, the incense offerings of the hypocrites was blessing vanity, i.e., a meaningless act.

2. Explanation of offensive acts (66:3e): Also they have chosen their ways, and in their abominations their soul delighted. Isaiah explains what turned legitimate acts of worship into an affront before Yahweh. The hypocrites had chosen their ways, rather than walk in the ways of Yahweh. The sinners did not inadvertently swerve from the paths of fidelity; they actually delighted in the abominations of the heathen.

C. Their Judgment was Imminent (66:4):

1. Yahweh’s decision (66:4a): I will also choose their wanton dealings, their fear I will bring to them… Those who choose the path of disobedience leave God no choice. He chooses to focus on their wanton dealings (ta’alûlîm), which lead inevitably to national destruction. Those whose minds are not fixed on Yahweh face a multitude of fears. Yahweh will bring upon them what they feared, i.e., their fear will become reality.

2. Yahweh’s justification (66:4b): because I called and there was no one answering, I spoke, they did not hear. And they did evil in my eyes, and that in which I did not delight they chose. Yahweh’s actions are not arbitrary. He had a complaint against his people. The Judeans complained that Yahweh did not hear them; his complaint was that the Judeans did not respond when Yahweh called and spoke. Instead of listening to Yahweh, the Judeans did evil in my eyes. They chose to do those things that they knew brought no delight to Yahweh. The Judeans were deliberate in their abandonment of Yahweh; he was just as deliberate in his abandonment of them.

FINAL WORDS FOR THE REMNANT
66:5-14

A. Address (66:5a): Hear the word of Yahweh, you that tremble at his word… Isaiah is addressing the godly remnant of the future that survives when the apostate nation is destroyed. The command to hear the word of Yahweh underscores the assurance and certainty of the promises that follow. The remnant is described as those who tremble at his word. Instead of choosing their own ways, they reverently search out Yahweh’s word for guidance in every facet of life.

B. Reproach of Unbelievers (66:5b-6):

1. Description of the apostates (66:5b): Your brothers say, those who hating you and casting you out for the sake of my name… Those who hate the faithful are identified as your brothers. They were brothers in the flesh but not in the spirit.
The apostates are further described as those who are *casting you out*. The faithful are ostracized by the majority who view their righteous lives as a perpetual rebuke. The faithful are objects of ridicule and criticism by the religious establishment. For the sake of my name indicates that the faithful have been persecuted because they have been true to all that Yahweh has revealed about himself.

2. *Statements of the apostates* (66:5c): *Yahweh will be glorified, and we shall look at your joy; but they will be ashamed.* These words of the apostates are to be interpreted as ironic or sarcastic. In casting out the faithful Yahweh would be *glorified*; and the faithful can rejoice that they were suffering reproach for the cause of Yahweh. The apostates can then see the joy of the suffering saints! Rather than see the rejoicing of the godly, the apostates who were sarcastically speaking *will be ashamed*. As events unfold the apostates will realize that the faithful have been right all along.

3. *Yahweh’s response to the apostates* (66:6): *A voice of noise from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of Yahweh, rendering recompense to his enemies.* The remnant could take some consolation in the fate of their tormentors. Those who persecuted the faithful and mocked their trust in God would come to grief. The prophet could hear, as it were, the outcry of the attackers. The doom of God’s enemies had arrived. This v explains the shame that the apostates will experience. The noise from the city is the tumult of war. This noise is coming from Jerusalem, even from the temple itself. The noise of war is the voice of Yahweh in the process of *rendering recompense to his enemies*, viz., the apostates. The coming judgment begins at the house of God with the purging of the religious hypocrites.

C. Zion’s Future (66:7-9):

1. *Birth of a child* (66:7): *Before she travailed she brought forth; before her pain came she was delivered of a male.* The unstated subject of this v is Zion, as the following v indicates. While most see this v as merely a metaphor for sudden birth, it is best to see it as a further development of the child/savior theme of 7:14 and 9:6 (cf. 49:1). A birth without labor points to (1) a miraculous birth; and (2) a sudden and unexpected birth. Mother Zion is delivered of a male child. The ancient Targum paraphrases: *her king will be revealed*, which clearly points to Messiah. Rev 12:5 uses similar terminology in reference to the birth of Christ.378 The emphasis on gender probably is intended to hint that this child will be the spiritual progenitor of the nation, i.e., NT Zion.

2. *Uniqueness of the birth* (66:8): *Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be brought forth in one day, or shall a nation be born at once? For Zion has travailed, she has also brought forth her children.* By means of three rhetorical questions Isaiah underscores the uniqueness of what he has just described. The questions anticipate a negative answer. No one has ever seen anything like what Yahweh has in store for his people. Out of the OT Zion in the person of a male child there comes forth a new people in a single day. Almost immediately after Messiah’s birth a new *nation, land* (kingdom) and her (Zion’s) *children* are born, i.e., appear on the stage of history. OT Zion fades away; but from her emerges NT Zion—the kingdom of Messiah—a thousand times more glorious and greatly enlarged by the influx of Gentiles.

3. *Certainty of the birth* (66:9): *Shall I bring to birth and not cause to bring forth? says Yahweh. Am I the one causing to bring forth, and shall I shut up? Says your God.* God will not permit his eternal plan to be aborted. He will not *bring to birth* the new Zion and then stop the process. Such action might kill the mother. The point is that when Yahweh begins a work, he will bring it to a successful conclusion. The final assertion (says your God) adds additional assurance. Zion’s own God is asserting these promises. Stripped of metaphor the passage asserts the birth of a male child and the emergence of a new Zion at the same time. One thinks of the sudden birth of the infant

---

church, the new Israel of God, on the day of
Pentecost AD 30.

D. Call for Rejoicing (66:10-11):
1. Mourning turned to joy (66:10): Rejoice with Jerusalem, and exult in her, all you who love her; rejoice with her with rejoicing with her, all you who mourn for her. The spiritual remnant that loved Jerusalem and mourned for her current condition are addressed. Rejoice and exult are synonymous. With Jerusalem means with respect to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the object of rejoicing. Such wonderful things are in store for Zion that all who love her can rejoice.

2. Source of joy (66:11): That you may suck and be satisfied from the breast of her consolations; that you may drain out and delight yourselves from the abundance of her glory. Those who mourn for Jerusalem will partake of the abundant joy that she will offer in the future. In messianic Jerusalem the faithful will find true satisfaction just as an infant at a mother's breast. Breast of her consolations means the breast from which Mother Zion consoles her distraught children. Only in messianic Zion (the church) can the faithful find satisfaction for their spiritual yearnings.

D. Specifics of Zion’s Blessings (66:12-14):
1. Peace (66:12a): For thus says Yahweh: Behold I am about to stretch out to her peace like a river… For introduces the explanation for rejoicing over Zion. Thus says Yahweh underscores the certainty of the promise about to be made. Behold focuses attention on what is shocking and unexpected. Peace like a river connotes an inexhaustible supply of peace washing over the city. Peace (šālôm) means abundant prosperity and total well-being.

2. Prosperity (66:12b): and like an overflowing stream the glory of nations… Earlier Isaiah pictured Assyrians flooding Judea like an inundation from the Euphrates (8:6-8). Now the overflowing flood figure is applied to peace (cf. 9:7). Gentiles are seen coming up to Jerusalem, not in devastating conquest, but in peace and with their wealth. An overflowing stream is the picture of a wadi filled to capacity that becomes a mighty torrent. Glory of nations includes the glorious nations themselves, and the resources with which those Gentiles will bolster the ministry of Zion.

3. Pampering (66:12c): then you will suck; on the side you will be carried, and on the knees you will be bounced. The figure of suckling is again introduced to depict how the new Zion in its fancy will be nurtured. Citizens of Zion will enjoy the full measure of peace and glory of the nations that Yahweh will bring in. On the side you will be carried depicts the normal manner in which a mother of the time carried her young. On the knees you will be bounced (dandled in NIV; NRSV; KJV; fondled in NASB). The word points to a mother’s playful actions with her baby. These figures denote the greatest tenderness of Yahweh for his redeemed children.

4. Comfort (66:13): Like a man whose mother comforts, so will I, even I comfort you; and in Jerusalem you shall be comforted. Earlier Isaiah compared God Zion’s husband (54:5). Now the figure changes to that of mother-comfort for a grown son. A mother’s affection for her offspring remains strong throughout life. She is always ready to render encouragement in the disappointments of life. Yahweh supplies this mother-comfort to his redeemed children. The comfort is dispensed in Jerusalem, i.e., in the NT Jerusalem (Heb 12:22). Isaiah is referring to the comfort and consolation that believers experience in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:1).

5. Joy (66:14): And you will see, and your heart will rejoice, and your bones like grass will sprout… Isaiah has not been setting forth idle dreams. Rich experiences were awaiting God’s people. Isaiah is addressing the spiritual remnant. You will see (experience), and your heart will rejoice, i.e., they will have heart-felt joy over what they will experience when the old Israel fades away and the new Israel is born. The sight will bring new vigor to the bones. Tired old bones will sprout like grass. Earlier grass was a symbol of human frailty; now it symbolizes nourishment under the blessing of God.

379The coming of Gentiles with their wealth into Zion is a major theme of the book. See 9:7; 48:18; 52:7; 54:13; 57:19; 60:17.
6. **Manifestation of divine power (66:14b): and the hand of Yahweh will be known to his servants, and he shall be indignant with his enemies.** The hand of Yahweh is a metaphor for his power. The emergence of the new Zion will be a powerful manifestation of the presence of Yahweh among those who are truly his servants. This coming salvation is accompanied by Yahweh’s wrath toward his (and Zion’s) enemies. The distinction between redeemed servants and lost enemies will become ever so clear in the messianic age.

**FINAL WORDS FOR THE WICKED 66:15-24**

A. **Judgment on Rebels (66:15-17):** The theme of judgment introduced in v 15 is now amplified.

1. **Yahweh’s judgment appearance (66:15a):** For behold as for Yahweh in the fire he will come, and like a whirlwind are his chariots…

   *For* connects this prophecy with the preceding assertion concerning judgment. *Behold* serves to focus attention on the awesome verbal picture now presented. Yahweh was coming against the wicked in the fire, i.e., surrounded by fire, symbol of judgment. *Whirlwind* depicts the speed and power of these heavenly chariots. An ancient interpretation of Ps 68:17 (reflected in KJV) associates innumerable chariots of God with angelic hosts (cf. 2 Kgs 6:17).

2. **Yahweh’s judgment purpose (66:15b):** to appease in fury his anger, and his rebuke in flames of fire.

   Yahweh’s anger had been aroused by the sins of the Judeans. This anger must be appeased (recompensed). This appeasement is achieved only by pouring out divine wrath on the sinners. The *repulce* of Yahweh (often mentioned in conjunction with his wrath) is the outward display of his wrath. *Flames of fire* depict the power of Yahweh’s judgment and the resulting destruction.

3. **Yahweh’s judgment method (66:16):** For by fire will Yahweh enter into controversy for himself; and by his sword with all flesh; and multiplied are the slain of Yahweh.

   Yahweh’s judgment upon the apostate Judeans is to be carried out through fire and sword, symbols of military invasion. *All flesh* is further defined in the following v. The result of the judgment is that the slain of Yahweh are multiplied. The v pictures the final judgment on the Jewish nation that Jesus further described in Mt 24, a judgment that culminated in the fiery destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. Because of their rejection of Messiah and their persecution of the new Zion (the church) wrath was to come upon them to the uttermost (1 Thess 2:16).

4. **Yahweh’s judgment target (66:17):** This v identifies those slain by Yahweh in the previous v. The hypocrites mentioned in 65:3ff are those in view.

   a. **Formal worship (66:17a):** Those sanctifying themselves and purifying themselves…

      The particles *sanctifying* and *purifying* describe actions prescribed in Mosaic ritual. The addressees were going through meticulous requirements of cleansing themselves from ritual defilement. They were zealous for the external appearance of holiness.

   b. **Abominable worship (66:17b):** unto the gardens after one in the midst; those who eat the flesh of swine and the abomination, and the mouse: together they will be consumed (oracle of Yahweh).

      The actions performed in purifying rituals were not done by those who had surrendered their hearts and minds to Yahweh. Therefore, their actions were into (i.e., for) the gardens where the rites of the cult were performed. The point is that formalistic rituals performed by those with impenitent hearts are as bad in Yahweh’s sight as idolatrous worship. *After one in the midst* is puzzling. In pagan ceremonies the worshipers followed the instructions of some priestly leader who stood in the center of a circle. The garden rites included ritual consumption of meat considered abomination under Mosaic Law, including swine and mouse. Together they will be consumed depicts the destiny of those who are in rebellion against Yahweh. This threat is presented

---

380 According to Ex 19:18 Yahweh descended on Mount Sinai in fire. Ever after his coming in fire has signified judgment.

381 Oswalt, NICOT, 2:686. Others take the reference to be to a particular rite or to the statue of a goddess in the midst of the garden.
as a direct oracle of Yahweh; it therefore must be taken seriously.

B. Salvation of Gentiles (66:18-23):

1. Gathering of Gentiles (66:18): *And as for me—

their deeds and their thoughts—it has come, to
gather all the nations and the tongues; and they
shall come and see my glory.* Their deeds and their
thoughts seems to refer to the apostates of the
previous v. Their deeds were evil, and their
thoughts were no better. They were totally corrupt.
As for me implies that Yahweh is aware of their
incorrigible corruption. It has come means that in
the light of the apostate condition of the nation, the
time has come for Yahweh to move in a new
direction. He will gather (summons; invite) all the
nations (Gentiles). Among them will be peoples
of various tongues (languages). In response to
Yahweh’s gathering these Gentiles come to Mount
Zion (cf. 2:2-4). The nations and tongues will see
(experience) Yahweh’s glory. His glory is reflected
in the judgment on apostate Israel, and the
emergence of NT Zion.

2. Basis of gathering (66:19): *And I will place
among them a sign...* The Gentiles are influenced
to gather to messianic Zion by a sign. This is the
climax of the “signs” in this book. I will place
among them indicates that the sign is of divine
origin. It is of such a nature that it persuades
Gentiles of many nations to break their attachment
to idolatry and come to Mount Zion. The sign
probably includes the resurrection of Christ (Mt
16:4) and all the signs and wonders connected with
the establishment of NT Zion (the church),
including the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Mt
24:30).


a. Those who are sent (66:19b): *and I will send
those who have escaped...* Those who are sent out
by Yahweh are those who have escaped some
judgment. Isaiah is describing those who have been

382Young (NICOT, 3:531) suggests that the gathering of the elect by
messengers of the Son of Man from one end of the heavens to the
other may reflect the language of this v (Mt 24:31).


saved from the wrath of God through faith in
Christ.

b. Destination of those sent (66:19c): *to the
nations, Tarshish, Pul and Lud, drawers of the
bow, Tubal and Javan; the distant islands, which
have not heard my fame and have not seen my
glory...* The saved are sent as missionaries to the
far parts of the world. The v lists several examples
of those who had seen (experienced) the glory of
Yahweh. For Tarshish, see on 2:16. Pul is not
elsewhere mentioned; it may be the same as Put
(Gn 10:6) or Punt. Punt and Lud were regions
along the African coast of the Red Sea. The epithet
drawers of the bow portrays the inhabitants of Pul
(Put) and Lud as warlike peoples. Tubal probably
refers to a region in northeast Asia Minor (Gn 10:2;
Ezek 27:13). Javan refers to Greece (Gn 10:2; Dan
8:21; Zech 9:13). The distant islands are those of
the Mediterranean Sea; the NT equivalent is the
ends of the earth in Christ’s commission (Acts
1:8).

None of these peoples had heard of my fame, i.e.,
reports of Yahweh’s interventions throughout
history on behalf of Israel. The heathen had never
been exposed to Yahweh’s glory as revealed at
Sinai, the wilderness, the tabernacle and temple.
The point of the v is that the message of Yahweh’s
glory will spread throughout the world.

c. Mission of those sent (66:19d): *and they will
declare my glory among the nations.* The mission
of the saved is to declare (proclaim) to the lost the
glory of Yahweh. This is accomplished by the
faithful preaching of the gospel. Missionary work
must never focus on improving living conditions,
or even on making wicked men better. The work of
missions is to proclaim the glory of the Lord.

4. Success of gathering (66:20):

a. Gentile brothers are brought (66:20a): *And they
will bring all your brothers from all the nations,
an oblation to Yahweh...* The subject of the v is
debated. Does the pronoun they refer to the
converted Gentiles? (Oswalt) Or to the evangelists
who go to distant lands? (Young). All your
brothers is also ambiguous. Are the brothers
Gentiles who respond to the gospel? Or are the
brothers Jews led to Christ by converted Gentiles?
In either case the brothers are those who have been converted through the gospel. Those who put their faith in Christ are brothers (Eph 2:14).

The evangelists bring these brothers in the faith as an oblation (minchāh). This is the technical term in the Mosaic Law for a non-bloody offering. An oblation was a thank offering rather than an atonement offering; for this reason it is an appropriate figure for the Gentiles who are brought to the Lord. No sinful person is able to atone for his own sins. Believers express thanksgiving for their salvation by leading others to know Messiah. A soul led to Christ is the most wonderful offering that a saved person can bring to the Lord.

b. Means of bringing (66:20b): with horses, and with chariot, and with litters, and with mules, and with dromedaries... Every means of conveyance will be used to bring the oblation (the Gentile brothers) to the Lord. Litters are covered wagons.

c. Destination of the bringing (66:20c): on my holy mountain Jerusalem, says Yahweh... The prophet sees the caravans carrying the oblation to my holy mountain, to the NT Jerusalem (Heb 12:22). The scene is essentially the same as in 2:2-4. Only in this Jerusalem can the Gentiles experience the glory of Yahweh. The promise receives an exclamation point with the words says Yahweh.

d. Spiritual significance of the bringing (66:20d): as the children of Israel bring the oblation in a clean vessel to the house of Yahweh. Under the Mosaic system an oblation had to be brought to the house of Yahweh (temple) in a clean vessel. An oblation so presented was an acceptable and legitimate offering. So through Messiah a Gentile, unclean by nature, can become a clean vessel.

5. Result of gathering (66:21):

a. Priesthood (66:21): And also of them will I take for the priests, for the Levites, says Yahweh. Gentiles will not be second class citizens in the household of faith. Yahweh will appoint them to the priesthood of the messianic temple.384 Mosaic Law restricted the priesthood to descendants of Aaron. Gentiles were not even allowed access to the temple. Levites were assistants to the priests under the Mosaic Code; but apparently the two are mentioned here for completeness, not to indicate levels of ministry in Christ’s temple. The point is that converted Gentiles will serve alongside believing Jews in a holy ministry of worship and service. Because of their relationship with the great high priest (Christ), all believers share the privileges of the Levitical priesthood (Heb 10:19-25; 1 Pet 2:5, 9).

b. Permanence (66:22): For even as the new heavens and the new earth which I am about to make are standing before, says Yahweh, so will stand your seed and your name. Yahweh is still addressing the spiritual Israel. God once created the heavens and the earth; now he is about to create the new heavens and the new earth (cf. 65:17). This is a figure for the re-creation that begin with the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week. Are standing before indicates that the new heavens and earth will be under his constant care and protection. Since Zion is the focal point of the new heavens and earth, Zion’s citizens can count on Yahweh’s watch care. Your seed refers to the Zion’s future children. Your name refers to reputation. NT Zion (the church) will be recognized as the chosen people of God forever.

c. Worship (66:23): And it will come to pass that as often as new moon in its new moon and as often as Sabbath in its Sabbath all flesh will come to do homage before me, says Yahweh. Under Mosaic Law monthly (or quarterly) observance of the new moon festival, and weekly observance of the Sabbath were obligatory. As often as means every new moon, every Sabbath, i.e., from month to month and from Sabbath to Sabbath. The two are chosen as occasions of true worship. Isaiah represents the faithful worship of the new dispensation under the worship categories of the Old. New covenant worship will be regular and festive. All flesh is contextually limited to all Zion’s citizens, i.e., the citizens of the new heavens and earth, spiritual Israel. The phrase regularly refers to activities involving both Jews and Gentiles. Before me indicates that worship in the redeemed world is directed to Yahweh alone.

384Cf. 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 5:9f.

276

1. Observation (66:24a): And they shall go forth and look on the carcasses of the men who revolted from me... The two verbs go forth/look on indicate actions that take place at the same time all flesh (Jews/Gentiles) come into messianic Jerusalem to worship Yahweh. The subject of this v continues to be the true believers of the preceding v. The thought is that as often as they go out from Jerusalem (for evangelism?) they will look on the carcasses. The verb indicates victory over one’s foes. The look is one of appreciation for the marvelous grace of God in salvation; it is one of discernment of the ultimate vindication and justice of Yahweh. There is no indication where the carcasses are viewed, except that they are outside messianic Jerusalem, i.e., in the world. The carcasses are of those who refuse to render homage to God in his house. They are dead while they live (cf. 1 Tim 5:6). Revolted from me points to unbelievers and apostates who reject the rule of Messiah in messianic Jerusalem.

2. Explanation (66:24b): for their worm shall not die and their fire will not be quenched, and they will be a horror to all flesh. While gold and silver depict the glories of Zion, so fire and worms depict the fate of the wicked. For introduces the explanation for what the believers see as they venture outside messianic Jerusalem. Their worm (maggots) shall not die indicates that unbelievers are consumed by their own corruption. Whereas the praise of Zion is perpetual, so also is the punishment of those outside of Zion. Their fire will not be quenched indicates that the spiritually dead are perpetually under the wrath of God’s judgment fire (Jn 3:18). The possessive pronoun their indicates that the worm/fire belongs to them; it is their due. They shall be a horror points to the shocking sight of the spiritually dead suffering the results of their own rebellion against the word and will of Messiah. As in the previous v all flesh points to the Jews and Gentiles who constitute the citizens of messianic Zion. This of necessity is the case because unbelievers do not view with horror the ravages of sin. Those who render homage to God, however, regard with abhorrence the rottenness of the lifestyle of the unbelievers. Jesus used the language of this v to describe the eternal fate of those who reject salvation (Mk 9:48).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

|---|---|